

A scenic view of a forest path leading to a lake and mountains. The path is lined with tall evergreen trees, and the lake in the distance reflects the surrounding forest and the rugged, rocky mountains in the background. The sky is a clear, light blue.

# KOOTENAY ROCKIES DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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## HIGHLIGHTS



# THANK YOU

The Kootenay Rockies Destination Development Strategy is the outcome of a two-year, iterative process of gathering, synthesizing, and validating information with tourism partners about the current status and future direction of tourism in the Kootenay Rockies.

We thank the Indigenous communities on whose traditional territories we travelled and gathered for our community meetings.

Thank you to our tourism partners who participated in the process by attending community meetings, participating in surveys and interviews, engaging in follow-up conversations, and forwarding relevant documents and insights. Special thanks to the members of the working groups for each of the planning areas within the region, as well as the Kootenay Rockies Destination Management Committee and the facilitation team.

# WHAT'S INSIDE

1. INTRODUCTION
2. REALIZING THE POTENTIAL
3. AT A GLANCE
4. GEARING UP

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## WHY A STRATEGY?

The Kootenay Rockies Destination Development Strategy was developed to enhance the competitiveness of the Kootenay Rockies region over the next 10 years and beyond. The strategy was developed as part of Destination BC's Destination Development Program to support and guide the long-term growth of tourism in British Columbia. This document presents some of the key highlights of the Kootenay Rockies regional strategy.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

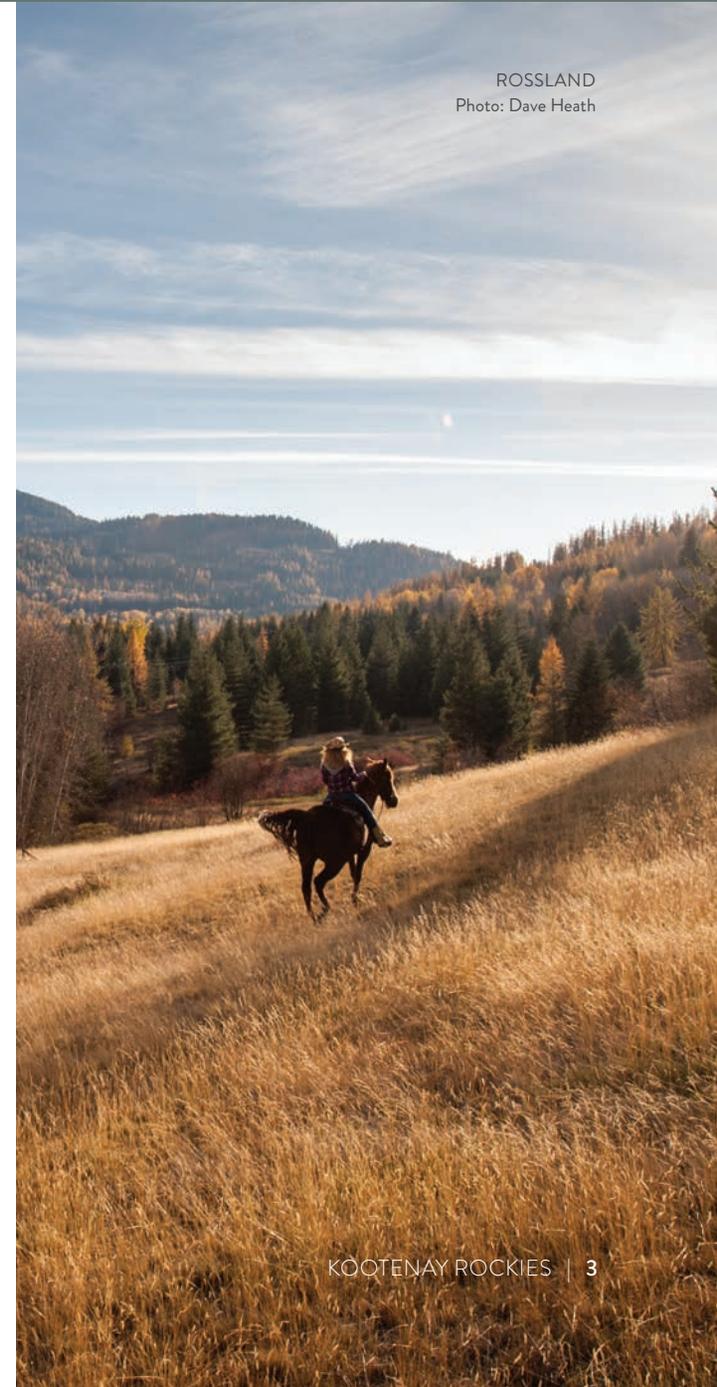
The Kootenay Rockies Destination Development Strategy is a guide for tourism partners as they work collaboratively to grow the visitor economy. The strategy will be reviewed and updated to reflect changing tourism objectives, priorities, and market conditions. Results will be tracked and learning outcomes will inform future implementation activities, thereby optimizing their effectiveness in increasing economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits for the entire Kootenay Rockies region.

