

INTERLAKES

# DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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HIGHLIGHTS



DESTINATION  
BRITISH COLUMBIA



# THANK YOU

The Interlakes Destination Development Strategy is the outcome of a 16-month iterative process of gathering, synthesizing, and validating information with tourism partners about the current state of tourism in the planning area.

We thank the Indigenous people on whose traditional territories we gathered for our community meetings including: Barriere, Roe Lake, Lone Butte, Sheridan Lake, 100 Mile House — home of the Simpcw, Tsq'escenemc (Canim Lake), and Stswecem'c Xgat'tem (Canoe/Dog Creek) First Nations.

Thank you to our tourism partners who participated in the process by attending community meetings, participating in surveys and interviews, engaging in follow-up conversations, and forwarding relevant documents and insights. Special thanks to the members of the Working Group as well as the facilitators of the destination development process.

HELMCKEN FALLS  
Photo: Max Zeddler

# WHAT'S INSIDE

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## WHY A STRATEGY?

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

## WHO IS IT FOR?

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

## WHERE IS IT FOR?

The planning area is an area of lakes, rivers, ranchlands, and mountains encompassing the main corridor of Highway 24 and its junctions with Highways 97 and 5. Stretching across the Bonaparte Plateau to Wells Gray Provincial Park and the communities of Barriere and Clearwater in the east. The western side of the

planning area is bounded by a portion of Highway 97 from 70 Mile House to 100 Mile House. To the south, the planning area includes Bonaparte Lake, and to the north, it includes the bulk of Wells Gray Provincial Park while being bounded by Canim-Hendrix Rd, Canim Lake, Crooked Lake and Azure Lake. With Highway 24 bisecting the planning area east to west, the area often sees visitors who are on a touring journey from Whistler to Jasper and want to take the road less travelled.

## WHERE DOES IT FIT?

The Interlakes is one of 20 planning areas across BC for which destination development strategies are being developed. Each planning area represents a logical destination for visitors in and around the province. As planning areas span across multiple jurisdictions, the importance of adopting an integrated approach with a shared vision and coordinated investment is critical. This Destination Development Strategy is one of three strategies that will be prepared for the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Region, and one of seven for the Thompson Okanagan Region. In time, informed by the outcomes of all relevant planning area destination development strategies, regional strategies will be developed. These will, in turn, inform the creation of a provincial strategy thereby ensuring a truly integrated and cohesive combination of bottom-up and top-down destination planning.

## A KEY IMPERATIVE

The recommendations contained within the Destination Development Strategy form the foundation for additional, focused and aligned discussions regarding implementation. It will be important to ensure that the strategy becomes embedded in local, regional, provincial and federal decision making processes. It is only by working collaboratively in an integrated way with a shared agenda that the full potential of the planning area will be realized.

## AT A GLANCE

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

# 2 REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

## A DISTINCTIVE DESTINATION

Located in the south Cariboo, Highway 24, a 100 km long route, extends from 93 Mile House to Little Fort. Nicknamed the Fishing Highway, it passes through the small communities of Lone Butte and Bridge Lake, skirting the countless lakes located along its length.

These lakes offer amazing fishing opportunities, and are a dreamland for anglers, paddlers, and families looking to enjoy a vacation nature.

More generally, the compelling quality of the natural environment provides a rich backdrop for outdoor recreation, nature-based pursuits, and genuine experiences. Wells Gray Provincial Park, with its mountain views, cascading waterfalls, roaring rivers, alpine meadows, and azure lakes, is a key attractor. The Park's extinct volcanoes, lava beds, mineral springs, and glaciers provide awe-inspiring glimpses of nature at its best. The planning area also provides boundless outdoor opportunities such as bird watching, boating and canoeing, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, swimming, and other activities including snowmobiling and snowshoeing in winter.

This area is home to the Simpcw, Tsq'escenemc (Canim Lake), and Stswecem'c Xgat'tem (Canoe/Dog Creek) First Nations who hold vast knowledge and a deep understanding of the land. The area also includes the municipalities of 100 Mile House, Barriere, and Clearwater. Traditionally, the economies in the

planning area have been highly reliant on the land and resource-based sectors. Logging continues to be a major economic generator within the planning area, as does mining. The area has long been recognized as a fishing and outdoor recreation destination that appeals to families. With Highway 24 bisecting the planning area east to west, the touring market remains an important opportunity for the future.

