

Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism Five-Year Strategic Plan 2025–2029 MRDT Renewal Application

APPENDIX I.2 Five-Year Strategic Business Plan



Designated Recipient Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism Society

Community Names: Nelson, Balfour, Ainsworth Hot Springs, Kaslo, Lardeau, Meadow Creek, Crawford Bay, Boswell, Destiny Bay, Wynndel

Date Prepared August 1, 2024

MRDT Repeal Date March 1, 2025

Five-Year Period 2025 to 2029

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SECTION I

Five-Year Strategic Overview

In the last five years, the world has changed in ways few people could have imagined. In March 2020, Covid caused the world’s operating systems to grind to a halt within the span of a few days.

Tourism —and even the freedom to travel within some towns and cities—was restricted, and at times it was outright banned. Everyone, including destination marketing organizations, was forced to rethink travel patterns.

When travel restrictions loosened and Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism (NKLT) began to slowly market the idea of regional travel again, our income from the Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) allowed us to pivot our messaging quickly and activate strategies that got people returning to our area.

NKLT is an industry-led, membership-based non-profit society and is the “eligible entity” for the MRDT. NKLT was incorporated in October 2009 and is responsible for the management, administration, and governance of the region’s MRDT funds and the overall strategic plan and budget.

Access to MRDT funding to creative effective marketing initiatives is essential to the Nelson Kootenay Lake region. Many regional DMOs that are located on the Trans-Canada Highway or other major transportation arteries will, by default, accrue hotel visitations with travellers who are passing through their catchment, with no intention to stay and visit. Nelson Kootenay Lake, however, and its surrounding communities, are not really “on the way” to anywhere. We are truly a destination, and one that needs to market itself effectively and successfully to attract more people to our area.

The development of this five-year strategic business plan is to seek





engagement with the community on tourism growth and economic development opportunities for the Nelson Kootenay Lake region for the next five-year MRDT term (2025–2029) at the rate of two percent MRDT.

Over the past five years, our organization has done incredible marketing work with the MRDT funds it has received. Our Kootenay Lake Road Trip app is a new experience that offers fun and informative self-guided audio tours around our region. For the development of this app, NKLT won the award of Business Excellence from the Nelson and District Chamber in 2023. MRDT funds help propel our authentic, fresh, and successful marketing campaigns, allowing us to continuously generate photo and video content that helps us draw visitors to our area.

Vision

Nelson Kootenay Lake is globally renowned as a vibrant, welcoming, year-round mountain and cultural destination known for its exceptional experiences; authenticity; and diverse, unique communities.

Mission

To attract value-aligned travellers based on data-informed destination-management strategies and effective marketing initiatives intended to increase visitations and length of stays, which increases stakeholder revenues and contributes to the region’s economic sustainability.



Our **Guiding Principles** help direct the performance and values of the board of directors and NKLT staff:

ABC (Always Bettering Community)

It is the most basic of our guiding principles, but also the most important. All NKLT initiatives and output can be measured against this question: will this action or request help benefit the communities in our region?

Difference Creates Desirability

The Nelson Kootenay Lake region is comprised of 10 different and unique communities, all nestled along the shore of beautiful and historic Kootenay Lake. Each community is different, offering travellers a more diverse and robust tourist experience than any other destination in Canada. Our area is often described as quirky, quaint, and authentic. NKLT uses marketing strategies intended to celebrate and leverage the uniqueness of our region and target audiences who have similar values.



Authenticity

We know from years of data collection that the Nelson Kootenay Lake region is known and appreciated for being a creative, real, and authentic place. Authenticity is a bedrock of community well-being and a direct reflection of the people who live here. To foster authenticity, NKLT is committed to working with local businesses and creatives on projects and initiatives that keep tourism dollars in the region. To preserve the region's authentic reputation, we have agreed to use AI only as a tool—not to create content. This commitment will help protect our authenticity. As more DMOs and businesses utilize AI, the content ecosystem will become more homogeneous over time.



Stewardship

We are respectful and cognitive of our actions and how they affect our community, our stakeholders, our partners, our local Indigenous communities, and the environment. Stewardship is a code of conduct that emphasizes the holistic care of natural and cultural resources. We work with local government and community, encouraging everyone to participate in preserving and enhancing our area, creating a richer and more meaningful experience for all.

