



**HARRISON RIVER VALLEY**  
TOURISM HARRISON

# **TOURISM HARRISON RIVER VALLEY STRATEGIC PLAN**

**2023-2027**



**HARRISON RIVER VALLEY**  
TOURISM HARRISON



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tourism Harrison River Valley would like to thank the Task Force members who provided their insight, knowledge and ideas into the development of this Strategic Plan.

<b>Andy Hillhouse</b>	Harrison Festival of the Arts
<b>Charlotte Murray</b>	Agassiz Harrison Museum
<b>Eric Towne</b>	Harrison Resort
<b>Jo-Anne Leon</b>	Kilby Historic Site
<b>Johanne Dyck</b>	Sasquatch Mountain Resort
<b>Kelsey Charlie</b>	Sts'ailes First Nation
<b>Marian Termeer</b>	Tourism Harrison River Valley
<b>Mike Veenbaas</b>	District of Kent
<b>Rhonda Schell</b>	Village of Harrison Hot Springs
<b>Riley Foreman</b>	Connect Media
<b>Robert Reyerse</b>	Tourism Harrison River Valley
<b>Stephanie Gallamore</b>	Tourism Harrison River Valley
<b>Summer Dhillon</b>	SLAP Communications
<b>Tony Nootebos</b>	Harrison Eco Tours/BCSFG

# INTRODUCTION

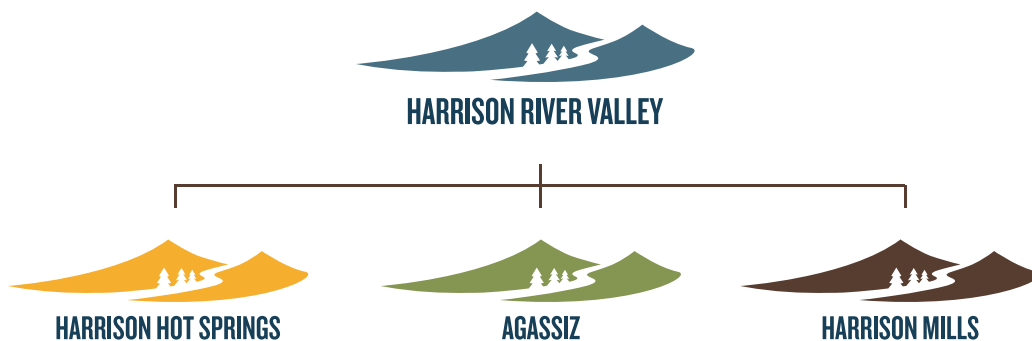
## WHO IS TOURISM HARRISON RIVER VALLEY?

Tourism Harrison River Valley (THRV) is the destination management organization representing a collective of communities spanning Agassiz, Harrison Hot Springs, Harrison Mills, and all the communities in between. We share the land of the traditional territories of the Sts'Ailes, Seabird Island, Cheam, Douglas, Leq'a:mel, Samahquam, Scowlitz, and Skatin First Nations.

The Harrison River Valley is nestled in Southwestern British Columbia (BC), between the magnificent mountains and the mighty rivers that connect our land. We are known for our healing hot springs, lush forested hiking trails, sandy beaches, heritage sites, and beautiful countryside.

As a destination management organization, our role is beyond just marketing. We are stewards of the region, we take responsibility in managing its assets, and we identify the experiences, programs and infrastructure that will continue to attract visitors to visit and stay.

THRV has expanded from our initial destination marketing organization, Tourism Harrison Hot Springs, to include all the communities in the Harrison River Valley, and to support collaboration among them.



## WHY THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

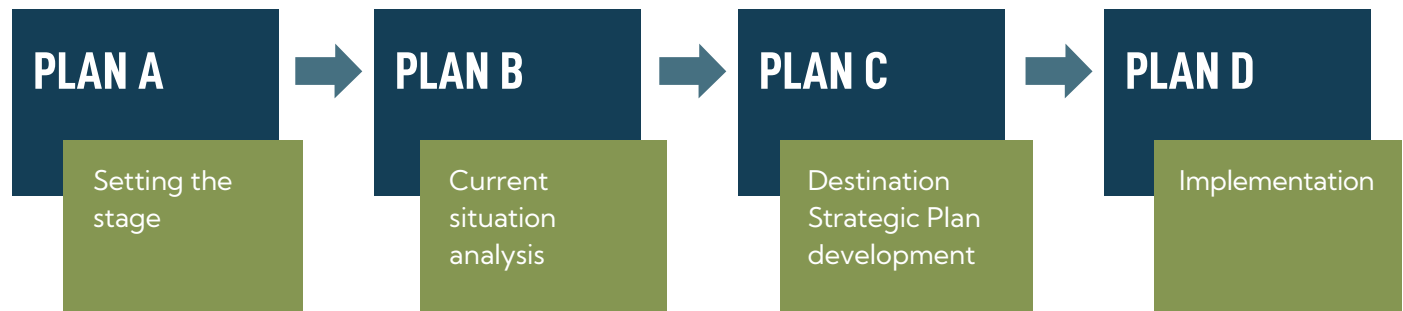
This strategic plan is to guide the planning and operations of THRV as it carries out its expanded mandate as a regional destination management organization (DMO). Creating a shared vision among the regional partners and clearly identified strategies to get there helps ensure everyone moves in the same direction.

This strategic plan defines a shared vision, mission and the five focus areas and strategies for THRV over the next five years. The strategic plan is focused on broad marketing, tourism sector capacity and organizational development strategies, and also includes specific destination development strategies, which are further defined in the appendix. The destination development “themes” could be further developed into a more detailed destination development plan as needed, but the destination development strategies articulated will provide guidance for tourism partners to start with destination development planning in those areas.



