

## Project Overview 2002-2005

*The Alberta Recreation Industry  
Labour Market Analysis*

*July 2005*



**ARPA**

*Recreation for Life*

ARPA is a charitable not-for profit organization with a voluntary board of directors dedicated to the promotion of recreation and parks and their benefits to the quality of life of all Albertans.

## Our Vision...

"A province, and communities within, that embrace and proactively use recreation and parks as essential means for enhancing individual well-being and community vitality, economic sustainability and natural resource protection and conservation."

## Our mission...

ARPA strives to build healthy citizens, their communities and their environments throughout Alberta.

For More information on ARPA, our programs or services or the benefits of recreation and parks please visit our website at <http://www.arpaonline.ca>.

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|---|-----------|
| <b>AUTHOR'S NOTE .....</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Section I: The Alberta Recreation Industry Labour Market Project.....</b>          | <b>2</b>  |
| Objectives.....   | 2         |
| Phase One.....  | 2         |
| Phase Two.....  | 2         |
| A Working Definition of the Recreation Industry.....                                  | 2         |
| Methods and Sources.....  | 3         |
| The Growing Business of Recreation in Alberta.....                                    | 3         |
| Perspectives on the Future.....   | 3         |
| A Labour Market Analysis of the Recreation Industry in Alberta.....                   | 4         |
| A Framework for Recreation Education and Training for Alberta.....                    | 4         |
| <b>Section II: Finding of the Studies .....</b>                                       | <b>5</b>  |
| The Growing Business of Recreation in Alberta.....                                    | 5         |
| Perspectives on the Future.....   | 5         |
| A Labour Market Analysis of the Recreation Industry in Alberta.....                   | 6         |
| Trends Influencing the Industry .....   | 6         |
| Industry Leadership .....   | 6         |
| Labour Market and Employment Trends .....   | 6         |
| Education and Training Needs and Expectations.....                                    | 7         |
| A Framework for Recreation Education and Training for Alberta.....                    | 7         |
| Alberta's Recreation Education and Training System.....                               | 7         |
| Best Practices and Innovations in Recreation Education and Training .....             | 8         |
| Organization.....   | 8         |
| Format.....   | 9         |
| Content .....   | 9         |
| Credentials.....  | 9         |
| <b>Section III: A Strategy for Recreation Education and Training for Alberta.....</b> | <b>11</b> |
| The Three Pillars of the Recreation Education and Training System .....               | 11        |
| Goals .....   | 11        |
| The Role of ARPA .....  | 11        |
| A Career Awareness Strategy .....   | 12        |
| A Career Preparation Strategy .....   | 13        |
| A Career Development Strategy .....   | 14        |

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### AUTHOR'S NOTE

This document provides an overview of the *Alberta Recreation Industry Labour Market Project* undertaken by the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) over a three-year period between November 2002 and June 2005. The project consisted of four studies, each carried out by consultants under contract to ARPA.

The purpose here is to present the principal findings and recommendations arising from the project without outlining all of the assumptions, research methods, and statistical materials generated by each of the four studies. For those wishing greater detail, the full reports from the four studies are available as follows:

- *An Alberta Recreation Industry Labour Market Analysis: Phase One – Setting the Scene*, June 2003 (67 pages). This report incorporates the findings of the first two studies:
  - *The Growing Business of Recreation in Alberta*, carried out by Promoting Communities Inc
  - *Perspectives on the Future*, carried out by WillowBridge Consulting.
- The report is available on the ARPA website ([www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm](http://www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm)).
- *A Labour Market Analysis of the Recreation Industry in Alberta*, June 2005 (92 pages) presents the work of the third study, together with a separate Appendix (71 pages) titled 'Recreation Industry Position Descriptions Resulting from the Job Content Analysis'. This report was prepared by Manecon Business Strategies Inc., and will be available on the ARPA website ([www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm](http://www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm)) in September 2005.
- *A Framework for Recreation Education and Training for Alberta*, June 2005 (63 pages). This report, incorporating findings from the fourth study, was prepared by Manecon Business Strategies Inc., and will be available on the ARPA website ([www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm](http://www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm)) in September 2005.

**It is important to understand that this document presents the author's assessment of the work and materials of the various consultants who carried out the four research studies. In particular, the recommendations included in Section III of this report, though driven and built upon the recommendations and *Action Plan* proposed by one of the consultants (Manecon Business Strategies Inc.), have been developed and placed within a three-part education and training strategy devised by the author.**

The entire project was made possible through the financial support of three Alberta Provincial Government Departments: *Alberta Community Development*; *Alberta Economic Development*; and *Alberta Human Resources and Employment* (with additional funding from *Human Resources Development Canada*).

