

**Partners in the
Wildland-Urban Interface**

Partnerships in Sustainable Tourism Development: The Case of Canmore, Alberta, Canada¹

Dianne Draper²

Abstract: A variety of formal and informal "partnerships" have evolved in the course of planning for the first two of several large-scale, multi-million dollar private sector tourism development projects proposed for the small town of Canmore, adjacent to Banff National Park, Canada. This paper briefly identifies the major impetuses for and the nature of these partnerships which have involved Canmore planners, area residents, environmental groups, developers, and a variety of local and provincial government departments. Drawing on social dilemma theory concepts, the paper notes that both structural and behavioral responses to the dilemma of balancing self-interests and collective-interests in tourism development projects could help ensure that sustainable tourism occurs in Canmore in the future.

Canmore, with a 1990 population of about 6000, was established in 1883 as a coal mining community but now plays a service support role for the Bow-Canmore corridor, including both Banff National Park and Kananaskis Country. For years, Canmore motel operators have supplied overflow accommodation for Banff. Currently, the Bow-Canmore area is emerging as a potential destination alternative to Banff Park and townsites for national and international visitor markets.

Extending about 33 kilometers from Banff National Park's east gate to the hamlet of Seebe, the Bow-Canmore corridor is one of the most significant potential tourism destination areas in Alberta and Canada. The high capability and desirability for major tourism facility development in this portion of the Bow River Valley has been identified in provincial, regional, and local plans for more than 20 years. The area has virtually all of the attributes necessary for development as a visitor destination area of international significance, including natural resource features such as scenic mountain landscapes, forested lands, and the Bow River itself; diverse wildlife, waterfowl and sport-fish species; excellent access via the Trans Canada Highway; proximity to metropolitan Calgary and its international airport; a world-famous neighbor, Banff National Park, where development opportunities are constrained by policy as well as limited land availability; suitable infrastructure; developable lands, both public and private; and private sector and governmental interest in tourism development.

Tourism Development Proposals in the Bow-Canmore Corridor

Recognizing these attributes, private sector tourism developers have proposed nine sizeable projects for the Bow-Canmore area. Two projects are most advanced in planning. One of these is Richard Melchin's Three Sisters Golf Resorts Inc. project, a four season resort complex with hotels, multifamily residential,

single family residential, interval ownership, retail, golf courses, camping, RV park, and other recreation facilities on private land (fig. 1). The company has completed an EIA for the entire development and is proposing to proceed with an 18-hole golf course and practice range. The other major project, Hal Walker's Canmore Alpine Development Company, proposes a Hyatt Regency-operated hotel, convention, golf course, and recreational housing development on private and public land. It has received approval for phase I, which will see construction of one 18-hole golf course, a 500-room hotel, 200 units of staff housing and residential subdivision. Other smaller-scale tourism development proposals involve time-shared chalets, more golf courses, RV parks, and a helicopter-accessed teahouse and lookout located on Mount Lady Macdonald.

Widespread community concern arose when the number, size, and potential rate of development of these projects first became known. Citizen groups such as BowCORD (Bow Corridor Organization for Responsible Development) were formed to protest the potential losses to the local population and environment that these massive resort schemes could bring. Later, a group of business persons united to voice their support for tourism growth through PROD (Professionals for Organized and Responsible Development).

Social Dilemma Theory and Sustainable Tourism

The drive for economic gain in the tourism industry frequently creates a dilemma between individual and collective rationality, a conflict which centers on the rift between private gain to individuals (tourism developers) who seek to maximize personal wealth and power, and gain to members of the public (local community) which focuses on the provision of an optimal mix of public goods and infrastructure over the long term. In terms of a social dilemma framework, each tourism developer and investor in the Canmore area has an economic incentive to increase the magnitude of development activities. If all do so, such socially defecting choices could result in irreversible damage to the host community, Canmore, and the environmental resources on which its tourism is based. Socially cooperative choices involve a form of restraint, such as sustainability, on tourism development.