## PROCESS TO DEVELOP PLAN

The Tourism Harrison River Valley Strategic Plan was developed over a year and involved the following phases. As much of this work took place during the pandemic, most of the engagement with the Task Force and stakeholders took place virtually.



**Phase A:** Setting the Stage involved creation of the Task Force and holding the first meeting to provide an overview of the project, seek input into desired outcomes, identify roles among tourism partners, and identify engagement opportunities.

**Phase B:** Current situation analysis involved conducting a community survey and stakeholder interviews along with some research to develop a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and to identify key tourism trends and potential destination development themes. The second Task Force meeting was held to review the findings of the community engagement and preliminary research, and to confirm the destination development themes to further explore.

**Phase C:** Destination Strategic Plan development involved conducting more detailed research on eight destination development themes and providing preliminary recommendations, holding a full day (in-person) strategic planning workshop followed by a half day (virtual workshop) to review draft strategies, and then developing the final strategic plan document.

**Phase D:** Implementation will be an ongoing phase that will see the implementation of the strategic plan led by THRV, involving key stakeholders and partners as necessary, and focusing on priority initiatives.

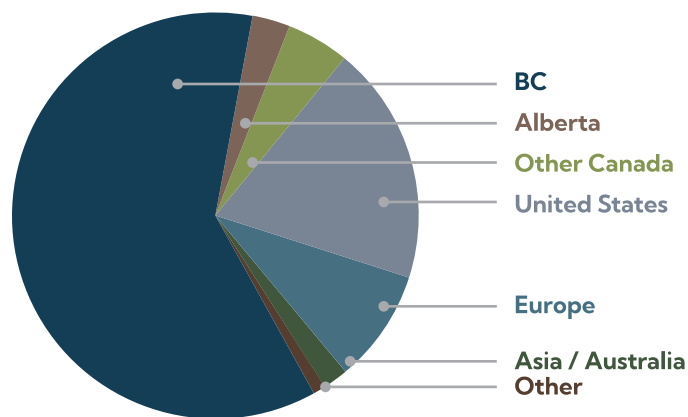
# CURRENT REALITY

Understanding our current market, motivating experiences for visitors to come to our region, trends impacting tourism, and a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis will help us better identify the tourism experiences that we want to provide for our visitors.

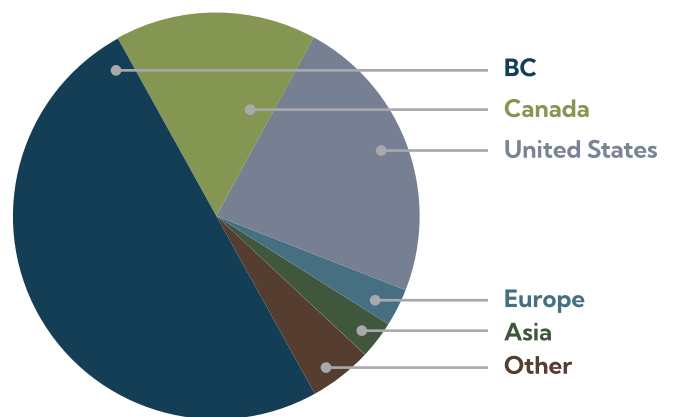
## OUR MARKET

The key market for THRV businesses is the Fraser Valley and Greater Vancouver.

Visitor Centre – Country of Origin



Website Traffic – Country of Origin



Approximate 50% of our visitors are day-trippers and 50% stay overnight, with a greater percentage of our day visitors in the summer and overnight visitors in the winter.

While the pandemic had a significant impact on visitation, especially overnight, we are seeing a rebound in visitation numbers, increased website use and social media hits, which has resulted in increased occupancy and average daily room rate.

The experiences that motivate visitors to the Fraser Valley, according to Destination BC research, are:

- Experience the Fraser
- Outdoor recreation
- Food and farm experiences
- Indigenous experiences
- Sport tourism
- Tourism and/or road trips
- Festivals and events

