

Castle Region Tourism



Strategy for Government of Alberta Support of Tourism Development

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Alberta 

Culture and Tourism, Government of Alberta

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the official designation of the new Castle Provincial Park and the expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Parks (the Castle Parks) in 2017, the Government of Alberta fulfilled its commitment to protect the Castle. With the new parks comes a valuable opportunity to help diversify and grow the local economic base beyond a resource-based economy, to one where recreation and tourism can be more significant contributors.

In order to help support the development of the Castle region as a more successful and sustainable tourism destination, the Government of Alberta undertook engagement with community members, Indigenous Peoples and key stakeholders within the region as well as interested Albertans province-wide. Based on input provided through the engagement, a series of strategic priorities and actions to be undertaken by government were identified. This document is a first step towards helping the tourism industry in the region grow.

The Government of Alberta is committed to working with the local communities, tourism stakeholders, Indigenous peoples and government partners to help ensure successful



Castle Provincial Park

implementation of the strategy, as well as to formulate how best to move forward on the next phases of destination development.

Local decision-making and influence will be key to the future success of this region. This Strategy creates a foundation for future tourism plans and priorities and enables tourism stakeholders (e.g. municipal government, tourism organizations, businesses owners, residents) and Indigenous peoples to participate in and benefit from tourism development of the Castle region.

The Strategy considers tourism development in the areas adjacent to the new Castle Parks, including communities within the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass and the Municipal District (M.D.) of Pincher Creek, including the Town of Pincher Creek. The Castle Parks and the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Public Land Use Zones, with their own management plans, are outside the scope of the Strategy.

This ecologically diverse region has world-class landscapes featuring premier mountains, foothills, forests, grasslands, rivers and lakes. The region is home to over 12,000 people with a population base on average older than the population of the province overall. It is a region of deep significance to many Indigenous peoples, who have longed used this area to practice their traditional and Treaty rights.

Key economic sectors in the region include energy and agriculture, with manufacturing and tourism growing in importance. Labour participation in the region is lower than the provincial average, mainly due to the large population of persons aged 65 and over.

While tourism is an important sector overall in Alberta, generating over \$8.5 billion in visitor spending and sustaining over 127,000 fulltime equivalent jobs in 2016, the sector has seen some challenges. Most visits in Alberta take place during the summer season with spring and fall visitation second. The winter season represents a significant opportunity due to the length of the season and variety of outdoor recreational experiences available. Although the Castle region is in the early stages of tourism development, tourism and recreation are becoming more important contributors to the local economy and the region has great potential to develop as a tourism destination in Alberta.

Growth in tourism development in the Castle region will help contribute to the economic and social wellbeing in the region. Tourism development helps increase spending, tax revenues, and is a good job creator. As well as being an economic tool, successful tourism can generate a host of non-economic benefits as well. It helps contribute to the attractiveness of a community as well as supporting recreational, cultural and historical assets. Tourism development in the region also offers notable opportunities for the development of Indigenous tourism, which can offer economic, community and cultural benefits to Indigenous communities.

It is noteworthy that this Strategy was developed in alignment with and in support of other Government of Alberta priorities, such as the Government of Alberta's economic diversification strategy, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, the Castle Parks Management Plan and the Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Public Land Use Zones Land Recreation Management Plan.

As implementation of the Strategy progresses, the following vision and guiding principles are suggested:

Vision

The region should offer a range of environmentally responsible and sustainable outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism opportunities, and authentic Indigenous, cultural and historical experiences. Tourism growth and development should be careful to balance economic development with environmental considerations, while contributing to economic prosperity and quality of life for local residents.

Guiding Principles

- Tourism growth and development and environmental sustainability are carefully considered, coordinated and balanced.
- Tourism growth and development takes place in a controlled and well-planned manner.
- Tourism growth and development should not impact residents' quality of life or what makes the region special.
- The majority of development is directed to current footprint, such as the towns and Castle Mountain Resort.
- Tourism development should be mindful of sacred Indigenous sites and spaces and have plans to mitigate unforeseen circumstances.
- Collaboration and cooperation amongst key tourism stakeholders and Indigenous peoples is essential in delivering on the Strategy.

Strategic Priorities

In order for tourism to further develop in the Castle region, priority areas will need to be addressed. Implementation of the Strategy and progress on strategic actions will help enable and encourage communities to further support tourism growth and development.

The five strategic priority and associated actions are:

Strategic Priority 1: Strengthen Community and Industry Capacity

1. Work with tourism organizations and municipalities to assess destination management approaches and the creation of an overarching tourism leadership and management organization to ensure that all stakeholders are working towards the same tourism goals and priorities.
2. Lead the exploration of establishing an effective and transparent local funding model to provide additional and sustainable funding support for tourism in the region.
3. Ensure that tourism stakeholders, municipalities and Indigenous communities can get timely and accurate information to advance tourism projects and activities.
4. Increase support to the communities and municipalities in the region to ensure the most up to date information and training are fully taken advantage of.
5. Develop “value of tourism” education/tourism literacy programming to build awareness and support tourism as a key regional economic driver.
6. Produce a public-facing Economic Impact Analysis of tourism in the southwest region to establish a base-line for which tourism growth can be measured against.
7. Develop a Labour Market Study of the region to identify future skill requirements, potential shortages and training needs.



Coleman, Crowsnest Pass

Strategic Priority 2: Create a Competitive Business Environment

1. Strengthen the coordination of interdepartmental activities and initiatives in the region.
2. Commission a strategic environmental assessment of the region to determine future development scenarios for the region.
3. Provide clarity on the plans and schedule for Highway 3 in order to allow the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass and the Piikani First Nation to better plan for future development.
4. Explore opportunities to establish a Safety Rest Area along Highway 3.
5. Conduct a Castle Parks' area transportation and infrastructure study to better understand what is needed to support future government and community economic development priorities.
6. Ensure entrepreneurs and other new businesses, including potential Indigenous entrepreneurs, have access to Government of Alberta tourism business training programs.
7. Work with relevant communities and entrepreneurs to facilitate the use of historical buildings for the delivery of tourism amenities and services.

Strategic Priority 3: Enhance Destination Development and Marketing

1. Develop a "Castle" brand strategy to better position the region and distinguish itself in the market.
2. Pursue opportunities for a "green destination" or "sustainable tourism destination" designation to encourage and promote sustainable tourism practices.
3. Work with Castle communities, municipalities and other tourism stakeholders to establish consistent and well-developed signage in the region that creates a more uniform look and feel, including trail and gateway/welcome signage.
4. Strengthen visitor services capacity in the region, encouraging more modern, coordinated and flexible visitor information services to better meet the needs of visitors.

Strategic Priority 4: Encourage Product Development

1. Support the development of a comprehensive, well-developed, connected and signed trail system that includes Parks, public and municipal lands.
2. Work with Castle Mountain Resort and other stakeholders to provide commercial recreation and tourism products and experiences to complement the Castle Parks.
3. Support the development of "learn to recreate" guided experiences to better enable amateur and new recreationists to participate in activities in the region.

Strategic Priority 5: Grow Indigenous Tourism

1. Collaborate with Indigenous people and support organizations to help establish Indigenous tourism businesses that will create employment opportunities and grow local communities.

2. Work with Indigenous communities and support organizations to identify training needs and opportunities to support successful employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples in tourism and related industries.
3. Strive to ensure that in the development of tourism, appropriate measures are applied to protect important traditional use sites identified through Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Traditional Land Use studies in the region.
4. Continue engagement with Indigenous peoples and communities to understand their needs and identify supports and opportunities to recognize and share Indigenous culture and history.

An implementation plan has been developed to guide the work and upon completion of the three years (2019-22), a progress report will be released identifying outcomes of each strategic priority.

INTRODUCTION

With the official designation of the new Castle Provincial Park and the expanded Castle Wildland Provincial Parks (the Castle Parks) in 2017, the Government of Alberta fulfilled its commitment to protect the Castle. With the new parks comes a valuable opportunity to help diversify and grow the local economic base beyond a resource-based economy, to one where recreation and tourism can be a more significant contributor.



