

Cowichan/Ladysmith Marine Tourism Authority

Interim Report

The Cowichan/Ladysmith Marine Tourism authority was created by the Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development in October, 2004. The Authority includes representatives from the Municipality of North Cowichan, the Town of Ladysmith, the Cowichan Valley Regional District, Cowichan Bay Electoral Area, Cowichan Tribes First Nation and four private sector members representing marine tourism sectors. The area MLA, Graham Bruce, and the Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development are also represented on the authority as observers.

The CMTA was initiated by MLA Graham Bruce as a catalyst for the development of a marine tourist destination and to act as a pilot project that could be introduced in other coastal regions. The Authority received funding from the Province (\$50,000), the Municipality of North Cowichan (\$5,800), the Town of Ladysmith (\$5,800), the Cowichan Region Economic Development Commission (\$5,800) and the Cowichan Bay Electoral Area (\$2,600). The mission of the Cowichan/Ladysmith Marine Tourism Authority is to encourage and support the development of marine tourist facilities and activities, and a diversified economy in balance with the marine environment, for the benefit of Cowichan residents and visitors. The preliminary work plan developed by the Authority to implement the mission included an inventory of marine tourism activities and identification of infrastructure gaps, barriers to growth, new development opportunities and strategies to enhance and promote business activities.

The CMTA has already completed a number of items in the work plan, including the production of a Resource Guide containing a review and summary of previous studies, a summation of the development approval process, a survey of operators & focus groups and an analysis of trends in the marine tourism sector. All of our completed work is available on the our website at <http://marine.cowichan.net/>

The resource guide is intended to provide operators and investors with a one-stop source for a collection of information about the Cowichan marine region. It provides a summary of historical reports on the marine sector and also includes a bibliography of other relevant material. Also include in the resource guide is a flow chart that highlights the types of approvals that may be required for marine tourism development and a list of map resources available from the website

The report on the development approval process provides a detailed review of Federal, Provincial and Regional regulatory requirements that developers may need to address in order to establish marine based businesses. The report also provides a work plan for First Nation involvement in project consultation and identifies the major regulatory agencies and their role in project review including Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canadian

Coast Guard, Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, Land & Water BC and the Environmental Assessment office.

The survey of operators and community focus groups was carried out by Malaspina University College's Tourism group and entailed a questionnaire mail out to over 200 firms in the region plus focus groups in Ladysmith, Chemainus, Maple Bay and Cowichan Bay. Survey results that were received from 47 firms provided the Authority with an inventory of marine tourism activities, a list of potential future directions for development, and identified obstacles/barriers to future growth. Major recommendations from a summary of the questionnaire include the following:

- Need for Expanded Infrastructure
- Simplify Regulatory Environment
- Develop Marine Tourism Marketing Strategy
- Resolve Land Use Issues

The recently completed study of Trends in the Marine Tourism Industry provides the Authority and private investors with a better understanding of the major industry components and provides direction in creating strategies and priorities for development. The report includes a review of major domestic and international destination marine tourism markets, an assessment of the impact of changing demographics on overall demand as well as an assessment of changes in demand in kayaking, wildlife viewing, cruising/touring, and diving sectors.

Based on the work completed to date, the CMTA has identified the following list of development priorities for the region.

1. Create the "Permeable Shoreline"
 - A. Improve services for visiting boaters
 - Visitor Docks (parking lots)
 - Pump out Stations
 - Inviting Path to the Village
 - B. Encourage Marina Development
 - 30 year tenure for Cowichan Marina Operators
 - Visitor and Annual storage in Ladysmith
 - Encourage local control and regulation where possible
 - C. Encourage Kayak / small boat cruising with campsites
 - D. Encourage Diving – artificial reef
2. Create the "Cowichan Brand"
 - A. Focus on environment and accessible wildlife
 - B. Coordinate Signage for Facilities
 - C. Link all the areas into the "Brand"
 - D. Integration with First Nations initiatives
3. Develop an integrated Marketing Strategy for the Brand
 - A. Website based maps and promotion
 - B. Support for tour wholesalers
4. Training in Eco Tourism, Diving Charters, Bird Watching

Our next major initiative will be to present these priorities to the public through a series of town hall meetings and presentations to First Nations. Comments from these meetings will provide a focus for developing a short list of preferred projects that may be progressively developed over the next several months.