

Five-Year Strategic Business Plan – *Preliminary Draft*

Designated Recipient:	Mount Washington Resort Association
Report Completed:	May 1, 2024
Community Name:	Comox Valley Regional District (Portion of Electoral Area C) Mount Washington
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MRDT Term Expiry Date:	January 1, 2025
Five Year Period:	January 1, 2025, to January 1, 2029

Section 1: Five-Year Strategic Overview

Vision and Mission	<p>Vision: By 2030 Mount Washington is recognized as the Island's premier, high alpine tourism attraction for year-round outdoor activities with overnight stays increasing during shoulder seasons.</p> <p>Mission: Over the five-year term, increased focused is prioritized to expand and enhance the destination development of outdoor adventure pursuits, with marketing initiatives and collaborations resulting in increased overnight stays on the Mountain with a priority on summer (shoulder season from May to November).</p>
Strategic Context	<p>Natural assets are the foundation of Mount Washington Resort Association (MWRA) tourism sector. These assets are leveraged by a range of backcountry tourism products – which intertwine with pivotal changes such as population and visitation growth trends into the Northern part of Vancouver Island due to increased flight options from BC communities and western Canada. The proximity of the Mount Washington Alpine Resort and community “The Village” also support unique opportunities.</p> <p>Key natural assets include Strathcona Provincial Park trail networks, outback adventure activities such as trekking, remote cabin rentals, nordic skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, mountain biking, horseback riding, alpine lake and river fishing, rock / cliff climbing. Each of these activities require the sustained availability and the quality of the natural assets to also be sustained. It is important to note that unlike many BC communities, MWRA and the Mountain Village, have limited “front country” experiences other than Ski and Zip lines at Mount Washington Alpine Resort that might be found in other tourism dependent areas.</p> <p>The BC economy is diverse and continues to evolve with the province's tourism sector recognized as a key economic driver. Defined as one of the world's fastest growing industries, the tourism sector in BC has been experiencing continuous and rapid growth (pre-COVID 19) and has been the top contributor to BC's GDP among the primary resource industries that includes forestry, agriculture, mining and fishing.</p> <p>Outdoor recreation is a big part of BC culture. It is also a big part of the Super, Natural BC brand. So is mountain biking. Imagery of the wilderness, people recreating and mountain bikes on local trails are seen everywhere from Destination BC videos to the advertisements for residential development and real estate projects. A study by Destination BC, claims that 9/10 people go into the outdoors at least once a year, 84%</p>

	<p>think that recreation is important, and 22% of British Columbians mountain bike.¹ The Fraser Valley completed a significant study of direct outdoor recreation activity which included a mix of outdoor adventure tourism activities. In total, approximately 7.4 million recreation days were estimated for the Fraser Valley Regional District in 2019. These recreationists (both residents and tourists) spent almost \$948 million on outdoor recreation-related products & services in the region that year, on such items as equipment purchase and rental, transportation, food and beverage, accommodation, and retail items. When economic spinoffs are included (indirect and induced economic impacts), the total economic impact increases from \$948 million to \$1.5 billion.²</p> <p>Relative to summer outdoor experiences, according to the 2009/10 Outdoor Recreation Study: BC Resident Participants, published by Destination BC (2012), the majority of British Columbia residents (91%) participated in at least one outdoor recreation activity during the past year. Of those that had participated, nearly two-thirds (64%) participated in activities at least once a week with the most common outdoor recreational activities of BC residents being day hiking (55%), one of Mount Washington's stronger assets as it is the gateway to Strathcona Provincial Park.</p> <p>The most popular outdoor adventure activities for Canadians are day hiking (18%), road biking (16%), and car camping (12%). As many outdoor adventure activities take place outside urban environments, it is important to understand attitudes towards wilderness. Approximately two-thirds of Canadians enjoy being in the wilderness, however a large portion have fears about remoteness. If the activity they enjoy requires them to do so, approximately 20% of Canadians will venture into the wilderness. Visitation to Canada's national parks, reserves and marine conservation areas within British Columbia has remained steady over the past five years, with approximately 2.4 million visits annually. The most visited national park in British Columbia was Pacific Rim (31%), followed by Mt. Revelstoke & Glacier (27%).³</p>
Overall Goals, Objectives and Targets	<p>Mount Washington Resort Association (dba Tourism Mount Washington -TMW) will promote events that align to and incorporate overnight stays on mountain and market the outback alpine adventure tourism experiences to draw visitors to the Village as their staging area. The overall goals and objective which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase room revenue amongst the MWRA properties; ● Increase length of stay of overnight visitors to MWRA properties; ● Create brand awareness in collaboration with Mount Washington Alpine Resort and off-mountain tour operators with an ultimate goal of generating longer stays via events; ● Increase mid-week and shoulder season stays; ● Enhance the visitor experience and community/village atmosphere, with new or expanded on-mountain events for families to enjoy ● Create and promote 'summer staycation' packages to Vancouver Island,