Collaborative, Engaging, Positive

We are open and honest with sharing appropriate information from our organization with partners, visitors, and stakeholders. We are positive, inclusive, and willing to engage to achieve our stated goals and objectives. We distribute three separate newsletters for communication,

and we have two newsletters that go out monthly, one to our visitors and e-mail subscribers, and the other to our members. We also provide a quarterly business report to our accommodation partners and our members. NKLT hosts a bi-annual accommodator meeting for our MRDT contributing hoteliers, as well as an annual NKLT AGM.

Accountability

We develop clearly defined directions based on stakeholder input and engagement. We are fiscally responsible, measure results, adjust to changing market conditions, and are accountable to stakeholders.



Strategic Context

Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism Society is a not-for-profit self-sustaining destination marketing organization. It is industry-funded, research-based and membership-driven, covering the areas of Nelson (including Whitewater Ski Resort and Baldface Lodge), Kaslo (including Retalack Lodge), and RDCK areas A, D, E, and F. The region offers visitors an authentic Kootenay experience with heritage buildings, boutique accommodation, shops and dining, and one-of-a-kind outdoor experience all year round.

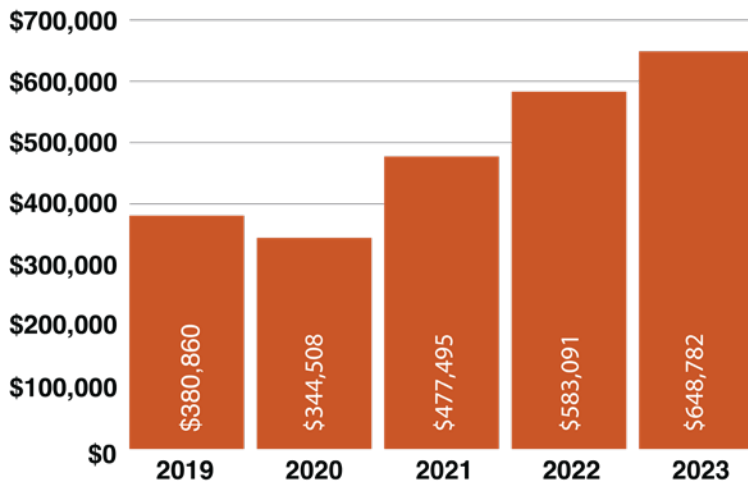
Our region is home to the largest number of cat- and heli-skiing operations in the world. Visitors describe the area as beautiful, cool, funky, free-spirited-yet-sophisticated, relaxing, and friendly. NKLT delivers that message in its marketing strategies. NKLT has seen consistent, year-over-year growth in its MRDT revenues.



Economic Growth

MRDT report

2023	\$648,782.16
2022	\$583,091.21
2021	\$477,495.00
2020	\$344,508.00
2019	\$380,860.00



Tourism Conditions

We know from Destination BC's 2022 *Value of Tourism* report that tourism is BC's leading primary industry, with over \$7.2 billion dollars in contribution to the GDP. Second was mining, with \$5.4 billion, followed by oil and gas at \$4.5 billion, agriculture and fishing at \$3.4 billion, and forestry and logging at \$1.7 billion.

Regionally, NKLT sees visitation growth, year after year, and new products are continually added to the tourism market, such as : restaurants, events, and experiential tourism products. We target potential visitors from an eight-hour radius, but we also see growth in international travellers from Europe and eastern USA. Cat- and heli-ski travellers are a very important audience; they use all of our amenities in the winter: dining, hotel rooms, ski hill, hot springs, shopping, and arts experiences. The marketing from Destination BC and Destination Canada is highly welcomed and appreciated by our locals, businesses, and organizations in our region.

