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http://www.vancouver.cbc.ca/newsindepth/colliding_visions/whistler.html

Could a flood and local opposition wash away Whistler's Olympic dreams?

The Early Edition will have more on the Olympics plus other issues when it broadcasts live from Whistler on Feb 9

When Salt Lake City launches the one-year countdown to the 2002 Olympics on February 8th, people in Vancouver and Whistler will be watching closely. That's because in just nine years, Vancouver/Whistler could be hosting their own Olympic Games.



On the way to the lift

It might be a long road to the 2010 Winter Olympic, but members of the Olympic bid Corporation believe Whistler stands a good chance. Their promotional literature says:

- Vancouver is a major cosmopolitan centre and one of the top tourism destinations in North America
- Whistler is a world-class resort, hosting more International Ski Federation Events than any other location
- For the sixth year in a row, Whistler has been rated the number one ski resort in North America by Ski Country Magazine

Given the international competition, Whistler's odds are looking good. So far, the only other cities that have indicated interest are Helsinki, Finland; Jaca, Spain; Montreaux, Switzerland; Muju, South Korea; and Sarajevo, Bosnia. It's Toronto's bid for the 2008 Summer Games that proves the biggest hurdle. That said, there are more local concerns for the Vancouver/Whistler bid team to jump over in order to win the Games.



Local Opposition

A recent Ispos-Reid survey showed 87 per cent of British Columbians support the Olympic bid. The study polled 600 people. But when pollsters focused their study on Whistler, that support dropped to 74 per cent of the 316 people interviewed. The concerns around the resort community centred on the strain it would place on local facilities, infrastructure and transportation services.

There could be another problem. In the last month several letters, critical of Intrawest's operations, have appeared in local Whistler papers. Jim Armstrong owns a weekend home in Whistler. He is one of those concerned letter writers. Armstrong says that since Intrawest purchased Whistler in 1996, more and more, the corporation has operated as a monopoly. He says that's a concern especially when public money could be used to fund Olympic facilities - the very same facilities that Intrawest could snap-up after the 2010 Olympic Games. Dave Brownlie, Intrawest's Senior Vice President of Finance at Whistler Blackcomb, responded in writing on January 5th. He says Intrawest is not a monopoly because Whistler-Blackcomb is not the only mountain resort close to Vancouver.



Fitzsimmons Creek

Slippery Slope

Fitzsimmons Creek flows between the upper village and the town of Whistler. In August 1991, heavy rains sent a torrent of debris rushing down the Creek. Bridges and homes were damaged but high dykes kept the flood waters from washing through the village.

Some say a flood the same size or larger is likely. A geotechnical investigation in 1993 concluded that the 1991 flood was caused when unstable soil on the slope slid into the creek. The slide caused a dam to form which broke and unleashed a debris torrent.

Since then, additional studies have shown that the slope continues to move slowly downhill. Frank Bauman is a geologic engineer familiar with the slope's movement. He says it could happen again and next time, it could be a lot more devastating.

Municipal officials don't accept this analysis. Brian Barnett, the acting director of Public Works says the slope movement is practically insignificant and remediation at this time is unnecessary.

Bauman says Olympic officials will have concerns when they learn about the slide potential at Fitzsimmons Creek.

Turn to CBC Radio and www.vancouver.cbc.ca for continuing coverage of the Whistler/Vancouver bid for the 2010 Winter Games.