

Forest and Fisheries Tourism Opportunities Study for the North Coast Forest District

Project Report

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	I
LIST OF FIGURES	III
APPENDIXES.....	VI
1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	1
2 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
2.1 STUDY PURPOSE.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
2.2 SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
2.3 REPORT STRUCTURE.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
3 BACKGROUND.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
3.1 IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
3.2 TOURISM AND LAND USE PLANNING.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4 THE TOURISM INDUSTRY	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4.1 GLOBAL TOURISM AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4.1.1 <i>Global Tourism Demand</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.1.2 <i>BC Tourism Outlook</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.2 TOURISM IN NORTHWEST BRITISH COLUMBIA.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4.2.1 <i>Visitor Origin</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.2.2 <i>Trip Characteristics</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.2.3 <i>Summary of Northwest Visitors</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.3 TOURISM IN THE NORTH COAST FOREST DISTRICT.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4.3.1 <i>Tourism Activities and Trends</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.3.2 <i>Tourism Operations in the North Coast</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.4 TRENDS IN TOURISM AND RECREATION.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4.4.1 <i>Social and Demographic Trends</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.4.2 <i>Global economic growth</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.4.3 <i>Technology and the Internet</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.4.4 <i>Competition</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.5 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR TOURISM ON THE NORTH COAST?.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5 COMMUNITY SITUATION ANALYSIS	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5.1 PHYSICAL SETTING	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5.2 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SETTING	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5.3 TRANSPORTATION SETTING.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5.3.1 <i>Introduction</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>

5.3.2	Road Transportation.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.3.3	Air Transportation.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.3.4	Water Transportation.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.3.5	Rail Transportation.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.3.6	Bus Transportation.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.3.7	Other.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.4	COMMUNITY PROFILES	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5.4.1	Prince Rupert/Digby Island/Metlakatla/Port Edward	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.4.2	Gingolx, Kitsault, Alice Arm, and Laxgalts'ap.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.4.3	Hartley Bay (Git'k'a'ta).....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.4.4	Kitkatla and Oona River.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.4.5	Lax Kw'alaams (Port Simpson).....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
5.5	RESOURCE AREA DESCRIPTIONS.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6	ASSESSMENT OF IDENTIFIED TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.1	NORTH COAST OCEAN KAYAKING	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.1.1	Discussion	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.1.2	Resource Assessment of Ocean Kayaking.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.1.3	Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Ocean Kayaking.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.2	HUT-TO-HUT.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.2.1	Discussion	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.2.2	Resource Assessment of Hut-to-Hut	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.2.3	Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Marine Hut-to-Hut.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.3	WILDLIFE/NATURAL HISTORY: LAND	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.3.1	Discussion	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.3.2	Resource Assessment of Wildlife / Natural History: Land.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.3.3	Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Wildlife / Natural History: Land.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.4	WILDLIFE/NATURAL HISTORY: MARINE.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.4.1	Discussion	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.4.2	Resource Assessment of Wildlife / Natural History: Marine	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.4.3	Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Wildlife / Natural History: Marine.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.5	MARINE CRUISING (POCKET CRUISES).....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.5.1	Discussion	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.5.2	Resource Assessment of Marine Cruising.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.5.3	Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Marine Cruising.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.6	DESTINATION LODGE RESORTS.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.6.1	Discussion	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.6.2	Resource Assessment of Destination Lodge.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.6.3	Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Destination Lodge	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.7	HERITAGE / CULTURE.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.7.1	Discussion	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.7.2	Resource Assessment of Heritage / Culture	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.7.3	Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Heritage / Culture	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.8	HIKING.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.8.1	Discussion	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.8.2	Resource Assessment of Hiking.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
6.8.3	Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Hiking.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>

6.9 AIR TOURS.....**ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**
6.9.1 Discussion *Error! Bookmark not defined.*
6.9.2 Resource Assessment of Air Tours..... *Error! Bookmark not defined.*
6.9.3 Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Air Tours *Error! Bookmark not defined.*
6.10 MOUNTAIN BIKING**ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**
6.10.1 Discussion *Error! Bookmark not defined.*
6.10.2 Resource Assessment of Mountain Biking..... *Error! Bookmark not defined.*
6.10.3 Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Mountain Biking..... *Error! Bookmark not defined.*
6.11 SKI TOURING**ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**
6.11.1 Discussion *Error! Bookmark not defined.*
6.11.2 Resource Assessment of Ski Touring..... *Error! Bookmark not defined.*
6.11.3 Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Ski Touring *Error! Bookmark not defined.*
6.12 PRODUCT LINKAGES**ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**
6.13 HIGHEST TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES ASSOCIATED WITH SPECIFIC COMMUNITY GROUPINGS..... **ERROR!
BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**