## A SHARED VISION

The vision for tourism development in the next 10 years reflects the distinctiveness of the destination and the ambition of its communities:



THE INTERLAKES IS AN AFFORDABLE, FAMILY-ORIENTED DESTINATION RECOGNIZED FOR ITS YEAR-ROUND OUTDOOR RECREATION, FISHING, TOURING AND GUEST RANCH

OPPORTUNITIES, AND IS SOUGHT OUT BY VISITORS WHO APPRECIATE GETTING AWAY FROM CROWDS TO ENJOY THE AREA'S BEAUTIFUL, NATURAL LANDSCAPES. THE BROAD DIVERSITY OF ACCESSIBLE BACKCOUNTRY ADVENTURES AND FRONT COUNTRY RESORTS, OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES, CULTURAL, HERITAGE, AND INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES SUPPORT A THRIVING TOURISM INDUSTRY, WHILE BEING MANAGED TO PRESERVE THE NATURAL ASSETS AND WAY OF LIFE VALUED BY RESIDENTS.

# 2

# REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

The planning area faces a number of challenges, including limited public and alternative transportation options; viewscape degradation and tourism asset base erosion; few purchasable guided and self-guided visitor activities; a declining accommodation inventory; staff and housing availability; reputational damage following recent wildfires, and a challenging policy environment.

However, key opportunities include:

- Collaboration with adjacent corridor initiatives to draw visitors into the area
- Circle route and itinerary development to lengthen stay
- Winter tourism growth
- Enhanced infrastructure and access to attractions in Wells Gray Provincial Park
- Potential for new paid visitor activities, services and experiences
- Potential for non-traditional options to enhance accommodation and dining
- Greater collaboration amongst stakeholders to increase referrals
- Indigenous capacity for tourism development
- Proposed tourism investment incentives

## EXPERIENCE POTENTIAL

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

### PLENTIFUL PARKS AND RECREATION SITES

- Wells Gray Provincial Park, home to 39 named waterfalls, 22 volcanoes, unique geological features not found anywhere else in BC, and Clearwater Lake, the largest non-motorized lake in North America; this park attracts over 250,000 visitors annually.
- Green Lake, the second most visited park in the planning area, is popular for families, boating, and fishing due to its variety of visitor amenities.
- Numerous, lesser-visited recreation sites and parks are also available to visit, when others are fully reserved.

### ACCESSIBLE BACK AND FRONT COUNTRY OUTDOOR ADVENTURE IN WILDERNESS ENVIRONMENTS:

- This area epitomizes Super, Natural British Columbia, offering hundreds of accessible front and backcountry lakes and natural areas for outdoor motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

- Already known as Fishing Highway 24, the area is recognized for its plentiful, year-round, freshwater fishing opportunities and offers visitors an array of lakeside, front and backcountry resorts, and recreation sites to enjoy nature in rustic settings.
- One of the few places in the province where it's possible to enjoy hut-to-hut hiking and ski touring opportunities year-round.

### OFF-THE-BEATEN-PATH TOURING, AND RESORT AND GUEST RANCH EXPERIENCES

- Highway 24 bisects the planning area allowing visitors travelling from Jasper to Whistler or the Lower Mainland to enjoy a less crowded touring experience away from Highway 1.
- Home to a wide variety of backcountry and rural roads, there are numerous opportunities for accessible backcountry circle touring routes.
- Numerous quiet, lakeside resorts offer ideal getaway vacations for visitors who want to disconnect from the hustle of everyday life, and enjoy an off-the-grid experience.

### A RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE WITH DIVERSE STORIES

- Home to the Simpcw, Tsq'escenemc (Canim Lake), and Stswecem'c Xgat'tem (Canoe/Dog Creek) First Nations, who are working to develop and offer experiences that connect visitors with their heritage and culture.
- Opportunities to connect with cowboy culture through ranch and horseback riding vacations.
- Numerous European residents and business owners who offer opportunities to connect with their settlement stories and cultural backgrounds.
- Local festivals and events such as rodeos, pow wows, fishing derbies, and fairs showcase the area's distinct culture and heritage.
- Sections of the old Hudson's Bay Brigade Trail are found within the planning area, with a potential to connect visitors to this aspect of Canada's and BC's heritage.

