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**Assessing local perceptions of ecotourism in
Canadian mountain communities**

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Assessing local perceptions of ecotourism in Canadian mountain communities

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<u>**Introduction**</u>

In light of the United Nation's International Year of Ecotourism (2002) and its International Year of the Mountain-2002, this paper investigates salient community-level perceptions of ecotourism in two neighboring Canadian Rocky Mountain communities (Hinton and Jasper, Alberta). The rationale for this investigation is that for a number of years, ecotourism has been touted as having potential economic benefits for the study area's natural resource based economy. Despite the enthusiasm, the concept of ecotourism does not share a consensus in terms of its meaning among all local stakeholder groups. These types of problems were also echoed at a recent international Sustainable Development of Ecotourism Web-based Conference.

The following section of this paper outlines the major sources of debate concerning ecotourism raised at a joint 2002 World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) ecotourism conference. Section three describes the study location as well as the data and methods used. Section four presents the results. In the final section, a discussion is provided linking the case study results with the current desired direction of ecotourism policies.

<u>**Links to the Sustainable Development of Ecotourism Web Conference**</u>

As part of a Preparatory Conference for the UN International Year of Ecotourism, a unique online conference was held between April 1-26 2002. More than 900 conference participants from 97 countries representing industry, NGOs, academic institutions and local communities

examined a number of ecotourism theme areas such as policy and planning, marketing and promotion, and environmental, economic and socio-cultural challenges of ecotourism.

In the final report presented at the World Ecotourism Summit (Quebec City, Canada, 19-22 May 2002), WTO Chief of Sustainable Development of Tourism, Eugenio Yunis, warned that lack of suitable controls could threaten the very future of this sector. "Unsustainable ecotourism" he stated "is putting at risk the survival of the natural environment that is the very bedrock of the ecotourism business and, more serious still, detracts from and even discredits this activity."(World Tourism Organization 2002)

Some of the report's key highlights included questioning the effectiveness of ecotourism promotion plans at the international, national and local level. The need to integrate ecotourism policies within wider planning frameworks was also an important consideration. Moreover, the most efficient manner in which to balance conservation and industrial development objectives in ecotourism policies and programs was questioned. This included discussions about successful management of protected areas and inclusion of local people and stakeholders. The major conclusion was that "the conceptual and practical workings of ecotourism have been isolated from each other too long." (World Tourism Organization 2002) The report argued that ecotourism development should focus on action plans and not become "bogged down" in definitions.

Many participants argued that ecotourism plans should be widely circulated among community members, NGOs, government agencies, travel companies and other stakeholders because "policy makers do not have the background in this field or experience in the local area." There is a need to teach policy makers so that policies reflect social and environmental concerns as well as

market realities. In terms of service delivery, the report argued that the "principal aim of an ecotourism business should be achieving high levels of satisfaction among its clients by providing quality services and contributing to the conservation of the natural and cultural resources".

The issues and findings of this conference are consistent with the findings in an ecotourism study conducted in two Canadian Rocky Mountain communities, Hinton and Jasper, Alberta. In this study, stakeholder representatives elaborated upon different perceptions about ecotourism and its compatibility with other activities in the area. The growing popularity of the ecotourism industry in this area suggests that an understanding of local ecotourism perceptions by policy makers and planners will be necessary in order to avert any of the shortcomings raised by the conference. There is a desire amongst local and provincial decision-makers to increase ecotourism opportunities within the surrounding area. However, the responsibility for the implementation of locally based ecotourism programs will lie with those on the front lines of the ecotourism industry as well as those from other potentially affected industries. In this article we empirically examine the important aspects of ecotourism from the perspective of key local stakeholders using both qualitative and quantitative methods utilizing NVivo, a computer software program.

Methodology

Study Area

The two Canadian Rocky mountain towns investigated, Hinton and Jasper, are located within the Foothills Model Forest (FMF), in central west Alberta. The towns are 90km apart from each other. The FMF, an area of 2.75 million square hectares, is one of eleven Model Forests located across Canada. The Model Forests are partnership arrangements between government, landowners, communities, academia, and other interested parties where new and innovative

sustainable forest management practices are development and implemented. The FMF is an area where tourism is an important economic sector and a generator of employment (Wellstead et al 2000, Wellstead et al 2001). The FMF contains the world-renowned Jasper National Park (JNP), a UN World Heritage site, that annually attracts millions of international visitors to this protected area. The remainder of the FMF contains a large industrial forest that is part of Weldwood of Canada's Forest Management Agreement (FMA), a Provincially protected area (Willmore Wilderness Park), William A. Switzer Provincial Park, and a number of small recreational areas (primarily camping sites). The areas allow for a wide range of recreational opportunities including ecotourism-based activities. In addition to tourism, the FMF's economy is diverse and includes forestry, mining, and oil and gas. A kraft pulp mill and large saw mill is located on the town site. The tourism/visitor sector is the third largest and represents 17.5% of the entire economy's sectoral output (forestry accounts for 28.1%, mining accounts for 27.5%, and oil and gas accounts for 11.8%) (Patriquin et al 2002). Visitor related expenditures in the FMF in 1998 were estimated at over $300 million (CDN) (Wellstead et al 2001).

Methodology

A total of 27 highly structured face-to-face interviews of stakeholder group representatives were conducted in both Hinton and Jasper between August 1999 and June 2000. Four broad stakeholder groupings were identified as having a vested interest in potential ecotourism development in the region. They included environmentalists, town planners, tourism operators (private camp ground and ecotourism operators, park rangers) and the natural resource industry (mining, forestry). An attempt was made to interview at least one representative from each stakeholder group. The only significant difference was that Jasper, unlike Hinton, does not have

any resource extractive industries; therefore, nobody from the natural resource industry group was interviewed in Jasper.

