Handbook

Key Resource

Climate Considerations For Outdoor Recreation Municipalities

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Introduction

This Outdoor Recreation Municipalities Handbook is part of the [Climate Caucus Handbook](#) - a toolkit to provide local elected leaders with inspiration, initiatives, case studies, and sample motions/reports to support local climate action.

The Handbook is a living document, which means we will be adding your successful motions as they happen, and it provides an up-to-date, real-time guide to the change being driven by Climate Caucus members from coast to coast to coast.

Are we missing any key resources? [Submit it here](#) or [email us!](#)

Context

Municipalities that rely on outdoor recreation for economic sustainability face significant exposure to climate risk. Unfortunately, to date, most outdoor recreation municipalities across Canada remain stuck in a business-as-usual model due to lack of staff capacity, financial capital, relevant research data, expertise in research, climate action implementation, and communications, as well as community buy-in. The ORM handbook is designed to help facilitate climate action to target the lack of capacity in these municipalities. This handbook lays out successful sustainability initiatives with real-life examples to simplify replication in your community.

Climate Considerations for Ski Destinations

Ski destinations, including 237 ski areas operating across over 90,000 acres, employing over 35,000 people, and generating economic impact estimated at over $4 billion CAD annually, are a key part of Canada's tourism sector ([CSC](#), 2019).

Climate Impacts

- Future ski seasons will see shortened season length, more variable conditions and increased reliance on snowmaking
    - Under a high-emission scenario, Ontario's ski tourism may not be economically viable by mid-century ([Scott et al., 2019](#))
    - As grids are decarbonized, emissions from snowmaking will not be a concern but water usage may be a concern.

- Demand has shown to be resilient - in record warm winters demand stays relatively stable
  - However, a reduced season will increase skier congestion, which will require increased investments in parking and lift capacity etc.
- Observed 'urban backyard phenomenon' wherein source market climate impacts influence tourists' behaviour (e.g. warm temperatures or rain in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver discouraging visitation to Collingwood, Tremblant, or Whistler respectively) ([Knowles, 2023](#))
  - Eastern Canadian participants suggest such conditions might encourage travel to Western Canada which is perceived as more climate resilient ([Knowles, 2023](#))
- But longer summers and urban heat encourage visitation to mountain destinations, shifting seasonality and growing green season tourism

Climate Initiatives for ORM

Include Tourism in Climate Plans

The Basics:
- Address how decarbonization targets can be achieved despite increased visitation and tourism development
- Adaptation efforts that protect tourism-based economies include:
  - Minimize wildfire threats
  - Ensure adequate water supply
  - Enhance weather independent tourism opportunities
  - Improve ski infrastructure for weather variability
  - Minimize threats to ecosystems & biodiversity

Examples:
- Whistler BC
  - [Community Energy and Climate Action Plan (2016)](#)
  - [Big Moves Strategy (2020)](#)
  - [Small Steps for Big Moves (2022)](#)

- ○ [Presentation recording](#) and [slides](#)
- ● [Mont Tremblant, Quebec](#)
    - ○ [Presentation recording](#) and [slides](#)
- ● [Banff, AB](#)
- ● [Squamish BC](#)
    - ○ [Slides](#)
- ● [Canmore AB](#)
- ● [Muskoka, ON](#)
    - ○ [Slides](#)
- ● [Blue Mountains ON](#)
- ● [Nelson, BC](#)

Initiatives to Address Over-tourism

In some ORMs 'over-tourism' may be a concern. Over-tourism is defined by the UNWTO as "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or visitors in a negative way" (2018). This can be observed via:

- ● Transportation congestion and wear on road infrastructure,
- ● Impacts on natural and recreation assets,
- ● Pressure on social services
- ● Unaffordable housing costs which;
    - ○ pushes out long-term residents and tourism workforce,
    - ○ increases commute emissions
    - ○ decreases community cohesion
    - ○ causes ecological impacts from new developments (i.e. reduced carbon sequestration & degradation of natural recreation assets)
- ● Increased recreation costs
    - ○ Increasing fees to combat overcrowding can exacerbate inequity, affordability, and accessibility problems