# 3

# AT A GLANCE

**VISION STATEMENT** The Interlakes is an affordable, family-oriented destination recognized for its year-round outdoor recreation, fishing, touring, and guest ranch opportunities, and is sought out by visitors who appreciate getting away from crowds to enjoy the area’s beautiful natural landscapes. The broad diversity of accessible backcountry adventures and front country resorts, outdoor activities, cultural, heritage, and Indigenous experiences support a thriving tourism industry, while being managed to preserve the natural assets and way of life valued by residents.

|         |   |   |   |
|---------|---|---|---|
| THEME 1 | SOLID FOUNDATIONS: STRATEGICALLY INVEST IN TARGETED INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES THAT WILL SUPPORT TOURISM GROWTH  |   |   |
|         | <p><b>TOURING FURTHER</b></p> <p>In collaboration with strategic partners identify the scope for creating new tourism routes, including new circle touring routes. In prioritizing options, ensure that supporting interventions such as touring route signage and visitor amenities are taken into account.</p>  | <p><b>RAISE THE BAR</b></p> <p>Within the context of Wells Gray Park, improve access by road to key visitor attractions and ensure that signage, parking, and supporting amenities respond to the needs of visitors. Focus attention on the enhancement and maintenance of key visitor attractions located within the west side of the Park.</p>  | <p><b>REST ASSURED</b></p> <p>Enhance the existing touring experience for visitors on primary and secondary roads. Address the provision of public washroom facilities, strategically located rest stops, plug-in stations for electric vehicles, pull-outs, and washrooms. Create a committee dedicated to addressing transport and signage improvements including interpretive signage.</p> |
| THEME 2 | COMMON CAUSE: LEAD STRATEGIC GROWTH THROUGH CONTINUED COLLABORATION   |   |   |
|         | <p><b>WIN HEARTS &amp; MINDS</b></p> <p>Communicate the value of tourism to government, local citizens, and business owners, and nurture their support for the tourism eco-system. Investigate a Tourism Ambassador program and engage frontline staff in familiarization initiatives designed to enhance their knowledge of the wider tourism offerings.</p> | <p><b>ON TRACK</b></p> <p>Develop a business case for expanding public and private transportation services such as shuttle services, public bus services, ride-sharing, and car-sharing services. Ensure city-based car rental companies make provision for visitors intending to travel the area’s forest service and back roads. Secure passenger rail service to Prince George from Vancouver.</p> | <p><b>STAY CONNECTED</b></p> <p>Identify locations in need of technology and communication service upgrades. Focus attention on improving the accuracy of Google mapping for key roads used by visitors within the destination.</p>   |
|         |   |   | <p><b>EXTEND THE SEASON</b></p> <p>Create a committee of interested stakeholders who are willing to work in a cluster to invest in staying open, therefore offering products and experiences at a new time of year. Develop packages, suggested itineraries, and one or two strategic events to support season extension.</p>   |