7 ISSUES AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS..... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

7.1 ISSUES OVERVIEW**ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**
7.2 ISSUES SCAN**ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**
7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS: SKILLS AND TRAINING.....**ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**
7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS: TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**



The Coast Ranger - Photo by David Nicolson

Photos on report cover are of Lucy Island - Photos by David Nicolson

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1: Forest and Fisheries Tourism Opportunity Study for the North Coast – Resource Areas.....6

Table 4.1-1: Overnight Visitor Activity in BC - 1997 to 2000 Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.2-1: Visitor Origin..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.2-2: Trip Characteristics Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.2-3: Activities in the Northwest Region..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.2-4: 1995/96 Northwest Traveler Summary Results Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.3-1: Room Revenues in Prince Rupert - 1991-1998..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.3-2: Residency of Provincial Park Visitors..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.3-3: Provincial Park Attendance (1990 to 1998)..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.3-4: Prince Rupert Travel Information Centre Statistics Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.3-5: Selected Saltwater License Category Purchases (1995 and 1998)..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.3-6: 1995 Freshwater Sport Fishing Activity..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 4.3-7: Tourism Business Types Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 5.3-1: Annual Traffic Statistics Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 5.3-2: Passenger and Flight Statistics for the Prince Rupert Airport... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 5.3-3: Average Summer Volumes on BC Ferry Routes..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 5.3-4: Cruise Vessel Traffic Through the Port of Prince Rupert Error! Bookmark not defined.

Figure 5-5: Forest and Fisheries Tourism Opportunity Study for the North Coast – Resource Areas and Tourism Facilities Error! Bookmark not defined.

Figure 5-6: Forest and Fisheries Tourism Opportunity Study for the North Coast – Resource Areas and Tourism Features Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.1-1: Opportunity Evaluation for Ocean Kayaking Based on Resource Criteria ..Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.1-2: Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Top Areas for Ocean Kayaking Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.2-1: Opportunity Evaluation of Hut-to-Hut Based on Resource Criteria Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.2-2: Market, Economic and Socio-economic Assessment of Top Areas for Hut-to-Hut.... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.3-1: Opportunity Evaluation for Wildlife/Natural History: Land Based on Resource Criteria Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.3-2: BC 1996 Visitor Survey: Land Based Participation Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.3-3: Market, Economic and Socio-economic Assessment of Top Areas for Wildlife/Natural History: Land Based Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.4-1: Opportunity Evaluation for Wildlife/Natural History: Marine Based on Resource Criteria Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.4-2: BC 1996 Visitor Survey: Marine Based Participation Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.4-3: Market, Economic and Socio-economic Assessment of Top Areas for Wildlife/Natural History: Marine Based Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.5-1: Worldwide Cruise Industry by Cruise Area - 1999..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.5-2: Opportunity Evaluation for Marine Cruising Based on Resource Criteria ..Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.5-3: Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Top Areas for Marine Cruising Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.6-1: Opportunity Evaluation for Destination Lodge Based on Resource Criteria..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.6-3: Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Top Areas for Destination Lodge Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.7-1: Opportunity Evaluation for Heritage / Culture Based on Resource Criteria Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.7-3: Market and Socio-economic Assessment of Culture / Heritage Tourism...Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.8-1: Opportunity Evaluation for Hiking Based on Resource CriteriaError! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.8-3: Market and Socio-economic Assessment of Top Areas for HikingError! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.9-1: Opportunity Evaluation for Air Tours Based on Resource CriteriaError! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.9-2: Market and Socio-economic Assessment of Top Areas for Air Touring Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.10-1: Opportunity Evaluation for Mountain Biking Based on Resource CriteriaError! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.10-2: Market and Socio-economic Assessment of Top Areas for Mountain Biking..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.11-1: Opportunity Evaluation for Ski Touring Based on Resource Criteria ..Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.11-2: Market, Economic and Socio-economic Assessment of Top Area for Ski Touring.... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table 6.12: Product Links Error! Bookmark not defined.