Castle Provincial Park

A tourism strategy to help define and guide government actions (the Strategy) was identified as key to supporting development of the Castle region as a more successful and sustainable tourism destination, becoming a significant contributor to a more diversified economy.

The Strategy identifies a vision for the region and strategic priorities and actions over the next three years (2019-22). The Strategy is a collaborative undertaking that will be implemented by the Government of Alberta and valued stakeholders to support the development of the Castle region as a successful and sustainable tourism destination. It should be noted that the Strategy spans an initial three-year period focusing on building upon existing opportunities, addressing barriers to

tourism development and growth and laying the foundations for further ongoing destination development.

Growing and improving a tourism destination is not a simple task. Developing tourism in the Castle region is a long-term project that will take time, along with local support and public and private investment to be fully realized. Given the complex and diverse range of needs and priorities held by communities, municipalities, individuals, businesses, non-profits, local and provincial governments, Indigenous communities, and other tourism stakeholders, successful tourism development requires the dedication, support and cooperation of all these groups.

The Government of Alberta is committed to working with the local communities, tourism stakeholders, Indigenous peoples and government partners to help ensure successful implementation of the strategy, as well as to formulate how best to move forward on the next phases of destination development.

Local decision-making and influence will be key to the future success of this region. This Strategy creates a foundation for future tourism plans and priorities and enables tourism stakeholders (e.g. municipal government, tourism organizations, businesses owners, residents) and Indigenous groups to participate in and benefit from tourism development of the Castle region.

CASTLE OVERVIEW

Geographic Region

The Strategy considers tourism development in the areas adjacent to the new Castle Parks, including communities within the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass and the Municipal District (M.D.) of Pincher Creek, including the Town of Pincher Creek.

The Castle Parks and the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Public Land Use Zones¹ are outside the scope of the Strategy. While both land bases will be guided by their associated management plans, the tourism and recreation opportunities



¹ <http://aep.alberta.ca/recreation-public-use/recreation-on-public-land/public-land-use-zones/livingstone-pluz.aspx>
<http://aep.alberta.ca/recreation-public-use/recreation-on-public-land/public-land-use-zones/porcupine-hills-pluz.aspx>

provided by both are in alignment with the Strategy and will contribute to tourism growth in the region. It should be noted that with the designation of the Castle Parks and the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Public Land Use Zones, grazing dispositions will continue to be honoured. Tourism and recreational activities developed in the Castle region will need to take into consideration livestock grazing on the surrounding land bases.

The Castle region borders British Columbia to the west and Waterton Lakes National Park to the south. It falls within a portion of the Crown of the Continent, which is a 72,000 km² area along the shared Rocky Mountain borders of Alberta, British Columbia and Montana. The Crown comprises the headwaters of North America's three great watersheds (the Saskatchewan, Missouri and Columbia River systems) and is an area known internationally for its rich biodiversity, iconic viewscapes and diversity of climate regimes and ecosystems (grasslands, forests, foothills and alpine habitats). This area has provided shelter, food and medicine, and enabled a long-standing way of life for Treaty 6 and Treaty 7 First Nations who continue to have a strong connection to the land.



Castle Provincial Park

Environment and Land Use

This ecologically diverse region has world-class landscapes, premier mountains, foothills, forests, grasslands, rivers and lakes. Significantly, this is where the prairies meet the Rocky Mountains, which creates visually stunning vistas.

From an environmental and ecological perspective, the region is valued for its headwaters, biodiversity, and it also serves as a wildlife corridor. It contains some of the most biologically diverse areas in Alberta, with over 200 species of rare wildlife and plants, including many species at risk such as wolverines, grizzly bears, and westslope cutthroat trout.

The Castle region is a multi-use landscape where energy (oil, gas, coal, and minerals), forestry, and outdoor recreation (such as skiing, hiking, fishing and camping) opportunities exist. It is comprised of a variety of land-bases, including public land, parks and protected areas, private land and municipal land. Each of these different types of land bases will have different opportunities and constraints to support tourism.

Population

In 2016, the Castle region (Crowsnest Pass, Town of Pincher Creek, and the M.D. of Pincher Creek) was home to approximately 12,196 people, of which 5,589 resided in Crowsnest Pass, 3,642 in the Town of Pincher Creek, and 2,965 in the M.D. of Pincher Creek. The population in the Castle is considerably older than the population of the province overall with persons aged 65 and over comprising roughly 22% of the population of the area compared to 12% in Alberta. Crowsnest Pass also has a large contingent of people who own a second home within the municipality (mostly from Calgary) who would not be accounted for in official statistics.

Indigenous Peoples

While the Piikani First Nation is within the Strategy boundaries, many Indigenous peoples, particularly the 13 First Nations in the South Saskatchewan Region, have long used this area to practice their traditional and Treaty rights. Many of the sites within the Castle region are held as sacred.

Archaeological records and the oral tradition of many Indigenous communities demonstrate an extensive history of recurring practical and ceremonial use of the region long before the European settlement of western Canada. Access to and use of the land, however, changed with the signing of Treaties. This resulted in many Indigenous peoples being confined to reserves and not being able to engage in the long-standing traditional practices on the land.

Government policy changes eventually eliminated travel restrictions, allowing Indigenous peoples to once again engage with their traditional sacred sites and culturally significant areas and to pursue hunting, gathering and other activities within their traditional territory.²

While traditional names in the region for key geographic features varies from Nation to Nation, some Blackfoot naming in the region includes Punii-ik”k”tattsis (“The Tipi Liner”) for the Livingstone Range, Napii Ootsit-taik”tsspii (“Napi’s Gambling Area”) for the Livingstone Gap and Maisto”puniik”taatssis (“Crow Curtains”) for an area in the southeastern part of the Castle Provincial Wildland Park. Skinniipiikani is the name used by the Piikani Nation to refer to the traditional lands used by their ancestors along the eastern slopes, stretching north to the Highwood River and south to Glacier National Park and covering the Castle area, the Porcupine Hills and the Livingstone Range.

This region remains important for Indigenous peoples to continue to hunt, gather food and medicines, collect materials for traditional uses and conduct ceremonies.

Economy

Key industries employing the largest number of people from the region include mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction. Other key industries in the area include health care and social assistance, retail trade, construction, and public administration which, when taken together with



Castle Falls

the mining industry, account for more than half of all employment.

In the M.D. of Pincher Creek, including the Town of Pincher Creek, agriculture (cattle and crops), natural gas extraction, and wind energy/renewables are key economic drivers. Pincher Creek is also home to a small but growing manufacturing industry. The Shell Waterton complex has been one of the major economic contributors to the region for over 60 years. Due to declining reserves, Shell is developing an exit strategy and will likely cease operations around 2026. Crowsnest Pass has a local economy primarily driven by natural resource development.

Tourism, particularly in the summer, is a key economic driver in the Crowsnest Pass region, with accommodation and food services being in the top five employing industries in the area. Winter tourism in Crowsnest Pass and Pincher Creek are important contributors to local economies, and the region is noted for downhill and cross-country skiing as well as snowmobiling.

Labour Force

The labour force participation rate in the Castle region is well below the provincial average of 71.8%. This is reflective of the fact that persons aged 65 and over make up roughly 22% of the population of the area compared to 12% in Alberta overall. In 2016, the unemployment rate for the Castle region was slightly lower than the provincial rate of 9%, with the highest unemployment rate being observed in Crowsnest Pass (8.8%), followed by the Town of Pincher Creek (8.1%) and the lowest rate observed in the M.D. of Pincher Creek (6.1%).

TOURISM AS A SECTOR OF IMPORTANCE

State of Tourism in Alberta

Tourism is defined as when a visitor takes an overnight trip or same-day trip of more than 40 km one-way, outside of their home community for leisure, business or other purposes. It is the fastest growing industry in the world and is Canada's largest service export.

In 2016, Alberta's tourism industry generated \$8.5 billion in visitor spending and supported over 19,000 primarily small and medium sized businesses. It is responsible for sustaining over 127,000 fulltime equivalent jobs, of which approximately 62,000 are direct jobs. Alberta's tourism workforce contribution ranks fifth for all sectors in the province. As Alberta's economic landscape continues its dynamic shift toward a diversified economy, tourism can play a greater role in the province's future economy.