The Whistler Institute found that crowding lowers the costs each tourist spends, or in other words increased demand leads to losses per tourist at the local level.
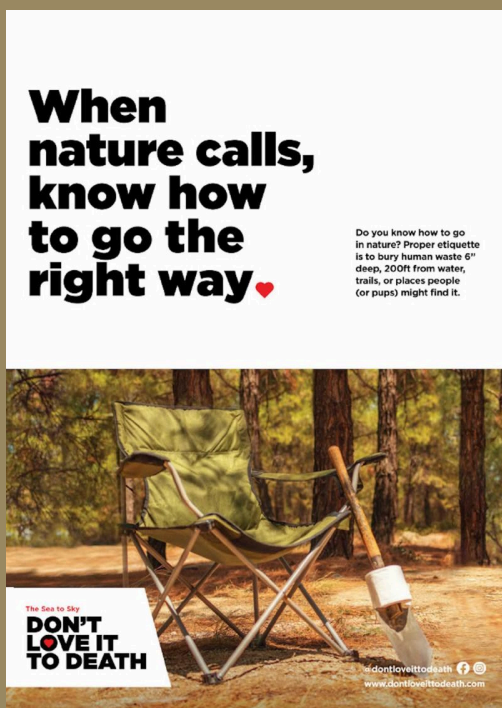
Responsible visitor education

The Basics:

- Municipalities can limit the impact of overtourism by teaching visitors responsible ways to engage with nature. These include:
  - Leave no trace practices
  - Invasive species awareness
  - Fire smart education
  - Respect for Bears and wildlife
  - Trail and camping etiquette
- Partner with regional tourism organizations and park authorities in developing messaging to encourage sustainable behaviours
- Tourism or Visitor centres are a great location to share this knowledge

Examples:

Case Study: Sea to Sky Destination Management Council, Don't Love it to Death Campaign

When nature calls, know how to go the right way.

Do you know how to go in nature? Proper etiquette is to bury human waste 6" deep, 200ft from water, trails, or places people (or pups) might find it.

The Sea to Sky
DON'T LOVE IT TO DEATH

@dontloveittodeath 🔵 ⚫
www.dontloveittodeath.com

The Sea to Sky Destination Management Council developed a destination education initiative to encourage responsible and respectful travel to BC. The Sea-to-Sky Destination Management Council, which was created in 2020, is made up of representatives of the various Sea to Sky planning areas. The council also includes organizations like the Indigenous Tourism Association of B.C., BC Parks, and various provincial ministries. While this isn't a local government initiative, their campaign might provide your community with inspiration for educating visitors on responsible tourism.

Their Don't Love it to Death campaign launched with social and paid media components in phase

one. They have a series of short and comical videos on 'being a bad houseguest' in nature. Phase two includes signage in key locations. Signage installation is underway throughout the Sea to Sky Corridor to further reinforce the key messages of the campaign. This campaign is being built in a way that's adaptable to other communities that are facing the same challenges.

Resources:
- [Leave No Trace Canada](#)

Promote off-peak programming

The Basics:
- Promote tourism during off-peak seasons through marketing and/or offering discounts and promotions
- This can counter overcrowding by encouraging a more even distribution of visitors throughout the year

Examples:

Case Study - Whistler, BC

Public Engagement in Whistler found that many residents believed whistler was getting too busy. As a result, Whistler Tourism shifted their goal from mass growth to finding respectful visitors, as well as promoting off-peak programming and dynamic pricing ([Tourism: Building Back Better](#)).

Paid Parking and Parking Management

The Basics:
- Increasing or implementing parking fees can be one way to reduce the impacts of over tourism on road congestion and reduce emissions

- Parking fees can also support active transportation and public transit use
- Parking reservation systems is another way some parks are managing the overflow of vehicles
  - I.e. Ontario Provincial Parks Reservation

Examples:
- Whistler, BC - Parking Rates Increase
  - Whistler is using the funds from the rate increase towards increasing bus hours, reliability and consistency
- Jasper, BC - Expanding Paid Parking

◆ Fare-free Public Transit or Shuttle Services

The Basics:

> "Whistler, Bow Valley and Collingwood study participants noted that destinations are reaching vehicle-based carrying capacity, including parking, congestion, commute times and wear on road infrastructure, well before reaching recreation and tourism ecological or social carrying capacity" (Knowles & Scott, 2024).

