

## **Questions and Answers – The Proposed Brewster Glacier Discovery Walk**

December 12, 2011

### **Purpose and Intent**

Parks Canada is providing the following information in response to a number of recurring questions raised by members of the public at the Jasper National Park Public Forums held in Jasper and Edmonton on November 15 and 17, and the Brewster Open House held December 6 regarding Brewster Travel Canada's proposed Glacier Discovery Walk.

#### **Q: Why is Parks Canada considering this proposal?**

A: Parks Canada is working to ensure that our activities are relevant to more Canadians by providing services and experiences that respond to visitor needs and expectations.

Parks Canada is receptive to the Brewster proposal in principle for its potential to provide new visitor opportunities and learning experiences that contribute to the achievement of the direction provided in the park management plan for the Icefields Parkway – which was developed with public participation. The proposal is consistent with land use zoning provisions for the Park and does not intrude into the lands managed as declared wilderness area. The project would use an already developed viewpoint and involves no incremental development such as new staff accommodation, transportation nodes, or maintenance facilities as it is supported by the Brewster operations at the Icefield Centre.

In this context Parks Canada accepted the proposed Glacier Discovery Walk for consideration into the development and review process.

#### **Q: Why would Parks Canada agree to privatize a free public viewpoint that, if the project is approved, would only be available to paying customers?**

A: There is no question that public access to the Mount Kitchener/Sunwapta Canyon viewpoint would change under the proposal, in terms of access by private vehicles and convenience. However, Parks Canada is of the view that the potential merits of the proposed new experience, with the continued, but modified opportunity for free access to the view point, warrant consideration. We also recognise that there are two other public viewpoints in the immediate area (Stutfield Glacier and Tangle Falls). There are a number of other viewpoints in the broader vicinity, including the Icefield Centre itself.

#### **Q: Is this project the “thin edge of the wedge” - opening the door to more commercial development in Jasper and other national parks?**

A: The proposed Glacier Discovery Walk is viewed by Parks Canada as a unique opportunity that merits consideration. It does not signal a change in Parks Canada's policies concerning commercial development, nor does it trigger other

developments in Jasper National Park or other national parks. An important consideration is that the proposal would utilize an existing developed viewpoint in the front country, and does not create a new developed footprint.

Each national park of Canada has a framework for managing growth and development through the park management planning process and land use zoning, which are aligned with the mandate, legislation, national policies, and objectives of Parks Canada. The approved management plan for Jasper National Park sets out specific limits to commercial growth and development, and provides directions to enhance visitor experiences and learning opportunities while ensuring that ecological integrity is maintained or improved. Under the management plan, over 97% of the Park land base is managed as declared wilderness area with no roads and only basic facilities permissible.

The environmental assessment process under CEAA will have an important role in identifying, analysing, and avoiding or mitigating any potential environmental effects of the project on the Park.

**Q: Does the Glacier Discovery Walk proposal represent a step away from your protection mandate?**

A: No. All three components of Parks Canada's mandate are taken into account in our consideration of the proposed Glacier Discovery Walk. Parks Canada is committed to remain a leader in the protection, education and experience of protected heritage places. Parks Canada will meet the directions articulated in its recently approved 2010 Jasper National Park management plan to connect more people to natural areas. Parks Canada is committed to principled and meaningful approaches to visitor experience and education opportunities in the national parks without compromising ecological integrity.

The environmental assessment process will inform the decision making process, to ensure that ecological integrity will not be adversely affected and to identify any requirements for mitigation measures.

**Q: What is the nature of the relationship between Brewster Travel Canada and Parks Canada with respect to the proposal?**

A: Brewster is the applicant for their Glacier Discovery Walk proposal, and Parks Canada is the land manager for Jasper National Park with decision making authorities under the *Canada National Parks Act* and regulations, and the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*.

Parks Canada and Brewster have an existing landlord-tenant relationship. Brewster holds a leasehold agreement and business license for its base of operations at the Columbia Icefield Centre. Brewster currently pays land rent to Parks Canada based on a percentage of their gross annual revenues, which is standard practice for the Government of Canada. For all leasehold arrangements, Parks Canada follows mandatory Treasury Board and Parks Canada policies and procedures.

It is important to note that all lessees and licenses in Jasper National Park, including other commercial operators outside of the community of Jasper and the Municipality of Jasper, pay land rent to Parks Canada.

**Q: Does Parks Canada have a financial stake in the project?**

A: Parks Canada is not a business partner in the proposed Glacier Discovery Walk, but we will collect land rent if the proposal proceeds - as we do for all leases. The potential for Parks Canada to receive revenue is not a factor in making land use or development decisions.

Parks Canada administers many lease and license of occupation agreements and business licenses in Jasper National Park, whereby lessees, license holders and operators deliver services and programs to visitors as a key means of achieving Parks Canada's mandate of fostering public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of our natural and cultural heritage.

