

Chapter 4: A Tourism Sector Strategy for the Southern Interior in Response to the Mountain Pine Beetle

This section covers proposed strategies, next steps and recommendations for implementation.

Vision & Mission Statements

Vision Statement

Communities in the Southern Interior Region will benefit from an expanded, diverse, four-season tourism base and a competitive, viable tourism industry.

Mission Statement

To promote economic development through tourism to support local communities and regions (geographical and cultural) impacted by the MPB epidemic.

Strategy Goals

- Encourage a supportive public policy environment that advances tourism development in the Southern Interior Region.
- Support collaboration of all communities, including aboriginal communities, in the implementation of provincial and regional tourism strategies.
- Identify specific actions that promote the viability and competitiveness of existing tourism businesses and encourage future tourism investment.

Action Plan

The Action Plan outlines tourism strategies for the entire Southern Interior region (as defined for this document), followed by tourism strategies specific to the subregional areas of Cranbrook, Kamloops, Lillooet and Merritt Timber Supply Areas (TSAs) where a more focused look was taken based on the work undertaken by SIBAC that identified these TSAs as hardest hit by Mountain Pine Beetle. The strategies were developed through analysis of ongoing needs identified in various strategic plans for the region at the provincial, regional and local levels as well as consultation with local and regional stakeholders in the four TSAs, input from the Working Group and, expert advice from First Nations and the broader tourism community.

Organizing for Implementation

1. Identify an agency (or agencies) and resource support to drive the implementation of A Tourism Sector Strategy for the Southern Interior.

This action is dealt with first because of its overwhelming importance to the successful implementation of *A Tourism Sector Strategy for the Southern Interior*. The goodwill and guidance, enthusiasm and learning that developed amongst an array of tourism stakeholders during the course of this project will only yield benefits if an appropriate agency (or agencies) is given the responsibility for carrying out the associated tasks. This agency (or agencies) needs to be identified, formally confirmed and supported by key stakeholders, including government and First Nations. The agency (or agencies) must then be provided with the necessary resources (time, money, people, and mandate) to facilitate overall implementation of the strategy. Preference should be given to an existing agency (or agencies) as most key stakeholders are already involved either as members of executives in local, regional or sectoral organizations. A new agency is unlikely to be viable, because of perceived or real potential conflicts with other agencies, as well as difficulties sourcing a sustainable funding base.

Regional Responsibilities:

- SIBAC should consider recommending and supporting an agency or agencies to lead the implementation of this document, *A Tourism Sector Strategy for the Southern Interior*. The regional DMOs (i.e., TOTA, KRTA) working together, may be well poised to accept this responsibility as part of their mandate that has recently been expanded beyond marketing into the realm of tourism management. Their role would be to work with a Regional Tourism Advisory Group (i.e. one in Thompson Okanagan, one in Kootenay Rockies) made up of representation from Subregional Tourism Advisory Groups to drive the implementation of this plan as further explained in Strategy #2. Since the westernmost TSAs making up the Southern Interior overlap into two other tourism regions, it may be best to allow inclusion of tourism businesses in these fringe areas to participate in the Regional Advisory Group led by TOTA.
- Develop a funding strategy to ensure resources are available for implementation.
- Develop tools and protocols for obtaining First Nation input into tourism development issues. While there is currently close First Nation involvement in SIBAC itself, this does not necessarily imply a similar involvement in an implementation agency. Sample protocol agreements, consultation forums and other mechanisms to enhance collaboration, trust, and professional development would empower implementation. Importantly, First Nation participation in resolving land use and resource issues is critical given government's New Relationship objectives and the future expected direction of strategic land and resource planning.

2. Enhance tourism collaboration at the regional and subregional level to support destination policy, planning, development and management.

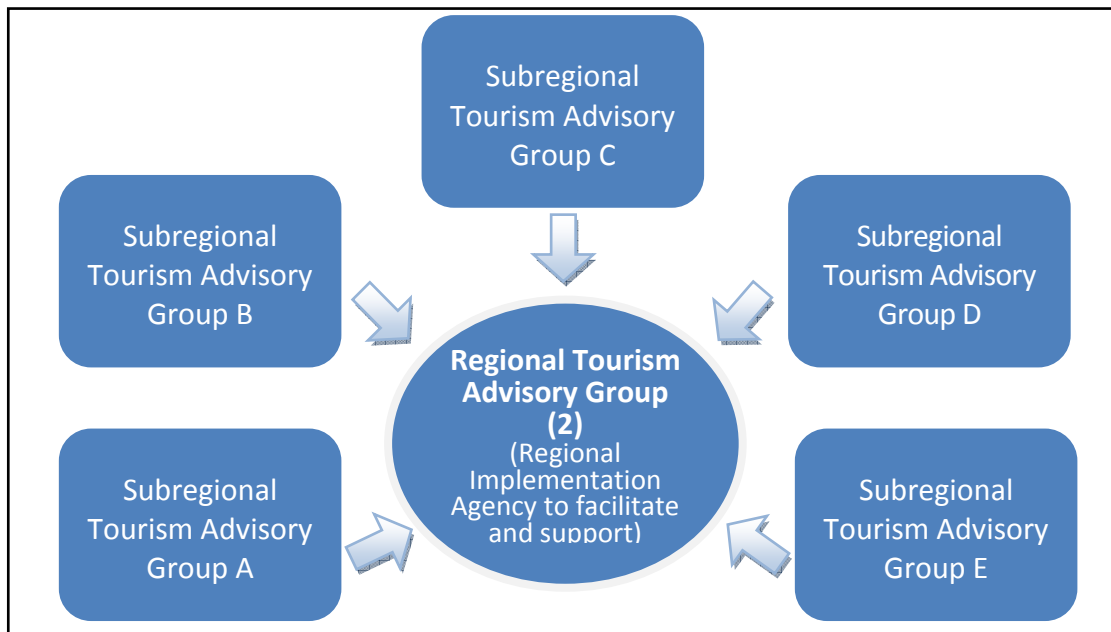
Tourism is unique among economic base sectors in that it is dominated by small and medium-sized businesses that must implicitly cooperate with “competing” businesses, government and residents if its potential is to be fully realized. It is also managed differently by government, primarily because the