Both structural and behavioral solutions to tourism development dilemmas are possible. Structural solutions involve coordinated, organized group action, and behavioral solutions derive from changes in an individual's behavior. Examples of structural solutions include placing restrictions on access to, and development of, tourism environments, or giving responsibility to a superordinate authority for control and development decisions relating to tourism environments. Behavioral solutions

¹Presented at the Symposium on Social Aspects and Recreation Research, February 19-22, 1992, Ontario, California.

²Associate Professor of Geography, The University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

seek to identify the conditions under which individual developers will voluntarily restrain their use of a public good in the absence of external constraints or coercion. The challenge the people of Canmore face is to gain cooperation in the social dilemmas posed by tourism development.

Tourism Development Issues in the Canmore Area

The task of ensuring that natural resource base and community values are maintained as the people in the valley prepare for future growth of tourism and recreation primarily falls on the municipality of Canmore. In 1991, as part of its Economic Development Survey, the town of Canmore administered a questionnaire survey to all households. Results indicated that the majority of respondents felt priority should be placed on Canmore's quality of life and need for environmental protection. Canmore's mountain setting, opportunities for outdoor recreational activities, and friendly, family-oriented, small town atmosphere were valued highly. Clear concern was expressed, however, that the town already was becoming another overcrowded, traffic-congested Banff.

Almost 91 percent of the survey respondents were aware of the tourism development projects proposed for the town, and over 76 percent indicated that tourism development projects would be an appropriate type of development for Canmore. Although 40 percent of residents felt the tourism projects were compatible with current lifestyle, 46 percent felt they were not. Further survey results showed that 89 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Canmore should adopt strong environmental protection guidelines, and that 82 percent agreed or strongly agreed that Canmore should develop strong design guidelines to control development. The stage was set for the institution and evolution of formal and informal cooperative efforts and partnerships to resolve tourism development dilemmas in Canmore.

Tourism and Cooperative Partnerships in the Bow-Canmore Corridor

In the absence of a master plan for tourism development in the Bow Valley, and particularly in response to the number of private sector tourism development proposals which were submitted during the 1989-90 period, Alberta Tourism established

