



Association for Mineral Exploration British Columbia

“The Flathead Valley is for Everyone”

Disrespecting our provincial land-use planning regime in handpicked places to satisfy foreign interests is simply a bad idea.

British Columbia entered land use planning in the early 1990s. The intent, according to government, was to “outline future intentions for the use of land and resources, providing a predictable basis for land use allocation, development approval and environmental management.” It was to be consensus-based with the stakeholders involved to build trust, reduce conflicts and improve decision-making about the land base.

Today, over 85% of the provincial Crown land base in BC is covered by land use plans, including four requiring final government to government negotiations with First Nations. Over 14% (or more than 13.5 million hectares) of British Columbia is protected – more than any other province in Canada and greater than most other jurisdictions in the world. An almost equal amount of land is in special management zones where industrial activity is extremely rare. Combine this with urban areas and much of the province is off-limits to potential natural resource extraction.

Unfortunately no process, no matter how inclusive, will satisfy everyone. In particular, foreign based and funded environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) continue to demand additional protected areas. Each area in question is designated “the last” or “threatened” or even renamed with slick marketing tags designed to manipulate emotional heartstrings to boost fundraising.

The tactics are predictable and an affront to all British Columbians who spent years designing our current land-use regime.

Of particular concern to the British Columbia mineral exploration and development sector is the Flathead region in BC’s southeast. Recently, ENGOS are demanding that thousands of hectares of the region be added to the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. For the most part, ENGO interests have bypassed First Nations, local, provincial and national governments in Canada and have appealed to Washington and UNESCO—presumably because they would be more sympathetic to their arguments and would have no knowledge of our land-use planning.

Yet, according to the BC Integrated Land Management Bureau, over 16.5% of B.C.’s southeast is in protected areas, while another 11.3% is in special management zones (including wildlife management zones) which restrict most, if not all, industrial activity or resource extraction.

This constitutes almost 28% of the land base, well above the 12% contemplated by the United Nations Brundtland Commission and certainly well more than the majority of jurisdictions around the world.

Thus, despite the creation of a generally agreed upon land-use plan with input from local citizens, the protection of a considerable portion of the region, and the existence of a committee to oversee that plan, external actors are being allowed to impose their values without ever having participated in the local process. This makes a mockery of land-use planning across British Columbia and fundamentally calls into question its purpose.

The mineral exploration and development sector, and other sectors including forestry, outdoor enthusiasts, hunters, and so on, enter into land-use planning discussions in good faith, realizing outcomes will almost inevitably restrict access to some of the land base; that is the nature of such discussions and negotiations. What these sectors don't expect is that the results of those negotiations can be swept aside by external pressure with little or no effort to include the stakeholders who worked so hard to craft those original land use plans. For land use planning to continue to have integrity and buy-in, it is paramount that it is respected and that efforts to circumvent it be rejected.

To more clearly make the point, Western Canada Wilderness Committee spokesman Ken Wu recently criticized the BC government on a forestry-related matter for wanting "...to put in place a major land-use change without a land-use planning process, or any public process." Wu called it a "a no-go." In our view the WCWC couldn't be more correct; consistent land use standards and a transparent process must be applied throughout the province. But this approach is only effective if all parties accept the outcome, regardless of whether they agree with it.

As we emerge from the recession, revenues from the mining and oil & gas sectors represent billions in tax dollars that are more critical than ever before. Our lifestyle, health care, and education systems in B.C. depend directly on these natural resource revenues which are barely keeping our province from plunging into long-term deficits and debts.

To survive and prosper, the mineral exploration and development sector (and ultimately the mining industry) must have certainty of land tenure and confidence in the land use planning process. Potentially toppling our land-use planning system to undermine our primary economic generators in a time of economic crisis to satisfy special foreign interests, who have no long term interest in our province and its citizens, is simply...a bad idea.

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December 2, 2009