relationship between demand, and the various inputs that go into the tourism experience to meet it, are not that well understood. Marketing and promotion of the province is led by Tourism British Columbia in affiliation with the Regional DMOs and Community DMOs. These marketing efforts and those of the Canadian Tourism Commission (and the industry itself) are relatively sophisticated and have worked well in maintaining the province’s competitive position. However, supply-side conditions, particularly those related to land and natural resources, infrastructure, and other “destination development factors” are not managed or coordinated in a way that creates a regional climate supportive of new investment, innovation and industry competitiveness.

The purpose of the Regional and Subregional Tourism Advisory groups would be to increase awareness and work towards resolution of the issues that impede tourism.

Figure 7 illustrates the relationship between the proposed Regional Tourism Advisory Group, the subregional Tourism Advisory Groups and the role of the implementation agency(ies).

Figure 1 Suggested Relationships between Regional and Subregional Tourism Advisory Groups



The following agencies are responsible for tourism development in the Southern Interior and should be involved in the Regional Tourism Advisory group:

- Thompson Okanagan (TOTA), Vancouver Coast and Mountains (VCM) and Kootenay Rockies Tourism Association (KRTA) in affiliation with Tourism BC (TBC) and Aboriginal Tourism BC (AtBC), as well as a host of community destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are responsible for regional,

provincial, sectoral and community tourism marketing activities. While mandated to function primarily as marketing agencies, many marketing agencies are looked upon as the *de facto* destination management agencies, due to their knowledge and expertise of the local industry. However, they lack the resources and mandate to adequately coordinate and advocate on behalf of the industry in a number of critical destination policy and development areas. Being governed by independent boards of directors comprising stakeholders from a variety of private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, the RDMOs (and community DMOs) are well positioned to be the leader in coordinating all aspects of tourism policy, planning, development, management, and marketing – provided they are given adequate resources and their mandates are formally adjusted to include all these aspects of the tourism system.

- BC's Integrated Land Management Bureau (ILMB) is responsible for Adventure Tourism tenures on Crown land. The Ministry of Environment (MoE) manages tenures for Guide Outfitters on Crown land. MoE also manages Guided Adventure (Commercial Recreation) tenures within BC Parks.
- The BC Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Arts (MTCA) has overall responsibility to develop tourism across the province. However, at the regional level, their efforts are focused primarily on the activities of the Recreation, Sites and Trails Branch, and the Resort Development Branch.
- Other levels that influence tourism development include the following examples: Federal government - Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), Aboriginal Tourism Canada (ATC), Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), Canadian Heritage; Provincial government - Ministries of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, Forests and Range, Health Services, Transportation and Infrastructure; First Nation government and non-government agencies - Tribal Councils, Unaffiliated First Nations groups, Aboriginal Tourism BC (AtBC); Local (regional and municipal) - Planning and Development, Public Works and Utilities, Parks, Recreation and Culture, and Economic Development agencies.
- Additionally, a variety of provincial not-for-profit societies are organized to support the interests of their constituencies, with the lead provincial agency being the Council of Tourism Associations (COTA). Additional sector associations include the BC Hotel Association, the Wilderness Tourism Association (WTA), Backcountry Lodges of BC Association (BLBCA), Canada West Ski Areas Association, and dozens of others.

The tourism advisory group would take action to address issues that prevent the industry from cementing its role as a central economic engine of the Southern Interior region. Importantly, the group would help instill a sense of commitment to regional planning and cooperation. As the Southern Interior is a large geographical area, subregional needs would also have to be considered.

At this point it must be emphasized that the regional and subregional advisory groups are not intended to duplicate the work of existing agencies, do not necessarily require complicated and time-consuming governance structures, and do not need to absorb costly time and resources of already overstretched agencies. Rather, with a focused structure and objectives, the coordinated efforts could result in considerable efficiencies by identifying and removing obstacles while capitalizing on opportunities in a collective and proactive manner.

Facilitating opportunities for ongoing tourism dialogue at the regional, subregional and community levels would generate a diverse range of perspectives and may generate a number of benefits. These may include greater collective understanding of common tourism issues and objectives in the region, including issues related to natural resource management, public-commercial interaction on Crown land, infrastructure requirements (forest service roads, signage, etc.), resolution of multi-jurisdictional challenges (e.g., conflicts on the popular KVR rail trail), and ways to develop new partnership opportunities.

Regional Responsibilities:

Once the implementation agency is confirmed, its tasks will be to:

- Facilitate discussions amongst public and private sector tourism stakeholders.
- Prepare terms of reference for the Regional Tourism Advisory Group. Critical decisions would have to be made on the function, term, objectives, roles and funding.
- Solicit input from potential participants and attract key individuals to sit on the regional tourism advisory group and establish the group.

