

Pathways to Prosperity

*The Natural Roots of Economic Success
in the Crown of the Continent*



Acknowledgments

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Waterton townsite and the Prince of Wales Hotel surrounded by the blue waters of Waterton Lake and the transboundary mountains of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. Photo: © Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation/Travel Alberta Photo Gallery.

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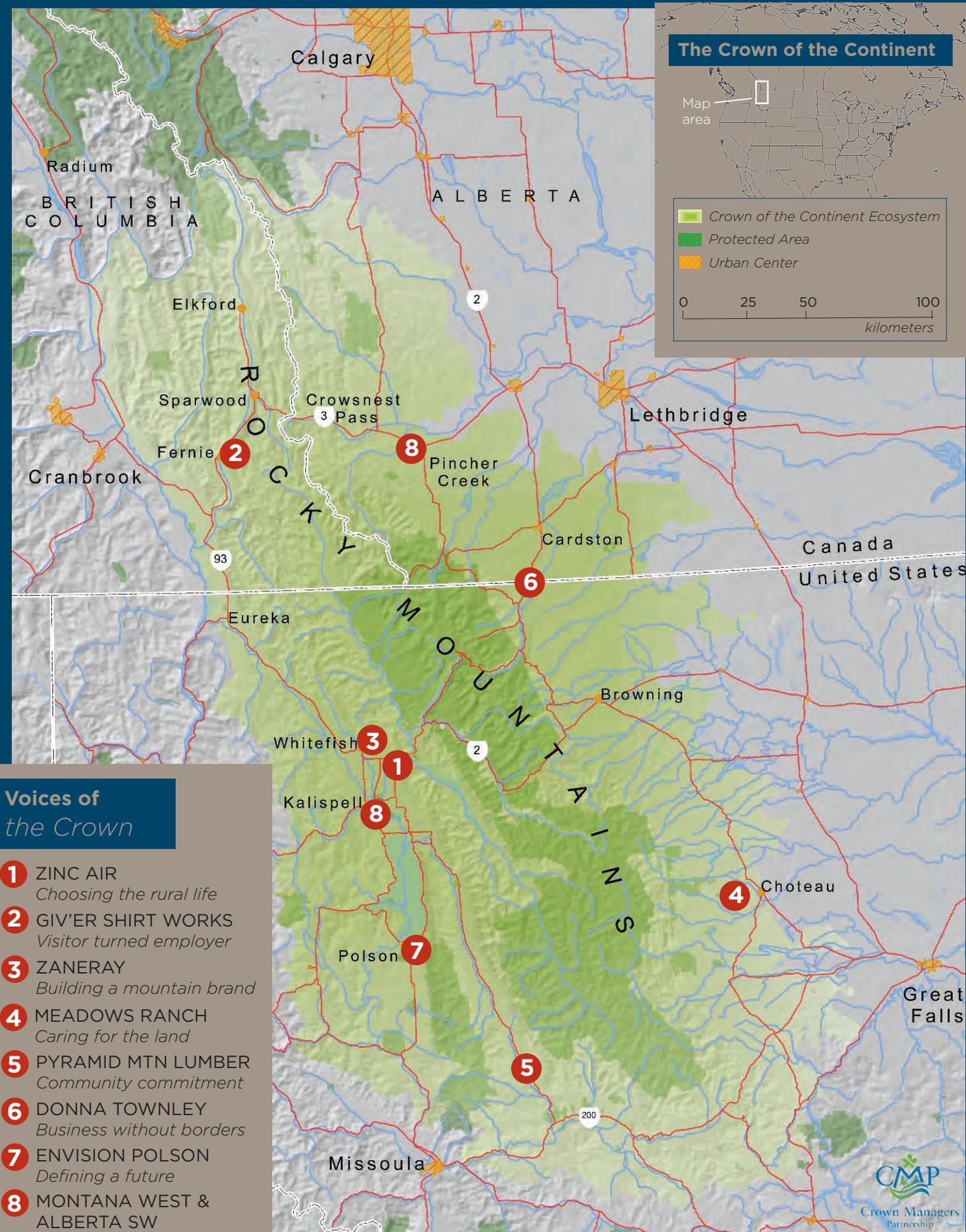
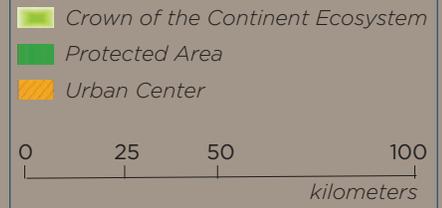
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The Crown of the Continent

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Leveraging natural assets

See business in the Crown of the Continent from a new angle.

Many of us choose to live and work here because of the Crown of the Continent's world-class landscapes—places such as Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park and Flathead Lake. We are fortunate to have inherited small, friendly communities set in a spectacular natural environment alive with recreational opportunities—hunting and fishing, clean water, wildlife, and scenic beauty. As economic development professionals, we know these quality-of-life advantages are key to our region's economic future.

To be sure, our fine schools, hospitals, airports, and roads are critical—and continued investment in this traditional infrastructure, and in new assets such as fiber optics and wireless service, remains essential to our economic success. But guess what? Everyone else, everywhere else, is marketing that same “bricks-and-mortar” infrastructure.

