



**Big White Master Plan Update  
and  
Master Development Agreement (MDA) Replacement  
Summary of Engagement**

**“What We Heard”**

**Prepared by:**

**Big White Project Review Team  
Mountain Resorts Branch  
Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource  
Operations and Rural Development**

**December 2021**

**Big White Master Plan Update  
and  
Master Development Agreement (MDA) Replacement  
Summary of Engagement**

**“What We Heard”**

The Province, as represented by the Mountain Resorts Branch (MRB) of the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD), received a draft Resort Master Plan update and an application for replacement of the existing Master Development Agreement (MDA) from Big White Ski Resort in mid-2020. More information about the draft Resort Master Plan update, the replacement of the MDA and the related Provincial decisions (the “Project”) can be found on MRB’s [Big White Project Review website](#).

The Project public engagement and review has been guided by the [All-Seasons Resort Policy and associated guidelines](#). Advertising for the opportunity to provide comments on the Project began early in January 2021, although public comments were being accepted as early as December 1, 2020 when the Project was posted to the Province’s [Applications, Comments and Reasons for Decision](#) website. During the public review and comment period, the Project was widely advertised in print and online news, including Kelowna Capital News, Sun Peaks Independent, Toronto Star and multiple websites such as Yahoo.com, sunpeaksnews.com, snowindustrynews.com, and the opportunity to engage was highlighted on [MRB’s website](#), the [govTogetherBC website](#) and [govTogetherBC twitter account](#) as well as [Big White’s website](#). In addition, Big White also completed the following advertising:

- [Blog post](#) to bigwhite.com on January 5
- Castanet.net advertising from January 11 to 25 in Classifieds & Community News sections (also promoted by Castanet on their social media channels)
- Kelowna Capital News half page advertisement in the January 8 and 15 issues
- The Province half page advertisement in the January 10 and 17 issues
- eblast to Season Passholders and Local databases on January 7 (28,008 recipients)
- Promotion added to high traffic pages of bigwhite.com (webcams, snow report, weather forecast) on January 6-25
- Social media posts to resort channels on January 6, 12 and 19

Following a two-week advertising period, as required by the All-Seasons Resort Policy, a virtual public open house was held on January 26, 2021 and the public comment period officially closed on February 26, 2021. Note that questions and comments received during the public open house were not included as official public comments because Skype Broadcast, the

platform used for the presentation, is a relatively untested form of communication technology. This was communicated to participants during the session along with information on how to submit comments so they could be officially received and documented. A recording of the virtual public open house can be found on the [Project Public Engagement webpage](#).

The numbers of public comments received during the engagement period are as follows:

- Uploaded to Applications, Comments and Reasons for Decision: 71
- Direct Email: 3
- Phone Calls: 0

Stakeholders (parties with known legal interests within the Project area or those with interests that may be impacted by a decision) were identified and directly contacted by email and/or regular mail. Of the 31 stakeholders identified, 10 provided responses.

Responses were also requested from local and provincial government agencies including:

- BC Safety Authority
- BC Timber Sales (Okanagan Columbia and Kootenay Business Areas)
- Regional District of Kootenay Boundary
- Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations, and Rural Development
  - Archaeology Branch
  - Natural Resource Districts (Okanagan Shuswap and Selkirk)
  - Regional Operations (Kootenay Boundary and Thompson Okanagan)
  - Recreation Sites and Trails Branch
- Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
- Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (BC Parks)
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation
- Interior Health

This “What We Heard” document is a summary of input and feedback received by MRB from local and provincial government agencies, stakeholders and members of the public during the Project review and comment period. The values and interests expressed during this process will be considered in project planning and decision-making. Based on the responses, this document summarizes the engagement into the following eight common themes/categories that emerged from the submissions:

- Environmental Considerations
- Forestry & Range
- Public Access & Recreation
- Planning / Master Plan
- Community Issues
- Transportation
- Water Use / Watershed
- Wildlife / Habitat

## Feedback Themes:

Due to the volume and scope of comments received, this document contains paraphrased wording (*italics*) summarizing the comments, concerns, questions, and suggestions.