## WHERE IS IT FOR?

The Kootenay Rockies tourism region lies in the southeast of the province, with the Canadian Rockies and Alberta border as its eastern limit, and the Columbia Mountains (Purcells, Selkirk, and Monashee Ranges) on the west. The region is within the shared Traditional Territories of the Ktunaxa Nation, the Sinixt Nation, the Okanagan Nation, and the Secwepemc (Shuswap) peoples.

It includes the Columbia River and its many tributaries along with the Columbia Wetlands — a RAMSAR designated wetland of international significance — as well as countless freshwater lakes. It has a wealth of provincial parks, including some of the most visited in non-urban areas of BC, as well as four of the country's national parks. The region boasts eight destination ski resorts, as well as five developed hot springs resorts and several natural hot springs pools found in more rustic settings.

ROSSLAND  
Photo: Dave Heath



# 1 INTRODUCTION

## WHERE DOES IT FIT?

The Kootenay Rockies Destination Development Strategy integrates the outcomes of four planning area strategies — West Kootenays & Revelstoke, Highway 3 Corridor, Columbia Valley, and Highway 1 Corridor — into one overarching regional strategy. It identifies the key priorities within each planning area strategy which would benefit from being advanced in an integrated way at a regional level. It is one of six regional destination development strategies that will be prepared for the province as a whole, each one developed through the integration of its respective planning area strategies. In turn, the regional strategies will inform a provincial plan, thereby ensuring a truly integrated and cohesive combination of bottom-up and top-down destination planning.

## A KEY IMPERATIVE

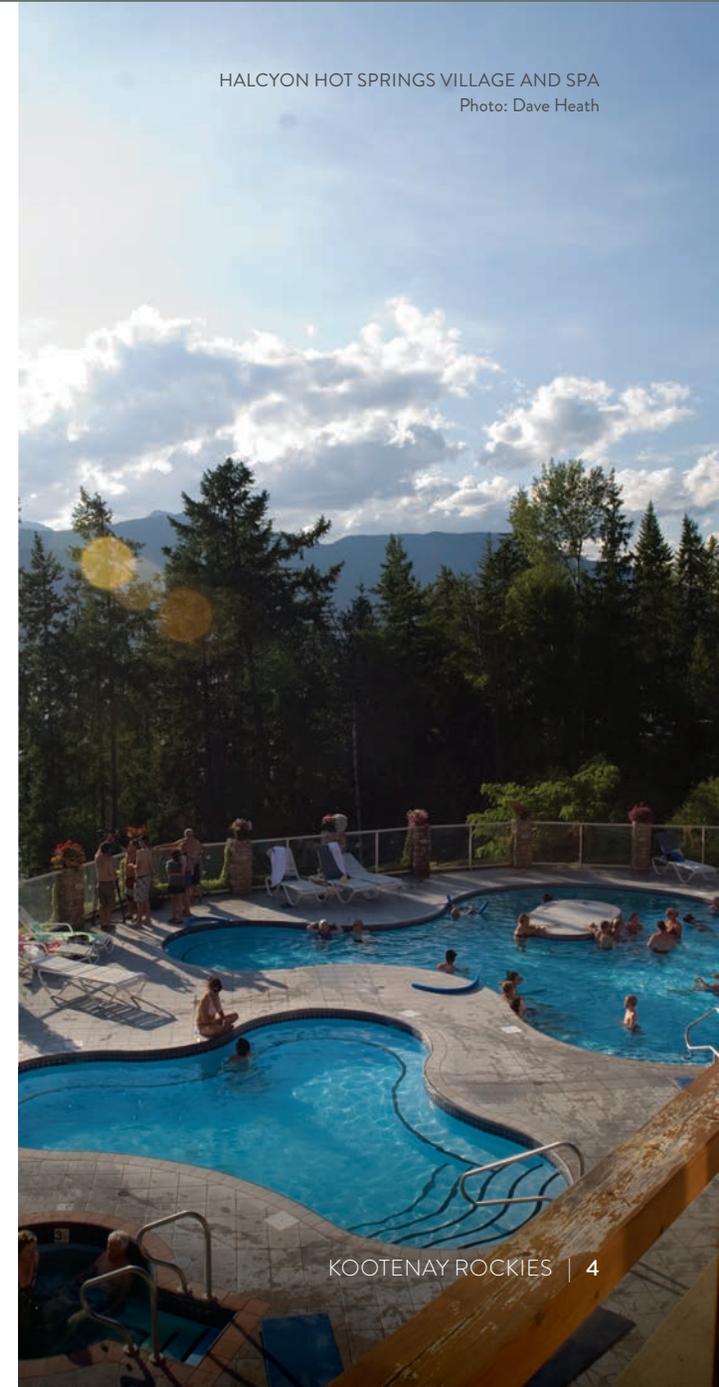
The recommendations contained within the Kootenay Rockies Destination Development Strategy form the foundation for additional focused and aligned discussions regarding implementation. It will be

important to ensure that the strategy becomes embedded in local, regional, provincial, and federal decision-making processes. It is only by working collaboratively, in an integrated way and with a shared agenda, that the full potential of the Kootenay Rockies tourism region will be realized.

