

ELEVATING THE KOOTENAYS

AN ECONOMIC IMPACT SUMMIT

Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce

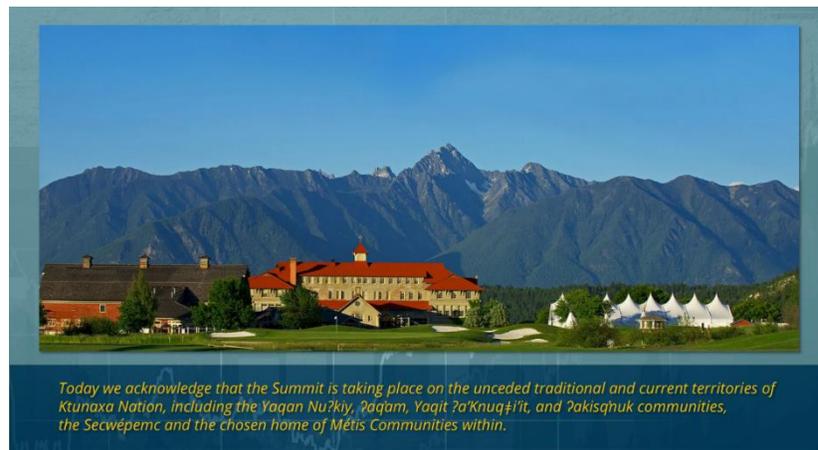
Event Summary Report

Elevating the Kootenays – An Economic Impact Summit

Introduction

The Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce hosted a regional event on October 2, 2024, at St. Eugene Resort titled “Elevating the Kootenays – An Economic Impact Summit”. The Summit convened thought leaders from key industries, including forestry, technology, renewable energy, agriculture, mining, and education. The event highlighted the region's challenges and delved into the potential opportunities. Topics of discussion included climate change, forest fire management, circular economy principles, workforce development, Indigenous relations, and the importance of investing in rural areas. This report synthesizes the insights and key takeaways from these discussions, providing a comprehensive overview of the Kootenays' current state and its promising future potential. The feedback in this report reflects the information as shared by attendees at the Summit event and does not necessarily represent the views of the Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce.

The Kootenay region of British Columbia is currently navigating a set of significant challenges that span across multiple sectors, including housing, workforce capacity, childcare, education, and industry sustainability. Despite these obstacles, the region continues to make vast contributions to British



Columbia’s GDP, while fostering a spirit of innovation, collaboration, and long-term growth. Emerging fields such as green economy transitions, technology, and bespoke education initiatives are major considerations for a prosperous and sustainable future for the region. This report seeks to provide a detailed analysis of the key issues, gaps, and opportunities identified in recent discussions about the region's future, offering insight into how to address these challenges and transform them into sources of regional advancement.

