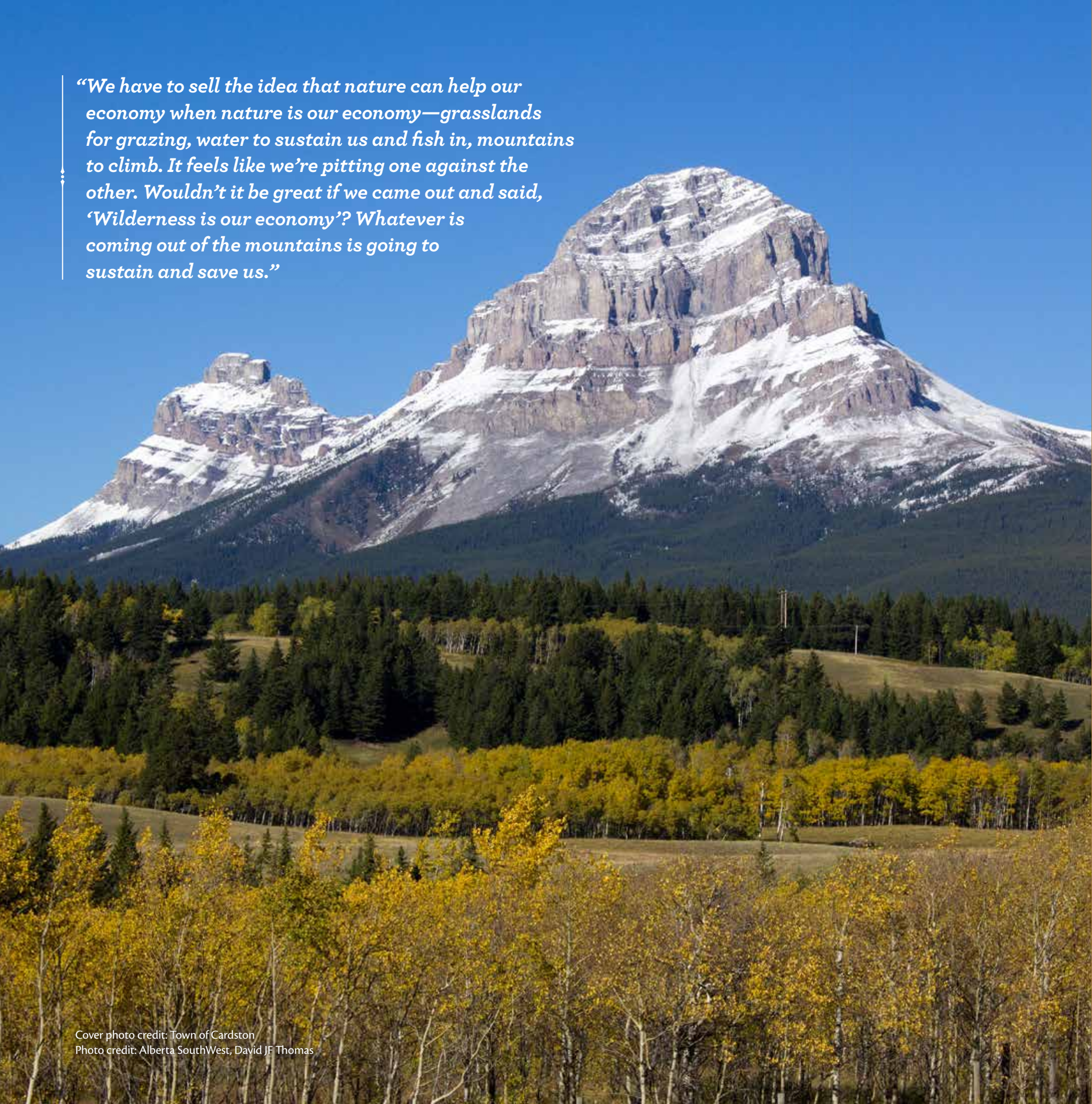A RESOURCE FOR

Nature-Positive Economic Development for Southwest Alberta

"We have to sell the idea that nature can help our economy when nature is our economy—grasslands for grazing, water to sustain us and fish in, mountains to climb. It feels like we're pitting one against the other. Wouldn't it be great if we came out and said, 'Wilderness is our economy'? Whatever is coming out of the mountains is going to sustain and save us."

Cover photo credit: Town of Cardston
Photo credit: Alberta SouthWest, David JF Thomas

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The G7 2030 Nature Compact, of which Canada is a signatory, laid out the global mission to halt and reverse planetary biodiversity loss by 2030.

As part of re-envisioning development for people and the planet, it was agreed that "our world must not only become net zero, but nature-positive."

A nature-positive economy is one where steps are taken to halt the degradation of natural systems while actively working to preserve or restore the ecosystem services that nature provides. The urgent effort to halt degradation is, in part, to ensure communities and their economies can benefit from nature in perpetuity.

To develop in a nature-positive way is to consider the multi-generational impacts and to ensure the health of human and wildlife communities continues to improve.

Our intention

Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) hired *Stormy Lake Consulting* to engage southwest Alberta communities in an exploration of opportunities to grow and diversify local economies while sustaining the region's waters, wilderness, and wildlife. While Y2Y provided the funding for research and engagement, this report has been written by Stormy Lake Consulting based on the unfiltered feedback of the members of the southwest Alberta communities that participated in the process. Any quotes that have been included are verbatim comments directly from participants.

As communities grapple with sustainability, both economic and environmental, in a context shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic crisis, the intention of this project is to examine how environmentally conscious (or, nature-positive) enterprises can support economic development in southwest Alberta and help enhance the opportunities and initiatives that already exist.

Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative | STORMY LAKE CONSULTING

It is not for Stormy Lake Consulting or any other organization to suggest what the communities of southwest Alberta should do to grow and diversify their economies. We have listened to many voices in these communities, studied the history of the region, and considered the generations of lived experience whether they go back hundreds of years or tens of thousands. This qualitative research report intends simply to share these voices. Regardless of their points of view, they have in common a love of the land and a deep sense of place. Most agree on a common future but differ in some ways on how to get there.

Project overview

This project consists of three phases:

PHASE 1
A socio-economic review of the region.

PHASE 2
A summary of forecast plans and activities in the region.

PHASE 3
Qualitative perspective gathering with southwest Alberta communities and Indigenous groups.

This report summarizes the insights and themes from all three phases of the project.

Quotes reflect what was said by the participants of the qualitative research, and sidebars corroborate their opinions with socio-economic data and elements of the forecast plans and activities that have been reviewed.

Qualitative research approach

RECRUITMENT

An extensive list of 107 key regional and industry stakeholders was developed with the support of two Advisory Panels—one with an economic focus and another with a community focus. Individuals involved in the community Advisory panel included representatives from business, social services, community-based organizations, government, recreation, education, tourism, agriculture, hospitality, arts and culture, media, resource extraction, environmental, health care, and relevant consultant groups. Representatives from the Piikani and Kainai Nations and local Métis chapter were also invited and involved. Invitations to participate in the two research initiatives below were sent through email, with follow-up calls scheduled when appropriate. Individuals invited to participate in the interviews were also invited to the workshop.

Members of the general public were also invited to participate, with invitations for the workshop posted on the Town of Pincher Creek's website, in the Pincher Creek Echo, and on community Facebook pages.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

From an extensive list, 60 individuals across all industries were offered the opportunity to participate anonymously in a structured telephone interview with Stormy Lake Consulting or Y2Y staff members. 27 interviews were conducted between October 1, 2021, and February 28, 2022. Open-ended questions were posed to understand the region, opportunities, and barriers to economic prosperity, and to explore how both economic and environmental prosperity might be achieved. All quotes in this report come from these interviews.

PUBLIC WORKSHOP

A three-hour virtual workshop was conducted by Stormy Lake Consulting on Monday, November 8 from 4:00 – 7:00pm. This workshop was free to attend and open to all. It had participants working through facilitated exercises in small break out groups of 6 - 8 people. Break out groups included participants with a diversity of views to encourage robust and multi-perspective discussions. 44 people attended.

UNDER-REPRESENTED VOICES

Although we had some participation from First Nations and Métis people in the workshop and through interviews, overall, these voices were under-represented in the qualitative research. Conversations with the region's First Nations and Métis communities is ongoing, through individual interviews and community dialogue.

Missing entirely from the engagement was a segment of the population that, through the social media platforms used to recruit for the public workshop, expressed outrage with "anti-industry" initiatives. Unfortunately, those who hold these opinions didn't accept our requests for one-on-one interviews to better understand their perspectives.

Y2Y's vision is that the entire Yellowstone to Yukon region will be managed so that this world-renowned mountain ecosystem and its inhabitants (both wild and human) remain healthy and connected for centuries to come. Y2Y also wants to ensure that human communities can continue to live sustainably off the land to ensure that future generations can also enjoy this spectacular region.

PROJECT FUNDING

This project was funded by the Government of Alberta's 'Community Initiatives Program' and by Alberta Ecotrust.

Sector	NUMBER OF PEOPLE ENGAGED		
	Workshop	Interview	Total
Government – municipal	5	3	7
Government – provincial	4	–	4
Business and hospitality	2	2	3
Economic development	1	1	2
Tourism	4	3	6
Resident	7	3	9
Resource extraction	2	2	4
Renewable energy	–	1	1
Construction	–	1	1
Recreation	–	1	1
Environmental	7	1	8
Agriculture, fishing, hunting	3	2	5
Health care	2	1	2
Social services	–	1	1
Community-based organizations & associations	–	1	1
Consulting	2	1	2
Media	1	–	1
Education	1	–	1
Indigenous	3	5	8
Total participants	**44**	**27**	**65**

ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED

- › Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance
- › Blood Tribe Economic Development
- › Buffalo Rock Tipi Camp
- › Cardston County
- › Castle Mountain Resort
- › Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)
- › Community Futures Crowsnest Pass
- › Government of Alberta, Environment & Parks
- › Headwaters Economics
- › Individual residents
- › Mikai'sto Foundation

- › Municipality of Crowsnest Pass
- › Piikani Travel Centre
- › SouthGrow
- › Southern Alberta Renewable Energy Co-op (SABRE)
- › Southwest Alberta Sustainable Communities Initiative (SASCI)
- › Tamarack Outdoors
- › Tourism Industry Association of Alberta
- › Town of Pincher Creek
- › TransAlta
- › Travel Alberta
- › United Riders of Crowsnest
- › Vestas

"This place is spiritual. I walk out my back door and I feel good."

"More visitors will be joining a larger local population and supporting a larger economic base which will all exert continued pressure on primary attractions."

Perfectly off the beaten path
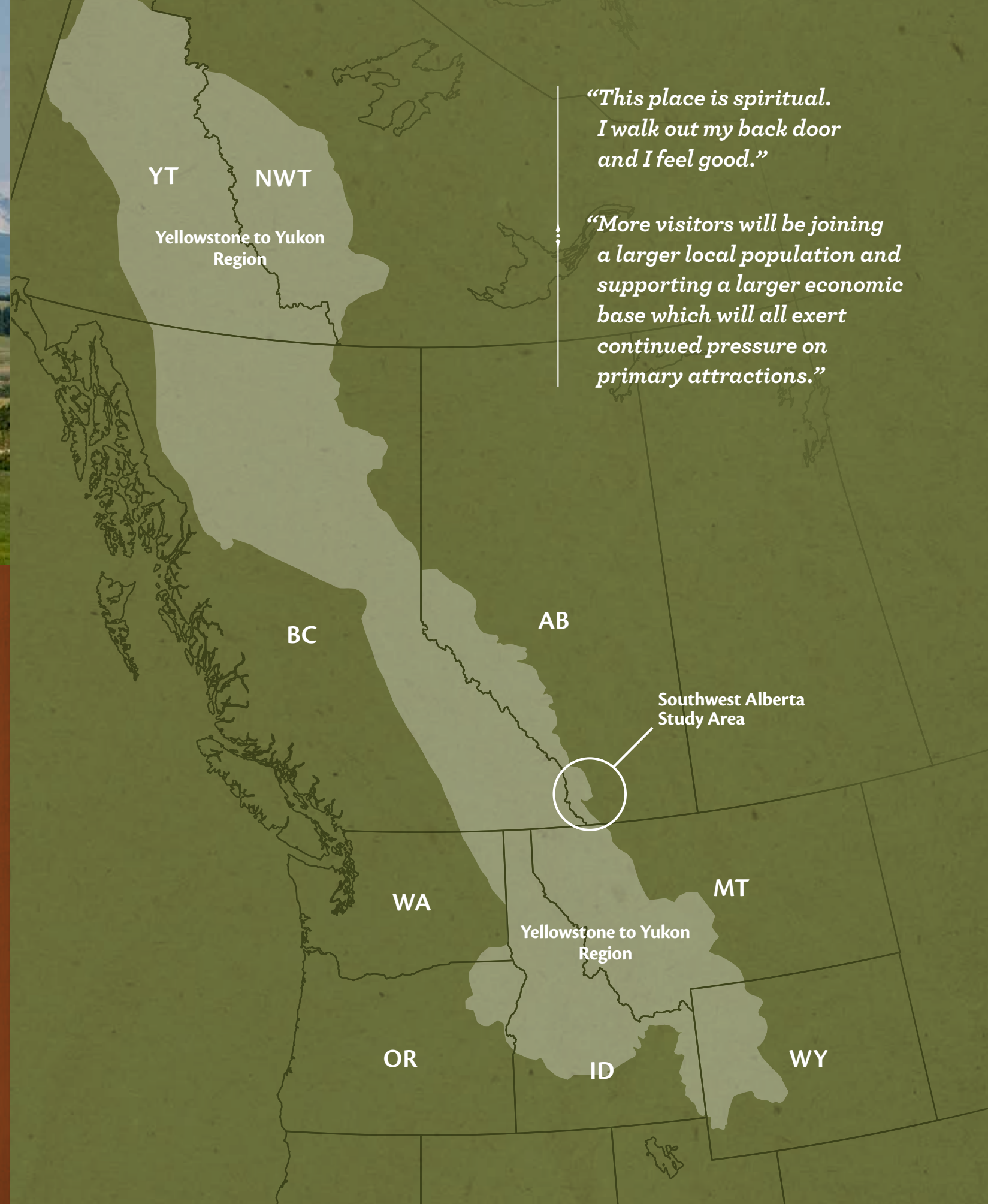
SOUTHWEST ALBERTA IS A SPECIAL PLACE

There is a tremendous pride of place in southwest Alberta. Nestled between the Rocky Mountains and the prairies and blessed by abundant natural resources, majestic wildlife, and caring people, it is a natural corridor for people, energy, goods and services, and wildlife. It is also home to the Alberta section of the Crown of the Continent.

