



STRATEGIC MARKETING AND PLANNING  
2014-17

## Executive Summary

1. **Tourism Goals**
2. **Key Objectives**

## Market Assessment & Findings

3. **Situation Analysis**
  - a. SWOT – Products
  - b. SWOT – Destination
4. **Competition Assessment/Advantages**
  - a. Functional Attributes
5. **Products & Markets**
  - a. Target Markets
  - b. Product Development
6. **Challenges**

## Lacombe Regional Tourism – Brand & Marketing Strategy

1. Funding
2. Partnerships
3. Community/Business Support
4. Regional Stakeholder Communication and Education
5. Marketing Strategy
6. Marketing Initiatives
7. 2014 Marketing and Content Plan

## Executive Summary

### Lacombe Regional Tourism Overview

The primary focus of the Lacombe Regional Tourism (LRT) campaign will be awareness of name, awareness of accessibility, and awareness of product. The largest challenge will be defining what makes the region unique. Our goals will seek to differentiate strengths and opportunities within the region that will attract more tourists.

Defining LRT target markets, the campaign will increase knowledge of regional products, location, and perceptions of the region. Working closely with industry partners will help expand reach and tap into new and existing opportunities.

LRT will implement the use of various communication channels with precise and specific timing, targeting, and measurement to reach a greater number of potential tourists. This will help create new segmentation based on cultural opportunities, geographical positioning, and local natural allures. The campaign will also define signature identity elements for each destination while ensuring coverage across the region and promoting products that carry across the region with the end result of creating a unified tourism destination.

### 1. Tourism Goals

Develop and promote Lacombe Regional experiences to be desirable tourism options.

Feature the "natural beauties" of the region, develop "cultural" product, and bring awareness to the region and its geographical position so that people know where it is on the map and what there is to do there.

**"I think Lacombe is a place that people stumble upon and then wonder why they had never visited before. Kind of like Alice falling into Wonderland." - Jennifer Kirchner**

- Branding – Establish a clear, respected, and sustainable distinction in the minds of target consumers and in regional stakeholders.
- Unification of the Lacombe Regional Tourism industry to build consistency across the region with values, quality and personality.
- Alignment and partnerships with the greater Alberta tourism industry.
- Increase the focus and efficiency of marketing and communications efforts while broadening marketing initiatives to build awareness and preference.
- Utilize analytics and learnings to feed into marketing initiatives in real time for sustainable and effective marketing.
- Development of tourism product where appropriate and within identified opportunities.

## 2. Key Objectives

- Marketing
  - Build awareness of primary product opportunities, experiences, and proximity in target regions
  - Build preference for current consumers and enhance knowledge of additional opportunities and experiences
- Regional development
  - Product
    1. Focusing on sustainable long-term strategies for cultural tourism
    2. Education and support for the regional tourism industry and regional businesses
  - Events marketing and program review and enhancements
  - Partnership development between businesses and between other organizations
- Education of industry
- Brand unification and awareness

# MARKET ASSESSMENT & FINDINGS

## 3. Situational Analysis

Market and product investigation/evaluation as identified by LRT Marketing Committee

### a. SWOT: Products

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Strengths – Product (“+” = unique)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• + Ag, Equine/Gaming             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Alberta Downs</li> <li>○ Farmers Markets/Country Store</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ag, Family             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Kray Family Farm</li> <li>○ Ag grounds</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Birding             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ellis Bird Farm</li> </ul> </li> <li>• + Murals</li> <li>• Quieter/less commercial camping/lakes</li> <li>• Historical             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ag Grounds</li> <li>○ Blacksmith shop</li> <li>○ Niche hopping downtown</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Events             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ + Light up the night</li> <li>○ Harvest festival</li> <li>○ Lacombe Days</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <p><b>Weaknesses (Product)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer Staff</li> <li>• Less funding</li> <li>• Very few hotels to accommodate large groups</li> <li>• Restaurants</li> <li>• Defined event locations</li> <li>• Poor online presence of accommodations, shops and operators</li> <li>• Business hours of operation</li> <li>• Poor shopping selection</li> <li>• No compelling reason to come off the highway</li> </ul>                  |
| <p><b>Opportunity (Product)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underutilized assets             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ag grounds</li> <li>○ Alberta downs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Staycations</li> <li>• Competition holding events on same day as Lacombe Days (Play off of increased regional traffic)</li> <li>• Market potential</li> <li>• Birding and walking tours</li> <li>• Eco tourism</li> <li>• Family Tourism             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Packaging Kraay Family Farm</li> <li>○ Gull lake</li> <li>○ Trails</li> <li>○ Summerland Mini-golf</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  | <p><b>Threat (Product)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not being able to deliver on promised experience             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Across businesses, seasonality issues, business hours</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Being outcompeted by regions with similar products</li> <li>• Similar location with proximity to target markets that can offer wider variety of services</li> <li>• Little control over funding</li> </ul> |

