

Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Centre Society



BUSINESS PLAN

February 2024

Working Document

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1.0 Executive Summary

The Creston Valley is home to a 7,000-hectare Ramsar Wetland of International Importance (www.ramsar.org), called the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (CVWMA). The CVWMA is located on the traditional territory of the Yaqan Nuʔkiy, part of the Ktunaxa Nation. From the mid 1970s until October 2017 a Wetland Interpretive Centre (old WIC) was operated on these wetlands. The old WIC consistently drew over 6000 visitors yearly into the centre until its closure in 2017 due to its poor condition. It was demolished in 2019.

The Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Centre Society (KCDCS) was created to continue the 45+ year tradition of providing environmental education programs and activities and to develop a new, and more enduring, wetland interpretive centre (new Discovery Centre). KCDCS is a BC registered not-for-profit society and a registered Canadian charity.

Since 2018, KCDCS has operated a small, temporary Wetland Interpretive Centre (temporary Discovery Centre) in a modular structure near the site of the old WIC. Visitation, excluding the pandemic period, has ranged from 4000 – 5100 visitors per year inside this centre. The centre also welcomed approximately 2000 students from 5 regional school districts per year in our programs, 400 – 600 canoers per year via guided tours and 1200 people annually in special events.

Public support for a new Discovery Centre, evidenced by a growing membership and the strong current influx of students and visitors, remains strong. While the primary benefits of the new Discovery Centre will be environmental education related, there will be economic benefits to the Creston Valley from a new Discovery Centre. Increased tourism as well as grant flow from outside the region is estimated to exceed \$500,000 per year.

2.0 Organization Profile

History

The CVWMA is a 7,000-hectare Ramsar Wetland of International Importance (www.ramsar.org). It is habitat for hundreds of species of flora and fauna, including 300 species of birds, 60 of mammals, 17 of fish and 6 each of reptiles and amphibians. It was created by the *Creston Wildlife Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996. It is managed by a board of directors called the Authority which includes a representative from each of the Province of B.C. and the Federal government. A third seat, for a member of the public, is currently unoccupied.

The CVWMA owned and operated the old Wetland Interpretive Centre (old WIC). While the region has many wetlands and natural spaces, the old WIC was the only institution of its kind in the region. It served educators, naturalists, tourists and visitors of all ages, providing educational and recreational programs and activities that promoted ecological awareness, environmental education and research since the mid-1970s.

In January of 2014, the Interpretive Centre Committee was formed to investigate the condition of the former facility and develop options for its future. Stakeholders on this committee included representatives from Federal, Provincial and local governments, the Lower Kootenay Band, local and regional businesses and non-profit organizations.

This committee retained a consultancy to perform the necessary investigations and make recommendations for the future. The consultancy surveyed other wetland educational facilities, conducted an engineering survey and held public consultations. The resulting report revealed that the old WIC was nearing the end of its lifespan and needed large-scale, very costly repairs in the order of several million dollars. It recommended the establishment of a non-profit organization to undertake the development of a new facility.

KCDCS was established as a society on October 20th, 2015, for that purpose. When the old WIC closed in October 2017, KCDCS took on the additional responsibility of constructing the temporary Discovery Centre and overseeing the delivery of educational programming while development of the new Discovery Centre is underway. The temporary Discovery Centre is a modular structure in the parking lot of the old WIC (photo below).



Mission and Vision

KCDCS' Mission is to promote and provide environmental education and awareness programs and activities in the Kootenay-Columbia region.

KCDCS' Vision is to develop and operate a new, technologically current Discovery Centre located on the CVWMA designed for the delivery of environmental education, displaying ecological exhibits and offering environmental awareness programs and activities. By doing so, we will help prepare individuals to make sound environmental decisions today and in the future.