Residents are eloquent about its sheer beauty and peace, and how they are deeply moved and inspired by its landscape. Less recognized than other places in Alberta, this only makes it feel more special. A best kept secret from the rest of the world. Word has, however, gotten out, and this region should expect the number of visitors and transplants to continue to increase.

Pressure on the Crown of the Continent: 2001 – 2021
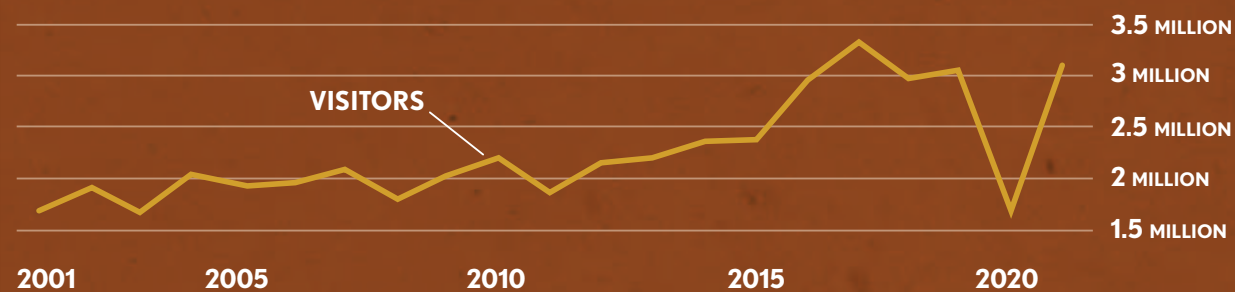
More People, Generations and Management: Selected trends affecting the visitation to the Crown of the Continent; Wayne A. Freimund, Professor, Recreation Resource Management, Utah State University – Moab; Recreation in the Crown of the continent: exploring trends and strategies for the future. March 8-11th, 2022

Yellowstone to Yukon Region

YT

NWT

BC

AB

Southwest Alberta Study Area

WA

Yellowstone to Yukon Region

MT

OR

ID

WY

WITH DEEP ROOTS

A strength of southwest Alberta communities is their deep generational roots on this land and strong traditional values. Indigenous peoples have traded in and occupied these lands for centuries. Residents also cited the Pincher Creek Community Economic Development Strategy which highlighted that more than three-quarters of the settler population in Pincher Creek is at least third generation families. Whether a settler or Indigenous to this place, residents feel a deep sense of connection to the land. Once you have lived in southwest Alberta, you never fully leave.

"Even though I live elsewhere now, whenever I think of the Crowsnest Pass area, I feel such a deep connection."

AND DEEP CONNECTIONS

With many generations living and working the land, southwest Albertans, regardless of heritage, experience a different level of connection to place. They consider the past, the present and the future of the land and the life it supports because generations before them have had, and generations yet to come will have, their own relationships with the land. You cannot talk about the environment without acknowledging the people who are of the land. They are committed to regenerative practices because they understand the importance of protecting the land and all that it supports.

This remarkable, personal connection to place results in a strong sense of community. For example, participants noted that volunteerism is flourishing which demonstrates the community's commitment to looking after itself. Many different challenges have been overcome over the years because the communities are connected and there is a belief that future challenges can be overcome together.

"People have been on ranches for over 100 years and feel... deeply entrenched in this area. This land is part of us."

"I think it's important to understand that the Blackfoot Confederacy has been here for thousands of generations and keep that at the forefront...whatever we can do to prevent any further destruction of these areas, we're gonna try and do that and will continue to look out for future generations. That includes all of Alberta's people in these areas, ranchers, guiding outfits, it's important to maintain the integrity of these locations."

THE BLACKFOOT CONFEDERACY

The Blackfoot Confederacy or Siksikaitsiitapi consists of the following nations and tribes; Amsskapipiikunniwa (Blackfeet Tribe) located in northern Montana, U.S.A., Kainaiwa (Blood Tribe), Siksikawa (Siksika Nation) and Aapatohipiikunniwa (Piikani Nation), located in southern Alberta, Canada.

These nations have, since time immemorial, occupied their collective territory, bounded on the north by the North Saskatchewan River, on the east by the confluence of the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers, on the south by the Yellowstone River, and on the west by the Rocky Mountains.

blackfootconfederacy.ca/about/

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSION

With the strengths of a generations-strong community, some have feelings of exclusion if on the periphery. In interviews, new people noted they don't always feel welcomed, nor are new or contrary perspectives. There appears to be a tension in holding onto the area's rich past in a world that is constantly changing.

Residents reported an 'us' versus 'them' division within the region—between generational residents and new residents, residents and visitors, and opposing industries and interest groups.

Different groups appear to be unwilling to come together, to listen to what the other has to say and to find a way to work together for the benefit of the whole community. Collaboration and compromise were not felt to be present-day values of the area but seen to be crucial to its future economic and environmental sustainability.

"The mining conversations broadened people's understanding of all the factors that go into an economic decision. But people stayed very far on each side of the continuum, we couldn't meet in the middle. There needs to be a lot more listening and understanding."

Conversations about fears, feelings and dreams expose angst and uncertainty. Time is needed to explore these issues, yet decisions and actions need to happen in shorter timeframes. Without tensions being addressed, the result is increased conflict.

While a desire for a balanced approach frequently is expressed, examples of silo-driven thinking abound. Leaders in tourism, economy, oil & gas, and ranching could come together more to talk about the management of the land. And communication could be more open between different user groups, such as forestry and hiking.
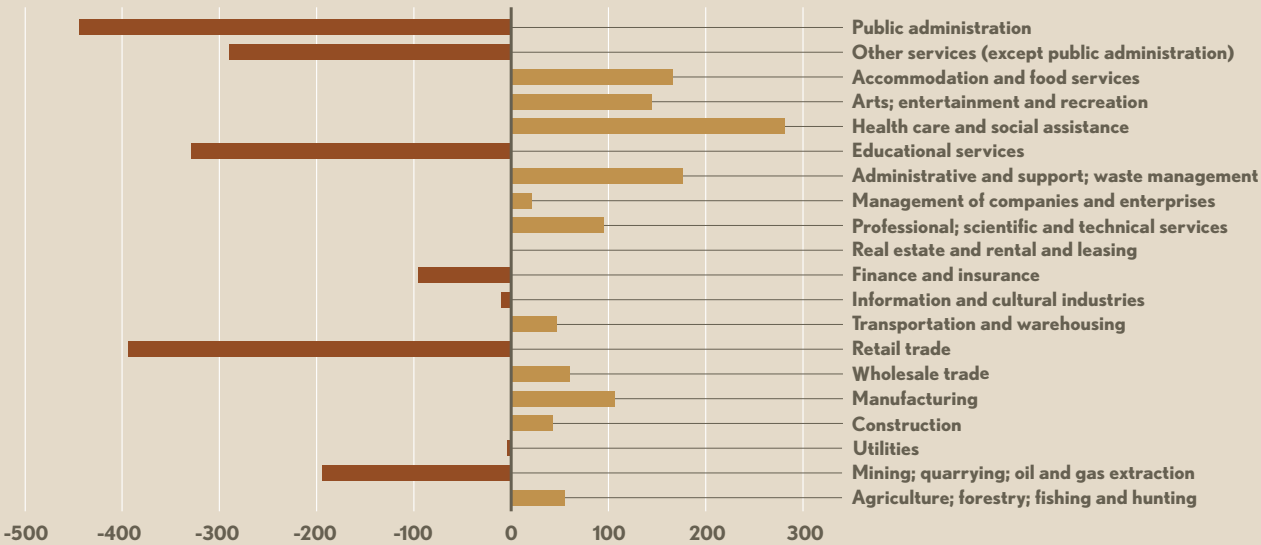
People are concerned for their own economic welfare. To gain traction, proposed solutions for balancing both environment and economy must focus on the interdependence of all the actors.
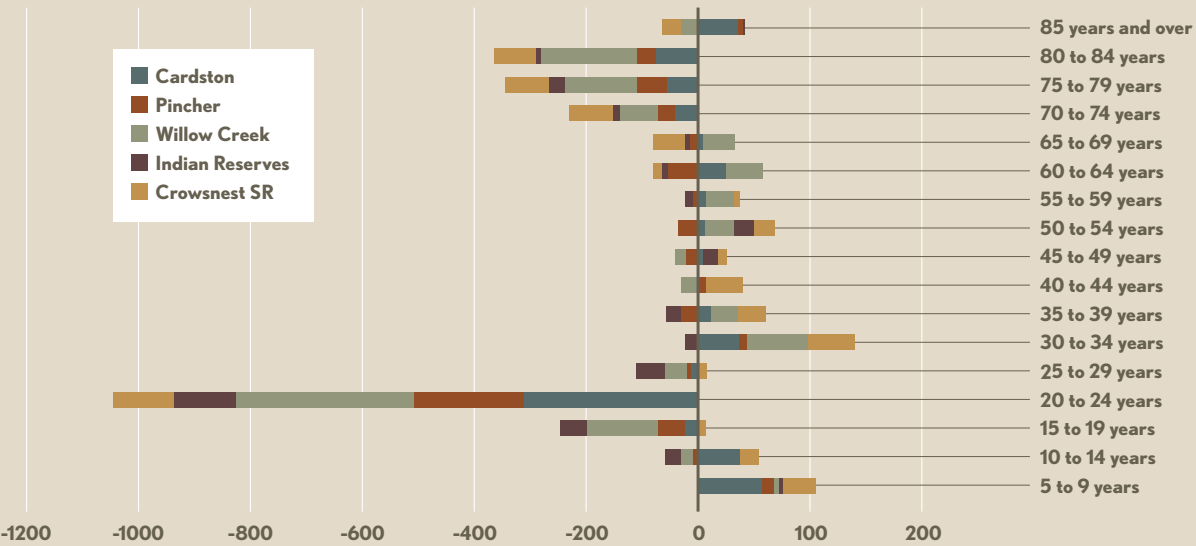
FUELLED BY URGENCY

Not everyone agrees that both economic and environmental prosperity are achievable in southwest Alberta because the traditional view has been one of trade-offs. Either the land is protected or there are high paying jobs in the region, but not both. Economic challenges are significant, and the importance and urgency of finding solutions cannot be overstated. People are desperate to stay in the place where their ancestors have thrived, and yet young people are leaving. There is a strong desire to ensure economic opportunities to which young people can return.

"I see it within the Town of Pincher Creek and MD. There's this 'is it benefiting the town?' We aren't big enough to do something that will only benefit the residents in this area. We need more leadership with a broader perspective."

"Our society is about 'me' and 'me' doesn't work. There are too many me's. There's going to be trade-offs that some won't be happy with. We have to work towards finding a balance to sustain the environment and have an economy that is working. We must have an open mind and compromise for the good of the whole—and we're not currently doing this well."

"The tax split in the Crowsnest Pass is 83% residential and 17% commercial. We've lost the Devon gas plant. We've lost the Blairmore Legion. We've lost a lot of mom-and-pop stores in Blairmore, Bellevue and Coleman. And we need economic development just to sustain the community."

