

Kootenay Rockies Tourism Sustainability Charter Final Report

January, 2021



Introduction

Kootenay Rockies Tourism engaged GreenStep Solutions to help develop a sustainability charter, complete with indicators, goals and an action plan, to enable the destination to meaningfully move the industry forward in reducing its contribution to climate change, and improving its sustainability performance. This document presents the process, outcomes and next steps along the Kootenay Rockies Tourism region's sustainability journey.

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What is a Sustainability Charter?

A sustainability charter can be defined differently based on the needs of the organization. Its purpose is to provide a clear expression of the organization's key objectives and the motivations that guide those objectives. It can be both internally and externally facing, providing the stakeholders with a cohesive philosophy while helping to define the region for a public audience.

For Kootenay Rockies Tourism (KRT), the Sustainability Charter is an articulation of the sustainability-related issues, goals, guiding principles and development themes included in the 2019-2029 Destination Development Strategy, combined with key criteria from various globally recognized authorities on sustainable destinations. The outcome is a set of indicators that can be measured by the destination to better understand these areas and to help manage and influence them as the destination strategy is implemented.

A final element in the Sustainability Charter, once selected indicators are measured, is setting specific goals around these indicators and their issue areas to improve the sustainability performance of the destination.

Kootenay Rockies Tourism Destination Strategy Goals

The following is the set of goals identified in the 2019-2029 Kootenay Rockies Destination Development Strategy:

1. Increase shoulder season visitation and work towards a year-round tourism economy
2. Increase average length of stay and average visitor yield in the region in each season

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3. Develop strategies to adapt to climate change and to reduce the contribution of the tourism industry to greenhouse gas emissions
 4. Improve resident recognition of tourism as a positive contributor to community resiliency and quality of life
 5. Improve tourism business ability to attract, retain and house skilled staff and thereby enhance the climate for tourism business success
 6. Increase overall visitor destination satisfaction rating as measured by a tool such as Net Promoter Score
 7. Become a leader in intermodal transportation and rural connectivity
 8. Attract visitors to the region from more diverse markets so as to eventually increase the proportion of long-haul fly-in visitors
 9. Lead Canada in growth of overnight visitor expenditures [Destination BC Destination Development Program provincial goal]
 10. Secure the highest Net Promoter Score in North America [Destination BC Destination Development Program provincial goal]

These goals became the basis for developing an indicators matrix that will enable the alignment of the 2019-2029 Kootenay Rockies Destination Development Strategy with international standards and metrics for destination sustainability.

Development Path

The development of the Kootenay Rockies Sustainability Charter included three key steps:

1. Engagement of KRT management, businesses, board, and other stakeholders
2. Developing a set of baseline indicators relevant to the Kootenay Rockies Region
3. Baseline measurement, goals and action plan

Stakeholder Engagement and Indicator Development

As a first step during the summer of 2019, GreenStep reviewed the draft 2019-2029 Destination Development Strategy and other relevant documents, and had several meetings with KRT management, in order to develop a deep understanding of the region's issues and goals, and to refine the process moving forward.

Through review of the Strategy, and by referencing the *Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria and Suggested Performance Indicators for Destinations*, the *UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations*, the *Canadian Indicator Framework (CIF) for Agenda 2030*, and other relevant standards and frameworks, dozens of potential indicators were then identified in an indicator matrix, and reviewed with KRT staff in October 2019.

In November 2019, GreenStep facilitated two in-person stakeholder workshops to engage a wide range of KRT stakeholders, including board members, tourism operators, and staff. The workshops took place in Nelson at Fairmont Hot Springs to provide opportunities for participation throughout the region. These workshops focused on building a common language around sustainable tourism, presenting the business case for sustainable tourism, introducing the Sustainable Tourism free Sustainability Score that would enable tourism operators to gauge their level of sustainability, reviewing the Sustainability Charter development process, and leaving time for questions and dialogue.

Following these workshops, the indicators matrix was reviewed and refined, in consultation with Kootenay Rockies Tourism staff. At this time a draft of the Province of British Columbia's Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture (MTAC) *Tourism Strategic Framework - Performance Indicators* was also introduced into the matrix, in order to ensure the selected indicators aligned with provincial performance measurement criteria for sustainable tourism. A short-list of indicators was then developed, which aligned with KRT, MTAC, CIF, GSTC, and UNWTO indicators for sustainability to ensure local, provincial, national and international relevance and credibility.

In February 2020, a third workshop was delivered online to engage the Kootenay Rockies Tourism Board. This workshop also aimed to build a common language and reinforce the business case for sustainability, and to then work through the short-list of potential indicators to gain insight into what indicators the board valued as priorities, as well as known sources of data.

Following this workshop, an indicator prioritization survey was developed in order to enable broad participation amongst all board members (including those not present at the workshop), in reviewing all proposed indicators. It was decided that the survey should include the most up to date draft indicators from MTAC, which became available in mid-March 2020. The indicators matrix and the survey were then revised to reflect these updates; however, due to COVID-19, further stakeholder engagement was put on hold and the survey was not distributed to the board. Instead, GreenStep and KRT staff worked together to finalize the list of 34 priority indicators that will help the region measure progress towards the goals identified in the Destination Development Strategy.

