

# Sustainable Destination Award Good Practice Story

## Conservation, Attractions, Community and Cultural Success Story

### Conservation

Inspired by the beauty of the place, the unique ecosystems and watersheds and high biodiversity, the people and communities of Alberta SouthWest Crown of the Continent have come together in a powerful way to grow healthy and diverse European, First Nations and religious communities in harmony with this special landscape.

The Crown of the Continent enfolds over 10-million acres of some of the most intact wildland on the entire continent. All the plants and animals seen here during the expedition of Lewis and Clark still survive here (The Nature Conservancy, <https://www.nature.org>).

Being on the Crown of the Continent creates a rather rare hydrologic feature: the many streams of Waterton-Glacier make important contributions to the great rivers of the continent. From the summit Glacier's Triple Divide Peak (8020 ft/2446 m), water flows to the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and Hudson Bay.

Alberta SouthWest forms the northeast corner of the "Crown of the Continent," which is a larger transboundary region encompassing the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, and the surrounding areas of Alberta, British Columbia and Montana.

This region features a number of important designations. In 1932, the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park becomes world's FIRST international peace park and has been the model for over 150 peace parks world-wide. In 1979: Waterton Biosphere Reserve (WBR) designated by UNESCO; it is one of only 18 biosphere reserves in Canada. WBR fosters and encourages a sustainable, community-based regional economy, with quality biodiversity, landscape and social values. Waterton Lakes National Park forms the core of the biosphere reserve. Adjacent provincial and private land with high conservation value encompasses some of the most spectacular and ecologically diverse landscapes in the Canadian Rockies and prairie grasslands. See <https://www.watertonbiosphere.com/>. Biosphere reserves are recognized internationally for demonstrating practical approaches to balancing biodiversity conservation and sustainable human use of the land.

### **Conservation** **Timeline:**

- 1932: International Peace Park. The Waterton Lakes National Park in Alberta, Canada, and Glacier National Park in Montana, U.S. are contiguous, separated only by the U.S.-Canada

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boundary. In honor of the longstanding friendship between the two countries, the parks shared the distinction of being named the world's first International Peace Park in 1932. Parks Canada and the U.S. National Parks Service collaborated on the application for this distinction, in keeping with the peace park's tradition of cooperation.

- 1981: Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- 1993: The first commercial wind farm in the nation was built in Alberta SouthWest, making the region the birthplace of the wind industry in Canada.

- 1995: Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- 2017: Castle Provincial Park (25,501 ha, 63,010 acres) and Castle Wildlife Provincial Park (79,678 ha, 196,890 acres) were designated by Alberta Provincial Government.

- 2017: Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park (W-GIPP) declared a Provisional International Dark Sky Park by the International Dark-Sky Association. See <https://www.darksky.org/worlds-first-transnational-dark-sky-park-receives-ida-accreditation/>. It is the first designation in the history of IDA's International Dark Sky Places Program that spans an international boundary. The new International Dark Sky Park caps a decade of effort undertaken jointly by the two national parks seeking IDA status. This is another significant step forward in our ongoing partnership with Waterton Lakes National Park," said Jeff Mow, Glacier National Park Superintendent. "In a time when one third of the world's population can no longer see the Milky Way, protecting this resource is essential."

- 2019: Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- 2018 to 2020: Jim Prentice Wildlife Corridor that stretches from Crowsnest Lake to Coleman, Alberta, giving wildlife a corridor over 5 kilometres wide from the forest reserve lands in the north to the Castle Parks network and the Waterton Lakes National Park and Glacier National Park to the south. The Nature Conservancy of Canada, the leading non-profit private land conservation organization in Canada, has since 2018 conserved 80% of the target lands in the corridor and aims to conserve the remainder in 2020. In January 2020, Canadian Pacific Railway made a contribution of \$500,000 to support the creation of this corridor. Once the corridor is completed, wildlife crossing structures similar to those completed within Banff National Park will be planned to cross highways and railways to reduce wildlife fatalities. See <http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/where-we-work/alberta/featured-projects/jim-prentice-wildlife-corridor.html>.

## Communities and Cultures

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The key attractions in the Crown of the Continent Alberta Southwest are international, national and provincial parks and recreation areas, and the destination benefits from the examples set by international, federal and provincial regulation and cooperation. This leadership positively influences business development in all parts of the region. Recognizing our natural assets and cultural richness has fostered a population that increasingly understands how precious these landscapes are, and there is pride in preserving, enhancing and celebrating these landscapes.

Alberta SouthWest is a rural region of small municipal, indigenous, Mormon and Hutterite communities, with a relatively light footprint on the landscape. Low population density and seasonal periods of visitation have preserved the natural assets of the region over the last decades. The region is able to look around at other destinations, see the potential threats and impacts to our landscape, and work together to go forward with a focus on sustainability of our resources.

In 2013 Pathways to Prosperity: The Natural Roots of Economic Success in the Crown of the Continent was researched and published, illustrating how landscape and lifestyle have emerged as one of the area's most important economic assets. Success stories of entrepreneurs are shared, demonstrating that locating to areas within the Crown "is no longer a trade-off between livelihood and lifestyle"; today's entrepreneurs are having their scenery and eating it too. Sustainability includes consideration for healthy landscapes, productive community economies, and engaged citizens. When those are in harmony, the culture and character of place is recognized, enhanced and celebrated.