## AT A GLANCE

In what follows, the distinctiveness of the destination is summarized, and its vision for tourism introduced. While acknowledging the challenges the sector faces, its potential for growth is set out in terms of key opportunities and experience development potential. A consideration of the key strategies and associated actions then follows. While further detail on each of these elements is available in the full strategy, they are brought together “At A Glance” to demonstrate the scope of the integrated nature of the approach being taken.

HALCYON HOT SPRINGS VILLAGE AND SPA  
Photo: Dave Heath



# 2

# REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

## A DISTINCTIVE DESTINATION

The stunning natural assets of the Kootenay Rockies region include majestic mountains, crystal clear lakes, wetlands of international significance, and several mineral hot springs. National and provincial park designations protect and make accessible many aspects of this natural heritage for visitors.

It is a place where deep, dry, and reliable snow supports world-class destination ski resorts, backcountry lodges, and nearby friendly towns. The variety, distinctiveness, and appeal of the region's natural wonders provide endless opportunities for outdoor activities, touring, and camping. The region boasts a growing number of world class trail experiences for hiking, mountain biking, trail running, and various mechanized activities.

A wealth of freshwater lakes and rivers provide opportunities for a wide range of paddling, whitewater, and float experiences, as well as exceptional angling.

Home to the Ktunaxa Nation, the Sinixt Nation, the Okanagan Nation, and the Secwepemc (Shuswap) peoples, this rugged area has been inhabited for

thousands of years. While mining, forestry, transportation, and agriculture have long been important industries, tourism is increasingly being recognized by residents and local governments as an essential economic contributor.

## A SHARED VISION

The vision for tourism development over the next 10 years reflects the distinctiveness of the destination and the ambition of its communities to ensure that the Kootenay Rockies region is a world-class tourism destination that offers remarkable products and experiences that are authentic, driven by visitor demand, exceed expectations, and align with BC's brand.

CRANBROOK  
Photo: Kari Medig



# 2

# REALIZING THE POTENTIAL



“The Kootenay Rockies region is a preferred four-season destination for

passionate travellers of all ages and abilities with a sense of adventure and a desire to discover unparalleled, accessible outdoor recreation and the authentic mountain culture unique to the Kootenay’s small towns. The Kootenay Rockies region offers travellers from near and far the opportunity to connect both to the nature that defines and sustains this place, and to the people that differentiate it with their outstanding service and warm welcome to visitors as “temporary locals”. The tourism industry in the Kootenay Rockies embraces collaboration, leads the world in sustainable tourism, and constantly builds and nurtures relationships that accelerate the region’s success as a travel destination.”

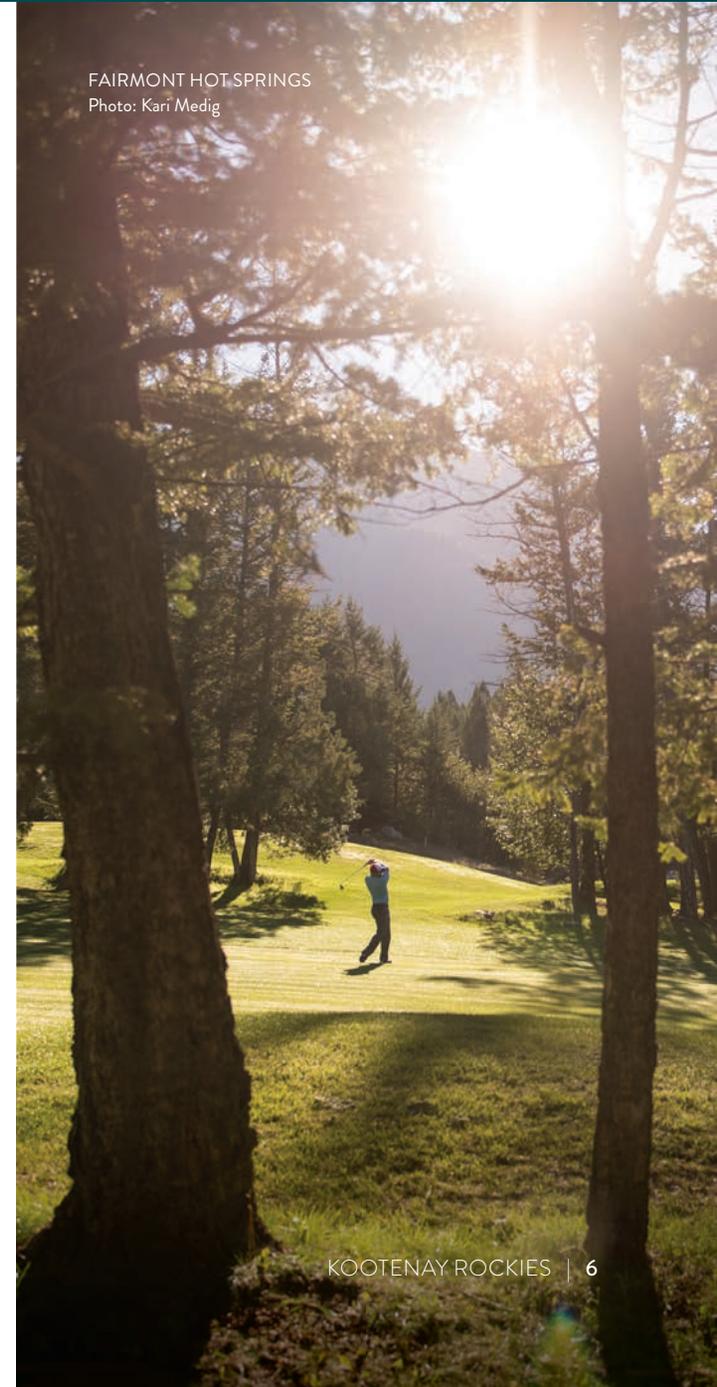
## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