Table 1-Interviewee Group Membership

Stakeholder Groups	Hinton	Jasper
Town Planner/Park	1	6
Tour Operator	5	3
Natural Resource Industry	7	0
Environmentalist	2	3
Total Number of Interviews	**15**	**12**

The questionnaire contained three main themes: local definitions and activities associated with ecotourism, the compatibility of ecotourism with the natural resources industry, and finally, a consideration of Ceballos-Lascurain's (1987) definitions of ecotourism.

The 14 question highly structured personal interview, which lasted anywhere from 45-60 minutes to conduct, were tape recorded and transcribed. The QSR-NVivo, part of the QSR-NUD*IST (non-numerical, unstructured data; indexing, searching and theorising) software program, was chosen because of its powerful features that allows the researcher to sort data into theme areas, locate key words or phrase them, link ideas together, and make categories for thinking about the data. (Gahan and Hannibal 1998). QSR-NVivo software has been employed in various fields including health (Bunston 1997, Poland 1995, Stynes 1998, Wiltshire 2001, Eliott 2002, and Olver 2002), social work (Rolfe et al. 1991, Mirfin-Veitch 1996, Michler & McHoul 1998, Yoong, P. 1999), and education (Middleton 1996, Scriber 1999).

QSR-NVivo operates in two different by highly integrated systems: documents and nodes. Documents are normally the text records. In this study they were the transcripts. Nodes are containers for categories and coding. They can be hierarchically organized in "trees" or they be stand alone entities called "free nodes." In this study both types of nodes were developed. The

first stage of the study involved importing the transcribed interviews into the document editor and the transcribed text from each of the individual interviews into various "nodes." The structural nature of the interview question made most of the coding straightforward. The node tree (Chart 1) was developed to correspond to the questionnaire structure. From the 14 useable questions, nine nodes were developed. First, the entire reply to each question was coded. For example, the question: *Do you think that protected areas are necessary for successful ecotourism* ? became the node Protected Area (1,3).

In this case, a respondent replied:

I would love to say no but I think they are. I would love to say that we're managing so well that we are allowing for ecosystem integrity across the board but I don't believe that is happening. So absolutely protected areas are necessary.

The entire response was coded, as denoted by the shaded area (which corresponds to the coding schema in the NVivo program). All of the texts from the 27 documents (interviews) were linked together via the nodes in Chart 1. By linking all the text to nodes, the coded text relating to each node was analysed and compared. In the above example, all of the responses pertaining to the protected areas questions could be simultaneously compared. Within the protected area nodes, new sub-nodes (known as children) were coded. From the above question (node), new child nodes were created that highlighted whether or not protected areas were necessary for the implementation of successful ecotourism activities. In this case, the entire comment was once again coded as "Necessary" (that protected areas were needed for successful ecotourism was found in "Necessary" (1,3) , a child node of node 1 (Questions). Other, more complicated nodes were developed. For example, the question pertaining to the economic, environmental, and social impacts of ecotourism (Impacts 1,5) produced a much more complex nodal arrangement.
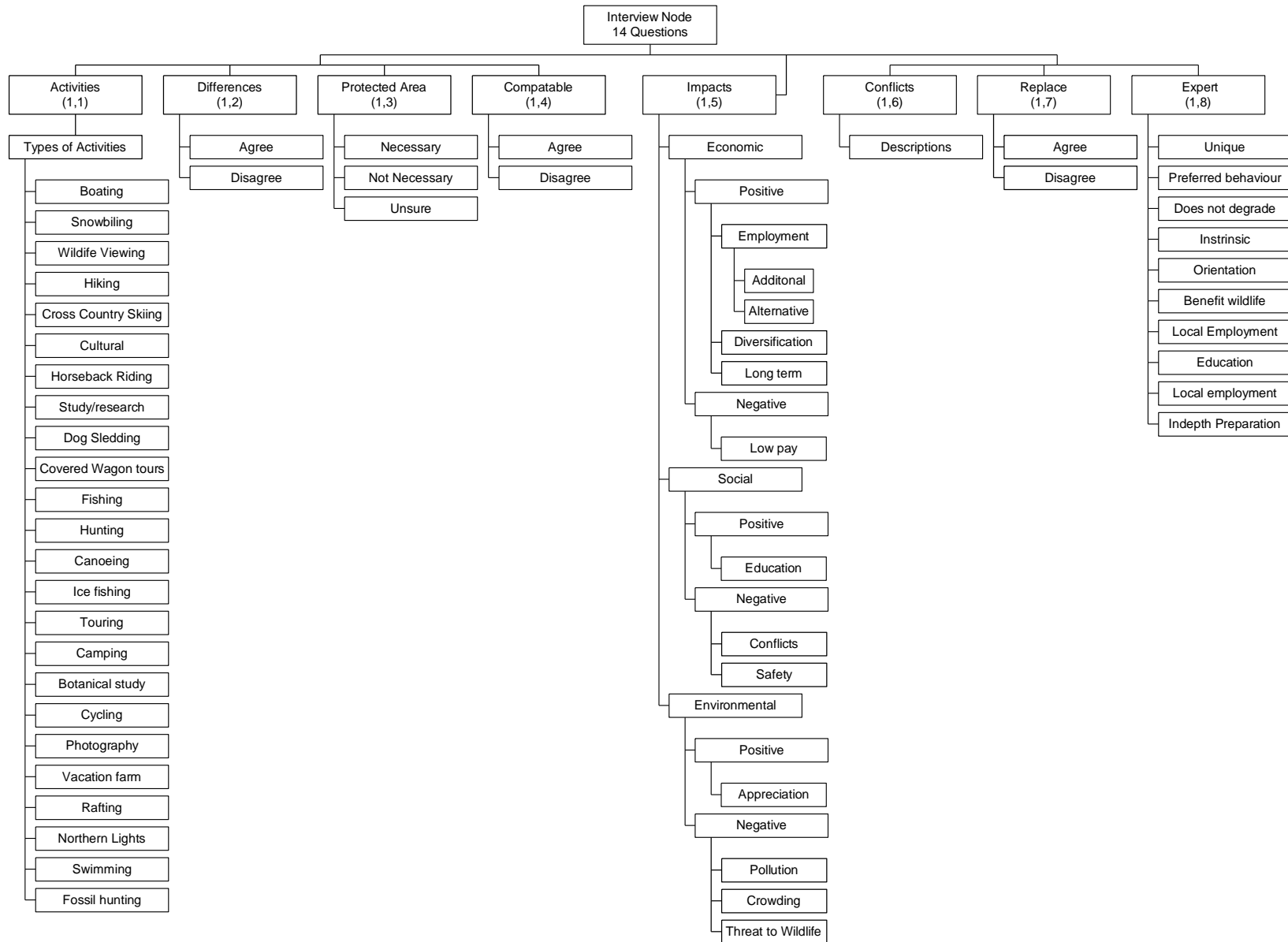
In addition to creating nodes relating specifically to each of the questions, free nodes were created. Free nodes are thoughts or ideas that were not specific to any one question. For example, discussion about aboriginal people was raised in a number of different contexts throughout each of the interviews. The NVivo software package also permits linking the attributes of the respondents with the various nodes. These are similar to background variables in quantitative survey research. In this study, two attributes were created. The first attribute was that of the respondent's stakeholder representation (local environmentalists, natural resource representatives, tour operators, and town planners & national park officials). The second attribute was the respondent's location: Hinton or Jasper. These attributes were used to develop cross tabs with the nodes. Therefore, it was possible to ascertain relationship between nodes (beliefs and attitudes towards ecotourism) and these two attributes. Moreover, a qualitative account of these relationships could be proved. For example, it was possible to calculate the number of environmentalists who argued for the necessity of protected areas and the content of their arguments. The ability to examine both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of responses was advantageous due the small size of the study group (n=27). In the results section below, both of these aspects are discussed.

