



Decision to dissolve Tourism British Columbia shocks BC's nature based tourism industry

(August 19th, 2009 Cumberland, BC) News of the BC Government's move to dissolve Tourism British Columbia came as a shock to BC's nature based tourism industry. "We were surprised by the announcement and had no prior indication that government was contemplating this move" said Brian Gunn, President of the BC Wilderness Tourism Association.

Tourism BC was an award winning organization, which had developed a world-class destination marketing model that was the envy of the world. As we understand it Tourism BC will be absorbed into the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (MTCA). Rod Harris, the current CEO of Tourism BC was relieved of his duties yesterday along with the current Board of Directors. Lori Wanamaker, Deputy Minister of MTCA will assume the role of Tourism BC CEO, and staff have been told that they will remain in place until April 1, 2010 at which time they will be integrated into the Ministry. Jim Yardley, representing MTCA, has been appointed as the sole director of Tourism BC board until it is integrated into the Ministry. An Advisory Council, accountable to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, will be appointed to take over from the independent Board of Directors.

"This move could be very detrimental to BC's over-all marketing effort and have a further negative impact on our current economic contribution to the province" said Gunn. "While government is making claims that this move will save money, which can be re-invested in BC's regions, and that it will increase efficiency and better target marketing resources, this will need to be proved. The Ministry of Tourism doesn't have a track record for this type of major marketing effort."

Dean Wyatt of Knight Inlet Lodge and Grizzly Tours said that "as a major tour operator in BC I am dismayed at this decision. In six months we will be wallowing in a sea of bureaucracy with government controlling tourism marketing as opposed to being led by an independent, efficient, and cost effective Crown Corporation. We sell tour packages all over the world and Tourism BC is considered a first class destination marketing organization. They really are the envy of world jurisdictions that promote tourism."

Evan Loveless, WTA Executive Director said that "we are concerned about government's tampering with Tourism BC at this point in time with the Olympic games soon upon us and coming out of the recent economic downturn. We are in dire need of stability and major moves like fundamentally shifting our lead marketing agency and implementing the new HST after this current tough tourist season doesn't bode well for tourism businesses throughout BC.

The WTA will be sending a letter to Premier Campbell and Tourism Minister Kevin Krueger outlining our concerns about this move and recommendations for moving forward.

– 30 –

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