The region faces a number of challenges, including actual and perceived safety and ease of travel; lack of infrastructure, services, and amenities to support travel quality; year-round staff constraints including skillsets and affordable housing; land use conflicts; and environmental capacity. However, these challenges lead to key opportunities to:

- Develop in a manner which respects environmental health and community resilience and values
- Improve actual and perceived safety and ease of travel within the region
- Build strong, collaborative relationships throughout the region
- Improve the quality of visitor infrastructure
- Improve the business climate and policy framework for tourism operators
- Encourage the launch of additional visitor experiences in shoulder seasons
- Improve the quality and consistency of service
- Recruit, train, and retain staff including the provision of sufficient affordable housing
- Improve accessibility for people of all ages and abilities, including those with access requirements

FAIRMONT HOT SPRINGS

Photo: Kari Medig



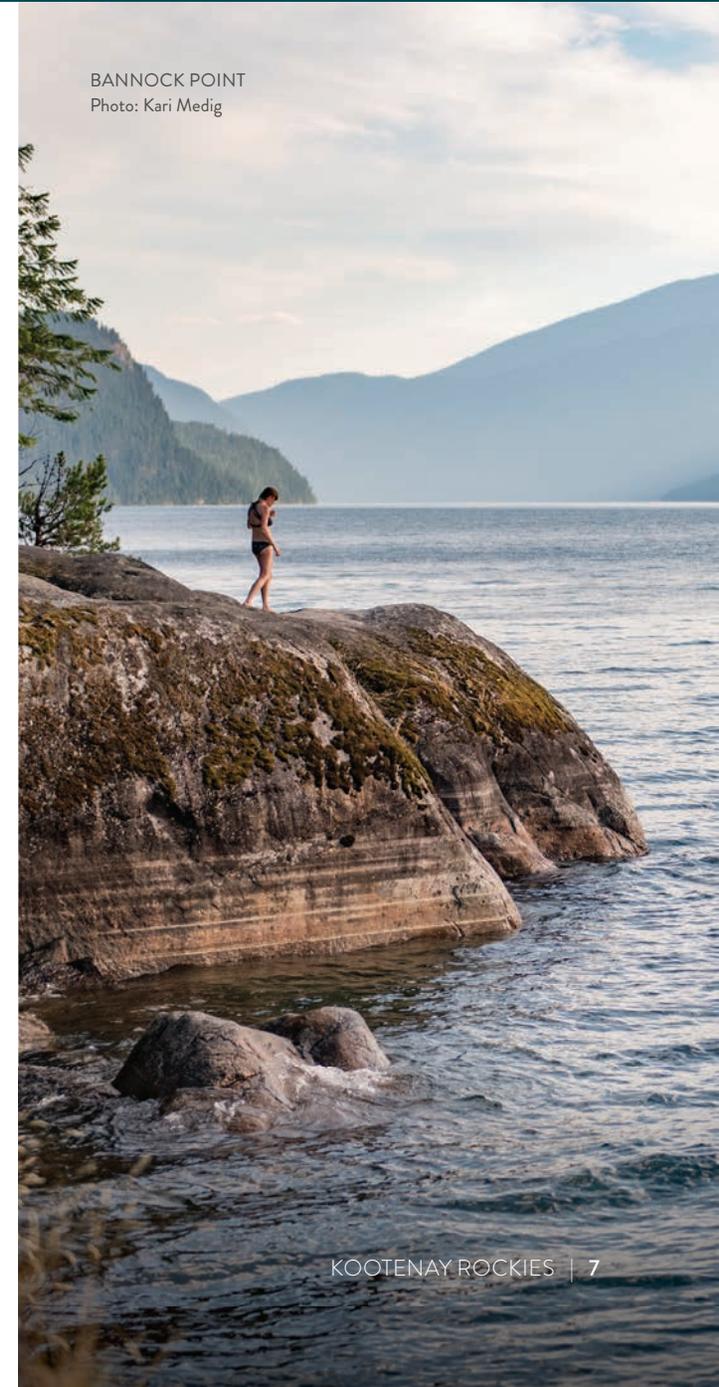
# 2

# REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

The current and future experiences that will motivate travel and differentiate the destination with a compelling, sustainable visitor experience include:

- **THE POWDER HIGHWAY** is readily accessible deep powder snow at a range of world-class destination ski resorts; an unparalleled concentration of heli and cat ski operations; a wealth of backcountry lodges; and accessible backcountry routes.
  - **BIG MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE** a collection of front and backcountry experiences — including mountain biking and trail-based experiences — allowing travellers of all ages and abilities to experience camping and nature (including accessible camping and hiking opportunities).
  - **INCREDIBLE SCENIC BEAUTY** accessible from the window of a car, or from deep into the backcountry — whichever option the traveller prefers, with relatively easy access to nature and outdoor adventure that surrounds, inspires, and defines each moment spent here. An ideal backdrop for a picture-perfect mountain wedding.
  - **HOT SPRINGS TOURING** a collection of developed and natural hot springs offering visitors a complete range of experiences including full-service resort, spa, and wellness services and amenities, either on-site or in neighbouring towns.
  - **HIGHWAY TOURING** the appeal of relaxed and scenic drives along the Highway 1 and Highway 3 corridors with multiple places to stop enroute, featuring the uniqueness of each community along the corridors, incredible scenic beauty, healthy ecosystems, easy access to outdoor adventure, and a growing inventory of trail-based infrastructures.
- **AN ABUNDANCE OF WATER** providing unparalleled opportunities for angling and water-based activities on the large bodies of fresh water.
  - **CLUSTERS OF EXCEPTIONAL DESTINATION GOLF COURSES** as well as more value-oriented golf courses, offering a strong combined value proposition and enjoyable touring routes.
  - **THE QUIRKINESS, SMALL TOWN FRIENDLINESS** and the many people that call Kootenay communities “home” and serve as a backdrop for authentic stories, old and new.
  - **A UNIQUE “SENSE OF PLACE”** that not only encompasses an abiding zen-like calm sense of peacefulness, but also exudes a sense of discovery, innovation, and search for adventure.
  - **A COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT** and to healthy living, manifested in a growing agri-tourism sector offering fresh organic produce, locally-sourced restaurant menus and culinary experiences.
  - **ARTS, CULTURE, AND HERITAGE** including a wealth of artists and artisans hand crafting and sharing their works; an intriguing history and heritage that embraces cultural diversity; a growing number of Indigenous cultural experiences; and festivals and events celebrating a range of interests all year long.

BANNOCK POINT  
Photo: Kari Medig



# 3 AT A GLANCE

**VISION STATEMENT** The Kootenay Rockies region is a preferred four-season destination for passionate travellers of all ages and abilities with a sense of adventure and a desire to discover unparalleled, accessible outdoor recreation and the authentic mountain culture unique to the Kootenay’s small towns. The Kootenay Rockies region offers travellers from near and far the opportunity to connect both to the nature that defines and sustains this place, and to the people that differentiate it with their outstanding service and warm welcome to visitors as “temporary locals”. The tourism industry in the Kootenay Rockies embraces collaboration, leads the world in sustainable tourism, and constantly builds and nurtures relationships that accelerate the region’s success as a travel destination.

THEME 1

## IT'S IN OUR NATURE: OUR NATURE DEFINES US

<p><b>TREAD LIGHTLY</b></p> <p>Develop, promote, and communicate a code of conduct which exhorts residents and visitors to respect the environment, behave responsibly, and stay safe. Ensure that the code is informed by best practices, is inclusive in its approach, and is widely distributed. Develop and communicate key messages regarding invasive species education and eradication.</p>	<p><b>PLAN WELL</b></p> <p>Map the relationship between areas of high-use and high-sensitivity to better inform land management planning processes, and the appropriate siting and development of visitor infrastructure. Consolidate planning area maps to gain a regional perspective, which can be used to guide both public and private sector investment decisions. Ensure key resource roads are maintained.</p>	<p><b>FOCUS ON SHARED STEWARDSHIP</b></p> <p>Collaborate with Provincial Ministries and Indigenous groups to develop a land and water management framework. Recognizing the contribution that tourism makes, develop an appropriately-funded model of shared stewardship and enforcement which protects the environment, mitigates usage impacts, reconciles competing land use, and provides certainty for tourism development.</p>	<p><b>RESPOND TO CLIMATE CHANGE</b></p> <p>Within the context of a climate action task force, work with the Province to develop an agreed approach to climate adaptation and mitigation. Share the lessons learned from best practices globally with the tourism industry, keep visitors informed, and profile this issue within the annual regional tourism conference.</p>	<p><b>SEEK GLOBAL RECOGNITION</b></p> <p>Research the experience of other destinations at home and abroad in developing accreditation programs for sustainable tourism. Develop a regional sustainability charter and, in exploring options for pursuing international accreditation, pilot a program with a number of operators.</p>
<p><b>CREATE EXCEPTIONAL TRAILS</b></p> <p>In continuing to support the development of the trail network, focus on trails which offer a regional mix of iconic experiences and meet the needs of all target markets, ages, and abilities. Develop at least one iconic trail experience in each community, and continue to support trail building and maintenance of the highest standard.</p>	<p><b>RESOURCE THE EFFORT</b></p> <p>Work together to secure the funding and volunteer support required to develop and maintain the trail network. Informed by research of what happens elsewhere, identify potential sources of funding through, for example, off-road vehicle licensing fees, and recommend funding mechanisms.</p>	<p><b>FILL THE GAPS</b></p> <p>Conduct an inventory of current experiential offerings and infrastructure within, between, and outside of communities to identify existing gaps. In addressing gaps, promote investment opportunities for the public and private sectors to develop additional experiences where needed.</p>	<p><b>MORE NIGHTS UNDER THE STARS</b></p> <p>Expand high season camping capacity in strategic locations (Parks Canada, provincial parks, Rec, Sites and Trails, potential new municipally-owned campgrounds) and review seasonal opening and closings. Encourage greater overall occupancy and promote investments in infrastructure to support ready-to-camp experiences.</p>	<p><b>PROMOTE UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY</b></p> <p>Continue to work with Spinal Cord Injury BC to understand the priorities for enhancing access for all. Secure a Regional Accessibility Specialist to audit the accessibility of attractions and services, promote the concept of Universal Design amongst operators and providers, and make recommendations for improving the accessibility of the tourism product for visitors of all abilities.</p>

