



WAPITI SKI HILL RESORT MASTER PLAN MARCH 2014

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Vision

The District of Elkford and the Wapiti Ski Club would like to see Wapiti Ski Hill continue to provide high quality, safe and memorable ski and boarding experience for the residents of Elkford and surrounding area. The purpose of this Master Plan is to create a phased development plan for Wapiti Ski Hill that can support continued growth and sustainability of the mountain, moving toward all-season use. The proposed Master Plan will allow the Ski Hill to incorporate new recreational uses that are within the existing License of Occupation boundary. Diversification will ensure that Wapiti continues to serve the family and youth market offering expanded recreational opportunities.

General Overview of Business

Wapiti Ski Hill has been a community based and volunteer operated ski hill since 1973. It is located in the southeastern interior of British Columbia, accessed by Highway 43 and through the District of Elkford as shown on Map 1: Overview. As a non-profit organization, the Wapiti Ski Club operates the ski hill to provide an affordable family-orientated ski experience within the Elk Valley. With over 350 cm of annual snowfall Wapiti offers an exceptional downhill skiing experience. Wapiti is an excellent place to teach children and important feeder ski hill for surrounding destination ski resorts (Fernie, Panorama and Kicking Horse). Wapiti Ski Club takes pride in being an affordable option for families to be physically active in a near-wilderness environment. Wapiti is the ideal place to enjoy fresh turns without the crowded lift lines.

Wapiti's diversification plan will give the Ski Club the opportunity to improve its winter operation, attract new user groups, and increase the ski hill's economic viability by adding year-round recreation opportunities.

Existing License of Occupation (File 4490149)

May 1st 1994 License of Occupation for a commercial alpine ski purposes over 103 ha of Crown Land in the vicinity of Boivin Creek.

Current Facilities:

- Day skiing Saturday and Sunday;
- Night skiing during the week;
- 14 cleared runs;
- T-bar lift;
- Terrain and rail park;
- Day Lodge;
- Concession;
- Rental Shop and Lessons.
- Night skiing lighting/infrastructure
- Parking area



New Operating Agreement

All-season outdoor recreation including commercial alpine skiing over 100 ha of Crown Land.

Facilities to include:

- Alpine skiing;
- Tube park;
- Snow School
- Mountain biking and dirt-jump park;
- 2 new lifts (One to service tube park and one to replace existing T-bar);
- Staging area and parking for skiing;
- Vehicle storage and maintenance facilities;
- Restaurant;
- Overnight Parking (RV);
- Care-taker and staff accommodations.

Identified Tenure Gaps

License of Occupation	Operating Agreement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpine Skiing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpine Skiing • Tube Park • Snow School • Staging Area For Skiing • Mountain Biking • Commercial Restaurant • Caretaker/Staff Housing • All Season Uses (mountain biking, dirt-jump park) • Overnight (RV) Parking
Area: 103 ha	Area: 100 ha

Key Areas of Concern

Careful consideration has been given to the environment in which we operate. Wapiti believes impacts of its diversification and expansion can be avoided where possible and mitigated if necessary.

- Wildlife Mitigation
- Pre-existing Forestry Tenures
- Public Recreational Users



SECTION 1: DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING OPERATION

1.1 Description of Existing Operation

Located in the District of Elkford Wapiti Ski Hill is a regular destination for community skiers and boarders in the winter. The 14 cleared runs, shown on Map 2: Trail Map, offer a variety of terrain for all ski levels from novice (30% to intermediate (50%) to expert (20%): 6 green; 6 blue; 2 black. A terrain park is also available. The ski hill typically operates from December to March; night skiing during the week and day skiing on Saturday and Sunday.

Day	Saturday	Sunday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Open	10:00 AM	10:00 AM	7:00 PM	7:00 PM	7:00 PM	7:00 PM
Close	4:00 PM	4:00 PM	9:30 PM	9:30 PM	9:30 PM	9:30 PM

The hill is also used by school programs during the week and available for private or corporate functions. There are ski and snowboard rentals, repairs and lessons offered. The ski patrol program has switched from a volunteer program to a paid pro-patrol program supported by volunteers.