Challenges

1. *Weather:* Smoke and fires in the summer or abnormal temperatures and low precipitation in the winter have been affecting the visitor experience in recent years.
2. *Homelessness and Open Drug Use in Public Places:* Some visitors have expressed a feeling of being unsafe in our downtown corridor.
3. *Lack of Infrastructure funding:* A lack of infrastructure funding prevents us from showcasing what we have and improving the visitor experience. Having access to funds for things like rapid EV charging stations, and wayfinding signage would be a huge asset. We actively seek grant funding opportunities to support improvements to the visitor experience.
4. *Transportation:* The West Kootenay Regional Airport, as well as the highways and ferries, are challenged by several factors, and the hours at the international border have been reduced. When there is limited access to transportation and visitors cannot move easily within the region, we are negatively impacted. NKLT has been working hard with other area DMOs and regional businesses, hoping to find collaborative ways to improve transportation to and around our region. We have also been working with industry partners to advocate for increased border hours.
5. *Peak Seasons:* In the past few years, peak seasons seem to have shifted. July and August have historically been when our region is



close to capacity. Recently, we have seen a reduction in visitations and MRDT funds in the summer peak season. We will be watching this closely in 2024 and making marketing adjustments if necessary.

Opportunities

1. NKLT has a diverse selection of tourism products that allows us to reach a variety of target markets and traveller types all year round.
2. We encompass a large geographical area—approximately 200 kilometres—that offers authentic, world-class experiences year round in our region’s lakes, rivers, and mountains.
3. We are in close proximity to the state of Washington’s border, which makes short one- to two-day trips from there a viable option. But longer stays are also encouraged.
4. We are located in a snow belt, and we host the largest number of cat-ski operators in the world.
5. Our region was just appointed an Indigenous representative, and there is an opportunity for us to increase visitor awareness of the region’s Indigenous heritage. The Ktunaxa First Nation operates and owns Ainsworth Hot Springs, creating a traditional Indigenous experience for visitors.
6. An increase in visitors equals an increase in dollars into the economy. Therefore, any improvements to visitor experience means more visitors.
7. Working toward attaining rainbow registered certification and improving messaging that NKLT is supportive of the 2SLGBTQI+ community

