

Council of Tourism Associations of BC (COTA)

A Tourism Sector Strategy: For the Southern Interior Region in Response to Mountain Pine Beetle

In support of the economic development work undertaken by the

Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition (SIBAC)

September 1, 2009

Prepared by: ***COTA Project Team***

Colleen Hannigan, MCIP, Project Team Lead

Sydney Johnsen, MCIP, MRM (Peak Planning Associates)

Steve Nicol, MBA (Lions Gate Consulting)

Jennifer Morrison, PAg

Brenda Baptiste, Aboriginal Tourism Advisor/Volunteer

Acknowledgements

The Council of Tourism Associations (COTA) would like to thank the Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition (SIBAC) and their associated communities and governments for their support in the preparation of this tourism sector strategy and for its inclusion in their final report to senior levels of government.

COTA would also like to thank all those who took the time to participate in this southern interior regional strategy development process. Your input on the Working Group, the mapping and strategy sessions, the online survey and in various conversations give this report its integrity and purposefulness.

The input and feedback of Tourism BC, the regional and city DMOs, provincial NGOs, economic development professionals, and First Nations representatives has helped base this strategy document in the reality of tourism and economic development professionals who will be driving these strategies to fruition.

Much work has been done in the southern interior region at the community level with respect to tourism sector planning, development and marketing. We acknowledge that work in this document and trust that the recognized value associated with such work will be further strengthened and supported by this tourism sector strategy.

COTA would also like to acknowledge the generous funding support of Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) for funding the project, in addition to funding support from the Government of British Columbia and the Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition (SIBAC).

- Peter Larose, Director, Policy and Corporate Communications, COTA – September 1, 2009

Glossary of Acronyms

(Alphabetical by acronym or abbreviation)

AtBC	Aboriginal Tourism British Columbia	MoFR	Ministry of Forests and Range
ATC	Aboriginal Tourism Canada	MSBED	Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development
ATV	All Terrain Vehicle	MTCA	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts
B&B	Bed & Breakfast	MoT	Ministry of Transportation
BC	British Columbia	MPB	Mountain Pine Beetle
BCPST	BC Partnership for Sustainable Tourism	NRC	Natural Resources Canada
BCSTC	BC Sustainable Tourism Collective	OBAC	Omineca Beetle Action Coalition
CCBAC	Cariboo Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition	RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
CDT	Community Development Trust	RFI	Resource Features Inventory
CFDC	Community Futures Development Corp	RDMO	Regional Destination Marketing Organization
CORE	Commission on Resources and the Environment	ROS	Recreation Opportunities Spectrum
COTA	Council of Tourism Associations	SEA	Socio Economic Assessment
CTF	Community Tourism Foundations	SIBAC	Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition
DDMC	Destination Management Company	SIMPBWG	Southern Interior Mountain Pine Beetle Working Group
DMO	Destination Marketing Organization	SIR	Southern Interior Region
FNFC	First Nation Forestry Council	SLUP	Sustainable Land Use Plan
FRPA	Forest and Range Practices Act	SNBC	Super, Natural British Columbia
FSR	Forest Service Roads	SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
GIS	Geographic Information System	TBC	Tourism British Columbia
GS	Guest Services	TCT	Trans Canada Trail
GST	Goods and Services Tax	TOS	Tourism Opportunities Studies
ILMB	Integrated Land Management Bureau	TOTA	Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
INAC	Indian and Northern Affairs Canada	TSA	Timber Supply Area
IOC	International Olympic Committee	US	United States
JOP	Job Opportunity Program	VC	Visitor Information Centre
KVR	Kettle Valley Railway	WED	Western Economic Diversification
LRDW	Land and Resource Data Warehouse	WTA	Wilderness Tourism Association
LRMP	Land and Resource Management Plan		
MAL	Ministry of Agriculture and Lands		
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding		
MoE	Ministry of Environment		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a strategic framework to advance tourism development in the Southern Interior Region impacted by the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB).

Strategy Purpose and Focus

The overall purpose of this strategy is to “maximize tourism opportunities within the Southern Interior Region in response to the Mountain Pine Beetle.” Regional strategies were developed to address this purpose in addition to subregional strategies focused on Timber Supply Areas (TSAs) most impacted by MPB in the Southern Interior, including: Kamloops, Merritt, Lillooet and Cranbrook.

While the report has a strategic-level focus, there are some more specific recommendations developed where stakeholders clearly articulated needs in priority areas. This report is not intended to be comprehensive for all tourism sectors and/or subregions in the southern interior. In particular, this strategy does not address marketing objectives, as those are amply provided for by community and regional destination marketing/management organizations (DMOs).