1.2 Base Operations

The ski base operations consist of a 2400 sq ft day lodge building constructed in 1983 with capacity for 150 guests. The building houses a concession, office, ski school, first aid and rental and repair shop. The parking area can accommodate approximately 100 vehicles.

1.3 Ski Hill Operations

A 1150 foot long (Dopplemeyer) T-Bar transports skiers 820 vertical feet to the top of the hill operated by a control room at base of the lift.

Fourteen runs are groomed by a grooming vehicle (2006 Prinoth BR 350 Snowcat and 1984 Bombardier Groomer/Tiller/Blade BR400). A shop to service the two machines was built in 1992. A storage shed was built in 2013 next to the shop.

The terrain park offers rails, bumps and jumps built and designed to accommodate all skill levels.

1.4 Access

Wapiti Ski Hill is located in Elkford off Highway 43 in southeastern BC. Natal Road is a public road to the ski hill parking lot and is maintained by the District of Elkford.

1.5 Servicing

Water is provided by the District of Elkford. Water is diverted from the District main line to a holding tank at the ski hill. Improvements are required.

Septic service is provided by a conventional septic tank and field, the tank is serviced by the District of Elkford.

Three phase 600 volt electrical is provided by BC Hydro. Internet and Telephone are provided by Telus.



1.6 Ski Hill Capacity and Skier Visits

Wapiti Ski Hill has one T-Bar with the capacity of moving 550 skiers per hour (PPH) up the mountain. Considering an efficiency factor (E) of 80% that number is reduced to 440 people per hour.

Vertical Rise	PPH	Hours	E	VTM/Day
249 m	550	6	80%	3735

$$\frac{\text{Vertical Rise} \times \text{PPH} \times \text{Hours} \times \text{E}}{\text{VTM/Day}} = 176$$

Based on the lift capacity, the number of runs or vertical demand of each skier, the comfortable carrying capacity (CCC) is considered 176 people per day.

Wapiti's skier visits have increased over the last 5 years with approximately 6000 skier days last season.

Based on the ski hill's carrying capacity of 176 skiers and approximately 48 of operating days a season, the season capacity is 8448 skier days.

SECTION 2: OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED CONTROLLED RECREATION AREA

2.1 Controlled Recreation Area

Wapiti Ski Club would like to diversify its current operations moving toward year-round operations, starting with increasing capacity for alpine skiing, adding a lift-serviced tube park, and adding capacity for mountain biking. The planned increase in recreational capacity is anticipated to be accomplished without a net increase in CRA area. Staff accommodation and overnight parking are being contemplated within the existing (and amended) license area, subject to further feasibility assessment.

There is also interest in future partnering opportunities to with parties willing to undertake commercial recreation ventures in the local area. Any future recreation interests may act as amenities of the Wapiti Ski Hill, the pursuit and establishment of such interests is external to the scope of this Master Plan. The DoE will work with the MRB to establish a Notation of Interest on areas with recreational value on the included mapping.

The ski hill is currently tenured under a Crown Land License of Occupation for Alpine Ski purposes on File #4490149. The existing license is 103 ha in size. There is a portion of the one ski run that is not included in the existing license. The proposed Controlled Recreation Area is shown on Map 3: Controlled Recreation Area. The new proposed Controlled Recreation Area will be +/- 100 ha in size. The majority of the improvements will be within the existing operational area; however, some adjustments of the Controlled Recreation Area will be required to accommodate existing operations.

The proposed improvements will improve the overall winter recreation experience and attract new visitors. Additionally, the amended area will reduce liability and obligations on lands which serve no benefit to the club (outside the scope of current or planned development). A phasing schedule will incorporate base facilities with skiable terrain and base area development.



