

# Facing job crisis, band supports new ski resort

## In pine beetle infestation's cruel wake, band says it will require developments to replace forestry jobs

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VANCOUVER -- The Coldwater Indian Band is throwing its support behind a proposed \$2-billion ski resort, and two other developments near Merritt, as it tries to deal with the impact of a pine beetle infestation that is devastating forest-sector jobs in the area.

"It's my hope all these projects are going to go over the next few years," Jim Adams, a consultant to the Coldwater Indian Band, said yesterday as he announced band plans for major economic diversification.

Mr. Adams said with the pine beetle infestation spreading through the forests around Merritt, the Coldwater Band has to start looking for other ways to generate employment.

"I live a few kilometres south of Merritt, and when I look out my window all I see are red forests," Mr. Adams said as he described how widespread the pine beetle epidemic has become.

"The people here work in the mills, log the forests and drive the trucks. What is going to happen when those jobs vanish?" he asked.

The answer for the Coldwater Indian Band is to promote three major projects, including the Juliet Creek Resort Development, which would see Vancouver-based Westscapes Development Inc. building a new all-season resort near the Coquihalla Summit.

The resort proposal, which earlier this year went to the B.C. Environmental Assessment Office for review, has come under attack from the Federation of Mountain Clubs and other groups that fear it will ruin the wilderness values in a popular hiking and climbing area.

But Mr. Adams said the band believes the project won't cause significant damage. "There's always going to be some impact but we think it can be mitigated," he said.

Traditional hunting and berry-picking activities in the area will continue, he said, and concerns about the fisheries impact can be addressed with a commitment to not draw water from the Coldwater River system.

He said the band has reached an agreement with Westscapes Development Inc., which would give natives a seat on the board and 10-per-cent ownership, as well as a share of land sales.

The resort proposal calls for about 200 hectares to be developed with a village, 2,500 dwelling units, a community spa and aquatic centre, an 18-hole golf course and other facilities.

The resort, to be located in high, snow-laden mountains just northeast of the Coquihalla Highway tollbooth, would be built to handle about 7,000 skiers a day.

"I just don't see how this proposal can fail," Mr. Adams said. "There is a huge snow pack there [with an average annual snowfall of 1,100 centimetres] and it's just two hours from the Lower Mainland."

Mr. Adams said a proposal will soon be put before band members for approval. "We're prepared to start looking at moving that forward," he said.

The band is also promoting two other projects: a proposed new industrial park just south of Merritt, located on the Coldwater Reserve, with prime access to the Coquihalla Highway; and a proposed "tourist hub" where Highway 97C, the Okanagan Connector, branches off the Coquihalla Highway near Merritt.

There is currently a tourism information centre at the junction, but Mr. Adams said the land isn't being used to its full economic potential.

"We've talked to the city [of Merritt] and the province and believe there is opportunity there that can be a win for everyone," he said.

Mr. Adams said an example is the Old Country Market at Coombs on Vancouver Island, where a local produce stand that featured goats grazing on a grass-covered roof developed into a popular tourism stop on Highway 4A, between Parksville and Port Alberni.

Coldwater Chief Harold Aljam said the developments would provide hundreds of construction jobs, and each project would offer local band members access to and training for skilled positions.

Stockwell Day, federal Minister for Public Safety and the Conservative MP for Okanagan-Coquihalla, is expected today to announce funding for feasibility studies for all three projects.