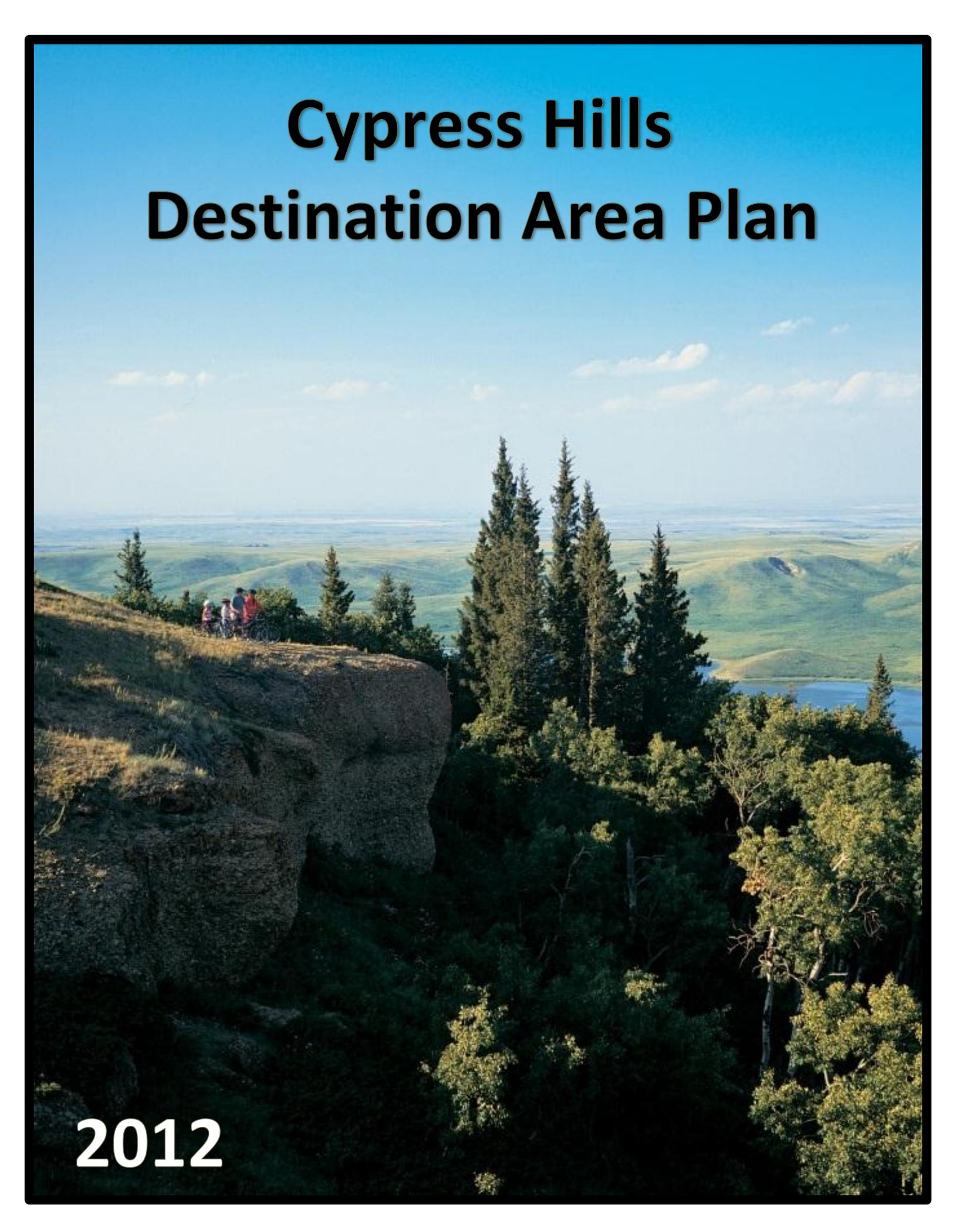


Cypress Hills Destination Area Plan

2012



*The area surrounding the Cypress Hills
Interprovincial Park is poised to become the
premier camping destination area for
Western Canada.*



**Government of
Saskatchewan**



Created by the Industry Development Department – Tourism Saskatchewan

SUPPORTING MUNICIPALITIES,
ORGANIZATIONS & BUSINESSES



Town of Eastend



Town of Gull Lake



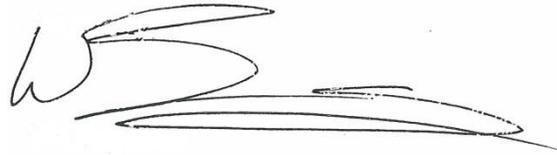
Town of Maple Creek



Cypress Hills Eco Adventures



Cypress Hills Inter-Provincial Park



The Resort at Cypress Hills

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ABBREVIATIONS:

TS – Tourism Saskatchewan; **CHC** – Cypress Hills Coalition; **CHIPP** – Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park; **TPCS** – Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport; **STEC** – Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council

.....'a tourism destination area is a geographic region in which attractions, businesses and regulatory authorities work together to deliver distinctive, high quality services and experiences, capable of attracting and holding significant numbers of visitors, from both within and outside the province.'

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Information

1.1.1 The Planning Area

The Cypress Hills Destination Area covers a diverse expanse of land in the southwest corner of Saskatchewan and the eastern corner of Alberta. The area is known for the beautiful Cypress Hills, diverse flora and fauna, incredible paleontological finds, cowboy and farming culture, and welcoming communities with authentic attractions such as historical museums, artist studios and displays relating to the area's rich fossil history.

The Cypress Hills Destination Area encompasses over 27 communities, regional and interprovincial parks and First Nations communities. These communities fall into an area that is bordered by Gull Lake and Maple Creek on the north, Highway 41 in Alberta on the west, the United States border on the south and a border on the east that runs south from Gull Lake to Shaunavon then southeast to the eastern boundary of Grasslands National Park. The map in Appendix "B" shows the rough area which falls into this destination area.

1.1.2 Population and Distance to Major Centres

This part of Saskatchewan is very sparsely populated. According to the most recent Census data (2011), the area encompassed by the Alberta boundary to the west, the Trans-Canada Highway (Highway 1) to the north, Saskatchewan Highway 37 to the

east (including the communities of Climax, Gull Lake and Shaunavon), and the Montana border to the south is home to approximately 11,000 people. The nearest Canadian urban centres are Medicine Hat (population 65,671) and Swift Current (population 15,503)¹. Calgary (population 1,095,404) is a four-hour drive from most of the region, while Regina (population 192,756) and Saskatoon (population 222,035) lie approximately three to four hours away from most of the Cypress Hills' attractions.

1.1.3 Visitation

The most well-known attraction in the region is Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park (CHIPP). For the annual period from April to September, its visitation has soared from 173,735 visitors in 2004 to 279,242 people in 2009. These figures do not include statistics from the rest of the year. Approximately one-third (32%) of cabin owners in the Centre Block are from Alberta, and 42% of campers are Albertans. Like other major parks in Saskatchewan, CHIPP has experienced a surge in visitation from Alberta in recent years. Other major attractions include the T.rex Discovery Centre, Grasslands National Park and Fort Walsh National Historic Site. Areas with large potential are the ecological sites 'Old Man on His Back' and 'The Great Sand Hills'.

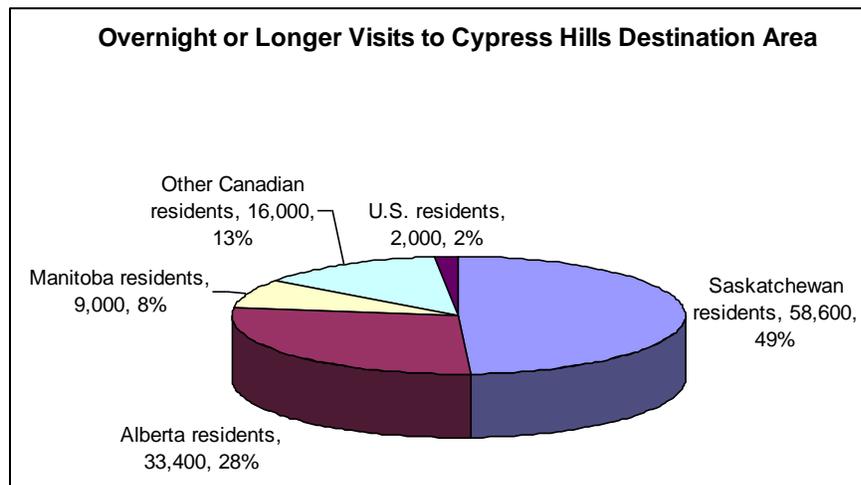
¹ Statistics Canada: 2011 Census

Saskatchewan and Alberta residents are the most important geographic markets for the Cypress Hills Destination Area. An estimated 150,000 tourist visits are made to and within the area annually². Roughly 34,000 of these visits are same day trips where the visitor returns home within 24 hours. This market primarily comprises Saskatchewan residents. Approximately 119,000 are visits of one or more nights in the area.

