SHUSWAP-NORTH OKANAGAN

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

HIGHLIGHTS

DESTINATION BRITISH COLUMBIA

THANK YOU

The Shuswap-North Okanagan Destination Development Strategy is the outcome of a nine-month, iterative process of gathering, synthesizing, and validating information with stakeholders about the current and future direction of tourism in the Shuswap-North Okanagan planning area.

We thank the Secwépemc People on whose traditional territories we gathered for our meetings in Enderby and Salmon Arm.

Thank you to our tourism partners who participated in the process by attending planning workshops, conducting interviews, hosting site visits, and responding to surveys.

Special thanks to the members of the Working Group, as well as the facilitators of the Shuswap-North Okanagan destination development process.

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OKANAGAN LAKE
Photo: Don Weixl

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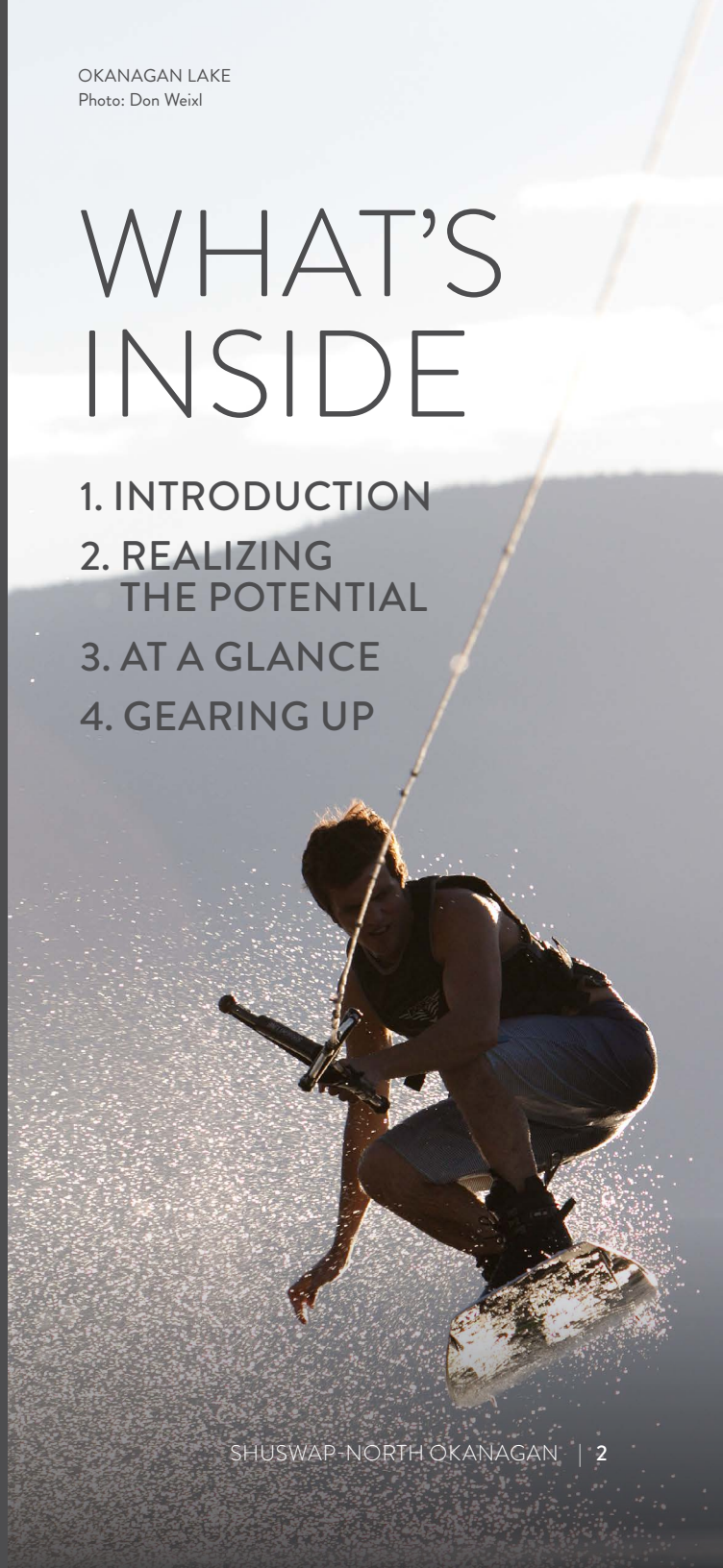


1 INTRODUCTION

WHY A STRATEGY?