2.2 Uses in Controlled Recreation Area

2.2.1 Alpine Skiing

Alpine skiing is provided for community skiers and boarders. There are 14 runs offering a variety of terrain and limited night skiing. A terrain park is also available. An adjustment to the CRA is required to accommodate some existing ski area.

2.2.2 Tube Park

A tube park is another opportunity to offer a family experience and offer winter recreation to non-skiers. There is opportunity to develop a tube park in the existing tenure area at the base of the Main Run as shown on Map 4: Base Area. A new lift may be required to tow tubes/users back to top; that lift could also service an improved terrain park.

2.2.3 Snow School

Lessons are available by appointment or through external providers. However capacity and frequency are limited. At this time there is little room in the existing day lodge to provide administration to support regular group ski or snow boarding lessons. The Ski Club would like the opportunity to capitalize on existing opportunities and provide group and private lessons for skiers of all abilities; from beginner to expert skiers, free-style skiers and terrain park riders.

2.2.3 Backcountry Ski Touring Staging Area

Ski touring has always been popular and Wapiti offers ideal access to the BC wilderness. The existing base area could be used for a backcountry ski touring staging area and take advantage of existing access to the backcountry. Attracting a guide to operate from the existing staging areas would expand the recreational opportunities.

2.2.5 Mountain Biking

Mountain biking is extremely popular in the region and a downhill mountain biking operation could attract new riders to the area and enhance the Wapiti Ski Hill operations and Elkford's shift to a recreational tourism destination. Likely the downhill mountain biking would be administered similar to the ski hill relying on volunteer support. A trail network will need to be developed over time within the existing use area. Eventually jumps and features would be incorporated into the trail network to enhance the natural flow.

The Ski Club is investigating modifications to the T-Bar system that could accommodate mountain bikes. Another option would be a shuttle service using the existing road network providing access to the summit. The District of Elkford is developing a Parks Trails Master Plan that could incorporate biking trails into the ski hill area and the Trans-Canada Trail.

2.2.6 Commercial Restaurant

A professional restaurant and enhanced concession within the existing day lodge is required to attract special events and corporate functions to the ski hill. This would also compliment the proposed commercial accommodation and improve year round usability.



2.2.7 Caretaker/Staff Housing

A manager will be required if the ski hill is to expand services. The volunteer model has been successful but there is constant pressure to avoid volunteer burnout. Caretaker or staff housing is important to both attract and retain staff and could use the same building to accommodate a snow school as shown on Map 4: Base Area. There is an identified need in Elkford to accommodate both short and long term workers.

2.2.8 Servicing and Parking Area Improvements

There are opportunities to improve existing water and sewer services; the DoE recognized that upgrades may be necessary and could incorporate those upgrades into existing maintenance plans. The parking lot is capable of providing overnight parking for RVs to accommodate skiers or mountain bikers.

2.3 Phases

Phase 1 (1-5 Years)

- Mountain Biking
- Restaurant
- Backcountry Ski Touring Staging Area
- Improved Parking Area
- Servicing Improvements

Phase 2 (6-10 Years)

- Staff Accommodation
- Tube Park
- New Lift
- Servicing Improvements

2.4 Economic Benefits

Currently Wapiti Ski Club has two full time ski patrollers and employs more than 30 students. This number will increase as required, mostly seasonal with some year round jobs. Experienced construction and trades people will be required and local tourism should increase benefiting retails sales, accommodation, food and beverage providers.



SECTION 3: ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL VALUES

3.1 Fish Values

Boivin Creek is a 15k m tributary of the Elk River whose headwaters are west of Profile Mountain and north of Philips Peak. Its confluence point with the Elk River is roughly 100 m upstream from the Elk River Bridge on the Fording Highway in Elkford, BC. Boivin Creek contributes to fish habitat in the Elk River for species including Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Bull Trout, and Mountain Whitefish. Although no immediate plans exist for development in the areas adjacent to Boivin Creek, any such future expansion and/or development of the Wapiti Ski Hill should utilize the Streamside Protection Act and Riparian Area Regulations to help plan this project in such a way that any harmful effects to Boivin Creek or the surrounding Riparian Area are prevented or mitigated to preserve the downstream fishery.