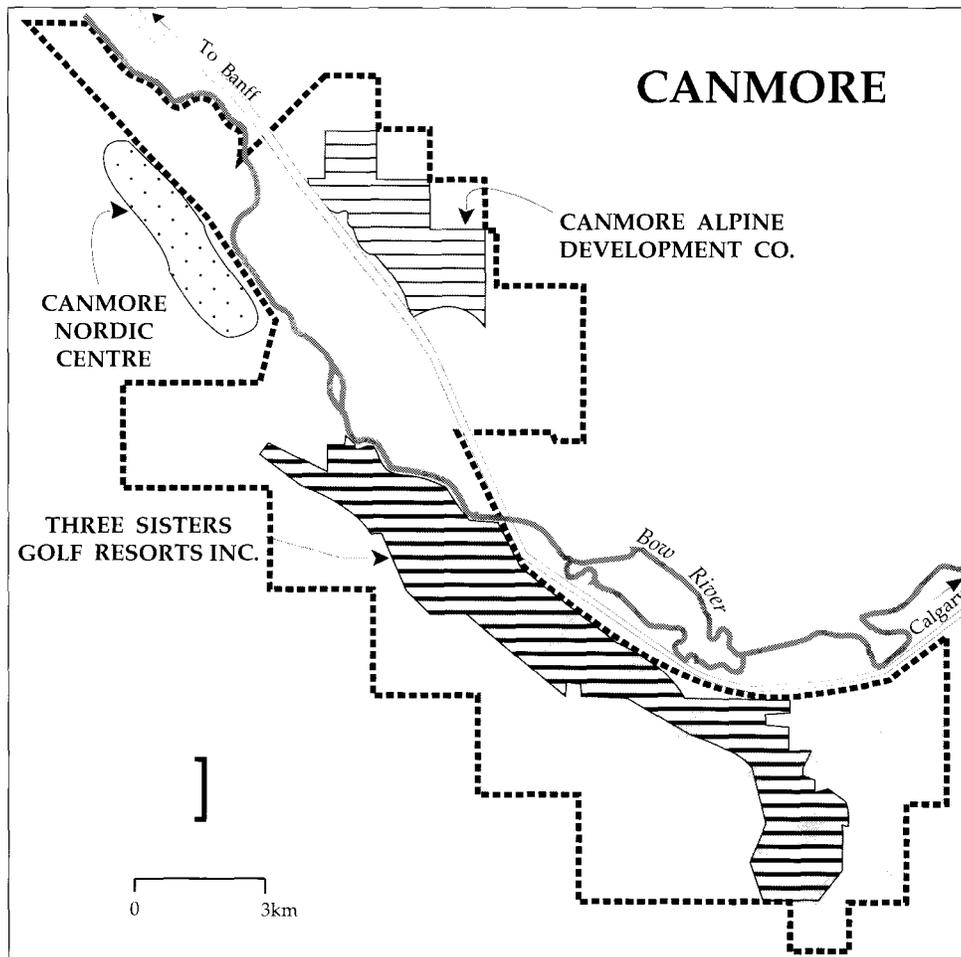


Figure 1—Proposed tourism projects in Canmore, Alberta.

and coordinated preparation of the "Bow-Canmore Tourism Development Framework." They saw this framework as an appropriate mechanism to examine development implications, provide information and guidance for public and private sector tourism development decisions, and coordinate overall government involvement. The framework may be considered as a formal, structural response to the social dilemmas posed by tourism development.

After 2 year's experience with the framework, Alberta Tourism has noted increased communication and cooperation among those associated with, or affected by, the proposed tourism developments. The "we-they" confrontational relationships which often characterized previous interactions have been replaced by more effective, working partnerships with most public and private stakeholders. The efforts of Alberta Tourism personnel to promote public involvement help explain how such improvement was facilitated. For example, the first research undertaken as part of the framework involved a visual impact analysis of existing and proposed development in the valley. A representative public group was brought together to help evaluate both existing and modified (computer simulated) visual quality within the Bow-Canmore Valley. In addition to their direct research input, this group was part of Alberta Tourism's monthly community meetings during which any proponent or opponent of tourism development could discuss the ongoing research or exchange information on pertinent issues. As a result of these and other meetings Alberta Tourism personnel were able to understand and become better attuned to what citizens, municipalities, and developers wanted from the tourism development opportunities. Future forums could provide decision makers with insights into those aspects of proposed developments that would be (in)compatible with desired community lifestyles.

Structural, informal responses to touristic dilemmas are evident in the creation and early reactions of members of BowCORD and PROD. Subsequent actions of citizens comprising BowCORD, however, reveal an evolution in understanding of the importance of collective interests in touristic development. As its members currently initiate a public "tourism information fair," BowCORD appears to be taking a more formal, proactive and interactive stance to achieving its view of appropriate development alternatives than it did previously.

Certain actions of developers Hal Walker and Richard Melchin highlight the significance of behavioral responses in achieving personal and local community development objectives. Each of these gentlemen has spent hundreds of hours at various public meetings and open houses designed to inform interested persons about their respective projects as well as to expose both men to local concerns. Melchin's and Walker's exemplary efforts to listen and respond illustrate the effectiveness of socially cooperative choices in bringing about restraint in development. Since both men reduced the on-site density of their projects partly as a result of this type of public input, and as both acknowledged, these and other modifications ultimately achieved better quality proposals, hence the likelihood of sustainable tourism development becoming a reality in the Bow-Canmore corridor is enhanced.

The increasingly cooperative and effective partnerships evolving in the Bow-Canmore corridor, as its citizens, developers, and governments respond in structural and behavioral ways to the challenges of resolving the dilemmas associated with touristic development, are clear signs of hope for the future of economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable tourism.