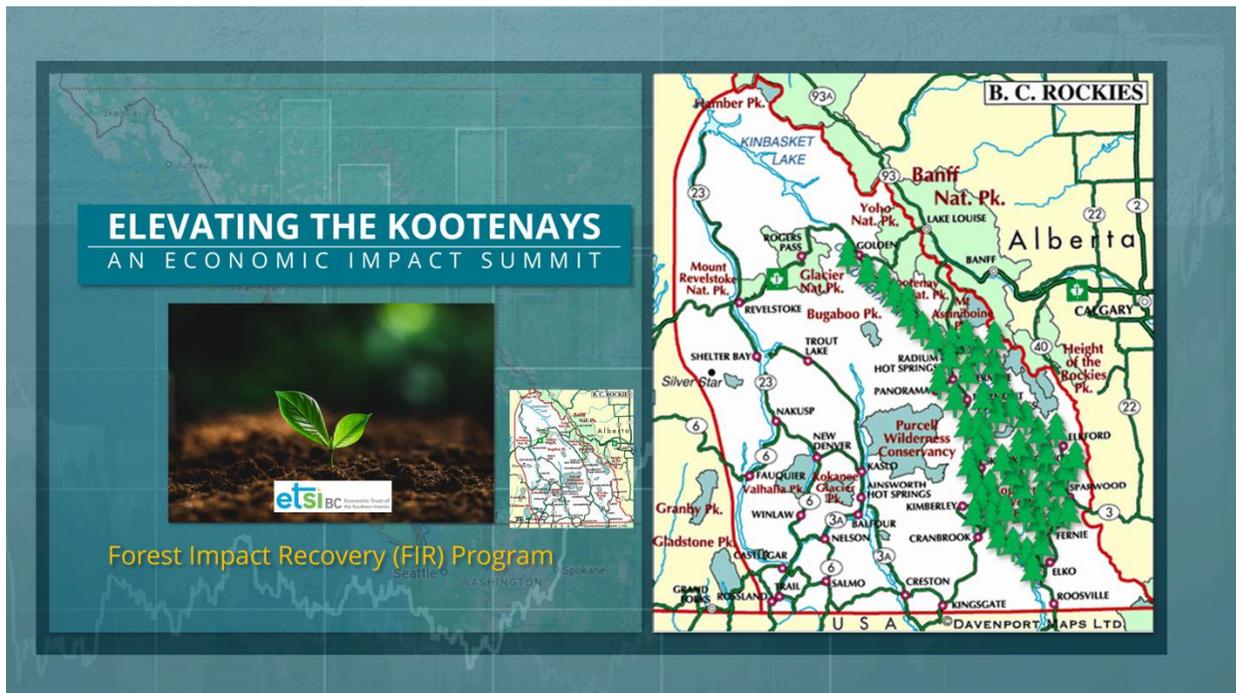
The Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce sees Elevating the Kootenays as a starting point to expand discussions, involve a wider range of participants, and unite key stakeholders to drive success. It marks the beginning of future collaborations and initiatives.

Elevating the Kootenays – An Economic Impact Summit

Background

British Columbia’s forest industry has undergone significant transformation in recent years, as the provincial government has implemented new forestry practices aimed at addressing key environmental and social issues. These include wildlife conservation, old-growth preservation, climate change mitigation, and fostering Indigenous partnerships. However, these changes have presented several challenges for the industry, particularly in terms of obtaining fibre and adhering to tight operational planning timelines. These difficulties have resulted in the curtailment of sawmill operations, leading to job losses and widespread economic impacts, particularly in regions heavily reliant on the forest sector.

As a cornerstone of many local economies, the forest industry's changes have had far-reaching consequences for communities across British Columbia. Recognizing the need for a comprehensive response to these challenges, the Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce initiated a regional project, funded by ETSI-BC, to support the work of three Forest Impact Recovery (FIR) Advisors based in Golden/Invermere, Cranbrook/Kimberley, and the Elk Valley. The advisors played a pivotal role in assisting communities affected by the evolving forestry landscape and provided valuable guidance on navigating the economic shifts.



Throughout the duration of this initiative, it became evident that simply bringing together stakeholders from across the region to discuss forestry-related issues had a significant positive impact. The discussions highlighted the interconnectedness of the forestry sector with other industries and demonstrated how adapting to changes in one area often led to new opportunities in others, such as manufacturing and technology. A regional summit focused on the resource industry served as a logical next step to continue and expand these conversations. This summit would serve as a forum for addressing cross-sectoral challenges, exploring new opportunities, and fostering collaboration across industries, aiming to create a more resilient and diversified regional economy.



*Attendees discuss ideas for partnerships in Industry, Education & Technology
(Photo: Morgan Turner Photography)*



*Community Partners, Chambers of Commerce, and elected officials connect with each other
(Photo: Morgan Turner Photography)*

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Bringing the Region Together

The Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce hosted an informative event featuring four guest speakers from key sectors in the Kootenay Region, each providing an update on their respective businesses.