The graph following illustrates the geographic origins of overnight or longer visitors to the Cypress Hills Destination Area in 2006. It shows that nearly half of these visitors are from Saskatchewan, while 28 percent are from Alberta, and eight percent are from Manitoba. Recent evidence suggests that the percentage of Alberta visitors continues to climb.

1.1.4 Visitor Spending

Visitors to the Cypress Hills Destination Area spend an estimated \$25 million in the area annually. About \$23 million is spent by overnight or longer visitors while same-day visitors spend approximately \$2 million.



² Please note: These numbers are calculated using different methodology than those used for Provincial Parks.

1.2 Looking Forward

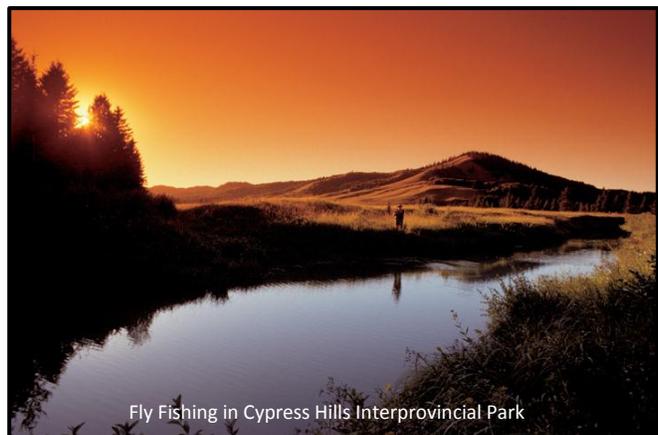
1.2.1 The Cypress Hills Destination Area's Potential

While the tourism industry's potential in the Cypress Hills Destination Area has long been recognized by locals and visitors alike, the realization of this potential has been hampered by a variety of factors. Among these are the sparse population base and the region's traditional focus on the agricultural and oil and gas industries, which all contribute to a lack of investment capital directed towards the tourism industry. Highway conditions, particularly in the past 15-20 years, have also hindered tourism development. For example, the condition of the Red Coat Trail (Highway #13) has for years discouraged all but the bravest – or most trusting – recreational vehicle (RV) users from exploring the southern part of the Cypress Hills. Historic lack of provincial investment in highways, provincial park infrastructure, and completion of work on assembling the bones of Scotty the T.rex has slowed tourism development.

In spite of these drawbacks, but because of its great potential, the Cypress Hills Destination Area has seen considerable investment in the past decade. The T.rex Discovery Centre in Eastend officially opened to the public in 2003, the Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery first opened its doors in 2006, and Cypress Hills Eco-Adventures enjoyed a successful first season in 2011. New investment in other small businesses, such as the Star Café, Redmond House Bed & Breakfast/Dining Establishment and Ghostown Blues B & B in Maple Creek, has also enhanced the

tourism experience for visitors to the area.

Recognizing the area's potential, Tourism Saskatchewan initiated discussion to support the development of the Cypress Hills Destination Area. Development of a plan was initially facilitated by the Horseshoe Marketing Group and its board members. Since the dissolution of the group, the project has been supported by the Cypress Hills Destination Area Coalition (refer to the Acknowledgments on Page 41). The plan has also been supported by several representatives from tourism attractions and related businesses. In the future the plan will then be provided to all relevant government ministries to assist them in prioritizing the implementation of the portions of the plan for which they are responsible in accordance with their legislated mandates.



1.2.2 The Goals of the Destination Area Plan

The goals of this plan are as follows:

- To increase visitation to the entire Cypress Hills Destination Area.
- To increase visitor spending throughout the area.
- To support the continued development and enhancement of new and existing tourist attractions, businesses and experiences in the area.
- To improve coordination among the area's attractions and tourism businesses.
- To improve the quality of the area's tourism attractions, businesses and experiences.
- To recommend specific strategies and actions to develop the area as a more competitive, investment-ready and marketable tourism destination.



T. rex Discovery Centre - Eastend

1.2.3 Core Demand Generators, Demand Supporters and Diversions

Core demand travel generators are attractions that are the primary reason for visitation to the Cypress Hills Destination Area. There are several core travel generators in the area, such as:

- Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park
- Fort Walsh National Historic Site
- T.rex Discovery Centre
- Grasslands National Park of Canada
- Historic Reesor Ranch

Travel demand supporters include attractions, services or features of the area that are associated with the core travel generator and serve instead to lengthen and enrich the stays of visitors while they are in the area. Diversions are activities that also lengthen the stay but are not related to the core generator.

Over 70% of spending in travel is generated by the demand supporters and diversions.

There are numerous travel demand supporters and some diversions in the area. Some significant ones include:

- The Resort at Cypress Hills
- Communities of Maple Creek and Eastend
- Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery
- Cypress Hills Eco-Adventures
- Spring Valley Guest Ranch
- Star Café
- Eagle Valley Campground
- Grand Coteau Heritage & Cultural Centre
- Jasper Cultural and Historical Centre
- Southwest Saskatchewan Old-Timers' Museum
- The Cypress Hills' and Frenchman River Valley's unique flora, fauna and geography
- The artists and galleries of Eastend and area
- Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area & Interpretive Centre
- The Great Sandhills ecological preserve

The number and variety of core demand generators in the region is significant. There are a more limited number of demand supporters and diversions. Creating and enhancing this mix will allow visitors to enjoy the Cypress Hills Destination Area in more ways that are unique to their personal interests thereby lengthening their stay in the area and increasing their spending. Because of the size of the area there is a significant barrier in the travel required across the destination area. This may act as a deterrent for some visitors.

1.2.4 Product Evaluation

The term "tourism product" generally refers to the breadth of tourism attractions, businesses and experiences in a specific area. When tourists come to an area they experience it as a whole. While a specific attraction they visit may do an outstanding job, a restaurant or hotel they stop at may provide poor service. Based on one negative experience they may then discourage friends and relatives from visiting the area.

The question is does the Cypress Hills Destination Area provide a high quality tourist experience? This may be gauged through:

1. Distinctive Demand Generators
2. Quality and Critical Mass of Attractions
3. Satisfaction and Value
4. Accessibility
5. Quality of Service
6. Strong Accommodation Base

1. Distinctive Demand Generators

On the first point the area is fairly strong. The number and variety of demand generators is unique in Saskatchewan. However, beyond the province's boundaries, competing product such as national, provincial and state parks, museums, and other attractions in Alberta and Montana lessen the Cypress Hills Destination Area's competitive advantage.

2. Quality and Critical Mass of Attractions

The quality and critical mass of these attractions is also generally positive, if slightly uneven. The core of product in the CHIPP/Maple Creek/Fort Walsh area is particularly strong, allowing for synergies to develop naturally between attractions. By contrast, major attractions in other parts of the destination area are not as concentrated, resulting in weaker coordination and perhaps in softer visitation figures.

3. Satisfaction and Value

Visitation, motel/campground occupancy, visitor spending and critical acclaim are good ways to measure tourists' satisfaction and perception of value with a destination. On these counts, the Cypress Hills Destination Area performs well, although somewhat unevenly again. Visitation to CHIPP is well above its five-year average, campground occupancy is very high, park revenues have been steadily increasing, and the park's reputation has continued to grow.

Occupancy can be very strong at hotels, motels, and at B&B's throughout the destination area in certain seasons. While some of this may be attributable to pleasure travelers and VFR (visiting friends and relatives), much of it is due to business travel. While all forms of visitation generate economic impact in a region, business travelers tend not to visit the area's attractions. Spending is usually concentrated towards accommodations, food and travel costs such as gasoline.

4. Accessibility

The Cypress Hills Destination Area's accessibility is a little less positive. The region is not directly accessible by air travel. The nearest major airports are four to five hours away, making the area relatively inaccessible to air travelers from North America and overseas. The Trans-Canada Highway #1 acts as the northern boundary of the area; this generally provides excellent road access for Saskatchewan and out-of-province residents. Still, the quality of other roads in the region has been a source of frustration for the area's tourism industry for many years. Many roads have been in poor shape, as have entry points from the United States, which also have limited hours. Recently, significant improvements have been made to some roads. More roadway work needs to be completed before the Cypress Hills Destination Area becomes truly accessible to rubber tire traffic.

5. Quality of Service

Like most parts of Saskatchewan, the Cypress Hills area has struggled with a labour shortage. This can have a profound effect on the quality of service that visitors receive at attractions and businesses alike. In addition, the quality of service depends on operators' efforts (or lack thereof) to train and educate staff. Quality of service varies greatly throughout the region.



Fort Walsh National Historic Site

6. Strong Accommodation Base

The only part of the destination area that can boast a relatively strong accommodation base – particularly one targeted towards pleasure visitors and VFR – is CHIPP. Its abundant and beautiful campgrounds are key draws for visitors. Like many other provincial parks, though, some of its campground facilities are due for upgrades. The Resort at Cypress Hills, located in the Centre Block of the park, is at or near capacity for much of its peak season and it generates significant visitation during other times of the year.