Results

What activities are associated with ecotourism? (Activities Node 1,1)

The first part of the analysis simply examined the aggregate level of agreement the participants had about 24 potential ecotourism activities (Nodes 1,1,1 through 1,1,24). Participant's interview responses for each of the activities were coded in a dichotomous fashion; either yes or no for each activity. On average, tour operators and natural resource industry representatives

Chart 1 - FMF Ecotourism QSR N-VIVO Node Tree

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                              Interview Node
                              14 Questions
   ┌──────────┬──────────┬──────────┬──────────┬──────────┬──────────┬──────────┐
Activities  Differences  Protected   Compatable  Impacts   Conflicts   Replace    Expert
  (1,1)       (1,2)      Area (1,3)    (1,4)      (1,5)      (1,6)      (1,7)      (1,8)
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Activities (1,1)
- Types of Activities
  - Boating
  - Snowbiling
  - Wildife Viewing
  - Hiking
  - Cross Country Skiing
  - Cultural
  - Horseback Riding
  - Study/research
  - Dog Sledding
  - Covered Wagon tours
  - Fishing
  - Hunting
  - Canoeing
  - Ice fishing
  - Touring
  - Camping
  - Botanical study
  - Cycling
  - Photography
  - Vacation farm
  - Rafting
  - Northern Lights
  - Swimming
  - Fossil hunting

Differences (1,2)
- Agree
- Disagree

Protected Area (1,3)
- Necessary
- Not Necessary
- Unsure

Compatable (1,4)
- Agree
- Disagree

Impacts (1,5)
- Economic
  - Positive
    - Employment
      - Additonal
      - Alternative
    - Diversification
    - Long term
  - Negative
    - Low pay
- Social
  - Positive
    - Education
  - Negative
    - Conflicts
    - Safety
- Environmental
  - Positive
    - Appreciation
  - Negative
    - Pollution
    - Crowding
    - Threat to Wildlife

Conflicts (1,6)
- Descriptions

Replace (1,7)
- Agree
- Disagree

Expert (1,8)
- Unique
- Preferred behaviour
- Does not degrade
- Instrinsic
- Orientation
- Benefit wildlife
- Local Employment
- Education
- Local employment
- Indepth Preparation

illustrated agreement for over 70% of all activities[1] agreed with just over 65% of the statements. The local environmentalists only considered 50% of the activities to be ecotourism related.

In Table 2, all four groups were compared to each individual activity. This enabled a categorization of activities according to the level of agreement. Those activities where 75% of the respondents agreed that the activity was ecotourism were classified as strong. In each of these cases a majority of the stakeholder representatives from all groups agreed that the activity was ecotourism. In some cases, 75% of all the respondents agreed with the statement but there was one stakeholder group that did not indicate a majority approval. In such cases those activities were labelled as "strong but split". In all of strong but split activities, it was the local environmental group who dissented. Those activities where a majority of respondents (less 75%) agreed with activity were classified as "moderate." Activities were considered "weak" examples of ecotourism when less than half of the respondents considered it to be ecotourism.