The Shuswap-North Okanagan Destination Development Strategy was developed to enhance the competitiveness of the Shuswap-North Okanagan 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 the key highlights of the Shuswap-North Okanagan strategy.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The Shuswap-North Okanagan 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 outcomes will inform future implementation activities thereby optimizing their effectiveness in increasing economic, social, and cultural benefits for the entire Shuswap-North Okanagan planning area.

WHERE IS IT FOR?

The Shuswap-North Okanagan planning area encompasses the Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO), the Shuswap electoral areas of the Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD), and the Village of Chase in the Thompson Nicola Regional District (TNRD). The key settlements include Salmon Arm, Sicamous, Chase, Falkland, Enderby, Armstrong, Vernon, Coldstream, and Lumby. The planning area is located on two key corridors — Highway 1 midway between Vancouver, BC and Calgary, AB, and Highway 97. The region is well served by these transportation routes. Air access into the region is through Kelowna International Airport and Kamloops Airport.

WHERE DOES IT FIT?

The Shuswap-North Okanagan planning area 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 multiple jurisdictions, the importance of adopting an integrated approach with a shared vision and coordinated investment is critical. The Shuswap-North Okanagan Destination Development Strategy is one of three planning area strategies being prepared for the Thompson Okanagan tourism region. The other two are the Okanagan Valley and the North Thompson-Nicola Valleys. 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 Shuswap-North Okanagan 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 Shuswap-North Okanagan will be realized.

AT A GLANCE

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

2 REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

A DISTINCTIVE DESTINATION

The Shuswap-North Okanagan planning area is located in the southern Interior of British Columbia, approximately half way between Vancouver and Calgary on Trans-Canada Highway 1. To the south is the Okanagan Valley which is major year-round tourist destination that is linked to the Shuswap by Highway 97. The mountainous area to the east encompasses Revelstoke and Golden, while Kamloops is situated due west. Highway 1 runs roughly east-west connecting Revelstoke, the communities of the Shuswap, and Kamloops.

For those travelling westwards, the emergence of Shuswap Lake, along with long, distant views and the ranches and farms of the area, herald a change from the mountain landscapes and mark a considerable transformation in the travel setting. For those travelling east, Shuswap Lake with its lush green setting and small communities signals a welcome change from the dry landscapes of the Kamloops region. As the principal feature of the region, Shuswap Lake is at the center of a large stream and lake network and the focal point of many tourism activities.

The region is hugely varied comprising remote mountains and wild streams, popular lakes, rich farm lands, and historic towns. It offers a diversity of landscapes and waterscapes associated with Shuswap Lake, Shuswap River, Shuswap Highlands, the Interior Plateau, Okanagan Lake, Kalamalka Lake, and a range of smaller lakes. The destination is characterized by small and medium sized communities that give the visitor a range of opportunities to connect with locals, and to experience the wealth of artists, artisans, and musicians that reside/perform in the planning area.

The Shuswap region owes its identity to the Secwépemc, who have lived in the area since time immemorial. With their rich and sophisticated culture these true stewards of the land, the plants, and the animals, continue to lead the way in developing a culture of stewardship and collaboration, particularly in relation to the planning and management of trails. More specifically this area is home to five First Nations Bands — the Adams Lake Indian Band, the Little Shuswap Lake Indian Band, the Nesknolith Indian Band, the Okanagan Indian Band, and the Splatsin (Spallumcheen) Band.

The planning area is particularly renowned for its trails, and its aquatic activities. The opportunities to engage in outdoor activities are extensive. Visitors enjoy biking, hiking, horseback riding, geocaching, birdwatching, fishing, paddling, rafting, rock climbing, canoeing, kayaking, windsurfing, stand-up paddle boarding, ziplining, scuba diving, skydiving, skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling, and snowshoeing. In addition, there is an eclectic mix of arts and culture attractions, Indigenous experiences, and local flavours of interest to visitors which brings a level of vibrancy to the area that makes the Shuswap-North Okanagan a distinctive planning area within BC.