The primary reason for traveling in Alberta, by visitors from within Alberta and Canada, was to visit friends and family (2016). Most visits in Alberta took place during the summer season with spring and fall visitation second. The winter season represents a significant opportunity due to the

length of the season and variety of outdoor recreational experiences available. This seasonality can represent a challenge to industry in managing their cash flows as most of industry revenues follow the seasonal visitation pattern. In developing new recreation and tourism products in the Castle region, tourism businesses will be encouraged to consider seasonal diversification to become more economically viable year-round and adapt to potential impacts of climate change on seasonal tourism activities (i.e. snow accumulation, changes in water levels, etc.)

State of Tourism in the Castle Region

Although the Castle region is in the early stages of tourism development, and visitation rates are comparatively low, tourism and recreation are becoming more important contributors to the local economy.³

The region features the natural setting of mountains, rolling hills and winding rivers. The Castle region offers an abundance of outdoor recreation activities, such as hiking, fishing, camping, mountain biking, caving, snowmobiling and skiing at Castle Mountain Resort and Pass



Castle Mountain Resort

³ <http://www.geocoops.com/butler-model.html>

Powderkeg. The communities host many key events throughout the year, including rodeos, festivals and extreme sports. The region is also home to many significant historical and cultural sites and museums, as well as an emerging arts scene. There is also a strong prehistory and history of Indigenous peoples in the region.

Currently there are 116 listings of tourism services within the Castle area on the Alberta Tourism Information Service (ATIS), a free digital marketing service provided by Travel Alberta. Most of these listings (49%) fall within the accommodation sector of the tourism industry. This includes hotels, motels, inns and bed and breakfast establishments, as well as campgrounds, guest ranches and vacation homes. There are 25 listings for attractions within the area, which include museums and historic sites, sports and recreational facilities, ski and golf courses, and performing arts venues. Culture and Tourism, including Travel Alberta, is working with tourism providers in the region to ensure that their information is entered into ATIS, making the tool more reflective of all tourism businesses and activities operating in the region.

The region offers many food and beverage opportunities such as restaurants, coffee shops and cafes or bakeries, and some more specialized establishments, such as farms, markets and breweries. However, it was heard through engagement that there is a desire in the area for more such offerings, both to benefit residents and to service visitors.

Accredited visitor information centres are situated in Crowsnest Pass⁴ and Pincher Creek (Kootenai Brown Visitor Centre). There are tourism companies offering guided experiences within the Castle region, including guided fishing, hiking, sledding and cycling experiences.

The Castle region is also home to some of Alberta's key historical and heritage sites, such as the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre and Leitch Collieries. The Remington Carriage Museum is also close by in Cardston County. The region also benefits from its proximity to two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. There are also a number of unique and authentic heritage buildings in the region that will especially be a draw to cultural tourism seekers.

Throughout engagement, it was often cited that the region has significant regional recreation and tourism opportunities and settings from wilderness to front-country, and that there is potential to grow sustainable tourism in the region.

Nature-based tourism and Indigenous tourism are two priority areas of focus for tourism development in Alberta. The natural setting and cultural significance of the Castle region provides ample opportunities to advance these priorities.

⁴ <https://www.travelalberta.com/ca/listings/travel-alberta-crowsnest-pass-visitor-information-centre-1042/>

WHY TOURISM FOR THE CASTLE?

Economic Diversification/Development

The establishment of the new Castle Parks greatly enhances recreation and tourism opportunities in the regional economy. Tourism growth and development can stimulate local economies. In addition to the direct spending that visitors contribute to a region, such as on hotel accommodation or restaurants, indirect spending in the region also increases.

As more visitors come to a region, more employees in the tourism industry are needed and are able to spend more money locally on clothes, food, transportation and other necessities, and pay more taxes. This is the induced impact of the visitor economy. The end result is that dollars from the tourism industry circulate through local economies, resulting in economic well-being, not unlike the dollars earned from other, more traditional resource sectors throughout Alberta.

Jobs

Tourism is also a strong contributor to job creation, which is important for the Castle region. Research shows that for every 30 new tourists to a destination, one new job is created. Today, the travel and tourism industry has almost twice as many women employees as other sectors. The travel and tourism industry offers employment opportunities for persons entering the labour market for the first time or without many options in other sectors.

In addition to creating opportunities for high-skilled workers, the industry plays a key role in creating opportunities for low-skilled workers, minorities, migrants, youth, and the long-term unemployed.

Tourism and Community Development

As well as being an economic tool, successful tourism can generate a host of non-economic benefits as well. Successful and sustainable tourism development is harmonious with the socio-cultural, ecological and heritage goals of the host community.

The cultural and historical resources of a destination contribute to its attractiveness to visitors and to its comparative advantages over competing tourism destinations. Visitors value the unique cultural and historical attributes of a destination and drive the demand for authentic cultural and historical tourism products and experiences. When a destination successfully combines the profit potential of cultural tourism with adequate preservation of cultural and historical resources, the visitor experiences the desired authenticity and the host community retains cultural and historical integrity.

Additionally, tourism revenues re-invested into cultural and heritage attractions not only attract visitors, but also result in non-economic benefits for members of the host communities. Members of the host community may benefit from increased opportunities to participate in cultural and historical attractions and events. Locals can experience increased pride in their culture and heritage, and re-invested tourism revenues can provide financial assistance to community groups seeking to preserve and enhance cultural and historical resources for use by the community.

The development of modern and functional recreation infrastructure, including indoor and outdoor facilities, while contributing to the comparative advantage of a tourism destination, also provide recreation opportunities for community members, providing increased inclusivity and connection for residents. Moreover, improved transportation infrastructure, including better accessibility, roads, trails, bike lanes and signage significantly contribute to quality of life for local residents.

Indigenous Tourism

The Alberta government is committed to renewing its relationship with Indigenous people based on trust and respectful engagement. The support and growth of Indigenous tourism in Alberta can be a key component of this renewal and aligns with the Government of Alberta's commitment to implementing the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights Indigenous Peoples.⁵

Indigenous peoples in Alberta have inspiring stories to tell and can offer authentic, educational and meaningful experiences that the tourism marketplace is demonstrating a significant demand for.⁶

The benefits of Indigenous tourism are diverse and can offer economic, community and cultural advantages.⁷

Indigenous tourism:

- enhances livelihood for Indigenous tourism businesses and local tourism economies through the building of support from local communities;
- provides an opportunity to develop businesses that showcase a community's traditions and culture;
- supplies the inspiration for elders to pass down culture, history and tradition to cultural ambassadors for sharing with guests;

⁵ http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

⁶ National Aboriginal Tourism Research Project 2015, Page 17

(<https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/REPORT-ATAC-Ntl-Ab-Tsm-Research-2015-April-FINAL.pdf>)

⁷ <https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/itac-five-year-plan-2016-2021-web.pdf>

- revitalizes Indigenous traditions for the benefit of communities as well as visitors; and
- enhances cultural awareness and sharing with visitors delivering understanding and connection.

Indigenous tourism can be a powerful means to bridging cultural divides and creating better relations and understanding by sharing culture, knowledge and country.⁸

The Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada has identified three types of tourism relevant to Indigenous people.⁹

Indigenous Tourism – all tourism businesses majority owned, operated and/or controlled by First Nations, Métis or Inuit peoples that can demonstrate a connection and responsibility to the local Indigenous community and traditional territory where the operation resides.

Indigenous Cultural Tourism – meets the Indigenous tourism criteria and in addition, a significant portion of the experience incorporates Indigenous culture in a manner that is appropriate, respectful and true to the Indigenous culture being portrayed.

The authenticity is ensured through the active involvement of Indigenous people in the development and delivery of the experience.

Indigenous Cultural Experiences – does not meet the Indigenous tourism criteria however offers the visitor a cultural experience in a manner that is appropriate, respectful and true to the Indigenous culture being portrayed.

The Castle region, with its cultural, historical and natural connections to First Nations and other Indigenous peoples in the South Saskatchewan region, offers opportunities to develop all of these types of Indigenous tourism.

Indigenous tourism is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Each Indigenous community (on reserve/off-reserve, on Métis settlement/off- Métis settlement, status/non-status, urban/ rural) is culturally distinct, as are the needs of its people.¹⁰ Continued engagement to understand these needs and support for Indigenous entrepreneurs and communities will be vital to the long-term success of Indigenous tourism.