Another criterion, which interviewees used to determine whether the activity conformed to their idea of ecotourism, was on the extractive and consumptive nature of the activity. Interviewees with a narrow definition only classified those activities that were non-consumptive and non-extractive in nature. For this reason, fishing, hunting and fossil hunting were immediately classified as being non-ecotourism. When asked about catch and release fishing, all environmentalists and park rangers interviewed stated that this would still not qualify as ecotourism because of mounting evidence of mortality among catch and release fish. In addition, hunting as part of a cultural experience or a farming lifestyle was also considered to be outside

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[1] Agreement meant that a majority of each group agreed that the activity was ecotourism. Therefore at least 4 town planners/park employees, 5 tour operators, 4 natural resource industry representatives, or three environmentalists would have to agree that activity was ecotourism to constitute agreement.

the realm of ecotourism. If hunting was to be part of the experience, then it was stated that it should be talked about and learnt but "true" ecotourists would not participate. However, with a more flexible definition, hunting and fishing were considered by some interviewees to be ecotourism if a learning component was added and the species was not endangered.

Certain activities were immediately associated with ecotourism by all of the respondents. These included hiking, canoeing, kayaking, wildlife viewing, dog sledding and cross country skiing. Horseback riding was also mentioned but recent controversy in both Jasper and Hinton concerning the impact they have on the environment meant that all interviewees thought that horseback riding could only be considered ecotourism if the number of riders were limited and the impact minimal. In all these activities, while they were identified to be appropriate ecotourism activities, all interviewees using a narrow definition believed that ultimately it was the manner in which the activities were marketed and practised that determined whether the activity was truly ecotourism. Hence, this implied having a learning or environmental educational component and making sure the environmental impact was minimal.

Table 2: Activities associated with Ecotourism

Level of Agreement			
Strong	**Strong but Split**	**Moderate**	**Weak to None**
Camping	Fishing	Bus Tour	Snowmobile
Canoe	Wildlife viewing	Cycle	Fossil hunting
Dog Sled		Motor boat	Hunting
Horseback riding		Motor home	Ice fishing
Hiking		Rafting	Vacation farm
Cultural		Study-research	
X-country skiing			

Camping had a range of views when classifying it as an ecotourism activity. First, all interviewees stated that motor home camping was not ecotourism but cheap accommodation. As

for tenting, this had a wide range of views. Camping at a camp site by some environmentalists were considered to be ecotourism only if impact was minimal while those adopting a more strict definition argued that it could be ecotourism if the camping occurred in the outback away from any signs of development. In other words, camping at a campsite near a road would not qualify. With respect to intensity of camping infrastructure and facilities, this was not considered to be an important factor. However, camping using a tent and then going out during the day to learn and appreciate nature would qualify as an ecotourism experience. A survey of the responses also revealed that camping by itself was not considered to be ecotourism activity.

Some activities deemed appropriate for ecotourism varied depending on how broad or narrow the definition being used. In the narrow sense, appropriate ecotourism activities were those that did not use a motorised vehicle, was out in natural environment, had low environmental impact, be non-extractive in nature and most importantly had a learning or appreciation of nature. By contrast, the broad definition that has emerged from these interviews is that any activity in the outdoor can be classified as ecotourism including wildlife viewing on reclaimed mine sites and activities in reforested areas of the FMA. All interviewees struggled with determining what activities would be appropriate. Problems with classifying activities as ecotourism arouse when some of them met some of their criteria and violated others. In these cases, interviewees would struggle in assessing which criterion was more important relative to the other. In other words, the multi-dimensional aspect of ecotourism and the continuum of possibilities for certain criteria created some problems for some interviewees. For example, all agreed that environmental education was an important element for ecotourism. However, the degree or level of learning required to associate the activity with ecotourism was found to be debatable.

Are there differences between ecotourism from other forms of tourism (such as nature and adventure tourism)? (Differences Node 1,2)

Interest group members were equally split on their views of whether there were differences between ecotourism and other forms of tourism such as adventure and nature tourism. The only significant difference was found in the environmentalist group. This group predominately thought that there were significant differences between ecotourism and other forms of tourism. Of those who stated that there were differences, educational or learning component were most mentioned to be the main criterion that differentiates ecotourism from other forms of tourism.

Town official: *"Ecotourism is a soft type of activity and is largely based on learning."*

Low environmental impact was also stated often as a defining characteristic by a wide range of respondents.

Natural resource industry representative: *" I would define it [ecotourism] as low impact and low intensity."*

Other comments about the differences between ecotourism and other forms of tourism included smaller groups, not including machinery, and being non-extractive. Narrower definitions further included an ethical and environmental attitude as well as a more intimate contact with nature. Carrying capacity, cited by one environmentalist, was also considered to be a vital characteristic of ecotourism. In some cases, several of the respondents did not differentiate nature tourism with ecotourism but nearly all stated that there were significant differences with adventure tourism and mass tourism.

Tour operator: *"It's just a new name that we have put on an old product."*

Town official: *"I'm sceptical towards organizations that attempt to sell a product as ecotourism."*

Most stated that they had a broad conception of ecotourism. However, there were many respondents who considered where people went in the FMF as an important criterion for determining if the activity was ecotourism or not.

Natural resource industry representative: *"my separation of tourism would be people who get off the front country and go to the back-country…front-country people are the RVers…"*

In general, interviewees stated that appropriate ecotourism activities were those that are performed in a natural setting, provided a learning or nature appreciation and had a minimal environmental impact. More specifically, those who equated ecotourism with nature tourism found all the activities on the list to qualify since they were all performed in the outdoors. Furthermore, some argued that ecotourism was just a "buzzword" and therefore really no different from nature or adventure tourism. However, these same people also mentioned that the environmental impact had to be low and that participants had to come out of the experience having learnt something about the environment.