Given the nature and focus of the impact of the MPB on rural and natural settings, nature-based and aboriginal tourism considerations were given particular emphasis in this strategy. The strategy also suggests tools and recommendations that reduce and mitigate impacts of the beetle and associated forest management practices in MPB affected landscapes, in order to minimize impacts on tourism’s land base assets required to support the sector. This work is based on a wealth of tourism strategy work that has been undertaken, including but not limited to the BC Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Art (MTCA) *Tourism Action Plan and Draft Recreation Trails Strategy*; Aboriginal Tourism BC (AtBC) *Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Blueprint Strategy for BC*; Province of BC Tourism Opportunity Studies, and other provincial strategies. Specific regional and community tourism strategies have been completed through Tourism British Columbia’s Community Tourism Foundations® Program and summary themes of these strategies have been incorporated in this report. In addition, a number of community and regional DMOs have been consulted and their plans incorporated.

This foundational work was further supported by input from approximately sixty individuals at eight half-day regional planning sessions, as well as more than fifty tourism stakeholder surveys, and dozens of additional meetings and discussions undertaken between December 2008 and June 2009.

PRIMARY CONSULTATION AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Impacts of the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB):

Consultations and research revealed the following general impacts of the MPB on tourism development opportunities:

Environment – The MPB has had its most notable impact on the caliber of recreation experiences and wilderness views, due to the significant deterioration of the forest canopy in areas with dominant Lodgepole and Ponderosa pine species. There were also noted impacts on biodiversity, water quality, and soil stability that negatively impact tourism values and experiences. Previously inaccessible and remote areas have also witnessed enhanced road building in attempts to access beetle-impacted timber, with resulting impacts on tourism experiences. Fire threats were also identified as a major concern for nature-based operators, many of whom have limited their non-motorized guiding in areas with high fire threats and single access points.

Economic – The MPB has depressed many rural economies and the overall provincial economy, limiting the resources of local, regional, and provincial governments seeking to support and finance tourism development. Forestry job losses have also decreased discretionary spending of forest workers on travel – though the precise impact has not yet been quantified. On the other hand, MPB has had a positive economic impact on regional tourism prospects in the mid-term, as communities traditionally dependent on forestry look upon tourism as a primary economic diversification opportunity. In some cases these expectations may be unrealistic, particularly in the short-term, and will need to be managed. In addition, the MPB has enhanced collaboration at the community and regional level by a variety of stakeholders that had not previously met to develop cohesive economic diversification strategies.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES AND ISSUES

A number of MPB-related tourism development issues were identified through the research process and consultations. Tourism planning and development issues in three key areas were identified as requirements to enhance the southern interior's competitive position as a marquee destination. These three areas are **infrastructure, access, and resource use**.

Additional information on each of these priority areas is elaborated below in the *TOURISM STRATEGY* section.

Infrastructure - Community or regional infrastructure is required to host visitors and/or attract investment to leverage that capacity. While this strategy helped identify some strategic infrastructure assets and gaps, a more comprehensive inventory and qualitative assessment of the natural and built tourism infrastructure would provide valuable information to assist in tourism destination planning and development.

Sustainable funding mechanisms for maintaining and expanding provincial recreation sites and trails was universally recognized as a high priority. The need for trail development, funding, protection and management would likely be addressed through the development of a trail advisory body and local/regional trail committees.

A wide variety of affordable and inter-connected air, road and rail transportation options to the region and throughout would make the region more attractive as a destination and as an investment option. Once tourists are in the region, enhanced wayfinding services (directional signage, mapping, visitor services) would entice them to stay and play in the region longer. Finally, downtown and gateway enhancement in some of the region's communities is needed to enhance their tourism appeal.

Access – in this case access refers primarily to the linkages between communities, staging areas, tourism features and recreation areas in the mid- and back-country. The development of Crown land Access Management Plans at the subregional level would serve to maintain the quality of the visitor experience through the identification of areas where roads (primary, secondary and resource) might be built or enhanced and which existing forest service roads should be maintained, upgraded, downgraded, or decommissioned.

Resource use and management is integral component of the tourism setting and directly influences the investment climate for the development of outdoor and nature-based recreation products. The creation and statutory designation of recreation use plans in areas which are subject to user conflicts would provide direction for stakeholder communication and cooperation and resource management, identify compliance and enforcement measures to control unlicensed commercial recreation and off road vehicles (ORVs). The need for coordinated trail development, funding, protection and management is evident throughout the region and is most likely addressed through the development of a trail advisory body and local/regional trail committees.