Subregional Responsibilities:

- Develop a Subregional Tourism Advisory Group in those areas where interest warrants doing so. Stakeholders in all four TSAs (Lillooet, Merritt, Kamloops and Cranbrook) stated the need for such an “umbrella” group for each subregion.
- Determine the approximate geographical boundaries of the subregions. Initial findings suggest that the approximate size of Timber Supply Areas would be a beneficial scale for coordination of tourism development at the subregional level. These boundaries could potentially overlap to provide the opportunity to link and interact more effectively across existing jurisdictional boundaries.
- Develop Terms of Reference for the Subregional Tourism Advisory Groups with the expectation that they will work in tandem. The TOR should identify organizational structure include decision-making and communications processes.
- Identify participants for Subregional Tourism Advisory Groups. Suggested participants include governments (community, regional and First Nation), private sector (tourism operators and suppliers), public sector employees (e.g. Community/Regional Economic Development Officers, ILMB Adventure Tourism Managers, MTCA Rec. Sites and Trails Managers) and regional and community DMO representatives.
- Identify funding opportunities (preferably sustainable and ongoing).
- Identify subregional issues and prioritize common goals and objectives to address.
- Provide membership training & education as required (about tourism, local issues, conflict resolution, project management, etc).

Suggested Implementation Team

Regional & Subregional Advisory Groups (possibly RDMOs in collaboration with DMOs)

Land and Resource Management

3. *Work toward enhancing access to back and mid-country recreation areas in the Southern Interior.*

Backcountry and off-road access are very important tourism development factors, not just for outdoor adventure operators but for any business whose clients interact with and explore the natural environment in this province. Access to these natural areas is primarily via forestry and industrial development roads that may or may not be designated and managed for tourism and recreation use. Increasing use among different industries, recreation and tourism users has led to concerns about the sustainability and quality of the experience in high value areas. The predominant issue is how to enable convenient and safe access yet preserve the visitor experience. Ideally this would be accomplished through the voluntary efforts of all users, but in reality access restrictions and zoning of the land base may be required where conflicts are most intense.

Regional Responsibilities:

The following four issues were highlighted in the workshops.

- Implement the Off Road Vehicle (ORV) Coalition Report recommendations¹. It is widely recognized by stakeholders that BC lacks an adequate off-road vehicle (ORV) management regime, possessing some of the lowest standards in western North America. The key issues associated with ORV and tourism includes degradation of the tourism experience and risk management. Not addressing the issues around ORVs will result in lost tourism opportunities as BC's reputation for quality backcountry experiences deteriorates. High profile examples where ORV issues exist include: the Kettle Valley Railway, much of the west and east Kootenays, Upper North Thompson, and within some parks.
- Participate more actively in MoFR and MoE mitigation planning. For example, MoE's *Southern Interior Strategic Regional Restoration Plan* has identified areas sensitive to access before mountain pine beetle salvage is done and new roads constructed. Where recreation access plans (as recommended above) are not in place, tourism input into the inventory of non-status roads and restoration needs, where no agency or company has a maintenance responsibility, would at least interject tourism interests into these mitigation measures.
- Strengthen compliance and enforcement measures and capabilities to safeguard recreational experiences (also identified in the ORV coalition report). This is a long-standing, well established problem identified by outdoor recreation and tourism groups. Upholding legal intent and the application of punitive measures for transgression of statutes meant to protect recreation values would contribute to the public's understanding of and adherence to those laws. The lack of resources (regulatory and human) has contributed to the growth in user conflicts on Crown lands,

¹ See <http://www.orvcoalitionbc.org> for more details. View the ORV Coalition Report at <http://www.orvcoalitionbc.org/Final%20ORV%20Recommendations.pdf>

for example, in some high profile cases where activities clearly contravene FRPA Section 46 or Section 58 closures.

- Build a coordinated trails and trail systems strategy. Trails in the region are used by those on foot, bike, horse, and/or ORV. Trails provide access to destinations (e.g., fishing lake, viewpoint) and between destinations (e.g., communities, accommodations). Many trails are destinations unto themselves. A small but growing percentage of trails are officially recognized by local or provincial governments (through MTCA, MoE-BC Parks or Parks Canada), but many are not. In addition, some trails and sites are in danger of deterioration beyond repair and are posing safety hazards as a result of beetle-killed trees. MTCA's treatment of 294 sites and 20 trails over the past two years that was supported by MPB mitigation funding is now complete. However, the ministry has identified a further 300 sites and 161 trails requiring MPB mitigation work.

Subregional Responsibilities:

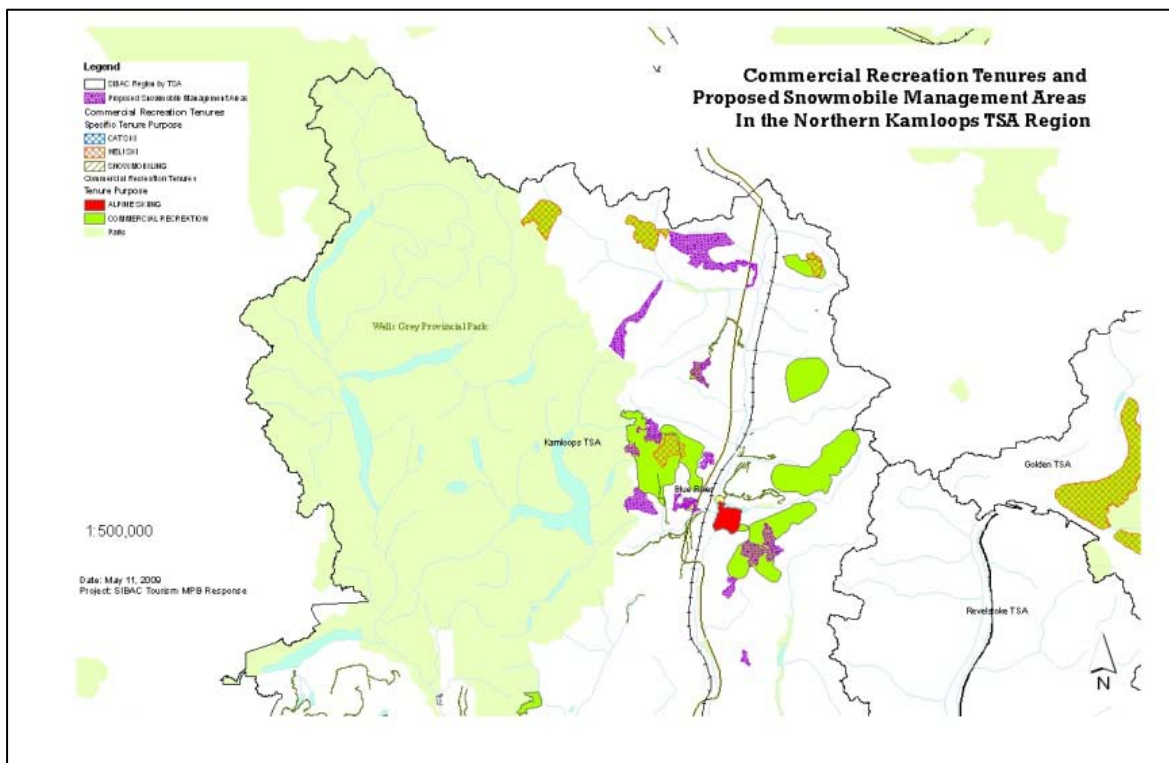
The Subregional Tourism Advisory Groups will each determine which issues are the most pressing in their region and also how they plan to address them. Each Subregional Tourism Advisory Group will have autonomous decision-making on determining which subregional issues are the most pressing and/or which issues can most easily be resolved. Broad suggestions for specific actions to be addressed at the subregional levels are provided below:

- Develop Recreation Access plans for those areas where conflicts on Crown land exist between user groups (e.g., between motorized and self-propelled users). These conflicts cause uncertainty for Crown land tenured tourism operators, discourage continued or new investment, contribute to animosity between user groups, and may negatively affect the tourism experience. For example a Recreation Access Plan can identify which trails should be legally designated and which should be decommissioned. These plans can also address issues related to forest service roads (FSRs). Their continued maintenance or deactivation are viewed differently by community members; some want the roads to be maintained while others argue they should not be as the increased access means the loss of the "wilderness" appeal for an operator and can even introduce invasive alien plant species and noxious weeds. A recreation access plan serves to protect the interests of both recreation and tourism users and would provide certainty that should increase investment in tourism products and services on Crown land.
- **Kamloops** - Prepare a Recreation Use Plan that resolves incompatible recreation and tourism uses on Crown land. User conflicts in the North Thompson area around the community of Blue River should be addressed to ensure the continued viability of commercial operations, protect sensitive Caribou habitat and to take advantage of the growing interest in the region by recreation snowmobilers and backcountry skiers. A plan could complement the adjacent Eight Peaks SRMP and promote additional tourism experiences in the Blue River area. Although some snowmobile management areas have been established, issues related to communication and compliance with these areas and the development of club-supported winter roads is still an issue for many users.

Another area that would benefit from such a plan is found in the Ashcroft/Cache Creek area. Dispersed motorized use of the area is severely damaging sensitive habitat and creating new trails that are not legally designated and which, if left unmonitored, could compromise the tourism potential in the Thompson-Nicola area.

Suggested Implementation Team

Subregional Tourism Advisory Group, MTCA Trails and Recreation Division, Regional and community DMOs, tourism operators, representatives of user groups (e.g. ORV organizations, backcountry skiers)



- Develop trail advisory bodies to address trail development, funding, protection and management issues. A trail advisory body and/or local/regional trail committees are needed to support development of trail opportunities. The trail advisory body can also work to resolve issues related to destruction of the biophysical and social environments as a result of noncompliance with SRMP guidelines.
- **Cranbrook-** A trail advisory body and/or local/regional trail committees in Cranbrook, Kimberly, and Lake Koochanusa is needed to support development of trail opportunities, including the development of mountain bike opportunities with the Fernie Trail Alliance, which currently manage a system of legally designated cross-country and downhill mountain bike trails. Regional trail connections that will connect communities and provide alternate mode of

transportation such as those outlined in the Kimberley Recreation Trails Master Plan could also be pursued.

