

The Great Wilderness

BRITISH COLUMBIA 

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

JUNE 2025



DESTINATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA®





LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Destination British Columbia acknowledges with gratitude the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwx̱ wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh Nation) on whose shared territories we operate our main office.

We respectfully recognise that we carry out our work on the territories of Indigenous Peoples throughout BC. We honour our ongoing and developing relationships with First Nations (status and non-status), Inuit, and Métis Peoples. We are on a path of learning and are committed to working together.

As an organization, we are committed to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's Act, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, and the Declaration Act Action Plan. We are working with the Government of BC, Indigenous Tourism BC, and the tourism industry to develop and implement actions of reconciliation. This includes the development of an action plan for Destination BC and collaboration with Indigenous communities interested in the benefits of tourism.

THANK YOU

Thank you to all the tourism partners who contributed to the co-creation of this destination development strategy by participating in workshops, providing feedback, and forwarding follow-up insights and information.

For a complete list of the individuals whose generous participation in engagement sessions contributed to the development of this strategy, please see Appendix A.



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 WHY A STRATEGY?

The [Invest in Iconics Strategy](#) is a long-term strategy to responsibly and sustainably increase tourism revenue to British Columbia, in more places and in all seasons, by marketing and supporting the development of globally compelling place and route brands. The Invest in Iconics Strategy is reflected within the '[Compelling Reasons to Explore BC](#)' pillar in [Destination BC's 2023-2025 Corporate Strategy](#).

Together, six iconic travel routes and places will differentiate BC on the world stage and grow the benefits of tourism across the province. Each new destination brand will be recognizable as part of the Super, Natural British Columbia® brand family. To help guide aligned and strategic implementation of the Invest in Iconics Strategy on the ground, a destination development strategy for each Iconic will identify high-potential opportunities for tourism partners, businesses and operators to develop brand-aligned experiences for visitors.

[The Great Wilderness Destination Development Strategy](#) outlines how [The Great Wilderness](#) brand will be brought to life on the ground for visitors, the tourism industry, and communities. With emphasis on the three focus areas identified in the [Iconics Destination Development Framework](#), *encounters*, *experiences*, and *touchpoints*, it serves to help the brand succeed on the ground through guiding the development of an enhanced visitor experience. It identifies experience development opportunities to deliver on the brand promise and sets out key priorities to make that happen.

1.2 HOW IT ALIGNS

Considerable work is already underway at different levels and locations across the province as part of the development and implementation of the regional and planning area destination development strategies that were co-created by various partners throughout BC. These strategies and plans focus on progressing transportation, workforce development, infrastructure, product development, and visitor service provision, all of which continue to be important considerations for destination development.

WHAT SETS DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT APART WITHIN THE INVEST IN ICONICS STRATEGY IS ITS CLEAR FOCUS ON THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE.

Building on the destination development work already underway, and on foundational pieces such as the [Northern BC Regional Destination Development Strategy](#), the [Northern BC Thematic Framework](#), and the [Great Northern Circle Route Signage Masterplan](#), this strategy recognizes progress to date and identifies opportunities to elevate, support, and, where needed, recalibrate destination development activities to better align with *The Great Wilderness*.

1.3 WHO IT'S FOR

The Great Wilderness Destination Development Strategy is intended primarily for partners involved in destination development, experience planning, visitor servicing, and destination management—including Destination BC (DBC), Indigenous Tourism BC (ITBC), the Northern BC Tourism Association (NBCTA), and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport (TACS).

Beyond these core partners, the goal is for the opportunities presented in *The Great Wilderness* Destination Development Strategy to support all those directly involved in the tourism ecosystem, as well as government leaders supporting the sector, in adopting a consistent, coherent, and cohesive approach to experience development throughout the destination. This could include Indigenous communities, tourism businesses, local governments, Community Destination Management Organizations (CDMOs), Sector associations, development corporations, not-for-profit and community groups, among others.

1.4 HOW IT WAS DEVELOPED

As part of the development of the Northern BC Regional Destination Development Strategy, Destination BC collaborated with ITBC, TACS, and NBCTA to host a series of co-facilitated workshops involving a range of participants from across the tourism sector, reflecting a strong commitment to a collaborative approach. This included Indigenous communities and representatives from throughout the region, along

with BC Parks, Parks Canada, the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation (JEDI), and participants from a wide range of communities, organizations, businesses, local chambers of commerce, community DMOs, not-for-profit groups focused on culture and outdoor recreation, and local governments across Northern BC. Strategic follow-up workshops with NBCTA and its partners helped to validate engagement outcomes and refine development priorities.

Throughout this collaborative and iterative strategy development process, insights were gathered on:

- Compelling story themes that will resonate with visitors in the global marketplace
- Experience development opportunities that will bring these story themes to life across the region
- Touchpoints that will help visitors navigate their way around *The Great Wilderness*, enticing them to explore and connect more deeply with the stories of the place.

As engagement is ongoing, we continue to hold space in this strategy for the inclusion of Indigenous community perspectives and further insights, guided by ITBC.



2. REALIZING THE POTENTIAL OF *THE GREAT WILDERNESS*

2.1 *THE GREAT WILDERNESS PROPOSITION*

The Place

The Great Wilderness is the northernmost area of BC, from the Coast Mountains in the west to the Alberta border in the east, to the Yukon border in the north. The coastal geography is made up of ocean, vast temperate coastal rainforests, and deep fjords that quickly give way to drier mountainous climates further inland. The area's large rivers include the Nass, Skeena, and Stikine. Separated from the Pacific Ocean by temperate rainforests, the northwestern area is generally mountainous, with many large lakes and rivers that have sustained a traditional economy and trade system since the earliest of times.

The north and eastern part of the region shares a border with Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories, and Alberta and includes part of the Peace River Basin. This area is separated from the northwestern part of the region by the Rocky Mountain Trench. The central interior part of the region is dominated by the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers.

The region's geography and cultural landscape is very diverse with coastal areas, mountains, significant headwaters, glaciers, rivers, lakes, hot springs, and valleys. It is BC's largest tourism region covering 569,000 km² – half of the size of the province – with more than 60 sites of natural heritage significance including provincial, national, and marine parks, and wildlife refuges. With just under 500,000 people, the population of Northern BC is characterized by a younger demographic than the province as a whole.

Communities

The 53 First Nations communities in *The Great Wilderness* are diverse in terms of their cultures, languages, traditions, perspectives, and ways of life. While several of these communities currently offer rich tourism experiences, there is untapped potential to further develop authentic, Indigenous tourism experiences in the region by those communities that wish to pursue these opportunities. There are several regional districts, one region (the Stikine Region), one regional municipality and 33 incorporated municipalities in Northern BC. While several of these communities currently offer rich tourism experiences, there is still untapped potential to further develop authentic Indigenous tourism opportunities, led by the communities that choose to pursue them.

Travel Corridors and Thematic Routes

For decades, touring has been a main draw for many visitors to Northern BC. Outstanding thematic touring and circle routes are enriched by diverse landscapes, natural features and wildlife, heritage and cultural experiences, and eco-tourism experiences. While this unique selling proposition is anchored by the iconic Alaska Highway, Highway 37, and Highway 16, there are many additional routes with considerable thematic potential that can help further develop *The Great Wilderness* as a touring destination. The primary touring routes are Highway 16 (the Yellowhead Highway), Highway 37 (the Stewart-Cassiar Highway), and Highway 97 (the Alaska Highway). Currently, initiatives are underway to create new circle tours and travel routes in the region, as well as enhance existing ones, including the Nisga'a Lisims Government's Circle Tour Project and the Great Northern Circle Route Signage Master Plan project. Another important initiative is the ongoing collaborative efforts to rebrand Highway 16.

Parks and Protected Areas

There is a wealth of parks and protected areas across *The Great Wilderness*, which offer motivation for travellers to visit the region. These parks draw visitors for a range of outdoor activities, both guided and self-guided. There are several parks and protected areas that have gained international attention. Some Indigenous Nations have their own recognized stewardship projects and protected areas, such as the informal but known protected and culturally sensitive areas in the Wet'suwet'en Territory and Gitksan Territory. In addition to these, there are processes in place to establish Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPACs). IPACs are areas where Indigenous governments lead the protection and conservation of ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance, and knowledge systems.

IPACs are being established in three important areas of the Tahltan Territory: Ice Mountain, Klappan Sacred Headwaters, and Sheslay. This initiative falls under the

broader Tahltan Land Stewardship Planning process. The Kaska Dena IPAC, Dene K'éh Kusān, is also being progressed. While other Indigenous communities may not be conducting an IPAC planning process now, they may be interested in doing so in the future. Some Nations have culturally significant or protected areas that are not necessarily recognized or mapped. This highlights the importance of Indigenous engagement to ensure that sensitive cultural or protected areas are respected by visitors, and that related practices and protocols are followed.