# SWOT

The SWOT is the analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to THRV. Strengths and weaknesses are internal to the organization/environment in which THRV operates, and opportunities and threats are circumstances, trends and dynamics that are external to THRV but could impact its work. Understanding positive and negative internal and external factors is important to inform the development of a strategic plan.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p><b>Environment/natural products</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natural pristine beauty/ scenery and tourism products (hot springs, lake, beach, trails, Mt. Cheam, Kilby Provincial Park).</li> <li>Numerous attractions/recreational experiences</li> <li>Low-impact outdoor options (walking, hiking, cycling, golf, water activities, camping)</li> </ul> <p><b>Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incredible community, relaxed pace; friendly/ welcoming</li> <li>Agrarian, rural, outdoors</li> <li>Values affordability</li> <li>Focus on small local businesses; help each other out</li> <li>Respect for local First Nations culture</li> </ul> <p><b>Town assets &amp; unique offerings/experiences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kilby museum</li> <li>Circle Farm Tour</li> <li>Locally grown food</li> <li>Arts, culture, events</li> <li>Focus on accessibility</li> <li>Invested in arts and culture events</li> <li>Friendly-tourism operators</li> <li>Proximity to Vancouver and US border</li> </ul> <p><b>Tourism Harrison (organization)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Doing a great job!"</li> <li>Shifting focus from solely marketing to destination management</li> </ul>	<p><b>Limited offerings &amp; amenities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimal year-round offerings</li> <li>Limited weekend offerings (such as night life)</li> <li>Lack of diverse market; too many day-trippers</li> <li>Limited restaurants / (good) food / beverage offerings, grocery stores</li> <li>Limited arts /culture/events and activities</li> <li>Limited guest service</li> </ul> <p><b>Affordability and labour</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of affordability (especially restaurants)</li> <li>Labour/staffing shortages, low quality of tourism jobs</li> </ul> <p><b>Infrastructure and access</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited infrastructure (e.g., parking, highway access, transportation options to, from and within, float plane air access)</li> <li>Lack of planning for visitor management in highway closures</li> <li>A need for more tourism investment</li> <li>Safety concerns re: single entrance/egress; FSRs</li> <li>Lack of public access to hot springs</li> <li>A need for public washrooms</li> <li>A need for more/enhanced recreational infrastructure (biking trails, kayak routes, marina, dock, golf club house, bike park, pool/waterpark)</li> <li>Rundown hotel; need for some beautifying around town</li> <li>Limited cell / internet coverage in some areas</li> <li>Need for better signage</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Tourism Harrison &amp; Partners (organization)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A need for a bigger, more ambitious vision that conveys social responsibility</li> <li>• A need for a long-term vision that supports balanced tourism growth</li> <li>• A need for better advertising</li> </ul> <p><b>Other</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community resistance to tourism</li> <li>• Environmental degradation (lagoon)</li> <li>• Polarization between development and industry vs conservation and environmental stewardship</li> <li>• Some tourism revenues to private companies not reinvested into infrastructure</li> <li>• Some limited understanding and respectful representation of First Nations history and culture</li> <li>• Poor community planning</li> <li>• Boring / cookie cutter development</li> <li>• Isolated location and lack of connections to other regional communities</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appetite in regional tourism markets (Vancouver, US) to get out of the city, relax</li> <li>• Tourism growth trends, e.g., popularity of outdoors/mountain sports</li> <li>• Tourism trends supportive of local food and related experiences (e.g., support for food products made or grown in the area)</li> <li>• Growing awareness and desire to learn more about First Nations language and culture</li> <li>• Increasing desire and opportunities to work remote (with support by expanded cell coverage)</li> <li>• Easing Covid restrictions and pent-up demand for travel and outdoor recreation</li> <li>• Potential ski resort</li> <li>• Funding for recovery initiatives in the immediate term</li> <li>• Growing world interest in environmental stewardship</li> <li>• Demand for affordable tourism experiences (e.g., camping)</li> <li>• Demand for regional tourism experiences</li> <li>• Growth at Abbotsford International Airport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change; wildfires; floods; landslides</li> <li>• High cost of living / fuel prices/ lack of affordability / inflation</li> <li>• Economic downturn (local / international)</li> <li>• Labour shortages; difficulties recruiting</li> <li>• Safety threats and crime (noise, partying, accidents, firearms, off roading/ off grid camping)</li> <li>• Environmental destruction/ degradation of sensitive areas, pollution, garbage dumping</li> <li>• Overcrowding / lack of space / lack of lodging</li> <li>• Future pandemics; border closures</li> <li>• Ignorant / disrespectful tourists</li> <li>• Lack of funding (to support businesses in times of need; to support tourism)</li> <li>• Provincial / Federal regulations limiting/inhibiting operations</li> <li>• Potential ski resort/gondola in Chilliwack/Bridal Falls</li> <li>• Power outages</li> <li>• Competition elsewhere</li> <li>• Visitor social media use, which drives uncontrollable growth and perhaps does not drive the same sense of responsibility to the growth/ sustainable use in these areas</li> </ul>

## TRENDS

In addition to the opportunities and threats identified in the SWOT, a number of big trends were identified that THRV should consider:

PEOPLE		
<b>Demographics: Aging/Millennials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freedom to travel outside peak periods</li> <li>Unique, ionic, beer/hike activities</li> </ul>	<b>Shifting Values: Health/Environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Balance between visitation and protecting nature</li> <li>COVID hangover means people may still be wary of events</li> <li>Wellness</li> </ul>	<b>Advocacy/Social Media: Word of Mouth</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiences are the new marketing focus more than ever</li> </ul>
<b>HR/Labour Shortages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than ever – related to housing/transportation challenges</li> <li>Consider mature workers, Indigenous communities or recent immigrants, or international students (permitted to work up to 30h/week)</li> </ul>	<b>Indigenous Peoples Interest/T&amp;R</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foster relationships and support self-led efforts to consider tourism</li> </ul>	<b>Community Expectations: Visitor Management/Land Use Demand</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More engagement with local communities about tourism</li> <li>Adherence to land use and advocacy for tourism</li> </ul>

INDUSTRY			
<b>Mobile Technology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunity to reach travelers before, during and after trips – need good connectivity</li> <li>Digital nomads working remotely</li> </ul>	<b>Sharing Economy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower cost experiences, modular growth opportunities, policy issues around growth</li> </ul>	<b>Travel Inspiration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digitized, so the ability to connect on these platforms is important</li> </ul>	<b>Customer Service</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expectations of best practice service from booking to the end of trip</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose Driven Genuine Experiences</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DMO experience enhancement roles and management in this area</li> </ul>	<b>Time Poverty and Shorter Trips</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proximal full experience destinations may benefit; staycations</li> </ul>	<b>Competition</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value proposition needs to be precise and targeted at the right visitors</li> </ul>	<b>Climate Change</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reducing footprint – value aligned</li> <li>Adaptation / emergency planning</li> <li>Protecting water access</li> </ul>

## VISION STATEMENT

The Harrison River Valley is a year-round destination where visitors enjoy diverse arts, culture, and recreation experiences, are respectful of the environment, and bring benefits to our unique communities and cultures.

## MISSION STATEMENT

To collaborate with our partners to grow our tourism offerings and responsibly steward our tourism assets for all.

