

Sustainable/Green Tourism in BC: A Framework and Plan for Action

A.) Introduction and Background

This document has been prepared as a discussion piece for BC's Sustainable Tourism Working Group and for tourism industry leaders at Green Tourism Forum II. Its primary purpose is to set the context, and to act as a road map for putting sustainable, green tourism into practice in BC.

There are two key and complementary documents which form the foundation for this work:

- COTA Foresight project – this set out a vision for sustainable tourism in BC by describing a scenario now known as “BC Uncorked.” In this scenario, visitors get the best possible experience while they're in BC, and businesses experience the most stable possible operating environment.
- BC Government's Tourism Action Plan – one of the top 8 actions in this plan is to “leverage our “Super, Natural BC” branding with a new, world-class Green Tourism Strategy for sustainability.”

In October of 2007, a group of 42 tourism industry leaders met in Vancouver in a first “Green Tourism Forum;” this was a turning point for BC. The group collectively strategized a greener, more sustainable tourism industry in the province (refer to GTF I report).

A Sustainable Tourism Working Group (STWG) was formed after the green tourism forum to kick-start detailed action planning. The STWG consists of:

- BC Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts (John Willow and Valerie Sheppard)
- Tourism BC (Ray LeBlond)
- Council of Tourism Associations of BC (Stephen Regan, Peter Larose, Dave Butler)
- BC Sustainable Tourism Collective (Ian Robertson)
- Industry Canada (Philip Fleming)
- BC Lodging and Campgrounds Association (Joss Penny)
- BC Hotels Association (James Chase, Alan Sacks)
- BC Climate Action Secretariat (joining STWG as of April 7)
- Anna Pollock (strategic assistance on contract).

This document lays out current thinking and describes next steps.

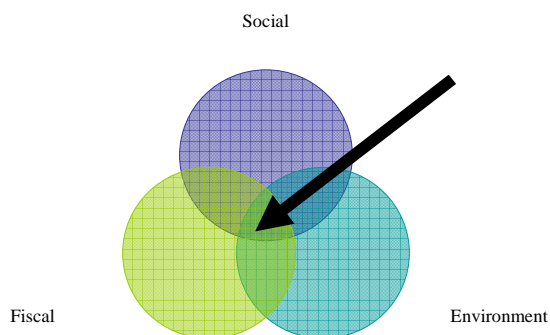
B.) Vision and Scope (What do we need to do?)

Based on the two documents above, the first green tourism forum and subsequent detailed work undertaken by the STWG and Anna Pollock, an operational-level vision is proposed for the project at hand. In essence, it translates the work to-date into a description of what success will look like in the future.

A sustainable, green tourism sector in BC is:

- *prepared for and is readily adapting to change*
- *addressing the needs and aspirations of present and future generations*
- *promoting and encouraging ethical behaviour in all stakeholders, including visitors*
- *recognizing the connectivity of the entire planet*
- *promoting the long-term health and well-being of visitors, suppliers, employees, host communities, and the natural and built environment*
- *promoting long-term socio-cultural and economic viability of the tourism system*
- *seen as a leader in Canada, across North America and in the rest of the world in the way in which it has tackled this in a successful, collaborative and unified way.*

It is critical to understand that this project is about sustainability from a tourism perspective. Ideally, the project will focus on specific strategies and actions which truly hit the “sweet spot” where fiscal, social and environmental components of tourism overlap (see figure below). In some cases, project initiatives will integrate these three components in a vertical way (such as with a certification program) whereas others will integrate these in a horizontal manner (such as in addressing climate change).



In order to achieve the project vision, it has become apparent (based on the work done to-date) that specific priority actions and tactics are necessary. In keeping with the shift in view that tourism is more akin to an interconnected system (not unlike an ecosystem) than it is to a conventional linear/hierarchical business sector, these efforts but can be broadly placed into four main categories (as per Anna Pollock's working paper for the STWG): (1.) envision (imagine, predict, visualize); (2.) enable (facilitate, remove barriers, provide structure); (3.) encourage (support, persuade, promote); and (4.) exemplify (demonstrate, illustrate, show, epitomize, embody). Appendix 1 is the original frame-work which flowed from Green Tourism Forum I. The framework and actions in the sections that follow are the STWG's recommendations for putting the broad direction from Appendix 1 into practice "on the ground."