HIGH-PROFILE PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS (NOT INCLUDING IPACS)
Khutzymateen Park (managing tourism demand important)
The Great Bear Rainforest ¹
Anhluut'ukwsim Laxmihl Angwinga'asanskwhl Nisga'a Park (Nisga'a Memorial Lava Bed Park)
Kitlope Heritage Conservancy
Liard River Hot Springs Park
North Tweedsmuir Park
Ancient Forest / Chun T'oh Whudujut Park and Protected Areas
Stikine River Parks (Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park & Edziza Park)
Mount Robson Park
Atlin/Áa Tlein Téix'i Park
Tatshenshini-Alsek Park ²
Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark
Muskwa-Kechika Management Area (integrated resource management decision-making with 18 park complexes within)

Heritage

The rich heritage of *The Great Wilderness* is integral to all visitor experiences. Its diverse heritage is reflected in stories about Indigenous cultures and traditions, coastal communities, the gold rush, fishing, hunting, homesteading, fur trading, agriculture, forestry, mining, oil and gas, hydroelectric power generation, four-seasons outdoor adventure, paleontological discoveries, wildlife, landscapes, rivers, trails, mountains, glaciers, plains, road-building, and more.

¹ The largest coastal temperate rainforest in the world

² which is part of the Kluane-Wrangell-St. Elias-Glacier Bay-Tatshenshini-Alsek Park system, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994

Unique Trails

Trails are found throughout *The Great Wilderness* and are recognized as critical infrastructure for both visitors and residents seeking outdoor adventure. Ongoing investment reflects their popularity, with a wide variety of trails available, including traditional Indigenous trails and trading routes, coastal trails, mountain biking parks and trails (some currently under construction), backcountry horse trails, hiking trails, and settler-era historic trails and trade routes.

Outdoor Adventure

The exceptional outdoor recreation and ecotourism opportunities found in the natural landscapes of The Great Wilderness are a foundational strength for tourism in the region. While some areas are shaped by the resource sector, much of the region remains undeveloped and rich in wilderness experiences. As untouched natural areas become increasingly rare worldwide, this reinforces what makes The Great Wilderness so distinctive and special.

Coastal Activities

The coast of northwestern BC is wild and beautiful, offering exceptional settings for a wide range of marine activities, including fishing, boating, paddling (canoe, kayak, SUP), coastal wildlife viewing, guided eco-adventure cruises, large ship cruising and coastal hiking.

Paleontological Adventures

Exploration and adventures built upon rich paleontological resources form a key theme for experience development, particularly in northeastern BC. The emergence of the Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark, including paleontological experiences complemented by a vast trail network and outdoor adventures, is an example of the growing presence and popularity of this type of experience.

Agritourism Experiences

Farm tours, the BC Farmers' Market Trail, Farm to Table experiences, farm stays, Indigenous led farming experiences, and Fall Fairs, are an important part of the visitor experience.

2.2 OUR VALUES

At its core, this strategy is about building strong relationships with Indigenous Peoples, who are the first and ongoing stewards of these lands; with tourism businesses and not-for-profit organizations that work tirelessly to deliver memorable visitor experiences; with regional and community destination management partners; and with all levels of government that play a key role in enabling tourism to support the well-being of communities across BC.

This strategy is focused on the following values:

- Respectful sharing and celebration of Indigenous cultures, traditions, and languages, which must be Indigenous-led
- The maintenance and restoration of the ecological integrity of natural systems
- The profitability of tourism businesses and the prosperity of the region
- Enriching the experience of visitors who value and Great Northern Circle Route (GNCR) respect what the destination offers
- The well-being of communities and the support of residents.

Acknowledging and respecting community aspirations and residents' attitudes toward visitors in host communities is essential, as destination development can be challenging without local support.

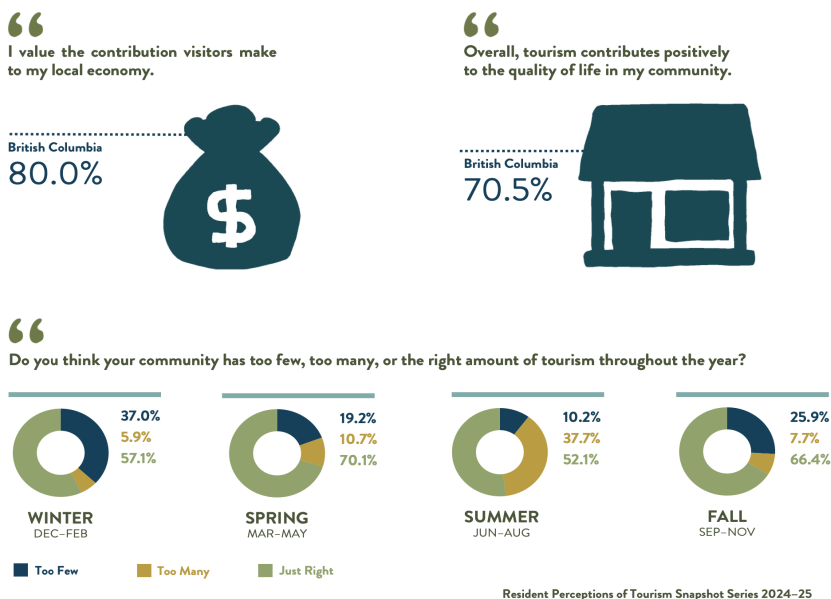


FIGURE X A 2024
SNAPSHOT OF BC
RESIDENTS' PUBLIC
PERCEPTIONS OF BC'S
TOURISM INDUSTRY.
Download the full [2024
Destination BC
Residents Perceptions
of Tourism Report.](#)

2.2 OUR VISION FOR THE GREAT WILDERNESS

A vision provides a clear, compelling, and bold picture of the preferred future for the destination and takes into consideration how values and visitor experience are connected to the brand positioning.

*“A great wilderness that surrounds adventurers in **immense** scale and the transformative power of nature, this vast land provides four-season adventures that inspire discovery. This is where northern lights glow, and wild, diverse landscapes, coastlines, rivers, and lakes provide a wilderness experience unlike any other.*

Visitors journey far and wide to explore thriving Indigenous cultures, appreciate the significance of what it means to be on the land, share food, and discover deep and revealing histories. Travellers will be moved by stories, both ancient and contemporary, which are shared and celebrated by Indigenous Peoples and residents.

Communities filled with enthusiastic and welcoming hosts across Northern BC will be enriched by the benefits that a flourishing visitor economy brings.”

2.3 VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND THE IDEAL TRAVELLER

The Invest in Iconics Strategy brings together branding and destination development by integrating marketing efforts with the creation of immersive, memorable experiences in destination. This integration will be achieved through shining a light on the attributes that make the places and communities within *The Great Wilderness* distinctive and compelling to those visitors we want to motivate to come here.

The audience we are targeting for *The Great Wilderness* is the “Outdoor Explorer,” as guided by [Destination Canada's Traveller Segmentation Program](#), a segment that is also defined as a “highly engaged guest,” meaning travellers in this segment not only travel often and spend more, but more importantly, also align with our brand values.

The ideal travellers for *The Great Wilderness* are:

OUTDOOR EXPLORER

"We are daring explorers who crave the thrill of unknown landscapes and overcoming challenges. Adventure travel allows us to grow, learn new skills, and establish personal traditions. We often seek adrenaline through physical activities, engaging with locals, and ensuring a positive impact. We embrace both short getaways and longer holidays, relishing in nature-related experiences"

- open to travelling to destinations with limited tourist infrastructure
- like to explore places that are off the beaten path and less explored
- want to learn about the history of the destinations I visit
- willing to put in the effort while travelling in order to see lesser-known places

For more details refer to [**the full traveler segment profile for the Outdoor Explorer.**](#)





NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA
Photo: Northern BC Tourism/Andrew Strain

3. DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT FOR *THE GREAT WILDERNESS*

3.1 ICONICS DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: AREAS OF FOCUS

To achieve the objectives, The Great Wilderness Destination Development Strategy considers the many aspects of the visitor's travel experience. These are broadly defined as experiences, touchpoints, and encounters in the Iconics Destination Development Framework, which was co-created by Destination BC, ITBC, and the RDMOs to guide the implementation of the Invest in Iconics Strategy through destination development. This supports a consistent, coherent, and cohesive approach to destination development for the Iconics by integrating experience development efforts with those already underway at the regional level.

EXPERIENCES

Experiences include all the ways visitors can enjoy, explore, engage with, learn about, and develop a deeper appreciation of the area they are travelling through. The tangible aspects of experiences include products and activities such as guided tours, wildlife viewing, fishing, and events, which alone or in combination can motivate travel and provide value for visitors. Equally important are the intangible aspects, including the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that are awakened through the experience, and the lasting impact it creates through memories, impressions, and personal transformation.

TOUCHPOINTS

Touchpoints are the places of arrival, welcome, orientation, and decision making experienced by visitors when in the destination. They raise awareness of what a place has to offer while providing reassurance to visitors that they are on the right track and know where to explore next. They can provide a physical manifestation of the brand on the ground, and include the physical elements of signage, interpretation (storytelling), and other navigational tools. Touchpoints also include key sites and facilities such as museums, interpretive centres, and Visitor Centres, which provide learning opportunities as well as points of orientation to the story of place and the people who live there.

