

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
COUNTY OF KITTITAS
STATE OF WASHINGTON

RESOLUTION No. 2025-106

RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE KITTITAS COUNTY TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN

- WHEREAS,** the Kittitas County Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (LTAC) has reviewed and recommended approval of the Kittitas County Tourism Strategic Plan; and
- WHEREAS,** the Tourism Strategic Plan is designed to guide the county's tourism development and promotion efforts, ensuring alignment with community goals and economic priorities; and
- WHEREAS,** adoption of the Tourism Strategic Plan will inform and support grant award decisions for tourism-related projects and events in accordance with RCW 67.28.1816; and
- WHEREAS,** the implementation of the Tourism Strategic Plan will support coordinated efforts to enhance tourism, promote economic growth, and benefit the residents and visitors of Kittitas County.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: The Kittitas County Board of County Commissioners hereby adopts the Kittitas County Tourism Strategic Plan as recommended by the Lodging Tax Advisory Committee to guide tourism-related grant awards and initiatives in accordance with RCW 67.28.1816.

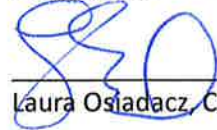
DATED this 6/2/25, at Ellensburg, Washington.

Attest:



- Clerk of the Board – Julie Kjorsvik
 Deputy Clerk of the Board – Mandy Buchholz

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
KITTITAS COUNTY, WASHINGTON



Laura Osladacz, Chairman

ABSENT



Cory Wright, Vice-Chairman



Brett Wachsmith, Commissioner





KITTITAS COUNTY TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN

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&

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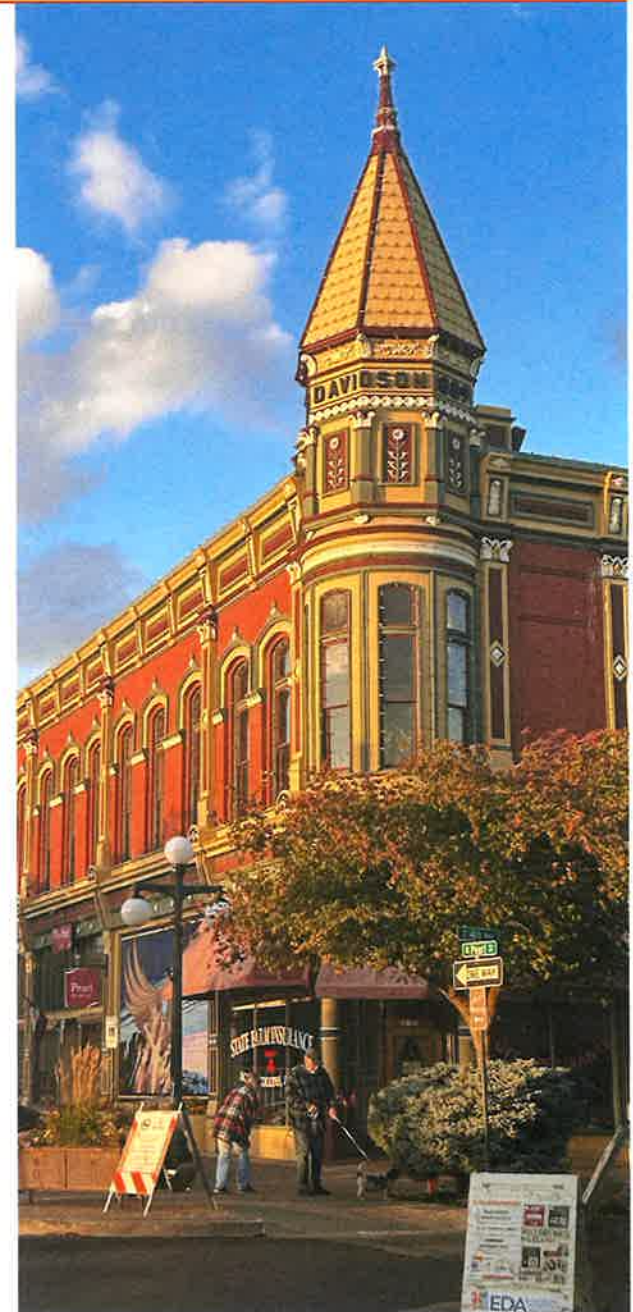


INTRODUCTION

Tourism is both an important and complex opportunity and issue for Kittitas County. The county's diverse landscapes, historic towns, and year-round outdoor recreation create a strong foundation for tourism, attracting visitors from across the region and beyond. From the Columbia River to the Cascades of Snoqualmie Pass, the county has an excellent mix of existing tourism assets. However, the growth in both visitors and part-time residents over the past five years has placed increasing pressure on communities—particularly in the upper county. As tourism continues to evolve, it is essential to balance economic opportunities with the protection of the county's natural resources, infrastructure, and overall quality of life.

This strategic plan was undertaken to provide direction as Kittitas County identifies and creates tourism-related policies, programs, and products, manages the environment and infrastructure, and makes investments in current and future tourism assets that serve both residents and visitors. It offers a framework for sustainable growth, ensuring that tourism strengthens the local economy while enhancing the character and livability of the region.

The following recommendations and strategies will guide the county as it continues to leverage and grow the economic benefits provided by the tourism industry while preserving and enhancing the quality of life, natural resources, recreational opportunities, and culture that residents enjoy. By aligning tourism development with community priorities, Kittitas County can position itself as a premier destination while maintaining the integrity of the places that make it special.





WHAT IS TOURISM & WHO IS A VISITOR?

Tourism in Kittitas County includes a wide range of activities, from outdoor recreation and cultural experiences to business and university-related travel. Visitors contribute to the local economy by spending on lodging, dining, retail, and recreation, supporting businesses and generating tax revenue. As tourism continues to evolve, understanding who visitors are, how they engage with the county, and what influences their travel decisions is critical to planning for sustainable growth.

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), a visitor is defined as: A person traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for leisure, business, or other purposes for not more than one consecutive year.

Building on this definition, a commonly accepted definition of a visitor is someone who travels 50 miles or more from their home or stays in the area for at least one night for a purpose other than regular commuting.

Visitors to Kittitas County can be grouped into several categories:

- Leisure Visitors – People traveling for recreation, outdoor activities, or personal reasons.
- Event & Festival Attendees – Visitors attending major events such as the Ellensburg Rodeo, Ellensburg Music Festival, or Roslyn’s community festivals.
- Cultural & Heritage Tourists – Those drawn to the county’s historic communities, museums, and agritourism experiences.
- Business & University Travelers – Individuals traveling for conferences, corporate retreats, or Central Washington University-related activities.
- Day Visitors – Travelers who visit for less than 24 hours but still engage in tourism-related spending.

Understanding these visitor types helps guide marketing efforts, infrastructure planning, and investment in tourism-related services, ensuring that Kittitas County remains a desirable destination while balancing visitor demand with community needs.





ABOUT THE PROCESS

The Kittitas County Tourism Strategic Plan was developed through a structured and inclusive process to ensure that tourism planning aligns with the county's economic needs, visitor trends, and community priorities. Tourism is a significant and growing industry in Kittitas County, and this plan reflects a collaborative approach that includes insights from public agencies, tourism stakeholders, and local businesses.

The planning process was conducted in multiple phases, incorporating stakeholder engagement, data analysis, and strategic development:

1. Project Kickoff & Initial Engagement

The process began with an introductory visit to Kittitas County, where site assessments and initial stakeholder discussions helped define key issues and opportunities. The planning team toured Ellensburg, Cle Elum, Roslyn, Vantage, Thorp, and Snoqualmie Pass, gathering preliminary insights on tourism infrastructure, business conditions, and visitor experiences.

2. Stakeholder Roundtables & Public Input

Throughout the planning process, targeted discussions with business owners, tourism operators, recreation organizations, and government officials provided critical perspectives on tourism challenges and opportunities. Public meetings and roundtables were held across the county to capture input from hospitality businesses, event organizers, outdoor recreation groups, and community leaders.