Elsewhere in the region, Val Marie has a small cluster of unique accommodation

facilities that are well-suited to visitors to Grasslands National Park. The number of beds is small, however, which limits the number of visitors who can overnight in the vicinity. Shaunavon boasts a strong cluster of motels. At the time of this report's writing, though, they are regularly filled with business travelers. In other locations, there are some quality motels, hotels and campgrounds, although few are well positioned to welcome families with children, for example. There is a need for new or renewed accommodation facilities in many communities throughout the region.



Camping at Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park

1.3 Sustainability

Typically, the ability for a destination tourism industry to sustain itself is based on three elements:

- Destination Marketing
- Product Renewal
- Managing Within Carrying Capacities

1.3.1 Destination Marketing

On these counts, there are some good efforts underway in the Cypress Hills Destination Area, but more needs to be done in the near future and beyond. The Horseshoe Marketing Group won, through constant struggle, the right to post tourism directional signs along the Horseshoe driving loop, which has added significantly to visitor awareness of the T.rex Centre and other attractions in the area. The Cypress Hills Destination Area Coalition is also working together to market the region, participating in a number of cooperative marketing initiatives. Tourism Saskatchewan is undertaking a number of projects to provide more marketing profile to key destination areas in Saskatchewan. Ultimately, all stakeholders need to work together to promote the region, to cross-promote each other, to find a common voice, and to find common solutions to challenges that will inevitably arise year after year.

1.3.2 Product Renewal

Product renewal is a significant challenge for the destination area. Publicly funded institutions and attractions are subject to the ebb and flow of government dollars, which can vary greatly between administrations, as well as with the strength of the local, provincial and national economy. Programming has been scaled back in many cases, which diminishes visitor experiences. CHIPP and Fort Walsh/Cypress Hills Massacre National Historic Site also require substantial reinvestment in many of their public facilities, the T.rex Discovery Centre needs significant funding to support the completion of “Scotty’s” skeleton, and all of these institutions, as well as Grasslands National Park, would greatly benefit from increased funding to their public education/interpretive programs.

There also needs to be significantly more private sector investment in the Cypress Hills Destination Area. With high occupancy rates and few family-friendly fixed-roof accommodations, opportunities for investment abound. The Daily Grind, the Star Café and the Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery are but three examples of successful private tourism-related ventures that have started operations in the past few years. Opportunities exist throughout the Cypress Hills area; connecting investors with these opportunities will be critical to the long-term sustainability of its tourism industry.

Only a limited number of operators have the financial or human resources to invest in new businesses in the area. Crucially, though, all have the capacity to improve their own operations. The desire to constantly improve the experience one

offers is fundamental to ongoing product renewal in the entire destination area. Operators need to constantly ask themselves the following questions:

- What are our product strengths?
- What things make us successful and how can we improve upon them?
- What enhancements to our product or services would our guests most welcome?
- Are our operation's strategies and marketing activities aligned with those of the destination area, Tourism Saskatchewan, etc?
- Who is leading the charge?

The last two questions strongly imply that cooperation is critical to improvement and, ultimately, to success. Not all marketing activities need to be aligned with a larger mandate, but it is important to always evaluate whether they should be. By contrast, if all operators gave different, disjointed messages to the same potential markets, the results would also be disjointed and likely dismal.

1.3.3 Managing Within Carrying Capacities

Most communities in the area would welcome more visitors and the dollars they invariably leave behind. CHIPP's campgrounds and The Resort at Cypress Hills are at or near capacity throughout the peak season. Other than accommodation facilities, most businesses in the region could easily accommodate more tourists' spending money at their operations.

Saskatchewan's relatively strong economy creates challenges in this regard. Because accommodation facilities are often at capacity, few new overnight visitors can come to the region. Overnight visitors generate the most tourism spending and are the target of any destination area plan. Without new accommodation facilities, the ability to grow revenues will be greatly limited.

Part of the solution lies in expanding the season for the park to include either shoulder or winter activities and moving more of the existing campers and other park guests into other parts of the Cypress Hills Destination Area on day trips and other excursions. This would benefit CHIPP, because it would generate more revenue at the park gate and its 10 business lessees could serve an expanded market.

Attractions and businesses outside the park would also gain from this model, since more tourists would visit their operations, but not require accommodations in their (full) hotels and motels. The limitations to this approach are the distances between centers in the area. Of the centers only Maple Creek currently has enough activity to justify the drive (partially because of its proximity) the other centres such as Eastend and Gull Lake would have to expand the offerings to tourists in order to entice them to make the journey. Val Marie/Grasslands National Park would be more successful operating in a partnership arrangement with the destination area.

1.4 Gaps

In order to develop a strategic plan that accomplishes the goals and objectives set out in Section 2.0, it is necessary to first identify gaps in the experiences that the Cypress Hills Destination Area offers. These

gaps can be broken into different categories. To date, the planning process has identified the following gaps that should be addressed as part of the plan:

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Highway conditions
- Heritage preservation initiatives
- Community beautification programs

PROMOTION

- Cooperative marketing
- Highway signage improvements
 - Alberta market
 - Websites
 - Social media
- Partnerships and cross-promotion
- Packaging

ATTRACTIONS

- Reinvestment and new investment in demand generators
- Reinvestment and new investment in demand supporters
- Festival and event development

HOSPITALITY

- Service quality
- Animation and interpretation of tourism experiences

BUSINESSES AND SERVICES

- Suitable accommodation facilities
- Unique dining experiences
- Investment initiative to attract new businesses and services

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

- Project management
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Public involvement

1.5 Strategic Plan

The ultimate success of the Cypress Hills Destination Area Plan rests with the local stakeholders. This document outlines some of the many challenges that impede this area from growing its tourism industry. Three things are now required to achieve this growth:

- A strategic vision outlining an overall approach to resolving these issues and making progress towards the goals outlined here for the area.
- The resources, both financial and human, to implement the plan.
- A tactical or work plan that lays out the details and timelines required to achieve the vision.

1.5.1 Strategic Vision

While a premier tourism destination already attracting large numbers of people to the area, CHDA has significant challenges to overcome in order for it to grow. The area is not homogenous but comprises at least five sub groups, all at different stages of development; these are:

1. The center block site of the Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park in Saskatchewan and the Elk Water park site in Alberta (CHIPP) with the Fort Walsh National Historic Site.
2. The towns of Maple Creek, Eastend, Gull Lake and Shaunavon.
3. Grasslands National Park and Val Marie.
4. The Old Man on His Back and the Great Sand Hills

sites both of which are ecologically protected areas of great value.

5. The cities of Swift Current and Medicine Hat which have a vested interest in this development as they are the gateway cities to the area.

Each of these has its own opportunities and challenges and while they share many of the barriers that are identified in other parts of this plan, it would be a mistake to try and develop a strategy that did not take into account their individual capacities and needs.

The fundamental difference in the different clusters above is that while the first cluster is a very established tourism destination drawing hundreds of thousand visitors each summer and operate at or near capacity in those months; the other areas are all either in the process of establishing themselves i.e. Grassland & Val Marie, or are almost completely undeveloped i.e. the Great Sand Hills, meaning that they are nowhere near their capacity in the summer season. This fundamental difference in development stage requires a unique focus for the growth models for the plan, one that fosters growth in each of the areas.



T. rex Discovery Centre - Eastend

The challenge is most easily expressed in terms of seasons; CHIPP & Elk Water need to develop an alternate season; either by expanding into the shoulder seasons or by building a winter season, all other areas need to build in the primary summer season first, with a long term goal of expanding the seasonality of their businesses into alternate seasons either shoulder or winter.

This may seem contradictory but it reinforces the opportunity of working together and the advantages of joint marketing. While CHIPP and some of the established tourism operators who have a significant business presence grow the market by selling into their traditional areas of southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, the opportunity exists for the



other clusters in the area to sell into the present market already traveling to the area. By providing a richer mix of experiences for the traveler to enjoy the smaller centers augment the overall offering and make the promotions/marketing initiatives more enticing thereby supporting the activities of CHIPP. As a benefit this market is fairly tightly grouped around outdoor enthusiasts/campers and therefore is more easily accessed and catered to.

Each of the sub areas has its own unique selling features i.e. Eastend has the T.rex Centre and Old Man on His Back ecological site. This means that each can develop a distinct approach to market in order to sell into the traveling public arriving in the area.

Each will also have its own unique challenges as well as the global ones listed here i.e. in Eastend most available accommodation including campgrounds are full with workers from the oilfield.

Several of the sub areas have unique strengths i.e. Grasslands/Val Marie. In this area the strength comes from Grasslands' position as a National Park. That strength has allowed it to start to generate traffic on its own. However it too has accommodation capacity issues both in camping and in fixed room.