⁸ <http://theconversation.com/how-indigenous-tourism-can-help-bring-about-reconciliation-in-australia-78344>

⁹ <https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/itac-five-year-plan-2016-2021-web.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://albertaviews.ca/aboriginal-tourism/>

ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA PRIORITIES AND INITIATIVES

The Strategy was developed in alignment with and in support of other Government of Alberta priorities.

Economic Diversification

To help reduce Alberta's reliance on uncertain resource revenue, the Government of Alberta has made a commitment to economic diversification.¹¹ Tourism is an economic platform that impacts and relies on many related industries such as transportation, accommodation, recreation, and retail. It can have a broad and diversifying effect on the economy. Growth in Alberta's tourism industry has the potential to positively impact communities in the province through regional initiatives or growing visitation in new areas of the province.

The Government of Alberta is committed to maximizing economic diversification opportunities through the growth of Alberta's tourism sector. Outcome Two of Culture and Tourism's 2018-21 Business Plan states: Tourism is a strong driver of Alberta's economic diversification.¹² Supporting the growth of new and expanded tourism attractions, destinations and experiences and the development and implementation of a tourism strategy for the Castle region are identified as contributors to this outcome.

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) is a strong, comprehensive and long-term vision for a busy and growing southern Alberta.¹³ It was first approved through Order in Council in 2014, and was amended in 2017 to include the new Castle Parks.¹⁴ An Outcome of SSRP is that "[t]he region's economy is growing and diversified"¹⁵ and that "[t]he region is positioned as a world-class, year-round, tourism destination."¹⁶ SSRP also supports the development of this Strategy by specifically dictating the development of a tourism strategy for the Castle region that will identify

¹¹ <https://www.alberta.ca/diversifying-economy.aspx>

¹² <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/culture-and-tourism-business-plan>

¹³ <https://www.landuse.alberta.ca/LandUse%20Documents/South%20Saskatchewan%20Regional%20Plan%202014-2024%20-%20February%202017.pdf>

¹⁴ South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, amended February 2017, pp. 146-147.

¹⁵ South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, amended February 2017, p. 43.

¹⁶ South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, amended February 2017, p. 50.

strategic actions that the Government of Alberta can undertake in order to support the development of the Castle region as a successful tourism destination.¹⁷

Castle Parks

The Castle Management Plan¹⁸ outlines recreation opportunities and conservation objectives in the two Castle Parks. It supports a balance between conservation, respect for Indigenous rights, and recreation and tourism experiences. The tourism strategy for the Castle region and the Castle Parks' management plan were developed to complement one another.

The Government of Alberta is working with surrounding communities to help ensure potential tourism development inside and outside of the Castle Parks contributes to thoughtful and sustainable tourism development on a regional scale and the improvement of the quality of life for all Albertans, while maintaining the management intent of the parks.

The Castle Management Plan recognizes that the “parks are endowed with significant recreational and tourism potential that will help drive tourism development and diversify the local economy.”¹⁹ It commits Alberta Parks to engaging in the development of this Strategy to help support and encourage multi-day visits²⁰ and to explore tourism development opportunities with Indigenous peoples.²¹

Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Public Land Use Zones

To the north of the Castle Parks are the Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Public Land Use Zones. While outside of the formal boundaries of the Strategy, these Public Land Use Zones, especially the Livingstone, offer significant tourism opportunities. With current plans to phase out summer motorized recreation in the Castle Parks, the Livingstone-Porcupine Public Land Use Zones will allow motorized recreation on designated trails. The Recreation Management Plan²² guides the management of these Public Land Use Zones. It was developed in consultation with Culture and Tourism and supports recreation and tourism and economic diversification in the region.

¹⁷ South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, amended February 2017, p. 51.

¹⁸ Castle Management Plan, May 2018 (<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/2864/documents/10327>)

¹⁹ Castle Management Plan, May 2018, p. 14 (<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/2864/documents/10327>).

²⁰ Castle Management Plan, May 2018, p. 69 (<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/2864/documents/10327>).

²¹ Castle Management Plan, May 2018, p. 63 (<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/2864/documents/10327>).

²² Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan, May 2018, (<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/4136/documents/10296>).

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Following the designation of the new Castle Parks, Culture and Tourism initiated work on developing a tourism strategy for the Castle region.

Engagement with targeted tourism stakeholders, Indigenous peoples and the general public was conducted in order to:

- obtain stakeholder, public and Indigenous peoples' views on direction setting and issue identification for tourism development;
- keep the public informed about issues relating to tourism development in the region;
- further strengthen relationships and networks in the region; and
- test ideas and concepts regarding tourism development in the region.

It was important that the Government of Alberta hear from local residents, Indigenous peoples and interested Albertans to help create a vision for tourism in the region.

In order to undertake fulsome and meaningful engagement and to ensure a breadth and variety of thoughts on tourism growth and development in the Castle region, engagement was divided up into three main groups and distinct engagement processes. Phase One concentrated on targeted stakeholder meetings in the region (April 2017) with over 70 participants representing municipalities, local tourism businesses and operators and tourism associations.



Crowsnest Pass

Phase Two was a public engagement that encompassed both public open houses and an online survey opened to all Albertans (September – November 2017). Around 200 people attended the open houses over the two nights and over 1000 people took the online survey.

Through engagement, we heard:

- The region is special to the residents and they would not like their quality of life impacted;
- There is support for improved and additional recreation and nature-based tourism opportunities in the region;
- There is support for further tourism development as long as it is controlled and well-managed;
- The preference would be to see most development directed to current footprints, such as the towns and Castle Mountain Resort; and
- There needs to be leadership in the region to ensure tourism priorities are aligned, coordinated, and well-managed.

Multiple visits to the Castle region have been made over a two year period to visit significant historical, cultural and recreational sites and attractions, to develop relationships and to meet with government and local partners, stakeholders, and Indigenous peoples more frequently and in a more informal manner.

Separate Indigenous community member engagement sessions have been ongoing since February 2017. Through engagement with the 13 First Nations in the South Saskatchewan region, both through one-on-one meetings and through the SSRP Sub-Table on Indigenous Relations, the following considerations for the Strategy were raised by Indigenous people:

- Preservation of hunting and treaty rights;
- Ensure traditional practices are honoured;
- Understand the difference between traditional land-use vs. recreation/tourism and the importance of this distinction;
- Protection of sacred sites and ceremonies that are not for public consumption;
- Opportunities to educate visitors about the Indigenous peoples and their history in the region; accurate, respectful history; and
- Ensuring revenue opportunities for Indigenous businesses and communities through tourism.

Ongoing communication and cooperation with Indigenous peoples and communities, especially the Piikani and Kainai (Blood) tribes who reside in direct proximity to the Castle region, is crucial in developing Indigenous tourism in the region.

REGIONAL TOURISM VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Successful tourism development and a vision for the region should be defined and developed with the support of the residents of the region. As tourism development will require a high-level of commitment from local residents and municipal governments, a successful tourism strategy needs to capture the desire and will of local stakeholders.

There are some challenges with tourism development. While it can bring much-needed revenues, jobs and services, it can also negatively impact some residents' quality of life. Therefore, the involvement and the participation of the host communities are pertinent towards the success of tourism development.

Vision

Based upon extensive engagement with key stakeholders within the region, the following vision should guide and focus Castle region tourism efforts.

The region should offer a range of environmentally responsible and sustainable outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism opportunities, and authentic Indigenous, cultural and historical experiences. Tourism growth and development should be careful to balance economic development with environmental considerations, while contributing to economic prosperity and quality of life for local residents.

Guiding Principles

In order to help achieve this vision, the following guiding principles should be paramount in moving forward:

- Tourism growth and development and environmental sustainability are carefully considered, coordinated and balanced.
- Tourism growth and development takes place in a controlled and well-planned manner.
- Tourism growth and development should not impact residents' quality of life or what makes the region special.
- The majority of development is directed to current footprint, such as the towns and Castle Mountain Resort.
- Tourism development should be mindful of sacred Indigenous sites and spaces and have plans to mitigate unforeseen circumstances.