Tim Burton, Ph.D.  
Project Manager  
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### Section I: The Alberta Recreation Industry Labour Market Project

#### Objectives

The *Alberta Recreation Industry Labour Market* project had three objectives:

- To provide an assessment of the size and scope of Alberta's recreation industry.
- To prepare an analysis of the industry's labour market.
- To identify education and training needs for the immediate and long-term future.

It was made up of two Phases, encompassing four separate but related studies.

#### Phase One

Phase One, made up of two studies, addressed the first of these objectives.

- *The Growing Business of Recreation in Alberta* (Study #1) identified and analyzed the scope of the recreation industry in the province and assessed its overall impact on the Alberta economy.
- *Perspectives on the Future* (Study #2) examined prospective macro socio-economic trends in Alberta likely to have a substantial impact on the development of the recreation industry and its future labour market.

#### Phase Two

Phase Two, also made up of two studies, addressed the second and third objectives.

- *A Labour Market Analysis of the Recreation Industry in Alberta* (Study #3) consisted of a rigorous assessment of the industry's labour market in Alberta: its historical evolution, present circumstances, future employment sectors and projections, job characteristics, and the like.
- *A Framework for Recreation Education and Training for Alberta* (Study #4) drew upon findings of the three previous studies to define the strategic elements required for the future education and training of recreation practitioners in the province.

#### A Working Definition of the Recreation Industry

The recreation industry has been variously defined in the literature. At its widest, it has included anything associated with free time activity - tourism, entertainment, gambling, drinking, community recreation, sport, parks, and more. At its narrowest, it has been limited to public recreation and parks services. The intent here, however, was to develop a *working definition* reflecting our specific interest in the labour needs of the industry, and encompassing only things that can be measured discretely.

So, recognizing that a working definition is always a work in progress, the following was adopted, indicating that the industry consists of four major segments.

- *Fitness and Active Living*: health, fitness, sport, and recreation centres; fitness programs in educational and health institutions; corporate fitness services, facilities, and programs; fitness and recreation-related health and community service professions, such as camp counsellors, recreation therapists, and play leaders; and manufacturing, retail, and wholesale trade related to fitness and active living – for example, swimming pools, and home-based exercise equipment.
- *Amateur Sport*: Provincial sport organizations; not-for-profit and user-pay organizations offering public access to sport and physical recreation, such as the YMCA; sport programming in primary, secondary, and post secondary educational institutions; and manufacturing, retail, and wholesale trade related to amateur sport – for example, equipment manufacture, sales, and rentals.

## Section I: The Alberta Recreation Industry Labour Market Project

- *Outdoor Recreation and Parks*: parks, open spaces, and facilities for group and individual recreational activity; guides and outfitters; provincial recreation associations; and manufacturing, retail, and wholesale trade related to outdoor recreation and parks, such as camping equipment and recreational vehicles.
- *Community Recreation*: public and community-based organizations, spaces, and centres offering recreation opportunities at local and provincial levels; and manufacturing, retail, and wholesale trade related to community recreation – for example, suppliers of playground equipment.

A more detailed definition, complete with discussion and rationale, is included in the first report from the project ([www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm](http://www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm)).

Though limited, this definition ensures that the resulting measures of the industry do not include substantial non-recreational components.

### Methods and Sources

A wide variety of methods and sources were used in carrying out the project. While full details can be found in the separate reports of the four individual studies ([www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm](http://www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm)), what follows is a brief summary of each.

### The Growing Business of Recreation in Alberta

- The monetary contribution of the recreation industry to the provincial economy was calculated through the *expenditure approach*, summing private household spending, public expenditure, and private investment in recreation in the province.
- The most recent year for which appropriate data were available was 2001, with comparable figures in the same format only available as far back as 1997.
- The effect of recreation spending on the size of the Alberta economy is its impact on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), incorporating what is commonly called the *multiplier effect*. This value was calculated using a modified version of an economic model obtained from *Alberta Community Development*.
- Levels of employment in Alberta's recreation industry were taken from published Census data for the years 1991, 1996 and 2001 for *primary* recreation occupations: program leaders in recreation and sport, recreation and sport program and service directors, and coaches. These figures were supplemented with estimates of the proportions of employees in associated occupations engaged in recreation – for example, in facility management, education, and retail sales.
- An estimate was also made of the value of volunteer work in Alberta's recreation industry. Volunteer work is known to play a significant role in the delivery of recreation opportunities in Alberta, but it is not usually included in evaluating GDP. It is important to note, then, that the volunteer contributions to Alberta's recreation industry presented in the report have **not** been included in the value of the gross provincial recreation product or the GDP impacts of recreation.