The trail advisory body can also work to resolve issues related to degradation of the biophysical and social environments as a result of noncompliance with SRMP guidelines. This lack of compliance (and enforcement) of the area covered by the Cranbrook West Recreation Management Strategy has led to reports of a “wild west” attitude, particularly in the Kooacanusa region. As noted in Chapter 3, the recent MOU signed between MTCA and enforcement agencies could be a reasonable starting point for this initiative. Specific examples of where hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, ATVing and snowmobiling activities take place along trails on Crown land areas includes:

- Hiking – Boivin Creek, Heiko Trail, Kimberley Nature Park area, Middle Pass Corridor, Saint Mary’s
- Mountain biking - Baldy Lake, Bootleg Mountain, Galbraith, Kimberley Nature Park area, Lois Creek, Lost Sunken, Mt. Fernie, Old Rail Line (Cranbrook to Kimberley), South Star Trail
- Snowmobiling – Corbin Creek, Elk Pass Highwood Valley, Hartley Pass, Moyie River, Ram Cabin Pass
- ATVing - Elko to Galloway, Elk Pass Highwood Valley, Rampart
- Horseback riding (day and overnight pack trips) – Dewer Creek to Purcell, Doer Road, , Middle Pass Corridor

Suggested Implementation Team

Subregional Tourism Advisory Group, Kootenay Rockies Tourism, Community DMOs, Community Futures, MTCA Trails and Recreation Division, representatives of regional trail users (e.g., mountain bike, endurance riders, or snowmobile associations)

- **Kamloops** - Develop a Regional Trail Management Board and subregional trail advisory committees for Barriere, Logan Lake, Clearwater and Kamloops to advise on trails planning and development. This Board could advise on which trails should be authorized, if and where new trails can be developed and address issues related to problems with use of these trails. Any strategies developed at the local or regional level should be aligned with provincial and national trails strategies.

Specific examples of where significant tourism-related hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, ATVing and snowmobiling activities take place along trails on Crown land areas includes:

- Hiking - Isobel Lake, Lac Du Bois, Lac Le Jeune, Sun Peaks, Raft Mountain/Wells Gray
- Mountain biking - Barnhartvale, Harper Mountain, Lac Du Bois, Logan Lake, Stake Lake, Sun Peaks
- Snowmobiling – Blue River to Valemout, Bonaparte Lake, Deadman River, Foghorn Mountain, Greenstone Mountain, Groundhog Mountain, Sun Peaks

- ATV and Horseback riding (day and overnight pack trips) – Barnhartvale, Barriere, Bonaparte Plateau, Greenstone Mountain, Logan Lake

Suggested Implementation Team

Regional Tourism Advisory Group, TOTA, Community DMOs, Community Futures, MTCA Rec Sites and Trails Branch, representatives of regional trail users (e.g., mountain bike, endurance riders, or snowmobile associations).

- **Lillooet** - The Lillooet TSA has numerous trail development opportunities and associated tourism services (e.g., hospitality services, guides, trail maintenance and repair, bike and snowmobile sales and maintenance). Fourteen unmarked biking and hiking trail systems (200 kms) can be found around Lillooet. As well, opportunities exist to take better advantage of Gold Rush trail and road routes to the Cariboo goldfields (Lillooet was 'Mile Zero'). Specific examples of where hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, ATVing and snowmobiling activities take place along trails on Crown land areas includes:
 - Hiking - Walden North, Joffery Lakes
 - Mountain biking - Texas Creek, Mt McLean (Seton Lake Trail Shuttle, out of Tyax Resort)
 - Snowmobiling - Yalokum, Spruce Lake, Eldorado, Slim Creek, Mt McGillivray, Lone Goat & Hurley River areas
 - ATV and Horseback riding (day and overnight pack trips) – throughout the area

Suggested Implementation Team

Subregional Tourism Advisory Group, Regional and Community DMOs, Community Futures, MTCA Recreation Sites and Trails Branch, representatives of regional trail users groups

- **Merritt** - Merritt has numerous high-value trails that could support more tourism activity, but this would require more active management and strategic development. Jurisdictional challenges need to be addressed to ensure the success of important recreation, cultural and heritage trail development, funding and ongoing management. In particular, the Kettle Valley Railway Trail (KVR) management and use was identified as a high priority. A multitude of jurisdictional authorities along the trail mean it is difficult to resolve maintenance and conflict issues. As well, there is limited access along parts of the KVR due to multiple crossings of private and Indian Reserve lands; washed out bridges and deteriorated trails further limit access along this trail. Finally, conflicts exist between user groups because the trail is used by hikers, cyclists (day trippers, touring), equestrians, and ATVerS in the summer and cross country skiers and snowmobilers in the winter.

The trail advisory body could work to enhance the community as a mountain bike destination, expand local trails that have been developed under agreement with MTCA Recreation Sites and

Trails Branch and support improvements to hiking trails (e.g., Dewdney and Hope Pass Trails). Other examples of where hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, ATViing and snowmobiling activities take place along trails on Crown land areas includes:

- Hiking – Chataway Lake, China Ridge, Centennial, Hope Pass, Dewdney and Hudson Bay Brigade Trails, Kane Valley, Pimanus Lake/Ridge, Sugarloaf Mountain, Stoyama Mountain, Upper Coldwater, Hedley
- Mountain biking – China Ridge, Coutlee Plateau (Lily Lake), Iron Mountain, Kane Valley, Princeton to Otter Lake to Osprey Lake (KVR)
- Snowmobiling – Chataway Lake, China Ridge, Coquihalla Summit, Kane Valley, Pike Mountain, Stoyama Mountain, Similkameen and Tulameen headwaters, Upper Coldwater
- ATV and Horseback riding (day and overnight pack trips) – China Ridge, Coutlee Plateau, Coquihalla Summit, Kane Valley, Lower Nicola, Marshall Springs, Sugarloaf Mountain, Pike Mountain, Princeton to Otter Lake to Osprey Lake (KVR)

Suggested Implementation Team

Subregional Tourism Advisory Group, COTA, MTCA Rec Sites and Trails Branch, ILMB Adventure Tourism, User group representatives.