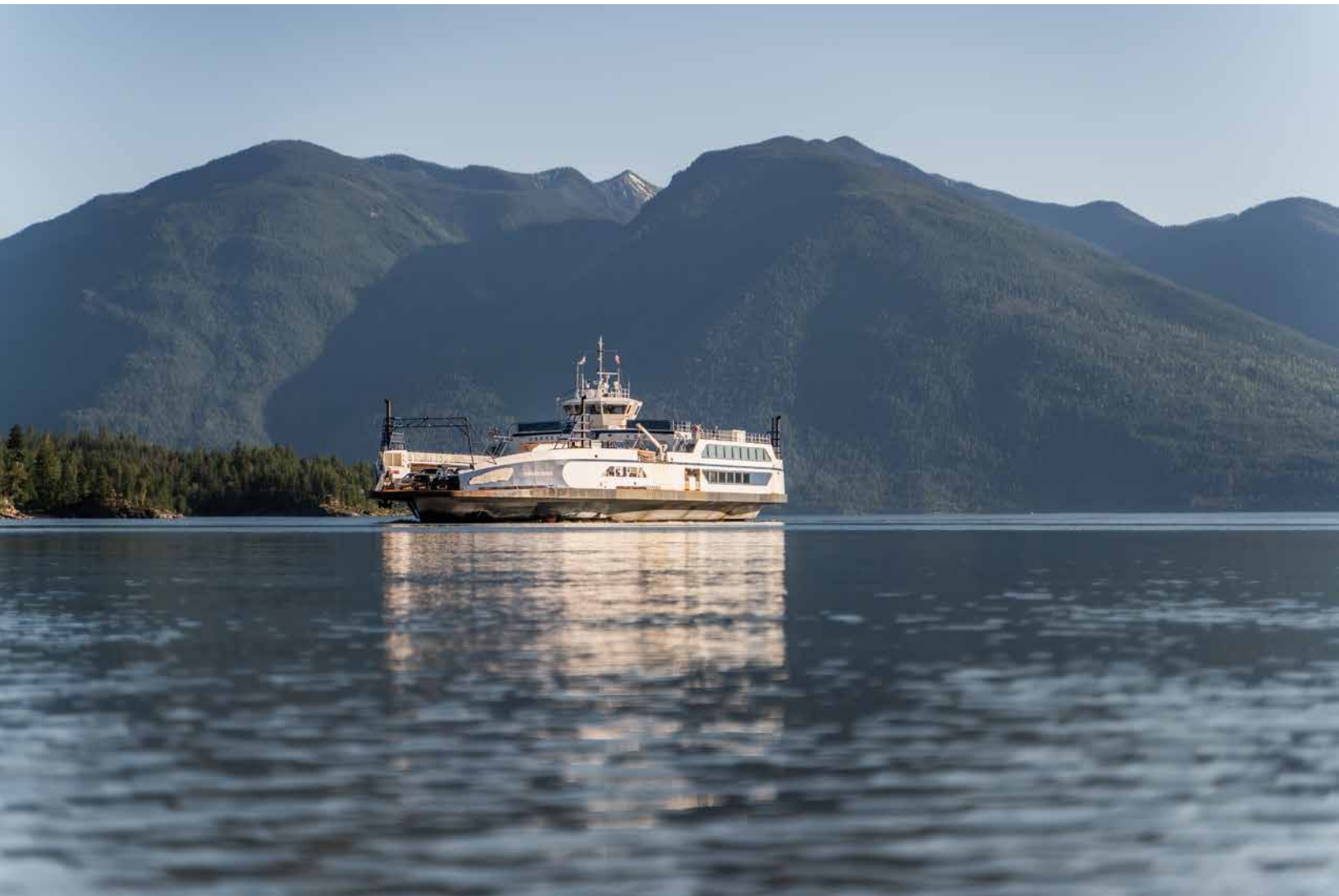
Key Learnings

1. Promoting the entire region as a unified destination has enabled us to economically deliver our message.
2. Promoting the region’s primary strengths and enhancing them with authentic stories that capture the lesser known gems has been key to our success.
3. Using #findingawesome, #explorekootenaylake to tell our authentic story across all businesses and organizations has unified our message and increased our assets in photography and video.
4. Continuing to connect with Destination BC is an asset to our growth. When #exploreBC shares our social content, it has amplified our messages at certain key times.
5. Continuing collaboration between DMOs and businesses allows us to effectively respond to challenges and successes as one unified, informed, responsible tourism voice.
6. Staying informed of technologies that increase marketing opportu-



nities makes us more competitive in an ever-changing consumer landscape. Our popular, self-guided touring app is a prime example of this.

7. Grant writing has perhaps been underutilized as a funding source. We have been approved for the DBC grant-writing support program, and we will continuously look for grant funding.
8. Taking advantage of Kootenay Rockies Tourism development days, and other informative presentations, helps our organization stay at the cutting edge of marketing technologies and opportunities.



Overall Goals, Objectives, and Targets

RESEARCH

Goal: Our goal is to gather as much data as possible from area visitors, locals, NKLТ stakeholders, and NKLТ members. A smart and effective tourism ecosystem is characterized by intensive information sharing among everyone with a stake in it, which highlights challenges and promotes finding solutions within the tourism industry. The changing economic, geo-political, and environmental landscapes all impact tourists and their decisions around travelling. The more up-to-date information that we have about these factors will only help us adapt more quickly in an ever-evolving world.

Objective: To create strategic and effective marketing plans based on collected data that will help us achieve our intended goals, including increased visitations and lengths of stay, and increased stakeholder revenues. To track visitor sentiment and make adjustments and improvements where needed.

Targets: Increased MRDT revenue from the previous year(s). Increased visitation to the region, with travellers staying two or more nights.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Goal: To ensure visitors to our region have an enjoyable, memorable experience that meets or exceeds their expectations. We believe that a positive visitor experience is the essence of tourism sustainability in our region.

Objective: To ensure that we work closely with regional communities, governments, and private sectors to effectively steward and manage the area, ensuring it remains a vibrant and meaningful place for future generations. We also believe that a positive visitor experience creates symbiosis with the experience of locals. Therefore, our objective is to continuously engage and communicate with both visitors and locals to glean as much information as possible to ensure their experiences in our region are as awesome as possible.

Targets: Increased MRDT revenue from the previous year(s). Feedback from visitor surveys indicating their experience was positive and they intend to return.

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION

Goal: To sustainably increase the value of the tourism economy in our region every year.

Objective: To increase the average length of a visitor's stay at all times



of year and put extra effort into increasing visitation and tourism activity in the shoulder seasons. We know that in 2023, the British Columbia tourism industry contributed more to the GDP than all other primary resource industries, adding \$7.2 billion to the provincial economy. We want to bring as much of this tourism economy as we can to this region so local business, NKLT partners, and NKLT stakeholders can all benefit.