### Perspectives on the Future

- Information for this study was obtained through two focus groups made up of people involved in the four segments of the industry. Each group met for a half-day to identify significant trends, to analyze their apparent effects on the recreation industry, and to reflect on the industry's labour needs.
- Trends identified by the focus groups were further reviewed through an Internet search, identifying related statistics and commentaries.
- The suggested implications of these trends for the recreation industry were drawn from a combination of focus group work and Internet research.
- In contrast to the trends analysis, the findings about labour needs came exclusively from the deliberations of the focus groups.

### A Labour Market Analysis of the Recreation Industry in Alberta

The research for the third study employed a diverse set of methods.

- An extensive secondary research program was undertaken to explore the environment in which Alberta's recreation industry operates and to assemble information about the labour market, the current state of the industry, and existing and former recreation education and training programs in Alberta.
- A web-based survey was conducted to explore various characteristics of the industry's labour market, and to assess employee skills and knowledge in quantitative terms. The survey targeted both employees and employers, and generated 463 responses.
- Thirty-five (35) exploratory interviews were conducted with industry leaders in a cross section of industry groupings to examine selected key issues in depth.
- Ten (10) exploratory interviews were conducted with recreation educators for the same purpose.
- Focus group discussions were conducted with students currently enrolled in post secondary recreation education programs at the University of Alberta, Red Deer College, and Mount Royal College – again, to examine key issues in depth.
- A content analysis of more than 200 postings of recreation positions currently available in the industry was carried out, leading to the identification of 40 additional types of jobs.

### A Framework for Recreation Education and Training for Alberta

The fourth study in the project consisted of three parts.

- A review of the historical evolution of recreation education and training programs in Alberta, leading to an inventory of current programs in the province.
- A program of secondary research, employing electronic, library, and telephone interview methods, exploring best practices and innovations in recreation training and education elsewhere, with particular focus on North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.
- Based on these two analyses and the findings of the first three studies in the project, a proposed education and training plan for the future was developed. This plan is interpretive in character, consisting of the consultants' suggestions and recommendations for revising and enhancing current education and training opportunities within the industry in Alberta.

## **Section II: Finding of the Studies**

### **The Growing Business of Recreation in Alberta**

Employing the narrow definition of recreation outlined earlier, the following are the principal highlights of findings from the first of the four studies:

- Total spending on recreation in Alberta in 2001 was slightly more than \$2.8 billion – an increase in real terms of 30.2% over 1997.
- This total spending represented about 2% of Alberta's Gross Domestic Product and 2.1% of provincial final demand for goods and services in 2001.
- The largest category of spending was by Alberta households: almost \$2 billion in 2001 – an increase in real terms of 26% over 1997.
- Recreation spending by all levels of government was about \$750 million in 2001 – an increase in real terms of 34% over 1997.
- In every year from 1997 through 2001 recreation spending by municipal governments exceeded spending by all other levels of government combined.
- Total primary employment in recreation was 21,534 in 2001 – an increase of 14.4% over 1996 and 30.1% over 1991.
- While not included in spending and employment figures, volunteering is important to recreation in Alberta. The equivalent wage value of volunteer contributions to recreation in 2000 amounted to about \$287 million, or 8,572 person-years of work.
- After allowing for 'leakages' from the provincial economy, the overall impact of recreation on Alberta's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), not including volunteer contributions, was \$2.2 billion in 2001, equivalent to 1.5% of provincial GDP.

Various other benefits are associated with the recreation industry: for example, improved health and well-being of participants, which increases their productivity in other sectors of the economy and reduces health care costs; reduced social costs associated with individuals pursuing the recreation activities defined in this study as opposed to less socially desirable forms of leisure; enhanced community and cultural development; and improved land use and environmental protection. While all of these have economic consequences, no attempt was made to place a monetary value on any of them.

### **Perspectives on the Future**

The following are the principal highlights of the findings from the second study:

- Important anticipated demographic changes in Alberta include the aging of its population, increased international immigration into the province, and growing demands for accessibility to recreation from disadvantaged groups, while major health concerns include rapidly rising levels of youth obesity and escalating costs of maintaining the health care system.
- A special concern for the industry is a growing preoccupation with safety and security issues - notably accountability, liability, and risk management.
- The principal institutional change affecting the industry in recent years has been the devolution of many services from senior levels of government to the local level (in particular, from the provincial government to municipal governments) and to the not-for-profit sector.

Some important implications of these societal and institutional changes for the recreation industry were also identified through this study:

- A need to strengthen the 'soft skills' of recreation industry personnel - in such areas as conflict management, problem analysis, and communications.
- A need to provide more effective applied learning and integrated training opportunities within post secondary education programs in recreation.
- A need to provide proper training for volunteers, and for recreation professionals in working with them.

- A need to promote the value of recreation as an important contributor to the resolution of social problems, including declining levels of personal and community health.
- A need to resolve confusing (and, sometimes, conflicting) certification standards in the industry.
- A continuing opportunity to develop partnerships between public, private, and not-for-profit organizations within the recreation industry.
- An opportunity to develop joint degrees (and careers) in the industry, combining recreation with such fields as business, law, and engineering.

