

STEP

Regional Tourism Opportunity Identification and Development Strategy

SEPTEMBER 2023

“We travel not to escape life, but for life not to escape us”



STEP

St. Paul / Elk Point
Economic Development Alliance

St. Paul, County of St. Paul, and Elk Point are located in Treaty 6 and the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Assiniboine, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

We respect the Treaties that were made on these territories, we acknowledge harms and mistakes, and we dedicate ourselves to move forward in partnership with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.



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To: Linda Sallstrom
From: Mark Baxter and Lesley Gaudry
Date: September 22, 2023
Re: STEP Regional Tourism Opportunity Identification and Development Strategy- Final Report

Dear Linda,

We are pleased to present our final report for the Regional Tourism Opportunity Identification and Development Strategy Project. This report is designed to assist stakeholders understand and execute the stages required to identify, strategize, prioritize and implement the tourism opportunities in the region.

Thank you for your willingness to accept our report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mark Baxter", written over a light blue circular stamp.

Mark Baxter

Outlook Market Research & Consulting Ltd

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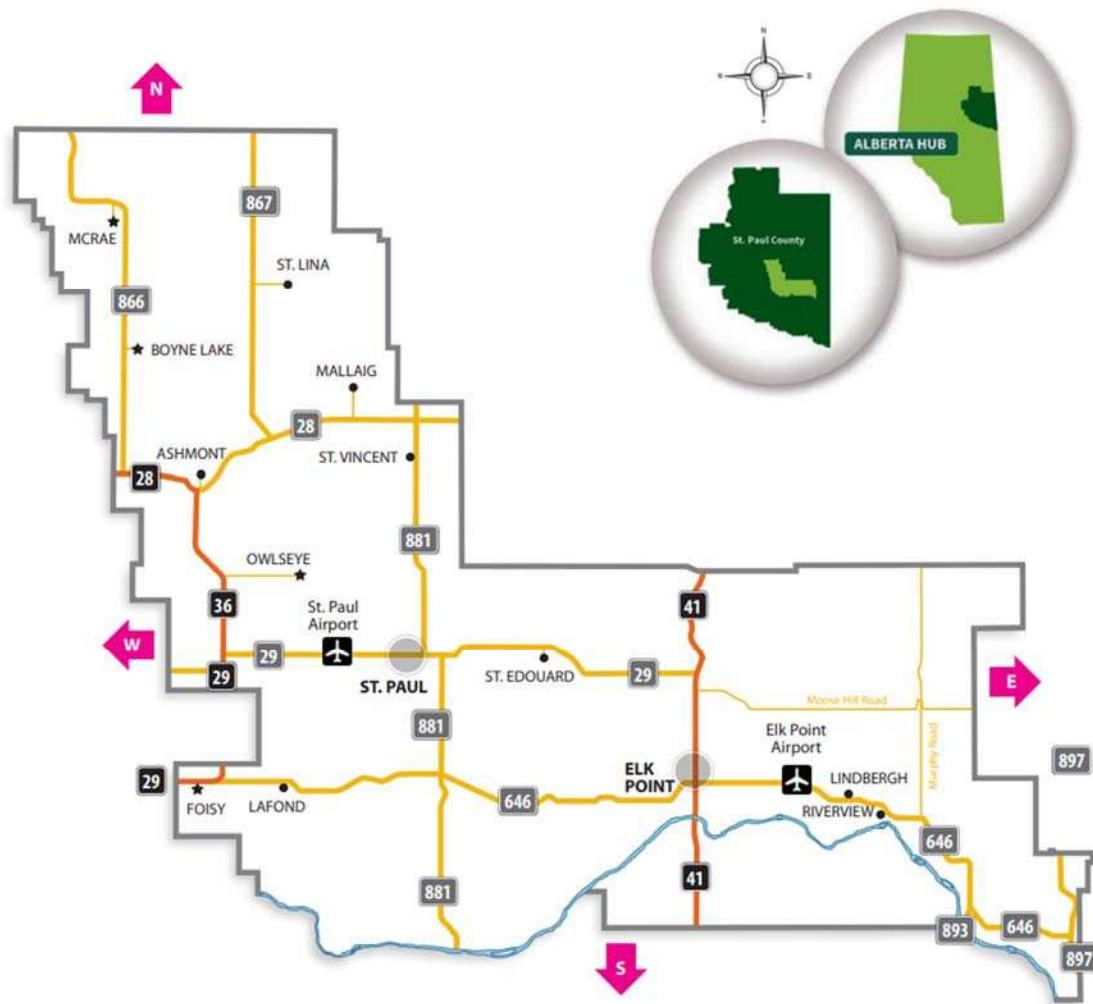
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Introductions

The St. Paul/Elk Point Economic Development Alliance (STEP) is a regional partnership that identifies, plans, manages, and advocates for economic development projects and initiatives.

The region represents the communities found in the County of St. Paul - a municipal district located in northeastern Alberta approximately 200 km east of Edmonton. The STEP regional partnership consists of the County, the Town of St. Paul - the County's major business center - the Town of Elk Point, and the Summer Village of Horseshoe Bay. Additional communities that STEP represents include the Hamlets of Ashmont, Heinsburg, Mallaig, Lafond, Lindberg, St. Lina, and St. Vincent.

COUNTY OF ST. PAUL



With a population of over 13,000 people, the region's economic activity consists of a strong agriculture industry, complemented with tourism, oil/gas, and manufacturing. In pursuing its economic endeavors, STEP aims to:

- Attract new businesses, investment, and workers
- Retain local businesses and workers, and help facilitate new opportunities
- Promote the region and its communities as a great place to invest, live, and work
- Support businesses and workers during uncertain economic circumstances and plan for future instances of regional economic disruption
- Develop relationships between businesses, government, educational institutions, workers, and stakeholders to foster regional economic development

The STEP region is situated in the Boreal Forest Natural Region, which makes up 58% of Alberta at a total of 381,046 km², covering most of northern Alberta and extending south in a narrow band along the eastern edge of the foothills almost to Calgary. As Alberta's largest natural region, the area is defined by its several large lakes and many small ones, and vast deciduous, mixed wood and coniferous forests interspersed with extensive wetlands especially in the far northern and central portions of the region. The size and location of the region, along with its varied climate (four distinct seasons which are beautifully characterized by unique features in each), topography, and vegetation, is responsible for a diversity of habitats and wildlife. The STEP region is known for its outdoor recreation, long hours of daylight in the summer, opportune northern lights viewing in the shoulder seasons (spring and fall), rodeo events, lakes and natural beauty, sports tourism and arts and cultural diversity.

The main service centre in the STEP region is the Town of St. Paul. Originally founded as a Metis Settlement, St. Paul has grown to become the STEP Region's major business centre and is an active commercial and agricultural service centre for Northeastern Alberta. The town offers excellent living with amenities and services, including a strong retail sector, government services, education, post-secondary education, medical/dental services, acute/auxiliary hospital, and numerous sports and recreational facilities, organizations, and opportunities. With a growing population of 5800, St. Paul is well-positioned for market access on Highway 29, which connects to Highway 36 to the west and Highway 41 to the east, providing access to U.S. markets.

The Town of St. Paul is showing signs of potential in its growing tourism industry. Currently home to the Musée St. Paul Museum, the UFO Landing Pad, and the St. Paul Lakeland Rodeo Association Finals, the town boasts additional assets - such as lakes and trails and its arts and culture community - which can provide favourable opportunities for tourism development.

The second urban district in the County of St. Paul, is the town of Elk Point which provides ample career, business, and investment opportunities due to the oil and gas, agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism industries. Located 35 km southeast of St. Paul, Elk Point is well positioned for oil and gas industry service and transportation companies via the Highway 41 corridor connecting oil development to U.S. markets in the south. Elk Point also boasts a business and industrial park, conducive in supporting oil development, manufacturing, and agricultural services. Excellent housing, educational, healthcare, and recreational opportunities additionally make the town an ideal place to raise a family.

The Town of Elk Point has an Eco Centre, an accessible staging area to the Iron Horse Trail, a superb bakery named the Golden Loaf who was named one of the Sweetest Shops in Canada, a fishpond, and public art and mural that share the stories of Elk Point. The Elk Point Golf Course, and three RV parks make it a popular rest and relaxation area for travelers passing through. The nearby Whitney Lakes Provincial Park and Fort George Buckingham House Provincial Historic Site are also catchment areas for servicing domestic visitors.

With a population of over 6,000 people, the rural County of St. Paul is defined by its strong agriculture industry, complemented by oil and gas, manufacturing, and a growing tourism industry. The County encompasses the outer edges of the Town of St. Paul and extends into the rural landscape. The County offers convenient market access, connecting to the U.S. market via the Eastern Alberta Trade Corridor; access to the Edmonton market



is available via the Highway 28 east-west corridor, and the County is also supported by its two regional airports - St. Paul and Elk Point.

The County of St. Paul's diversified agricultural economy helps to make it one of the biggest industry sectors in the region. The County boasts 680 farms, producing coarse grains such as wheat, barley, and canola, and more recently has increased peas and hemp production. The County is also home to cattle, dairy, and poultry farms, organic farms, and greenhouses.

The County of St. Paul boasts the presence of established upstream oil service companies that service the industry. This, in conjunction with reasonable land costs, developed infrastructure, and direct access to markets, helps to promote favourable outcomes in the area's oil and gas industry.

Tourism continues to see growth in the region, as the County offers excellent investment and countless outdoor recreation opportunities. One of the defining tourism features of the County is the presence of Alberta's Iron Horse Trail, and rural tourism gems such as the County campgrounds. The County also shows great potential to further cultural education experiences with Indigenous partners and signature experiences via ÉCONOMUSÉE®/Artisans at Work. An economuseum or économusée is small-scale production of goods in a workshop environment focusing on the preservation and



perpetuation of traditional skills and craftsmanship. The function of the economuseum is to promote the products of local craftspeople, create employment and in the end, promote intangible, cultural heritage.

STEP/RTIC geographic location has the potential to grow their visitor economy and tap into tourism destinations that are west of the STEP region such as Smoky Lake and Metis Crossing and east of the STEP region, such as Cold Lake. Working collaboratively with these destinations to entice visitors to come into STEP would strengthen regional relationships and visitor numbers. It is the hope with this report the residents and businesses realize they can provide high quality and engaging services and provide the experiences that visitors are looking for. With St. Paul's solid foundation and plethora of planning documents strategic efforts can be realized and maximized with financial, human, and cultural capital. Recognizing and treating tourism as economic development assists with the transition of this feel-good industry to one of purpose and complexity where the revenue generating good is right at home.

The Regional Tourism Initiative Committee (RTIC) was formed based on the recommendations of the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce and Alberta's Lakeland Destination Marketing Organization in 2019 prior to the set up of STEP. It was formed as a regional committee with multiple partners to support tourism planning, development, and marketing in the region in addition to fostering tourism entrepreneurship. The RTIC has been an active and working committee. They have supported tourism development to date with the following successes:

- Tourism Investment Profile (Northeast Alberta Information Hub, Alberta HUB)
- Tourism Asset Inventory List
- Content Development: Strong Coffee Marketing
- Alberta Community Partnership Grant including the Regional Tourism Opportunity and Identification and Destination Development Strategy, The Regional Master Trail Plan, Northern Regional Economic Development Grant: Accommodations Strategy, Winter Destination Strategy, Arts and Culture Strategy, and E-Bike Network
- Travel Alberta Destination Development Zones (TDZ) stakeholder committee
- Collaboration with Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta (CDEA) and EconoMusée Network Society.
- Partnership and collaboration with Alberta's Lakeland Destination Marketing Organization and Smoky Lake Regional Community Development Committee.

The STEP Alliance has also slated a second position, an economic development assistant, to assist with economic development projects.

The STEP Alliance works closely with many organizations to research, plan and develop tourism in the region. A short list of the prominent organizations with who they work closely with include:

- Alberta's Lakeland Destination Marketing Organization
- NE Muni-Corr Ltd
- Community Futures St Paul-Smoky Lake
- Northeast Alberta Information HUB
- Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta (CDEA)
- Association Canadienne-Française de l'Alberta (ACFA) Regionale de Saint-Paul
- Municipal District of Bonnyville
- Victoria Settlement Economic Development (Smoky Lake and County of Smoky Lake), Smoky Lake Regional Community Development Committee (RCDC) which comprises of the Town of Smoky Lake, Smoky Lake County, and the Village of Vilna.
- Metis Crossing
- Travel Alberta
- Indigenous Tourism Alberta
- Destination Canada
- Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada

Alberta's Lakeland Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) works closely with the RTIC committee due to its variety of tourism assets. They also work with the service centre hub of St. Paul which caters to Alberta's Iron Horse Trail visitors, and the staging areas in the communities of St. Paul, Heinsburg, Elk Point, Lindberg and Mallaig. Alberta's Lakeland DMO has a comprehensive website, travel blog, and community representation online that supports the promotion of all things tourism in the STEP region. The DMO publishes an annual Lakeland activity guide which is distributed throughout the province, parts of Saskatchewan and British Columbia, and some into the US through different means. The guide is also handed out at several industry trade shows attended by the DMO to promote the Lakeland. Travel Alberta recognizes Alberta's Lakeland DMO as a large geography piece of northern Alberta and as such references the Lakeland as Northwest Lakeland and Northeast Lakeland (out region) which is branded as Travel Lakeland.

Chapter 1: Project Scope

RTIC is in their next phase of tourism planning to understand and execute the stages required to identify, strategize, prioritize, and implement the tourism opportunities in the region. A strong regional tourism strategy considers the data and literature available as well as the local assets, natural and human built, along with the local people and their passions to build a foundational plan. This tourism strategy will assist STEP/RTIC in helping to prioritize tourism initiatives moving forward.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this tourism strategy includes background research (literature review), a weeklong observational visit for a situational analysis, key stakeholder interviews and a strategic planning and prioritization session with industry and sector leaders. The strength of this report lies within the results found throughout the consultation stage.

The consultants spent six days (in August 2022) visiting a variety of tourism assets both natural and built, to gain a greater understanding and appreciation for the region. As noted, the region is large and takes more than a few days to see everything it has to offer. The consultants met with a variety of business owners, scheduled surprise visits to a few tourism attractions and received a guided tour on Alberta's Iron Horse Trail.

The second step in the consultation phase included key stakeholder interviews with a set interview script allowed for descriptive information gathering, a SWOT scan, and key industry retention and expansion questions. The consultants engaged with 21 participants between January and March 2023. A full list of the key stakeholders can be found in Appendix A.

The third step in the consultation process included a facilitated session reviewing key feedback information, strategy brainstorming and matrix prioritization. The session was held on June 19th, 2023. Individuals were asked to participate in a 3-hour strategic planning session. The session included 16 individuals representing different sectors in the tourism industry such as accommodation, food service, arts and culture, outdoor recreation, campgrounds, regional events etc. The consultants dedicated their time to helping the committee identify key goals and objectives, with five primary pillars being identified: 1) product development, 2) enhanced marketing, 3) education and training 4) strategic positioning, partnerships, and packages and 5) tourism infrastructure.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

During this phase the consultants reviewed existing relevant materials such as: Statistics Canada census data, community and regional reports, case studies from other jurisdictions, community plans, quality of life indicators, target market data, inventory asset data, neighbouring strategic plans, etc. The consultants also paid heed to provincial-Travel Alberta and Canadian tourism reports for industry trends and growth areas. While marketing resources were reviewed and referenced, this tourism strategy does not replace a traditional marketing plan.

NATIONAL SCALE: DESTINATION CANADA

COVID Implications

Tourism demand is on the rise with spending and activity nearing pre-pandemic levels, which is primarily driven by domestic tourism. The supply side – tourism businesses are also showing an increase in growth however there are still lagging, especially tourism businesses. They remain 2% below pre-pandemic levels as of April 2022 and those most affected are businesses in the transportation sector. The removal of the pre-arrival testing for travellers entering Canada has assisted with the growth. As with most tourism destinations, the labour market continues to struggle to attract and retain workers.

Outside of urban areas, small town hotels have seen a rise in occupancy rates above their June 2019 levels (67% in 2022 vs. 63% in 2019).

Key trends that will have the greatest impact on Canada's travel and tourism industry in the next one to three years includes the economic change with travel spending accelerating, inflation, social and extreme weather events. With a true spirit of reconciliation, Canadian tourism organizations are working towards more meaningful partnerships with indigenous communities, their tourism businesses and support the connection for visitors who are eager to connect with local cultures and stories.

Climate change policies have affected corporate travel through sustainability commitments, cost controls, and many businesses having restricted their travel to essential trips. Online meetings have been given favour to reduce costs and emissions. Labour and skills shortage remain an issue as many workers have moved to other industries. Lastly, a larger inflation trend has made prices for airlines, hotel stays, food and car rentals higher. Business travel will likely recover only to around 80% of pre- pandemic levels by 2024 as digital adopters are able to maintain high levels of effectiveness while working remotely (How the pandemic is reshaping corporate travel, Deloitte, 2021).

The pandemic has made it challenging for businesses to operate with limited revenue and capital investments at an all time low. At the same time, the speed and impact of the pandemic has also led to uncertainty for local and provincial destination marketing organizations due to changes of visitor numbers to many destinations. On a national scope, destination marketing organizations are taking on alternate activities such as finding alternative revenue streams, taking on stronger advocacy roles, advising tourism businesses on government grants and funding applications, and more. Many DMO's have had advocacy and path find as part of their original mandates but the frequency and intense demand for these services peaked during 2020 and 2021 with many businesses and organizations unsure how to navigate their new and challenging realities.

National Key Market Trends

Despite the challenges that the tourism industry has faced, key market trends have emerged that DMO's, tourism businesses, and community organizations can learn about to assist in their strategic planning and directions. They include:

1. Frictionless Travel – this includes making travel bookings and finding of tourism information as easy as possible. For example, “turnkey vacation” where visitors do not have to take multiple steps to find information and book their activities, but rather the travel itinerary is coordinated and packaged and requires fewer individual bookings by the visitor. This also includes raising the profile of *the digital divide* in Canada between highly connected urban centres and rural destinations which in turn will benefit rural and remote communities and operators. Many rural settings in Canada still struggle with lack of quality internet service which routinely affects their ability to market, track, and service visitors.
2. Domestic Travel – “drive-to” destinations and road trip itineraries remain at the forefront of visitors travel behaviours. Domestic travellers are loyal and willing to go off the beaten track.
3. Responsible Travel- visitors are rethinking their travel footprints and are drawn to the idea of “responsible travel” so that they can support local businesses, engage with local cultures, and reduce their emissions and enable conservation efforts.
4. Ascendance of Communities – destinations are favourable to development that reflects an improved quality of life for the residents, contributes to positive social interactions, and growing environmental stewardship.
5. Indigenous Connection – there is a growing interest in Indigenous experiences that can be accessed, appreciated, and provide an opportunity for education.

6. Wild for Wilderness – Wild and open spaces have been the perfect antidote to confinement drawing visitors to nature more than ever before.
7. Health & Wellbeing – visitors are attracted to tourism experiences that help combat health, hygiene, epidemic-level loneliness, decreased mental health and lack of connection. The opposite would be people are looking for wellbeing and the good feelings associated with travel, rejuvenation, and nature-based activities.
8. Affluent Travel Boom – High income earners have been able to save at a rate which allows them to book personalized travel that provides a sense of well and the high “badge value” is important to this cohort.
9. Great Resignation and Retirement - by 2025, people aged 65 and older will account for 11% of the world’s population and their international travel — the number of cross-border trips they take per year — will more than double.
10. Remote Work & Residential Tourism – people are interested in working from a variety of vacation destinations forcing innovative platforms to adapt.

Destination Canada’s market trends are also summarized into six key categories (2022). They include:

- Tourism that is authentic, local, responsible, and intentional
- Wild for wilderness, off the beaten track, less crowded regions
- Big life changes impacting travel, celebrating everything.
- Growing health, mental, and emotional well-being
- Cultural engagement/curiosity; ancestral cuisine and rituals
- Fun travel, crafting workshops, themed events.

Considering all positives with travel trends considerations on a national level, the continued universal challenges leading into 2024 also include chronic labour shortages, increased pricing, risk aversion, slower GDP growth, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and new Covid 19 variants. With these in mind, destination marketing organizations, businesses and tourism providers are working hard to make informed and strategic decisions based on market demand and growth areas.

Government of Canada -Federal Tourism Strategy 2023

The Federal Government released the Federal Tourism Strategy on July 4th, 2023, entitled “Canada 365: Welcoming the world”. According to the strategy, a national scope takes on tourism in Canada was summarized as follows:



- Tourism is a key contributor to Canada’s economy. In 2022, the sector supported approximately 623,375 direct jobs and 1.9 million total jobs.
- In 2022, tourism contributed nearly \$38 billion to Canada’s GDP, generated close to \$94 billion in revenue for businesses, and accounted for almost 13% of service exports.
- There were 218,041 businesses in the tourism sector in 2022.
- Destination Canada forecasts that tourism spending will fully recover by 2024 and international visitation will fully recover by 2026.
- In 2022, youth made up about one third (33.2%) of tourism workers, compared to the total economy average of 13.3%.
- In 2022, immigrants made up 29.2% of the tourism labour force, slightly higher than the total economy average of 27.6%.