ENCOUNTERS

Encounters are the ways in which the stories of places are authentically and respectfully shared with visitors, with approval from the story owners. This can happen through the interactions visitors have with local people, the tourism experiences they participate in, or the interpretative materials they encounter. The stories we choose to tell can change the way visitors experience a place and enable them to reach a deeper understanding of the significance of the places they visit.



FORT NELSON
Photo: Ryan Dickie



4. NAVIGATING *THE GREAT WILDERNESS*

4.1 DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT ROUTES, CORRIDORS AND THEMATIC REGIONS

Access to Northern BC is primarily by highway and air, and in the Prince Rupert area, by ferry or cruise ship. The main passenger airports are located in Prince George, Fort St. John, Dawson Creek (currently serving primarily charter and private flights at this time), Fort Nelson, Smithers, Terrace, and Prince Rupert. Smaller airports provide service for chartered flights and private aircraft. Limited passenger bus and VIA Rail service is available to and from some communities. The main highways are Highway 16 (the Yellowhead Highway, east–west), Highway 37 (the Stewart–Cassiar Highway, north–south), and Highway 97 (the Alaska Highway, also named the John Hart Highway between Prince George and Dawson Creek).

The Northern BC Thematic Framework (NBCTF) identifies the themes and topics that will guide and align the future development of meaningful heritage interpretation and visitor experiences across Northern BC. The Framework reflects the voices, contributions and experiences of Northern BC residents, who shared their perspectives through workshops, interviews, research, and conversations. The NBCTF organizes Northern BC geographically into regions, sub-regions, and corridors and assigns themes, sub-themes, and interpretive topics to each area. It also identifies the iconic features associated with each region. These geographic and thematic distinctions are reflected in the Great Northern Circle Route (GNCR) Signage Master Plan, which outlines a signage system to be implemented along the GNCR and on connecting routes off the main highways. The system is designed to guide visitors, share destination information, and communicate the themes, sub-themes, and stories of the regions throughout Northern BC.

The Thematic Regions, sub regions, and associated corridors in the NBCTF include:

NORTHERN ROCKIES THEMATIC REGION

<i>Sub Regions</i>	Muskwa-Kechika, Fort Nelson
<i>Associated Corridor</i>	Highway 97 (Alaska Highway)
<i>Main Airport</i>	Northern Rockies Regional Airport, Fort Nelson
<i>Iconic Features</i>	Alaska Highway, Muskwa-Kechika Management Area, Liard Hot Springs, Muncho Provincial Park

PEACE THEMATIC REGION

<i>Sub Regions</i>	Tumbler Ridge, Peace River
<i>Associated Corridor</i>	Highway 97 (Alaska Highway and John Hart Highway)
<i>Main Airport</i>	Fort St. John, Dawson Creek (limited service)
<i>Iconic Features</i>	Alaska Highway, Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark

PRINCE GEORGE-CENTRE THEMATIC REGION

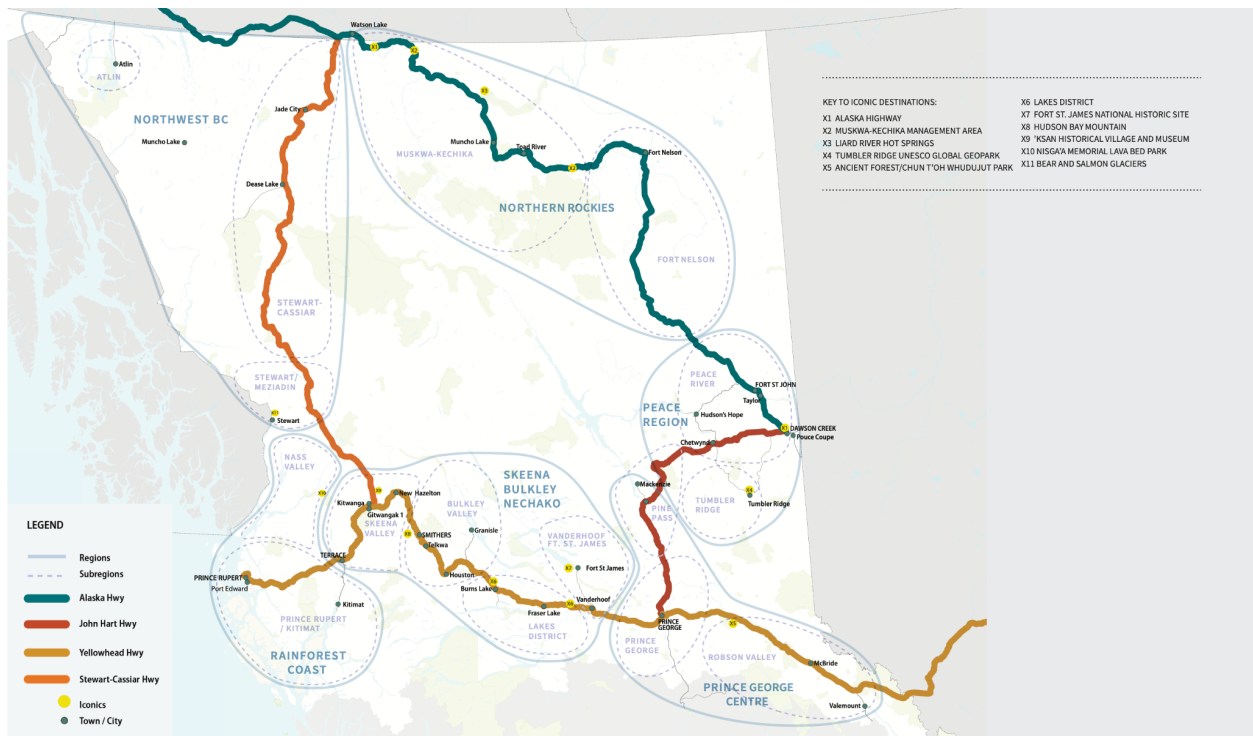
<i>Sub Regions</i>	Prince George, Robson Valley, Pine Pass
<i>Associated Corridor</i>	Highway 97 (John Hart Highway) and Highway 16 (Yellowhead Highway)
<i>Main Airport</i>	Prince George International Airport
<i>Iconic Features</i>	Ancient Forest – Chun T’oh Whudujut Provincial Park – Mount Robson Provincial Park

SKEENA-BULKLEY-NECHAKO THEMATIC REGION

<i>Sub Regions</i>	Skeena Valley, Bulkley Valley, Vanderhoof - Fort St. James, Lakes District
<i>Associated Corridor</i>	Highway 16 (Yellowhead Highway)
<i>Main Airport</i>	Smithers Regional Airport, Northwest Terrace Regional Airport
<i>Iconic Features</i>	Lakes District, St. James National Historic Site, Hudson Bay Mountain, K’san Historical Village and Museum

NORTHWEST BC THEMATIC REGION

Sub Regions	Stewart-Meziadin, Stewart-Cassiar, Atlin
Associated Corridor	Highway 37 (Stewart-Cassiar Highway)
Main Airport	Smithers Regional Airport, Northwest Terrace Regional Airport, and Whitehorse International Airport (for access to Atlin). <i>Note: Both Whitehorse and Northwest Terrace airports are located outside the boundaries of this region.</i>
Iconic Features	Stewart-Hyder Glaciers, Atlin Tatshenshini, Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park, Mount Edziza Park



4.2 KEY CHALLENGES

The Great Wilderness faces a number of challenges. Participants in the planning process identified the following considerations as the most critical challenges for destination development.

CATEGORY	KEY CHALLENGES
ENVIRONMENTAL INTEGRITY AND SUSTAINABILITY	• There is opportunity for all levels of government to better understand local circumstances and strengthen coordination across ministries and departments involved in land and resource planning and management. • There are opportunities to learn from traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices, and to strengthen coordination and networking around resource, environmental, and land management. • Issues related to emergencies and climate change are increasingly impacting the ability for tourism operators and communities to consistently offer experiences. • Wildlife and fisheries, along with their associated habitats, are threatened in many areas. The health and integrity of these habitats are critical, as they form the foundation for visitor experiences and <i>The Great Wilderness</i> brand.
INFRASTRUCTURE, ACCESS, AND AMENITIES	• Touring and the ability to move comfortably and safely through the region are critical to tourism and destination development in Northern BC. Continued investment in road and highway upgrades and maintenance is needed to support this. • Transportation to and within the region is impacted by the distance to key markets and the associated convenience and cost of travel. Coupled with this, air service has declined since the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacts the ease and cost for visitors from certain markets to travel to the North. • Many parts of the region have unreliable or limited broadband service. This issue needs more attention, and solutions should be identified to improve connectivity as part of the region's essential infrastructure.