## b. SWOT: Destination

To add additional items to the SWAT analysis please use this link

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Strengths – Destination (“+” = unique)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central location on HWY 2</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Lake based recreation</li> <li>• Provincial recognition of local culture and growth of culture sector</li> <li>• Access to nature, trails (paved and non) throughout the County.</li> <li>• Farm to table: access to local food (sunlight/soil)</li> <li>• Prime ag area/open farm days</li> </ul>  | <p><b>Weaknesses - Destination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of L. as a region</li> <li>• Knowledge of local product (industry and local citizens)</li> <li>• Access to information (trip advisor, comments, knowing how to be found)</li> <li>• Lack of supporting infrastructure</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge/understanding of Lacombe Tourism organization</li> <li>• Lack of Co-op marketing and advertising</li> <li>• Lack of funds for ads – knowing how to spend \$</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Opportunity - Destination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red Deer             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Target as market</li> <li>○ Create partnerships</li> <li>○ Target their markets through them</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Use of online and social media</li> <li>• Partnerships             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Coordinate regional websites</li> <li>○ Packages</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Education             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Workshops</li> <li>○ Opportunities to network</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Gain more regional content             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Storytelling</li> <li>○ Videos</li> <li>○ Imagery</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Farm to table – Ag tourism/experiences</li> <li>• Awareness -&gt; marketing, tradeshow</li> </ul> | <p><b>Threat - Destination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of Rural (nothing to do, boring)</li> <li>• Distance</li> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Environmental (ie. Blue algae problems)</li> <li>• Similar offerings/audiences being targeted by competition and other regions already</li> <li>• (Perception) lack of Lacombe as a tourism destination</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of value of tourism</li> </ul>  |

#### 4. Competition Assessment/Advantages

To understand the tourism gap and opportunities presented, LRT identifies the following regions as direct competitors based on their locations, strengths and capabilities, natural resources and tourism management.

| LOCATION  | STRENGTHS (theirs)       | OVERLAPPING PRODUCT  | HOW WE DIFFER - Negative   | HOW WE DIFFER - Positive |
|---|--------------------------|--|--|--------------------------|
| Red Deer<br>- Proximity<br>- Variety of products<br>- Work capacity | Paid Staff Funding       |  | - Limited Funding  |                          |
|   | Accommodations           | B&B's  | - Don't have large hotels<br>- Based on smaller/one-off tourists<br>- Ability to market                        | + Small town B&B         |
|   | Shopping                 | Some boutique shops  | - Lacombe has more niche/boutique shops<br>- L. does not have large box stores<br>- R.D. abundance of shopping |                          |
|   | Variety/Number of events | - Lacombe days on same weekend as westerner Days<br>- R.D. has arts events too | - Funding for events<br>- R.D. has more events all year.<br>- No ability in Lacombe to do all year.            |                          |
|   | Facilities (Westerner)   |  |  |                          |

| LOCATION   | STRENGTHS (theirs)  | OVERLAPPING PRODUCT                                    | HOW WE DIFFER - Negative | HOW WE DIFFER - Positive                                  |
|--|---|--|--------------------------|---|
| Sylvan Lake<br>- Wider commercial offering<br>- Full day-trip experience | Larger marketing budgets and capabilities                         | Lakes/activities                                       |                          | + Less crowded<br>+ less "party" more "relaxing/pristine" |
|  | Complete experience in 1 location (outdoor and indoor activities) | Camping and Accommodation with attractions/experiences |                          | + RV parks  |
|  | Attractions: Waterslide, go-carts, family activities              | Winter activities: Skidoo, Nordic,                     |                          | + More options<br>+ Less crowded                          |
|  | Closer to highway and Red Deer hub                                |  |                          |   |
|  | More access to hotels and Red Deer nightlife                      |  |                          |   |
|  | Winter: can stay on the lake                                      |  |                          |   |

| LOCATION  | STRENGTHS (theirs)           | OVERLAPPING PRODUCT                                       | HOW WE DIFFER - Negative                       | HOW WE DIFFER - Positive   |
|---|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Rockies<br>- Camping experiences<br>- picturesque | Picturesque scenery (famous) | Nature/water  |  | + Sandy beach<br>+ temperate/swimming water<br>+ Murals, historic downtown   |
|   | Multi-day hiking adventures  | trails  |  | + More daytime activity in L.  |
|   | Tourist Packages             | Camps/retreats  | - Non packaged activities and attractions      |  |
|   | World Class Wintersports     | Indoor/outdoor skating<br>Skihill<br>Icefishing<br>Nordic |  | + Curling  |
|   | Iconic Canadian Experience   |   | - Less coverage from outside marketing sources | + Prairie/Parkland experience<br>+ Proximity and experiences attractive to consumers within Alberta and not close to Rockies or looking for day trip experiences<br>+ boutique shopping/antiques |

| LOCATION   | STRENGTHS (theirs)      | OVERLAPPING PRODUCT      | HOW WE DIFFER - Negative | HOW WE DIFFER - Positive                                  |
|------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Wetaskiwin | - Proximity to Edmonton | - Historic sites/museums |                          | - Abundance of natural opportunities (lakes, campgrounds) |

| LOCATION         | STRENGTHS (theirs)                                    | OVERLAPPING PRODUCT | HOW WE DIFFER - Negative   | HOW WE DIFFER - Positive   |
|------------------|---|---------------------|--|--|
| Edmonton/Calgary | Size<br>Proximity to target markets<br>Ease of access | events              | Limited by seasonality<br><br>Limited by hours of operation<br><br>Limited by volume of events and funding | Can be combined with cultural or natural get-away<br><br>More intimate |