4. Encourage land management that safeguards natural resources upon which high quality tourism experiences are dependant.

The tourism industry would benefit from greater involvement in decision-making processes around natural resource management extraction policies, guidelines and activities (e.g., FSR development and decommissioning, location, timing and type of timber harvesting, location/timing of IPPs and mineral exploration, etc.). Focusing on the potential benefits of protecting tourism’s resource based interests to a greater degree will support the development and growth of high-value / high-yield tourism opportunities in the region while having little or no impact on other resource sectors. This will include identifying tourism’s land-based interests and developing management objectives to meet these interests in consultation with tourism and government stakeholders as well as First Nations.

Regional Responsibilities:

- Using the content and maps developed in this report, assist communities and regional representatives in developing and utilizing strategic land use tools (spatial and/or non-spatial) in the short and mid-term to ensure the tourism land base assets are managed appropriately and in support of growth targets for these sectors.
- Develop tools to ensure that planning and other cost impacts on forest licensees are minimized, and in line with First Nations interests.
- Develop a Best Practices guide for managing tourism values in forest practices, including stand prioritization, access management, timing, consultation processes, trail buffers, viewscape management, and other requirements to manage impacts on tourism land values.

Subregional Responsibilities:

- Bring specific subregional issues to the attention of the Subregional Tourism Advisory Group and the Regional Tourism Advisory Group.

Infrastructure and Product Development

5. Facilitate infrastructure development among Southern Interior communities.

New infrastructure investments would increase opportunities to grow and diversify the tourism base. Examples of new development opportunities include:

- Improve multimodal access to and within the region. Transportation underpins all tourism activity as it enables visitors to arrive and move within the region. Air services and other modes of transit (road, rail, and water) are critical to ensuring convenient and efficient access to and around the region so visitors can connect to attractions and services. Areas of strategic emphasis include best practices research, as well as guideline and policy support for:
 - Community and regional initiatives that attract and sustain regional air services,
 - Highway and connector road development, and
 - Mapping, signage and circle tour development;
- Public infrastructure aimed at improving visitor services, including the development of gateway visitor centres (e.g. in Lillooet at Station Hill);
- Offer assistance in developing authentic Aboriginal tourism products and services - These are essentially an untapped opportunities for First Nations communities in the Southern Interior region; and
- Festivals and events - A greater emphasis on destination-oriented festivals and events would draw in more visitors and diversify the available products while still complementing the outdoor recreation strengths of most communities.

The intent of this strategy (#5) would be to prioritize, and assist communities who have already committed previous planning efforts and funds to these areas.

Regional Responsibilities:

- Complete a regional inventory of all tourism operators, features and infrastructure in a centrally maintained and accessible database. Different government agencies maintain different components of this proposed inventory, for example Tourism BC has been building an inventory of tourism assets as part of its Community Tourism Foundations program. ILMB, MTCA and MoFR have GIS databases containing recreation sites, trails, features, viewpoints, travel corridors, recreation tenures and

other information. Local government and First Nations have their own data on tourism-related infrastructure. RDMOs have stakeholder databases. Brought together in a central repository, the inventory would represent a major contribution to tourism intelligence and substantially advance the understanding of the industry and how it might be built in the future.

- Develop a Best Practices Handbook that will assist First Nations communities, local governments, and community groups to most effectively collaborate in infrastructure planning and development.
- Develop policy statements and support tools that can be drawn from industry and sector organizations such as COTA and WTA and articulated and utilized at the local level.
- Take further advantage of MPB interpretive opportunities. Turning a setback into an opportunity is at the heart of this strategy. Visitors to the region are interested in learning more about the natural lifecycle of the beetle, the reasons behind the explosion of the beetle, how BC has handled this epidemic and other related forest health issues. While opportunity exists to view the display at the Royal BC Museum in Victoria, tourists should be provided with some level of interpretation in MPB impacted communities. The production of beetle-related arts, crafts and buildings for viewing and sale are also local interpretive and economic opportunities.

Subregional Responsibilities:

Multimodal access initiatives

- **Cranbrook** - Of first importance is the need to support activities of the Southern Interior “Lead Agency” to improve overall access to the region. Concerns specific to Cranbrook include:
 - Lack of international air services,
 - Need to sustain/enhance Delta flights into Cranbrook airport on a regular basis, and
 - Need to improve northbound access to the Canadian Rockies International Airport (in Cranbrook); presently tourists arriving at the airport and heading north up the Columbia Valley have to either travel northwest through Kimberley or south towards Cranbrook before heading north

Suggested Implementation Team

Subregional Tourism Advisory Group, Kootenay Rockies Tourism, regional and municipal governments including the City of Cranbrook.

