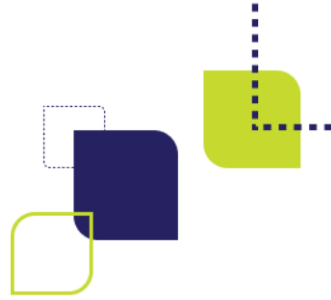




Beyond the Powder

THE ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND COMMUNITY IMPACT OF
THE BACKCOUNTRY SKI SECTOR IN REVELSTOKE

October 2025

A report by Deetken Insight

Commissioned by:





Contributions to the Revelstoke Community

5 | 2 | 5

Heli-Ski | Cat-Ski | Lodge
Operators with
Operations in Revelstoke

9,584 | 40,662

Annual Unique Skiers | Skier
Days Serviced by the Sector

59%

Skiers Who Return the
Subsequent Year

638 | 123

Total Jobs During Peak |
During Off Season
across the 12 Operators

75%

Estimated Proportion of
Employees who Live in
Revelstoke Year Round

8%

Annual Revenue Growth,
2022 to 2024

\$19M

In Expenditures on
Locally Sourced Goods
and Services

88

Jobs Attributable to the
Industry Among Local
Suppliers

52%

Skiers Spend 1 or More
Extra Days in Revelstoke

Contributions to the Province

\$95M

Incremental **Gross
Domestic Product**
(GDP) Attributable to the
Industry

\$7M

Incremental **Provincial
Tax Revenue**
Attributable to the
Industry

965

Incremental **Jobs**
Attributable to the
Industry

\$36M

Incremental **Household
Income** Attributable to
the Industry

\$84M

Export Revenue
(Operator Revenue from
Non-BC Residents)

Executive Summary

This report was commissioned by HeliCat Canada (HCC) and the Backcountry Lodges of British Columbia Association (BLBCA) to understand the **economic and community impacts** of the backcountry ski sector in the Revelstoke area. It complements province-wide studies by focusing on a specific area in British Columbia where the sector is particularly active.

All 12 backcountry ski operators present in the **Revelstoke region** were interviewed and provided business details including expenditures to estimate their economic impacts. These included 5 heli-, 2 cat-, and 5 backcountry ski tour lodge operators.

Seventeen community representatives—including business owners, government officials, non-profit leaders, scientists, and ski guide professionals—were also interviewed. **The report as much tells their story as the industry's.**

The sector has deep roots in the region. Backcountry ski guiding for visitors began in the late 19th century. Today's operators range from newer businesses established within the past eight years to long-standing, family-run operations passed down through generations.

The sector is largely insulated from normal economic cycles given a wide-ranging clientele from BC and—predominantly—the US and other countries. Impacted severely by COVID-19, the sector has returned to pre-pandemic levels. **Trips are in high demand**, with over 59% of visitors returning from the prior year.

As such, the sector is an **economic anchor** for the region. Most employees live in Revelstoke year-round, and most seasonal workers return to one or another operator year over year. There is a steady demand for goods and services from local businesses.

Key economic contributions to the Revelstoke community include employing approximately **638 people** during peak season and generating **\$19 million** in purchases from local businesses. Additional benefits flow from workers spending their earnings on local goods and services, while **52% of visitors** extend their stay in the Revelstoke area before or after their trip.

Meanwhile, province-level contributions include **\$95 million in gross domestic product, \$36 million in household income, \$7 million in provincial tax revenue, and 965 jobs.**

Community members enthusiastically expressed the impact the sector has on the community. The report highlights **six major themes** from these interviews:

High Quality Local Jobs. Jobs are highly desirable, workers tend to be permanent residents of the community, compensation and benefits are attractive, and workers gain transferable skills for the shoulder and summer seasons.

Local Business Support. Local businesses depend critically on the sector. For local helicopter companies, for instance, the sector creates much needed business to help them sustain year-round operations.

Public Safety and Emergency Response. Guides keep visitors safe and contribute to emergency rescue throughout the region. Operators collect and share snowpack data with avalanche organizers to enhance public safety.

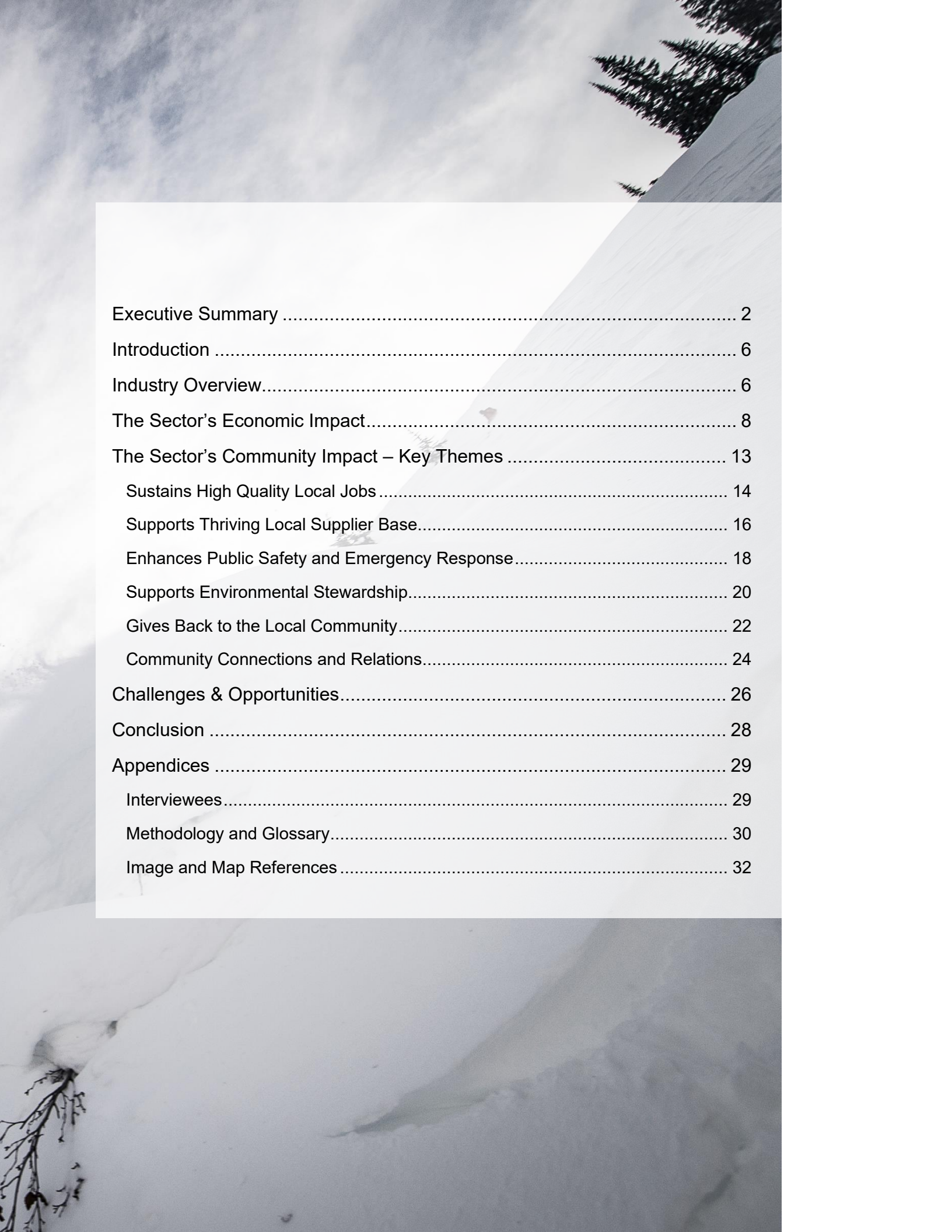
Environmental Stewardship. Operators' support for and participation in research projects demonstrate their commitment to minimizing their environmental impact and being good land stewards. Their business depends on a thriving natural environment.

Giving Back. From donating a season's worth of recycling, to supporting women's safety, seniors' care, and recreation clubs, to guides volunteering their time to local search and rescue services, the sector has a consistent track record of giving back to the community.