## a. Functional Attributes

### Niche Tourism Activities

Special interests, culture and or activity based tourism

- Cultural: Heritage, Agri-tourism (food incl),
- Environmental: Nature/Trails
- Rural: Camping, Beaches, Watersports
- Urban: Events, Sports, Food

**Where we want to grow** – cultural and natural immersive experiences.

### Core Products

The following chart looks at our current core products and the variables that allow us to determine product strength/potential to compete in the regional tourism industry. **Orange** text refers to challenges or negative attributes.

| Core Products/Attributes | Features Infrastructure, Accessibility, Resources, Quality of Experience,  | Who   | Accessibility   | Disadvantage   | Competitive Advantage   | Current Reputation  |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Culture (culinary)       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- local products (Ellis tea house)</li> <li>- fresh produce purchase</li> <li>- dining still developing</li> <li>- farmers market/farmers market experience (3 markets)</li> <li>- seasonality, <b>mainly summer</b> but some availability in winter (greenhouse)</li> <li>- culinary events w/local products - sip and savor</li> <li>- Tea houses/heritage house restaurants</li> <li>- diverse local products</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- mostly locals, locals bringing guests older demographic</li> <li>- farmers markets is mixed demographic</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- farmers markets across region</li> <li>- <b>hours of operation for tea houses and heritage houses, mainly lunch</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>rely on WOM</b></li> <li>- <b>awareness</b></li> <li>- <b>hours</b></li> <li>- Competitors - pigeon lake Eco cafe, red deer farmers market is much bigger, Red deer public market</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less chains</li> <li>- Farmers markets all homegrown</li> <li>- Heritage houses</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tea houses/heritage houses are a draw, overall positive</li> </ul> |
| Culture (historic)       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a number of historic</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regional travellers</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 7 days a week in</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>limited hours and days</b></li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- architecture very</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>hours and days of week</b></li> </ul>                           |

|                             |   |   |  |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|--|
|                             | <p>sites and museums, year round walking tours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not just seasonal historic experiences, town of Lacombe is its own historic experience</li> <li>- antique stores well known amongst collectors (a good draw)</li> <li>- only a few in the town though</li> <li>- quilts and quilt stores popular with locals (Ponoka, etc)</li> </ul>   | -   | <p>summers, Sunday is very slow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- businesses not open evenings</li> <li>- rv parks visitors dying for things to do, go to red deer</li> <li>-</li> </ul>  | <p>of the week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no evenings and weekends open- people turn to red deer</li> <li>- older buildings don't have appropriate shops</li> <li>-</li> </ul> | <p>unique</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- close by, easy to walk</li> <li>- murals- more unique, more being added, ongoing</li> <li>- newer public art type murals as well</li> <li>-</li> </ul>                                      | <p>an issue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- its probably closed... I'll go to red deer</li> </ul>   |
| Natural                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High degree of visitation</li> <li>- Abundance of natural experiences in proximity to each other (lakes, camping, trails, birding)</li> <li>- Swimming and fishing available</li> <li>- Proximity to town and other local attractions</li> <li>- Proximity to urban hubs</li> <li>- High provincial marketing interest and support</li> <li>- Short term and long term stays and activities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Draw from regional urban hubs</li> <li>- Families</li> <li>- Retired (RV)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primarily summer</li> <li>- Close proximity to cities</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not as attractive as the parks</li> <li>- Lakes may experience blue green algae</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proximity combined with multiple experiences</li> <li>- Peaceful and quiet nature of the region</li> <li>- Long term stays are possible</li> <li>- High quality birding in proximity to cities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Area known for natural assets but the region itself is largely unknown as well as its additional experiences</li> </ul> |
| Attractions / Entertainment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- always changing and growing</li> <li>- agricultural based (including rodeos)</li> <li>- unique experiences</li> </ul>  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- paved roads, not long trips on gravel</li> <li>- free parking</li> <li>- accessibility from Edmonton and Calgary</li> <li>- easy full experience</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- rodeos, community parades without the crowds</li> <li>- old time experiences</li> <li>- easy way to have an authentic, accessible</li> </ul>  |  |

|                                     |   |  |  |   |   |  |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|---|--|
|                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- county is large</li> <li>- small town feel in many communities</li> </ul>  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>day trips close to home</li> <li>- perception of not being far away</li> </ul>                            |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>experience</li> <li>- no crowds</li> <li>- market to grandparents with grand kids showing youth new experiences</li> </ul> |  |
| Transport infrastructure and access | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- close proximity to Red Deer for signature experience interest and outdoor pursuits.</li> <li>- day trip distance from Edmonton</li> <li>-</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- paved roads throughout region</li> <li>- Most of the attractions are just off of the highway</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- awareness</li> <li>- other regions with similar products are closer to Edmonton and Calgary</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- proximity to Red Deer</li> <li>- paved roads throughout region</li> <li>-</li> </ul>                                     |  |

## 5. Products & Markets

### a. Target Markets

Geo Target: Primary region to target is Red Deer (**Direct** marketing)

Get Target: Secondary (**Direct/Indirect** marketing) Edmonton and area

Get Target: Secondary (**Indirect** marketing through partner advertising) Calgary and area

### Segmentation: EQ

Lacombe Regional Tourism will be matching its products and messaging with targeted and focused segmentation. In an effort to influence consumers with the highest likelihood to show preference we will develop marketing and product development initiatives to understand the mindset that guides our target segments' decisions. Based on the CTC EQ model of segmentation, and in alignment with Travel Alberta, the segment identified is "Cultural Explorers".