## ALIGNMENT WITH FRASER VALLEY DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Destination BC developed the Fraser Valley Destination Development Strategy in 2017. While some context may have changed during the pandemic years, it is likely that these destination development themes are still relevant for the region, and for the Harrison River Valley:

1. Build tourism strategically by investing and managing growth collaboratively.
2. Accelerate the visitor-based evolution of Experience the Fraser.
3. Accelerate river-based and mountain-based product development.
4. Deliver an exceptional visitor experience.
5. Build a more success-friendly business environment.
6. Prepare the destination and tourism businesses for digital transformation.





# DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT + MANAGEMENT

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

**Destination development** is the strategic planning and advancement of defined areas to support the evolution of desirable destinations for travellers, with a sole focus on the supply side of tourism, by providing compelling experiences, quality infrastructure, and remarkable services to entice repeat visitation.

Destination development could include working with individuals and partners from the following organizations:

- Tourism industry (CDMOs, tourism businesses, and associations)
- Local and regional economic development agencies and economic development trusts
- First Nation governments and Indigenous tourism organizations
- Local and regional governments
- Not-for-Profit organizations (heritage/arts/cultural organizations, community groups)
- BC government ministries<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Destination BC



**Destination management** consists of the coordinated management of all the elements that make up a tourism destination. Destination management takes a strategic approach to link-up these sometimes very separate elements for the better management of the destination. Joined up management can help to avoid overlapping functions and duplication of effort with regards to promotion, visitor services, training, business support and identify any management gaps that are not being addressed.<sup>2</sup>

Destination management includes strategies to ensure the livability, longevity and sustainability of the tourism and community assets and can include visitor management strategies and climate and resiliency initiatives.

Understanding tourism demand – what visitors are interested in or what motivates them to come, as well as the foundations for enhancing and developing your tourism assets, is what will help strengthen tourism revenue drivers.

Eight destination development strategies were explored for THRV. These destination development strategies were identified by the Task Force as ones that had potential for development in the Harrison River Valley. For each strategy, research was conducted to understand how it has been done in other jurisdictions and potential ideas for implementation in the Harrison River Valley. Managing garbage and environmental impact is a destination management strategy that was identified by the Task Force as an important strategy and is included. The destination development strategies are listed below; full descriptions of each strategy are in the Appendix.

- Agritourism
- Events
- Hot springs/warm spots
- Indigenous tourism
- Managing garbage and environmental impact
- Recreation trails
- Tourism hubs
- Water and waterfronts



<sup>2</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization



## FOCUS AREAS

Our focus areas are the components of our strategic plan that describe what success looks like, the strategies to get there, and the key performance indicators of how we measure that success. Key aspects of the eight destination development strategies are integrated within the relevant focus areas; the detailed destination development strategies are attached in the Appendix.

**Our five focus areas are:**

**GROWING OUR WINTER AND  
SHOULDER SEASONS**

**EXTENDING TOURISM  
EXPERIENCES ACROSS OUR  
COMMUNITIES**

**ENHANCING VISITOR  
EXPERIENCE**

**ALIGNING TOURISM  
APPROACHES TO  
COMMUNITY VALUES**

**STRENGTHENING  
COMMUNITY AND  
TOURISM ASSETS**

# GROWING OUR WINTER AND SHOULDER SEASONS

## WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:

- Winter and shoulder season visitation is approaching summer levels
- Increased tourism experiences are available year-round
- Businesses wish to stay open and are able to maintain service levels year-round

## STRATEGIES:

1. Develop offerings to drive overnight stays in shoulder and winter seasons, especially mid-week.
2. Continue to invest in developing new shoulder season experiences.
3. Develop more indoor experiences (e.g., at restaurants, museum).
4. Leverage the success of established events into expanded experiences.
5. Strengthen relationship with Sasquatch Mountain and collaborate on product development and marketing.

## KPI

- Total MRDT by season
- Room nights/occupancy rate by season
- Estimated number of visitors by month/season

# EXTENDING TOURISM EXPERIENCES ACROSS OUR COMMUNITIES

## WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:

- All of our communities contribute to and benefit from tourism
- Regional organizations collaborate to grow tourism
- Indigenous tourism is a leading tourism sector
- Connectivity between communities, including Sasquatch Mountain, is improved

## STRATEGIES:

1. Strengthen relationships with First Nations and support their lead on Indigenous tourism development in the region.
2. Develop stronger marketing and messaging tools that promote experiences across the region.
3. Better understand all experiences offered in the region and how they can be further connected.
4. Leverage existing agritourism experiences in the region and strategically expand them.
5. Further develop and maintain select high value trails and explore opportunities to expand the trail network in the HRV.
6. Enhance connections between the three or four hubs in the region.
7. Continue to activate the other and lesser-known hubs in the region.

## KPI

- Number of business members
- Distribution of business members across the region
- Distribution of visitors across the region's attractions/activities

# ENHANCING VISITOR EXPERIENCE

## WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:

- A sufficient and skilled workforce delivers a positive and authentic visitor experience
- Visitors can find lots of things to do in the region, including night-time activities
- There is adequate and well-managed infrastructure and amenities to support visitation levels
- There is sufficient choice and availability of visitor accommodation

## STRATEGIES:

1. Consistently deliver high quality customer service.
2. Pursue ways to increase workforce housing supply.
3. Continue to seek visitor feedback to improve visitor experience.
4. Develop partnerships with educational institutions for potential staff.
5. Identify and provide key missing infrastructure (e.g., bathrooms, benches) that would enhance visitor experience.
6. Continue to expand events and festival programming.