One of the principal conclusions from this study is the necessity for the industry to act as a leader in seeking solutions to health care issues and rising health care costs. Partnerships between organizations in the recreation and health sectors (and, indeed, in other sectors as well) are not only vital, but would also give the industry the credibility and recognition that it has long sought.

### **A Labour Market Analysis of the Recreation Industry in Alberta**

The principal findings from this study are presented below in four sections: trends influencing the industry; industry leadership; labour market and employment trends; and education and training needs and expectations.

#### **Trends Influencing the Industry**

- Demographic change and market evolution, changing political and economic priorities, increased awareness of health, rehabilitation, therapeutic recreation, and active living, and specialization within recreation disciplines are all factors that directly impact the recreation industry.
- Competition for limited financial resources and employees, increasing costs and operating revenues, and customer demands have shown that recreation professionals need to have strong business skills - including leadership, marketing, innovation, and negotiation skills - to be successful in the industry.
- Industry experts believe the current image of the recreation industry constrains recruitment and limits funding.

#### **Industry Leadership**

- The study found that many leaders in the industry are aging, considering retirement, or being promoted out of the industry – especially within the public sector.
- Both employers and employees within the industry believe that continuing reductions in recreation education programs at post secondary institutions, limited career opportunities, non-competitive employee compensation, and difficult working conditions will likely limit the supply of new leaders for the industry.
- Professional development and mentoring programs are essential to address these issues in the short term. As well, the industry must place more emphasis on focused post secondary education programs to provide a longer-term human resource base of qualified employees.

#### **Labour Market and Employment Trends**

- The study shows that recreation industry employers have increased levels of staffing in recent years and expect further growth in numbers of employees in most job categories, especially in program related areas and marketing.
- Ideals appear to be just as important as salaries in motivating recreation industry employees and recreation students looking to make a career in the industry. However, increased labour market competition has led to career opportunities with higher pay in other sectors of the economy becoming increasingly attractive. The study suggests that innovative revenue and operating strategies and alliances must be implemented to counteract such challenges to staffing the industry.
- Economic and organizational restructuring has changed the face of the industry's labour market. The industry is hard pressed to compete for qualified employees due, among other things, to limited pay scales.
- The industry relies extensively on the commitment of volunteers, who contribute their time freely and often spend their own money on required certification.
- Part-time and seasonal work is also very prevalent in the industry.
- There is significant mobility into and within the industry. The largest proportion of employees joined the industry directly from secondary or post secondary graduation.
- The study also identifies a significant trend in early-career attrition.

- The study shows that recreation industry professionals are in demand in other industries because of their well-rounded education and their values.

### Education and Training Needs and Expectations

- A large proportion of jobs require formal education in recreation or related disciplines and, mostly where liability exists, formal certification.
- While employers recognize the contributions of the existing recreation education system in preparing employees for the industry, there is a measure of 'disconnect' between educators and practitioners in the field. This leads to a need for the development of strategies to build effective cooperation.
- Employers identified skill and knowledge deficits in several areas, significantly in those having to do with business or general management, human resources management, and leadership.
- As well, the study found that professional development opportunities are constrained by location, time, and money, and by a lack of suitable programs. There are few current programs that are truly appropriate for the industry.
- Both employers and employees noted that innovative delivery and carefully planned content are important to stimulate a vibrant education and training environment. Unfortunately, there is a relative dearth of both at this time.

Analyses of data relating specifically to the four segments of the industry - fitness and active living, amateur sport, outdoor recreation and parks, and community recreation - show that practitioners in all segments generally agree about the trends influencing the industry and on their needs for an improved education and training environment.

However, these separate analyses also show marked differences between the labour environments of municipalities and not-for-profit societies, and between rural and urban market employers. These relate to such things as differing rates of pay, varying organizational structures, shifting human resource strategies, and dissimilar methods of recruitment, all of which lead to greater difficulty finding, hiring, and retaining qualified and experienced employees. This challenge is exacerbated in rural communities.

Recreation is a significant foundation of the *Alberta Advantage* and a central component of the lifestyles of Albertans. New realities, marketplace trends, and prospects for operating alliances present an extraordinary opportunity for the industry. But it must embrace and lead change. It will continue to evolve positively only by responding aggressively to changing demands in a fluid marketplace.

### A Framework for Recreation Education and Training for Alberta

As noted earlier, the fourth study was made up of three distinct but related parts:

- A review of historical and current recreation education and training programs in Alberta.
- An exploratory analysis of best practices and innovations in recreation education and training elsewhere, with particular focus on North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.
- Based on these two analyses and the findings of the first three studies in the project, development of a proposed framework for a recreation education and training plan for Alberta.