Old Man on His Back and the Great Sand Hills are both ecologically protected areas of great interest and appeal but with extremely limited infrastructure to service any

traveling public. As demand supporters they offer opportunity to the communities closest to them to inexpensively create an experience that could have great appeal to the market at hand.

The gateway cities (Swift Current and Medicine Hat) have two distinct opportunities; the first is to capture more of the traffic that is currently passing through en route to the park area, the second is to entice travellers from the other province to extend their trip out to include the city. The tools they have for this are the retail, culture and gaming industries, all of which are of significant secondary interest to the explorer group that is currently traveling.

The common thread to this is the traveler; the entire market will appeal to the type of

traveler that is attracted to the primary travel generators, CHIPP and to a lesser extent Grasslands. This means that a joint marketing approach supports growth in the market both organically, as in selling more to the current market, and exponentially as in building an alternate season.

The strategy then is two-part:

- Work together as a group to promote the entire area as a four season destination to the traditional markets of southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. This will require resources from each participating group.
- Each sub area/operator then sells into the traffic. This will require a willingness to cross promote and package from all participants.

1.5.2 Resources

The resources required to build and sustain this Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) will be considerable. Experienced staff, maintenance of an office and website, promotional activities and management of the organization will all require resources.

As in any start-up in the initial stages, support will have to come from both the primary participants in the organization and from outside agencies. However over the long term self-sustainability will be required. As a joint effort, funds could come initially from the municipalities, provincial/federal agencies and from the operators through the implementation of a levy system. Prior to developing a work

plan estimating required funds is difficult, at a minimum a budgeted amount in excess of \$120,000.00 should be targeted. At this level the majority of the resources will go to staffing leaving a limited amount for promotion, to increase this more resources will have to be found. As well resources will be needed to create enhanced marketing tools for the organization like a website and promotional materials.

1.5.3 Tactical Work Plan

A strategic plan should not be mistaken for a work plan. A work plan should always be prepared and administered by those tasked with realizing the goals. In this case that will be the Board of Governors of the organization and the staff hired to implement the plan. As an interim measure to move this initiative forward, a temporary board will be appointed to draft the original work plan and to identify the staff requirements and put in place the staff to implement the plan. This temporary board will be representative of the subgroups listed previously.

The organization itself will be an incorporated Not-for-Profit entity. As a legal requirement for this type of group, a formal elected board will be put in place at the first annual general meeting.

The recommendations in the following sections will serve to guide the appointed and subsequent boards as they build the tourism capacity and impact in the Cypress Hills Destination Area.

CHAPTER 2: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Improve Tourism Infrastructure

Tourism Infrastructure includes the physical assets such as roads, bridges and ferries, airports and landing strips, parking areas, wastewater and garbage disposal facilities, water and power services, which enable visitors to access an area and stay there.

2.1.1 Improve Highway and Other Road Conditions

BACKGROUND

East-west traffic in the Cypress Hills Destination Area is primarily served by the Trans-Canada Highway (Highway 1) and the Red Coat Trail (Highway 13). Most traffic into the region follows one of these routes. The Trans-Canada brings most visitors to the CHDA. The Red Coat Trails serves as a significant alternate route, popular with those who like the road less travelled, and with vacationers travelling to or from attractions further east, such as Grasslands National Park, the Big Muddy Valley and more. It is also a connecting corridor between key attractions within the CHDA. Therefore, both highways are vital to the success of communities and attractions in the area.

North-south traffic in the Cypress Hills Destination Area follows Highways 21, 37 and 271. Highway 21 between Highway 1 and CHIPP is the main access route to the park and is well maintained. Highway 37 provides access from the Trans-Canada to Shaunavon, Eastend and attractions along the Red Coat Trail. When the oil industry is strong, Highway 37 sees significant traffic volume from drilling and servicing vehicles. The road is well maintained and is generally in good condition.

Highway 271 serves two major attractions in the CHDA – Fort Walsh and Cypress Hills Massacre National Historic Site, as well as the Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery. The highway is also a key artery for people who travel to and from the Alberta side of CHIPP. Highway 271 is in good condition, although it is quite narrow for RV and bicycle traffic. The Battle Creek Road can become impassable (or nearly so) during wet and muddy conditions. This limits access to and from each province, as well as to attractions such as Historic Reesor Ranch, Fort Walsh and the Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery.

ISSUE

Highway conditions directly influence travel decisions. Some of the highways in the Cypress Hills Destination Area deter travel. For example, Highway 21 south of Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park (CHIPP) and a small portion of Highway 13 west of Eastend act as a disincentive for travel between CHIPP, the T.rex Discovery Centre, Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area & Interpretive Centre, and other attractions in the southern parts of the area. Further east, portions of the Red Coat Trail (Highway 13), particularly between Highways 4 and 37 discourage use of the route as an east-west alternative to the Trans-Canada Highway.

Because of its rolling, scenic terrain, the Cypress Hills Destination Area has considerable potential for bicycle touring. Many intrepid cyclists already travel through the area, but their journeys are hindered by the lack of good shoulders on many of the highways. Better shoulders would encourage more use by cyclists and open up a relatively untapped market.

Poor roads are particularly detrimental to recreational vehicle (RV) travel, as RV owners are often unwilling to take their vehicles on gravel, narrow or rough surfaces. The Cypress Hills Destination Area, with hundreds of serviced sites, is a primary destination for this market. Poor roads inhibit the movement of RVs (and other vehicles) to anywhere other than CHIPP. This not only reduces travel, but it also reduces the economic impact of tourism by reducing visitor spending throughout the region.

Recommendations dealing with highway infrastructure have been prepared to address the following objectives:

- Improving the quality of highways used by key tourism markets, including Saskatchewan residents, Albertans, the RV market and others such as cyclists.
- Ensuring that highways that serve established and emerging attractions and destinations meet the needs of critical tourist segments.
- Ensuring that highway corridors that serve important market segments are maintained at a high standard.

RECOMMENDATIONS – IMPROVE HIGHWAY AND OTHER ROAD CONDITIONS

Actions:
Improve/rebuild Highway 21 from CHIPP intersection to junction of Highway 13.
Improve/rebuild sections of Highway 13 that are not up to primary highway standards.
Improve shoulders on major corridors, including Highways 13, 21 and 271.
Allocate maximum point allotment (five points) to important tourism highways in the CHDA. (Tourism Saskatchewan)
Develop roadside pull-outs along grids such as the Davis Creek Road.
Improve the condition of the Battle Creek Road.

2.1.2 Participate in Community Preservation and Beautification Programs

BACKGROUND

The difference between successful tourism destinations and unsuccessful ones often relate to their appearances. Communities that make concerted efforts to look warm, welcoming and interesting tend to draw and keep visitors who, in turn, spend money. Roger Brooks of Destination Development International recommends the following actions be taken in communities that wish to be successful tourism hotspots.

Increase the street appeal of stores. Restoring heritage values of older buildings, or generally increasing the curb appeal of new ones, is a proven method to increase sales and to increase first and lasting impressions of a community. Curb appeal can account for 70 percent of first-time sales at restaurants, retail shops, golf courses, lodging, wineries, etc.

Place potted plants outside of businesses year-round (evergreens are fine in winter). Studies have shown that women, in particular, respond positively to beautification programs. Women are also

responsible for 80 percent of all vacation spending.

Give people a place to sit. Benches or sitting areas enhance visitors’ propensity to stay in a shopping district for a while. They are particularly effective for men, who often need somewhere to wait while their spouses shop.

The downtowns of major communities in the Cypress Hills Destination Area – Maple Creek, Gull Lake, Shaunavon and Eastend – are all home to buildings of significant character and potential. Maple Creek, in particular, has capitalized on its downtown heritage to create a unique shopping district and is continually working towards downtown beautification programs. However, businesses in all four communities (and others in the area) would benefit from restoration and beautification programs. These may be community-driven, or they may be developed by outside agencies.

ISSUE

Downtown restoration and beautification is critical to not only developing the appeal of the CHDA, but also to generating significant economic return for its business community.

RECOMMENDATIONS – PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY PRESERVATION AND BEAUTIFICATION PROGRAMS

Actions:
Participate in “Main Street” programs.
Access provincial grants and other funding programs.
Participate in the Communities in Bloom program.

2.1.3 Invest in Good Washrooms and Washroom Maintenance

BACKGROUND

One of the most common concerns of tourists is finding a good, clean washroom. While most everyone who has travelled knows this issue well, many destinations do not actively maintain and promote either public washrooms, or high levels of washroom maintenance in their communities. According to Destination Development, though, studies show that relieved visitors spend more and that toilets should be viewed as an economic development tool.

Roger Brooks recommends that businesses do not put up signs saying “washrooms for customers only” because:

- Many people who use a washroom will make a convenience purchase.
- Once people have used a washroom, they often make a purchase out of guilt.
- Eighty percent of all tourism spending is by women, and when women need to stop, they often also shop.
- Washrooms are perfect places to provide visitor information.