The new strategy highlighted the following five priorities to make Canada a top global destination:

- 1) **Investing in Canada’s tourism assets** which includes an announcement from Budget 2023 that \$108M over 3 years to create the Tourism Growth Program (TGP) to assist communities, small-and medium-sized businesses, and non-profit organizations to develop tourism projects and events is underway.
- 2) **Embracing recreation and the great outdoors** meaning the ability to offer year-round recreational experiences. Travellers are increasingly spending more on ‘adventure tourism’. Canadians themselves consistently show an interest and an appreciation for parks, trails, and natural spaces in their vacation plans. A stepped-up focus on recreational tourism includes facilitating Canadian and international guests’ access to natural spaces and helping disperse visitation both seasonally and geographically. It also provides an opportunity for a new Trails Tourism Strategy
- 3) **Partnering to grow Indigenous tourism.** Indigenous tourism offers visitors one-of-a-kind experiences to engage in the sharing of traditional knowledge, histories, stories, and cultural practices. Through these interactions and learnings, Indigenous communities can communicate and assert inherent rights while diversifying their economies for present and future generations. Visitor surveys show a keen interest in authentic experiences led by Indigenous-owned businesses and organizations, particularly in the German, French, and British markets.

Advancing economic prosperity, self-determination and reconciliation with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples is critical to Canada's future. Indigenous tourism can play an important role.

- 4) **Attracting more international events** will be undertaken by developing an intentional approach. This approach will secure more international events as a four-season driver of travel, will bring more visitors to our country, and extend our tourism season. Planning will begin now to secure events for the medium and long-term, with a focus on events that drive seasonal and regional dispersion. Governments and the tourism industry will work together to ensure that communities across the country have what they need to be exceptional Canadian hosts. The 2023 federal budget announced funding to Destination Canada of \$50 million over three years to attract major international conventions, conferences, and events to Canada.
- 5) **Improving coordination through a federal ministerial council** to align and collaborate for tourism strategies that cross over 20 different ministries and departments. The Government of Canada will establish a Ministerial Tourism Growth Council, to align with international best practices such as those of the United States and France. The Government of Canada will continue to support Destination Canada's NorthStar partnership network. It brings together Canada's top destination marketing and management organizations from across the country to increase visitation, spending and investment.

The Federal Tourism Strategy priorities that align directly with this strategy report and confirm the STEP Alliance's strengths are congruent under the pillars of accessible outdoors and cultural tourism experiences and opportunities.

National Tourism Human Resource Canada

In January 2023, Tourism HR Canada published a report that reviewed a general population survey, labour market information and employment research data. This report highlighted the workforce and labour in the tourism sector is struggling. Many feel it is an interesting prospect or career path with 61% of Canadians with industry experience agreed they learned relevant skills. With 89% of Canadians thinking that tourism is important to the economic well being of Canada it is unfortunate that many of the HR trends are so challenging. In summary, tourism employment is seen as a short term, or temporary, or seasonal position that does not allow for growth. It is low paying, lacks job security, and rarely offers pension and benefits. The perception is there is little opportunity for career enhancements, and what jobs are available are often stressful and require long work hours. In Alberta, respondents were more likely to agree there are many interesting jobs to choose from in tourism (68%) however year-round employment, extra incentives, employee housing, increased training and career enhancement options, and increased pay would entice them to stay for the long term.

PROVINCIAL TOURISM TRENDS

Travel Alberta's Provincial Tourism Business Plan for 2023 to 2026 states that in "2019, tourism was a 10.1 billion industry which contributed \$8.4 billion to Alberta's GDP and supported 82,000 jobs".

Interestingly, Alberta's travel deficit (the amount of money Albertans spent outside of Alberta) was \$7.9 billion or was \$1,815 on a per capital basis, which was the highest in all of Canada. As such, Travel Alberta's current business plan outlines the provincial framework and programs to help reduce the deficit and get Albertans to stay in province.



The number of active tourism businesses in Alberta has almost returned to 2019 levels, but the number of employees in the stated businesses is falling behind. The Travel Alberta plan is to invest in boutique experiences and accommodations that are attractive to high value travelers so businesses can prosper and retain or add more employees. They will also work to support seasonal businesses to expand their operations to year-round.

For the last decade, if not generation, most tourism expenditures and over half of tourism visits were in common destinations "aka the mountains and capital zone". This is not surprising considering the bulk of tourism promotion for the west includes Mountie's and mountains. To change this trend, Travel Alberta is investing in emerging destinations to encourage Albertans to travel to lesser known or popular places within the province and to leave the legacy destinations for international travelers. Travel Alberta will be investing a long-term strategy to focus on rural tourism development so those not in the Mountains and Capital Zone can participate and grow their visitor economy. Their three strategic pillars include destination promotion (marketing), air access and broadband and transportation initiatives (access) and destination development and tourism business support (place).

Following in BC's footsteps, Travel Alberta has established ten Tourism Development Zones (TDZ). In recognition of the work Alberta's Lakeland DMO, STEP, RTIC, Smoky Lake RCDC, and several passionate and focused tourism operations have done to foster and develop new and enhanced product in the region, Travel Alberta accepted the Lakeland region as the destination marketing organization of which to refer northeast of Edmonton and has divided the region into Lakeland Northwest and the Lakeland Northeast. The STEP region can be found within the Lakeland Northeast Tourism Development Zone. Significant investment will support the creation and activation of the zones and their management plans including \$18.3 million annually in 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 and \$15 million in 2025-2026 through the Tourism Investment Program. Travel Alberta will also invest \$6 million over three years to support Indigenous Tourism Alberta for business development and marketing.

By supporting the TDZ's through the Tourism Investment Program each delivery sector in tourism can benefit. There are three main programs. The first is the Cooperative Investment Fund which provides direct investment for destination development, promotion, cultural events, and festivals. The second fund is the Product Development Investment Fund for businesses and municipalities/counties launching NEW tourism infrastructure, acquiring assets, or developing visitor programs. The third fund is the Community Investment Fund for regional organizations to lead strategic initiatives in their communities.

Regardless which tourism stream or sector one finds themselves in, in the visitor economy, the trends listing above summarizes that visitors are looking for opportunities to learn, grow, and connect with local storytellers. They are willing to pay for it before and during their stay and providing word of mouth recommendations afterwards.

Rural destinations held a strong preference for visitors during the pandemic with one preference showing rural hotels have fared better than urban hotels across Canada and the globe (Tourism Economics). Domestic travel and short-haul travellers will dominate northeastern Alberta's visitor economy as there are lower costs and less restrictions. Rubber tire traffic will remain the majority of Alberta's Lakeland visitation, which is congruent with Travel Alberta's market scans.

Overall, the industry trends are like those of Destination Canada with digital marketing taking the lead in acceleration of digital and ecommerce platforms. Artificial Intelligence, albeit newer and more complex to development into experiences, is the opportunity to increase personalization "by giving brands the ability to deliver the right message to the right customer at the right time to drive purchase behaviour".

The shift to local hood and local audiences should not be dismissed. The next generation of destination marketing is based on building community between locals and visitors around different passion points – the idea is they can both learn from each other by sharing collective knowledge. The destination becomes much more than a physical place, rather it is a living social platform to connect like minded visitors with locals.

Visitors are looking for transformational experiences that allows them the opportunity for self-actualization (their limits and strengths) and the opportunity for growth. The ability for visitors to enrich their inner lives as they explore outwardly cannot be overstated. Whether visitors are looking for health and wellness opportunities, outdoors experiences, or participation in arts and culture, a form of learning and education is occurring.

Destination marketing organizations are also putting greater emphasis on destination management that is community building and provides for opportunities for higher visitor spending and new business development. There is a greater involvement in advocacy and stronger collaborations and organizational alignment than ever before.

Destination management organizations continue to focus on differentiators that include winter, Indigenous, Francophone, wilderness, and park based and water-based activities. These type of demand generators amplify the sense of place and destination DNA that enables communities to grow their unique existence in the marketplace.

REGIONAL TOURISM PROFILE – STEP REGION

The Alberta HUB Tourism Profile extends beyond the STEP borders and includes additional communities that are versed in tourism. Access and assets are reviewed which show a strong and vibrant tourism sector for the HUB region. Within their asset list the STEP Region hosts 14 tourism assets from the bullet list below:

OUTDOOR RECREATION

- 8 Provincial Parks
- 10 Provincial Recreation Areas
- Elk Island National Park with over 360,000 visitors (2016)
- 14 Golf Courses
- Iron Horse Trail
- Over 150 lakes including Alberta's 6th and 7th largest lakes, Cold Lake and Lac La Biche
- One of Western Canada's largest inland marinas at Cold Lake
- 20% of Alberta's white sand beaches
- Scenic North Saskatchewan River
- Bird Watching
- Motorcycle Tourism (Town of Two Hills voted top rider-friendly community, 2015)
- Kinoo Ridge Snow Resort and Long Lake Ski Hill

ARTS & CULTURE

- Performing and Visual Arts Centres
- Canada's Largest Ecomuseum; a "living" outdoor museum across 20,000 sq. km
- Fort George & Buckingham House
- Lac La Biche Mission
- Historical Village and Outdoor Pioneer Museum
- Canada's largest Ukrainian settlement
- Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village; average 45,000 visitors/yr
- Victoria Settlement
- Smoky Lake Métis Crossing
- Numerous Museums and Historic Sites

MAJOR EVENTS

- Cold Lake Air Show
- Pow Wow Days & Fish Derby
- Numerous Festival & Fairs
- Adventure Tours
- Winter Festival of Speed
- Pro Rodeos and Jamborees
- World Pro Chuckwagon Association (WPCA) circuit
- Canadian Pro Chuckwagon Association (CPCA) circuit
- Culinary Events
- Warfaire Medieval War Festival



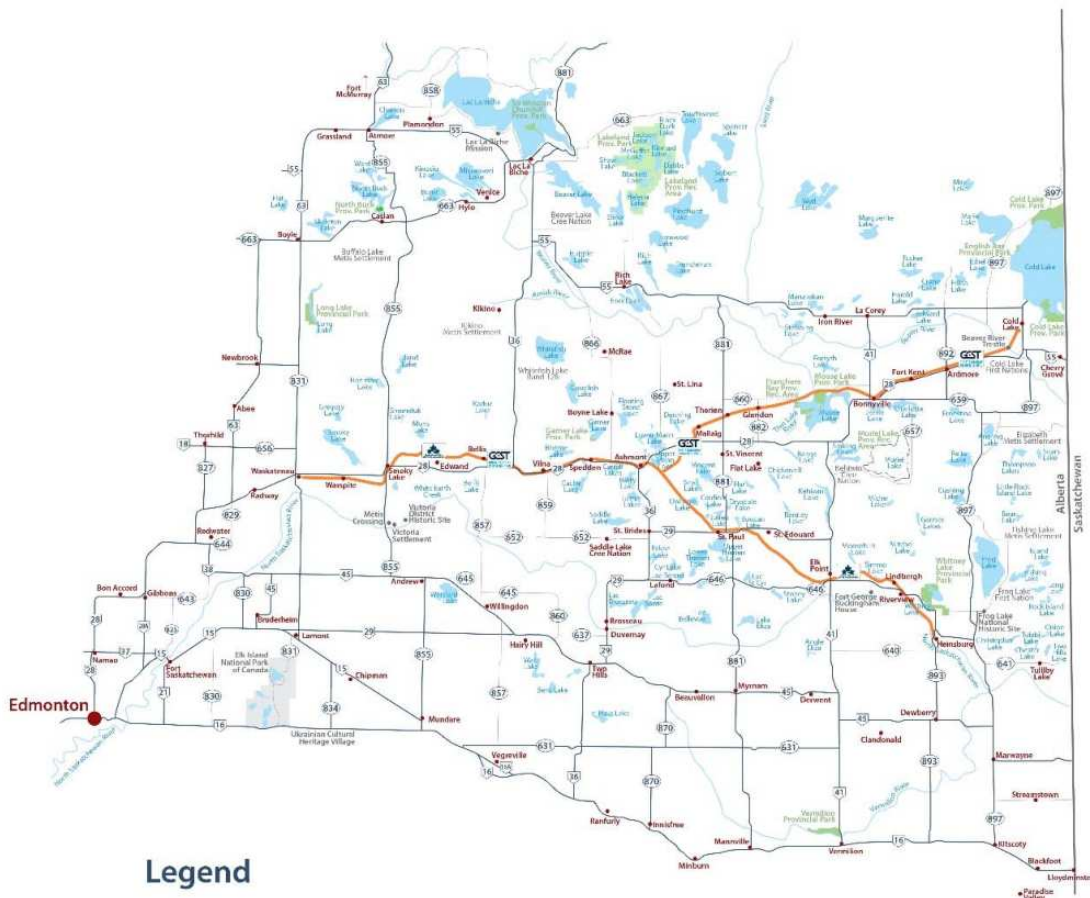
Outdoor adventures and adventure tourism are the primary focus of investment opportunities for Alberta HUB which parallels strongly with the STEP Region's tourism products, services, and experiences.

The Northeast Lakeland Destination Development Report from Travel Alberta noted a slightly more elaborate and updated list of the area's strongest regional tourism offerings.

They are classified as Recreational -Soft Adventure, Cultural, and Culinary experiences. There are ample water-based recreation opportunities with boating, fishing, swimming, canoeing, and kayaking taking the lead. Wilderness recreation such as hunting, camping, hiking, ATV and snowmobiling and cross-country skiing are secondary adventures. The regions strong cultural heritage (Métis, Ukrainian, French, Filipino, and Indigenous cultures) and the culinary delights are maturing in strength with breweries taking special note.

The report shows an assortment of hotels, motels, and inns, with a second layering of campground options in the spring and summer season. The area is not known to have many alternative accommodations such as B and B's or lodges.

St. Paul and Elk Point are clustered in the centre of the Alberta's Lakeland DMO and Northeast Alberta HUB regions which bodes well for connectivity for visitors exploring the area.



Legend

- Towns
- Primary Highways
- Secondary Highways Paved
- Provincial Parks
- National Parks
- Alberta's Iron Horse Trail
- Trans Canada Trail
- The Great Canadian Snowmobile Trail



Travel Lakeland

www.travellakeland.ca

The top attractions for this cluster as noted by Travel Alberta TDZ are:

- Alberta's Iron Horse Trail with the St. Paul and Heinsburg Staging Area
- UFO Landing Pad,
- St. Paul Golf Course
- Elk Point Golf and Country Club
- Whitney Lakes Provincial Park
- Upper and Lower Therien Lakes
- Lac Santé

Improved regional tourism management and marketing, and strengthening tourism corridors, clusters and partnerships is a regional goal for the Lakeland (TMZ report). Building on the water resource activities, improving waterfront development and access, supporting the developments along Alberta's Iron Horse Trail (glamping in St Paul and Heinsburg), and strengthening the accommodations sector are prioritized strategic areas. Further investment in these as well as lengthening opportunities in the shoulder seasons perhaps with cultural tour circuits and culinary initiatives will only have positive benefits for STEP as a central node in Alberta's Lakeland.

LOCAL TOURISM RESEARCH AND PERSPECTIVES

RTIC has been diligently compiling their tourism inventory over the last three years. They have also participated in regional strategy consultations that have a tourism focus. One of the strongest strategic documents for the region includes the Alberta's Iron Horse Trail (AIHT) Master Plan. This comprehensive report is written with tourism as a driver and a support for trail development. The consultants crafted a clever strategy that not only looks at infrastructure requirements needed to service the local and nonlocal population but includes intimate detail on what is required to cater to a visitor experience on the trail that is safe, enjoyable, and like no other in the Lakeland. Boasting 278 kms in length, the AIHT is the longest continuous segment of the Trans Canada Trail. To grow visitation on the trail, it is summarized that new visitor amenities, increased options for accommodation, improved access and improved signage will be needed. This multimodal trail is also striving to become Alberta's "must experience" OHV trail. By understanding the visitors needs and meeting them with higher standards, this will ensure trail users talk about their travels to friends and family becoming repeat travelers.

The STEP Region's neighbouring counties and communities are participating and promoting tourism products, experiences, and events. The following neighbours are on the radar:

Victoria District Economic Development Strategy includes Smoky Lake County, Town of Smoky Lake, and Villages of Vilna and Waskatenau, and the Metis Nation of Alberta. Their Strategy includes the formation of the Smoky Lake Tourism Corporation which is a Municipality Controlled Corporation so it can pursue its goals from a perspective not

always available to a municipality, including profit accumulation. This format provides a corporate platform for the Town and County to invest funds into the local tourism economy and ensures economic diversification in the region through lending to and investing in the Smoky Lake Tourism Corporation. The goal is to add dollars into the local economy, add jobs, grow the local population, and reduce unemployment.

The MD of Bonnyville undertook a Recreation Needs Assessment and a Recreation Master Plan in 2018 and 2019. Bonnyville is only 45 minutes away from St. Paul and 30 mins from Elk Point. With proximity to both communities, it is worth noting any tourism implication from these municipal planning documents. The residents in Bonnyville have a strong preference for spontaneous and unstructured recreation and are involved in a diverse array of activities in several different settings. Nature and outdoor based recreation (hiking, walking, swimming, boating, fishing, ATVing, and ice fishing) were the most popular recreational activities. This proves well within balance of the findings of what STEP has to offer, right next door to Bonnyville. The MD of Bonnyville appreciates easy access to outdoor spaces but found lack of time, accessible facilities, cost of programming, inconvenient times of programming, and being unaware of opportunities as the main barriers. With word of mouth and social media being the top two marketing channels for residents to become aware of opportunities, STEP can utilize these in their future marketing campaigns. It was noted that individuals that prefer structured recreation spend their time and money at Kinosoo Ridge and in aquatic programs.

With boat launches being the most utilized recreation facility/amenity in the area, the Recreation Needs assessment also listed boat launches and water access as one of the top gaps in the Bonnyville area that need addressing. Numerous comments were also received that too much focus and investment is being placed on organized sports and future planning needs to ensure that spontaneous and passive recreation receives the same attention. Performing arts came out as an emerging trend, as well as pickleball.

Recreation participation trends were highlighted and focused on the decline or low rate of physical activity that youth are experiencing these days as well as “nature deficit disorder” (not spending enough time in nature or nature-based play – Richard Louv). Albertans are living more sedentary lifestyles and require more consistent physical activity. The gender gap in sport participation has also increased (Sport Participation 2010 published by Canadian Heritage). Knowing these trends, STEP can cater to their neighbours by providing well marketed passive recreation opportunities and showcase STEP as a destination for movement in nature’s playground.

The Alberta Recreation Survey, commissioned by Alberta Culture and Tourism additionally provides data into the activity preferences of Albertans. The most recent (2017) survey found Albertans continue to enjoy an array of physical activity, recreation, and leisure pursuits. The following graphic depicts the top 5 activities for a variety of activity types:

The population in the MD of Bonnyville (with a median age of 37 years old) make up a substantial part of the domestic tourists that visit STEP. They desire flexible, unstructured leisure opportunities that can include some of the top 5 activities that many Albertans enjoy such as active living, culture, land-based activities, water-based activities, and snow-based activities. STEP is well poised to cater to their neighbours. STEP has active living opportunities, is strong in the creative industry segment, and has land-based activities and phenomenal picnic sites. Many lakes are found in the STEP region for those seeking water-based activities. STEP is also home to cross country ski and snowmobile trails. Any activities listed above in the chart that cannot feasibly be provided by the local town or county, provide opportunities for entrepreneurship in the STEP region. The private sector or new tourism businesses can offer this flexibility and increase their revenues by trying drop-in fees, utilizing multiuse spaces for tourism activities, promote physical activity and engagement via social media, host TRY-IT days, or age specific theme nights. Additionally, campgrounds, water bodies, and park spaces received high levels of use and are important recreation spaces that can be used as the setting or the stage for a tourism activity such as hosting “Lake Days”.



The MD of Bonnyville Recreation Master Plan had two strategies that highlighted tourism. Under Partnerships and Community Development, Strategy #4 reads “continue to support sport, recreation, and cultural tourism initiatives and identify opportunities to further capitalize on these to generate economic development and regional vibrancy”. Strategy #7

reads “continue to promote safe, sustainable and responsible use of campgrounds, parks and natural areas including undertaking a Trails Strategy, with a focus on motorized and non-motorized stakeholder groups and developing a Boat Launch Strategy that focuses on identifying priority sites for enhancement and development and refurbishment standards”. These two strategies are very similar to what will be discussed as priorities in the STEP strategies.

A tourism asset STEP has, which cannot be found in Bonnyville (at the time of their Recreation Needs Assessment and Master Plan), was a performing arts facility. With the St. Paul Arts Foundation and the Allied Arts Centre in Elk Point, STEP has the opportunity collaborate and capitalize on creative and cultural recreation and tourism opportunities within the larger Lakeland borders while their neighbours work towards their own localized Performing Arts Centre.

The MD Bonnyville has prioritized their recreation opportunities in the tune of improving trails, boat launches, water access, campgrounds, and a performing arts venue. These priorities are like the offerings STEP can offer, which provides a viable audience for those in Bonnyville who wish to explore on a day trip or a weekend getaway.