For those who thought there was a distinction between ecotourism and other forms of tourism, some activities tended to be easier to classify as ecotourism activities relative to others. First, motorised activities such as snowmobiling or powerboats were all deemed to be anti-ecotourism due to the noise and impact on the environment. However, most agreed that snowmobiles could be used as a means of transportation to an ecotourism venue. The ecotourism experience would then start afterwards. For individuals following a more stringent definition, bus tours and motorised boat rides (even with a guide) such as that offered on Maligne Lake (in JNP) were also considered to be anti-ecotourism[2]. In these cases, the educational component was deemed to be not sufficient enough to bypass the intrusiveness of the boat rides. In addition, it was argued that

tourists on the bus were not experiencing a real first hand encounter with nature. However, if they got out and used the bus as a means of transportation, then such an activity would qualify.

Are protected areas important for the success of ecotourism? (Protected Area Node 1,3)

Not surprisingly, nearly all of the industry representatives (Table 3) argued that protected areas were not necessary for successful ecotourism to occur. In contrast, all of the local environmentalist respondents argued that some sort of protection was necessary. Tour operators were split and more tour operators thought that ecotourism could be occur outside of protected areas compared to more town planner/park employees who thought ecotourism could be practised in a protected area (such as JNP). However all stakeholders interviewed stated that some degree or level of protection was required for successful ecotourism. In comparison to other interest groups, environmentalists felt a need for higher level of protection and for larger areas. With respect to tourism operators, protection was felt to be necessary in that it provided long-term security of the land base and hence security for their livelihood. From a geographic perspective, more of the Jasper-based respondents argued that protected areas were necessary for successful ecotourism whereas more Hinton respondents thought the opposite.

Table 3 - Respondent's support for the necessity of protected areas to undertake ecotourism

Are protected areas need for successful ecotourism	Local Environmentalists	Tour Operators	Town Officials	Natural Resource Industry
	Unanimously Agree	Split	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
	Hinton Residents	**Jasper Residents**		
	Disagree	Strongly Agree		

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[2] By the same token, many respondents also gave the Maligne Lake boat tours as an example of an ecotourism experience

In general, areas designated in the FMA for recreation purposes were deemed to have sufficient level of protection. However, some also argued that industry should designate more of their land for recreation purposes. Furthermore, interviewees, particularly those from the Hinton area, were aware that most of the forests in the area had already been allocated. Therefore, realistically speaking, they were aware that they could not ask for high level of protection.

The responses indicated that protected areas were not a prerequisite for ecotourism. Ecotourism activities could be practised successfully in non-protected areas at the same level as protected areas. However, environmentalists and some tourism operators thought that protection of an area or some sort of designation in the Hinton area allows for long term ecotourism possibilities. Of those respondents who thought protected areas were not necessary for successful ecotourism activity many argued that ecotourist-tourist visitors needed to understand the "good" forestry and mining practices taking place on the land-base.

Town official*: "what ecotourism can do is help people gain an appreciation and an awareness of the issues around those things and a more aware public then I think can serve public policy much better."*

A natural resource industry representative stated that ecotourists needed to learn about "the non-natural impacts on the forest". The education/learning component played an important part in their arguments. Some of the respondents considered that there were also many wilderness areas in non-protected lands. Others stated that only a small minority of visitors would demand a complete wilderness experience and that most would accept some activity. One respondent mentioned that scale was important—that is one could appreciate and understand wildflowers in cut block. Some stated that protected areas were not really representative of wilderness area because many of Alberta's forests were susceptible to forest fires.

Conversely those respondents who argued for the necessity of protected areas stated that poor management by the resource industry led to problems such as a lack of biodiversity. As a result protected area were required for ecotourism. An environmentalist identified other competing interests "as a detriment to the ecotourist experience." A tour operator stated that visitors, particularly those from Europe, demanded pristine wilderness areas. Most however argued for a broader interpretation of protection.

Town official: *"When I say protected area, I view that very broadly. I don't view the national park to be the only type of protected area…"*

Town official: *"[protected areas] are probably more representative of the true ecological processes and learning experience."*

Are ecotourism activities compatible with other resource users? (Node Compatible 1, 4)

Initially there were three closely related questions relating to the compatibility of ecotourism with other resource users in FMF (Can Ecotourism be practised in a Forest Management Agreement (FMA) Is ecotourism part of sustainable natural resource management?

Can ecotourism coexist with mining and forestry industries in Hinton?). These questions were given separate node addresses. However, there were similarities in the type of responses given for each of the three questions. N-VIVO has the functions to merge nodes. The three nodes were merged into a new node labelled Compatible.

Responses by all stakeholder groups including environmentalists in both Hinton and Jasper indicate that ecotourism can be practised in FMA. This is surprising given the split in opinion over protected areas. This illustrates some inconsistency and a noteworthy contraction in the responses. Most Hinton based tourism operators said they were already operating in the FMA and that they had no alternative because nearly all of the forested land outside of Jasper (with the

exception of Wilmore Wilderness Area and Switzer Provincial Park) is part of the FMA. Therefore, many of the respondents stated that if Hinton were to experience further ecotourism activity, it would have to be in the FMA. Environmentalists believed that ecotourism could be practised in areas of the FMA that have not been clear-cut and also in reforested areas. They also acknowledged that ecotourism can also be defined in terms of using the FMA to educate people about "pure natural" areas and comparing them to "reforested" areas.

All those interviewed believed ecotourism to be part of sustainable natural resource management. The majority responded that it had to be that; otherwise there would not be ecotourism in the area. In addition, interviewees also said the non-consumptive, low impact; non-intrusive and educational characteristics make ecotourism sustainable. With respect to the industry, they also agreed but based their arguments on different reasons. They argued that ecotourism was part of sustainable natural resource management because according to their definition, ecotourism is about integrating all aspects of the land, multiple use of landscape and educating people about how industry reclaims the land or reforests the land. All groups seemed to cite the environmental education component of ecotourism as contributing to sustainable natural resource management.

