

# COLUMBIA VALLEY DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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## HIGHLIGHTS



DESTINATION  
BRITISH COLUMBIA



# THANK YOU

The Columbia Valley Destination Development Strategy is the outcome of a 14-month iterative process of gathering, synthesizing and validating information with stakeholders about the current status and future direction of tourism in the Columbia Valley planning area.

We thank the Ktunaxa and Secwepemc First Nations on whose shared traditional territories we 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 Committee as well as the facilitator of the Columbia Valley destination development process.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## WHY A STRATEGY?

The Columbia Valley Destination Development Strategy was developed to enhance the competitiveness of the Columbia Valley tourism destination 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 the key highlights of the Columbia Valley strategy.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

The Columbia Valley 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 emerging learning outcomes will inform future implementation activities thereby optimizing their effectiveness in increasing economic, social, and cultural benefits for the entire Columbia Valley area.

## WHERE IS IT FOR?

The Columbia Valley planning area lies between the Purcell Mountain Range to the west and the Canadian Rockies Mountains to the east and includes Columbia Lake and Lake Windermere, the Columbia Wetlands and the Columbia River as well as Kootenay National Park. Geographically, the Valley extends some 102km from the community of Spillimacheen in the north to Canal Flats in the south and includes Areas F and G of the Regional District of East Kootenay.

## WHERE DOES IT FIT?

Columbia Valley is one of 20 planning areas across BC for which destination development strategies are being developed. Each planning area represents a logical destination for visitors in and around the province. As planning areas cross multiple jurisdictions, the importance of adopting an integrated approach with a shared vision and coordinated investment is critical. The Columbia Valley Destination Development Strategy is one of four planning area strategies being prepared for the Kootenay Rockies tourism region. Others include the West Kootenay/Revelstoke area, the Highway 1 Corridor and the Highway 3 Corridor. In time, informed by the outcomes of all relevant planning area destination development strategies, regional strategies will be developed. These will, in turn, inform the creation of a provincial strategy thereby ensuring a truly integrated and cohesive combination of bottom-up and top-down destination planning.

## A KEY IMPERATIVE

The recommendations contained within the Columbia Valley 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 with a shared agenda that the full potential of Columbia Valley will be realized.

## AT A GLANCE

In what follows, the distinctiveness of the Columbia Valley 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 each development priority 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.

# 2 REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

## A DISTINCTIVE DESTINATION

Nestled within the Traditional Territories of both the Ktunaxa Nation (?akisq'nuk First Nation) and the Secwepemc (Shuswap) peoples, the Columbia Valley destination planning area is located in the Rocky Mountain Trench, a long, wide valley flanked by the Rocky Mountains to the east and the Purcell Mountains to the west. Along its length meanders the Columbia River, which from its source in Columbia Lake, widens to form Lake Windermere as it journeys north west beyond the planning area to Golden. Along with the Kootenay River and its tributaries, it provides a life support system for hundreds of thousands of birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles and mammals.

The river is also home, within its floodplain, to the Columbia Wetlands — a globally significant system of lakes, marshes, ponds, swamps, flowing and standing water. Extending within the planning area from the community of Spillimacheen in the north to Canal Flats in the south, the Wetlands are a vital component of the Pacific Flyway, providing nesting, feeding and resting sites for migratory birds as well as vital habitat for all manner of wildlife, especially in winter.

Its long history of occupation by indigenous peoples is evidenced by numerous archaeological and traditional use sites of importance to First Nations. Apart from the Akisq'nuk First Nation, other communities within the area include Canal Flats, Fairmont Hot Springs, Windermere, Invermere, Panorama, Radium Hot Springs, Edgewater, Brisco and Spillimacheen. An area of unparalleled beauty, its natural assets include Kootenay National Park and the provincial parks of Whiteswan Lake, Columbia Lake, Windermere Lake, Dry Gulch, Thunder Hill, James Chabot and Bugaboo.

While mining, forestry and agriculture have long been important industries, tourism development has a strong pedigree. Radium Hot Springs, for example, became popular with travellers in the late 1800's and in 1922 was included in the new Kootenay National Park. Over the years, the remarkable natural assets of the Columbia Valley have been enhanced by the development of resorts, golf courses, ski hills and other amenities. A network of trails supporting cycling and hiking activity is under construction. Water based activities include boating, rafting, floating, paddling, wildlife watching and angling. The area is a popular second home destination for those seeking the warmer and sunnier side of the Rockies.