#### CULTURAL EXPLORERS

*"Cultural Explorers want to immerse themselves in the culture, people and settings of the places they visit. They enjoy the history, but also look to experience the modern culture. Prior to every trip, they research their destination to better understand it. And once they're there, they prefer to let things unfold spontaneously. They want their trips to go beyond just seeing the tourist sites so they strive to leave the beaten path and explore out of the way places."*

- Primary
- History and culture seekers
- Natural/Outdoor: (trails, historical, nature, agri., culinary products), Camping

#### Cultural Explorers - (Travel Alberta's secondary target)

**Primary** - Direct marketing target for LRT

- Natural/Outdoor: camping, trails, nature,
- Culture seekers (agri - culinary products, history)

#### Free Spirits - (Travel Alberta's primary target)

**Secondary** and indirect marketing target of LRT.

Use Travel Alberta listings and partnerships with Tourism Red Deer to connect with this segment.

- Red Deer, Edmonton (Calgary) and region day-trippers

## Cultural Explorers

9% of Canadian Market



### Demographics

averages refer to market total



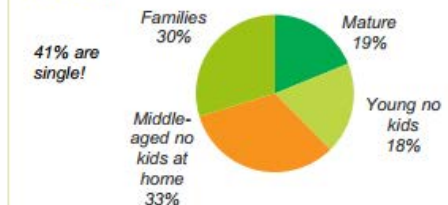
**Education:** Average

**Employment:** FT, slightly above avg. # of homemakers

**Household Income:** Average



### Lifestage



## Core Experiences

With the identified target locations and segments LRT will build a marketing program around its immersive cultural, natural and family themed experiences.

Awareness during the initial stages of both location and experience opportunities will be crucial. Preference will be built through industry education and partnerships to enhance experience quality for the consumer. An initial focus on 2 or 3 unique experiences the region can deliver on well will be key. It is also important that LRT is able to represent these experiences throughout its region.

- 1) Natural
  - o Camping
  - o Trails
  - o Nature/birding
- 2) Culture
  - a. Historic features
  - b. Event
  - c. Agri tourism (Development)
- 3) Main attractions

## Traveller Types

Currently there are 2 primary sub-types of “Cultural Explorers” to the Lacombe region.

- 1) Short and long term stays (camping/VFR)
- 2) Full and partial day-trippers (experience or event)

In each instance, a goal of LRT will be to increase the knowledge and attractiveness of taking part in additional activities to both elongate and enhance the stay of a visitor to the region. The strategies outlined below will take this goal into account in industry partnering, cross-promotion and advertising.

| Product Type         | Current Strength/ Features | Benefits | Value for repeat visits                            | Segment Interest Level | Planning timeframes prior to experience                                      | Duration Spent in Activity                     | Travel Motivations (VFR, family celebrations, getaways, learning opportunities, adventure etc.) |
|----------------------|----------------------------|----------|--|------------------------|--|--|---|
| Culture Agri-tourism | Across region              | Abundant | Seasonality produces different product experiences | High                   | Day to months out depending on variation in product (event based, vs farmers | Dependent on participant and product variation | Culture<br><br>Culinary tourism   |

|                  |  |                             |  |                |   |                   |  |
|------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|----------------|---|-------------------|--|
| Culture Historic | Hands on experiences<br><br>Unique Edwardian architecture<br><br>Ability to combine experiences with Cultural experiences close to home sightseeing, antique shopping and food | Experience updates (murals) | Medium,<br>Not across the region<br><br>Significantly increased with partnership development. Medium to high if experience is unique or memorable. |                | markets, vs CSA)<br>In the moment (RV'er and campers, VFR, passing through) to several weeks (VFR, campers) | Half to full day  | General interest                             |
| Natural          | Abundant, multiple types (camping, lake activities, trails, birding)<br><br>Peaceful<br><br>High quality   |                             | High in summer, medium low in winter   | Medium to high | Short to months   | Hours to weeks    | VFR, getaways, daytrip recreation, hobbyists |
| Attractions      | Strong signature attractions<br><br>Unique experiences   |                             | Medium high for summer   | High           | Short   | Hours to full day | Recreation, education, hobby                 |

### a. Marketing Focus - Regional Strengths

The Lacombe tourism region has a strength in its natural attractions, primarily camping and lakes, and enhanced by activities such as birding and trails. Focusing on these strengths, LRT will enhance marketing to build:

- A larger claim in the province to this combination of natural product, playing off of accessibility and quality of overall experiences (decreased crowds, closeness to home, proximity to additional experiences)
- Increased awareness of the region and it's tie to the product that people do and do not know (understand the region they are in, local communities and more of the additional experiences available)

Several strategies utilized within this marketing focus will support product development (as described below) and in the same token will be enhanced during the product development process. As well, through enhanced marketing support and working with other tourism programs in the province, the increased promotion/cross promotion of additional product will increase awareness and extend the breath of products experienced by consumers.