MEET THE SPEAKERS
Charles C. Downie
 President & CEO, Director
 EAGLE PLAINS RESOURCES



MEET THE SPEAKERS
Hugh Moore
 Director Relationships & Business Development
 KAKIN



MEET THE SPEAKERS
Danny Turner
 Delivery Executive
 BASIN BUSINESS ADVISORS PROGRAM



MEET THE SPEAKERS
Jacomien van Tonder
 Director
 metaltechalloy

Following their presentations, the speakers were invited back to the stage to engage in facilitated discussions covering a wide range of topics that impact the local business environment. Throughout the event, break-out sessions were organized to encourage active participation from attendees, allowing them to share their insights. Discussions focused on the region's achievements, challenges and opportunities within various industries, as well as the support and funding programs available to local businesses.



MEET THE MODERATOR
Dr. Sarah Patricia Breen
 Regional Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development
 Selkirk Innovates Selkirk College

MEET THE MC
Riley Wilcox
 Forest Impact Recovery Advisor
 supported by etsiBC

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Regional Development and Industry Support Initiatives: Success in the Kootenays



*A series of workshops provided a forum for attendees to share their successes and contributions to the region
Photo: Morgan Turner Photography*

A recurring theme during the Summit was the need to elevate the awareness of some of the achievements of business and industry in the region, and to spread that message proudly.

The region has seen significant advancements in various sectors, with notable pivots and expansions across industries. One tech company reported that they've transitioned from focusing solely on IT and Cyber Security to incorporating design and technology integration. This shift aligns with broader efforts to elevate safety training, such as the Canada Backcountry initiative, and assist industry groups in their transition to a carbon-neutral future. At the College of the Rockies (COTR), educational programs continue to evolve to meet the needs of emerging industries, with new offerings like a micro-credential in Environmental Water Monitoring and a 2-year diploma in Computer Information Systems.

COTR is also collaborating with local industry partners like Elk Valley Resources to create pathways in STEM, engineering, trades, and mining apprenticeships.

In terms of economic development, initiatives like the Metal Tech Alley strategy are helping to strengthen the Lower Columbia region's economy. Investment in natural asset management and support through programs like the National Research Council Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP), which has been backing business innovation in the Kootenays for over 25 years, are key elements of the region's growth. Additionally, regional



collaborations are fostering innovation in forestry and resource sectors, with programs supporting industrial and resource investment and advisory services for forestry impact recovery.

There is also a recognition of the value and potential of attracting tech companies to the area as part of a pivot to a greener economy—several tech companies are already contributing to a re-imagined version of the region's success, including Thought Exchange in Rossland, Cronometer in Revelstoke, and Drop Software in Nelson. These companies are not only serving regional needs but also exporting products and services globally, further supporting the wealth generated by traditional industries such as forestry, mining, and agriculture. Regional partnerships, such as those with Basin Business Advisors (BBA), Community Futures (CF), COTR, and Kootenay Association for Science and Technology (KAST) help connect businesses with funding and grants, to support continued innovation and growth.



Regional chambers are leading projects to support business resiliency in times of emergency, while new educational programs, such as a diploma in computer systems management at COTR, prepare students to meet the evolving demands of local industries. In agriculture, the region is working to keep farmers and ranchers informed and ready for recruitment, with educational and advisement programs to support workforce development. Lastly, the focus on inclusivity and fluidity in workforce participation continues, with an emphasis on creating partnerships and offering education that equips the local workforce with the hard skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing landscape.

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Challenges & Opportunities

Key Challenges in the Kootenays

1. Housing Shortage: The most pressing issue identified by business owners and residents alike is the lack of housing. This challenge is exacerbated by the difficulties in hiring and retaining employees, as many workers are unable to find affordable housing. Surveys indicate that housing availability is the number one concern for local businesses, limiting growth and development.



2. Childcare Shortage: Attendees reported a severe shortage of childcare spaces, with an estimated five hundred spaces needed in Cranbrook alone. The lack of childcare contributes to a workforce shortage, particularly in sectors such as Early Childhood Education (ECE), where low wages and insufficient staff deter workers.