- Fare-free transit is an option to reduce congestion, cut emissions and increase accessibility
- Most municipalities depend on fares to fund a significant portion of its transit operations, but private sponsorship (such as resorts) or funding from upper levels of government could be a way forward

Examples:
- Municipality of Whistler, BC
- Town of Canmore, BC
- City of Gatineau, QC
- City of Mont-Tremblant, QC

■ – ◆ Active Transportation Networks

The Basics:

- Encouraging active transportation to and around ORMs reduces traffic congestion and emissions
- Reducing speeds on roads popular for active transportation increases safety, encouraging use
- Electric bike financing programs are especially popular in mountain destinations to support active transportation on challenging gradients

Examples:

- Town of Canmore, AB – perspective on reducing speeds to 30 km/h, and advocacy by Community Cruisers, a local organization
- Town of Banff, AB - 30 km/h Town-wide Speed Limit
- The Legacy Trail- linking Canmore to Banff is heavily used by commuters and tourists

- The loan is applied directly onto the homeowner's Nelson Hydro electric bill and repaid over the term of the loan. Participants may choose a 2 or 5 year amortization period, with an interest rate of 3.5%.
- This aspect of the program may raise challenges for municipalities that do not own their local electric utility provider.
- The maximum loan amount is $8,000 per household, facilitating the purchase of more than one electric bicycle.
- Under the Electric Bicycle Staff Financing Program, City of Nelson Municipal Staff are able to purchase an electric bicycle with the opportunity to have it paid off in installments taken from their paycheck with no interest. This helps remove the upfront cost barrier.
- City of Nelson staff are actively working with local businesses to have them implement a similar program so that more residents have access to a sustainable mobility device.

Case Study: Saanich Community E-Bike Incentive Pilot (2021–2023)
- Pilot Interim Results Report, Presentation
- This program offered incentives on the purchase of an electric bicycle in order to remove the high upfront cost barrier that prevents people from adopting the climate friendly technology.
- Through this program, Saanich estimates that each participant will result in a reduction of ~390-650kg of CO_2e savings per year
- Saanich provided 300 incentives with three tiers, served on a first-come, first-served basis
  - Tier 1: 180 incentive packages of $350, provided regardless of income
  - Tier 2: 80 incentive packages of $800, for income qualified citizens (LICO*1.6-2.1)
  - Tier 3: 40 incentive packages of $1600, for income qualified citizens (LICO*1.6 and below)
- Following the great success of Saanich's award-winning e-bike incentive pilot program in 2021-22, the Province launched an BC Electric Bike Rebate Program in 2023. For more information, visit bcebikerebates.ca.

Resources:

- Canadian Health Association for Sustainability and Equity - [Best Practices for Active Travel and Health Equity in Small Towns in British Columbia](#)
- [Getting Started with Active Transportation: a guide to challenges of implementing Active Transportation initiatives - Municipal Engineers](#)
- [Small Towns - Big Steps in Active Transport](#)
- [Webinar Transport Actif by Marianne Giguère from WSP Consulting](#)
- [Active Transportation for Small and Rural Communities - Climate Caucus](#)

▌ Protect affordable housing stock through zoning to limit vacation rentals

The Basics:

- Regulate tourist accommodation to protect the visitor experience, as well as affordable housing for residents and neighbourhood character.
- Having residential zoning which may not be marketed as available to tourists, for any length of time, is important to protect long-term resident and workforce housing stock.

Examples:

- [Whistler, BC - Tourist Accommodation: Zoning and Covenants](#)
- [Banff, BC Housing Action](#)
- [Calabogie, ON, Zoning around Calabogie Peaks Resort](#)
- [PEI Recreation Municipality Zoning & Subdivision Control Bylaw](#)
- [Comox Valley Regional District, Zoning FAQ](#)
    - "AirBnB and other similar temporary rental options are not allowed within the Comox Valley Regional District. This is to increase the availability and accessibility of rental properties within the Comox Valley."

Initiatives to Address Scope 3 Emissions

Scope 3 emissions are the result of activities from assets not owned or controlled by the industry/municipality, but that the industry/municipality indirectly affects ([EPA](#)). For a vacation destination, scope 3 emissions include emissions from travel to the location, waste disposal, and resort/recreation activities.

