

June 16, 2020

Office of the Premier
The Government of British Columbia
West Annex Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

To The Honourable John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia,

On behalf of the tourism businesses and industry in the Kootenay region of BC, we are writing to express our concern about the reopening plan and the limited understanding, response and support by the BC Government in addressing our critical and unique needs.

As a rural part of the province that is heavily reliant on tourism, most specifically from Alberta, and serviced by small and medium sized enterprises, the current plan addressing reopening and COVID-19 are not adequate and is causing the our industry to feel unheard and in distress.

Below represents a list of issues and proposed solutions follow. We would appreciate your response.

The Issues:

Kootenay Rockies

- 2.3 million overnight visitors, approximately 11% of BC total.
- 50% from Alberta (closer to 70% for the eastern side of the region)
- Over \$725,000,000 in visitor spending

- **Excluding interprovincial travel** - specifically between Alberta and BC, from current messaging and the start date of Phase 3. This indicates that only BC residents should be travelling within our provincial borders. This will decimate our economy. Tourism in our region is heavily reliant on visitors from Alberta. They represent between 40% to 70% of the summer travellers to our communities, even greater with no international visitors. *For example, in Fernie, visitor spending during the non-winter months is over \$50 million. Since Alberta signifies 65% of Fernie's market that time of the year, that represents a potential loss of \$30 million to the local and BC economy.* That is just one small community of many. Our region sees little traffic from the rest of BC, as such marketing to fellow British Columbian's will not revive our struggling sector nor fill that gap.
- **Lack of clarity & timelines for planning** - Tourism is an industry that requires clarity, effective communications and timing to be successful which are key areas of failure during this COVID-19 crisis. Travellers need time to plan and book their trips. Industry needs time to prepare for visitors that are coming. The continual movement of the timing for allowing non-essential travel is a major issue.
- **Businesses/sectors are not receiving the support needed to survive** – Many businesses are extremely fearful that support, if any, will come after they've closed their doors permanently. One recent example is the letter (attached to email) sent to the province by the East Kootenay Angling Guides. Another example is the cancelling of Kootenay Lake Ferry's summer sailing schedule is a major hit to businesses and tourism.

The Solutions:

- **Allow Alberta to visit right when Phase 3 starts** - and clearly message this in the media. Communities and businesses are following health guidelines and know best how to manage their tourism economies while keeping residents and visitors safe. We do not have a major 'BC' population centre that can easily get here (poor air service, drive is 10-12 hours from Vancouver), this is especially the case for the east side of the Kootenay region closest to the Alberta border. In addition, the announcement that BC Parks were calling for cancellations to existing reservations and blocking new ones from out of province residents was understood by many, especially Alberta residents, that they were not welcome, whether at BC Parks or otherwise. This continues to create anger and confusion and we field on-going calls and emails from our eastern neighbours on whether they will be welcome or not.
- **Provide clear dates sooner than later** - on when non-essential travel opens, and the geographical phases within Canada and beyond. This includes the US border. Then we can all plan for success giving businesses a much better chance of survival.
- **Make good educated decisions** – for the Kootenays. Given the number of active cases in both provinces, the health risk of welcoming a Calgary or Alberta visitor is no greater than a Vancouver one. Also, all essential services are now well advanced in their preparation for cases, should any appear.
- **Please visit us soon** – and tour some of the tourism communities to hear from our sector and some of the businesses on how COVID-19 and provincial and federal decisions are uniquely impacting us. Our region is different. Our voice is smaller and more distant but we are equally important and need to be heard.
- **Speak to a diversity of small tourism businesses directly** – to better understand the urgency, needs and issues. The temporary wage and rent subsidies are a band-aid and very short term. Tourism businesses need 'business' to survive or grant funding to be made available to them, as without them our industry would not exist.

The Kootenay Region is unique and so is its tourism industry. We are all in this together and have the willingness to make it all work safely for everyone but if our tourism businesses fail our communities fail. We need your help.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. We hope to hear from you very soon.

Sincerely,

Community DMOs:

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Community Chambers of Commerce:

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CC:

Hon. Lisa Beare, Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture
Hon. Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
Hon. Carole James, Minister of Finance
Hon. Tom Shypitka, MLA Kootenay East
Hon. Katrine Conroy, MLA Kootenay West
Hon. Doug Clovechok, MLA Columbia River – Revelstoke, Critic for Tourism, Arts & Culture
Hon. Michelle Mungall, MLA Nelson-Creston
Hon. Michelle Stilwell, MLA Parksville-Qualicum, Critic for Tourism, Arts & Culture
Hon. Coralee Oakes, MLA Cariboo North, Opposition Critic for Small Business
Shauna Brouwer, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture
Marsha Walden, President & CEO, Destination BC
Nancy Small, Chair, BC DMO Association
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Kathy Cooper, CEO, Kootenay Rockies Tourism
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