3. Overregulation and Bureaucracy: Participants noted significant concerns with overregulation, where multiple levels of government oversee similar processes, often leading to inefficiencies and ultimately, inaction. There is a growing frustration that the responsibility of ensuring compliance often falls on businesses and proponents rather than regulators ensuring streamlined and effective processes. These challenges were noted in specific reference to delays in addressing the housing crisis, as well as permitting, licensing and other facets of industry operations.

4. General Workforce and Employment Challenges: The workforce capacity is severely limited due to a lack of affordable housing and childcare, leading to difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled workers. Wages are not meeting the expectations of employees, particularly in small businesses. Employers must pay higher wages to attract good workers, but the cost of doing business is rising. Trade shortages and a mismatch between the skills offered by the workforce and the needs of local industries, especially in skilled trades, are exacerbating employment issues. Youth retention is a concern, with many young people leaving the region for work elsewhere. There is a need for more career pathways and reskilling opportunities to retain youth and fill gaps in the workforce. A strong desire to retain youth in the community was linked to the preservation of the unique and special community cultures within the region.

5. Skilled Labor Shortage: Across both the East and West Kootenays, there is a lack of



skilled labor, particularly in trades and technical sectors. There is a growing gap between the skills young people acquire in schools and what is needed by industries. Furthermore, attracting skilled labor from outside the region is difficult due to the area's rural nature and limited job opportunities for young workers.

6. Industry-Specific Issues: The forestry industry is struggling with uncertainty around access to land and timber, especially with Canfor's shutdown and the reduction in fiber availability. There is a need for strategic planning in the transition to a greener economy. Some industry attendees in construction and renovations reported that renovations are down, with one subsidiary trade reporting a 30-50% drop in sales. Some developers are hesitant to invest in new housing projects due to regulatory barriers and economic uncertainty. Small business startups are facing challenges, particularly due to a lack of mentorship, advisory support, and access to funding.

7. Transportation & Infrastructure: The Kootenay region has underutilized transportation infrastructure, particularly its proximity to major highways and rail systems that could facilitate better regional and international shipping. Freight costs are high due to inefficiencies in the transportation system, making it difficult for businesses to take advantage of the region's adjacency to the U.S. border and Alberta. There is a growing interest in leveraging the regional airport to better serve the transportation needs of both people and goods.

8. Indigenous Relations & Coordination: There is a need to increase the alignment with Indigenous communities; attendees reported a critical gap in both economic development and social inclusion. Collaboration with Indigenous groups is essential for the success of regional initiatives, particularly in areas such as land management, resource extraction, and education.

9. Lack of Commercial Industrial Space: Areas such as Kimberley face a shortage of commercial industrial space, making it challenging to attract investment and grow local businesses. Without the necessary infrastructure, economic development remains constrained.

10. Limited Broadband Access: Rural and remote communities in the Kootenays suffer from inadequate broadband connectivity. This limits business development, hinders educational opportunities, and curtails the region’s ability to attract tech-focused industries. Expanding broadband infrastructure is seen as a critical step for economic diversification.

11. Regulatory Changes and Industry Adaptation: The forestry sector, a key industry in the region, is undergoing significant changes, including reductions in annual allowable cuts and increased regulatory constraints. There is an urgent need for businesses and employees to adapt, either by reskilling or pivoting to other sectors. This, however, requires considerable effort, resources, and long-term planning.



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Key Opportunities in the Kootenays

1. Collaboration & Regional Strategy

The region’s spread-out communities often operate independently, which can result in missed opportunities for mutual benefit. Enhanced collaboration, particularly between communities like Kimberley and Cranbrook, could improve infrastructure, share resources, and strengthen the region’s economic potential. The region would benefit from better collaboration between municipalities, businesses, and educational institutions. There was a strong desire expressed for the creation of shared spaces for collaboration, such as hubs for business mentorship, interdisciplinary innovation, and industry partnerships. Regional advocacy and shared problem-solving across sectors, including housing, childcare, and workforce development, are essential to creating long-term solutions. A regional approach can ensure that issues are addressed collectively rather than in isolation. The Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce endeavours to play a partnership role in continuing to bring key stakeholders together on important issues and opportunities.