## KPI

- Net promoter score
- Average length of stay
- Tourism sentiment index trends

# ALIGNING TOURISM APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY VALUES

## WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:

- Visitors appreciate and respect the community.
- Tourism offerings and experiences support community values
- Leading practices in sustainable tourism are implemented
- Residents appreciate the benefits received from tourism
- There are limited negative impacts from tourism, and visitors participate in stewardship of natural resources
- Our communities are prepared to respond to emergencies

## STRATEGIES:

1. Explore green/environmental tourism designation or certification.
2. Identify and promote environmental assets (e.g., Harrison Salmon Stronghold designation).
3. Encourage businesses to provide incentives for locals to partake in local tourism experiences.
4. Develop the plans and mechanisms to prepare for and respond to emergencies, including visitor evacuation.
5. Strengthen messaging and communications about protecting natural assets and minimizing impact.
6. Ensure sufficient resources are available to support minimizing visitor impact.

## KPI

- Percentage of residents who feel the benefits of tourism outweigh the challenges

# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY AND TOURISM ASSETS

## WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:

- Residents and businesses benefit from tourism programs, activities and infrastructure
- Important community and tourism infrastructure is enhanced
- Employees have year-round jobs

## STRATEGIES:

1. Develop more active transportation infrastructure and an improved pedestrian/cycling friendly environment.
2. Explore partnerships between businesses to "share" employees in different seasons.
3. Explore opportunities to expand revenue generation (e.g., from municipal waterfront land and paid parking areas).
4. Improve messaging around the value of tourism.
5. Support businesses in their digital transformation.
6. Enhance access to existing hot springs and plan for future expanded access.
7. Protect existing waterfront infrastructure and explore additional visitor focused experiences across all communities.
8. Improve accessibility of infrastructure throughout the region.
9. Promote the region as a good place to live and do business in order to attract new businesses and investment.

## KPI

- Percentage of residents/businesses who feel the benefits of tourism outweigh the challenges
- Resident satisfaction with the quality and access to community/tourism natural and built amenities, e.g., trails, beach front, lake



# IMPLEMENTATION

Tourism is unique compared to other industries, perhaps most of all in the collaboration and partnership required to deliver the experiences sought by visitors and the community alike. Public and private sectors jointly provide a range of visitor amenities including attractions and activities as well as the support infrastructure like roads, land use and water systems. Strategy implementation will be an ongoing project phase and actions can only be achieved through the cooperation and participation of many individuals and organizations in the Harrison Valley.

Tourism Harrison will lead the implementation phase and delivery of the strategic plan involving key stakeholders and partners as necessary. Implementation will be prioritized to focus on the strategies and actions that deliver the biggest gains at the least cost with resources that are readily available. Longer term initiatives that require additional resources will be addressed as part of the ongoing implementation working with the involved communities in the Harrison Valley.

The following implementation approaches should be considered to enable continued success in tourism and the effective roll out of this strategy:

1. Tourism Harrison River Valley Strategic Plan approved and recognized by THRV and potentially presented and received as an information report by local governments.
2. Creation and commitment to a Tourism Harrison River Valley Strategic Plan Implementation Sub-Committee (coordinated by THRV) with the following roles:
  - a. Creating awareness of the vision, goals, directions and actions with respective colleagues, community members, organization members and other tourism stakeholders such as the regional district and province
  - b. Advocating for the Tourism Harrison River Valley Strategic Plan vision, goals, and strategies in relation to significant organizational, community, regional or provincial decisions that might impact progress
  - c. Regularly (quarterly) reviewing progress and reprioritizing strategies and actions as needed on an annual basis to ensure thoughtful and timely implementation
  - d. Reviewing the monitoring results outlined in the plan and sharing that data for group evaluation
  - e. Reporting progress to respective councils, boards, organization membership, and residents

# FIRST YEAR STEPS AND TIMELINE

What happens during the first year of the Tourism Harrison River Valley Strategic Plan implementation is crucial to ongoing success.

## STEP 1:

To help ensure a continued commitment to the plan and the implementation structure to support it, it is recommended that the THRV Board adopt the plan, and that the plan is presented to local governments.

## STEP 2:

It is recommended that the Implementation Sub-Committee meet formally at least four times a year to discuss plan progress. The first meeting should take place in winter 2023 and the first meeting should include opportunities to:

- Consider the strategies and what it might take to implement and prioritize each as needed to ensure thoughtful and effective implementation
- Identify partner organizations and individuals to help create actions and timelines for prioritized strategies
- Identify and discuss possible sources of funding for strategy implementation

## STEP 3:

It is recommended that the Sub-Committee at least meet again in the early spring of 2023. This second formal meeting should include opportunities to:

- Involve partner organizations or individuals in a process to develop actions/timelines and identify lead/supporting entities
- Confirm action acceptance/modifications by the lead/supporting entities to confirm implementation support for strategies possibly through a project MOU
- Confirm most likely sources of funding for projects

## STEP 4:

Ongoing meetings in the fall/early winter might include:

- Checking in on progress for the actions labeled as year 1
- Checking in on plans for actions labeled as year 2
- Evaluating progress by reviewing and discussing the results from the Strategic Plan monitoring
- Reviewing local tourism trends and upcoming organization plans
- Adjusting action timing and prioritization as required based on new information
- Developing communications to create awareness of and to advocate for the plan

# RESOURCING

The resources required to facilitate the Sub-Committee will be minimal and will primarily include Tourism Harrison River Valley staff time to coordinate reporting back. Resourcing the Tourism Harrison River Valley Strategic Plan and achieving the vision and success as it lays out, however, will require time, ongoing funding, and the focus of many organizations. While some actions will be part of the normal course of business for organizations and tourism businesses, actions to purchase or maintain built or natural infrastructure or to develop new programming will require funding. The two major foundational funds to help continue this work are the Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) and the Municipal Regional District Tax (MRDT) funding (see below for details). This funding could be aligned, where possible, with the strategies and actions in this strategic plan.

