



Hiking with a Canoe  
Photo Credit: Travel Alberta

# Mackenzie County Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan

Final: December 6, 2024



Mackenzie County

**expedition**  
MANAGEMENT CONSULTING



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MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

December 6, 2024

Caitlin Smith  
Director of Planning and Agriculture  
Mackenzie County  
4511-46 Ave  
Box 640 AB  
Fort Vermilion, Alberta, T0H 1N0

Dear Ms. Smith

Please find enclosed the final Mackenzie County Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan. We look forward to hearing about your successes in implementation.

If you have any questions or require clarification on the attached report, please feel free to contact me at 780-266-7888.

Sincerely,



Justin Rousseau, Managing Director  
Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.



Photo Credit: Mackenzie County



Photo Credit: Mackenzie County



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# Executive Summary





Photo Credit: La Crete Chamber of Commerce

## Community Overview

Mackenzie County is a remote region located in the northwest corner of Alberta. It covers over 80,000 square kilometers. It is home to several communities including Fort Vermilion, La Crete, Zama City, recognized rural areas such as Buffalo Head Hills, Blumenort, Rocky Lane and the Hutch Lake cottage area. It contains numerous lakes, rivers, wetlands, unique landforms, campgrounds, trail systems and parks. This diverse area and its amenities make it an appealing destination for year-round outdoor recreation and tourism. The municipality recognizes the tourism potential of the area and is committed to providing its residents with recreational opportunities. It is for these reasons that Mackenzie County has created an Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan.

## Project Purpose

This Plan provides the County with strategic direction and focus regarding the development of outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities. The plan will help to guide future actions and investments by the municipality and its tourism partners. It will also support long-term and sustainable growth in tourism and outdoor recreation infrastructure and opportunities.

## Community Engagement

As an input toward the Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan, residents, County Council, tourism industry stakeholders and regional partners were engaged through a variety of activities, including a survey, facilitated workshops, in-person community engagement and one-on-one interviews.



## Current State

A high-level analysis of Mackenzie County’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as they relate to outdoor recreation and tourism was completed by the consultant team to support the plan. The key findings from this analysis are below.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abundance of natural attractions and outdoor recreation opportunities.</li> <li>• Access to the Peace River.</li> <li>• Excellent fishing opportunities.</li> <li>• Quiet and remote area.</li> <li>• Rich history and successful cultural facilities, including the Mennonite Heritage Village, Fort Vermilion Heritage Centre and the Old Bay House.</li> <li>• Non-profit organizations contribute significantly to the extent of outdoor recreation and tourism assets in the County.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited supply of accommodation options for visitors.</li> <li>• Need for access to remote areas and lakes.</li> <li>• Need for designated recreational areas.</li> <li>• Need for more market ready tourism experiences.</li> <li>• Challenge to prioritize funding to build and maintain recreation assets.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leveraging tourism and outdoor recreation assets to benefit residents and visitors.</li> <li>• Supporting established tourism operators and encouraging new operators.</li> <li>• Enhancing local tourism.</li> <li>• Improving signage and directions to key attractions.</li> <li>• Attracting visitors travelling to/from the Northwest Territories.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing the needs of residents with the needs of visitors.</li> <li>• Environmental threats including natural disasters (e.g. wildfires and floods).</li> <li>• Competition for visitors from other destinations that offer tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities.</li> <li>• Increasing costs to operate tourism businesses (including high cost of insurance).</li> </ul>

Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.





# Tourism Product Opportunities

Eight high-potential outdoor recreation and tourism product development opportunities were identified for the County as described next. Each of these opportunities can leverage the County's many natural assets and improve access to them.

## 1. Unique Wilderness Accommodations

Unique wilderness accommodations offer special getaway experiences that provide enhanced opportunities for connecting with nature. Developing these in the County would help to fill a gap in accommodation options, provide opportunities for visitors to experience wilderness areas and related activities, and respond to increasing market demand for high-end glamping stays.

## 2. Destination Campgrounds

Destination campgrounds offer campsites that feature enhanced on-site recreational opportunities and programming that offer visitors a place to stay and things to do, transforming a campground into a destination. More of them in the County would help to meet a growing demand for fully serviced campground facilities, provide new outdoor recreational opportunities, and leverage existing successful destination campgrounds.

## 3. Trail Development and Water Access

Well developed trail systems can offer exceptional outdoor experiences to both residents and visitors. Development of new trails in the County is supported by high demand for trails for all-season use and the abundance of natural assets in the region. Trails, boat launches, access roads and water-side campgrounds can provide access to lakes and rivers, further enhancing recreational opportunities.

## 4. Outdoor and Backcountry Equipment Rentals

Many outdoor recreation opportunities in remote and backcountry areas require specialized equipment. Rental businesses would cater to the needs of visitors wishing to explore the County's outdoor opportunities by providing equipment that supports their desired activities.

## 5. Fly-in Fishing Resorts

The County is home to many lakes and excellent fishing opportunities. Many of them are not accessible by land. Developing fly-in fishing resorts would improve access and cater to the significant market for fishing tourism.

## 6. Wilderness Education Training

Given the remoteness of many areas of the County, and the demand and potential for varied outdoor recreational experiences within them, there is opportunity for businesses or organizations to deliver courses that help tour operators, residents and visitors safely access and enjoy the backcountry.

## 7. Guided Adventure Tours

Guided tours offer organized outdoor experiences to visitors and include outdoor recreational activities like outfitting, ATVing, snowmobiling, paddling trips, hiking, and horseback riding. New operators would strengthen local offerings, as would new infrastructure to support activities.

## 8. Culture and Heritage Tourism

Fort Vermilion, Buttertown, and the La Crete Mennonite Heritage Centre are examples of existing assets in Mackenzie County that could be leveraged to attract more visitors and enhance visitor experiences through immersion in local heritage and culture.



## Vision for the Future

The following vision with supporting outcome statements has been developed to guide the Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan.

### 10 Year Vision Statement

*By 2034, Mackenzie County residents will benefit from a growing tourism industry through increased access to outdoor recreation, enhanced stewardship of the land and new economic opportunities.*

### Outcome Statements

- The region will see increased investment in new outdoor recreation and tourism ventures.
- There will be more ways for people to enjoy the great outdoors.
- Access to the land and to water for recreational and tourism purposes will be enhanced.
- More visitors and residents will be experiencing the area's outdoor offerings in ways that are sustainable and responsible.
- Greater local buy-in and promotion of outdoor recreation and tourism, and wide recognition that they are key drivers of economic, social, and environmental benefits for communities in Mackenzie County.

## Strategy for Tourism Development

It is recommended that Mackenzie County employ a product development strategy as its strategic focus over the next 10 years. This strategy entails developing new tourism products (i.e. experiences) for existing markets. A product development focus is supported by an abundant outdoor recreation asset base to build from, a need for formalized experiences, and visitors and residents who are highly engaged by the product offering.

## Target Markets

Considering available visitor and resident data, and taking into account what inspires people to participate in outdoor recreation in Mackenzie County, the following target markets have been identified for the plan.

### Primary Target Markets:



1. Visitors from across Alberta who are seeking true outdoor recreation experiences in wilderness settings.



2. Residents of Mackenzie County and their visiting friends and relatives who want to enjoy nature and deepen their connections to the land.



3. Regional residents and visitors travelling to and from the Northwest Territories.

### Secondary Target Market:



Visitors from across Canada who are seeking to immerse themselves in nature through outdoor experiences.



## Goals

Three overarching goals have been developed to guide the plan.



### 1. ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Goal:** Build stakeholder capacity to grow the visitor economy and implement the Mackenzie County Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan.



### 2. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

**Goal:** Expand the County's outdoor recreation and tourism offerings by developing new attractions, visitor experiences, and amenities.



### 3. MARKETING

**Goal:** Encourage travellers to visit and explore Mackenzie County by promoting the region's tourism offerings to target markets.

## Roles in Implementation

The Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan describes how stakeholders can come together to collaboratively action the plan. It is envisioned that a variety of local, regional, and provincial partners will contribute toward implementation, including Mackenzie County, businesses and entrepreneurs, community champions, the Mackenzie Frontier Tourist Association, local organizations, and other orders of government. It will be important to engage individuals who are champions of tourism, collaboratively minded, and stand to gain by building the visitor and outdoor recreation economy in Mackenzie County.



Photo Credit: Wikimedia



## Action Plan

The action plan contains priority initiatives and detailed action items under each of the plan's three goals. Performance measures are included, in addition to funding and support programs to assist with implementation.

### Top 10 Action Items

The following actions have been identified as the top priorities of the plan. They are listed in a recommended order of priority.

1. Engage with partners to encourage coordination, collaboration, and cooperation when implementing the plan. This could include the Community Services Committee, Chambers of Commerce, Agricultural Societies, Recreation Boards, Mackenzie Frontier Tourist Association, Regional Economic Development Initiative Association for Northwest Alberta, tourism operators, campground caretakers, and other applicable partners.
2. Work with partner organizations to host an Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Forum.
3. Utilize the Development Plans (see Appendix E) to support the development of unique wilderness accommodations and destination campgrounds across the County.
4. Work with existing organizations, such as the Rocky Lane Agricultural Society, La Crete Polar Cats Snowmobile Club, and Watt Mountain Wanderers Snowmobile Club, to secure long term access to trail areas and to further develop existing infrastructure and amenities.
5. Improve trailhead amenities, signage and directions to existing trail access points.
6. Work with tourism operators to help them access Travel Alberta's Tourism Investment Program for Product Development and other development grant opportunities.
7. Lobby the Provincial government to secure enhanced access to outdoor recreation and tourism assets.
8. Encourage participation in tourism experience and package development training offered by Travel Alberta and Community Futures.
9. Work with the MFTA to enhance tourism websites, align branding and support the implementation of other actions in this plan.
10. Develop a Tourism Emergency Communications Plan.

## Conclusion

The Mackenzie County Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan provides strategic direction and actions that will advance the County toward its 10 year vision and desired outcomes. The region has an abundance of natural and wilderness areas, and a solid base of outdoor recreation and tourism amenities, all of which provide a foundation to build on and opportunities for growth. Quick win actions identified in the plan provide opportunities for positive short term change and real improvements for outdoor recreation and tourism. These will help to build momentum for long term implementation and return on investment that will benefit residents and visitors alike.



1

# Project Overview







Trail Riding Near the Peace River

## Introduction

Outdoor recreation activities are abundant in Mackenzie County and contribute to an increased quality of life for residents. The many year-round offerings also lend themselves well to tourism, especially when they are paired with the County's rich history and heritage. Mackenzie County is committed to providing its residents with high-quality and accessible outdoor recreation opportunities, while also exploring tourism opportunities. This plan will assist the County and its tourism partners by providing strategic direction and focus regarding the development of outdoor recreation and tourism in Mackenzie County.

“

*“Camping with family and friends at the Ferry Campground and Wadlin Lake has been a great blessing.”*

– Survey Respondent



## Process

The Mackenzie County Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan process has five, interconnected phases. This report represents the main deliverable for Phase 4 – Draft Plan. The Draft Plan will be reviewed with Mackenzie County Council and staff to collect feedback that will be utilized in preparing the Final Plan.



## Project Team

The project committee was established to oversee the study and provide input and feedback at key junctures. The plan was developed by the consultant team.

Project Team	
Organization	Representatives
Project Committee (Mackenzie County)	Caitlin Smith – Director of Planning and Agriculture Don Roberts – Director of Community Services Sheila Gibson – Administrative Officer
Consultant Team (Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.)	Justin Rousseau – Managing Director Maxwell Harrison – Senior Associate Cassandra Gilmore – Associate Lisa Larson – Consultant Breanna Hives – Graphic Designer

Photo Credit: PeakVisor



# Overview of Research

This report was informed by a variety of primary and secondary research. Primary research was gathered through a public survey, digital input workshops with various stakeholders, in-person community engagement, in-person site tour, and one-on-one interviews. Secondary research was gathered from local, regional, provincial, and national data sources, information requests of the Client, and a review of relevant literature.

## 1. Surveys Administered

- a. Community Survey (113 responses)

## 2. Meetings Conducted:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Project Steering Committee Meetings<br/>Dates: February 26, March 15, April 5, April 25, July 18, and July 31, 2024</li> <li>b. Community Input Workshops<br/>Dates: May 7 and May 9, 2024</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c. Council Input Workshop<br/>Date: April 23, 2024</li> <li>d. In-person Tour and Trade Show<br/>Dates: April 26 to April 28, 2024</li> </ol> |
|---|--|

## 3. Stakeholders Engaged (through workshops and/or interviews):

The following stakeholder groups chose to participate in the engagement process.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mackenzie Frontier Tourist Association</li> <li>2. Fort Vermilion Heritage Centre</li> <li>3. La Crete Agricultural Society</li> <li>4. La Crete Polar Cats Snowmobile Club</li> <li>5. Mennonite Heritage Village</li> <li>6. Rocky Lane Agricultural Society</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Zama Recreation Society</li> <li>8. N'deh Limited Partnership</li> <li>9. Explore Edmonton<br/>(Northern Sky Corridor Project)</li> <li>10. Government of Alberta<br/>(Forestry and Parks)</li> </ol> |
|---|---|

## 4. Documents Reviewed

- a. Strategies, plans, and other documents from Mackenzie County.
- b. Reports, statistics, surveys, and planning documents.
- c. Research and plans from provincial and national sources.



Photo Credit: Mackenzie County



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# Destination Analysis





Located in the northwest corner of Alberta, Mackenzie County is Canada's largest county at just over 80,000 square kilometers in size. The County was incorporated relatively recently in 1995; however, the area is among the oldest settled places in the province. The Dene and Cree were the first people to inhabit the area. This was followed by Europeans drawn to participate in the fur trade starting in the late 1700s. Since that time, people have flocked to Mackenzie County to contribute to the agricultural, forestry, energy, and tourism industries which drive the local economy.<sup>1</sup>

## Community Analysis

Mackenzie County's three hamlets are Fort Vermilion, La Crete, and Zama City, and it encompasses the communities of High Level and Rainbow Lake. These communities are described next.

### Hamlet of Fort Vermilion

Fort Vermilion is a hamlet located approximately 78 km southeast of High Level. It was established at its current location on the southern bank of the Peace River as a fur trading post for the North West Company between 1828 and 1831.<sup>2</sup> The Old Bay House is the only remaining structural element of the post. The original fort, at a different location on the Peace River, was established in 1788. The name Vermilion apparently comes from the red ochre deposits along the riverbanks in that area. Members of the Beaver First Nation were the first to inhabit the area. People from other First Nations and Métis people came to live there also.<sup>3</sup> Today Fort Vermilion is a riverside community with potential and opportunities to grow and flourish as a tourist destination.



Photo Credits (top-bottom): Travel Alberta, Fort Vermilion



### Hamlet of La Crete

The Hamlet of La Crete, at the north base of the beautiful Buffalo Head Hills, is surrounded by forests, lakes and lush farmland. The area boasts unlimited opportunities for adventure such as water sports, hunting, camping, fishing and snowmobiling. The La Crete Mennonite Heritage Village features many historical buildings from the original townsite.<sup>4</sup> The ferry is one of only six in Alberta.<sup>5</sup> It crosses the Peace at Tompkins Landing in all its roaring splendor and peaceful serenity. La Crete has a rich history dating back to 1918, which has embedded strong cultural ties into the lives of its inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> The possibilities for tourism growth in and around the community are immense, including in agritourism.

### Hamlet of Zama City

Zama City is a tiny hamlet in the far north of Mackenzie County. It was established in the late 1960's as a resource community. It is surrounded by boreal forest and is within the Bistcho Lake Caribou Range. Community amenities are in abundance. The main tourism feature is a fully serviced campground, with glamping and year round cabin stay options, fish pond, and swimming area.<sup>7</sup> The vision by the community for this facility is a northern event center that can partner with the community hall with commercial kitchen to host family, community and corporate events. An interesting fact, the Zama City Library is the most northern library in the province. The wild Hay-Zama bison herd also is home in this part of the County, and it is normal to see bison within and surrounding the community. The prime location of Zama City makes it a perfect base for the exploration of the surrounding boreal forest, access to nearby lakes, and the Hay-Zama Wildland Park.