# 3 AT A GLANCE

THEME 2

## MANY VOICES, ONE STORY: OUR PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE US

<p><b>SUPPORT INDIGENOUS TOURISM</b></p> <p>In collaboration with Kootenay Rockies Tourism, the Indigenous Tourism Association of British Columbia, and the Province, secure a regional resource to work with the Ktunaxa and other First Nation communities in supporting the development of Indigenous tourism.</p>	<p><b>PROMOTE CULTURAL AWARENESS</b></p> <p>In building relationships between all First Nations communities, local communities, and tourism operators, provide Indigenous cultural awareness training, including protocols for engaging with the Ktunaxa.</p>	<p><b>AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION</b></p> <p>Within the context of building relationships with representatives of each First Nation, identify opportunities for cultural sharing as an integral part of the visitor experience. Work collaboratively with the Ktunaxa to incorporate, where appropriate, oral histories and place names into interpretation and signage.</p>	<p><b>MADE TO MEASURE</b></p> <p>Under the guidance of DBC Research Services, develop and implement a consistent, easy-to-use methodology for measuring and communicating the economic, social, cultural, and environmental value of tourism in each community, and across the region. Pilot the approach in several communities before mainstreaming it across the region.</p>	<p><b>SHOWCASE AND CELEBRATE</b></p> <p>Review the current calendar of events, noting the distinction between those which have the capacity to motivate travel and those which are more community focused. Establish an annual festival &amp; events forum to optimize the timing of key events. Identify opportunities to create strategic motivational events and build event planning, coordination, and volunteering capacity across the region.</p>
<p><b>POOL RESOURCES</b></p> <p>Explore ways to support year-round staff retention within, and between, communities by exploring and piloting a cross-season/cross-business job pool. Investigate the possibility of pooled liability insurance programs for land-based and water-based activity operators, transportation/shuttle operators, and other tourism experience providers.</p>	<p><b>ATTRACT AND RETAIN</b></p> <p>Run regional campaigns to raise awareness of tourism career opportunities and attract prospective tourism industry workers from within and beyond the province. Build awareness of tourism employment opportunities in tourism in Indigenous communities.</p>	<p><b>ACCOMMODATE AND SUSTAIN</b></p> <p>Within the context of the development of local and regional workforce strategies, establish the right balance between the need to regulate short term/sharing economy rentals with a critical need to accommodate industry employees.</p>	<p><b>TAILOR AND TRAIN</b></p> <p>Match industry needs with the capacity of educational institutes to deliver relevant skills. Raise awareness of training opportunities on offer, and provide tailored, affordable, on-site training to existing tourism businesses. Include advice on export-readiness, and on how best to serve travellers from emerging markets.</p>	<p><b>REMARKABLE BY DESIGN</b></p> <p>Encourage all tourism experience providers in the region to participate in Destination BC's Remarkable Experiences program. Initiate the process of establishing a baseline to measure the quality of the visitor experience.</p>
<p><b>EMPOWER THE AMBASSADORS</b></p> <p>Enable visitor centres, front-line staff, and residents to take advantage of product familiarisation initiatives and participate in broader resident and cross-industry education programs, thereby equipping them to become ambassadors for the destination.</p>				

# 3

# AT A GLANCE

THEME 3

## STRONGER TOGETHER: OUR COLLABORATION ACCELERATES US

### ADVISE AND CHAMPION

Harness the capacity of the Kootenay Rockies Regional Destination Management Committee to advise on regional destination development issues and champion the promotion of local and regional tourism. Facilitate the communication and review of the 10-year regional destination development strategy and oversee its implementation.

### MONITOR AND MANAGE

Provide on-going liaison and support to the project management efforts and monitor progress in each of the four planning areas (West Kootenays and Revelstoke, Highway 3 Corridor, Columbia Valley, Highway 1 Corridor) in the implementation of catalyst projects and high priority actions.

### ADVOCATE AND ENABLE

Consolidate the efforts of those sectors actively engaged in lobbying government through the creation of a regional advocacy coalition. Facilitate inter-industry and cross-ministry dialogue to identify key issues, affected stakeholders, and appropriate responses.

### KEEP MOVING

Within the context of a regional multi-modal transportation committee, prioritize options for developing a cohesive, affordable, and reliable transportation network throughout the region that works for visitors and residents alike. Advocate on a range of issues from air access to traffic management, and avalanche risk management infrastructure to visitor informed signage, and cell service to shuttle services.