OKANAGAN LAKE
Photo: Grant Harder

2 REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

A SHARED VISION

Adopting a sustainable approach to the development of the planning area, partners working together are keen to realize the following vision:

VISITORS EXPERIENCE A SENSE OF WELCOME AND REJUVENATION YEAR-ROUND IN A DESTINATION THAT IS KNOWN FOR ITS PASTORAL LANDSCAPES, ITS DIVERSITY OF AQUATIC ACTIVITIES AND TRAILS. THE PLANNING AREA IS ALSO KNOWN FOR ITS RANGE OF AUTHENTIC AND WELL-CONNECTED COMMUNITIES WITH THEIR STRONG SENSE OF PLACE, THE RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE OF FIRST NATIONS, AND THE MORE RECENT TRADITIONS AND STORIES OF PIONEERS AND SETTLERS. WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON ESTABLISHING AND ADOPTING BEST PRACTICES BY WORKING COLLABORATIVELY TO DEVELOP A COMPETITIVE DESTINATION, PROTECTING ITS ENVIRONMENT, CULTURAL INTEGRITY, AND DELIVERING MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES THAT CREATE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF THE TOURISM ECONOMY.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

The destination faces a number of challenges such as connectivity between communities seasonality, accommodations, access to Crown land, and lack of coordination between businesses in delivering memorable experiences. However, key opportunities include:

- Growing demand for authenticity, creativity, and self-fulfillment
- Global growth in cycling
- Strengthening of Alberta and the US markets
- Development of an iconic rail trail from Shuswap to South Okanagan
- Broadening the tourism dialogue to include more resource sectors
- Potential to tap retiree market for HR/ enhanced training
- Sharing economy
- Leveraging ski development in Revelstoke

EXPERIENCE POTENTIAL

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

- Trail-based adventure — with a focus on hiking, mountain biking, equestrian, Nordic, paddle trail experiences, and snowmobiling.
- Water-based recreation — Shuswap Lake with its system of four arms and 1,000 kilometres of shoreline; is stocked for fishing opportunities and there are water-based provincial parks that provide camping and day use facilities.
- Living landscapes — with a focus on the farmed landscape set within the valleys and against the backdrop of the mountains there is a growing emphasis on local flavours. Those flavours include orchards, gardens, ranches, greenhouses, dairies, and markets, in addition to wineries and vineyards, breweries, distilleries, restaurants, and more conventional food outlets.
- First Nations — with a focus on the Switzmalph Cultural Society's Shuswap Centre, Quaaout Lodge and Spa Resort, and the new Splatsin Community Centre — a venue for gatherings and events.
- Cultural heritage — with a focus on cultural heritage attractions and community museums presenting the pioneer and settler stories of the planning area. There is an extensive array of artists and artisans and a vibrant performance scene, with a range of public art galleries, private studios, and shops showcasing local and visiting talent.

3 AT A GLANCE

VISION STATEMENT visitors experience a sense of welcome and rejuvenation year-round in a destination that is known for its pastoral landscapes, its diversity of aquatic activities and trails. The planning area is also known for its range of authentic and well-connected communities with their strong sense of place, the rich cultural heritage of first nations, and the more recent traditions and stories of pioneers and settlers. We will continue to focus on establishing and adopting best practices by working collaboratively to develop a competitive destination, protecting its environment, cultural integrity, and delivering memorable experiences that create sustainable growth of the tourism economy.

THEME 1

GET DOWN TO BUSINESS: CREATE AN ATTRACTIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE FOR NEW AND EXPANDING TOURISM BUSINESSES

ALL-IN

Extend the Shuswap Trails Roundtable model of collaboration, including its operational structure, to the North Okanagan. Ensure First Nations' title, rights, values, and interests are enshrined within agreements for the shared management and future use of the area, including the realization of its tourism potential.

ON TRACK

Within the context of a Shuswap-North Okanagan Trails Forum, look at opportunities to develop the Sicamous to Armstrong Rail Trail; improve the mapping of, and connectivity between, trail systems, and create new, cross-jurisdictional trail experiences and associated support services.

HUB & SPOKE

Ensure existing trails are maintained and all new trails can accommodate, where feasible, year-round use. Promote the development of hut-to-hut experiences and encourage communities with a significant accommodation base to position themselves as hubs within the emerging network of trails.