Hamlet of La Crete



Hamlet of Zama City



Photo Credits: Mackenzie Frontier Tourist Association



### Town of High Level

High Level is located centrally in Mackenzie County. The town offers a variety of activities for residents and visitors throughout the year. In winter, visitors can skate along the skate path at Jubilee Park or make use of the indoor and outdoor arenas. The town also features a curling club, aquatic centre, and golf and country club. Outdoor enthusiasts appreciate the nearby trails, which are ideal for snowmobiling and hiking. High Level's northern location is ideal for those seeking a base from which to go out and enjoy hunting, camping, fishing, and experiencing the northern lights. The town is also home to the Mackenzie Crossroads Museum and Visitor Centre, where visitors can learn about the community's history and culture.<sup>8</sup>

### Town of Rainbow Lake

Rainbow Lake is located west of High Level and offers a variety of amenities and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. The town's Multi-Use Facility includes a community hall, public library, health and fitness club, curling sheets, and an ice arena.<sup>9</sup> 45km south of the community is Rainbow Lake Provincial Recreation Area, where visitors can enjoy camping, boating, fishing, and canoeing on the lake.<sup>10</sup> Residents and visitors also enjoy the cross-country ski trails and snowmobile trails available in the area. Throughout the year, Rainbow Lake hosts several community events, including a winter carnival, Easter Egg-stravaganza, the annual Father's Day Fish Derby, Christmas tree lighting, and various sports tournaments.<sup>11</sup>

“

*“Camping at Rainbow Lake is always a favourite. They have a nice sandy beach and a separate dock for boats/fishing and a kid friendly swimming area.”*

– Survey Respondent



Town of High Level



Town of Rainbow Lake

Photo Credits: RED1



## Demographics

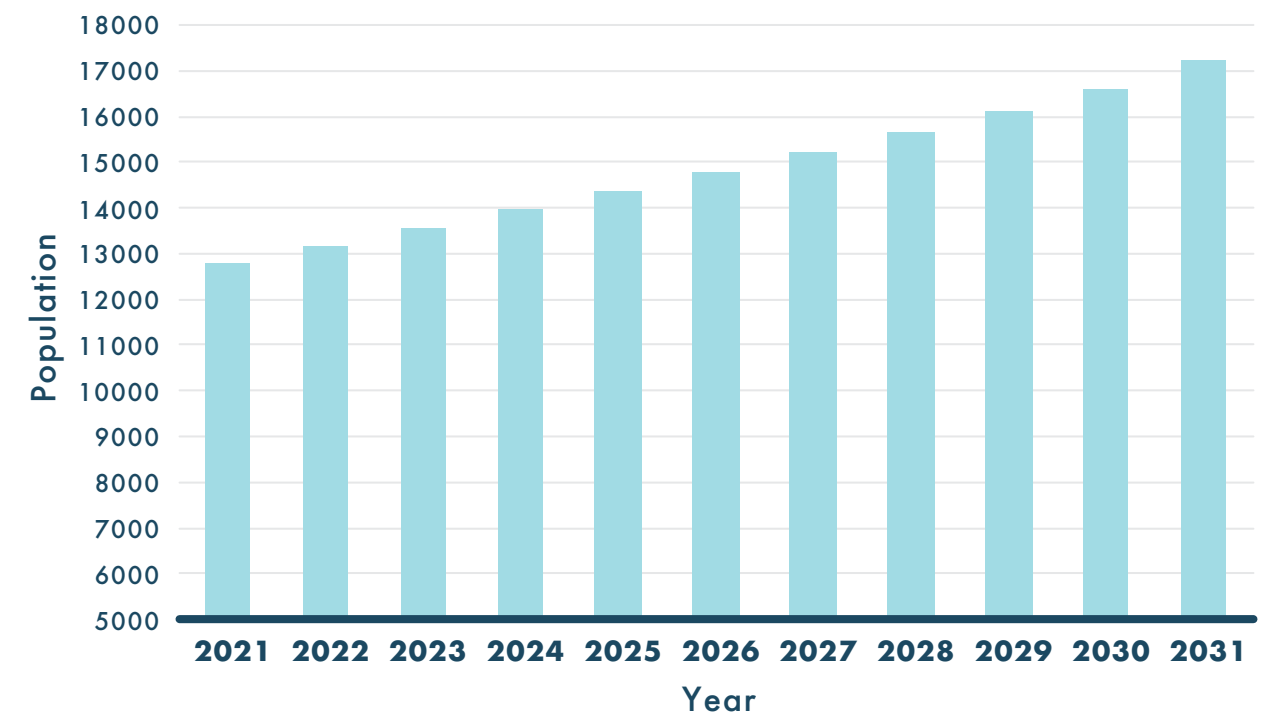
The total population of Mackenzie County was estimated to be 14,380 in 2024. There was an increase of 14% between 2018 and 2024.<sup>12</sup> The rate of growth is slightly higher than the provincial growth rate of 13% over the same period.<sup>13</sup> According to Mackenzie County’s Municipal Development Plan from 2021, the population of Mackenzie County will rise to 17,237 by 2031 (see Figure 1).<sup>14</sup>

In 2024, children aged 0 to 14 represented 34% of the total population, the working age population (15-64) represented 53%, and the senior population (65 and over) represented 7%. The cultural origin of County residents is varied and includes European, Russian, Mennonite, Latin American, Indigenous and others. The number of newcomers from outside Canada is increasing. Newcomer places of birth are varied also, with people from Mexico, Haiti, elsewhere in the Americas, Asia, and Europe choosing to call the County home.<sup>15</sup>

The majority of residents in the County live in single-detached houses (77%) and there are 3,515 occupied private dwellings.<sup>16</sup> Household size is varied, with 16% of the population living in single person households, 33% living in households of two people, 15% living in households of three and 15% living in households of four. Thirty eight percent of households include five people or more. The median after-tax income of households was \$82,000 in 2020, which was an increase of 3% from 2015.

Despite differences in ages, income, cultural background, and household size, County residents all share a love of where they have chosen to live, work and play.

Figure 1. Projected Population Growth in Mackenzie County





# Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Asset Analysis

Several strengths, gaps, and opportunity clusters in Mackenzie County's tourism and outdoor recreation offering were identified during the Tourism and Recreation Opportunity Assessment. These were identified as a result of an asset inventory process, engagement process, and planning review.<sup>17</sup> A summary of the strengths and gaps is provided next. Please see the previous report under separate cover for an expanded discussion.

## Strengths

- Abundant Natural Areas
- Attractive Waterways
- Excellent Fishing Opportunities
- Strong Outdoor Recreation Offerings
- Interesting Culture and Heritage

## Gaps

- Need For More Designated Recreational Areas
- Limited Support Amenities
- Limited Access
- Few Accommodation Options
- Need For More Market Ready Tourism Experiences

### The Impact of Non-Profit Organizations

The extent of outdoor recreation and tourism assets present in Mackenzie County today is in large part thanks to many non-profit organizations. These groups dedicate their time to developing and upkeeping assets that both residents and visitors enjoy.

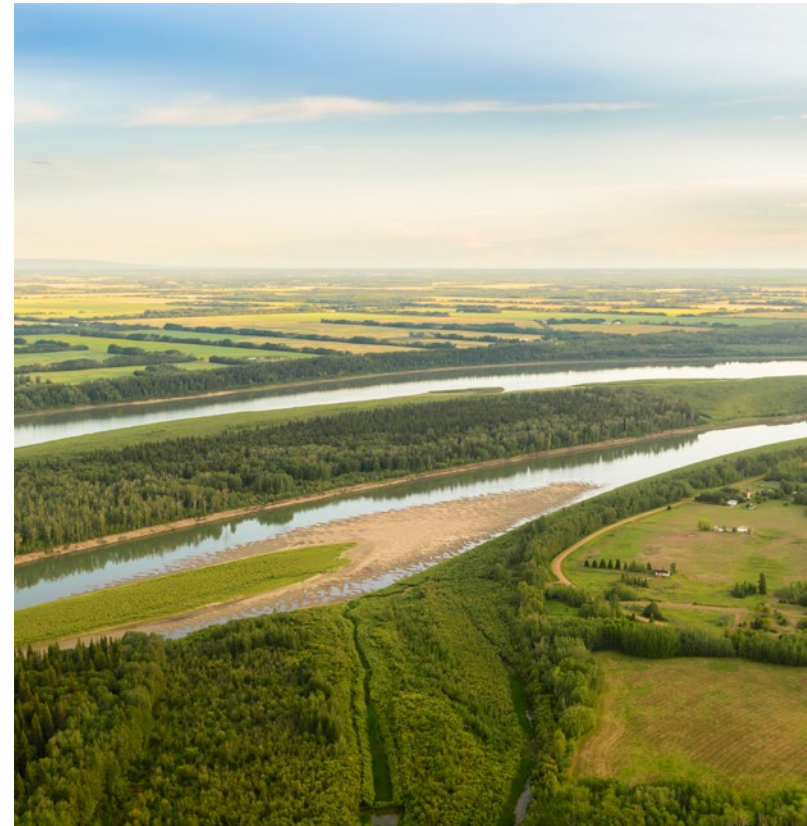


Photo Credit (top - bottom, left to right): Mackenzie County, La Crete Heritage Centre, Fort Vermilion, Mackenzie County

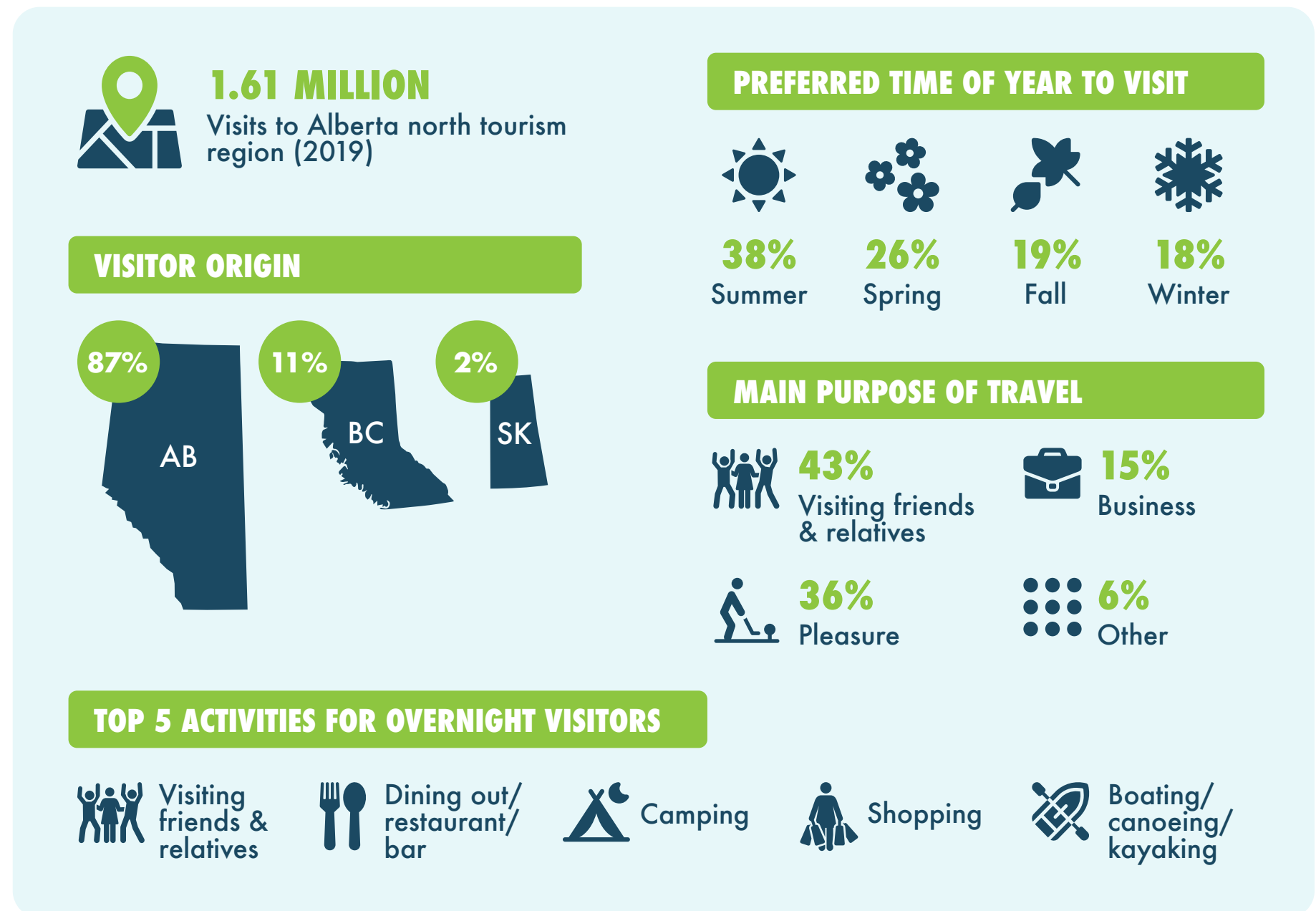


# Visitor Analysis

The following describes existing and potential new visitor markets for Mackenzie County.

## Domestic Tourism in Alberta North Tourism Region (2019)

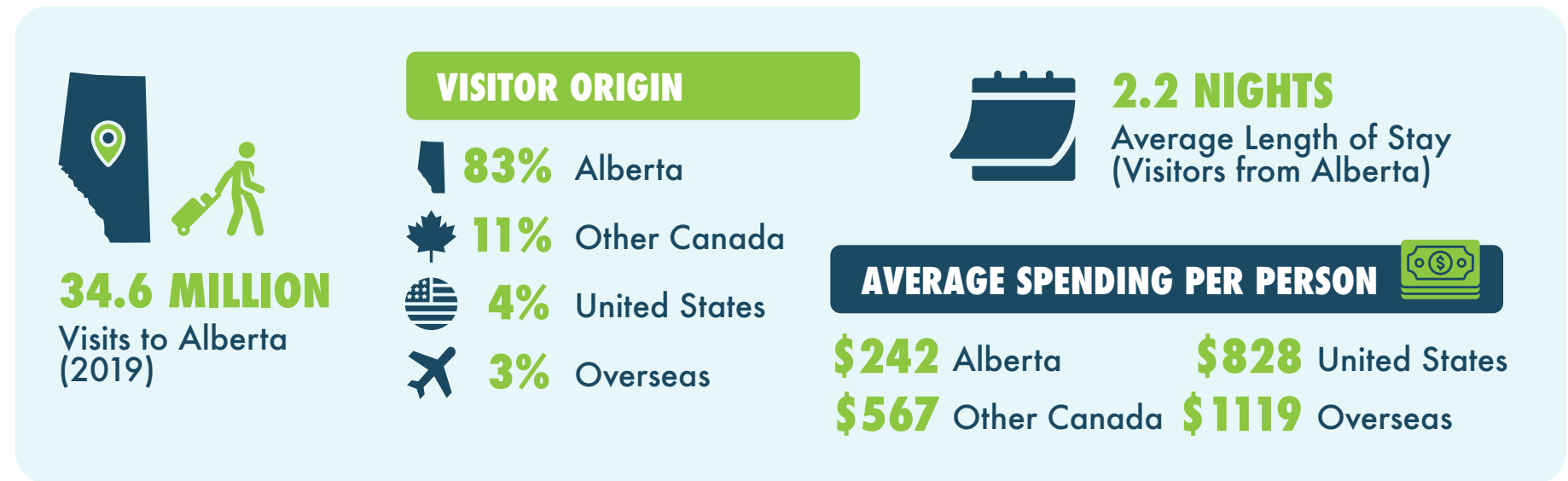
In 2019, 1.61 million visits were made to destinations in the Alberta north tourism region. Visitors primarily came from Alberta (87%), British Columbia (11%), and Saskatchewan (2%). Visitors preferred to visit during the summer months (38%), followed by spring (26%), fall (19%), and winter (18%). The top five activities for overnight visitors included visiting friends/relatives, dining out/restaurant/bar, camping, shopping, and boating/canoeing/kayaking. In terms of the main purpose of travel, visiting friends and relatives was the most common (43%), followed by pleasure (36%), business (15%), and other (6%).<sup>18</sup>





### Visitation to Alberta (2019)

In 2019, 34.6 million visits were made to Alberta. Visitors primarily came from within Alberta (83%), other parts of Canada (11%), United States (4%), and overseas (3%). The average length of stay of overnight visitors that came from within Alberta was 2.2 nights. Average spending per person per visit for visitors that came from within Alberta was \$242. For visitors from other parts of Canada it was \$567.<sup>19</sup>



### Visiting Friends and Relatives

Traveling to visit family and friends is a significant driver of travel to Mackenzie County. In fact, “Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) represents a considerable share of all tourism in Alberta”.<sup>20</sup> The VFR market accounts for 43% of all in-province trips by Albertans, and VFR is the main reason for more than half of Canadians traveling to Alberta from other provinces.



Photo Credit: Mackenzie County



## Marketing Analysis

The following describes the current state of tourism-related marketing in Mackenzie County and identifies broader marketing initiatives that the County could seek to leverage.

### Mackenzie Frontier Tourist Association

The Mackenzie Frontier Tourist Association (MFTA) is a not-for-profit organization that works to support and grow tourism in northwest Alberta. Their mission to “Promote the Frontier” is accomplished by promoting the region through various channels such as their website, social media, trade shows and marketing initiatives with partners. For example, MFTA has partnered with Mighty Peace Tourism to produce both online and print versions of the Great Northern Circle Tour. MFTA also collaborates with MoveUp Magazine and distributes brochures across Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories.

The MFTA website advertises a range of tourism opportunities, featuring activities such as touring, camping, wildlife viewing, winter, golfing, history, and day trips. Visitors can also download brochures like the Campgrounds Brochure, Stay in the Frontier, Wildlife in the Frontier, Winter in the Frontier, and the Fort Vermilion Historical Guide. Their website also provides detailed one-page features on various communities and activities including Fort Vermilion, High Level, La Crete, Zama City, geocaching, golfing, food, museums, and snowmobiling.

Businesses and organizations are encouraged to become members of MFTA so that they can better leverage the organization’s services. These include full listings on the MFTA website, inclusion in the printed Business Directory, MFTA publications, social media promotions, and a quarterly feature in MoveUp Magazine. Additional benefits include access to Travel Alberta sponsored programs and free distribution of member brochures at Visitor Information Centres, trade shows, and through information requests. Members also receive regional news and updates on tourism related events.<sup>21</sup>

### Mackenzie County

Mackenzie County supports the work of the MFTA and manages its own marketing initiatives. The County’s website provides information on local campgrounds, including amenities, locations, and rates, along with a community events calendar and a list of the County’s day-use parks. Visitors can also find details about historic sites such as the Old Bay House, Trapper’s Shack, the Bourassa/St. Germain House, Buttertown, St. Louis Church, and the La Crete Mennonite Heritage Village. Additionally, their website offers links to resources like the Mackenzie Frontier Tourist Association, Fort Vermilion Heritage Centre, La Crete Heritage Centre, and Zama City. Mackenzie County also engages the community through its social media platforms.