Kinosoo Ridge Business and Destination Development Plan

Kinosoo Ridge is 1 hour and 20 mins away from the Town of St. Paul. It is known in Lakeland as a premium destination for downhill skiing and a winter tourism destination. In the summer, their ariel adventure park is very popular. They underwent a business and destination development plan in 2020/2021 to investigate the expansion of the resort as a 4-season destination. They identified their target market as being visitors who are within the vicinity of a 2-hour drive for day trippers and 4-hour drive for weekend or multiday trippers. Their business plan identified the need for a “critical mass” (a mix of activities that will attract a diverse market segment) as necessary to create a guest experience compelling enough to entice singles, families, couples, and multiple generations to visit. The Resort alone did not have enough accommodation options to cater to the diverse market. The report identified yurt development and expansion at the nearest campground, Frenchman Bay Municipal District Campground, was required to accommodate more overnight visitation.

The strength of the business plan also lies in the criteria of which the winter and summer activities were chosen upon. These criteria are very congruent and align with visitor assessment criteria. They include cost (expensive and inexpensive), guided versus unguided activities, physical versus sedentary activities, age specific activities and indoor and outdoor options, flexible scheduling, and environmental appropriateness, and seasonality. The activity menu provided in the business plan provides a great listing for

future considerations for STEP as options for exploration. They include for summer: events and festivals, weddings, mountain coasters, chair lifts, and scenic chairlift rides. Specific summer activities could include mountain bike downhill destination, ATV skills training park, waterfront tubing, waterpark, horseshoe pits, zorbing, fitness trails, vita parkours, astronomy platforms, multi-sport courts, bossa ball, spike ball, mini golf, amphitheater, and summer camps.

For winter activities, to broaden the demographic and increase overnight stays, they can concentrate on alpine skiing, x country skiing, alpine coaster, tubing, snowshoeing, ice climbing tower, skating, hockey rink, snowmobiling, a warming hut, and a bistro. For winter events, the Ridge was mentioned as a site for school groups, alpine races, charity events, rallies, weddings, workshops, themed meals, wine and beer tastings, evening speaker events, end of season events, and first aid courses, senior lecture series, carving demonstrations, Christmas themed events (crafts, lights, petting zoo) etc.

Cold Lake Economic Development Strategy

The downturn in the Alberta economy over the past few years has created the need to diversify local economies and in regions where the natural resources exist, tourism is one of the sectors that communities are turning to, hence the reference to tourism throughout the document and a complete section in the strategy titled, Theme #4 Tourism. The action plan items for tourism in Cold Lake include working collaboratively with the DMO, undertaking a tourism asset inventory which identifies gaps and outlines new tourism products and packages, develop the lake front and business offerings in Cold Lake North, undertake a tourism signage program, and develop a Sports Tourism strategy. Cold Lake also identified that support for a working committee who focuses on tourism with culture in mind was required to maximize the potential of the Cold Lake Museum, theatre focused products and collaborate with Cold Lake First Nation groups to develop a strategy for cultural experiences.

Cold Lake viewed Travel Alberta as a primary stakeholder to support promotional efforts, and partnering with Bonnyville to promote features, events and tourism bundles that include theatre and culture.

Lac La Biche County – Tourism Strategy and Product Development Plan

Lac La Biche developed a comprehensive tourism strategy and development emphasizes exceptional natural assets and unique cultural attractions as the two primary products the community has to offer. The region attracts many outdoor nature lovers and history buffs. With over 150 lakes in the region, and the cultural assets of Lac La Biche Mission, Plamondon Museum and Mini Parc Heritage Park, and the Museum of Indigenous

Peoples' Art and Artifacts at Portage College there are opportunities to drive visitation for longer stays. Domestic travelers (visiting friends and relatives) are the primary target for Lac La Biche. This provides a marketing advantage to the region since they have a high brand loyalty and are repeat visitors. Lac La Biche also boasts high quality sports infrastructure. Their gaps to be addressed include developing a stronger accommodation and food service sector and tourism ready products. They also identified the opportunity to enhance their placemaking initiatives by further developing McArthur Park and downtown Lac La Biche.

The Lac La Biche Tourism Strategy identifies 7 targeted product development strategies for the region including: 1. Outdoor Experiences 2. Cultural Tourism 3. Dark Sky/Northern Lights Viewing 4. Sport Tourism 5. Festivals and Events 6. Culinary Tourism and 7. Lac La Biche as a Winter Destination. The organization and support required to feed the progress of these strategies is outlined through governance and administration tasks, targeted success indicators, and promotional activities. A unique aspect of this report is the identification of supports to assist each strategy. For example, under culinary tourism, resources such as the Culinary Tourism Event Handbook, Alberta Open Farm Day, and The Alberta Culinary Tourism, the Culinary Adventure Trip Planner (postings on their website and events calendar and participating in events like Cook It Raw) and the Alberta Small Brewers Association are highlighted.

The Strategy also notes that sustainable funding to a tourism entity is required to place the resources in the hands of where they need to be to see progress. A comprehensive list of funding opportunities available to support tourism development is listed as follows: municipal funding, fee for service, destination management funds, provincial funding, membership fees, stakeholder contributions, and corporate partnership. The short term and medium-term support systems are identified to activate the strategy. They recommend that over the long term, a multi-pronged funding approach that generates revenue from private and public sources be developed.

Lake access and health were highlighted as a priority in the strategy. They referenced Pigeon Lake (outside of the STEP region) as a strong example of where remediation work was successful in part due to the efforts of the Pigeon Lake Watershed Association. This Association has valuable experience, connections and educational materials that could be of use to Lac La Biche, and they are open to sharing their knowledge. This is also important to note for STEP as they work towards lake health for their water bodies. In addition, the strategy identified the need for updated campgrounds and the development of niche accommodation (ecolodges, comfort camping) which would also increase the potential for more overnight stays in the region.

The traditional business attraction and retention program, with a tourism focus, was reviewed as a priority for Lac La Biche. This program will allow the County to identify issues and address those issues with solutions that have a business approach. They noted that to achieve this, training by connecting tour operators with one another, and ongoing

support by the DMO is required. Incentives, packaging initiatives, tax exemptions, reducing barriers for tourism businesses including access to land, and communities' facilities, and advocating for tourism development is necessary to foster a business-friendly environment for the tourism sector. Lastly, education and training for the business sector was seen as vital to build the tourism service sectors' capacity and meet visitors' expectations and needs. A wealth of programs offer free and subsidized tourism education workshops through provincial agencies, including: • Tourism Entrepreneurship Startup Seminar (AEDTT) • Visitor Information Providers Program (AEDTT) • SHiFT Program: Transforming Products to Experiences (TA) • Getting to Know Your Best Customer (TA) • Experience Essentials Workshop (TA) • Global Ready – China (TA). The examples of offering a Tourism Ambassador Registry and an Experience Toolbox were also mentioned as innovative ways to support the volunteers and businesses who contribute to the visitor economy.

Marketing the Region

Alberta's Lakeland Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) was incorporated in 1996 firstly as the Heart of the Lakeland Marketing Organization. This DMO is a not-for-profit organization and has regional partnerships with private businesses, non-profits, and government organizations to assist tourism operators with their product development and marketing initiatives, and works with regional tourism stakeholders to develop, grow, and promote tourism experiences across Alberta's Lakeland including the communities in STEP. Alberta's Lakeland DMO,

branded as *Travel Lakeland* for the visitor, offers opportunities for digital and traditional advertising and membership with the organization affords access to advertising funding opportunities, discounted advertising options, and increased visibility on their (mobile-friendly) comprehensive website (which includes blogs, itineraries/road trips, activities and attractions, an events calendar, and a tourism business directory). They also have an active social media presence and participate in a variety of tourism tradeshow such as the Edmonton Boat and Sportsmen Show, Fort McMurray Spring Show, the Sherwood Park Trade Snow and the Alberta Snowmobile and Power Sports Show. Alberta's Lakeland DMO, under the brand of Travel Lakeland, gives the communities of STEP a chance to be part of a strong regional brand, and offers an annual regional travel guide, together with all their online digital content.



Alberta's Lakeland DMO does a strong and dedicated job of involving STEP in partnerships projects such as improving the staging areas for Alberta's Iron Horse Trail in Heinsburg, Mallaig, St. Paul, Elk Point, and Lindberg. As noted by Alberta's Lakeland DMO Executive Director, Marianne Jenke, there are further projects and collaborations that are currently underway supported by a successful PrairiesCan grant application of which STEP will benefit immensely. They include:



1. Commissioned EconoMusée Network Society (ENS) to spend 8 days in the region for the purpose of determining if there are enough qualified or potential sites to warrant an Alberta's Iron Horse Trail EconoMusée Destination. ENS met with several operators to introduce the EM concept and conducted site visits and assessments. The results and how to move forward, strategies/suggestions will be published in a report which will be available end of May - early June. In discussions with the ENS, we already know the feasibility of an Alberta's Iron Horse Trail EconoMusée Destination is a good and we have started to look at preparing a funding proposal and identifying potential funding sources.
2. Commissioned ClearThink Group to complete an Ag, Food & Tourism Strategy. This strategy is meant to build on the work the Connect for Food Initiative has conducted over the last 18 months. Through a series of workshops, information from the Agri-tourism, producers, processors, restaurants and more, has been gathered and we were looking for a way to take that data and turn it into a long-term plan for building, strengthening, and moving the ag, food and tourism sectors in the northeast.
3. Commissioned Portage College to implement the SuperHost program and develop an ambassador program, both to be included in their curriculum. These programs are for front line workers and seasonal staff.
4. Build a regional Resource Library to house all the assets; studies, strategies, photos, video in one place and accessible so operators and stakeholders can update, add, or delete their own information. This project also included building a regional master event calendar that will not only benefit the Travel Lakeland DMO but provide a service for all the communities within the Lakeland Region with connectivity, cross promotion, and customized information packages.

Alberta's Lakeland also undertook the Master Trails Strategy written for Alberta's Iron Horse Trail and is a comprehensive document that highlights the tourism potential of Alberta's Iron Horse and how communities of St. Paul and Elk Point (among others) can benefit. This Strategy reviews the potential of the trail as a recreation driver but also more

wholistically as a tourism driver. Currently, Alberta's Lakeland has also been contracted to manage the RTIC/STEP Regional Master Trail Plan project providing an even more localized focus on the trail assets.

Go East of Edmonton is a regional tourism organization representing communities residing in Northeast and East Central Alberta. This enterprise focuses on tourism and destination marketing (online and print) primarily with the mandate of driving tourism East of Edmonton rather than focusing on the mountain region and Calgary region. In recent years, Go East has implemented the Road Trip Adventure Game and Road Trip Savings Passport, which encourages visitation to participating communities via contests for completing road trip milestones. The RTIC committee has participated in both initiatives throughout the years, however not on a consistent annual basis. In previous years, municipalities individually participated in Go East initiatives, however in the last year STEP/RTIC has taken on the cost of marketing.

Created in 1997 to meet the needs of French-speaking entrepreneurs in Alberta, the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta (CDEA) is an economic development organization whose focus is on supporting the creation and implementation of Francophone economic development opportunities in Alberta, including sector support in tourism. Members of the CDEA include the Association Canadienne-Française de l'Alberta (ACFA) Regionale de Saint-Paul, a local organization that promotes the development of French life and culture within the French-speaking community of the Saint-Paul region and is known for hosting events including Jazz Art and Cabane a Sucre and special events such as a heritage bus tour to Edouardville and other centennial French homesteads. The Town of St. Paul and the County of St. Paul are also both members of the Association of Bilingual Municipalities of Alberta.

Among CDEA's recent initiatives - of benefit to tourism in the STEP region - is the development of the Northern Alberta Bilingual Tourism Network and the launch of the Northern Alberta Bilingual Routes website. Incorporated into the Tourisme Alberta digital platform, which provides tourism information on Alberta in French, visitors can choose from over 200 attractions in Northern Alberta to create personalized itineraries using the website's interactive map.

The CDEA also works closely with the ÉCONOMUSÉE® Network Society, an international organization that owns and promotes the ÉCONOMUSÉE®, which is a business concept that promotes artisans and their traditional crafts by sharing their know-how with visitors. Under this framework, visitors are afforded the opportunity of enjoying enhanced experiences with artisans; artisans can generate revenue from their visitors, which then contributes to the economic activity and sustainable development of the regions in which the artists operate. There are currently three EconoMuseum's in the Northeast Region: Old School Cheesery in Vermillion, Healing a la Source in Lac La Biche, and Twisted Fork in St. Paul. Future expansion of the EconoMuseum initiative and network will be occurring in Lakeland since funding was secured to explore opportunities along Alberta's Iron Horse

Trail. With the potential of 10 new EconoMusee's being established along the Trail over the next few years, Lakeland may end up with the largest concentration of EconoMusee's in Alberta, and possibly Western Canada. The Manawannis Native Friendship Centre in St. Paul and Sew Heavenly in Elk Point are among a few artisans identified as quality candidates to develop as an EconoMusee.

Travel Alberta is shifting gears to support the development and marketing of the key generators in the ten destination marketing zones. Support for regional and destination management organizations continues, and tourism marketing remains the primary mandate of Travel Alberta with a provincial marketing mandate. Clustering opportunities to drive overnight visitation and bookable experience will remain at the core of Travel Alberta's marketing investment decisions. It is important for local businesses to sign into the Alberta Tourism Information System (ATIS), so they are aware of market readiness of the operation. Indigenous entrepreneurs are encouraged to reach out to Indigenous Tourism Alberta as well as Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada to take part in their marketing campaigns such as the "Original Original".

Community Futures St. Paul-Smoky Lake Region, funded by PrairiesCan as a part of the larger Community Futures organization, is a not-profit organization that specializes in business training programs, regular business networking events, and flexible business loans aimed at building economic diversification for the communities in the region, supporting companies across all industries including tourism. Focusing on rural economic diversification, Community Futures St. Paul-Smoky Lake Region works alongside community leaders and other key stakeholders to create community economic development plans and implement projects that support value-added activity and expansion into new sectors, as well as provides guidance on business retention and succession planning strategies.

Community Futures St. Paul-Smoky Lake Region's involvement with economic diversification in the STEP region has led to the development of Champions for Change, a not-for-profit organization whose four pillars are a vibrant downtown core, more seniors' housing and options, children, and youth, and maintaining healthy living. With these pillars at the forefront, Champions for Change has instigated or been a part of tourism-related initiatives such as art installations, community banner projects, and the Rock the Block community event, and the St Paul Art Walk.

RTIC/STEP do not currently have their own stand-alone established tourism brand and website. RTIC may wish to investigate the feasibility and investment required to create their own established brand and the resources that will be required to bring it to life. Alternatively, STEP could collaborate with Alberta's Lakeland Destination Marketing Organization to develop a more comprehensive landing page (such as Metis Crossings' or Pine Creek Retreat) on the Travel Lakeland website and participate in distinct regional marketing campaigns. Participating in branding and marketing initiatives in collaboration with Alberta's Lakeland DMO would allow STEP to capitalize on the SEO and SEM

strategies and strength of the DMO overall. This would also allow STEP to maximize their efforts in an efficient manner should human resources and budget be limited, while still participating in the marketing activities on a regional and provincial level and be relevant in the tourism marketing landscape.

Consumer Profiles (traveler profiles)

Based on Destination Canada's Explorer Quotient model, there are nine (9) different types of travellers that make up visitors to the Canadian tourism economy. Extensive psychographic, sociographic and consumer research has been undertaken to understand the characteristics and motivations of these visitor types. The three main visitor types that are likely to visit Alberta could be identified as like most other Western Provinces: Free Spirits, Cultural Explorers, and Authentic Experiences. These traveler profiles are no longer being marketed in Alberta, but they are worth noting since they do provide motivational and additional market segment information that are useful for businesses and their marketing efforts. The test and traveler profile descriptions can be found at <https://quiz.canada.travel/>. For the full EQ report that lists the demographics, personality traits, social values, travel values and experience appeal please visit: https://www.destinationcanada.com/sites/default/files/archive/2013-01-01/Tools_ExplorerQuotient_Profiles_2015_EN.pdf

In 2019, Travel Alberta updated their consumer market profiles to be defined under two personas' now which include *the Curious Traveler and the Hot Spot Hunter*. A full resource guide of each consumer profile (traveler profile) can be found at <https://industry.travelalberta.com/resources/brand-and-marketing/alberta-ultimate-travellers>. The Curious Traveler and the Hot Spot Hunter are identified as high value travellers that can help the Province of Alberta achieve their goals of stimulating sustainable growth and elevating industry profitability across the province. These two personas are built on expansion work from the Explore Quotient categories to "understand individual motivators and attitudes to enable more focused targeting.". Travel Alberta as a Crown Corporation works with the different sectors to market to the future travellers that represent the greatest economic potential across the province matching travellers' interests and expectations with the experiences that Alberta has to offer.

An additional tool that is engaging for business owners to investigate with studying data based on your customer's postal code (their home geographical pocket). Many of the visitors to the region will be domestic in nature. An analytic tool called PRIZM (<https://prizm.environicsanalytics.com>) provides geographically based consumer profiles that may be helpful to further understand the STEP visitor profile base. Businesses can research their primary customer profiles by postal code and can identify which of the 67 consumer profiles they are categorized in. These profiles provide demographic, behavioural, financial, health and psychographic insights.

The Ideal Visitor as Identified by STEP Stakeholders

Understanding that RTIC/STEP have not undertaken a brand identify and marketing strategy such as the one Alberta's Lakeland, Metis Crossing and Kalyna Country recently completed, it is worth putting some attention to STEP's potential ideal visitors. The ideal visitor is one that the community wishes to attract that reflects the values, and offerings that make up the best things about a region. It is worth asking what type or style of visitor would make your most ideal guest since it helps set the framework for identifying *who* you would like to attract to your region and *how* you would frame your tourism development initiatives and marketing materials for them. As with simple economic theory, supply and demand are very much interdependent. The supply side of tourism (your tourism assets, services, and experiences) won't appeal to everyone, nor should they. The most strategic investment is to market your assets to consumers (tourists and travelers) that you "want" to attract and to those that will align with your offerings. The space for exploration, education, and appreciation blossoms when these two joins.

The feedback from the stakeholders and collaborators to this strategy has identified potential ideal visitors (or population groups) for STEP. The ideal types of travelers and demographic favourites were:

- *young families,*
- *outdoor recreationists and*
- *active adults and seniors who are active.*

The type of ideal visitors identified align mostly with the Curious Traveler (Travel Alberta) and EQ traveler types of the Authentic Experiencer, Cultural Explorer, and the Free Spirit. All these types of travelers are drawn to areas that allow for individual exploration and learning and participating in localized culture and traditions. They are active and open minded, indulge in hands on learning and are ready for adventure (passive and active).

The young families category of traveler was identified as a strong market for the Town of St. Paul which coincides with the tourism assets that are found at this service centre – recreation infrastructure, sports tourism – tournaments, and easy to find services such as hotels, and food service. Young families will also appreciate libraries, open spaces, parks, splash pads and aquatic centres. Lastly, they will appreciate the ability to affordably camp on large sites and try boating and swimming on smaller lakes.

The second strongest category identified was **those who like to be in nature and experiences outdoor recreation**. They may be passive with camping and trail walking or skiing or more complex activities that require additional equipment such as boats or quads. These types of visitors enjoy individuality and going at their own pace. They will support local businesses, but also appreciate the opportunity to explore and cook on their own. They will participate in organized outings that are not familiar to them such as a guided tour of the UFO landing pad but are equally motivated to rent an e-bike and explore the town on their own.



The last category that was identified as a great market for the STEP **region were active seniors** who would enjoy outdoor recreation as well as be interested in the arts and cultural assets that are found throughout the region. Visitors who are interested in taking the time to learn, explore and set a slower pace were identified as being optimal for some of the many heritage sites such as Fort George & Buckingham House, the St Paul Museum, the Elk Point Mural or the Victoria District Historic Site and the Victoria Settlement District. They may be interested in exploring the fur trade, a local theatre show, participating in a public art project, strolling the Farmers' Market, or strolling the St. Paul Arts Walk. The element of respect and appreciation for those that engage with heritage tourism is strong.

Chapter 3: Findings

Situational Analysis - Asset Inventory

The listing of tourism stakeholders below includes those that the consultants visited in person in August of 2022. This list is not an exhaustive list of all tourism industry partners found in the STEP/RTIC Tourism Inventory. Descriptions and suggestions described below were taken when visiting and are not meant to replace individual site investigations and strategic planning for the tourism infrastructure and programming that is currently offered (seasonal or full time). Rather the consultants visited the region as “tourists” and took note of elements and features of the built environment and sense of place, noted in the block of time of the visit. For a copy of that please contact the Economic Development Officer of STEP/RTIC.

TOURISM Service Delivery

Counties and towns in Alberta organize their operations based on local circumstances that include development plans, demographic data, socio-economic conditions, local needs, and service demands and the availability of human resources, volunteer commitment, and financial resources. Tourism development is often not that different. The delivery of tourism and recreation services are dependent on three service sector providers. They include private companies and businesses, non-profit organizations and associations, and the public (federal, provincial, and municipal) sector.