Governance and Staff

KCDCS is a B.C. registered non-profit society and a registered Canadian charity. It is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. The Board is composed of people from across the spectrum of

professions, occupations, cultures and experiences. We employ a professional environmental educator, Senior Manager, with over 20 years' experience in the field. The KCDCS Educational Programs Committee as well as the Senior Manager, plan, organize and oversee daily program operations under the general supervision of the KCDCS Board and in ongoing consultation with the CVWMA. Seasonal staff (3-4) are hired to help deliver programming in the summer (May-August) and the Senior Manager delivers programs year-round (in local schools in the winter).

Membership

Any person other than a corporation may apply for membership in KCDCS. Membership is free. Members have the right to attend general meetings and nominate and vote for directors. KCDCS keeps members informed via its website, social media and newsletter. Members are vital to help KCDCS promote environmental education and awareness programming, and to participate as volunteers in activities and events. Membership is now over 1200 members and growing. Social media followers are over 900 and growing. An important 2021 survey of members (Appendix I) showed that the development of a new Discovery Centre is strongly supported, echoing the findings of the 2015 consultancy. An active, substantial membership is an important factor when applying for funding and seeking donations.

Partnerships and Revenue Sources

From 2018 – 2022, funding for the temporary Discovery Centre and the wetland education and awareness programs primarily stemmed from two, regional multi-year agreements. In 2022, one of these agreements expired without renewal due to the grant maker shifting focus to physical ecosystem restoration at the expense of environmental education. The other agreement was re-structured as a fee-for-service arrangement. Due to this reduction in funding, in 2023 we successfully added grants from Canada-wide educational and environmentally supportive corporations (both for-profit and Crown) and private foundations beyond our valued local partnership base. This new funding diversity has significantly lowered our not-for-profit business operating risk.

In 2023, the KCDCS total operating budget was near balanced at approximately \$180,000 per year. Our programs are low fee or free so that all can participate. Operations revenue therefore typically covers only about 10% of the total budget. KCDCS also typically receives several thousand dollars per year stemming from the annual campaign and individual donors. Donations can also be streamed towards a new Discovery Centre for which a separate account (restricted cash) is maintained.

2023 grantors who provided most of the funding for programs were:

- British Columbia Community Gaming Grants
- Columbia Basin Trust
- Creston-Kootenay Foundation
- Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area
- Fortis BC

- Gainey Foundation
- RBC Future Launch
- Takla Foundation
- TC Energy
- Telus Future Friendly Foundation
- Y.P. Heung Foundation

Funding from the above grantors must be applied for on an annual basis except for RBC who committed to funding for 2023 and 2024. Further details on the nature of the grants KCDCS receives may be referenced in our audited or reviewed financial statements (www.discovery-centre.ca).

3.0 Existing Operations

Environmental Education

KCDCS school programs are supported by five school districts within a three-hour drive of the centre. The wetland education and awareness programs include the delivery of: BC curriculum matched school programs (K-12); guided canoe and walking excursions; interpretive presentations; kids summer nature camps; group events; and virtual and self-guided programs. KCDCS also operates the temporary Discovery Centre that provides visitors and program participants the opportunity to experience hands-on educational displays and information about the wetland and wildlife of the CVWMA and surrounding Kootenay-Columbia Basin. One of the many reasons that Creston Valley needs a new Discovery Centre is that valuable exhibits from the old WIC are currently sitting in storage.

In addition to regular programming, KCDCS develops and delivers programs for people upon request for a variety of user groups, e.g., people with accessibility or mobility issues or special program needs. The building, trails and washrooms are accessible for people with mobility issues. Access to the temporary Discovery Centre to view and interact with the displays is free. From 2018-2023, KCDCS hosted approximately 23,000 visitors in the temporary Discovery Centre, delivered school programs to 8,400 students, enjoyed over 400 children in the summer camps, paddled over 4,700 people on guided canoe tours, and delivered special events to 5,000 people. Many program participants come from throughout the Kootenays. There are also visitors from across BC, Alberta and Canada as well as USA and internationally. In addition, the CVWMA estimates that upwards of 30,000 people per year of all ages with diverse interests (hikers, snowshoers, photographers, skiers, birders, etc.) access the trails and viewing towers located on the CVWMA for free.