In general, all stakeholders believed there was a potential for all resource users to coexist. Some operators and environmentalists asserted that under current industry practices all groups would be in conflict while industry and some operators argued that stringent environmental views meant that currently ecotourism would not be able to coexist with industry. However, the latter could coexist and complement ecotourism through environmental education of the natural processes including those of industry, increased consultation and openness of industry with

tourism operators, acknowledging the carrying capacity of the area, decrease in environmental impact, assurances and most importantly through compromise. The mine-based representatives stated that if environmentalists broadened their definition to include reclaim mine site visits, then in their view they could coexist with ecotourism.

What are the economic, environmental, and social benefits and negatives of ecotourism? (Node Impacts 1,5)

Of all the questions, the most discussion revolved around the positive or negative impacts on the economic, environmental, or social fabric of the area. All of the groups stated that there would be positive impacts of some type (either economic, social, or environmental). There were a total of 21 (out of a possible 27) respondents who indicated that ecotourism would have some kind of positive effect on the region. However, respondents from all of the groups, albeit with fewer responses (13), stated that there were also negative impacts associated with ecotourism activity. In terms of the type of impacts discussed, the respondents were equally divided between economic and environmental impacts.

Table 4 - Positive and Negative Impacts of Ecotourism Development

Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Appreciation (high)	Conflicts (high)
Economic Diversification (high)	Crowding (high)
Education (medium)	Low Paying Jobs (medium)
Additional or Alternative Employment Opportunities (medium)	Pollution(medium)
Long Term Benefits	Safety(medium)
	Native Concerns (medium)

Specific types of positive and negative impacts were coded. The appreciation (a environmental benefit) and economic diversification were the two most mentioned positive features of ecotourism.

Environmentalist*: That natural resource extraction is not the only deal in town and that we can actually look at a diversification strategy.*

Town Official: *I can only see benefits for tourism activity. How Jasper has benefited is obvious to anybody that lives here. I think that people who travel to Jasper are ecotourists to one degree or another and our entire economy is based on ecotourists.*

Natural Resource Industry: *There's an added benefit in regards to the diversification of the local economy. Although I believe the local economy is fairly stable with regards to the local industry other than maybe the mining but certainly the forestry, which is the mainstay here, which is a sustainable long term venture. But you know everybody enjoys a certain degree of ecotourism in this area and it always has fit with industry here.*

This was followed by positive attributes of education and employment opportunities.

Town Official: *But I also think that in an increasingly urban culture it's important that people get the opportunity to get into these areas and experience them. And whether that's a National Park, whether, that's a Provincial Park, whether that's a forest area with different uses going on. People who have had that experience will better understand what we are talking about and are more likely to support the overall protection of those areas or aspects of those areas.*

Environmentalist: *Well, I mean I talked about respect of the locals for the outdoors. I guess part of the effects of ecotourism or ecotourists is that there might be conflict between the two groups, resource extraction groups and ecotourism.*

In terms of negative impacts, concerns about ecotourism crowding out other land uses and land use conflicts were the most frequently mentioned. Economic benefits generated by increased visitors to the region and spin off businesses was the most commonly stated potential benefits of ecotourism. Local employment opportunities in Hinton and Jasper were also mentioned. These benefits were stated for both Jasper and Hinton. Environmentalists also included increased conservation and environmental education. For industry respondents, visiting reclaimed mine sites and reforested areas was also cited as increasing the knowledge of the forestry and mining sectors and their attempt to mitigate environmental impacts. In addition, increased recreational opportunities derived from increased protection or designated areas as well as the ecotourism's ability to push industry into using more environmentally friendly practices were mentioned.

Tour Operator: *[There] is a concern that if we take large groups of people to the traditional sites that maybe it might have an impact on the environmental or perception that those sites aren't special any more, that is something we really have to be careful about. We have to talk to local elders about that we don't want to go to sites they don't want us to go to.*

Town Official: *There are concerns about development. Stresses within the communities surrounding that issue. There are population concerns. We are experiencing considerable influx of seasonal workers, problems of housing them and problems of making them feel part of the community and of course tourism activities do run in temporal peaks. There is an influx of temporary workers often associated with that and that creates social problems. There tend to be a lot of lower paid jobs associated with tourism so that leads to certain problems.*

Town Official: *I think that there is a potential for areas to get overused and over exposed to maybe the point that there's social and maybe environmental impacts. So I mean areas are physically overused, the trails are overused and get degraded and get into all these conflicts with folks on bicycle, folks on horses, folks on foot. So I think that there is a danger for as an area becomes more popular then in fact use levels get to the point where its a different experience and that's physiologically or in fact out there in the Park.*

A number of Hinton-based respondents acknowledged negative impacts on the extractive industries in the region. In particular, both forestry and mine industry representative argued that ecotourism (if narrowly defined) had the potential to adversely affect Hinton's and thus the Province's economy, thereby decreasing the standard of living in the community. In the same manner, environmentalists admitted that ecotourism would not be able to generate the same amount of revenue as the extractive industries, lowering the standard of living in the region. Furthermore, they recognised that following a strict definition of ecotourism would take away areas from the and hence have a negative impact on the forestry industry. Other negative impacts mentioned included environmental impacts arising from large groups of tourists. Interviewees living in Jasper also spoke of negative social impacts such as accommodation problems to support the increase in seasonal workers.