### **Goals 2014:**

- Increase awareness of the regional experiences with new and current audiences
- Connect product strengths (campgrounds and natural) with current attractions and product development for cross promotion
- Increase the number of activities experienced during a tourism visit, length of stay, and frequency of return visitation

### **Strategy:**

- Increase marketing of natural experiences (camping and lakes)
- Grow agri-tourism to enhance regional experiences (described below)
- Increase awareness of additional product by:
  - Working with Travel Alberta to build unique travel offers. The regional and long-haul tourism marketing bodies (Travel Alberta, TPR) are looking for unique experiences to promote and LRT can benefit from external organization promotions of these products.
  - Work with AB Parks to include unique travel offers in confirmation emails of people booking on the campground reservation system.
  - Ensure all tourism product is listed in ATIS (especially campgrounds/RV sites and tourism businesses)
  - Tie together local experiences for cross-promotion and packaging (example: tie antique shops to B&B's or local food)

## **b. Product Development**

### **Ag/Culinary (Primary Development)**

“I think there is considerable potential to increase agri-tourism initiatives in our region. People from the cities really want to touch base with nature, farming etc., and given the diversity of our local tourism industry as well as our close proximity to the major cities in Alberta the Lacombe region would be an ideal location to build this industry”

LRT stands to benefit from local agriculture history, farmer's markets, tea Houses and Edwardian Architecture charm, linking local agriculture to tourism. With unification, planning and partnerships, Ag tourism is one potential growth area **across the region**. There is current support in the province for this product and when comparing to other potential growth areas, it is one that can be developed in the near future, step by step, and supported going forward.

### **Goals 2014:**

- Increase agri-tourism knowledge and support in the region through direct and indirect marketing channels
- Identify initial businesses and sustainable opportunities to focus on for product development
- Seek product development support and partnerships with culinary and agri-tourism bodies
- Increase agri-tourism revenue

### **Strategy:**

- Develop partnerships with ACTA (Alberta Culinary Tourism Alliance)
- Develop concepts for Open Farms days and begin discussions with TPR (Brenda Hanson – Tourism Development Officer). During these discussions it is important to outline our ideas for agri-tourism and Open Farm Days: possible connection to farmers markets (perhaps at Gull Lake), developed travel deals, and other ideas developed with ACTA and Travel Alberta (travel offer development).
- Promote industry education - Have TPR present the findings from the
- Develop measurements for success
- Develop new/ additional Ag /Culinary events as part of Lacombe Culture & Harvest Festival and Lacombe Days Festival in conjunction with the Festival and Events Tourism Growth Strategy for the region.

Example development initiatives:

- Gail Hall food safari, farmers market tours, upicks, greenhouses
- Dig your own dinner – field to fork dinners/ long-table / guided
- Planting season and camping season – open community garden space on the periphery of Gull Lake, perhaps at Summerland LP
- Farmers market at Aspen Beach to support OFD, long term campers/RV'ers
- CSA programs with multiple greenhouses and farms – for Red Deer
- Cross promotions with other regional experiences

Although multiple experience ideas are listed above, one or two experiences should be focused on to start. This experience can be supported by LRT primary marketing initiatives as well as the marketing programs of partner organizations.

### **Events/Activities (Secondary Development)**

#### **Goals:**

- Increase number of visitors to LRT festivals and events
- Enhance the visitor experience
- Increase tourism revenue from events

Increase exposure to tourism region and product to new and existing consumers



### **Strategy:**

- An identified opportunity (originally see as a weakness) is that other regional communities are hosting events in the same timeframe. LRT can use the enhanced visibility of the region to target marketing and "piggyback" off of the increased interest in regional events
- Develop comprehensive marketing plans around events and apply for co-operative funding
- Be at the table for all City and County run events
- Provide Lacombe Days Committee with support to implement the Lacombe Days Festival and events Growth Plan from 2014 – 2016 which was developed through the AB Festival and Events Tourism Growth Program in 2013-2014.

### **Sporting 2015 (Future Development Potential)**

LRT has numerous large and small sport clubs and facilities including the areas of curling, equine, martial arts, lacrosse, aquatic, etc. The underutilized Ag grounds at Alberta down shows potential for allowing event and sport based tourism to the region.

Due to the breadth of current needs including partnership development, working with local sporting groups (education and support), human resources and accommodation needs, further research and planning is required before major time investment can be made by LRT and is suggested for 2015.

## **6. Challenges**

Lacombe Regional Tourism needs to be realistic in overcoming challenges that may hinder the overall experience and could hurt the brand. Over-promising and under delivering. Look for strong partners willing to try and share successes, being strategic with a “one-at-a-time” approach will assist in sustainable growth and successes.

**To overcome these challenges LRT will need to continue to foster and grow local and regional support/funds for the association. This will allow LRT to participate in more marketing and advertising opportunities to promote regional tourism.**

### **Challenges – Accessibility**

One of the identified challenges effecting tourism growth in the region is the hours of operation for regional tourism businesses and support businesses. With reduced hours in winter, numerous businesses closed on the weekends, and hours of operation that do not lend to evening activities our regional competition is a more attractive for our identifies growth markets.

### **Strategies:**

- Showcase success stories for businesses with extended support hours.

- Develop industry site and communications
- Unification across region (buy in from industry) through partnerships and education.

### **Challenges – Funding & Human Resources**

The ability to accommodate growth will also be an important factor. Finding qualified individuals to support tourism and local businesses, events and other areas of desired growth will prove to be a challenge. With the desire to maintain quality experiences, realistic strategies will need to be developed for staffing and volunteer support.