Each sector operates under their own specific motives. In an umbrella sense, the private sector is driven by profit, while the non-profit sector is driven by its service to their members. The public sector role is to develop services that fill gaps not included in the private and non-profit sector services and to ensure that core services are accessible and available on an equitable basis for all community residents and are designed to achieve “public good.” There are times where these sectors overlap and take part in each other’s delivery, however it is often due to responding to demand.

Most municipalities try to avoid competing with the private and not for profit sector where their services are available to the public, are provided in an equitable manner and meet their service objectives. In Alberta, the type of tourism services that are provided by each sector are based on factors outlined above as well as tradition and culture, share experience or context, or established agreements.

The STEP region’s approach to tourism delivery is seen to be a mix of all three service types. The STEP region will encourage and assist tourism businesses to establish, support the not-for-profit organizations who host regional events such as tournaments and rodeos, and the Municipalities themselves own and maintain campground accommodation options. Participating in tourism with a threefold service lens is in fact the most common. The assumption is that business development support would be the first line of service delivery if it was in fact economical to do so. There may also be an overlap whereby a municipality owns the land, but a not-for-profit organization provides the management service and programming to the tourism asset (such as Willie’s Pond that is situated on the Town of St. Paul land but is managed by the St. Paul Fish and Game).

The consultants participated in a six-day tour of the STEP region at the end of August 2022. Businesses, attractions, outdoor recreation opportunities and service-based businesses such as hotels and food service establishments were visited. The consultants conducted the tour by vehicle, and had an opportunity for hiking, paddleboarding and quadding the region to experience different modes of transport.

The town of St. Paul, the town of Elk Point and the rural area within the County of St. Paul were visited. The consultants were pleasantly surprised at the diversity and quality of the

tourism assets in the region. The county campgrounds and outdoor recreation opportunities were numerous, the regional recreational infrastructure was expansive and well managed for the size of the service centre of St. Paul. What was also a key finding was the strength and diversity of the arts and cultural landscape in the STEP region and the opportunity for winter tourism development which is currently untapped. The Alberta's Iron Horse Trail – though a regional trail asset – span across the STEP region and bodes as one of the strongest assets in the region for multi modal use. The observational site visit gave the consultants practical and visual context of how the community is accessed, and the state of market readiness of many of the assets. Some generalized findings were:

- The staff and residents were extremely friendly which provided a welcoming introduction to the stay. The hotel staff were helpful, the restaurant staff were diligent, and the service experience (lodging and food) were of high quality and delicious.
- The tourism assets that allow for a traditional and fun in the sun summer vacation are abundant – such as splash pads, aquatic centre, smaller lakes and camping grounds, restaurants, parks, and museums. These could be tied together as a young family destination.
- Wayfinding signage in general (welcome signage, directional signage, and community prompt signage) was lacking in the STEP region and at a lesser extent along the AIHT. The staging areas were thoughtfully laid out but could use more community-based signage to showcase what each community has to offer. Making the signage obvious, simplistic, and easy to read, makes it frictionless for visitors who don't necessarily have knowledge of the local context.

Situational Analysis – For Profit Tourism Service

Diamond Back Sturgeon Charters. Diamond Back is owned by Stewart Kotowich who is an outfitter that takes visitors out on the North Saskatchewan River to fish for sturgeons. His access points are Myrnam, Heinsburg or by the bridge by Elk Point. He can only take 3 people out at once and charges \$700 for 8 hours and \$550 for 4 hours. The charter operates from May to October. He owns one boat but would like to upgrade to 2 boats with a vision of a 19-foot inboard boat. Stewart's friendly demeanor would put any visitor (even those who are not anglers) at ease.

Stuart Steinhauer Sculptures. There are distinct places throughout the STEP region where Stuart Steinhauer Sculptures can be seen, however unless you know how to look for them, they are easy to miss. This is a shame because they are beautiful and stunning cultural and natural pieces. A driving tour that showcases where they can be found would be a wonderful asset for those that are arts and cultural buffs. Examples include the sculptures in the field by the road at Universitynuhelot'ine thaiyots'ı nistameyimâkanak

Blue Quills, on the highway west of Foisy, and some can be found in the Town of St. Paul by the Mannawanis Native Friendship Centre, Portage College, and Racette School.

Elk Point Golf Course. This golf course is managed by a third party with a club house, pro shop, carts and club rentals, outdoor covered deck, and tournament bookings. The course is adjacent to the baseball and soccer field. There is the potential for synergies between the golf course and AIHT with development of an access route that could be developed municipally. Current access from the trail to the course is a provincial highway which is illegal for ATV's. Minor upgrades (at the time of visitation) such as the driving range netting required attention, however the site is open and large and provides a very relaxing experience.



Sew Heavenly Designs (Elk Point). This former church has been converted into a quilt shop. The owner has been quilting for 17 years and has owned the shop for 3 years. With the busy season in the spring, and summer being quieter, the potential for sewing classes or a quilting experience is possible. The variety and stunning fabrics showcased in the shop makes one appreciate the quilting genre. A sandwich board outside would help feature the location for drive by traffic. The large workshop space in the facility is prime for workshops and experiences or rental space.

Mann Lake Golf Course is located just off Hwy 28 near Mallaig. This is a family friendly 9-hole golf course that has new owners who are looking to showcase the venue with local food fair and service and expand its offerings with a possible driving range and mini putt and outside entertainment features. The unique aspect of this course is a 9 hole with 53 acres of land with 35 acres of bush and a hayfield. The potential for this location remains as follows:

- A naturalized tree area that could be utilized as a location for forest bathing and sensory experiences, or natural setting for glamping options.
- A location for a winter playground should the owners wish to capitalize on



diversification of seasons understanding the labour-intensive nature of an endeavor.

- Becoming a golf and culinary destination – offering a culinary experience that cannot be experienced elsewhere.

Centre Field Music Festival is a larger solo event that is put on by Danny Gervais and was supported by the Town of St. Paul through contract with Trubador Entertainment (Keynon Turnevoy). This festival is a large-scale event that is known for attracting visitors to the community, however, has struggled with engagement and sponsorship support from the community due to the sponsorship opportunities being at a higher-level bracket of \$5000.00, making it harder for smaller businesses to participate. This music festival did not happen in 2023, however there is appetite for recreating it or exploring a renewed version in the future. Considering a more inclusive sponsorship package would entice more community members to connect with Centre Field in a more active and connected role.

Camp Calvin – Fiddling Camp is hosted by Calvin Vollrath and Daniel Gervais. They are both professional fiddler players in the STEP region and have organized fiddling events and are considered a real asset to the community and music scene in the STEP region. The Fiddle Camp format occurred for 20 years in person and continues to organize and host in person events when registration is sufficient. The Fiddling Camp also hosts a virtual camp which has allowed many fiddlers to participate and the ability to host fiddling events in the winter season.

Warehouse Sports is a recreational retail store in St. Paul that is embedded in community support and spirit. The store has a variety of sporting goods, hunting, and fishing items, clothing, and gun sales. It sponsors the rodeo, promotes Diamondback Sturgeon Charters and assists the St Paul Fish and Game at their gun range to host competitions. Warehouse Sports welcomes partnership opportunities and is interested in one day hosting an NHL - independent game/pre - season or Alum Game between the Oilers and Calgary Flames.

Water Spirit Spa and Retreat. Karen and Rob Telford own and operate this rustic and authentic retreat that provides therapeutic massage, culture activities, and cultural weekend retreats with activities such as yoga, plant walks, survival skills training, foraging, ice fishing, etc. Karen is also working on becoming certified in Whatsu which is water massage. Beautifully located on Fishing Lake Metis Land, the site is serene and offers a variety of accommodations from self-serve tenting



sites, to a trapper's tent, a tipi, and a tree house. A Pipe Ceremony for a fee is possible and Karen will cater her services to what people want/need. She has thought about expanding her accommodations options onsite to include a micro cabin, an RV site, and potential geodomes.

The Landing Hotel and Conference Centre. This hotel was originally built as a social enterprise with no kitchen or laundry facility in the hotel. It has since been sold and has been re-branded and refreshed with laundry services added. The new manager, James Paul, seeks innovative ways to address the food service aspect that is often associated with hotel events by hiring local restaurants such as Tin Cup, Smitty's, and Twisted Fork for catering. The Hotel hosts a Christmas market with various vendors. The Hotel continues to work with the goal of strengthening community engagement by showcasing the hotel as a viable option for meetings and events.

Twisted Fork Restaurant. Twisted Fork is a well-known culinary destination that offers delicious homemade meals, Backroad Farmhouse Coffee, and local art and pottery. Island Girls Candles select exclusive scents for sale at Twisted Fork. The restaurant also caters to the drop in visitors and takeout specialty boxes such as Sangria and Caesar Boxes, Chacuterie Boxes, and Experience Lakeland in a Box which includes breakfast of jams, syrups, pancake mix, coffee, and juice. In 2023, Twisted Fork has become an EconoMusée featuring their preserves which are now in 20 retail locations. There is potential for scaling up production of her preserve line.



Elk Point Motel and RV Campground are located right in the Town of Elk Point. This location includes 42 rooms and 17 RV fully serviced sites. This location is a convenient location for those looking to pull in and relax. There is room for expansion at this site.

Elk Point is also home to the Hill Top Motor Inn and is approximately 25 mins from Whitney Lakes Provincial Park.

Medical Tourism. The Hospital of St. Paul has an obstetrics and gynecology specialist who has invested in the establishment of a birthing house. St. Paul Town Council has created a social health care policy for the planning department. There is the potential for medical tourism programs and tours to grow with this investment.

Situational Analysis – Not for Profit Tourism Delivery

Sport Tourism. There are a lot of tournaments in the region but there is a lack of coordination and communication on how to promote local tourism attractions and amenities to the participants and their families before and when they arrive. There is great potential to provide visiting families with information so that they can come early or stay later in the area after a tournament and experience all that STEP has to offer.

The Champions of Change Committee has taken in active role in beautification and streetscape /public art in the Town of St Paul over the past number of years. Their strategic projects have led to beautiful pieces being showcased which include cultural art, identity art and heritage panels made in multi – textiles. Herman Poulin, Hans Rohner, Eric Spoeth, and Stephen Yettaw are some of the artists who have work showcased throughout the



community. The Committee’s support for promoting local and regional artists by coordinating the establishment of public art pieces and promoting them by the creation of the St. Paul Art Walk self-guided tour and brochure has provided St. Paul a unique sense of place for accessible public art.

St. Paul Fish and Game Association and Trout Ponds. St Paul Fish and Game operates a gun range in the county and supports the two town Fishing Ponds which are great assets for the community. They provide a space for people to try fishing, for families to go outdoors and to try something that is affordable and fun. The St. Paul Trout Pond, Willy’s Pond, is strategically located by the campground, recreation fields and St. Paul’s Alberta’s Iron Horse Trail staging area.

Elk Point & District Lions Club Trout Pond & Memorial Park. This trout pond is a large and deep pond with a trail all the way around which makes for an ideal setting for an afternoon outing. The Trout Pond signage has been updated and is more visible for visitors. It would be of benefit to move the temporary washroom facility away from the main site signage so that when photos are taken, it does not appear in the photographs. This Trout Pond is a hidden gem for the community and for visitors, especially those that may want easy access to a water source for catch and release fishing. This site also lends well to be a staging area for intro to fishing programming and kids’ events such as a Trout Pond Fishing Derby.

St Paul Agricultural Society, Rodeo and BULL-A-RAMA. The St. Paul Ag Society hosts the High School Rodeo in April, and the Lakeland Rodeo Finals on the long weekend in September along with BULL-A-RAMA and a shark tank to be in the ring with the bulls and

cowboys. The September Labour Day weekend rodeo is a large regional event that draws 5000 visitors a day into St. Paul. The Rodeo Weekend includes a kids' zone and activities, and other events. The Ag Society owns the Ag Coral, but the LRA Finals are held in the Clancy Arena and other town owned spaces. They also support and promote regional ag activities such as the Transon's Northern Connection Simmental Bull Sale, horse packing workshop, a critter market, and wild west skjoring. Seventy percent (70%) of the visitors for the Rodeo events are contestant family members that have the potential to pursue local amenities and activities and as such additional local marketing could be coordinated to maximize this potential. The Lakeland Rodeo Association will bill out a \$100,000 contract for three years to host the high school provincials. The Town of St. Paul participates by elaborating on the rodeo events and turning it into a rodeo themed week.

Lakeland Cross Country Ski Club. The ski club has a user agreement with the County of St. Paul to utilize the West Cove Recreation Area. The agreement states that the club can use the trails at the park for snowshoeing and x country skiing. The three-year agreement is working well with the County ploughing the parking lot, and the volunteers grooming the trails. The hiking trails in the summer become the ski trails in the winter. The County uses the steeper trails in the park for snowshoeing which adds a complimentary activity for those that may not have ski equipment or are inclined for a more passive and slower paced activity. As popularity for x-country skiing increases, STEP/RTIC is also starting to work with NRED on a Winter Activities strategy that will include a review and potential enhancement of the user agreement between the club and the County of St. Paul. The West Cove Recreation Area, as a user base for winter activities holds much potential.

Farmers' Market. There are two Farmers' markets in St. Paul operated by two different groups. One is held on Wednesday, and one is held on Fridays. The Friday market committee has moved their market to Portage College and has already seen an increase in visitors and activity. The community would benefit from cross promoting these events and supporting their endeavors. The value of Farmers' markets and local food economy will only need to be strengthened in time as rising food prices and inflation affect the populations' ability to have healthy foods that are not nutrient deficient. Promoting or stationing pop- up farmer's markets close to the Rodeo grounds, Centre in the Field event, at AIHT staging areas, and when regional tournaments come to town can assist in driving traffic to the markets. Market locations can shift if there is staff or volunteer capacity to review the logistics and coordinate with vendors. Changing market locations assists in driving more traffic for vendors, capturing new clients, and activating sites in the community. Themed market nights are also a popular spin for attracting new visitors (for example cultural nights).

The St. Paul's & District Arts Foundation is a charitable, multidisciplinary arts organization with 2 streams of programming working towards their mission. The first stream is classes for all ages, genres of art, and skill level. The second stream is the constant community projects designed to unite professional artists with developing

artists. This year, the Arts Foundation will be putting on their 10th annual production of the Nutcracker which brings artists from across Alberta together in St. Paul to present a culturally diverse show. They recently hosted the Northeast Alberta Community Art Clubs Association Art Show and were able to get Indigenous Art to submit and 3 pieces won awards. There are scheduled events and networking events with other organizations such as the Alberta Media Association, and Alberta Digital Arts. For the Canada Heritage Grant – Commemorate Canada they worked with Joshua Wolchansky and Eric Spoeth to produce an interactive art gallery and community-built mosaic mural that promoted a sense of belonging for all individuals. The building that the organization proudly owns has 2 performance space studios, a practice music room/recording studio, a visual arts studio, accessible bathrooms, and a kitchenette to support the events they host. There is also an Artist in Residence program, which provides a space for professional artists to develop their long-term projects in a designated space. This program allows the Artist in Residence the option to pay their rent through teaching classes, making it as accessible as possible to artists who have varying available resources. The Art Foundation is excited to be amid developing a third stream of programming for their mission - an inclusive art gallery in the front of their building which will allow artists from the area to present formal exhibits and give the young artists in their education programming a place to begin their professional careers. The St Paul & District Arts Foundation would benefit from more support from the community for their Nutcracker since the performance has the potential to be a major tourist draw. Once the mortgage on their space is paid off, it will allow more financial flexibility to continue contributing to community development in the region. Support for staffing continues to be a challenge due to limited funds but the volunteers at the Centre assist in building Alberta's ever-growing collective of artists and art supporters.

ACFA. Is a francophone community organization that helps to promote and maintain the French language and culture through live activities such as the Cabane a Sucre, celebratory events, history presentations with the Société historique francophone de l'Alberta Regionale de St Paul. One of their popular events is Jazz Art where musicians are playing and 5 different artists work on different pieces and sell them. It is a fundraising event for the ACFA with a silent auction.

Haying in the 30's. Hayin' is a complete volunteer driven event that was dreamt up and established by the Corbiere family. The event draws up to 5000 visitors a day with approximately 300 to 400 RV's and campers in the field. It is a 2-day event where all efforts and materials are donated. The 1930's village comes to life with volunteers who role play different characters such as lawyers, barbers, teachers, farmers, saloon workers, etc. The event is free for visitors



and donated beef and food feeds everyone at the event free of charge. A donation area is open, and funds are raised to support and offset cancer treatments and living expenses (total funds raised can exceed \$300,000). Satellite events are held in the region to support the fundraising efforts. Worker bees begin before the event to help maintain the site and set up for the “big event”.

The Iron Horse Ultra Race. The Ultra Iron Horse 100 and the Ultra mini is organized by volunteers as an endurance race that tests one’s abilities and limits. The creation of the mini is meant to help boost athlete numbers. The Ultra Iron Horse 100 is part of the Alberta Ultra Race series and draws visitors from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and B.C. The race takes place over two days with registration and the event(s). Families supporting the athletes could be canvassed with more promotion of community information and events while they wait for their loved ones. The town of Elk Point could make for a great staging area to promote businesses, amenities, and tourism sites in the region. There have been many of the same volunteers running this event, year after year, and they would benefit from some strategic planning.

Situational Analysis – Municipal owned/Indigenous owned/Provincially owned or designated Tourism Delivery

The Regional Tourism Initiatives Committee is a grassroots movement that is in its first stages of development and guidance. The Committee is working towards gaining momentum in tourism research and identification of assets and asset development. It is also building relationships with the local and regional community. RTIC is in communication with their regional partners such as Smoky Lake Regional Community Development Committee (who holds property and has an inventory of their heritage assets), the M.D. of Bonnyville who undertook a trails plan, and Lac La Biche who has a comprehensive tourism strategy. RTIC has been active with many tourism research and planning projects since 2019.

The St. Paul’s Beach is an untapped resource that could be utilized to showcase Vincent Lake Beach as a viable ice fishing destination. The fluctuating water levels, and receding shoreline makes for challenges to develop this site as a summer public access destination, unless a mitigation plan was set into play and regular monitoring and maintenance were committed. The heritage story that predicates this site (local flour mill, store, and cabins) would make for great interpretive panel content.

University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'i nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills (UnBQ)

is an educational facility owned and governed by 7 First Nations in the region and sits on reserve lands designated for educational purposes. With its history as a residential school, there is an ongoing search for unmarked graves. It remains an active site of discovery, mourning and ceremony. This site is rich in history and is part of the Indigenous and community cultural landscape. UnBQ is a space for cultural understanding and education,



however not in a typical tourism sense. They do offer an annual cultural camp to the public. Further engagement sessions are recommended with the staff and Nations of the University to explore the potential of creating regular or seasonal Authentic Cultural Experiences, when the funding, timing and willingness of the leaders are in place. At a minimum, interpretive panels could be explored and placed at the edge of the property to showcase and explain the beautiful Stewart Steinhauer commissioned pieces that stand in an open field at the east entrance– the reason for their placement can provide an interpretive story set in a specific snapshot that allows for education but respects the notion that there is so much more to learn. There is beauty in stillness, and this site has much to offer for those that are willing to listen to the silence and when the time is right, participate in or observe ceremony, healing, and celebration.

Frog Lake National Historic Site (Heritage Cairn) and Provincial Historic Resource

– **Frog Lake.** The 1.6-hectare historic site situated amid rolling aspen spruce parkland, 3.5 kilometres south of the Village of Frog Lake and 13 kilometres northeast of the North Saskatchewan River - was designated as a Provincial Historic Resource on June 15, 1976. This site is also a National Historic Site, as it tells: “A story of hardship, confusion, hunger and a retaliation that would cost the community everything”. Local tales tell of the story of a telegraph station in Lindberg being used as the communication mechanism to get word to the NWMP to send reinforcements for this conflict. The Frog Lake Memorial is on First Nations Land and is an important site that tells the historical, cultural story of this landscape.

Elk Point Municipal Airport and St. Paul Municipal Airport are assets to the region but requires an Analysis Study to look at the lifecycle of the facilities and operations. There is a loss of expertise that is happening with the exodus of pilots and airline businesses. The knowledge and synergy of how airports are maintained requires action. The Flying Club in St. Paul could start with tracking the use of the airport, at a bare minimum. Without the data to support the infrastructure, its long-term viability will be questioned.



