



British Columbia  
Regional Tourism  
Secretariat



BIOSPHERE  
TOURISM

## REGIONAL TOURISM ASSOCIATIONS MARK EARTH DAY BY TAKING FIRST STEP TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATION

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**Victoria, B.C.** – Four regional destination management organizations that operate under the umbrella of the BC Regional Tourism Secretariat (BCRTS) marked Earth Day by signing a letter of commitment to pursue the Responsible Tourism Institute’s Biosphere certification – which will contribute to a more sustainable tourism sector and be a key component of helping rebuild the post-pandemic tourism economy.

“I am extremely proud of the regional destination management organizations for the leadership they have shown in their commitment to our environment in pursuing the Biosphere Certification for Tourism Destinations,” said the Honourable Melanie Mark, BC Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport. “It will communicate to travellers that we are committed to improving and enhancing sustainability, supporting and celebrating Indigenous cultures through tourism, and responsibly managing tourism while preserving B.C.’s natural spaces. This recognition will position our province as a world leader in the tourism industry for years to come.”

The Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association, Kootenay Rockies Tourism Association, Northern BC Tourism Association and the Tourism Vancouver Island – each signed a letter today, officially declaring their application. If successful, they will join their BCRTS partner, the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA) which is among only 34 destination management organizations in the world – and the only such body in Canada – to achieve this status.

“Now more than ever, destination management organizations must address challenges such as social license, safety and responsibility in a way they never have before,” said TOTA Senior Vice President and Acting CEO Ellen Walker-Mathews. “These efforts will also communicate to travellers that we adhere and are committed to ideals that parallel their own.”

The certification aligns with 17 sustainable development goals of the United Nations in areas that include climate change, environment, social, economy and culture – and guarantees compliance and continuous improvement through a private, voluntary and independent certification system which is evaluated on an annual basis. The certification allows a region to demonstrate how they take sustainability seriously, but also keeps them accountable to make necessary and ongoing improvements.

“The Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association is in very select company and has distinguished itself as a leader among destination management organizations across the globe,” says Anthony Everett, Chair of the BC Regional Tourism Secretariat. “The ultimate certification of five regional associations is one that will resonate with visitors around the world, when it is safe for them to travel and once again visit our province which is home to many of the most beautiful destinations found anywhere.”

Everett also underlined that it’s not just certification that the regional associations are seeking to achieve. “It’s important to have a partner with whom we have a certain affinity and can help guide us through the technical aspects of the process. However, certification is a means to achieving thoughtful, tangible results that we can measure and improve upon, versus something that may be more anecdotal in nature.”

Also participating in today’s event were Patricio Azcárate Díaz de Losada of the Responsible Tourism Institute; Dr. Dirk Glaesser, Director of the Sustainable Development Program of the United Nations World Tourism Organization; Dr. Paul Rogers, Co-founder and Director of Planet Happiness; and Frank Antoine, Co-founder of Moccasin Trails, an Indigenous tourism business based in Kamloops, and a strong tourism ambassador who is passionate about issues of sustainability and Indigenous culture.

For information about the Biosphere certification, visit: [www.biospheretourism.com/en](http://www.biospheretourism.com/en)

**About the BC Regional Tourism Secretariat:** *The BC Regional Tourism Secretariat (BCRTS) is a collaboration between five regional destination management organizations Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association, Kootenay Rockies Tourism Association, Northern British Columbia Tourism Association, Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, and Tourism Vancouver Island representing more than 8,000 tourism businesses and organizations. The BCRTS is leading a ground-up approach so local voices and knowledge shape programs and compliment local and regional tourism strategies. This focus is also reflected in destination development to help tourism operators offer the most desirable and sustainable tourism experience for visitors.*

**About the Responsible Tourism Institute:**

*The Responsible Tourism Institute (RTI) has been leading the contribution of tourism to Sustainable Development for more than 20 years. The mission of the RTI is the promotion of the principles of the World Charter for Sustainable Tourism and all the guidelines and precepts on Sustainable Development promoted by United Nations.*

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