The Crown's unique appeal has emerged as one of our most important economic assets. These are “footloose” times—new technologies and global economic shifts have enabled employers, employees, and entrepreneurs to choose where to put down roots. As we consult with business owners and investors looking to relocate, we hear that quality of life is as key to their decisions as are tax rates, labor costs, and broadband networks.

— **Sarah Converse**
Sweet Grass Development

— **Rob Gay**
Community Futures
East Kootenay

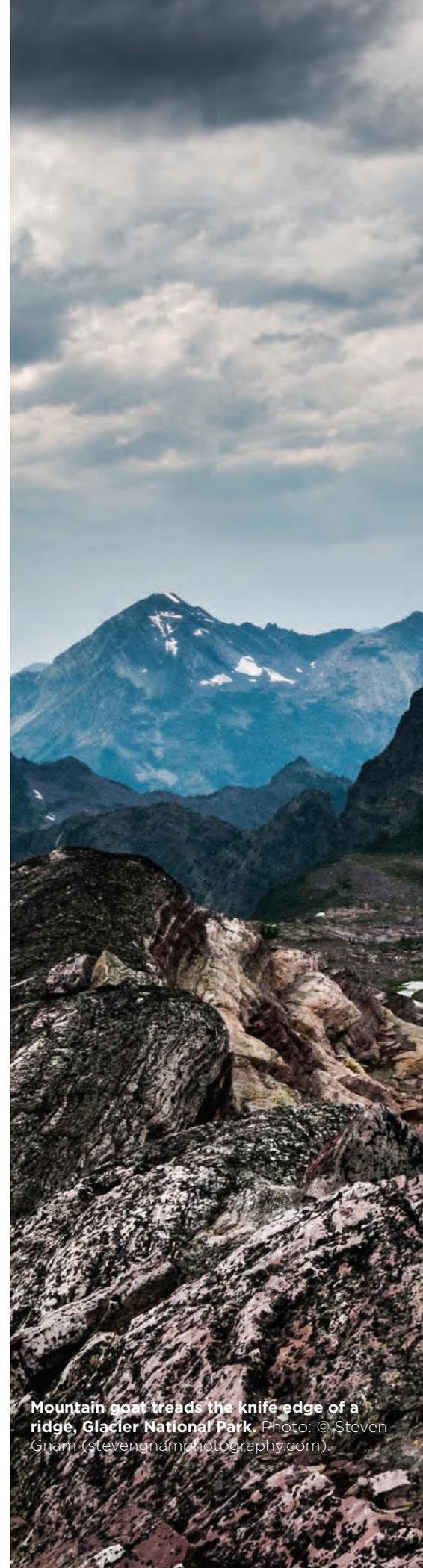
The Crown of the Continent has an “X-factor” that cannot be bought, built, nor duplicated anywhere else in the world. Our “natural infrastructure” is in high demand and limited supply—it is what sets us apart. It's who we are, it's how we make our living, and it's our unique strength in today's economy.

Our natural amenities and small-town character are every bit as critical to our economic future as are our roads, hospitals, schools and airports. As with all types of infrastructure, this Rocky Mountain setting requires care, attention and investment. To fully capitalize on our exceptional lifestyle means maintaining and enhancing these invaluable assets—ensuring that our wildlands stay wild, our rivers flow clean, and our communities sustain their traditional roots even as we move into a new economy. This is not a matter of implementing expensive economic development programs—this is simply safeguarding and leveraging the unique wealth we have inherited.

Such investments in our natural capital represent a down-payment on our shared economic future. They are essential to building our region's unique “Pathway to Prosperity,” a route that will continue to attract the investment needed for diversifying our entrepreneurial strength.

— **James Van Leeuwen**
Ventus Development Services

— **Liz Marchi**
Innovate Montana and
Frontier Angels



Mountain goat treads the knife edge of a ridge, Glacier National Park. Photo: © Steven Gnam (stevengnamphotography.com).



“ We see our community’s future tied directly to the Crown of the Continent. ”

Brian Gallant
Full Moon Adventure Company
Crowsnest Pass, Alberta

A Diverse Place

The Crown of the Continent encompasses 18 million acres of alpine mountains, lush river bottoms, soaring forests, and rushing rivers. This is a remarkably diverse landscape—and one of the world's most biologically rich ecosystems.



Elevation

Ranges from 3000-foot wetlands to 10,000-foot peaks.



Latitude

Spans 4° of latitude.



Precipitation

Varies from 10 inches per year in desert areas to annual inundations of 60+ inches in remnant rain forests.



Climate

Convergence of the Arctic, continental, and Pacific maritime climate systems.



Birds and Plants

From high mountain slopes to riverside marshes, the Crown's diverse habitats support an impressive 300 bird species and 1,200 species of plants.