Port Essington – Photo by Mathew Lamb-Yorski

APPENDIXES

Appendix A-1 Contact List.....	A-1
Appendix A-2 Chronology of Events	A-3
Appendix A-3 Meeting Minutes and Attendees	A-4
Appendix B-1 Selection of Tourism Products for Analysis.....	B-1
Appendix B-2 Market, Economic and Social Assessment Criteria	B-4
Appendix B-3 Market, Economic and Social Assessment Sources	B-8
Appendix C-1 Operator Survey and Data Collection Methods.....	C-1
Appendix C-2 Survey Results.....	C-3
Appendix C-2 Sample Survey and Correspondance	C-7
Appendix C-3 Inventory of North Coast Tourism Operators.....	C-19
Appendix D-1 Digital Data Methods.....	D-1
Appendix D-2 Digital Data Sources	D-34
Appendix D-3 Data Dictionary.....	D-36
Appendix E-1 Description of Features in Resource Areas	E-1
Appendix F-1 Map Folio	F-1



Oval Mountain, Porcher Island – Photo by Mathew Lamb-Yorski

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Clover Point Cartographics Ltd. has been commissioned by the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture to identify opportunities for sustainable community-based tourism development within the North Coast Forest District. Working with Clover Point on the project are Geoscape Environmental Planners, Marlyn Chisholm and Associates, and Sunderman and Associates.

Clover Point served as the project manager, had primary responsibility for the inventory and resource capability modelling, and contributed to the resource analysis segments of the project. Geoscape had a lead responsibility for community liaison and undertook much of the inventory fieldwork, as well as contributing to the analysis. Chisholm and Sunderman were the principal economic analysts and had the lead responsibility in the analysis segments.

Purpose

The information obtained will enable senior governments to support the efforts of individuals, municipal governments, First Nations, tourism groups and economic development agencies to diversify local economies, maintain access to recreational resources for local residents, and minimize conflicts among resource users. The analysis is not meant to be either exclusive or exhaustive. The study's objective is to identify those products with the best development capability based on a combination of natural resource, market potential and local development capability.

Background

The Tourism Opportunities Study (TOS) concept is part of a natural progression for the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture. Prior to 1998, one of the Ministry's key emphases was conducting regional or strategic scale Tourism Resource Inventories (TRI), the primary focus of which was to support land use planning. The TRI uses a Geographic Information System (GIS) based inventory of tourism assets and predictive tourism product capability modeling. Building on the same GIS-based tools as a TRI, a TOS adds a SWOT analysis to incorporate the economic and social priorities of the community, reflects the current status of local tourism development and provides the detailed information required for sub-regional or community level planning.

Regional Tourism Profile

The Northwest Tourism Region, which includes the North Coast Forest District, accounts for approximately 7% (2.2 million visitors) of the provincial visitor volume and 5% (\$425 million) of the provincial tourism revenue. The majority of visitors (73%) are BC residents.

The North Coast has the attributes and appeal to draw domestic and international visitors seeking authentic wilderness and adventure experiences.

A total of 140 tourism operators were identified as being based in or using the region. Of these:

- 30 offer accommodation only
- 43 offer accommodation and touring services/experiences (including 26 charter boats)

- 36 offer tours and experiences only (primarily fishing charters)
- 5 offer tours and scheduled transportation services
- 9 offer scheduled transportation only
- 8 offer museum or art attractions (one of which also offers accommodation)
- 7 offer a marina , 1 offers a golf course and 1 offers rentals (in conjunction with retail services)

Community Analysis

Most tourism operations are based in the Prince Rupert area. The outlying, unincorporated communities, including Oona River, Laxgalts’ap (Greenville), Kincolith, Hartley Bay, Kitkatla, Metlakatla, Port Edward and Lax Kw’alaams (Port Simpson), have very little tourism infrastructure.

Each community has a unique history that contributes to the cultural tapestry that is integral to the history of the North Coast. This unique history lends itself to the tourism industry.

The regional economy is largely dependent on the fishing sector, with forestry and Prince Rupert’s role as a major service/distribution centre for the Northwest also accounting for a large share of economic activity.

Each community is at a unique juncture with regards to their economic and tourism development. Several have established and are implementing tourism initiatives.