Changes in Employment by Industry in the Study Region, 2011 to 2016

Public administration
Other services (except public administration)
Accommodation and food services
Arts; entertainment and recreation
Health care and social assistance
Educational services
Administrative and support; waste management
Management of companies and enterprises
Professional; scientific and technical services
Real estate and rental and leasing
Finance and insurance
Information and cultural industries
Transportation and warehousing
Retail trade
Wholesale trade
Manufacturing
Construction
Utilities
Mining; quarrying; oil and gas extraction
Agriculture; forestry; fishing and hunting

-500 -400 -300 -200 -100 0 100 200 300

Changes in Age Characteristics of Study Region Residents between 2011 and 2016

Legend:
- Cardston
- Pincher
- Willow Creek
- Indian Reserves
- Crowsnest SR

85 years and over
80 to 84 years
75 to 79 years
70 to 74 years
65 to 69 years
60 to 64 years
55 to 59 years
50 to 54 years
45 to 49 years
40 to 44 years
35 to 39 years
30 to 34 years
25 to 29 years
20 to 24 years
15 to 19 years
10 to 14 years
5 to 9 years

-1200 -1000 -800 -600 -400 -200 0 100 200

Focus on shared goals

YOUTH PROSPERITY

The intent of this initiative is to identify opportunities for economic development which also support a healthy environment—also known as nature-positive. Residents have expressed a desire for their community to thrive; however, most recognize that this means providing meaningful income opportunities and access to nature. The two are interrelated and each are required if progress is to be made.

One of the markers of economic challenge is the number of youth leaving southwest Alberta for better jobs in other regions. Functionally, this creates issues of an aging population and a shrinking community. Emotionally, it is a great loss to the vibrancy of the place and the longevity of the culture. It creates an atmosphere of decay rather than one of possibility. For a more detailed data and analysis see the associated SEIA linked here or available through Y2Y.

Some residents are starting to reframe the nature-positive economy discussion by starting with a different question: How do we support our kids to prosper? From this place of connection and hope, productive conversations can emerge based on what's universally meaningful to members of the community. For example, discussions can be centered in a way that examine how to maintain and enhance this place for future generations given that connecting with nature is such a pervasive value.

"When your children are leaving the community on graduation day and never coming back, you're not setting your community up to thrive and survive over the long period of time."

Changes in Age Characteristics of Study Region Residents between 2006 and 2016

Source: SC 2007a; SC2013a; SC2017
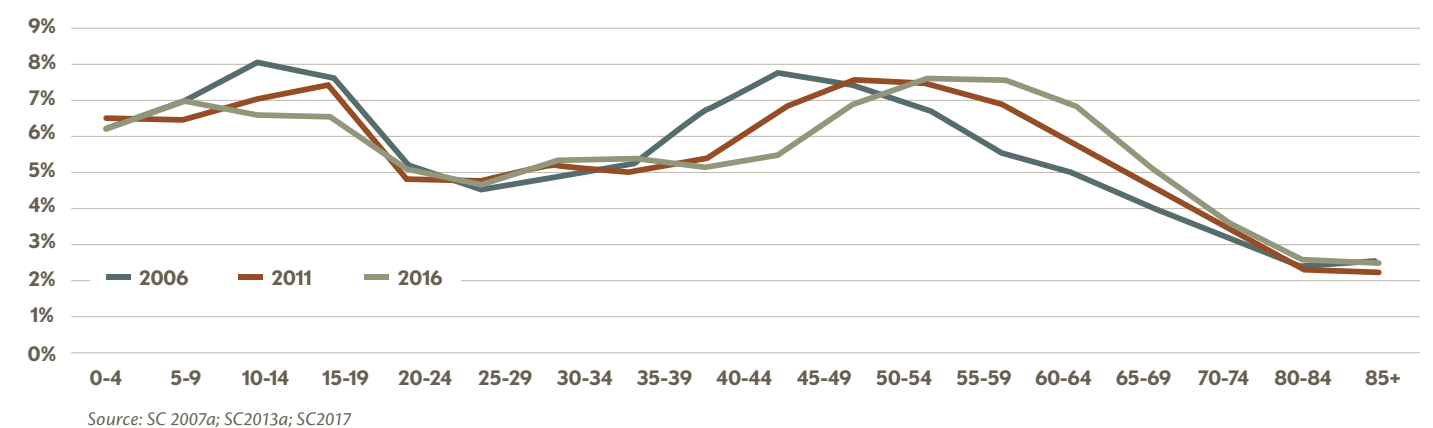
"We, as a group of groups, need representation every time there's a group of anybody pondering our future. We should be there to help change the narrative. Coal extraction is looking to the past, where would our children look to the future?"

PRESERVATION VS. CONSERVATION

The concepts of preservation and conservation each address the protection of land and can be perceived as synonymous. They are different terms, however, and their difference is in the means of protection each describes. When one speaks to land preservation, they are referring to protecting nature from human use, whereas when one speaks to land conservation, they are allowing for human use, but in ways that support nature. Both concepts are relevant when speaking about human development. In the case of nature-positive economic development, the concepts can be jointly utilized to address what kind, and how much human development might, most appropriately, take place and where.

"Landscape is part of our culture. Our main industries— visitor economy, renewable energy, agriculture—are all tied to the landscape and intermingle."

LAND PROTECTION

All who participated in the qualitative research recognized the importance of the environment and valued the majesty of the mountains. This was reflected in the economic development priorities of local government as well, which have been listed in Appendix 3 (Pg 55 – 57). Where perspectives differ is how the lands should be protected, managed, or used as a resource.

We determined that those involved in this work primarily viewed land management options through one of three lenses: the *protected* perspective, the *managed* perspective, and the *resource* perspective.

The **protected** perspective focuses on the benefits of parks development and making the land largely inaccessible to industry. However, most participants in the qualitative research felt this approach was unrealistic and believed it to be the agenda of conservation groups (Y2Y included).

The **managed** perspective is the most widely shared. It is based on the idea that with careful management, the environment can be sufficiently protected. This perspective seeks the most balanced approach to economic and environmental sustainability.

"I think modern day forest management practices in Canada are the best of anywhere in the world. I work down in the U.S. and a lot of different places, and I have firsthand experience of dealing with the regulatory environment. Canada is so strict compared to other jurisdictions. We've been doing water quality studies for over 20 years, and it is showing that when you implement the best forestry management practices, there's no detectable impairment of the water."

The **resource** perspective primarily values the land for the resources it provides and focuses on how value can be extracted. Preservation of land and resources is important to sustaining lives and communities as long as it has only an acceptable limit on the economic value. Current regulations protecting the environment are considered strong and provide the necessary guardrails to protect the land.

There is common ground. Each of these perspectives agrees that the land and landscape is an integral part of the culture.

To advance the discussion and identify solutions that can be built on common ground, there is an opportunity to approach the economy and the environment as equal, interrelated components in decision-making processes. Both the positives and negatives of ecologically and economically sustainable initiatives need to be evaluated in all cases. A focus on only one or the other will be limiting and ineffective in developing comprehensive and lasting land management plans.

This discussion of balance is challenging and important. Southwest Alberta is a wild landscape, but people must be able to prosper if there is to be a sustainable future for the community. Negotiating the balance and finding middle ground must be the foundation of engagement.

"A thriving and vibrant community often means prosperity for people. But as we know from our own histories, it's come at a tremendous cost to the local environment. Creating common ground has to include all of the creatures on it."

"We need to pivot to ecologically benign or beneficial land use. We need to live in communion with the environment."

QUALITY OF LIFE TIED TO OUTDOOR RECREATION AND NATURAL AREAS

In the Community Values Assessment for the MD of Pincher Creek, five of the 15 highest rated 'value statements' pertained to environmental conservation (protecting the natural environment, conserving and protecting water resources, practicing sustainable agriculture, protecting the natural environment, and maintaining natural wildlife and fish populations). Participants in the study also identified the beautiful scenery as the best thing about living in the MD.

The Pincher Creek Regional Recreation Master Plan more explicitly "acknowledge[s] [that] recreation, parks, and culture have an important role to play in keeping young adults in the community, attracting new residents, attracting investment, and improving quality of life for all residents." This plan offers a holistic approach to a broad range of recreation recommendations, from trail system expansion and enhancement, to new or improved indoor recreation facilities to "create a… rich experience for residents."

Similarly, the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass "recognize[s] the connection between the natural environment and quality of life" and links the need for a new recreation centre directly to their strategic goal of attracting and retaining working-age families. Additionally, it recommends specific park space, playgrounds, and fields within urban areas, while their Community Beautification Plan includes trail development and upgrades as a key priority. The Municipality of Crowsnest Pass also has a mid-term goal of developing a comprehensive recreation strategy and could likely benefit from the experiences, findings, and plans arising from the Pincher Creek Regional Recreation Master Plan.

Echoing the goals and recommendations of the surrounding communities, the Castle Tourism Strategy found a direct connection in the minds of regional residents between quality of life and ongoing access to recreational assets and a desire for improvements to local recreational assets.

CREATING AN ETHICAL SPACE

Society is learning what it means to live in right relations with the original inhabitants of this land. Our efforts to engage with the Piikani and Kainai Nations for the creation of this report include efforts to create ethical space for listening and dialogue. The Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE) describe ethical space in the following terms:

› **Creating a place for knowledge systems to interact with mutual respect, kindness, generosity, and other basic values and principles. Recognizing that all knowledge systems are equal; no single system has more weight or legitimacy than another.**

› **Supporting the validity of Indigenous practices and story as shared, without the need for outside validation from another group or individual.**

› **Understanding that being in this space together requires flexibility. This could mean that parties may frequently need to adjust to change, surprise, and other factors that cannot be envisioned at the initial stage.**

› **Accepting that engaging in ethical space is not to be understood as a means to achieve consultation or accommodation as defined under existing or previous provincial or federal legislation or policies.**

This initiative is taking steps toward creating an ethical space for dialogue and collaboration; Indigenous teachings are, at their core, about living in harmony with the land. This includes economic development. While some collaboration has taken place for this report to gather various Indigenous perspectives, there is a more fulsome and parallel effort currently underway which will work within their specific goals and schedule.

FOUR CONSIDERATIONS

Four economic development considerations were identified by the Indigenous communities we spoke with: tourism, economic prosperity, decision-making, and education.

Indigenous tourism presents opportunities to share history and culture and to teach traditional environmental practices. Buffalo Rock Tipi Camp and Head Smashed-In Buffalo Jump were commonly shared examples. Indigenous Tourism allows the Indigenous community to gain a sense of pride, a sense of ownership to the landscapes. To share their story and their connection.

The second consideration is that protecting the environment for the long-term is part of our collective responsibility to our local societies to provide jobs and opportunities for young people.

The third consideration is Indigenous people need to be participating in decision-making, not just on reserve but across the region.

The fourth consideration is the importance of education to influence our understanding of what balance could be for residents and tourism—from place-based elementary school education to universities, with Indigenous input.

BUFFALO ROCK TIPI CAMP

Buffalo Rock Tipi Camp on the Piikani Nation reserve teaches parallels between Indigenous and Western science for riparian restoration. This territory goes back to the time of the woolly mammoth and mastodon. More than a thousand generations of Blackfoot people and their ancestors have lived on this part of Turtle Island so there is a far-reaching understanding of the land and living in balance with the land.

A HISTORICAL FIRST

To support Indigenous knowledge and culture in the Castle provincial parks, and to hopefully provide an area for economic development, Alberta Parks and the Piikani Nation have signed a Cooperative Management Terms of Reference.

This is a historical first, as the province places greater emphasis on traditional activities and treaty rights in parks planning. This includes economic development opportunities such as retail, guiding and interpretation services.

This agreement also helps to provide representation for all members of the Blackfoot Confederacy and has the potential to improve accessibility and representation for Indigenous Peoples in general.

It is a functional part of the larger Truth and Reconciliation project and can directly contribute to increases in understanding and appreciation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures.

Indigenous relations

The region is coming to terms with Truth and Reconciliation and what it means for relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous neighbours. Truth and Reconciliation influences people's understanding of the issues and opportunities related to regenerative economies and further complicates paths forward, although a common desire for everyone to prosper and connect to the land provides a starting point.

It's important to note that by 2046, it is anticipated that at least 25 per cent of the region's population will be Indigenous (data and analysis in the associated SEIA linked here or available through Y2Y). The growing number of Indigenous youth in the coming years provides an opportunity for everyone to come together in new ways, united by the shared goal of creating youth prosperity. In so doing, the entire community can work together to support the advancement of Truth and Reconciliation through economic development activities.

An extensive engagement process with Indigenous leaders and communities is continuing in parallel to the work of this report, to explore and understand the nature-positive perspectives and economic development opportunities ideas emerging from the Blackfoot Nations (Siksikaitsitapi) of the region.

"Stewardship comes from caring and generosity and responsibility. All that we've given, all that we've been given, is sacred land. And we must keep it that way. We take what we need to survive, but nothing more. The responsibility of everyone living now is to think back seven generations and think forward seven generations, calling on the ancestors and also recognizing ourselves as ancestors for seven generations ahead of us."

TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE

Opportunities exist throughout the region for tourist "linkages" and wayfinding signage. The Municipal District of Pincher Creek is considering a travel plaza, and the Peaks to Prairies Electric Vehicle Charging Network adds a unique element to the region.

The Municipality of Crowsnest Pass and Municipal District of Pincher Creek Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework Agreement outlines responsibilities for development of the airport, while the Town of Pincher Creek will "confirm a business case that could leverage the airport to move more products, people, services and investment in the region."

Regional public transportation is of interest to increase connectivity within the five Municipal District of Pincher Creek urban communities, and the Town of Pincher Creek hopes to establish a Town transit system and "other transit options." They also hope to "increase partnerships and project-based activities to promote an increase in the flow of goods and services via roads, rails and runways that feed into the community."

Additionally, two of the five themes that emerged from the Castle Tourism Strategy include concerns about signage and wayfinding, transportation infrastructure and funding.