Regional Recreation Infrastructure. The Town has an impressive amount of recreation infrastructure that provides services to residents but also acts as a stage for sport tourism events. These include the Ag Arena (Elk Point), the Clancy Arena and CAPP Arena (St. Paul), the library, recreation centre, curling rinks (Elk Point, St. Paul, and Mallaig), JC ball diamonds (St. Paul), The ball diamonds (Elk Point), the soccer pitches and Reunion Station (St. Paul), a new skate park (St. Paul), a swimming pool (St. Paul), and splash pads (Elk Point, St. Paul, and West Cove Recreation Area). Sport tourism (regional tournaments, provincial tournaments, and niche events) could be an expanding tourism market for this region. The Region undertook a Recreation Feasibility Study to explore the need for a field house. The report concluded that a field house would be warranted for St. Paul and recommends further infrastructure assessments on the aquatic centre (St. Paul), the Visual Arts Centre (St. Paul), and AG Ross Arena. Further funding applications will be explored to fund these assessments. The concentration and state of the regional recreation infrastructure sets many opportunities for

The St. Paul Golf Course. The St. Paul Golf Course has tennis courts and pickleball on the premise. It is managed by its own board, with the Town having ownership of the facility. There is a struggle to keep golf pros on staff. There is no driving range onsite, but they are interested in building one. It is a well-used location for local and regional tournaments. The Town of St Paul leases out the restaurant space to the Tin Cup by Little Greek which is a well-established food service.

Lac Bellevue Municipal Campground (County of St. Paul operated).

This campground is 2 hours from Edmonton, 1 hour from Cold Lake, and 45 minutes from Bonnyville. This location is a beautiful spot in the valley with a stunning view as campers drive down the hill to the campsite. Camper's paddle and do catch and release. There is an opportunity for more programming onsite (such as learning to fish for a day, ghost tours, etc.). The campground has 34 sites and is very busy with day users who enjoy boating and fishing. The park opened in 1985. Reservations are online for this campground (14-night max). A new boat launch costing \$200,000 was installed and completed in 2023 and 14 accessibility mats made of recycled rubber were installed. This increased the accessibility of the area. The campground is staffed with a seasonal contract from the May Victoria Day weekend to September Labour Day weekend. Lawnmowers are battery operated and the new golf carts for use by the part attendants are solar operated. Parking is a challenge at this location because three quarters of the visitors are here to fish and come by truck, boat, and trailer.



The location is unique but has its challenges with expansion due to its neighbouring crown land on the one side and a hill with significant elevation on the other. The Royal Canadian Legion Alberta Branch 39 (Vegreville and Vermilion Legion) owns a camp on the other side of the lake that can be booked seasonally by members. Lac Bellevue Ag society has a lease on the southside kept for Ag society members who host a ball tournament. The subdivision on the southeast portion of the lake has a boat launch. The permanent residents in the area have grown to 25. Repeat visitation from Edmonton and Calgary are common. Park attendants on a year-to-year basis sell ice and ice cream as revenue sources. They do get requests for kayak and paddleboards bookings and would benefit from offering them in the future as an additional revenue source.

Westcove Municipal Campground (County of St. Paul operated). Westcove has a large land base. It is not as booked as Lac Bellevue and takes monthly bookings (park rates are reduced if booking for 5 nights, campers get 7, 20 days paid campers get 28 nights). Westcove facilities include a basketball court and a splash pad. Water access from a beach is limited due to receding water. The campground has great space for group rentals such as for weddings, celebrations and team building events. Many cultural groups use the facilities for picnics and rent the Pavilion for \$100 a day. Vincent Lake, that is the water body adjacent to Westcove Municipal Campground is quite developed with the Summer Village of Horseshoe Bay is located on the East side of the lake. Mallaig Beach (provincially owned), operated by the Mallaig Chamber, is located on the south side of the beach. There are also other County developments located around the lake.



Westcove has the potential to become a winter tourism destination built on the cross-country ski trails, snowshoe trails and ice fishing in the winter. The Taste of West Cove is another event idea to help draw people to the park. Westcove is the largest park which was obtained in the 1990's on a tax sale and is the most underutilized. The boat launch will be redone in the future.

Floating Stone Recreation Park (County of St. Paul operated). Four Town/County employes are responsible for the Parks. Floating Stone, originally a Provincial Park was taken over by the RM with 120 acres in total. There are 65 sites more compact than West Cove with 50 powered and 15 non powered. There are a lot of walking trails onsite, fishing is mostly catch and release except for perch, there is a boat launch, visitors will kayak or paddleboard but there are no rentals. A new Gazebo and new playground have made the site safer for young people. Cultural groups regularly visit for picnics. Large families who are not able to book the group site areas would like to have sites that specifically cater to larger families. The larger sites have some more privacy. Ice fishing shacks can be found on the lake in the winter months. This is rated as one of Alberta's top 10 beaches.



Stony Lake (County of St. Paul operated). Stony Lake is a very picturesque lake that is longer and narrower. It has a beautiful picnic area, gazebo and 40 camping sites. There are 2 docks and a boat launch. As with all lakes in STEP, the water can get blue green algae which makes it unsafe for dogs or for swimming. Stony Lake, and the other lakes in the Lakeland region would benefit from further investigation into techniques to aerate the lake to improve the water quality. This location would be a prime area for teaching paddling sports (providing water quality is safe).



Alberta Farm Days/ Open Farm Day. This event occurs in the middle of August which includes numerous farms and sites to visit. The Province of AB covers insurance for participating farms and sites, for the one event weekend. There is the potential to formalize private farm tours that would operate outside of this one weekend event. Further exploration with an Agri-Tourism strategy would be a good starting point including insurance policy discussions with local Ag Societies. Hobby farmers such as K Cow Ranch, Gloria Yeta's – Flying Rabbit Fruit Farm, Linda Young - U Pick (haskaps on site, café, and pies), Pine Meadow Hutterite Colony are all potential contenders to benefit from a more formalized agritourism initiative. The STEP/RTIC and larger Lakeland area has been identified for an ag food cluster development project. Food Tourism Strategies has and will provide workshops across the region to promote cluster development through Open Farm Days. There is an intention to organize and host a larger Open Farm Days event in the region in 2024.

Alberta Culture Days. The Cultural Days has a platform that is already developed and could be enhanced into an experience – in June or July 2023. Cultural Week could take place with National Indigenous Day on June 21, St. Jean Baptist Day June 24th, a Multicultural Day, and Canada Day. There is a large community of Filipino's, Ukrainian and French and Indigenous cultures in the Community.

Business and Conference Travel. The Town of St. Paul is very organized and coordinated for business and conference travel with the creation of the Conference Ready Community Project. This project provides all the needed information in a databased format, and anyone can visit this one stop shop to organize their next conference or business event. The database needs to be updated and marketing is required for this asset to be fully utilized. St Paul could also undertake an inventory of what larger parent associations are in the region that could host conferences. In addition, this resource can be added to the Travel Lakeland Resource Centre.

Portage College. Portage College is an educational facility with its main campus in Lac La Biche with campuses in St. Paul and Cold Lake, as well as smaller satellite locations in First Nation Communities. Portage College in St. Paul includes a Culinary School with a comprehensive inventory of culinary equipment including a packaging lab, a meat lab, a bakery, a processing unit, and a testing laboratory, and a food analysis lab. There is an event space where a Cook Off event could take place. A new manager for the Facility is working towards community buy in and assisting students in obtaining local practicums. Portage College is also offering the LPN program and has received funding for the Nurse Bridge (immigration focused) program and is also set to run the Bachelor of Nursing program in the future. The hallways at Portage College also showcase some of the art from the St. Paul's Art Walk Tour. Culinary students competed in the EDNA of Trades Competition. There are also a few rooms available for rent for visitors and students. There are also several incubator spaces available to rent at the College for entrepreneurs and new businesses.

The UFO Landing Pad. The UFO Landing pad was built and opened by the 1967 Centennial Commissioner, John Fisher, and Minister of Defense, Paul Hellyer, who flew in by helicopter. It was visited by the Queen in 1978 and Mother Theresa in 1982. Artist Anne Georg has photos of this visit, and a collaboration to commemorate this event in partnership with the St. Paul Museum may be worthwhile exploring. This tourism asset is visited by 100's of people every year and is a Centennial Star



Community project with intergalactic space underneath that explores the notion of aliens as well as universal acceptance. Bobby Gimby sang the Canada song on the landing pad. The St. Paul Chamber of Commerce ran a hotline for UFO sightings and when reports were received, they were typed and forwarded to the National Institute of Discovery (for example May 31, 1995). A record binder that holds reported stories sits in the Visitor Centre. There is a real opportunity to have the whole visitor centre re-imagined and build an experience out of it. The VIC structure itself could be used for books, bicycles, ice cream sales, etc. There are currently six panels used to display information that could be revamped into an interactive storytelling experience.

Mallaig. Mallaig is in the County of St. Paul and is known as a primarily French town. It has a French immersion school, a staging area for Alberta's Iron Horse Trail, the Mallaig Museum, and an old church. The Town has a subdivision with newer homes, a curling rink, and a recreation centre. The Town hosts an annual festival at Cabrini Park with bean bag tourney, antique car show. This would be a good location for a supper in the field with Deb Poulin of Twisted Fork.



Lagasse Park in St Paul. This park is a beautiful community park that follows the shoreline of Upper Therrien Lake. Within the park, a unique Herman Poulin Metal Art exhibit can be moved as one piece or viewed as separate pieces. A Ukrainian Public Art display showcases 121 strands of barbed wire to replicate Holodomor which was the man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 that killed millions of Ukrainians. The park has a boardwalk, splash pad, and Mannawanis Native Friendship Centre comes here annually to conduct a water ceremony. This park has significant tourism potential and would benefit from a master site plan and expansion strategy. The interaction and connectivity of this site to the water and shoreline of Upper Therrien Lake must also be addressed as water treatment processes are upgraded and water quality improves. These improvements will dictate any future waterfront developments in Lagasse Park and along Upper Therrien Lake. Visitors appreciate waterfront developments and access and will only add to the value and appreciation of Lagasse Park.

The St. Paul Skate Park is a bowl style skate park that was initiated by the owners of Bears BMX store owned by the Reid family. It is a \$750,000 project that now remains a beacon of infrastructure for the board and cycle world to practice and show their moves. The skate park is of high quality and has the potential to draw in competitions and demo days. The land adjacent to the skate park has the potential to be developed into a more comprehensive recreation zone and would benefit from some future strategic discussions or planning.



St. Paul Iron Horse Campground. This campground, designed to accommodate the equine crowd, is conveniently located next to St. Paul's Alberta's Iron Horse Trail staging

areas and is adjacent to Willie's Trout Pond. Upon entering the campground, visitors pass through a large metal artistic gate created by Rob Bonnard. It is the host site of the ShiverFest Family Day with wild west skijoring.

The North Area Structure Recreational Zone borders the west property line of the St. Paul Iron Horse Campground and is also a great location for local, regional, and provincial soccer tournaments. The potential for this site to be marketed as a location for larger events and family reunions with individuals looking to camp would be ideal. Reunion Station is a facility on the grounds of the Zone that provides an indoor event venue for shoulder season events and when a commercial kitchen and food prep is required.

Elk Point Campground Recreation Area by the Golf Course (17 power sites) and River Park Campground by Hwy 41 (4 non, 8 powered). These two municipally run campgrounds provide more options for visitors who are looking for sited accommodation. The Recreation Area campground is next door to the Elk Point Golf Course and carries a few more amenities (free showers, flush toilets, baseball diamond, golf course, playground) and the River Park Campground has great views of the North Saskatchewan River. With rates from \$25 to \$35 a night, it is an affordable place to rest.

Glacial Eskers Hiking Trail at Whitney Lakes Provincial Park. For an off the beaten path and true nature hiking experiences, one can find the Glacial Eskers Hiking Trail at the northern part of the Whitney Lakes Provincial Park. This trail is quiet, provides an elevation change, and a stunning view of Borden Lake. Improved signage is required to direct visitors to the proper entrance location. The site could also benefit from additional interpretive signage. Wildlife is abundant in this section of the park, and hikers must be prepared accordingly.

Whitney Lakes Provincial Park.

Whitney Lakes Provincial Park includes Ross, Borden, Laurier, and Whitney Lake. Power boats are allowed on all lakes except Borden Lake. There is a boat launch, tenting sites, a picnic pavilion, and ski trails. The lakes are beautiful and calm, but more activation in this park is needed. Dixie Cottage Lot development is being constructed just outside of the park boundary.



Heinsburg. Heinsburg is a rural community located 45 mins from St. Paul. It is characterized as a beautiful heritage town that features a staging area for Alberta's Iron Horse Trail. Folks may camp at this staging area. The town has an accessible boat launch and river access to the North Saskatchewan River. The town also features a CN Station that is a designated Provincial Historic Site that (could be funded to add decking since the

original decking doesn't meet code) and one of Alberta's oldest wooden water tower on its original site. This is birders dream area as it is along the migratory bath for many birds (Bonnyville Birders).

Fort George and Buckingham House.

This Provincial Historic Site is a space where Northwest and Hudson's Bay Forts existed. There is a tipi exhibition inside the Interpretive Centre that includes 14 poles, tripod, and elk hides. An onsite trail system takes you to the foundations of the fort. The site is quite popular with school groups in May and June and there can be wait lists for schools that want to visit. In the summertime the facility runs themed weekends rather than large events. This well-designed facility allows for modern heritage interpretation of the prior to 1870's era.



Town of Elk Point hosts a Canada Day event annually that draws visitors from the region. There is the potential to expand on this. The town includes residential and industrial development off Hwy 41. Recreation opportunities include walking trails that are in town, the spray park, and the Lions Memorial Park. The local bakery, Golden Loaf, is well known in the region for its products but would benefit from expanded hours of operation to make it more accessible for visitors.

The Elk Point Eco Centre. The Centre is located next to Elk Point's Alberta's Iron Horse Trail staging area. The Eco Centre is leased by the town and sits on North East MuniCorr Ltd. property. It is a strategically placed facility that houses a wind turbine, an elevator, and washrooms. It has the potential to house a tourism business due to its proximity to the above-mentioned staging area. Next to the Eco Centre is a cabin/shack that the Town of Elk Point owns since the local snowmobile club folded. This cabin/shack can be maintained as a warmup shelter in the winter months for snowmobile tourists where visitors can stop and prepare food and drink, warm up and learn about the local amenities and businesses. Visitors are apt to spend monies when they are aware of what the community has to offer and how to access it. Interpretive panels and storyboards would be a nice addition to this site.



100 Foot Elk Point Mural by artist Billie Milholland is a heritage feature in the Town that depicts the local history with real characters. This unique mural is hidden in Town

and not intuitive to come across if you don't know how to look for it. The mural needs repainting and some interpretive panels to assist with local storytelling on site.

Peter Fidler Statue. This statue was created by Herman Poulin and provides an iconic depiction of a local and regional legend. The interpretive sign about the statue requires redoing so that visitors can see the site and understand the story behind this “larger than life” fellow.

The Allied Arts and Leisure Centre. This not-for-profit centre is a wonderful facility that has exceptional space for artistic production and high-quality sound architecture. It is the home of the Elk Point Regional Allied Arts Society who are known for their engaging and sometimes hilarious Christmas and Spring dinner theater experiences. The Society hosts events at the Centre throughout the year such as guest concerts, culinary evenings, supports the Elk Point Community Choir and is working towards the establishment of a Farmers' Market for the Town of Elk Point. The Centre was also the home base for the 2nd Chance Trail ride which brought in visitors from all over the province.

Alberta's Iron Horse Trail. The Alberta's Iron Horse Trail (AIHT) is a 300km trail that has been converted from an old rail bed into a multi-use trail that spans across the County of St. Paul and Elk Point and beyond. The land on which the trail sits is owned by the Northeast MuniCorr Ltd., a not-for-profit company comprised of 3 rural counties and 7 townsites and villages. The AIHT has multiple staging access in different locations that act as the public access points to the trail. There is maintenance required in some sections of the trail, especially east of St. Paul towards Edouardville. The designated users of the trail are hikers, cyclists, snowmobilers, ATV's enthusiasts, and horse riders and waggoneers. Travel Alberta, through the Tourism Development Zones strategic planning, has identified the AIHT staging areas as key priorities for further support and development to drive tourism visitation.

Neighbouring Tourism Assets

Pine Creek Stopping House and Retreat Centre is being developed by Clayton Didea. It is a Provincial Historic Site that is being developed into a high-end retreat in Smoky Lake County near Metis Crossing and the Victoria Settlement. It is not within the STEP region but the clientele staying at this retreat may be a target audience for day trips.

Victoria Settlement Provincial Historic Site.

The Victoria Settlement Provincial Historic Site is within the Victoria District National Historic Site. The McDougall Grave Sites and mission site of 1862 – 1922 was designated the Victoria Settlement Provincial Historic Site. The 1864 original building is still on the original site (it is not tongue and groove). The Kennedy family named Victoria Settlement, but the “Pakan” name was also used. Mr. McDougall recounts over 100 tipis on site in 1874. The Provincial Heritage Site interpreters are extremely knowledgeable and very friendly.

Victoria District National Historic Site (NHS).

The Victoria District NHS is home to the Victoria Park Cemetery with the grave sites of original Metis Families and settlers that lived in the area.

The Settlement district goes west off Hwy 897 and is all gravel and borders the STEP region. The number of tourists that visit this region and its adjacent border to St. Paul make it a place of interest to keep on the radar. The beautiful River Drive leads through the Victoria District and could potentially act as the County of St Paul’s claim to a little piece of the area. Due to its designation, house owners in the district cannot make large exterior changes to their properties and must maintain the tree line. Along Victoria Trail historic sites include an RCMP monument, Anderson House, a Red River Cart, and in the Fall, it is a stunning location to observe the fall foliage.



Smoky Lake. Smoky Lake is a townsite that is located outside of the STEP boundaries but is a regional tourism destination on the road to Métis Crossing. Smoky Lake has an original CN Station that houses a museum and the local tourism information centre. Smoky Lake historically had a ferry crossing by the NWMP landing site and ran from 1892-1972 and was also known as the Pakan Ferry. It is now preserved in town but requires better signage to direct visitors to its location. Some tourism points of interest that are worth noting are the Smoky Lake Hotel with a lounge, wine selection, wine tastings, and singer event venue. Culinary stops in Smoky Lake include Betsie’s Burger Stand, the PharmaChoice who carries Carmen’s Lil’ Cheesecakes, and Just for Licks Small Batch Creamery who creates small batch natural artisan ice cream and incorporates in season fruits such as harvested strawberries available at Serben Farms. Smoky Lake is also a host community for Ukrainian refugees and residents connects with Ukrainian culture and heritage since the town is twinned with a town from the Ukraine. Twelve families from the Ukraine have moved to Smoky Lake in the last two years. Smoky Lake has The Great White North Pumpkin Fair on the first Saturday in October every year. The growers of Alberta and surrounding provinces bring their pumpkins, squash and gourds to the world-famous Smoky Lake Great White North Pumpkin Fair and weigh off. Contestants have

been known to travel over 1000 kilometers to participate in the event. The Fair showcases businesses, dignitaries, car shows, fair and rides, Farmers' Market, and the infamous pumpkin smash with a large crane that carries big pumpkins and drops them on old cars.

Metis Crossing. Metis Crossing has national designation as a historic site for the last 20 years. Their focus is on attracting international travelers which STEP can leverage if they coordinate and collaborate with Metis Crossings' marketing director. Partnership campaigns could entice and encourage visitors to travel further into Alberta's Lakeland. The site consists of a hotel, a conference centre, a gift shop, an RV park, trappers' tents, an outdoor stage area – Homer Place Theatre, river views, a heritage barn, observatory, playground, monument, and sky watching domes. The local icon in the conference centre includes a White Bison harvested from Metis Crossings' herd (old). Upon arrival at the site, it is a bit confusing as to where to check out the site first. Directional signage would assist the visitor with traffic flow and how to navigate the site. Formalized and expanded programming is being expanded onsite, with heritage tours and plant tours being offered currently. Metis Crossing can leverage the unique sites of other tourism assets in the region to extend their visitors time in Lakeland by including a well marketed visitation loop that includes: Waskatenau to St. Paul – 1 night, St Paul to Heinsburg 1-night, and down Hwy 16 to the Edmonton airport.



Vilna, Alberta – is a boom town from the 1920's that still features the boarded sidewalks and boom town facades. It is close to Hwy Garnier Lake Provincial Park. The Vilna Pool Hall celebrated its 100th Anniversary. Samuel May and Company out of Toronto sold it to the Brunswick Company in 1910 but it would have been sold before 1880 or 1890. A group of volunteers hosts a wiener roast as a fundraiser, and it is now owned by the Society. In the fall time there was an informal pool league. The back portion is being renovated with colours used from the 1940's. Mushroom harvesting is also popular in the region. The school House is boarded up and they would like to do something with it.