#### **Strategies:**

- Slow growth – don’t bite off more than you can chew. Identify marketing and development priorities and timelines.
- Partnership development within the Lacombe Tourism Region will allow for cooperative funding availabilities to off-set marketing costs.
- Proactive engagement – Raise awareness of Lacombe Regional Tourism and Encourage Membership in the Association and Regional Stakeholder Engagement from other municipalities in the County.

### **Challenges - Accommodations**

Lacombe does not have a large or recognizable brand name hotel in the city, which is a distinct disadvantage for larger events or unless the individual travelling is staying in Blackfalds or Red Deer. This may prove to be an issue for sport and event based tourism development however, with a focus on cultural explorer and ag tourism experiences, the smaller local hotels, B&B’s and campgrounds will provide an appropriate accommodations style if embraced and add to the overall experience.

#### **Strategies:**

- Work with local B&B’s on packaging and partnering to create themes experiences that are aligned with LRT goals. The idea being to provide quaint and immersive experiences.
- Proudly promote small and quaint accommodations over canned “large-hotel” experiences.

## **LACOMBE REGIONAL TOURISM - BRAND & MARKETING STRATEGY**

Bringing the brand “to life”. LRT will utilize the following mediums to carry the Brand messaging and associated experiences to target consumers. To be effective LRT will work towards and celebrate short-term successes in order to gain support for long term success.

- Defined marketing program (web and traditional)
- Public relations
- Cross promotions
- Partnerships
- Word of mouth (social media, other)
- Awareness (tradeshows, other)

## 1. Funding

Co-op funding will be sought after by LRT for branding and marketing initiatives. LRT will also assist in educating industry in partnership marketing programs. By identifying

### Objective:

- Apply for Travel Alberta Co-op funding for Brand Development - **RECEIVED**
- Apply for Travel Alberta Co-op funding for 2014/15 marketing program - **RECEIVED**
- Apply for AB Culture grants and Travel Alberta Co-op funding for 2014 signature events
- 2014/15 - Identify agri-tourism and culinary partnership opportunities.
- 2015 - Driving historic and agri-tourism tours. Assist in funding applications.

## 1. Partnerships & Development

Partnerships will be an important part of the LRT strategy and will focus on 3 silos.

1. Encourage membership in the Lacombe Regional Tourism Association – Raise awareness of Lacombe Regional Tourism in the region and engage with the Municipalities in the County to become potential Regional Stakeholders.
2. Partnership development assistance between businesses of similar or complimentary product(s).
3. Partnerships with other tourism regions for increased marketing and brand awareness.

These partnerships will be used to obtain enhanced promotional reach, get more businesses in the region understanding importance of cross promotion and upselling, increase tourism expenditure in the region. With limited marketing budgets this will be a very beneficial and crucial part of LRT marketing efforts.

### Parties Involved:

LRT, Travel AB, TPR, AB Parks, Local Attractions

### Objective:

- Lacombe alignment and partnerships with Travel Alberta
- Lacombe alignment and partnerships with Tourism Red Deer
- Work with local municipalities and economic development to improve experiences and appearances
- Overcome competition shopping advantages due to breath of product
- Agriculture and Culinary partnership development
- Business cross promotion education

**Strategy:**

- Partnership: Travel Alberta
  - Align brand segmentation to Travel Alberta and CTC EQ model
  - Provide data (product, events and packaging to ATIS), image resources and content to resource centres and online marketing programs.
  - Hold or Attend (with Tourism Red Deer) Travel Alberta programming/education opportunities.
- Partnership: Tourism Red Deer
  - Register for marketing partnership. Extend awareness of region and Brand to Red Deer and Tourism Red Deer target audiences including Edmonton and Calgary.
- Travel Deal development with Travel Alberta
- Agri-tourism product development with TPR and local businesses
- AB Parks – Campground reservation confirmation email additions
- Assisting local retailers and businesses in understanding tourism focus, unify local character, charm and “theme”.
- Plan 2014 tradeshow and get partner commitment
- Identify business suitable for cross promotion to develop initial examples within the community.
  - Tourist goods (based on traveller types) available in key retail locations.
  - Attraction partnerships with local restaurants for value added opportunities.
  - Develop hands on experiences in agri-tourism and historic experiences
    - Community tours in antique cars
    - Make public aware and announce new mural development. Celebrate completions.
    - Work with antique shop or artisan retail locations to schedule on-site artisans in the summer.
    - Develop more public interpretation opportunities (ex. Blacksmith Shop)
- Work with Municipalities in District to improve appearance of communities

## 2. Community/Business Support

Local business support will be required to deliver on the experience promised.

**Goal:** Expanded hours of operation

Strategy:

- Showcase profiles of businesses currently with extended hours.
- Work with identified businesses to develop further community examples and case studies for 2014 season.
- Develop measurements for success and showcase through 2014/15 to encourage more participation for 2015 onward.

**Goal:** Consistent Brand Message and enhanced regional customer service

Strategy:

- Brand awareness and buy in. Be present and be make industry aware of the character of the region that is being portrayed to tourists.
- Increase support of local businesses and education on the importance of tourism

**Goal:** Cross promotion

Strategy:

- Identify new, high potential businesses for cross promotion. Work with them to develop cross promotion initiatives that are easy to implement and measure.
- Work with Travel Alberta to identify partnership and packaging opportunities. Develop case studies for future promotion and development.