What are the conflicts arising between stakeholders (Node Conflicts 1,6)

All stakeholders admitted to conflicts between interest groups. When asked to state an example, most cited conflicts arising between the Black Cat Ranch (an ecotourism operator) and Weldwood (the forestry operation operating in the FMA) or the expansion of the Cheviot coal mine. When asked about consultation process to solve these conflicts, industry-based respondents believed they were doing a good job but admitted that they could be doing better. As for tourism operators, they thought that more consultation and open channels were necessary.

Can ecotourism replace mining and forestry industries ? (Node Replace 1,7)

There was a spit in their responses (with more arguing against) as to whether or not ecotourism could replace mining or forestry. Nearly all environmentalists agreed with the statement whereas all of the natural resource industry respondents and nearly all tour operators disagreed. As a group, tour guides were split with more disagreeing. From a geographic perspective, interviewees living in Hinton (including split responses from environmentalists) stated that ecotourism would not be able to drive out the extractive industries. They thought that tourism would not be able to sustain the economic base of the community and the standard of living in the community. Nearly all of those who disagreed with the question admitted that ecotourism would (and does) generate jobs but they also stated strongly that the tourism industry would not be able to match the wages that employees in the extractive industries were currently receiving. They argued that the tourism sector also carried somewhat of a stigma in that it was associated with low paying jobs. Furthermore, they argued that even if ecotourism jobs paid as well as resource industry jobs, the area did not have the carrying capacity to replace existing economic base. All agreed that ecotourism is not economically viable to support the current lifestyle of

Hinton and surrounding areas who work in the extractive resource industries. By contrast, there were more in Jasper believed that tourism had a strong potential to replace those industries.

Is ecotourism as defined in the FMF consistent with the traditional literature definition? (Node Expert 1,8)

At the end of the interview, respondents were given a table citing   -Lasucrain's (1987) definitions of ecotourism. These are widely cited in other ecotourism-based studies. The aim of this exercise was to evaluate how respondents thought that their definition matched that of Ceballos-Lascurain and whether they thought that those ecotourism characteristics were realistic for their community.   In the Table 5, all of the respondents agreed with only three of the statements. These included statements about involving the community, providing opportunities and employment, and the in-depth knowledge of participants. From the remainder of Ceballos-Lascurain's (1987) ecotourism definitions, there was a notable amount of disagreement to the definitions by the natural resource representatives. On the other hand, there was a consistent pattern of agreement made by tour operators and town officials.

It does not degrade the resource. It does not involve consumptive erosion of the natural environment.

Natural Resource Industry – Disagree *Well it's quite a different definition from what I thought and this definition it would not be able to coexist and it is a pretty hard line definition saying that there is no degradation to the resource don't see it as really being ecotourism in its own box. There is a gradation you know…*

Town Official – Agree *I guess if it's in excess of what nature can handle…With hunting and fishing even if you are consuming and it is part of the resource and it is in a managed way so you are not letting things go extinct…I guess tourist management is meant to be managed for the long term so even if you are consuming something if it is a properly managed process it should still be there.*

Table 5 - Level of agreement or disagreement with Ceballos-Lascurain's (1987) ectourism definitions

	Environmentalist	Town Planner	Tour Operator	Natural Resource Industry
It requires a unique, accessible natural environment (protected or non-protected) (1,8,1)	Strongly Agree	Split Agree	Strongly Agree	Split disagree
It promotes positive environmental ethics and fosters "preferred" behaviour in its participants (1,8,2)	Unanimously agree	Strongly Agree	Unanimously agree	Split disagree
It does not degrade the resource. It does not involve consumptive erosion of the natural environment. (1,8,3)	Unanimously agree	Split Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
It concentrates on intrinsic rather than extrinsic. (1,8,4)	Unanimously agree	Unanimously agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
It is orientated around the environment in question and not around man. (1,8,5)	Unanimously agree	Strongly agree	Strongly Agree	Unanimously Disagree
It must benefit the wildlife and the environment. (1,8,6)	Strongly agree	Split Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
It provides first hand encounter with natural environment and with any cultural elements found in the undeveloped areas. (1,8,7)	Strongly agree	Unanimously agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
It actively involves the local communities in the tourism process(1,8,8)	Unanimously agree	Unanimously agree	Unanimously agree	Strongly Agree
Its level of gratification is measures in terms of education and /or appreciation rather than thrill seeking or physical achievement(1,8,9)	Split agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree
It involves considerable preparation and demands in-depth knowledge on the part of both leaders and participants. (1,8,10)	Unanimously agree	Unanimously agree	Unanimously agree	Split Agree
It provides employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local people (1,8,11)	Unanimously agree	Unanimously agree	Unanimously agree	Split Agree

Strongly agree/disagree meant that more than 75% of the group agreed with the statement, split agree meant that more than 50% but less than 75% agreed, and unanimously agree/disagree meant that all agreed or disagreed

Town Official – Agree *I guess if it's in excess of what nature can handle…With hunting and fishing even if you are consuming and it is part of the resource and it is in a managed way so you are not letting things go extinct…I guess tourist management is meant to be managed for the long term so even if you are consuming something if it is a properly managed process it should still be there.*

It concentrates on intrinsic rather than extrinsic.

Environmentalist – Agree *I certainly think there is a certain amount of it but I also know that there are tons of buses going through everyday and that maybe-even 90% of the people on there are only interested in the extrinsic*

Natural Resource Industry – Disagree *It depends on what the day is. I go for both. Ecotourism in this description is a smaller range in what I'm looking at. I guess I'm saying there is no difference*

It is orientated around the environment in question and not around man.

Natural Resource Industry – Disagree *Well again that's a contradiction of terms. Man is part of the environment and there's no getting away from that. If there wasn't man there wouldn't be ecotourism.*

Natural Resource Industry – Disagree
When I go into the woods, the environment is important but also the experience of being there with my kids and my dog are important. So to separate one from the other, I think that is artificial. You could go on an ecotour with a group of people you really like and that's not only the natural environment but it's the action among the people in the natural area.