The findings of the first two of these parts will be reviewed here, while the final part will be the subject of the next section of this report.

### Alberta's Recreation Education and Training System

Principal findings of the inventory of historical and current recreation education and training programs in Alberta are as follows.

- Alberta was a pioneer in developing professional training and post-secondary education in recreation. Beginning with part-time leadership training, followed by in-service training for full-time workers, the Government of Alberta took a lead role in identifying needs and responding with education opportunities.
- Alberta's post secondary recreation education system has shrunk considerably in recent years, as educational institutions have faced serious fiscal challenges.

- Currently, there is limited awareness among people about to enter the labour force of what career opportunities exist in the recreation industry, and how to prepare for entry to various recreation occupations.
- Many students graduating from high schools in Alberta are apparently unaware of potential career opportunities in the recreation industry and are unfamiliar with the availability of recreation education programs in the province.
- There are few systemic links between organizations in the recreation industry and institutions in the secondary and post secondary education systems.
- There is no common foundation course that examines core aspects of recreation. Each program has its own foundation, and while there may be commonalities in the details, there is little that is common in the core of these programs.
- Typically, courses that have most in common between programs are those required from outside the discipline itself: English or Communications, Accounting, Management, Administration, and Computing.
- Within the discipline itself, there are only a few commonalities, notably courses in Program Planning, Leadership, and Fieldwork or Practicum experiences.
- As a result of these conditions, graduated students competing for the same jobs usually bring something different from their education. And, while this may be seen as advantageous, since it gives employers a variety of perspectives from which to choose, it also has drawbacks wherever attempts are made to measure each graduate against a similar expectation or standard.
- There are also serious constraints in the transferability of programs. Students who begin a program at one institution often experience difficulty switching to a program at another, especially where this involves a change from one type of institution (such as a community college) to another (for example, a university).
- As well, those seeking to build on a previous qualification – for example, a diploma from a certificate, or a degree from a diploma - usually find there is little in the previous qualification that will be accepted by a subsequent institution due to variations in curricula.
- There are few opportunities for ongoing professional development for employees currently working in the industry. The few opportunities that exist are seriously constrained by location, time, and cost. Most are directed at formal higher education qualifications, such as a Master's degree, and require at least some full-time enrolment, necessitating a prolonged absence from work. Or, they are programs designed for professionals in related fields – for example, advanced diplomas and certificates in business administration - that have only indirect relevance to the recreation industry.

This research has suggested that the existing recreation education and training system in Alberta has not kept pace with changes in the industry over the past two decades. There is almost no linkage to the secondary school system. There are few opportunities for private sector training and few ongoing professional development opportunities for current practitioners. Opportunities for distance learning are rare.

### **Best Practices and Innovations in Recreation Education and Training**

The second part of the fourth study consisted of an exploratory analysis of best practices and innovations in recreation education and training in North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Details can be found in the full report ([www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm](http://www.arpaonline.ca/research.htm)). What follows is a brief description of such practices under four headings: organization, format, content, and credentials - with references to examples in parentheses.

#### **Organization**

In addition to the traditional post secondary education institutions, recreation industry associations and private companies have begun to take on enhanced roles in the delivery of recreation education and training. There are several developments of note.

- Partnerships between educational institutions and private and not-for-profit associations include First Nations' organizations and Seniors' Lodges.
- In-house education and training opportunities continue to be provided through employers' human resource departments, although to a relatively limited extent.
- Not-for-profit associations provide various kinds of professional development opportunities for their staffs and members: see, for example, *SkillsActive* in the United Kingdom ([www.skillsactive.org.uk](http://www.skillsactive.org.uk)), and *insportandrecreation.net* in Australia ([www.insportandrecreation.net](http://www.insportandrecreation.net)).

- Private and commercial companies and organizations offer specialized programs: for example, Strathcona Park Lodge ([www.colft.bc.ca](http://www.colft.bc.ca)) and Sprott Shaw College ([www.sprott-shaw.com](http://www.sprott-shaw.com)) in British Columbia.
- Institutes such as the Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism affiliated with Utah State University provide outreach programs in outdoor recreation and tourism to students and professionals ([www.extension.usu.edu/cooperative/iort](http://www.extension.usu.edu/cooperative/iort)).

### Format

Although traditional courses still dominate, new delivery formats are emerging.