### GIVE THE ALL CLEAR

Work collaboratively with key partners in transportation and the emergency services to provide timely and accurate information about incidents affecting travel. Ensure follow-up communication in terms of what's "open for business" is aligned within and across provincial boundaries in order to reassure travellers about their travel plans.

### ACT IN CONCERT

Develop a source of best practice policies and practices for local and regional governments keen to provide a supportive environment for tourism. Work collaboratively with Parks Canada to ensure park amenities respond to visitor needs. Explore the potential of Agricultural Land Reserve lands for tourism use.

# 4 GEARING UP

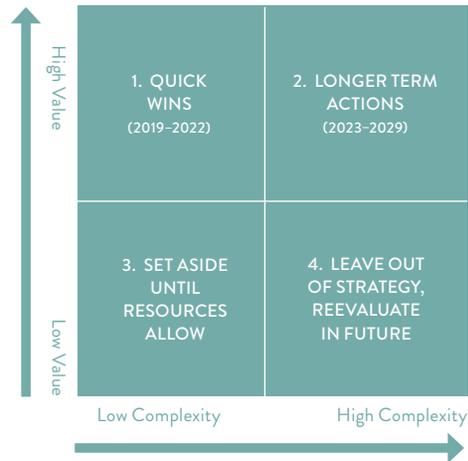
## SUCCESS NETWORKS

This strategy is intended to inform actions for the future, which over time may be embedded in local, regional, and provincial decision-making processes. The result will be an integrated system of priorities to achieve better development decisions, drive greater tourism revenues, and realize benefits for businesses and communities in the Kootenay Rockies tourism region. All of this will contribute to a thriving, vibrant, and growing economy.

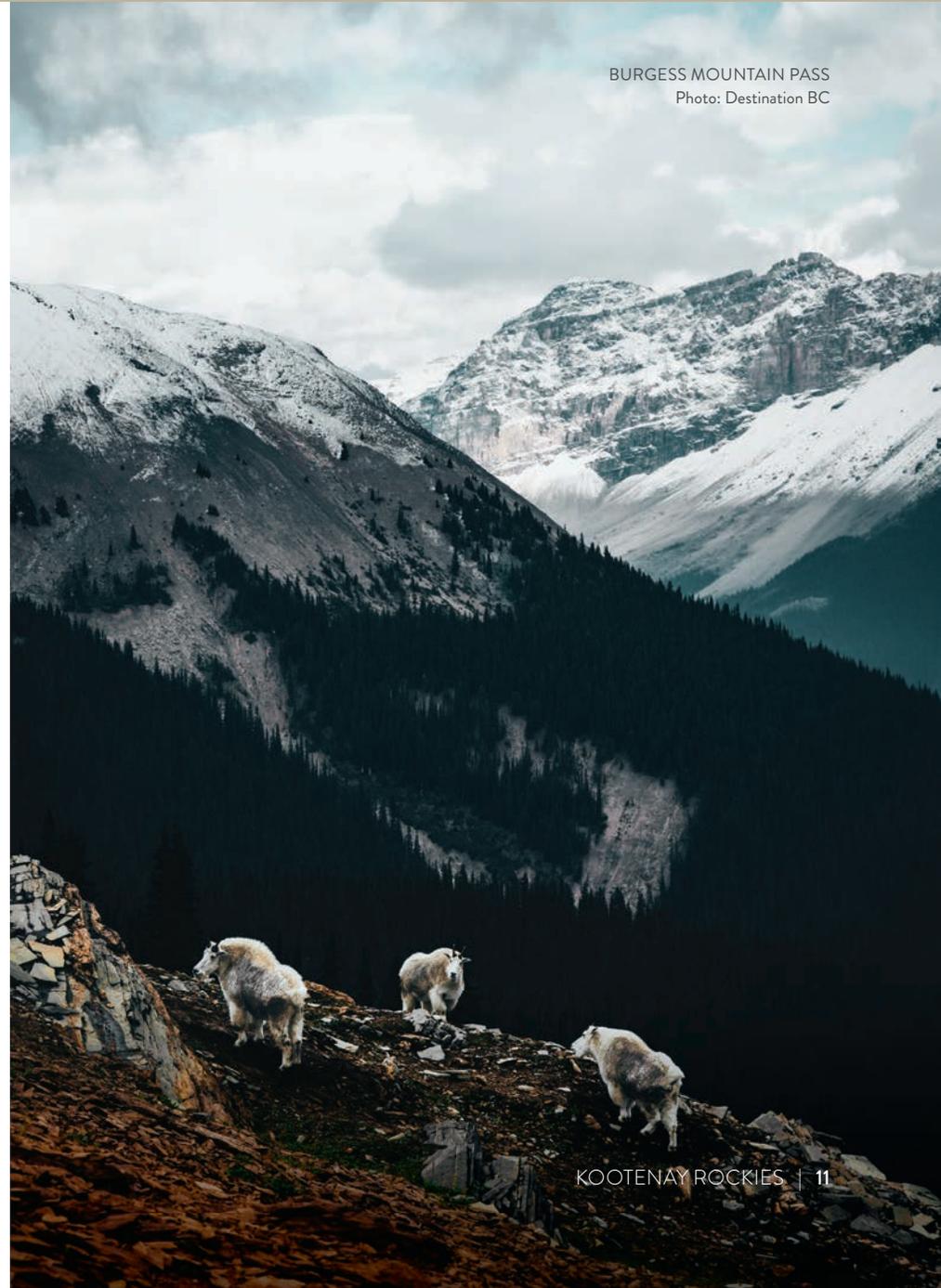
Joint strategy ownership among all regional area tourism partners is a critical component of this program's success. The strategy identifies a suggested success network of tourism partners to champion and move actions within each objective forward.