- Collaboration and cooperation amongst key tourism stakeholders and Indigenous peoples is essential in delivering on the Strategy.

The strategic priorities identified below are set out to achieve this vision, address engagement results and balance tourism development, access and environmental conservation of this culturally and ecologically significant part of Alberta.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

In order for tourism to further develop in the Castle region, priority areas will need to be addressed. Implementation of the Strategy and progress on strategic actions will help enable and encourage communities to further support tourism growth and development.

The five strategic priority areas are:

- Strategic Priority 1: Strengthen Community and Industry Capacity
- Strategic Priority 2: Create a Competitive Business Environment
- Strategic Priority 3: Enhance Destination Development and Marketing
- Strategic Priority 4: Encourage Product Development
- Strategic Priority 5: Grow Indigenous Tourism

Strategic Priority 1: Strengthen Community and Industry Capacity

In order for the destination to fully realize a tourism industry that makes a greater contribution to the economy and to ensure tourism grows and develops in a sustainable manner, leadership and management capacity need to be nurtured. There is a need to build awareness and understanding of tourism in the communities as a key regional economic driver as this will be critical to improving perceptions of and local support for tourism.

To ensure sustainability (economic, cultural and social), tourism development must be properly managed and planned. Successful tourism is highly dependent on the conservation of the appropriate environmental conditions that support the activities and attractions of the destination. Without adequate management, increased visitation to a destination can result in environmental degradation and a poor visitor experience, ultimately leading to reduced visitation and unhappy residents.

Castle communities need to be vibrant, attractive and tourism-friendly with regional and community cohesion. Improved industry and stakeholder capacity and knowledge about visitor needs, expectations and experiences in the region is required. Communities within the region

also need to understand the benefits of tourism and have access to tools and programs to assist them in growing their local industries.

Actions

1. *Work with tourism organizations and municipalities to assess destination management approaches and the creation of an overarching tourism leadership and management organization to ensure that all stakeholders are working towards the same tourism goals and priorities.*

In developing the strategy and through engagement, the importance of leadership and the need for coordination and collaboration often came up. Local decision-making is important. There are currently a number of organizations and municipalities in the region that have tourism within their purview. These include the South West Regional Alliance, Chinook Country Tourism Association, the M.D. of Pincher Creek, the Town of Pincher Creek, the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass, Beaver Mines, local Indigenous communities, the Crown of the Continent, Community Futures – Crowsnest Pass, historic sites and many other local communities and organizations. Each of these groups are supporting their tourism offerings individually. It is recognized within the region that leadership, coordination and streamlining of efforts is needed to fully realize the tourism potential of the region. In order to ensure that tourism develops in a well-managed, well-planned manner there needs to be strong leadership and for the communities in the Castle region to work together to identify and advance tourism priorities.

A destination management organization coordinates the management of all the elements that make up a destination, such as attractions, access, marketing and products. It takes a strategic approach to align separate entities for the better management of a tourism destination.²³ While destination marketing organizations are more typical in Alberta, which concentrate on the marketing elements of a destination such as Tourism Calgary and Banff-Lake Louise Tourism, a destination management organization would be more appropriate for a developing destination as the Castle region.

An example of a type of destination management organization model in Alberta would be Canadian Badlands, which was established in 2005 with support from the Government of Alberta to support the full spectrum of destination development, management and marketing.²⁴ The Canadian Badlands is now moving towards a sustainable membership-based model.

²³ <http://stmedproject.eu/what-we-do/destination-management-organization-dmo/>

²⁴ <https://www.canadianbadlands.com>

Culture and Tourism will facilitate initial discussions with the tourism organizations and municipalities in the region to determine what the best approach to destination management should be. The creation of this management body is a crucial first step in tourism development in the region.

2. *Lead the exploration of establishing an effective and transparent local funding model to provide additional and sustainable funding support for tourism in the region.*

Adequate and sustainable funding to meet tourism growth, development and marketing challenges for communities is a persistent challenge. While there are numerous sustainable funding models, many communities in Alberta have instituted a Destination Marketing Fee usually calculated as a small percentage on hotel room charges (2-3 per cent), in local hotels that is delegated to a destination management fund to finance local tourism endeavours. These are not legislated fees and are charged by hotels who voluntarily agree to submit to the program. This is not a municipal fee or tax. Funds from such programs are generally intended to be incremental and not to replace resources traditionally available from municipal and provincial government sources. Allocation of these funds should complement other tourism development and marketing activities and be utilized as part of an integrated approach and planning involving key tourism partners.

Culture and Tourism will work with Travel Alberta and tourism stakeholders in the region to determine if a sustainable funding program, such as a Destination Marketing Fee or an alternative, would be desirable in the region.

3. *Ensure that tourism stakeholders, municipalities and Indigenous communities can get timely and accurate information to advance tourism projects and activities.*

Many challenges and questions with regards to tourism (such as insurance, permits, signage, public lands) are sometimes difficult to get clear and quick answers on. The Government of Alberta is dedicated to the development of the Castle region as a tourism destination and is committed to supporting this development. Accordingly, the government will direct one of its Tourism Development Officers to act as a central point of contact in the region, triaging issues and working with local businesses and stakeholders to ensure government is efficiently able to provide required answers and information. This resource will help ensure effective and timely communication between the Government of Alberta and the stakeholders in the region as well as serving as an expert in the region. The Tourism Development Officer will be responsible for connecting the region with government partners, programs and services in support of destination development and management of the region.

4. Increase support to the communities, municipalities and entrepreneurs in the region to ensure the most up to date information and training are fully taken advantage of.

Culture and Tourism has a suite of programs and services available to communities to help them create a welcoming and tourism friendly-destination, such as the Visitor-Friendly Program, the Tourism Business Friendly Program, festival and events planning guide and the Tourism Growth Innovation Fund.²⁵ A Municipal Visitor Friendly Policy Guideline Handbook is also in development as a key resource and provides a collection of policy and regulatory considerations highlighting best practices across Alberta municipalities in directing and facilitating local tourism industry development.

The Tourism Development Officer would be instrumental in ensuring all tools and programs have been utilized.

5. Develop “value of tourism” education/tourism literacy programing to build awareness and support tourism as a key regional economic driver.

The more local residents, businesses and other key stakeholders accept and subscribe to tourism being a key economic driver, the greater the support for and development of a destination there will be. For tourism to succeed there needs to be recognition and acceptance that “we are a tourism destination.” Increasing tourism literacy and ensuring that all businesses and community members understand that they are part of the tourism economy was an important issue heard through engagement.

6. Produce a public-facing Economic Impact Analysis of tourism in the southwest region to establish a base-line for which tourism growth can be measured against.

As well as providing base-line date, an Economic Impact Analysis will also help to determine employment, expenditures and Gross Domestic Product contributions that the southern region contributes to the Alberta visitor economy and be useful in measuring tourism growth in the region. The Economic Impact Analysis will provide valuable information to determine which programs and services will be impactful for the region, and will also help in assessing the potential for investment, retaining or expanding existing businesses and supporting the attraction of new businesses.

The Government of Alberta has several economic models and measurement tools that will be used to develop this analysis.

²⁵ <https://www.alberta.ca/visitor-friendly-program.aspx>
<https://www.alberta.ca/festival-event-planning-guides.aspx>
<https://www.alberta.ca/tourism-growth-innovation-fund.aspx>

7. *Develop a Labour Market Study of the region to identify future skill requirements, potential shortages and training needs.*

The purpose of conducting a Labour Market Study will help to establish a baseline of the current state of the workforce in the region as well as to identify potential gaps and needs. The study is intended to support:

- Establishment of labour market partnerships;
- Increased awareness of current information and effective practices that support successful attraction and retention strategies;
- Increased capacity of employers and employer associations to attract and retain workers; increased workplace training;
- Increased investment in skill development by employees, employers and self-employed; and
- Increased ability of employer and employer associations to anticipate and manage workforce attraction and retention challenges.