2. Infrastructure Development: The region's airport infrastructure offers significant growth potential, particularly for tourism and business investment. Expanding air service could also help attract workers by providing easier access to urban areas. The East and West Kootenays' proximity to key U.S. and Alberta markets enhances opportunities for trade and transportation, especially with the existing railway system.



Photo: British Columbia Aviation Council

3. Innovation & Technology

There is a growing tech community in the Kootenays, with numerous successful companies like Thought Exchange in Rossland, Cronometer in Revelstoke and DROP Software in Nelson leading the charge. By fostering this ecosystem, the region can diversify its economy and attract investment in software, technology integration, and design. Supporting tech start-ups and cross-pollination of ideas between industries can drive innovation and create new opportunities for business growth and employment.

4. Renewable Energy – Solar and Hydro: The shift to a green economy offers significant potential, particularly in sectors such as renewable energy, solar development, and energy transition from traditional industries like forestry. The Kootenays possess some of the best solar energy resources in the province. There is significant potential to expand solar energy production, supported by existing hydroelectric infrastructure. This aligns with the provincial push for a green economy driven by renewable energy and metals. Further investment in these sectors could position the region as a leader in clean energy.

5. Green Economy and Metal Production: The growing demand for metals in the green economy (e.g., for battery production) provides an opportunity for the Kootenays to position itself as a key supplier of raw materials. Moreover, the region could explore opportunities in smelting, refining, and battery recycling. Metals like lithium and copper, crucial for green technologies, are gaining importance, and the Kootenays could position itself as a key player in the green economy driven by these resources.

6. Economic Diversification – Film and Technology: The Kootenays have the potential to diversify into sectors such as film and technology. Proximity to major film markets and the growing tech industry in both the East and West Kootenays provide opportunities for growth in these areas. Innovation in technology could also be leveraged to support existing industries like forestry, agriculture, and manufacturing. The Columbia Valley Community Economic Development Office (CVCEDO) team has been working tirelessly behind the scenes with regional partners to prepare for the Film Sector to be a prominent economic driver in the region, having recently announced a movie will soon be in production. Revelstoke has also been the filming location for multiple Hallmark Movies, full-length films and documentaries.

7. Education and Skills Training: Post-secondary institutions, particularly COTR and Selkirk College, can play a central role in addressing the skills gap.



There is a great opportunity for collaboration with industry leaders to inform the development of customized training programs that meet specific workforce needs, to help bridge the gap between education and employment. There

is a significant opportunity to develop and offer more micro-credential programs, apprenticeships, and skills training that are responsive to industry needs. Micro-credentials are currently well-funded and are gaining increased recognition as a tool to help workers transition into new industries, upskill existing employees, and fill gaps. COTR (College of the Rockies) is playing a key role in this transition by offering programs like the



Environmental Water Monitoring micro-credential and partnerships with industries like Elk Valley Resources. Faster development of training programs would help address the rapid changes in industry requirements in sectors such as environmental science, technology, and health care.

8. Leveraging Education for Economic Growth: Education programs like STEM, engineering pathways, and trades apprenticeships are crucial for preparing a skilled workforce to support emerging industries.

9. Youth Engagement and Workforce Development: Attracting and retaining youth in the



workforce is a major challenge, but also a significant opportunity. By fostering closer relationships between employers, local high schools, and colleges, the region can create more pathways for youth to enter the workforce and build careers in Kootenay-based industries. This also includes the potential to retrain older workers displaced by industry changes.

