



Big White Mountain Ecological Reserve Action Plan

An Appendix to the 2026 Big White Ski Resort Master Plan
October 2025



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1 INTRODUCTION

The Big White Mountain Ecological Reserve Action Plan has been created by Brent Harley and Associates ('BHA'), on behalf of Big White Ski Resort Ltd. ('Big White') as part of the 2026 Big White Ski Resort Master Plan. It outlines the actions and steps that Big White and BC Parks will take to protect the Reserve's unique natural ecosystems and to support related research and education, while permitting respectful, non-destructive activities such as hiking, nature observation, and photography.

The actions included in this plan are driven by the ecological significance of the Reserve and consider existing and planned recreational activities within the Big White Controlled Recreation Area ('CRA') and ongoing non-destructive recreation in the Reserve. They also reflect the roles and responsibilities of Big White and BC Parks within the CRA and the Reserve, respectively, as well as opportunities for collaboration and support arising from their proximity.

The following sections provide background on the Ecological Reserve and the 2026 Master Plan, before detailing the actions that Big White and BC Parks will implement.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Big White Mountain Ecological Reserve

The Big White Mountain Ecological Reserve (ER) is a provincially protected area established in 1972 by BC Parks, nine years after the Big White CRA and resort were established. The ER was created to preserve the rare and sensitive Engelmann Spruce-Subalpine Fir and Alpine Tundra zones in the southern interior ecosystems and support related scientific research and education.

The 951-hectare ER is located on the northern slope of Big White Mountain, approximately 42 km east of Kelowna (Figure 1). The Reserve gently rises from the 1,860 m contour line that delineates its western, northern, and eastern boundaries, towards the mountain's peak at 2,315 m. It overlaps with the upper Whitefoot Creek and, on the north side, with the uppermost section of a tributary of the West Kettle River. The Reserve is immediately north but outside of Big White's Controlled Recreation Area (CRA); it is not part of the resort, is unpatrolled, and has no maintained trails or visitor services.

Figure 1. Big White Mountain Ecological Reserve and Big White Ski Resort



2.2 2026 Big White Ski Resort Master Plan

Big White Ski Resort, a 1-hour drive southeast of Kelowna in B.C.'s Okanagan, opened in 1963 and has grown into an award-winning, family-friendly, four-season mountain destination. As the second-largest all-season resort in BC with an extensive ski-in/ski-out village and accommodation options, along with a variety of activities — alpine and Nordic skiing, tubing, ice skating, snowshoeing, dog-sled tours, sleigh rides, downhill mountain biking, cross-country mountain biking, and hiking — it has established itself as one of B.C.'s top all-season destinations.

The 2026 Big White Ski Resort Master Plan outlines the Resort's long-term development strategy over a 60-year agreement with the Province (Figure 2). It provides a clear plan for the continued improvement of the winter and summer recreation experiences, the quality and mix of resort facilities, as well as the ski-in/ski-out village and accommodation that Big White is known for.

Big White and BC Parks held meetings in Fall 2021 as part of the review process for the Draft 2020 Big White Master Plan. Parks staff emphasized that the main concern was increased access and visitation to the Ecological Reserve during summer and edge effects from resort development and use that could affect the Reserve. Since then, Big White has revised its Master Plan, removing the proposed eastward expansion and restricting future development to the current CRA. The activities and facilities near the ER remain unchanged; however, summer trails and recreation attractions proposed near the Ecological Reserve will be built within the footprint of winter trails and recreation attractions, and no new summer trails will lead into the Ecological Reserve.

The Proposed Actions listed below address BC Parks' concerns and aim to support and enhance BC Parks' ongoing management efforts and programs in the Reserve.

Figure 2. 2026 Big White Ski Resort Proposed Concept



**Big White Ski Resort
Master Plan
2026**

Legend

- Existing Big White CRA
- Proposed Roads
- Proposed Parking Lots
- Existing Ski Lifts
- Committed Lifts
- Approved, Not Yet Built Lifts
- Proposed Lifts
- Existing Ski Runs
- Committed Ski Runs
- Proposed Ski Runs
- Proposed Vegetation at Buildout
- Ski Trails - Approved and Committed
- Existing Glading
- Proposed Glading Thin
- Proposed Glading Dense
- Existing Buildings at Buildout
- Proposed Buildings

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**Resort Master Plan
at Buildout**

3 ACTION PLAN

Big White has no jurisdiction within the ER and cannot assume management or enforcement roles inside it. However, opportunities exist to educate visitors to the Resort and influence their behaviour to support BC Parks' goals and objectives for the ER. As such, the Big White Mountain Ecological Reserve Action Plan is focused on visitor education and awareness, with the objectives to:

- Clearly identify and demarcate the ER boundary for visitors on the mountain;
- Emphasize the value and importance of the ER to visitors;
- Highlight and encourage appropriate visitor behaviour within the ER;
- Provide physical and digital maps and trip-planning content that steer visitors to designated resort trails and viewpoints;
- Provide information on the ER to employees, who can act as mountain hosts and ambassadors with visitors; and
- Collaborate with BC Parks and volunteers to keep ER information accurate and signage effective.