## RMI

The RMI Program is intended to support small, tourism-based municipalities to build and diversify their tourism infrastructure, deliver exceptional visitor experiences, and incorporate sustainable tourism practices and products. Harrison Hot Springs is one of 14 communities receiving this funding from the Province of BC.

## MRDT

The MRDT Program is jointly administered by the Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture; and Destination BC and has existed since 1987. It is intended to help grow BC revenues, visitation, and jobs, and amplify BC's tourism marketing efforts in an increasingly competitive marketplace. In 2015, the option for a community to charge up to 3% tax on room revenues was made available. Since then, more than 50% of BC communities have increased the MRDT to 3% and more are in the process.

Funds from the MRDT should augment current funding and funds should be used according to the following MRDT program spending principles:

- Effective tourism marketing, programs, and projects
- Effective local-level stakeholder support and inter-community collaboration by contributing resources that can be further leveraged
- Coordinated and complementary marketing efforts to broader provincial marketing strategies and tactics
- Fiscal prudence and accountability

## Online Accommodation Platform (OAP) MRDT Revenue

These funds consist of new MRDT revenues collected from online marketplaces that facilitate transactions for renting short-term accommodation (many of which operate across jurisdictions) and typically list basement suites, individual rooms, whole homes, or other forms of accommodation (such as trailers or motor homes).

MRDT, OAP and Housing: More info can be found [here](#).

- MRDT revenues from OAP can be used for affordable housing initiatives though it is at the discretion of the designated recipient to determine whether all or part of OAP revenues are to be used either for affordable housing or tourism marketing programs or projects.
- General or traditional MRDT revenues cannot be used for affordable housing initiatives unless the designated recipient can demonstrate support of tourism stakeholders and accommodation providers.

## OTHER FUNDING

Other sources of funding are also available to implement strategies in the Tourism Harrison River Valley Strategic Plan. Some of these tourism focused funds are listed below and more can be included as they arise. There are likely other sources of funding for infrastructure, arts and culture, environmentally focussed initiatives, community building, and skills training.

**Destination BC Event Funding:** The Tourism Events Program (TEP) was created to help events increase the volume of visitors to British Columbia, broaden global recognition of the province, and build our reputation as an internationally renowned destination. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/tourism-immigration/tourism-resources/tourism-funding-programs/tourism-events-program>

### Specific to Indigenous Tourism:

**First Citizens Fund:** Business loans are available to Indigenous entrepreneurs in BC, delivered in partnership with Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada.

**Indigenous Tourism British Columbia:** Indigenous Tourism BC offers funding and support for Indigenous individuals, businesses, and communities to develop tourism experiences and products.

**Accessibility related funding sources:** There are multiple funding sources that tourism industry stakeholders (businesses, regions, communities, and sectors) may consider when developing and marketing their tourism products. [https://www.destinationbc.ca/content/uploads/2021/08/Accessibility-Related-Funding-Opportunities\\_for-Tourism-August-2021.pdf](https://www.destinationbc.ca/content/uploads/2021/08/Accessibility-Related-Funding-Opportunities_for-Tourism-August-2021.pdf)

### Others

Other grants are available from the following organizations:

- Active Transportation Infrastructure Grant Program
- BC Arts Council
- Community Futures British Columbia
- Community Gaming Grants BC
- Cycling Infrastructure Funding BC
- Green Municipal Fund BC
- Heritage Canada
- Hosting BC (viaSport)
- Invest Canada – Community Initiatives
- Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program
- Municipalities for Climate Innovation Program BC
- Southern Interior Development Initiative Trust

# APPENDIX: TOURISM HARRISON RIVER VALLEY DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

## AGRITOURISM

### **Leverage existing agritourism experiences in the region and strategically expand them**

1. Convene farmers and ranchers to discuss potential experiential agritourism opportunities
  - a. Identify farms and ranches not currently leveraging on-site sales and/or agritourism programming
  - b. Identify incentives for participation
  - c. Discuss opportunity for developing specific experiences such as weddings and overnight farm stays
  - d. Identify funding opportunities to grow agritourism experiences and support grant-writing for farms and ranches
  - e. Advocate for ALR legislation that will better support agritourism
2. Refocus on and expand the Guided Circle Farm Tour
  - a. Increase farmer engagement through direct appeals and incentives
  - b. Add missing sectors/activities (e.g., fruit and vegetables, craft breweries, beef/poultry/eggs)
  - c. Engage a supplier to provide e-bike rentals
  - d. Explore guided tours and shuttle services for mobility-limited participants
  - e. Identify a preferred starting point in Agassiz and animate that location/venue with appropriate visitor arrival infrastructure
3. Expand Agassiz Farmers' Market offerings
  - a. Identify and include more suppliers and experiences
  - b. Work with vendors to open a weekend day with extended hours, expanded offerings, and related services / entertainment (e.g., music, children's entertainment)
  - c. Support governance and strategic planning of the Farmers' Market to ensure its financial viability and maximize its opportunities
4. Engage with Earthwise Society to develop more comprehensive agritourism programming in the area
  - a. Work with Earthwise Society to identify ways to partner to deliver programming such as a Circle Farm Tour Festival
5. Further leverage Kilby Historic Site as a location to promote agricultural education and current agritourism experiences in the area
  - a. Identify potential programming and providers to support on-site educational and cultural experiences
  - b. Partner with the Circle Farm Tour in cross-promotions and encourage transportation connectivity between Kilby or Agassiz as a staging area / base camp for a Circle Farm Tour Festival

# EVENTS

## **Continue to invest in developing new shoulder season experiences**

1. Promote shoulder and winter-season wedding locations and venues
  - a. Better highlight the wedding opportunities in HRV on the website and at venues and information centres
  - b. Understand the current underutilized capacity for wedding events
  - c. Create a specific promotion package for shoulder season and winter weddings
  - d. Identify opportunities for farm-based events such as weddings (Agritourism Policy update in 2016 allows 10 weddings with up to 150 people per event)