Community Connections & Relations. There is a track record of operators making efforts to deepen their relationships with the four First Nations for whom the Revelstoke region is home and establishing connections with various community organizations.

Operators expressed a strong commitment to providing world-class backcountry ski experiences for years to come. Looking ahead, both operators and community members emphasized the importance of continuing to build and deepen relations with the Sinaix (Sinixt), Ktunaxa (Naha), Secwepemc, and Okanagan (Syilx) Nations, whose traditional territories overlap with the operators' land tenures, as a vital step in achieving this vision.





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Introduction

The backcountry ski sector is a defining part of Revelstoke's economy and community life. This report examines how backcountry ski operators contribute to the region—economically, socially, and environmentally—and how their activities extend benefits well beyond the ski day. It focuses on the Revelstoke area, one of the most concentrated and historic hubs for backcountry skiing in Canada, where the sector's impacts are both deeply local and provincially significant.

Twelve operators—representing six heli-ski, two cat-ski, and four backcountry ski tour lodges—participated directly by providing detailed operational and expenditure data. Their input was complemented by seventeen interviews with community members including business owners, guides, municipal officials, non-profit leaders, Indigenous advisors, and scientists. Together, these voices illustrate how the sector shapes Revelstoke's civic fabric, supports livelihoods, and contributes to environmental and cultural stewardship.

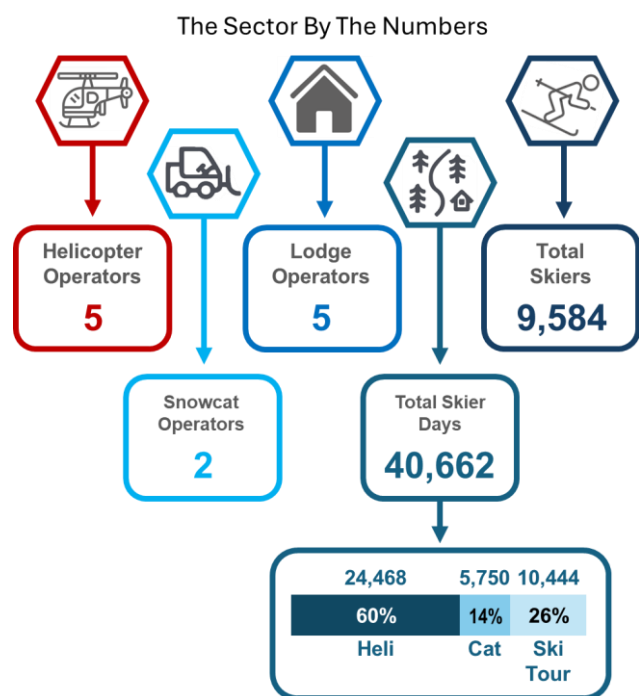
Building on prior province-wide studies, the analysis provides a community-level view of how the sector functions as an economic anchor and civic contributor. Quantitative modeling estimates the direct, indirect, and induced effects on employment, income, GDP, and tax revenue, while qualitative findings capture dimensions that numbers alone cannot—how operators sustain high-quality jobs, strengthen public safety, foster reconciliation, and give back to the community.

The report was prepared by Deetken Insight and commissioned by HeliCat Canada (HCC) and the Backcountry Lodges of British Columbia Association (BLBCA).

Industry Overview

The helicopter and snowcat skiing ("helicat") and commercial backcountry ski tour lodge sector is a cornerstone of British Columbia's adventure tourism industry, renowned for delivering world-class, guided powder skiing experiences in remote mountain environments.

Helicat operators use either helicopters or snowcats to access expansive alpine and subalpine terrain, while ski tour lodge operators provide a non-mechanized skiing experience. Both offer guests the chance to ski or snowboard untracked snow far from lift-served areas. These experiences are typically sold as multi-day packages (while also accommodating day trips) that combine guided skiing with high-end accommodation, gourmet dining, and sometimes, wellness amenities such as spas or massage



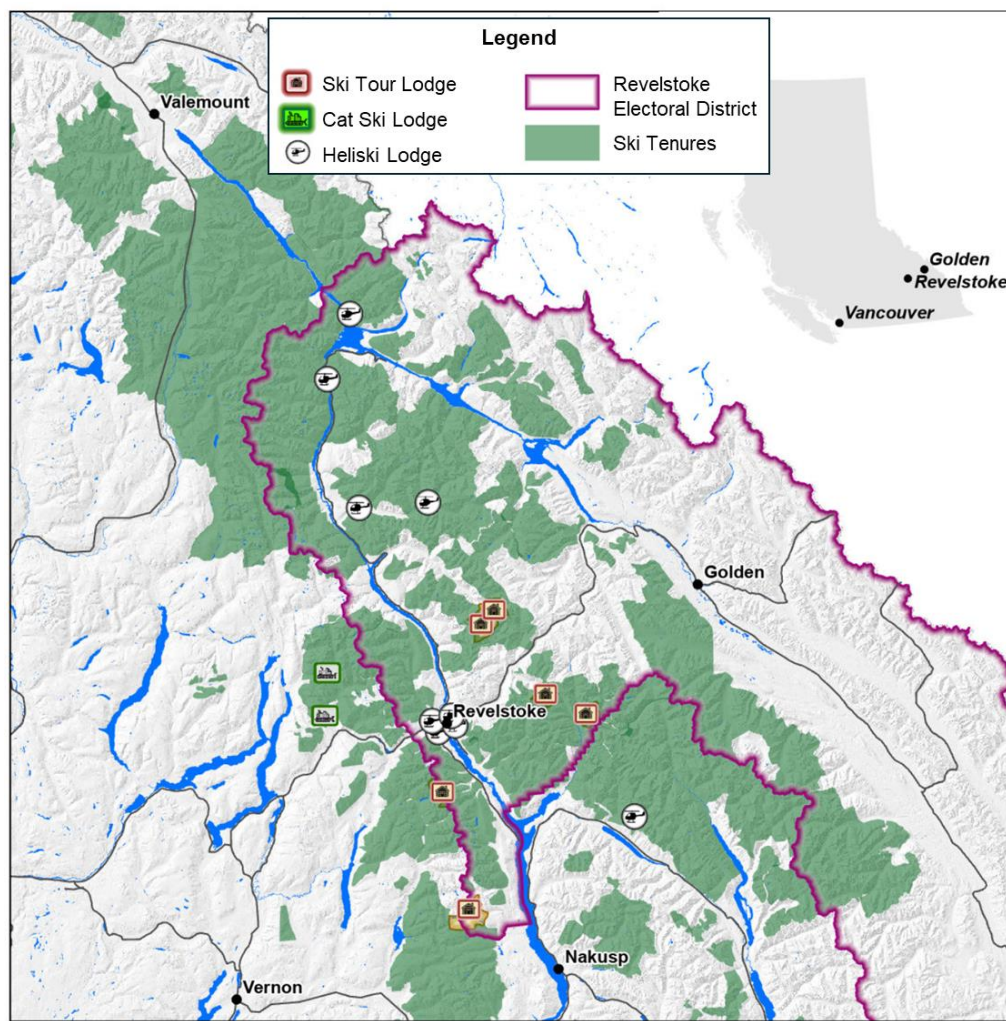
services. Over half of total skier days are provided by heli-ski operators, roughly a quarter by ski tour operators, and the balance by cat-ski operators.

The sector caters predominantly to international and out-of-province visitors—drawn by BC’s deep powder snow and varied terrain, which means most revenue is new to the provincial economy.

Revelstoke is one of the most significant hubs for the industry in Canada. The region has a rich heritage in commercial backcountry skiing, with some operators having had continuous operations in the local area for over 60 years. A small number of operators offer offseason (non-winter) operations such as guided hiking and mountain biking.

Tenured areas are present through the Revelstoke Area B electoral district and operate across traditional and often overlapping territories of several Indigenous and First Nations groups including The Sinaix (Sinixt), Ktunaxa (Naha), Secwepemc, and Okanagan (Syilx) Nations.

