

SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

Lake Louise threatened by hotel expansion, environmentalists say

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

Environmentalists in eleven Canadian cities protested the expansion of Chateau Lake Louise Monday, saying the resort's planned new facilities threaten the park's wildlife and contradict a Canadian moratorium on commercial expansion within national parks.

Canadian Pacific (CP) Hotels plans to build a 7-story conference centre in Lake Louise, located in Banff National Park. The centre would include meeting rooms, a dining hall, and 81 new guest rooms.

The plans for the expansion were passed in May 1998, six

weeks before Canadian Heritage Minister Sheila Copps announced a one-year moratorium on all commercial accommodation development in Canadian national parks.

The National Day of Action was co-ordinated by the Bow Valley Naturalists and the Banff Environmental Action and Research (BEAR) society.

A Halifax protest was held in front of Hotel Halifax, a CP hotel, and was coordinated by the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group (NSPIRG). The number of people who attended the event was low, and that disappointed NSPIRG co-ordinator Dave Caulfield.

"There weren't as many people out as we thought," said Caulfield. "It's not a very pedestrian area. But a lot of people took postcards and there was a lot of support from cars driving by."

Protestors carried a banner reading "Lake Louise — for Canadians or for CP Hotels' Profits?" and handed out postcards addressed to prime minister Jean Chretien, asking him to keep his 1996 promise to protect Banff National Park.

A protest was also held in Lake Louise, near the site of the Chateau.

"It went really well. We got incredible feedback," said Ricardo

Hubbs of the BEAR society. "A lot of people were quite shocked when we told them what was to be done. From where we were standing we could say 'right there is where they're planning to build a massive 7-story convention centre'."

Dr. Stephen Herrero, Chairperson and research supervisor for the Eastern Slopes Grizzly Bear Project, stated in a letter to the Alberta Wilderness Association that "the proposed expansion of overnight capacity at Lake Louise will very likely have significant impacts on grizzly bears and wolverines, thus decreasing ecological integrity."

Herrero says the increased number of people staying in the area overnight will increase the stress on the ski hills, an important grizzly habitat.

In 1994, the federal government announced the creation of the Banff Bow Valley Study, which in 1997 provided a basis for the Banff Park Management Plan. The plan states that ecological integrity must be given first priority when considering human use of the park, and that only "basic and essential facilities" will be allowed in Lake Louise.

Conservation groups disagree that the convention centre is basic or essential.

"Basic and essential does not include schools, it does not include hospitals, it does not include churches," said BEAR's Ricardo Hubbs, "but suddenly it includes a massive 7-story convention centre and a luxury shopping arcade and up to 100 extra rooms."

"When you consider a massive 7-story convention centre and luxury shopping arcade as portraying what we feel about our national parks—something's gone amiss here,"

Hubbs said.

Janet Eger, director of public relations at Chateau Lake Louise, says that contrary to what the Bow Valley

Naturalists and the BEAR society are saying, there is no luxury shopping mall, and no retail shopping at all, included in the new complex.

"We appreciate that people may have opposing views and we respect their right to express their opinion," Eger said.

"As far as Chateau Lake Louise is concerned, we've been involved in over three years of discussion and public consultation related to the proposed expansion and we're confident that the development meets all the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act requirements."

She also said that the new facility will not disturb wildlife habitats.

"We're not building our

meeting facility on previously undisturbed land. Currently on the site there is a boiler house which has not been used in 15 years. It's previously disturbed land [that is]



Lake Louise, Alberta.

currently completely unused."

She said the Chateau will also be taking further steps to minimize the environmental impact.

"As part of our conditional approval provided by Parks Canada, Chateau Lake Louise will implement a comprehensive environmental management strategy, which includes a formal environmental management system to be in place by the end of 1999," said Eger. "The Chateau has appointed a full time environmental manager to administer all aspects of the system."

On July 15 of this year, the BEAR Society and the Bow Valley Naturalists filed a lawsuit against Canadian Heritage Minister Sheila Copps, Parks Canada, and CP Hotels, claiming they violated Canada's park policies and environmental laws. They say the environmental assessment conducted by CP Hotels was not

satisfactory.

The BEAR society and the Bow Valley Naturalists met with CP Hotels on Sept. 15, when it was suggested that if CP

Hotels withdrew their proposal and complete a new environmental assessment, the lawsuit would be withdrawn. To date, CP Hotels have not responded to this proposal.

The National Day of Action is the most recent action attempting to stop the expansion.

"I think it's very important that the steps we take in Lake Louise set a precedent on steps to be taken in other national parks across the country," said Hubbs.

"If the Liberal government is going to say there is a moratorium on all commercial development, yet at the same time they're saying they can build a 7-story conference centre, there's a dual story happening here."

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