Product Analysis

PRODUCT: OCEAN KAYAKING	
Strengths	Remoteness, scenery, high value features, culture and related features, growing demand, community support, low startup Capital requirements
Weaknesses	Repeatability of feature along coast, high precipitation, cost to access region, poor presentation of culture and related features, lack of infrastructure /accommodation in close proximity to best areas to experience the product
Opportunities	Wilderness, ecotourism or adventure markets for kayaking. Links with a mothership, hut-to-hut, circuit routes, overland (hiking, freshwater linkages to marine), hot spring tour, resort
Threats	Land use uncertainties, increased use affecting “remote” experience, forest harvesting, possible conflict with First Nation traditional use or historic sites

PRODUCT: HUT-TO-HUT TOURING	
Strengths	Remoteness, scenery, high value recreation features, optimum topography, successful model in place for rustic product, community support for locally-based initiative, minimal training required
Weaknesses	Potentially repeatable product along BC Coast, lack of support infrastructure (trails), cost to access region, some difficulties staging from remote communities because of distance to transportation nodes, difficult for private operator to obtain financing, compliance and enforcement, vandalism, carrying capacity unknown, relatively untested high-end product.
Opportunities	Rustic to high-end alpine, lake and marine hut-to-hut; linkage with US Forest Service cabin system, and possible international Inside Passage marine park system
Threats	Land use uncertainties, increased recreation use affecting "remote" experience, forest harvesting.

PRODUCT: WILDLIFE/NATURAL HISTORY: LAND	
Strengths	Remoteness, scenery, limited development, high quality whale and bear viewing areas, high recreation value features. Excellent salmon, trout and steelhead fishery.
Weaknesses	Intervening opportunities along BC coast, limited wildlife viewing areas, cost to access region, influences of tides on the rivers and estuaries. Extended periods of wet weather.
Opportunities	Educational tours, link to other products like overland routes for hiking/canoeing/portage, cultural products.
Threats	Land use uncertainties, increased use affecting "remote" experience, forest harvesting

PRODUCT: WILDLIFE/NATURAL HISTORY: MARINE	
Strengths	Remoteness, scenery, limited development, high quality whale viewing areas, high value recreation features, high quality scuba diving on outlying islands.
Weaknesses	Repeatability of product along BC coast, limited number of wildlife viewing areas, cost to access region. Sediment from major rivers minimizes underwater visibility, day-to-day unreliability of sightings, many severe weather systems.
Opportunities	Educational tours. Linkages to other products.
Threats	Land use uncertainties, increased recreation use affecting "remote" experience, forest harvesting.

PRODUCT: MARINE CRUISING	
Strengths	Sport fish, remoteness, scenery, high value features including hot springs, wildlife (bears and whales), culture and heritage features, remote communities, and tourism infrastructure such as Port Edward Cannery and Pike Island; Atlin pier in Prince Rupert; growing demand; community support
Weaknesses	High precipitation, cost to access region, lack of suitable infrastructure in the communities (with the exception of Prince Rupert), lack of organized tourism related activities in the communities (cultural interpretation, shows), no marine glaciers (as in Alaska); possible high startup costs; high tidal variances hazard for cruisers lacking local knowledge
Opportunities	Development infrastructure. Support products to pocket cruises. Cultural and historical exposition. Linkages to on-shore commercial businesses, e.g. Atlin Terminal.
Threats	Land use uncertainties, forest harvesting (with visual and environmental concerns), full support of community lacking, competition from Alaskan pocket cruise industry

PRODUCT: DESTINATION LODGE RESORTS	
Strengths	Sport fish, remoteness, scenery, high value features and wildlife (First Nation Culture, bears and whales), high visibility to Alaskan cruise market.
Weaknesses	High precipitation, poor scheduling of flights and cost to access region, competition among existing sport-fishing lodges, high start up and operating costs, government regulatory obstacles and possible lack of community support
Opportunities	Diversification into other types of activities such as whale and wildlife watching, freshwater fishing, hiking, exploring, etc.; linkages to air and marine tours; soft adventure market niche seeking world class wilderness experience
Threats	Land use uncertainties, increased use affecting "remote" experience, forest harvesting (with visual and environmental concerns), decline of the Pacific salmon stock.