Native Mammals

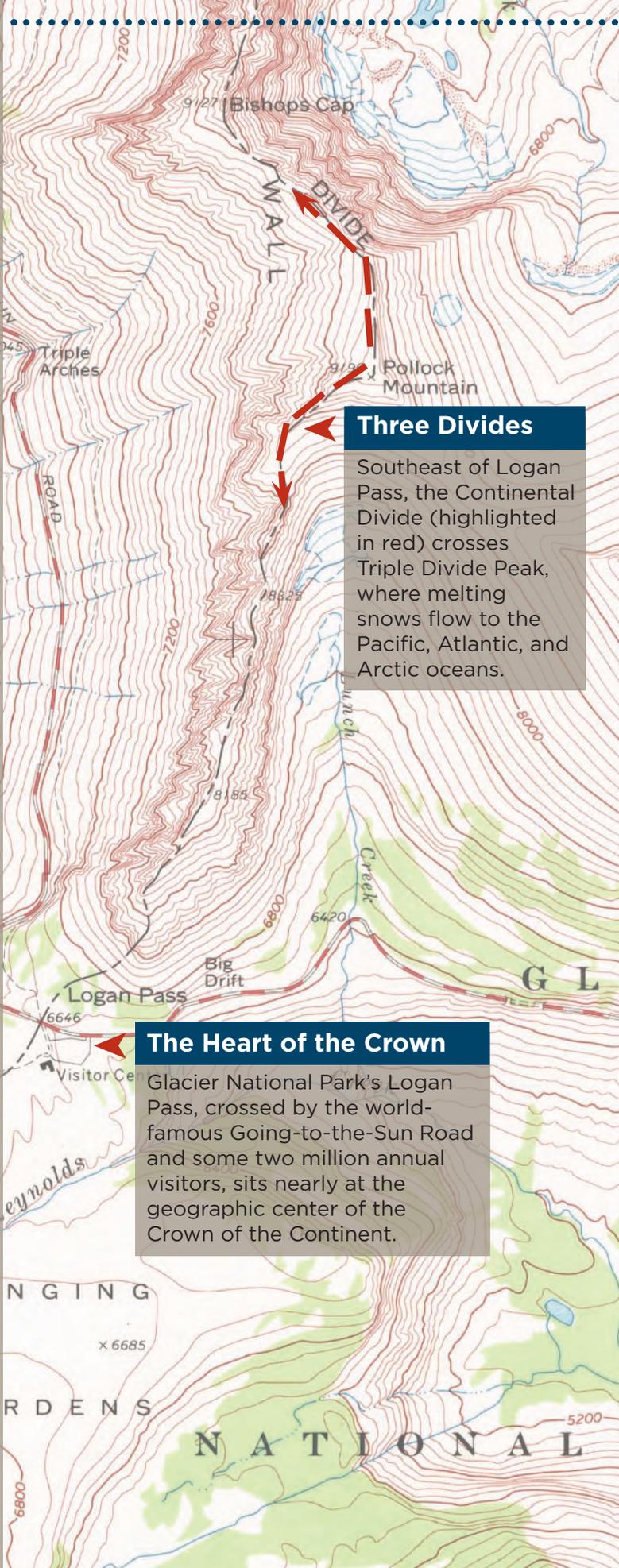
An astounding 65 native mammal species are at home in the Crown—among the few places on the globe that has escaped post-industrial extinctions.



“Charismatic Megafauna”

Nearly all of North America's iconic animals are found in the Crown, including wolves, elk, wolverines, mountain goats, and the largest population of grizzly bears in the lower 48 states.

Photos: National Park Service



Three Divides

Southeast of Logan Pass, the Continental Divide (highlighted in red) crosses Triple Divide Peak, where melting snows flow to the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic oceans.

The Heart of the Crown

Glacier National Park's Logan Pass, crossed by the world-famous Going-to-the-Sun Road and some two million annual visitors, sits nearly at the geographic center of the Crown of the Continent.

of the Continent

And its People

Where We Live in the Crown

Nearly 160,000 people call the Crown home. Here's where we live:



Population Growth Trends

From 1970 to 2010, the Crown's human population grew 52 percent. Montana's Flathead County added a whopping 128 percent during that time.



Glacier's Glaciers

The Crown's ancient glaciers feed streams and aquifers through the dry heat of summer. Since 1850, the number of glaciers in the park has plunged from 150 to about 25—and will likely be zero by 2020.

If the Crown were 100 Workers

Across the Crown, the biggest employers are education, health care, and government administration. Here's the breakdown:

Education, health care, public administration



Arts, entertainment, other services



Business services, professional, management; transportation, utilities



Retail trade



Construction



Farming, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining, oil & gas



Manufacturing



Finance, insurance, real estate



Wholesale trade



Data sources:
U.S. Census Bureau,
Statistics Canada,
U.S. Geological Survey

Pathways to Prosperity

We live in a special place. The Crown of the Continent is one of the world's premier mountain regions, home to elk and grizzlies, waterfalls and aspen glades, and the soaring heights of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park.

Nearly 160,000 people call the Crown home, spread among the region's cities and towns, reservations and ranches. Some live east of the Continental Divide, some west; we live in Alberta, in Montana, and in British Columbia.

But no matter our business or our politics or our citizenship, we choose to live in the Crown for many of the same reasons. *Pathways to Prosperity* tells eight stories from eight very different perspectives, exploring what we hold in common across our borders, and what it means to live and work in the Crown.