Operators’ Locations in the Revelstoke Region



The Sector's Economic Impact

Introduction

Across the sector, operators describe themselves as stable, high-quality employers who provide dozens of seasonal jobs and a smaller number of well-paid, year-round positions. Many actively recruit and retain local

residents, valuing low turnover and offering career pathways such as tail-guiding and apprentice-guiding programs that feed into full guide certification.

Several operators note that their work draws skilled staff to Revelstoke who settle, buy homes, volunteer, and raise families—although housing shortages and affordability are persistent challenges.

“We’re not a massive employer, we’re a stable employer. We provide great jobs to people... Seasonal folks who come here love the Revelstoke area and want to set down roots... that demographic drives the community forward—buying houses, paying taxes, volunteering.”

— *Dave Morrison, Owner, Mica Heliskiing*

Operators also emphasize the flow of visitor spending into the local economy. Most guests travel from outside the region—many from the U.S. and Europe—and spend before and after their lodge or ski package on local hotels, restaurants, shopping, resort skiing, and other services. Operators typically source as much as possible from local suppliers—from food and beverage to helicopter services—creating indirect jobs and supporting small businesses.

The industry is seen as a stable “anchor” sector: demand is relatively resilient to economic cycles, capacity is limited by tenure and environmental constraints, and client retention is high. While not a high-growth sector, it generates consistent winter tourism revenue, supports training for future guides, and helps position Revelstoke as a global destination for premium backcountry skiing.

Overall, the sector in Revelstoke acts as a cornerstone of the winter economy, supporting economic diversification, sustaining high-quality jobs, stimulating local procurement, and bringing in new money that circulates widely through the community.

Quantitative Highlights

Business and expenditure data was collected from operators to estimate their collective economic impact on the Revelstoke area and British Columbia. An input-output methodology

was used that assigns expenditure categories to supplying industries and accounts for estimated imports from jurisdictions outside BC. The methodology builds on and is consistent with previous economic impact modelling undertaken by Statistics Canada for HeliCat Canada. More detail about the methodology to be added. See Appendix – Methodology for more details.

Quantitative highlights from the modeling and data provided by operators for this report are described below.

Contributions to the Revelstoke Community

5 | 2 | 5

Heli-Ski | Cat-Ski | Ski Tour
Lodge Operators with
Operations in Revelstoke

The region boasts 12 operators in total, including 5 heli-ski, 2 cat-ski and 5 backcountry ski tour lodges. Several operators operate multiple lodges in the area – some in the backcountry and others in the town of Revelstoke. The operators have been present in the Revelstoke region between 8 and 60 years.

In the most recent winter season, the operators hosted 9,584 unique skiers who skied a total of 40,662 days. Most visitors are on multi-day packages, while some heli- and cat-ski operators offer single-day trips that are run out of town-based staging areas. Many visitors also ski at Revelstoke Mountain Resort before and/or after their trip.

9,584 | 40,662

Annual Unique Skiers | Skier
Days Served by the Sector

59%

Skiers Who Return the
Subsequent Year

Overall, among operators reporting this information an estimated 59% of visitors returned from the previous season. This pattern has been consistent for many years excluding the COVID-19 seasons. This loyalty demonstrates robust demand and the compelling value proposition the sector offers its visitors.

During peak season, the sector employs 638 people between full and part-time positions. 123 are employed during the off-season. Three operators offer off-season activities such as backcountry hiking and biking. Significant changes or expansions to offseason services are not anticipated in the short term.

638 | 123

Total Jobs During Peak |
During Off Season across the
12 Operators

75%

Estimated Proportion of
Employees who Live in
Revelstoke Year Round

Operators report that most employees who are based in Revelstoke are either long-term or returning employees. Year-over-year demand for workers is consistent but stable. Recruitment of new employees to the sector is typically via word-of-mouth, while dependency on immigration is limited and

ad hoc and focuses mostly on roles with unique skills such as advanced guides.

The sector has fully recovered from the Covid-19 interruption and experiences moderate growth year-over-year growth. In “normal” seasons like last year they are at full capacity and maintain waitlists. Major influences on economic performance are long-term in nature including climate change, which is increasing the unpredictability of weather and snow conditions.

8%

Annual Revenue Growth,
2022 to 2024

\$19M

In Expenditures on Locally
Sourced Goods and
Services

Operators spent approximately \$19 million on goods and services supplied by Revelstoke-based businesses. Local businesses that depend on demand from the sector include helicopter operators, retailers, and food and beverage suppliers, among others. Most operators report that they prefer to procure from local suppliers not only to reduce their costs, but also to support the local economy and community.

Using the input-output model for this project, an estimated 88 jobs are attributable to the \$19 million in expenditures on locally sourced goods and services. This estimate does not include secondary employment benefits from local suppliers purchasing from other Revelstoke-based suppliers to satisfy demand from the industry, given data limitations. Likewise, the estimate does not include the employment impacts of workers’ spending part of their income on locally sourced goods and services.

88

Jobs Attributable to the
Industry Among Local
Suppliers

52%

Skiers Spend 1 or More
Extra Days in Revelstoke

For the large majority of skiers who do multi-day trips with the operators, most spend at least one day before or after their backcountry ski trip. This benefits local suppliers. For instance, many operators report that their visitors ski one or more warmup days at Revelstoke Mountain Resort.

Contributions to the Province

Gross domestic product reflects the economic value-add of the industry. It comprises income earned by workers and by business owners among other smaller items. The sector accounted for \$95 million in GDP including direct, indirect, and induced effects.

\$95M

Incremental **Gross Domestic
Product (GDP)** Attributable
to the Industry

\$7M Incremental Provincial Tax Revenue Attributable to the Industry	The sector accounted for \$7 million in tax revenue to the Province of BC including direct, indirect and induced effects. This does not include tax revenues to local authorities.
The sector contributed an estimated 965 jobs to the BC economy including direct, indirect and induced effects. Direct jobs are based on a survey of operators while indirect and induced jobs are estimated using an input-output model.	965 Incremental Jobs Attributable to the Industry
\$36M Incremental Household Income Attributable to the Industry	The sector generated \$36 million in household income. This includes labour compensation earned by employees in the sector, as well as attributable indirect and induced effects.
With 89% of skier days accounted for by visitors from outside BC, the sector is a significant source of export revenue to the province.	\$84M Export Revenue (Operator Revenue from Non-BC Residents)

Capital Investment and the Role of Tenure Certainty

Operators across the sector continue to demonstrate confidence in the region through ongoing and planned capital investment. Several have completed major infrastructure projects in recent years that have strengthened their operational capacity and workforce stability. Eagle Pass Heli described investing in a permanent facility along the highway to use for day trips that “helped us springboard... to building our own ski lodge,” reflecting a long-term commitment to growth. Kingfisher/Eleven Experience made a similar leap by purchasing and renovating a downtown property to create the Eleven Revelstoke Lodge and Quartermaster Eatery—establishing a lasting presence in the community. Selkirk Tangiers Heliskiing has been completing new staff accommodation at Revelstoke Mountain Resort, reducing dependence on private rentals and helping retain seasonal workers. Smaller operators, such as Kapow Guiding, operators of Blanket Lodge, are also scaling up: “We’ve only operated the Kapow House for a year... that was a big growth for us. We want to build a big garage with a commercial kitchen and staff quarters.”

Planned investments continue to focus on enhancing facilities and workforce infrastructure. Selkirk Tangiers described plans to transition contractor pilots and engineers into dedicated on-site accommodation as its new housing becomes operational, while others noted the need for ongoing reinvestment in lodge infrastructure and safety systems to sustain reliable operations. The scale of these commitments is substantial: one medium-sized heli-ski operator estimated the replacement value of its existing assets at \$12 million, underscoring the high capital intensity of the sector. Collectively, these projects represent millions of dollars in local construction and service spending and reflect the sector’s confidence in Revelstoke’s continued appeal as a global backcountry destination.

