

The Great Water Giveaway

Once upon a time, a mine was allowed to operate on Jumbo Creek, a watercourse close to Rossland where the town could get good water at relatively low cost. But the mine, which provided a few jobs for a few years, contaminated that creek for an indefinite period of time. Jumbo Creek water is no longer fit for human consumption. But hey—who knew what the real price of those few short-term jobs would be?

Now somebody else wants to get hands on our resources. He's not a miner; he's a land speculator. What he wants is 450 acres of Crown land (that is, land which belongs to *us*), along with a lot of water that also belongs to us. The Provincial government actually has the power to hand over our land and water to this resort developer, but it probably won't do that unless the people of Rossland, who have a licence on the water which dates back a hundred years, agree that it's okay to give this land speculator the 35 million gallons of water per year he says his golf course will require, plus an additional, undisclosed amount of water to supply the 500-unit hotel and 350 or so resort estates he plans to build.

This development will, of course, provide jobs—just like the old mine did. Most will be seasonal, and few will pay enough for those employed there to buy a home in Rossland—perhaps not even enough to rent a place in Rossland. But that's another issue. The main question is whether you want to give away that part of the Topping Creek watershed which supplies an estimated two-thirds of the town's water during the nine most water-short months of the year. Removing the lower Topping Creek area from our watershed would also mean giving up the Blue Eyes Swamp, which includes springs which supply water *year around*. The Blue Eyes serves as a natural reservoir, too. It holds an estimated two million gallons of water. And reservoirs, as Rossland taxpayers know by now, do not come cheap. Is the town ready to abandon a reservoir it has been given, free of charge, courtesy of nature?

It has been said by some misinformed people that the Blue Eyes ought to be taken out of the system because it is contaminated by the Granite Mountain gravel pit and the septic tanks of private homes in the area. In fact, there are *no* septic tanks in the Topping Creek watershed. None. The gravel pit does have an occasional catchment basin overflow which puts silt into the Blue Eyes, but most of the silt settles out there, or further along, in the Star Gulch reservoir. Tests of Rossland's water supply have always shown the water to be of extraordinarily high quality—and that's in its raw state, even before it goes through the City's sand filter in route to your kitchen.

But here's something to think about: *that sand filter cannot stop chemicals*. Studies confirm that 5-10% of nitrogen fertilisers typically used on turf grass leaches into the groundwater. Other chemical nasties used on or around the golf course may likewise leach into the groundwater. As RMV's own hydrologist admitted, groundwater would be "the main uncontrolled discharge" from the golf course. Exactly where this contaminated groundwater will flow we don't know. What we do know is that groundwater generally flows downhill. There is nothing to prevent contaminants from getting into Ophir Reservoir.

If that worries you, the stuff these land speculators propose to build around the golf course should worry you even more. Plans include hundreds of houses, a big hotel, parking lots, and about five kilometres of public road. The track record for golf course contamination is not good—lawsuits related to same are raging all over Canada right now. But the track record for contamination resulting from residential development, including runoff from roads, parking lots, and driveways, is truly appalling. If you don't believe it, Google "*watershed pollution by housing development.*" In ten seconds it will return about 16,000 articles, and you can do your own research.

Maybe none of that worries you. Maybe the idea of you or your kids finding work at this new golf course complex, is, from your point of view, worth giving up a huge chunk of our most productive watershed, a natural reservoir that has served the community for close to a century, and 450 acres of land. If that's how you feel then read no further. What comes next is only for those who *do not* want to make this trade-off. This is what we can do to stop elected officials, local and provincial, from giving away our land and our precious, irreplaceable water.

1. **Inundate your council members** with letters and phone calls and conversations on the street. As of now, most of them, having heard more from the developers than from you, are inclined to give away our water resources forever in exchange for the developer's (inflated) claims of tax revenues and jobs. You cannot reasonably expect councillors to do what you want if you don't let them know what that is. Write letters. Send e-mails. Phone them. Tell them. *Keep doing it until they get the message.*
2. **Go to the Tue May 20th OCP meeting and speak up.** If you want the Official Community Plan to specifically say that the existing watershed is to be protected in perpetuity, you'll have to tell Council that. If you don't ask for it you're not going to get it, because some councillors want to use wishy-washy language which will "give them options." (Read, allow them to approve the application they have received, to put a golf course and residential development in the Topping Creek Watershed.) The new OCP should make it crystal clear that development in this area is not acceptable.
3. **Sign the new petition now being circulated.** The previous petition, which 935 of you signed, went to Council. MLA Katrine Conroy promises she will carry this one to the provincial legislature. The Province has an operating agreement with Red Mountain Resorts which allows for skiing but does not allow for a golf course. This new petition asks that the agreement *not be changed*, but remain as it is, permitting skiing, but not a golf course or housing development, in this sensitive watershed area.
4. **Don't wait. These things must be done now.** The petition has to be in Katrine's hands by May 21 so she can get it to the legislature before it recesses. Your Council needs to know, *right now*, how you feel about this issue.

--Rosa Jordan

*Don't it always seem to go
that you don't know what you've got till it's gone.
They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.
- Joni Mitchell*