

# Glacier Discovery Walk Project Update Newsletter

The Environmental Assessment for Brewster's Glacier Discovery Walk is now available for public review and comment.

## Introduction

Brewster Travel Canada (Brewster) is proposing the development of the Glacier Discovery Walk (the Project), a new visitor experience at the Sunwapta Canyon Viewpoint at Tangle Hill on the Icefields Parkway (Highway 93) in Jasper National Park. In order to receive approval from Parks Canada Agency (Parks Canada) to construct the Glacier Discovery Walk, Brewster was required to complete a screening level Environmental Assessment under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA). The goal of the Environmental Assessment is to identify potential environmental impacts from the proposed Project and propose measures to eliminate and/or reduce them.

## How to Access the Environmental Assessment

Copies of the Environmental Assessment are available at:

**Jasper National Park Administration Office:**

607 Connaught Drive, Jasper, Alberta  
Tel: 780-852-6171 Fax: 780-852-6229  
e-mail:jasper.superintendent@pc.gc.ca

**Jasper Municipal Library:**

303 Bonhomme Street, Jasper, Alberta

**Glacier Discovery Walk Website:**

[www.glacierdiscoverywalk.ca/downloads.html](http://www.glacierdiscoverywalk.ca/downloads.html)

All comments regarding the Glacier Discovery Walk Environmental Assessment should be provided in writing by December 16, 2011 to:

**Superintendent, Jasper National Park**  
PO Box 10, Jasper, Alberta T0E 1E0  
Fax: 780-852-6229  
e-mail: [jasper.superintendent@pc.gc.ca](mailto:jasper.superintendent@pc.gc.ca)

## Environmental Assessment Process

All major projects within National Park boundaries are subject to an Environmental Assessment under CEAA. Once it is determined that an Environmental Assessment is required, a responsible authority is identified. In the case of the proposed Project, because it is within the boundaries of Jasper National Park, the responsible authority is Parks Canada.

Parks Canada provided Brewster with a Terms of Reference that identified the required studies and scope for the Environmental Assessment. Brewster contracted Golder Associates to conduct the required studies and prepare a draft assessment for review by Parks Canada. Parks Canada has now deemed the Environmental Assessment to be 'technically complete' and has released it for public review and comment. Any interested members of the public are invited to review the Environmental Assessment and submit comments to Parks Canada to be taken into account in making a final determination. Once the public comment period is complete, Parks Canada will then determine whether or not the Environmental Assessment is satisfactory, and whether the proposed Project may then proceed to the permitting and approvals stage.

## Glacier Discovery Walk Overview

A key goal of the proposed Project is to support the strategies and key directions within the Parks Canada *Icefields Parkway Action Plan*, which identified the need to redesign the Sunwapta Canyon Viewpoint to enhance visitor experience, improve safety, and reduce wildlife mortality.

The Glacier Discovery Walk, as well as the enhanced free public viewpoint, will appeal to a broad cross section of independent travellers, the majority of whom do not stop for any type of professionally guided interpretive experience on the Icefields Parkway. The Glacier Discovery Walk will appeal to family groups, younger travellers, new Canadians and urban dwellers looking for an opportunity to engage with the landscape in a safe, front country manner. Hiking along rough trails is a predominant

activity within the National Parks and excludes an increasing number of Canadians across all age groups from active participation due to mobility constraints. The barrier-free design of the Glacier Discovery Walk will be fully wheelchair-accessible and will enable those visitors to Jasper National Park who are unable to access hiking trails to have a meaningful and educational experience in the Park.

### Visitor Usage Trends at the Site

Brewster anticipates that the Glacier Discovery Walk will result in a 219% increase in visitation rates. The Sunwapta Canyon Viewpoint currently receives an average 82,467 visitors a year, based on 35,855 vehicles at the site with 2.3 visitors per vehicle.

In the first year of Glacier Discovery Walk operations, Brewster expects 5% of Icefields Centre visitors, about 50,000 people, to use the free public viewpoint. In addition, they expect 40% of the existing viewpoint visitors to continue to use the site, 32,987 people, for a total of 82,987 visitors to the free public viewpoint.

Brewster expects an additional 180,000 "combination visitors" to visit the free public viewpoint and the Glacier Discovery Walk for a total of 263,000 total visits to the site.

### Public Site Access

Access to the site will primarily be through free public shuttle busses from the Glacier Discovery Centre. Secure locking stations for bicycles will also be made available on site. Outside operating hours and off-season, public parking will be available on site. In addition, Brewster plans to connect the Tangle Falls parking lot to the Sunwapta Canyon Viewpoint via an 800m walking path. Brewster would also work with Parks Canada on upgrades to the Tangle Falls parking lot .