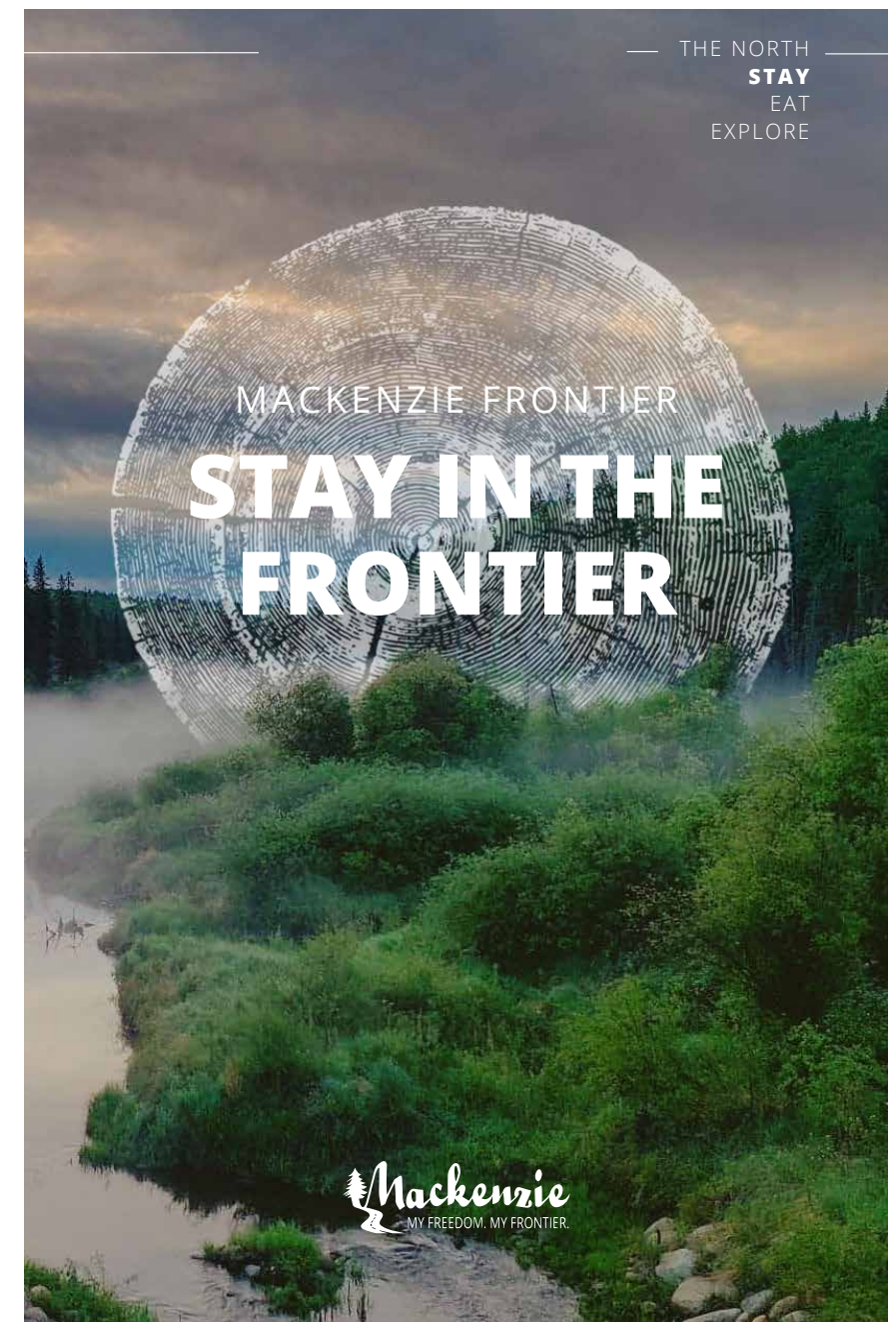


Photo Credit: Mackenzie Frontier



## Travel Alberta’s High Value Travellers

Travel Alberta has identified High Value Travellers that the organization targets. High value travellers tend to spend more per visit, deliver the highest return on investment, and contribute to the province’s economic growth. Travel Alberta defined these categories based on a combination of psychographic, demographic, and socioeconomic data. The type that is most relevant to Mackenzie County is Curious Adventurers.<sup>22</sup>



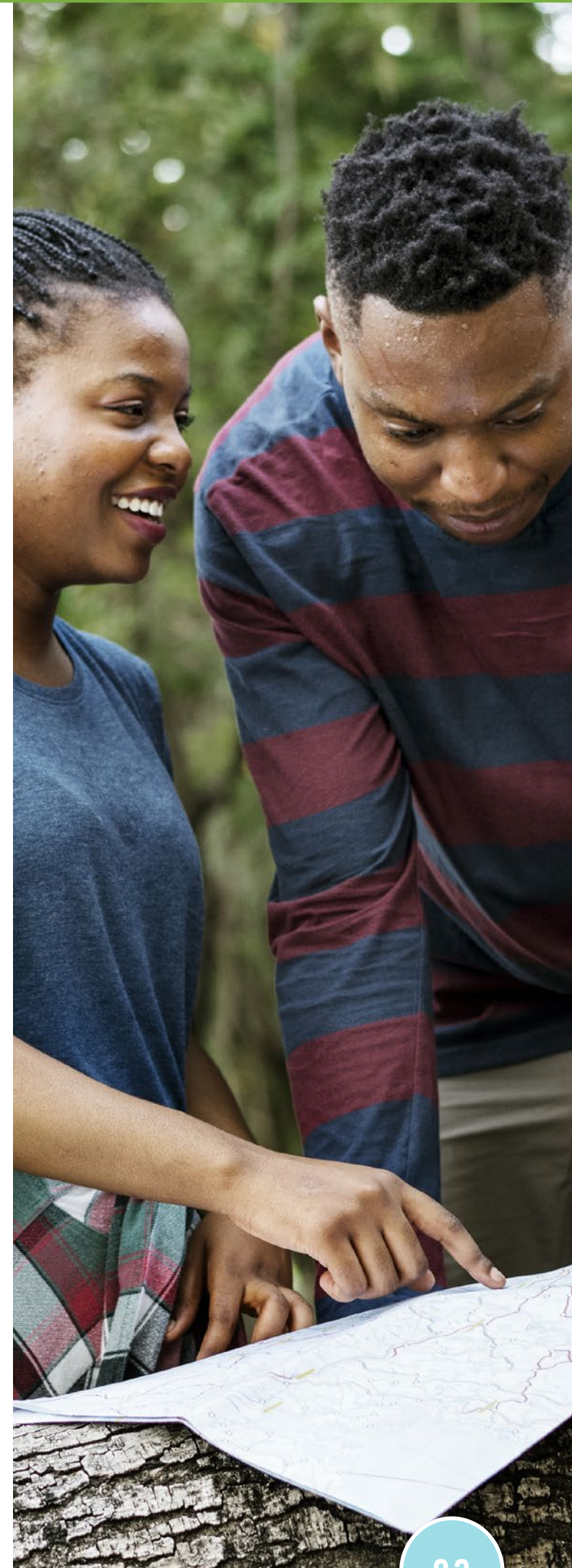
### CURIOUS ADVENTURERS

Curious Adventurers are primarily between the ages of 40-55. They are defined by their passion for exploring new destinations, spontaneity, and being open-minded. They are thoughtful planners, driven by adventure and discovery. Curious Adventurers enjoy the planning process; however, they approach it with flexibility. They also seek authentic interactions with locals to guide their experiences.<sup>23</sup> Their personal interests that align with Mackenzie County’s tourism offerings include birdwatching, camping, hiking, motorcycles and ATVs, motorized watercrafts, museums, and RVing.

Mackenzie County could seek to align their marketing efforts with Travel Alberta’s Curious Adventurers travellers where appropriate to enable greater leverage on marketing dollars.

### Personal Interests

-  Birdwatching
-  Camping
-  Hiking
-  Motorcycles & ATVs
-  Motorized Watercrafts
-  Museums
-  RVing





## Northern Sky Corridor

Destination Canada’s newly established Northern Sky Corridor is intended to more strongly connect northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories from a tourism perspective. The Northern Sky Corridor will celebrate the region’s rich cultural heritage, art, and experiences amongst expansive natural beauty. In this corridor, demand for experiences currently exceeds supply. Through Destination Canada’s program, development here will “identify product gaps, explore transportation partnerships, and identify infrastructure needs to support the creation of new itineraries”.<sup>24</sup>

The Northern Sky Corridor project is in its Discovery Phase currently. Representatives of the project met with local tourism stakeholders in Mackenzie County in November 2024. Plans for the two year program were discussed, including opportunities to increase operator capacity and build new experiences, such as destination campgrounds and unique stays.<sup>25</sup> A strategy, implementation plan, and investment plan are scheduled to be completed in June 2025.<sup>26</sup>

## Land Use Planning Analysis

County representatives identified land access as a key barrier perceived as limiting recreational opportunities for residents and visitors in the County. There are few municipally or provincially designated zones that explicitly support outdoor recreation and access such as public land use zones, public recreation zones, and provincial parks. Transportation infrastructure, such as roads and trails, is also limited to facilitate access to natural areas. For example, there is no vehicle access into the Caribou Mountains Wildland Park, the adjoining Wood Buffalo National Park, or the Hay-Zama Wildland Park.

For these reasons, existing land use plans and regulations, as well as potential future land use planning initiatives, were analyzed to determine opportunities and barriers related to access to recreational lands. During the engagement process, local stakeholders reported challenges working through the Provincial land planning bureaucracy and with securing permission to access and develop certain areas in the County, particularly those adjacent or close to water bodies. For an expanded discussion on the Land Use Planning Document Review, please see Appendix A.<sup>27</sup>



Photo Credit: Travel Alberta



# Trends Analysis

Trends impacting the tourism and outdoor recreation sector were reviewed to inform the planning process. The most relevant trends for Mackenzie County are provided next.

## Tourism Trends



### Experiences vs Material Goods

Today's visitors are seeking experiential tourism products that connect them to the people and places they visit. One of the biggest recent shifts in consumer behaviour has been the prioritization of experiences over material goods. According to a 2015 study published in Forbes magazine, 78% of people between the ages of 25-40 prefer to spend money on an experience over a material possession.<sup>28</sup>



### Community Alignment

The most effective destinations have the support of government officials and area residents who believe that the visitor economy positively impacts their community and elevates their overall quality of life. When government, businesses and residents agree on the value of the visitor economy, then it is much easier to build support for new initiatives that will grow tourism.<sup>29</sup>



### Localism

Visitors want to experience local life when travelling and are embracing unique, locally crafted, more sustainable, and higher quality products made at the host destination with local ingredients. Some of these products include farm to table offerings, craft beer, and events that show off authentic community values and spirit.<sup>30</sup>



### Digital Travellers

Technological changes are having a significant impact on traditional marketing channels. Marketing is becoming more sophisticated with more targeted advertising and engaging promotion through digital channels (e.g. websites, social media, search engines, etc.).<sup>31</sup> Destinations need to keep up with these shifts if they want to compete.



### Increase in Remote Work Opportunities

There has been an increase in remote work opportunities since the COVID-19 pandemic. This opens up opportunities for rural communities to attract new residents with the capability to work from anywhere. Known as "lone eagles", these people live in large cities, but many are moving to small towns and rural areas in search for a better quality of life.<sup>32</sup>



### Cultural Tourism

Over the last decade, cultural tourism has emerged as a growing trend. This form of tourism immerses visitors in local heritage and culture, connecting them to the places they visit and leaving them educated and inspired.



## Outdoor Recreation Trends



### Utilizing Crown Lands for Outdoor Recreation

Albertans are increasingly utilizing Crown lands for outdoor recreation activities. In 2019/2020, it was estimated that Albertans took over 13.4 million outdoor recreation trips to Crown lands, with 78% being day trips and 22% involving overnight stays. It was also estimated that they spent \$2.3 billion on Crown land outdoor recreation trips annually. These visitors often spend money in gateway communities on items such as equipment, gasoline, food and beverage, accommodation, supplies, guiding services, and repairs.<sup>33</sup>



### Increase Use of Trails

According to the National Léger Survey, 40% of Canadians have increased their trail usage since 2020. Furthermore, 77% of Canadians believe it is important for governments to invest in the development and upkeep of recreational trails.<sup>34</sup>



### Increase in Independent Participation in Life Sports

Participation in independent, life sport activities have been increasing and is a trend across the recreation sector. Life sport activities include things like biking, swimming, walking, hiking, and other pursuits that are non-competitive, fun, and individualised.<sup>35</sup>



### Increased Focus on Natural Playground Environments and Youth Recreation Opportunities

“Nature play” areas incorporate natural elements to enhance the play environment and complement traditional play structures. Providing recreational opportunities and community spaces specifically for youth are critical to the positive youth development and engagement in the community.<sup>36</sup>



### Increase in Flexible, Unstructured Activities

Nearly all households in Alberta have participated in some form of informal activities. The most popular activities among adults are walking, bicycling, and jogging/running.<sup>37</sup> In order to accommodate this trend, recreation providers are developing more flexible opportunities for participation by providing flexible day-use areas and developing trails for biking, cycling, walking and jogging.



## Crown Land Outdoor Recreation Economy Trends in Alberta

Access to public lands and designated areas is critical for outdoor recreation and tourism. The findings of a 2021 report on the Crown land outdoor recreation economy in Alberta underscores this. The study found that of all outdoor recreation trips by Albertans, 33.0% occur on public lands, 36.3% occur in provincial parks and protected areas, and 30.7% occur in national parks. It also found that access to Crown lands is unequal across the province with respect to support for outdoor pursuits. Only 3.5% of Crown land recreation trips in Alberta occur in the Upper and Lower Peace. In comparison, 61.1% occur in the South Saskatchewan and 23% occur in the North Saskatchewan. Overall, Albertan outdoor recreation consumers generate \$2.3 billion in trip-related expenditures (fuel, food & beverage, rentals, fees, accommodation, etc.) and \$376 million in equipment and accessory expenditures (gear, equipment, apparel, vehicle purchases, etc.) each year.<sup>38</sup> There is opportunity for operators and businesses in Mackenzie County to capture more of this spending in the future. Enhanced access to public lands will be required to make it happen.



Photo Credit: Mackenzie County



## SWOT/Situational Analysis

A high-level analysis of Mackenzie County's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) as they relate to outdoor recreation and tourism was completed by the consultant team to support the plan. The key findings from the analysis are provided next.

### Strengths

- Abundance of natural attractions and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Access to the Peace River.
- Excellent fishing opportunities.
- Quiet and remote area.
- Rich history and successful cultural facilities, including the Mennonite Heritage Village, Fort Vermilion Heritage Centre and the Old Bay House.
- Non-profit organizations contribute significantly to the extent of outdoor recreation and tourism assets in the County.

### Weaknesses

- Limited supply of accommodation options for visitors.
- Need for access to remote areas and lakes.
- Need for designated recreational areas.
- Need for more market ready tourism experiences.
- Challenge to prioritize funding to build and maintain recreation assets.

### Opportunities

- Leveraging tourism and outdoor recreation assets to benefit residents and visitors.
- Supporting established tourism operators and encouraging new operators.
- Enhancing local tourism.
- Improving signage and directions to key attractions.
- Attracting visitors travelling to/from the Northwest Territories.

### Threats

- Balancing the needs of residents with the needs of visitors.
- Environmental threats including natural disasters (e.g. wildfires and floods).
- Competition for visitors from other destinations that offer tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Increasing costs to operate tourism businesses (including high cost of insurance).





3

# Community Engagement Results





Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.

## Summary of Engagement Process

Input from residents, stakeholders, and County Council was gathered from April 15th to May 10th, 2024. In total, the engagement process produced 222 touchpoints. Figure 2 provides a breakdown of engagement touchpoints by activity.

Figure 2. Summary of Engagement Touchpoints

Engagement Activity	Total Engagement
Public Survey	113 responses
Digital Community Input Workshops	3 participants
Council Input Workshop	7 participants
Mackenzie Frontier Tourist Association Board Interviews	5 participants
In-Person Community Engagement	76 participants
Interviews	9 completed
Digital Interactive Mapping	9 responses
<b>Total</b>	<b>222 Touchpoints</b>



## Key Findings

The following provides a summary of the key findings from the engagement process. To view the expanded engagement results, please see Appendix B.



**94%**  
 "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that participating in outdoor recreation opportunities in Mackenzie County is important to their quality of life



**TOP OUTDOOR TOURISM ASSETS IN MACKENZIE COUNTY**

- Peace and Boyer Rivers
- Campgrounds
- Variety of lakes, trails, & hunting opportunities
- County's unique location



### NEW OR IMPROVED FACILITIES MOST NEEDED

- Trail systems for non-mechanized uses
- Accommodations
- Boat launches and docks
- Trail systems for mechanized uses



### DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

- Trails
- Campsites and camping opportunities
- Enhanced accessibility



### BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

- Lack of facilities
- Lack of access to areas where activities could happen
- Not interested in available activities
- Distance to activities



4

**Vision,  
Strategy,  
and Goals**







Photo Credit: Trent Schlamp

This section puts forward a vision for the future, a strategic focus, target markets, and goals for development.

## Our Path Forward

The Government of Alberta is committed to growing Alberta's visitor economy to \$25 billion in annual expenditures by 2035. Travel Alberta is currently working with communities to reach that goal. Currently, 60% of visitation and 75% of tourism expenditures occur in popular tourism destinations, such as Banff, Lake Louise, Canmore, Jasper, Calgary, and Edmonton. These destinations are at or nearing capacity, especially the mountain parks. Therefore, it will be necessary to expand tourism into untapped areas of the province.

With appropriate investment in outdoor recreation assets, Mackenzie County can play a role in growing Alberta's tourism industry. However, of critical importance will be ensuring the needs of residents are at the forefront of future outdoor recreation development. Residents are passionate about the land. For many, it is a central reason why they chose Mackenzie County to be their home. Mackenzie County and its partners have an opportunity to chart a course that will invite visitors to share in the beauty of the region while ensuring strong stewardship of the land and advocating for local needs.

“

*Mackenzie County can play a role in growing Alberta's tourism industry. However, of critical importance will be ensuring the needs of residents are at the forefront of future outdoor recreation development.*



## Vision

The following vision with supporting outcomes statements has been developed to guide the plan.