The effectiveness of the proposed actions will be measured through observation and website metrics and reviewed annually with BC Parks to enable adaptive improvements.

3.1 Actions

3.1.1 Education and Awareness

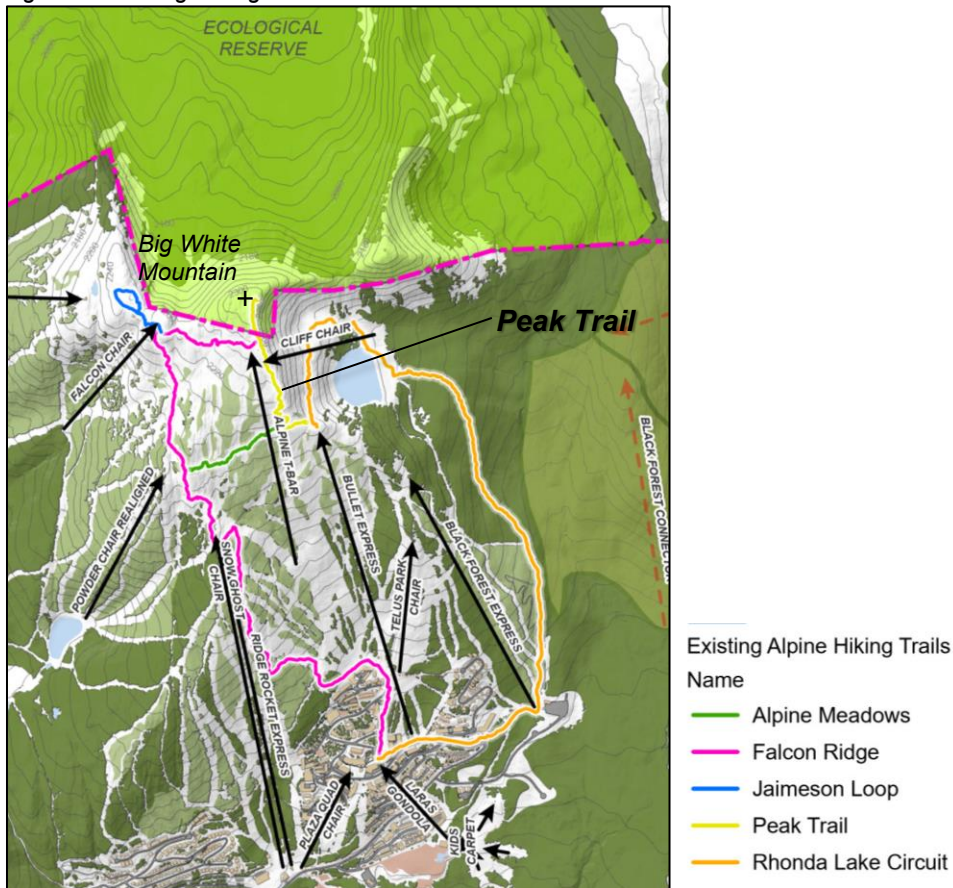
The focus of Education and Awareness will be altering visitor behaviour to a) guide them to preferred experiences (e.g., resort trails) and b) practice appropriate behaviours in the Reserve, to preserve the Reserve's ecological values.

Communication Programs

- Guest Education
 - Guest Education will be rolled out through multiple mediums (e.g., signs, existing information kiosks, trail maps, the Big White website), but collectively will cover the following content:
 - Ecological Reserve Values, History, and Importance
 - Location and Access (i.e. Maps)
 - BC Parks Outdoor Ethics and Leave No Trace protocol
 - Resort Trail Alternatives
 - Methods for Reporting (e.g., Litter, Env. Degradation)
 - Guest Education materials will be developed with the BC Parks Engagement, Education, and Enhancement (EEE) Team to ensure accurate and consistent messaging.
 - Guest Education materials will include the Big White and BC Parks logos to demonstrate a unified position and convey strong community norms regarding the ER's importance. Both parties will review and approve all co-branded materials to ensure consistency and alignment with existing messaging standards.