### Visual Impact

In recognition of the Glacier Discovery Walk’s unique design features that allow it to integrate into the natural surrounding, the Project received the Future Projects, Competition Entries Award at the 2011 World Architecture Festival. Both the Glacier Discovery Walk and Discovery Vista have low profiles and are minimally visible when approaching on the Icefields Parkway from either the north or south. Angular forms, and the warm texture of the Corten steel finish were designed to mimic the rocky outcroppings of the surrounding mountains. A visual impact study completed for the Project determined that the impact on surrounding views will be low because the placement of the

**Table 1: Use and Predicted Use for Sunwapta Canyon Viewpoint and Glacier Discovery**

Current Vehicle Total	35,855 <sup>(a)</sup>
Visitors per Vehicle Factor	2.3
<i>Current Visitors</i>	<i>82,467</i>
<b>Prospective Visitors to the SC Free Public Viewpoint After GDW</b>	
5% of Icefield Center Visitors to the Free View Area	50,000 <sup>(b)</sup>
40% of Existing Viewpoint Visitors to Free View Area	32,987
<i>Total Free Viewpoint Only Visitors</i>	<i>82,987</i>
<b>Prospective Visitors to the Glacier Discovery Walk<sup>(c)</sup></b>	
New Visitors Attracted to Area by GDW	30,000
Group Tour Visitors to the GDW	54,000
FIT <sup>(d)</sup> Glacier Tour Visitors who will also go to GDW	60,000
Current Drive-by Individuals who will go to GDW	36,000
<i>Total Free Viewpoint and GDW Combination Visitors</i>	<i>180,000</i>
<b>Total Visitors to the Free Viewpoint Area</b>	<b>262,987</b>
<b>Estimated Increase in Visitors</b>	<b>219%</b>

(a) Based on 2008 vehicle count by Parks Canada (Parks Canada 2009).

(b) Number of guests that use GDC services is estimated to be double the number of people that use Ice Explorer Tours.

(c) Based on Brewster’s business plan.

(d) FIT’ travellers are “Fully Independent Travellers.”

Glacier Discovery Walk below the level of the highway and the integrated design features significantly reduce visibility along the highway.



*Rendering of Glacier Discovery Walk from Visual Impact Study*

## Vegetation

Construction of the Glacier Discovery Walk will occur on a previously-disturbed site with little native vegetation, where introduced weedy species are common. The pathway connecting the Glacier Discovery Walk and Tangle Falls follows the old highway alignment, which is sparsely vegetated. Tree-clearing will be kept to a minimum and will not include the removal of any large diameter trees. The final route will be determined in consultation with Parks Canada.

Landscaping for the Glacier Discovery Walk will include the use of native rock excavated during construction and will reduce available soil for the proliferation of weeds on the site. Brewster will regularly monitor rock beds for weed growth. Herbicides will not be used: any weeds that are found will be hand-pulled.

The vegetation study examined whether or not any federally-listed plant species were present at the site. A survey was conducted for Haller's Apple Moss, and the site was determined not to have appropriate habitat for this species. Whitebark pine and limber pine were not identified during site visits.

## Wildlife

Mountain goats and bighorn sheep currently use the Sunwapta Canyon Viewpoint despite human activity. Golder Associates conducted a field study to document daily and seasonal use of the escape terrain below the highway and movement within and around the proposed Glacier Discovery Walk site between June and October 2011. This included a remote camera study and site visits to identify wildlife trails and habitat features around the Sunwapta Canyon Viewpoint and within the broader Mountain

Goat and Bighorn Sheep Regional Study Area used for this survey.

The combination of escape terrain, forage, access to salt and a relatively predator-free environment at the Viewpoint offers goats and sheep a combination of high value resources in one area. However, it does not appear that goats using the cliffs below the Viewpoint consider the human traffic in the area as a sufficiently serious threat to leave the area.

To reduce impacts on bighorn sheep and mountain goat populations at the site during construction, activities such as drilling and blasting will be specifically avoided on the site between May 15 and June 30, and all work will be carried out during daylight hours (07h00 to 19h00) to reduce sensory disturbance during peak goat use times. Mountain goat and bighorn sheep rutting seasons (November 1- December 15) will not be impacted by sensory disturbance associated with construction.

Routes providing access to escape terrain above and below the Sunwapta Canyon Viewpoint will not be physically blocked during construction, although sensory disturbance may affect sheep and goat use during the day. During operations, access will be restricted only along a 240 metre section of the existing overlook that currently consists of fences and a parking lot adjacent to the highway.

With an increased amount of over-sized traffic along the Icefields Parkway, construction is predicted to have some impact on highway mortality rates. Careful planning and coordination of delivery and removal of waste loads will reduce the number of trips, and construction activities will be limited to daytime hours when animal activity is lower and visibility is the highest.

Brewster commits to implementing a systematic wildlife monitoring program for the duration of construction and during the first two years of operations. The program will be designed to obtain information regarding:

- Highway 93 traffic volumes and patterns;
- ungulate highway mortality;
- mountain goat and bighorn sheep occupancy of the Glacier Discovery Walk site and surrounding area;
- mountain goat and bighorn sheep use of the north and south end access points adjacent to the Glacier Discovery Walk; and
- mountain goat and sheep use of the cliffs below the Glacier Discovery Walk.

This monitoring program will be designed in consultation with Parks Canada to test the predictions of the CEAA screening assessment, as well as to determine the efficacy of mitigation measures.



All comments regarding the Glacier Discovery Walk Environmental Assessment should be provided in writing by December 16, 2011 to:

**Superintendent, Jasper National Park**  
**PO Box 10, Jasper, Alberta T0E 1E0**  
**Fax: 780-852-6229**  
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