Tour Operator - Agree
Well we talk a lot about the park to start with and because our main line is the animals we talk a lot about the management and a little bit of history of how the herds have come and gone

Its level of gratification is measures in terms of education and /or appreciation rather than thrill seeking or physical achievement

Tour operator - Agree

yeah..some our tours we don't get to see exactly what want to see but we learn about them and I do get comments about that..we didn't see 18 moose today but I sure did learn about them..you have to come away from these trips not just driving around...you don't get the high impact like running down the river in raft at least you are going on a tour to learn

Natural Resource Industry - Disagree

I don't agree. In fact for most of what I believe for the larger percentage of the population that could be reversed. You're average tourist isn't coming out here to go a study trip and identify flowers; that's boredom (laughing). Most people what a little bit of thrill seeking and physical activity.

The prevailing view arising from the interviews appear that for natural resource representatives, the traditional definition is too stringent and unrealistic for the communities in the FMF. However, the environmentalists who thought that they conformed to their personal definitions with minor changes do not share this view. All respondents believed that ecotourism could also take place in a non-unique natural environment. Moreover, all agreed that protection of an area was not required for ecotourism and that ecotourism would benefit the local community in terms of employment. Some felt that the "non –degradation" of the environment was too stringent. Industry felt that if such a definition were taken, then industry would not be able to coexist with ecotourism. Others also believed that ecotourism is not restricted to "undeveloped areas". For example, they felt this characteristic would exclude ecotourism in reforested areas of the FMA and on reclaimed mine sites. While all agreed that their definitions of ecotourism revolved around an educational and nature appreciation component, some felt that it was too restrictive to exclude the "thrill" factor of the activity. Finally, everyone believed that tourism operators have to understand ecotourism and try to minimise their environmental impact. Furthermore, industry and some tour operators suggested that tourism operators should provide more information to their clients in terms of industry's role in minimising environmental impacts and their contribution to restoring the natural environment in the area.

Discussion and Conclusion: Putting local perceptions of ecotourism and nature in a larger context

This paper set out with two objectives. The first was to illustrate how global level concerns about the long-term sustainability of ecotourism is also reflected at the local level by those individuals who are responsible for its implementation. The second objective was to highlight the application of computer software (NVivo) that can assist in the analysis of

In general, it was found that the definitions ranged from one that was narrow and specific and closely matched traditional literature definitions to a more broad and flexible definition which incorporated more developed areas.

The emerging pattern appeared to be the environmentalists (with conservation and protection perspective) as having the narrowest definitions while industry groups (mining and forestry) tended to accept and define ecotourism more broadly. This is consistent with their perspective a resource extractor and developer. Definitions from the tourism operators, park rangers and town planners were found to be in between these two extremes. Furthermore, even among the tourism operators interviewed, definitions varied according to where they operated. For example, those operating in outside the FMA tended to give a more stringent definition compared to those operating in the FMA. Another pattern that emerged from these interviews concerns important characteristics that define ecotourism. All thought that a learning or appreciation of nature and low environmental impact were highly associated with the ecotourism concept. Furthermore, all interviewees felt that some degree of protection was required for successful tourism. However, the level of protection varied from environmentalists to industry as expected. With respect to activities, most interviewees felt that ecotourism could not be distinguished between one activity to another but rather in the manner in which they are offered and practised.

It appears from the interviews that Hinton and Jasper communities define and see ecotourism differently. This can be attributed to the different lifestyles and economic realities facing these communities. Jasper's economy is based on nature tourism while Hinton's is based primarily on extractive resource industries with tourism still developing. As such, it is likely that two different definitions of ecotourism will have to be adopted for these two different communities. As stated in the literature, identifying an operationalized definition of ecotourism largely depends on the host community, the circumstances surrounding the community and above all a willingness and involvement on the part of the community. With respect to Jasper, it appears that a more narrow definition, perhaps one that is closer to the traditional definition as proposed by Ceballos-Lascurain (1987), might be more in line with the community. By contrast, it is unlikely that such a narrow definition would work or be accepted in the Hinton community. If compromises are to be made, then a broader and more flexible definition which incorporates some of the industries' "natural" attractions should be considered for Hinton. One approach is to perhaps adopt the Canadian Environmental Advisory Council's (1992) ecotourism definition[3] and interpret it according to the needs and circumstances of each community. With this definition, a more strict interpretation might be embraced for Jasper while a more liberal interpretation can be used for Hinton. However, while adopting two definitions for the FMF region may serve as a compromise and be more practical, they must nonetheless be approached with extreme caution and the goal of ecotourism should always be kept in mind. That is, the broad definition should keep the main tenets of ecotourism (environmental education, low environmental impact, protection and security) intact and adjust them ever so slightly so as to incorporate some of the elements found in the industries' definition. Ecotourism thrives on three

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[3] The Canadian Environmental Advisory Council (1992) defines ecotourism as " Ecotourism is an enlightening nature travel experience that contributes to conservation of the ecosystem while respecting the integrity of host communities."

main components: The attraction of tourists to an accessible natural area. The use of tourism as a tool in nature conservation through the generation of education, profits, changing attitudes, community development and political priorities. And thirdly, the provision of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local people. Therefore, using these as goals of ecotourism, more precise definitions for Hinton and Jasper can be attained. The difficulty however, lies in finding the balance between industries' definition and environmentalist's' definitions, or perhaps just using the tour operators' definition. Ultimately however, the success of ecotourism in the Foothills Model Forest will depend on the willingness of all stakeholders to comprise and their political will.

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