As per the table below, visitor numbers in the temporary Discovery Centre were about 25% less than in the old WIC likely due to the greatly reduced space and exhibits. The 2020 numbers reflect a shortened season and potential visitor responses to Covid restrictions and safety measures. The number of canoe tours given is very unpredictable since it can be affected by low

water levels or flooding, smoke from wildfires or wild rice obstruction, and distance measures during Covid. There has been a high demand for Jr Naturalist Camps and Special events and an increased number has been offered in the last 3 years.

SUMMARY STATISTICS							
	CVWMA AVERAGE (2008-2017)	KCDCS 2018	KCDCS 2019	KCDCS 2020	KCDCS 2021	KCDCS 2022	KCDCS 2023
Visitor Numbers	6,203	4,911	5,105	1,381	3,378	4,004	4,261
Number of Days Open	127	129	122	64	132	125	128
Canoe Tours (Public)	725	387	605	123	169	409	430
School Programs	1,742	1,579	1,881	101	1,198	1,823	1,796
Jr Naturalists Camps	60	53	60	52	72	89	88
Special Events/Programs	628	793	607	211	1,054	1,179	1,155

Financial Outlook for Existing Operations

In 2014, a consultant for the Interpretive Centre Committee conducted a survey of 11 interpretive/environmental education centres (2 American and 9 Canadian). The consultant found that all Canadian facilities depended heavily on government funding for operations (one was able to raise revenue to cover almost 50% of expenses). KCDCS is therefore unique in Canada insofar as it does not rely on government funding for the majority of its operations.

The following table is a pro forma 2024-26 projection of KCDCS cash revenue and expenses:

Kootenay Columbia Discovery Centre Society - Budget Projection 2024-2026				
PROJECTED EXPENSES				
Category	Description	2024	2025	2026
Operational Costs	Administrative, Fees and Services	\$21,900	\$22,995	\$22,995
Salaries	Senior Manager and Seasonal Staff	\$129,920	\$132,205	\$132,205
Transitional Costs	Temporary Facility Related	\$14,500	\$15,225	\$15,225
Non-Transitional	Programs, Gift Shop, Promotional, Fundraising, Communications	\$16,900	\$17,745	\$17,745
TOTAL PROJECTED EXPENSES		\$183,220	\$188,170	\$188,170
PROJECTED REVENUE				
Category	Description	2024	2025	2026
Grants	Various	\$157,520	\$162,470	\$162,470
Donations		\$4,000	\$4,000	\$4,000
Gift Shop		\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
Programs Fees	School, Jr Nats, Canoe Tours, Special Events	\$19,000	\$19,000	\$19,000
Misc	Misc	\$700	\$700	\$700
TOTAL PROJECTED REVENUE		\$183,220	\$188,170	\$188,170
Surplus/Deficit		\$0	\$0	\$0
Surplus/Reserve Carry Over	Estimate	\$20,000	tbd	tbd

Local Economic Uplift from Existing Operations

Most of the KCDCS grant and operations revenue originates outside of the Creston Valley. This outside revenue, of approximately \$125,000 per year, is a boost to the local economy.

Post Covid restrictions, visitation in the temporary Discovery Centre is approaching pre-pandemic levels of 5,000 people per year. Data from prior years indicate that an average of 80% of visitors are from outside the Creston area. These tourists may spend on average an extra half day in the valley on account of KCDCS' operations. Destination BC had previously estimated \$125 per day (2023) per person average tourist spending in the Kootenay region. This temporary Discovery Centre tourism component therefore results in an estimated boost to the local economy in the order of \$250,000 per year $((5000 * .80) * (\$125/2))$.

The total local economic uplift from existing KCDCS operations is therefore estimated at \$375,000 per year $(\$125,000 + \$250,000)$ in 2023 dollars.