At the same time, operators emphasized that **tenure certainty directly affects their willingness and ability to make such long-term investments**. Dave Morrison, CEO of Mica Heliskiing, explained that clear and predictable tenure terms “allow an operator to invest or go to a bank to borrow,” whereas “operators facing more uncertainty are going to be less likely to make that investment in an anchor industry for the sector.” Others noted that short or uncertain renewal timelines make it difficult to justify large capital projects or obtain financing. As one put it, **with only a few years left on a licence and “no clear path to tenure renewal,” major commitments become a “hard thing to sell.”**

Taken together, these perspectives highlight the **critical link between stable tenure frameworks and sustained capital investment**. When operators can plan confidently beyond their current licence horizon, they are more likely to undertake the kinds of infrastructure, housing, and facility upgrades that reinforce both the sector’s competitiveness and its contribution to Revelstoke’s year-round economy.

The Sector's Community Impact – Key Themes

Drawing on input from operators and seventeen community interviews, **six themes** emerged that together illustrate the social and economic footprint of Revelstoke's backcountry ski sector.

These conversations reveal how residents, business owners, and partners perceive the sector's influence—not just in jobs and GDP, but in the everyday texture of community life. The findings tell a more personal story about how backcountry ski operators help sustain livelihoods, support local suppliers, strengthen public safety, care for the environment, and contribute to the civic and cultural fabric of the region.

Together, these themes describe a sector deeply interwoven with Revelstoke's identity—one whose value is measured as much in relationships, stewardship, and shared resilience as in economic indicators. They also shed light on the challenges and opportunities facing the sector going forward.

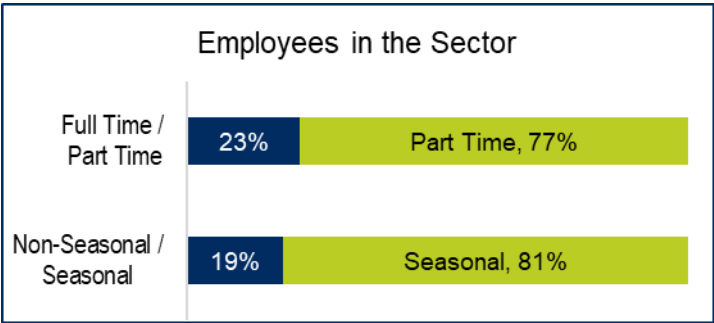


Sustains High Quality Local Jobs

The backcountry ski sector sustains high-quality local jobs by anchoring residents in Revelstoke, offering competitive, benefit-rich compensation, and investing in training that builds portable skills for complementary off-season work. The combination of steady seasonal demand, employer-provided housing solutions, and limited dependence on temporary foreign labour strengthens local labour-market resilience and supports year-round household stability.

When it comes to local employment, interviews and research show three reinforcing dynamics: (1) workers put down roots in Revelstoke and nearby communities; (2) demand for staff is steady across winter seasons and diverse occupations; and (3) compensation and benefits are attractive, with meaningful training that builds transferable skills for the shoulder and summer seasons.

Interviews and operator data indicate that approximately **three-quarters of the total workforce live in or near Revelstoke year-round**, out of 638 employed during peak season—representing one of the largest concentrations of the sector’s workforce in BC. This underscores how the industry helps people build lasting lives in the community. Longevity extends to the operators as well; as Carl Trescher, VP of Mountain Operations at CMH, noted, **“the majority are 20+ year long-time guides with us,”** reflecting career-length commitments that strengthen both operations and community stability.



Competitive compensation and steady demand for employment. The *2025 HeliCat Canada Wage & Benefit Survey* shows a competitive total compensation picture across roles among mechanized operators. Industry-wide, operators commonly pay employees for pre-season setup and training at or near their regular rates, and most provide accommodation and meals as part of their compensation packages. Hiring difficulty ranges from just over 1 for tail guides to just over 4 for executive chef, heavy duty mechanic, and snowcat driver (1=not difficult at all, to 5=extremely difficult). Difficulty hiring has trended down slightly since 2022. Operator testimony mirrors the data. **“Not hard... we get tons of resumes every year... we don’t have a whole lot of turnover,”** said Kris Moore, owner/founder of K3 Cat Ski, linking strong interest in these jobs to the work environment and lifestyle in and around Revelstoke. Kate Devine, owner of Selkirk Lodge, described multi-year retention in key positions and a steady stream of qualified applicants for core hospitality roles. The upshot is sustained demand from both sides: operators reliably need capable teams each winter, and capable workers actively choose the Revelstoke area because remuneration, benefits, and the mountain community are attractive.

Limited reliance on temporary foreign labour. While a few operations bring back specific international specialists on seasonal permits, interviewees described this as the exception rather than the rule.

Address housing needs. To make housing workable in a constrained market, managers reported using a mix of owned or leased units. Dave Pehowich, General Manager, Selkirk Tangiers, explained that the company and its aviation partner “**have been renting local houses... four houses in town**” to accommodate pilots and engineers—reducing pressure on the private rental market and ensuring crews can live locally during the season. Several operators described similar approaches, which in turn help seasonal workers become repeat, multi-year residents.

Highly skilled jobs with transferable off-season skills. Most jobs in the sectors are professional roles with structured training pathways, paid pre-season setup, and ongoing certification support. Derek Wilding, Director of Operations, Association of Canadian Mountain Guides, emphasized that many Revelstoke-area guides build year-round careers by guiding in the southern hemisphere during the Canadian summer and/or working in parks, at Revelstoke Mountain Resort, or in small outdoor businesses—keeping their skills sharp and their incomes local across seasons. HeliCat Canada’s social impact survey shows that 53% of employees reported taking a second job while remaining in rural communities during the off-season—evidence that training and experience in the sector translate directly into other regional work.

“Now I live in Revelstoke...this sector just creates places that people want to live.”

— Harrison Bolger-Munro, Full Lead Heli-Ski Guide, Revelstoke Search and Rescue

A training ground for the wider economy. Members of the Canadian Ski Guide Association—a national association of ski guides—were surveyed at the time of this report. Results were shared with Deetken. 39% reported having trained or worked in Revelstoke at some point in their career. As a highly skilled profession that supports health and safety in the backcountry, ski guides value Revelstoke as a premier location to build their skills even if many now live and work in other places in BC or Canada.

Why this matters? The sector’s employment model converts seasonal visitor spending into durable local value. Predictable, well-paid roles—supported by housing and training—anchor workers and families in Revelstoke, sustaining school enrolment, volunteering, and year-round demand for local services. Lower turnover lifts service quality and reduces recruitment costs, keeping more expenditures in the region.

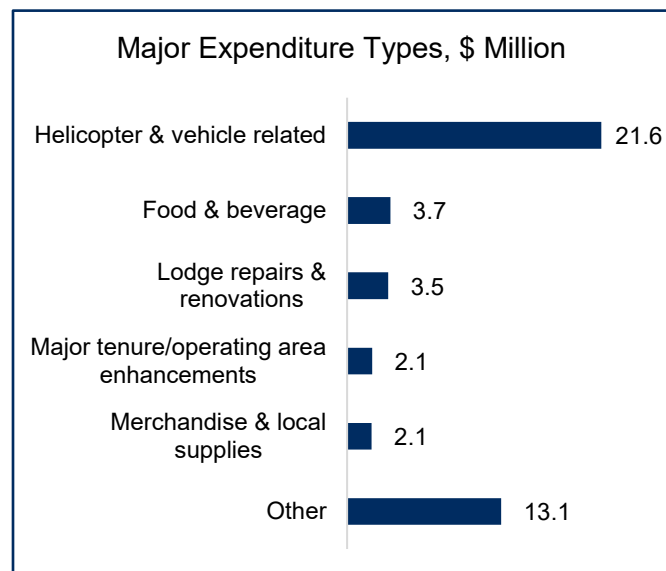
Supports Thriving Local Supplier Base

The sector's procurement choices and guest-flow management translate into a robust winter economy for local suppliers. Hotels and restaurants gain predictable blocks; aviation firms keep crews and aircraft utilized through winter; retailers and trades capture high-margin, time-sensitive sales; and the cumulative effect is a resilient, place-based supply network sustained by operators who prefer to source locally and keep visitor dollars in Revelstoke.

