

<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> Amazing Places Geotourism Program					
<b>NAME OF ORGANIZATION:</b> Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region – Vancouver Island University					
<b>CONTACT PERSON:</b> Pam Shaw, Research Director		<b>TELEPHONE NUMBER:</b> 250.753.3245 x 2620		<b>EMAIL ADDRESS:</b> Pam.Shaw@viu.ca	
<b>TOTAL NCED PROGRAM FUNDING:</b> \$3,000.00			<b>TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET:</b> \$24,000.00		
<b>PROJECT START DATE (YYYY/MM/DD):</b> May 23, 2017			<b>PROJECT END DATE (YYYY/MM/DD):</b> August 31, 2018		
<b>PERCENT COMPLETE:</b> 100% of project initiation and implementation is complete (pursuant to this funding). This project will continue to operate into the long term.					
<b>IF NOT COMPLETE, WHAT ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT REMAIN? PROVIDE ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE:</b> N/A					
<b>PROJECT AREAS (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY):</b>					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARKSVILLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> QUALICUM BEACH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AREA 'E'	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AREA 'F'	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AREA 'G'	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AREA 'H'
<b>PLEASE PROVIDE A SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT RESULTS:</b>					
<p>Funding received from the Northern Community Economic Development (NCED) grant went towards establishing new partnerships and marketing materials for the Amazing Places project. Specifically, funding supported the development of a Geotourism program that encourages residents and tourists to explore the Amazing Places while also spending additional time in local stores, restaurants and organizations within the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (MABR). Geotours combine geocaching and tourism into a fun activity that connects visitors and residents to various destinations across the world. They do this by driving extended visitation to the region, capturing a broad audience in an activity that is appropriate for all age and skill levels, and creating new and innovative ways of exploring and learning about the region, even for those already familiar with the area. In doing so, they support strong, thriving and creative local economies.</p> <p>Although attempts were made to form a visioning session made up of local business owners and stakeholders to discuss how a regional passport program could be economically beneficial,</p>					

low engagement was an issue. With input from the regional tourism association, whose role it is to closely engage with tourism and business providers on various projects and programs, we were advised not to allocate additional resources into gaining input from these stakeholders due to a recent and prolonged period of low engagement. Rather, a decision was made to create an innovative and flexible project that would provide local economic benefit, facilitate long-term opportunities for collaboration when the time was right, and address the goals of the NCED fund. Therefore, the Amazing Places Geotourism program represents a more relevant iteration of the proposed passport program, attracting new visitors to the region and promoting adventure, sustainability, ecological and historical awareness, as well as local economic development.

The Geotour program is comprised of a series of geocaches - 6 traditional geocaches and 2 multi-caches – hidden at each of the Amazing Places. An informative and interesting Geotour Field Guide provides lots of information on each Amazing Place, and guides participants to each of the sites, challenging them to find both the geocache and the Amazing Places interpretive sign that is installed at each place.

Geocachers can download their Field Guide for free from the Amazing Places website or buy a hard copy from the local Chamber of Commerce or Tigh-Nah-Mara Resort Gift Shop for ten dollars. In the Field Guide is a Cache Code Collection Page that must be completed with coin rubbings from each cache and the answer to each Geoclue, determined by reading the interpretive signage at each site. Submitting the completed Cache Code Collection Page earns participants the reward of a customized Amazing Places geocoin – a highly prized item. Hints and clues guide participants through parks, urban areas, and businesses showing visitors what makes the biosphere a special place.

Reduced funding from the NCED grant limited the team's ability to purchase and fully launch the Geotourism program. However, additional funding was provided by the Parksville Qualicum Beach Tourism Association and Destination BC, and the project was launched in November of 2018.

**DESCRIBE THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OR OTHER OUTCOMES THAT HAVE RESULTED FROM THIS PROJECT:**

Regionally, the Amazing Places Geotourism program has already attracted the attention of local tourism providers interested in collaborating with the MABR. This includes interest in promoting the program to their clients, offering reduced fees for services to those participating in the program, designing tourism products around the program, and selling Field Guides as a means of attracting new visitors to their place of business. These opportunities are sure to be of economic benefit to the community. Furthermore, because the program takes some time to complete, visitors are encouraged to spend time in the region – visiting local restaurants and shops, purchasing goods and souvenirs, and in some cases, requiring accommodation or engaging in other local activities. To illustrate, in the first week of the program's launch comments appeared on the Geotour landing page from participants in Seattle who wrote that

when they saw that a new Geotour had been launched they took the ferry to Vancouver Island from Washington State right away. They enjoyed spending time at the Amazing Places so much, they were unable to complete the Geotour in one weekend and wrote that they would be back again to spend another weekend in this quaint community they'd never before visited.

Promotion on the world geocaching hub – geocaching.com – combined with a two-month, province-wide digital advertising campaign, has provided the region and the program with substantial exposure. Visitors have arrived to complete the Geotour from Washington State, communities in the BC interior, Vancouver, as well as across Vancouver Island. With time, visitation is expected from much farther afield, and is typically the case with Geotours. Creative and interesting programs such as the Amazing Places Geotour enhance local economic resilience by diversifying the tourism amenities of the region and providing opportunities for future development and collaboration. They also showcase local businesses, environment and culture in a sustainable way.

