



Revelstoke, July 19, 2021

Honourable Ravi Kahlon, MLA  
Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation  
Economic.Plan.Engagement@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister,

With several serious global challenges facing us all, including climate change, accelerating loss of biodiversity, and rising inequality, the world is at a crossroads that calls for bold and confident leadership to face these challenges head-on and commit to doing things very differently. Congratulations on appointing Professor Mariana Mazzucato and her team at University College London to advise the Province on how best to develop its plan for a sustainable, inclusive and innovative economy. We are pleased to be invited to be consulted on our ideas for BC's economic plan and look forward to supporting this vital work going forward.

The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (ORCBC) is a charitable, social impact organization composed of organizational members representing a broad and diverse spectrum of recreation user groups, including paddlers, hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, snowmobilers, quad riders, 4WDs, sport fishers and many other nature interests. Our vision is that recreation and outdoor places are valued as essential to healthy individuals and vibrant communities and that every British Columbian has access to meaningful outdoor recreation experiences. We believe that the path to economic prosperity and community well-being runs through the outdoors.

In addition to a healthy and educated population, BC's greatest asset is the natural environment. From our national and provincial parks to local trails and green spaces, from alpine lakes to mighty rivers and a vast coastline, BC's outdoor recreation assets are the building blocks of a vibrant and sustainable economy. All across BC, from small rural towns like Burns Lake and the Village of Cumberland to Metro Vancouver, outdoor recreation powers a vast, yet poorly understood, economic engine that creates millions in spending and thousands of jobs for British Columbians.

Access to outdoor recreation boosts local economies and builds communities by:

- Providing jobs, encouraging spending and supporting a thriving tourism economy
- Making rural communities more desirable for companies and employees
- Improving physical and mental wellbeing and saving healthcare costs through prevention
- Fostering reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in BC through sharing economic opportunities and enhanced land stewardship.

As communities across the province strive to develop sustainable, diversified economies that are less tied to a single extractive resource industry, outdoor recreation offers a promising path to prosperity.

In the US, the outdoor recreation economy is calculated at US\$887 billion in consumer spending and sales generated by outdoor recreational activities, and it accounts for 2.2% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). While we do not have access to the same data in BC, there is no reason to believe that the outdoor economy is not equally substantial in BC. By doing a simple extrapolation, we could be looking at \$9 billion in annual consumer spending and sales for BC<sup>1</sup> and \$6.32 billion in annual GDP contributions.

BC's advantage is its natural environment, diversity of outdoor activities, and spectacular scenery. Stewarding and leveraging these resources provide us with tremendous opportunities for fostering innovation and growth within the outdoor recreation economy, leading to job creation, economic growth, sustainable resource management and enhanced social well-being.

Our recommendations include to:

- Collaborate with the outdoor sector to gain a better understanding of the socio-economic value of outdoor recreation
- Invest in recreation infrastructure and programs, including increased operational funding for Recreation Sites and Trails BC and other provincial land managers
- Create policies to protect public lands and waters that are key to outdoor recreation and support these with appropriate funding mechanisms
- Ensure all British Columbians have access to quality outdoor recreation opportunities and promote outdoor recreation as part of public health policy and programming
- Support Indigenous land stewardship and look at alternative measures of value to Gross Domestic Product including those that incorporate Indigenous principles of wellbeing.

Please find our responses to your questions below.

1. What global trends are you watching and how might they impact British Columbia's economy over the next decade? Are environmental, social, and governance values (ESG) important to these trends?

### **Outdoor recreation participation and impacts**

British Columbians embraced the outdoors during the pandemic with participation skyrocketing. Bikes, nordic skis, paddleboards and other outdoor gear flew off the shelves and have been in short supply for the past year. With the increase in visitation, BC's vital outdoor recreation system on Crown lands faces a number of growing issues including degradation of recreation

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<sup>1</sup> Weighted average based on industry data from <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/oregon/>, <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/montana/>, <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/washington/> and <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/idaho/>.

infrastructure, lack of facilities such as outhouses and wildlife-proof garbage containers, serious environmental and cultural impacts, and insufficient staff and budgets to plan and to maintain these valuable assets, including critical road access to trailhead and recreation sites. The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services recommended in its report on the Budget 2021 Consultation an increase in operational funding for Recreation Sites and Trails BC to "support staffing, monitoring and enforcement, maintenance, land management planning, oversight of public health and safety, and recreational infrastructure and services, including promoting and supporting volunteer efforts". Tackling this critical shortcoming in operational funding is crucial if we want a thriving outdoor recreation economy.