ISSUE

A good washroom strategy does not currently appear to be in use in the CHDA. The opportunity exists for a community or business(s) to pilot a washroom project.

RECOMMENDATIONS – INVEST IN GOOD WASHROOMS AND WASHROOM MAINTENANCE

Action:
Implement a washroom pilot program.



Jones Peak near Eastend

2.2 Improve Tourism Promotion

Tourism Promotion involves activities which individuals and groups undertake to attract potential tourists. Co-operative advertising, attendance at travel shows, magazine articles, brochures, maps, commercial and promotional signs, travel guides, newspaper, radio, television, internet websites, social media campaigns and tourist information centres are all examples of promotional activities.

2.2.1 Co-operative Marketing

BACKGROUND

The Cypress Hills Destination Area is co-operatively promoted through an informal marketing coalition known as the Cypress Hills Destination Area Coalition. Members of the CHDA are eligible to partner with Tourism Saskatchewan at consumer and trade marketplaces and in co-operative advertising initiatives.

The marketing coalition produces very good marketing pieces. However, it is a volunteer organization made up of busy attractions staff and tourism business owners, and sometimes it does not have the human or financial resources to take advantage of all of the promotional opportunities that would be of benefit to it. The purpose of co-operative marketing objectives is to reinforce and expand the capacity of the coalition to continue its successful promotional activities.

The Cypress Hills Destination Area will truly thrive when all of its communities,

attractions and tourism businesses realize benefits from their participation in the plan’s implementation. There are numerous organizations that have been established to represent these communities and businesses, and to advance tourism development and promotion in the area. One of the key roles of the coalition and of the project manager assigned to this project should be to communicate and to coordinate with these organizations.

Each organization should continue to pursue the goals specific to its needs, but these goals – and those of the Destination Area initiative – should align where necessary to achieve common objectives.

ISSUE

Co-operative marketing is an efficient way of pooling financial and human resources to promote the destination area effectively. The marketing coalition needs to expand the support it receives in order to maintain and increase its effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS – CO-OPERATIVE MARKETING

Actions:
Expand partnerships with stakeholders in the Cypress Hills area (municipalities, operators and other governmental organizations).
Arrange for trade show representatives to take the “Boothmanship” training provided by STEC.
Seek co-operative promotional opportunities with nearby attractions, e.g. Great Sand Hills, Grasslands National Park, CHIPP (Alberta).

2.2.2 Alberta Market

BACKGROUND

The Alberta market is a priority market for Tourism Saskatchewan. There are many opportunities to take advantage of cost-shared Tourism Saskatchewan programs. The following are some statistics regarding visitors from Alberta:

- The average age of Alberta visitors to Saskatchewan is 34.
- Seasonally speaking, 42% come in summer, 18% in spring, 25% in the fall and 15% in the winter.
- Albertans’ average stay in Saskatchewan is four nights, and their average group size is two people, indicating a high percentage of “empty nesters” or couples travelling without children.
- Approximately 22% travel with children.
- Average spending by Alberta visitors here is \$169.80 per day.
- Albertans have the highest ratio of campers to population anywhere in North America.

- Albertans have higher than average interest in outdoor activities – fishing, hiking, wildlife viewing, golfing, canoeing and kayaking, water sports and extreme sports.
- The large majority, or 83% of Albertans who come to Saskatchewan, visit central and southern parts of the province.
- Large numbers of Albertans already visit CHIPP on a regular basis.

ISSUE

The Alberta market is a major opportunity for attracting visitors to the Cypress Hills Destination Area.

Recommendations with respect to the Alberta market address the following objectives:

- Increasing visitor expenditures;
- Focussing on tourism products of interest to key Alberta markets.
- Partnering with Tourism Saskatchewan in making the Alberta market a priority.
- Helping to develop the area as a more competitive and marketable tourism destination.

RECOMMENDATIONS – ALBERTA MARKET

Actions:
Meet with marketing staff at Tourism Saskatchewan to discuss and coordinate Alberta strategies.
Expand promotional activities and partner with Tourism Saskatchewan at travel and consumer shows.
Partner with CHIPP (Alberta) to take advantage of Travel Alberta opportunities and to broaden reach into Alberta market.
Target the RV market in shoulder seasons.

2.2.3 Increase Online Presence

BACKGROUND

The internet is the most important promotional tool for most destinations. The percentage of tourists who use it to research their intended destinations has risen dramatically over the past decade. A well-designed website is very important, but it only addresses part of the challenge in reaching potential visitors.

The Cypress Hills Destination Area is promoted through several websites. The Cypress Hills Coalition launched the www.cypresshills.ca site in the summer of 2009. This site's homepage provides a map of the CHDA, with links to the sites of major attractions and communities in the area. Another site, www.cypresshills.com focuses on the Alberta and Saskatchewan sides of CHIPP, as well as Fort Walsh and Cypress Hills Massacre National Historic Site. The Saskatchewan Provincial Parks website, www.saskparks.net provides information on CHIPP and is an essential tool for many campers. Fortunately, www.saskparks.net has undergone a significant redesign, which has greatly improved its user-friendliness, visual appeal and functionality, which had previously been lacking.

Search optimization is critical to the success of any website. In order to be effective, the website should appear on the first or second page of any related browser (e.g. Google) search. By this measure, the Cypress Hills Destination Area is well served. As of December 2011, a Google search of "Cypress Hills" reveals www.cypresshills.com to be its first hit, while www.cypresshills.ca also shows up lower down on the first page. In addition, the website of one of the CHDA's key attractions, the Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery, is the sixth hit.

ISSUE

The informal marketing coalition of CHDA partners has done a commendable job of developing the www.cypresshills.ca website, but more work lies ahead to fully take advantage of the site's possibilities.

Recommendations dealing with increasing online presence have been prepared to address the following objectives:

- Increasing the effectiveness of the coalition's website.
- Making the site relevant and refreshed on an ongoing basis.
- Generating an online social network of Cypress Hills enthusiasts.



Fly Fishing at Battle Creek – Cypress Hill Provincial Park

RECOMMENDATIONS – INCREASE ONLINE PRESENCE

Actions:
Further develop/redesign www.cypresshills.ca to act as more than a portal, and to include more content and imagery, develop an information/FAQ page (weather, what to pack, maps/directions), add area packages, and promote seasonal activities to encourage shoulder and winter visitation, etc.
Develop a CHDA mobile website.
Develop an e-newsletter and promote sign-ups.
Establish a Facebook page and Twitter account, update them regularly and encourage people to become followers.
Add existing streaming video and develop new clips that promote unique aspects of the area, and establish a YouTube channel.
Develop new detailed itineraries and promote existing itineraries developed by Tourism Saskatchewan with a southwest focus.



2.2.4 Optimize Impact of Traditional Marketing Activities

BACKGROUND

Despite the growth in importance of the internet, a significant portion of the travelling public still relies on traditional marketing vehicles for tourism information. Billboard, magazine and radio advertising, for example, can raise awareness of the CHDA and increase key markets’ desire to visit. Other activities, such as consumer shows and the Cypress Hills Destination Area Guide, can both promote the area and provide more in-depth information about vacation ideas, itineraries and places to stay shop and eat.

ISSUE

One of the major challenges facing the Cypress Hills Destination Area is the fact that most visitors come during the summer and concentrate their activities in CHIPP,

and fail to visit other attractions in the area. This speaks partly to the success of CHIPP in providing a quality experience, but it also speaks to the need to spread visitors’ economic activity around the area. CHIPP itself has identified a desire to increase the number of day visitors who utilize the park’s facilities, while in turn encouraging overnight and longer-term visitors to explore the many attractions of the CHDA. Strong marketing materials and even stronger co-operation amongst the coalition partners will be required to achieve these objectives.

Recommendations with respect to traditional marketing activities have been prepared to address the following objectives:

- Increasing visitor expenditures.
- Improving business operations into the shoulder seasons.
- Increasing awareness of, and visitation to, all CHDA attractions.

RECOMMENDATIONS – OPTIMIZE IMPACT OF TRADITIONAL MARKETING ACTIVITIES

Actions:
Develop, participate in and promote marketing activities, including: Cypress Hills Destination Area Guide, billboard space on Highway 1, advertising space in appropriate publications, radio advertising and on-site promotion of coalition partners (through marketing materials, displays, etc.).
Participate in and promote Tourism Saskatchewan marketing activities, including: targeted marketplaces and consumer shows (Quartzite, AZ RV show, Calgary Stampede, Calgary Home & Garden Show, Calgary Women’s Show, etc.), advertising co-ops (e.g. CAA Alberta WestWorld, WestJet Up), the Saskatchewan Discovery Guide and in-province marketing campaigns where appropriate.

2.2.5 Packaging

BACKGROUND

Packaging increases visitor spending because it combines a number of attractions, experiences and business services into a single product, thereby spreading tourism expenditures among venues that might not attract as many visitors on their own.