### 10 Year Vision Statement

*By 2034, Mackenzie County residents will benefit from a growing tourism industry through increased access to outdoor recreation, enhanced stewardship of the land and new economic opportunities.*

### Outcomes Statements

- The region will see increased investment in new outdoor recreation and tourism ventures.
- There will be more ways for people to enjoy the great outdoors.
- Access to the land and to water for recreational and tourism purposes will be enhanced.
- More visitors and residents will be experiencing the area's outdoor offerings in ways that are sustainable and responsible.
- Greater local buy-in and promotion of outdoor recreation and tourism, and wide recognition that they are key drivers of economic, social, and environmental benefits for communities in Mackenzie County.

## Strategy

It is recommended that Mackenzie County employ a product development strategy as its strategic focus over the next 10 years. This strategy entails developing new tourism products (i.e. experiences) for existing markets. A product development focus is supported by an abundant outdoor recreation asset base to build from, a need for formalized experiences, and visitors and residents who are highly engaged by the product offering. Through this strategy, tourism stakeholders will work together to build the region's outdoor recreation and tourism asset base, fill existing gaps, and leverage new opportunities for growth.

## Target Markets

Considering available visitor and resident data, and taking into account what inspires people to participate in outdoor recreation in Mackenzie County, the following target markets have been identified for the plan.

### Primary Target Markets:



1. Visitors from across Alberta who are seeking true outdoor recreation experiences in wilderness settings.



2. Residents of Mackenzie County and their visiting friends and relatives who want to enjoy nature and deepen their connections to the land.



3. Regional residents and visitors travelling to and from the Northwest Territories.

### Secondary Target Market:



Visitors from across Canada who are seeking to immerse themselves in nature through outdoor experiences.





Photo Credit: Mackenzie County

## Goals

Three overarching goals have been developed to guide the plan. Key short-term action items have been included under each goal in this section. See Section 6 for a description of roles in implementation and Appendix C for the full implementation plan.



### 1. ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Goal:** *Build stakeholder capacity to grow the visitor economy and implement the Mackenzie County Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan.*

The first step toward outdoor recreation and tourism development will be to bring stakeholders together and gain support for implementation. Investments and capacity building initiatives from multiple partners will be needed to action the plan.

#### Key Actions:

- Engage with partners to encourage coordination, collaboration, and cooperation when implementing the plan. This could include the Community Services Committee, Chambers of Commerce, Agricultural Societies, Recreation Boards, MFTA, Regional Economic Development Initiative Association for Northwest Alberta (REDI), tourism operators, campground caretakers, and other applicable partners.
- Work with partner organizations to host an Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Forum.





## 2. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

**Goal:** *Expand the County's outdoor recreation and tourism offerings by developing new attractions, visitor experiences, and amenities.*

More outdoor recreation and tourism offerings are needed to attract more visitors to Mackenzie County. The following high potential development opportunities can be used as a starting point for experience providers to develop their own product offerings. These opportunities are described in more detail in Section 5.

- |  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Unique Wilderness Accommodations          | 5. Fly-in Fishing Resorts        |
| 2. Destination Campgrounds                   | 6. Wilderness Education Training |
| 3. Trail and Water Access Development        | 7. Guided Adventure Tours        |
| 4. Outdoor and Backcountry Equipment Rentals | 8. Culture and Heritage Tourism  |

### Key Actions:

- Utilize the Development Plans to support the development of unique wilderness accommodations and destination campgrounds across the County.
- Work with existing organizations, such as the Rocky Lane Agricultural Society, La Crete Polar Cats Snowmobile Club, and Watt Mountain Wanderers Snowmobile Club, to secure long term access to trail areas and to further develop existing infrastructure and amenities.
- Improve trailhead amenities, signage and directions to existing trail access points.
- Work with tourism operators to help them access Travel Alberta's Tourism Investment Program for Product Development and other development grant opportunities.
- Lobby the Provincial government to secure enhanced access to outdoor recreation and tourism assets. Conduct research and create well-supported documents that will strengthen lobbying efforts.

Photo Credit: Mackenzie County







### 3. MARKETING

**Goal:** Encourage travellers to visit and explore Mackenzie County by promoting the region's tourism offerings to target markets.

To become a well known destination for outdoor recreation and tourism, tourism stakeholders should expand their marketing and leverage available channels and support programs. This will serve to build awareness of Mackenzie County's offerings and increase participation from both residents and visitors.

#### Key Actions:

- Organize tourism experience and package development training by Travel Alberta and Community Futures to be delivered to new tourism operators.
- Work with the MFTA to enhance tourism websites, align branding and support the implementation of other actions in this plan.
- Develop a Tourism Emergency Communications Plan.



Photo Credit: Mackenzie County



5

# Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Opportunities





In order to support the product development strategy, several high potential opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism development in Mackenzie County were identified through the opportunity assessment process. Descriptions of the opportunities are provided next. Please see Appendix D for the criteria that was used to evaluate opportunities. As a whole, these opportunities build on the County's many existing natural assets including abundant lakes and rivers, unique landforms, remote wilderness areas, and the northern lights. Instead of building something entirely new to the community, they leverage existing strengths. In this way they can support enhanced outdoor recreation and tourism products and experiences that are unique to the area while minimizing development risks and costs. The private sector will play an important role in realizing these opportunities. While there are actions the County can take to support them, it is not expected that the County would be responsible for funding and developing them.

## 1. Unique Wilderness Accommodations

Unique wilderness accommodations offer special getaway experiences that provide enhanced opportunities for connecting with nature. Developing these in the County would help to fill a gap in accommodation options, provide opportunities for visitors to experience wilderness areas and related activities, view the northern lights, and respond to increasing market demand for high-end glamping stays. Such accommodations could be developed in multiple areas throughout the County, with potential forms including rustic or serviced canvas tents, yurts, and star-gazing domes. More permanent or fully serviced structures may be appropriate in some areas, in particular on private lands. Future cabins at Hutch Lake, as considered in the management plan for the area, are one such example. Stays there and elsewhere in the County could be paired with outdoor recreational experiences unique to the region such as fishing and hiking tours, and snowmobile and northern lights viewing adventures. Online platforms could help new operators start up their businesses (e.g. Airbnb, VRBO, etc.), and empower residents to provide accommodation for visitors and generate additional income. A development plan for unique wilderness accommodations is included in Appendix E. Case studies of successful unique wilderness accommodations in Alberta are included in Appendix F.



Photo Credit: KOA Camping

“

*“Unique accommodations are a key attraction for travellers seeking an immersive nature experience in Alberta. From lakeside cabins with fishing and boating access to log cabins surrounded by wildflowers, these retreats offer a perfect blend of adventure and tranquility, allowing guests to disconnect from daily life while enjoying modern comforts.”*

Source: Travel Alberta



## 2. Destination Campgrounds

Destination campgrounds offer campsites that feature enhanced on-site recreational opportunities and programming such as swimming areas, boat access and fishing, green spaces, adventure parks, picnic areas, walking paths, dark sky viewing platforms, organized events, and more. By combining these amenities they offer visitors a place to stay and things to do, transforming a campground into a destination. They frequently include tent sites for those content with more rustic accommodations as well as RV sites for those who may prefer more comforts of home. They may also provide key visitor services such as a small store for food and camping essentials, water and power at some or all sites, washroom and laundry facilities, sani-dumps, and wi-fi. Increasing the number and diversity of destination campgrounds in the County would respond to growing demand for fully serviced campground facilities, provide new outdoor recreational opportunities, and leverage existing successful destination campgrounds. Offerings at Zama Community Park and Campground and at the La Crete Ferry Campground could be expanded or replicated elsewhere, including at other existing campgrounds such as Wadlin Lake, Fort Vermilion Bridge, Machesis Lake and Hutch Lake. Water access makes such locations particularly attractive for destination campgrounds and the County's 10 year Capital Plan supports additional infrastructure and amenities at these sites. A development plan for a destination campground is included in Appendix E. Case studies of successful destination campgrounds in Alberta are included in Appendix F.



## 3. Trail and Water Access Development

A well developed and interesting trail system can be an anchor attraction for visitors, as can a well-developed system of water access points. Recreational trails provide views, access to natural attractions, and supporting infrastructure such as directional and interpretive signage, and formal staging areas with parking and washroom facilities. Water access points provide formal places for users to safely access swimming, boating and fishing opportunities, with related infrastructure such as roads, trails and boat launches supporting use of these points. Development of new trails and new water access points in the County is supported by high demand for land and water-based recreation from visitors and residents, for both summer and winter use. It is also supported by the presence of existing and well-loved trails, local associations that build and maintain them, and an abundance of natural assets to showcase such as the County's numerous lakes, rivers and natural attractions. These include the Peace River, Bistcho Lake, Vermilion Chutes, Hungry Bend Sandhills, Buffalo Head Lookout Point, and the High Level hot pot. In the long term, a trail along the Peace River connecting Fort Vermilion to the La Crete area would provide a recreational connection between key natural and cultural destinations in the County. There are opportunities for both summer and winter season access, for trails to loop around lakes or run beside rivers, and to provide access to remote locations for complementary recreational activities such as ice fishing. There is a gap in terms of guided river experiences north of Carcajou.



Photo Credits (top-bottom): Snow Valley, Mackenzie County



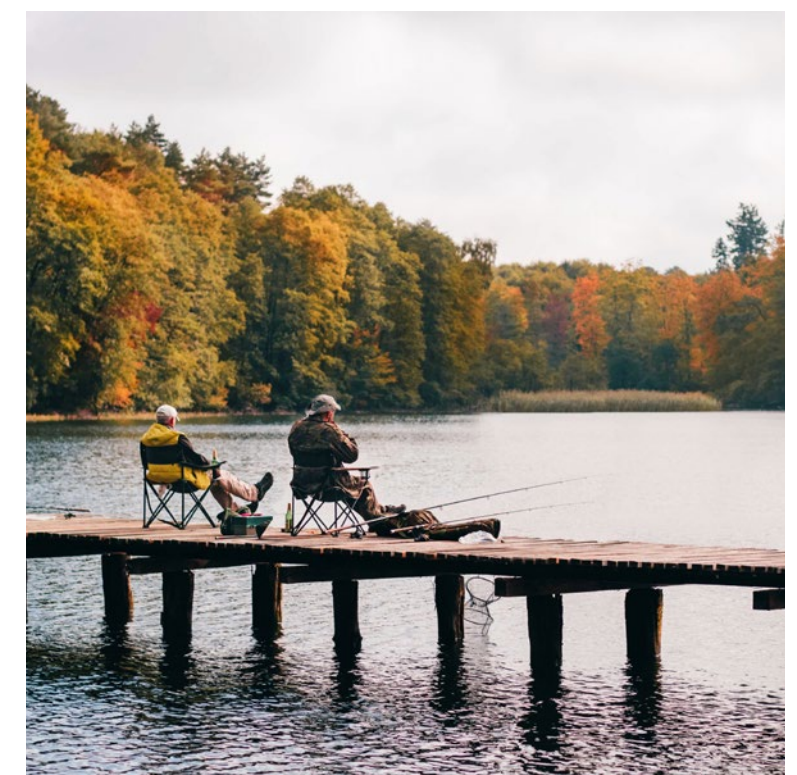
#### 4. Outdoor and Backcountry Equipment Rentals

Many outdoor recreation opportunities in remote and backcountry areas require specialized equipment and a means for visitors to transport them to their destinations. Not all visitors who want to experience the outdoors in the County will own their own equipment or be able to bring it with them. Rental businesses could cater to the needs of such guests by providing equipment so that their customers can enjoy the areas in the County that they came to see. Desirable equipment for the diverse areas of the County and its varied recreational opportunities include motorized vehicles (e.g. ATVs, UTVs, dirt bikes, snowmobiles, motor/jet boats), non-motorized equipment (e.g. canoes, rafts, kayaks, paddleboards, cross-country skis), and safety gear (e.g. emergency transponders, radios, medical kits). This opportunity supports the promotion and expansion of County businesses. Potential operators include existing businesses that specialize in the sale and/or maintenance of these types of equipment, existing rental businesses, existing tour operators interested in diversifying their offerings, and entrepreneurs looking to enter the outdoor recreation business.



#### 5. Fly-in Fishing Resorts

The County has many lakes with excellent fishing opportunities. It is possible to fish for several species including arctic grayling, lake whitefish, northern pike, rainbow trout, and walleye. Fishing in the region is a year-round affair, with ice fishing established as a popular recreational activity in the winter months. Many of the best fishing lakes are not accessible by land. Developing fly-in fishing resorts would improve access and cater to the significant market for fishing tourism. There is a long history of and precedents for successful fly-in fishing operations in Mackenzie County. Developing fly-in fishing resorts in the County would help to access the proven market for fly-in fishing operations in Canada's north. Accommodations and fishing could be paired with diversified experiences such as dark sky/aurora viewing, wildlife photography, adventure tourism, ecotourism, and more. Improving access to fishing resorts, for example through the construction of more all season roads to key fishing areas such as Bistcho Lake, could help to increase visitor numbers, reduce maintenance and access costs for operators, and improve the viability of fishing resort businesses.





## 6. Wilderness Education Training

Given the remoteness of many areas of the County, and the demand and potential for varied outdoor recreational experiences within them, there is opportunity for private sector or non-profit operators to deliver wilderness education training courses and programming. These could cover backcountry access and safety, wilderness survival and first aid. Trainings could be introductory courses for beginners, intermediate courses for experienced individuals looking to gain new skills, or advanced courses to train the trainer or tourism operators (i.e. how to guide). The County could potentially support operators and programmers by identifying or providing space for them to operate out of County campgrounds or other facilities. It is not envisioned that the County would be a direct provider of wilderness education training.



## 7. Guided Adventure Tours

Guided adventure tours offer organized outdoor experiences to visitors. They include outdoor recreational activities like outfitting, ATVing, snowmobiling, paddling trips, hiking, northern lights viewing and horseback riding. Through these tours participants can experience places that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to visit and partake in activities they might not otherwise get the chance to. Adventure tours can bring guests out onto the water and land, and can include stops at and programming related to naturally, culturally and historically significant areas. Guides provide interpretation and hospitality, local knowledge, logistics support and safety. Available market research indicates that visitors are very interested in small group-based activities where they are immersed in experiences related to nature and feel like active participants.<sup>39,40</sup> There is some adventure guiding already happening in the County, including formal and informal activities by local organizations, community associations, businesses, and residents. New operators would further strengthen local offerings, as would new infrastructure to support activities (e.g. river and lake access, boat launches and access points). Guided tour operators could also provide equipment rentals and wilderness education training.



## 8. Culture and Heritage Tourism

Cultural tourism assets include things like historic sites and interpretive centres, art galleries and exhibitions, museums, cultural centres, historic forts, historic driving routes and walking trails, culture and heritage themed tours, events, festivals, and culturally inspired services such as accommodation and food options. Fort Vermilion, Buttertown, and the La Crete Mennonite Heritage Centre are examples of strong assets in Mackenzie County that immerse people in local heritage and culture. They could be further enhanced and leveraged to attract more visitors and enhance visitor experiences. Considerations for enhancements could include improved signage, additional partnerships to market and celebrate these facilities, and planning for tourism opportunities as part of future development activities in their vicinities (such as in the floodplain rebuilding project in Fort Vermilion).



Photo Credits (top-bottom): Happiest Outdoors, Mackenzie County, Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.



6

# Roles in Implementation







Photo Credit: Trent Schlamp

The following describes how stakeholders can come together to action the plan and outlines potential roles for partners in implementation. A discussion on provincial and federal grant programs to support implementation of the plan is provided in Appendix G. It is expected that the private sector will take the lead in terms of investment into new products, and that Mackenzie County and the Province will support them by investing in supporting public infrastructure.



## Potential Partner Roles

Implementation of this plan will require the cultivation of partnerships to collaboratively accomplish initiatives. The following identifies key partners for the plan and describes potential roles for them.