### **Amenity migration**

The pandemic and opportunities for remote work have amplified the movement of new people, including families and young professionals, to amenity destinations. Amenity destinations tend to be rural areas with unique qualities such as natural beauty, exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities and distinctive cultures. Amenity migration is significant because rural communities in BC tend to experience declining populations, however, rural communities that are amenity destinations report stable or growing populations. We need to better understand this demographic phenomenon. Understanding the short and long-term impacts on the community and on the landscape will allow us to better harness the positive impacts and mitigate the negative impacts of amenity migration.

### **Climate change**

Climate change will have an increasingly harmful and devastating impact on all aspects of life in BC. We are already seeing the effects on the natural environment, which is the foundation of nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation in BC, including increases in the severity and duration of wildfires and associated risks such as loss of communities, impacts to ecosystems, and increased health and safety risks.

2. Where do you see opportunities for innovation and growth in our economy? Where does British Columbia have an advantage, and what kinds of goals could be achieved?

### **Developing outdoor recreation opportunities to retain and attract talent**

Rural areas with extraordinary outdoor recreation opportunities and cheaper real estate are becoming hyper-attractors for new residents, particularly those pulling back from urban life. Rural amenity migration, or the relocation for quality of life purposes as opposed to monetary reasons, has been occurring for decades but has seen an increase since the start of the pandemic, leading to an increase in remote work opportunities and revived interest in outdoor recreation.

These sources from the US show how outdoor recreation attracts talent:

- Source: [Recreation Counties Attract New Residents and Higher Incomes](#)
- Source: [For today's companies, nature is a top recruiter](#)

- Source: [Outdoor Recreation: A top driver of Wisconsin's economy](#)

### **Protecting natural areas as a natural resource and tourism asset**

Protecting natural resources can be more economically valuable than extracting them. E.g. “In 2012 a kayaking company in Discovery Islands did an illuminating economic analysis. It calculated the economic value of 60 hectares of timber scheduled to be logged above and around the kayaking base camp across from the world-famous Robson Bight. It was determined that the value of the 60 hectares of timber was worth about \$3,600,000.00. Since the regeneration cycle meant the area could be cut only once every 60 years, the yearly economic value of the timber was \$60,000. The economic value to the kayaking company, however, was \$416,000 per year, or \$24,960,000 for the same 60-year period. In stark contrast to the approximately 300 person-days employment from logging the 60 hectares just once, the kayaking company provided 20,160 person-days of employment during the 60-year cycle. And this simple economic analysis didn't include the employment and earnings for the 40 other ecotourism businesses using the same area.” (Source: [Protecting Old Growth Rainforest to the Economic Benefit of Tourism-Based Communities \(2019\)](#), BC Chamber of Commerce)

### **Investing in outdoor recreation create jobs and better communities**

Outdoor recreation is a creator of direct and indirect jobs in BC, including those related to outdoor gear design and manufacturing, guiding, retail, education, tourism and hospitality. Trail workers are skilled workers that help build and maintain trail infrastructure. There are thousands of kilometres of trails in BC that are not getting the maintenance they need. Investing in trails can create jobs while promoting outdoor recreation (which benefits health, community well-being and can help with economic development ([Source: 17 Trail Benefits for British Columbians](#))). Trail workers also have transferable skills, and some will also work for the BC forest fire services ([Source: From Wildfires to Pandemics](#)).

### **Investing in parks generates returns**

“An analysis of the economic benefits of B.C.'s protected areas found the following:

- *For every dollar invested by the government, there were ten dollars in visitor expenditures*
- Almost one-third of expenditures were from out-of-province visitors (\$148 million)
- Economic activity in the parks system sustains approximately 9,100 direct and indirect person-years of employment every year
- The economic benefits of parks is widely distributed across the province, with one-half of benefits occurring outside of the lower mainland and Victoria regions”

(Source: British Columbia Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Date Published: September 1, 2001)

### **Enhancing accessibility**

Accessibility and inclusion is a space that is lacking in BC, including when it comes to the outdoors. Accessibility is about more than making a trail accessible for wheelchair users; it is

also about people with temporary disabilities, invisible disabilities, ageing populations, children and so on. Inclusion needs to be at the heart of BC's new economic plan.