CATEGORY	KEY CHALLENGES
INDIGENOUS COLLABORATION AND REPRESENTATION	• There is a need for enhanced collaboration between Indigenous communities to coordinate experiences and learn from one another. • Awareness about First Nations cultures, values, history, Title and rights is variable or low amongst residents and visitors. There is a need for cultural training and education, a visitor code of conduct and capacity-building for visitors and non-Indigenous communities. • Indigenous tourism development must be led by Indigenous communities. • Schedules for key projects need to ensure that: ◦ Indigenous interests are considered before a project begins ◦ Timelines for discussions are workable for all parties, allowing time for meaningful input.
ICONIC FEATURES AND EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT	• Awareness of the region's assets, travel options, and available experiences is low in many markets, which limits its potential to grow as a destination. • There are very few market and export-ready experiences. • Related to the above point, most experiences are self-guided, and there are few businesses offering equipment rentals. • Tourism services are limited in some areas, and hours of operation for many businesses are inconsistent. • In many areas, the quality and quantity of signage used to welcome, orient, and inform visitors is limited, which can affect the overall visitor experience. • While some communities are working together to coordinate experiences, there is an opportunity to take a more strategic approach to experience development and delivery across the region. • Many areas lack diversity in overnight accommodations that appeal to certain visitor markets. This gap presents a potential investment opportunity.

4.3 OUR OBJECTIVES

At the core of destination development work for *The Great Wilderness* is sustainable tourism growth, anchored by the following strategic objectives that guide and enable progress.

- *The Great Wilderness* offers a strong collection of unique market-and export-ready experiences that inspire travel and exceed visitor expectations, while maintaining the environmental and cultural integrity of the destination.
- Varied touring routes offer journeys linked by experiences and supported by well-designed, branded touchpoints that provide a sense of welcome, reassurance and learning opportunities for visitors.
- *The Great Wilderness* offers outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation experiences on both land and water. These experiences are supported by touring circuits, trail networks for mountain biking and hiking, guided experiences, boat launch-points, well-designed touchpoints, services, and a range of camping and lodging facilities.
- First Nations engaged in destination development offer series and clusters of authentic Indigenous experiences that are linked through circuits and routes, and supported by touchpoints and stories that provide learning opportunities for visitors.
- Story themes that reflect *The Great Wilderness* brand are integral to experiences and attractions offered throughout the region.
- The six thematic regions identified in the Northern BC Thematic Framework offer their own unique experiences that reflect the natural and cultural attributes of their region.
- The resources that tourism depends on, including natural landscapes, land, wildlife and fisheries, habitat, water resources, and air quality, are well managed over the long term.
- Indigenous communities recognize the opportunities that tourism presents and are working to develop tourism in ways that reflect their interests, values, cultures, and economic goals.

4.4 OPPORTUNITIES

In alignment with the objectives identified for destination development, five overarching experience development opportunities have been identified for *The Great Wilderness*:

1. **The need for more market-ready and export-ready experiences**
2. **Opportunities to elevate touring experiences**
3. **Opportunities to elevate outdoor recreation experiences**
4. **Opportunities to elevate Indigenous stories, experiences, and touchpoints**
5. **Opportunities to share stories and enhance experiences – connecting visitors to routes and places.**

1. MARKET- READY AND EXPORT-READY EXPERIENCES

While there are several guided experiences and inclusive adventure resorts, the majority of experiences in *The Great Wilderness* are self-guided. There is an opportunity to increase market-ready and export-ready experiences, including guided experiences, throughout the area. This would present opportunities to broaden the market base by making experiences more accessible to different types of visitors. There is also a need for greater diversity in accommodation to meet the needs of visitors seeking an adventure experience with a higher level of comfort than camping provides.

2. TOURING EXPERIENCES

Touring is a main draw for visitors to *The Great Wilderness*. In addition to well-established touring routes, there are opportunities to further develop and elevate these routes as touring experiences, and to supplement them with enhanced shorter circle tours, which can help keep visitors in local areas longer.

BC Ferries Route 10 provides access to *The Great Wilderness* via Prince Rupert and connects to the Terrace area. The main touring routes are Highway 16 (the Yellowhead Highway), Highway 37 (the Stewart–Cassiar Highway), and Highway 97 (the Alaska Highway).

Currently, there are initiatives underway to create new circle tours and travel routes, or enhance existing ones, including the Nisga'a Lisims Government's Circle Tour Project and the Great Northern Circle Route Signage Master Plan. Another important initiative is the ongoing collaborative effort to rebrand Highway 16.

In addition, the Great Northern Circle Route Signage Master Plan provides detailed guidance for the development of new, coordinated signage in strategic locations throughout the route network.

GREAT NORTHERN CIRCLE ROUTE: 14 DAYS



MONKMAN PROVINCIAL PARK, TUMBLER RIDGE
Photo: Mike Seehagel

3. OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPERIENCES

The Great Wilderness offers outstanding outdoor recreation experiences on both land and water, supported by circuits and networks of mountain biking, hiking, and multi-use trails. There are also opportunities to further develop snowmobiling, guided experiences, launch points, well-designed touchpoints, visitor services, and a range of camping and lodging facilities.

4. INDIGENOUS STORIES, EXPERIENCES AND TOUCHPOINTS

While communities currently offer rich tourism experiences, there is untapped potential to further develop authentic, Indigenous tourism experiences in *The Great Wilderness* by communities that wish to pursue them. This potential is complemented by growing demand across many markets for meaningful and authentic Indigenous tourism experiences. There is also a need to better integrate Indigenous culture, stories, history, languages, and values in established tourism experiences across *The Great Wilderness*. Several high-profile heritage attractions focus on colonial versions of history and do not reflect Indigenous stories, history, and values. While this represents a gap to be addressed, it's important to note that permission from First Nations is needed before including these stories in experiences and related touchpoints.

During the engagement sessions, participants also emphasized the importance of ensuring that the development of Indigenous experiences and the telling of Indigenous stories are Indigenous-led. It is critical that relationship-building with Indigenous communities occurs on an ongoing basis, and that planning allows time and space for meaningful, proactive collaboration that takes place in advance. While there are strong opportunities for Indigenous communities interested in destination development to collaborate in offering coordinated circuits and clusters of authentic experiences, there is also a need for partnerships and joint ventures with nearby towns and districts, along with support for established Indigenous solopreneurs. It will be important to move beyond the showcasing of Indigenous cultures to building platforms for genuine collaboration with Indigenous partners taking control, and having agency.

5. CONNECTING VISITORS TO ROUTES AND PLACES THROUGH STORY

The Northern BC Thematic Framework is based on extensive engagement with many groups and individuals in Northern BC, including Indigenous communities. The rich stories and themes that emerged during engagement, along with the individual stories shared in the workshops that informed this strategy, are integral to *The Great Wilderness* brand and to the experiences and attractions offered throughout the region. A key consideration will be exploring opportunities to connect these themes and stories to the development of itineraries.



5. THE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Every story shared, every experience offered, and every touchpoint introduced across *The Great Wilderness* contributes to both localized expression of place and to the cohesiveness of the larger destination experience. The ability to meaningfully **share the stories** (Section 5.2) of *The Great Wilderness* and to deepen the traveller's sense of wonder and connection to the brand, is essential. These kinds of investments bring the journey to life and add meaning to the overall travel experience.

When assessing destination development priorities, it is important to consider the anticipated contribution an investment will make to both the local community and the wider region. Another key consideration is the contribution an investment will make towards creating a compelling depth, density, and **clustering of experiences** (Section 5.3) for travellers across *The Great Wilderness*. A central element of previous destination development plans, further emphasized in the Northern BC Thematic Framework, was the identification of iconic features around which experiences could be clustered, and destination identity and branding could be developed. This is particularly important for *The Great Wilderness*, given that the area is in the earlier stages of tourism development and there is very low awareness of the region in many markets.

Another consideration when assessing destination development priorities is cohesively connecting the touring and road trip experience by providing **reassurance to travellers** (Section 5.4) through investments in touchpoints.

5.2 STORY AS A MECHANISM FOR CONNECTING VISITORS TO PLACE

The brand promise and brand pillars identified in *The Great Wilderness* manifest on the ground through the experiences the destination has to offer. Compelling experiences draw inspiration not only from the essence and multifaceted nature of this place, but also from the stories of the local destination that communities want to share with visitors.

The stories and themes that emerged from the engagement sessions related to the development of the Northern BC Thematic Framework were supplemented with individual stories gathered from recent conversations and workshops for The Great Wilderness Destination Development Strategy.

The focus was on “root stories”, defined as those unique, foundational narratives of people and place that are important to communities, distinctive, and add a layer of depth to the experience. These themes and stories were then organized through the lens of *The Great Wilderness* brand pillars to identify those that would most effectively amplify the brand positioning.