If the Glacier Discovery Walk proposal were to be approved, Parks Canada and Brewster would negotiate the terms and conditions of a lease for use of the Sunwapta Viewpoint. After obtaining the advice of an independent third party assessor on fair market value, Parks Canada would negotiate land rent for the new lease.

**Q: Is the project already approved? Is this a done deal?**

A: No decisions have been made by Parks Canada as to whether the proposed Glacier Discovery Walk may proceed or not. The draft environmental assessment is under review and comments from the public will be carefully considered before Parks Canada makes a determination under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA).

**Q: When will a decision be made?**

A: Parks Canada is expecting to take a decision regarding the environmental assessment and proposal by late January, 2012. A notice of decision will be posted on the Canadian Environmental Assessment Registry at [www.ceaa.gc.ca](http://www.ceaa.gc.ca) once a decision has been taken.

Parks Canada will report back on public feedback and how it was taken into account in the decision making process.

**Q: Why the short public review period?**

A: Given the length of time that project information has been widely available to the public, Parks Canada is of a view that three weeks – one week longer than the mandatory minimum under CEAA, will allow sufficient time for the public to obtain the draft environmental assessment and provide meaningful comments on the content.

Brewster has conducted a public participation program since January 12, 2011, and they held four community open houses January 31 - February 3, in Jasper, Banff, Calgary and Edmonton. The open houses offered members of the public an opportunity to review detailed project information and to meet with project staff and invited initial public comment on their proposal. Early on, Brewster engaged with interest groups, both potential supporters and potential opponents, and interested Aboriginal groups. A report on Brewster's public and Aboriginal engagement activities between January 1, 2011 and October 19, 2011 is available at [http://www.glacierdiscoverywalk.ca/files/Brewster-GDW-CR\\_Oct2011.pdf](http://www.glacierdiscoverywalk.ca/files/Brewster-GDW-CR_Oct2011.pdf).

The public open house held by Brewster in Jasper on December 6 provided opportunities to meet with subject experts to discuss the draft environmental assessment in detail. Parks Canada participated to provide information about policy and the development review process. The environmental assessment has been available to download on line since November 23, and hardcopies are available on demand.

Under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, projects must be posted for a minimum of two weeks, and most projects administered by Parks Canada are posted for the mandatory time period. For proposals where a high level of public interest is known to exist, or develops, Parks Canada ensures a proactive public participation program is conducted and formal invitation is offered to the public to review and comment on the environmental assessment. This is the case for the proposed Glacier Discovery Walk.

**Q: What is being done with the 7,000 [not verified] postcards that opponents to the project have distributed to be sent to the Prime Minister?**

A: Public comments to the Minister and Prime Minister are taken seriously. Parks Canada is aware of the postcard campaign directed to Ottawa. As we are not the recipients of the cards, Parks Canada cannot verify or comment on the numbers received or their content.

**Q: How are public [and Aboriginal] comments taken into account and who makes the decision?**

The Superintendent of Jasper National Park is the decision making authority for the environmental assessment process for the proposed Glacier Discovery Walk. As required under CEAA, the Superintendent will take public comments into account when deciding on a course of action.

Parks Canada will give serious consideration to all comments we receive. The number of public responses is not the only factor in assessing public interest or concerns. Parks Canada will take into account the nature of the comments, the validity and scope of concerns expressed, Ministerial and other correspondence, the geographic area represented by respondents, and whether the comments provide new information relevant to the assessment.

The public feedback received to date by the Superintendent about the proposed Glacier Discovery Walk indicates a high level of public interest and a range of opinions. Many well-reasoned perspectives have been received both for, and against, the proposal.

The benefits of public and Aboriginal participation in the environmental assessment process include accessing and learning from public knowledge, opportunities for understanding and addressing public concerns, contributing to transparency and accountability in decision making by Parks Canada, and strengthening the environmental assessment process for the project. We will analyze the feedback we receive and report publicly at the end of the process.

We do very much appreciate the time that people have taken to produce thoughtful responses.

**Reminder - public comments are due December 16, 2011**

The draft environmental assessment prepared by Brewster is available for public review at the following locations:

- Glacier Discovery Walk website at: [www.glacierdiscoverywalk.ca/downloads.html](http://www.glacierdiscoverywalk.ca/downloads.html)
- The Jasper National Park Administration Office (607 Connaught Drive)
- The Jasper Municipal Library (located in the Jasper Activity Centre)
- By contacting the Office of the Superintendent at 780-852-6171, fax at 780-852-6229, or e-mail at [jasper.superintendent@pc.gc.ca](mailto:jasper.superintendent@pc.gc.ca).

**For more information and/or to provide comments on the draft environmental assessment, please contact:**

The Office of the Superintendent, Jasper National Park of Canada

Fax: 780-852-6229

Email: [jasper.superintendent@pc.gc.ca](mailto:jasper.superintendent@pc.gc.ca)

Mail: P.O. Box 10, Jasper Alberta T0E 1E0.