Packaging can be especially beneficial in the shoulder seasons, when most businesses are likely to have fewer customers than they do in mid-summer. Many empty nesters prefer to travel during shoulder seasons, including the months of May, June, September and October. A key sub-segment of empty nesters are the Baby Boomers. Some experiences embraced by Baby Boomers include culinary tourism (e.g. visiting chefs, restaurants, wineries, educational opportunities) and art tourism (e.g. artists in action). Studies have shown that people are more likely to buy art if they meet the artist.

In addition to these opportunities, some examples of packaging options include:

- Stay and explore attractions – two or three-day packages, based in CHIPP (for example), that include accommodation and entry fees to several CHDA attractions.
- Stay and view flora/fauna – two or three-day packages, based anywhere in area, that include accommodation and guided tours to engage in bird/wildlife viewing, hiking, and soft adventure.
- Stay and learn – two or three-day packages, based anywhere in area, that allow visitors to explore

interests in the cultural, historical and paleontological history of the CHDA.

All of these packages could include meals at local restaurants (or bag lunches from them), as well as stops at other attractions or businesses that would enrich the overall experiences provided to visitors. Opportunities whereby visitors can engage with local people and learn about the local culture are well received.

Tourism expenditures generated in the shoulder seasons are helpful to all businesses, but particularly seasonal operations. Reams of market research demonstrates that “empty-nesters” – mature couples without children at home – often prefer travel in shoulder seasons because the weather is often favourable, there are few crowds, there is more time to explore an area, and there is more opportunity to interact and learn. The empty-nester market represents a solid packaging opportunity for the Cypress Hills Destination Area.

ISSUE

Opportunities to increase visitor spending through packaging are not being adequately developed and promoted in the CHDA. This is a lost opportunity to increase visitor spending throughout the area and to promote the area to new markets.

Recommendations with respect to packaging have been prepared to address the following objectives:

- Increasing visitor expenditures.
- Improving business operations into the shoulder seasons.
- Developing and promoting new tourism products.

RECOMMENDATIONS – PACKAGING

Actions:
Meet with operators and encourage the development of more packages.
Initiate the development of new itineraries, group and self-guided tours linking attractions and businesses.
Investigate opportunities for bus tours, and work with Tourism Saskatchewan’s travel trade and marketing staff to assist operators to become trade-ready.
Encourage potential package partners to take part in training and mentoring programs.
Promote the packages at appropriate venues such as travel and leisure shows, trade shows, service clubs, conferences and in regional promotion.



2.2.6 *Improve Highway Signage*

BACKGROUND

Tourism signage in the Cypress Hills Destination Area is inadequate. It does not meet the needs of visitors, either from a directional nor promotional standpoint. This is particularly true because of the distance between attractions and because of the relative complexity in reaching some of them, such as Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area & Interpretive Centre.

Current signage policy generally requires signs to be located on highways which lead directly to an attraction or a community. Visitors need to see signage on the highways that connect with the highways which lead directly to an attraction or community. Over the years some progress has been made on this issue, as the former Horseshoe Marketing Group and the T.rex Centre were able to obtain signage. More recently, the Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery acquired tourism signage at the junction of Highways 21 and 271.

The Cypress Hills Destination Area is served well by its proximity to the Trans-Canada Highway, yet countless travellers pass the area completely by, because signage never alerts them to the tourism offerings just to the south. This concern is not specific to the CHDA, as the same issues face attractions, communities and destination

areas right across the province. Over the past few years, the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure (MHI) has been working closely with Tourism Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport to address some of the policy shortcomings related to the signage issue.

Ideally, signage within the area should be standardized through the use of a common symbol, which would identify locations and attractions as being part of the destination area.

ISSUE

Visitors need good highway signage to help them find their way to attractions in the Cypress Hills Destination Area. The placement of promotional and directional highway signs at key locations is crucial to the ongoing tourism development of the area.

Recommendations with respect to highway signage have been prepared to address the following objectives:

- Improving visitor access.
- Developing the area as a more competitive and marketable tourism destination.
- Enhancing the visitors' experience by providing information and direction at appropriate locations.
- More effectively promoting the diversity of tourism products within the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS – IMPROVE HIGHWAY SIGNAGE

Actions:
Meet with MHI to discuss highway signage requirements for the area.
Identify requirements and cost the various priorities / options.
Develop a destination area signage plan.
Design large entry point signs and smaller themed signs.
Arrange for financing (including sponsorships) and for on-going maintenance of signs and locations.
Implement the various signage projects in co-operation with communities and attractions.



2.3 Improve Tourism Products and Experiences

Tourism Attractions include parks, museums, paleontological centres, galleries, a variety of cultural festivals and experiences, agricultural exhibitions, craft fairs, fall suppers and events reflecting our way of life. Some of our golf courses are known internationally. Events in nature, such as shorebird and waterfowl migrations and the northern lights, also act as attractions.

2.3.1 Re-investment

BACKGROUND

Core travel generators are the features, facilities and experiences which act as primary motivators for travel to an destination (e.g. CHIPP). A core attraction can also result from the grouping of features, facilities and experiences all relating to a specific theme (e.g. Maple Creek's "Old Cowntown" heritage).

It is imperative to invest in core attractions since they are the major tourism travel generators. From the public sector perspective, when visitation increases, fuel tax and other taxation revenues also increase. From the private sector perspective, increased visitation provides an opportunity to increase sales and improve the prospects of solvent and profitable business operations. These encourage business retention and expansion, thus retaining services required by area residents all year round.

The core attractions in the Cypress Hills Destination Area are among the best in Saskatchewan. Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park ranks with Prince Albert National Park and Meadow Lake Provincial Park among the most highly visited tourist attractions in

the province. CHIPP boasts an array of visitor experiences, primarily geared to campers, outdoor enthusiasts, families, and people generally seeking rest and relaxation.

Other travel supporters lend themselves to the unique character of the area. Dinosaurs, wineries, cowboys, fine dining, beautiful terrain, resorts, and unusual wildlife make the trip more rewarding but they also require continued maintenance and reinvestment.

ISSUE

Key tourism assets require ongoing repair and maintenance, and periodic renewal. When they are neglected, it is more difficult or impossible to attract and hold visitors. It also lends to a perception of a second-rate destination.

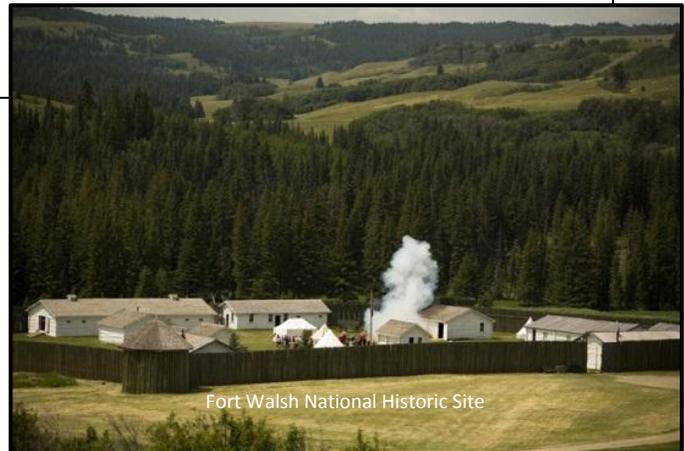
Recommendations with respect to core attractions have been prepared to address the following objectives:

- Improving the overall quality of attractions which serve key tourism markets.
- Increasing visitor expenditures.
- Improving visitor access.
- Ensuring that ongoing funding is provided for major core attractions.

**RECOMMENDATIONS – RE-INVESTMENT IN CORE ATTRACTIONS,
SUPPORTERS AND DIVERSIONS**

Actions for Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park:
Upgrade Battle Creek Road (connector to CHIPP – Alberta) to meet visitor expectations.
Upgrade Rainbow, and Terrace Campgrounds.
Maintain and improve all campsites.
Preserve backcountry.
Maintain water quality in Loch Leven.
Expand shoulder/winter season activities.
Work with business lessees to expand their shoulder seasons.
Develop season marketing campaign.

Recommendations for Fort Walsh National Historic Site:
Implement management plan.
Upgrade Visitor Reception Center.
Address the issues of food service at Fort Walsh.
Improve visitor infrastructure and diversify visitor experience opportunities.



Recommendations for Grasslands National Park:
Improve the basic service offer for visitors – orientation, campgrounds and interpretive trails.
Build regional awareness of the park by partnering with local attractions and regional tourism associations.
Work with surrounding communities and businesses toward the park, and possibly the region, being designated a ‘dark sky preserve’.
Design visitor experience opportunities for key markets.

Actions for the T.rex Discovery Centre:
Increase funding for interpretive program development to increase visitors’ length of stay
Mould, cast and display Scotty
Increase marketing dollars
Update displays in gallery
Hire technician to work in the lab year-round
Create Centre of Excellence in paleontological research



T. rex Discovery Centre - Eastend

Actions for Old Man on His Back:
Expand partnership with T.rex Centre.
Add ghost town, ranching elements to overall experience.
Expand hours of operation.
Acquire better signage.
Develop more walking trails and interpretive programs.
Partner with B&B’s in Robsart, Eastend and Ravenscrag.