BROADBAND

As noted in Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance's 2019 broadband overview, services in the Town of Pincher Creek seem satisfactory, but for the Municipal District of Pincher Creek and the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass, this "last mile" technological infrastructure remains a key consideration in its community strategic and development plans. For both, leadership and administration continue to explore innovative and affordable solutions.

Alberta's Broadband Strategy, as part of its Recovery Plan, commits to "working with all levels of government and the private sector to increase investment into rural connectivity and achieve 100 per cent connectivity by the end of fiscal year 2026/27."

"The rural co-ops that are in Alberta are the longest-standing wealth-creators in rural economies and should be viewed as a precedent example of how to move forward."

Community-identified opportunities
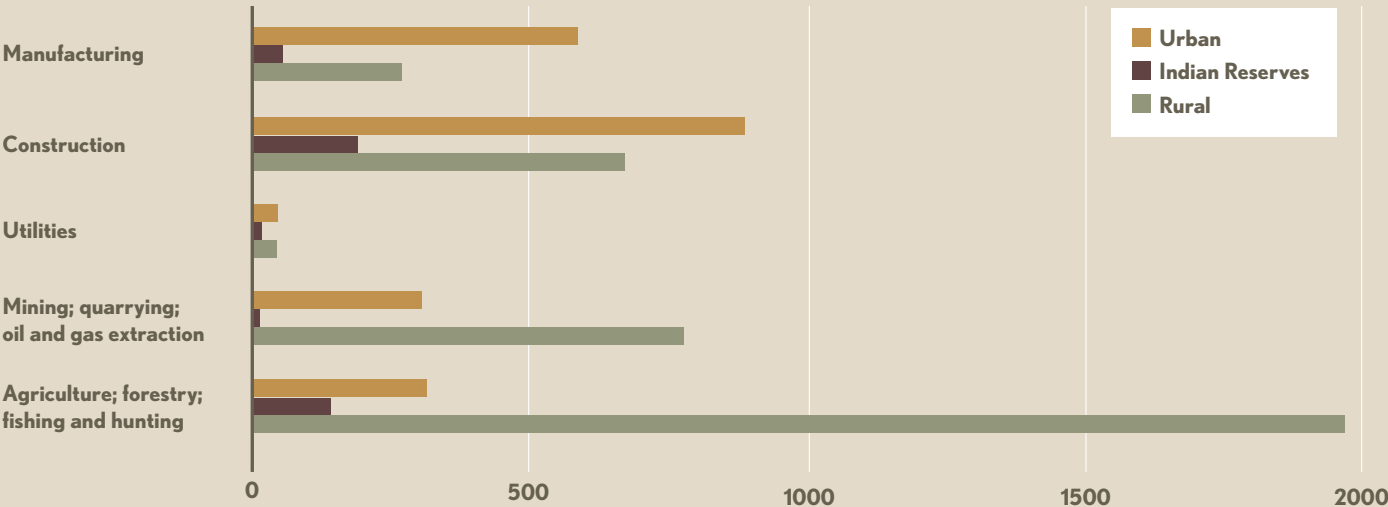
FACILITATE ORGANIC GROWTH

For the most part, communities recognize that the "oil & coal cash economy" is under threat. The replacement is seen by respondents to be a larger number of small, community and business enterprises with distributed ownership. Rural Opportunity Development Cooperatives (ODCs) are seen to be a model to emulate as cooperative principles naturally embed democratic decision-making, community ownership, and environmental sustainability.

Infrastructure—such as broadband internet for businesses and transmission lines for alternative energy projects—are essential to the success of decentralized initiatives. Where there are existing programs or interest to create such, more support is needed.

"Smaller, decentralized alternatives are what's needed, and they should be supported."

"Renewable resource infrastructure would be helpful. You can have both solar and wind and farming on the same land, but we need transmission lines to enable this."

Number of Workers Employed in Basic Industries for the Study Region, by Community, 2016

Legend: Urban, Indian Reserves, Rural

Categories: Manufacturing, Construction, Utilities, Mining; quarrying; oil and gas extraction, Agriculture; forestry; fishing and hunting

Axis: 0, 500, 1000, 1500, 2000

Source: Statistics Canada 2017

BUILD LOCAL NETWORKS

Because southwest Alberta is made up of a variety of small communities, many of the economic drivers and ways to add value to local products exist outside of the regional economy. For example, trees that get cut down in southwest Alberta go to Cochrane and are processed elsewhere in the province. Residents would like to see value-added manufacturing processes, such as developing a wood-processing research centre and/or specialty production (e.g., wide plank flooring, engineered lumber, wood pellets, etc.) somewhere in the region similarly to those that exist in British Columbia. The same applies to ranching and meat processing.

Supporting the collaboration and investment required to create interconnected networks instead of isolated businesses would enable business growth, job creation, and more local innovation and prosperity.

"One thing we had through the COVID-19 pandemic was 'thinking inside the box' because we were looking at our local producers and how we can add value for our own local businesses."

Community economic development plans and strategies align with the Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance's business-specific initiatives: such as the succession matching program in partnership with Community Futures, and a regional business license program which authorizes the license holder to do business in partner communities.

ROLE OF TOURISM

Tourism was a key theme in the qualitative research; however, the community is not unanimous in its perceptions. There is tension among the desire for the benefits tourism can provide (from jobs to improved services), concerns about the negative impacts of increased visitation, and lack of appropriate (or funded) infrastructure. What follows are three sections as expressed by the community: opportunities, limitations and benefits.

For many, tourism is the first consideration when people consider diversification outside of extraction industries. It leverages the natural, beautiful landscapes, it is aligned with the recreational activities that locals value highly, and it builds on nearby attractions such as the Castle Parks, Castle Mountain Resort, Waterton National Park, and the Crowsnest Pass. In bringing more people to the area, tourism might create enough economic opportunity for some local businesses to thrive.

Potential opportunities

These specific tourism opportunities were identified by research participants:

> Low impact recreational tourism

> Indigenous cultural awareness, history and understanding

> Ranching and cowboy culture

> World heritage sites

> Ecotourism

> Agritourism

Following a recommendation from the Government of Alberta, the South Canadian Rockies Destination Tourism Management Organization (DMO) has been formed and supported by community and business leaders from the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass, the Town of Pincher Creek, the Municipal District of Pincher Creek, the Village of Cowley, Castle Mountain Resort, Community Futures Crowsnest Pass, Community Futures Alberta Southwest, and the Crowsnest Pass Chamber of Commerce. The region encompasses Crowsnest Pass, Municipal District of Pincher Creek, Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park, Piikani Nation and all towns, hamlets and communities within their boundaries who wish to "co-create a prosperous future through sustainable development that respects the environment and balances a number of regional priorities." Some key focus areas include: enhancing the well-being of residents (who should and must benefit from tourism in the area) and the support of economic sustainability and diversification.

In a 2019 community survey conducted on behalf of the South Canadian Rockies DMO, 69 per cent of respondents said the tourism industry is extremely important to the region while the remaining respondents said very important. As such, this organization will be very important to the region as this economic driver grows. They have done good work in identifying a number of tourism destinations from which to learn, such as Revelstoke, Golden, and Fernie in British Columbia as well as cautionary examples (development challenges, overtourism) of Canmore and Banff in Alberta.

Foothills Tourism Association is another prime example of how local businesses from 13 different towns are working together to leverage these types of opportunities and build a vibrant visitor economy for the Foothills Region. Established in 2019 from a desire to "fill the void between other successful tourism initiatives," its mission is to enrich the region's tourism opportunities by:

> Developing and growing a strong agricultural and entrepreneurial rural business community.

> Bringing tourists from local, provincial, national, and global markets to the Foothills.

> Attracting provincial and corporate funds to the development of the region.

> Working with municipalities and industry associations to stimulate agritourism and rural experiential tourism.

Tourism is designated as a key economic driver in all of the regional plans reviewed, focusing in varying degrees on the strategic priorities as outlined most succinctly by the Government of Alberta's 2019 Castle Region Tourism Strategy:

> Strengthen community and industry capacity.

> Create a competitive business environment.

> Enhance destination development and marketing.

> Encourage product development.

> Grow Indigenous tourism.

It was also identified as the first of four Indigenous economic development principles.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & MARKETING

The region is nearly unanimous in its desire for local-based businesses, entrepreneurialism, and new business development. The Municipality of Crowsnest Pass will allow "home occupations in residential areas" and The Town of Pincher Creek's Strategic Plan includes attracting new businesses and events, and having a promotion strategy in place, as explicit success factors.

The Town of Pincher Creek's Community Economic Development Strategy plans to "designate time and budget to entrepreneur-led economic development activities."

The plan goes further in its recommendations for business outreach programs, community investment market places for alternative funding and financing, and addressing cumbersome administrative processes. Similarly, a mid-term goal of the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass is to "remove barriers and create incentives" for new businesses and commercial development, with a longer-term goal of increased marketing strategies to encourage new business. They are also committed to marketing the area to working-age families, and mitigating barriers to relocation.

OVERTOURISM

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines overtourism as "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitor experiences in a negative way." Overtourism is a concept based on the perceptions of locals and perceived as congestion or overcrowding from relatively high numbers of tourists and can be addressed through tools to better manage numbers and timing of visitors through infrastructure and businesses that adequately meet demand.

Photo credit: Alberta SouthWest, David JF Thomas

Quantifying economic benefits

A key barrier to evaluating the tourism opportunity is understanding the dynamics of the visitor economy and how it contributes to the local economy and local pride. Without this insight, the visitor economy can be devalued. According to Travel Alberta, for every $100 a visitor spends in southwest Alberta, an additional $67 in economic benefit is realized in the region, including wages, salaries, profits, supply chain income, and local taxes.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that economic development that results from tourism may indeed start with dollars from tourists, but when fostered appropriately, could lead to attracting growth in population in areas closer to town centres, bringing such things as additional entrepreneurialism, tax dollars, business development, and manufacturing. Dollars from tourism can translate to permanent development and growth beyond tourism itself.

Travel Alberta Corridors and Clusters

To increase visitor capacity and provide economic diversification to Alberta communities, Travel Alberta is focusing on developing high potential destinations that will lure travellers to communities and regions in all seasons. Travel Alberta will support industry recovery through investments that drive partnerships and business growth and will assist with new capital development opportunities that contribute to job creation and future revenue for the visitor economy.

Travellers are looking for unique, in-depth opportunities to engage in the destinations they visit. Understanding the visitor audience and designing experiences to meet the demand for experiential travel is the first step. Clustering these unique offerings is key to delivering amazing visitor experiences.

Developing tourism routes or tourism corridors as they are referred to by Travel Alberta, involves creating itineraries and critical linkages between communities. Focusing on themes helps to define the experience and can attract new travellers to explore destinations they may never have considered if it weren't along the route. In collaboration with businesses, destination organizations, and municipalities, Travel Alberta will identify the prime opportunities to develop experience-focused routes that will attract new and returning travellers.

Southwest Alberta is in a prime position to be one of the Corridors and Clusters supported by Travel Alberta.

Potential limitations

While some in the community support tourism development and expansion, other conversations reveal a negative perception of and/or significant limitations to tourism as a diversification opportunity:

› **Lack of infrastructure, including hotels, washrooms, parking and/or shuttle services, and garbage/recycling facilities.**

› **Stress on existing infrastructure such as emergency services and road maintenance.**

› **Lack of developed or "hardened" areas to accommodate the majority of tourists and offset impacts to more sensitive areas.**

› **Locals don't want people filling up the trails and landscapes.**

› **Perceived negative impact on quality of life, disruption to quiet.**

› **Impact to sensitive environmental areas.**

› **Tourism jobs are seen to be seasonal and low paying.**

Some residents believe that focusing on tourism as an economic solution distracts from the hard work of seeking other alternatives. Canmore, A.B. and Fernie, B.C. are held up as examples of what southwest Alberta does not want to become.

"Tourism is a huge mistake. It has an impact too. And it has economics that don't come close to replacing the high paying jobs that are being lost."

"There is only so much farming and ranch land down here. People down here don't want to have a lot of people here. They like the fact that it is empty. Encroachment by urbanites is not something they are looking to encourage."

UPLIFT ADVENTURES

Uplift Adventures is a small business homegrown in Crowsnest Pass. They have won provincial tourism awards and continue to inspire sustainable outdoor recreation throughout the Canadian Rockies.

They mainly operate in the South Canadian Rockies, more specifically Waterton, Castle Parks, and Crowsnest Pass. While they offer several services that are bookable online, Uplift Adventures also works closely with schools to provide curriculum-based programs and mentorship experiences.

The dream at Uplift Adventures is to create outdoor experiences and knowledge for people to feel confident and connected to the outdoors.

They value building an outdoor community to include all types of people; and their ultimate dream is to create Conservation Tourism to rebuild some of the damaged landscapes from historical mining, exploration, and neglected trail use in the Canadian Rockies.

They are also very passionate about their local heritage and want to ensure this is passed on and celebrated by many people around the world.

Outdoor recreation contributes to economic success in many ways.

TOURISM
Visitors who come to enjoy the outdoors spend money on lodging, restaurants, and other services, creating jobs and putting money into the community.