¹ Destination BC (2009). Mountain biking/cycling. 2009 Outdoor recreation study. BC resident participation. Retrieved from https://www.destinationbc.ca/content/uploads/2018/08/ODR_Biking_FINAL.pdf

² Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact Analysis in the Fraser Valley Regional District. 2019

³ DBC Outdoor Recreation Study

	<p>BC, and Alberta residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create brand awareness in collaboration with Mount Washington Alpine Resort and the various outdoor clubs that call Mount Washington home
Strategies - Key Actions	<p>Strategic direction will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening and building packages with the destination and local experiential products (i.e. marine and outdoor, cultural products) that are unique to the Comox Valley region; • Seeking additional marketing revenues through co-op funding and collaborations; • Leveraging MRDT funding through third party partnerships to increase visitation to websites promoting overnight stays on Mount Washington and conduct promotional initiatives within their own media platforms; • Increasing mid-week winter and summer occupancy; • Collaborating with partners including Mount Washington Alpine Resort and Mountain accommodation to develop mutually beneficial campaigns that increase midweek and off- peak period overnight stays. • Increase the # of owners that are contributing to the MRDT and supporting a diverse mix of accommodation.
Evidence of Engagement	<p>In preparing for the renewal process MWRA conducted a survey to assess the level of awareness of tourism marketing activities in the community and assess the level of satisfaction with the use of MRDT funds. Summary of Feedback from the engagement is as follows:</p> <p>Respondents were asked a range of questions based on the suggested MRDT questionnaire in the form of a 1-5 point scale with 5 being the highest.</p> <p>Q1 – How familiar they were with the services and programs offered by MWRA on a scale of 1-5 resulting in high familiarity source of 4.13</p> <p>Q2 – Marketing Activities awareness on a scale of 1-5 resulting in a mid to high score of 3.88</p> <p>Q3 - Satisfaction with MRDT Strategies satisfaction - For each of the 5 strategies the weighted average of respondents 3.57 – 4.14</p> <p>Q4 – Overall use of MRDT funds – weighted response 4.00</p> <p>Q5 Ways to improve - open ended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the good work. • Encourage Mountain to more deeply engage broader community incl loyalist customer base e.g. partner w CV Healthcare Foundation for proposed fundraiser event during ski season. • Providing training on how to build a stronger AirB&B / VRBO profile and digital marketing • Work closer with private rental owners. Help encourage private enterprise. <p>Q7 – overall satisfaction - Weighted average of 3.88</p> <p>Q8 - Tourism Product Experiences - 14 outdoor alpine experiences (including conferences) with (4.75), Naturae and Wilderness Tours (4.71 and zip lining (4.57)</p> <p>Q9 - Ranking of marketing activities resulted in the following - Special Events and</p>

	<p>festivals (4.75), Online digital Marketing Campaigns (4.25) Tour Operator partnerships (3.67) and packaged vacations (3.14)</p> <p>Q10 - Future priorities included community relations (4.25), Destination Management (4.0) and MW Community planning for tourism growth (3.88)</p> <p>Q11 - Affordable housing – the majority (62%) disagreed for use of funds</p> <p>The 5-year plan was available at the MWRA website with the opportunity to provide comments, with links to the plan through social posts.</p> <p>In addition, meetings took place to review the plan provided in the fall of 2023 and early 2024 with accommodation providers at Mount Washington to explore the approach and 5-year plan strategy and vision. Board members of MWRA were also interviewed to allow for their suggestions independently.</p> <p>A meeting was held with the Chair of the Electoral Area Committee, Director Edwin Greive to discuss the MRDT 5-year plan and renewal process. Follow-up calls and emails were also provided for additional information. The long-term support for the MRDT in the Mount Washington area from the Comox Valley Regional District has been significant, with high awareness of the Rural Directors for projects such as the Mount Washington Master Plan, support for the Mountain Sport Association and recently the creation of a much needed fire service on the hill. A letter of support has been provided to the Regional District by the Chair of the MWRA and the first available Board meeting May 28 is when it is expected to be on agenda for approval.</p>
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Section 1: Five-Year Strategic Overview