PRODUCT: HERITAGE/CULTURE	
Strengths	Remoteness, scenery, limited “development”, high quality features, highly marketable. High capacity for expansion. Existing labour force.
Weaknesses	Although each culture is unique, repeatability of similar product along BC coast. Access. Support facilities. Extended periods of wet weather.
Opportunities	Educational/interpretive tours, link to other products like overland routes for hiking/canoeing/ kayaking/marine cruise. Infrastructure development.
Threats	Increased use affecting "remote" experience, forest harvesting. Loss of culture through aging elders and youth moving away for education/employment

PRODUCT: HIKING	
Strengths	Scenery, high value recreation features, logging roads. Coastal hikes with outstanding beaches.
Weaknesses	Weather, few existing trails, lack of brand recognition.
Opportunities	Development of regionally significant coastal hikes, linkages with other products such as kayaking, lodges, and hut-to-hut.
Threats	Competition from elsewhere in BC, Canada, lack of public sector funding to develop and maintain trails.

PRODUCT: AIR TOURS	
Strengths	Remoteness, scenery, high value recreation features
Weaknesses	Weather, access time to high recreation features, transportation costs to the region, short operating season, high startup costs
Opportunities	Linkage to marine cruising and lodge products, soft adventure market – generally well-seasoned travellers, particularly affluent couples
Threats	Usage of Protected Area / Park Airspace

PRODUCT: MOUNTAIN BIKING	
Strengths	Scenery, high value recreation features, logging roads
Weaknesses	Weather, shortage of trails, stiff competition from other regions of BC, small market for guided mountain biking, potential conflicts with other recreational users
Opportunities	Linkage to high recreation features (less rugged terrain linking beaches and other high value features), marine cruising and lodge products. Provides existing tourism operators opportunity to diversify their products.
Threats	Lack of public sector funding to develop and maintain trails. Environmental concerns in sensitive areas.

PRODUCT: SKI TOURING	
Strengths	Scenery, access and proximity to population center (PR) and uniqueness of accessible snow close to the coast, strong support from local interests
Weaknesses	Proximity to better snow conditions in the adjacent district, weather, lack of adequate, consistent and reliable snowfall
Opportunities	Linkages to Nordic hut-to-hut opportunities and helicopter access; possible growing niche of backcountry recreationists, mostly local
Threats	Lack of public sector funding to develop and maintain access, possible effects of harvesting on visual quality, competition from Shames Mountain near Terrace

Community Opportunities

The study area has a blend of high quality tourism attributes and existing market development that is unique in the province. Many of its features are nationally and internationally significant. The following table provides a summary of the product/activity opportunities identified as having the most potential for each of the study area communities. A letter in the table below depicts the resource area with the greatest potential for each activity. Refer to **Figure 1-1** for the location of the resource areas associated with each activity for each community.

Trail- & Road-based	Prince Rupert / Port Edward	Metlakatla	Port Simpson	Oona River	Kitkatla	Hartley Bay	Gingolx / Laxgalts'ap
Hiking	D	C, D	C, D	G O, H, I	G O, H, I		
Mountain Biking	D	D	D	G	G		B
Area-based							
Destination Lodge/resort	ALL	C	C, A	G	G	K	A
Heritage/Culture	D	D	C, D, E	G	G	H, K, L	A, B, Q
Wildlife/Natural History (land)	D	D	D, F		H	K, L	B, Q
Air Tours	D, P, ALL	D	D, E, F	G	G	P, L, K	A, B, Q
Hut-to-Hut tours		C	C	G	G, I	I, K	
Ski Touring	D						
Water-based							
Ocean Kayaking	D	C	C, D	G	G, I	L	
Pocket Cruises	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL
Wildlife/Natural History (marine)	D	C	C, D, E	G	G, J	J	Q

Figure 1-1: Forest and Fisheries Tourism Opportunity Study for the North Coast – Resource Areas

Community Recommendations

Communities, through entrepreneurs, must develop adventure products in a manner that maximizes community participation, realizes most of the economic benefits of tourism development within the local communities, and develops tourism in a manner that fits with their social and economic objectives.

Communities wishing to expand their tourism product/activity offerings must not only look after the needs of entrepreneurs, businesses and new investment, they must also address more basic economic development issues in the study area. Opportunity development often has less to do with matching resource capability with target markets than with making sure fundamental building blocks that encourage new business activity are in place.

Enhancement of basic infrastructure will contribute to general economic development of remote communities as well as improve opportunities for tourism development.

Entrepreneurs and communities can use this study as tool for furthering tourism development. Detailed feasibility studies may be required to provide more in-depth analysis and planning around specific tourism themes or complex multi-use developments.



Khtada Lake – Photo by Mathew Lamb-Yorski