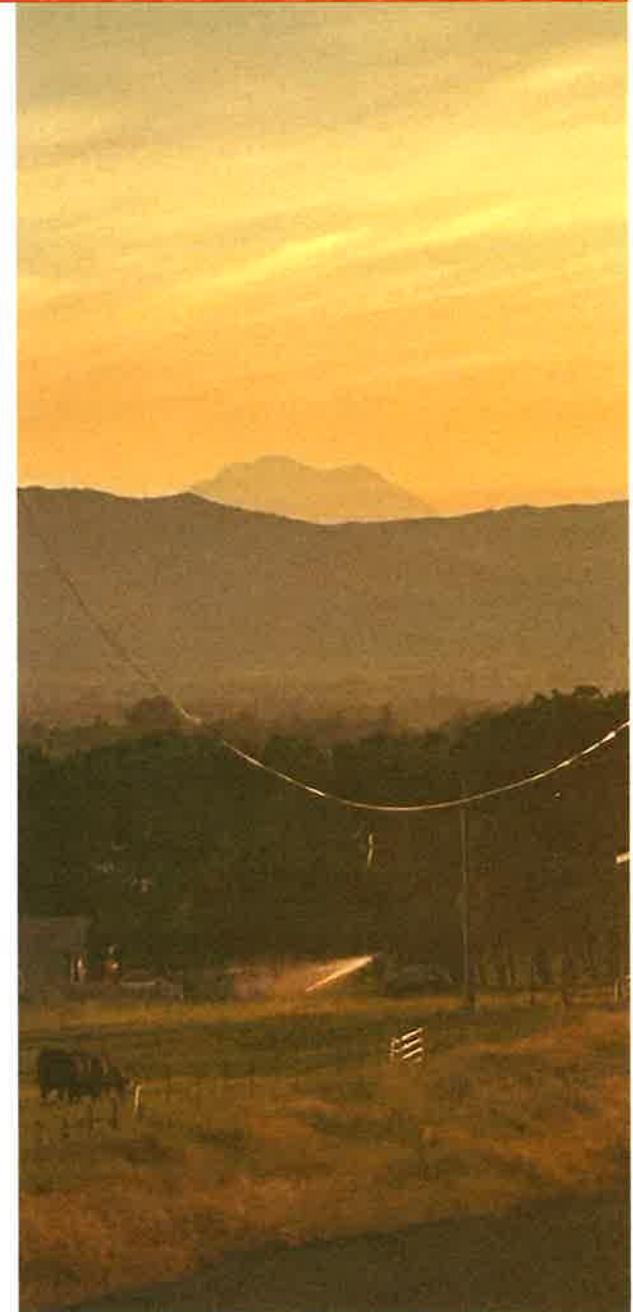
3. Data & Market Analysis

To supplement local knowledge, the planning process incorporated visitor trend data, economic impact research, and regional tourism comparisons. This included reviewing geofencing and survey data, analyzing visitor spending trends, and identifying opportunities for sustainable growth in key tourism sectors.

4. Drafting & Refinement of Recommendations

Based on stakeholder input and market findings, the planning team developed strategic priorities for Kittitas County's tourism sector. The final recommendations reflect a balanced approach to tourism development, ensuring that economic benefits align with infrastructure capacity, community values, and long-term sustainability.

This approach ensures that the Kittitas County Tourism Strategic Plan provides a clear direction for growth while preserving the assets that make the county an attractive destination for visitors and a great place to live.





STRATEGIC GOALS

Tourism in Kittitas County has long been an essential economic and cultural driver, but recent growth in visitation has intensified pressures on local resources. While marketing and promotion efforts—led in part by the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce—have successfully drawn more visitors, the strain on infrastructure and natural assets calls for a more balanced approach that prioritizes resource management, strategic investment, and stronger collaboration among tourism partners.

This plan recognizes the importance of maximizing existing tourism resources rather than simply increasing visitor numbers. By improving infrastructure, diversifying tourism beyond high-traffic destinations, and coordinating efforts among stakeholders, Kittitas County can enhance both the visitor experience and residents' quality of life.

1. Managing Visitor Impact and Strengthening Infrastructure

Managing visitor impact and strengthening infrastructure is a key priority, particularly in high-traffic areas such as Snoqualmie Pass, Roslyn, and Yakima Canyon. Increased visitation has placed pressure on trails, parks, and small-town infrastructure, creating a need for proactive investment and planning. Addressing these challenges will require targeted upgrades to parking, restrooms, trailheads, signage, and waste management systems to ensure that increased visitor traffic does not degrade the local experience. Additionally, visitor management strategies such as educational campaigns, seasonal restrictions, and enforcement policies will encourage responsible tourism while preserving the natural environment. By developing a clear visitor capacity management approach, Kittitas County can work to distribute tourism more evenly across the region rather than concentrating it in a few high-demand locations.





2. Enhancing Trail Connectivity and Expanding Outdoor Access

Expanding trail connectivity and outdoor access is another essential strategy for balancing tourism growth while easing pressure on over-visited destinations. Kittitas County's existing trail networks provide an opportunity to guide visitors further into the region, fostering economic benefits in smaller communities while reducing congestion in high-traffic areas. The Mountains to Sound Greenway Trail, which connects the Puget Sound to Eastern Washington, represents a key corridor for expanding regional tourism beyond the Cascades into Ellensburg and the broader county. Similarly, the Palouse to Cascades State Park Trail, formerly known as the John Wayne Pioneer Trail, is a unique long-distance recreation opportunity that could attract more hikers, cyclists, and equestrians with improved access points and facilities. The Coal Mines Trail, which connects Cle Elum, Roslyn, and Ronald, serves as both a recreational and heritage tourism asset that, with further investment, can provide a deeper connection to the county's history. Additionally, the Yakima Canyon Scenic Byway, a significant natural and recreational draw, can be enhanced through interpretive sites and improved visitor services. By prioritizing investment in these trail systems and regional attractions, Kittitas County can develop a more sustainable tourism economy that supports local businesses while reducing strain on the most heavily trafficked sites.

3. Optimizing the Use of Existing Tourism Funds

The county is in a strong financial position having strategically reserved tourism funds to invest in large capital grants, critical infrastructure, and other initiatives based on guidance from this plan. Reevaluating spending priorities to ensure that tourism-generated revenue is directed toward public benefit projects, such as park maintenance, transportation improvements, and placemaking initiatives, will create long-term value for both visitors and residents. Partnerships with private businesses, conservation groups, and tourism stakeholders can further maximize investment in shared infrastructure projects. A strategic, multi-year investment plan will help prevent future funding bottlenecks while ensuring that tourism continues to generate meaningful economic and quality-of-life benefits.





4. Strengthening Tourism Partnerships and Coordination

Collaboration among tourism stakeholders is essential for creating a more cohesive and effective approach to tourism management. The Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce, which plays a leading role in marketing the region, must coordinate closely with partners across the county to ensure that tourism efforts align with local priorities. Key partners include city and town organizations (municipalities, Downtown Associations, etc.) in Ellensburg, Roslyn, Cle Elum, and Kittitas, which are instrumental in supporting downtown tourism initiatives. The Snoqualmie Pass Community Association plays a vital role in balancing recreation-based tourism with infrastructure and housing needs in the fast-growing Snoqualmie area. Outdoor recreation and conservation organizations such as the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust, Washington Trails Association, Cascade Bicycle Club, and local trail advocacy groups are essential partners in expanding and maintaining the county's outdoor assets. Public land managers, including Washington State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), must coordinate with local entities to manage tourism demand in natural areas effectively. Additional partners include the Kittitas Environmental Education Network (KEEN), the Yakima Canyon Scenic Byway Project Team, Central Washington University (CWU), youth sports organizations, and representatives from the county's emerging film tourism industry. Establishing a framework for regular communication and strategic coordination among these stakeholders will help ensure that tourism development remains sustainable, community-driven, and aligned with broader county goals.

Conclusion

Kittitas County has successfully positioned itself as a top-tier outdoor and heritage destination, but managing its growing tourism economy requires a shift in focus. The goals outlined in this plan reflect a transition from tourism expansion to responsible management, ensuring that visitor spending translates into lasting benefits for residents and communities. Through improved infrastructure, better visitor dispersal, strategic funding, and strong partnerships, Kittitas County can continue to leverage tourism's economic potential while protecting its natural, cultural, and recreational assets for future generations.





SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Understanding the current state of tourism in Kittitas County is essential for making informed decisions that balance visitor growth with community well-being. This section presents an overview of visitor trends, competitive positioning within Washington State, and key strengths and challenges that impact tourism.