Situational Analysis – Tourism Asset Inventory Chart

Table sourced: template from Lloyd Fridfinnson Consulting

Tourism Asset	Boulder	Rock	Pebble	Comments/ Improvements	Significant Driver
Nature/Outdoors					
Alberta's Iron Horse Trail (staging areas St Paul, Heinsburg, Elk Point and Mallaig)	X			Staging areas and facilities Surface improvements in some locations Animation – more things to stop and see along the trail. Events – Ultra 100, XC ski event, skate skiing, ski-joring	XXXXXXXXXX (9)
Diamond Back Sturgeons	X			Need more boat launches. Promote at Eco Centre and other strategic locations and partnerships (craft beer and fish)	XXXXXXX (7)
Fishing in the Lakes		X		Regulations – keeping fish. Boat launches, filleting shacks	X (1)
Fishing in Willie's Trout Ponds & Elk Point & District Lions Club Trout Pond and Memorial Park			X	Better signage and access – need more inviting landscape	
West Cove Campground	X			Water levels low More accommodation options such as yurts or cabins Winter destination potential Water attraction Driving range, mini golf, trail head, XC ski events, etc.	XXXXXXX (6)
Floating Stone Campground	X				X
Stony Lake Campground	X				X

Bellevue Lake	X				X
Whitney Lakes Provincial Park	X				XXX (3)
Elk Point Campground Recreation Area (by Golf Course)		X		Develop as winter destination with XC ski trails	
Elk Point Motel & RV Park		X		Oil and gas workers primarily	
Elk Point – Riverview Campground		X		Not well used or promoted	XXXX (4)
St Paul Beach (Vincent Lake)		X		Long term project to rejuvenate beach area, better lake access	
Lagasse Park – St Paul		X		Needs promotion and lake access	
Lakeland Ski Club and Trails		X		Great potential particularly with West Cove	XXXXXX (6)
Esker Trails- Whitney Lakes PP			X	Promotion and signage required.	
Foraging (saskatoons, mushrooms)			X		XX (2)
Arts, Culture and Heritage					
Stuart Steinhauer Sculptures	X				XXXXXX (3)
UFO Landing Pad	X				XXXX (4)
Family Reunions			X		X
Hay'in in the 30's	X				XXXXXXXXXX (9)
Heinsburg – Train Station and Water tower		X			X (1)
Victoria District Provincial Historic Site & Settlement	X				XXXXX (5)
St. Paul Museum and People's Museum		X			XXXXX (5)
Mallaig Museum			X		
Fort George & Buckingham House	X				XXXX (4)
Authentic Cultural Education Experience, UNBQ	X				XXXX (4)
Water Spirit Spa and Retreat		X			XXX (3)
St. Paul Art Walk			X		

ACFA- Jazz Art and Maple Sugar Shack			X		
Saddle Lake Pow Wow As well as Frog Lake Pow Wow, Good Fish Pow Wow and Kehwin Pow Wow	X				XXXXX (5)
St Paul and District Arts Foundation- Nutcracker, space, events, and Art Show		X			XXXXX (5)
Sew Heavenly Quilting Shop			X		X (1)
K Cow Ranch			X		
Alberta Culture Days			X		X (1)
Econo Musee's/Artisans at Work	X				XXXXXXXXX (8)
Sport, Competition, Events, Demonstration, Niche Tourism					
Elk Point Canada Day		X		Promote more	
St Paul Skate Park, Splash Pad, Canada Day		X		Skate park is well utilized and a real asset	
The Landing Hotel and Conference Centre		X		Nice size conference room and friendly staff	XX (2)
Mann Lake Golf Course			X	Unique and cute course to cater to those who want to have fun	X
Centrefield Music Festival	X			Hope it runs again	XXX (3)
St Paul Golf Course		X			
Elk Point Golf Course		X			
St Paul Sport Infrastructure (soccer pitches)		X		Nice soccer pitches and great location	
Lakeland High School Rodeo		X			XX (2)
LRA Finals and BULL-A-RAMA	X				XXXXXXXXX (7)
Critter Market (St Paul, Ashmount)			X	Weird and wacky, good attraction	

Ski-joring (wild west and dogs)			X	So much potential to expand this	
Iron Horse Ultra Marathon & Ultra mini		X		Support promotion of this growing event	XXXX (4)
Portage College Conference Events			X		
Alberta Open Farm Days			X	Connecting people to farms, safe for customers	XX (2)
Allied Arts and Leisure Centre Theatre Event		X		Has a lot of potential	
Elk Point Eco Centre			X	Currently closed but has potential	
Reunion Station			X		
100 Foot Billie McHolland Mural			X	Needs repainting	
Pete Fiddler Statue – Elk Point		X		Interpretive signage needs redoing	
Medical Tourism			X		
St Paul Municipal and Elk Point Municipal Rural Airports		X		Signage to highlight the sites would be helpful	
2 nd Chance Trail Ride	X				XXX (3)
Culinary Tourism					
Lakeland Brewing Company		X		No growth potential, doesn't want too	
Twisted Fork Culinary Experience	X			Marketing to more touch points	XXXXXXXXXX (9)
Pine Meadow Hutterite Colony and Store		X		Lots of questions, re touris intent	
The Golden Loaf Bakery		X		Hours of operation are limited	XX (2)
Shopping /Dining					
Tin Cup Restaurant		X		Better connections to golfers for food options	
Donair and Pizza Place			X	They are very accommodating	
Warehouse Sports		X		More marketing – does he want to expand?	X
Sat and Wed Farmer's Market			X	Needs more collaboration with local and branding it	X

Bears BMX- St. Paul			X	Lots of potential	
Wally's Pub – Elk Point			X	Somewhere to go	
Crowbar Boutique- St Paul		X		Has potential	
The Nest Café and Boutique- St Paul		X		Potential to grow with more marketing	
West Cove Treasures – Vincent Lakes			X		
Owlseye Greenhouse and Gardens			X	Opportunity for trial farmers market/unique	XXXX (4)
Happy House Healthy Foods and Supplements			X	Has potential	
Knotty Boyz Embroidery and Giftware			X		
Linda's Yarn and More- St. Paul					
Mel's Cookies					
Wine Knows					
Backcountry Farmhouse Coffee		X		Has potential with more marketing	
GEMS (storytellers, artists, artisans, skilled trades, talents)					
Margo Lagasse					
Herman Poulin					XXX (3)
Stephen Yettaw					XX (2)
Stuart Steinhauer					XXX (3)
Eric Spoeth					XXX (3)
Curling Rick					
Bordering Assets					
Vilna Pool Hall	X			Vilna Boontown Days	X
Victoria Settlement Provincial Historic Site and District	X				X
Metis Crossing Hotel, Heritage Site, and Conference Centre	X			Mature site with lots to offer, potential to connect to their visitors	XXXXXXXX (7)
Smoky Lake Pumpkin Smash and Betsie's Burger		X			XX (2)
Smoky Lake Hotel Events		X			
Pine Creek Stopping House and Retreat Centre			X		

Cold Lake Air Show	X				XXX (3)
Comfort Camping Tipis at Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park		X			XX (2)
Kalyna Country Ecomuseum		X			

During the Tourism Strategy session, the participants identified the STEP/RTIC region's boulders as:

- Alberta's Iron Horse Trail (9 points)
- EconoMusée's (8 points)
- Hayin' in the 30's (9 points)
- Twisted Fork Culinary Experience (9 points)
- Diamond Back Sturgeon Adventures (7 points)
- Lakeland Rodeo Association Finals and BULL-A-RAMA (7 points)
- Metis Crossing (7 points)
- Stuart Steinhauer Sculptures (6 points)
- Municipal Campgrounds – Westcove (6 points) and Elk Point River Campground (4 points)
- Victoria District Provincial Heritage Site and Victoria District Settlement (5 points)
- Saddle Lake Pow Wow (5 points)
- UFO Landing Pad (4 points)
- UNBQ Cultural Education Experience (4 points)
- 2nd Chance Trail Ride (3 points)
- Centrefield Music Festival (3 points)

Situational Analysis – Uniqueness Lens

Table Source: Template sourced Lloyd Fridfinnson Consulting

STEP Alliance is /has the best...	<p>Alberta's Iron Horse Trail – multi-use trail that can be used for passive outdoor recreation opportunities (hiking, cycling, quadding, XC skiing, snowmobiling, etc.)</p> <p>Pro-active, community spirit, leadership, hardworking and resilient, friendly people</p> <p>Strong Heritage (St. Paul Museum, Fort George Buckingham House, and Victoria</p>	
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	<p>Settlement Provincial Historic Site and Settlement District)</p> <p>Multiculturalism</p> <p>Trout Ponds for Fishing</p> <p>Concentration of Recreation Infrastructure to host Regional/ Provincial/National tournaments.</p>	
STEP Region has the most...	<p>Proximity and variety of lakes within an hour's drive</p> <p>Natural beauty (rolling hills, glacial eskers, lakes)/curvy roads.</p> <p>Amount & spacious campground sites that are affordable and available.</p> <p>Staging areas and access to AIHT – longest part of the AIHT with no road access – providing a remote experience.</p> <p>Connection to the Carlton Trail – as a settlement story.</p> <p>Most concentration of EconoMusee's in Alberta.</p> <p>Most concentration of Herman Poulin's and Stewart Steinhauer's work in Alberta.</p>	
STEP Region has the first...	<p>Arts & Culture Strategy in the Region (public art, arts walk, St Paul and District Arts Foundation, Allied Arts & Leisure Centre, etc.)</p> <p>Winter Tourism Strategy in the Region (skiing at West Cove and Golf Courses, ice fishing, snowmobiling, skating, snowshoeing, Shiverfest, wild west ski-joring, dogsledding etc.)</p>	
STEP Region has the only....	UFO Landing Pad	

	<p>Home to the largest concentration of Stuart Steinhauer Sculptures.</p> <p>LRA Lakeland Rodeo FINAL Weekend</p> <p>Centrefield Musical Festival Event.</p> <p>Hayin in the 30's Event</p>	
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KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS WITH SWOT ANALYSIS

A key stakeholder interview script was drafted to guide the discussion and questions of tourism with residents. Questions regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) for tourism in the STEP region was also asked to gain information and localized perspectives. The questions were focused on allowing residents and stakeholders to provide input about their favourite assets as well as offer feedback for tourism items that require further planning and development. A total of 23 respondents from a cross section of residents who have been part of the community and region from 3 to 41 years contributed.

Internal Influences: Strengths and Weaknesses

Acknowledging the strengths weaknesses, opportunities and threats in a tourism region is beneficial to understand what factors are contributing to or hindering the planning and growth of a region. Planning and development of the region is only successful when everyone is privy to these factors and what influences the region internally as well as externally. Some items are within the control of the region, but many are not, and acknowledging them allows for opportunities to analyze them and come up with solutions that may otherwise not have been considered. For the STEP region, this understanding will help drive its efforts to establish a region that visitors want to come back too.

For the purposes of this strategy, strengths refer to the characteristics that give the Region an advantage over other regions, characteristics that help make this region as welcoming and diverse as it is. The weaknesses refer to the disadvantages or downsides of the region that need further exploration or development. Strengths and weaknesses can be both physical, relational, or intangible in nature. Strengths and weaknesses can also vary in severity in comparison to other areas. Establishing a realistic baseline to characterize the region with strengths and weaknesses is valuable for when approaching next steps.

Stakeholders identified the following internal characteristics that make up the STEP Region:

Strengths

Nature/Outdoors

- Iron Horse Trail (4)
- Fishing for Sturgeon
- Fishing in the Lakes
- Fishing Trout Ponds (2)
- Great assortment of campground options (3)
- Great number of lakes (3)
- Natural landscape – rolling hills and trees.
- X Country skiing- Lakeland Ski Club,
- Foraging (saskatoons, mushrooms)

Heritage

- Family reunions
- Hayin' in the 30's
- Vilna Pool Hall

Sport, Competition and Demonstration Tourism

- Our sports tournaments (3)
- Sports infrastructure (ball diamonds and soccer fields, curling rink) (3)
- Golf Course (2)
- Annual Lakeland Rodeo (2)
- Ski-joring (wild west and dogs) (2)

Arts & Culture

- Established St. Paul and District Arts Foundation
- French association brings in amazing shows and events.
- Saddle Lake Pow Wow
- Diversity of cultures in the region
- St. Paul's Arts and Culture Walk
- Public Art in the STEP Region

Shopping & Dining

- Good hotels in St. Paul
- Twisted Fork
- Tin Cup Restaurant
- Donair and Pizza Place
- Warehouse Sports – strong support for the community events and activities
- Saturday and Wednesday's Farmers Market (St. Paul)
- Happy House
- Warehouse Sports
- Bears BMX – skateboard park, bikes,
- Sew Heavenly - uses one half of the store for retail and the other side for workshops.

- Elk Point Bakery,
- Wally's Pub
- Mallaig Liquor Store
- Crow Bar Boutique - clothing retail, local artists, knitted goods, west cove, treasures florals.
- The Nest – Coffee shop baby goods upstairs space
- West Cove Treasures - at Vincent Lakes
- Pine Meadows Store – sausage, eggs, preserves,
- Owlseye Greenhouse (15 mins) incredible potential - along the Iron Horse Trail
- Elk Point Greenhouse
- Knotty Boys – Rainelle
- Linda's Yarns
- Online businesses
- Mel's cookies,
- Wine Knows
- Backcountry Farmhouse Coffee

People

- Great EDO
- Lakeland DMO staff
- Howard Krekoski & Ross Krekoski (sustainable micro-cabins)
- Linda Young (artist and dancer Singapore) off grid, sustainability
- Wayne and Wendy Krekoski – chief track setter, farmer, wild rice

Location

- Central Location in region
- Central to Edmonton and Lloydminster and Cold Lake

Strengths Commentary:

- *“With the variety of amenities in the region – we have a lot to offer and need to promote it more”.*

Weaknesses

- Blue green algae in the water
- People focus on big box shopping.
- Disparity in promoting the different campgrounds and lakes in the Region.
- Challenge of getting volunteers for events and to be on boards of directors (Iron Horse Ultra, Museum, 4H, Lakeland Ski Club etc.)

- Challenge of promoting events with resource at hand
- Lack of connectivity and information for tourists coming in versus what the community has to offer.
- Accessing capital to expand business ventures and operations.
- Working with regulating authorities such as Alberta Health, Alberta Parks, etc.
- Muriel Lake – MD with St Paul the trail head cabin always gets broken into
- Finding volunteer time to train seasonal staff.
- Ski Club – lack of a strategic plan
- Lack of or poor signage on trails
- Slow admissions to museum during Rodeo Weekend
- People working in Silo's.
- A shift in attitude is required.... tourism can be a good thing for everyone. Trying to get people to invest in tourism in the region.
- The County is under tight budgets. There is a lot of capital that needs replacing, purchasing of new capital is required and granting opportunities are becoming less and less.
- Staff at the DMO's are working their hardest but they are short-staffed.
- Maintain a balance of budgets with services for residents versus infrastructure or projects for tourists.
- Funding is becoming more restrictive.
- It is a challenge to modernize and stay with the times – people think individually and not necessarily regionally.
- Motels are grimy and there is no curb appeal in town – it is a utilitarian town and lacking the Catch.

Weakness Commentary:

- “We say lakes are the top asset but the health of our lakes and fisheries is in a tough state”.
- “We lack diversity in unique accommodation”.

Strengths and weaknesses can sometimes be seen from both perspectives. Where one sees a positive there can often be a negative if the positive characteristic is not managed or development properly. The importance of establishing a baseline understanding of how the STEP tourism region is characterized is that it brings everyone around the table to the same understanding, at the same time. This exercise can help mitigate any future negative impacts with proper research and planning. For example, a weakness such as lack of proper wayfinding signage can be mitigated with an updated wayfinding signage strategy and installation.

The diversity of the STEP region for its natural and cultural landscape lends to a strong ability to cater to target markets to diversify the visitor economy. The lack of wayfinding signage, lack of accommodation diversification, volunteer burnout and decreased funding can be mitigated with proper research, planning and future investment.

External Influences: Opportunities and Threats

External factors that influence the STEP Region can be categorized into opportunities and threats. Opportunities are factors that can be leveraged to attract more tourists, encourage visitors to spend more time, lengthen their initial stay, and provide more opportunities for revenue generation by enhance existing tourism experiences. Threats are factors that can be environmental, financial, ecological, political, or social in nature that the STEP tourism region has no direct control over.

Stakeholders identified the following external characteristics affecting the STEP Tourism region:

Opportunities

- People coming on a Sunday evening there is no place to eat aside from fast food.
- Deb does a great job but room in the area for another local restaurant.
- Create a place where ebikes and fat bikes can be rented in St. Paul
- Develop dog sledding demo day with Elk Point resident Val Goulet
- Host Indigenous games in the region - partner with First Nations.
- Create grazing reserves and host education workshops with folks with the knowledge for berry picking, hunting, mushroom picking, etc. Alberta Fish and Game lands are there just need to know where to go.
- Promote the region as a snowmobile destination.
- Increase promotion of our natural beauty, history, and crazy amount of events

- Explore tourism business opportunities with Frog Lake First Nation and Elk Point.
- Expand Multicultural Event with Ukrainian culture, Chinese Culture, Irish, French, Filipino, First Nations at the Elk Point Canada Day celebration showcasing cultural dance and food.
- Develop a Rain Day Campaign for campers and cottagers.
- Explore more agritourism experiences.
- Support the development of more B & B's
- Participate in recreation for reconciliation with skiing. Pierre Lamoureux Pierre connected with First Nations – Moosekwa – Jaime Fugere at Saddle Lake School out to Moosekwa - Talking to Elders and doing Ceremony.
- Use the Iron Horse Trail as a stage to create an Indigenous Storytelling Tour to share all about the history of the area and where the Indigenous culture, cuisine and communities are – pair it with cycling tour.
- Utilize the Lions Park in St. Paul's for more seasonal programming such as food trucks, or music concerts.
- Promote Public Art projects that are running in the community and paint nights.
- Coordinate a rental location for fat bikes, e bikes, skis, skidoos, etc. close to the Iron Horse Trail.
- Promote the regions campgrounds and trails to rubber tire traffic.
- Keep marketing the Iron Horse Trail for the asset that it is – include the proximity to all services needed and required when doing trail tourism including that there are staging areas where you can directly connect to the trail. Ex: South ASP – commercial shop for quads motor bikes x county skiers.
- Create camp, play, and golf packages.
- Finish the walking trail in the Town of St Paul and rent bikes for the trail.
- Clean up the lake in town and rent kayaks on Upper Therrien Lake.
- Cross promote the museums and historic sites in the STEP Region in partnership with t libraries, cultural groups, Pete Fidler ancestors, etc.
- Connect canoeists and the paddling community to the Fort George and Buckingham House Museum.

- Create more fishing derbies.
- Enhance ski trails with more signage at the St. Paul Golf Course.
- Extend the ski trails at the Elk Point Golf Course – utilizing Lakeland equipment, create satellite club,
- Coordinate a Day Bus Trip with the Cold Lake Maple Flag event – training games and visitors are coming from different countries and potential for many tourists in the area.
- Create LOOPED itineraries that make it easy for visitors to visualize a visit to Metis Crossing, into the STEP Region, and Hideaway Campground etc.....
- Cross Promote the Onion Lake and Saddle Lake Pow Wows
- Create a partnership with Arbo Ranching to provide visitors with information about the STEP Region – create custom packages based on their clientele.
- Create visit packages or coupons for cross promotion between the Lakeland Brewing Company (and other restaurants) and the UFO Landing Pad.
- Support the amelioration of Mann lakes with improved oxygen initiatives, and aeration.
- Host a Hunter Safety Education Course and Environmental Education Courses for eco tourists with the St Paul Fish and Game Association.
- Host Learn to Ice Fish for a day with schools and St Paul Game and Fish Association.
- Improved interpretive signage on Alberta Fish and Game Conservation land (where the trails are, wayfinding, appropriate activities, nature-based information etc.).

Threats

- Increased cost of living and fuel
- Inflation
- Oil industry is changing and that will affect our economy.
- Our assets are not visitor ready – lack of access and hours of operation.
- Lack of public washrooms

The STEP region will need to be flexible to address opportunities and threats. The biggest threats can only be addressed when there is recognition of the real challenges and advocacy and planning with multiple partners is undertaken. Trying to tackle threats in a silo leads to depleted resources and burnt-out staff. Through education and training, marketing initiatives can grow and expand, and local knowledge of the value and benefits of tourism can be heightened.

The RTIC is a focused and dedicated team that has the support of other regional DMO's such as Alberta's Lakeland, and Travel Alberta and sister organizations like Lac La Biche Economic Development, Cold Lake Economic Development and Smoky Lake Regional Community Development Committee, Victoria Settlement Economic Development and Community Futures organizations.

Threats can be addressed with thoughtful planning, care, and investment. High inflation rates may be addressed with discount partnership packages, and lack of certain amenities can be addressed by enhancing business operations of those willing to participate. Tourism experiences can be created by training businesses who wish to expand their operations or market audience but require time to do so. Tourism experiences do not develop in a short time span, it is a longer process for authentic and meaningful tourism experiences to be visitor ready.

Chapter 4: Vision and Mission Statements

VISION STATEMENT

RTIC's Vision Statement is *“As a centralized service HUB to Alberta's Lakeland, STEP is a welcoming visitor destination where you can experience the natural landscapes of numerous lakes and rolling hills, accessible arts and culture, and a vibrant recreational scene that draws families and friends, and visitors alike. With so much to do all year long, visitors can't wait to return to create favourite memories in the heart of Alberta's Lakeland.”*

MISSION STATEMENT

RTIC's mission statement reads *“RTIC promotes tourism opportunities to encourage visitation, empowers residents to share their heritage and stories, and collaborates with organizations and entrepreneurs to create connections to expand tourism experiences and grow the visitor economy in Alberta's Lakeland.”*

VALUES

RTIC wishes to follow these values throughout their strategic and operational work:

Collaboration – RTIC will work on a regional perspective to improve tourism in the region, viewing tourism development as a part of business development.