ENTREPRENEURS + TALENT
Access to the outdoors and a high quality of life attract and retain new businesses and skilled workers.

RETIREMENT + INVESTMENT INCOME
Wealth from retirees and investors—who are drawn to live near outdoor access—helps boost the local economy.

TAX REVENUE
Spending at local businesses and increased property tax revenue contribute to the tax base.

HEALTHIER RESIDENTS
Access to the outdoors improves public health and reduces costs of chronic conditions, especially for impoverished and under-resourced neighborhoods.

NEW RESIDENTS
Places with recreation amenities often have higher rates of in-migration, helping fuel jobs for teachers, doctors, construction workers, and more.

MAIN STREET BUSINESSES
Restaurants, grocery stores, gear stores, and other local retailers benefit from visitors and new residents.

GEAR MANUFACTURING
Companies that make outdoor equipment tend to locate in places with outdoor amenities, providing jobs and investment in the community.

SALE

BIKES

HEADWATERS ECONOMICS
HEADWATERSECONOMICS.ORG

Perceived barriers to economic diversity and environmental sustainability

Participants identified a range of barriers that must be overcome if the region is to balance economic diversity and growth with a healthy environment.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Regional housing has appreciated dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic, making it increasingly difficult for lower income workers to stay in the area. This in turn limits small business development and growth. Each community requires a mix of affordable rental housing and home ownership in combination with market rental housing and home ownership (and employee housing for tourism destinations) that is unique to them. Most local governments support an increase in housing close to town centres and more dense development over single-family acreages.

Complete Communities & Conservation Design

In the context of building communities that enable coexistence between humans and the natural world, the concepts of Complete Communities and Conservation Design should be considered together. A **Complete Community** is one that could be urban or rural in nature whereby the basic needs of all residents can be met through integrated land-use planning, community design, and transportation planning. It is characterized by densification and/or walkability, diverse housing and mixed land uses that account for the needs of a full range of housing and commercial development, and employment and transportation options to support livability and mobility of all residents.

Conservation Design is a concept whereby a minimum of 50 per cent of a total development area is typically set aside as open space. Ideally the open space that is set aside for recreation and/or connection of wildlife habitat areas is contiguous to ensure movement networks are maintained. This type of development can maintain the rural character of a region and can be achieved through an array of methods such as municipal development planning, private conservation easements, and public-private partnerships. Together with designing for Complete Communities, these two methods for land-use planning and design can help to ensure humans and nature can thrive alongside one another.

LIMITED WORKFORCE

Youth often leave town as soon as they graduate high school. In the case of resort destinations like Castle Mountain Resort, it is possible to attract foreign nationals with work visas to provide a workforce. However, it is difficult to attract new workers with the desire to stay for the long term, due to the lack of opportunities for upward mobility and career development alongside affordable housing.

Housing and worker, youth & family supports

The region identifies access to and diversity of urban housing options as key to community prosperity, both to encourage newcomers and mitigate the out-migration of the region's younger generations. The Municipality of Crowsnest Pass goes further to articulate the benefit of a diverse housing mix which allows older residents to "age in place."

Similarly, the Town of Pincher Creek has a key objective of "sustainable affordable housing" and the community economic development strategy includes the creation of (1) a residential growth plan that includes a variety of housing options, and (2) a Housing Action Plan in partnership with the existing Housing Management Body. It also notes that its central location lends itself to being a "service and amenity hub" for workers in the region. The Town of Pincher Creek's idea to develop a "rural immigration welcoming community program" could be expanded to reach the region more broadly.

The Municipality of Crowsnest Pass is working with the Livingstone School District to assess and support future school needs. The Municipal District of Pincher Creek committed a $1M contribution to the Pincher Creek Community Early Learning Centre, which is also a key objective of the Town of Pincher Creek strategic plan: to develop a comprehensive, world class daycare. The two locations in Pincher Creek opened in 2020.

GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION

Different arms of government can seem to be working at cross purposes. Consultation and collaboration across agencies and government entities are critical if the region is to create practical, efficient policy solutions that benefit the health of both the environment and the economy.

LIMITING DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY

Each town has its own bylaws that draw geographic boundaries around collaboration. This sometimes leaves out functional members of the broader community, which can mean personal networks, formal associations, and proximal neighbours are cut out of conversations, limiting innovation and cross-sector solutions.

NARROW VIEW OF JOB CREATION

Local government and economic development authorities often have a narrow view of job creation in the region, focusing mainly on mining and agriculture. However, attracting those with job portability and/or white collar jobs, where work isn't entirely geographically based, is more nuanced, but can lead to the growth of several other industries. For example, jobs associated with education, housing development and construction, healthcare, local business ownership, and manufacturing, all can stem from attracting the right mix and numbers of transplants to a town. Attracting this mix of new community members may be aided by the diverse outdoor recreation opportunities towns in southwest Alberta have to offer.

'NOT IN MY BACKYARD' OR NIMBYISM AMONG LANDHOLDERS

Residents may oppose development because it is close to them but would tolerate or support it if it were built farther away. However, if each group of landholders protects its own interests and rejects new people and the thoughts and ideas they can contribute, this may make it difficult to collaborate and innovate new solutions that balance the health of both the environment and the economy.

SMALL BUSINESS/FARMS ARE GETTING PUSHED OUT BY LARGER INTERESTS WITH MORE RESOURCES

Small-scale and regenerative agriculture are an important new economic opportunity for the region; however, the increasing cost of land ownership means these types of businesses are getting priced out of the market.

Pincher Creek Regional Recreation Masterplan

The recreation masterplan recommends regional collaboration and partnerships with the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass, among others. And, because the Municipal District of Pincher Creek and Municipality of Crowsnest Pass Intermunicipal Development Plans provide a feedback mechanism for proposals for rural recreational designation or development as well as for shared use and funding of regional recreation facilities, the Municipal District of Pincher Creek could provide a natural overlap in the two area plans.

There is a stated desire across the region for partnerships, collaboration and increased marketing. One potential starting point is articulated in the Town of Pincher Creek's Community Economic Development Strategy:

"Clearly define the purpose and roles of regional organizations and institutions. Understand who is working on what and how the outcomes will benefit the Pincher Creek Region. Recognize and support regional partnership roles."

This is echoed in the qualitative research findings from the Castle Tourism Strategy, with "concerns raised regarding the role of both the municipal and provincial governments in the region. Key issues identified in the engagement results included the lack of clarity on government priorities and lack of coordination."

In response, the Government of Alberta has a stated goal to "align the policies and programs of the various orders of government to ensure a more integrated and effective approach to supporting the region."

Identified in the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass Development Plan, "implementation of the Castle Region Tourism Strategy will require an ongoing commitment to collaboration with Alberta Transportation, Alberta Environment and Parks, and especially Travel Alberta." Other possible partner organizations include Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance, the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta, and South Canadian Rockies Tourism, among others.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS WATER

Water protection and conservation are critical to the sustainability and economic prosperity of the region. There is concern that government and industry see water as a resource to be extracted rather than the lifeblood of community and prosperity.

The community's concerns about water protection are expressly echoed by some of the governmental and quasi-governmental organizations in the region. Castle Mountain Resort references water use specifically, with water preservation and protection as a key element in its Area Structure Plan. Similarly, in a response to the coal policy engagement, the Municipal District of Pincher Creek Council confirmed its intention to maintain "untouched" spaces, and protect wildlife and water: "Everything truly valued by us, begins and ends with our water."

The primary purposes of Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park are to ensure the protection of biodiversity, water resources, ecological integrity, and connectivity.

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, which regulates and guides activities and resource management in the area, identifies objectives related to air quality, biodiversity and land management, water management, efficient use of land, and outdoor recreation and historic resources. These objectives are to be used to guide provincial and municipal government decisions related to the process and outcomes for balancing economic development opportunities with social and environmental considerations related to land-use.

ACCESS TO FUNDING

Economic diversification and innovation requires investment. Without local investment and/or government funding, the default solutions will be more of the same as big companies employ their resources to achieve their profit goals in the region.

POLARIZED OPINIONS

Previous development initiatives have shown that southwest Alberta can have polarized opinions and create tension for developers. Much of this has to do with language and how one speaks to ideas (which, at their core, are often quite similar) could result in further polarization.

ACCEPTANCE OF LIMITS

Residents and local organizations reject externally-imposed limits like the number of cows, how many trees can be cut down, how many campsites will be allowed, and the number of hikers on the trails. Limits are better received when they are collaborative and balance environmental outcomes with the economic realities of the region's actors.

"For Pincher [Creek], tourism is a potential down the line but right now we don't have the infrastructure to support it, for it to replace another industry...and the MD of Pincher Creek also has a very clear directive that they're ag based, right? Tourism isn't fitting in their direction at the moment."

(Government of Alberta, 2018, Castle management plan: *Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park*).

Photo credit: Alberta SouthWest

"Are there four or five interesting stories that emerge? Then we could test our hypothesis a little bit—that the potential for a new narrative is there."

"Don't be centrally planning the economy. Don't over promote tourism. Listen first, learn, go door to door, meet people, take a good look at the numbers. Find key messages, key business leaders. Then they start sending op eds, speaking out, saying I am here for the quality of life. Get four or five people speaking up like that and you get a life of its own. Support in the background, don't control the narrative."

Changing the southwest Alberta narrative

A CONGRESS NOT A KING

The story of southwest Alberta is the Indigenous inhabitants, oil and gas, coal, ranching, generations of families, and the magnificent Rockies. The narrative also is that extraction industries are leaving and leaving behind large economic holes. Everyone is looking for the magic bullet.

In his 2007 book, *The Geography of Hope*, Chris Turner suggests that the leader we need to simultaneously fight climate change and achieve shared prosperity is "a congress not a king." In other words, there is no magic bullet, no one big solution or organization, but rather a multitude of activities, perspectives, and organizations working together.

The qualitative research identified that a new narrative is required. One that builds on the resilience of the communities, the opportunities of alternative energy production, existing parkland, and the emerging recreation and tourism opportunities. The new narrative might also focus on how the community is breaking ground regarding how to develop the land and the economy responsibly.

"We're under the thumb of coal mines and what can be done to change that narrative in the region? Are there some local success stories that can be brought out that are examples of economic prosperity, like ranching or renewable energy? There are other stories like recreation and tourism that can be told about the region."

GRASSROOTS SOLUTIONS

A small but significant group of stakeholders in the qualitative research expressed serious concern that anything resembling a centrally managed approach to balance the economy and the environment would fail because no organization should be seen to pick winners and losers.

The way forward is to empower communities and work from the ground up. Support local leaders without managing or filtering the narrative. Support building and maintaining infrastructure. Facilitate people getting together.

The optimal approach is for outside support in the form of resources and ideas to be available to the community to encourage and advance their own work.

The desire of community members for grassroots leadership aligns with the Town of Pincher Creek's published approach to helping develop small businesses by:

› Asking the community for help.

› Envisioning a revitalized downtown and conducting a retail analysis.

› Establishing a Welcoming Communities committee and action plan.

› Passing an Investment Incentive Bylaw.

› Reduce red tape for business.

"Social and community innovation needs a foothold first to help drive the eventual economic innovation. The ideas need to emerge from the existing people and place."

Importance of leadership

OVERARCHING VISION

There is an opportunity to develop an overarching and collaborative vision for southwest Alberta as a whole. This would dispel the tension between individuals and groups pursuing their own interests at the expense of the collective. Research participants weren't clear about what the region stands for or how their particular community fits into that.

Southwest Alberta is a large and diverse area, so an overarching vision for the region must recognize the distinct needs and ambitions of each local community. One approach for all southwest Alberta is less likely to succeed.

"I wonder if it would be better to rebrand the area into something completely different. Make it something we can all fit into. There's communications and marketing in the area but each person is trying to do what's best for them. We don't have a banner that's a broad enough idea that we could all see ourselves under."

"How do we support a local business with our local residents and our visitors. That's the hot topic right now. When you go somewhere you want to eat local and buy local and shop local. They've got some, some pretty good products and some pretty good stories to tell."

LEVERAGE UNEXPECTED VOICES

Nature-based economic development is seen by some as the agenda of environmental conservation organizations; therefore, the vision for economic diversification, which supports natural capital, should come from within the community, preferably a business leader. Through leadership from within the business community, residents will be better able to see that a balance of environmental and economic prosperity is possible.

"What we realized is that we needed to change the messenger. It cannot be an environmental group. It has to be people in business [to get buy-in]. The reason I am here is because of the surrounding landscape. That is really powerful."

"There needs to be a different way that conservationists approach community. Misinformation is created by genuine and understandable fear. It stops people from participating."

BETTER COMMUNICATION

Some residents are frustrated by a lack of communication from municipalities, the region, and industries. Better information sharing and transparency with residents is necessary and will go a long way to build trust and more informed residents.

"A lot is going on but we're not aware that it's happening. We need to address communication and information sharing."

"Education of youth and newcomers. Most important part is educating the old dogs that take it for granted and don't have good ways for doing what they do. Education is going to be key. We all need to be educated."

Participants identified a number of communities in transition that might offer insight into the challenges and opportunities faced by southwest Alberta. While not all of these examples contain stories of perfectly balanced economic and environmental benefits, they provide some insight into the potential opportunities and pitfalls of transitioning to a nature-positive economy. Furthermore they demonstrate how nature is central to long-term abundance.