The Government of Alberta delivers a Labour Market Partnerships program to support workplace human resource development and labour market adjustment strategies through community partnerships.²⁶

The Labour Market Partnerships program is designed to develop and support projects with groups, organizations, industry sectors, and communities with common labour market needs which may include:

- Research and analysis of labour market trends;
- Developing strategic plans to prepare for future skill requirements and/or prevent skills shortages;
- Promoting current labour market needs or heightening awareness of labour market issues such as skills shortages; and
- Sharing best practices in human resource development and career/employment training.

The Government of Alberta will support Castle region stakeholders in applying to the program for funding.

²⁶ <http://work.alberta.ca/labour/workforce-partnership.html>

Strategic Priority 2: Create a Competitive Business Environment

To facilitate the development of new tourism products and amenities in the Castle region, there needs to be supportive conditions to encourage investors and entrepreneurs to do business in the region. While many facilities and tourism businesses will be encouraged to develop on existing footprints, such as the Town of Pincher Creek, the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass and Castle Mountain Resort, the development of some new nature-based tourism experiences could also occur on public land.



Crowsnest Pass

Foundational to tourism development is transportation infrastructure, as roadways and highways connect visitors to their chosen destinations, activities and amenities. It is important to ensure that the Castle region has adequate transportation networks to move people within the region. Should the region's visitation grow, it will also be necessary to ensure transportation networks are safely able to meet growing demands.

New and growing tourism businesses, entrepreneurs and operators need to be able to understand how and where they can do business and should they have questions or concerns with how to proceed, that they have resources that they can turn to for support and guidance.

Actions

1. *Strengthen the coordination of interdepartmental activities and initiatives in the region.*

Other areas of the province, such as Kananaskis Country, have benefitted from purposeful and coordinated collaboration among ministries to help ensure thoughtful development and planning in the region. This would be a particularly useful platform to discuss commercial recreation and tourism development in the Castle region (infrastructure, economic diversification and sustainable development) and to balance economic and environmental considerations. Better alignment amongst ministries was also a message heard through engagement.

2. *Commission a strategic environmental assessment of the region to determine future development scenarios for the region.*

The completion of a strategic environmental assessment of the Castle region would assess environmental, social, cultural and cumulative effects and provide direction on possible future development scenarios in the region. This assessment would also:

- provide direction for planning in terms of where recreation and tourism development would be best placed to occur, minimizing potential impediments/challenges to tourism development;
- serve as a tool to guide ministries in the development of the most appropriate policies and programs to develop for the Castle region;
- provide more certainty to potential tourism entrepreneurs/investors about availability of lands, thresholds for development and help facilitate decision-making processes; and
- serve as a resource for tourism investors planning their tourism development applications.

The Government of Alberta will work with local municipalities to determine interest in the assessment, land-bases to be included and potential cost-sharing. Indigenous communities will also be engaged on the current use of lands and resources for traditional purposes.

3. Provide clarity on the plans and schedule for Highway 3 in order to allow the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass and the Piikani First Nation to better plan for future development.

Especially in Crowsnest Pass engagement, this was one of the top issues that was raised during engagement. Alberta Transportation is currently holding selected parcels of municipal land until it determines the route for the eventual twinning of Highway 3.

Crowsnest Pass businesses and municipalities have indicated that growth and investment is stymied due to uncertainty on what will occur with these land bases. Once the current Highway 3 twinning planning study has been completed and the route has been confirmed, lands that are considered surplus may then be reviewed for release.

4. Explore opportunities to establish a Safety Rest Area along Highway 3.

During engagement, the issue of safe pullouts and rest areas along Highway 3 was discussed. The ability to safely pull aside and exit the highway offers three key benefits: improved safety, the opportunity for visitors to learn more about the history and attractions of the region, and the potential opportunity for commercial establishments. Local



Frank Slide

communities and municipalities have expressed an interest in finding ways to encourage visitors to stop in the region.

The Government of Alberta is conducting a Safety Rest Area Review of Provincial Highways to:

- Ensure safety of the travelling public;
- Provide effective and efficient Safety Rest Area Facilities;
- Ensure the Safety Rest Areas are designed, constructed, maintained, and will be environmentally responsible in a manner that meets or exceeds provincial and federal standards; and
- Encourage innovation throughout the process.

A strategic rest stop off of Highway 3 could encourage people to consider spending more time in the region.

5. *Conduct a Castle Parks' area transportation and infrastructure study to better understand what is needed to support future government and community economic development priorities.*

During engagement, municipalities indicated that in order to see any economic benefit from the new Castle Parks they would need suitable road access into the parks. The paving of Highway 774 was initiated by the Government of Alberta to ensure paved access into the Castle Parks from Pincher Creek as well as to improve access to Castle Mountain Resort. However, Crowsnest Pass's municipal government and tourism businesses have indicated a strong interest in seeing paved access to the Castle Parks from Crowsnest Pass, potentially along the Adanac or Sartoris roads, which are currently gravelled. In general, to facilitate greater local and tourist traffic in the region, changes to transportation infrastructure need to be considered. This would include the growing use of the rural roads for cycling (e.g. Secondary Highway 507) which provides recreational opportunities but raises safety concerns. This could also help identify road maintenance and snow plowing responsibilities.

A regional study would have to be developed in consultation with ministerial partners, local municipalities, Indigenous communities and tourism stakeholders to understand the priorities of the region and what might be needed for roads, transit, parking and other infrastructure to support tourism growth and economic development in the region. While the government's commitment to paving Highway 774 from Beaver Mines to Castle Mountain Resort meets part of the Parks' access needs, the study would also specifically look at ensuring adequate access to the Castle Parks, in support of the Castle Management Plan

that identifies ensuring access to the Castle Parks from Crowsnest Pass, Beaver Mines and Pincher Creek.²⁷

6. *Ensure entrepreneurs and other new businesses, including potential Indigenous entrepreneurs, have access to Government of Alberta tourism business training programs.*

Castle region specific sessions of the Tourism Entrepreneurship Start-up Seminar and other relevant business programs will be held by the Government of Alberta to ensure the region's potential tourism operators have the information and tools needed to start or grow a business.²⁸

The Government of Alberta will also work with Indigenous Tourism Alberta and other partners to facilitate Tourism Entrepreneurship Start-up Seminars to meet the specific needs and requirements of Indigenous entrepreneurs to be held in the Castle region.

7. *Work with relevant communities and entrepreneurs to facilitate the use of historical buildings for the delivery of tourism amenities and services.*

Historical buildings in the region's municipalities offer an excellent opportunity to house needed tourism amenities and services in unique and authentic settings. The preservation of historical buildings is important for Alberta's shared history and culture, and having them re-purposed for commercial opportunities provides a means of ensuring main streets in the region's municipalities have an interesting and attractive appearance and that visitors can access needed services and amenities in an appealing and memorable manner.

Strategic Priority 3: Enhance Destination Development and Marketing

To attract visitation and contribute to a positive visitor experience, there is a need to ensure and maintain a high quality, vibrant and welcoming destination. The attractiveness of a destination, quality public infrastructure and vibrancy are key factors in tourism growth.

Growing the industry is not necessarily always about attracting more people; it can also be about building value that each visitor contributes to the industry. Through engagement, it was made clear that tourism development should take place in a planned and controlled manner that will result in a prosperous and resilient industry as well as ensuring that what is special about the Castle region is maintained.

²⁷ Castle Management Plan, May 2018, p. 67 (<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/2864/documents/10327>).

²⁸ <https://www.alberta.ca/tourism-entrepreneurship-programs.aspx>

Actions

1. *Develop a “Castle” brand strategy to better position the region and distinguish itself in the market.*

Successful tourism destinations and regions provide a clear and appealing portrayal of what they have to offer visitors. This is often referred to as the overall image or “brand” of a destination. Alberta is recognized nationally and internationally for its strong tourism brand that combines epic adventures, natural wonders, wildlife, small towns and urban experiences, with the welcoming, generous and active nature of Albertans. The Castle region is well positioned to leverage and capture the recognition and excitement of this provincial tourism brand.

The Castle region is more than just the Castle Parks and includes the local communities, including Indigenous peoples, that will benefit from the parks. There should be one brand for the region that still respects the differences in the region. A unified and collaborative approach to the region will be key to attracting visitors from across the province and from the neighbouring regions of south eastern British Columbia and northern Montana. Much can be gained by unifying messaging under a common brand and strategy. There will also be significant cost savings for the marketing partners through increased efficiencies and sharing of expenses. A strong brand can also be extremely effective in consolidating the image of a region and exposing a destination to visitors who may be looking for new or unique regions to explore. A strong Castle region tourism brand and strategy has the potential to position the region as another “must see” destination in Alberta.