4.0 Proposed New Discovery Centre

Indigenous Content

KCDCS is committed to maintaining relationships with First Nations consistent with the principles of Reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. The CVWMA is located on the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa Nation. The Lower Kootenay Band (Yaqaṅ Nuʔkiy) is one of six bands in the Nation and is the Ktunaxa's local representative. We enjoy a positive relationship with and are grateful to the Yaqaṅ Nuʔkiy who have helped KCDCS in fundraising by providing letters of recommendation.

KCDCS has a desire to incorporate Ktunaxa traditional teachings into both our existing programs and a new Discovery Centre and to that end has made a proposal to the Yaqaṅ Nuʔkiy Heritage Society to improve our existing programs. Also, we have, and will continue to have, periodic joint venture discussions with the Yaqaṅ Nuʔkiy regarding the new Discovery Centre. Any new Discovery Centre would, at the very least, be subject to their approval and indeed no new facility would be complete without a significant indigenous component.

Technological Innovation and Improvements

Both the building and exhibits in the new Discovery Centre will be designed to complement environmental education programs that inform and keep pace with emerging issues of importance like climate change. Technology will also play an important role in the new programs. Today, technology has an enormous impact on how people interact with each other and learn. An example of our interactive application of technology is the recent purchase and installation of a Microeye microscope in the temporary Discovery Centre. This microscope can display real time enlargements on a big color overhead screen.

With more space, the new Discovery Centre could be able to show larger groups of students informative media presentations from film, Internet links, video sharing, etc. This facility would also benefit from better Internet connectivity and bandwidth than in the temporary Discovery Centre.

Program Enhancement and Development

A new Discovery Centre will provide much more than expanded interactive exhibits. Other incremental benefits of a new centre as opposed to the existing temporary one include:

- an on-site venue for curricula based and extra-curricular programs throughout the school year
- expanded high school programs
- greater provision of digital maps and guides for teaching and general use
- expansion of our outreach to schools, including post-secondary institutions, across B.C.
- offering of rainy-day shelter for outdoor camps for pre-school children through adults
- increase special events targeting families, naturalists, bird and other wildlife watchers to participate and learn outdoor photography, painting/drawing, journaling, etc.
- provision of new and esthetic meeting space for community groups
- new programs and facilities used for educational partners, e.g. girl guides, boy scouts, 4H, etc.
- the ability to host temporary exhibits and displays
- the ability to host visitors from other environmental education centres
- the ability to offer train-the-trainer programs for educators; and,
- provision of a space to work collaboratively with First Nations to offer programs and events celebrating their history, traditional knowledge, ecology, language and stewardship practice

Low Operating Costs

Our 2021 members survey (Appendix I) received 317 responses which can be considered a statistically significant representation of our community. Its results underscored the importance of building a new, green, fit-for-purpose Discovery Centre: not only to set a leadership example in materials used and energy conservation, but also to keep operating costs manageable. A non-profit organization does not have the funds to sustain a structure with high operating and maintenance costs.

To be sustainable, the normal course operating costs of a new Discovery Centre should not be significantly greater than those of the temporary Discovery Centre. KDCS has demonstrated that these costs, of approximately \$13,000 per year (2024), can be absorbed by a small not-for-profit society. Insurance costs will be higher for a new building, but utility costs could be lower.

In addition to normal course operating costs, there will be longer-term maintenance items to address, e.g., a new roof, new windows, new cladding. There also needs to be a contingency provision for unexpected problems. CVWMA has suggested that a legacy operating cost

endowment be set up to cover these longer term and costly items. KCDCS envisions establishing the amount of the legacy endowment according to a professional engineering report. This procedure would be like that used by condo (strata) boards to establish their total monthly charges. In our case, the present value of the engineer's reported long-term maintenance costs would form the legacy operating cost endowment. Specialty fundraising would be required for this but it has been done before in Canada.

Site Selection

Site selection included a review of several potential building sites proximate to the old WIC. All available options were considered. A consulting architect provided site recommendations (see "PreDesign Report" at www.discovery-centre.ca) for the new Discovery Centre. Additional criteria considered included: 1) the Ramsar Handbook (www.ramsar.org); 2) input from our members (Appendix I), who are considered to represent a cross-section of Creston Valley demographics and beyond; and, 3) answering the simple question of "where is the best location to run environmental education programs in the Creston Valley?". The answer to the latter question is "wetlands" because people of all ages first and foremost want to see wildlife. Wetlands also represent the greatest biodiversity of any regional ecosystem and are important to natural sequestration of carbon.