Organization	Potential Role(s)
Mackenzie County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The County will play a role in coordinating initiatives and working with partners to implement the plan.</li> </ul>
Community Services Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Terms of Reference for the Community Services Committee is aligned with many of the implementation actions of this plan. The Committee could participate in implementation activities.</li> </ul>
Mackenzie Frontier Tourist Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The MFTA could be an active participant in advancing the plan, including strengthening relationships with regional tourism partners, connecting entrepreneurs to available resources, and leveraging its marketing channels.</li> </ul>
Tourism Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism operators are businesses and organizations that provide services and experiences for visitors. Examples include tour companies, accommodation providers, and attractions. New and existing operators will play a key role in growing outdoor recreation and tourism in Mackenzie County through the development and delivery of high-quality services and experiences.</li> <li>They should be actively engaged in implementing the plan.</li> </ul>
Businesses and Entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The private sector provides many front-line services to visitors, such as food and beverage, entertainment, and transportation.</li> <li>New and existing businesses will play a key role in growing outdoor recreation and tourism in Mackenzie County through the provision of new and enhanced tourist support services.</li> <li>Businesses should be actively engaged in implementing the plan.</li> </ul>
Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These non-profit organizations support local economic development, help to attract new businesses, assist entrepreneurs, and promote and communicate a region's offerings. The La Crete and Area Chamber of Commerce and the Fort Vermilion and Area Board of Trade operate in Mackenzie County.</li> <li>These organizations could contribute to implementing numerous actions in this plan, particularly those related to attracting and supporting new tourism operators.</li> </ul>



Organization	Potential Role(s)
Regional Economic Development Initiative Association for Northwest Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• REDI’s mission is to ‘promote, support and enhance economic growth and diversification in northwest Alberta through regional cooperation and partnerships’. Tourism is one of REDI’s focus areas.</li> <li>• REDI could support implementation of the plan through its activities and website, including promotions and marketing, investment attraction, existing partnership with the MFTA and regional relationship building (in particular into the Northwest Territories).</li> </ul>
Local Recreation Boards, Organizations and Agricultural Societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These local organizations provide much needed support to outdoor recreation and tourism in the County such as trail maintenance, facility and campground operations, and event delivery. They include the Watt Mountain Wanderers Snowmobile Club and La Crete Polar Cats Snowmobile Club, Zama Recreation Society, La Crete Ferry Campground Society, La Crete Agricultural Society, and the Rocky Lane Agricultural Society.</li> <li>• They should be actively engaged in implementing the plan. Their efforts could lead to the development of new tourism products such as new trails and destinations, and their involvement can also help to ensure that tourism develops in a way that supports recreational access for residents.</li> </ul>
Volunteers and Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated community champions can be inspired to help implement the plan and generate buy-in within the many unique communities in the County. There is the potential to include residents in Task Force activities.</li> </ul>
Travel Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel Alberta provides funding for the development and marketing of tourism initiatives through its Tourism Investment Program. The organization also provides research on visitor markets, helpful resources to support tourism development, and reviews business plan components of Tourism and Commercial Recreation Lease applications to Alberta Forestry and Parks. Travel Alberta should be engaged as an active partner in implementation of the plan.</li> </ul>
Community Futures Northwest Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A non-profit organization that offers free business planning and coaching within the region. They can help to support new tourism and outdoor recreation operators in the County and help existing operators diversify their offerings. Their services also include business loans and business training programs.</li> </ul>



Organization	Potential Role(s)
Neighbouring Destination Marketing Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are other DMOs, governments and related entities in the region to begin to partner with or continue to partner with to support tourism development. This could lead to experience and itinerary packaging, collaborative marketing, and product development, in particular for the Deh Cho Route which connects Northern Alberta to the Northwest Territories and Northern British Columbia.</li> <li>• Potential partners include Mighty Peace Tourism (existing partners) and Northwest Territories Tourism (potential new partner).</li> </ul>
Alberta Forestry and Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forestry and Parks is responsible for preserving and managing public lands and provincial parks. They are an important partner in securing access to public land in the County.</li> </ul>
Destination Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destination Canada helps the Canadian tourism industry reach targeted markets. It offers intelligence, tools and resources to do so. Under its Tourism Corridor Strategy Program it is working with stakeholders to develop the Northern Sky Corridor which includes Alberta and the Northwest Territories. This work should be leveraged to support tourism in Mackenzie County.</li> </ul>



7

# Conclusion







Peace River  
Photo Credit: Travel Alberta

The Mackenzie County Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan provides strategic direction and actions that will advance the County toward its 10 year vision and desired outcomes. The region has an abundance of natural and wilderness areas, and a solid base of outdoor recreation and tourism amenities, all of which provide a foundation to build on and opportunities for growth. Quick win actions identified in the plan provide opportunities for positive short term change and real improvements for outdoor recreation and tourism. These will help to build momentum for long term implementation and return on investment that will benefit residents and visitors alike.



# Appendices



## Appendix A – Land Use Planning Document Review

Applicable Plans and Legislation	Opportunities and Barriers	Supporting Context and Notes
<p><b>Mackenzie County Municipal Development Plan</b></p>	<p>Opportunity: The MDP lays the groundwork for other municipal plans and strategies to address tourism and access to recreational land.</p>	<p>The MDP directs the development of a Regional Tourism Plan, including direction to collaborate with partners and to identify core areas of focus for tourism.</p> <p>It also recommends the creation of an Open Space Plan to identify recreational amenities and sites.</p>
	<p>Opportunity: The MDP supports public access to and expanded use of Crown lands.</p>	<p>The MDP directs the County to “Facilitate public access to Crown land areas where deemed suitable, desirable, and economically feasible for Provincial funding and support”.</p>
	<p>Barrier: There is no definition or criteria for appropriate, suitable, or desirable use of Crown lands.</p>	<p>While the MDP refers to use of and access to Crown land, it does not define what are appropriate, suitable, desirable, or economically feasible uses. Defining these will strengthen planning and advocacy efforts.</p>
<p><b>Mackenzie County Community Sustainability Plan</b></p>	<p>Opportunity: The plan recognizes the importance of the natural environment to the tourism sector and directs the designation of a specific area as a ‘zero development area’ for nature tourism purposes.</p>	<p>This plan lays the groundwork for the designation of an area for nature tourism purposes.</p>
	<p>Opportunity: Directs the consideration of designation of a wilderness area northeast of Fort Vermilion.</p>	<p>Reference to this specific area within the region will support further steps to designate a natural area for recreational and tourism access. The plan also directs the development of a socio-economic impact assessment prior to designation.</p>



Applicable Plans and Legislation	Opportunities and Barriers	Supporting Context and Notes
<p><b>Mackenzie County Land Use Bylaw (2024)</b></p>	<p>Opportunity: Zoning allows for recreational and tourism uses within the County in multiple zones.</p> <hr/> <p>Barrier: Zoning Bylaw does not specifically include building/structural forms and mix of uses that may be required for non-traditional forms of accommodations and destinations.</p>	<p>The Land Use Bylaw facilitates instead of prohibits recreational and tourism uses, including those accessed through Crown land or water bodies.</p> <p>Changes to the Land Use Bylaw may be required to allow new types of accommodation and new recreation and tourist destinations within the County.</p>
<p><b>Forest Management Plan for Forest Management Unit 26</b></p>	<p>Opportunity: Existence of a forest management plan provides opportunity for collaboration with other stakeholders on recreational access to lands within the unit.</p> <hr/> <p>Barrier: Does not address access to land for recreation within the forest management unit.</p>	<p>FMU26 includes a significant amount of land in the County. The plan notes that opportunities for outdoor recreation in the forest management area are well known to community members but does not outline any means to support or improve access. Unlike timber quotas, FMAs require the harvesting company to be more involved in long-term planning of the forest, public consultation, and ongoing stakeholder collaboration.</p>
<p><b>Bistcho Subregional Plan</b></p>	<p>Opportunity: Potential exists to enhance access to lands for recreational use in future management plans for the sub-region, and to inventory tourism and commercial recreation opportunities in the sub-region through related processes.</p> <hr/> <p>Barrier: Directs development of a recreation management plan that will identify proposed recreation management areas. No progress has yet been made to develop one.</p>	<p>Sub-regional plans support caribou recovery while considering a broad range of interests and land-use activities. The plan recognizes that existing tourism operators on public lands have formal dispositions enabled through the tourism and commercial recreation lease process. In addition, the plan supports new and expanded tourism development. Sub-regional plans are enabled through the <i>Alberta Land Stewardship Act</i>.</p>



Applicable Plans and Legislation	Opportunities and Barriers	Supporting Context and Notes
Chinchaga Subregional Plan	Barrier: This plan is not yet prepared.	A planning task force has finished its work and a draft is expected, though the Province has not provided a timeline for this. The plan will apply to caribou range lands in the southwest of the County.
Alberta Land Use Framework	Barrier: No plan has yet been developed for the Lower Peace River Region. This contributes to ambiguity around land use.	The County is situated within the Lower Peace River planning region. Regional plans outline a vision and goals for large areas of the province. Regional plans in other regions have resulted in the identification of new public land use zones and recreation areas. Regional parks plans will be developed for each of the seven <i>Land-use Framework</i> planning regions in Alberta. Priority sites requiring specific plans are identified during development of regional plans.
Public Lands Act and Public Lands Administration Regulation	<p>Opportunity: Enables land dispositions for recreational developments, recreational trails, and tourism and commercial development, including leases of up to 60 years.</p> <hr/> <p>Barrier: Provincial approval is required for any development on Crown land within the County.</p> <hr/> <p>Barrier: Without a formal disposition temporary access permits are required for access to Crown land, and these permits expire after 14 days.</p>	The Act directs use and management of Crown lands in the province, and provides for dispositions (permits, licenses, leases) for access to, and activity on, public lands. Under the Public Lands Administration Regulation (table a1) <sup>41</sup> , dispositions are possible for commercial, municipal, and non-profit recreational developments, recreational trails, and tourism and commercial development (including accommodations, resorts, viewpoints, day use areas, recreation areas, recreational campgrounds, etc.). Temporary access permits are required for group activities, instructional and guided activities, on vacant public land that are for a commercial purpose, or for a recreational activity that may cause loss or damage to vacant public land, or will occupy the land for longer than 14 days. As an example, snowmobiling clubs in the County must get access permits for organized club activities that take place on public lands.
<i>Trails Act</i> <sup>42</sup>	Opportunity: Allows for identification and designation of motorized and non-motorized trails on public land, and appointment of trail managers, including municipalities and recreational organizations.	The Act provides a formal system to identify and manage trails on public land (i.e. those administered under the Public Land Act), including trail networks. Several snowmobile, hiking and cross country ski trail systems exist in the County. Designation could improve access, trail management, network expansion, and improvements such as trail shelters, signs, and parking.



Applicable Plans and Legislation	Opportunities and Barriers	Supporting Context and Notes
<p><b>Federal Woodland Caribou Recovery Strategy</b></p>	<p>Opportunity: Requires range plans, the development of which (along with subsidiary plans) can address access and recreation.</p> <hr/> <p>Barrier: The Province has not yet completed the range plan. This contributes to ambiguity around land use.</p> <p>Barrier: Requires protection of critical woodland caribou habitat, which may limit access to land for recreation and tourism in caribou ranges.</p>	<p>Requires range plans to be completed by provinces and territories within three to five years of the posting of the final Recovery Strategy (October 2017). Range plans will demonstrate how provinces and territories will protect the species’ critical habitat under their jurisdiction.<sup>43</sup> The main purpose of a range plan is to outline how range-specific land and/or resource activities will be managed over space and time to ensure that critical habitat for boreal caribou is protected from destruction. According to the <i>Report on the Progress of Recovery Strategy Implementation for the Woodland Caribou (Rangifer tarandus caribou), Boreal population in Canada for the Period 2012 to 2017</i>, Alberta had made a commitment to complete a provincial range plan by 2017.</p>
<p><b>Alberta/Canada Woodland Caribou Agreement</b></p>	<p>Opportunity: Planning for range lands can incorporate considerations for tourism and recreation and direct development of subsidiary plans to guide these.</p> <hr/> <p>Barrier: Requires the Government of Alberta to take action to protect caribou habitat, which may result in limitation on access to critical range lands.</p>	<p>Under this agreement Alberta is required to achieve and maintain a minimum of 65 percent undisturbed caribou.</p>
<p><b>Canada Species At Risk Act (SARA)</b></p>	<p>Potential barrier: The Province may be less likely to issue permits for recreational activities in areas of critical habitat for listed species such as woodland caribou.</p>	<p>Section 11 of the federal Species at Risk Act enables a federal minister to enter into an agreement “with any government in Canada, organization, or person to benefit a species at risk or enhance its survival in the wild.” It also allows the federal government to take actions to protect caribou if it determines that caribou and their habitat are not protected by provincial plans and actions.</p>



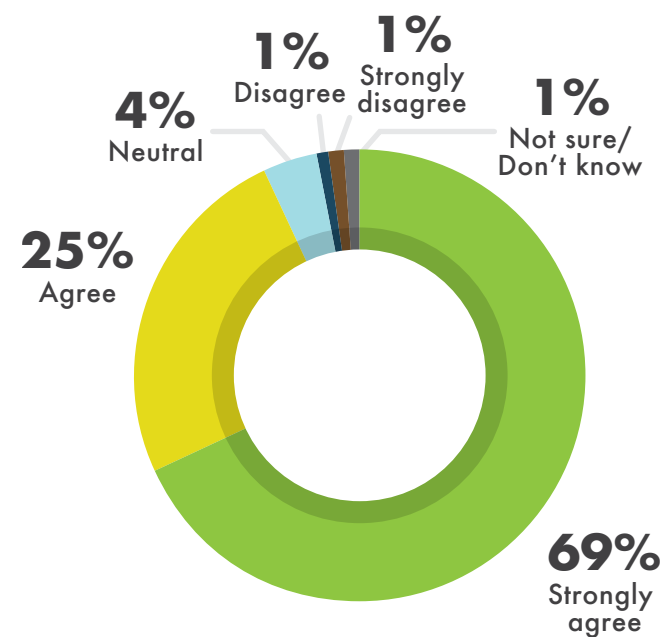
# Appendix B – Expanded Engagement Results

## Community Survey

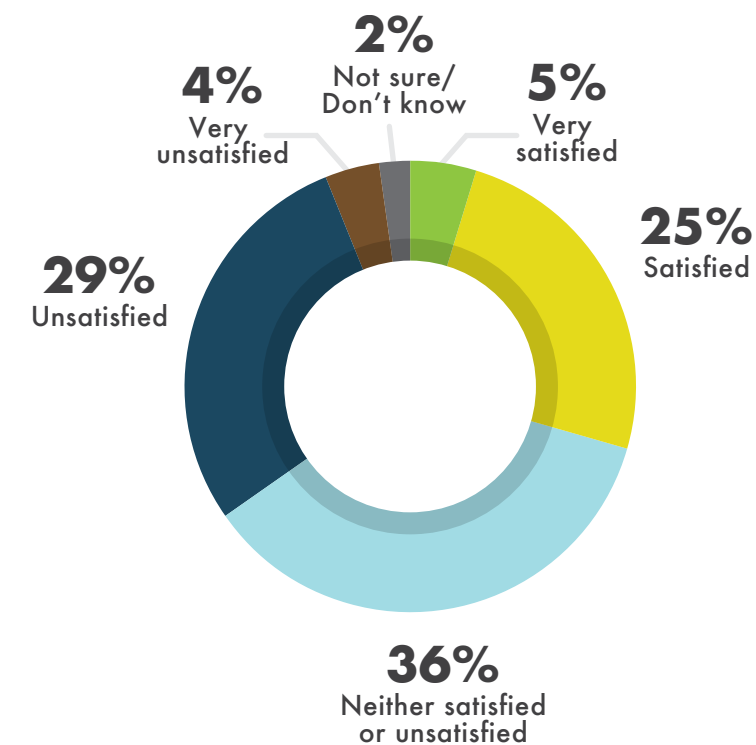
A survey collected input from residents and stakeholders from April 15 to May 10, 2024. In total, 113 responses were received. 69% of respondents indicated they reside in La Crete, 20% said they reside in Fort Vermilion, 7% said they reside in an unincorporated community in Mackenzie County, 3% said they reside in High Level, and 1% reside in Rainbow Lake. 57% of responses identified as male, 39% identified as female, 3% preferred not to say, and 1% preferred to self identify. Respondents were primarily between the ages of 30-39 (37%), 40-49 (29%), 50-59 (12%), and 20-29 (11%).



Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement:  
 Participating in outdoor recreation opportunities in Mackenzie County is important to my quality of life.



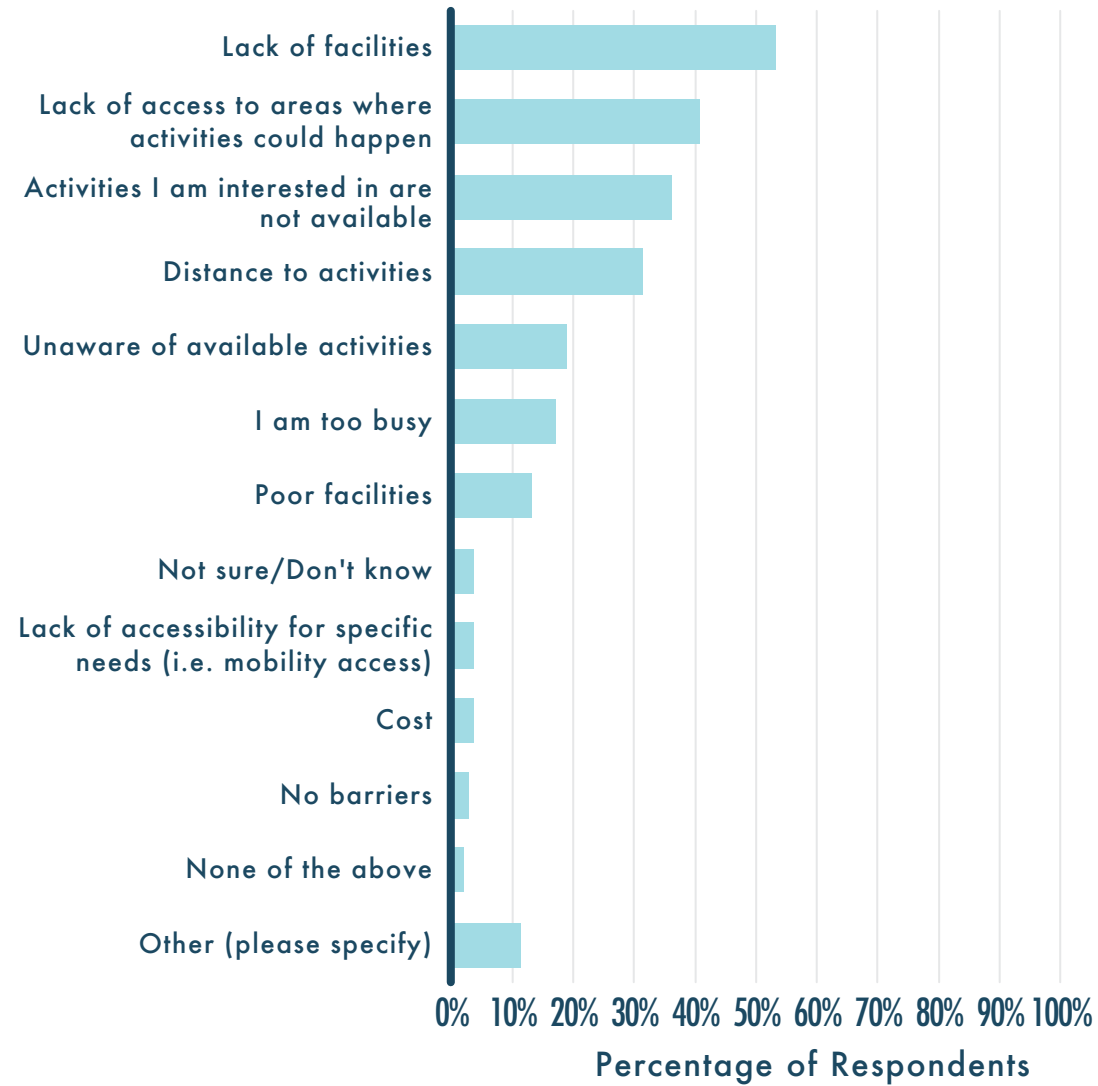
Please rate your level of satisfaction with outdoor recreation opportunities in Mackenzie County.