Revelstoke's backcountry ski operators channel significant, recurring spending to local suppliers—including accommodation, aviation, food and beverage, transport, and retail. Their strong “buy local first” approach is driven by practical logistics (speed and reliability in a mountain town), guest experience goals (encouraging visitors to spend time downtown before and after trips), and multi-month contracts that help sustain specialized firm, particularly helicopter service, through the winter season.

Accommodation and dining anchored in town.

For example, CMH's Revelstoke operations are based out of the Regent Hotel, generating a steady flow of room nights, meals, and related spending in the downtown core. Newer entrants have built on this approach through direct investment—most notably, Eleven Experience's purchase of a downtown hotel and restaurant to firmly anchor its heli-ski program in the city centre. These decisions convert seasonal operations into guaranteed business for hotels and eateries and encourage guests to arrive early or stay late in Revelstoke rather than simply “pass through.” Meanwhile, Selkirk Tangiers puts all their frontline staff through the Revelstoke Ambassadors training platform, a program run by Revelstoke Chamber of Commerce designed to train participants to deliver excellent visitor-experiences while strengthening Revelstoke's workforce.



Aviation contracts that keep local fleets turning. Helicopter providers based in the region depend on winter contracts with heli-ski operators to keep aircraft, pilots, and engineers working at scale. As Carl Trescher of CMH, explained, CMH's Revelstoke program partners with Selkirk Mountain Helicopters (SMH) “for the whole winter period,” noting that SMH also serves Eagle Pass and is “the main provider” for the area. From the operator side, Eagle Pass's general manager, Sean West, explains how a single local helicopter company “has five aircrafts—three

... on contract for Eagle Pass,” and that “these businesses are employing these aircrafts full time in the wintertime.”

For helicopter operators that sell their services to backcountry operators, the winter work is **essential for stable, year-round employment**. While summer operations—especially wildfire fighting—remain their core business, winter operations play a crucial role, significantly supporting the companies’ scale and overall operating model. For one helicopter company interviewed, the winter business can account for **"anywhere from 1/4 to 1/3" of the company's annual business.**"

Day-to-day procurement stays local. Operators emphasize that routine purchases—everything from bulk soap to emergency parts—are sourced in Revelstoke whenever possible. Dave Morrison, CEO of Mica Heliskiing says **"We buy local where we can... for our food and beverage program and for [supplying] our hotel with soaps,"** and guests **"dining at restaurants, shopping in shops, [and] engaging in shuttle services"** compound that impact.

Retailers and mountain services benefit directly. Revelstoke gear shops see steady traffic from operator purchases and guest needs. Kris Moore explained, **"we're renting gear left, right and center in Revelstoke... the ski shops... are just loving it,"** adding that even local boutiques feel the lift—"my wife owns a clothing store in town... in the winter it's [when] her business is [busy]". This blend of outfitting, last-minute gear replacements, and "while-you're-here" shopping by visiting skiers and their families extends spending well beyond the heli-cat sector, supporting the broader "Main Street" ecosystem.

"We use local suppliers for almost everything — groceries, laundry, helicopters — and our guests all spend money in town before and after their trips on accommodations and meals. It's a good influx of money into Revelstoke."

— Kate Devine, Selkirk Lodge

Why local matters in Revelstoke? In a remote mountain economy, local sourcing reduces downtime, deepens inter-business resilience, and improves visitor experience (walkable pre/post-trip days downtown). The interviews point to a reinforcing loop: operators intentionally steer guests into Revelstoke; guests concentrate demand for rooms, restaurants, retail, and shuttles; and specialized suppliers—particularly helicopter companies—leverage reliable winter contracts that complement their summer utility work. This, in turn, anchors skilled jobs and recurring purchases in town, keeping more of each season's revenue circulating locally.

Enhances Public Safety and Emergency Response

The backcountry ski sector is a force multiplier for public safety. It reduces response times and increases operational effectiveness for avalanche rescue, search and rescue (SAR), and wildfire aviation. Without these contributions, public agencies would face either slower responses or meaningfully higher costs to replicate the same level of coverage and situational awareness during fast-moving emergencies.

The backcountry ski sector functions as an extension of the Revelstoke region's public-safety system. Operators generate high-quality avalanche observations on a daily basis, maintain backcountry communications and weather infrastructure, and mobilize trained guides and aircraft during incidents. Industry social-impact surveys have long noted that these contributions are essential yet under-valued in formal accounting of public safety in BC.

InfoEx as safety infrastructure. A key contribution of Revelstoke-area operators is snow science data. They submit daily, standardized snowpack, weather, and avalanche reports to the Canadian Avalanche Association's InfoEx program, which Avalanche Canada (AvCan) uses to produce public avalanche forecasts. As AvCan Executive Director Gilles Valade noted, "**InfoEx is specifically used for producing our daily avalanche forecasts,**" highlighting that the professional quality and standardization of operators' submissions are "key" and meet CAA standards. Near Revelstoke, HeliCat Canada (HCC) tenures alone cover an estimated 48% of the area from which AvCan receives member data—a measure of the share of professional observations available to forecasters. A 2023 study valued HCC member data at up to \$2 million annually if AvCan had to collect it independently via additional field teams (across all helicat tenures in Western Canada).

Emergency response: trained people, aircraft, and comms—on call. Operators' guides are advanced first aid and avalanche professionals who are frequently first on scene because they are already in-terrain with aircraft, rescue gear and communications. A 2019 survey of HCC members documents dozens of rescues, hundreds of staff hours and six-figure direct costs incurred over five years. The same survey also records operators maintaining backcountry communications and weather stations that SAR and partner agencies can access during incidents.

In avalanches, the survivability rate drops off dramatically per minute—getting there in time matters. Having helicopters and trained guides nearby is huge.

— Ren Bessette, RevSAR

Mass-casualty avalanche readiness, proven in practice. The “Big Iron Shootout” avalanche at Boulder Mountain near Revelstoke in 2010 illustrates how commercial operators augment public response. Operators halted their own programs to deploy aircraft and guides for rescue, acting as first-on-scene professionals because they were already embedded in the mountains. Revelstoke Search and Rescue (RevSAR) leader Ren Bessette emphasized how vital that private capacity is when events scale: **“When it becomes exponential like that, we don’t have the capacity [to respond].”** HCC reports indicate that operators collaborated with SAR during that mass-casualty event near Revelstoke. More broadly, HCC members noted dozens of SAR deployments and the associated material costs absorbed by companies.

Wildfire response acceleration via fuel access and caches. Crucially for the Revelstoke area, the BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) confirms that local ski operators are integral to wildfire readiness and initial attack logistics. Letters of Agreement enable the BCWS to stage critical assets on operator property at short notice. These arrangements allow caches to be deployed rapidly and infrastructure to be positioned as needed, facilitating the quick mobilization of resources. They also support the safe staging of large fuel volumes near threatened communities, ensuring aircraft can refuel and return to operations quickly—a decisive factor in the effectiveness of initial attack efforts.

Local readiness and shared infrastructure. Revelstoke-based operators maintain specialized assets that directly enhance patient survivability. Carl Trescher of CMH Revelstoke highlighted a dedicated sling-rescue kit **“that lives in our helicopter for the winter,”** ready for immediate deployment, and noted CMH **“helped contribute to the [helicopter] landing pad at the [Revelstoke] hospital,”** facilitating faster medevacs. He also emphasized operator investments and two-way data sharing with Avalanche Canada, which strengthen both public forecasts and daily professional decision-making.

Why this matters? In Revelstoke, the backcountry ski sector effectively extends the public-safety system. By embedding professional capacity, aircraft, and communications in terrain every day, it lowers risk and shortens response times across avalanche, SAR, and wildfire contexts. These privately financed assets operate as shared civic infrastructure, benefiting residents and visitors far beyond paying clients. Recognizing this role in land-use, tenure, and partnership decisions helps keep the region’s safety system resilient as visitation grows and climate volatility increases.

Supports Environmental Stewardship

In the Revelstoke area, backcountry ski operators safeguard the very snow, water, and wildlife their business depends on—co-funding high-elevation science with Living Lakes, sharing operational data, maintaining remote stations, and working with the BC Wildfire Service through Letters of Agreement—turning private logistics into public-good stewardship.