Kittitas County is a geographically diverse region encompassing 2,333 square miles, including 889,000 acres of public lands and 36 square miles of water resources, which provide significant outdoor recreation opportunities. The county's economy is supported by 2,124 businesses employing 20,007 people, serving a population of 48,264 residents. With key communities including Ellensburg, Cle Elum, Roslyn, Easton, Thorp, Kittitas, Vantage, Snoqualmie Pass, and the resort community of Suncadia, Kittitas County features a mix of rural small towns, recreational destinations, and historic districts that contribute to its appeal as a tourism hub.

Currently, the impact of domestic tourism is estimated at 2.7 million visit nights and \$359m in visitor expenditures annually in Kittitas County. This level of visitation and economic impact is a vital component of the economic vitality of the county.



48,264
Population



2,333 sq mi
Size



20,007
Employees



889,000
Acres of Public Land



36 sq mi
of Water



1,000+ mi
Public trails



PUBLIC INPUT AND COMMUNITY SURVEY FINDINGS

Public input played a critical role in shaping the **Kittitas County Tourism Strategic Plan**, ensuring that the perspectives of residents, business owners, and visitors directly inform the county’s approach to tourism development. The input process included a **county-wide community survey, stakeholder interviews, and roundtable discussions**, capturing insights on tourism’s benefits, challenges, and future priorities.

Key Themes from Public Engagement

Managing Tourism Growth & Preserving Community Character

A significant takeaway from public input was concern over tourism’s rapid growth and its impact on local infrastructure and quality of life. The survey and stakeholder discussions highlighted that Upper County communities—Roslyn, Cle Elum, and Snoqualmie Pass—are experiencing disproportionate visitor impact, leading to crowded trailheads, parking shortages, and rising housing costs linked to short-term rentals.

In contrast, smaller communities such as Thorp, Vantage, and Kittitas (city) noted fewer direct tourism benefits. Many residents suggested that future tourism strategies should focus on dispersing visitors across the county, rather than concentrating them in a few high-demand areas.

Outdoor Recreation & Trail Infrastructure

Public input confirmed that outdoor recreation is the backbone of Kittitas County’s tourism economy, but there is growing concern about infrastructure strain on public lands, recreational trails, and water access points. Several advocacy groups, including KEEN (Kittitas Environmental Education Network), Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust, and the Coal Mines Trail Commission, emphasized the need for:

- Better maintenance and signage for high-use trails like Palouse to Cascades State Park Trail, Coal Mines Trail, and Yakima River Canyon Recreation Area.
- Expanded parking and access improvements for Lake Kachess, Teanaway Community Forest, and the Ellensburg Trail System.
- Visitor education programs to promote responsible and sustainable tourism and conservation practices.

While survey respondents strongly supported outdoor recreation investment, many also stressed that tourism-generated revenue should be reinvested into infrastructure that benefits full-time residents—such as trail maintenance, public restrooms, and expanded transit access to popular destinations.



Housing & Workforce Challenges in the Tourism Sector

The hospitality and tourism industries in Kittitas County face a labor shortage tied directly to a lack of affordable housing. Employers across lodging, restaurants, and recreation sectors cited difficulty in hiring and retaining staff due to high housing costs, particularly in Cle Elum and Roslyn. Many business owners and workforce advocates suggested:

- Exploring workforce housing solutions, including incentives for housing developments that support tourism employees.
- Revisiting short-term rental regulations, as vacation homes continue to reduce long-term rental availability.
- Additionally, seasonal businesses noted that transit and transportation challenges create barriers for workers commuting from Ellensburg or other lower-cost areas.

Balancing Marketing Success with Sustainable Tourism

Kittitas County has a strong tourism marketing presence, led by the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce, regional visitor bureaus, and downtown associations. While these efforts have successfully increased visitation, some stakeholders expressed concern that marketing has outpaced the county's capacity to manage tourism growth.

Residents and business owners alike called for:

- A more strategic, data-driven approach to tourism promotion—focusing on distributing visitor impact year-round and highlighting shoulder-season tourism to relieve peak congestion.
- Improved collaboration between tourism organizations—ensuring cohesion between marketing efforts and infrastructure investments.
- A stronger partnership between county agencies, trail organizations, and downtown groups to promote lesser-known assets beyond the I-90 corridor.

Guiding Public Priorities

The public's strong emphasis on responsible tourism development has directly shaped the strategic priorities outlined in this plan. Key takeaways include:

- Spreading tourism benefits countywide by promoting less-visited communities and underutilized recreational assets.
- Investing in tourism-related infrastructure to improve visitor experiences while prioritizing local quality of life.
- Ensuring tourism revenue supports residents, including workforce housing and transportation solutions.
- Strengthening collaboration across government, business, and conservation partners to manage tourism's long-term impact effectively.

This community-driven approach ensures that Kittitas County continues to benefit from a thriving tourism industry while maintaining its character, environment, and livability for both residents and visitors alike.



COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Understanding the competitive landscape is essential for positioning Kittitas County effectively within both the regional and state tourism markets. This analysis evaluates peer communities and compares Kittitas County to other notable tourism destinations in Washington State. By identifying similarities, differences, and successful strategies, Kittitas County can build on its strengths and differentiate itself within a crowded market.

Regional Context and Peer Communities

Kittitas County's strategic location at the intersection of Western and Eastern Washington places it in direct competition with several well-established and emerging tourism markets. Chelan County, the Tri-Cities, the Olympic Peninsula, Snoqualmie Valley, and Lewis County represent significant competitors in outdoor recreation, wine tourism, and cultural experiences. Each region offers distinct attractions but faces similar growth challenges. Below is a comparative analysis of these regions.

Chelan County

Chelan County, located in north-central Washington, is known for its stunning natural landscapes, including Lake Chelan, the Cascade Mountains, and its growing wine industry. As of the 2020 census, the county's population was 79,074, with an estimated increase to 79,997 by 2023. Tourism is a major economic driver in the region, attracting approximately 650,000 annual visitors who contribute significantly to the local economy. Chelan County offers outdoor activities such as boating, hiking, and winter sports and has developed a strong agritourism and wine tourism sector.

Similarities to Kittitas County:

- Both regions are known for their outdoor recreation and agritourism offerings, such as hiking, boating, and local wineries.
- Chelan and Kittitas County share a focus on sustainable tourism and balancing growth with environmental stewardship.

Differences from Kittitas County:

- Chelan County has a higher visitor-to-resident ratio, with a population of 79,074 and 650,000 visitors annually, indicating a larger influx of visitors compared to Kittitas County's population and tourism statistics.
- Chelan County has well-established destination branding and wine tourism infrastructure, benefiting from its reputation as one of Washington's premier wine regions.

What is Working in Chelan County:

- The Chelan County Tourism Master Plan emphasizes long-term, sustainable tourism development, focusing on creating a balanced visitor experience that also preserves community well-being.
- The county has successfully integrated wine and agritourism into its tourism offerings, benefiting from tourism-generated revenue and attracting a steady stream of visitors year-round.



Tri-Cities (Kennewick, Pasco, Richland)

The Tri-Cities, located in southeastern Washington, is a metropolitan area that draws visitors for its wineries, scientific research institutions, and outdoor events. The region is home to over 300,000 residents, with tourism spending in Benton and Franklin counties reaching \$594.7 million in 2023. The Tri-Cities attract visitors for wine tourism, family-friendly activities, and major events like the Northwest Food & Wine Festival.

Similarities to Kittitas County:

- Like Kittitas, the Tri-Cities leverage wine tourism as a key part of their visitor appeal, offering similar opportunities for wine tasting and culinary experiences.
- Both regions have a growing interest in outdoor recreation and are positioned to attract tourists seeking a mix of nature and culture.

Differences from Kittitas County:

- The Tri-Cities have a much larger population (300,000) and see more substantial tourism spending, with \$594.7 million generated in 2023.
- The Tri-Cities benefits from more urban infrastructure and is positioned as a hub for business tourism and conventions, something Kittitas County has yet to fully develop.

What is Working in the Tri-Cities:

- The Tri-Cities Tourism Branding and Marketing Plan has been highly successful in promoting the region's attractions, focusing on wine tourism, outdoor recreation, and business events.
- The region's ability to host large-scale events, such as the Northwest Food & Wine Festival, demonstrates successful efforts in attracting high-volume visitors to the area.

Olympic Peninsula

The Olympic Peninsula is a major competitor for outdoor recreation and nature tourism. The Olympic Peninsula Tourism Master Plan (2024-2029) outlines strategies to enhance the region's tourism offerings, which include national parks, beaches, and forests. The region attracts visitors for hiking, cycling, wildlife watching, and water activities, with over 922,000 acres of protected land. However, the region struggles with limited accommodation availability and the challenge of managing peak-season visitor numbers.