THE GREAT WILDERNESS			
Brand Positioning	A great wilderness that surrounds adventurers in vast scale and the transformative power of nature.		
Brand Pillars	EPIC SCALE	BEYOND LIMITS	STRENGTH & WISDOM
	Towering lands: This land of giants features endless skies, open roads, soaring volcanoes, deep valleys, and ancient glaciers. Though you might feel solitude here, you are not alone — you are connected to nature and those who came before you.	Separated from the Ordinary: Amidst the vastness of nature and under a sky filled with endless stars, we distance ourselves from everyday concerns, inspiring a shift in perspective and transformation.	Stewarded Wilderness: Though these lands are vast, they are anything but untouched: the First Nations of the North have lived in harmony with these lands since time immemorial.
	Animal Kingdom: A place where wildlife outnumbers people, and colossal creatures like elk, moose and bison roam free all around you.	Beyond the Bounds: The North is for trail blazers, boundary pushers, and opportunity seekers. For all who come, the reward is a sense of freedom, expansion, and the kinds of stories others can only imagine.	Northern Spirit: Strong, quirky characters with generous hearts and unapologetic charm. A journey here is shaped by legends which connects us to the heart of the North.
Thematic Region	NORTHERN ROCKIES		
Main Theme	Defined by big, intact mountainous landscapes, abundant wildlife and a warm welcome.		
Story Themes and Experiences	Elevate the Alaska Highway Journey as an iconic experience	Outdoor adventure in wild and special landscapes, mountains, rivers, and lakes	Northern lights, Indigenous culture and celebrations
Thematic Region	PEACE		
Main Theme	The landscape of the Peace Region, including its waterways, geography and geology, has made it a major economic engine for BC, providing wood, food, coal, oil, gas and hydroelectric energy.		
Story Themes and Experiences	Alaska Highway Journey, including Mile 'O' in Dawson Creek.	Outdoor adventure in wild and special landscapes, mountains, rivers, and lakes	Paleontological discoveries Tumbler Ridge — one of five UNESCO Global Geoparks in Canada. Fossils & fossil fuels. Human industry.

Brand Pillars	EPIC SCALE	BEYOND LIMITS	STRENGTH & WISDOM
	Towering Lands	Separated from the Ordinary	Stewarded Wilderness
	Animal Kingdom	Beyond the Bounds	Northern Spirit
Thematic Region	PRINCE GEORGE-CENTRE		
Main Theme	Prince George Centre is the confluence of many key elements of Northern BC: rivers, lakes, rail, economic activity, abundant recreation, and diverse people.		
Story Themes and Experiences	Chun T'oh Whudujut/ Ancient Forest Provincial Park — part of the only inland temperate rainforest in the world Mount Robson - one of seven parks that form the Canadian Rocky Mountains World Heritage Site	Outdoor adventure featuring special landscapes, mountains, rivers, and lakes Winter adventures (Pine Pass and Mount Robson)	The mighty Fraser River - an important resource for Indigenous Peoples, local agriculture, and recreation
Thematic Region	SKEENA-BULKLEY-NECHAKO		
Main Theme	The area is defined by its numerous connecting rivers and lakes: they are historic travel routes, incredible food sources for thousands of years, and boast friendly small communities to discover along their riversides and shores.		
Story Themes and Experiences	Abundance of connecting rivers and lakes	Wealth of outdoor adventure activities — renowned steelhead fishing, fishing lodges, downhill and heliskiing, hiking, mountain biking, and more	The Skeena River — heart of the region serving as a First Nations travel route historically and an incredible source of food

Brand Pillars	EPIC SCALE	BEYOND LIMITS	STRENGTH & WISDOM
	<i>Towering Lands</i>	<i>Separated from the Ordinary</i>	<i>Stewarded Wilderness</i>
	<i>Animal Kingdom</i>	<i>Beyond the Bounds</i>	<i>Northern Spirit</i>
Thematic Region	NORTHWEST BC		
Main Theme	<i>Northwest BC is sparsely populated and has incredible natural attributes: towering Coast Mountains, ancient glaciers, raw wilderness, diverse wildlife, protected landscapes, and mineral riches.</i>		
Story Themes and Experiences	<i>Unique and raw landscapes featuring ancient glaciers, rich minerals, and salmon-filled rivers</i> <i>This is home to abundant wildlife and sparse human populations</i>	<i>This region offers touring, fishing, bear viewing, river rafting, heli-skiing, whitewater rafting, and other backcountry experiences for the truly adventurous visitor</i>	<i>The original Peoples and authentic northern spirit shaped this land. Resilient and unwavering. Characters of strength with strength of character. A land of legends, earthly and supernatural, sharing a timeless wisdom that honours the past and shapes us today. A tapestry of tales that enrich your journey and connect us to the living heart of the North.</i>

5.3 EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT FOCUS

THEMATIC REGION	EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT FOCUS
NORTHERN ROCKIES	Enable more visitors to experience the iconic natural attractions of this region — Liard River Hot Springs, Muncho Lake Provincial Park, and the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area — by offering additional guided adventure experiences . A balanced approach to encouraging more use of these areas needs to be employed, given some areas that are more environmentally fragile. Ensure there is a visitor management plan in place and provide additional visitor amenities.
PEACE	Elevate the Alaska Highway journey as an iconic experience, complemented by shorter circle tours . Increase the breadth and depth of experiences in and around Tumbler Ridge . Expand the selection of visitor accommodation in key areas, focusing on glamping, yurts, small cabins, sky-viewing pods, and/or, where appropriate, teepees and pit houses and address the challenges around the availability of land for new accommodations. Profile successful Indigenous experiences to serve as motivation for other Indigenous communities who would like to offer tourism experiences. Develop and offer additional market- ready and export-ready experiences and coordinate these experiences with areas and communities in the Northern Rockies Thematic Region.
PRINCE GEORGE-CENTRE	Continue to develop experiences in the Ancient Forest/Chun T'oh Whudujut Provincial Park , led by the Lheidli T'enneh . Continue to develop adventure tourism using a balanced approach that respects residents' desire to mitigate overcrowding and environmental damage.
SKEENA-BULKLEY-NECHAKO	Develop the capacity to support interested Indigenous communities to further develop their visitor experiences and businesses in an economically viable manner. Collaborate to offer visitor experiences that capitalize on the depth of attractions and experiences available in this region. Expand the selection of visitor accommodation in key areas, focusing on glamping, yurts, small cabins, sky-viewing pods, and/or, where appropriate, teepees and pit houses.
NORTHWEST BC	Enhance the main touring routes — Stewart-Meziadin and Stewart Cassiar — by coordinating and profiling the unique, niche activities and attractions this region offers in concert with key partners and organizations and, for the Stewart-Cassiar Highway, the Talthan Central Government. Focus on combining several experiences to attract visitors and keep them in these remote destinations longer.

5.4 PROVIDING REASSURANCE: ENHANCING TOUCHPOINTS

Tangible connections to place can be offered through physical touchpoints like signage that provides comfort and assurance that the traveller is in the right place, as well as through a consistent and frequent brand presence. *The Great Wilderness* brand presence can occur in many forms throughout the corridor such as on signage at Visitor Centres, static signs at interpretive kiosks, as well as on digital applications. In addition to the NBCTA's Great Northern Circle Route Signage Masterplan, Destination BC has developed an [Iconics Signage Opportunity Strategy](#) to provide signage guidelines, specifications, and recommendations to support partners in bringing to life the Iconic brands on the ground through physical signage. It also identifies opportunities to align with existing signage systems, as well as possibilities for co-branding with partner organizations.

Interpretive signage, public art, exhibits in local museums, cultural centres, and Visitor Centres provide both a tangible connection to place, as well as the intangible connection that arises when stories of place are shared through encounters. The identification of touchpoint development opportunities emerged through the engagement sessions. The touchpoint development opportunities are detailed by thematic region in Section 6, [Development Priorities](#).



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Photo: Northern BC Tourism/Andrew Strain



6. DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

6.1 DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES BY THEMATIC REGION

When well-considered and strategic, destination development priorities can support a region's or community's aspirations for its future, while also providing ways to fulfill the brand promise made to visitors.

Having identified overarching development opportunities for The Great Wilderness in Section 4, we will now examine each of the thematic regions in more detail to report on the emerging priorities. While these priorities were identified by partners during the engagement process, they do not bind any particular partner to their delivery.

NORTHERN ROCKIES

Priorities for experience development and enhancement

- ★ **Alaska Highway Infrastructure Improvements:** Continue upgrading rest stops as part of the Gotta Go Project.
- ★ **Alaska Highway Experience Enhancement Strategy:** Invite tourism operators, businesses, and organizations to participate in upcoming experience development initiatives for NEBC. Focus on making the journey more interactive, offering experiences that connect to others "down the road" and providing a critical mass of visitor experiences. Through this process, explore how to better showcase the other iconic features of the region — Liard River Hot Springs and the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area — in addition to other businesses and attractions.
- ★ **Alaska Highway Regional Interpretive and Adventure Centre Feasibility Study:** Conduct a feasibility study for the potential development of a Regional Alaska Highway Interpretive and Adventure Centre. Potential concepts and topics to consider include a multi-regional focus showcasing the "Best of the Northern Rockies and the Peace," such as Indigenous cultures,

heritage and history, attractions, experiences, culinary offerings, interactive displays and activities, adventure booking services, mobile exhibits, retail and food and beverage, leasing opportunities for businesses (to generate additional revenue), joint funding management (between relevant governments and First Nations), and the possibility of partnering with Muskwa-Kechika or progressing this as a collaborative venture with all Treaty 8 First Nations' Territories. A first step before committing to a feasibility study would be to conduct a scan of similar centers, including, for example, the Squamish Adventure Centre.