## FRAMEWORK

The strategy presents the destination development objectives using a consistent framework to determine the prioritization of each objective, and the relative timing for implementation. Objectives with a provincial or regional scope are identified as well and will inform the regional and provincial destination development strategies.



BURGESS MOUNTAIN PASS  
Photo: Destination BC



# 4 GEARING UP

## CATALYST PROJECTS

The following 19 actions were identified as catalyst projects for immediately moving the strategy into implementation.

### It's in Our Nature: Our Nature Defines Us

- Work collaboratively to create and communicate a code of respectful and safe conduct and a shared story (including invasive species education) for front, mid, and backcountry, to educate both residents and visitors; distribution should be both to public recreationalists, and also to visitors via operators.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to build awareness of the value of the tourism industry, and to create a regional master planning area map of high-use areas and high-sensitivity areas (land and water), to be used to inform land management planning processes, and other plans for infrastructure development in these areas (e.g., rest stops, lookouts, washrooms, parking for private vehicles/buses, bike racks, signage, water access, boat launches, marinas, shelters, wi-fi and connectivity, accessibility considerations, invasive species cleaning stations, etc.).
- Work collaboratively with Provincial Ministries and Indigenous groups to develop a process and a land and water management framework leading to a shared stewardship and enforcement model that recognizes the significant contribution of the tourism industry and that it is adequately funded, and will provide environmental protection, mitigate usage conflicts (human and wildlife), manage inter-industry uses, and provide reasonable certainty for tourism development, motorized and non-motorized use, public and commercial recreation uses, and maintenance of viewscapes.
- Create a climate action task force and work together with the Province to develop an approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation, to be used to educate the industry and visitors, and to share best practices.
- Participate in the development of a regional sustainability charter and seek sustainable destination accreditation by an internationally-recognized body.
- Support the development of a wide range of trail-based experiences and trail network enhancement within, and between, communities in the region. Identify and invest in at least one iconic trail experience in each community in the region. Ensure continued support for existing iconic trails.

ST EUGENE GOLF RESORT CASINO

Photo: Kari Medig



# 4 GEARING UP

- Work collaboratively to identify sustainable funding for trail development and maintenance to support efforts of local volunteers.
  - Support improved accessibility of infrastructure, trails, businesses, and services for visitors of all ages and abilities.
- Many Voices, One Story: Our People Differentiate Us**
- Work together with Kootenay Rockies Tourism, Indigenous Tourism BC, and the Province to secure a regional resource within Kootenay Rockies Tourism to work with the Ktunaxa and other First Nation communities, and to support Indigenous tourism development.
  - Conduct Indigenous cultural awareness training, including protocols for engaging with the Ktunaxa, and continue to build relationships between all First Nations communities, local communities, and tourism operators.
  - Continue to work collaboratively with the Ktunaxa to incorporate oral histories and place names into interpretation and signage where they deem appropriate.
- Secure resources and working together with Destination BC Research Services, implement a consistent methodology to measure and communicate the economic, social, cultural, and environmental value of the tourism industry in each community, and across the region.
  - Convene an annual festival & events forum to optimize the nature and timing of key events. Support regional capacity building for event planning and coordination.
  - Continue to investigate and pilot customized approaches to create a cross-season/cross-business job pool to support year-round staff retention within, and between, communities.
  - Design and execute regional campaigns to promote tourism career awareness and labour attraction from in and out of province.
- Stronger Together: Our Collaboration Accelerates Us**
- Continue to leverage the Kootenay Rockies Regional Destination Management Committee as an advisory group for regional destination development issues, and as champions in each community and sector.
  - Create a regional advocacy coalition to consolidate the voice of the many small sectors actively engaged in lobbying government, and to facilitate work with Tourism Industry Association of BC. Continue dialogue between tourism and other industries, and between tourism industry and various Ministries.
  - Create and participate in a regional multi-modal transportation committee to strategize on the multi-modal transportation options and priorities to be pursued to achieve a cohesive, affordable, and reliable transportation network throughout the region, that addresses the needs of visitors and workers moving between and around communities.
  - Work collaboratively with Drive BC/AB, emergency responders, RCMP, and the Ministry of Transportation to align communications within, and across, provincial boundaries in order to ensure positive and 'open for business' facts are promoted as well as accurate, factual, and timely information regarding incidents.

RED MOUNTAIN RESORT  
Photo: Ashley Voykin



# LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

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Read the Kootenay Rockies Destination Development Strategy  
or reach us at:

DESTINATION BC  
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FRONT COVER PHOTO: FERNIE, Kari Medig

BLANKET CREEK  
Photo: Ryan Creary