*What, if anything, prevents you from participating in outdoor recreation activities in Mackenzie County more often? Please select all that apply.*



*Do you have any specific ideas for outdoor recreation activities or programs that could be developed (or further developed) in Mackenzie County for the benefit of residents? If so, please share your thoughts below. Please be as descriptive as possible.*

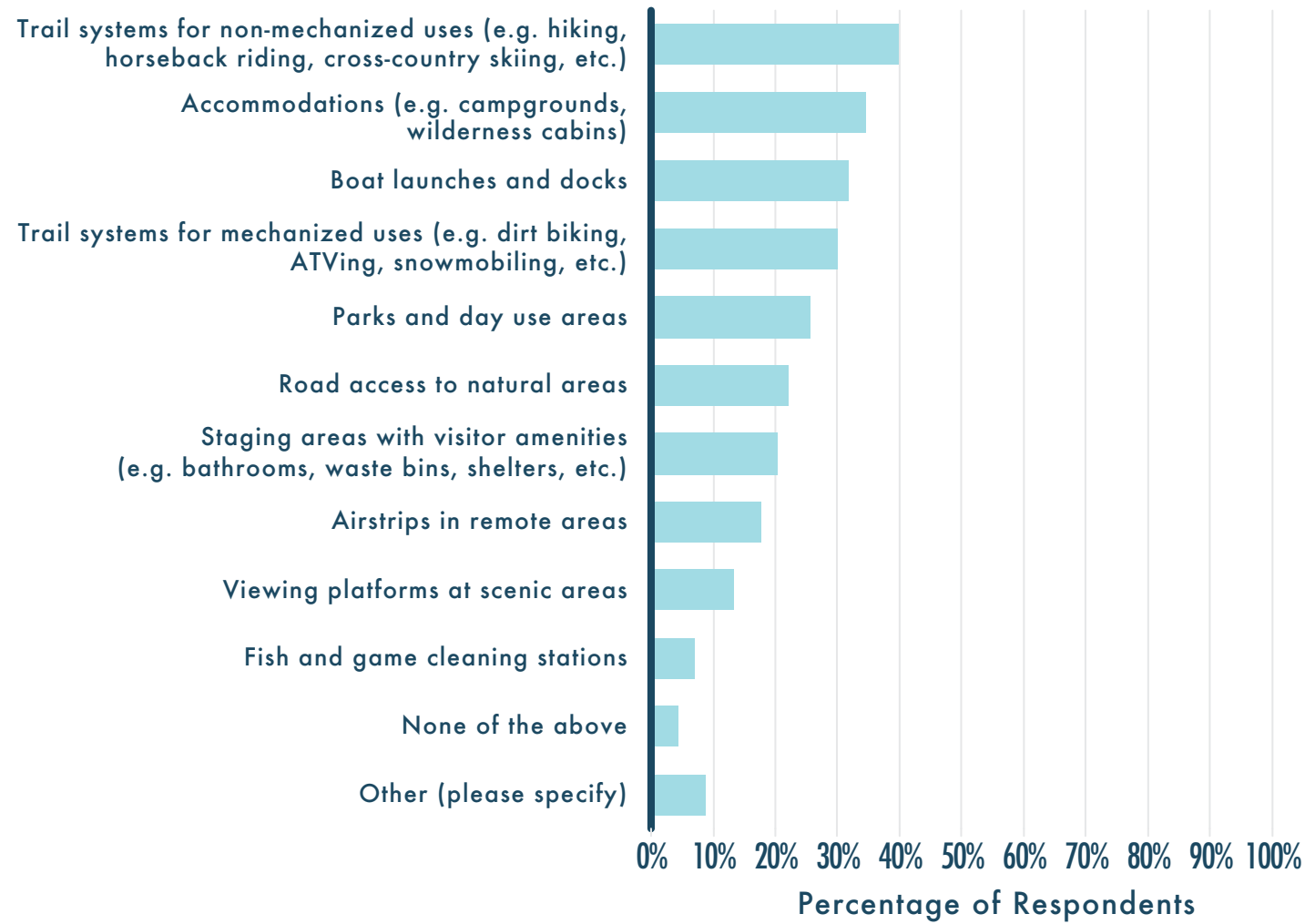
Respondents identified the following most often:

- Developing more trails for the purpose of hiking, snowmobiling, mountain biking, walking, and biking.
- Indoor and outdoor swimming pool.
- Developing more campsites. Specific locations include Atlas, closer to La Crete, and near the Blue Boyer Bridge.
- Enhancing accessibility to fishing areas, lakes, and the Peace River.
- Upgrading and improving Jakes Lake picnic area, Fort Bridge Campsite, and local fishponds.
- Enhancing access to lakes for fishing.
- More rental options for equipment such as canoes and kayaks.
- Increasing the number of programs such as archery, baseball, and community gardening.
- More events such as winter festivals and music festivals.





*What, if any, new or improved facilities are most needed in Mackenzie County to support outdoor recreation for residents? Please select up to three options.*



*We would like to better understand what makes Mackenzie County a unique place to live and visit. In your opinion, what makes the County a special destination?*

Respondents identified the following most often:

- Appreciation of the wilderness and wildlife.
- Its remote location and quiet communities.
- The County’s natural beauty and landscape.
- Friendly community.
- Having access to the Peace River.
- Northern location and northern lights.
- Rich history.
- Large, forested areas.
- Opportunities for outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and boating.



*Please list what you consider to be the top five outdoor tourism assets in Mackenzie County (outdoor tourism assets include, but are not limited to, natural attractions, lake, trails, parks, campgrounds, etc.).*

Respondents identified the following most often:

- Various rivers including the Peace River and Boyer River.
- Campgrounds.
- Lakes including Bistcho Lake, Jakes Lake, Margaret Lake, Wadlin Lake, Hutch Lake, and other remote lakes.
- Trail development including walking trails, trails at the Rocky Lane Agricultural Society, etc.
- Hunting opportunities.
- Parks including Caribou Mountains Park, Wood Buffalo National Park, and Jubilee Park.
- Indoor facilities including arenas and Agricultural Society Hall.





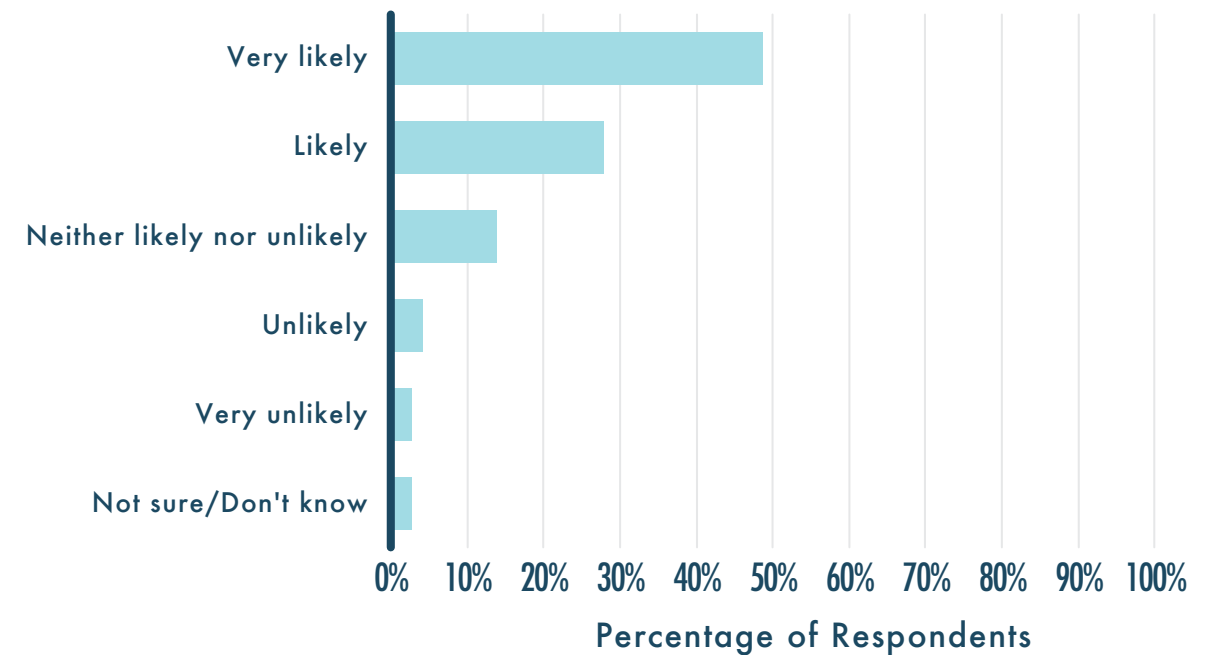
*Do you have any specific ideas for outdoor tourism attractions, experiences, or other assets that could be developed (or further developed) in Mackenzie County to increase visitation? If so, please share your thoughts below. Please be as descriptive as possible.*

Respondents identified the following most often:

- More trail development for the purposes of biking, hiking, snowmobiling, and ATViing. Enhancing the number of marked and seasonal trails.
- More campsites and amenities.
- Developing new facilities including batting cages, recreation centre, and water park.
- Opportunities for guided tours (e.g. boating, canoe, wilderness, etc.).
- Enhancing access to lakes.
- More accommodation options such as cabins and lodges.
- Developing proper boat launches.
- Developing a beach area at Jakes Lake.
- Upgrading DA Thomas Park.
- Programming such as horse camps, wellness programs, etc.



*How likely are you to invite your friends and/or family to visit Mackenzie County and participate in outdoor activities within the next 2 years?*



*Please provide any additional comments that you think should be taken into consideration during development of the Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan.*

Respondents identified the following most often:

- Developing new facilities such as batting cages, swimming pool, and recreation centre.
- Developing trails and facilities to support trails.
- Encouraging community events such as a community clean up.
- Careful consideration when planning for tourism.
- The County has lots to offer for tourism.
- Enhancing access to natural lakes and the river.
- Improving signage.
- Engagement with the public and local First Nations.



## Digital Input Workshops

Two digital input workshops were hosted on May 7 and May 9, 2024. 3 participants attended the workshops. The following summarizes the input received.



*What opportunities and challenges do you foresee in relation to outdoor recreation and tourism development in Mackenzie County?*

- 
- Enhancing access to remote lakes including Margaret Lake and Wadlin Lake.
  - Developing more opportunities to enhance use of the Peace River.
  - Providing more fishing opportunities for the community.
  - Opportunity to build off what the County currently offers.
  - Improving outdoor facilities (e.g., boat launches).
  - Improving signage in the County.
  - Enhancing marketing and promotions of tourism opportunities.
  - Opportunity for tourism packages.
  - Lack of interest to pay for outdoor recreation activities.
  - Lack of access to lakes.
  - Lack of resources to expand snowmobile trails.
  - High insurance costs for tourism operators.



*As a result of implementing the Plan, what will be different about outdoor recreation and tourism in Mackenzie County in 5 years? 10 years?*

- 
- Opportunity for more local tourism.
  - Ensuring there is a balance in terms of tourism.
  - More resources for visitors including guides and tours.
  - More potential for accessing new areas/lakes/places.
  - Lack of cabin access.
  - More support from the County for tourism startups (e.g., supporting insurance costs).



*What can you and/or your business or organization do to help outdoor recreation and tourism in Mackenzie County?*

- 
- Continuing to maintain trails.
  - Supporting small businesses with business plan development.
  - Local knowledge and promotion of the area.



## Trade Show

A member of the consultant team travelled to Mackenzie County to collect in-person input at the La Crete Trade Show on April 26 and 27. 76 people provided input. The following summarizes the input received.

Outdoor Activity Needs	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More trails including hiking/walking trails, bike trails, quad trails, and horseback riding trails.</li> <li>• More campsites and enhanced campsite availability.</li> <li>• Power/shower options at La Crete Ferry Campground.</li> <li>• Boat hook ups at campsites.</li> <li>• Opportunities to camp with horses.</li> <li>• Enhancement of Jake's Lake (cleaning the lake and beautifying the day-use area).</li> <li>• Enhancing access to lakes.</li> <li>• More opportunities for recreational fishing.</li> <li>• Stocking lakes with more fish.</li> <li>• Outdoor pool.</li> <li>• Mini-golf course.</li> <li>• More accommodations such as cabins.</li> <li>• More rental options available.</li> <li>• Boat launches ready to go earlier in the season.</li> <li>• More activities including sports, disc golf, and activities for youth.</li> <li>• Facilities including a bike park, skatepark, indoor golf, more parks, dog park, and beach areas.</li> <li>• Turn the old Boyer Bridge into a walking trail.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of fishing opportunities.</li> <li>• Gravel roads are challenging to access certain places.</li> <li>• Cost.</li> <li>• Lack of time.</li> <li>• Consider location of mechanized trails (ensuring they aren't near private property).</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge.</li> <li>• Distance.</li> </ul>

## Digital Interactive Map

A digital interactive mapping tool was made available to the public from April 15 to May 10, 2024, to collect location-based input. Participants were able to drag and drop markers on the map and had the opportunity to provide input at specific locations. The following summarizes the input received.

- All weather road to Bistcho Lake.
- All weather road access to Vermilion Chutes.
- Walking trail around Jakes Lake.
- Boat launch at Ferry Campground.
- Redevelop Fort Vermilion Bridge Campground.
- Restock Wadlin Lake with fish.
- Ensuring the road is well maintained into Wadlin Lake campground.
- Blue-green algae at Hutch Lake is a barrier to camping and accessing watersport activities.

## Council Input

A Council Input Workshop was hosted on April 23, 2024. Seven councillors attended the workshop. The following summarizes the input received.

- Challenges identified include land access to provincial lands and lack of funding to build recreation areas and maintain them.
- Lack of accommodations in the region, including Fort Vermilion in particular.
- Lack of willingness to share culture with visitors.
- Opportunities for enhanced snowmobile access.
- Opportunity to build partnerships with non-profit organizations.
- Potential for long term funding agreements with the Province.
- Enhanced access to remote lakes (e.g., Bistcho Lake).
- Enhanced operational and capital funding for outdoor pursuits.
- Explore ways to make securing approvals easier and more efficient.



# Appendix C – Implementation Plan

The implementation plan is divided into the following sub-sections for organizational purposes.

- Organizational Development.....62
- Product Development.....63
- Marketing Development.....67

Each action item has been assigned a suggested priority rating, estimated cost, and anticipated timeline for implementation.

### Cost Criteria

Low Cost (L)	Less than \$10,000
Medium Cost (M)	\$10,000 - \$50,000
High Cost (H)	More than \$50,000

### Implementation Timeline

Short Term (S)	Less than 2 years
Medium Term (M)	2 – 5 years
Long Term (L)	More than 5 years

### Quick Wins



A blue star indicates that an action item is a “Quick Win.” Quick wins are actions that can be implemented within a year or two, have a high probability of success and have a relatively low cost.

### Future Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting

A key component of the success of this plan will be evaluation of its initiatives. The implementation plan should be reviewed bi-annually, at which time priorities should be re-evaluated and a discussion of any variances should occur in reference to key performance indicators (KPI’s). If new projects are added (or old projects removed) as the plan progresses, this should be done by weighing the relative priority of all projects in the plan. The implementation plan should be updated on a yearly basis; therefore, the third quarter evaluation period will set the stage for the updated version of the plan. In the fourth quarter, the updated plan should be formalized, and a draft approved by the end of the year.

### Implementation Considerations

The implementation plan identifies several initiatives and action items. Attempting to complete all of them concurrently will stretch the resources and limit the focus of stakeholders as they implement the broader plan. Therefore, it is recommended that implementation begins with the highest priority items. Should the County desire to expedite implementation of the plan, it could do so by allocating more human and/or financial resources. This could involve reallocating existing resources, adding new resources, leveraging grant funding, or securing contract staff with expertise in tourism development.