The Government of Alberta, including Travel Alberta, will work with local communities to develop a coordinated branding exercise and plan.

2. *Pursue opportunities for a “green destination” or “sustainable tourism destination” designation to encourage and promote sustainable tourism practices.*

A globally recognized, credible and rigorous designation could lend credibility to the region as a “green” and sustainable tourism destination. Many visitors are seeking sustainable tourism experiences²⁹ so an appropriate designation could attract visitors as well as encourage local tourism operators and businesses to operate in a more sustainable manner.

Accreditation as a sustainable or green tourism destination offers many economic and social benefits such as:

²⁹ http://www.ifema.es/fitur_06/Prensa/Noticiassectoriales/INS_048004_06

- Attracting more and different tourists to destinations, creating income and employment;
- Allowing known areas to flourish and to extend their reach through enhanced reputation;
- Allowing the destination and local residents to manage tourism, and the tourism experience; and
- Achieving value alignment between local residents and visitors.

Efforts are underway to pursue recognition from various organizations including Green Destinations, an accredited Global Sustainable Tourism Council agency. The Castle region has been nominated for the Top 100 Green Destinations Award, a ranking of tourist destinations according to their sustainability credentials.³⁰ The government of Alberta will continue to work with stakeholders on the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and other opportunities.

3. *Work with Castle communities, municipalities and other tourism stakeholders to establish consistent and well-developed signage in the region that creates a more uniform look and feel, including trail and gateway/welcome signage.*

In the age of social media and hand held mobile devices, visitors still require and expect effective and appealing roadway directional signage. The need for better signage, both as a marketing tool as well as for “wayfinding” once in a destination, was identified as a priority through public engagement.

Signs make it easier for tourists to find local attractions and services. They help visitors feel welcome, safe and at home within a destination. Consistent look and feel signage for trailheads, trails, historical and cultural sites, experiences and other amenities and attractions contribute greatly to the attractiveness and functionality of the destination.

Signage can also support the overall branding of a destination by portraying consistent look, feel and messages. “Welcome” signs to a destination, community or region are a common method of delivering and reinforcing branding messaging.

The Government of Alberta, including Travel Alberta, will work with local communities to develop and support the plan. Programs such as the Tourism Highway Signage Program³¹ will be considered in the establishment of gateway signage at the entrance/exit of the

³⁰ <https://www.gstcouncil.org>. <http://greendestinations.org>

³¹ <https://www.signupalberta.com>

Castle region. Access to additional financial support will be explored through tourism-related grant programs.

4. *Strengthen visitor services capacity in the region, encouraging more modern, coordinated and flexible visitor information services to better meet the needs of visitors.*

Alberta's Visitor Services Model supports the principles of providing convenient, relevant and innovative multi-channel access to visitor information with effective tools and resources and through collaboration amongst stakeholders. Effective visitor services inform, inspire and influence visitors to maximize their travel experiences and help grow the tourism economy.

In the Castle region, in addition to the accredited visitor information centres in Crowsnest Pass and the Town of Pincher Creek, there are other community organizations providing varying levels and types of visitor services for visitors. These organizations support tourism by helping visitors to discover more, stay longer and return on future trips. Positioning the Castle region as a tourist destination will require an effective and coordinated approach to visitor services. Improved visitor services would also provide the opportunity to work Indigenous communities in promoting their culture and providing education to visitors on the history of the area and its relevance to Indigenous peoples.

The Government of Alberta will work with tourism stakeholders to further develop Castle region visitor services. Programs such as the Alberta Visitor Information Providers, Culture and Tourism's provincial visitor information centres (both within the Castle region and surrounding the region), and Alberta Parks visitor services programs will contribute to providing an integrated visitor services approach for the Castle region. The three surrounding visitor information centres will be able to funnel and direct visitors into the Castle region.

Strategic Priority 4: Encourage Product Development

One of the key factors to a successful tourism destination is a wide array of quality activities, experiences, amenities and services. Through engagement, it was indicated that the region already has a wide variety of recreation, nature-based tourism and historical/cultural opportunities, but that some of these could use enhancements or supports to become more market ready. Engagement also highlighted that the region would benefit from more accommodation, including three and four star hotels, new and consistent food and beverage opportunities, more nature-based tourism opportunities as well as more 'learn to recreate' guided experiences.

Canada is emerging as a global destination for eco-tourism and adventure travel. The country is a natural draw for international visitors seeking authentic wilderness, adventure and cultural experiences.³² In a competitive climate, there is a need to continue to innovate. Tourists seek authentic experiences, and to keep them coming back for more, there is a need to support the renewal of products and services offered.³³

Actions

1. Support the development of a comprehensive, well-developed, connected and signed trail system that includes Parks, public and municipal lands.

Trail tourism is an excellent way of creating opportunities for people to vacation and to visit, especially in places that are not standard tourism destinations, such as the Castle region. It is recognized that hiking is a primary motivation for visiting regions of our province. To date the Castle region has not received the same recognition as other areas of the province for its hiking trail network. This region already has an array of trails, but a completely developed, designated and mapped trail system for hiking, mountain biking, equestrian and any other activities would be a good tourism draw. This should include strategic trailheads and staging areas both inside and outside of the parks to ensure visitation to host communities including Castle Mountain Resort, Pincher Creek and Crowsnest Pass.

Consideration should be given to Indigenous signage and markers within the trail system to support education of Indigenous knowledge and landmarks. The importance of identifying and naming natural, cultural and historic sites or features using Indigenous languages is identified in the Castle Parks Management Plan³⁴ and the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Public Land Use Zones Recreation Management Plan has also identified the need for Indigenous history and culture to be reflected in educational signage at staging areas, trailheads, view points and other areas of cultural significance.³⁵

Work to develop an International Mountain Bicycling Association Epic Trail should also be encouraged. The Epic designation is reserved only for immersive rides that are technically and physically challenging, at least 20 kilometres long, with beautiful scenery, backcountry riding experience in a natural setting.

³² <https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/marketing-sales-export/marketing/pages/how-attract-international-tourists-business.aspx>

³³ <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/095.nsf/eng/00002.html>

³⁴ Castle Management Plan, May 2018, p. 63 (<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/2864/documents/10327>).

³⁵ Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan, May 2018, p. 40 (<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/4136/documents/10296>).

Environment and Parks is currently working on the trail improvements in the Castle Parks and the mapping associated with it. The Government of Alberta, including Travel Alberta, will continue to work with local communities, businesses and other tourism stakeholders to develop and market trail systems in the area.

2. *Work with Castle Mountain Resort and other stakeholders to provide commercial recreation and tourism products and experiences to complement the Castle Parks.*

Castle Mountain Resort, with its existing footprint, could provide commercial and facility



Castle Mountain Resort

support for the new Castle Parks. Castle Mountain Resort's Master Development Plan states that they could offer parking, trail heads, equipment rental, small shops and restaurants to support recreation in the new parks. Through engagement, there was also support for continued operation of a local ski resort and expansion of beginner terrain to attract more local families that might otherwise travel outside the province to ski. In its Master Development Plan, Castle Mountain Resort identifies issues impacting the long term viability of the resort and one of the considerations that should be examined further is seasonal diversification to include summer-time activities at the resort. In addition, seasonal diversification would enable the resort to be better positioned to respond to the potential impacts of climate change (such as decreased snowfall).

The Government of Alberta continues to work with the management of Castle Mountain Resort, the Castle Mountain Community Association and the M.D. of Pincher Creek to address issues, concerns and opportunities. Key issues for Castle Mountain Resort include snow production for skiing, and trails for hiking and biking during the summer. Opportunities include staging support for Castle Park activities and the commercial diversification beyond a single season ski resort. In addition, the government will be supporting a baseline assessment for sustainable tourism for the community.

Opportunities for partnering with Indigenous communities or potential Indigenous entrepreneurs to offer authentic Indigenous tourism experiences at Castle Mountain Resort are strongly encouraged and will be actively facilitated by the Government of Alberta.