LONG DISTANCE TRAIL

Work collaboratively within a regional forum to develop the Sicamous to Osoyoos long distance rail trail. Within the context of a consolidated management strategy for the trail, address, amongst other matters, its naming and branding, governance and funding, connectivity and linkages, business opportunities, and experience development.

SUSTAINABLY DRIVEN

Map and assess the capacity of the resource base to sustain and accommodate motorized recreation trails. Develop an ORV trail strategy and adopt a strategic approach to meeting the needs of this particular user group, whilst mitigating the impact of unauthorized ORV trail networks.

ADVANCING ACCESS

Identify, map, and address land and water access issues, including: parking capacity at trailheads, access over private lands, and access to Crown lands. In light of concern over access to waterfront areas, review regulations regarding dock size for private facilities and boundary fences into the water.

INTO THE BLUE

Develop an inventory of suitable access and launch sites, together with trailhead infrastructure. Promote the concept of blueways — paddle trails — within the broader community and further develop this opportunity to encourage access onto the water.

RIVER RULES

In response to the growth in motorized recreation on the Shuswap River, develop a code of conduct for users and information (digital and print) to familiarize visitors with the river, its regulations, and its places of interest. Raise awareness of its ecological value through interpretive signage; strengthen the River Ambassadors program, and engage users and First Nations in a River Guardians program.

SQUEAKY CLEAN

In line with the critical importance of safeguarding water quality and promoting water safety, ensure that the recreational needs of the Shuswap, Little Shuswap, Mara, and Adams Lakes are sustainably addressed.

WATER'S EDGE

In identifying recreational management zones, address the issue of motorized and non-motorized boat launch sites. Create boating destinations within the lakelands as well as a coherent system of signage for promoting the safe and appropriate use of the waterways.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Developing adaptability and resiliency to managed growth, work collaboratively to agree on indicators, and share data on the cumulative impacts of visitor use. Support policy and program measures to protect the environment and introduce a stewardship fund for environmental initiatives.

FOLLOW-THROUGH

In strengthening the link between sustainability practices and improved industry competitiveness, leverage the destination's Biosphere accreditation to develop innovative approaches to product development, energy efficiency, and carbon footprint tracking.

BE PREPARED

Put a disaster and emergency program in place to enable the destination to respond to major natural events such as floods and wildfires. Provide best practices research on response options for the sector relative to cancellations, refunds, re-bookings, and customer relationship policies.

3 AT A GLANCE

THEME 2

VITAL LINKS: CONNECTIVITY

BE DRIVEN

In developing a business case for a shuttle service, work with BC Transit to improve the scheduling and coordination of the transit service to connect with airports. Explore the opportunities for both the private sector and the sharing economy to provide effective airport connectivity solutions.

FAR & WIDE

Work with BC Transit and other relevant partners to identify innovative solutions to providing a consistent and regular transit system to enable visitors to move around the region. Develop a regional transit plan for the Shuswap and expedite the introduction of a ride-sharing framework to tackle the challenge of transportation in rural areas.

HIT THE ROAD

Within the context of work underway to upgrade Highway 1 from Kamloops eastwards, ensure that the measures timetabled for the Shuswap area address congestion and safety. Make provision, through adequate signage, for those businesses likely to be affected by the changes to maintain their visibility to passing traffic.

IN PARALLEL

Ensure that the opportunity to develop the Chase to Sun Peaks road is pursued; its economic benefit demonstrated and the interests of its advocates are aligned in support of its realization. Expedite the rural roads initiative which is designed to provide safe parallel routes along all key rural corridors and enhance the road cycling experience.

FULLY CONNECTED

Within the context of developing a regional plan for internet coverage, work with the government of BC and the telecommunications sector to achieve enhanced connectivity throughout the region. Support the tourism industry as it moves towards adopting innovative technological solutions to enhance the visitor experience.

THEME 3

GET DOWN TO BUSINESS: INDUSTRY READINESS

FRONTLINE FOCUS

Learning from the success of similar initiatives elsewhere, develop and secure the uptake of a Tourism Ambassador program for the planning area. Continue to encourage participation in SuperHost training and invite further participation in Destination BC's ongoing learning opportunities.