The global economy is changing—has changed—and today's employers and employees are free to relocate where they choose. Many choose the Crown. Locating in our region's rural towns is no longer a trade-off between livelihood and lifestyle; today's entrepreneurs are having their scenery and eating it too.

Voices from the Crown

Consider Kevin Waldher, at Columbia Falls-based Zinc Air. His high-tech firm could be anywhere, but Waldher chooses the Crown because his highly-skilled workforce likes to fly fish after work and explore Glacier on weekends.

For Kieran Summers, up in Fernie, the skiing first captured his attention. He, like many, came to visit and stayed to set up shop—a lesson that tourists are potential investors, and their vacations are scouting trips.

Our iconic landscape is not just a draw but also a powerful marketing tool for firms such as ZaneRay. They know the Crown “brand” resonates with clients all over the globe.

Traditional industries, too, are shaped by the same deep connection to land that attracts new businesses. Megan Lee, a Choteau rancher, and Gordy Sanders, a Seeley Lake mill worker, explain how they've adapted to our changing economy by reinforcing natural and cultural relationships—to the soil underfoot and to the neighbors next door.

These natural assets are not just our inheritance; they must also be the legacy we leave.

No matter where in the Crown you live and work, these successful businesses have something to teach. That's Donna Townley's job, in fact. An economist at Alberta's University of Lethbridge, Townley is breaking down business barriers across the Canada/U.S. border, and opening new economic opportunities.

Amongst the Crown's professional economic development agencies, emphasizing our unmatched natural infrastructure—our peaks and our parks—is a winning formula. In Alberta, for instance, economic developers have attracted more than \$25 million in foreign investment by banking on natural amenities. “From an economic development perspective,” they say, “our land is by far our greatest asset.”

Investing in Our Assets

Throughout the Crown of the Continent, we have long invested in

sustaining this region's wild heart. Three million acres of national parks and protected wildlands—and eight million more of other public lands—give rise to our rivers and lakes, and support world-class biodiversity as well as ski hills, hiking trails, and fishing access sites.

Combined, these amenities drive a powerful economic engine, fueled by a core of national parks and adjacent protected lands. Tourism brings more than \$3 billion to the Crown each year—Glacier National Park alone generates more than \$110 million in new money to local economies, not to mention those entrepreneurial tourists who choose to relocate and start businesses here.

The stories in this report point to the Crown's spectacular wildlife, its scenic appeal, and its unmatched outdoor recreation as anchors to which our economic success is tethered. These natural assets are not just our inheritance; they must also be the legacy we leave. Parks need funding, trails need maintenance, wildlands need a buffer of compatible development, weeds need control, native fish need clean water. All this requires our attention and our continued commitment to invest in our natural infrastructure. Absent this investment, we weaken our brightest opportunities and jeopardize the entrepreneurial strength profiled in this report.

The stories featured in *Pathways to Prosperity* are as diverse as the landscape itself—but they are, in the end, just one story, our story, the story of how a unique people have come together in a unique place, creating a thriving blend of lifestyle and livelihood.

KEVIN WALDHER, ZINC AIR
Columbia Falls, Montana

“The rural life is no longer a trade-off, it’s a leg up.”

In the competitive world of high-tech business, every firm has its own patents and plans. But the trade secrets at Zinc Air hide in plain sight, just beyond the big plate-glass windows—a panorama of avalanche paths streaking from the alpine crest of the Swan Range, of the Flathead River meandering through a fringe of cottonwoods, of tall pines blurring into bottomless blue skies.

This, Kevin Waldher says, is the real secret to a successful business. This stunning view is why he chooses to live here, why his clients and investors like to do business here, and why he can entice all those talented employees to move their families here.

Waldher is Vice President of Business Development in this futuristic enterprise that is decidedly remarkable—Zinc Air is pioneering powerful new batteries to bank tomorrow’s energy sources. But what’s truly out of the ordinary is the fact that they are operating in a remote corner of northwest Montana. Zinc Air could be going head-to-head with energy innovators down in Phoenix, or in San Francisco or Sacramento or perhaps in China. Instead, they’ve nestled into the mountain wilds of the Crown of the Continent.

Zinc Air is one of a growing number of “footloose” businesses—outfits that locate where they choose, often far from markets, but close to amenities that deliver a high quality of life. That used to be called a “trade-off;” today, it’s clearly an industry advantage.

When courting clients and investors from outside the region, Waldher relies heavily on that Big Sky scenery outside his office window. “In the winter, we take clients skiing,” he said. “In the summer, it’s hiking in the park or boating. Last year, we had several investors take a tour of Glacier Park.”

Those unique opportunities help Zinc Air draw some of the industry’s most talented and entrepreneurial minds to explore frontiers of science in the rural shadow of wild mountains. The perks here are peaks, and simply cannot be found in a big city. Zinc Air’s employees “love to ski, sail and hunt, all of those things you can do around here,” Waldher said. The rural life is no longer a trade off, he said—it’s a leg up, the reason Zinc Air can attract and retain such a professional workforce.