Welcoming – RTIC will strive to work with all partners in a welcoming and responsible manner, will provide welcoming spaces and places for visitors to gather, enjoy and celebrate the diverse heritage found here.

Leadership/Accountability - RTIC will spearhead tourism initiatives in STEP by committing time and effort that showcases the Lakeland brand and creates opportunities for residents and business to participate in and appreciate tourism.

Innovative – RTIC will champion tourism research, planning and development and encourage others to think about tourism as an opportunity for connection, transformation, education, appreciation, growth, and a catalyst to turn visitors' moments into lasting memories.

Chapter 5: Strategic Plan Results

The strategic planning session was held on June 19th, 2023, at Reunion Station in St. Paul, Alberta with key leaders and participants invited from the community to represent tourism. The first part of the session included a short presentation on some industry data, and the research findings to date. The participants were then asked to complete the tourism asset chart, the uniqueness chart, and expand on the draft goals and objectives presented. Following this exercise, participants did a dotmocracy exercise to help identify their lead tourism drivers. The final exercise included a prioritization matrix whereby participants, based on their perceptions, identified if the objectives were high effort, high value tasks, high effort low value tasks, low effort high value tasks or low effort and low value tasks. This prioritization matrix also helps identify which objectives and strategies should be considered short-, medium- or long-term tasks.

Participants were engaged throughout the session and summarized the session as informative. Many were overwhelmed with the diversity of opportunities in STEP and Lakeland. Many tourism assets discussed were market and visitor ready, while others require significant organization and investment. The direction of tourism development in STEP is very positive and bright. Since the beginning of this consultation phase and report, three other tourism focused strategies have been identified, funded and are underway (Arts and Culture Strategy, Winter Destination Strategy, and an E-Bike Network Plan). The end of the strategy session confirmed the five main draft pillars that were identified, with goals and objectives drafted subsequently underneath to support the established pillars. They are listed below.

GOAL #1: PRODUCT & DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Objective #1.1: Identify and define trail development in the Region by undertaking a Master Trails Plan Strategy (Spring Summer 2023) (4 points)

- Undertake a Master Trails Strategy for the STEP region to identify key trail development initiatives. Talk with landowners, Town and County, experts in equestrian trails, hiking, cycling, and e-biking. Explore connecting the eastern portion of the County to the western Portion.
- Review case studies of other trail networks and integrate the Master Trails Strategy with the Iron Horse Trail Strategy. Consult the Bonnyville and Cold Lake Municipal Trail Strategy, the Victoria Settlement Trail Strategy for Cold Lake and note the St Paul to Elk Point – MuniCorp 10-year trail strategy.
- Engage existing user groups who are already doing trails-based events such as the Iron Horse Ultra, and the 2nd Chance Trail Ride for organ and tissue donation, and the Trail Runners Association.

- Create a map of existing trails/ seasonal trails/ for summer hiking, winter walking and snowmobiling.
- Continue to look for funding to support more trail development.
- Build upon current successes with Alberta’s Iron Horse Trail.
- **Case Study:** https://manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/proactive/20222023/mb-trails-strategy-what-we-heard.pdf
- **Case Study: Cold Lake Intermunicipal Trails Strategy:**
<https://coldlake.com/en/play/intermunicipal-trails-master-plan.aspx>
- **Resource:** Trans Canada Trail granting with Destination Canada:
<https://www.destinationcanada.com/en/news/destination-canada-and-trans-canada-trail-form-new-partnership>
- **Resource:** Winter Cities Institute:
<https://www.facebook.com/WinterCitiesInstitute/>

Objective #1.2: Diversify the accommodation units available in St. Paul, County of St. Paul, and Elk Point for visitors to increase the number of overnight stays (2 points):

- Research and create an Accommodations Strategy with special focus on utilizing and enhancing municipal campgrounds.
- Priority project: establish a business plan for creating unique accommodations specifically at West Cove Municipal Campground to compliment the existing trail infrastructure and future developments. Based on data from the Canadian Camping and RV Council’s Economic Impact Report 2015 – there were the following campgrounds in Canada including Alberta:
 - 2347 Private campgrounds in Canada and 132 in Alberta,
 - 907 Provincial Campgrounds in Canada and 257 in Alberta
 - 505 Municipal Campgrounds in Canada and 215 in Alberta
 - 354 NFP Campgrounds (66 AB), and (13 MB)
 - 119 Federal Campgrounds (28 AB), and (5 MB)

Total of 4,231 campgrounds
 Total of 423,283 campsites
 Seasonal: 193, 343
 Overnight: 228,878

- **Number of Other types of Lodges in Canada and Alberta**
- 7851 Cottages in Canada and 381 in Alberta
- **339 Yurts in Canada and 12 in Alberta**
- 2446 Ready to Camp in Canada and 117 in Alberta

- Total 10 636 in Canada and 510 in Alberta
- **Case Study:** Comfort Camping Sir Winston Churchill Lake, Lac la Biche
<https://www.albertaparks.ca/parks/north/sir-winston-churchill-pp/>
- **Case Study:** Northgate Trails Micro Cabins: <https://northgatetrails.com/plan-your-trip/accommodations>
- **Case Study:** Turtle Mountain Adventure Huts: <https://www.adventurehuts.ca/>
- **Resource:** The Economic Planning Group of Canada. 2005. A Guide to Starting and Operating a Campground in Nova Scotia.
https://tourismns.ca/sites/default/files/page_documents/campground_guide.pdf
- **Resource:** The Praxis Group. 2009. Recreational vehicle camping in Alberta: A Demand and Supply Side Perspective. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/4de40dcb-6674-4cfa-beaa-e804fe8fcb6f/resource/f6908d1a-528a-47d6-a7f2-fe55d539d9cd/download/2009-recreational-vehicle-camping-in-alberta-demand-and-supply-side-perspective-march-2009.pdf>
- **Resource:** Canadian Camping and RV Council (2015). Economic Impact and trend Analysis of the Canadian Camping Industry.
https://www.campingquebec.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Impacts_economiques_CCCVR_2014_complet_ANG.pdf
- **Resource:** <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-forestry-parks-mandate-letter-1.6918653>
- **Resource:** https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/new-alberta-parks-ministry-to-focus-on-tourism-and-opening-new-campgrounds/article_cff58ff5-4ae7-5d33-8392-8812399fcff4.html?#:~:text=Save-EDMONTON%20%2D%20The%20head%20of%20the%20new%20provincial%20ministry%20that%20oversees,Premier%20Danielle%20Smith%20on%20Tuesday.

Objective #1.3: Support the enhancement and activation of municipally owned campgrounds to increase visitation and delivery of revenue generating programming (2 points):

- Continue to prioritize water access and boat launch repairs at municipally owned boat launches.
- Support the establishment of summer and winter activities in the municipal campgrounds and park such as more cross-country ski events, rental options such as kayaks, stand up paddleboards, and canoes, and themed events such as Food Truck Friday's, Wine, and Beer Festivals, etc.

- Optimize rental opportunities at municipal campgrounds for picnicking, corporate events, and family reunions.
- **Case Study:** Lac La Biche Tourism Strategy:
<https://www.laclabichedcounty.com/Home/DownloadDocument?docId=74d448de-dea6-4269-aa81-78d3b9a3c119>
- **Resource: Four Inspiring Examples of Innovative Programs in Rec and Parks:** <https://www.civicplus.com/blog/pr/innovative-parks-and-rec-programs>
- **Resource:** Best Practices in Inclusive Camping:
<https://www.acacamps.org/article/camping-magazine/best-practices-inclusive-camping-roundtable-discussion-programming>
- **Investing Whitney Lakes Provincial Parks is a Travel Alberta TDZ recommendation.**

Objective #1.4: Create an Arts & Culture Strategy for the STEP Region to promote existing arts and tourism infrastructure and make STEP the HUB for Arts and Culture in Alberta's Lakeland (3 points):

- Create a committee to launch and supervise an art and culture strategy for the STEP region with tourism at the forefront.
- Find a host to create a bookable Arts & Cultural guided tour that is branded for the region showcasing many of the arts and culture assets – using the St Paul's Arts and Heritage walk as a base, with permission from the CF office.
- Develop a marketing and promotional campaign for the concentration of EconoMusee's (along Alberta's Iron Horse Trail) once they are established.
- **Case Study:** Barn Quilts Trail, Ontario: <https://barnquilttrails.ca/>
- **Case Study:** Wave Art Tour <https://www.watchthewave.ca/>
- **Case Study:** Thompson FabLab helps Northerners explore creative potential:
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/thompson-fab-lab-north-forge-1.6621149>
- **Case Study and Resource:** Pierrette Sherwood, Dawson Trail Treasures
<https://dawsontrailtreasures.ca/>

Objective #1.5: Develop a 3 X 3 Cultural & County Campaign which includes small cultural circuits (art, dance, food, music, heritage etc.) to educate and showcase the rich cultural landscape of the STEP region to elevate education of visitors and market to three urban centres (Lloydminster, Edmonton, and Calgary) – launch in partnership with Cultural Days Event (15 points):

- Partner with CDEA and AFSP for French Cultural Tours
- Partner with Ukrainian cultural group to promote the Ukrainian exhibit in the St. Paul Museum, Ukrainian public art in Lagasse Park and Ukrainian cuisine.
- Create a Multigenerational Tour with St. Paul Museum, Mallaig Museum, Glendon Perogy and Perogy on a Form, Hayin' in the 30's and local passive town assets such as aquatic centre, parks, and food.
- **Case Study:** Folklorama: <https://folklorama.ca/>
- **Resource:** <https://bucketlistjourney.net/create-the-perfect-travel-itinerary/>
- **Resource:** <https://www.canva.com/planners/templates/itinerary/>
- **Resource:** <https://www.endurancewarranty.com/learning-center/travel/united-states-best-rest-stops/>

Objective #1.6: Create a e-bike cycling tour with a network of e-bikes/e-scooters utilizing the Alberta's Iron Horse Trail as the stage (2 points).

- Develop an E-Bike Network pilot project between Elk Point and St. Paul that can be expanded across the entire Alberta's Iron Horse Trail.
- Locate and path find the project with an entrepreneur or as a municipal pilot project for rental system for ebikes and escooters.
- Coordinate and establish e-bike rentals with prominent locations such as Fort George Buckingham House and Lakeland Brewing Company.
- **Resource:** <https://escapebicycletours.ca/>
- **Resource:** Electric Scooter Program Framework Calgary: <file:///C:/Users/lesle/Downloads/electric-scooter-program-framework-appendices.pdf>
- **Resource:** Zapped: E and eAssist Micromobility in Alberta. A Resource Compilation for Recreation and Transportation Managers, Jeff Gruttz [jgruttz\(at\)shaw.ca](mailto:jgruttz(at)shaw.ca)

Objective #1.7: Partner with the St. Paul Fish and Game Association to host events to utilize local trout ponds in St. Paul and Elk Point (1 point).

- Market the trout ponds to visitors who are attending sport tournaments, competitive events, and rodeo days.
- Host learn to fish events days for youth, female anglers specifically, and trout pond derbies.
- Host gear days in partnership with Warehouse Sports to test gear, learn about gear, and accommodate weather testing.
- Utilize fishing enthusiasts, and retired biologists, to provide story telling, and natural interpretation of the fishing industry in the NE.
- **Contact:** St. Paul Fish and Game Association <https://stpaulfishandgame.ca/>
- **Contact:** CPAWS: Canadian Parks and Wilderness Alberta Chapter – hosting events, Program Coordinator Riley, <https://cpawsemb.org/>

Objective #1.8 Expand and Create a Cultural Education Experience in partnership with University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'i nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills.

- Secure funds to hire a tourism consultant to engage with UNBQ to curate a Cultural Camp Experience that educates visitors about Indigenous culture, skills, the place of ceremony and sacredness, and local storytelling.
- Communicate and collaborate with Indigenous Tourism Alberta and Travel Alberta, and Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada.
- **Case Study: Brandon Riverbank Audio Tours:**
<https://www.brandonsun.com/westman-this-week/2023/07/13/riverbank-audio-tours-to-highlight-indigenous-history-of-brandon>
- **Case study of Regional Partnership Network (SK):**
<https://www.westsidetourism.ca/>
- **Resource Article:** Alberta's Indigenous-Led Tourism Experiences are Among 'National Geographic's' Top 2023 Travel Destinations:
<https://www.slice.ca/albertas-indigenous-led-tourism-experiences-are-among-national-geographics-top-2023-travel-destinations/>
- **Resource Article:** <https://www.msn.com/en-us/travel/tripideas/your-complete-guide-to-indigenous-travel/ar-AA1dbP2R>
- **Resource: Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada**
<https://indigenoustourism.ca/>

- **Resource: Woodland Cultural Centre:**
<https://woodlandculturalcentre.ca/experience-woodland>
- **Resource: National Indigenous Residential School Museum of Canada:**
<https://nirmsmuseum.ca/>

Objective #1.9: Support and promote Rodeo Culture in the region and curate accessible tourism experiences to increase revenue generated programming (1 point):

- Communicate with the St. Paul Ag Society, the Lakeland Rodeo Committee to identify a Rodeo Ambassador to organize and host an Intro to Rodeo, a Backstage Rodeo Pass, A Roper's Pass, or How to be a Cowboy/Cowgirl for a Day to capture and engage family members and spectators and regional visitors in the Rodeo Circuit weekends. Visitors learn the different skills and aspects of what it means to "Rodeo" in an up front close and personal experience.
- Engage with regional partners to cross promote ALL rodeo & western themed events (any horse events) to raise awareness and promote rodeo information on ONE platform.
- Encourage Rodeo culture themed initiatives during Rode events such as costume parades, themed menus, themed fundraisers, themed art exhibits, themed events at the Museum etc.
- Partner and promote existing Ranch Experiences as part of the Rodeo Program.
- **Resource:** <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/unleash-your-inner-cowboy-on-these-dude-ranch-vacations-180979713/>
- **Resource:** <https://landwithoutlimits.com/stories/experience-cowboy-culture-cariboo-chilcotin-coast/>
- **Resource:** <https://tejasrodeo.com/>

Objective #1.10: Develop a Winter Tourism Strategy that includes winter tourism experiences, promotes existing winter events, and expands winter tourism offerings (7 points):

- Research and connect with the Winter Cities Shakeup Program schedules to review iconic ideas for Winter Tourism (themed ice huts for trail skating, Winter Geodome glamping, Ice Fishing Derbies, x country skiing and adventure hut, etc.)
- Curate a heightened and accessible winter tourism experience at an existing event (such as wild west skijoring or dogsledding) in conjunction with Shiverfest that encourages visitors to pay for, and try, a new experience.

- Undertake a recreation for reconciliation event with cross-country skiing as the activity (Pierre and Jason Fugere with the Lakeland Ski Club for equipment).
- Partner with Frog Lake First Nation and Onion Lake First Nation to coordinate cross promotion of snowmobiling opportunities and races.
- Support Lakeland Ski Club with a lengthened user agreement at West Cove Campground, track trails with upgraded machinery, and promote winter accommodations as part of the Accommodation Strategy.
- Expand on making West Cove Municipal Campground a winter destination with additional snowshoe trails, winterized accommodation options, skating trails and oval.
- Collaborate with Lakeland Ski Club to support a grant application to purchase a fleet of skis for rental opportunities.
- Cross promote STEP winter activities with regional winter tourism assets such as Long Lake Ski Hill – Boyle, Kinasoo Ridge Resort, Bonneville Nordic Ski Club.
- Coordinate and support school ice fishing programs with Darryl Ltaski
- **Case Study:** Winteruption in Saskatoon: <https://winterruptionyxe.ca/>
- **Winter Cities Shake Up:** <https://wintercities2023.com/>
- **Case Study:** Top 20 Places to Spend Christmas in Canada: <https://www.readersdigest.ca/travel/canada/canadas-10-most-festive-christmas-cities-old/>.
- **Case Study:** Selkirk, MB- Holiday Alley: <https://holidayalley.ca/>
- **Resource:** Winter and Shoulder Season Tourism Strategy Development Pilots: <https://ecehub.tiac-aitc.ca/en/resource/winter-and-shoulder-season-tourism-strategy-development-pilots/>

Objective #1.11: Partner with Alberta’s Lakeland DMO Agritourism Strategy as a launch point for developing a culinary tourism strategy for the STEP Alliance (5 points):

- Conduct an asset inventory of all producers, u picks, restaurants, producers, and makers that may be interested in participating in a culinary tourism strategy.
- Identify opportunities to cross promote and incorporate culinary experiences into market ready tourism experiences, for example long table farm to fork dinners with local chefs such as Debra Poulin, Twisted Fork.

- Coordinate a Food Truck Festival and utilize a centralized park to activate the site (Lion's Park, Lagasse Park, Eco Centre Elk Point).
- Coordinate a chef's plate competition with Portage Culinary College.
- Provide additional entrepreneurship training to producers from Alberta's Open Farm Days who are interested in a culinary side hustle.
- **Case Study:** Tourism Lethbridge launches agritourism app as part of Canada's Food Tours: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/alberta/article-tourism-lethbridge-agritourism-app-canada-food-tours/>
- **Case Study:** 350 Farms, Cold Lake. <https://www.350farms.ca/>
- **Resource:** An Invitation for More Guests: <https://www.country-guide.ca/guide-business/an-invitation-for-more-guests/>
- **Resource:** And Even More on the Way Celes Davar, Country-Guide.Ca, March 28, 2023. <https://www.country-guide.ca/guide-business/and-even-more-on-the-way/>

GOAL #2 ENHANCE MARKETING

Objective# 2.1 Create a Tourism Signage Corridor in St. Paul and Elk Point that welcomes visitors and makes directional wayfinding easy and accessible (12 points).

- Consult with new municipal and provincial delegates to request a subcommittee and planning initiative for new Entrance /Welcome Signage for St. Paul, Elk Point, the County of stony lake, Heinsburg, Mallaig and Lindberg (AIHT staging area towns).
- Hire a consultant to explore and create branded signage that highlights St. Paul, Elk Point and the County of St. Paul's tourism assets giving the STEP region a cohesive and welcoming place brand.
- Renovate exiting signage and interpretive plaques at key locations including Pete Fidler Statue (Elk Point), Flora and Fauna Display by the St Paul Fish and Game Association at Lagasse Park (St. Paul), and the 100 foot Mosaic Mural (Elk Point).
- **Resource:** County of Middlesex Tourism Signage Strategy: <https://www.visitmiddlesex.ca/sites/default/files/2021-08/Middlesex%20Tourism%20Signage%20Strategy%20FINAL%20REPORT%20-March%202013.pdf>

- Resource: Wellington County Signage Strategy:
<https://www.wellington.ca/en/business/ed-signage-strategy.aspx>

Objective #2.2: Create a unique landing page for STEP that promotes all tourism assets and activities with Travel Lakeland and participate in collaborative marketing opportunities (5 points).

- Hire a marketing and design company to create a unique landing page for STEP that is cohesive with the Travel Lakeland website (include consultation with all cultural groups)
- Market the STEP landing page to a base audience such as rubber tire traffic from Edmonton and Lloydminster, seasonal cottagers, campers, and sport tourism participants.

Objective #2.3 Undertake a STEP Marketing Plan that focuses on increased digital marketing (12 points):

- Create an existing APP or utilize Driftscape to market and provide GPS wayfinding for STEP's tourism assets and attractions.
- Create gamification opportunities on established APP or other venues.
- Create more geocaching locations to promote assets and attractions.
- Develop a digital marketing strategy in association with Alberta's Iron Horse Trail (Facebook, Instagram, influencers)
- Optimize Travel Alberta digital marketing campaigns and cooperative marketing opportunities.
- **Resource:** Driftscape.com
- **Resource:** IntriTech, Brandon MB: <https://intritech.ca/>
- **Resource:** 5 Tips for Influencer Marketing: <https://www.tourismcurrents.com/5-tips-for-influencer-marketing-in-tourism-plus-sample-contract/>

Objective #2.4 Increase communication with the 'Business Community' for tourism marketing and promotion by 2023 (5 points):

- Partner with the Chamber of Commerce to increase tourism messaging, connect with businesses and familiarize business with the benefits of tourism – through workshops, monthly emails, sharing resource information etc.
- Create a badge or certificate that can be showcased for which businesses participate in Portage College's SuperHost Program.