Similarities to Kittitas County:

- Both regions boast vast public lands and diverse natural environments, making them prime destinations for outdoor enthusiasts.
- Kittitas and the Olympic Peninsula share the challenge of managing high-season congestion and balancing tourism growth with environmental sustainability.

Differences from Kittitas County:

- The Olympic Peninsula has a much larger tourism footprint with protected lands and multiple national parks, which Kittitas County doesn't have.
- While both areas are prime outdoor recreation destinations, the Olympic Peninsula's primary appeal is its coastal areas, while Kittitas County offers a unique combination of mountain, river, and forest activities.

What is Working on the Olympic Peninsula:

- The region has successfully implemented a Destination Stewardship Plan focused on sustainable tourism and preserving local heritage while boosting visitor numbers.
- By leveraging its natural resources, the Olympic Peninsula has positioned itself as a prime destination for eco-tourism and outdoor adventure, with ongoing studies and infrastructure investments supporting long-term visitor management.



Snoqualmie Valley

The Snoqualmie Valley, home to communities like Snoqualmie, North Bend, and Fall City, offers a combination of outdoor recreation, wine tourism, and family-friendly activities. The area is popular for Snoqualmie Falls, a major natural landmark that draws millions of visitors each year. The valley's proximity to Seattle makes it an attractive destination for weekend getaways, but it faces infrastructure challenges, including limited lodging and parking in some of the more popular areas. Additionally, it's important to note that the Snoqualmie Valley shares Snoqualmie Pass with Kittitas County, making tourism management for this area a shared responsibility.

Similarities to Kittitas County:

- Both regions offer a mix of nature-based recreation and local cultural heritage, which draws visitors seeking both outdoor adventure and authentic local experiences.
- Both benefit from proximity to major urban centers—Snoqualmie Valley is close to Seattle, and Kittitas County is positioned between Seattle and Spokane, making them accessible to large metro areas.

Differences from Kittitas County:

- Snoqualmie Valley is closer to Seattle, giving it easier access to a larger urban market and making it a more popular destination for weekend trips. Kittitas County, while centrally located, does not enjoy the same level of metropolitan access.
- While Snoqualmie Valley has a more urbanized tourism appeal, Kittitas County offers a broader range of outdoor activities, including skiing, mountain biking, and agritourism.

What is Working in Snoqualmie Valley:

- The Snoqualmie Valley Tourism Promotion and Development Plan has been effective in promoting the region's outdoor recreation, historic sites, and wine tourism, providing a well-rounded visitor experience.
- The region has successfully attracted tourism to Snoqualmie Falls and other natural landmarks, driving both day trips and longer visits, particularly from those traveling from Seattle.

Lewis County

Lewis County, located between Seattle and Portland, Oregon, offers a mix of outdoor recreation, historic attractions, and small-town charm. Like Kittitas County, it faces the challenge of balancing tourism growth with preserving local character. Lewis County's primary tourism assets include Mount Rainier National Park, the Cowlitz River, and the historic town of Centralia.

Similarities to Kittitas County:

- Both regions are rural tourism destinations offering a combination of outdoor recreation, nature experiences, and historic sites.
- Like Kittitas County, Lewis County faces visitor management challenges—particularly in areas near high-use outdoor recreation sites such as Mount Rainier.

Differences from Kittitas County:

- Lewis County benefits from proximity to the Portland metro area, providing it with a consistent flow of visitors from both Seattle and Portland. This proximity provides a competitive advantage in attracting urban tourists seeking weekend getaways.
- While Kittitas County offers a broader range of mountain, river, and agricultural tourism, Lewis County leans heavily on and takes advantage of its proximity to Mount Rainier, attracting more nature-focused tourists partly due to marketing/promotion activities of the national park.

What is Working in Lewis County:

- The Lewis County Tourism Development Strategy has been instrumental in enhancing the county's visitor experiences. Initiatives include promoting heritage tourism, preserving historic sites, and building infrastructure around high-traffic recreation sites like Mount Rainier.
- Efforts to balance tourism growth with environmental sustainability have been successful, with increasing investment in local events, community engagement, and regional marketing collaborations.

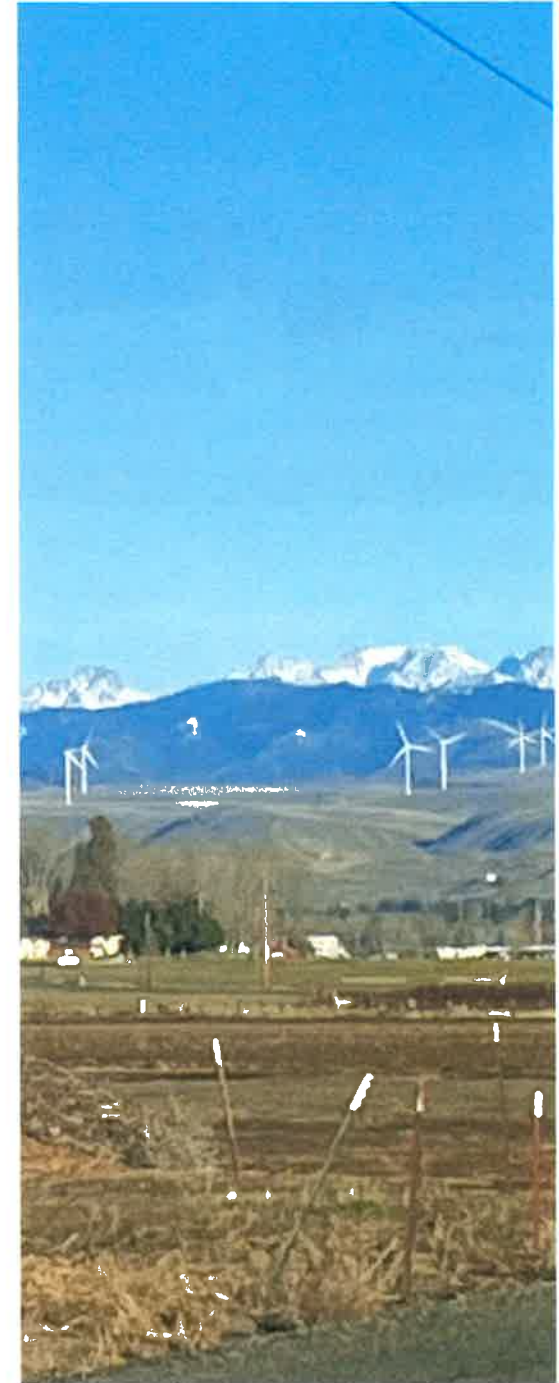


Conclusion

Kittitas County is well-positioned in the competitive tourism landscape, with its unique blend of outdoor recreation, cultural heritage, and agritourism. The county's tourism industry has seen a substantial increase, with \$359.0 million in visitor spending, 1.3 million overnight trips, and 2.7 million overnight nights, making it a strong competitor in the Washington State tourism market. By examining the strategies of Chelan County, the Tri-Cities, the Olympic Peninsula, the Snoqualmie Valley, and Lewis County, Kittitas County can learn from these successful initiatives while also distinguishing itself.

With the right approach, Kittitas County can leverage its central location, diverse tourism assets, and growing agritourism sector to further enhance its tourism appeal. The county can differentiate itself from competitors by focusing on year-round tourism, investing in sustainable tourism development, and ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with growth. Moreover, Kittitas County's unique combination of mountain, river, and agricultural experiences provides it with a competitive advantage in the outdoor and agritourism markets.

By strengthening regional collaborations, enhancing its tourism marketing strategies, and fostering community engagement, Kittitas County can continue to build on its strengths and ensure that tourism growth is sustainable and beneficial to both visitors and residents.