Brand Positioning	Over the next five years - MWRA seeks to update, strengthen and grow the Mountain brand as Vancouver Island's premier, all season, all ages, high alpine outdoor adventure and experiences destination. Marketing and branding efforts are undertaken in a collaborative approach with Mount Washington Alpine Resort to ensure complimentary messaging and focus, that doesn't overlap mandates of each organization.
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Target Markets	<p>Before the pandemic, the Mountain travelers and visitors were almost all alpine and nordic skiers, with close to 90% originating from Vancouver Island. During the pandemic years, significant new visitation and residential relocation from BC and Western Canada occurred, creating a slightly newer mix of younger outdoor adventure enthusiasts. Continued focus will be on winter mid-week travelers and late spring, summer and early fall shoulder seasons. The primary geo-markets are Vancouver Island & Lower Mainland, while secondary geo-markets are Edmonton, Calgary, and Seattle.</p> <p>MWRA will focus on two market segments identified under the Destination Canada Explorer Quotient: Free Spirits represent 13% of the Global Market and are highly social and open-minded. Their enthusiasm for life extends to their outlook on travel. Experimental and adventurous, they indulge in high-end experiences that are shared with others. Cultural Explorers represent 9% of the travel demographics in Canada they are defined by their love of constant travel and continuous opportunities to embrace, discover and immerse themselves in the culture, people and settings of the places they visit.</p>
Management, Governance, and Administration	<p>MWRA, a registered not for profit organization with a volunteer board of five directors, continues to work collaboratively together with mountain accommodation, alpine and the many nordic and mountain sports clubs and organizations to advance and strengthen the tourism economy through new visitation. In keeping with the intention of, and guidelines for the MRDT, funds generated will be used to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assist increased visitation and length of off season, shoulder stays in the alpine region through marketing the alpine tourism sector, accommodation and outdoor adventure attractions and experiences. 2. To actively and represent tourism interests for stakeholders in alpine Village, clubs and mountain organizations, Strathcona Provincial Park, complimentary tour operators and Mount Washington Alpine Resort. 3. To receive and administer funds from the MRDT, BC and other levels of governments and stakeholders. 4. To coordinate the common interests and collective resources of the resort community representing and including all alpine tourism sector participants, businesses, service providers and community. <p>As such, the MWRA is well positioned to continue to act as the 'eligible entity' and to oversee all matters relating to the MRDT through its role in fostering ongoing community tourism for the alpine region at Mount Washington.</p>
Sources of Funding	<p>Funding is mainly from the MRDT, which is then leveraged via DBC Cooperative Marketing Partnerships Program collaborations when possible, as well as partnerships with entities including Mount Washington Alpine Resort, the Comox Valley Airport, etc. With the impacts from the pandemic, coupled by difficult snow seasons over the last five years, visitation, and as a result, funding from MRDT contributions have declined. Addressing this issue, while difficult, will be supported with a transition of MWRA to an outdoor adventure focused tourism organization.</p>
Affordable Housing (if applicable)	<p>As noted on the Signatory pages, the stakeholders do not wish to use the funds for Affordable Housing initiatives at this time.</p>