## 3. Regional Stakeholder Communication and Education

The Lacombe Tourism region has had inadequate tourism education. Involvement is limited to larger attractions and lacks support from local support businesses and smaller operators.

Taking a leadership role, LRT will need to be vocal about what is being done within the region and how (businesses, economic development and the community) can be involved and what is expected of them.

**Strategy**

- Develop industry contact lists and encourage ongoing interaction
  - Develop industry portal on website

- Deliver regular newsletters with news and opportunity information
- Provide monthly content to Lacombe County News
- LRT must be very vocal, boasting about successes and high visibility of programs and opportunities through local media, and the aforementioned industry mediums.
- Encourage the attendance of Travel Alberta education programs
- Industry support
  - Schedule education events with SCM and Travel Alberta
  - Develop local case studies and showcase success stories
  - Provide more directory details for members lacking an internet presence on LRT website
  - Assist in partnership and cross promotion development
  - See partnerships and funding strategies

## 4. Marketing Strategy

### 2014/15

Initial marketing strategies will be around awareness of LRT region, and experiences to target markets.

The 2014/15 marketing campaign will be used to increase target market awareness to the member attractions, events and experiences in the Lacombe Tourism Region. A number of marketing channels will be used to drive targeted traffic to the Lacombe Regional Tourism website and digital properties with the goal of increasing reach and awareness, increasing conversion with those making travel decisions and increasing retention by providing follow-up and post experience marketing.

Our integrated online/offline marketing efforts will be very focused in both demographic and geographic criteria. Much of our focus will be on Cultural Explorers from the **local (Red Deer and area) region as well as Edmonton (initial secondary target) and Calgary (for 2014/15)**.

The flexibility of online advertising will allow us the ability to hyper-target audiences with relevant brand messaging and specific product/experience solutions. Online mediums will also allow us to test and change messaging, focus and visuals mid-campaign based on real time performance review. With a new brand launch we will need to be nimble in our advertising as we refine what advertising resonates best with our audiences.

Goals will be to increase reach, retention and conversion:

- 1) Increase the amount of time spent in the region and get people who are staying longer in the areas (camping/RV) to explore more of the region,
- 2) Increase return visitation
- 3) Increase opportunities for awareness (brand and experience marketing, social media engagement for word of mouth opportunities)

## **Active Marketing – LRT Funded Marketing Initiatives**

**Marketing Priority 1:** Increase marketing reach and awareness of regional strengths tied to a common theme as outlined in the brand. Accomplished through a holistic marketing program and partnerships.

- Natural experiences (camping and lakes etc)
- Cultural experiences and attractions (Ag, signature experiences)
- Events

**Marketing Priority 2:** Increase marketing reach and awareness of LRT to regional stakeholders, showcasing it's capabilities, successes and developing brand and buy-in of marketing goals.

**Marketing Priority 3:** Develop agri-tourism product and use to enhance priorities 1 and 2.

### **2015/16**

The exploration of Sport and Event development (AB Downs rental space, curling, etc) for the 2015 marketing season and onward should be considered and will be based on resources available and successes of 2014.

## **Partner Outreach Marketing**

**Outreach Priority 1** - Utilize and develop partner programs to extend the promotion of primary products

**Outreach Priority 2** - Utilize and develop partner programs to extend the promotion of attractions and cultural experiences

## **5. Marketing Initiatives**

### **a. Goals and Measurement**

Identify performance goals and get measurement and reporting tools in place

### **Designs & Printing (Including Publications and Outdoors)**

Lacombe Regional Tourism (LRT) will be developing a series of print and display advertisements that will be used in our visitor centre, distributed to local operators/partners and regional VICs. These marketing materials will be used to bring awareness to the LRT brand and the experiential opportunities of our region. This will include:

- Rack Cards/ Brochures – for tradeshow, VIC's, member & attraction locations
- Stand Toppers – in visitor centre signage
- Window Decals – in visitor centre signage
- Exterior Banners - visitor centre signage
- Stand Up Banners – visitor centre signage, tradeshow signage
- Highway Sign (1 year) – Digital display on Lacombe Main Street
- Red Deer Living Magazine (2 issues x ½ page)– Advertorial and advertisement
- Tourism Red Deer Experience Guide Advertisement (1 year x ½ page)

**Other signage/ print /advertising opportunities for LRT to pursue and/or look into:**

- Hot Summer Guide
- Alberta Views Magazine
- Red Deer Publications (such as Child Magazine)
- Travel Alberta Publications
- Driving Tours or RV Magazines
- Hwy 2 Signage and/ or Advertising
- Regional Road Signage and/ or Advertising
- Develop a Passport to the Lacombe Region

**b. Tradeshow**

LRT will be working to expand its regional awareness and will be participating in the 2014 Lacombe Trade Show. The Alberta Summer Travel Show was



identified as an excellent introductory tradeshow for LRT and partners. Situated in Edmonton, LRT will have the opportunity to showcase many of the regions experiences while bringing awareness to the region itself to one of our identified target markets. At this time LRT will be purchasing 2 double booths and will invite 4 additional industry partners (Ellis Bird Farm, Brown Eggs and Lamb, Kraay Family Farm, Lacombe & District Historical Society) to participate.