VISITOR DATA AND DOWNTOWN/ATTRACTION TRADE AREA REPORTS

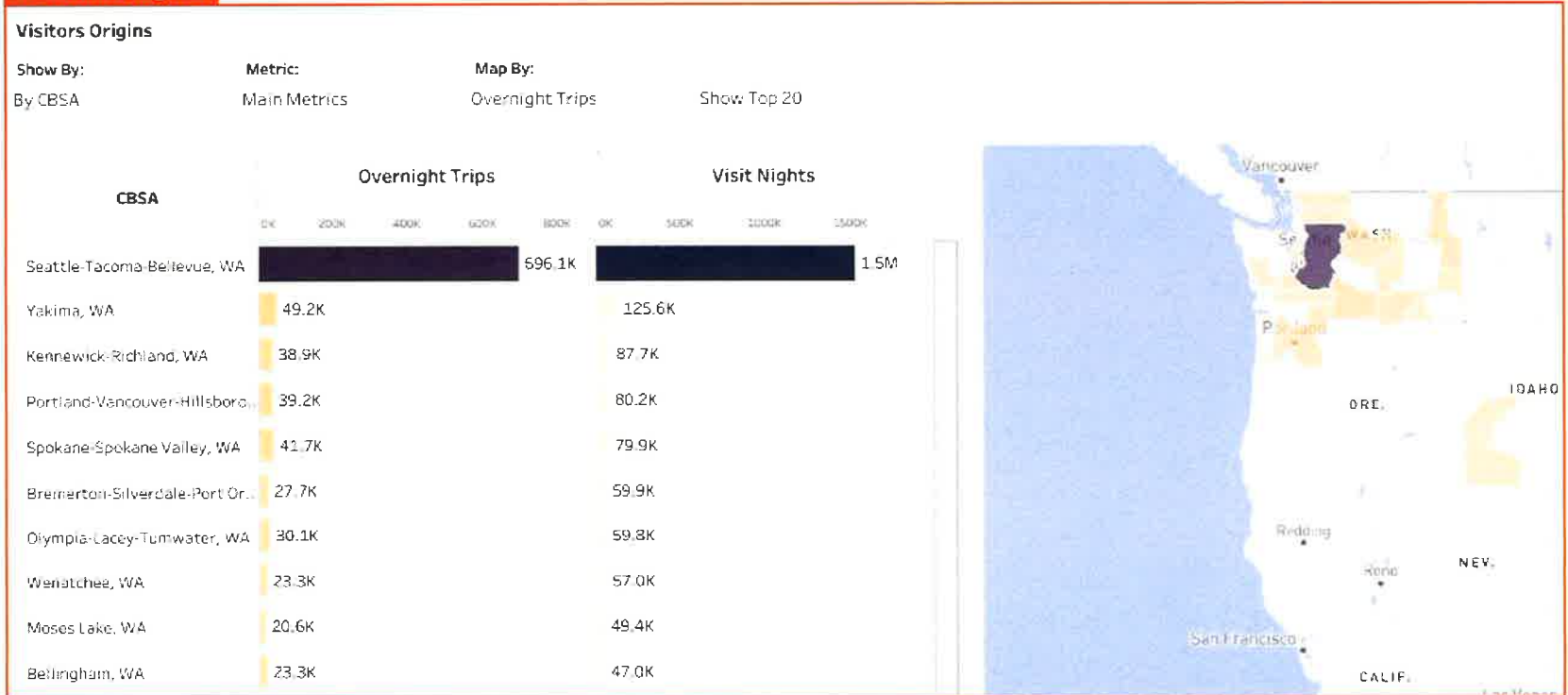
To determine current visitation trends, Placer.ai was used to identify current markets and provide baseline data to track future growth or decline in tourism in the county. A Domestic Travel and Tourism Report was run for Kittitas County as a whole and for the City of Ellensburg. Sufficient data was not available for the other communities. Using geofences, the team also ran trade area reports for downtown areas in the five communities as well as the Washington State Horse Park, Suncadia, Kittitas Valley Events Center/Ellensburg Rodeo Grounds and The Gorge/Watershed Festival site. Thorp Mill did not have sufficient data to generate a report.

Summaries of the data in those reports follow.

Kittitas County Domestic Travel and Tourism Report

Overnight Trips	Visit Nights	Total Visitors' Spend
1.3 million	2.7 million	\$359.0 million