### 3. What are the conditions that need to be in place for innovation and growth to happen?

We believe the outdoors is a critical asset that should be leveraged in the pursuit of economic prosperity and wellbeing. Outdoor recreation is a growing and diverse economic sector that is an integral part of successful community development, particularly in rural communities. The concept of an outdoor recreation economy is still emerging and up until now, BC has not invested in understanding this sector. Until we do this we have no way of more fully realizing its undeniable economic, social and health benefits. One of the ways the province can support innovation and growth within the outdoor economy is by providing financial support for a hub for research and innovation in outdoor recreation.

a. What successful projects, services or products can we build on? Where do you see existing partnerships or opportunities for collaboration?

#### **Outdoor recreation and technology sector**

Pairing technology jobs and outdoor recreation opportunities can make rural communities attractive places to live. The technology sector can create jobs for people in rural communities, while outdoor recreation can help keep people there and attract new people. We can invest in "technology centers" in rural communities. They can help diversify rural communities and can create job opportunities for residents who may have otherwise relocated given the decline in jobs in the forestry sector.

"A recent report from KPMG and B.C. Tech suggests B.C.'s technology sector continues to contribute more to the provincial economy than traditional sectors, such as forestry and oil and gas, but it's still dominated by small firms and has "significant room to grow when compared to US jurisdictions." (Source: [Scaling up in rural Canada: BC tech firm's success a blueprint for growth outside of big tech's shadow](#))

#### **Provincial trails strategy**

The Trails Strategy for British Columbia is an important framework that guides how trails can be a force for good in BC through strategic trail planning and management. The Provincial Trails Advisory Body (PTAB) is a working group established by the Province in 2015 that is co-chaired by ORCBC and the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development and composed of representatives from various provincial government ministries, local government, the outdoor recreation sector and tourism. The PTAB's mandate includes the mandate to conduct periodic formal reviews and recommend improvements to the Trails Strategy. A recent comprehensive review of the Trails Strategy showed many shortfalls in terms of its implementation and how it was resourced. The PTAB has presented its recommendations to the BC government for how best to update and implement the new Trails Strategy. Implementation of the new Trails Strategy offers a significant opportunity for the Province to

leverage strategic connections and goals with First Nations reconciliation, rural development, diversity and inclusion, active transportation, healthy lifestyles, and COVID-19 economic recovery efforts.

b. What barriers currently hamper innovation and growth, both non-financial and financial? What could government do to help address these challenges?

Throughout the pandemic, funding and resources were spent to keep businesses afloat. Rewarding companies/sectors that can adapt and thrive in an environment like this opens doors for these businesses to expand and hire more people. A growth mindset and the ability to adapt are key for the next number of years as we come out of this season and into the next.

4. What actions would you prioritize to support equity and Indigenous participation in the economy?

### **Measuring wellbeing and sustainability**

In this time of rapid climate change, rising inequality and massive loss of biodiversity a singular focus on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) indicators alone is inadequate as a measure of economic value and as a guide for social and economic policies. It has become increasingly evident that GDP fails to reflect the values that will lead to improved economic, social and environmental sustainability in BC. We implore you to look at alternative measures of value including those that incorporate Indigenous principles of wellbeing (Source: [Centering First Nations Concepts of Wellbeing: Toward a GDP-Alternative Index in British Columbia](#)).

### **Indigenous land stewardship**

Enabling Indigenous peoples to exercise land stewardship and co-manage land in BC can open economic opportunities for them such as Indigenous-led tourism.

I along with other representatives of the outdoor sector would like an opportunity to meet with you to further discuss our ideas and perspectives on the role that outdoor recreation can play in BC's future economic plan. I can be reached at 250-814-9699 or [louisepedersen@orc.bc.ca](mailto:louisepedersen@orc.bc.ca).

Sincerely,



Louise Pedersen  
Executive Director | [Outdoor Recreation Council of BC](#)

CC: Minister Katrine Conroy, Minister of State Nathan Cullen, Parliamentary Secretary Roly Russell, Minister Melanie Mark, Minister George Heyman and Parliamentary Secretary Kelly Greene.