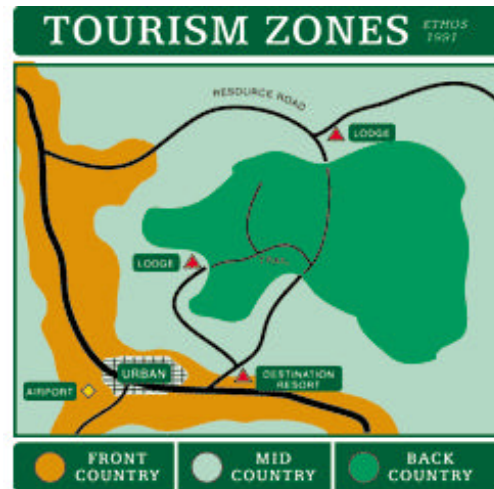


## LAND USE PLANNING FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The Tourism Zonation System (TZS) is a landuse planning approach which allows tourism to be planned in an environmentally sensitive and economically viable way. Pioneered in British Columbia, the Tourism Zonation System maps the landbase of the province into Urban, Frontcountry, Midcountry, and Backcountry zones according to their:

- degree of naturalness (from urban to wilderness);
- type of tourism outdoor experience possible;
- environmental sensitivity;
- method of transport;
- intensity of use; and,
- scale of facilities (e.g. from destination resorts to cabins)



Each of the tourism zones has its own features and is best suited to a particular type of tourism. By using the zonation system it is possible to reduce conflict between the needs of tourism and the conservation values of BC's natural areas. The following descriptions of the four zones help show how it is possible to both preserve wilderness and support environmentally appropriate tourism through effective resource planning.

**The Backcountry/Wilderness Tourism Zone** provides a high quality (often world class) wilderness experience in a pristine environment to a smaller, though generally affluent, clientele. Multiday river rafting, canoe tripping, photo safaris and nature treks, multi-day ski touring, guided mountaineering, sail charters, sea kayaking, and wilderness horseback trips are all associated with this zone. The absence of motorized access and lack of built structures and infrastructure characterize the Backcountry zone. The tourism experience emphasizes personal and small group interaction and physical activity within pristine natural landscapes. It is a value-added tourism product with higher prices charged per visitor day. The emphasis on guides also increases the employment level per visitor day. Examples of high calibre Backcountry zones that are found within the BC park system include Tatshenshini, Tweedsmuir, Spatsizi, Purcell Wilderness, and the Northern Rockies.

The Backcountry zone is a rapidly diminishing resource, and yet it is an especially attractive and internationally appealing tourism image. Few other areas of the planet still retain high calibre large wilderness areas equivalent to those found in BC. Given the shrinking availability of wilderness elsewhere in the world and the growing demand for it by an affluent traveling public, wilderness promises to play an increasingly important part in the future of British Columbia's tourism industry. Managing use and preserving the pristine wilderness, so that it retains its 'wildness', is the key management challenge of this zone. Hence backcountry/wilderness is a fundamental asset of BC's tourism offering.



**The Midcountry/Natural Tourism Zone** is characterized by recreation opportunities for 'intermediate' numbers of visitors in a high quality natural but not wilderness environment. Therefore, unlike the backcountry, this zone is associated with motorized access and accommodation, but on a smaller scale and to a lesser intensity than in the Frontcountry. For example, Midcountry accommodation might consist of small lodges with simpler facilities. The rustic basics of comfort are provided but the emphasis of the experience is still on the natural environment rather than on the facilities themselves.

Access in the Midcountry may be provided by helicopter, float plane, boat, or unpaved resource roads. Heli-skiing, multi-day heli-hiking, motor launch cruises, mountain biking, and some guest ranches are examples of adventure activities associated with this zone. The Midcountry zone and its experiences are found surrounding, and outside of, protected areas. As a result the Midcountry tourism zone serves to buffer (and link) areas in a fashion consistent with the principles of Conservation Biology. Examples of such Midcountry zones occur in lands surrounding parks such as the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy, Glacier National Park, and Wells Gray Provincial Park.

As well Midcountry operations (such as heli-skiing) in parks could lead to key conflicts with conservation priorities. As a result, future expansion of Midcountry-style tourism is not recommended for lands protected in parks. Rather, these operations should be located on the perimeters of parks. Containing the level of access and infrastructure and keeping the zone from becoming too developed is a key issue in the management of the Midcountry/Natural Zone.

**The Frontcountry/Intensive Tourism Zone** services large volumes of tourists in a naturally scenic though substantially human altered environment. Often, the more natural Mid and Backcountry zones provide the scenic backdrop for Frontcountry/Intensive zones (e.g. the Banff National Park Frontcountry looks into extensive Backcountry vistas). Tourism in the Frontcountry/Intensive Zone will often be closely linked to motorized, high volume transportation on major highway or rail corridors, or through nearby airports. Tourism in this zone often involves the use and development of substantial infrastructure: destination resorts, motels, restaurants, shopping areas, entertainment services, ski areas, and so on. Adventure tourism activities associated with the Frontcountry/Intensive zone include daytrip rafting, daytrip ski touring and nordic track skiing, daytrip heli-hiking, highway based nature viewing tours and paved road bicycle tours.

Frontcountry tourism activities appeal to tourists seeking a short-duration, outdoor oriented activity. Tourists enjoying the Frontcountry often do not have the time to explore further into the Midcountry, or prefer to limit their natural experience in order to enjoy the full comfort and convenience of hotels and restaurants. Protection of viewsapes and scenic corridors is an important element of Frontcountry tourism management.



Frontcountry zones have developed adjacent to some BC parks. The best examples occurs at the world class Frontcountry resort of Whistler, which benefits from its viewscape of the adjacent Backcountry Garibaldi Provincial Park. Within parks, the intensity of Frontcountry use and development leads to severe conflicts with conservation priorities. The example of the Banff townsite development, where an entire tourism supported town has sprung up at a significant cost to wildlife and wilderness, exemplifies this. Controversies of the type that have long plagued Frontcountry tourism at locations like Cypress Bowl Park, where a full scale ski hill operates, indicate that future expansion of Frontcountry tourism within parks should not be allowed. Rather, such intensive tourism should be located outside of protected areas.

**The Urban Tourism Zone** is an integral part of the Tourism Zonation System, although as far as wilderness tourism and parks management is concerned in BC, it is of minimal significance. This zone corresponds with urban areas with populations over 20,000 people where a wide variety of services are provided. *Culturally-based tourism is the strongest feature of this zone.*

*Ethos Environmental Inc.*