Bend, Oregon, USA | Post-forestry

When it comes to the success of Bend, it is widely assumed that tourism replaced the timber industry jobs and revenue when, in fact, the most significant industry transition was IN construction, with professional and business continuing to grow. Leisure and hospitality remain a steady and important part of the local economy, but the trend of outmigration from cities to more rural or "lifestyle" areas, and the ease of remote work, may be larger contributors to the post-forestry growth. Recent census data shows over half of the residents own their homes, and most have received higher levels of formal education.

worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/bend-or-population

southernoregonbusiness.com/the-myth-of-bends-timber-to-tourism-transition

Finding success

WITH POTENTIAL ALLIES IN THE REGION

Participants in qualitative research were asked for recommendations regarding organizations who are well situated to partner, support, or even lead nature positive economic development in the region.

The long list of organizations that were identified by the community has been combined with Stormy Lake's recommendations, which are based on the review of regional plans, priorities and activities.

The list has been organized into the following groups, based on mission or area of focus and is included as Appendix 1:

› **Agriculture**
› **Arts, culture and history**
› **Economic development**
› **Energy**
› **Health**
› **Higher education**
› **Recreation**
› **Tourism**
› **Wilderness and wildlife**
› **Youth**

Oakridge, Oregon, USA | Post-forestry

Although the Pioneer Picnic and Tree Planting Festivals are "a reminder of [its] past as a timber town," the Town of Oakridge is better known as the Mountain Biking Capital of the Northwest. The mountain bike focus began around 2020, and now Oakridge boasts being one of only six cities in the world that is designated by the International Mountain Biking Association as a gold-level "Ride Center."

Mountain bikers spend an estimated $2.4 to $4.9 million in Oakridge each year, which accounts for 5 per cent of the local economy. For some local businesses, at least 75 per cent of their business comes from mountain bikers. This financial success isn't without criticism, though, as some locals have concerns about erosion of the community's identity, soil, and trails.

ci.oakridge.or.us/community/page/welcome-oakridge-oregon

headwaterseconomics.org/trail/104-or-mtn-bike-tourism-oakridge/

npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129186583?storyId=129186583

Raymond, Alberta | Green energy

Raymond is believed to be Alberta's first "net zero" community in carbon emissions. The project was spearheaded by the community's economic development coordinator, and made possible by a provincial grant; however, its' future remains uncertain as the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre has spent about $1.5 million out of a five-year $6.9 million allocation for solar projects that mostly came from the province's carbon tax, which was repealed by the Government of Alberta.

globalnews.ca/news/5439656/raymond-alberta-solar-net-zero

mccac.ca/app/uploads/Case-Study-Raymond.pdf

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

The research team has identified additional communities worth studying for potentially relevant or revealing insights into energy and economic transition.

Strong Towns is an U.S.-based organization that provides media and research, advocacy, events and education for people choosing to "make their cities stronger and more financially resilient." Two towns profiled in their "in-depth series on economic challenges facing resource-based communities, and strategies that can help build lasting prosperity" are of particular relevance to the southwest Alberta nature-positive project: Sandpoint, Idaho and Big Horn County, Montana.

The Strong Towns Academy may be an interesting resource for local communities in Southwest Alberta.

Full articles have been included in Appendix 2.

Olds, Alberta | Optical fiber

The Olds Institute for Community and Regional Development (OI) is a non-profit entity founded in 2001 to encourage the development of Olds as an innovative and entrepreneurial community and to improve the quality of life for its residents. OI is a partnership of the Town of Olds, Olds College, Olds & District Chamber of Commerce, and Olds Regional Exhibition. One of its biggest projects was to establish ultrafast, inexpensive internet, with the hope of becoming "the first 'gig town' in Canada" and boosting the economy.

The population of Olds has been steadily growing, and some businesses have been moving to the area, likely due in large part to broadband speeds. However, while the broadband service itself has been a success, the financial model has not. In the summer of 2021, the Town of Olds called on OI to repay the nearly $14M loan, ultimately resulting in the various OI entities being consolidated into one, town-owned corporation.

mountainviewtoday.ca/olds-news/receiver-named-to-consolidate-olds-institute-related-entities-3911915

zajko.ca/2021/01/23/trouble-in-olds

calgaryherald.com/cannabis/cannabis-business/olds-embraces-the-new-horticulture-and-a-budding-relationship-with-pot-plant

Canal Flats, British Columbia | Post-Forestry

The Columbia Lake Technology Center (CLTC) in Canal Flats, British Columbia was founded in 2018, three years after its primary employer —a sawmill—closed its doors. Soon to employ more people than the sawmill once did, the CLCT is a tech industry hub. Its core source of revenue is currently as a server farm, but what makes it different from many other server farms is that it is powered by renewable energy. The immense heat it creates is recycled back into CLTC buildings and into a heating loop that feeds back into Canal Flat's infrastructure as well. Furthermore, they are contributing to the community plan with plans to build employee housing, provide training and employment to skilled industrial trades, and to mentor youth.

columbialaketech.com

canalflats.ca/columbia-lake-technology-center

Paths Forward: Recommendations for Nature-Positive Initiatives for Southwest Alberta

Recommended strategies, whether proposed or existing, have been chosen based on these guiding principles:

1 Creates net new jobs

2 Creates both economic and environmental benefits

3 Supports Truth and Reconciliation

4 Engages youth or multiple generations

5 Amplifies community initiatives wherever possible

Further recommended strategies for all to consider, continue or act upon, have been organized into two overarching categories: primary and enabling.

The advisory panels and community interviews made it clear there is no one magic bullet, instead it will take a diversity of sectors and industries to foster economic resilience. Three primary sectors (tourism, renewable energy, and agriculture) have been identified as key economic drivers for the region, but they aren't always ready to achieve immediate results. Five enabling initiative areas (housing, education, broadband, business development, and communications) will direct the groundwork that is required to achieve success in the primary economic areas.

We heard from our Advisory Panel that good ideas are important to include in the recommended strategies, but what is essential to advancing this work is leadership. Leadership in this context can take many forms and all are important. It can come as support for those who have been working on solutions for years to help them keep up the good work; it can come in the form of added capacity and collaboration from partners; it can be the creation of a new organization; and it can come in the form of policy and funding.

The best means for good ideas to become reality is by using work already underway as their foundation and to celebrate abundance and collaboration over scarcity and competition.

PRIMARY SECTORS
Tourism
Renewable Energy
Agriculture

ENABLING SECTORS
Housing
Education
Broadband
Business Development
Communications

Primary Strategy Recommendations

TOURISM

Support existing initiatives

Support the South Canadian Rockies Destination Tourism Management Organization as a nature-based destination marketing organization focused on promoting both responsible visitation and providing the tools necessary to support the region's ability to be tourism ready.

Support regional and municipal efforts in parks and trails creation, such as the Town of Pincher Creek's Regional Recreation Master Plan and the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass' Community Beautification Plan.

Support an Indigenous tourism mentorship program, such as Indigenous Tourism Alberta's Good Relations Mentorship Program or the Australian Government's National Indigenous Tourism Mentoring Program.

Leverage data from the collaborative Peaks to Prairies project, and their focus on EV charging stations, to identify further needs of travellers passing through the region, including a gap analysis.

Continue to work with the Government of Alberta to identify synergies and amplify their initiatives associated with this work.

Create new initiatives

Convene multi-sector discussions (that include Alberta Parks, Travel Alberta, and local businesses) to share relevant data that emphasizes quality of life and economic benefits from nature-positive development.

Identify all potential partners for the creation of a tourism 'corridor and cluster'; conduct a gap analysis and feasibility study.

Create a tourism operator incubator to provide operators with the necessary knowledge, training, and skills to assist in 'nature-positive' development and marketing that aligns with the regions' tourism strategies.

Develop a grant writing resource for sustainable tourism to align with existing Destination Management Organizations (DMO's).

Increase use of technology such as augmented reality, app-based guides and others to enhance the tourism and recreational experience and create new bundles of products and services.

In partnership with South Canadian Rockies, Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance, municipalities, and the Government of Alberta, develop regional wayfinding signage and transportation linkages to local businesses and attractions, as identified in the Castle Tourism Strategy.

Produce a regional map highlighting road, trail, and open space networks overlaid with sensitive and protected natural areas within the region to illustrate human connectivity and access as well as identify opportunities and constraints for future tourism development.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Support existing initiatives

Reallocation of royalties/tax credits from hydrocarbon industries to regional renewable energy initiatives as part of hydrocarbon transition solutions.

Raise awareness for Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership and Energy Futures Lab events to foster the development of solar, wind, and bioenergy in the region.

Frame conversations in terms of energy autonomy and self-sufficiency.

Support Opportunity Development Cooperatives for community-owned renewable energy, such as the Southern Alberta Renewable Energy Co-op (SABRE).

Raise awareness of various regional waste-to-energy projects, such as those promoted by the Southern Alberta Energy from Waste Association (SAEWA).

Continue to work with the Government of Alberta to identify synergies and amplify their initiatives associated with this work.

Create new initiatives

Fund an alternative energy tax credit that is available to First Nations and municipalities.

Advocate, with organizations already working in this space, for land-use planning that supports nature-positive transmission infrastructure on underutilized agricultural land. For example, unirrigated corners of plots that are missed by centre-pivot irrigation systems or linear corridors above culverted irrigation canals.

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

The concept of "capital" comes in many forms and can be applied to various facets of economic development. Natural capital accounts for the land, air, water, and renewable and non-renewable resources that the planet provides. This capital is responsible for ecosystem services, or the benefits that people derive from ecosystems, and is the foundation for all economic activity.

Ecosystem services are commonly organized into four different categories. **Provisioning Services** are the most readily identifiable and account for the direct resources nature provides, such as food, water, timber, and oil and gas. **Regulating Services** provide the processes needed to ensure ecosystems remain healthy, functional, and resilient to change and include such things as pollination, water purification, flood mitigation, and climate regulation. **Cultural Services** are those that are non-material but contribute to cultural advancement such as idea generation, recreation, and inspiration for the creation of art. Lastly, **Supporting Services** are those we know to be foundational to indispensable life processes here on earth, including nutrient cycling, photosynthesis, the water cycle, and soil creation.

Ecosystem services are often not adequately valued by decision-makers when development is proposed, often leading to the loss of one or more from a landscape when development takes place. To provide a more complete picture of economic value of development, in concert with conserving, preserving, and/or restoring areas of land, ecosystem services assessments can be produced to calculate the economic costs of these services as if we need to replicate them ourselves.

An example of a multiple account process for development —which includes social and environmental impacts—was conducted by the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy in **"A Multiple Account Benefit–Cost Analysis Of Coal Mining In Alberta"**. In this they found the economic benefits are "overshadowed by the costs arising from the displacement of ranching, tourism and the negative environmental effects on water, vegetation, air and wildlife. Compounding these effects is the non-zero probability that the Alberta government will pick up the tab for reclamation costs, and the adverse social impacts on local communities and on Indigenous Peoples' rights and interests. Therefore, any new coal mine development is unlikely to provide the province with a net benefit."

policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/EFL53_Coal-Mining_Winter-et-al.pdf

AGRICULTURE

Support existing initiatives

Raise awareness for Rural Routes to Climate Solutions (RR2CS) events and initiatives.

Explore a partnership with the Foothills DMO farm-to-table program to expand efforts to increase interest in agricultural start-ups in the study area, working with Alberta SW and the South Canadian Rockies DMO.

Connect Crown Manager Partnership land-use planning with Government of Alberta, Waterton Biosphere Reserve, Nature Conservancy of Canada, and other relevant organizations to identify natural areas for consideration in development, connectivity, riparian health, etc.

Support cross-promotion of agriculture and tourism.

Support cross-promotion of agriculture and solar power generation.

Support the expansion of the Farmers Markets and Open Farm Days programs.

Collaborate with the Municipal District of Crowsnest Pass, Town of Pincher Creek, and Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance in their efforts to support not only current agribusinesses, but also to improve access to innovation, trends, and succession plans, including attention to new proteins (e.g. pea), value-added processing and supply chain development, along with the popularity and benefits of farmers markets and local farm-to-table initiatives.

Continue to work with the Government of Alberta to identify synergies and amplify their initiatives associated with this work.

Create new initiatives

Advocate for the creation of an Agricultural Land Reserve, as has been established in British Columbia, prioritizing arable agricultural land-use over other forms of more invasive development.

Develop youth curriculum for best sustainable agriculture practices.

Promote sustainable farming methods such as Agroecology to mitigate climate change, work with wildlife, and mitigate runoff and erosion in coordination with organizations already working in this area.

An Opportunity Development Co-operative is a for-profit co-op, made up of local community members who identify or are approached by local entrepreneurs with an idea or business investment opportunity.

Enabling Strategy Recommendations

LAND-USE & HOUSING

Promote conservation design, preservation development, smart growth, and/or new urbanism as appropriate in land-use planning, and as reflected in the Crowsnest Pass Heritage Management Plan and the Pincher Creek Community Economic Development Strategy respectively.

Produce ecosystem service assessments at the community level to support strategic planning of land base.

Ensure local land-use mapping efforts link to regional mapping to increase density through infill development and support development plans that, according to the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass, "focus development away from sensitive areas" and maintain the "generally undeveloped" land between urban areas.