Targets: Increased MRDT revenue from the previous year(s). Feedback from visitor surveys indicating their experience was positive and they intend to return.

RESIDENT / COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

Goal: Although our goal is to increase the value of tourism in our region year after year, we also have the goal to ensure that the type of tourism we are promoting is aligned with the desires of the residents who live in our communities, which is based on survey feedback, etc. We believe that the visitor experience and local experience are one in the same.

Objective: To keep close contact and open communications with local government and our communities so we receive feedback about our marketing initiatives and their effectiveness.

Targets: Community approval of our marketing strategies via resident feedback from annual surveys, AGMs, and accommodator meetings.



Strategies and Key Actions

To achieve our goals and objectives, we will strategically incorporate a mix of marketing methods that include the following:

Advertising and Promotional Initiatives

1. Fall billboard campaign in Spokane, Washington. *Ohhhh Canada #ExploreKootenayLake*

Data from our visitor centers show that visitation from Washington state is increasing year over year. Because Spokane is less than three hours away, we will continue to target the area to bring more Washington state visitors to our region. Current exchange rates continue to provide American visitors a nearly 30 percent discount. Our fall billboard campaign is intended to remind Americans that we are a great place to visit—and not far away. We feel that this messaging will amplify and become more valuable as we get closer to the US elections in November 2024.

2. Fall Advertising Campaign That Encourages Inter-Catchment Travel

NKLT has 10 different cities/towns within our region. We will be working with our accommodation and food and beverage members in each community to offer discounts for “local” travelers. 25% off dinner and accommodation in Nelson for those who live in Kaslo, Crawford Bay etc, and vice versa.

3. Winter Video Campaign

A total of three, 30- to 45-second videos will be produced to promote winter activities in our catchment. The videos will address meteorology and the natural forces that create incredible skiing. The Nelson Kootenay Lake region is not only the cat- and heli-skiing capital of the world, but we also boast several backcountry operations and a world-class ski resort. We know this to be true, but why? These three videos will suggest that it is the “People, Powder, and Place” that make our area the best in the world for winter recreation. These videos will run as YouTube ads, using targeted interest and age-specific placements. They will also be used on our social-media channels.

4. Digital Ad Campaign

We will run targeted YouTube and Google ads to help further amplify marketing initiatives like Ohhhh Canada and the inter-catchment travel campaign. We will also continue to target our identified Explorer Quotients with our messaging of “Our Place, Your Pace.”



5. Print Ad Campaign

NKLT will likely advertise in a few print publications in specific geographical locations for winter 2024 and spring 2025. *Out There Outdoors* magazine is printed in Spokane, Washington, and distributed throughout Washington and Idaho, two states from which we want to attract value-aligned visitors. *Out There Outdoors* offers an advertorial program, which means if we advertise, we also get a feature story, allowing us to create targeted messaging that aligns with our advertising campaign.

6. “One Charge Away” Campaign

NKLT already markets to those who are within a four- to eight-hour drive of our region. Aligning with our commitment to destination stewardship, NKLT will work with our regional district, as well as municipal, provincial, and federal governments, to improve and increase electric vehicle charging stations and awareness about those stations within our area. NKLT will take the lead on marketing initiatives that encourage electric-vehicle travel, and within our catchment area. Our marketing will inform visitors about the location of charging stations and which attractions are nearby. Our goal is to improve our area’s network of charging stations and amplify the message that the Nelson Kootenay Lake region is always just “One Charge Away.” We have already begun discussions with our local Indigenous community about using the charging areas as a “information portal”.

Trade Show Partnerships with Other Regional DMOs

NKLT works closely and openly with the other DMOs in our corner of the province. We have determined two trade shows (winter and summer) that we feel are worth attending. We have also determined that sharing the costs and time managing the booth will help us reach our goals in a cost-effective and timely manner.

Content and Asset Development Initiatives

In May, we began contracting photographers and videographers to gather much-needed summer content to use for marketing and promotional initiatives. Fires and smoke conditions were a concern for the later summer months, so we worked hard to create content early in the season. We will stick to this strategy in the coming years. We also did a forensic assessment of NKLT’s photography and video assets in the and determined areas of weakness and areas that needed new or improved assets. We will be working hard to create that new content in the coming month and years.