Baseline Measurement

In April 2020, GreenStep conducted research to identify sources of data for several of the indicators, complimenting the sources previously identified in consultation with the KRT staff and board, and identifying gaps in data availability which would require further research by KRT. An Excel spreadsheet with links to data sources identified and/or recommended approaches to data collection was then provided to KRT. However, due to COVID-19, KRT did not have the resources or time available to complete the baseline data collection, nor would it have been appropriate to survey tourism operators who were facing significant challenges at this time.

The initial plan was to have completed the baseline measurement for some or all of the priority indicators, followed by the development of a series of goals and related actions for improving the sustainability performance metrics of the KRT region by the spring of 2020.

These final steps were postponed until the tourism industry had some time to recover, with the final Sustainability Charter and Action Plan completed in January of 2021.

Appendix A 'Kootenay Rockies Sustainable Tourism Indicators' identifies the 34 prioritized indicators and their baseline data collected by both KRT and Greenstep. In July 2020, KRT created and distributed a survey for residents and visitors for resident/visitor-focused indicators, and to understand the resident's level of comfort with visiting local businesses, travelling and welcoming visitors to their communities. Greenstep helped to create and distribute a survey to tourism businesses to collect business specific indicator data in November 2020, and researched the remaining indicators during the rest of the year. Once all of the baseline data had been collected, Greenstep used that data together with the KRT Destination Development strategy to complete the sustainability charter and action plan.

Simultaneous to the development of the Kootenay Rockies Tourism indicator matrix, GreenStep has developed and announced a new Sustainable Tourism Destination Framework, which is also aligned with the UNWTO, GSTC, CIF and MTAC sustainable tourism indicators. In early 2021, GreenStep will work with Kootenay Rockies Tourism as the first destination to utilize this framework to measure their sustainability score and to determine the region's potential to achieve Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification. GreenStep plans to seek formal recognition for this standard from the GSTC in 2021.

Kootenay Rockies Sustainability Action Plan

The action plan is the final result of the information and data collected for each of the prioritized 34 indicators in the Kootenay Rockies region, which includes the following items:

- Key sustainability goals with targets (related to the goals in the Destination Strategy)
- Baseline performance towards each goal
- A list of 3 to 4 actions towards achieving each target

The action plan identified a few overarching themes for KRT. These include enhanced engagement and communication with stakeholders, and improved data collection with a particular focus on how the tourism sector is affecting sustainability indicators and performance in the region.

Appendix B includes information on indicators related to each goal, baseline data for those indicators, targets, and suggested timelines for completing targets. This will enable KRT to assign each target a lead team member, adapt and change the targets as needed, and track progress on each of the targets and action items identified. The action plan overview shows the five goals that have been identified and action items for each of those goals:

Action Plan Overview

(See pages 5 and 6 for Destination Development Strategy Goals)

GOAL 1: Reduce Carbon Emissions in the Region

Destination Development Strategy Alignment: 3

Action 1: Support businesses to measure their carbon footprint

Action 2: Educate businesses on carbon reduction strategies, net zero goals and carbon offsets

Action 3: Encourage businesses to sign on to Tourism Declares

GOAL 2: Increase Energy Efficiency in the Region

Destination Development Strategy Alignment: 3

Action 1: Develop an engagement program on energy efficiency for businesses, i.e. providing toolkits and resources, hosting training and workshops, etc.

Action 2: Establish a baseline on energy usage of the tourism sector in the region

Action 3: Promote CleanBC, BC Hydro and FortisBC programs and resources to stakeholders

GOAL 3: Increase regional commitment to Sustainability amongst tourism industry

Destination Development Strategy Alignment: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8

Action 1: Lead by example as an organization; measure our sustainability performance and develop an action plan to improve our sustainability performance

Action 2: Encourage business to take the free Sustainable Tourism score assessment and/or become BioSphere Committed

Action 2: Encourage businesses to pursue sustainability certification

Action 3: Supporting businesses in creating formal sustainability management programs, including action plans and measurable targets

Action 4: Provide information and resources to businesses to incorporate accessibility measures in their business practice and facilities

GOAL 4: Increase industry resilience and economic sustainability

Destination Development Strategy Alignment: All goals

Action 1: Work with the industry and tourism partners to support product and infrastructure development to help reduce seasonality and support shoulder season growth

Action 2: Provide tourism career awareness and workforce development initiatives to build capacity in the industry that helps improve talent attraction and retention

Action 3: Improve marketing to support geographic and season dispersion

Action 4: Supporting partners to maintain and increase regional and domestic marketing activities

GOAL 5: Improve data collection and analysis skills to help inform future action plans.

Destination Development Strategy Alignment: All goals

Action 1: Create Sustainability Champions across sectors, industries within the region to take the lead on data collection and action plan implementation

Action 2: Establish time frame and person responsible for data collection

Action 3: Determine occupancy rates in the region on a real-time basis

Conclusion

This project has set Kootenay Rockies Tourism on a path to measure and improve the sustainability performance of the Kootenay Rockies Tourism region, in direct alignment

with the 2019-2029 Destination Development Strategy and goals for sustainable tourism at the local, provincial, national and international levels. Although the timeline and progress to date was impacted by external circumstances, KRT and Greenstep were able to complete the final stages of the project in early 2021.