Advocate for an inclusionary zoning policy to ensure some housing remains affordable.

Ensure land-use bylaws and tax structures are in place to support non-permanent residential development as well as the Passive House building standard.

Raise awareness for Southern Alberta Cooperative Housing Association (SACHA).

Support the continuation or creation of community housing corporations to administer rental and rent supplement programs and subsidized home ownership. For example, the Town of Pincher Creek's Community Economic Development Strategy includes creating a residential growth plan and a variety of housing options, and developing a housing action plan in partnership with the existing housing management body to meet its key objective of sustainable affordable housing.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Identify and share best practices in value-add business development for tourism, renewable energy, and agriculture through workshops and forums, with extended community communication plans highlighting findings, case studies and community-generated options for implementation.

Support applications in the region to become designated Rural Renewal communities.

Work with municipalities and other ENGOs working in the Highway 3 corridor (e.g. Miistakis and NCC) to assist in siting applications in the region to develop commercial safety rest areas and light industrial areas.

Identify clusters of businesses that would benefit from common infrastructure in the region.

Increase use of technology to add value to harvested timber and create new bundles of engineered wood products and services.

Expand on Town of Pincher Creek's rural immigrant welcoming program by finding partners in other communities.

Encourage entrepreneurialism, with initiatives such as the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass' approval of "home occupations in residential areas," and the Town of Pincher Creek Community Economic Development Strategy's plans to "designate time and budget to entrepreneur-led economic development activities."

Establish a local currency to ensure money spent at local businesses becomes reinvested in the community.

BROADBAND

Support the creation of an Opportunity Development Cooperative for community-owned high-speed Internet by connecting key actors in the region, like O-NET.

Work with Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance to refresh the existing broadband strategy from an equity and accessibility lens and, if possible, tie to recent Government of Alberta broadband commitments.

EDUCATION

Support regional planning and collaboration on the incentivization of post-secondary institutions to create satellite campuses/distributed learning in the area, and support fledgling regional initiatives in education and skills training. This can be done by prioritizing the following:

› **In its contemplation of becoming an innovation hub, the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass may consider partnering with an academic institution and establishing a satellite campus for field studies and cross-sector training.**

› **The Crowsnest Pass Heritage Management Plan includes a recommendation to partner with post-secondary trades programs to expand local knowledge and skill in heritage building conservation.**

› **The Town of Pincher Creek Community Economic Development Strategy includes a recommendation to develop a regional workforce training initiative and to leverage the teaching hospital.**

› **The Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance Energizing Agricultural Transformation recommends capacity building workshops for regional agri-businesses, as well as leveraging agri-business partners such as the University of Lethbridge and other academic institutions.**

COMMUNICATIONS & BRANDING

Frame conversations about southwest Alberta's economy around legacy to reposition the region as representing the economy of the future.

Amplify the efforts of local government.

Ensure solutions champion local values.

› **Satellite or distributed education models as an opportunity to attract post-secondary facilities or programs that keep youth in the area, and which explore nature-positive programs, such as:**
  • **Renewable energy**
  • **Old home/building refurbishment**
  • **Rural health**
  • **Environmental science**

Host a workshop for local governments to identify funding and/or partners for opportunities for training in jobs that balance the economy and the environment (land reclamation, land management, building restoration and retrofitting, environmental monitoring, tourism, etc.).

Make the land the classroom for primary education, using experiential learning to elevate the knowledge, skill, and innovation of the region.

Red Crow Community College has received funding for a new 9,455 square-metre facility, to continue to support its innovative cultural and educational programming.

Appendices

THE BUFFALO: A TREATY OF COOPERATION, RENEWAL AND RESTORATION
(First Nations, Crown of the Continent, Waterton Park, Glacier Park, others)

To honor and restore the human relationship with the buffalo, the purpose and objective of the historic Buffalo Treaty (paraphrased) is "to welcome buffalo to once again live among us [and to] recognize buffalo as a wild free-ranging animal and as an important part of the ecological system… [to] lead us in nurturing our land, plants and other animals to once again realize the buffalo ways for our future generations." The process by which the treaty came into existence, including the broad amount of signatories, make it an extraordinary example of what is known as Cultures-Based Innovation. It may serve as a model for other ambitious collaborations seeking to address cultural, environmental, educational, economic, and health outcomes in the region.

Community-identified potential allies in the journey towards a nature-positive economy

Participants in the qualitative research were asked for recommendations regarding organizations who are well situated to partner, support, or even lead environmentally conscious economic development in the region. What follows are brief descriptions of the community-proposed organizations, along with additional recommendations which emerged from Stormy Lake Consulting's review of regional plans, priorities, and activities.

AGRICULTURE

Alberta Beef Producers
Representing the collective interests of the 18,000 beef cattle producers in Alberta, and dedicated to maintaining a sustainable, competitive industry for the benefit of all society.

Alberta Milk
Alberta Milk is a non-profit organization that represents Alberta's dairy producers and is a strategic partner in Canada's dairy industry.

Cows and Fish
The Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society, also known as "Cows and Fish", is a non-profit society striving to foster a better understanding of how improvements in grazing and other management of riparian areas can enhance landscape health and productivity for the benefit of landowners, agricultural producers, communities, and others who use and value riparian areas.

Grazing co-ops

Organic and small-scale agriculture

Rural Routes to Climate Solutions podcast and projects
Farmers and ranchers can play a pivotal role in building the low-carbon economy of the future. Especially in Alberta, home to one-third of Canada's agricultural land and two important carbon sinks—grasslands and the boreal forest. The wildrose province also has some of the best solar and wind power resources in Canada. Climate solutions are often viewed as being an inconvenience to our everyday lives. But farm solutions are climate solutions and many of them have multiple concrete benefits that go beyond stopping climate change: improving soil fertility; creating new economic opportunities; protecting biodiversity; energy independence and building resiliency against droughts and floods. It is a win-win strategy. Rural Routes to Climate Solutions is working with producers and other members of the rural community to put this win-win strategy into action. By providing learning opportunities to better understand climate solutions, we are empowering rural Albertans with the tools to reap the benefits of climate solutions for themselves and their communities.
rr2cs.ca/about

Leading workshops, farm field days, and producing a podcast series in Alberta so agricultural producers can find more about the climate solutions that work best on farms and ranches, with topics such as:

› **Soil carbon sequestration**
› **Perennial cereal grains**
› **On-farm solar and energy efficiency**
› **Protecting biodiversity to increase yields**
› **Operating passive solar greenhouses**

ARTS, CULTURE & HISTORY

Artist co-ops
From Salida and Ridgway, Colorado and the Northeast Minneapolis Arts District, to East Vancouver and its Eastside Culture Crawl, communities have been encouraging artists to live and create through subsidized housing, studio spaces, event, and marketing support. In many cases, these cultural districts have attracted new businesses, increased tourism and property values, and revitalized neighborhoods.

Historical societies
There are many benefits to historical conservation of significant sites and historical buildings, including:

› **Developing or preserving tourist attractions and the surrounding wilderness or open spaces.**

- › **Attracting businesses and visitors to quaint historic downtowns.**
- › **Economic impact of building conservation itself.**
- › **Environmental benefits of reduced waste streams.**

The Crowsnest Pass Heritage Management Plan includes a wealth of statistics and analysis on the broad beneficial impacts.

Keep Alberta Rolling
Alberta already utilizes a relationship with major studios and networks to help produce high quality television and blockbuster films. Many Albertans can proudly say they've personally contributed to Emmy, Golden Globe, and Oscar-winning projects. With talented crews, breathtaking locations, and rich-production history, Alberta is perfectly poised to become the next great screen industry 'hub'.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Alberta Community Cooperatives Association (ACCA)
ACCA provides education, advocacy, and development services to support its members and raise community awareness of cooperatives. Organizations supported by the ACCA include consumer, financial, producer, worker, investment, and utility cooperatives.

Alberta Innovates
With many programs available and annual investments of $286 million, Alberta Innovates delivers a broad spectrum of funding and grant opportunities for those looking to make a difference in the province. AI funding support builds research capacity, innovation culture, talent supply, and research infrastructure. Funding and grant programs support the development and delivery of innovations that meet industries' "pull" for practical solutions to their biggest challenges. Through these solutions, Alberta Innovates helps establish, sustain, and grow industry in the province.

Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance
Alberta SouthWest is one of nine Regional Economic Development Alliances (REDAs) within Alberta. Its purpose is:

- › **Business and industry development: support business retention, expansion, and investment attraction**
- › **Communications and regional promotion: build capacity for community and regional economic development success.**

- › **Shared services and planning: cultivate and foster collaborative partnerships.**

Chambers of Commerce (Crowsnest Pass, Pincher Creek and District)
Chambers of Commerce provide advocacy, education, and promotion for member businesses.

Community Futures
Providing guidance, support, and financial help for small businesses, the purpose of Community Futures is to help rural communities develop and implement local solutions to challenges and opportunities in the areas of:

- › **Economic stability, growth, and job creation**
- › **Diversified and competitive local rural economies**
- › **Economically sustainable communities**

SouthGrow Regional Initiative
Southgrow is a member-driven, non-profit regional economic development alliance in south central Alberta. Their focus is on working with member communities, industry/business, government and others to achieve common purpose of area economic development and shared services opportunities primarily within the sectors of agri-food development, alternative energy, regional tourism, and water security.

Southwest Alberta Sustainable Community Initiative (SASCI)
SASCI delivers services and programs that promote community sustainability through sharing sound information, facilitating dialogue, and building collaborative relationships.

ENERGY

Community Energy Association
This B.C.-specific association channels provincial, federal, and private funding to the community to prepare energy and emissions plans and implement low carbon projects and programs.

Energy Futures Lab
An Alberta-based coalition that is collaboratively developing solutions for a low-emission and socially equitable energy future.

Southern Alberta Alternative Energy partnership (SAAEP)
The Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership is an initiative of four economic development organizations that encompass all of southern Alberta, and its objective is "to nurture and facilitate our region's growth as an alternative energy provider, while at the same time introducing methods that will allow individuals and organizations who live here to become more self-sufficient energy users."

HEALTH

The healthcare system
The relationship between health outcomes and access to the outdoors is becoming increasingly clear. There may be an opportunity to develop outdoor programs with the regional hospitals and mental health facilities, or even to advocate in partnership with AHS or others for increased funding for or protection of wild spaces as a health initiative in addition to an environmental one.

Oldman River Health Advisory Council (AHS)
Focused on educating community stakeholders, hosting community engagement events, and building new partnerships particularly in the areas of seniors' health, addiction and mental health, rural health, Indigenous health, and virtual health.

The Town of Pincher Creek Community Economic Development Plan includes a recommendation to develop a regional healthcare workforce training initiative and to leverage the teaching hospital in creating a "health and wellness hub."

HIGHER EDUCATION

Two opportunities stand out from possible collaborations with educational institutions: one, from the perspective of remote learning and practicum programs that could support the development of new skills for locals entering a new (non-extractive) economy, and the other being an opportunity to develop learning and research "hubs" in support of any number of subjects, from historical building preservation an mine reclamation science to agricultural innovation.

Higher education and skill training centres are noted in many communities as potential mechanisms to attract and maintain regional residents, as well as diversify the economy.

In its contemplation of becoming an innovation hub, the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass may consider partnering with an academic institution and establishing a satellite campus for field studies and cross sector training. Similarly, the Crowsnest Pass Heritage Management Plan includes a recommendation to partner with post-secondary trades programs to expand local knowledge and skill in heritage building conservation. Crowsnest Pass also has an Adult Education Association dedicated to lifelong learning.

Other post-secondary institutions in Alberta, like The Universities of Calgary and Alberta, have been building relationships between medical educators, healthcare professionals in training, individuals and families living in rural communities, including Crowsnest Pass and Pincher Creek. For over 20 years, the hospitals and clinics in Crowsnest Pass, Pincher Creek and Cardston have been training sites for medical students, residents, nursing students, and other health professionals. Utilizing the teachers in the small rural communities for training in comprehensive real medicine and regional specialists, the programs have successfully produced competent and compassionate rural physicians.

With the pandemic, medical and other post-secondary education went online. New technologies and innovations are now leading to successful virtual education. Using these experiences of distributed medical education and pandemic-inspired virtual education programming, a completely distributed university education in health professions and other subject areas could be realized. Allowing students to stay in their home communities and be taught by a distributed academic workforce would be an opportunity to retain youth, attract in migration, and develop a vibrant community.

The Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance Energizing Agricultural Transformation recommends capacity building workshops for regional agri-businesses, as well as leveraging agri-business partners such as the University of Lethbridge and other academic institutions.

RECREATION

Crowsnest Pass Quad Squad
A non-profit organization that manages over 1,300 km of trails in the Rocky Mountains of southwest Alberta.

Great Divide Trail Association
The association maintains, protects, and promotes the Great Divide Trail, which traverses the continental divide between Alberta and British Columbia.

Horseback riders, mountain bike and hiking trail guides

United Riders of Crowsnest (UROC)
A mountain biking club formed to steward, create, and promote mountain biking trails in the Crowsnest Pass.