- Promote the Digital Calendar being developed with Alberta's Lakeland DMO.
- **Resource:** Columbia Valley Chamber of Commerce:
<https://www.cvchamber.ca/the-economy-of-tourism/>
- **Resource:** Prince Edward County Chamber of Commerce:
<https://www.pecchamber.com/what-we-do>

GOAL #3 EDUCATION & TRAINING

Objective #3.1 Encourage citizens to become local champions to share and promote STEP's tourism assets 2023 (11 points):

- Host an **AMAZING RACE in the STEP** for residents to learn all about the local attractions and encourage cross promotion of the communities in the region.
- Create a Tourism Ambassador Program for STEP which encourages local champions to promote and share visitor information packages.
- Ensure accommodation sector has visitor information packages for visitors.
- **Resource:** Pembina Valley Central Plains Amazing Race:
<http://pembinavalleycentralplains tourism.com/amazing-race/>
- **Resource:** How to Host: <https://medium.com/edutainment-by-kids-clique/how-to-host-an-amazing-race-event-ec9b3c3d2686>
- **Resource:** How to Organize an Amazing Race:
<https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/434104851552100921/>

Objective #3.2 Create a tourism workforce development campaign by 2025 (7 points):

- Partner with HR Tourism Canada, University of Alberta Indigenous Canada Course, and Portage College to host Superhost Program, Customer Service and Tourism Ambassador Training for seasonal and front-line employees.
- Create Tik Tok videos to encourage tourism positions in the STEP Region.
- Encourage the benefits of tourism entrepreneurship through the Chamber of Commerce and in Youth Career Days in High Schools.
- **Resource:** Tourism HR Canada's Discover Tourism Campaign:
(<https://mailchi.mp/destinationcanada/destination-canada-news-feb-627464?e=201e4a6959>)

Objective #3.3: Assist existing tourism businesses to elevate their existing offerings into a fully immersive tourism experience (example, Diamond Back Sturgeon Adventures, Rustic Ranch, Water Spirit, Sew Heavenly, and Lakeland Brewing Company) within three years and market to Travel Alberta, Travel Lakeland and Go East (11 points):

- Work with existing businesses to offer training to diversify, strengthen and curate tourism experiences that involve all the senses and provide an opportunity for transformation, connection, learning and growth.
- Provide incentives for businesses to participate in a tourism experience training program and assist with familiarization tours to test the tourism experience.
- Investigate existing community facilities as allow them to be used as a stage for a tourism experience.
- Coordinate any Indigenous entrepreneurs or Cultural Experiences with Indigenous Tourism Alberta.
- **Case Study:**
<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/lifestyles/community/Indigenous-tourism-576611271.html>
- **Resource:** Indigenous Tourism Alberta: <https://indigenoustourismalberta.ca/>
- **Resource:** Okanagan Spark and Mentorship Program:
<https://www.therockymountangoat.com/2022/10/got-a-tourism-idea-new-program-could-help-kickstart-it/>
- **Resource:** Tourism Café for tourism training and e-learning:
<https://www.tourismcafe.org/>

GOAL #4 STRATEGIC POSITIONING, PARTNERSHIPS AND PACKAGES

Objective #4.1 Undertake an economic impact assessment of tourism in the STEP region (5 points):

- Leverage funds to conduct an economic impact assessment taking in the hotels, food service, St. Paul – Lakeland Rodeo event, Centrefield Music Festival, Sports Tourism, UFO Landing Pad visitation numbers, Museum visitation, etc. and other regional tourism assets to highlight the value and investment opportunities for local tourism in the region.
- **Resource:** Banff Economic Impact Study: <https://www.banff.ca/558/Economic-Impact-Study>

Objective #4.2 Collaborate and communicate information with Industry Associations with local businesses (2 points):

- Become a member of Indigenous Tourism Alberta and the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and encourage entrepreneurs to become members.
- Maintain communication with Travel Alberta and Destination Canada communicate latest industry trends and marketing opportunities and initiatives to businesses. Participate and partner for themed campaigns such as Winter Tourism.

Objective #4.3 Remain vigilant and provide stakeholder feedback for municipal and regional planning documents (2 points):

- Support Alberta's Iron Horse Trails' Master Plan recommendations.
- Contribute to and support St. Paul's Recreation Master Plan recommendations and advocate for municipal campgrounds to be resourced and staff accordingly to cater to an increase of visitors and enhanced programming.
- Collaborate with M.D. of Bonnyville on mutual priorities set in their Recreation Master Plan that cater and address the visitor economy (Number 4 and Number 7).

Objective #4.4: Formalize RTIC into a tourism focused organization for STEP. Collaborate and partner with STEP Alliance to create a revenue generating mechanism to maximize marketing efforts (12 points):

- Request the Town of St. Paul, the Town of Elk Point, and the County of St. Paul to draft and pass an official municipal Tourism Policy.
- Hire a consultant to prepare an Advisory Paper to explore establishing a Municipal Crown Corporation for RTIC (such as the Victoria District Economic Development model) exploring the advantages and disadvantages of creating an MCC for the purposes of investment and reinvestment in the local tourism economy. Include a thorough investigation of destination management and marketing fees.
- **Resource:** Victoria District Economic Development Strategy: <https://www.smokylakecounty.ab.ca/m/victoria-district-economic-development-strategy>
- **Resource:** Kinosoo Ridge Resort: <https://legacytourism.com/kinosoo-ridge-business-and-destination-management-plan/>

Objective #4.5 Create Packaging, Itineraries, or Passport Options for local organizations and businesses to benefit from (2 points):

- Attend a Tourism Experience Packaging workshop from the TOURISM Café to prepare a packaging initiative for STEP with interested partners.

- Organize a pilot project identifying relevant and interested businesses in STEP to package “stay and play itineraries” for the three identified consumer profiles. Share and promote the packages with Destination Marketing Organizations, Sport Tourism visitors, and larger neighbouring events such as Saddle Lake Pow Wow, Cold Lake Air Show, 2nd Chance Trail Ride attendees.

GOAL #5 TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Objective #5.1 Invest in upgrading and enhancing the ownership model and tourism service delivery at the UFO Landing Pad with specifications for redevelopment of the first-floor level (3 points):

- Explore a 2 P partnership with a not for profit or entrepreneur to use the UFO Landing Pad interior as a tourism information centre & revenue generating space.
- **Resource:** Tourism Collective: 12 Things Successful Visitor Centres Do Differently: <https://tourismcollective.com.au/blog/12-things-successful-visitor-centres-do-differently/>
- **Resource:** Ten Best Tourism Information Centres in Canada: <https://www.tripadvisor.ca/Attractions-g153339-Activities-c60-t48-Canada.html>
- **Resource:** Brandon Riverbank Discovery Centre: <https://riverbank.mb.ca/>
- **Investing in the UFO Landing Pad is a Travel Alberta TDZ recommendation.**

Objective #5.2 Undertake a Master Site Plan and Opportunities Identification Study for the Elk Point Eco Centre and Cabin to enhance the Alberta’s Iron Horse Trail staging area (3 points):

- Research and apply for funds for a Master Site Plan and Opportunities Identification Study for the Elk Point Eco Cabin and staging area including the Wooden Shack/Hut previously owned by the Snowmobile Club.
- **Resource:** Sefton Eco Centre: <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/around-sefton/southport-eco-visitor-centre>
- **Resource:** Falcon Lake Welcome Centre: <https://falcontrailsresort.com/owl-wing-nordic-centre>.

Objective #5.3: Partner with a strategic organization to conduct a Waterbodies Health and Access Study to better understand the access, water quality and fishing potential of Lakes in the STEP boundaries including the North Saskatchewan River (8 points):

- Collaborate with provincial and local naturalists to apply for Funds for a Waterbodies Access, Health, and Feasibility Study. Include a visitor ready waterways assessment that looks at signage, access, wayfinding, public amenities, parking and washrooms, and water quality and mitigators and notify gaps areas to be improved.
- Contribute to water education messages for water quality and species notifications.
- Create more interpretive panels at prominent waterway locations that correspond to the newly formed maps.
- **Case Study:** Pigeon Lake Watershed Association: <https://www.plwa.ca/>
- **Resource:** <https://paddlingmaps.com/region/Manitobasa> You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geloN6qPP8I>
- **Resource:** <https://www.paddleplanner.com/>
- **Resource** – Sample Routes: <https://portagestore.com/canoeing/sample-canoe-routes/>

Objective #5.4: Invest in water improvement initiatives for Upper Therien Lake in conjunction with a Master Site Plan for Lagasse Park (5 points):

- Prioritize and partner with the appropriate advisory committee for researching and providing recommendations for improved water quality and conditions in Upper Therien Lake in partnership with the St. Paul wastewater treatment plant.
- Invest in Master Site Plan for Lagasse Park in conjunction with water improvements of Upper Therien Lake.
- Partner with local businesses or new businesses to provide rental options to increase visitor traffic at the Lagasse Park and use of Upper Therien Lake when it is safe to do so.



- Showcase and update naturalist – brown field development interpretive panels to show the benefits and treatment of our waterways for locals and visitors.
- **Resource:** Lake Winnipeg Foundation: <https://lakewinnipegfoundation.org/>
- **Resource:** Lake Minnewasta, Morden, MB: <https://htfc.ca/projects/lake-minnewasta-carrying-capacity-study/> and <https://www.pembinavalleyonline.com/articles/morden-moving-ahead-with-master-plan-for-lake-minnewasta>
- **Investing in Upper and Lower Therien Lakes is a Travel Alberta TDZ Recommendation.**

Chapter 6: Prioritization of Strategies

Creating strategic plans are important as they provide strategic direction to committees and organizations with short-, medium- and long-term goals. The key to prioritizing the goals is to set them into themed areas, and then identify where prioritization should occur. Adding prioritization helps move a strategic plan from a checklist to a document that provides actionable items with timelines. Prioritization also helps with budget setting for future action items.

The Prioritization Matrix (High Impact, Low Impact – High Effort, Low Effort Matrix) was used to review and categorize the strategic goals into respective quadrants. During the tourism strategy session, participants scored the goals and objectives firstly on their impact and secondly on the effort needed to complete them. This was followed by plotting them on the matrix, so that they can prioritize appropriately, and delegate or eliminate low-impact activities. A summary of the quadrants includes:

QUADRANT 1: QUICK WINS (HIGH VALUE/IMPACT, LOW/EFFORT)

2023-2026.

Objective #1.1: Identify and define trail development in the Region by undertaking a Master Trails Plan Strategy (Spring Summer 2023) (4 points).

Objective #1.4: Create an Arts & Culture Strategy for the STEP Region to promote existing arts and tourism infrastructure and make STEP the HUB for Arts and Culture in Alberta's Lakeland (3 points).

Objective #1.5: Develop 3 X 3 Culture & County Campaign which includes small cultural circuits (art, dance, food, music, heritage etc.) to educate and showcase the rich cultural landscape of the STEP region to elevate education of visitors and market to three urban centres – launch in partnership with Cultural Days Event (Lloydminster, Edmonton, and Calgary (15 points).

Objective #1.6: Create a e-bike network utilizing the Iron Horse Trail as the stage (2 points).

Objective #1.7: Partner with the St. Paul Fish and Game Association to host events to utilize local trout ponds in St. Paul and Elk Point (1 point).

Objective #1.9: Support and promote Rodeo Culture in the region and curate accessible tourism experiences to increase revenue generated programming (1 point).

Objective #1.10: Develop a Winter Tourism Strategy that includes winter tourism experiences, promotes existing winter events, and expands winter tourism offerings (7 points).

Objective #2.2: Create a unique landing page for STEP that promotes all tourism assets and activities with Travel Lakeland and participate in collaborative marketing opportunities (5 points).

Objective #2.3: Undertake a STEP Marketing Plan that focuses on increased digital marketing (12 points).

Objective #2.4: Increase communication with the 'Business Community' for tourism marketing and promotion by 2023 (5 points).

Objective #3.2: Create a tourism workforce development campaign by 2025(7 points).

Objective #4.2: Collaborate and communicate information with Industry Associations with local businesses (2 points).

Objective #4.5: Create Packaging, Itineraries, or Passport Options for local organizations and businesses to benefit from (2 points).

QUADRANT 2: MAJOR PROJECTS/ LONGER TERM (HIGH VALUE/IMPACT, HIGH/EFFORT)

2026-2029

Objective #1.2: Diversify the accommodation units available in St. Paul, County of St. Paul, and Elk Point for visitors to increase the number of overnight stays (2 points).

Objective #1.3: Support the enhancement and activation of municipally owned campgrounds to increase visitation and delivery revenue generating programming (2 points).

Objective #1.8: Expand and Create a Cultural Education Experience in partnership with University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'i nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills (no points given as this was viewed as a support and partnership strategy that is owned and controlled by UNBQ).

Objective #1.11: Partner with Alberta's Lakeland DMO Agritourism Strategy as a launch point for developing a culinary tourism strategy for the STEP Alliance (5 points):

Objective# 2.1: Create a Tourism Signage Corridor in St Paul's and Elk Point that welcomes visitors and makes directional wayfinding easy and accessible (12 points).

Objective #3.3: Assist existing tourism businesses to elevate their existing offerings into a fully immersive tourism experience (example, Rustic Ranch, Water Spirit, Sew Heavenly, and Lakeland Brewing Company) within three years and market to Travel Alberta, Travel Lakeland and Go East (11 points).

Objective #4.1: Undertake an economic impact assessment of tourism in the STEP region (5 points).

Objective #4.3: Remain vigilant and provide stakeholder feedback for municipal and regional planning documents (2 points).

Objective #4.4: Formalize RTIC into a tourism focused organization for STEP. Collaborate and partner with STEP Alliance to create a revenue generating mechanism to maximize marketing efforts (12 points).

Objective #5.1: Invest in upgrading and enhancing the ownership model and tourism service delivery at the UFO Landing Pad with specifications for redevelopment of the first-floor level (3 points).

Objective #5.2: Undertake a Master Site Plan and Opportunities Identification Study for the Elk Point Eco Centre and Cabin to enhance the Alberta's Iron Horse Trail staging area (3 points).

Objective #5.3: Partner with a strategic organization to conduct a Waterbodies Health and Access Study to better understand the access, water quality and fishing potential of Lakes in the STEP boundaries including the North Saskatchewan River (8 points).

Objective #5.4: Invest in water improvement initiatives for Upper Therien Lake in conjunction with a Master Site Plan for Lagasse Park (5 points).

QUADRANT 3: FILL INS - SET ASIDE UNTIL RESOURCES ALLOW (LOW VALUE/IMPACT, LOW/EFFORT)

Objective #3.1 Encourage citizens to become local champions to share and promote STEP's tourism assets 2023 (11 points).

QUADRANT 4: LEAVE OUT OF STRATEGY/ THANKLESS TASKS- RE-EVALUATE IN THE FUTURE (LOW VALUE/IMPACT, HIGH/EFFORT)



Chapter 7: Conclusions & Recommendations

Following all the tourism industry information, trends, statistics, and recommendations can be overwhelming. Understanding your target markets (your ideal guests, the consumers – otherwise known as demand) and your regions assets (the supply side) and their situation, feeds the strategic goals, objectives, and strategies. The STEP region's assets, strengths and opportunities are vast.

The five main pillars for growth 1) Product Development, 2) Enhanced Marketing, 3) Education and Training, 4) Strategic Positioning, Partnership and Packages and 5) Infrastructure for Tourism will help grow the regional tourism industry by increasing visitation, extending visitor stays and provide an influx of choices/more options for visitors. Tourism also has the power to be a change agent for good by increasing civic pride, providing a directing focus on infrastructure revitalization, and creating memories and attachments for residents and visitors, which can translate to more care for the environment and its people.

The STEP Region has a strong tourism asset base and can also participate and adapt initiatives to suit their context in the following potential growth areas. These include:

1. **Accessibility.** Making sure that any promotional marketing falls within the accessibility guidelines that are required by the end of 2024.
2. **Investing in a Fall Foliage Tour.** Alberta's Lakeland, and the STEP borders included, carry with it a lot of promise for fall tourism activities including but not limited too hiking, cycling, fishing, and fall foliage tours. Open spaces, less crowds and beautiful landscapes with fall foliage can be settings for incredible experiences where colours and outdoor contrasts are at their finest.
3. **Event Based Tourism.** The STEP region has significant infrastructure to carry and host larger event-based tourism, including tournaments. Coordinating with the Chamber of Commerce's Conference Planning website and initiative, bringing in niche organizations and groups for concerts, conventions, events, and tournaments could help fill the shoulder season when the bookings are lower at the facilities.
4. **Multigenerational Tourism.** With the growth in the Baby Boomer cohort, multigenerational travel is on the rise. The desire to foster closer family ties and everlasting memories among different generations in a relaxing and entertaining environment away from home is the main motivator. The STEP region boasts ample activities that would cater to multigenerational visits. The localized play infrastructure (such as splash pads, swimming pools, skate parks, play parks and hiking trails etc.) cater to children's free spirit to play, and is easy on grandparents'

pocketbook combined with serviced based amenities (such as restaurants, hotels, shops, and bakeries etc.) that make it easy for grandparents to provide and cater to the children's wants & needs. The icing on the cake, so to speak, lies in the heritage assets that are abound (such as the St Paul Museum, the Mallaig Museum, and Hayin' in the 30's) that allows for a direct dialogue and linkage for a transfer of knowledge from grandparent to grandchild. <https://drprem.com/travel/how-multigenerational-travel-trends-are-creating-unique-vacationing-experience/> and <https://www.travelweekly.com/Travel-News/Hotel-News/Multigenerational-family-travel-booming-post-pandemic>

5. **Direct and targeted marketing campaigns to neighbouring County's and Communities specifically Bonnyville.** Domestic tourism will remain the bulk of STEP's visitation and should not be ignored when investments for marketing opportunities become available. Programming that is flexible in nature, drop in style events (at the skate park or the arts centre), or self guided tours (at the museums) can strengthen the offerings in STEP and be marketed to regional visitors. Making information accessible for boat launches, picnic sites, and trail systems will only increase awareness for visitors who are looking for land based, water based, and snow-based activities. An increased marketing budget for the Allied Arts and Leisure Centre in Elk Point, and the St. Paul Arts Foundation will benefit the reach of their already established programs as well as potential new programs such as TRY it events, and age specific theme nights.

Tourism development and planning in the STEP Region has so much potential. Planning for future tourism growth must also build in check in points for monitoring different aspects of the growth. Three key concepts are worthy of monitoring and maintenance:

1. **Keeping in mind the carrying capacity of the location. Having a solid understand of a baseline of estimated numbers of visitors and the frequency and timing of the visits** is important when planning to market a visitor ready asset. It is one thing to attract tourists to a region but doing so should be done responsibly with consensus on the best times of year to visit, the number of visitors you wish to have, and how to mitigate over tourism. Also keep on track when neighbouring events are happening and how to tap into that rubber tire traffic – ex – Cold Lake Air Show and regional assets such as Metis Crossing.
2. **Monitor the willingness of the local community to be engaged with and participating with tourists and their activities.** Having residents who become ambassadors – either formally or informally - can go a long way in providing that check and balance to maintain visitors in a positive light. Many rural tourism assets – especially that are event based – are only as strong as the volunteer community that stands behind it, with most volunteers being local or regional.

3. **Pursue opportunities that provide good for all** – locals and tourists alike. Develop strategies that allow for responsible behaviour, stewardship of resources, and education of different perspectives and cultures. Develop amenities and infrastructure that are thoughtful and lasting by asking yourselves the following questions, “**will it be appreciated?**” and “**will it have the ability to be maintained?**”. First impressions go a long way to attracting as well as keeping tourism experiences positive. Favourable word of mouth and social media reviews are often based on first impressions.

4. **Defining your successes** with confirmed and agreeable measurables (otherwise known as key performance indicators) at the outset of any strategy is key to monitoring if you are heading in the desired direction. Every community and strategy will determine what indicators they wish to measure and their level of success. The Lac La Biche Tourism Strategy (p. 108) identifies 5 measurables that are a good starting base. They include increased experiences and annual growth in experiential learning, increased awareness – new product or digital, increased revenue – new business/business tax revenue, increased visitation, and increased satisfaction. It is not just about attracting more visitors all the time. A successful tourism strategy and development will attract the right kind of visitors “the ideal visitor” at the right time (season and duration) and for the right reasons (visitor motivation and expectations that turn into positive memories). Additional key performance indicators for tourism that may be measured are revenue growth, revenue per client, profit margin, client retention rate, distribution, conversions and traffic, and customer satisfaction to name a few.



Appendix A – Key Stakeholder Interview Participant List

1. Linda Sallstrom, Economic Development Officer for the STEP Alliance.
2. Marianne Jenke, Executive Director for Alberta’s Lakeland DMO
3. Chris Down, Travel Alberta
4. Stuart Kotowich, Diamondback Sturgeon Charters
5. Monique Poulin, Iron Horse Ultra 100
6. Joanne Lamoureux, Lakeland Ski Club
7. Sydney Smyl, Smyl Trailers
8. Ray Makowecki, St. Paul Fish and Game Association
9. Ken Gwozdz, Town of Elk Point
10. Martin Corbiere, Producer
11. Sherri Chisan, UNBQ
12. Karen Telford, Water Spirit Spa
13. Tim Mahdiuk, County of St. Paul
14. Fort George Buckingham House
15. Martin Naundorf, Hayin in the 30’s
16. Kelly Martin, Mann Lakes Golf Course
17. Val Pratch, St. Paul & District Arts Foundation
18. Thomasina Hatch and Clement, St. Paul Museum & the People’s Museum
19. Harvey Smyl, Town of St. Paul Parks and Recreation
20. Dixie Colter, Whitney Lakes Provincial Park

Attempts were made to the following stakeholders:

21. Adam Charbonneau, Guest Ranch
22. Nic Trufal, Helicopter Tours

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