There is also potential to create new youth-focused initiatives, and/or support/expand existing initiatives like the CBT Youth Summit. This would engage young people in discussions around the future of the region, including the integration of traditional industries with newer sectors like tech. It would also create a space for them to share their insight and contribute to the conversations.

10. Indigenous Partnerships and Rights & Title: Clarifying the role of Indigenous nations in land use, permitting, and business operations is essential. Developing stronger, more transparent relationships with Indigenous groups and creating opportunities for partnership in economic development projects is critical for sustainable growth.

Report: Elevating the Kootenays – An Economic Impact Summit

Strategic Recommendations for the Kootenay Region

1. **Invest in Housing Development:** Address the housing crisis by incentivizing the construction of affordable housing, particularly rental units, through subsidies or partnerships with private developers.
 2. **Streamline Regulations:** Advocate for more efficient regulatory processes by encouraging government agencies to reduce duplication and focus on providing clear, timely support for businesses.
 3. **Focus on Workforce Development:** Expand programs aimed at bridging the skills gap, with a particular emphasis on trades, technical skills, and adaptability in existing industries like forestry and mining.
 4. **Develop Green Energy Initiatives:** Invest in solar energy production and other renewable resources to capitalize on the region's capacity and position the Kootenays as a leader in clean energy.
 5. **Enhance Broadband Infrastructure:** Expand broadband networks in remote communities to improve business opportunities, attract new industries, and increase access to education.
 6. **Foster Industry Collaboration:** Encourage businesses, municipalities, and other stakeholders to collaborate on infrastructure projects, workforce development, and regional economic diversification.
 7. **Strengthen Indigenous Partnerships:** Work with Indigenous communities to clarify the governance framework around rights and title, ensuring smoother integration into business processes and development opportunities.
 8. **Support Business and Innovation Networks:** Establish more peer-to-peer networks for businesses and entrepreneurs to share experiences, knowledge, and best practices, helping them overcome common challenges and innovate collaboratively.
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Report: Elevating the Kootenays – An Economic Impact Summit

Panel Discussion – Insights and Key Takeaways

Our four guest speakers returned to the stage for a guided panel discussion with our moderators.

Mining: Chuck Downie, Eagle Plains Resources Ltd.

Forestry: Hugh Moore, Kakin Group of Companies

Agriculture: Danny Turner, Just-A-Mere Farm

Technology and Circular Economy: Jacomien von Tonder, Metal Tech Alley

Moderators: Dr. Sarah Patricia Breen, Selkirk Innovates, Selkirk College

Riley Wilcox, Forest Impact Recovery Advisor via ETSI-BC

Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship

- The importance of adapting to climate change and mitigating its impacts was highlighted, especially in forest fire management. Land rotation strategies are being used in the mining sector to manage seasonality and reduce operational disruptions. There is also a focus on minimizing water usage due to increasing regulations.
- There are forestry businesses that are showing commitment to environmental stewardship, promoting a green approach and small carbon footprints in operations. Some companies are actively engaged in land stewardship with a focus on reducing emissions.

Building Strong Relationships with Indigenous Communities

- The panelists agreed that fostering positive relationships with Indigenous communities, even at the grassroots level, is essential for mutual growth. There is a need for proactive communication and outreach. The fear of doing things wrong should not hinder action. Including Indigenous communities from the onset is of benefit to all parties.

Regulatory Challenges and Consultation

- Concerns were raised about the lack of consultation with local communities in light of new regulations. The consultation process was described as “heavily influenced by preconceived government plans, rather than truly listening to the needs of businesses on the ground”.
- It was reported that First Nations also face similar regulatory burdens, and it was noted that smaller businesses, especially local prospectors, are being pushed out due to the high costs of compliance.

Renewable Energy and Power Generation

- The Kootenays is considered one of the best places in Canada for renewable energy harvesting, yet significant infrastructure gaps are preventing the region from fully realizing its full potential.