According to the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation has the potential to generate \$646 billion per year in consumer spending and approximately \$80 billion in federal, provincial, and local tax revenue; these numbers include dollars spent on travel-related expenses such as lodging, restaurants, and more. Collectively, this project will increase regional foot traffic by broadening the demographic that desires to visit the Regional District of Nanaimo and MABR.

**PLEASE DESCRIBE HOW THE PROJECT HAS MET THE PROGRAM PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITY AREAS:**

The Amazing Places project met four of the principles established by the NCED grant while also contributing to various priority areas. Firstly, the project focused on the *Flexibility* principle to ensure that the program developed reflected the values and vision of everyone involved with, and to benefit from, the initiative. The passport program was reworked to suit the needs of the community and local businesses, resulting in the development of a Geotour. Today, the geotour attracts visitation to the region and as a result, expenditure within the region. However, substantial potential exists for future development of the project that will promote collaboration and offer the potential for sustained economic benefit to the region.

The project also meets the *Foster Diversification* principle by promoting the regions attractiveness as a Geotourism destination. The program developed has created a unique opportunity that distinguishes the MABR from other parts of Vancouver Island. Currently, there are a total of four Geotours in Canada, with the closest being in Vancouver and Chilliwack. The only Geotour on Vancouver Island, the project adds diversity to the region's tourism portfolio, and broadens the region's attractiveness as a tourism destination. Ultimately, the program offers visitors a fun, exciting experience while visiting the Amazing Places located in the RDN. Visitors will have the opportunity to solve riddles, adventure, site see, and gain a better connection to the area while also checking out local businesses where clues and geocoins will be hidden/sold. The program will provide each participant with a unique peak into what it

means to be a UNESCO-designated biosphere reserve in Canada.

The Amazing Places project has also contributed to the *Facilitate Cooperation* principle through the development of new partnerships both locally and nationally. Through this initiative we have been able to establish a network of partnerships with local businesses, municipalities, entities, and five of Canada's UNESCO-designated biosphere reserves. Through these partnerships, we have had the opportunity to engage with a number of diverse organizations to enhance local, regional and national economics. Funding attained from the NCED grant has provided the team with funding to leverage these new partnerships while also investing in marketing materials for the Amazing Places project.

Finally, Amazing places has met the *Create Regional Benefits* principle as it has created opportunities for businesses and organizations to leverage a program that distinguishes them geographically. The new Geotourism program is a brand that will belong to Canada's UNESCO biosphere reserves, and can be utilized by local businesses as an asset to increase economic profit at their leisure. Further, it can be leveraged as a marketing ploy to engage a broader demographic in tourism visitation.

**PLEASE CAN YOU HELP QUANTIFY THE ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THIS PROJECT ON THE COMMUNITY. THIS WILL ASSIST THE RDN TO MEASURE THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF THE NCED PROGRAM ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY.**

**TO MEASURE ECONOMIC OUTPUT LOCALLY WE HAVE PREPARED THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

**1. HOW MANY JOBS WERE FUNDED THROUGH THIS PROJECT?**

In total, three jobs were funded to develop and manage the Amazing Places Project. Two part-time positions were created to oversee the national program as well as a temporary work-op position to engage students in Vancouver Island University's Tourism and Recreation program. The student position was funded to help with material development, social media marketing campaigns, while also providing support to the Amazing Places coordinator and MABR Coordinator.

**2. HOW MANY SHORT TERM LONG TERM POSITIONS WERE CREATED?**

One long-term and two short term positions were created.

**3. PLEASE OUTLINE THE AMOUNT OF GOODS AND SERVICES PURCHASED LOCALLY?**

During our trial of the Geotourism program goods from the MABR were purchased to fill each of the ten geocache boxes. Various objects and printed materials were supplied in each of the caches and were purchased locally within the biosphere reserve. All printing of materials were sourced and purchased from Vancouver Island Universities printing department. Local post cards, keychains, magnets, and book marks were purchased from the Parksville District Chamber of Commerce, Coombs Fair, Shades of Green and other local businesses. In total, 60 post cards, stickers, magnets keychains, and

bookmarks were purchased and shared with participants from the Canada C3 voyage.

To develop the full-scale program that launched in November, 2018, numerous materials and services were purchased locally, including cache materials, geocoin manufacturing, Field Guide writing and printing, and creative development.

#### **4. WHAT IS THE LASTING LEGACY OF THIS PROJECT ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY?**

The Amazing places project has contributed directly to socio-economics in the RDN by developing and implementing a Geotour program that aims to diversify tourism in the region. The program offers unique economic opportunities that will enhance the region's resiliency in regards to year round tourism. Our new tourism product can be a model initiative for other regions outside of the biosphere, but within the RDN, to enhance the following: job opportunities, marketing of RDN as a tourist destination, local income for businesses, promotion of sustainable tourism initiatives as well as increased cultural exchange.

#### **5. WOULD THIS PROJECT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT FUNDING FROM THE NCED?**

Seed funding from the NCED program allowed the MABR Amazing Places team to enhance local and regional partnerships through the development of the Geotourism product. The product would not have been developed without funding from the NCED program as it enhanced our ability to fund project coordination and development as well as facilitation of dialogue between various entities. Although funding received was less than the requested amount, it provided our team with an opportunity to continue developing a product that suited the needs of local businesses and residents.

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YES ☐ NO ☐