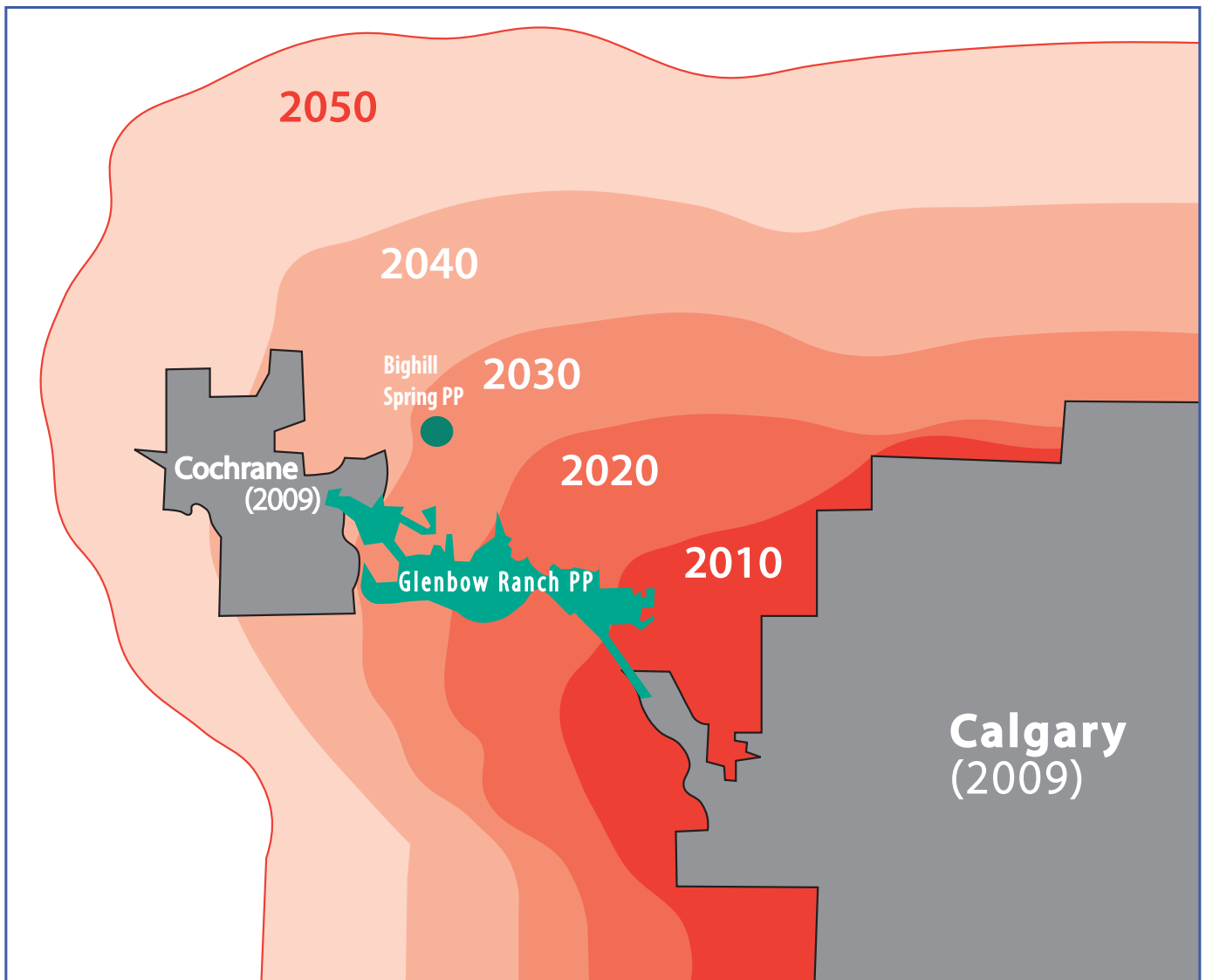


Best Practice: Market Analysis for Interpretation and Education Programming



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Best Practice in Assessing the Market

Market Information and Analysis

A closer study of information about the local market will supplement the information gathered on park users. Key areas are discussed below.

Alberta Parks Inclusion Strategy

This is one of the key strategies coming out of *Alberta's Plan for Parks*. This requires that Visitor Services staff understand the demographic structure of its target markets in detail so that they know the ethnic, social, physical and mental challenged groups within the target market (central Alberta) and develop programs that fit their needs and abilities and market these offerings in ways that attract participants from all these groups (see Chapter 2: Foundations Summary for more details).

Population Structure

Population structure is a way of describing age groups and the numbers in each group. Understanding this structure gives you better insight into the potential audiences and users of your services and programs. For example, studies show that seniors are generally interested in longer programs and activities than families with small children. When you know the size of your potential audience groups, you can make strategic decisions about the amount of effort they will put into development, promotion and delivery of targeted services.

