



# Northeast Heritage Strategy: Backgrounder

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## Background

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The Alaska Highway Community Society, which has led the work on Historic Sites of Canada nominations along the Alaska Highway Corridor, is working with other organizations in the Northeast to explore the value of a heritage strategy for Northeastern British Columbia. A strategy would set out a roadmap to create a viable future and sustainable foundation for community heritage in the region. The first step, however, is to determine whether communities support development of a strategy and what form it might take. Work on the strategy is also being used to support Destination BC's Destination Development Program, which will help develop and market cultural and natural tourism experiences in the Northeast.

Members of a volunteer working group include representatives from the Alaska Highway Community Society, the Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark, the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area, Fort St. John Tourism, BC Provincial Parks and the North Peace Museum.

All groups with an interest in the cultural and natural heritage of the Northeast have an open invitation to participate.

The Strategy is led by April Moi, Alaska Highway Community Society, with consulting services by Julie Harris and Natascha Morrison, Contentworks Inc., and Karen Aird, Indigenous Cultural Heritage Specialist. The Strategy is funded by the Peace River Regional District.

## First Steps (2016)

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The work in 2016 is focused on whether communities in the Northeast see value in developing a collective approach to celebrating, accessing and promoting the history, living culture and nature of the Northeast for residents and visitors.

We want to explore:

- Practical ways that communities and organizations can access funds, share resources and increase revenues to strengthen existing heritage opportunities and create new ones
- Promote and access cultural and natural heritage opportunities
- Priorities for heritage that will serve residents and attract new visitors
- Unifying themes that can support collaboration

Results of discussions, workshops and open houses will be integrated into presentations and materials that local supporters of a Northeast Heritage Strategy can use to talk to their respective local governments and First Nations.

## Strategic Priorities for 2016

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Engage Everyone

- Stimulate productive conversations and maintain a regular dialogue among interested and affected communities and organizations
- Seek voices from all heritage stakeholders, especially those who have experience delivering services to both visitors and local communities



### Celebrate and Nurture Heritage in All Forms

- Bridge the silos of nature, culture and history
- Enhance community support for heritage by demonstrating benefits

### Focus on Iconic Experiences

- Give visitors a reason to stay and return to the Northeast by leveraging locally valued heritage
- Use a visitor-centred approach to set priorities for the action plan

### Strengthen Partnerships

- Create a strong collaborative culture and a dynamic partnership approach
- Complement existing strategic directions and priorities of local governments, First Nations, organizations and the Province
- Support caretakers of Indigenous heritage and traditional use areas

### Grow Investment and Access

- Leverage catalyst projects that can demonstrate the power of heritage investments
- Advocate for marketing, operational and capital investments to increase access to heritage
- Improve access to heritage places, stories and experiences

## Key Questions

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- Which natural and cultural experiences are most valued locally and why?
- Which locally valued experiences can become priorities for destination development in the near term?
- What kind of governance framework is needed to address conservation, access and interpretation requirements for heritage in the Northeast?
- Where are the funding and governance gaps?
- What is the action plan?

## Enabling Success

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- A regional perspective is required to understand and demonstrate the benefits that can be gained by using heritage to build the Northeast as a strong and competitive destination with a high level of market appeal. No single opportunity is sufficient to draw new visitors.
- Shared goals are important. The goals must be understood and appreciated by those who provide funds, the organizations responsible for specific actions, and by all affected communities. This means that the Strategy must be closely related to issues of concern to communities.
- The Strategy must be flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances in the implementation phases. A clear guiding purpose can help decision-makers adjust objectives and tactics when necessary.
- Ideas, energy and leadership come from many places. Partnership, collaboration and diversity will be needed to complete the study and set out the recommendations in the action plan. A commitment to deepening the maturity of the industry and to generating a greater level of community support for heritage will be needed.
- While monitoring, measuring and reporting are important to effective implementation, the value of celebrating success cannot be overlooked.



- An examination of existing heritage assets (programs and facilities) should consider how momentum can be sustained and whether new partnerships could be beneficial. Opportunities that serve multiple purposes are more likely to be sustainable.
- The Strategy must take advantage of information and ideas that have already been collected and analyzed through previous studies, such as the community tourism plans.

## **Barriers**

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Systemic and periodic barriers exist in implementing the Strategy. Examples are:

- Partnering effectively across such a large geographic area is difficult
- Existing investments in heritage places are largely limited to provincial parks and small museums; local governments have limited experience in heritage development
- Some communities may not be able to contribute time or financial resources to the Strategy even though they are caretakers of important heritage resources
- Benefits are likely to be distributed unevenly in the near term

## **Next Steps (2017)**

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Organizations, local governments and First Nations that agree to collaborate on a pan-regional heritage strategy would work together to:

- Outline a partnership approach
- Build awareness of unique features and visitor experiences in the Northeast
- Identify priorities
- Set out an action plan in the areas of governance, funding and capacity-building