## **Leverage the success of established events into expanded experiences**

2. Enhance existing shoulder season events
  - a. Season of the Wild
    - i. Seek partnerships with organizations such as universities, colleges or other institutions that can enhance Season of the Wild experiences/events
    - ii. Seek partnerships with Sts'ailes to create ambassadors/interpreters to attend specific sensitive area hotspots during the weekends
  - b. Lights by the Lake
    - i. Expand Lights by the Lake into a regional event with a stamp card to visit each location
    - ii. Seek ways to continue to build the "wow" factor at Lights by the Lake
    - iii. Partner with Sasquatch Mountain Resort to create packages for winter weekends that include Lights by the Lake and mountain activities
  - c. Sasquatch Days
    - i. Work toward expanding to a 10-day event with events covering two weekends
    - ii. Expand the number of activities including interpretation walks
    - iii. Ensure visitor services are aligned with the event days and timing

## **Continue to expand events and festival programming**

- a. Initiate a specific cultural/recreational events and festivals working group
- b. Develop an event and festivals strategy that aligns with the destination development focus areas
- c. Review current event/festival venue assets, needs and future covered requirements near the lake and throughout the region
- d. Seek out additional opportunities for hosting 3rd party cultural or recreational events as a venue (e.g., Hobie Cat race, gravel fondos, car shows, running races – 5 peaks and other)



## HOT SPRINGS/WARM SPOTS

### Enhance access to existing hot springs and plan for future expanded access

1. Conduct a joint planning meeting with the Village of Harrison Hot Springs, Sts'ailes First Nation, Harrison Hot Springs Resort, and Government of BC (and Canada?) representatives to identify appropriate models for expanding access of the hot springs by the Sts'ailes First Nation, without disrupting business opportunities for Harrison Hot Springs Resort (the hotel)
2. Reengage existing tourism operations with discussions about additional hot spring areas and development e.g., Sandpiper
3. Convene sessions with current owners with respect to site redevelopment and/or alternative operating models that allow for additional opening hours for the public, e.g., Fairmont Hot Springs membership model
4. Further explore operating/ownership models (e.g., with Sts'ailes) for a waterfront pier and sauna house swim area extending from Harrison beach

## INDIGENOUS TOURISM

### Strengthen relationships with First Nations and support their lead on Indigenous tourism development in the region

1. Deepen opportunities for economic reconciliation with the region's Indigenous communities
  - a. Confirm the vision and objectives for Indigenous tourism with the Sts'ailes First Nation and Seabird Island First Nation, in whose caretaker lands THRV operates
  - b. Identify how THRV and local governments can support the vision and objectives of the Sts'ailes and Seabird Island First Nations
2. Build more land-based public amenities and attractions such as trails and cultural interpretation sites for guided and self-guided tours in the Harrison River Valley
  - a. Explore the meaning and potential with Seabird Island Nation (Sto:lo) and Sts'ailes of an Indigenous interpretive trail from Agassiz region to Harrison
  - b. Consider interest in naming landmarks and existing trails in the HRV in Indigenous community languages
3. Support the capacity in the region for Indigenous tourism
  - a. Partner with Sts'ailes School to identify emerging youth leaders to foster the next generation of Indigenous tourism specialists and develop formal and/or informal mentoring with experienced Indigenous tourism leaders within the community, or elsewhere in B.C.
  - b. Inventory Indigenous cultural experiences in the region that can be shared with visitors, including storytelling, dance, and/or environmental interpretation



- c. Support the incubation for Sts'ailles Nation-owned and operated business under the Sts'ailles Development Corporation to develop and resource a consistently scheduled and delivered suite of land and water-based cultural interpretation experiences
  - d. Ensure Indigenous operations are prominent on the HRV website and specifically identify the connection (e.g., West Harrison Camping)
  - e. Conduct a joint planning meeting with the Village of Harrison Hot Springs, Sts'ailles First Nation, Harrison Hot Springs Resort, and Government of BC (and Canada?) representatives to identify appropriate models for expanding access of the hot springs by the Sts'ailles First Nation, without disrupting business opportunities for Harrison Hot Springs Resort (the hotel).
  - f. Build capacity in the region through grants and programs to enhance tourism / business education and training, tourism product development, and experience design
  - g. Re-establish immersive Indigenous cultural interpretation tours through paddling journeys on the Sts'ailles and Harrison Rivers, as well as land-based excursions to cultural areas that are open to visitation from visitors
4. Create a physical area for Indigenous tourism
- a. Explore existing Indigenous tourism operational sites and new site options to extend experiential programming
  - b. Accelerate development of the Sts'ailles Cultural Interpretation / Visitor Centre in the Village of Harrison Hot Springs and use this Strategic Plan to inform the Visitor Centre's key offerings

## MANAGING GARBAGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

### **Strengthen messaging and communications about protecting natural assets and minimizing impact**

- 1. Develop "made in Harrison River Valley" messaging about protecting natural assets, leave no trace, etc.
  - a. Develop a communications strategy for promoting the messages, including pre- and during visit
  - b. Develop and promote a visitor code of conduct

### **Ensure sufficient resources are available to support minimizing visitor impact**

- 2. Install more infrastructure (waste, recycling, composting and toilets) at high use areas
- 3. Budget for and fund garbage removal resources and clean-up, scaled to visitor use
- 4. Identify areas of heavy use and develop strategies to disperse visitors (e.g., to Green Point and Sasquatch Provincial Park, Breakwater Beach)

# RECREATION TRAILS

## Further develop and maintain select high value trails and explore opportunities to expand the trail network in the HRV