The key actions necessary to achieve the project vision include:

(i.) Develop an Overarching Green Tourism Strategy for Sustainability

This will set out the principles and goals for tourism sustainability in British Columbia, encompassing the action plan, governance and leadership needed to ensure BC is recognized as a world leader in sustainability and is a top "green" destination. As an element of the BC Tourism Action Plan and flowing from COTA's FORESIGHT initiative, this strategy will ensure the people, companies and organizations that make up BC's tourism system will benefit from inspired and shared leadership, true collaboration and coordinated action for decades to come.

(ii.) Develop and Track Key Indicators

- a. Identify a set of proxy indicators against which the project's progress can be measured over time, and by which BC's progress can be bench-marked against competing jurisdictions. These can be pulled from Foresight, GTF I, Anna Pollock's paper for the STWG, and UNEP/WTO documents.
- b. Develop a system to track those indicators moving forward

(iii.) Develop and Implement Tourism Actions to Address Climate Change

- a. Carbon foot-printing at sector and company levels (tools, education)
- b. Mitigation and adaptation strategies
- c. Carbon off-setting (e.g. build understanding of Pacific Carbon Trust, and potential role and value of it for tourism)

(iv.) Develop Incentives Program

- a. Green, Sustainable Tourism Certification for BC
 - i. build on what has already been done, both in BC and elsewhere
 - ii. link to Super, Natural BC brand
 - iii. engage ENGO's to build transparency and credibility
 - iv. ensure value for participating businesses and associations

b. Reward/Recognition

- i. develop an enhanced reward and recognition program (build on existing Foresight and TBC award program) at provincial level and through RDMO's and DMO's
- ii. develop an industry mentorship program around sustainability
- iii. explore government role in building value for businesses – taxation, regulations, incentives or?

(v.) Communicate

- a. Use regular COTA Council meetings to communicate with tourism businesses and associations about specific actions
- b. Develop and maintain web-site/resource centre (obvious opportunity to link with LinkBC's TORC)
- c. Communication to industry and visitors about overall provincial approach to sustainable tourism

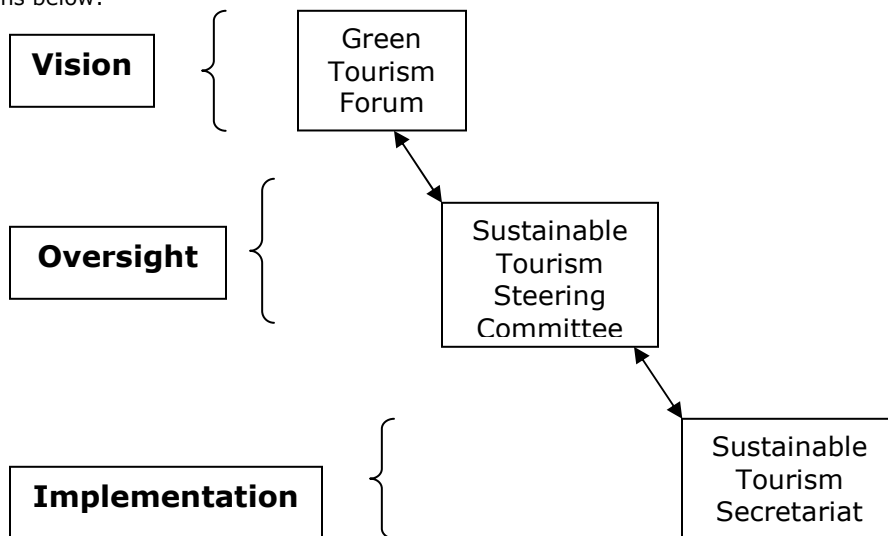
(vi.) Answer Outstanding Questions Through Research

- a. Work with soon-to-be-formed BC Tourism Research Advisory Council (BCTRAC) and *LinkBC* partners to identify and coordinate priority research.

C.) Proposed Framework (How do we make this happen?)

With an understanding in place of what is to be done, it is then necessary to consider how this will occur.

From a frame-work perspective, it is suggested that a project of this nature needs three primary levels: vision, oversight and project implementation. Those levels are shown graphically below, and described in detail in the sections below:

**(i) Project Vision and Oversight**

Participants in Green Tourism Forums, which includes senior leaders from government and key tourism stakeholders, will continue to provide ideas, question assumptions and identify challenges and opportunities at the strategic level. On a regular basis, this group provides on-going guidance and feedback, answering the following kinds of macro questions: is the project on the right track? how is the project doing in the context of progress against key indicators? what's coming at tourism in BC of which we should be aware (such as new initiatives in competing jurisdictions)?