Stewardship is not optional in Revelstoke’s backcountry ski sector—it is the foundation of operators’ licence to operate. These operators depend on stable snowpacks, intact watersheds, and healthy wildlife for their survival, making environmental care a business imperative rather than a marketing choice. In practice, this means weaving stewardship into daily operations, long-term investments, and partnerships—aligning economic goals with the protection of the natural capital that sustains both the industry and the wider community.

Partnering with science groups to monitor high-elevation waters. The sector has collaborated with Living Lakes Canada on high-elevation water monitoring—supporting access, providing local knowledge, and sharing data for alpine lake ecosystems. Paige Thurston of Living Lakes Canada explains that a grant from the HeliCat Canada Futures Fund provided

“Absolutely... [operators are] self-interested to be good stewards of the land... [because their operations] live or die by the quality of the alpine environment.”

— *Paige Thurston, Living Lakes Canada*

“significant multi-year support which enabled us to deliver consistent monitoring over several seasons.” Operators also share snowpack and weather data and make high-elevation sites easier to access for environmental fieldwork. Sector-wide, companies help maintain weather stations—an average 2.75 stations per reporting operator in 2018—contributing data that supports both safety and environmental monitoring.

Concrete action on waste and carbon. Operators have implemented wide-ranging waste-reduction initiatives, including recycling, composting, phasing out single-use plastics, and reusing materials. According to HCC’s 2019 social impact survey, respondents reduced waste by an average of 7.3 kilograms per person between 2013 and 2018. The sector also invests in lower-carbon energy solutions—such as micro-hydro, solar, and geothermal—along with idling reduction and efficient flight and logistics practices, including shuttles and carpooling. In recent seasons, HCC has complemented these efforts with a carbon-offset program, covering roughly 37.6% of skier-days in 2022–23.

Funding wildlife and habitat research.

Beyond daily operating practices, the sector funds research on species and ecosystems that matter in the Columbia Mountains. In 2018, reporting operators directed ~\$87,140 to caribou research, ~\$17,500 to wolverine work, and ~\$68,500 to other studies. These investments inform land-use planning and operating protocols that reduce disturbance risks to sensitive wildlife.

The sector also records all wildlife observations and submits this to a third-party biologist for analysis

“A lot of guides and operators are born here (Revelstoke). They're very much embedded in the communities and want to see those (communities) succeed and they don't want to compromise anything on the environmental side.

— *Steven Wilson, Ecologic Research*

Wildlife monitoring. Operators voluntarily **monitor, track, and report wildlife observations**, collecting detailed data on animal reactions to vehicles and skiers, particularly focusing on species of concern such as mountain caribou, mountain goats, and wolverines. This data, voluntarily collected and consolidated, helps to refine operating protocols, such as maintaining specific distances from animals to minimize disturbance. As biologist Steven Wilson noted, operators **"have always been open to the collection of additional data to improve the evidence that we're using to base those... practices on."** This commitment to scientific input allows the industry to adapt and continuously improve its environmental performance, supporting the viability of both their operations and the sensitive ecosystems in which they function.

Environmental education and operational culture. Operators integrate stewardship into both daily operations and guest experiences. Regular briefings review wildlife protocols, snowpack observations, and terrain management to reduce disturbance and enhance safety, while guides share their knowledge about the alpine environment. As Selkirk Lodge's Kate Devine noted, “I show [guests] pictures from when my parents first went up there in the 80s to what it looks like now, and it's mind-blowing... **That education piece is really important because it brings to front of mind... people won't fight to save places they don't care about.**”

Why the environment matters to the industry. Operators' livelihoods rely on healthy snowpacks and headwater ecosystems, making their environmental actions both strategic and sustained. Ongoing waste reduction, wildlife research funding, and shared environmental data are example efforts undertaken by operators to safeguard the natural resources that sustain both Revelstoke's economy and its way of life.

Gives Back to the Local Community

Revelstoke's backcountry ski operators do more than host skiers—they invest in the local community. From donations and in-kind support for healthcare and adaptive sports, to infrastructure like the hospital helipad and accessible transit at Mount Cartier Court, and even recycling programs that fund local organizations, operators consistently give back while delivering world-class skiing experiences.

The backcountry ski operators in the Revelstoke convert guest spend and operational assets into deliberate, place-based community benefits: recurring cash and in-kind support flows to health care (e.g., the Queen Victoria Hospital helipad), seniors' mobility (a wheelchair-accessible bus for Mount Cartier Court), adaptive sport and youth programs, and shared backcountry infrastructure. Much of this giving is engineered through guest networks and matched by staff time, equipment, and aircraft—turning a luxury tourism product into a reliable funding stream for local non-profits and civic projects.

Giving that starts with what the community asks for. As Rob Cloke, formerly with Mustang Powder, explained after visiting Mount Cartier Court: **"I realized they didn't have a bus that could take [residents] outdoors. So, I initiated the work to get support from guests to buy [a wheelchair-accessible] bus for Mount Cartier Court."** This story is corroborated in sector reporting that highlights Mount Cartier Court among community beneficiaries of operator philanthropy, situating such gifts within a broader norm of health- and youth-focused giving by the sector's operators.



Place-based donations that stay in the Revelstoke region. Interview data shows operators emphasize local targets—food security, women's safety, seniors' care, recreation clubs—rather than diffuse national causes. This aligns with the sector's recent social impact baseline, which documents member practices of channeling resources to their host towns and nearby rural communities.

Turning guest networks into community assets. Operators regularly activate guest and supplier networks to solve local problems. Selkirk Tangiers Heli Skiing staff described how **"Rob**

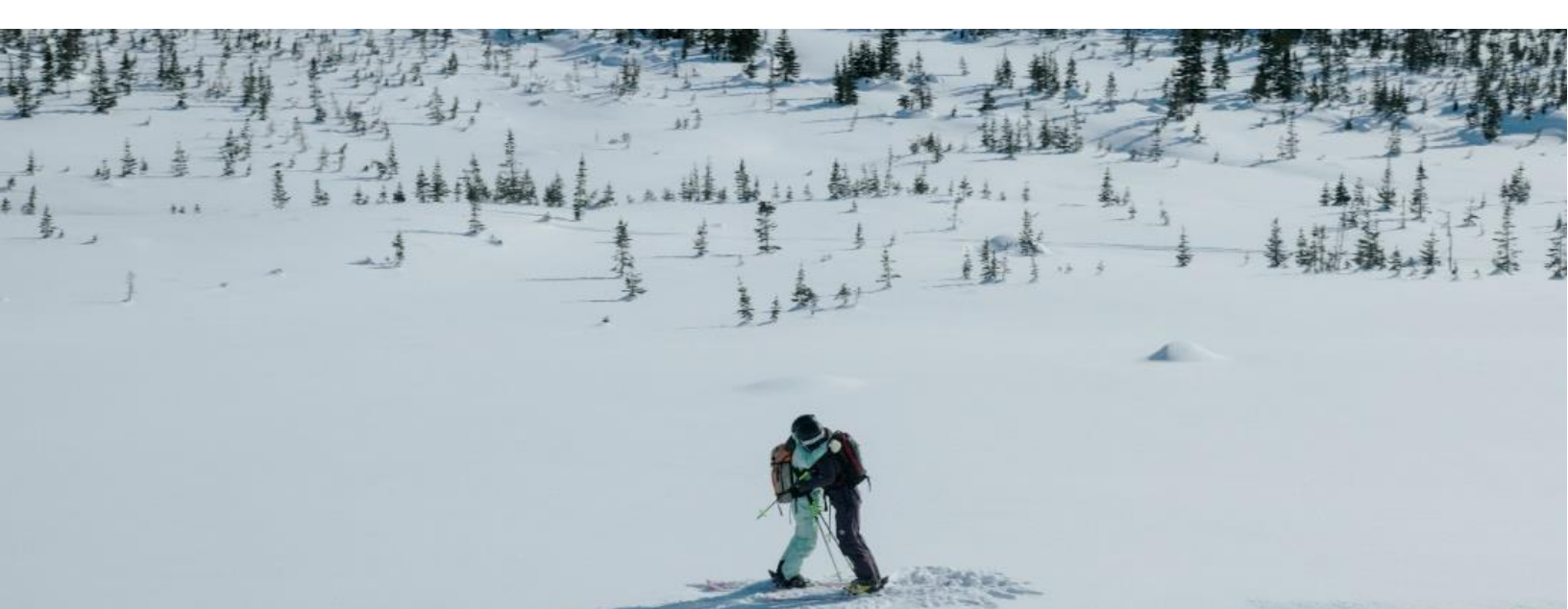
[Cloke] started fundraising for a wheelchair bus at Cartier Court... and it became a community effort with guests and partners pitching in,” underscoring the catalytic role operations play when they “know the people in need and can move quickly.” This “operator-as-connector” function is one reason the sector is often a major social presence in its host towns, beyond its visitor-facing role.