*Networking opportunities for numerous industries and sectors
Photo: Morgan Turner Photography*

Circular Economy and Industrial Supply Chains

- Considerable focus was given to the development of the circular economy in the Kootenays. A key initiative was the 2017-2019 strategy that emphasized circular economy principles, such as traceability and design. Funding was received from the

Clean BC Plastics Action Fund; \$1.2 million allocated to KC Recycling, which is playing a pivotal role in battery recycling in the region. The region also boasts the only lithium-ion battery recycling plant in the Pacific Northwest, located in Trail, which processes complex materials, including the increasingly important EV batteries.



- Creston has had significant a continuing series of annual agriculture challenges, including worker shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating losses from the heat dome in 2020. The introduction of innovative technology, such as blueberry harvesting machines and optical sorters, helped to address the worker shortage while increasing efficiency. At the heart of finding solutions is the willingness to examine the data and extrapolate findings that illuminate which parts of the operation are profitable, and which parts need to be eliminated or adapted.

Workforce Development and Education

- A recurring theme was the need to adapt the local workforce to emerging industries. The importance of industry-based educational programs was highlighted, such as those offered by Selkirk College's S.T.A.C., which focus on real-world skills. This approach aims to match available jobs with people who have the right skills.
- Shifting the mindset of the workforce is crucial before diving into retraining. Introducing young people to technology, innovation, and sustainable practices at an early age is vital for the future of the Kootenays.

Attracting Youth and Future Workforce

- Quality of life and the opportunity to work on innovative projects could be attractive to younger generations. Making industries such as tech, circular economy, and agriculture appealing to youth is key. Engaging young people with the idea that they can work in cutting-edge fields like AI and engineering in the Kootenays could help stem the outflow of talent to urban centers.



Investment and Economic Growth

- The panel discussed ways to attract investment to rural areas. The focus should not necessarily be solely on attracting new businesses but rather on expanding existing ones and supporting entrepreneurs who bring capital to the region.
- Concerns were raised about the need for investment in the mining sector, citing the historical example of BC being a poor investment destination in the 1980s, which pushed many companies to Chile. Today, investment in BC's mining sector is still contingent on the regulatory environment and financial incentives.

Agriculture and Land Stewardship

- Agriculture in the Kootenays requires leadership in land stewardship and production practices. Agriculture currently is required to hold itself accountable for the full life cycle of its products, unlike other sectors, such as electric vehicle manufacturing, which do not face similar accountability.



Photo: Kootenay Business

Challenges and Opportunities for the Kootenays

- The panel concluded by discussing the region's future. Some speculated that the population may not see a major increase in the next decade, while some expressed hope that the Kootenays could become a hub for innovative industry in response to our evolving societal needs, such as battery recycling and manufacturing in Canada.
- Some reflected on the challenges of living at the "end of the supply chain" and how industries need to adapt to remain competitive. Workforce attraction is one of the biggest barriers for the region, as it is difficult to bring in people who are willing to relocate without losing the region's quality of life.



Left to right: Hugh Moore, Jacomien von Tonder, Chuck Downie, Danny Turner, Dr. Sarah Patricia Breen
Photo: Morgan Turner Photography

Report: Elevating the Kootenays – An Economic Impact Summit

Emerging Themes and Future Directions

1. Youth Engagement and Retention: There is a strong desire to provide opportunities for youth to stay in the region by offering stable, long-term career paths. The youth summit and other youth-focused initiatives can help foster this engagement.

2. Invest in Housing Development: Address the housing crisis by incentivizing the construction of affordable housing, particularly rental units, through subsidies or partnerships with private developers.

3. Succession Planning and Knowledge Transfer: As the workforce ages, the region needs effective succession planning and knowledge transfer programs. Initiatives like mentoring and mastermind programs are crucial for transferring skills and knowledge between generations of business owners and workers.

4. Infrastructure Development: Upgrades to transportation infrastructure, including rail and road systems, are essential to unlock the region's economic potential. Leveraging the regional airport and improving access to international markets will be key to driving business growth.