▌ Ensure tourism industry and municipal climate goals are aligned

The Basics:
- Support tourism organizations and operators in adopting sustainable business practices, including energy management and waste reduction.
- Encourage the tourism industry to share the municipality's sustainability initiatives on their website, such as active transportation Infrastructure, and public transit.

Examples:
- [Tourism Whistler – Sustainability Journey](#), BC
- [Tremblant – Eco Responsibility](#), ON
- [Banff & Lake Louise Sustainability](#), AB

▌ – ◆ Include reducing visitor travel emissions in climate plans

The Basics:
- Scope 3 Aviation emissions to outdoor recreation destinations represents a huge portion of the carbon footprint of tourism.
- There is currently no way to decarbonize aviation, so to reduce transportation emissions to their community, municipalities and industry can target local tourism or rely heavily on pay to pollute schemes (i.e. carbon credits).
- Municipality and industry reports demonstrate a collective failure to account for scope 3 transportation emissions from tourism, which constitute a large proportion of destination emissions, particularly in Western Canadian destinations reliant on international tourism markets ([Knowles & Scott, 2024](#)).

Examples:

Valencia in Spain was the first destination to measure the impact of their tourism economy and they found that [81% of those emissions are from people getting to the destination](#).

Case Study - Whistler, [The Big Moves](#) 3. Reduce Visitor Travel Emissions

By 2030, Whistler has a goal to demonstrate leadership in redefining tourism in a low carbon world through their 6 big movies. Goal number three is to reduce visitor travel emissions.

"Emissions associated with tourist travel to and from Whistler are estimated significantly higher than Whistler's total community emissions. While the vast majority of these emissions occur outside of Whistler's municipal boundaries, they should be considered since they are a result of Whistler's success and because there are increasing expectations for the tourism industry to address travel emissions." Initiatives to make this happen include:

- partnering with the tourism sector to define low-carbon tourism,
- creating marketing and communication about the benefits of longer duration travel and fewer annual trips
- Partner with resort organizations and regional partners to encourage alternatives to personal vehicles travelling to and within Whistler
- Partner with car rental agencies to make EV's available for visitors
- Partner with resort organizations to encourage high quality carbon offset purchases and carbon neutral vacations

◆ **Ensure Transportation options linking ORM with their nearest major urban area**

The Basics:

Climate Caucus
Outdoor Rec Municipalities Handbook

- Many visitors to outdoor recreation destinations travel from the nearby major urban center, but lack convenient, fast and cost-effective public transportation options from these areas.
- Ensuring transit options are available access to outdoor recreation communities is critical to counter equity, and affordability issues in nature access.

Examples:

Case Study: [Gatineau Park QC Shuttle Bus](#)

From Spring to Fall, the National Capital Commission provides a free shuttle bus six days a week from the City of Gatineau and Ottawa to the nearby Gatineau Park trailheads. This shuttle bus allows those without a personal vehicle to enjoy the park. Additionally, it reduces traffic along the parkway which is a popular location for road cyclists.

Reduce Scope 3 Waste-based Emissions

The Basics:
- Encourage tourists and seasonal workers to reduce their waste through sharing and circular economy initiatives
- Support the creation of a "ReBuilt it Centre" which allows for the recycling of certain materials, and collection and resale of certain materials

Examples:
- [Tofino, Take Back the Tap Program, BC](#)
- [Whistler ReBuild It Centre](#), [Squamish Rebuild It Centre](#) -foster the resale aspect

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Case Study: Banff addressing Scope 3 Waste-based Emissions

"All participants understand ski tourism's reliance on low-income seasonal workers who, like tourists and amenity migrants, are drawn to the benefits of living, working, and recreating in mountain destinations. Workshops with municipality stakeholders

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discussed how low-pay short-term employment push tourism workers to purchase cheap, disposable goods (including furniture, small appliances, recreation gear) which contribute to scope 3 waste-based emissions. Banff identified this causal loop as an opportunity to simultaneously address affordability and waste-based emissions by creating a sharing-economy-style 'library-of-things' and a reuse centre for larger items such as furniture" (Knowles, 2023).