- Traditional University and College Programs are engaged more actively in delivery formats such as ‘Laddering’ or ‘Two-Plus-Two’ brokered degrees ([www.mala.bc.ca](http://www.mala.bc.ca) and [www.capcollege.bc.ca](http://www.capcollege.bc.ca)), and executive degrees offered through weekend and evening study ([www.business.queensu.ca/emba](http://www.business.queensu.ca/emba)).
- Although a traditional vehicle for recreation education and training, workshops and conferences are now being offered in various innovative formats ([www.srq.qld.gov.au/community\\_programs/building\\_active\\_communities\\_workshops.cfm](http://www.srq.qld.gov.au/community_programs/building_active_communities_workshops.cfm)).
- Short courses continue to be a popular, though limited, form of recreation education and training ([www.bcrpa.bc.ca/leisure\\_dev](http://www.bcrpa.bc.ca/leisure_dev) and [www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org)).
- Field-based experiential learning and training continues to be popular and effective ([www.langara.bc.ca](http://www.langara.bc.ca) and [www.mun.ca](http://www.mun.ca)).
- Electronic (Online) Learning and Distance Delivery are becoming increasingly popular formats for recreation education and training ([www.gmcc.ab.ca](http://www.gmcc.ab.ca) and [www.mba.athabascau.ca](http://www.mba.athabascau.ca)).
- In *Open Space* sessions, participants create and manage their own agenda around a central theme, and share experiences and expertise in structured yet flexible environments ([www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org) and [www.leadershipcanada.org](http://www.leadershipcanada.org)).
- Prior Learning Assessment is a process for assessing previous non-formal (often experiential) learning, and providing appropriate credit for this ([www.chn.nl](http://www.chn.nl)).
- Self-Directed Learning allows individuals to upgrade their knowledge and skills through self-directed study in activities such as monitoring trends and professional networking, for which they receive formal credit ([www.ilam.co.uk](http://www.ilam.co.uk)).

### Content

Innovative and promising practices in content fall into several categories.

- Programs in niche markets make up a large proportion of new programs in traditional post secondary education institutions: for example, adventure recreation, golf management, recreation entrepreneurship, and arts and culture management.
- The *Alberta Play Leadership Development Program* introduces young people to a range of skills applicable to children’s play settings ([www.recreationforlife.org](http://www.recreationforlife.org)).
- The *Lifesaving Society* involves young people in various training programs suitable for use in recreation employment ([www.lifesaving.org](http://www.lifesaving.org)).

### Credentials

There have been numerous developments in the kinds of credentials offered to recognize successful completion of recreation education and training.

- While diplomas and degrees continue to be the most recognized and sought after credentials, increasing numbers of specializations are being recognized, such as leisure events management, tourism, and therapeutic recreation ([www.shu.ac.uk](http://www.shu.ac.uk)).
- Some membership organizations now provide recreation education and training through a process of certification: examples are aquatics ([www.lifesaving.org](http://www.lifesaving.org)), fitness ([www.calainc.org](http://www.calainc.org)), and coaching ([www.coach.ca/e/ncccp](http://www.coach.ca/e/ncccp)).
- In recreation generally, the U.S. National Recreation and Parks Association offers a certification program for various categories of park and recreation professionals – full, provisional, and associate ([www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org)).

- Accreditation consists of formal recognition that a recreation education program meets the requirements of professional training. The U.S. National Recreation and Parks Association has accredited recreation programs in more than 100 universities and colleges and 55 agencies, indicating that they meet the requirements for professional certification of their graduates ([www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org)).

Historically, Alberta has been a leader in the delivery of recreation services and in the education and training of practitioners. However, provincial programs and activities have not kept up with recent developments elsewhere. Most of the practices and innovations cited above do not exist in Alberta – and, perhaps, some will not be readily applicable here. Nevertheless, they are worthy of careful consideration to determine if they would enhance Alberta's recreation education and training system as the province moves into its second century.

## Section III: A Strategy for Recreation Education and Training for Alberta

### The Three Pillars of the Recreation Education and Training System

There are three principal components of an education and training system for the recreation industry in Alberta that may be perceived as the three pillars of a strategy for the future. They deal with:

- Career Awareness, consisting of efforts to make those entering the labour force (as well as those already in it who might be considering alternative careers) aware of the kinds of opportunities and careers available within the recreation industry.
- Career Preparation, consisting of education and training programs designed to prepare people to enter the recreation industry workforce. These programs usually lead to formal qualifications in the form of certificates, diplomas, and baccalaureate degrees.
- Career Development, consisting of a variety of opportunities for those already working in the industry to upgrade skills and knowledge, meet certification requirements (where appropriate), and pursue professional advancement.

The proposed recreation education and training strategy for Alberta will be outlined by reference to specific strategies for each of these three pillars of the system.

This presentation will begin, however, with a statement of goals for the strategy and an outline of the proposed role of ARPA in the development and implementation of this. Recommendations drawn from, or based upon, the studies reported here will be stated, with appropriate explanation and discussion.

