



MEMBERS' BULLETIN

Box 5253
Vancouver, B.C.
V6B 4B5

Tel: (604) 683 - 5133
Fax: (604) 685 - 8697

B.C. ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION INSTITUTE

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RECREATION, GARNETS AND GOVERNMENT!

Standing on top of Mt. Riordan, just a few miles west of Penticton, looking out over the Apex Recreation Area with the sun shining and a warm breeze in your face is entrancing. The tranquility however is clouded by the knowledge of the intense struggle that is going on between a proposed garnet quarry and the Apex Alpine recreation development.

In British Columbia we have reached a critical stage in our development with respect to land use. The conflict that is going on between the Crystal Peak Garnet Project and the Apex Recreation Area citizens' group is not unique. In fact it is fairly typical of numerous conflicts that are going on in B.C. at the present time. While the environment and environmental management are put forward as primary issues these are not the real issues. The environmental aspects are simply being used to obfuscate the true underlying issue, which is land use.

CONFLICT

When a little garnet quarry was proposed within the Apex Recreation Area, just out of Penticton, there was trouble.

Is this an environmental problem? Here is the story.

The result of these conflicts is becoming clear - reduced investor confidence and lost opportunity. The solution to these conflicts is not quite so evident. The thing that is clear is that this type of conflict is increasing and if you do not face this problem in your community now the odds are that you soon will. Perhaps a look at the facts of this particular situation will help achieve a better understanding of the problem.

SOME BACKGROUND

The Garnet Quarry

- 1 The site of the garnet is primarily centred on two mineral claims that have been in good standing since the turn of the century. The claims overlap the western boundary of the Apex Recreation Area that was established in 1961. The RECREATION AREA was reopened for mineral exploration in 1989.
- 2 Garnet is a harmless, inert mineral that is extremely valuable as a substitute for harmful sand blasting agents such as silica sand, that causes silicosis, and potentially toxic slags. It is also valuable for use in a variety of abrasives and in water filtration plants.
- 3 The proposed quarry site is about 1 kilometre west of the ski village area and will be out of sight of the main ski development. The proposed garnet processing site is 2 kilometres west of the village area and is also out of plain view.
- 4 The size of the operation is quite small. The projected quarry site - at the end of 20 years of operation - will be about 150 meters X 180 meters. This is about the size of 1 of the ski development parking lots.
- 5 The quarry is only planned to be worked for about 6 weeks each year during the slack period for the recreation area, usually May and June.
- 6 The processing plant will be a 12 month operation working on stock piled materials from the quarry operation. The process involves crushing, screening and magnetic separation. No chemicals are used.
- 7 The project is expected to create full time employment for 27 people. When indirect and induced employment is considered this number has been estimated to increase to 83 man years of employment provincially on an annual basis.
- 8 Production of finished product is estimated at 60,000 tons per year with a minimum quarry life expectancy of 20 years but potentially as long as 70 years. Current market prices indicate the annual value of production at about \$6,500,000.00.

9 This garnet deposit is unique. It is believed to be the largest deposit of this purity (80%+-) in the world and would be the first garnet operation of this type in Canada. Canada currently imports all of its industrial garnet products at a cost in excess of \$40,000,000.00 per year.

10 Environmental studies have been completed that include;

- Water quality
- Dust and air quality
- Noise pollution
- Fish
- Wildlife including birds
- Trees and low vegetation including flowers
- Recreation resources
- Rangeland
- Visual impacts
- Heritage and historic sites
- Native concerns

The primary concern seems to have been the location of the quarry site from a visual perspective and the quarry site was moved slightly to significantly reduce this problem.

Other problems that were identified appeared minor and have been dealt with in the Stage 1 report.

THE RECREATION AREA AND SKI DEVELOPMENT

1 The Apex Mountain Recreation Area was created in 1961. The sale of crown lands outside but immediately adjacent to the Recreation Area began in 1966 and was the beginning of the Apex Village complex.

2 In 1961 there were 1 lift and a few runs at Apex. The complex now has 5 lifts and 36 runs with a maximum vertical drop of about 600 meters or 2000 feet. It is reported that the complex catered to 83,889 skier-days in 1989-90. The area also caters to cross country skiing, ski touring, snowshoeing and snowmobiling. Summer recreation is also a consideration with a small number of people using the area for hiking, exploring and similar activities.

3 In addition to the 50 - 60 chalets and cabins in Apex Village, the Apex Alpine complex includes 122 condominiums and town houses, 2 day lodges, restaurant, lounge, ski school, rental shops and other facilities. Electrical services are provided by West Kootenay Power and the complex has its own water supply and sewage treatment facilities.