3.2 Water Values

The Elk River Watershed is located in the southeast corner of British Columbia. It spans an area of 3570 km² and is bordered by the Bull River Watershed and Kootenay River Watershed to the west, and the provincial boundary to the east. Tributaries of this watershed include, but are not limited to, the Fording River, Forsyth Creek, Aldridge Creek, and Boivin Creek. Any streamside or in-stream work conducted within the CRA will be subject to applicable legislation, regulations and be conducted in accordance with best-management practices.

Although Elkford has a dependable winter season, the effect of climate change is expected to continue to reduce the season for snow related sports. Reliable snow cover will be crucial for the success of Wapiti Ski Hill. The use of artificial snow making equipment may be required in the future and an amendment to the Master Plan would be required.

Boivin Creek is designated as a Community Watershed, Code 349.003, under the Forest Practices Code. Thus the proper licensing for use and allocation will be required to utilize this as a water source for the production of artificial snow.

Environmental studies regarding the impacts of removing water from Boivin Creek should be done. These studies will be used as a planning tool to determine: when is the best time of year to remove and store water from Boivin Creek, what is the best methodology to pull water from Boivin Creek, and what steps can be taken to remove or mitigate any possible impacts.

3.3 Wildlife Values

There are a number of species including Elk, Deer, Black Bear, Grizzly Bear, Cougar, and Moose that reside in the area. Sightings of these animals are not uncommon on Wapiti Ski Hill or along the Boivin Creek Nordic Ski Trail.

The upstream area of Boivin Creek provides some level of winter range for Moose, and may also be a winter range for Mountain Goats in the higher elevations. The overall area is considered to be ungulate winter range and falls under the “Open Forest” and “Managed Moist Forest” classification.



The District of Elkford will consult with local Conservation Officers, Environmental Professionals, and Provincial Biologists as required to plan the Ski Hill Expansion in such a way as to mitigate or remove any harmful impacts to local wildlife.

The risk of conflict between humans and ungulate species is greatest in the spring when mothers are aggressive and protective of their young; There is, however, minimal use of the area at this time of year.

Conflict with the local Grizzly Bear and Black Bear populations is managed by the District of Elkford on an ongoing basis, and is often related to food availability. An initiative through public education and cooperation with local Conservation Officers is working to lower the number of conflicts between humans and the local wildlife within Elkford. Human/Bear conflicts tend to peak in spring and fall, after and before hibernation. These are seasons of little to no CRA use.

3.4 First Nations

The Wapiti Ski Hill recognizes that the Akisqnuq First Nation, Lower Kootenay Band, St. Mary's Indian Band, Tobacco Plains Indian Band, Ktunaxa Nation Council and the Shuswap Indian Band have asserted the area as part of their traditional territories. The District of Elkford will consult with First Nations as required.

SECTION 4: OVERLAP WITH EXISTING USE

4.1 Land Act Tenure

There is an Access and Power Agreement between the Wapiti Ski Club and Telus Mobility registered as License Number 342058 which is a sub license to the existing License of Occupation for a cell tower.

4.2 Timber Tenure

Wapiti Ski Hill is within the Rocky Mountain Forest District Cranbrook Timber Supply Area. The Wapiti Ski Club is recognized under the Resort Timber Administration Act. The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations is the approval authority for applications for an Occupant License to Cut or Forestry License to Cut.

Canfor has a Forest Development Plan License A190470 covering 205 ha south of the ski area. If this Master Plan is approved Canfor will be consulted with any changes within the license area.

4.3 Land Use Planning, Regional Zoning Requirements

As Wapiti Ski Hill is within the District of Elkford, all applicable bylaws will apply. The District of Elkford Zoning Bylaw No. 737 zones the area Urban Reserve. Outdoor recreation uses are permitted in the Urban Reserve Zone.



Appendix 1 – Existing licence (blue) and proposed Controlled Recreation Area (red)