In both 2012 and 2013, the Alberta SouthWest received Marketing Canada Awards from the Economic Developers Association of Canada. Between 2009 and 2017, they received Awards of Excellence in attracting investment, marketing, partnerships, international partnerships (Canada/US) and business retention from the Economic Developers of Alberta. In 2017 the Alberta SouthWest received a Recognition Award from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). These awards are accentuated by the investment opportunities available in the region including, but not limited to Agriculture/ Value-added agriculture, renewable and alternative energy (wind, solar, geothermal, bio-products), and geotourism development, see <https://communityeconomicdevelopment.alberta.ca/media/1174/reda-profile-january-2018-albertasw.pdf>.

## Transboundary Crown of the Continent Geotourism Council

Leadership in promoting sustainable business development is demonstrated by the transboundary Crown of the Continent Geotourism Council, formed in 2007 when National Geographic identified the Crown of the Continent as a significant "geotourism" destination. Stakeholders in Alberta SouthWest, British Columbia and Montana came together to share best ideas on how to develop our tourism industry, preserve and celebrate assets and attract the traveller who is interested in

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experiencing the unique character of place, in terms of landscape, culture and historical significance, see [www.CrownoftheContinent.NatGeoTourism.com](http://www.CrownoftheContinent.NatGeoTourism.com)

## ***Initiatives of the Geotourism Council***

### ***Partners:***

- National Geographic mapguide: printed in 2007; updates and reprints in 2014, 2017, 2018 Fall 2018: one millionth mapguide distributed in fall 2018.

- National Geotourism Council (NGC): Crown of the Continent Geotourism Council assisted in the formation of the NGC to further the goals of geotourism internationally. Industry partners are National Geographic, Solimar International, and Sustainable Travel International; the Crown is on the Executive Committee.

- Sustainable Business Workshops Sustainable Business Leadership Program: “UnCommon Sense” is the first fully regional two-year sustainable business program aimed at tourism businesses; developed with the assistance of the Yellowstone Business Partnership

- Crown of the Continent: Parks Across Borders: Mini-documentary produced and aired by KSPS Public Television (Spokane, Calgary, Edmonton)

- Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent: Held annually since 2007; Crown serves on Leadership Team to help facilitate this large landscape conference

- Alberta Culture & Tourism Castle Parks Tourism Strategy: newly designated parks are being carefully planned to sustainably serve community needs

- Summit on the Business of Outdoor Recreation: Region’s first ever gathering of industry, community, and conservation to address the business of outdoor recreation. Summit was an opportunity to share perspectives and develop relationships and opportunities to utilize and integrate into future work.

- Electric Charging Station Infrastructure: The southwest Alberta “Peaks to Prairies” electric vehicle charging station network will form part of a transboundary Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park Driving Loop, routing through southwest Alberta, southeast British Columbia and northwest Montana

- Crown Traverse-600 Mile Mountain Journey: This hike was filmed and followed by social media, highlighting the backwoods interior of the Crown of the Continent from Missoula, Montana to Banff, Alberta with film showings in Banff, Breckenridge Film Festival, Chicago, Minneapolis and Boston, and numerous newspaper stories.

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The wind industry has matured in southwest Alberta. The region receives the most days of sunlight of anywhere in Canada, and the cool temperatures of a higher altitude make solar installations a very efficient proposition. Alberta SouthWest is a founding partner of the Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership (SAAEP). Since 2007 the goal has been to engage and educate communities and businesses to better understand the technology and the opportunities; see [www.saaep.ca](http://www.saaep.ca).

## Diversity of Landscapes and Cultures

The Alberta SouthWest region is built upon farming and ranching. As that industry evolves, the region has continued to build its capacity to understand the opportunities in new markets, new technologies and evolving consumer demand. Regional collaboration creates the capacity to facilitate information-sharing on issues of GHG and waste management. Alberta SouthWest is launching a new project: "Energizing Agricultural Transformation" which will serve to support future researched-based decision-making.

Crown of the Continent Alberta SouthWest represents a diversity of landscape and cultures that are a precious asset and an important responsibility. The region includes twentyfive Hutterite colonies, two First Nation communities, the largest designated First Nations reserve lands in Canada, and the first Mormon Temple and community in Canada in Cardston, Alberta.

As rural communities, there may be limited resources, but together communities can accomplish things together that unable to do on their own. Having achieved successes together, and being dependent upon each other has resulted in communities minimizing differences and appreciating each other's strengths. The cumulative effect of Alberta SouthWest communities working together for over fifteen years has resulted in the capacity to create significant impacts.

The Alberta SouthWest has received recognition for excellence and gained the capacity to engage effectively with many layers of government and organizations, at the community, regional, multi-regional, national and international levels. As the region becomes more defined as an important destination, the communities and agencies are motivated to work together to continue this forward momentum, demonstrating that success breeds success.

The Alberta SouthWest has also learned that a true concern and connection with their landscape generates the power to motivate stewardship. Alberta SouthWest continues to become ever more firmly established as a unique place in the world that is worth cherishing. As a world society, they learn more every day and, thankfully; it is now "fashionable" to be concerned with sustainability; public opinion and consumer demand help drive an interest in doing the right things.



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