Section 2: One-Year Tactical Plan with Performance Measures

Major Category: Media Advertising and Production
Activity Title: Summer & Shoulder Season Campaigns
1. Mountain Biking & Tapped Craft Beer, Cider, Wine and Spirits Campaign - Budget and Time Frame: \$2500, June to October
Short Description & Rational: Leveraging Mount Washington Alpine Resort, the region's largest stakeholder, paid campaigns promoting Ride and Stays and Festival packages are marketed to MRDT properties. Additional social media ads are purchased through the mountain's campaign efforts to bolster the reach and directing sales to MRDT properties, plus participating stakeholders. Tactics will be primarily focused around digital and social media advertising which allows us to hyper-target mountain bikers and beer/wine enthusiasts. The Ride Island campaign is a consortium through DBC in partnership with Mountain Bike BC and multiple bike regions in the Central and North Island regions.
Quantifiable Objectives: # of accommodation referrals MRDT revenue, impressions, click throughs (referrals), sales conversions on each campaign through Central Reservations.
Action Steps: Liaise with Mount Washington Alpine Resort and to ensure and support alignment and integration of MWRA into the campaign portals and marketing tactics.
Potential Partnerships: Mount Washington Alpine Resort, Mountain Bike BC, other Island DMO's.
Resources: Ride Island Reporting, past events and marketing reporting.
Sources of Funding: MRDT, Mount Washington Alpine Resort
2. Hike and Stays - Budget and Time Frame: \$2500, June to October
Short Description & Rational: Social media and digital advertising campaign directed at easier hikes for families and those wishing to stroll through Paradise Meadows and Lake Helen Mackenzie, with overnight stays as part of the package. Incorporation of the Strathcona Wilderness Institutes and Vancouver Island Mountain Centre's suite of outdoor programs and potential partnerships will be explored and developed to produce a more robust hike and stay offering to destination visitors.
Quantifiable Objectives: # of accommodation referrals through DiscoverMountWashington.com, MRDT revenue, impressions, click throughs (referrals), social media shares, website unique visits and sessions.
Action Steps: Update website, social media and online ads, research new and existing Strathcona Park events and tours.
Potential Partnerships: Strathcona Provincial Park Wilderness Centre, Mount Washington Alpine Resort
Resources: Strathcona Park Wildness Institute website
Sources of Funding: MRDT, Mount Washington Alpine Resort

Major Category: Media Advertising and Production

Activity Title: Digital media and Consumer Outreach

3. Social Media Campaigns ongoing organic posting and e-News updates - Budget and Time Frame: \$8500, ongoing throughout the year

Short Description & Rational: Reflecting the EQ traveler types, this project will see the development of a social media content and posts on three channels (FB, X, and Instagram) that drives visitors to the MWRA website, as well as directly to businesses and tourism products and experiences in and around the Village. Social media content development and curation will be undertaken to engage, inspire and expand interest and interactions via the MWRA social media channels through organic postings. The content will further leverage and enhance the paid online and traditional media marketing campaigns being undertaken throughout the year, as well as be reflected via regular e-Newsletter distribution. The e-Newsletter database will be expanded via more expressed consent, and remarketed through targeted social media and online contesting, to convert additional sales and engagement. Monthly consumer-oriented e-newsletter distribution will occur to present accommodation specials, upcoming events, and activities within the mountain community. Community-specific e-news will be sent to stakeholders quarterly and when time-sensitive communications are required to update MWAR initiatives.

Quantifiable Objectives: Total followers, Engagement Rate, Reach, Total consumer use and reach of campaign hashtags and related hashtags.

Action Steps: Develop content calendar, key partner tags, image bank, links, and update/maintain website to drive increased clicks and visits.

Potential Partnerships: Mount Washington Alpine Resort

Resources: Historic posting data and researching other related Mountain Assn. social media channel strategies, as well as reviewing and complimenting Mount Washington Alpine Resorts channels.

Sources of Funding: MRDT

Major Category: Consumer Shows and Events

Activity Title: Event Development and Marketing

4. On-mountain Event Development, Enhancement & Activation - Budget and Time Frame: \$48,000 ongoing throughout the year

Short Description & Rational: Based on feedback from past MWRA research and engagement and, with current knowledge based on the impact from pandemic years where no events were able to occur, this tactic will see the development of 1-2 new or enhanced on-mountain, summer events to create more reasons for visitors to extend stays and foster a more vibrant environment on the mountain.

Quantifiable Objectives: # of events, # of attendees, MRDT revenue, contest entries, website unique visits and sessions.

Action Steps: Review Mount Washington Alpine Resort event calendar, compile options for shoulder and summer season schedule, solicit events.

Potential Partnerships: Mount Washington Alpine Resort, Mountain Sports Clubs and Service Groups, Arts, Culture and Tourism businesses and groups, Vancouver Island Mountain Sports Centre, Vancouver Island Tour operators and related associations.