## A SHARED VISION

Columbia Valley's natural assets are simply stunning — beautiful mountain backdrops, crystal clear lakes, wetlands of international importance and several mineral hot springs. It is a place which is both exhilarating and profound. Adopting a sustainable approach to the development of the destination, partners working together are keen to realise the following vision:



THE COLUMBIA VALLEY IS KNOWN AS A PLACE TO UNWIND AND RELAX, WHERE TRAVELLERS, KEEN TO DISCOVER ADVENTURE, DISCOVER THEMSELVES.

VISITORS HAVE A DEEP SENSE OF CONNECTION WITH THIS PLACE, MAKING THE COLUMBIA VALLEY A CHERISHED DESTINATION. HIGH YIELD VISITORS FROM DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETS ARE DRAWN TO THE COLUMBIA VALLEY — THEY COME IN ALL SEASONS, STAY LONGER AND SPEND MORE.

# 2 REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

TOURISM IS UNDERSTOOD AND VALUED IN THE COLUMBIA VALLEY. HOWEVER, ITS IMPACTS ARE ALSO CAREFULLY MEASURED AND SO THAT THE FOUNDATION OF THE VALLEY'S SUCCESS, ITS NATURAL BEAUTY AND HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS, ARE PROTECTED. THE LOCAL BUSINESS CLIMATE SUPPORTS GROWTH AND EXPANSION THAT IS IN KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY VALUES. THE AREA'S REPUTATION FOR EXPERIENTIAL EXCELLENCE AND SERVICE QUALITY HAVE MADE THE COLUMBIA VALLEY THE MOST HIGHLY SOUGHT AFTER PLACE TO SEEK TOURISM EMPLOYMENT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

COLLABORATION IS A VALLEY-WIDE MANTRA AND OTHER DESTINATIONS COME TO STUDY THIS BEST PRACTICE MODEL THAT CONTINUES TO DELIVER EXCEPTIONAL RETURNS AGAINST DEFINED AND AGREED OBJECTIVES BY UNITING INDIVIDUALS, PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESSES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

While the destination faces a number of challenges in terms of reliable access, cohesive wayfinding, season extension, community and natural carrying capacity and year-round business sustainability, key opportunities include the need to:

- Improve business climate and policy framework for entrepreneurs
- Enhance transportation experience
- Encourage launch of additional visitor experiences in shoulder season

- Improve quality and consistency of service delivery
- Recruit, retain and train staff
- Promote sustainable growth
- Engage in Valley wide collaboration
- Enhance tourism infrastructure

## EXPERIENCE POTENTIAL

Given the area's existing draw, it will be important to build on its current strengths, support developing opportunities and identify future potential. This will ensure that the benefits of a sustainable approach to tourism are felt throughout the destination.

**Product experiences with world class appeal to motivate travel, encourage longer stays and sustain year-round tourism throughout the destination include:**

- Lakes, Rivers, and Wetlands based Experiences — with a focus on angling, rafting/ float trips, bird watching and wildlife viewing.
- Snow-based Experiences (Skiing, Boarding, and Heli-Skiing), Mountains and Trails — with a focus on Panorama Mountain Resort, Fairmont Hot Springs ski hill, backcountry lodge and backcountry snow experiences.
- Golf Experiences — with a focus on championship golf courses and family friendly golf options.
- Hot Springs, Spas, and Wellness Rejuvenation — with a focus on Radium, Fairmont Lussier Hot Springs.
- Mountains, Lodges, Parks, Arts, Culture, and Heritage — with a focus on access to protected wilderness in Kootenay National Park, provincial parks, camping, hiking and mountaineering experiences.
- Trails Based Experiences — with a focus on a growing network of trails for motorized and non-motorized use.
- Arts, Culture, and Heritage including Culinary, Festivals, and Events — with a focus on existing and developing arts, culture and heritage experiences, including culinary/agri-tourism.
- Sport Tourism — with a focus on regional and provincial scale sporting events.
- Meetings and Conferences — with a focus on private and community facilities.