Based on the above considerations, it is the view of the KCDCS that the most appropriate site for a new Discovery Centre is on or near to the site of the old WIC which was much valued by the public.

Design Options

The PreDesign Report suggested these design concepts:

- compliment and frame the setting
- be original and impressive, using regionally available building materials and accent local indigenous customs and traditions
- reflect present and future spatial needs
- facilitate multiple uses of space
- be environmentally sound
- facilitate the use of contemporary technology in the-use of exhibits and displays, and in program delivery
- accommodate the needs of local and regional users
- the safety of users and staff is a high priority
- protection of wildlife and their habitat is paramount

Public consultation has also drawn attention for improvements to:

- roadways
- barrier-free walkways
- parking generally and for persons with disabilities and RV's
- emergency/service routes
- barrier-free washrooms

- ramps and rails
- strategically located seating and viewing areas

Costs of Construction and Operating

The PreDesign Report contained some conceptual new Discovery Centre designs and associated costs in 2017 dollars. These capital costs estimates are both dated and, due to the large square footage of the concept designs, are no longer considered consistent with our “low operating costs equals sustainability” philosophy. We can still look at “larger versus smaller” concept designs, but both should be reduced in size from those outlined in the PreDesign Report. For reference, the old WIC was 5,600 ft² (about twice the area of a tennis court) excluding decking.

KCDCS is planning to finalize two Discovery Centre conceptual designs, using a consultant, to generate Class 4 quality capital and operating cost estimates. Prior to major fundraising, these designs and costs would then be reviewed with the stakeholders and one final design selected. Starting in 2024, KCDCS will be seeking grantors to help fund this consultant's study. Once the study is complete, this business plan will be updated with the costs.

Sources of Funding

Once design and costs are confirmed, KCDCS can approach potential funders for both capital cost assistance and to set up an appropriate legacy operating cost endowment as discussed in the section entitled “Low Operating Costs”. KCDCS will approach funders known from operations funding for seed money followed by requesting funds from larger private foundations and corporations that have been selected as potential new centre grant makers. We do not see, currently, any arm government as being prospective at the seed money grant seeking stage.

Once seed money for a new Discovery Centre has been obtained, a major fundraising campaign will be launched to build on the commitment of the seed donor. At this stage, there should be a much wider range of prospective funders due to momentum. They include private individuals, local businesses, and various arms of government for-profit corporations and private foundations. Naming opportunities will be made available.

Marketing

The Kootenay Rockies region of BC hosts 13% of the tourists travelling to and recreating in the province. The main tourism activities occur outdoors and the top three activities for non-B.C. residents include nature parks, wildlife viewing and bird watching. Specific to the Creston Valley, over 40% of the non-local tourists enjoy canoeing/kayaking and about 40% enjoy photography. In other words, light eco-tourism is the primary focus of travelers to our region.

Long-term visitors going inside the old WIC averaged 6,300 per year. This excludes the many other people who simply use the parking lot as a hiking trailhead. KCDCS will explore how to measure the total visitor numbers more accurately. For the new Discovery Centre, 6,000 to 10,000 visitors per year are targeted in the centre itself. Some increase in visitors from the old

WIC can be expected both from the improvements in the centre itself as well as the light eco-tourism market in the Kootenays being generally underserved. The geographical composition of the target market is defined by the visitors seen at the temporary Discovery Centre. For example, in 2023, 73% of the visitors were from Canada. Most of these visitors were from various Kootenay-Columbia regions as well as from elsewhere in BC and from Alberta. In addition, 17% of the visitors were from the USA, 8% were from Europe and 2% were from other international destinations.