Resources: Past Event Work-back plans and results, Mount Washington Alpine Resort event schedule, research on other mountain event concepts.

Sources of Funding: MRDT, Mount Washington Alpine Resort, sponsors

Major Category: Marketing
Activity Title: Collateral production and distribution - (written content, video, photography)
5. New visitor and outdoor adventure visitor guides and trip itineraries - Budget and Time Frame: \$11,000 Winter and Summer
Short Description & Rational: Based on feedback from the Invigorate MWRA engagement process survey work and interviews, this new tactic will see the develop and marketing of 5-7 on-mountain presentation of specific key product experiences in a bookable format - focused on local natural attractions complete with location information, maps, links to website and social media, activity promotion, links to operators, and safety information. With the abundant adventure tourism opportunities in the Strathcona Park and surrounding area the focus for the 5 year to an outdoor adventure one with properly developed designed materials including individual product experiences, rack cards (e.g. horseback riding, hiking snowmobiling) that will be provided to Visitor Centers in surrounding communities, Vancouver Island be made available to local accommodation providers and businesses (e.g. gas stations).
Quantifiable Objectives: # of images, amount of refreshed text, number of tools developed.
Action Steps: Review best practices from similar destinations, prepare content outline, contract writers, photographers, designers, and establish review / feedback process to ensure it meets the needs of potential visitors.
Potential Partnerships: Determine if Destination BC and Mountain Washington Alpine Resort have any available images (based on usage agreements), and from that, create a shot list and content gaps to contract photographers and writers as needed.
Resources: Destination BC Image Bank
Sources of Funding: MRDT Mount Washington Alpine Resort, Destination BC (in-kind)

Major Category: Website Hosting, Development and Maintenance
Activity Title: Website and SEO Improvements
6. MWRA Website Enhancements and Improvements - Budget and Time Frame: \$4500, ongoing
Short Description & Rational: After the discovermountwashington.com was highjacked in early 2022, MWRA undertook a website rebuild using discovermountwashington.ca and included some baseline SEO improvements. Continued improvements are required as well as ensure the website is adjusted to reflect the seasons and the changing experiences, as well as new tactics including events and campaigns.
Quantifiable Objectives: # of SEO improvements, # of unique visits, organic search rating improvements.
Action Steps: Review Google and SEO data, determine shortfalls relative to industry standards, action improvements, refresh images and content to reflect current day attractions, things to do and accommodations.
Potential Partnerships: MWRA, Mount Washington Alpine Resort.
Resources: Past reports on website results/SEO.
Sources of Funding: MRDT

Major Category: Marketing
Activity Title: Travel Media Relations
7. Media Hosting Program - Budget and Time Frame: \$4500, June
Short Description & Rational: In collaboration with Destination BC Media department and Mount Washington Alpine Resort, invite and host select media / travel writers / influencers to drive increased awareness via targeted outlets to support increased awareness of the lesser-known summer season experiences.
Quantifiable Objectives: # of articles, distribution, engagement metrics, earned media value, # of media visits.
Action Steps: Establish a target list, connect with DBC Media Department to ensure complimentary activities that don't overlap, send invitations, arrange itineraries, host media and track results.
Potential Partnerships: Destination BC Media Department, Mount Washington Alpine Resort, area marine operators
Resources: BC Media Department
Sources of Funding: MRDT, Mount Washington Alpine Resort, Destination BC (in-kind)
Resources: Past reports and data on travel media

Major Category: Consumer Focused Asset Development
Activity Title: Photography
8. Photography Inventory Improvement - Budget and Time Frame: \$5600, June to August
Short Description & Rational: In order to maintain and improve social media channels, e-Newsletters and the website, new images will be taken, and content development to ensure the visuals and content is reflective of the current on-mountain experiences.
Quantifiable Objectives: # of images (new and accessed via partners)
Action Steps: Determine if Destination BC, mountain sports groups and Mount Washington Alpine Resort have any available images (based on usage agreements), and from that, create a shot list and content gaps to contract photographer(s).
Resources: Destination BC Image Bank, mountain sport organizations, Mount Washington Alpine Resort
Sources of Funding: MRDT, Mount Washington Alpine Resort, Destination BC (in-kind)