# 1. Organizational Development

Priority Initiatives		Action Items	Priority/Cost	Timeline
A. Organize for Tourism Development	1.A.1 ★	Engage with partners to encourage coordination, collaboration, and cooperation when implementing the plan. This could include the Community Services Committee, Chambers of Commerce, Agricultural Societies, Recreation Boards, MFTA, REDI, tourism operators, campground caretakers, and other applicable partners.	H/L	S
B. Allocate Resources for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Development	1.B.1	Assess the County's capacity to implement relevant components of the plan and consider reallocating existing resources, adding new resources, leveraging grant funding, or securing contract staff to expedite implementation. See Appendix G for a list of applicable grant programs that could be accessed to support development.	H/variable	S
C. Collaborate with Key Partners	1.C.1 ★	Work with partner organizations to host an Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Forum. It is envisioned that the Forum would be a highly engaging event that would serve as a rallying point for tourism stakeholders from all areas of the County. The event could be hosted at an existing tourism operator to further showcase what the region has to offer. Consider hosting Forums annually to report on successes, describe upcoming initiatives, increase communication and collaboration, and energize stakeholders.	H/M	S
	1.C.2	Meet with Mighty Peace Tourism and Northwest Territories Tourism to inform them of the plan and identify areas for collaboration in marketing and experience/product development.	M/L	S
D. Measure Performance	1.D.1	Utilize the attached performance metrics and other measures as appropriate to measure performance on an annual basis.	M/L	Ongoing



## 2. Product Development

Priority Initiatives	Action Items	Priority/Cost	Timeline
A. Support the Development of Unique Wilderness Accommodations	2.A.1 Use the Development Plan for this priority initiative to support the development of UWAs across the County. (See Appendix E).	H/L	S
	2.A.2 Review existing regulations to ensure UWAs are permitted where desired across the County.	H/L	S
	2.A.3 Continue working with the Province to secure land/lease permissions for potential operators and to identify potential public lands where such operations are most desirable and feasible.	H/L	Ongoing
	2.A.4 Host an event to inform potential operators and investors about the potential of unique wilderness accommodations and generate interest in them.	H/M	S
	2.A.5 Approach established tourism operators to promote the idea and build community support.	H/L	S
	2.A.6 Work with MFTA and other local organizations to develop business supports for operators (e.g. startup guides).	H/L	S
B. Encourage the Development of Destination Campgrounds	2.B.1 Use the Development Plan for this priority initiative to support the development of destination campgrounds across the County. (See Appendix E).	H/L	S
	2.B.2 Review regulations to ensure new destination campgrounds are permitted where desired across the County.	H/L	S
	2.B.3 Inventory and assess existing campgrounds in the County and identify strong candidates for development into destination campgrounds.	H/L	S
	2.B.4 Work with the Province to identify locations for potential future destination campgrounds based on access to adjacent public lands for outdoor recreational opportunities.	H/L	S
	2.B.5 Work with private businesses who may be interested in developing and operating a destination campground on their own properties or on public lands and help guide them through municipal and/or provincial disposition and development processes.	M/L	S
	2.B.6 Work with MFTA and other local organizations (such as Community Futures Northwest Alberta) to develop supports for potential non-profit or for-profit destination campground providers.	M/L	M



Priority Initiatives	Action Items	Priority/Cost	Timeline	
C. Develop New Trails and New Water Access	2.C.1	Develop a trail and water access master plan to guide the development of new trails, new trail systems and greater access to lakes and rivers across the County, including enhancements (such as warming huts) to existing trails and water access points to improve the visitor experience.	H/M	S
	2.C.2	Work with existing organizations, such as the Rocky Lane Agricultural Society, La Crete Polar Cats Snowmobile Club, and Watt Mountain Wanderers Snowmobile Club, to secure long term access to trail areas and to further develop existing infrastructure and amenities.	H/M-H	S
	2.C.3	Improve trailhead amenities, signage and directions to existing trail access points.	H/M	S
	2.C.4	Identify new water access sites and infrastructure needs in priority areas, such as boat launches, roads, and trails.	M/M	S
	2.C.5	Identify land access and infrastructure needed to support expanded fishing opportunities on regional lakes and rivers. This may include storage areas for ice fishing huts, boat launches and docks, and new all-weather access roads.	M/M	S
	2.C.6	Develop a trail map and provide it to visitors in digital and hard copy formats.	M/L	S
	2.C.7	Support the efforts of tourism stakeholders to acquire Tourism and Commercial Recreation Leases and other approvals as necessary from the Province to support recreation and tourism activities on Crown lands and in provincial parks.	M/L	Ongoing
	2.C.8	Improve access to the Vermilion Chutes for visitors on the water and off, in addition to developing supporting amenities.	L/H	L
	2.C.9	Work with communities and property owners along the Peace River, including near the Vermilion Chutes, to provide access and to develop more formal paddling routes through the region, including accommodation, boat launches, and related infrastructure.	L/H	L
D. Support Outdoor and Backcountry Equipment Rentals	2.D.1	Work with Community Futures Northwest Alberta to support new operators and to encourage existing business to expand into this field.	M/L	M
	2.D.2	Identify desirable locations across the County for rental businesses.	L/L	M
	2.D.3	Develop an investment prospectus for these types of businesses.	L/L	M



Priority Initiatives	Action Items	Priority/Cost	Timeline
E. Pursue the Development of Fly-in Fishing Resorts	2.E.1 Study the feasibility of an all-seasons road to Bistcho Lake.	M/M	M
	2.E.2 Identify potential locations for new fly-in fishing resorts, working with the Province and other partners as required.	M/L	M
F. Support Wilderness Training Opportunities	2.F.1 Work with local stakeholders to identify potential operators or operator training opportunities.	M/L	M
	2.F.2 Support businesses and organizations in providing training opportunities by identifying potential locations and facilities across the County.	M/L	S
G. Support the Creation of Guided Adventure Tours	2.G.1 Assist operators with navigating public land access approvals.	H/M	Ongoing
	2.G.2 Identify prime locations in the County for different types of guided tours to assist potential operators in developing business plans and securing land use approvals.	M/L	S
	2.G.3 Investigate the potential expansion of existing recreational and staging areas with an emphasis on access to unique natural features and landscape elements.	M/L-H	S-M
	2.G.4 Work with the Province to identify, and designate, where desirable, more formal recreational areas that will support nature-based tourism and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.	M/L	M
	2.G.5 Work with partners to attract established tour operators from outside the County.	M/L	M
H. Enhance Culture and Heritage Tourism Opportunities	2.H.1 Support tourism operators in the creation of cultural tourism experiences that leverage existing assets around Fort Vermilion and throughout the County.	L/L	L
	2.H.2 Work with the Mackenzie Frontier Tourist Association to develop and promote unique events and festivals that draw tourists to the County and encourage those passing through to extend their stay.	L/M	L
I. Expand and Enhance Tourism Offerings in the County	2.I.1 Organize tourism experience and package development training by Travel Alberta and Community Futures to be delivered to new tourism operators.  Consider offering training workshops on an annual basis and collaborating with partners to increase participation and share associated costs.	H/L-M	S



Priority Initiatives	Action Items	Priority/Cost	Timeline
	2.I.2 ★ Work with tourism operators to help them access Travel Alberta's Tourism Investment Program for Product Development and other development grant opportunities.	H/L-H	Ongoing
	2.I.3 ★ In the short to medium term, focus product development efforts on tourism offerings that are close to being visitor and/or market ready. This will help to quickly expand the product base in the region.	H/L	Ongoing
J. Strengthen Land Use Planning and Access	2.J.1 Lobby the Provincial government for the development of a regional land use plan for the Lower Peace Region.	H/L	S
	2.J.2 Work with other rural counties to lobby the Province for more streamlined leasing processes for municipalities and non-profits.	M/L	M
	2.J.3 Continue to participate in sub-regional planning task forces, and the development of subsidiary plans.	M/L	Ongoing
	2.J.4 Create documents that can be used by partners to lobby the Province for approval of proposed outdoor recreation developments and access to Crown lands. Documents should include appropriate justification, relevant data and background information.	H/L	S
	2.J.5 Research investments by the Province in outdoor recreation and tourism assets in Mackenzie County, and compare these to provincial investments in other regions of Alberta.	M/L	S
K. Support Visiting Friends and Relatives Tourism Products	2.K.1 Develop a Tourism Ambassador Program and recruit residents to join the program who are passionate about showcasing their community's outdoor recreation opportunities to visitors.	L/L	S-M
	2.K.2 Provide resources, training, and other supports to encourage residents to host VFR (e.g. trip planning tools, ambassador programs, VFR packages, how-to-host tip sheets, opportunities to experience available tourism activities etc.).	L/L	M
	2.K.3 Encourage tourism experience providers to offer host incentives, such as discounts when residents bring visitors with them.	L/variable	Ongoing

### 3. Marketing

Priority Initiatives	Action Items	Priority/Cost	Timeline
A. Expand Marketing of Mackenzie County's Tourism Offerings	3.A.1  Continue to support the MFTA and its marketing efforts.	H/L	S
	3.A.2 Collaborate with Travel Alberta to fully leverage available marketing programs, funds and supports for the County, partners and tourism operators.	H/L	S
	3.A.3 Provide tourism marketing training to existing and potential new operators. Consider offering training workshops on an annual basis and collaborating with partners to increase participation and share associated costs. Focus should be put toward digital marketing training to respond to the needs of operators and visitors (e.g. social media, website design, e-commerce).	H/variable	Ongoing
	3.A.4  Encourage tourism operators to develop marketing plans for their experiential offerings.	H/L	Ongoing
	3.A.5 Engage with partner organizations (i.e. Explore Edmonton, Tourism Northwest Territories, and Destination Canada) to explore opportunities to align with and leverage the Northern Sky Corridor initiative.	H/L	Ongoing
	3.A.6 Encourage partners, existing operators and new tourism entrepreneurs to build their marketing skills through the micro-learning opportunities on Travel Alberta's E-Learning Portal and its eLearningU platform.	H/L	Ongoing
	3.A.7  Ensure the use of social media and digital platforms in tourism promotions. For example, ensure the region's visitor and market ready tourism products are listed on Travel Alberta's ATIS platform and other relevant consumer-facing tourism websites.	M/L	M
	3.A.8 Plan familiarization tours with media outlets, travel influencers, potential partners, and the travel trade industry to showcase the region's high quality and market ready tourism experiences.	L/variable	M-L
	3.A.9 In partnership with MFTA, send delegations of tourism champions to important tourism conferences and trade shows to capitalize on emerging opportunities, build capacity and drive visitation to the County.	L/L	Ongoing



Priority Initiatives		Action Items	Priority/Cost	Timeline
B. Understand the Visitor	3.B.1	Conduct research to better understand existing and potential future visitor markets (e.g. visitor surveys, PRIZM analysis, data collection, etc.).	H/L	Ongoing
	★			
	3.B.2	Develop and maintain target market profiles for the region's best customers. Share these with tourism operators to help inform their product development and marketing efforts.	L/L	Ongoing
C. Tourism Branding	3.C.1	Communicate Mackenzie County's tourism brand to tourism operators and stakeholders and encourage them to align with the positioning.	M/L	S
	3.C.2	Work with the MFTA to enhance tourism websites, align branding and support the implementation of other actions in this plan.	M/M	S
	3.C.3	Work to ensure consistent implementation of the brand throughout all tourism marketing activities and materials.	M/L	Ongoing
D. Educate Communities in the Region on the Benefits of Tourism	3.D.1	On an annual basis, formally share "good news" stories related to tourism with communities in the County (e.g. new business openings, business success stories, positive economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism, etc.).	M/L	Ongoing
E. Plan for Communication During Emergencies	3.E.1	Develop a Tourism Emergency Communications Plan. The plan should provide direction on how tourism marketing will be adjusted and/or leveraged to respond to, and recover from, emergencies that can increase or decrease visitation, such as wildfires.	M/L	M

## Top 10 Action Items

The following actions have been identified as the top priorities of the plan. They are listed in a recommended order of priority.

1. Engage with partners to encourage coordination, collaboration, and cooperation when implementing the plan. This could include the Community Services Committee, Chambers of Commerce, Agricultural Societies, Recreation Boards, MFTA, REDI, tourism operators, campground caretakers, and other applicable partners.
2. Work with partner organizations to host an Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Forum.
3. Utilize the Development Plans (see Appendix E) to support the development of unique wilderness accommodations and destination campgrounds across the County.
4. Work with existing organizations, such as the Rocky Lane Agricultural Society, La Crete Polar Cats Snowmobile Club, and Watt Mountain Wanderers Snowmobile Club, to secure long term access to trail areas and to further develop existing infrastructure and amenities.
5. Improve trailhead amenities, signage and directions to existing trail access points.
6. Work with tourism operators to help them access Travel Alberta's Tourism Investment Program for Product Development and other development grant opportunities.
7. Lobby the Provincial government to secure enhanced access to outdoor recreation and tourism assets.
8. Encourage participation in tourism experience and package development training offered by Travel Alberta and Community Futures.
9. Work with the MFTA to enhance tourism websites, align branding and support the implementation of other actions in this plan.
10. Develop a Tourism Emergency Communications Plan.



## Performance Evaluation Framework

22 key performance indicators (KPI's) have been developed to help evaluate implementation of the plan. It is suggested that the KPI's be measured on an annual basis. Baseline figures will need to be established for KPI's that are not currently tracked.

Desired Outcomes	KPI	Measurement Tool
1. The region will see increased investment in new outdoor recreation and tourism ventures.	1.1 5% annual growth in number of overnight stays in the County each year.	Accommodation data, operator survey
	1.2 5% annual growth in new tourism businesses and associated increase in municipal business tax revenue.	Tourism asset inventory, municipal budget
	1.3 5% annual growth in operational revenue for tourism operators and accommodation businesses.	Operator survey
	1.4 5% annual growth in investment in new outdoor recreation and tourism ventures.	Operator survey, annual reports
2. There will be more ways for people to enjoy the great outdoors.	2.1 5% annual growth in experiential tourism programming for visitors on a County-wide basis.	Tourism marketing, Tourism asset inventory
	2.2 5% annual growth in outdoor recreational opportunities for residents on a County-wide basis.	Recreation asset inventory
3. Access to the land and to water for recreational and tourism purposes will be enhanced.	3.1 Annual increase in the number of Tourism and Commercial Recreation Leases held in the County.	Provincial reporting
	3.2 Annual increase in the number of approvals for recreation and tourism activities on Crown lands and in provincial parks (e.g. access and guiding permits, approvals for recreation operations plans, licenses of occupation for trails, and other relevant leases/dispositions).	Provincial reporting
	3.3 New infrastructure is developed to support access to the land and water (e.g. new trails, new staging areas, new access roads, new signage, new boat launches).	Recreation asset inventory, capital plans
	3.4 5% annual increase in number of development permits issued by the County for outdoor recreation and tourism development.	Annual reports

Desired Outcomes	KPI	Measurement Tool
4. More visitors and residents will be experiencing the area's outdoor offerings in ways that are sustainable and responsible.	4.1 5% annual growth in digital engagement with visitors seeking tourism experiences.	Website metrics
	4.2 5% annual growth in new tourism product awareness by visitors.	Visitor survey
	4.3 5% annual growth in visitors and residents participating in sanctioned or approved outdoor experiences.	Participation stats, surveys
	4.4 Increased awareness of sustainable and responsible outdoor practices.	Surveys
	4.5 5% annual growth in visitors and residents accessing recreational activities through formal amenities and systems.	Surveys
	4.6 5% annual growth in the construction of amenities that are purpose built for a particular use (e.g. trails, staging areas, boat launches).	Annual reports
	4.7 5% annual growth in trail maintenance activities.	Annual reports
5. It will be widely recognized that outdoor recreation and tourism are key drivers of economic, social, and environmental benefits for communities in Mackenzie County.	5.1 85% great rating for tourism operators (by year 5).	Visitor survey
	5.2 85% great rating of overall experience in the County (by year 5).	Visitor survey
	5.3 Achieve a Net Promoter Score of 50 (by year 5).	Visitor survey
	5.4 20% increase in number of return visitors (by year 5).	Visitor survey
	5.5 Strong support for outdoor recreation and tourism offerings in the community.	Resident survey



## Appendix D – Opportunity Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Description
1. Availability and Market Readiness of the Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity is currently available in the County or could be developed with limited investment.</li> <li>The extent to which the opportunity is visitor ready, market ready or export ready.</li> </ul>
2. Human Resource Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of the opportunity will not put un-due stress on existing human resources.</li> <li>The operator of the opportunity has a strong organizational structure that can support growth (i.e. leadership, business infrastructure, experience, management capacity).</li> </ul>
3. Partner and Community Buy-In	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity demonstrates commitment from a wide variety of partners (public and/or private).</li> <li>The community is open to sharing the opportunity with visitors.</li> </ul>
4. Unique and Authentic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes an authentic experience that highlights what is unique and valuable about the County.</li> <li>Product differentiates itself from the competition.</li> <li>The opportunity provides experiential product.</li> </ul>
5. Market Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity reaches identified target markets.</li> <li>The opportunity demonstrates market demand through relevant indicators (e.g. visitation statistics, gap analysis, expressed demand, survey data, population projections, trends, etc.).</li> <li>Limited competition exists relative to market demand (by geography, season, product offering, etc.).</li> <li>Development of the opportunity will attract day-trippers.</li> <li>Development of the opportunity will attract over-nighters.</li> </ul>
6. Market Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity has the potential to be promoted year-round to leverage the brand of the community.</li> <li>The opportunity has the potential to attract the attention of the media.</li> </ul>
7. Return on Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity will produce a high return on investment.</li> </ul>
8. Strategic Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of the opportunity aligns with the strategic intent and organizational strategy of stakeholders.</li> </ul>
9. Community Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity fosters the culture, health and development of the community by enhancing community spirit.</li> </ul>

Criteria	Description
10. Ability to Generate New Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity has potential to develop new and complementary product on an annual basis.</li> </ul>
11. Growth Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity has potential to achieve year over year growth in revenue, product and visitation.</li> </ul>
12. Environmental Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity has minimal environmental impacts.</li> <li>Further development of the opportunity would have minimal environmental impacts.</li> </ul>
13. Physical Infrastructure Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The community has the physical infrastructure in place to support development (e.g. roads, public facilities, accommodations, etc.).</li> </ul>
14. Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity has a sound logistical plan that will help ensure the execution of high-quality experiences for visitors.</li> </ul>
15. Evaluation and Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity can be clearly evaluated and have its performance measured.</li> </ul>



## Appendix E – Development Plans

These plans are tools that can be used to support the development of new Unique Wilderness Accommodations and Destination Campgrounds in Mackenzie County. They outline their respective experiential offerings, market insights, target markets and target operators. The plans also identify operational and start up considerations to help potential operators understand and move ahead with developing these facilities in the County.

### 1. Unique Wilderness Accommodations

#### Experiential Offering

Unique wilderness accommodations will bring visitors into diverse areas of the County that they would not otherwise be able to access. They will offer special getaway experiences that provide opportunities for connecting with nature. Accommodations could include rustic or serviced canvas tents, yurts, and star-gazing domes. There is also potential for more permanent structures and full servicing on private lands, as well as sites designed to accommodate RVs outside of a traditional campground setting. Stays could be paired with unique seasonal outdoor recreational experiences such as fishing and hiking tours in summer, and snowmobile and northern lights viewing adventures in winter.