Seniors and Youth

Information on community age structure provides clear information on other key program groups including seniors and youth. These groups have high potential as targets for specialized interpretation and education programs and as sources of volunteers for park projects as they become interested in higher levels of engagement in the stewardship model.

Income

Traditionally, participants in interpretation events have middle and high incomes. Studies show that people of higher income are generally the largest markets for traditional visitors to parks museums and nature centres in North America.

You will need to be more creative to find ways of serving lower income groups who do not traditionally use parks.

Regional and Cultural Background

Canada is a large country with many regions and a mosaic of cultural backgrounds. Knowledge of where site visitors and outreach audiences come from and understanding of cultural and regional attitudes toward nature and history including the traditional knowledge of First Nations people. This information can be applied by interpretation and education staff to frame communications and tailor activities to fit the needs and interests of the people that visit the parks and protected areas in the David Thompson Corridor.

Educational Background

This has little to do with the intelligence of participants or their interest in your site. Level of education often has significant importance to the prior knowledge of participants on some subjects (e.g., where does the interpretation and education programmer begin—at the basics, at an advanced level, or somewhere in between). It may also influence the complexity of language used in program offerings.

New Canadians: Country of Origin

Parts of Alberta, especially big cities, have very large communities of new Canadians (people born outside of the country who are permanent residents of Canada). Knowledge of the place of origin of these groups gives you a starting point to research their culture and knowledge and attitudes toward nature and human history of the parks in the David Thompson Corridor.

You must be sensitive to barriers specific to new Canadians such as fear of wild places and negative connotations of people in uniform delivering programming (related to past negative experiences with police and soldiers in their original homeland).

You may decide to look for local ethnic societies to contact as a first step to developing relationships and for providing meaningful programs targeting these groups.



Best Practice in Assessing the Tourism Market

The tourism market for interpretation and education services at your site consists of people living outside the area that come to visit or pass through the corridor.

The provincial government and the tourism industry regularly conduct studies that identify numbers, nationalities, demographics and activities and interests of tourists, plus overall trends. Most tourism studies not only look at the international market, they also examine the national, provincial, regional and local markets. The gathering of local information means that even if any of the parks in the David Thompson Corridor are not likely currently or in the future to become a major international or national tourist destination, tourism information can still be a source of detailed data about local repeat visitors to these parks. Tourism research results must be consulted regularly by interpretation and education staff.

Key Areas of Interest

Tourism research can provide information on:

- total number of tourists
- where they come from
- reasons for visiting
- how long they stay
- do they come often (repeat visitors)
- types of activities they engage in
- interests
- demographics (ages, gender)
- group size and composition (e.g., individual family, group of seniors)

This information can be used by interpretation and education staff to:

- identify key target groups (based on the numbers and interests)
- design programs and services that fit the selected target group (based on their interests, length of stay, and status as one-time or multiple-return visit tourists)
- choose an effective marketing technique to reach each particular target group

Key Sources of Information from Current Tourism Research:

A key source of information is the Canadian Tourism Commission (www.corporate.canada.travel/en/ca/index.html) which provides up-to-date statistics and research (market segmentation, trends, emerging markets etc.).

Other sources include provincial tourism agencies and local chambers of commerce.

Best Practice in Assessing the School Market

For many natural and cultural resource stewardship organizations schools are a major focus of education programming. This occurs when:

- there are sufficient schools and students within easy travel distance to the site
- there are direct matches between foundations of the agency (overall vision, mission, goals), its education themes, goals and objectives and the school's curricula for specific subjects and grades
- there are open niches within the groups and organizations that provide services to schools
- there are infrastructure, locations and facilities that can support visits by school groups

Numbers of Schools and Student Population

Information on number of schools and student populations is available from local school boards and through regional census information.

Curriculum Connections

Teachers, schools and school boards have limited time and budget for field trips, classroom visits or for remote learning activities such as video conferencing. Education service providers such as Alberta Parks are most successful at attracting teachers and students to take part in their education programs if they can show that their education offerings have learning outcomes that are the same as or similar to grade focused learning outcomes prescribed in Alberta Education's grade-specific curriculum guides. When such connections are clearly articulated, teachers can integrate the education offerings into their teaching plans and justify the time and expense to their superiors.

You must know and understand your provincial ministry of education's curriculum guides and fashion your education programs to fit. This involves looking for connections between:

- your site and agency goals
 - site-specific education themes, goals and objectives
- with
- grade-specific learning outcomes specified in provincial curriculum guides.

For parks and science centres and museums, key areas of curriculum connections usually can be found in:

- science
- social studies
- native studies
- Canadian and world studies

There are also likely to be connections within:

- art
- physical education
- language arts

For historic sites and some museums may not need to include a focus on science curriculum.