★ **Muncho Lake Provincial Park Experiences:** Support the completion of the Management Plan and Front Country Management Plan for Muncho Lake and explore the potential to attract operators to offer more guided experiences in the park, including water recreation, biking, and hiking.

★ **Liard River Hot Springs Improvements:** Support the Fort Nelson First Nation in their ongoing efforts to expand Indigenous-focused experiences in the area. Possible enhancements include the development of Indigenous cultural experiences, fly-in packages featuring Fort Nelson, northern lights, and hot springs, wellness-related experiences (such as massage, spa, and yoga), ecological interpretive tours, and the addition of heated change rooms and a welcome area.

Touchpoint investment priorities

★ **Muskwa-Kechika Management Area and Muncho Lake:** In conjunction with signage enhancements outlined in the GNCR Signage Master Plan, determine how improvements can be made to information kiosks at various locations along the highway, signage at Muncho Lake, safety signage warning travellers about distances to the next fuel station, and interpretive signage that includes orientation maps.

★ **Liard River Hot Springs Provincial Park:** In concert with signage enhancements outlined in the GNCR Signage Master Plan and in collaboration with BC Parks, determine if improvements can be made to signage that encourages more people to leave the highway. This could include gateway signs, updating outdated signs with new content and branding, adding Indigenous content and language to touchpoints, and incorporating Indigenous place names at trailheads.

PEACE

Priorities for experience development and enhancement

★ **Alaska Highway Rest Stop Improvements:** Continue to complete upgrades to rest stops as per the Gotta Go Project.

★ **Alaska Highway Experience Development Strategy:** Invite tourism operators, businesses, and organizations to participate in upcoming experience development initiatives for Northeast BC. Focus on making the journey more interactive and offering experiences that connect to other experiences “down the road”.

★ **Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark Experience and Accommodation Development:** Conduct a feasibility study to assess potential private sector investment in diverse and unique accommodations (e.g., yurts, glamping, adventure lodges, sky-viewing pods), combined with

retreat activities and outdoor adventure. Collaborate with existing operators and businesses to develop guided experiences featuring recreation, adventure, and paleontological resources (both summer and winter), as well as experience packages (including guided tours, accommodation, and food and beverage). Identify actions to further develop experiences, branding, and awareness related to the UNESCO Global Geopark designation, the Dinosaur Museum, notable awards (such as "the best place to snowmobile in Western Canada"), key iconic events (like the annual Emperor's Challenge half-marathon), and the Game of Thrones.

- ★ **Indigenous Experiences:** Continue building on the successful work related to the Tse'k'wa National Historic Site, including its interpretive components, trails, and programming. Highlight the success of Tse'k'wa to position it as a catalyst for the development of complementary Indigenous experiences in the Peace Region. Support the efforts of BC Hydro and local First Nations to establish an Indigenous-led cultural center at the third dam on the Peace River. Additionally, support First Nations in the Peace Region who are developing new experiences that celebrate their culture and heritage, such as Dunne-za Lodge, Urban Reserve, 548 Trading Company, Kema Experiences, and local rodeos and cultural camps.

- ★ **Short Circle (Driving) Tours Enhancement/Development:** Enhance existing, short circle tours in the Peace Region to help keep visitors in the region longer. Characteristics of the existing tour include a 445-kilometer journey that takes approximately five days to complete; the towns of: Tumbler Ridge, Pouce Coupe, Dawson Creek, Taylor, Fort St. John, Hudson's Hope, and Chetwynd, and local culture and geological wonders. The towns and operators associated with this route could work collectively to further enhance and profile experiences along this route, using [Oregon's Infinity Loop](#) and other established circle tours as examples.

Touchpoint investment priorities

- ★ **Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark):** Partner with communities to develop an interpretive signage plan at Ministry of Transportation and Transit rest stops and in communities to highlight the area and key attractions such as the Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark.
- ★ **Short Circle Tours:** If the development or enhancement of short circle tours is implemented, provide effective touchpoints and signage to complement the tour experience. The GNCR Signage Master Plan can serve as a resource for this.

PRINCE GEORGE-CENTRE

Priorities for experience development and enhancement

- ★ **Powder King Mountain Resort:** Support Powder King infrastructure, experience enhancements, and the ability to implement the Master Development Agreement with the Province of BC and future updates to the Resort Master Plan.
- ★ **Ancient Forest/Chun T'oh Whudujut Provincial Park:** Ongoing Facility and Experience Development: Continue supporting efforts to further develop infrastructure and experiences in the park. The goal of these improvements is to help visitors learn about this special place through the lens of its original people. The Lheidli T'enneh are leading initiatives related to

touchpoints, including wayfinding and interpretive signage, as well as substantial park enhancements such as a new interpretive center, cultural area, widened boardwalks, and cultural tours.

- ★ Differentiate the **Mount Robson** and **McBride** areas from destinations such as Jasper. Mount Robson and the McBride area offer exceptional settings for a variety of popular adventure activities. Infrastructure to support activities such as mountain biking, hiking, and horseback riding is continuously being expanded and improved. Take a balanced approach to further develop infrastructure for mountain biking, hiking, winter activities, and other outdoor adventures associated with Mount Robson Provincial Park and the McBride area. These areas currently offer, and have the potential to grow, mountain biking and other year-round outdoor adventure experiences. Local participants indicated that while they support sharing these activities and infrastructure with visitors, they want to be cautious not to over-promote or over-develop the area. Planning and investment must ensure that proper visitor management systems—such as parking, reservation systems, washrooms, signage, fences, etc.—are implemented alongside experience development. Additionally, develop a corridor strategy to mitigate the impact of the Jasper wildfire on the Robson Valley area and Highway 16.

- ★ **Mountain Bike Trail Network Development:** Support Prince George Cycling Club, Association of Caledonia TrailBuilders, and Caledonia Nordic Ski Clubs investment in infrastructure, experience enhancements, and accessibility on their mountain bike specific trail networks.
- ★ Work with the city of Prince George and other partners to develop a trail network access management strategy that provides consistent access for both visitors and residents, while enhancing the competitive advantage for events.

Touchpoint investment priorities

- ★ **Caledonia Nordic Ski Club (CNSC):** Work with the facility to develop year-round experiences and packages that include cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, and mountain biking. Improve year-round transit access from Prince George, with the ability to transport outdoor recreation equipment. Continue to support CNSC's Sport Tourism initiatives.
- ★ **Ancient Forest/Chun T'oh Whudujut Provincial Park:** Continue efforts to develop new and enhance existing signage. The Great Northern Circle Route Signage Master Plan provides guidance for the development of signage for Highway 16 and the areas around Chun T'oh Whudujut Provincial Park.
- ★ **Ancient Forest/Chun T'oh Whudujut Provincial Park:** Enhance interpretive signage about the Ancient Forest and the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation within the City of Prince George and community of McBride to build awareness about the attraction to generate interest and visitation.

SKEENA-BULKLEY-NECHAKO

Priorities for experience development and enhancement

- ★ **Indigenous-focused business** capacity building to support sustainable business and experience development: There is good potential to further develop and elevate tourism experiences centered around attributes such as 'Ksan Historical Village and Museum; 'Ksan Performing Arts; Gitsegukla Totem Poles; Kispiox Totem Poles; Seven Sisters Mountains; Gitanyow Reconciliation Trail Project; traditional fishing practices and food preparation; and wildlife viewing. Indigenous communities in this area have expressed interest in learning how to better start-up and manage small businesses focusing on tourism experiences.

Indigenous-Focused Business Capacity Building to Support Sustainable Business and Experience Development: There is significant potential to further develop and enhance tourism experiences centered around key attributes such as the 'Ksan Historical Village and Museum, 'Ksan Performing Arts, Gitsegukla Totem Poles, Kispiox Totem Poles, Seven Sisters Mountains, Gitanyow Reconciliation Trail Project, traditional fishing practices and food preparation, and wildlife viewing. Indigenous communities in this area have expressed interest in learning how to better start and manage small businesses that focus on tourism experiences.

- ★ **'Ksan Historical Village and Museum Master Plan:** This iconic feature is included in tour operator bus itineraries and is also popular with self-guided touring visitors. Given the existing awareness of this attraction and its potential to offer expanded, authentic Indigenous experiences, the proposal is to develop a master plan that addresses several opportunities and gaps. These include building on the existing village to create a fully immersive and functional village and historical site, reopening the Carving School and providing additional workshop spaces for other artists, such as jewelers. The plan also suggests offering Indigenous-focused food and showcasing traditional food preparation methods, expanding the retail shop to feature and sell artwork from local Indigenous artists, and exploring opportunities to develop additional forms of accommodation, such as glamping, cabins, and other unique stays, alongside the existing campsite.
- ★ Collaborate with the Gitxsan First Nation to develop a sustainable funding model that supports both capital improvements and ongoing operations. Additionally, create a staff capacity-building program aimed at attracting, developing, and retaining skilled labor.
- ★ Led by the First Nation, support the development of an itinerary framework that positions 'Ksan as the anchor experience, while incorporating other holistic Indigenous experiences across Kispiox, surrounding communities, and locations along the river.