In 2015 LRT will have a booth at the Camrose Growing Rural Tourism Conference Trade Show to raise awareness of the region among industry members in the province of Alberta. In 2015, LRT will look into participating in additional tradeshow that will help promote and raise awareness of the LRT Brand.

### c. Memberships

LRT recognizes strength and opportunity in partnerships. As a member of Tourism Red Deer, LRT will be able to expand/enhance its reach to of our target markets, including Edmonton and Calgary. With growing reach, the membership advantages with this Central Alberta marketing organization will allow LRT and regional events, attractions and accommodations to tap into enhanced visibility, website traffic, marketing initiatives and learning opportunities. With these listing available on TourismRedDeer.com and as part of their marketing materials, LRT will also be able to expand exposure with one of our primary target market, Red Deer itself.

- Buy in to Tourism Red Deer membership, take advantage of marketing opportunities
- Utilize ATIS and Travel Alberta marketing programs (co-op marketing, segmentation, education programs)

### d. Online Advertising

Online advertising will be used to target select demographic and geographic groups with relevant ads and messaging. These ads will primarily lead people back to the Lacombe Regional Tourism website and social profiles with feature content from both Lacombe Regional Tourism as well as content that is shared from stakeholder social media sites and websites.

- Product advertising on experiences (articles) and attractions wrapped in brand
- Awareness and Brand advertising wrapped in Cultural Explorer experience imagery
- Event advertising

### e. Online Content Creation

Engaging online content will be required to help progress our online marketing initiatives and strengthen our new website. Lacombe Regional Tourism will work to develop experiential content for our targeted segments that showcases the region and the many stakeholder attractions, accommodations, shops and restaurants. Content will also be used to feed social media activities.

Content will be made for the Cultural Explorer segment and will feature experiential story and imagery content. The focus will be on natural experiences combined with historic, food, family fun - developed and utilized to showcase day trips, itineraries, and first hand experiences.

## 6. 2014 Content Plan

|            | Special days to visit (events)   | due        | posted | Daytrips (attractions)  | due        | posted |
|------------|--|------------|--------|---|------------|--------|
| <b>Apr</b> | Encore Art Show and Sale,<br>Celebrate Main Street Event &<br>new exhibit about Lacombe`s<br>main street at Flatiron | 01-Apr     | 07-Apr | Easter indoor farmer's markets,<br>Gallery on Main, quilt and antique<br>stores   | 15-Apr     | 21-Apr |
| <b>May</b> | Alberta Downs opening<br>Eckville Rodeo (June)   | 01-<br>May | 07-May | Campgrounds<br>Summer Camps for kids and adults at<br>Flying Cross Ranch<br>(Roping, Riding Clinics and more)<br>Weekly outdoor farmers markets<br>begin. | 15-<br>May | 21-May |
| <b>Jun</b> | Canada Day and Lacombe Days<br>(Jul)   | 01-Jun     | 07-Jun | Historic downtown tours, heritage<br>home tour (Aug)  | 15-Jun     | 21-Jun |
| <b>Jul</b> | Ellis Bird Farm: Bluebird festival<br>(Jul), bug jamboree (Aug)  | 01-Jul     | 07-Jul | Kraay Family Farm<br>trails in region (new Battle River Trail<br>Map – including trails from Lacombe<br>to Blackfalds and Gull Lake to<br>Bentley)        | 15-Jul     | 21-Jul |
| <b>Aug</b> | Rodeos: Bentley (Aug 7-10), Tees<br>AB Open Farm Days (Aug 23-24)  | 01-Aug     | 07-Aug | Gull Lake: beach and shallow water,<br>Alix wakeboard competition<br>highlight on local farm and<br>restaurants, u-picks                                  | 15-Aug     | 21-Aug |
| <b>Sep</b> | Lacombe culture and harvest fest   | 01-Sep     | 07-Sep | Orchards, ranches and farm tours  | 15-Sep     | 21-Sep |
| <b>Oct</b> | Alberta Historic Resources<br>Foundation Heritage Forum<br>Halloween happenings                                      | 01-Oct     | 07-Oct | Mural walk - Museums in Lacombe   | 15-Oct     | 21-Oct |
| <b>Nov</b> | Shopping and craft sales<br>Light Up the Night Festival  | 01-Nov     | 07-Nov | Boutiques, antiques, locally-made art<br>and crafts   | 15-Nov     | 21-Nov |
| <b>Dec</b> | Holiday fun (skating,<br>tobogganing)  | 01-Dec     | 07-Dec | Cross-country ski trails and Medicine<br>Lodge ski  | 15-Dec     | 21-Dec |

|            |  |        |        |   |        |        |
|------------|--|--------|--------|---|--------|--------|
| <b>Jan</b> | Lacombe Annual Bonspiel and AB Women`s Curling Championship  | 01-Jan | 07-Jan | Date night: Ugly's, Salt, Leto's, Station   | 15-Jan | 21-Jan |
| <b>Feb</b> | Gem and mineral show, ammonite (end of Feb-early march)  | 01-Feb | 07-Feb | Lacombe Memorial Centre: business meetings/conferences, public art and library programs | 15-Feb | 21-Feb |
| <b>Mar</b> | Lacombe Trade Show (April)<br>Agricultural fairs throughout the year: cutter parade (was cancelled in 2014, not sure if will come back), tractor pull, donkey show | 01-Mar | 07-Mar | B&Bs  | 15-Mar | 21-Mar |