- Staff Education
 - Big White will include information on the history and importance of the Ecological Reserve in the employee handbook, which is given to every Big White employee.
 - Note: The Ecological Reserve is already identified as Out of Bounds in the employee handbook and training materials.
- The Peak Trail – An Interpretive Experience
 - The Peak Trail is a hiking route that extends into the Ecological Reserve (215 m length), leading to Big White Mountain's summit (Figure 3). Before the ER was in place, hikers began exploring this route following the establishment of the Big White CRA and installation of the first lifts in the early 1960s, and it has become a popular hiking destination. The trail would be reimagined as an educational opportunity with interpretive signage about the Reserve's environmental values. Developed in collaboration with BC Parks and its Community Liaison Officer and implemented by Big White, the signage would be unobtrusive, blending into the landscape while informing visitors about the Reserve and its ecosystem.

Figure 3. Existing Hiking Trails



Communication Methods

- Resort Maps
 - The Ecological Reserve will be featured on Big White Trail Maps and identified as a sensitive ecosystem.
 - BC Parks permits ‘non-destructive’ recreation in the ER, so finalizing the exact wording about public use included on maps and related materials will be important.
 - Appropriate symbology and labelling for the Reserve will be determined in coordination with BC Parks.

- Resort Signs
 - The signage Big White proposes to install within the CRA is intended to complement the signage installed by BC Parks at the boundary and/or within the ER.
 - For all resort signs related to the Ecological Reserve
 - Signs to include Big White and BC Parks Logos
 - Signs can include QR codes to the BC Parks’ Responsible Recreation materials, Outdoor Ethics guide, and ‘Leave No Trace’ protocol
 - Both parties will review and approve co-branded materials before implementation
 - Existing Village Information Kiosks
 - Will feature a Resort Map that includes the ER
 - Will feature a brief summary of the importance of the ER and behaviours users should adhere to (e.g. BC Parks Outdoor Ethics and ‘Leave No Trace’).
 - Will illustrate the Resort’s trails and viewpoints that serve as alternatives to the ER.
 - On-mountain (Big White)
 - Big White will install small trail signs along its summer trails that are closest to the Ecological Reserve.
 - Trail signs will inform users that lands beyond contain a sensitive ecosystem unsuitable for recreation, but refrain from stating that users cannot enter the Ecological Reserve.
 - For example, “Beyond this point is a BC Parks Ecological Reserve. Terrain is fragile and unmaintained. Please choose designated resort trails.”
 - On-mountain (BC Parks)
 - BC Parks will install small signs along the Ecological Reserve boundary
 - Trail signs will inform users that they are entering the Ecological Reserve, leaving the CRA, and that the lands beyond contain sensitive ecosystems that are not patrolled.
 - For example, “You are leaving the Controlled Recreation Area and entering a BC Parks’ Ecological Reserve—this area is unpatrolled and contains sensitive ecosystems. Please tread carefully.”

- Information Booths
 - BC Parks and/or affiliated volunteers (e.g., Ecological Reserve Wardens) can set up an information booth or tent in the Village on peak days to offer educational materials to guests.

- Big White Website
 - Big White will include a webpage providing an overview of the Ecological Reserve. The page will include links to the BC Parks webpage for the Reserve, where additional materials are provided.
 - The webpage will include Big White and BC Parks Logos

3.1.2 Ongoing Collaboration

- BC Parks and Big White will meet annually to discuss the state of the Ecological Reserve, review visitor use trends, the effectiveness of current collaborative actions and communication efforts, and opportunities for improvement.

3.1.3 Support for Ongoing Monitoring and Management

- Support for Ongoing Monitoring by Volunteers (e.g., Ecological Reserve Wardens)
 - Should BC Parks and affiliated volunteer organizations develop a monitoring program for the Ecological Reserve, Big White will provide complimentary day passes to allow volunteers to easily access the Reserve during the summer season (Note: lifts do not operate every day of the year. Volunteers should confirm operations before travelling to Big White).
- Big White Webpage Reporting
 - Big White can provide annual counts of the views of its Ecological Reserve webpage.
- Adaptive Management
 - Big White will coordinate the placement of signs (noted above) with BC Parks and affiliated volunteers based on:
 - The location and alignment of Big White's summer trails
 - The location of public access points to the Ecological Reserve from the Big White CRA.
 - Big White and BC Parks will hold annual meetings (see description above).



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