TOURISM

South Canadian Rockies
South Canadian Rockies' mission is to connect regional priorities with market opportunities by:

› **Achieving a single voice for tourism.**
› **Working toward enhancing the well-being of residents.**
› **Fulfilling both a leadership and advocacy role for tourism.**
› **Developing an attractive and competitive set of tourism facilities, events and/or programs.**
› **Assisting visitors through the provision of products and services.**
› **Serving as a key liaison to assist external organizations.**
› **Ensuring designation management and stewardship.**
› **Supporting economic sustainability and diversification.**

Travel Alberta
The Castle Tourism Strategy identifies Government of Alberta actions to help support the development of the Castle region as a successful sustainable tourism destination, becoming a more significant contributor to a diversified economy. Priority areas include strengthening community and industry capacity by:

› **Creating a competitive business environment.**
› **Enhancing destination development and marketing.**
› **Encouraging product development.**
› **Growing Indigenous tourism.**

Foothills Tourism Association
Foothills Tourism Association's mission is to enrich the region's tourism opportunities by:

› **Developing and growing a strong agricultural and entrepreneurial rural business community.**
› **Bringing tourists from local, provincial, national, and global markets to the Foothills.**
› **Attracting provincial and corporate funds to the development of the region.**
› **Working with municipalities and industry associations to stimulate agritourism and rural experiential tourism.**

Tourism Industry Association of Alberta (TIAA)
TIAA advocates for policy that supports the growth and sustainability of all facets of Alberta's tourism economy.

WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE

The Agroforestry and Woodlot Extension Society (AWES)
AWES is a non-profit organization encouraging sustainable forest management through conservation and restoration.

Alberta Conservation Association
"Conservation is about keeping our connections to the past, getting outdoors now, and most of all—shaping our quality of life as we take on tomorrow."

Focused on both conservation and education, the Alberta Conservation Association holds special status as a delegated administrative organization, which means that they deliver responsibilities as outlined in the Wildlife Act and defined in a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Alberta Environment and Parks.

EcoServices Network
The EcoServices Network is a multidisciplinary group of stakeholders working to develop and implement conservation markets in Alberta, building capacity and driving innovation in science, data and information management, socio-economics, and policy to support the creation of a working conservation market system, bringing Alberta to the forefront of economic diversification, environmental excellence, and sustainable development.

Local watershed groups
These independent, non-profit organizations report on watershed health, and facilitate collaborative planning, education, and stewardship. Examples include Old Man Watershed Council and BeaverCreek Stewardship.

Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)
The Nature Conservancy of Canada is the country's largest national land conservation organization. Since 1962, they have helped to protect 14 million hectares (35 million acres) across the country.

Southern Alberta Land Trust Society (SALTS)
SALTS' primary focus is working to place conservation easements on Alberta's most ecologically valuable private lands. SALTS also works to facilitate stewardship projects with landowners to improve riparian and range health and providing outreach and education to help Albertan's understand the broad benefits that come from healthy landscapes.

Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association
The Carnivores and Communities Program was mentioned specifically and provides a successful example of a community-based program that helps people and large carnivores better coexist on the landscape.

Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y)
Y2Y's role is to set the context for regional conservation work by providing the vision for healthy landscapes across the Yellowstone to Yukon region, and to bring partners together to achieve as a network what none of us can accomplish alone. Y2Y's vision is an interconnected system of wild lands and waters, stretching from Yellowstone to Yukon, where the needs of people are harmonized with those of nature.

YOUTH

Because youth and family engagement feature so prominently in the economic and development plans of the region, particularly as a means to keep and attract younger families, partnering with local youth organizations in education, conservation activities, outdoor recreation, and appreciation could serve multiple purposes for a thriving community and wilderness awareness.

4-H Southern Region
4-H is a youth development program offering programs, projects, and events in active living, arts, science and technology, crafts, cooking, and agriculture.

Girl Guides Chinook Area
Chinook Area includes the communities of Barnwell, Barons, Bellevue, Blairmore, Cardston, Claresholm, Coaldale, Coalhurst, Coleman, Coutts, Del Bonita, Enchant, Fort MacLeod, Granum, Grassy Lake, Hays, Hillcrest, Lethbridge, Magrath, Milk River, Nobleford, Picture Butte, Pincher Creek, Raymond, Skiff, Shaghnessy, Stavely, Taber, Vauxhall, Warner, and Waterton Park. Girl Guides of Canada is the largest organization for girls and women in Canada.

APPENDIX 2: Strong Towns

SANDPOINT, IDAHO: WALKING THE LINE
Samuel Western • June 1, 2021

Moving past a commodity-based economy is not for the faint of heart. Communities must navigate byways laced with potholes and sketchy bridges, their foot consistently applied to the accelerator. Detours and wrecks are par for the course.

It's a particularly dicey path for isolated regions that have both raw materials, say timber or agriculture, and natural beauty. Look at towns like Driggs, Idaho, which for decades grew seed potatoes, or Bend, Oregon, which once hosted one of the world's largest sawmills.

When ski areas arrived in both places, they were seen as quaint and gauzy contributions to the community, good for providing seasonal winter work. Until they—and the economy they spawned—took over. Locals resented that. Folks who work in lumber mills or coal mines or tending cattle have a deep bond with their jobs. Recreation economies threaten their identity. Nobody likes that.

Some places, however, not only learned to accommodate commodities and recreation but welcome newcomers with new, OK, maybe even weird, ideas on how to make money.

That's Sandpoint, Idaho...

Read the full article at:
strongtowns.org/journal/2021/6/1/rbc2021-walking-the-line-sandpoint-idaho#rbcseries9

Photo credit: Image via Flickr (Jasperdo)

BIG HORN COUNTY, MONTANA: LEAVING COAL BEHIND
Samuel Western • June 2, 2021

Natural resources have been a mixed bag for Big Horn County, Montana. It's classic Big Sky country, roughly equal in size to Connecticut. An abundance of arable soil, timber, water, and especially coal grace the county.

But prosperity gained through commodities never seemed to last, even when given a boost. The Yellowtail Dam, completed in 1967 across the Bighorn River, created impressive numbers: $100 million to build and 525 feet high, 250 megawatts of electricity, and thousands of acre feet of additional irrigation water. When promoting the project, Montana Senator James Murray wrote President Dwight Eisenhower, stating, "Yellowtail Dam is the key to a great deal of potential, permanent economic expansion in southeastern Montana."

While recreational activities—fishing and boating—boomed as a result of the dam, the irrigation water and electric power sales created limited regional amplitude.

Instead, the county shuffled along, doing its best to deal with boom and bust. Sugar beets took a hit in 1971 when Holly Sugar closed its processing plant in Hardin, the county seat, putting 125 people out of work...

Read the full article at:
strongtowns.org/journal/2021/6/2/rbc2021-big-horn-county-montana-leaving-coal-behind

Photo credit: Image via Flickr (Kent Kanouse)

APPENDIX 3:
Summary of southwest Alberta plans and activities

List of Priorities of Regional Organizations and Municipalities

MUNICIPALITY OF CROWSNEST PASS

Strategic Plan Goal
Municipality of Crowsnest Pass' growth will be effectively planned, managed, sustainable, and focused on the Municipality's long-term needs and opportunities, and rooted in the community's vision and values;

Resilient industrial and commercial businesses choose to locate or remain in Crowsnest Pass and feel well accommodated;

Working-age families will choose to remain in or relocate to Crowsnest Pass and will feel welcomed and accommodated in a community with vibrant, effective volunteerism and community spirit;

Municipality of Crowsnest Pass will use planned, prudent and transparent financial processes which make optimal and sustainable use of its resources;

The Municipality will communicate and effectively engage with its community and stakeholders and will encourage its citizens to be engaged and participate effectively in the public process;

Crowsnest Pass will be known as a vibrant mountain community;

Crowsnest Pass expands as a culture and recreation destination;

Development Plan and Growth Strategy
› **Promoting our urban centres**
› **Expanding our housing options**
› **Investing in our economy**
› **Protecting our treasured places**
› **Building our infrastructure and transportation**

TOWN OF PINCHER CREEK

Strategic Plan Key Objectives
› **Sustainable affordable housing**
› **Municipal and inter-municipal transportation**
› **Comprehensive world class daycare**
› **Inter-regional collaboration**
› **Facility planning**

Community Economic Development Strategy
› **Retain and expand businesses in the community**
› **Attract new investment and businesses to the community**
› **Develop a regional workforce initiative**
› **Leverage key assets for a diversified economy**

CASTLE MOUNTAIN RESORT

Respect the natural attributes of the mountain and the setting recognizing that these are Castle Mountain Resort's primary attraction and currency;

Provide state of the art all-season facilities on the mountain and in the village and base areas;

Focus on the development and operation of a wide variety of recreation and retreat pursuits;

Accommodate the needs and expectations of the day use visitors, the destination guests, the weekend patrons and the growing population of full time residents;

Provide a well-balanced lift serviced alpine skiing and snowboarding experience as the primary winter attraction;

Offer a diverse range of winter and summer attractions.

CASTLE PROVINCIAL PARK AND CASTLE WILDLAND PROVINCIAL PARK

The primary purposes of Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park are to ensure the conservation of nature, the respect of Indigenous rights, and the provision of recreational and tourism experiences. All management decisions will be consistent with the protection of biodiversity, water resources, ecological integrity and connectivity.

GOA CASTLE TOURISM STRATEGY

Priority areas
› **Strengthen community and industry capacity**
› **Create a competitive business environment**
› **Enhance destination development and marketing**
› **Encourage product development**
› **Grow Indegenous tourism**

Commitments that the plan will
Seek to improve the quality of life for Albertans (healthy environment and overall physical and social well-being).

Expand the recreation and tourism products and experiences available in the Castle region in a well-managed and well-planned sustainable manner, sticking to current footprint.

Align the policies and programs of the various orders of government to ensure a more integrated and effective approach to supporting the region.

Facilitate tourism development through the foundational supports required to foster a successful and vibrant tourism economy.

Support better tourism leadership and awareness of the value of tourism in the region.

ALBERTA SOUTHWEST MANDATE

› **Encourage and support economic diversification and value added sector development.**
› **Identify and communicate new investment opportunities.**
› **Support the attraction, retention and growth of business enterprises.**
› **Enhance Alberta's competitiveness by promoting innovation and productivity.**

› **Facilitate regional cooperation and collaboration.**
› **Identify opportunities to streamline regulatory processes to enhance regional competitiveness.**
› **Support strategic economic development planning.**
› **Demonstrate inclusiveness of regional stakeholders in planning processes and establishment of priorities**
› **Engage in the exchange of regional economic information.**

The Study Region is situated within the South Saskatchewan Region (SSR) and activities and resource management are regulated and guided by the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The purpose of the plan is to set "the stage for robust growth, vibrant communities and a healthy environment within the region over the next 50 years." The strategic plan describes the main sectors of economic development of the SSR in terms of agriculture, energy, renewable energy, forestry, transportation, surface materials (aggregates) and tourism.

The key strategic direction of the regional plan related to the economy is "sustainable development wherein economic development takes into account environmental sustainability and social outcomes."

Specific economic objective of the plan include:
The region's agricultural industry is maintained and diversified.

Opportunities for the responsible exploration, development and extraction of energy resources are maintained.

Opportunities for the responsible development of the region's renewable energy industry are maintained in support of Alberta's commitment to greener energy production and economic development.

Value-added opportunities for renewable resources that enhance the sustainability of Alberta's industries and communities are created.

The region's forest industry is maintained and diversified.

Opportunities for the responsible development of surface materials resources are maintained on public lands.

The region is positioned as a world-class, year-round, tourism destination.

The plan also identifies objectives related to air quality, biodiversity and land management, water management, efficient use of land, and outdoor recreation and historic resources. These objectives are to be used to guide provincial and municipal government decisions related to the process and outcomes for balancing economic development opportunities with social and environmental considerations related to land-use.

The following table represents a visual matrix of the theme areas and the noted overlap, consistencies and synergies among and across the study area's towns, districts and organizations. A checkmark (✓) notes an explicit focus on the theme, but the specific approach or definition within each theme area varies. For example, "natural experiences" may mean different things for Castle Mountain Resort as for the Town of Pincher Creek, but those experiences are stated priorities for both communities.

Further, the interest areas from the region's Indigenous communities is limited, and based primarily on the community engagement from the Castle Tourism Strategy, which is quoted below. This information will be augmented by the additional work being done on Indigenous engagement and analysis.

Local Development Strategies in Study Area

	MCNP	ToPC	MDPC	CMR	CASTLE TOURISM STRATEGY	INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES	ALBERTA SW
Environmental Conservation, Protection and Conscious Development	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Urban Beautification and Heritage Preservation	✓	✓					
Trails, Parks, Recreation Facilities and Natural Experiences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Tourism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Extraction, Energy and Alternatives	✓	✓					✓
Knowledge, Education and Innovation	✓	✓				✓	✓
Arts, Culture and Heritage	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Business Development and Marketing	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Housing, Worker, Youth and Family Supports	✓	✓	✓				
Transportation	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Agriculture		✓	✓				✓
Health and Wellness		✓					
Broadband	✓						✓

Exploring Emerging Economic Opportunities in Southwest Alberta: Current Socio-Economic Conditions

A summary report of the social economic condition assessment is available at **y2y.net/NaturePositiveAB**

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