Travel Media and Travel Trade Initiatives Include FAM visits

NKLT will continue to work closely with DBC and Kootenay Rockies to encourage media to visit our region and participate in the cultural, historical, and activity-based offerings of our region.

Social Media Engagements and Initiatives

Contests remain a great way for us to engage with visitors and encourage them to visit our region. We often partner with local businesses and create valuable offerings where people can sign up to win. This strategy helps us build our newsletter subscriptions, further amplifying NKLT offers and messaging.

Further Development of Kootenay Lake Road Trip App Tours

We currently have four successful, self-guided app tours available for download. We plan to increase these self-guided app tours to include more arts and culture tours, as well as a new tour for Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park. These apps are available in both French and English.

Stakeholder Engagement

Communicating with our 180+ stakeholders is an important, ongoing process that gives us valuable information and guides our new strategic directions. The decision to stay at a two percent MRDT was based upon a survey provided to all 58 of our accommodation partners. Once the outcome was shared with our partners, we scheduled a meeting at the Prestige Resort in Nelson on May 21 to discuss. Minutes to that meeting can be found [here](#). Those who didn't want to move to a three percent MRDT simply felt that way because they didn't know how and where the money would be spent. At this meeting, we decided we would begin to put together an action plan to move to a three percent MRDT. Stakeholder and visitors were surveyed annually over the past 5 years and will continue to be surveyed in the years to come, asking them their perspective on the status of tourism and their visitor experience.

A draft of the 2025–2029 five-year strategic plan will be available online and shared with all tourism stakeholders, with opportunity for input six weeks before its submission deadline. All feedback will be reviewed before the submission due date of September 1, 2024.

Brand Positioning

Our current brand positioning statement is “No better time, no better place.” Our vision is to be globally renowned as a vibrant, welcoming, year-round mountain and cultural destination, and that it is always a good time to visit our region. In winter, we offer some of the world's

greatest commercial skiing operations. In summer, there are 10 completely different and unique communities to explore in our region, sharing one unique similarity: they are all nestled along the shores of stunning Kootenay Lake, home to the world's longest and most scenic free ferry.

Target Markets

We know through our EQ survey that the travellers who most align with our region's goals and values are the Free Spirit, Cultural Explorer, Authentic Traveller, and increasingly the Rejuvenator. Stakeholders we have recently engaged with have informed us of their desire to increase our marketing initiatives that target groups and organizations that would bring more sporting events, tournaments, and conferences to our region. Geographically, we target visitors within an eight-hour driving radius. One of our new marketing initiatives is a "One Charge Away" campaign that would target visitors with e-vehicles who are within a 500-kilometre radius. Destination BC appears to be targeting more European and international travellers with its new Iconics strategy. We would welcome more international travellers as we begin to more aggressively market our region as the cat- and heli-skiing capital and the greatest place to ski on Earth!



Management, Governance, and Administration

NKLT is the eligible entity that will manage all of the actions: marketing, finances, communications, and management. The executive director oversees all actions of NKLT, with exception of governance, which is managed by an external committee. NKLT is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the use of funds, even when outside contractors are hired to complete tasks and objectives. NKLT has two full-time employees who work 40 hours a week: Peter Moynes, executive director and Danica Heaton, marketing manager. NKLT hires local contractors to fill the other required roles for NKLT, including photographers, writers, event co-ordinators, etc.

The board of directors of Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism Society is made up of 12 seats, each serving two-year terms, up to a maximum of six consecutive years. Our board consists of tourism-related businesses: three MRDT contributors, one food and beverage member, one summer and one winter member, one Nelson Chamber/Economic Development member, one Village of Kaslo/area D/Kaslo Chamber member, one Balfour/Area E and F member, one heritage/culture member, one retail member, and one member at large. The NKLT board meets every six weeks, nine times a year for 2 hours. NKLT's executive director currently sits on the following external boards and committees: Kootenay Dirt, West Koot Route, International Selkirk Loop, and the Highway 3 Tourism Alliance.



Sources of Funding

Destination BC, Kootenay Rockies Tourism, cooperative advertising initiatives, grants

Affordable Housing

Because NKLT has decided to stay at an MRDT rate of two percent, we are ineligible to utilize MRDT funding for affordable housing.

Special Thanks

NKLT would like to thank all of the individuals, partners, and businesses, including Destination BC, who have helped in the development of this strategic plan.