Greater acknowledgement and incorporation of tourism values and consideration in land and resource use, particularly forest planning is necessary if local, regional and provincial economies are to benefit to a greater degree from tourism.

Finally, bridging the interests of First Nations and the mainstream tourism industry is critical for community tourism development to reach its full potential. First Nations are now recognized by governments and industry as having legitimate interest and claims to the land base, and must be a key partner in all land use decisions going forward.

The barriers, opportunities and issues that drive tourism activity and tourism development in the Southern Interior were also examined in the report. A land values and interest analysis in the context of the MPB epidemic and provincial land management practices at the regional and local level identified

tourism development needs. Challenges and opportunities for tourism development in the Southern Interior are provided in Tables 7 & 8 of the report. A summary of the main themes is presented below.

The mapping sessions identified “high value/potential” tourism areas based on existing use, destination attractions and supportive infrastructure. Land-based and water-based activities, staging areas and destinations were identified for specific areas of the Cranbrook, Kamloops, Lillooet and Merritt TSAs.

A TOURISM SECTOR STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTHERN INTERIOR (SUMMARY)

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.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

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

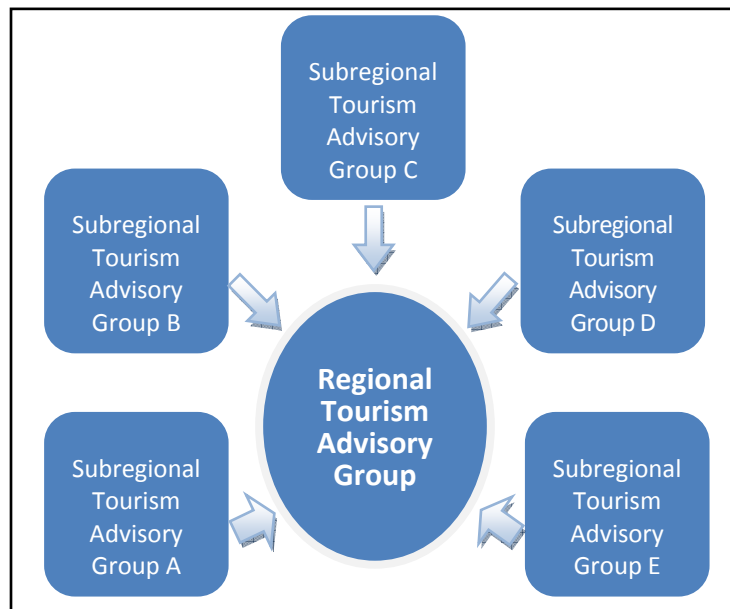
It is clear that in order for the *Tourism Sector Strategy* goals to be realized, the responsibility for carrying out the various tasks must be housed within a formal implementation agency or agencies. The report recommends the RDMOs (i.e. TOTA & KRT) work together in the Southern Interior in this role, at least initially, as further outlined in Strategy #2 below.

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

The key prerequisite for enhancing tourism development in the region, according to strategy participants, is the enhancement of coordination among regional stakeholders in tourism policy development and planning, destination development, and overall destination management. At present there are few or no venues for provincial and local governments, regional and city Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), economic development corporations, First Nations communities, recreation groups, and other community stakeholders to collaborate in the interests of enhancing the region and subregions as tourism destinations.

These groups are all involved in making critical destination development decisions relating to resource management, infrastructure, investment attraction, destination branding and marketing, human resource development, business support, and visitor services.

This schematic provides a general framework model on how the overall region and subregions can collaborate around tourism development and management.



Enhanced coordination would

increase awareness of opportunities and challenges, and work toward the resolution of issues that impede tourism development, while reducing overlaps and inefficiencies.

The regional DMOs (e.g., Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, Kootenay Rockies Tourism) have recently taken steps to fill some of the gaps in destination management. These organizations, in collaboration with community DMOs, were viewed by most stakeholders consulted in this study as being the best positioned to coordinate tourism activities at the local and regional level, provided they were given sufficient resources, and their mandates were broadened to formally include tourism policy, planning, development, and advocacy. The DMOs are led by primarily private-sector boards, giving them a strong connection to industry opportunities and challenges, while being relatively independent from political interference. (R)DMO boards also presently provide forums for input from a variety of stakeholders in the private sector, government, and not-for-profit sectors.