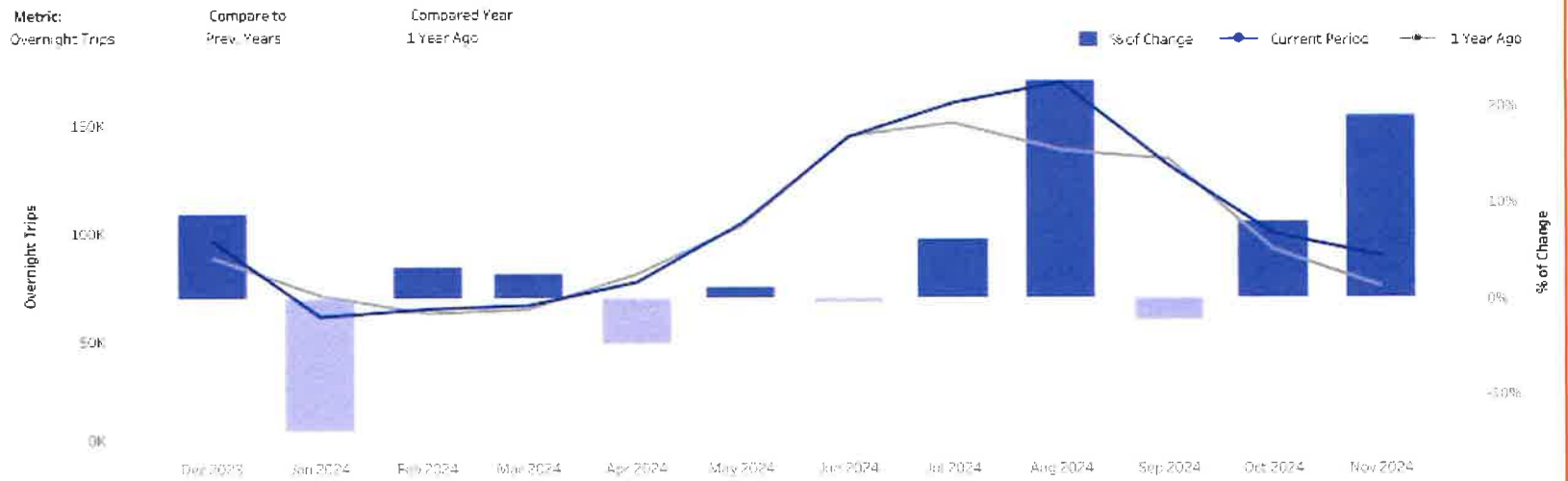
Visitor Origins



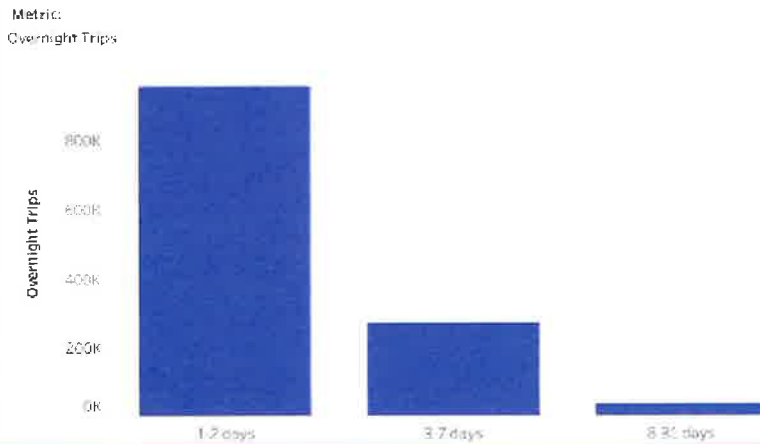


Visitor Metrics

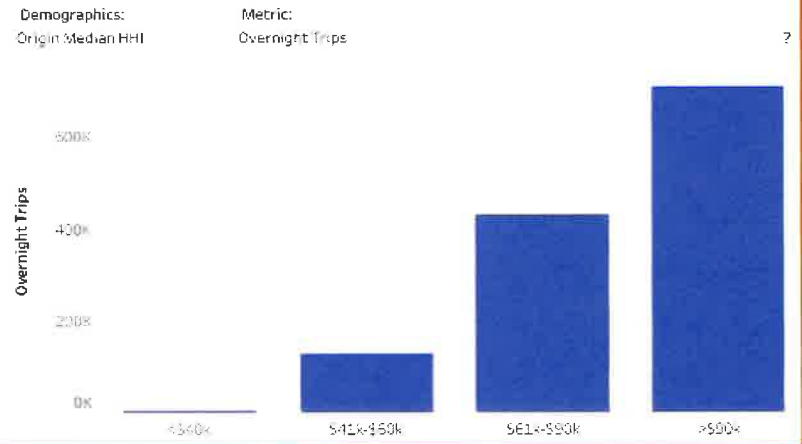
Visits Variance



Breakdown By Visit Lengths



Breakdown By Demographics

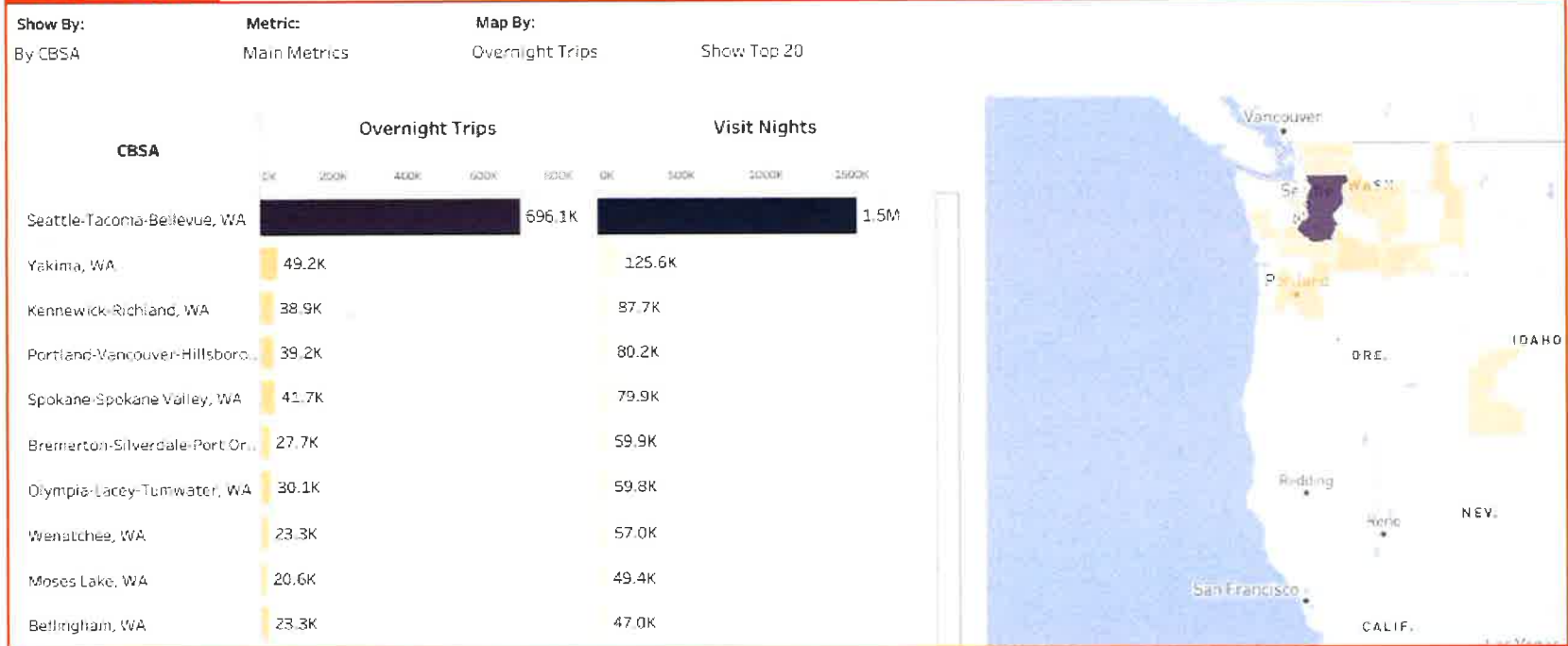




City of Ellensburg Domestic Travel and Tourism Report

Overnight Trips	Visit Nights	Total Visitors' Spend
364 thousand	811 thousand	\$187.1 million

Visitor Origins





Visitor Metrics





Key observations from Domestic Travel and Tourism Reports

1. With \$359 million total in visitor spending county-wide and \$187 million in Ellensburg, domestic overnight visitation represents a significant industry for the county.
2. Kittitas County hosts 1.3 million overnight trips representing 2.7 million total visit nights while Ellensburg hosts 364k overnight trips representing 811k total visit nights.
3. For the county as a whole, the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue market is the strongest current market where visitors are coming from followed by Yakima, Kennewick-Richland, Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, and Spokane-Spokane Valley markets; and for Ellensburg, the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue market is the strongest current market where visitors are coming from followed by the Yakima, Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, Spokane-Spokane Valley, and Kennewick-Richland markets.
4. Both the county's and city's tourism "season" is strongest from July-December with a significant drop-off in overnight visitation creating a shoulder season from January through June. Snoqualmie Pass is the exception that does not experience a significant drop off in visitation during the winter/spring seasons.
5. Approximately 85% of overnight visitors stay 1-2 days in the county and Ellensburg.
6. 57% of visit nights come from households with a median income of greater than \$90k with an additional 34% coming from households with a median income range of \$61-90k.



Downtowns and Attractions Trade Area Reports - Visit Metrics

Downtown/Attraction	Visits	Unique Individuals	Visit Frequency	Average Dwell Time
Snoqualmie Pass	946k	535k	1.8	40 min
Roslyn	482k	203k	2.4	66 min
Suncadia - Full	1.2m	252k	4.9	512 min
Suncadia - Hotel+Amenity	303k	105k	2.9	237 min
Cle Elum	1.1m	360k	3.0	49 min
Washington State Horse Park	30k	9k	4.2	375 min
Ellensburg	2.6m	352k	7.5	53 min
Kittitas Valley Events/Rodeo	277k	77k	3.7	150 min
Vantage	159k	113k	1.4	26 min
The Gorge/Watershed	774k	376k	2.1	249 min

This chart provides a breakdown of the total number of visits to each downtown area/attraction along with the number of unique individuals accounting for those total visits, how often those individuals visit (visit frequency), and the average time they spent in the downtown area/attraction.

Downtowns and Attractions Trade Area Reports - Demographics

Downtown/Attraction	Median Income	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	Median Age	Most Common Ethnicity	Persons/Household
Snoqualmie Pass	\$105.4k	55.8%	35.8	57.3% White	2.43
Roslyn	\$67.9k	44.7%	27.1	79.6% White	2.55
Suncadia - Full	\$84.8k	42.3%	33.3	68.1% White	2.54
Suncadia - Hotel+Amenity	\$82.7k	43.4%	36.3	76.5% White	2.42
Washington State Horse Park	\$86.1k	38.3%	37.5	69.7% White	2.43
Cle Elum	\$50.4k	31.2%	25.6	71.4% White	2.42
Ellensburg	\$55.0k	37.0%	27.8	77.4% White	2.36
Kittitas Valley Events/Rodeo	\$55.7k	38.8%	27.6	78.9% White	2.34
Vantage	\$56.0k	20.9%	30.7	48.3% White	2.82
The Gorge/Watershed	\$59.4k	23.8%	31.2	56.6% White	2.69

This chart provides basic demographic characteristics of visitors/users of the downtown areas/attractions. While visitors/users of Snoqualmie Pass have a higher median income than the state and the county, all other downtowns/attractions are lower. Degree attainment is higher or approximately the same in all cases but Vantage and The Gorge/Watershed Festival site. Median age is lower than the state with the exception of Snoqualmie Pass while the white being the most common ethnicity is higher than the state in Roslyn, Cle Elum, Ellensburg, and the Kittitas Valley Events Center and Rodeo Grounds.



Downtown and Attractions Trade Area Reports - Home Location by Distance

Downtown/Attraction	<5 miles	<30 miles	>50 miles	>100 miles
Snoqualmie Pass	1.3%	8.6%	42.8%	18.4%
Roslyn	23.9%	34.4%	58.8%	13.3%
Suncadia - Full	8.1%	15.6%	77.7%	19.0%
Suncadia - Hotel+Amenity	10.9%	16.4%	75.9%	15.4%
Washington State Horse Park	9.1%	18.2%	73.25%	25.4%
Cle Elum	27.6%	44.8%	48.5%	12.6%
Ellensburg	55.9%	77.6%	20.3%	9.8%
Kittitas Valley Events/Rodeo	48.4%	74.2%	22.8%	11.2%
Vantage	1.7%	10.7%	77.5%	72.9%
The Gorge/Watershed	0.9%	10.1%	83.3%	76.8%

This chart outlines the distance visitors to each downtown area/attraction live from that attraction. It provides an estimate of local (less than 5 miles), regional (less than 30 miles), and true tourists (greater than 50 and greater than 100 miles) who visit the downtown/attraction. This data demonstrates that Ellensburg Downtown and the Kittitas Valley Events Center are attract the most local/regional visitors at 77.6% and 74.2% of visitors to those sites living within 30 mile while 77.5% and 83.3% of visitors to Vantage and The Gorge/Watershed Festival live more than 50 miles away. Cle Elum and Snoqualmie Pass are relatively balanced between locals/regional visitors (less than 30 miles) and true tourists (more than 50 miles) while Roslyn has a higher level of true tourists with 58.8% of visitors living more than 50 miles from downtown Roslyn.