Actions for The Resort at Cypress Hills:
Increase winter/shoulder season programming.
Expand shoulder season and increase winter visitation.
Attract qualified labour.
Increase visitation of overnight and restaurant guests.
Host unique events (e.g. culinary retreats), cowboy poetry, etc.
Actions for Historic Reesor Ranch:
Improve road access.

Actions for Cypress Hills Vineyard and Winery:
Develop packages.
Improve roads and signage.
Develop shoulder season.



Actions for the Town of Eastend:
Attract new accommodations/make current accommodations more tourist-friendly.
Improve promotion of all tourism opportunities in area.
Pursue downtown beautification.
Improve signage within the community for galleries, observatory, boat launch, etc.
Improve signage corridors, particularly on the west side of town.

Actions for Maple Creek/Heritage District:
Participate in Communities in Bloom / Winter lights campaign.
Promote winter sports tourism.
Develop 'Welcome' gateway signage.
Continue development of Heritage District.
Complete Main Street Program/downtown beautification.
Offer guided & self-guided tours.
Encourage new bed and breakfasts and customer service- focused hotels.
Engage STEC training for service providers.



2.4 Improve Hospitality

Tourism Hospitality involves how tourists are welcomed and looked after during their stay. It determines whether visitors have a pleasant and enjoyable experience, and therefore is critical to the success of tourism attractions and businesses. Visitors to tourism operations have high expectations of the quality of personal service they receive. Courtesy, service and genuine thoughtfulness are noticed and appreciated. Quality service leads to good word of mouth, which is generally considered to be the most effective form of promotion. In the internet age, it also leads to positive testimonials on websites such as www.tripadvisor.com, which influence great numbers of tourist decisions.

2.4.1 Training and Education

BACKGROUND

The Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council (STEC), an award-winning division of Tourism Saskatchewan, delivers education and training programs in support of human resource development in the tourism sector. STEC is a founding member of the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC) and is the provincial representative for the CTHRC's *emerit* program – a nationally recognized industry training and certification brand recognized by employers in the tourism sector.

STEC delivers National Occupational Standards in 46 tourism occupations and Professional Certification in 27 frontline, supervisor and management positions. These include such occupations as:

- Campground Operator
- Event Co-ordinator
- Heritage Interpreter
- Local Tour Guide
- Front Desk Agent
- Supervisor
- Tourism / Visitor Information Counsellor

Larger employers such as provincial parks and major hoteliers often access training

programs, but generally speaking, operators of many smaller businesses and attractions are either unable to find the time to do so, or are unaware of what training is available.

ISSUE

Many businesses and attractions operators are unaware of training and education opportunities, or do not know how to access these opportunities for themselves and their employees.

Recommendations with respect to Training and Education have been prepared to address the following objectives:

- Improving awareness of the existence of tourism occupations and certification programs.
- Improving employers' and employees' knowledge in areas such as: tourism awareness, attitude, professionalism, communication, operational procedures, sales, event co-ordination, guest relations, interpersonal skills, human resource management, regulations, etc.
- Improving access to tourism training and education opportunities.
- Improving the quality of service provided to visitors (and residents).

RECOMMENDATIONS – TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Actions:
Contact STEC for training tools and available courses.
Utilize the Service Best customer service program to improve customer service levels.
Utilize the Trade Development Strategy Initiative (TDSI) employer training program.
Utilize the on-line programming through Standards and Certification – to develop skills and certified staff offered through STEC.
Utilize the Serve it Right program to manage risk and liability when serving alcohol (through STEC).
Develop “how-to” information sheets/sites for operators who cannot participate in training.
Offer customer service training to students in school.



2.4.2 Service Evaluation and Recognition

BACKGROUND

Good quality service is one of the most important considerations when visitors decide to make repeat visits to an area, and opportunities to find out how visitors feel should be considered. The First Impressions Community Exchange program is one means of helping communities learn about existing strengths and shortcomings, including customer service as seen through the eyes of a first time visitor.

This program involves two municipalities of similar size and situation sending small teams of volunteers to each other’s communities to assess aspects such as friendliness, aesthetic appeal, housing, infrastructure, recreational opportunities and other elements of the community. They do so to determine how different individuals and organizations such as tourists, youth, business people and retirees might view a community and

decide whether or not to visit, live or locate a business there. Afterwards, the volunteers meet to exchange feedback, highlighting strengths and suggesting how weaknesses could be addressed. It is at this point that the quality of service, friendliness, et cetera, experienced by these visitors can be communicated.

ISSUE

In order to reach their potential, individually and collectively, members of the Cypress Hills Destination Area need to have a solid understanding of the quality of visitor experiences that they and their partners provide.

Recommendations with respect to service evaluation and recognition have been prepared to address the following objectives:

- Finding out how visitors feel about the quality of service they experience.
- Considering ways in which to publically recognize outstanding employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS – SERVICE EVALUATION AND RECOGNITION

Actions:
Pilot a First Impressions program between CHDA and other destination areas.
Meet to discuss common questions to include in surveys.
Conduct annual visitor surveys at major businesses and attractions to determine their opinions about customer service and visitor experiences.
Hold a yearly meeting to discuss findings of customer research and ways to improve visitor experiences in the CHDA.
Work with STEC to develop a recognition program.
Determine ways of recognizing outstanding employees.

2.5 Improve Tourism Businesses

Tourism Businesses include the casinos, hotels, motels, campgrounds, vacation farms, bed and breakfasts, guest ranches, outfitters, service stations, golf courses, motor coach, car rental, airline and charter services, restaurants and all other retail businesses that can take care of visitors' needs.

2.5.1 Improve Businesses and Services

BACKGROUND

The Cypress Hills Destination Area is rich in natural beauty, history and unique, sometimes quirky attractions. Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park's campgrounds are a haven for all types of campers, regardless of whether they choose to sleep in recreational vehicles, campers or tents. Other campgrounds, such as Eagle Valley near Maple Creek, and Pine Cree Regional Park near Eastend, also offer high quality camping experiences. There are also excellent vacation ranches, farms and bed and breakfasts in the area.

There are several hotels and motels in communities such as Maple Creek, Gull Lake, Shaunavon and Eastend. CHIPP is home to The Resort at Cypress Hills, which has a strong focus on pleasure travellers, as well as on people visiting the park for special events such as weddings. Although they also serve pleasure travellers, most other motels and hotels in the region rely heavily on business travel, such as work crews to support their operations. Occupancy levels have been very high – often reaching capacity – in recent years, as oil, gas and other resource-based economic activity in the Cypress Hills region has been positive. While the economy has

been strong, the Cypress Hills Destination Area's ability to properly serve pleasure travellers has been restricted.

There is considerable opportunity to improve this situation, either through expansion of existing accommodation facilities, or through the attraction of new ones. Better accommodations in communities such as Eastend and Maple Creek could serve as bases for day users of CHIPP and other attractions, alleviating some of the accommodation pressure in the park. They would also provide attractions such as the T.rex Discovery Centre, the Star Café and others with suitable facilities to lodge their guests.

ISSUE

The Cypress Hills Destination Area needs more and better accommodation facilities.



Grasslands National Park

RECOMMENDATIONS – IMPROVE BUSINESS AND SERVICES

Actions:
Work with economic development professionals and community leaders to attract suitable accommodation facilities to the CHDA.
Develop a portfolio of investment opportunities.
Identify channels to promote opportunities.
Contact potential investors.



CHAPTER 3: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

This section of the plan describes how it should be implemented. Given the scope and potential of its implementation, full time paid project management services will be required. Monitoring and reporting are essential to ensure objectives are being achieved and to be able to change and update the plan effectively. Public Involvement will continue to be an important part of the ongoing implementation process.

3.1 Project Management

BACKGROUND

A project of this magnitude should be managed by an established not-for-profit or other organization with a dedicated project manager and demonstrated capabilities in the following areas:

- Financial solvency and stability.
- Experience preparing and managing budgets of more than \$100,000.
- Experience in the tourism industry – business and/or attractions management.
- Familiarity with highway signage programs.
- Experience in preparing and implementing marketing plans.
- Writing skills including preparation of newspaper and magazine articles, operational reports, press releases, and briefing notes.
- Strong interpersonal and communications skills.
- Understanding the concerns of rural Saskatchewan.
- Experience working with First Nations.
- Experience working with volunteers.
- Thorough understanding of municipal governance structures.
- Thorough knowledge of the Cypress Hills area.



Tourism Saskatchewan has in the past provided cost-shared financial assistance for a three-year period to support the implementation of these plans.

ISSUE

Implementation of the plan will require project management and financial partnerships.