“We choose here,” Waldher said, “because it’s good for business.”



Kevin Waldher at a Flathead-style team-building retreat. Photo: Courtesy Kevin Waldher.

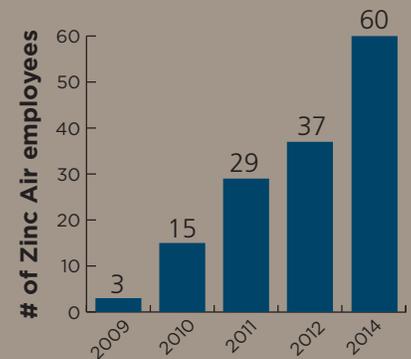
Zinc Air *by the numbers*

70%

approximate percentage of Zinc Air’s private investors who are local.

20X

projected employment growth in six years.



KIERAN SUMMERS, GIV'ER SHIRT WORKS Fernie, British Columbia

“On powder days, we take turns going up the mountain.”

Kieran Summers first saw the Canadian Rockies through a pair of goggles. Now, he sees these mountains through the lens of a businessman, an entrepreneur who turned a ski vacation into both lifestyle and livelihood.

Summers, who owns a custom clothing store in Fernie, British Columbia, is what economists call a TSEM, or “travel-stimulated entrepreneurial migrant”—a mouthful that basically means a tourist who stayed and became an important community employer. It is an increasingly frequent tale here in the Crown of the Continent—he came, he stayed, he hired.

“While I was at University,” Summers recalled, “I came out with a friend for a ski trip.”

Fell in love with the place, with its small-town character and its big

mountain scenery, and decided to carve a niche for himself. It’s a decision repeated every day of the year in communities throughout the Crown of the Continent. Turns out, these vacationers aren’t just tourists—they’re prospective business owners, and their visits to our towns are like job interviews.

Summers built a business plan, hired some artistic know-how, and in 2003 launched Giv’er Shirt Works, creating custom clothing from a shop in downtown Fernie. The story of our modern Main Street is increasingly being written by these “TSEMs”—the merchants and brokers and professionals who are driving our local and regional economy, but who first arrived as tourists.

Business has grown tremendously since 2003, he said, “but on powder days, we still take turns going up to

the mountain.” By “we” he means his whole shop of full-time employees—wage-earners and taxpayers who might not be contributing to the region’s economy if it weren’t for these Rocky Mountain qualities. The effect is multiplied region wide, and has emerged as a fundamental economic driver.

Summers still sees Fernie through those old ski goggles, but these days he also sees it through the eyes of a business leader proud of his community—of the way townsfolk come together to protect and enhance the region’s mountain attractions.

“We live in a cool place,” he said, “and we know that’s why our economy is strong. We want to keep it that way.”

Fernie Alpine Resort.

Photo: © Henry Georgi, courtesy of KootenayRockies.com.



1 in 6

jobs in the Crown are in retail trade.

16%

growth in wholesale and retail trade jobs in Fernie, B.C. (1991-2006).

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Statistics Canada

REED GREGERSON, ZANERAY Whitefish, Montana

“We’re leveraging this landscape into a naturally unique brand.”

Reed Gregerson spends his days talking to clients around the world, advising them on the finer points of Web design and online marketing. But before they begin the business of bits and bytes, they usually take a few minutes to chat about the fly fishing, or the mountain biking, or the huckleberry picking.

“There is an intangible benefit,” Gregerson said, “to being able to tell a client you just came in from skiing, and to describe the snow conditions. They love to hear about where we live.”

Those intangibles are his marketing tools, and they are why *Made in Montana* is as important to selling software as it is to selling huckleberry jam. “Montana is a powerful brand,” Gregerson said. “To the rest of the world, it represents trout streams and rugged mountains—the whole Western story, actually.”

Gregerson is president of ZaneRay Group, a Whitefish-based footloose business designing and building Websites for global clients. Those clients are leading outdoor retailers, with whom the Crown’s nature resonates particularly well.

ZaneRay attracts employees with high wages and a unique lifestyle. A recent job posting: “Ideal candidate should possess a love for the outdoors, a sweet snowboard or fat skis, a mountain bike, and probably a fly rod or two.” Because Montana is a brand, and his clients are buying more than Web expertise, Gregerson needs employees who speak the same language.

His location in the Crown of the Continent, then, is a tactical advantage in the highly competitive tech-sector business of attracting both quality employees and top-notch clients. The Crown is part of a marketing strategy that relies on places such as Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

“What we’re doing,” Gregerson said, “is leveraging this landscape into a naturally unique brand that works.”

ZaneRay *by the numbers*

16
employees.

55%
factor by which
average salary at
ZaneRay exceeds
median income in
Flathead County,
Montana.

Reed Gregerson in
the conference room
at ZaneRay’s Whitefish
office.

Photo: Michael Jamison.



MEGAN LEE, MEADOWS RANCH
Choteau, Montana

“I feel blessed to
live where I do.”

Truth is, you can eat the scenery.

Especially if the scenery is a wild Western landscape where rolling prairie runs like a west wind from mountain heights. This is home to Megan Lee, who ranches the Choteau homestead where her parents and their parents and their parents and their parents ranched.