- **Kamloops** - The actions to address this specific strategy for the Kamloops TSA are assumed to be coordinated through the Southern Interior “Lead Agency”. Access related issues within the Kamloops TSA include the desire to:
 - Improve highway infrastructure. As an example, calls were heard to improve highway infrastructure on Highway 99 between Whistler and Cache Creek (particularly between Pemberton and Lillooet – the “Duffy Lake Road”), Highway 1 between Cache Creek and Hope and Kamloops and Chase, and Highway 5 between Little Fort and Heffley Creek;

- Promote reliable and consistent access. The closure of the Coquihalla Highway to the south, and to a somewhat lesser degree, Hwy 1 to the east due to avalanche negatively impacts tourism destinations in the winter. Calls were heard to improve preventative maintenance (e.g., highway and avalanche control work);
- Upgrade/develop a year round road between Chase and Sun Peaks in order to provide an alternate route to/from Sun Peaks and on north to Barriere. This is a long-standing issue from both safety and tourism perspectives and a resolution would see an increase in FIT travellers on a circle route and coach tours;
- Improve water access along the South Thompson River in order to better link the City of Kamloops to Kamloops Lake and the Tobiano Resort, as well as the proposed Tranquille on the Lake resort. This would provide tourism opportunities similar to those experienced in the Southern Okanagan (e.g., water skiing, house-boating, paddle-wheeler);
- Improve wayfinding (e.g., signage, maps) within the region that encourages higher visitation, connects visitors to attractions, and attracts longer visits; and
- Improve intermodal accessibility particularly between Kamloops Airport and VIA Rail or Rocky Mountaineer.

Suggested Implementation Team

Subregional Tourism Advisory Group, TOTA, Tourism Kamloops, Tourism BC, COTA, Community Development Corporations, resort operations (e.g., Sun Peaks Resort Corp, Tobiano), BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, Regional Transportation Advisory Boards.

- **Lillooet** - The Lillooet TSA has particularly poor transportation services relative to the rest of B.C. It does not have scheduled air service, no longer receives passenger rail services, and except to the eastern portion of the TSA transected by Highway 1, experiences relatively low flow-through due to its location along a provincial highway that receives little traffic, even in peak months. The region relies heavily on road travel along the main highways (Hwy 1 (north/south aligned) and Hwy 99 (between Whistler and Cache Creek), both of which provide an excellent circle routes, although road conditions on some sections and during some seasons can be hazardous. Access issues to resolve in the region include those related to road, rail, and water. More specifically, the following issues should be addressed:
 - Support activities of Southern Interior “Lead Agency” to improve access;
 - Improve air access by lengthening and crack sealing Lillooet airstrip, upgrade service to regional airport status (the nearest airports are in Kamloops and Abbotsford);
 - Improve opportunities to enhance circle tour - replace or upgrade bridges and overpasses to allow coach tours to access the circle route formed by Highways 1 and 99 (coaches are hampered by the single lane bridge on Hwy 99 South and the overpass on Highway 99 North); improve safety at Big Slide on Hwy 12; improve pullout/stop areas;
 - Address issues that limit rail passenger stops in Lillooet (afternoon, day, overnight) in order to enhance tourism opportunity in Lillooet and the surrounding area;

- Increase boat access on the region’s man-made Seton and Anderson Lakes; and,
- Develop a regional forest service road plan for upgrading and/or decommissioning.

Suggested Implementation Team

Subregional Tourism Advisory Group, District of Lillooet, Village of Lytton, Squamish-Lillooet Regional District, First Nations.

Enhance and expand built tourism facilities.

- **Lillooet** - The Lillooet TSA would benefit from an assessment of existing built resources – through a tourism lens. While many facilities may be acceptable for locals, this may not be the case for tourists. An inventory and assessment of current and potential assets within the region may identify if enhancement is needed and if so, the level of enhancement priority needed. This assessment could be based on the level of product/market match and market readiness in order to prioritize the need for and level of support.

In addition, the inventory should identify the need to develop further tourism resources. Focusing efforts on one or two specific tourism pilot projects and doing them well will provide the highest likelihood of success- (e.g. Lillooet - viticulture demonstration project, native art centre, or an in-town ecolodge; Lytton - a Stein, Siska or Botanie Valley Ecolodge). Beautification of destinations should also be considered (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Suggested Implementation Team

Subregional Tourism Advisory Group, community, regional and FN governments, community and regional DMOs, economic development agencies.

- **Merritt** - The Merritt TSA would benefit from an assessment of existing built resources to determine potential improvements to attract tourists (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Enhancing tourism resources may include upgrading visual appeal of destinations within the region as first impression is a key factor in visitors’ determination to stay or move on. Investment in entry and downtown beautification may include upgrading streets and sidewalks, adding charm to otherwise plain or unsightly buildings or adding public art, gardens, benches and fountains. This enhancement can work in tandem with the region’s natural attributes that draws attention to strong natural features.

Suggested Implementation Team

Subregional Tourism Advisory Group, community, regional and FN governments, community and regional DMOs, economic development agencies

Expand special events and festivals.

Events and festivals would diversify the product base and draw in more destination visitors. Communities and regions pursue event tourism because it increases tourism spending in the community with very little capital investment. However, events are volunteer-intensive and require considerable planning if they are to be successful. Events can enhance the image of a community and its sense of place². Event tourism is “the systematic planning, development and marketing of events as tourist attractions, catalysts for other developments, image builders and animators of attractions and destination areas.” (Getz, D., 1997).

- **Lillooet** - Events within the Lillooet TSA would most likely fall under three categories:
 - Local – includes community festivals and social events, local and regional competitions, markets;
 - Business – meetings and conventions or small trade and consumer shows; and/or
 - Event programming – events linked to specific attractions or facilities.

Of these three, local and event programming are the ones that have the most likelihood of success. Events might include those related to ATV, local First Nations, horses, ice climbing, logger sports, mountain biking, pursuit of gold, railways, rafting, snowmobile, whitewater kayak, or others.