Photo Credits (L-R): Hipcamp, airbnb

#### Market Insights

- The number of campers in Canada that stay in cabins or glamping accommodation has more than doubled since 2014. There is an overall downward trend in tent usage.<sup>44</sup>
- In a 2024 study Canadian campers indicated a desire to embrace the escapism offered by outdoor experiences, with 54% of those surveyed noting that they wanted to slow down and enjoy the moment and simply enjoy their experiences.<sup>45</sup>
- Nature-based tourist activities have a special place in the hearts of Canadian residents, with natural attractions being their primary trip anchor.<sup>46</sup>
- In 2023, the global glamping market size was estimated at USD 3.15 billion. Between 2024 and 2030 it is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 8.7%.<sup>47</sup>

#### Target Operators

Unique Wilderness Accommodations are well suited to private operators on private lands. They provide the opportunity for entrepreneurs to use existing land and infrastructure assets in new ways, and to diversify their incomes in alignment with their personal knowledge, interests and abilities.



## 2. Destination Campgrounds

### Experiential Offering

Destination campgrounds offer campsites and on-site recreational opportunities such as swimming areas, boat access and fishing, green spaces, adventure parks, picnic areas, walking paths, dark sky viewing platforms and more. By combining these amenities they offer visitors both places to stay and things to do, transforming a campground into a destination. They frequently include tent sites for those content with more rustic accommodations as well as RV sites for those who may prefer more comforts of home. They may also provide key visitor services such as a small store for food and camping essentials, water and power at some or all sites, washroom facilities, sani-dumps, wi-fi, and laundry facilities. Destination campgrounds are attractions in and of themselves and can also serve as sites from which to explore other regional tourist attractions. There are successful destination campgrounds in Mackenzie County already, including the Zama Community Park and Campground and the La Crete Ferry Campground.



Zama Community Park and Campground  
Photo Credit: Mackenzie Frontier

### Market Insights

- More and more campers in the US and Canada desire access to everyday comforts on their trips, and prefer campgrounds that offer full service amenities.
- RV rentals have increased, even as RV ownership has dropped off somewhat after a COVID-19 induced ownership surge.
- In North America in 2023, eight in 10 campers integrated at least some of their camping trips with stays to visit family or friends.<sup>48</sup>
- Many travellers are choosing nearby getaways for long weekends.<sup>49</sup>

### Target Operators

Destination Campgrounds are well suited to public and non-profit operators on public lands. This is because their land, infrastructure and financing needs can be higher than what private operators on private lands may be able to provide. For these reasons they are also well suited to being developed at existing campground locations, where access to land and some services are already in place.



# Steps for Developing Unique Wilderness Accommodations and Destination Campgrounds

## Business Planning

Business planning is a critical step towards making a Unique Wilderness Accommodation or Destination Campground business a reality. Begin by following the steps and answering the questions below. They will help you to write a business plan. These steps are flexible enough to be used by a variety of potential tourism operators. The Government of Alberta's archived *Tourism Business Start Up Workbook* is a good resource for more detailed exploration of key considerations. See also the business plan template that follows.<sup>50</sup>

**Question 1: Why do you want to start a tourism business?** To diversify your income? To change careers? To grow an existing business? To pursue your recreational interests through your job? To introduce visitors to your region? List your top three reasons.

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**Question 2: What do you want your business to be?** Do you want to only provide accommodations? Are you interested in offering additional services and experiences like tours? How do you want to interact with guests? What size of business do you want to be?

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**Question 3: What experience are you selling?** What form(s) of accommodation will you provide? During what seasons will they be available? What experiences and services will you offer in addition to accommodation? Where will your experience take place and what activities will it include?

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**Site Selection Criteria and Considerations**

Criteria	Considerations
Site Capacity	Ability of the site to accommodate required infrastructure (size of the site, size and number of accommodation options, level of servicing provided)
Site Accessibility	Ease of access, including location on a reliable road (summer or winter access, whether guests can access with a regular vehicle), distance from main transportation corridors and tourist hotspots, feasibility of securing access through Crown lands if required
Site Characteristics	Wilderness setting (visually removed from developed areas such as hamlets, highways, commercial and industrial areas) and proximity to recreational amenities to provide packaged experiences or ability to offer/develop amenities on the site (trails, water access, star-gazing platforms, wildlife viewing areas, etc.) (proximity to complementary recreational areas)
Site Availability	Confirmation of whether the site can be used for accommodations (e.g. zoning and applicable regulations) and whether it would be available for lease/occupancy for this use if it is on public land
Site Synergies	Opportunities for partnerships with other local tourism service providers (e.g. food services, tour operators)
Operations and Revenue Generation	Operational efficiencies (e.g. existing servicing and infrastructure), feasibility of servicing, potential for diversified revenue streams

**Question 4: Why will people buy your experience?** What is your pitch? What makes it unique? What tourism need does it fill?

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**Question 5: Who will buy your experience?** Who is your principal target customer? What are their needs and interests? What trends and seasonal patterns do you need to be aware of as an accommodation and/or experience provider?

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**Question 6: Who are your competitors?** What other operators in the region exist and what services do they provide? How will you be different? How might you work with them?

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**Question 7: What is your competitive advantage?** What can you and only you provide to guests? (Unique location? Immersive experiences? Personalized services? Deep knowledge about the area?)

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**Question 8: How is your experience sold?** How will you make sales/confirm accommodation and experience bookings? Consider direct sales through online booking platforms (e.g. Airbnb, VRBO, Hipcamp, Campspot, and Harvest Host).

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**Question 9: How are you going to promote your business to customers?** Consider multiple tools such as a business website and social media accounts, marketing collateral like brochures and posters, using the Alberta Tourism Information Service (ATIS), relationships with regional destination marketing organizations, user-generated content, and familiarization tours for travel influencers and potential partners.

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**Question 10: How will your business operate?** Will you be the owner/operator? How will you earn revenue (e.g. accommodation fees, tour fees, add on services such as food and/or transportation)? Who will deliver experiences? Where and when? What on-site facilities are required? What equipment do you need? What human resources/staffing do you need? Do you need special permissions, permits, or approvals to deliver your experience?

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Ensure to consult municipal and provincial bylaws and regulations. If you plan to operate/develop on public (Crown) land, you will need approvals from the Government of Alberta. Consult the Director’s Guide to Leases for Tourism and Recreation Purposes to understand the process to secure access to Crown land for accommodations and tourism and commercial recreation.

**Question 11: What is the operating budget of your business?** What are your main expenses? How much revenue will your business need to be profitable?

Revenue	Projection for Year 1
Accommodation charges	\$
Experience fees	\$
Sale of products	\$
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$</b>
Expenses	
Salaries & benefits	\$
Advertising and promotions	\$
Insurance	\$
Supplies/Materials	\$
Utilities	\$
Repairs/Maintenance	\$
Rent/Rentals	\$
Professional fees	\$
Service charges	\$
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$</b>

**Question 12: What are your startup costs?** What needs to be in place before you can begin operating?

Potential Start Up Costs	Amount
Land	
Servicing (e.g. power, water, sewer/septic)	
Accommodation structures (e.g. tents, cabins, campsites, stargazing domes)	
Furniture/Fixtures (e.g. beds, chairs, tables, lights, signs)	
Outbuildings/Accessory buildings (e.g. washrooms, laundry, covered gathering areas, storage sheds)	
Amenities (e.g. walking paths, viewing platforms, swimming areas, activity areas, signage)	
Access infrastructure (e.g. roads, driveways, paths)	
Vehicles	
Site design	
Business license	
Permit fees	
Training	

**Question 13: How will you finance your business?** How will you pay for your start up costs and cover ongoing expenses? Will you require financing (loans, grants, investors?) and where will you access it?

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**Question 14: How will you know you are successful?** Are you generating a profit? Is your business resonating with visitors? Have you established a competitive advantage?

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## Business Plan Template

The following template can be used to help you organize your business plan. It is based on the Government of Alberta's archived *Tourism Business Start Up Workbook*.

Business Plan Section	Contents
Letter of Transmittal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce your business plan to the reader</li> <li>• Outline the major features that may be of interest</li> </ul>
Title Page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide identifying information about you and your proposed business.</li> <li>• Name, address and contact numbers for the business as well as key company contacts</li> </ul>
Table of Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list of the major headings and subheadings contained in your plan</li> </ul>
Executive Summary and Fact Sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A 1-2 page summary of the important points in your plan</li> <li>• May be the most important part of your business plan</li> <li>• Your fact sheet summarizes the basic information that relates to the venture</li> </ul>
Company and Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History and current situation of your company</li> <li>• Goals and objectives for the business</li> <li>• Principal characteristics and trends in the industry</li> </ul>
Product and Service Offering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed description of your product or service</li> <li>• Outline stage of development and proprietary position</li> </ul>
Market Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the profile of your principal target customer</li> <li>• Indicate current market size, trends and seasonal patterns</li> <li>• Assess the nature of your competition</li> <li>• Estimate your expected sales and market share</li> </ul>
Your Marketing Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detail the marketing strategy you plan to use</li> <li>• Describe your marketing plan with respect to your sales strategy, advertising and promotion plans, pricing policy, and channels of distribution</li> </ul>

Business Plan Section	Contents
Your Development Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline the development status of your product and what is still required to get it to a market-ready state</li> <li>• Are there regulatory, testing, or other requirements that still have to be met?</li> </ul>
Your Production/Operations Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline the operating side of your business</li> <li>• Describe your location, kind of facilities, space requirements, capital equipment needs, and labour requirements</li> </ul>
Your Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify your key management people, their responsibilities, and their qualifications</li> <li>• Indicate the principal shareholders of the business, principal advisors, and the members of your board of directors</li> </ul>
Your Implementation Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present an overall schedule indicating what needs to be done to launch your business and the timing required to bring it about</li> <li>• Discuss the major problems and risks that you will have to deal with</li> </ul>
Your Financial Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicate the type and amount of financing you are looking for and how the funds will be used</li> <li>• Outline your proposed terms of investment, the potential return to the investor, and what benefit is being provided</li> <li>• Provide an overview of the current financial structure of your business</li> <li>• Prepare realistic financial projections that reflect the effect of the financing; include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cash flow forecasts</li> <li>- Pro forma profit and loss statements</li> <li>- Proforma balance sheet</li> <li>- Break-even analysis</li> <li>- Startup costs</li> <li>- Personal net-worth statement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Appendices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting material for your plan including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Detailed resumes of the management team</li> <li>- Product literature and photographs</li> <li>- Names of possible customers and suppliers</li> <li>- Consulting reports and market surveys</li> <li>- Copies of legal documents</li> <li>- Publicity material</li> <li>- Letters of reference</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## Appendix F – Case Studies

### Case Studies

#### Peace River Cabins and Outdoors

Peace River Cabins and Outdoors is situated approximately 32 km from the Town of Peace River, Alberta. The privately-owned getaway operates from April to October. The property features three distinct cabins, the St. Germain Full Service Cabin, the Jackson Full Service Cabin, and the JB Early Rustic Cabin. Additionally, there is an authentic Teepee available.

The cabins are located along the banks of the Peace River, surrounded by natural scenery. Visitors can enjoy various amenities including a spacious covered deck, a barbeque, a fire pit, and access to power and potable water. Wi-Fi is available and an optional wood-fired hot tub can be rented. The Teepee is equipped with cots, and campfire cooking utensils are provided.

For groups, Peace River Cabins and Outdoors offers additional amenities such as catering services and canoe, kayak, and shuttle rentals. There is also the opportunity for guided adventures. With advance notice, guests can experience a guided canoe, kayak or raft trip or explore the area on a guided hike. Vacation packages are also available. For example, they offer a 5-night active cabin vacation that includes a mix of outdoor and cultural activities. Vacation highlights include:<sup>51</sup>

- Cocktail reception during the first night.
- Two guided canoe or kayak day trips.
- Lunches are included.
- ½ day visit to a provincial interpretive centre.
- Two local museum visits.
- Optional bird watching, farm tour or scenic ultralight flight.



Photo Credits: Peace River Canada

### Boundary RV Park

Boundary RV Park is located along the banks of the Tay River, just east of the Rocky Mountains in David Thompson Country. This privately owned establishment welcomes visitors from May through October and is surrounded by Crown land, offering a variety of outdoor activities such as trail riding, hiking, fishing, and swimming.

The park provides a range of accommodations, including unique Geo Domes and rustic cabins. The three themed Geo Domes offer a glamping experience with their spherical structures crafted from metal or wooden frames, covered in weather resistant fabric. For those who prefer a more traditional stay, the park also offers three rustic cabins, glamping tent rentals, an enchanting tree house, as well as both serviced and non-serviced campsites. Some of the Geo Domes and cabins are equipped with propane, wood, or pellet heating. All visitors have access to a modern wash house and a pay shower with flush toilets.<sup>52</sup>



Photo Credits: Travel Alberta



### Elk Island Retreat

Elk Island Retreat is located in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, and spans across a 60-acre parcel of privately owned land. Open from March to November, this getaway offers a diverse range of accommodations including three cabins, four geodomes, two yurts, and 36 full-service RV sites.

For group gatherings, Elk Island Retreat offers a unique event space perfect for weddings, family reunions, workshops, retreats, or special events. The event area is equipped with large tents, a stage, tables, and chairs. Additional event services include a venue-wide sound system, dedicated bartender, selection of lawn games, and an on-site coordinator.

Guests have access to a variety of on-site amenities including sustainable shower and laundry facilities, outdoor washrooms, water refilling station, Wi-Fi, and cooking shelters. For those who don't have their own gear, the retreat offers rental options such as bedding, cooking utensils, mattresses, and cots.

Elk Island Retreat also offers unique experiences to enhance guests' stays. The REN Massage and Wellness service brings massages directly to your accommodation. Guests can also purchase a "Bits and Bites" luxury picnic. For outdoor enthusiasts, the nearby Lake Sloughise trail offers opportunities for hiking and exploring nature.<sup>53</sup>



Elk Island Retreat Event Space



Photo Credits: Elk Island Retreat

## Appendix G – Grant Programs

The following describes some of the provincial and federal grant programs available to support outdoor recreation and tourism development.

### Provincial Funding

The Government of Alberta invests funds in provincial, regional, and local initiatives through various programs as described in Figure 4. There are programs open to private businesses, municipalities, and non-profits such as destination organizations, industry associations and economic development organizations.

Figure 4. Provincial Funding Programs

Organization	Program/Stream	Eligible Organizations/Activities	Available Funding
Travel Alberta	Tourism Investment Program/ <i>Product Development Fund</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alberta-based tourism operators (including startups), Indigenous organizations, not-for-profit organizations, and municipalities</li> <li>Tourism assets and/or infrastructure, and promotional support</li> </ul>	\$75,000 to \$500,000, minimum 25% matching contribution from project owner
Travel Alberta	Tourism Investment Program/ <i>Rural Development and Promotion Fund</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alberta-based destination organizations, not-for-profit organizations, municipalities, chambers of commerce, and industry associations</li> <li>Product and experience development, and promotional support</li> </ul>	\$50,000 to \$150,000
Travel Alberta	Tourism Investment Program/ <i>Events &amp; Festivals Fund</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alberta-based businesses, associations, and communities</li> <li>Events lasting two or more days that charge admission and target overnight visitation</li> </ul>	\$20,000 to \$150,000, minimum 25% matching contribution from project owner



Organization	Program/Stream	Eligible Organizations/Activities	Available Funding
Government of Alberta	<i>Northern and Regional Economic Development (NRED)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporated non-profit organizations that have an economic development mandate, municipalities</li> <li>Initiatives that support economic development including planning and feasibility studies, training or events, marketing and investment promotion, business retention and expansion</li> </ul>	\$10,000 to \$300,000
Government of Alberta	Community Facility Enhancement Program ( <i>small/large</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registered non-profits</li> <li>Projects to upgrade, expand, purchase or build arts, cultural, heritage, recreational, sport or other related public-use community facilities</li> </ul>	\$125,000/year (small) \$1,000,000/year (large)
Government of Alberta	Community Initiatives Program ( <i>program based stream</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registered non-profit</li> <li>Community events such as festivals, theatre productions, films, exhibits, symposiums, workshops</li> </ul>	\$75,000 (project based)
Government of Alberta	<i>Heritage Awareness Grants</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business, First Nation, individual, municipality, Métis Settlement, non-profit organization, school K-12, post-secondary institution</li> <li>Delivery of interpretive and public engagement projects that preserve, interpret and promote appreciation of Alberta's history</li> </ul>	\$25,000 maximum
Government of Alberta	<i>Historic Resource Conservation Grants</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad eligibility including individuals, registered organizations and non-profits, corporations and</li> <li>Conservation work on historic resources and places, and associated studies and professional services</li> </ul>	\$50,000 to \$100,000

Organization	Program/Stream	Eligible Organizations/Activities	Available Funding
Government of Alberta	<i>Workforce Partnership Grants</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad eligibility including businesses, non-profits, economic development organizations, community action groups, and municipalities</li> <li>Workforce attraction and retention activities, and labour market partnerships</li> </ul>	No maximum
Government of Alberta	<i>Small Community Opportunity Program</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small communities, Indigenous communities, and Métis Settlements</li> <li>Projects that support rural business and entrepreneurship, labour force and skills development, marketing and promoting rural tourism, rural economic development capacity building</li> </ul>	\$20,000 to \$100,000
Government of Alberta	<i>Alberta Culture Days Grant</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registered non-profits</li> <li>Alberta Culture Days activities, events and promotions that engage public participation and inspire future involvement</li> </ul>	\$10,000 maximum

### Federal Funding

The Government of Canada invests in programs that could be leveraged to support outdoor recreation and tourism development, including:

- *PrairiesCan Tourism Growth Program*
- *PrairiesCan Community Economic Development and Diversification (CEDD) in the Prairie provinces*



## Appendix H – References

- <sup>1</sup> Mackenzie County. (2021). County Overview.
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