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| THEME 2 CONTINUED  | <p><b>BROKER SUPPORT</b></p> <p>Foster relationships with local businesses and forest service management, and work in conjunction to address issues impacting tourism's future, including viewscape management and degradation, land sales and transfers, and the timing of forest operations. Communicate changes that might impact access to backcountry trails and lands, including the decommissioning of forest service roads, and collaborate to minimize their disruption to tourism activities.</p>  | <p><b>REALIZE THE POTENTIAL</b></p> <p>Continue to grow the potential of Wells Gray Provincial Park by collaborating on key development initiatives. Encourage the development of new, non-motorized, winter activities and new, paid visitor experiences other than canoe and hiking in the main park corridor.</p>   | <p><b>AIM HIGH</b></p> <p>Test the appetite amongst stakeholders to reapply for UN World Heritage Site or garner support for a Geopark designation status for Wells Gray Provincial Park. Communicate the benefits and costs of the various designation programs relative to the protection and promotion of the Park.</p>   |
| <b>THEME 3</b>   |  |  |  |
| <b>EXCEL, ACCELERATE: DIVERSIFY AND EXPAND THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE</b>        |  |  |  |
| THEME 3  | <p><b>EXPERIENTIAL ENCOUNTERS</b></p> <p>Increase the availability of paid visitor activities and experiences that allow for greater engagement with the area's natural assets. Focus on developing packages and itineraries, food-based offers, dark skies experiences, and festivals and events.</p> <p><b>MORE CHOICE</b></p> <p>Support the growing interest in diversifying the outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the area. Explore opportunities for new recreational equipment rental options aligned with popular activities. Increase access and infrastructure for fishing, and support the completion of existing projects.</p>   | <p><b>INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES</b></p> <p>Work with the Simpcw, Tsq'escenemc (Canim Lake), and Stswecem'c Xgat'tem (Canoe/Dog Creek) First Nations to identify and support new Indigenous tourism development opportunities for more purchasable tours and products that support their economic development and bring their culture, traditions, and heritage to life.</p> <p><b>GOOD FOOD</b></p> <p>Encourage the growth and diversity of food and beverage opportunities in the planning area, particularly along Highway 24. Focus on food experiences which respond to visitors' interests, develop a forum for business owners to find solutions to operating challenges, and explore access to investment and services for start-ups.</p> | <p><b>COMPELLING TRAILS</b></p> <p>Invest in the identification and maintenance of new trails that will diversify opportunities for various visitor markets in the long-term. Focus on low-mobility trails, motorized trails, connecting snowmobile trails, and developing iconic trails. Expand the hut-to-hut network in Wells Gray Provincial Park and adapt existing trails to create shorter loops for families.</p> <p><b>REFRESHED &amp; RENEWED</b></p> <p>Support the upgrading of existing accommodations in line with visitor expectations. Create a no-interest or low interest capital investment fund or loan guarantee and/or financing programs, working with the province, for tourism operators to upgrade their properties. Encourage a more diverse offer, and expand camping and recreational vehicle services.</p> |
| <b>THEME 4</b>   |  |  |  |
| <b>HIT THE GROUND RUNNING: ENABLE TOURISM BUSINESS VIABILITY AND SUCCESS</b> |  |  |  |
| THEME 4  | <p><b>RELIABLY INFORMED</b></p> <p>Improve visitor information services and develop a public safety plan that addresses the lack of connectivity in some parts of the planning area. Identify options for Wi-Fi hot spots and investigate a mobile visitor servicing option to enable connectivity in places where visitors are congregating.</p> <p><b>RESPONSIVE RESOURCING</b></p> <p>Support quick actions to help businesses cope with labour challenges. Provide training on adapting to new workforce realities and changing demographics, and provide businesses with the knowledge and skills to attract and retain new types of workers.</p> | <p><b>FUTURE-PROOFED</b></p> <p>In addressing the need for business succession planning, create a working group for the communities and businesses most impacted to identify the issues, needs, opportunities, and remedies. Identify issues of common concern across the planning area and agree on the best resolution.</p> <p><b>BETTER EQUIPPED</b></p> <p>Develop a long-term labour market and/or business development and human resource training strategy that addresses growth and the challenges arising from increased tourism activities and marketing. Include barriers to growth, access to staff training, business development resources, and volunteer burnout.</p>   | <p><b>AFFORDABLY HOUSED</b></p> <p>Address the availability and affordability of tourism staff housing. Create a regional or multi-stakeholder taskforce to brainstorm short-term solutions that can be implemented to address the availability and affordability of tourism staff housing.</p> <p><b>FULLY ENABLED</b></p> <p>Provide support and training to new foreign investors, business owners, and their staff to fast-track their integration within the visitor economy. Support efforts by the Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia (TIABC) and tourism operators to improve and streamline government processes that impede business viability and success.</p>  |

THEME 5

A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH: BALANCE ECONOMIC GROWTH WHILE PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS UPON WHICH TOURISM RELIES

WISE LAND USE

Establish a framework for reaching consensus on decisions affecting the use of land, in particular the merits of tourism development vis a vis extractive industries. Communicate the importance of the economic value and impact of tourism in the planning area to local and provincial land use decision makers.

LIMITS TO GROWTH

Safeguard the natural environments upon which tourism relies, while managing strategic growth within the capacity of the land and communities to sustain investments, and the local way of life. Work collaboratively to ensure tourism does not negatively affect the natural environment, displace wildlife or impede fish stocks.

THEME 6

BE PREPARED: SUPPORT NATURAL DISASTER RECOVERY SUCCESS

RECOVER THE COST

Secure temporary tax relief and operating permit relief (2018–2021) for tourism businesses impacted by recent wildfires.