Suggested Implementation Team

Community and regional DMOs, Chambers of Commerce, community, regional and FN governments, attractions/facilities managers, related industry representatives, cultural groups (e.g. Community Arts Council), sport associations and club representatives

- **Merritt** - Encourage and enhance the development of Car Rallies. The Specialty Subaru Mountain Trials Rally was previously staged in Merritt. Opportunities exist to rebuild this event and attract more participants and viewers which will increase tourism spending in the region. A long term impact of such a strategy will increase overall visitation to the region as tourists travel throughout the region to watch the rally from different viewpoints.

Suggested Implementation Team

Subregional Tourism Advisory Group, West Coast Rally Association, Sponsors (Yokohama Tires, Specialty Subaru, Merritt AutoPlus, Total Autosport), community, regional and FN governments, community and regional DMOs, economic development agencies

6. Enhance and secure the availability of skilled tourism workers

Tourism is a high growth industry globally and under the right conditions, it can be the same in the southern interior. The availability of skilled workers is a critical competitive factor, particularly in resort areas where the resident labour force is unable to meet labour demand. Skill development should be

² As example - when people think of Merritt, they automatically link it to the Country Music Festival.

available through a variety of modes, in different times and places (e.g., formal public education, entrepreneurial clubs, showcasing successful tourism employees, exposure to community members who have gained success in the industry, etc.). Recruitment could also be facilitated by correcting common misperceptions about tourism occupations and potential career paths.

First Nation peoples have great opportunity to develop aboriginal tourism products and services. They also could be a strategic solution to industry's demand for skilled labour as they represent one of the fastest growing segments of the population and are more inclined to remain in their communities for their working lives. For those communities seeking to take advantage of tourism opportunities, an implementation agency (SIR 1) can help identify resources and bridge access to skills and business development programs.

A thriving tourism industry requires workers throughout the year but these jobs are not always year-round. A central registry for employees/employers where seasonal tourism workers would have greater opportunity to be employed throughout the year by different employers (e.g. ski resort in winter/spring and golf resort in summer/fall) could be developed. This can be achieved by encouraging collaboration among seasonal tourism operators that takes advantage of the availability of skilled tourism workers and utilizing existing local, provincial and national resources (e.g., local employment centres, go2³, Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council⁴). Developing cross-training opportunities builds employees skills, creates more stable employment, increases tourism business certainty and improves guests' tourism experience.

Regional Responsibilities:

- Explore partnerships with government, educational institutions and industry's designated human resource leader (go2) to ensure existing programs and resources are fully utilized.
- Promote Tourism BC operator workshops aimed at identifying local tourism labour market needs.
- Increase awareness and uptake of First Host, SuperHost and high school tourism programs.
- Collaborate with the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC) to promote National Occupational Standards for the tourism industry.
- Add a significant education and training component to the BC Tourism Industry Conference (TIC), which provides workshops and/or presentations that enhance business owner and employee capacity in priority areas (business planning, sales and marketing, risk management & insurance, general HR, utilization of technology, etc.)
- Promote the regional expansion of best practices at the local level (e.g. College of the Rockies tourism cluster).

³ <http://www.go2hr.ca/>

⁴ <http://cthrc.ca/en/default.aspx>

7. Improve access to funding agencies and coordinate investment priorities.

Tourism is a complex industry that is sometimes not that well understood by operators and even front-line workers. Yet a sound understanding of supply, demand and competitive conditions is essential if development potential in Southern Interior communities is going to be realized. The industry's complex and shifting operating environment (due to sudden and often unforeseen external forces such as 9-11, SARS and now the H1N1 flu) means it takes time for tourism operators to react and adapt to take advantage of tourism opportunities and to build their businesses. The lack of funding and difficulties smaller operators faced in raising long-term and working capital was a consistent theme at all the workshops. Three separate areas of concern were identified:

- Providing business development support and greater access to capital to tourism entrepreneurs for an extended period of time would encourage investment and support operators to stay the course while they develop the most profitable niche product/market match.
- Tourism business development is a particularly difficult issue for First Nations because of the financial barriers to on-reserve tourism development. For example, challenges associated with access to venture capital due to Indian Reserve property ownership structure (e.g., customary rights, certificates of possession under the Indian Act) means they often have little established equity through property. Changing legislation/regulation at the federal and provincial government level may address this problem but will take some time. A shorter term opportunity may exist by coordinating linkages to develop aboriginal and non-aboriginal partnerships as "the synergy of working together is greater than the sum of the parts." Linkages also need to extend to federal programs, which are often more appropriate for reserve development than provincial programs.
- Investments in public infrastructure are critical because they improve the overall business climate and generally leverage private sector investment. However, local and regional government are often faced with severe budget constraints that limit direct investment as well as the potential for leveraging financing from senior government programs.

Regional Responsibilities:

- Establish a venture capital tourism / product innovation and development fund (\$20-25 million – to be verified) for regional First Nations ventures and other businesses looking to develop and/or enhance existing tourism products. A portion of the funding should be dedicated to working with businesses to ensure they are "export-ready."
- Establish a tourism infrastructure grant program to assist *First Nations, communities and businesses* with developing or upgrading tourism-related infrastructure. Initial analysis suggests this would not be directed primarily at physical (built) infrastructure, but would focus on such items such as developing / enhancing community recreation sites and trails, restoration of First Nations historical/cultural sites, beach access / boat launch areas, docks, marinas, fish habitat restoration, public camping, snowmobile networks and staging areas, etc. A regional tourism infrastructure database should be created to track and assess the feasibility of projects.