### Goals

The following goals for a recreation industry education and training strategy for Alberta are consistent with the major findings of the four research studies carried out as part of this project. They are:

- To develop awareness of recreation as an industry of choice for potential career candidates, thereby seeking to ensure an adequate labour supply for the industry.
- To ensure delivery of a broad spectrum of education and training opportunities for those entering the industry and those already in it, intended to ensure that recreation practitioners have a core foundation, knowledge base, and set of skills in recreation, while recognizing the diversity of occupations within the industry.
- To fill identified gaps in education and training by developing new programs in cooperation with formal education institutions, and through industry associations.
- To broaden the range of mechanisms employed to deliver education and training programs so that they better fit with the needs of those working in the industry.
- To strengthen collaboration and partnerships within the recreation education and training system to ensure that programs are coordinated and integrated among and between institutions offering them.
- To enhance accessibility to, and mobility in, the education and training system to ensure that those working towards a career in the industry are supported in navigating through the various levels of the system.

### The Role of ARPA

ARPA has played a leadership role in the recreation industry for more than half a century, and maintains liaison with associations and organizations within the industry, relevant provincial and municipal government departments, recreation education and training institutions, suppliers to the industry, individual recreation practitioners, and organizations in related industries such as health care and social work.

ARPA has sponsored and carried out a great deal of research and planning for the recreation industry focused on its articulated vision for recreation in Alberta for the next decade (Proceedings of the 2015 Symposium on Leisure, Wellness, Prosperity and Quality of Life, 2002, available on the ARPA website at [www.arpaonline.ca](http://www.arpaonline.ca)). It was the prime mover behind the project that has been described in this report. It is a logical organization to guide implementation of the many proposals emerging from the project.

### *Section III: A Strategy for Recreation Education and Training for Alberta*

To do so, however, it needs to locate the initiative institutionally in a setting in which education and training will be an exclusive responsibility.

***Recommendation #1: That ARPA establish a Centre for Professional Education and Development, in cooperation with partners in the recreation industry, to provide a forum for regular consultation between industry associations, recreation organizations, employers, and recreation education and training institutions in the province.***

In addition to acting as a forum for regular consultation between associations, organizations, and employers in the industry and its recreation education and training institutions, the Centre would enhance the identity of the recreation industry in the province. It would act as a catalyst to bring together organizations and associations in the four principal segments of the industry, its various education and training institutions, and its individual practitioners. It would act as a clearinghouse for information about recreation education and training in the province. It would also provide a focal point for ARPA's relations with associations, institutions, and practitioners in related industries such as health care, especially health promotion.

The Centre's principal purpose would be to identify and examine issues and problems in professional recreation education and development, and work with relevant industry partners to resolve them. This, in turn, requires that a mechanism be created for ensuring the ongoing involvement of industry partners.

***Recommendation #2: That ARPA establish a Recreation Education and Training Task Force, under the auspices of the Centre for Professional Education and Development and in cooperation with partners in the industry, to monitor and advise on the need for changes in, and additions to, recreation education and training opportunities in the province.***

The mandate of this Task Force would be to facilitate ways of implementing the kinds of changes to the current recreation education and training system in the province that have been identified as necessary through this research project. It would also be responsible for monitoring the state of health of the recreation education and training system in the province.

### **A Career Awareness Strategy**

The first pillar of an effective recreation education and training system must consist of awareness among potential employees of the kinds of careers and occupations that exist within the industry. This calls for the development of A Career Awareness Strategy for the industry.

***Recommendation #3: That, through the Centre for Professional Education and Development, ARPA collaborate with colleges, universities, businesses, and recreation industry associations in developing and implementing A Career Awareness Strategy designed to attract secondary students and others into recreation education programs and, subsequently, into the recreation industry workforce.***

Elements of this Career Awareness Strategy would include at least the following.

- Identification of primary entry points into the industry, including, among others, starting positions and volunteer opportunities.
- Identification and targeting of major sources of potential employees for the industry: secondary school students; seniors seeking part-time or semi-retirement positions; and employees in related sectors of the labour force (health care, community development, social work, correctional services, and so on).
- Emphasis on the characteristics, quality, and attractiveness of many recreation occupations.
- Expansion and enhanced promotion of recreation industry occupational profiles in existing employment databases: for example, the Alberta Learning Information System (ALIS) maintained by Alberta Learning.
- Development of cooperative employment marketing programs among and between post secondary recreation education institutions, recreation industry employers, and recreation associations and advocates.
- Aggressive promotion of the system of recreation education and training opportunities available to potential practitioners.
- Implementation of a work placement program at the secondary school level to enhance awareness of the industry and create a feeder system for entry to it.

## Section III: A Strategy for Recreation Education and Training for Alberta

- Development of an elective course in recreation education at the secondary school level, aimed at introducing students to the industry and occupations within it. (When British Columbia introduced an elective tourism education course into schools in the 1990's, the numbers of students entering post secondary tourism programs in subsequent years increased, as did the numbers choosing tourism as a career option.)
- Aggressive promotion of extracurricular programs integrating youth into the recreation industry, thereby providing a major stimulus to career awareness.