ADAPT & MITIGATE

Develop tourism-focused natural disaster plans that include climate change mitigation and adaption plans for tourism operators as well as a regional tourism emergency preparedness, response, and recovery plan.

COHERENT COMMUNICATION

Share consistent messages with all businesses in the impacted wildfire areas that can be used in their visitor communications.

CLEARWATER  
Photo: Kari Medig





# 4 GEARING UP

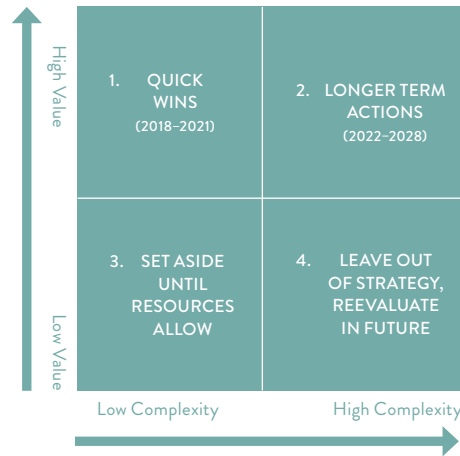
## SUCCESS NETWORKS

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

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

## FRAMEWORK

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



CANIM FALLS  
Photo: Blake Jorgenson

# 4 GEARING UP

## CATALYST PROJECTS

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

### **Solid Foundations: Strategically Invest in Targeted Infrastructure Upgrades that will Support Tourism Growth**

- Work collaboratively with FLNR on a tourism road inventory that will support the creation of new potential tourism routes, including measuring existing use, prioritizing options, and assessing the needs relative to touring route signage and visitor amenities.
- Improve road access to key visitor attractions in Wells Gray Provincial Park; prioritize signage, parking and visitor amenities, and establish a long-term maintenance plan for key visitor attractions on the west side of the Park.
- Create an Interlakes communications committee to identify locations in need of technology and communication service upgrades.
- Increase the accuracy of Google mapping for key roads used by visitors in the Interlakes.

### **Compelling Message: Lead Strategic Growth through Continued Collaboration**

- Improve the understanding with government, local citizens, and businesses of the tourism eco-system and the value of tourism.
- Create a committee of interested stakeholders who are willing to work in a cluster to invest in staying open and offering products and experiences at a new time of year to lengthen the tourism season or stimulate a new season — e.g., winter.

- Build relationships with local forest service management companies, and government representatives to improve communication related to key issues impacting tourism's success, including viewscape management, communication on land transfers to logging or mining companies, and Forest Service Road deactivation.
- Continue to grow the tourism potential of Wells Gray Provincial Park by collaborating on key development initiatives.

### **Excel, Exceed, Accelerate: Diversify and Expand the Visitor Experience**

- Work with the Simpcw, Tsq'escenemc (Canim Lake), and Stswecem'c Xgat'tem (Canoe/Dog Creek) Nations to identify and support new Indigenous tourism development opportunities for more purchasable tours and products that will support their economic development, and bring their culture, traditions, and heritage to life.
- Encourage the growth and diversity of food and beverage opportunities in the planning area, particularly along Highway 24.
- Create a no-interest or low interest capital investment fund or loan guarantee and/or financing programs, working with the province, that tourism operators could access to invest in and upgrade their properties.

### **Hit the Ground Running: Enable Tourism Business Viability and Success**

- Improve visitor information services and develop a public safety plan that addresses the lack of connectivity in some parts of the planning area.
- Create a multi-stakeholder taskforce to brainstorm short-term solutions that can be implemented to address the availability and affordability of tourism staff housing.
- Support quick actions to help businesses cope with labour challenges.
- Support efforts by TIABC and tourism operators to improve and streamline government processes that impede business viability and success.

### **Be Prepared: Support Natural Disaster Recovery Success**

- Secure temporary tax relief and operating permit relief (2018–2021) for tourism businesses impacted by the 2017 and 2018 wildfires.

70 MILE HOUSE  
Photo: Michael Bednar



# LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

You can likely find it in the more detailed Interlakes Destination Development Strategy or you can reach us at:

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: FAWN LAKE RESORT, Blake Jorgenson



100 MILE HOUSE  
Photo: Albert Normandin