Everyday programs: recycling revenue, gardens, and youth. Community support extends beyond large donations—many contributions are small, consistent, and local. Aziz Barna, owner of Return-It’s Revelstoke location, highlights that operators like Mustang Powder donate recyclables and direct the earned commission to charity, with Return-It providing in-kind labor to sort and count. This collaboration reduces waste while supporting local causes. Industry reporting also notes member initiatives such as recycling programs with proceeds to community groups, community gardens, and local food projects, showing how environmental practices often double as micro-fundraisers for neighborhood needs.

Why this matters? These place-anchored contributions translate a seasonal tourism engine into year-round community capacity: mobility for seniors, safer homes for women, stocked shelves at the food bank, stronger clubs for youth, and circular-economy wins from recycling. In summary, operators’ dollars, networks, and logistics are woven into Revelstoke’s civic fabric—making the local quality-of-life dividend of the backcountry ski sector visible well beyond the ski day.

“We’re starting to give money to community charities... probably around 60 or 70 thousand... Food Bank, Hospice Society, Women’s Shelter... Snowmobile Club... Cycling Association.”

— *Rob Cloke, former Operations Manager, Mustang Powder*



Community Connections and Relations

Backcountry ski operators in the Revelstoke region play a dual role in strengthening both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community life. Their activities extend well beyond skiing. For example, building relationships with First Nations whose territories host their operations, supporting cultural and training initiatives, and contributing skills, knowledge, and resources to the wider Revelstoke community.

Community relationships are evolving. Indigenous advisors emphasize that while the industry has taken meaningful steps forward, more work remains. At the same time, operators are helping to knit together a broader civic fabric through public avalanche education, recreation partnerships, and volunteer service that deepen residents' sense of belonging in a mountain town.

Building relations with Indigenous communities is a long-term endeavour.

The sector's operations overlap with the territories of several First Nations. Over the past decade, operators have moved from limited, transactional engagement toward longer-term relationship-building with the First Nations that call the area home. Ray Cormier, an Indigenous consultant who has worked with the industry, notes that while relationships are often strong in times of agreement, they are truly tested when difficult issues arise—such as tenure renewals or wildlife management. Sustaining progress will require operators to deepen cultural knowledge, connect regularly and consistently in communities, and embed Indigenous voices more directly in decision-making.

There are numerous examples of collaboration with Indigenous communities.

The Indigenous Backcountry Training (IBT) program blends avalanche education with land-based learning and mentorship, helping participants from more than a dozen First Nations communities gain guiding and outdoor skills and a sense of belonging in a space that has historically lacked Indigenous representation. Additionally, Mustang Powder has provided scholarships for First Nations youth to attend Thompson Rivers University's Adventure Guide program—two \$5,000 awards

“HeliCat and its operators have made a great effort in building relationships with Indigenous communities. Continued efforts made by the industry to understand and appreciate Indigenous communities' unique challenges and opportunities will allow for strong relationships to be fostered. Indigenous communities should not only be viewed as rights holders but also as desirable partners to the operators.”

— *Ray Cormier, Secwepemc Nation Member and Indigenous Relations Advisor*

annually for six years—typically supporting Secwepemc or other local students from the Thompson and North Okanagan areas.

Public avalanche education builds shared situational awareness. Alongside Indigenous engagement, operators continue to contribute to community safety, education, and recreation more broadly. Free community nights like *State of the Snowpack* provide an accessible entry point to safer backcountry use, especially for year-round workers and new tourers. As one organizer explains: “I would say it’s like 75% locals... they’re trying to get into backcountry skiing... **This is totally free to see what’s going [on]... and hear from**

the locals what’s happening.” In fall 2025, HCC became a Provincial Sponsor of *State of the Snowpack*, contributing \$10,000 in financial support. **Guides translate professional expertise into civic capacity.** Many staff apply their professional avalanche training to volunteer service. As heli-ski guide and paramedic Harrison Bolger-Munro explains: “I volunteer on the search and rescue team. Being [an] avalanche professional through my job allows me to have the skills to do that... without the sector, I wouldn’t have any of those skills.” Observations collected for operator safety also feed directly into public avalanche forecasts, extending benefits to all backcountry users.

Four-season club partnerships broaden participation and place attachment. Lodges and operators also strengthen Revelstoke’s recreation culture. For example, Alex Cooper (local cycling leader) highlights a long-standing donation of two-night lodge stays to encourage membership in cycling clubs. He describes how Sol Mountain’s trails “add another option when [visitors] come in the summer.” Operators have also developed connector trails and supported local clubs, with the level of contribution varying by company and over time.

Why this matters? Together, these contributions illustrate the backcountry ski sector role now and going forward as a bridge between visitors, residents, and local Indigenous communities. By treating First Nations as partners, while also investing in Indigenous training pipelines, and supporting cultural relationships, operators help lay the groundwork for reconciliation in practice. At the same time, avalanche education, volunteer service, and club partnerships strengthen Revelstoke’s civic infrastructure and quality of life. The combined effect is a tourism sector that not only brings international visitors to the mountains, but also reinforces local resilience, inclusion, and community well-being.

“IBT isn’t just about avalanche training or getting a foot in the door; it’s about reclaiming our place in the mountains... We’re building community, careers, and confidence with every course we run.”

— *Dylan Murray, Founder of IBT*

Challenges & Opportunities

The backcountry ski sector in the Revelstoke region operates within a landscape of both remarkable potential and complex pressures. As operators strive to sustain world-class experiences in one of the globe's premier mountain environments, they face interrelated challenges that test the sector's adaptability and commitment to stewardship.

Deepening Relations with Local First Nations: Building stronger partnerships with the multiple Indigenous Nations whose territories encompass the Revelstoke region remains both a responsibility and an opportunity for the backcountry ski sector. Many operators have laid important groundwork through dialogue, training, and shared stewardship projects, but meaningful reconciliation requires ongoing, year-round engagement that extends beyond regulatory consultation. Operators are learning that long-term trust depends on consistency—showing up in communities, hiring locally, integrating Indigenous knowledge into operations, and finding ways for First Nations to participate directly in planning and environmental decision-making.

Climate Change and Snow Reliability: A primary concern for operators in Revelstoke and throughout BC is the unpredictable impact of climate change on snow and weather conditions. This leads to less predictable snowpacks, melting glaciers, and changes in skiable terrain, affecting product quality and booking predictability. Operators note that while Revelstoke has historically reliable snow, conditions are changing, making terrain more complex to manage. Operators are adapting their operations by managing terrain differently, which sometimes means not skiing certain areas or roping up groups to manage higher-risk terrain. The sector continues to invest in environmental stewardship, including wildlife research, implementing waste reduction programs, and exploring alternative energy sources like micro-hydro, geothermal, and solar to reduce their carbon footprint.

Land Use and Tenure Uncertainty: The security of land tenures is a critical issue for operators, as they make significant investments in lodges, fuel caches, and access roads on Crown land they do not own. Shorter or uncertain tenure renewals discourage long-term investment and create business insecurity. This uncertainty is heightened by overlapping land uses and government policy changes related to conservation. Operators engage in proactive cooperation with other land users, such as snowmobile clubs, to maintain relationships and reduce threats to their tenure. They also engage in building strong relationships and collaborations with First Nations through consultation on land use, run development, and supporting Indigenous skill development and youth programs like the Indigenous Backcountry Training (IBT) program.