FUTURE PROOFED

Adopt a coordinated approach to looking at the specific business retention and expansion needs of the tourism sector, including the development of a customized plan.

THE HOUSING CHALLENGE

Profile the specific housing needs of tourism workers within the context of providing innovative solutions to meeting their housing needs. Establish a working group that can fully assess the current state of the housing market and determine the extent to which the availability of affordable accommodation is constraining the delivery of quality experiences.

MEASURE & REPORT

Work with relevant partners to measure the value of tourism. Adopt a coordinated approach to reporting on economic impact data and find ways to measure business confidence. Work strategically with lending institutions to promote their understanding of the visitor economy.

ATTRACT & RETAIN

In collaboration with relevant partners, strengthen the appeal of tourism as a career and work towards securing a living wage for sector employees by 2028.

THEME 4

EXCEED EXPECTATIONS: THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

WHEELS IN MOTION

Build on the opportunity to develop Shuswap-North Okanagan as an internationally recognized cycle tourism destination. Leverage initiatives such as the rail trails, the parallel pathways, and the focus on transportation networks to accommodate the needs of this market and provide supporting and complementary services.

INDIGENOUS TOURISM

Empower First Nations communities and local entrepreneurs to build up new experiences; connect consumer-ready product with the wider marketplace and facilitate the development of partnerships to strengthen the delivery of experiences.

CURATE & CELEBRATE

Establish a regional working group to develop an integrated arts and cultural heritage strategy to advance the opportunities identified in existing plans. Develop a coordinated approach to the management and promotion of events and leverage the capacity of the arts, heritage and culture to motivate visitor interest and add value to the experience.

TRUE FLAVOUR

Engage farmers, growers, artisans and operators in creating outstanding culinary experiences. Introduce and extend various agritourism programs designed to nurture a strong network and well-connected distribution system between local suppliers and restaurants, including the artisan retail sector.

WONDERFUL IN WINTER

Informed by the EQ program, encourage operators to focus on developing signature winter experiences. Assess the opportunity for winter trail experiences as part of the development of a year-round trail use plan for the entire planning area.

4 GEARING UP

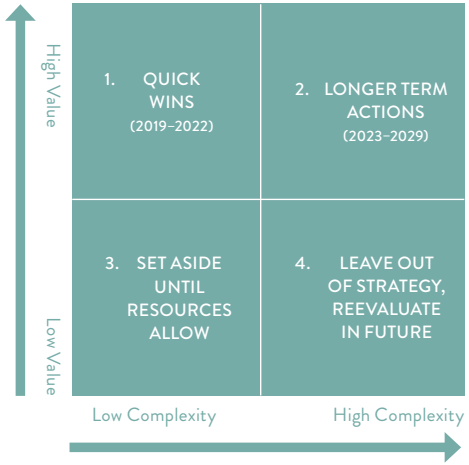
FRAMEWORK

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

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

SUCCESS NETWORKS

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



SILVER STAR MOUNTAIN RESORT
Photo: Blake Jorgenson

4 GEARING UP

CATALYST PROJECTS

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

What Matters Most: The Natural Environment

- Continue to implement all existing trails strategies and pursue opportunities to promote more regional integration in trails systems.
- Build a comprehensive understanding of all access related issues.
- Support the work of the Shuswap Trails Roundtable in developing cumulative effects assessment tools and processes.

Vital Links: Connectivity

- Work with local governments and the private sector to establish a regular shuttle service between communities and airports.
- Continue to work with community and regional partners to support the implementation of transportation systems in the region, including the further development of parallel pathways.

Get Down to Business: Industry Readiness

- Promote participation in Destination BC's ongoing learning opportunities.
- Work with the tourism business community and Destination BC to measure the value of tourism.

Exceed Expectations: The Visitor Experience

- Strengthen the appeal of the area for road cycling with the objective of having a robust internationally recognized cycle tourism sector in place by 2028.
- Work with all sectors to identify new opportunities for winter experiences.

VERNON
Photo: Destination Canada

LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Find it in the more detailed Shuswap-North Okanagan Destination Development Strategy or you can reach us at:

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: SILVER STAR MOUNTAIN RESORT, Blake Jorgenson.

SICAMOUS
Photo: Darren Robinson