

Exploring emerging economic opportunities in the Columbia Headwaters Region of British Columbia

A RESEARCH BRIEF WITH KEY TAKEAWAYS
AND HIGHLIGHTS

The Columbia Headwaters region is found within the globally unique inland temperate rainforest of southeastern British Columbia.

It includes portions of the traditional territories of the Ktunaxa, Okanagan, Secwepemc, and Sinixt First Nations. Local governments include the municipalities of Golden, Nakusp, and Revelstoke and surrounding rural areas.

This region has many advantages including the creativity and leadership of the people who call it home. Communities within the Columbia Headwaters have the potential to lead the way in finding a path forward in creating a balance for future generations of people and wildlife.



Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative



WHO

This briefing is based on a research project conducted between June and November 2019 by Gary Bull, professor and head of the Forest Resources Management Department at the University of British Columbia, and Jeremy Williams of ArborVitae Environmental Services. A research advisory committee made up of diverse regional representatives and provincial and national experts provided direction, advice, and review. Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative commissioned this work.

WHY

The purpose of this research was to explore the opportunities and challenges in providing for a strong local economy while sustaining the region's ecological integrity. The intention was to lay the groundwork for a discussion on the intersection of healthy ecosystems, a healthy economy, and the emerging opportunities that may come with a more sustainable approach to resource use. The region makes an excellent case study because the current economies are dependent on the sustainability of natural resources for extraction, tourism and recreation.

While much is going well for the region, growth and change always creates challenges and the study area has its share of them. Several resource management issues have emerged. On-going timber harvesting and the expansion of adventure tourism, as well as more widespread recreational use, has increased conflict and challenges in sustaining the outstanding natural features of the region.

HOW

With limited reliable and useful socio-economic statistics, this research focused on interviews with 30 key informants from across the region. These people represent diverse backgrounds, sectors and experiences including local decision-makers, foresters, economic development practitioners, business leaders, recreationists, First Nations, and more.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Local communities are concerned about having healthy ecosystems and economies and local municipalities, First Nations, and businesses are committed to improving the quality of life in the region while seeking to maintain its natural attributes.

Indigenous rights and interests include ecological integrity and economic participation.

Many interviewees are concerned that increasing levels of recreational land use will lead to greater conflict between users, a decline in the quality of the outdoor experience, and more negative impacts on the biodiversity and natural heritage features of the area.

The study revealed a need for more reliable, useful data such as regional socio-economic statistics including demographic and employment numbers.

KEY ECONOMIC DRIVERS IN THE COLUMBIA HEADWATERS



HOUSING & ACCOMMODATION



TOURISM & RECREATION



FORESTRY & PAPER MILLS



MINING



HYDROELECTRIC POWER



TRANSPORTATION



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WHAT'S WORKING

Forestry, particularly in Revelstoke and Nakusp, includes locally managed community forests, important for ensuring various sized companies have access to wood for products.

Local municipalities, First Nations, businesses and residents are invested in maintaining a balance for strong natural resources, growing communities and thriving natural places and wildlife.

Adventure tourism and recreation have added diversity to the economic scene and are bringing considerable wealth to some parts of the region. Communities recognize that limits are needed.

There is an emerging start-up culture to encourage entrepreneurs to explore how technology fits into tourism, forestry and recreation as well as to support workforce skill development.

CHALLENGES

Urgently addressing the management and conservation of mountain caribou.

Ensuring Indigenous people and communities are decision-makers in the future of the ecosystem health and economic make up of the region.

Addressing community challenges related to increases in tourism, seasonal residency, and housing prices.

Reconciling the needs of nature with recreation and tourism use.

Developing new policies and approaches to forest management that balance old growth forest and biodiversity conservation with forest harvest.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholder interviews and meetings with the research advisory committee found a widespread recognition that the region needs to be proactive to get ahead of current and anticipated challenges that exist. This can be done by building on the strong foundation of knowledgeable people, a stable and skilled workforce, outstanding natural capital, excellent transportation infrastructure, Indigenous knowledge, people committed to sustainability, and an emerging technology sector that can assist in finding more sustainable and creative solutions.

People in the area recognize that now is an opportune time to begin the necessary discussions and organization of what could be a new model for sustainable planning and development.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RESEARCH

ECONOMIC & LAND-USE PLANNING INITIATIVES

- Collect and compile more reliable and useful data on economic sectors and use of the landscape
- Begin a regionally driven land use planning process
- Include decarbonization imperatives in local and regional planning

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Develop a forum for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to get to know each other and share interests and aspirations
- Increase involvement of First Nations in the local society and economy and explore opportunities to increase their share of economic benefits

RECREATION & TOURISM INITIATIVES

- Establish and support regional backcountry recreation associations and access management
- Assess adventure tourism activities with a sustainability lens

FORESTRY INITIATIVES

- Explore mechanisms to generate local forest-based carbon offsets
- Transition from dependence on old growth harvesting
- Expand community forestry operations
- Increase use of technology to add value to harvested timber, enhance the tourism and recreational experience, and create new bundles of products and services

LEARN MORE

This research brief was prepared based on the findings of an independent report commissioned by Y2Y. Read the report at columbiaheadwaters.org

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