# 3 AT A GLANCE

THEME 1	GETTING HERE, GETTING AROUND: SECURE, RELIABLE, AND TIMELY ACCESS TO AND WITHIN THE COLUMBIA VALLEY			
	CONFIDENTLY CONNECTED  Advocate for increased air access and affordable flights through YXC. Within the context of reviewing public and private shuttle service provision, ensure movement between airports, communities and experiences is convenient, reliable and viable.		FIT FOR PURPOSE  Ensure resource roads which are critical for access to trailheads and recreation areas remain open and maintained. Through positive messaging and responsive traffic management, ensure the driving and cycling experience is safe, reliable and inspires the confidence of visitors.	
THEME 2	GET DOWN TO BUSINESS: CREATE AN ATTRACTIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE FOR NEW AND EXPANDING TOURISM BUSINESSES			
	ADVOCATE & SUPPORT  Communicate the value of tourism to residents and business owners and nurture their support for the sector. Strengthen their role as ambassadors for the destination through their participation in familiarization initiatives designed to enhance their knowledge and appreciation of the wider tourism offer.	ACKNOWLEDGE & ENGAGE  Ensure new and emerging tourism operators adhere to established protocols for working within traditional territories and engaging with First Nations.	ACCOMMODATE NEEDS  Within the context of a supportive policy and regulatory environment, address the impact of the sharing economy on the availability of longer term rentals for employees and entrepreneurs. Address the specific needs of the sector within the context of providing creative solutions to the provision of affordable housing as well as day and after-school care.	RESOURCE & EQUIP  Find creative ways to pool resources, share liabilities and communicate funding opportunities to address staff shortages and business viability. Match industry needs with the capacity of educational institutes to deliver relevant skills. Offer tailored, affordable, on-site training to tourism businesses.
THEME 3	KEEP IT SPECIAL: PROTECT THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND MANAGE TOURISM IMPACTS			
	PROTECT & PLAN  Within the context of an agreed framework, promote the pro-active management, shared stewardship and wise use of land/water based assets. Ensure that the framework provides reasonable certainty for tourism development; safeguards views; promotes appropriate uses and affords environmental protection.	MONITOR & ENFORCE  Within the context of the shared stewardship model of land/water management, resource the enforcement of agreements and regulations.		MODULATE & MITIGATE  Work with key stakeholders to agree measures for and collect data on the impacts of tourism on the health of the ecosystem. Ensure that tourism impact modulation and mitigation measures are reflected in formal plans for managing the natural environment.
THEME 4	LOCAL MATTERS: MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND VIBRANCY			
	REFRESH & REVITALISE  Continue to enhance public corridors and gathering places and, in partnership with landlords, address building spaces and facades. Explore the scope for introducing revitalization tax incentives or “business improvement area” measures.	ANIMATE & ENERGISE  Within the context of securing a Columbia Valley-wide coordinator, continue to invest in the animation of communities to encourage longer stays and enhance the overall visitor experience. Work to relieve artists, buskers and other cultural animators of the onerous burden of insurance.		ALIGN & ACTIVATE  Ensure that tourism is developed in line with community values, aspirations and acceptable limits. In promoting a new website for prospective volunteers, ensure that their efforts are recognized and rewarded.

# 3 AT A GLANCE

THEME 5	STRENGTHEN THE APPEAL: DEVELOP AMENITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT QUALITY TRAVEL EXPERIENCES		
	<b>TARGET &amp; INVEST</b> Work with key agencies to map highly used/highly sensitive areas to better inform the strategic location of visitor infrastructure. Identify gaps in provision — camping/sport tourism infrastructure/weather independent venues — and assess the feasibility of further provision.	<b>FOCUS ON EXCELLENCE</b> Ensure core visitor attractions are well maintained and accessible; signage and interpretive wayfinding is accurate and consistent and critical connectivity — internet/Wi-Fi — is readily available.	<b>SAFE &amp; SOUND</b> Promote responsible waterway and backcountry user behaviours supported by a well-resourced search and rescue service.
THEME 6	EXCEED EXPECTATIONS: MAINTAIN CURRENT EXPERIENTIAL STRENGTHS AND SUPPORT THE INTRODUCTION OF ADDITIONAL YEAR ROUND, MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES		
	<b>EPIC ENCOUNTERS</b> Whether land or water based, develop a suite of year-round, multiday, value-added experiences in nature. Augment opportunities to golf, ski, hike, boat, float or paddle with additional experiences to deepen and enhance the visitor offer.  <b>SHOWCASE &amp; CELEBRATE</b> Within the context of a regional plan, prioritise festivals and events relative to their capacity to align with tourism objectives and provide signature appeal. Utilize a common calendar for existing and planned community festivals and events.	<b>ICONIC TRAILS</b> Develop a network of family friendly, trail-based experiences over land and on water. In identifying iconic routes, engage volunteers in associated trail development and promote business opportunities such as guiding, shuttle service provision and gear rental.  <b>CONTINUITY &amp; CREATIVITY</b> Celebrate the history and heritage of the area by integrating its key stories into the visitor experience. Explore the scope to augment art and culture tours with, for example, culinary experiences to create truly motivating events.	<b>THE POWER OF QUIET</b> From immersion in hot springs to forest bathing, spas to zen sports, identify, strengthen and promote the depth and range of wellness experiences on offer throughout the destination.  <b>GREAT TASTE</b> Engage farmers, growers, artisans and operators in creating memorable food and drink experiences. Nurture new product development opportunities and cultivate a “Made in Columbia Valley” quality brand.
THEME 7	COMMON PURPOSE: WORK TOGETHER COLLABORATIVELY AND EFFECTIVELY FOR MUTUAL GAIN		
	<b>ONE VOICE</b> Within the context of a Columbia Valley-wide approach, increase the number and range of collaborative projects to optimise the value of partnered resources and deliver a seamless experience for visitors in terms of information and visitor services.	<b>GOOD RELATIONS</b> Continue to nurture relationships with First Nations, local communities and tourism operators. Build positive relationships with user groups, environmental stewardship groups, search and rescue and others to better communicate the benefits and challenges of tourism.	