Report: Elevating the Kootenays – An Economic Impact Summit

Bringing Others to the Conversation

The discussions at the Summit were insightful and productive, driven by the active participation of key stakeholders. The Kootenay region's greatest asset is its people - motivated, knowledgeable, and committed to working together. They share a common goal of achieving success and maintaining a strong quality of life for their community.

Attendees included those from Ktunaxa Nation, Metis Nation, the Columbia Valley, Golden, Creston, Castlegar, Trail, Castlegar, Nelson, Kimberley, Cranbrook, Fernie, Sparwood and more. Also in attendance were Office of MP for Kootenay-Columbia, Former MLA for Kootenay East/Shadow Critic Energy Mining Low Carbon Innovation, Cranbrook City Councillors, and the Chair/Area C Director for RDEK.

In the final portion of the Summit, the audience engaged in a conversation to identify key stakeholders missing from current discussions. Suggestions included representatives from the tourism sector, transportation experts, youth, regional Chambers of Commerce, the trucking association, and Indigenous groups. The goal was to ensure more inclusive and comprehensive dialogue, addressing the diverse needs of the community and regional economies.

The inclusion of representatives from various government ministries was a critical component to the original vision for the Summit event; the discussion panel was originally planned to include Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Initiatives (EMLI), Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation (JEDI). Government representation from both the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food were in attendance. Due to the timing of the Summit in proximity to the provincial election, the interregnum period was a barrier to participation. For future Summit events, the Chamber will endeavour to bring governments to the event, to align discussions with policy-making processes.

The Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce would endeavour to also include the Secretariat for Southeast Initiatives as a future Summit participant, as its involvement could help strengthen regional cooperation and support the implementation of key initiatives. Once the interregnum period was passed, the Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce met with the Secretariat's office in December 2024 to gain a deeper understanding of the scope of their work and explore how this new pilot position could collaborate with the Chamber on regional issues moving forward.

Report: Elevating the Kootenays – An Economic Impact Summit

Chambers of Commerce: A Unique Role in Regional Growth

Chambers of Commerce do not make government decisions but play a vital role in regional development through advocacy and networking. They represent the interests of their members and, by collaborating with other Chambers and organizations, can extend their advocacy to regional, provincial, and federal levels.

Chambers also connect stakeholders to drive collective success. They bring businesses, organizations, and governments together to share ideas, align goals, and create strategies. A key theme at the recent Summit was the need for increased interconnectedness across sectors. By fostering these connections, Chambers spark innovation and partnerships that benefit all involved, strengthening regional economies and supporting long-term growth.



Report: Elevating the Kootenays – An Economic Impact Summit

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Kootenay region stands at a pivotal moment, balancing between challenges and opportunities that will shape its future. To thrive, the region must focus on overcoming barriers related to housing, childcare, and workforce development, while also seizing the growing potential in emerging industries such as the green economy, technology. The discussions from the "Elevating the Kootenays" panel highlighted the critical need for collaboration among government, businesses, educational institutions, and Indigenous communities. By investing in infrastructure, fostering workforce training, and nurturing relationships, the Kootenays can overcome obstacles and unlock new growth avenues, particularly in sectors like renewable energy, battery recycling, and the circular economy. With a strong foundation built on its natural resources, engaged community, and innovative spirit, the Kootenays have the potential to create a sustainable, resilient, and diversified economy that benefits all residents and businesses in the region. Through collective action, the Kootenays can chart a course toward a prosperous and sustainable future.



Valuable discussion and brainstorming at the Summit
Photo: Morgan Turner Photography

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Acknowledgements

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MODERATOR

Dr. Sarah-Patricia Breen

MC

Riley Wilcox

PRESENTERS

Hugh Moore - Ka·kin Group of Companies

C.C. (Chuck) Downie - Eagle Plains Resources Ltd.

Danny Turner - Basin Business Advisors

Jacomien van Tonder - Metal Tech Alley

PHOTOGRAPHY

Morgan Turner Photography

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