Megan loves her corner of the Crown; there is, quite simply, no place she'd rather be. “I feel blessed,” she said, “to have the opportunity to live where I do, to get up every morning to such clean air and incredible beauty.

“Sometimes, I wake up laughing at my good fortune.”

Megan is the fifth generation to operate this ranch; her nephew is the sixth. It is also home to herds of cattle and goats—and elk, mule deer, and grizzly bears. “My vision,” she said, “is ranching to promote a vibrant grass ecosystem that sustains and supports us economically, ecologically, and socially.” It's a vision shared by old-timers and newcomers, and it's the literal roots from which the amenity migrants and footloose businesses have sprouted.

Megan's connection to the Crown is part obligation to heritage, and part responsibility to the future. “I feel we've been entrusted with this piece of land,” she said, “and we want to strive to be good stewards.” This is livelihood and lifestyle, all in one.

In addition to the ranch, Megan also works for Farm Tech, a Choteau-based business that combines agronomy with technology and data analysis to help producers improve their operations. It's where old-school meets new-school, and business is booming, with clients from Kansas to Canada.

Farm Tech might be considered one of the Crown's most successful footloose businesses—it could, theoretically, be based in any agricultural community—except for the fact that there's nothing whatsoever footloose about five generations on the same patch of prairie. The Crown's wild nature not only attracts business, it holds onto it, too.

This tremendous landscape is Megan's cultural heritage, extending from generation to generation, and from pronghorn prairie into the mountains beyond. It is also her economic future.

“We're all here for similar reasons,” she said. “It's the land that sustains us, in so many ways. Sure, we could make an easier living elsewhere. But that would mean living somewhere else.”



Megan Lee rides toward the Rocky Mountain Front. Photo: Courtesy of Megan Lee.

How the Front was formed

A conservation history timeline

- 1895 Waterton Lakes National Park
- 1910 Glacier National Park
- 1913 Sun River Game Preserve
- 1932 Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park
- 1948 Sun River Wildlife Management Area
- 1964 Bob Marshall Wilderness
- 1972 Scapegoat Wilderness
- 1978 Great Bear Wilderness
- 1999 Bob Creek Wildland Provincial Park
- 1999 Black Creek Rangeland Natural Area
- 2011 Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act (proposed)

Pyramid Mountain Lumber
by the numbers

145
employees.

\$5.8
million in annual payroll.

\$180,000
local taxes paid each year.

\$21.2 million
sales in 2011.

\$10.7 million
log purchases in 2011.

3,000+
products made at Pyramid.

Equipment at work in the Pyramid Mountain Lumber log yard.
Photo: © Tom Bauer.



GORDY SANDERS, PYRAMID MOUNTAIN LUMBER
Seeley Lake, Montana

“We are committed to our community.”

Seeley Lake’s loggers are also hunters and anglers, skiers and snowmobilers, campers and hikers and mushroomers and berry pickers. They can see the whole forest, you might say, far beyond their trees.

“The Crown of the Continent has it all,” said Gordy Sanders, “and that’s why no one wants to leave.” But in order to stay, people need jobs. Sanders is resource manager at Pyramid Mountain Lumber, in the timbered rift between the Bob Marshall and Mission Mountains wilderness areas. In the 1990s, Sanders said, many such mills were on the verge of being shuttered.

In other Western timber towns, people found themselves forced to move on to where the jobs were, to learn new trades in new places. But not in Seeley Lake. There, the land holds tight to its people, and the people hold tight to their tremendous quality of life, their outdoor heritage, and their tight-knit small-towns. They held tight to Pyramid.

“We held a town-hall meeting” Sanders said, “and the whole community came out. We talked about having to reduce costs and retool in order to stay afloat.” Landowners offered cut-rate access to timber. Local officials found grants. Economic developers guaranteed loans. The mill modernized, overhauled, and rebuilt.

“Because we’re local, that means we are place-based, and we’re committed to our community,” Sanders said. “We’re a small company, and we care about the industry and our employees and this amazing landscape. It really is unique. You don’t find that kind of connection just anywhere.”

And that, he said, makes the Crown of the Continent a very special place to do business. He understands that people are actively choosing to live and work in Seeley Lake, and so “we try to find restoration and stewardship projects for our contractors. If they can make a living, they’ll stay here, and then they’ll be around when we need them.”

Many of Pyramid’s 145 employees are passionate backcountry users, at home in some of the most remote wilderness corners of North America. “The towns around here provide a logical gateway to the Crown,” Sanders said.

“People are committed to this way of life, and that, ultimately, is very good for our business.”



Canadian and U.S. flags fly in front of the Glacier Bank office in Whitefish, Montana. Photo: Michael Jamison.

DONNA TOWNLEY, UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE
Lethbridge, Alberta

“We’re coming south and U.S. businesses can benefit.”

The Blackfeet people called this mountain region the Backbone of World, and for them it had no borders. Even after the “Medicine Line” separated the U.S. from Canada, boundaries were hard to define. George Bird Grinnell—the “father” of Glacier National Park—coined the term “Crown of the Continent” in a late 1800s magazine article. Gazing north from Montana’s mountains into the Canadian Rockies, he saw the fundamentally international nature of our shared landscape. Wildlife didn’t acknowledge the new border, and neither did Grinnell.