RECOMMENDATIONS – PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Actions:
Confirm the appropriate corporate structure and administrative requirements for managing the implementation of the plan.
Formalize financial partnerships and establish an advisory board for monitoring and evaluation.
Prepare a 36 month budget and work plan with timelines and reporting requirements.
Finalize financial agreements and proceed.



3.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

BACKGROUND

The advisory board referred to above will enable the financial partners to periodically review progress and thereby ensure their interests are being served. It may also include, from time to time, members or advisors from government ministries as required, such as the Ministry of the Economy as well as the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure.

These government ministries and agencies will be encouraged to allocate resources to implementing some of the recommendations of the plan. This will require inclusion of some of the work in their annual budgets, which are traditionally planned in the fall, and implemented the following spring.



Day to day monitoring of activity will be undertaken by a project manager.

ISSUE

Monitoring and evaluation are required to ensure that objectives are being achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS – MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Actions:
Create a tactical work plan.
Identify skills required to implement the plan successfully and then recruit and hire a person with these skills.
Report quarterly to the Board of Directors
Report annually on progress to the membership

3.2.1 Public Involvement

BACKGROUND

Before this plan is implemented, broader public consultation needs to take place. This will achieve several key objectives:

- Raising awareness of the plan and of the efforts of the marketing coalition.
- Generating input and ideas related to the plan’s recommendations.

- Identifying potential partners and volunteers for future initiatives.

As implementation of the plan proceeds, the public should be given opportunities to identify new issues and to recommend ways of resolving them. Periodic updates on the plans progress should be provided through newspaper articles and other means of local communication.

ISSUE

Public support of the plan, and of its implementation, is critical to its success.

RECOMMENDATIONS – PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Actions:
Report progress through newspaper articles, newsletters, etc.
Make copies of the plan available to the public, once it has been approved and endorsed
Increase awareness of the Cypress Hills Destination Area Plan through presentations, public speaking engagements, municipal council meetings, service club events, etc.
Hold one-on-one meetings when necessary for specific issues
Make copies of the annual progress report on plan implementation available to the public



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Maple Creek, S0K S0N 1N0
306.662.2244
[http://www.maplecreek.ca/](http://www.maplecreek.ca/tourism@maplecreek.ca)
tourism@maplecreek.ca

Maple Creek Chamber of Commerce

Box 878
Maple Creek, S0K S0N 1N0
306.662.558.7055
[http://www.maplecreekchamber.ca/](http://www.maplecreekchamber.ca/thedailygrind@sasktel.net)
thedailygrind@sasktel.net

Historic Reesor Ranch

Box 1001
Maple Creek, S0K S0N 1N0
306.662.3498
[http://www.reesorranch.com/](http://www.reesorranch.com/reesorranch@hotmail.com)
reesorranch@hotmail.com

Cypress Hills Vineyard and Winery

Box 122
Maple Creek, S0K S0N 1N0
306.662.4100
[http://www.cypresshillswinery.com/](http://www.cypresshillswinery.com/cheers@cypresshillswinery.com)
cheers@cypresshillswinery.com

Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area

c/o Nature Conservancy of Canada
100-1777 Victoria Avenue
Regina, SK S4P 4K5
306.296.2077 or 306.296.4908
[http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/where-we-work/saskatchewan/](http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/where-we-work/saskatchewan/saskatchewan@natureconservancy.ca)
saskatchewan@natureconservancy.ca

The Resort at Cypress Hills

Box 1480
Maple Creek, S0K S0N 1N0
306.662.4477
[http://cpri.sasktelwebhosting.com/](http://cpri.sasktelwebhosting.com/resort.office@cypressresortinn.com)
resort.office@cypressresortinn.com

Elkwater Lake Lodge and Resort

Box 56
Elkwater, AB T0J 1C0
403.893.3811
[http://www.elkwaterlakelodge.com/](http://www.elkwaterlakelodge.com/info@elkwaterlakelodge.com)
info@elkwaterlakelodge.com

Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park Saskatchewan

Box 850
Maple Creek, S0K S0N 1N0
306.662.5411
[http://cypresshills.com/](http://cypresshills.com/cypresshills@gov.sk.ca)
cypresshills@gov.sk.ca

**Fort Walsh and Cypress Hills Massacre
National Historic Sites of Canada**

Box 278
Maple Creek, S0K S0N 1N0
306.662.3590 or 306.662.2645
<http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/sk/walsh/index.aspx>
fort.walsh@pc.gc.ca

**Eastend Community Tourism Economic
Development Authority**

Box 43
Eastend, S0K S0N 0T0
306.295.3670
<http://dinocountry.com/ecteda@gmail.com>

**Southwest Quest for Saskatchewan Art
and History**

Box 283
Consul, S0K S0N 0P0
306.299.4445
<http://artandhistoryquest.com/southwestquest@gmail.com>

Hidden Valley Ski Resort

97 Carry Drive S.E.
P.O Box 410
Medicine Hat, AB T1B 3M6
403.893.3961
<http://skihiddenvalley.net/info@skihiddenvalley.net>

PHOTO CREDITS:

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Cypress Ventures Ltd. – Page 31

Douglas E. Walker – Cover Page

Greg Huszar Photography – Pages 5, 7, 8, 12, 18, 21, 22, 25, 27, 29, 30, 34, 37 & 40

Hans-Gerhard Pfaff – Pages 13 & 38

Paul Austring – Page 4

Robert Postma – Pages 36 & 41

Town of Maple Creek – Page 32

APPENDIX A

Cypress Hills Destination Area Town Hall Participant List

TUESDAY APRIL 17TH – VAL MARIE

In Attendance:

- Royce Pettyjohn (EDO Maple Creek)
- Brenda Kornfeld (GNP)
- John Parker (SWCF)
- Karra Park (SWCF)
- Ervin Carlier (VMEDC)
- Michael Fitzsimmons (GNP)
- Ashley Wruth (VMEDC)
- Lindsay Alliban (Hazlet EDO)
- Ken Hollinger (Village of Val Marie Administrator)
- RM 45 Representative
- RM 46 Representative
- Michael Shervan (Village of Mankota, RM 45 &46)
- Barb (RM and Village of Frontier)
- Shelly Larson (GNP)
- Dianne Hahn (Cabri)
- Lynne Lemiux (Ponteix)
- Mayor of Ponteix
- Carol Masecar (GNP)
- Kathy Grant (GNP)
- Carrie Clausen (VM EDO)
- Katherine Patterson (GNP)

THURSDAY APRIL 19TH – MAPLE CREEK

Those who attended:

- Greg Hisey – Ghostown Blues Bed and Breakfast
- Melody Nagel – Hisey – CHIPP
- Laurie Leigh – The Rocking Horse Restaurant
- Tina Creswell – The Star Restaurant, The Daily Grind and Town Council
- Barry Rudd – Mayor of Maple Creek
- Barry Elderkin – Town Council
- Roxanne Wong – Howard’s Bakery and Chamber of Commerce
- George and Gail – Southwest News
- Daphnee – The Resort at Cypress Hills
- Adrienne – Tourism Coordinator
- Carol – Ghostown Blues Bed and Breakfast
- Darcy Dietrich – Oldtimers Museum and Tourism Maple Creek
- Theresa and Scott Reesor – Historic Reesor Ranch
- Darrell – General Manager of Murrays Chev

MONDAY APRIL 23, 2012 – GULL LAKE

Those who attended:

- Dave Colter
- Patrick Simpson – RM of Gull Lake
- Betzy Cooney – Tourism Committee
- Wendy Klein – Quilts N More Quilting Store
- Belinda Yorke – Lyceum Theatre
- Deanna Service
- Anne Frishy – Lyceum Theatre
- Blake Campbell – Mayor of Gull Lake

TUESDAY APRIL 24, 2012 – EASTEND

Those who attended:

- Ron Macrae
- Jim Fletcher – T-Rex Centre
- Dennis Webster
- Sean Bell – T-Rex Centre and CHDA Coalition
- Edna Laternus – Town Administrator
- Dawn Dainard – RM of White Mud Administrator
- Kendal McCuag – Town Council

THURSDAY MAY 3RD, 2012 – ELKWATER

Those who attended:

- Gary Stimson – Elkwater Lake Lodge
- John Hammil – Elkwater Golf Course
- Darlene – Elkwater Golf Course
- Lezlie
- Jim and Peggy Bengert
- Keith Fisher – Elkwater Golf Course
- June Blaquiere
- Theresa and Scott Reesor – Historic Reesor

TUESDAY MAY 8TH, 2012 – SHAUNAVON

Those who attended:

- Sharon Dickie – Mayor
- Kyle Bennett
- Mike Elmgren
- Charmaine Bernath – Town Administrator
- Wendy Theines – Grand Coteau Heritage and Cultural Centre
- 2 summer students from the Grand Coteau Heritage and Cultural Centre
- 2 volunteers from the Grand Coteau Heritage and Cultural Centre

APPENDIX B