### 1. Environmental Considerations

Comments in this category related to climate change, sustainability, and the environment. Respondents expressed several concerns in this theme, including:

- *The proposal has high operational water and energy requirements, will impact wildlife and ecosystems, and will result in pollution from increased traffic and human use.*
- *The proposed golf course could create environmental hazards due to the amount of chemicals required to maintain a course in poor growing conditions.*
- *The proposal should consider climate adaptation and resilience for new infrastructure and buildings or development of eco-friendly communities with a reduced environmental impact.*
- *The plan needs more consideration of climate change and sustainability, and climate change projections should be included in environmental reviews and water availability assessments.*

The proximity of the existing resort and proposed expansion area to the Big White Ecological Reserve also generated some concern among respondents:

- *The Province should increase the ecological reserve instead of expanding the resort.*
- *Expanded year-round use would increase the potential for unsanctioned trail development and recreation use in the ecological reserve, impacting the ecological reserve's values and resiliency.*
- *It is expected that the proposed resort expansion will result in a rise in refuse accumulation in the ecological reserve.*

The comments included a few suggestions to mitigate some of the concerns around environmental impacts and potential impacts to the ecological reserve:

- *Education and public awareness are effective ways to get compliance for environmental protection and Best Management Practices; Big White could showcase their biodiversity, water conservation and Bear Aware programs.*
- *Best Management Practices to meet environmental requirements should be applied to all developments during each specific site planning phase to help meet legislation, regulation, and policies.*
- *The resort should maintain an invasive species management plan to prevent the introduction and/or spread of invasive plant species and be held responsible for removal or control of invasive plants introduced or spread by development.*
- *Maintaining the integrity of the boundary between the ecological reserve and the resort should be a key priority, and access by motorized users needs to be prevented.*

- *New road access near the ecological reserve should be avoided to minimize unsanctioned use.*

## **2. Community Issues**

Residents and businesses within the Big White community have had ongoing communication with the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary regarding their desire for various community facilities and amenities at the resort, and further utilized this review process as an opportunity to emphasize those interests:

- *The plan should include locations for community owned facilities, such as a community center, indoor recreation facility, community meeting rooms, town hall, post office and medical center.*
- *The outcomes of the recent Big White Community Issues Assessment and any associated recommendations from the local Official Community Plan may lead to discussions with the resort regarding community assets and infrastructure.*
- *Developers should be responsible for green space, art installations, park space, walking paths and special needs access.*

Affordability and economics were also identified as issues affecting local and regional communities and requiring consideration in the Master Plan:

- *Locals should be able to enjoy all the amenities of the resort, regardless of socioeconomic status.*
- *Except for locals with a season's pass, resort skiing has become unaffordable to most families due to the high cost of lift tickets and accommodations.*
- *Many residents are seeking out the quiet and affordability of the backcountry, which should remain accessible to the public instead of the wealthy top percentage of the population.*
- *The amount of proposed future development that would be allocated to employee and affordable housing should be clearly identified in the Master Plan.*

Within the category of community issues, services such as waste management, snow storage/removal, and emergency response were identified as needing improvements or expansions to accommodate the proposed growth of the resort:

- *The Master Plan should provide a plan for the increased demands on the existing waste transfer facility. There will also need to be a plan for diverting hazardous, organic, and recyclable materials.*
- *The location of sewage treatment areas should consider future growth and include buffers to minimize potential odor issues, and an area for management of biosolids should be considered.*
- *Each neighbourhood will require snow storage areas.*
- *Any development in the Gem Lake and East Peak areas would require a hydrant water distribution system and may require one or more fire stations.*

- *An increase in guests would result in an increase in emergency responses and would require an increase in fire apparatus, support vehicles, and staffing.*
- *The Master Plan should include a designated helicopter landing pad that is equipped to accommodate night landings.*

Some of the benefits that the Big White proposal could generate for the community were also shared during the comment period:

- *The expansion of Big White and more year-round recreation will attract people who want to call Big White home; a thriving residential community will support businesses, which in turn will meet tourist needs.*
- *Approval of the proposal would create jobs, increase tourism, generate more economic activity, and increase occupancy rates for properties.*
- *Big White is an important tourist destination and a good employer.*

### **3. Transportation**

Several issues related to transportation were communicated during the review and comment period. It is noted that some of the concerns about increased traffic were regarding the effects on the environment and wildlife and have been captured in other sections within this document. The following comments within this category are specific to issues such as traffic congestion, parking, and roads:

- *The plan states there is adequate parking, but experience has shown there is not enough parking for overnight guests and day skiers. This can lead to blocked roadways, parking in cul-de-sacs, and parking in no parking areas, which impacts the guest experience, hinders emergency access, and prevents road crews from being able to clear streets of snow.*
- *The road up to the mountain (Highway 33) is a two-lane highway with no turning lanes that sees bumper to bumper traffic for several hours on weekends and holidays; it is already dangerous enough without increasing the number of vehicles on it.*

Some of the comments regarding transportation provided suggestions for how to mitigate the potential issues:

- *Development and use of transportation demand management strategies such as a shuttle service, increased bus parking, and more walking trails are encouraged to support community sustainability.*
- *It will be important for new developments to consider winter roadway width and turnarounds large enough to accommodate fire apparatus when snowbanks are present, as well as snow storage and removal, connecting roads, roadway grade, streetlights, sidewalks, and paths.*
- *It will be important to engage the appropriate government agency/agencies regarding the adequacy of the road networks to support increased traffic densities and any proposed new highway structures or infrastructure.*

Concerns were also raised about the single road leading in and out of the resort, and the lack of an emergency egress route:

- *The plan needs an emergency route in case of forest fire or other emergency needing mass evacuation.*
- *The current evacuation plan using the one route of egress would require dedicating both lanes of the road to evacuating residents, which would prevent access to the community by emergency responders. The Master Plan should consider how to increase accessibility to the community in the event of an emergency.*

#### **4. Forestry & Range**

Given that the draft Master Plan update proposes an expansion into areas of Crown land that are currently used for forestry, several comments were received regarding the potential impacts to that industry:

- *An expansion of the resort will reduce the timber harvesting landbase and the Annual Allowable Cut, threatening jobs that rely on the forest industry. It will also transfer harvesting pressure onto other operating areas to make up for the reduced timber availability.*
- *Several forest stewardship values are likely to be impacted, including Old Growth Management Areas, water, visual quality objectives, wildlife and habitat, and forest health.*
- *Proposed development would impact the future return on the investment into reforested (previously harvested) areas.*
- *All-seasons use will result in overlaps between forestry activities and recreation in the expansion area.*

Reviewers concerned about impacts to forestry identified some ways that the resort and forestry interests can coexist:

- *Timber harvesting plans can coincide with areas that the resort would require to clear in fulfilling its long-term vision for the area and can help enhance public recreation opportunities.*
- *The development should minimize disturbance of old growth as much as possible and avoid disturbing any forests older than 250 years in areas that are deficient in old growth.*

The area is also used for cattle grazing, and the comments expressed the need for the resort to continue working collaboratively with the local ranching community:

- *The proposed expansion will incorporate lands currently identified as Crown range, including an existing grazing licence.*
- *Measures will need to be taken to mitigate livestock movement into the village and surrounding slopes; the protection of domestic water is a priority.*

- *Winter activities and cattle grazing can coexist, but the expansion to summer activities will have to take the proximity of livestock into consideration.*
- *The development of trails for off-road vehicles may increase the likelihood of cattle in the village; the potential for livestock access will need to be considered during the trail planning process.*
- *Public safety is a consideration when motorized recreation is in proximity to cattle, due to the risk of collisions.*

## **5. Water Use / Watershed**

The Kettle River and its watershed are important values, and several comments related to water availability, water quality, drought, and flooding were received:

- *Not enough is known about how this will affect the Kettle River and the watershed in the long term.*
- *Water availability is becoming a more pressing issue for agriculture; granting Big White approval to increase their water usage will cause harm to farmers and our food systems.*
- *Further development in this watershed could divert additional source water from the Kettle, worsening the downstream drought conditions and water temperatures.*
- *Due to climate change and the clear cuts already existing in the Boundary area, additional clear cuts in the highest elevations will increase the risk of floods and subsequent low flows in the late summer and fall.*
- *Consideration of the water requirements for fire protection should be clearly demonstrated in the Master Plan.*

Some of the suggested ways for Big White to reduce the impacts on the watershed include the following:

- *Future water licence applications will need to be informed by additional studies and supported by clear plans pertaining to existing and future water use.*
- *Stormwater discharge is a concern and run-off should be prevented from entering surface waters unless its quality meets or exceeds the current guidelines.*
- *Water availability may be a limiting factor due to climate change; the resort should consider increasing water conservation efforts and reducing water dependency.*
- *Riparian areas need to be protected; this will help prevent erosion, contribute to wildlife corridors, and protect water quality.*

## **6. Public Access & Recreation**

The proposed expansion of the Big White Controlled Recreation Area generated some concern about public access to Crown land:

- *The loss of access to Crown land will impact recreational backcountry users that currently use the area and restrict access to more Crown land users than it will benefit.*



- *Reasonable uphill access through Big White terrain to the backcountry should be included in this agreement.*
- *Dedication of a backcountry area and allowing ski touring in certain areas when lifts are not operating should be considered.*

Respondents also provided their support of the Master Plan update and highlighted the possible recreational benefits of the proposed expansion:

- *Expanded recreational areas allow for more users and the capture of more tourism dollars.*
- *The expansion looks exciting, and I look forward to skiing the new terrain.*
- *Increased training areas and a focus on developing world class training facilities will create opportunities for ski racing and skier development.*
- *The expansion proposal provides opportunities for a snowmobile staging area with connectivity to existing snowmobile trails, and future trail alignments that are conducive to accessing the existing cabins and backcountry areas beyond the resort.*

## **7. Wildlife / Habitat**

Throughout the comment period we heard from many respondents who had concerns about the proposed expansion and the potential impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat:

- *The increase in vehicle traffic, the heavy machinery and equipment required for construction, maintenance and year-round operations, the proposed ATV trail network, and the staging area for motorized access outside of the CRA, will all be major sources of disturbance for wildlife.*
- *The expansion will further impact wildlife species already permanently displaced by the current resort footprint. Habitat loss in the form of deforestation will come from the development of additional infrastructure, residential areas, and recreational features.*
- *Increased road density can lead to an increase in wildlife mortality, increased human activity could displace wildlife from habitat, and disturbance and snow compaction can impact browse for ungulates.*

Some of the comments, especially those from other government agencies, included measures or spoke to management practices that would minimize or mitigate impacts to wildlife, especially species at risk and sensitive ecosystems.

- *Vegetation alteration or removal should occur within the least risk timing windows for nesting birds, and site-specific nesting periods should be confirmed by a qualified professional.*
- *Wildlife corridors, riparian areas and sensitive ecosystems need to be considered in the layout of future developments.*
- *Species at risk, such as American badger and grizzly bear, must be respected and protected for their range and specific habitat needs.*

## 8. Planning / Master Plan

We also heard differing perspectives on the planning presented in the Master Plan; some comments pertained to specific features, while others spoke to broader community planning objectives:

- *The golf courses are not practical or realistic, given the short season at this altitude and the number of courses already established in the Okanagan.*
- *The Big White community should have more walking paths and sidewalks and less reliance on cars.*
- *Consideration of complete and compact communities (clustering, development pattern, accessibility, and walkability) is encouraged as planning moves forward.*
- *Big White risks becoming an auto-dependent suburb of Kelowna, with treeless subdivisions and large homes blocking each other's views.*
- *The low-density development presented for certain neighbourhoods creates challenges for the extension of services and roads, increases development and maintenance costs, presents safety concerns, and encourages higher car usage.*

### Next Steps:

- MRB and Big White are continuing to engage with First Nations, local government, stakeholders, and Provincial agencies to identify potential solutions to issues that have been raised.
- Big White has reviewed all the questions, concerns, and comments received during the review and comment period, and is working on resolving the issues and/or determining where more work or additional studies are required.
- Provided that the agency, stakeholder, and First Nations concerns have been adequately addressed, which may require revisions to the draft Master Plan, another information session will be held to demonstrate to the public how issues raised during the previous review have been addressed. Advertising prior to the information session will run for two consecutive weeks.
- For more details on the planning process and information requirements for All-Seasons resort development in British Columbia please visit: [/gov/content/industry/natural-resource-use/resort-development/applying-to-develop-a-resort](#)
- For a visual representation of the entire process from draft Master Plan to the final project approval please refer to the [All-Seasons Resort Application Process Flowchart](#).