

June 15, 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 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 the critical, and unique, needs of the tourism sector in our region.

As a rural part of the province that is heavily reliant on tourism, more specifically from Alberta, and is serviced by small and medium sized enterprises, the current measures addressing COVID-19 impacts on the economy have yet to address the tourism crisis in our area. This inability to genuinely pay attention to what is happening here, and about to happen, is not just heartbreaking but causing the industry to feel unheard and in distress.

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

The Issues:

- **Excluding interprovincial travel** - specifically between Alberta and BC, from current messaging and the start date of Phase 3 thereby indicating that only BC residents should be travelling within our provincial borders 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 \$60 million. Since Alberta signifies 65% of Fernie's market that time of the year, that represents a potential loss of \$40 million to the local and BC economy.* That is just one small community of many. Our region sees very little traffic from the rest of BC, so marketing to fellow British Columbian's will not revive our struggling sector nor fill that gap. 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, some local residents have indicated they would be more comfortable welcoming Alberta vs Vancouver since they know Albertan's very well. Lastly, the announcement that BC Parks were calling for cancellations to existing

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)
- \$725,000,000 in visitor spending

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 as the BC Government continues to vaguely indicate that when Phase 3 starts it would be just BC wide. As CDMOs we field on-going calls and emails from our eastern neighbours on whether they will be welcome or not.

- **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.
- **No equitable support** – The level of attention, support and funding to support tourism and business on the coast and the larger cities is and will hurt rural tourism. Are travellers not looking for 'less faces and open spaces'? Marketing funds limited to rural areas. Cancelling of Kootenay Lake Ferry's summer sailing schedule.
- **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. Two examples are: BC Hydro provided support whereas Fortis did not for businesses, and a recent letter to the province by the East Kootenay Angling Guides.

The Solutions:

- **Allow Alberta to visit right when Phase 3 starts** - and clearly message that in the media, or allow for travel radiuses such as within 500km from a destination. Communities and businesses are following health guidelines and know best how to manage their tourism economies while keeping residents and visitors safe. Also, Vancouver is up to 12 hours away from the Kootenay tourism destinations, whereas Calgary and southern Alberta is only minutes to a few hours away.
- **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 it which will give 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.
- **Please visit us this month** – 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 since we are rural vs urban, but we are equally important and need to be heard.
- **As soon as possible 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. We can help supply names and numbers for local examples of needs and concerns.

The Kootenay Region is unique and so is its tourism industry. We do not feel like we are being heard, or perhaps some of the messages are getting heard but we are not getting any action or response specific to our region. 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 more help.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and we hope to hear from you very soon on how we can work together on addressing these issues and suggested solutions.

Sincerely,

Cranbrook Tourism
Destination Castlegar
Invermere & Panorama Tourism
Tourism Fernie
Tourism Golden
Tourism Revelstoke
Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism
Tourism Kimberley
Tourism Radium Hot Springs
Tourism Roseland
Creston Tourism