- 4 There appears to be a moderate potential for further recreational development in both winter and summer recreational activities. Plans are being considered for additional ski runs and additional accommodation in the way of residences, condominiums and town houses and hotel units. There appears to be the potential to expand the summer use of the area with an emphasis on outdoor recreation and physical fitness.
- 5 Apex Alpine is reported to employ about 100 people from December through April with a greatly reduced number year round.
- 6 Private property values in Apex Village and Apex Alpine have been estimated at approximately \$12.5 million, a significant portion of this value being intrinsic to the setting.
- 7 Tourism is an important element of the economy in the south Okanagan. There is no doubt that the Apex Alpine complex is of economic importance and has the potential to increase in importance over time.
- 8 A citizens' coalition called "Save Apex Recreation Area" was formed in 1989 to protest the garnet quarry proposal. The submission prepared by "S.A.R.A." and submitted to the "British Columbia Mine Development Steering Committee" includes some interesting comments.

(a) "All mineral related activity must be halted until a full and comprehensive management/master plan is developed for the Apex Mountain Recreation Area."

(b) "S.A.R.A.'s position is clear and unequivocal! We firmly and unalterably hold the view that: MINING AND RECREATION ARE NOT COMPATIBLE INSIDE THE APEX MOUNTAIN RECREATION AREA!"

(c) "THERE IS NO ROOM FOR COMPROMISE - RECREATION AND MINING ARE NOT COMPATIBLE!"

(d) ".....,these deposits have no commercial value as a high-grade abrasive material source."

(e) "S.A.R.A. has no reason to doubt that Polestar, or the future owner of Crystal Peak Garnet Corporation, will remove Mount Riordan."

SOME OBSERVATIONS

Following a hike over Mt. Riordan, a look around the ski complex and reading the material prepared by Polestar Explorations Inc. and the Save Apex Recreation Area submission a number of observations seemed appropriate.

- A The Apex recreation complex is a commercial operation, albeit recreation. The lifts, the parking lots, the gravel pit and the structures, when viewed in summer, are clearly not part of the natural environment nor do they contribute to the natural attractions of the area.
- B Looking farther afield the view of the Nickel Plate open pit mine, about 6 kilometres to the west, and the recent logging, in very close proximity, are remainders that this is not a pristine wilderness area but a very active integrated use area.
- C It is evident that the garnet quarry will not be in view of the Apex Village or ski complex. On pacing out the projected size of the operation it becomes evident that it will be similar in size to the current gravel pit on the edge of the village.
- D The position taken by S.A.R.A. with respect to the preparation of a comprehensive management plan is sound. What is confusing is the statement that S.A.R.A. is "unequivocally" opposed to mining development in the area under any conditions. The general area is obviously an integrated use area - gravel pits are technically mines - and a comprehensive plan could well support the garnet proposal.
- E The garnet is sufficiently unique that it is not beyond the realm of possibility that a display of garnet and its uses could be developed as a minor tourist attraction in its own right. In addition there is the potential for a B.C. Garnet souvenir industry.
- F The impression, after looking at the area, is that the garnet quarry and processing facilities are so small, environmentally benign and in keeping with the integrated use character of the area as to be fully compatible with the current uses of the general area.
- G There appears to be a significant economic benefit in the garnet proposal that need not detract from the recreational potential of the area.
- H The health benefits of substituting garnet for silica sand and slags as sand blasting agents may be important elements and should not be overlooked.

The fact that this mineral development proposal has been held up for about 2 years is something that needs to be questioned. The S.A.R.A. group have pointed out that mineral will not go away. This however is not the point.

The point is that if B.C's reputation for equivocation does not go away, mineral development dollars will, together with a wide range of opportunities.

We are advised that the Ministry of Environment have now asked for a variety of new reports and studies most of which are specious. This is not to say that some specific points may not require clarification but where does it end?

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM HERE?

After everything has been considered it comes down to 3 things -

1 A LACK OF DECISION.

British Columbia does not have a land use policy. Is British Columbia prepared to entertain natural resource development proposals and if so, of what kind and where?

2 NO CLEARLY DEFINED PROCESS.

The process for acceptance or rejection of development proposals needs to be much more clearly defined and fixed timelines established for the process.

3 LEGAL RIGHTS

What is the point of holding mineral claims or of opening areas to mineral exploration when any resulting mineral development can be unreasonably delayed.

When Is A Deal A Deal?

Economic developers need a simple yes or no. The present guessing game is costly to every one and counter productive in terms of our international reputation.

The Mine Development Review Process is certainly comprehensive and appears to provide the public with the protection they require. Any problems that exist seem to centre around bureaucratic excesses, the lack of specific timelines for critical decisions and ill defined legal rights of the mineral developer.

A CONCLUSION

While the B.C.Environmental Information Institute is committed to sound environmental management and protection of our natural environment we are opposed to waste. At the present time in British Columbia money, energy and resources are being wasted at an astounding rate by government, industry and the public in trying to cope with land use and quasi environmental issues. We are embroiled in a bureaucratic "boondoggle" that is supposed to provide "environmental protection" but which is having the negative effect of discouraging economic activity.

The fact is we are wasting valuable economic and human resources that are badly needed to solve real environmental problems.

British Columbia must have a clear LAND USE STRATEGY, a clearly defined REVIEW PROCESS - WITH TIMELINES and defined LEGAL RIGHTS for the mining industry that we can all have confidence in and that will rebuild confidence within the international business community.

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