- ★ **Hagwilget Bridge** area improvements: Further develop and promote the pathway from 'Ksan to the bridge, which features views of the canyon and surrounding area.

- ★ **Gitanyow Reconciliation Trail Project:** Support the Gitanyow Reconciliation Trail Project, which envisions a year-round hiking, riding, and sledding route that follows and restores the historical grease trail—a 180 km trail and cabin system between Kitwancool and Stewart. The plan includes community-built cabins along the trail, with cache pits, smokehouses, garden spaces, outdoor kitchen areas, and signage.

★ **Lakes District Accommodation Diversification:** Conduct a market study to determine if there is demand for alternative forms of accommodation—such as glamping, yurts, and cabins—in key locations. If the market study indicates a positive outlook, proceed with a feasibility study and promote the opportunity to potential investors.

★ **Fort St. James National Historic Site Accommodation Diversification:** Conduct a market study to assess the potential demand for alternative forms of accommodation, such as glamping, yurts, and cabins. If the market study yields positive results, proceed with a feasibility study and promote the opportunity to suitable investors.

★ **Fort St. James National Historic Site Indigenous History:** Collaborate with the Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation to incorporate Indigenous history into the story of the Fort St. James National Historic Site; and offer Indigenous-led experiences at the Historic Site and in the surrounding area.

★ **Hudson Bay Mountain Coordinated Experiences:** Collaborate with regional businesses, towns, and attractions to develop linked experiences featuring hotels in Terrace and Smithers, the Ale Trail and brewpubs, and mountain biking—such as the “Bikes and Brews” trail. Additionally, create connecting trails to link nearby towns and accommodations for hikers. Indigenous-led experiences, including 'Ksan Historical Village and Museum, Widzin Kwah Diyik Be Yikh (Widzin Kwah Canyon House Museum), Gitsegukla Totem Poles, and Kispiox Totem Poles, should also be highlighted.

★ **Integrity of the Nechako Watershed:** The Nechako Watershed offers outstanding lakes and natural environments that support current and future visitor experiences. It is very important to ensure that this watershed is well managed. Support the work of the Nechako Watershed Roundtable (NWR) to protect and improve the health of the Nechako Watershed for future generations. Support the actionable recommendations of the Lakes Monitoring Working Group in implementing the Large Lakes Monitoring Strategy, which aims to advance the health and resilience of lake ecosystems in the Nechako, Stuart, and Takla Watersheds by collecting critical data on lakes through water quality monitoring. Participate in opportunities for collaboration and input, such as the NWR's Annual Meeting and Spring Technical Meeting, and report findings to Destination Development Advisory Committees and NBCTA stakeholders. Seek opportunities to partner with the Roundtable to cross-promote and support sustainability and environmental projects that may interest visitors to the region.

Touchpoint investment priorities

★ Proposed '**Ksan area touchpoint improvements** include improved signage along the route to Old Hazelton and new signage for 'Ksan Campground.

★ **Hagwilget Bridge** – Provide interpretive signage with information about the natural features and the history of the bridge.

★ **Totem Drive, Kispiox Village:** Collaborate with the Kispiox Band to develop signage and digital touchpoints, as well as relevant content for the visitor centre and related materials. Additionally, create a double-sided map that includes all Indigenous communities, along with maps and community guides.

NORTHWEST BC

Priorities for experience development and enhancement

- ★ **Stewart Area Experience Improvements:** Combine multiple experiences to attract visitors and encourage longer stays in the area, including heli-hiking tours, mountain bike trails, bear viewing tours, glacier viewing tours, and winter snowmobile tours.
- ★ **Atlin Area Collaborative Tourism Planning:** Support the collaborative efforts of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and Atlin residents to develop tourism experiences, focusing on several key initiatives. This includes working with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and the Atlin community to recognize the Wóoshtin wudidaa Atlin Taku Land Use Plan, which was negotiated under a shared decision-making framework that respects land use and wildlife management between the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and the BC government. Additionally, support the revitalization of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation's Bear Viewing Tourism Venture and the development of a business plan for a Wilderness Eco-Tourism initiative on 183 acres of the Warm Springs property. The effort also includes the development of storytelling that highlights various aspects of the area's Indigenous and gold rush history, such as Goat Island and the Tarhen boat. Finally, explore the potential development of a Community Tourism Plan that incorporates the Taku River Tlingit First Nation's traditional law.
- ★ **Stewart-Cassiar Touring Route Experience Enhancements:** This is an established touring route that has appealed primarily to the more adventurous traveller, given its remoteness and the limited services and amenities available along the route. As part of the Great Northern Circle Route, there are opportunities to enhance this touring route by elevating and coordinating unique, niche experiences and attractions, such as river based activities, rafting and canoe tours; Indigenous cultural tours (showing guests cultural practices and guided hiking); Mount Edziza Provincial Park (multi-day hikes for the experienced adventurer); whitewater kayaking (independent adventure traveller); Jade City and related stories (overlap Tahltan territories); Boya Lake Provincial Park (fishing, lake recreation, Northern lights viewing); Spatsizi Plateau Provincial Park (multi-day hikes for the experienced adventurer); Gold rush history and heli skiing.
- ★ Note that planning related to these priorities must be conducted in collaboration with the Tahltan Central Government for policy and communication, as well as with the Tahltan and Iskut Bands for feedback and engagement. The Tahltan Central Government is also working closely with Tourism Yukon, Northwest Territories Tourism, and Destination Canada on the development of a Northern Indigenous Lodge Network ([Northern Indigenous Lodge Network](#)).

Touchpoint investment priorities

- ★ **Stewart-Meziadin Drive:** Signage for this route needs improvement, including the addition of new touchpoints (directional and interpretive) at Meziadin Junction and Kitwanga Junction. Additionally, signage along Highway 37A should be enhanced and maintained, while new signs in Hyder, Alaska, should direct visitors to Salmon Glacier. Interpretive signage should also be added at the trailhead for Salmon Glacier.
- ★ **Stewart-Cassiar Touring Route:** Implement signage recommendations included in the Great Northern Circle Route Signage Master Plan.

- ★ **Northwest Region** overall: Address several touchpoint deficiencies related to the interpretive signage at Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Wilderness Park. Additionally, upgrade the "Welcome to BC" signs at the Yukon-BC border, as these signs are frequently used by visitors for photo opportunities and shared on social media.

6.2 DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES FOR *THE GREAT WILDERNESS* OVERALL

The following projects are relevant to experience development in *The Great Wilderness* as a whole. They are considered priorities, as they would help amplify *The Great Wilderness* brand and would contribute to destination-wide experience development. While these priorities were identified by partners during the engagement process, they do not bind any particular partner to their delivery.

Increase Market- Ready and Export-Ready Experiences	★ Gain an accurate understanding of the number and type of market-ready and export-ready experiences in <i>The Great Wilderness</i> through the preparation and annual updating of an inventory. ★ Identify where there are key opportunities and associated programs to help existing experiences evolve to better meet market demand. ★ Create more guided experiences. ★ Connect existing products to offer more extensive and enriching experiences. ★ Create more market-ready and export-ready experiences.
Diversify Accommodation	★ Prepare a regional market demand study to support potential private and/or public sector investment in alternative, low-capital accommodation options, such as glamping units, yurts, sky-watching pods, and small cabins. These types of accommodations align well with many of the experiences offered in <i>The Great Wilderness</i>.
Facilitate Touring	★ Continue to implement touchpoint and signage priorities that are aligned with the Great Northern Circle Route Signage Masterplan and Iconics Signage Opportunity Strategy. ★ Identify itineraries and interpretive signage for communities and side routes. ★ Work collaboratively with interested communities, tourism attractions, and businesses along routes to profile stories and tourism offerings that will enrich the overall experience for travellers. ★ Develop an initiative - "<i>The End of the Road is Just the Beginning</i>" to address the opportunities around "end of route" communities.

