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9:00 AM MST February 9, 2012

Approval of Jasper Development Ignores Public Outcry

Banff, Alberta— Over the objections of almost 200,000 citizens, the federal government has approved the proposed “Brewster Glacier Discovery Walk” in Jasper National Park. Conservation organizations fear that the beauty and integrity of Jasper National Park are being surrendered to commercial interests, opening the door for more for-profit businesses to capitalize on the splendour of Canada’s most loved and protected landscapes.

“The development of a permanent infrastructure by Brewster Travel Canada along the Icefields Parkway accessible only by paid admission will serve as a precedent for other business interests who will be demanding their own enterprises along this world-famous highway,” says Wendy Francis, Program Director for the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y). “Every survey initiated by Parks Canada over the past 20 years has indicated that the top priority for visitors is the opportunity to see wildlife and enjoy the peace and beauty of the breathtaking scenery from the viewpoints along the Icefields Parkway, not new “attractions” that are unnecessary and detract from the area’s natural assets”, she adds.

The decision by Minister Peter Kent allows a foreign-owned corporation to monopolize the popular Tangle Ridge Viewpoint and charge an entry fee to access a ‘skywalk’ cantilevered over a small canyon – 7 km from the nearest glacier, and offer the same view that has for decades been free to everyone. The project will involve blasting a 300 m walkway across a cliff face in important mountain goat and bighorn sheep habitat.

"Tens of thousands of Canadians have made it clear that they do not believe these sorts of intrusive engineering projects are appropriate in our National Parks," says Nigel Douglas with Alberta Wilderness Association. "Once again big business has trumped the ecological integrity of our parks."

National park advocates criticized the environmental assessment for the project as grossly inadequate. It monitored wildlife usage of the area to be impacted for only two seasons in one year. This is not nearly long enough to understand the impacts of building a permanent structure and bringing thousands of visitors by busloads to the site for a projected fifty-year life span.

Criticism was also levied at the three-week comment period for the environmental assessment, which did not provide enough time for adequate national consultations appropriate for such a major development.

The federal government and Parks Canada also ignored opposition to the project from of hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world, over 180,000 of whom in just three weeks signed a petition against the project.

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