DOWNTOWN AND ATTRACTION VISITATION ORIENTATION MAPS

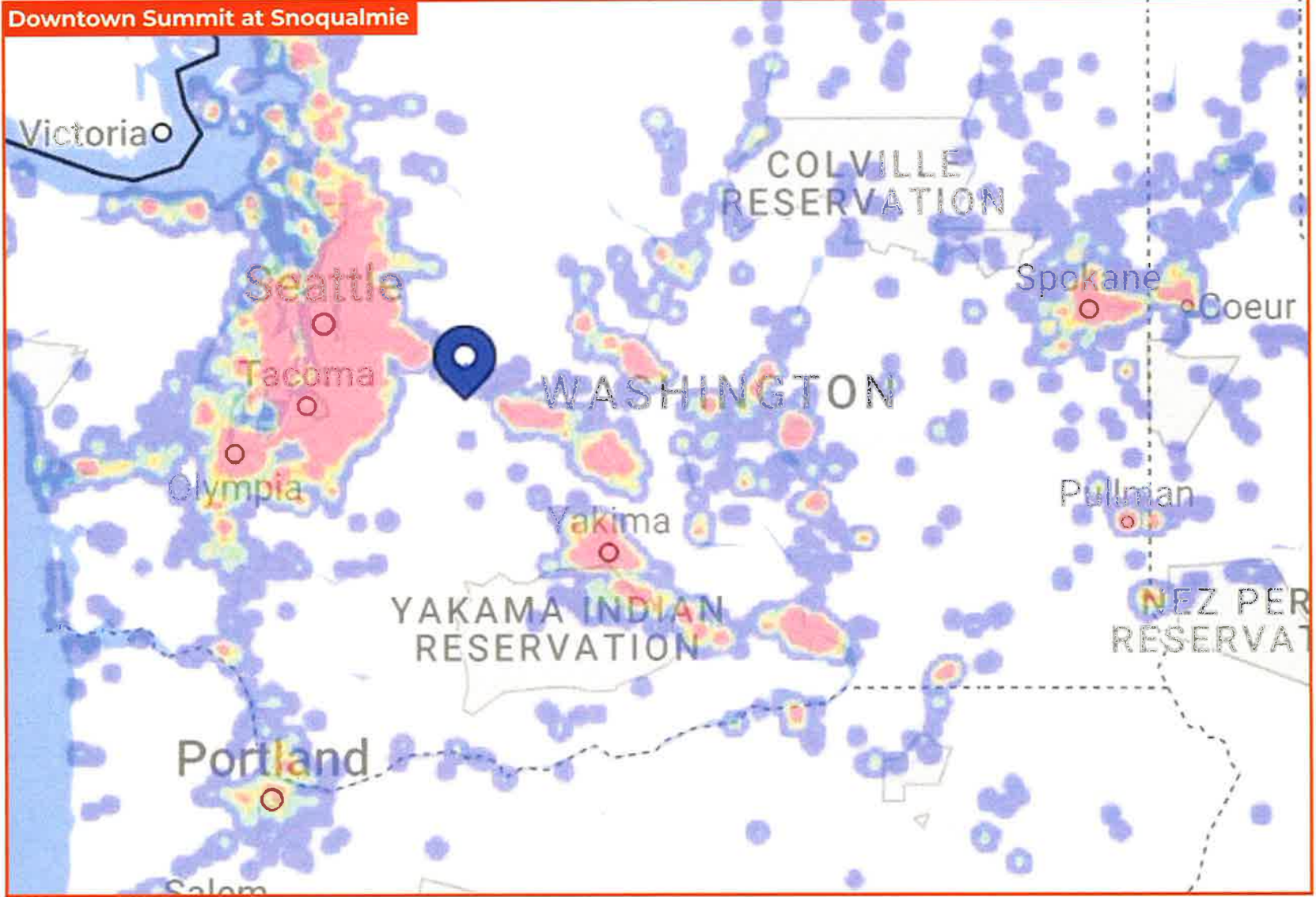
Key Takeaway

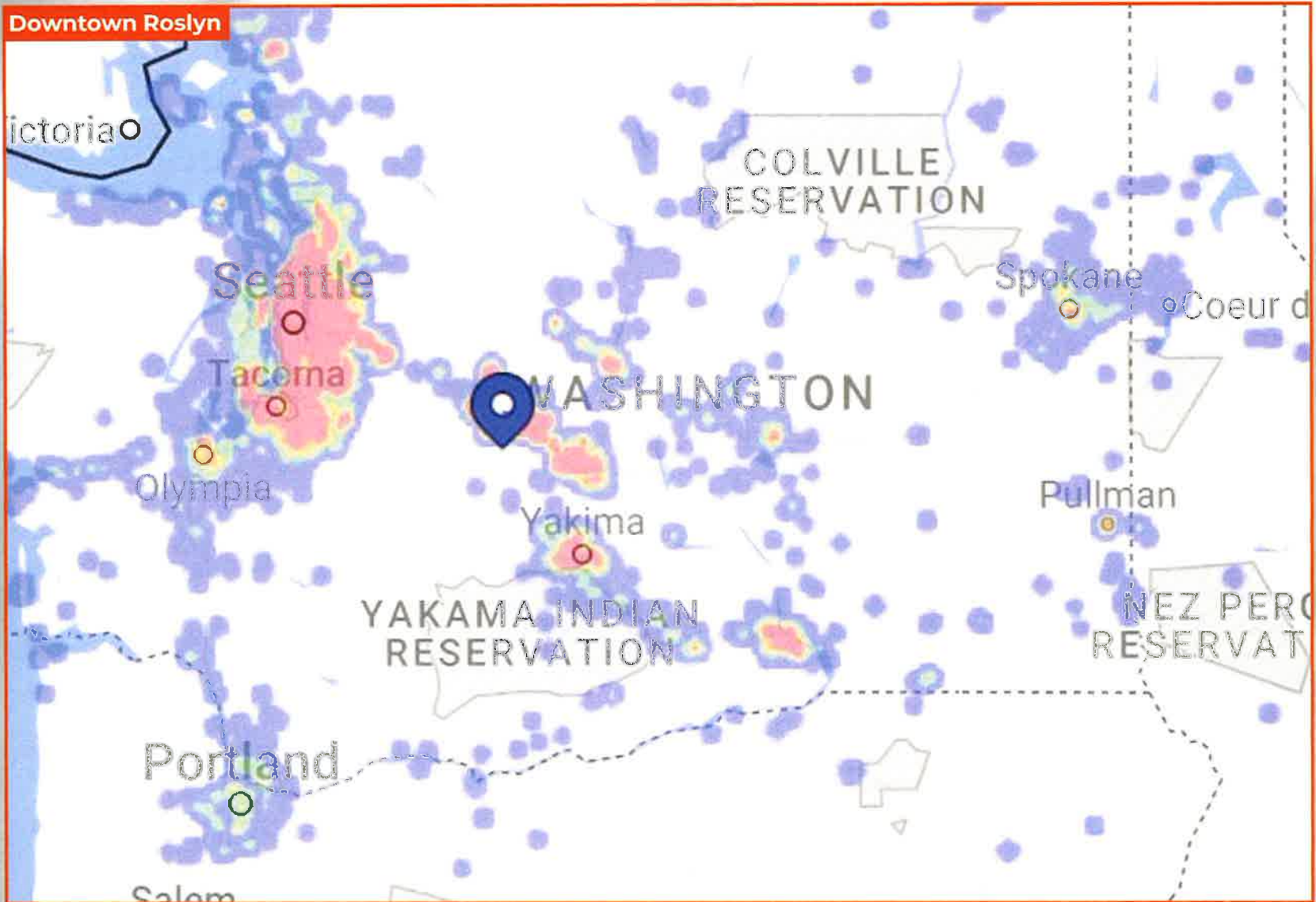
The primary purpose for including the visitor origination maps is to identify current target markets. Overlaying these maps on top of one another shows that the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue market is the strongest current market where visitors are coming from followed by Kennewick-Richland, Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, Yakima, and Spokane-Spokane Valley across all towns and attractions demonstrating and highlighting the opportunity for efficient and coordinated marketing and promotion activities among partners.