Expand Experiences, Services and Amenities in BC Parks	★ Work with BC Parks to explore opportunities to extend the operating seasons for specific provincial parks by extending seasons for dry camping. ★ Form a committee to collaborate with BC Parks on opportunities to extend the season through dry camping. This will involve developing and recommending a policy to the government for changes to the fee structure. ★ Add new amenities and services, including food and beverage, retail, guided experiences, accessible trails, story trails, and more.
Develop Trail Circuits	★ Develop a regional or sub regional strategy that connects and highlights the high-quality destination trails and experiences, allowing visitors to access and explore <i>The Great Wilderness</i>. ★ Utilize planning to capitalize on the integration of multiple sports, cultural heritage, and servicing infrastructure.
Facilitate Hiking and Mountain-biking	★ Create a plan for mountain bike "destination" circuits that highlight the unique trails and riding experiences at each stop (municipality/park). Consider the necessary infrastructure, such as trails, camping/lodging, service facilities, and touchpoints/signage. ★ Coordinate circuits and routes with other key attractions, brew pubs (Ale Trail), and experiences. ★ Develop a strategy that connects and showcases the high-quality hiking trails and experiences that allow visitors to explore <i>The Great Wilderness</i>. Examples of established and evolving trail networks include Hudson Bay Mountain, Tumbler Ridge, Pine Pass, Mount Robson, various Indigenous communities, and many others.
Support Authentic, Indigenous-led Experience Development	★ Develop a strategy that connects and highlights existing and emerging Indigenous experiences as clusters and routes. Many of these experiences have strong potential to attract visitors individually. By combining them into routes, circuits, and clusters, there is an opportunity to offer more enriching experiences and encourage visitors to stay longer. ★ With permission and in collaboration with First Nations, integrate Indigenous culture, stories, history, languages, and values into selected tourism experiences and attractions to accurately reflect Indigenous histories and cultures. ★ Address the need to provide Indigenous-focused business capacity building to support sustainable business and experience development.
Support Agritourism	★ Support the development of agritourism strategies and initiatives that incorporate farm tours, the BC Farmers' Market Trail, farm-to-table experiences, farm stays, Indigenous-led farming and food security experiences, and fall fairs.



7. GEARING UP FOR DELIVERY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

A key challenge for *The Great Wilderness* Destination Development Strategy is finding the right mechanisms for supporting its delivery and implementation. Key themes relating to delivery were identified in the [Iconics Destination Development Framework](#) and remain relevant for the *The Great Wilderness* Destination Development Strategy. These included the importance of adopting an integrated approach, building on existing partnerships while creating new alliances, and finding ways to secure the necessary investment to support and advance the vision, objectives, and experience development priorities outlined in *The Great Wilderness* Destination Development Strategy.

7.2 INTEGRATION

The Invest in Iconics Strategy marks a key shift towards a new approach to marketing BC. This reimagined approach emphasizes a dual focus which integrates place branding and destination development and endeavours to harmonize marketing efforts with the creation of immersive, memorable experiences for visitors.

There are four levels of integration to consider:

1. INTEGRATION between place branding and experience development with the focus of integration being 'story'.

Integration between destination branding and experience development – with storytelling as the central thread.

This level focuses on aligning storytelling across branding and experience design to spotlight what makes the places and communities within *The Great Wilderness*

distinctive. Through this alignment, the region becomes a globally compelling destination grounded in authentic, local narratives.

2. INTEGRATION between the destination development plans being taken forward and the opportunities presented by the place brand to elevate experience development opportunities identified therein.

In terms of destination development planning, this integrated approach enhances the impact of community-led plans and elevates experience development across *The Great Wilderness*.

3. INTEGRATION across Destination BC where the focus of integration is at Program Level.

Destination BC has already begun aligning its programs and resources with the *Invest in Iconics* Strategy. In fall 2023, a new pilot grant program was launched to help visitor centres enhance the overall visitor experience—both within the centres and across their communities—by focusing on key experiences, encounters, and touchpoints.

Other initiatives that present opportunities for further alignment with the Iconics vision include upcoming experience development programs, the Community Tourism Planning program, and the Co-op Marketing program. Additionally, the *Provincial Signage Opportunity Strategy* has identified recommendations for a refreshed, cohesive roadside signage system that will help bring the Iconic brands to life across BC.

4. INTEGRATION across and between the core partners in supporting the implementation of the Northern BC Destination Development and Iconics Strategy within their respective mandates.

- The **Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport (TACS)** is focused on creating healthy, inclusive, and resilient communities in BC through tourism-related programs, policies, and investments that support the sustainable growth of the tourism sector. To support the creation of Iconic, inspirational routes and places that will strengthen travel appeal in all regions of BC, TACS is committed to raising awareness of the needs of the visitor

economy across government, as well as working to ensure policy enables destination development throughout BC. TACS will mobilize support for provincial destination development priorities that emerge through the Iconics Destination Development Strategies through cross-government engagement and collaboration.

- **Indigenous Tourism BC (ITBC)** prioritizes First Nations decision-making and Indigenous inclusion within the Invest in Iconics strategy. Firstly, it ensures that there is no prejudice against First Nations interests, safeguarding Title and Rights, and respecting self-government agreements. The team is dedicated to providing support through community engagement with Indigenous groups and organizations. Additionally, it focuses on growing human and economic capacity. The Indigenous Tourism Training Initiative, comprising three programs, offers training and educational opportunities for ITBC stakeholders. Furthermore, ITBC extends further assistance through the Capacity Building and Resiliency Program, including mentorship and funding Opportunities.
- **Northern BC Tourism Association (NBCTA)** works to develop, support, and sustain the tourism sector in Northern BC. NBCTA will continue to champion the strategy and work collaboratively with the provincial government, Indigenous Tourism BC, Destination BC, and a range of regional and local partners to carefully and respectfully steward the development of tourism in ways that will realize benefits for communities throughout the region.

7.3 PARTNERSHIP

As the strategy moves into the delivery and implementation phase, it will be essential to maintain a regional perspective, build new relationships, involve the right partners with the necessary expertise or authority at the right time, and remain flexible throughout the process. Key partnerships will include:

- Working closer with Parks Canada and BC Parks to progress experience development priorities, visitor management initiatives, signage, and other touchpoint enhancements
- Working with the Ministry of Transportation and Transit (TT) to progress the provincial signage opportunity strategy which aims to bring the Iconic brands to life in destination through a refreshed and cohesive branded roadside signage system, as well as enhancements at key rest stops.

- Working with the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation (JEDI), Regional Economic Operations to champion innovation, and support economic development and tourism investment attraction within the context of Northern BC.
- Leveraging Destination BC's partnership with the British Columbia Economic Development Association (BCEDA) to reach and engage more of the economic development community and increase awareness of experience development investment opportunities
- Leveraging Destination BC's partnership with the Local Government Leadership Academy to continue raising awareness about the value of tourism and the opportunities for municipalities to participate in tourism and align their investments with the larger provincial efforts.

It is envisaged that each core partner will be responsible for nurturing certain partnerships at the right level at the right time. . For example, NBCTA may engage at the district level with BC Parks, the Ministry of Transportation and Transit (TT), JEDI, and municipalities to advance locally significant aspects of experience development and touchpoint enhancement priorities outlined in this Strategy.

- Local tourism partners such as CDMO's, municipal and regional governments, tourism businesses, business associations, Visitor Centres and not-for-profit groups, have a critical role to play in the success of the tourism economy provincially. These partners can use this strategy to inform their own planning and create alignment with the broader vision. They can also use this Strategy to elevate and gather support for those local projects positioned as key priorities in the provincial context in addition to providing benefits locally and supporting local aspirations.

NBCTA and ITBC serve as key points of contact for local tourism partners. They can provide guidance on aligning with strategic priorities for the Iconics, support connections with potential project partners, and offer access to best practices and case studies from BC and beyond. In addition, they can assist in developing project plans, identifying funding opportunities, and delivering a wide range of programs and resources available to local tourism organizations and businesses.

7.4 INVESTMENT

The Destination Development program in BC has seen a lot of success supporting new public investments, however there is a tremendous opportunity in BC to uncover the potential of tourism as a priority sector for attracting private investment. Through partnerships, Destination BC will aim to support both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities within *The Great Wilderness* in building awareness around tourism investment readiness. This includes helping communities understand the steps needed to enhance their appeal to tourism investors and promoting investment opportunities at regional, provincial, national, and international levels. Continued collaboration with community groups will also be essential to identify suitable funding sources for specific projects and to explore opportunities such as angel investors and non-collateral-based start-up funds.



8. APPENDICES

LIST OF ACRONYMS

- DBC Destination BC
- ITBC Indigenous Tourism BC
- RDMO Regional Destination Management Organization
- CDMO City Destination Management Organization
- CASL Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation
- FOIPPA Freedom of Information Policy (gov't)
- IPACs Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas
- SUP Stand up Paddleboard
- NWR Nechako Watershed Roundtable
- BCEDA British Columbia Economic Development Association
- SUP Stand Up Paddle Board
- NBCTF Northern BC Thematic Framework
- GNCR Great Northern Circle Route
- CNSC Caledonia Nordic Ski Club

Regional Tourism Association Acronyms

- VCM Vancouver, Coast & Mountains
- 4TVI Tourism Vancouver Island
- TOTA Thompson Okanagan
- KR/KRT Kootenay Rockies Tourism
- CCC/CCCTA Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism
- NBC /NBCTA Northern British Columbia Tourism

Government of BC Ministry Acronyms

- TACS Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture & Sport
- TT Ministry of Transportation and Transit
- MIRR Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
- ENV Ministry of the Environment

- JEDI Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation
- BCEDA British Columbia Economic Development Association



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