The target market can also be sub-divided according to interests. Schools that offer environmental curricula, but require an appropriate field venue for programs, are a key component of KCDCS' customer base. All children want to see wildlife and that the wetlands can deliver. Also, birders, adult wildlife viewers and naturalists are among KCDCS' strongest supporters. Finally, special events such as bat counts, the Creston Valley Bird Festival and the Blue Heron Road Race will always be supported by the KCDCS.

KCDCS marketing plan strategy will also integrate a means of cost recovery. Standard membership fees and fees for programs and events will be considered as well as fees for services like digital maps and guides, guiding, hosting and supervising events and camps, offsite activities, adult training, event use of the Centre, viewing of temporary/loaned exhibits and displays, and attending expert lectures and presentations. A small paid admission to a new Discovery Centre may be required as well for sustainable operations.

The marketing success will be measured by analyzing data including:

- total number of visitors to the CVWMA
- number of visitors to the new Discovery Centre
- number of participants in student, adult programs and special events
- number of participating schools and other learning institutions
- formal surveys and informal feedback from users
- website and social media analytics
- surveys and social media ratings and reviews; and,
- revenue from all sources

Tourism and Economic Benefits of a New Discovery Centre

The new Discovery Centre will be exciting and family friendly. It will be the premiere tourist attraction in the Creston Valley. Based on historical data, we expect 70% of our visitors to come from Canada (80% of these from outside of our region), 20% from the USA and 10% from elsewhere. Visitors to a new Discovery Centre are estimated to be 6,000 to 10,000 per year. Scaling up the local economic uplift from the temporary Discovery Centre (see Section 3.0) results in a local economic uplift ranging from \$450,000 to \$750,000 per year with a new Discovery Centre.

5.0 Project Management Roadmap Towards a New Centre

To get a new Discovery Centre built there are certain project management tasks, outcomes and key decision points that need to be recognized up front. Outside consultants and contractors will be required and the extent of the use of these outside parties will be determined by available budget dollars and funding. Forward of 2023, these issues are meshed in the three decision diagrams of Appendix II. In summary form, the three major tasks to get a new Discovery Centre built are:

- 1) securing a seed money source for several hundred thousand for a new Discovery Centre;
- 2) resolution of all business impediments and formation of a new organizational structure and joint venture partnerships to share in project risks; and,
- 3) solicitation of donations and grants to match seed money leading to a final investment decision and project management to mitigate construction execution risks.

KCDCS will seek professional advice along the way, including from our Canada-wide existing supporters, for critical items such as finding visionary seed money donors. A proprietary Canadian grant maker database was developed from 2020 – 2023 that will aid in selecting potential funders. Our analog new building fundraising model is the one used by Dalhousie University for their IDEA building. Funders for a new building will ideally also be able to provide experienced advice to aid in the venture.

One analog wetland interpretation centre, in terms of the smaller centre design option and exhibits, is the Wetlands Centre in the Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia Wildlife Management Area. It is approximately 2,000 square feet in size and handles 50,000 visitors per year. There may be helpful information gleaned from this centre with regards to building, operation and maintenance costs as well as overall experience operating a centre of that size.

Ongoing consultation with the major stakeholders, the CVWMA and the Lower Kootenay Band, is critical for success. At least one more major public consultation round will be held. Once the building design is chosen, the sustainable new Discovery Centre operations model can be finalized.

The task ahead of KCDCS, for the Board comprised of a small but dedicated and resolute group of volunteers and one full-time employee, is formidable. Notwithstanding, each individual task required to have a new Discovery Centre built and sustainably run is possible. The biggest weakness of KCDCS as an organization is known as a “key person risk” that is, the dependency on one, difficult to replace, senior manager and a small board of directors. We must therefore always be rigorous with regards to board renewal and try to retain the senior manager.

6.0 Feedback Link

Comments and suggestions are welcome. This is a live document. The support that is given to KCDCS is very much appreciated and KCDCS is looking forward to developing additional collaborative, mutually beneficial relationships in the future.

Need further information or have a comment or suggestion?

- www.discovery-centre.ca
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