In 1932, the two countries formalized the Crown’s trans-boundary character by bridging the border with Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, the world’s first of its kind. Rotary drove that effort, which aimed to acknowledge natural connections, highlight cooperation, and increase business.

Today, there may be no better example of this long partnership than the work of Donna Townley. An economist at Alberta’s University of Lethbridge, Townley sees herself as a transboundary citizen. One day, she and her family might be grabbing a burger in Lethbridge; the next, attending an auction in Polson.

But despite the vision of the Blackfeet, Grinnell, Rotary—and now Townley—barriers to business-

across-borders persist. “I’ve been coming to the Flathead for more than ten years,” she said, “and I’ve seen a lot of money just walking away from businesses.” Trade is strong between the two nations—Canada is by far Montana’s largest foreign trade partner. And Canadians love to drive south to find value in the Montana Crown. But Canadians still have trouble using their debit cards and dollars at Montana businesses, and Montana merchants struggle to adapt to Canadian debit-card systems. That’s a problem for transboundary business—Canadian debit-card use is the second highest in the world.

Townley’s recognizes the flip side of obstacles as opportunity. “I’m helping businesses become Canada-friendly,” she said, “because we’re coming south. And Montanans are heading north, too, to shop and explore wildlands from Waterton to Banff.” She advises Montana bankers and businesses, and has spoken to many Chambers of Commerce. Her message: it’s not just the shopping that pulls across borders.

“It’s the clean air, the clean water, the trees and the parks first,” she said, “and the shopping second.”

Which, of course, is just as it was in 1932, when ecology and economy merged to create our Crown jewel, the world’s very first Peace Park.

Calgary is the Crown’s market

No matter where you live in the Crown, the nearest, largest market is to the north—it’s Calgary.

Calgary is big
Metro area is 1.3 million people.

Calgary is young
Average age is 36.

Calgary is wealthy
Household median income is \$88,260 (USD).

Calgary is growing
Calgary’s real GDP rose 3.1 percent in 2011.

Calgary will continue to grow
Forecasted GDP growth for 2012 is 3.6 percent.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Calgary Economic Development

PENNY JARECKI, ENVISION POLSON
Polson, Montana

“We’re making Polson a place for entrepreneurs.”

The Greater Polson Community Foundation’s task—without a budget, without a staff—is to discover an identity for their hometown, to define a future for their community, to diversify their city’s economy—in short, to *Envision Polson*.

Fortunately, Polson isn’t difficult to envision. Positioned in the heart of the Crown of the Continent, Polson floats on the shores of Flathead Lake, ringed by the peaks of the Mission Mountains Wilderness, a place of white-water rivers and world-class fishing. Polson also is a cultural hub, located on the Flathead Indian Reservation and home to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Some of the Crown’s most iconic scenes unfold from this tiny town’s doorstep; it has what travelers call “spherical appeal” — meaning it’s picture-postcard-perfect

when looked at from any side.

Polson couldn’t be Anyplace, USA, if it tried.

Envision Polson’s mission, then, is not to change Polson, but to acknowledge and promote what Polson already is—a unique balance of city and outdoors, rodeo and pow-wow, river bottom and mountain top. Toss in a historic downtown, museums, fine dining and shopping, and Polson’s strengths quickly become clear as the waters that lap at its Main Street.

Throughout the Crown, communities are “re-branding” themselves, seeking to capitalize on their natural infrastructure, recreational access and small-town authenticity.

Envision Polson’s work here on Flathead Lake’s southern shores is similarly focused. “We’re a grass-

roots effort to intentionally move Polson forward,” said Penny Jarecki, a retired rancher turned *Envision Polson* volunteer.

The first goal: “to round out the town’s calendar.” Polson is bustling in the summer months, she said, as families flock to Flathead Lake; but in the winter, this small town slows.

Community leaders have chosen to hitch Polson’s economic future straight to its rich culture and natural amenities. Not surprisingly, they’re focusing economic development plans around Flathead Lake, in all seasons. A winter festival, perhaps, or some snowmobile and cross-country ski trails to round out the year. But what they’re really talking about is anchoring economic opportunity in the wilder Crown landscape.

Jarecki recognizes that economies are shifting, and that today’s entrepreneurs are free to live and work where they choose. “We’re hoping that *Envision Polson* can identify new ways to make Polson a place where these entrepreneurs want to be—and that means branding ourselves and promoting what makes us special.”



Looking west across Polson Bay.
Photo: © Steven Gnam
(stevengnamphotography.com).

KELLIE DANIELSON, Montana West Economic Development
BEV THORNTON, Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance

“Our landscape and lifestyle are an all-encompassing asset.”

When it comes to the business of creating business, economic development experts usually spend most of their time talking about things such as human capital and critical infrastructure, market productivity, and policy intervention.

Unless, of course, those economic development experts happen to live in the Crown of the Continent. Here, development corporations tend to place as much emphasis on critter infrastructure as on critical infrastructure.