While some of these activities already take place, what is required is that they be integrated into a unified marketing strategy designed to create awareness of the recreation industry itself and the variety of career opportunities within it.

Development of this Career Awareness Strategy should be undertaken as a joint venture with a variety of stakeholders: school boards, individual schools, and other secondary education organizations; post secondary education institutions; recreation employers; and recreation associations.

### A Career Preparation Strategy

The second pillar of a comprehensive recreation education and training strategy for Alberta must be focussed on the provision of education and training opportunities designed to provide necessary skills and knowledge for those entering the industry. Most of these opportunities lead to formal higher education qualifications: certificates, diplomas, and baccalaureate degrees. However, fieldwork and practicum opportunities are also important since they allow for the application of acquired knowledge and skills to practical situations. As well, both employers and employees participating in this research project identified specific skill and knowledge deficits in subjects they deemed essential to success in the industry.

All of this implies a need for formal communication and collaboration among and between recreation education and training institutions in the province. Such communication should take the form of articulation meetings covering any aspects of recreation education and training in the province that are of concern to one or more of the participants and should lead to the development and implementation of A Career Preparation Strategy.

***Recommendation #4: That ARPA invite all institutions offering post secondary recreation education and training in Alberta to participate in a series of articulation meetings under the auspices of the Centre for Professional Education and Development, aimed at designing and implementing A Career Preparation Strategy for the industry.***

Elements of this strategy should include:

- The pursuit of greater commonality in core components of recreation education programs.
- The conduct of periodic reviews of recreation education specialties in light of the changing needs of the industry.
- The identification of ways of ensuring improved transferability among and between programs at different levels in the post secondary education system: specifically, programs leading to certificates, diplomas, and baccalaureate degrees.
- The need to provide greater opportunities for the integration of learning and practice through cooperative programs, fieldwork and practicum placements, work experience, and seasonal and part-time employment.
- Inclusion within current curriculums of courses and experiences enabling students to acquire essential skills and knowledge presently not provided sufficiently or at all: management skills, including human resource management, volunteer management, and leadership; and 'soft' skills in such areas as problem analysis, conflict resolution, and communications.
- The need for greater diversity in methods of delivery of recreation education and training programs: for example, through electronic delivery (online) as well as intensive courses outside the traditional semester system and beyond the (literal and organizational) walls of the host institutions.

The best practices and innovations identified through the research studies discussed earlier provide a valuable resource for addressing these concerns.

### **A Career Development Strategy**

The final pillar of the recreation education and training system encompasses the provision of opportunities for those already working in the industry to upgrade skills and knowledge, meet certification requirements (where appropriate), and pursue professional advancement. It is concerned with ongoing career development,

The recreation industry is dynamic. As a result, there are constant changes occurring in the skill sets necessary to perform effectively in the industry. Unfortunately, opportunities for both upgrading skills and ongoing professional development are severely limited in Alberta's recreation industry. The principal sources of training are recreation industry associations and not-for-profit organizations that provide on-the-job training and upgrading opportunities in specialized areas such as aquatics, facilities management, fitness, and therapeutic recreation.

Besides these training opportunities provided by industry associations, there are some generic programs and courses available in related industries that have varying application to recreation - in particular business management courses of various kinds - but these are not focused directly on issues and concerns within the recreation industry itself. As well, many of them are unaffordable or not readily accessible.

In addition, some segments of the industry are now facing increased demands for certification of practitioners – especially where risk and liability concerns are paramount. Programs and courses appropriate for this are rare.

In short, though some valuable training opportunities exist in particular areas, the career development system as a whole is woefully weak. There is a need to build this component of Alberta's recreation education and training system virtually from scratch!

***Recommendation #5: That, through the Centre for Professional Education and Development and in consultation with recreation associations, employers, and recreation education and training institutions, ARPA prepare and implement A Career Development Strategy aimed at upgrading the skills of practitioners currently in the workforce and creating formal procedures for practitioner certification and institutional accreditation where appropriate.***

As noted above, recreation industry associations in Alberta already play an important role in training employees. Opportunities exist for continued innovation in training programs offered by these industry associations, and further work should be done to promote industry training within the future system.

Elements of A Career Development Strategy would include the following:

- The design of professional development programs cooperatively with public, private, and not-for-profit educational institutions.
- The promotion of course-based opportunities for upgrading professional knowledge and acquiring new skills.
- The promotion of online, distance learning, and other non-traditional opportunities for professional upgrading and continuous learning.
- The development of certification programs where appropriate.
- The development of accreditation systems with industry partners.

The best practices and innovations identified earlier demonstrate how various other jurisdictions have gone about providing such opportunities.