The Sustainable Tourism Steering Committee is a smaller sub-set of the current Sustainable Tourism Working Group which will include COTA, MTSA, TBC and other major funding partners up to a maximum of 7. It provides on-going project direction and leadership to the Sustainable Tourism Secretariat. It ensures on-going commitment of key players, ensures funding is and remains in place, and encourages overall project efficiency and effectiveness. It also monitors and connects with relevant initiatives and policy work, and ensures that the activities of key agencies and organizations - as they relate to the

implementation of the action plan - are as much as possible coordinated and complementary. The Steering Committee will also make decisions on the allocation of future revenue streams that may flow from the project (such as certification fees, workshop registrations, etc).

(ii) Project Implementation – The BC Sustainable Tourism Secretariat

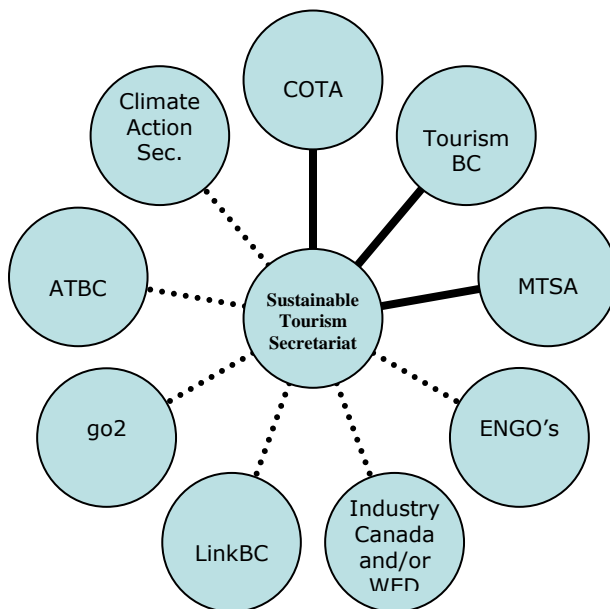
Based on discussions to-date, it is clear that a small team of passionate, knowledgeable and persuasive people must lead, drive, deliver and be accountable for this project in order to achieve success on the ground. It is too complex and too important to be done off the corner of desks. It must be undertaken with a clear and laser-beam-like focus on achieving demonstrable results within a relatively short time-frame to prove the approach and build value for all participants. Ultimately, this must lead to credible results that provide value to businesses and organizations, and focus on constant improvement.

We propose the creation of a “**sustainable tourism secretariat**”¹ as the primary level of project development and implementation. **The Secretariat will be accountable to and receive broad project direction from the Sustainable Tourism Steering Committee.**

This secretariat will need to include, or have direct access to the following skill sets: leadership, significant understanding of tourism (business and government), project management, significant technical knowledge around sustainable tourism, communications, IT and the web, monitoring, and the ability to get things done in a complex, sensitive and ever-changing environment.

The three main players that link to the secretariat are the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts, Tourism BC and COTA (see bold lines in figure below). Additional partners will be added through additional sources of funding.

In reality, the framework around the Sustainable Tourism Secretariat involves a broader range of stakeholders than just the three noted above. Dotted lines denote a role that may involve funding partner (in the overall project or for specific actions) or participation on working groups (or sub-committees) for specific actions. Beyond each organization listed here, there would be another ring of organizations to which each links. For example, MTSA is the main conduit to the provincial government, and will link other Ministries and agencies of government to the project (e.g. Ministries of Environment, Transportation, Economic Development, etc.). Tourism BC will link with the Regional DMO’s and DMO’s. TBC will be responsible for linking with CTC (where necessary), for communicating to visitors about the standards being developed and for integrating those standards with marketing activities. COTA will be the primary link to the tourism industry through its many association and business members. COTA will also be responsible for linking with TIAC (where necessary) on initiatives such as TIAC’s tool-kit project (ideally, this might be a first step toward some form of consistency across Canada). LinkBC would connect with universities and colleges throughout BC.