1. Develop and promote iconic hiking challenge experiences on official trails
  - a. Designate 2–3 iconic challenging trails (Harrison Grind, Agassiz Grind) and include and ensure good signage and maintenance
  - b. Designate 2–3 gentle trail challenges and ensure good signage and ongoing maintenance
  - c. Identify one or two local sponsor food and beverage businesses to support these experiences e.g., bar/tavern with Fraser Valley Microbrew Beers, ice cream shop with local milk-based ice creams
  - d. Develop a marketing campaign around the trail challenges based on recent successful initiatives (e.g., <https://ferniebrewing.com/our-culture/trail-to-ale>)
2. Continue East Sector trail development
  - a. Assess the area for additional ecologically sensitive low grade trail routes in the East Sector and adjacent Bear Mountain shoulder
  - b. Consider additional staging points along McPherson Rd for Bridle Trail or areas to the east
  - c. Invest in trail development in the East Sector
  - d. Identify one loop in the East Sector area that can be wheelchair accessible
3. Explore the potential for bike/hiking trails that can also be used for active transportation
  - a. Explore opportunities to enhance the pedestrian and cyclist travel experience on Rockwell Drive, between Harrison Hot Springs and Green Point Day use Area
  - b. Develop a trail from Harrison McPherson and Hot Springs Rd junction to Golf Rd via the west side of the Harrison Resort Golf Course (avoid km of the highway)
4. Support development of additional hiking trails, maintenance, promotions and infrastructure
  - a. Support the development of a Trails Advisory Body in the Harrison River Valley focussed on appropriate trail development and maintenance
  - b. Develop trail and trail junction directional and identification/wayfinding signage for core trails
  - c. Engage the Regional Trails Advisory Body to explore possibilities for the Green Mountain / saddle area and Green Point to Lakeside area for a network of non-motorized trails including possible focused investments in an iconic hike trail
  - d. Align with the most popular trail app for the area in order to communicate trail condition, closures, etc.
  - e. Develop materials and content (e.g., interpretative signage, birding guide, map) to promote birding on recreational trails

# TOURISM HUBS

## **Enhance connections (all types) between the three or four hubs in the region**

1. Finalize hub brands and use them to develop community welcome points and wayfinding in the area
  - a. Develop a cohesive wayfinding and signage strategy for the HRV area with a special emphasis on Harrison Hot Springs
  - b. Ensure that entry point signs in the three areas are visible night and day and that they provide a sense of arrival
  - c. Create incentives to encourage visitation throughout the HRV, e.g., passports, redeemable bingo cards, incentives to go into the visitor centre to learn about other activities
2. Provide transit / shuttle between hubs
  - a. Explore partnerships (Sasquatch Mountain, Harrison Hot Springs, THRV) to operate a shuttle from Harrison Hot Springs to/from Sasquatch Mountain Resort for core periods during the winter
  - b. Consider partnering with the municipalities and private operators (e.g., river tours) to pilot a shuttle between hubs during the peak month(s)
  - c. Advocate for improved pedestrian and cyclist routes over the Agassiz Rosedale Bridge
3. Improve connections and access to destinations such as Kilby

## **Strengthen relationship with Sasquatch Mountain and collaborate on product development and marketing**

4. Cross-promote Sasquatch Mountain
  - a. Ensure a role for Sasquatch Mountain Resort on tourism planning committees and special projects such as creating a regional event and festivals strategy
  - b. Align summer media and communications with the announcement of new activities at Sasquatch Mountain Resort to attract new visitor types and disperse existing ones
  - c. Feature Sasquatch Mountain Resort more prominently alongside other winter experiences to give another reason for visiting the region
5. Promote employment opportunities in the HRV by coordinating employment opportunities between the winter Sasquatch Mountain Resort and summer in the valley

## **Continue to activate the other and lesser-known hubs in the region**

6. Significantly increase Agassiz / Harrison Mills marketing, investment and activities during the peak months
  - a. Focus new infrastructure, programming investments and marketing on the experiences in Agassiz and Harrison Mills to create a broader itinerary for visitors and to help disperse visitors during the peak visitation periods
7. Create a greater sense of arrival (e.g., more defined arrival point such as kiosk or signage) and clear wayfinding to key destinations

# WATER AND WATERFRONTS

## **Protect existing waterfront infrastructure and explore additional visitor focused experiences across all communities**

1. Stimulate commercial waterfront investments by ensuring long term access to the waterfront through municipal land or dock leases
2. Conduct an economic assessment of existing and potential waterfront uses to ensure that this limited land is used for the highest and best use for the region (public leased dock space, boat launch, peak or offseason arts/cultural/event uses – festivals, beer festivals, food truck festival, etc., boat moorage infrastructure on the lake)
3. Explore potential expansion of the float plane dock area to create overnight moorage and to enhance the connection between boat access and the town's commercial area
4. Further explore operating/ownership models (e.g., with Sts'ailes) for a waterfront pier and four-season sauna house swim area extending from Harrison beach
5. Review current event/festival venue assets, needs and future covered requirements near the lake and throughout the region
6. Consider existing concepts and new design ideas for the lagoon space especially as it relates to the shoulder and winter seasons, but that complements the summer function
7. Feature unique Harrison River fall excursions as a truly iconic experience for the Lower Mainland
  - a. Enhance boat launch and pull-out facilities along the Harrison River
  - b. Explore hosting a river festival weekend event in the fall (as part of Season of the Wild) with Lower Mainland paddling clubs as an introductory river excursion utilizing the beginner friendly Harrison River
  - c. Coordinate a working group to simplify the boat rental shuttling return service between Harrison Mills and Harrison Hot Springs



**HARRISON RIVER VALLEY**  
TOURISM HARRISON