Initiatives to Address the Invisible Burden

Local authorities have the biggest burden of covering costs per tourist from local infrastructure use. Local governments need to measure this 'invisible burden' to understand the impact of tourism on local government assets. Many local governments do not have the tax base to pay for tourists' use of vital resources and infrastructure. As a result, they may need to unfairly tax their residents.

The invisible burden placed on municipalities includes additional required infrastructure for energy, waste, wastewater and the protection of natural and cultural resources, without recompense from the tourism economy. These costs are not recognized in local economic impact analyses, despite lowering the economic benefits from tourism. Partnering with the private tourism sector to partially cover tourism infrastructure costs is one way to reduce this burden.

Resources:
- Destination Risk: The Invisible Burden of Tourism (2019)
- Tourism: building back better, Webinar, The Whistler Institute

Examples
(Source):

Climate Caucus
Outdoor Rec Municipalities Handbook

01 Energy & GHG

Cost of infrastructure upgrades
(including green technology)

Cost of managing peak demand

Increased reliance on
non renewables

02 Water

Cost of infrastructure upgrades
(including green technology)

Cost of desalination

Overexploitation
(leaving residents without
potable water resources)

03 Solid waste

Cost of infrastructure upgrades
(including green technology)

Uncollected waste, unsanitary
waste dumps and pollution
(harm to human health
and ecosystems)

04 Sewage

Cost of infrastructure upgrades
(including green technology)

Untreated sewage
(harm to human health
and ecosystems)

05 Natural capital

Costs to maintain
biodiversity, green corridors
and protected areas

Loss of biodiversity and
ecosystem services

06 Social capital

Higher cost of living

Amenities for residents
displaced by tourism

SOUVENIRS

Undermined
community values

◆ **Monitoring the Invisible Burden**

The Basics:

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Outdoor Rec Municipalities Handbook

- Local governments lack the necessary tools to measure the impact of tourism on their infrastructure and services.
- Acknowledging and measuring this invisible burden can enable decision makers to determine how such costs can be paid for.
- Where resources are available, municipalities and city managers should create a staffed data unit to measure the cost for delivering essential services to the tourist, for example, water, wastewater treatment, and solid waste management systems to ensure proper evaluation of tourism costs to the community.

Public Private Partnerships

The Basics:
- Private tourism profits from transportation infrastructure provided by municipalities and so should cover some of the costs.
  - e.g. EV charging networks, shuttles

Examples:
- [Revelstoke Resort Shuttle](#)
- [Lake Louise Shuttle](#)
- [Banff/Lake Louise/Norquay inter-ski resort shuttle](#)

Small Community Initiatives by Category

In addition to the ORM initiatives listed above, the following handbook sections include initiatives for ORM and small communities broken down by category.

Our goal is to provide best practice climate solutions for each area, including relevant case studies and program details, bylaws, jurisdictional contexts, sample resolutions, and briefing notes.

Click on any of the links to access our research and resources!

CATEGORY	LINK TO CATEGORY DOCUMENT (includes initiatives, case studies, resources, etc.)
TRANSPORTATION	*MORE HERE*
ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION	*MORE HERE*
ZERO WASTE / CIRCULAR ECONOMY	*MORE HERE*
SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT	*MORE HERE*
BUILDINGS	*MORE HERE*
NATURE–BASED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS	*MORE HERE*
FOOD SECURITY	*MORE HERE*
MANAGING NATURAL ASSETS	*MORE HERE*

Additional Resources

Useful Tools:
- [Outdoor Recreation for Community and Economic Development](#)
- [Ski Resort Realities in a Warming Climate](#), Webinar, Protect our Winters
- [Tourism: building back better, Webinar,](#) The Whistler Institute
- [Ontario and Quebec resort municipality climate modelling](#)
- [Advancing ski tourism transformations to climate change: A multi-stakeholder participatory approach in diverse Canadian destinations](#)
- [The Future of Canada's Ski and Mountain Destinations in an Era of Climate Change](#)

Climate Caucus Resources:
- [Climate Caucus Municipal Grants List](#) – detailed list of relevant municipal grants
- [Policies and Resources Library](#) – list of motions, bylaws, council reports and briefing notes