# 4 GEARING UP

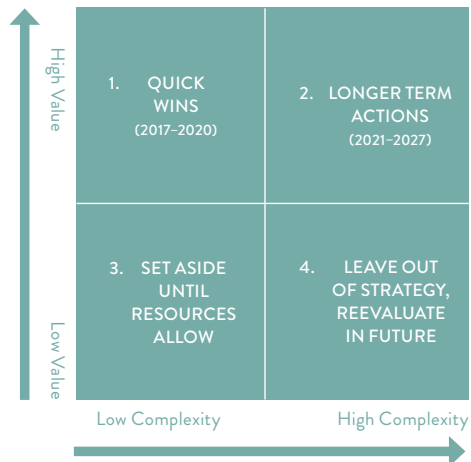
## SUCCESS NETWORKS

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

Joint strategy ownership among all planning 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.



SINCLAIR CANYON  
Photo: Kari Medig



# 4

# GEARING UP

## CATALYST PROJECTS

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

### **Getting Here, Getting Around - Secure Reliable and Timely Access to and Within the Columbia Valley**

- Advocate for increased air access, affordable flights through YXC.

### **Get Down to Business — Create an Attractive Business Climate for New and Expanding Tourism Businesses**

- Create a cross-season/cross-business job pool to support year round staff retention within communities.
- Develop a local/regional affordable housing strategy (learning from best practices and mistakes of other communities) and secure resources to implement the initial phase of recommendations (including incentives for under-utilized housing to be directed into affordable staff housing).
- Educate tourism operators (new and potential) on protocols for engaging with First Nations and operating on traditional territories.

### **Keep it Special — Protect the Natural Environment and Manage Tourism Impacts**

- Work with Parks Canada, ENV, local stewardship groups to agree on measures and collect data on the impacts of tourism on ecosystem health, leading to recommendations for impact mitigation and management that are included in formal plans (e.g., mitigation of tourism impacts on Wetlands included in update to Wetlands Management Plan).
- Work collaboratively with the Province and Ministries to develop a process leading to a land and water management framework (front/mid/back) and shared stewardship/enforcement model (including lakes and rivers) to provide reasonable certainty for tourism development, environmental protection, motorized and non-motorized use, public and commercial recreation uses and viewscapes.

### **Local Matters — Maintain and Enhance Community Character and Vibrancy**

- Continue to invest in the animation of communities to encourage longer lengths of stay and to enhance the overall visitor experience.

### **Strengthen the Appeal — Develop Amenities and Infrastructure to Support Quality Travel Experiences**

- Engage with Provincial Ministries (FLNR, ENV and TRAN) as well as national parks to create a master planning area map of high use areas and high sensitivity areas (land and water), to be used to inform plans for infrastructure development in these areas (rest stops, lookouts, washrooms, parking, signage, boat launches, marinas, shelters, Wi-Fi and connectivity etc.)

### **Exceed Expectations — Maintain Current Experiential Strengths and Support the Introduction of Additional Year Round, Memorable Experiences**

- Utilize a common community calendar for festivals and events.

# LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

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Find it in the more detailed Columbia Valley Destination Development Strategy or reach us at:

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: KOOTENAY NATIONAL PARK, Kari Medig



FAIRMONT HOT SPRINGS  
Photo: Kari Medig