Work toward enhancing access to back and mid-country recreation areas in the Southern Interior. Specific recommended actions include:

- Implement the Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Coalition Report recommendations, including the licensing and registration of ORVs to identify users, improve zonation for motorized and non-motorized use areas, enhance compliance and enforcement efforts, and improve signage – among others.
- Ensure tourism participation in Ministry of Forests and Range and Ministry of Environment activities regarding Mountain Pine Beetle salvage area avoidance and rehabilitation.
- Establish a coordinated trails and trail system strategy for the region based on the Provincial Trails Strategy, with trail advisory committees established for subregions and communities where interest is expressed.
- Develop recreation management plans for areas with high tourism potential and growing user conflicts. Preliminary analysis suggests that candidate areas include the upper North Thompson / Blue River area, East Kootenays, Kettle Valley corridor, and Cache Creek - Ashcroft region.

3. Encourage land management that safeguards natural resources upon which high quality tourism experiences are dependant. The following recommended actions were identified in the report, including:

- Use the maps and information in this report to assist communities and regional representatives in developing and utilizing strategic land use tools (spatial and/or non-spatial) to ensure that tourism land base assets are managed appropriately and in support of growth targets for these sectors.
- Develop a Best Practices Guide for managing tourism values in forest practices, including stand prioritization, access management, timing, consultation processes, trail buffers, and viewscape management, while minimizing cost impacts on forest licensees and addressing First Nation interests.

4. Facilitate infrastructure development in/around Southern Interior communities. Infrastructure is the backbone upon which the tourism destination is built. A short-list of priorities identified for the region includes:

- Enhance key highways and connector roads. Priorities include:
 - Highway 99 between Whistler and Cache Creek;
 - Highway 1 between Cache Creek and Hope and between Kamloops and Chase;
 - Highway 5 between Little Fort and Heffley Creek; and,
 - Highway 1 connection from Chase to Sun Peaks.
- Ensure reliable winter road access to resort communities (road maintenance and avalanche control).
- Attract and sustain regional air services, particularly mid-haul flights to major regional airports (Cranbrook, Kelowna, Kamloops).

- Enhance public infrastructure aimed at improving visitor services, including the development of gateway visitor centres (e.g. in Lillooet at Station Hill).
- Further develop roadside interpretive signage, wayfinding, and circle tours;
- Enhance festival and event development capacity.
- Improve pleasure craft access along the South Thompson River, linking downtown Kamloops to Tobiano Resort and the proposed Tranquille Resort on Kamloops Lake.

5. **Enhance and secure the availability of skilled tourism workers.** While the report did not go into great detail on human resource issues, the following issues were identified in research and consultations:

- Acknowledge and explore partnerships with government, educational institutions and tourism associations (e.g., go2) to ensure existing programs and resources are fully utilized.
- Promote regional 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.
- 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 (risk management & insurance, business planning, sales and marketing, 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).

6. **Improve access to funding agencies and coordinate investment priorities.**

- Provide business development support and ensure access to capital for tourism entrepreneurs – particularly during periods of economic challenges.
- Coordinate linkages to develop aboriginal and non-aboriginal partnerships.
- Establish a venture capital tourism / product innovation and development fund for regional First Nations ventures and other businesses looking to develop and/or enhance existing tourism products. Preliminary suggestions are in the \$20-25 million range.
- Establish a tourism infrastructure grant program to assist First Nations, communities and businesses with developing or upgrading tourism-related infrastructure.

Additional detail on specific local/subregional recommendations for the above seven recommendation areas can be found in Chapter 4 of the report, whereas specific details on recommended sub-regional projects can be found in Chapter 3, associated with the Timber Supply Area mapping.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION – REPORT ADDENDUM

The project steering committee¹ has reviewed the draft report and has directed COTA to work with relevant stakeholders to further refine an implementation approach for the strategy, and to develop three pilot areas for immediate focus. The suggested pilots include:

1. Facilitate the development of a minimum of two subregional tourism advisory groups, with an initial focus on supporting the development and implementation of trail plans for the region, based on the BC Trail Strategy.
2. Work toward enhancing tourism access to mid and back-country attractions, by:
 - a. Identifying funding and resources to develop legally designated tourism and recreation management plans for high priority areas (e.g., North Thompson, East Kootenays, and Cache Creek/Ashcroft area).
 - b. Coordinating tourism industry stakeholder involvement in provincial initiatives related to forest service / resource roads.
3. Develop a toolkit and program to support First Nations access to capital and private investment. Preliminary suggestions were to partner with MTCA to enhance First Nations involvement in small/medium resorts, such as RV Parks.

COTA will be working with various interested parties on these pilots, and will seek partners for implementing other strategy components throughout the Summer and Fall of 2009.

¹ The project steering committee comprises representatives from COTA, the BC Lodging and Campgrounds Association, Tourism British Columbia, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, the Ministry of Community and Rural Development, and Aboriginal Tourism BC.