¹ Sustainable Tourism Secretariat ... Sustainable Tourism Action Team?

a. The BC Sustainable Tourism Secretariat – Resourcing and Structure

This approach is based on best available knowledge as of today, but it needs to be flexible, adaptable and relatively nimble. It is anticipated that a project of this scope and importance requires an initial budget of at least \$300,000 per annum. This is necessary to cover salary costs and administrative support (office, travel, contracting) for one senior (visionary, reputable and results-oriented) team leader, at least one project manager and a technical/administrative position (for a total of three positions). Building this initial team for the Secretariat can be done by either secondment(s) from government or other organizations, direct hiring of individuals for the Secretariat, or some combination of both. While there will be a short period of ramping up, an initial commitment to at least one year of direct and in-kind funding from Sustainable Tourism Steering Committee members is critical to kick-start the project. An agreement to review the project for an additional two-year term based on the results of the initial 12 months is suggested. As the project plan rolls out, Steering Committee partners may determine that additional resources are required to deliver on that plan.

Perhaps the most pivotal lesson learned from COTA's FORESIGHT project was that strategic, pan-industry initiatives should be housed in a permanent institution or organization. This would not only foster continuity in strategic directions and in the implementation of operational-level initiatives but would help to bolster the permanent capacity of an organization such as COTA. The STWG considered options including housing the secretariat in government, in TBC, in an academic institution or in an industry organization such as COTA. It is proposed that the Sustainable Tourism Secretariat be housed as a separate unit under the umbrella of COTA. **However, the Secretariat will be accountable to the Steering Committee.**

COTA is in the midst of increasing its capacity with a renewed focus on engagement with, and building value for members. In light of the foundation set by FORESIGHT and the priority which government and business are placing on sustainable tourism, this provides a significant opportunity. Housing the Sustainable Tourism Secretariat within COTA will require a degree of "re-engineering" of the administrative structure of the organization; this is now under consideration by the COTA Board. One – 1.5 of the positions in the secretariat could come from COTA if resources are available to back-fill to allow focus on the many other priorities that COTA must continue to undertake. COTA is also considering new office space (in conjunction with industry partners) to allow for a more efficient approach.

Much of the necessary project communication between the Secretariat and key stakeholders can occur through communication by Sustainable Tourism Steering Committee members, and by the Secretariat itself building on COTA's outreach activities. Regular COTA Council and member meetings (to be held at various locations around BC) will be a key part of on-going communication and outreach both for the project as a whole and for specific project actions. For example, a carbon foot-printing workshop for associations and businesses could be held just prior to, or just after each regional COTA Council/Board meeting.

It is proposed that the Secretariat, COTA and LinkBC would work together to develop a web-based resource center focused strictly on sustainable tourism. Project updates, tool-kits, key links to other web resources, etc can be housed in this resource center. This is another important communication tool.

It is also suggested that each member of the Secretariat will lead one or more of the specific actions (see B. (i) – (vi) above) through direct implementation, contracts or use of issue-specific sub-committees. For example, the Secretariat might work with MTSA, TBC, CTC, COTA, LinkBC and the soon-to-be-formed BC Tourism Research Advisory Council (BCTRAC) to develop and undertake the research agenda associated with the project.

D.) Next Steps and Timelines

Some of the most critical next steps for undertaking the action plan include the establishment of the governance framework and confirmation of available resources (additional actions are also offered for illustration):

Actions to Establish Secretariat	Timeline
Finalize action plan and detailed Terms of Reference for Sustainable Tourism Secretariat	Before GTF II (April 22)
Finalize budget (salaries, administration, office space, travel, etc) and preliminary funding commitments from partners	By GTF II
Obtain direction, confirmation and (financial) support for proposed direction and team	At GTF II (April 22)
Confirm support structure and team and commitment levels required	May 2008

Develop job descriptions for Secretariat	May 2008
Develop a draft work plan with primary actions, timelines and deliverable expectations for the new Secretariat team.	May 2008
Identify/recruit potential secretariat members with initial focus on team leader	May/June 2008
Place secretariat members in new roles and initiate work	June/July 2008
Announce BC's progress on sustainable tourism (such as a new green, sustainable certification program?) at Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference	October 2008
One year review point; review progress and determine commitment to subsequent two years	April 2009

Examples of specific actions that would be undertaken by the Secretariat as soon after creation as possible include:

Examples of Specific Secretariat Actions	
Develop web resource center with COTA and TORC	
Identify and engage sub-committees	
Develop research agenda	
Work with BC's Climate Change Secretariat to develop action items for addressing climate change	
Develop and implement communications/outreach plan	
Research and work with relevant partners to develop green, sustainable tourism certification program for BC	
Identify/plan for revenue streams that may flow from this work (such as workshops or certification program)	

Appendix 1 - Overall Framework for Developing a Sustainable Tourism Industry