Up in Pincher Creek, at the Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance, “we’re coming to understand that this safe, clean, friendly environment offers a lifestyle that is increasingly attractive to newcomers.” And down at Montana West Economic Development, the job of attracting jobs relies increasingly on the understanding that “people have

choices about where they want to live, thanks to the virtual office environment. Today’s workers aren’t tied to brick and mortar.”

Kellie Danielson, president of Montana West Economic Development, has focused her marketing campaigns on a very particular target audience: those footloose entrepreneurs who weigh lifestyle choices when making bottom-line business decisions.

Her equation for economic development is simple—national parks plus ski areas plus lakes and rivers...minus the sticker shock. “There are many Western towns with active outdoor recreation, scenery, wildlife, those kinds of opportunities,” she said. “But the cost of living in the Crown is far more acceptable than Jackson Hole or Aspen.”

Danielson’s equation is paying dividends: she has secured capital to help businesses relocate into the region, and helped existing businesses develop manufacturing facilities. Often, she said, they’re drawn by iconic landscapes such as Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. It turns out the math works on both sides of the border.

“Our agriculture businesses, as well as our main street businesses, are characterized by people who choose to live here because of the quality of life,” said Bev Thornton. “The landscape is a tremendously important influence in our lives, both socially and economically.”

Thornton is the Executive Director of the Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance, a regional economic development partnership of 15 communities in the northern Crown. These are the mayors,

Economic Development *by the numbers*

\$3

million in loans to local companies, made by Montana West in cooperation with local banks.

96%

of Flathead Valley homes can access 10MB of Internet bandwidth, after Montana West helped improve service. Nine of ten businesses have broadband access.

\$25

million in foreign investment, and workers to boot, attracted through the work of AlbertaSW.

councils, town managers, economic development officers, and business leaders working together to build a vibrant future.

Their programs are designed to attract and retain business, forge economic partnerships, generate foreign investment, and support tourism, agriculture and renewable energy development. To do all that, they promote the qualities that make the Crown unique—good neighbors; rural lifestyles; working landscapes; big mountain views; skiing; fishing; hunting; backcountry access and front country storefronts. “Marketing our attractions opens the front door to our region,” Thornton said. “Once people realize the opportunities they find ways to move their businesses here so they can enjoy these things, too.

“From an economic development perspective, our landscape and lifestyle is an all-encompassing asset.”

35

communities in the Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership—building a renewable energy economy around sun, wind, and farm products.



Paintbrush in bloom, Canadian Flathead River, British Columbia. Photo: © Steven Gnam (stevengnamphotography.com).



Kayaker glides across the early-morning stillness of Bowman Lake, Glacier National Park. Photo: © Steven Gnam (stevengnamphotography.com).

National Parks and Protected Areas
good for business

37.1

million Americans moved in 2009, 6.9 million from one state to another. Moves were up five percent over 2008.

210%

growth in population density—people per square mile—around Glacier National Park (1940-2000). National park areas grew faster than non-park areas in that time.

4X

greater job growth in rural Western counties with more than 30 percent federal land than in rural counties with no federally protected lands.

Footloose economy + National parks = Job growth

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; Cory Davis and Andrew Hansen, Montana State University; Headwaters Economics

“Across the western United States, our research finds that protecting public lands is good for the economy. If someone has a ten-minute drive to a trout stream after work, that is a big draw. National parks, wilderness areas, national forests, and other public lands play into our quality of life, and high-quality jobs are following.

“Between 2000 and 2010, Montana added new jobs and real personal income at twice the national rate—and per-capita income grew more than four times faster than in the U.S. as a whole. Montana illustrates that investing in public lands is investing in economic strength.”

Chris Mehl
Headwaters Economics



Our Common Ground

Why do you choose to live and work in the Crown of the Continent? That's the question we asked Chambers of Commerce across the region.

This “word tree” represents your most frequent answers; the larger the word, the more times it was used to describe why this area is a great place to do business. These, then, are the true jewels of the Crown—the values we hold in common, the shared treasures that make us unique, and the roots of both our lifestyle and our livelihood. Image: © 2012 Tagxedo.com

The National Parks Conservation Association—America’s leading voice for our national parks—places a premium on partnering with local leaders to ensure that our gateway communities remain economically diverse and vibrant, while safeguarding the tremendous natural and cultural treasures we all cherish. We recognize that parks are more than spectacular spots on our nation’s map—they also represent a unique way of life for those fortunate to live nearby.

The amenities that flow from national parks invigorate regional economies by attracting entrepreneurs who choose to live near parks because how they live matters. And that is good for business. It is also good for those of us who believe that national parks need our faithful attention.

North America’s parks are central to our countries’ ecosystems and cultural heritage, and serve as a wellspring for our nations’ economies. They are the enviable “natural infrastructure” that drives economic development in gateway towns.

As advocates for these special places, NPCA and our national park gateway communities share an obligation to ensure that parks receive the funding and the protections they deserve. That is what we do every day at NPCA. Join us in preserving our national heritage—our treasured landscapes and our vital communities.

Tom Kiernan
President, NPCA



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