3. *Support the development of “learn to recreate” guided experiences.*

While the Castle region has many wonderful opportunities to recreate and take part in nature-based activities, it is often experienced and adventurous visitors who can fully take advantage of what the region has to offer. Through engagement came the message that there is a need for more “how to” guided and beginner experiences to help introduce interested visitors to the outdoor challenges and opportunities the region has to offer. More beginner opportunities are also a great way to encourage families to visit and to recreate.

Programming developed by Environment and Parks to introduce Albertans to outdoor recreation will promote new visitors to the parks and surrounding area. Through Culture and Tourism's suite of programs, there is support for new guides to establish services in the area. This includes business coaching and navigation of the permitting process for public land access.

The introduction of purpose-built accessible pathways, and the associated trail signage and mapping, will also open new opportunities for those wishing to experience the Castle region without the need for advanced outdoor adventurers.

Strategic Priority 5: Grow Indigenous Tourism

Indigenous tourism is well placed to meet the tourism marketplace demand for authentic, meaningful experiences. Alberta currently has around 66 Indigenous tourism experiences, though only 33 per cent are market ready and 37 per cent are export ready.³⁶ Of these identified experiences, none are found within the Castle region.

During engagement sessions we heard from tourism stakeholders that authentic Indigenous tourism products and experiences (land based education and cultural appropriate teachings) would be a welcomed addition to the region's tourism supply.

During engagement, Indigenous communities also noted an interest in the development of tourism in the Castle region. Areas of interest included:

- Tourism opportunities for Indigenous peoples, including service sector jobs, tour guides hunting, “co-management” on Indigenous-specific projects;
- Touring routes/signage in the area with histories, information, education on Indigenous people in the region (where appropriate, without interfering with sacred sites/practices);
- Entrepreneur support;
- Support local authentic Indigenous crafts and artisans (e.g., no international goods appropriating North American Indigenous culture);
- Involving Indigenous youth;
- Promote/maintain Indigenous names in the region; and
- Tourism/hospitality training for Indigenous peoples.

Supporting and encouraging Indigenous tourism in the Castle region supports the Cooperative Management agreement signed by Alberta Parks and the Piikani Nation, which includes the creation of a management board to help increase cultural practices in the Castle parks and protect access to areas of cultural significance. This agreement will help with Indigenous tourism

³⁶ Market ready refers to businesses or experiences that have all their licenses, permits and insurance in place to operate legally. The business or experience also meets or exceeds industry expectations for their sector, communicates with potential visitors year round, and is ready to accept advanced reservations. Export ready refers to a business or experience that meets market-ready criteria and is prepared to market and partner with travel trade distribution sales channels. This includes understanding commission and net rate pricing plus agreeing to trade bookings and cancellation policies. Tourism experiences should be adapted to the interests, language and expectations of the international market being pursued. *Indigenous Tourism Alberta Strategy 2019-2024*, pp. 5,13-14, 33, <https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ITA-Strategy-2019-2024-FINAL.pdf>

development by providing the mechanism for the Piikani Nation to provide input on Indigenous tourism in the region, including interpretation and education of Piikani history and culture, appropriate use of Blackfoot language in Alberta Parks' signage, and economic development opportunities such as retail, guiding and interpretation services.³⁷

In 2017-18, the Government of Alberta provided funds to the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada to investigate the barriers Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs encounter when starting up tourism businesses. Capacity building and training were identified as key barriers.

In order to help address some of these barriers, additional funding was provided to the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada for the creation of a new tourism association in Alberta to help Indigenous entrepreneurs and communities in the province start tourism businesses, create jobs, and offer visitors an authentic experience. Indigenous Tourism Alberta (ITA) was incorporated in 2018 as a not-for-profit society to provide leadership in the development and marketing of authentic indigenous tourism experiences through innovative partnerships. It is seeking to grow Indigenous Tourism economy by 24 per cent by 2024 (currently worth around \$130 million of Alberta's GDP).³⁸ ITA will be a key partner in growing Indigenous tourism in the region.

Actions

- 1. Collaborate with Indigenous people and support organizations to help establish Indigenous tourism businesses that will create employment opportunities and grow local communities.***

The Government of Alberta, through its ministry of Culture and Tourism, has a team dedicated to growing Indigenous tourism and supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs in Alberta. The team provides business-coaching services to Indigenous entrepreneurs and existing tourism operators wanting to enhance or expand their tourism product. Some of these services include business planning, options for accessing capital, regulatory process on- and off-reserve, business permits and licensing and access to in-depth research and statistics on the Alberta tourism industry. The team will proactively liaise with Indigenous communities and potential entrepreneurs in the region to encourage the development of Indigenous tourism products and experiences in the Castle region and to support the goals

³⁷ "Respecting Indigenous rights in Castle parks,"

<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=619335DC86B1B-F422-3EC9-E48A179A58A610BB>

³⁸ *Indigenous Tourism Alberta Strategy 2019-2024*, <https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ITA-Strategy-2019-2024-FINAL.pdf>

set out in ITA's five year strategy, including the growth of Indigenous tourism businesses from 66 to 100 by 2024.³⁹

As identified in the Castle Management Plan, Culture and Tourism will also continue to engage with Parks officials and interested Indigenous communities to explore tourism opportunities in the Castle Parks.⁴⁰

2. *Work with Indigenous communities and support organizations to identify training needs and opportunities to support successful employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples in tourism and related industries.*

The Government of Alberta's First Nations Training to Employment Program⁴¹ supports the development of partnerships designed to create training and work experience projects that lead to employment for First Nations members. These partnerships will assist unemployed or marginally employed First Nations members (primarily living on reserve) gain the necessary skills training and/or work experience in projects to obtain and maintain long-term employment.⁴² The Government of Alberta will also continue to work with Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training agreement holding organizations to identify training opportunities related to the tourism and hospitality industry.⁴³

3. *Strive to ensure that in the development of tourism, appropriate measures are applied to protect important traditional use sites identified through Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Traditional Land Use studies in the region.*

The importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and outcomes of Traditional Land Use studies should be consulted in tourism development and appropriate measures such as mitigation or avoidance should be used to protect traditional use sites. The Castle Parks Management Plan identifies the importance of ensuring the protection and traditional use sites where materials for cultural, ceremonial and historical practices are located through the use of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Traditional Land Use studies.⁴⁴ The Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Landscape Footprint Management Plan also indicates that the completion and integration of Traditional Land Use Studies to support planning and land use decisions that respect Treaty rights and ancestral, traditional and continued land

³⁹ *Indigenous Tourism Alberta Strategy 2019-2024*, p. 5 (<https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ITA-Strategy-2019-2024-FINAL.pdf>).

⁴⁰ Castle Management Plan, May 2018, p. 67 (<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/2864/documents/10327>).

⁴¹ <https://work.alberta.ca/labour/atep-fntep.html>

⁴² <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/AWonline/ETS/4374.html>

⁴³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/indigenous/asets.html>

⁴⁴ Castle Management Plan, May 2018, p. 62 (<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/2864/documents/10327>).

use, is a priority.⁴⁵ The Government of Alberta will ensure that this information is made available to potential tourism operators when developing new tourism products.

4. *Continue engagement with Indigenous peoples and communities to understand their needs and identify supports and opportunities to recognize and share Indigenous culture and history.*

The Government of Alberta will continue to engage with the thirteen First Nations of the South Saskatchewan region to identify projects, strategies and potential funding mechanisms to grow Indigenous tourism in the Castle. The Government of Alberta, along with Indigenous tourism partners, will specifically hold tourism information sessions in interested Indigenous communities to help build Indigenous tourism products and experiences.

⁴⁵ Livingstone – Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan, p. 26
(<https://talkaep.alberta.ca/4136/documents/10295>)

NEXT STEPS

Since the Government of Alberta designated the new Castle Parks and identified the Castle region as an area of importance for the growth of recreation and tourism, work has been ongoing by government in support of tourism development. Many of the actions identified in the Strategy are well underway. Upon completion of the Strategy's three-year term, a progress report will be released, identifying outcomes of each strategic priority.



Crowsnest Pass