Housing Affordability and Availability: The high cost and limited availability of housing in Revelstoke is a significant obstacle to local businesses in general, impacting the ability to attract

and retain staff. Some operators, like Selkirk Tangiers Heli Skiing, are developing or acquiring staff accommodation to alleviate housing challenges for their employees and helping mitigate housing pressures in the community. Others note that most of their staff are already Revelstoke residents, which helps mitigate the direct impact on their operations. Some also provide support such as letters of employment to help staff secure mortgages.

Wildlife Habitat Protections and Regulatory Uncertainty: Proposed or expanded protections for mountain caribou and mountain goat habitat create significant risk for tenure holders. In worst-case scenarios modelled by HeliCat Canada, losing access to federally mapped habitat could force some operations to shut down completely, while others would lose significant portions of their skier days. Operators have altered run development practices to avoid disturbing wildlife, collaborated on live GPS collar-tracking of caribou to plan ski days around animal movement, and adjusted timing to protect migratory bird nesting seasons. Many also invest in research—collectively over \$170,000 in 2018 alone to caribou, wolverine, and other studies—and participate in First Nations–led consultation and habitat stewardship projects.



Conclusion

Revelstoke's terrain, snowfall, and mountain culture make it a global epicenter of backcountry skiing. Few places in the world combine the vast, accessible alpine terrain with the snow reliability and expertise that have defined the region for decades. This natural advantage—coupled with generations of guiding experience—has anchored a sector that attracts visitors from around the world while sustaining high-quality local employment and community life.

The backcountry ski industry's longevity reflects both entrepreneurial endurance and deep respect for the region. Many operators have been part of the landscape for forty years or more, investing steadily in infrastructure, training, and safety systems that serve not only guests, but also the wider community. Their commitment to sustainability is both pragmatic and principled: the health of the environment underpins the health of the business.

Economically, the sector functions as a reliable anchor industry for the Revelstoke region and a consistent export generator for British Columbia. The sector supports a network of local suppliers, sustains stable, skilled employment, and contributes substantial provincial tax and GDP benefits year after year. These outcomes highlight how backcountry skiing, though largely seasonal, provides year-round value to the province's economy and communities.

Looking forward, a key opportunity lies in deepening partnerships with the First Nations whose territories overlap the operating areas. By working together as stewards of shared landscapes, the industry and its Indigenous partners can help guide responsible growth and navigate the challenges ahead—including climate change, evolving land-use priorities, and increasing environmental variability. With this collaborative approach, the backcountry ski sector is well positioned to continue as both a world leader in mountain adventure and a model for sustainable, resilient tourism in British Columbia.

Appendices

Interviewees

Representatives from all Revelstoke-area operators were interviewed:

Operator	Type	Year Began
CMH Heli-Skiing and Summer Adventures	Heli-ski	1965
Selkirk Tangiers Heli Skiing	Heli-ski	1978
Blanket Glacier Chalet	Ski Tour Lodge	1983
Selkirk Mountain Experience	Ski Tour Lodge	1985
Selkirk Lodge	Ski Tour Lodge	1988
Mustang Powder Cat Skiing	Cat-ski	1998
Mica Heliskiing	Heli-ski	2000
Sol Mountain Lodge	Ski Tour Lodge	2004
K3 Cat Ski	Cat-ski	2007
Kingfisher Heliskiing	Heli-ski	2014
Eagle Pass Heli	Heli-ski	2017
Snowfall Lodge	Ski Tour Lodge	2017

The following individuals were also interviewed:

Name	Organization
Alex Cooper	MTB
Aziz Barna	Return-IT
Caroline Lachapelle	Revelstoke Chamber of Commerce
Cat Moffat	City of Revelstoke
Derek Wilding	Association of Canadian Mountain Guides
Dylan Murray	Indigenous Backcountry Training (IBT) Program
Gilles Valade	Avalanche Canada
Harrison Bolger-Munro	Ski Guide and Revelstoke Search and Rescue
Jamie Ryga	Helicopter service
JP McCarthy	Access Mountain Technical
Mike Hainault	Canadian Ski Guide Association
Paige Thurston	Living Lakes Canada
Ray Cormier	Secwepemc Nation Member and Indigenous Relations Advisor
Ren Bessette	Revelstoke Search and Rescue
Rob Cloke	Mustang / Bus program
Steven Wilson	College of Applied Biologists
Gwen Teichroeb	BC Wildfire Service

Methodology and Glossary

Overview

The economic impact estimates in this report were produced using a model developed by Deetken Insight to quantify how expenditures translate into economic activity across British Columbia. The model applies an input–output framework, which captures the relationships between suppliers and purchasers of goods and services (“products”) in the provincial economy. These relationships are defined in Statistics Canada’s 2021 Supply and Use Table (SUT) and Symmetric Input–Output Table (SIOT), which provide detailed data on industry and product flows.

Data Collection

The analysis is based on voluntary, self-reported information submitted by helicopter, snowcat, and backcountry ski tour lodge operators. Eleven of twelve participating operators provided data using a standardized collection template—adapted slightly for this study—that was also used in previous HeliCat Canada (HCC) economic impact reports, including *Elevating Adventure: A Five-Year Update on the Economic Impact of Helicopter and Snowcat Skiing in British Columbia*. For the twelfth operator, historical data from a previous HCC report were used to maintain consistency. These data were benchmarked and extrapolated to estimate sector-wide inputs.

The data template captured:

- Operating and capital expenditures for the most recent operating year (2024);
- Total skiers and skier-days;
- Employment by seasonality (year-round vs. seasonal) and status (full-time vs. part-time);
- Visitor origin (BC, other Canada, US, and international);
- Percent of repeat visitors and those extending their stay in Revelstoke.

Economic Modelling

To estimate total economic impacts, operator expenditures were mapped to product categories in Statistics Canada’s Supply and Use Product Classification (SUPC) system, following the same mapping approach used in prior HCC studies. This mapping, prepared in collaboration with Statistics Canada, ensures that spending aligns with relevant industries and adjusts for interprovincial and international imports based on historical trade patterns.

Input–output multipliers were then applied to estimate impacts on four core variables:

- **Domestic Output:** The total value of goods and services produced within BC, roughly equivalent to business revenues.
- **GDP at Basic Prices:** The sum of gross value-added by all economic agents, including wages, salaries, and gross operating surplus (excluding net product taxes).

- **Employment (Jobs):** The number of jobs expressed as average annual positions. Part- and full-time jobs are counted equally, and one person employed in two years counts as two annual jobs.
- **Household Income:** Wages and salaries paid to employees.

Operators also estimated the share of expenditures made with Revelstoke-based suppliers. These proportions underpin the local spending estimates referenced in the *Contributions to the Revelstoke Community* section and related infographics.

Impact Definitions

Economic impacts are reported as direct, indirect, and induced effects:

- **Direct:** The immediate economic activity generated by the twelve participating operators.
- **Indirect:** The cumulative economic activity generated through suppliers and their upstream transactions (intermediate inputs).
- **Induced:** The additional activity arising when employees involved in the direct or indirect impacts spend their wages on other goods and services.

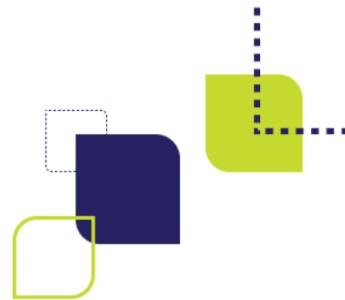
Provincial Tax Revenue

Provincial tax revenue estimates are generated using the provincial tax revenue multipliers for industry *BS713A00 - Amusement and recreation industries* purchased from BC Stats. This is the industry that maps most closely to the backcountry ski sector. Previous HCC reports similarly mapped the industry to BS713A00. These multipliers are for 2015.

Image and Map References

Page	Courtesy of
Inside front cover	HeliCat Canada
4-5	HeliCat Canada
7	HeliCat Canada and Bob Plummer, Smart Map Services
13	Indigenous Backcountry Skiing
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