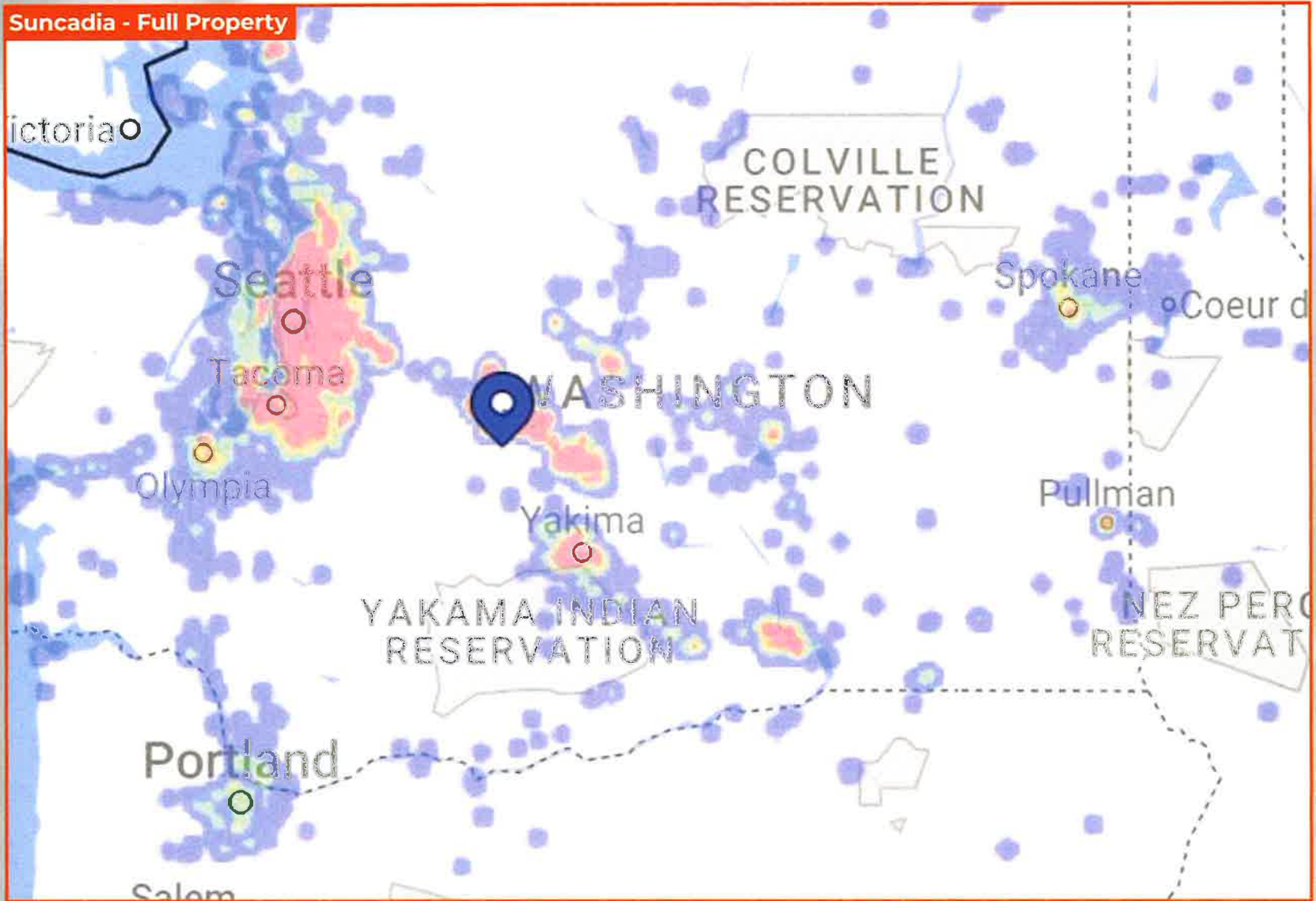
While The Gorge/Watershed Festival Site is not in Kittitas County, it was included as an example of how future/additional Placer.ai analysis of competitors and complimentary tourism attractions throughout the region and state can be used to confirm current markets and identify new markets.

The maps on the following pages show where visitors came from in the 2024 calendar year.



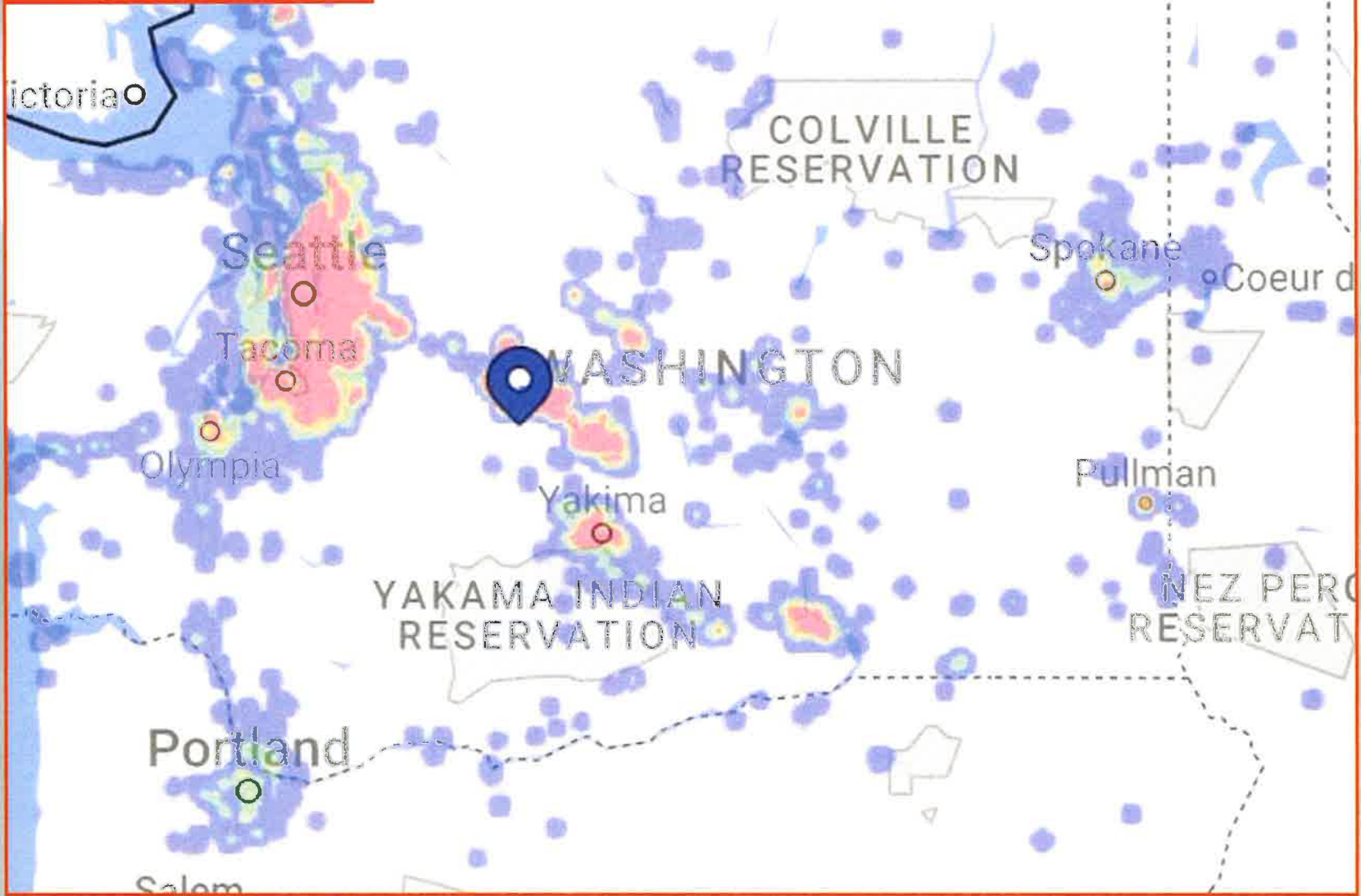


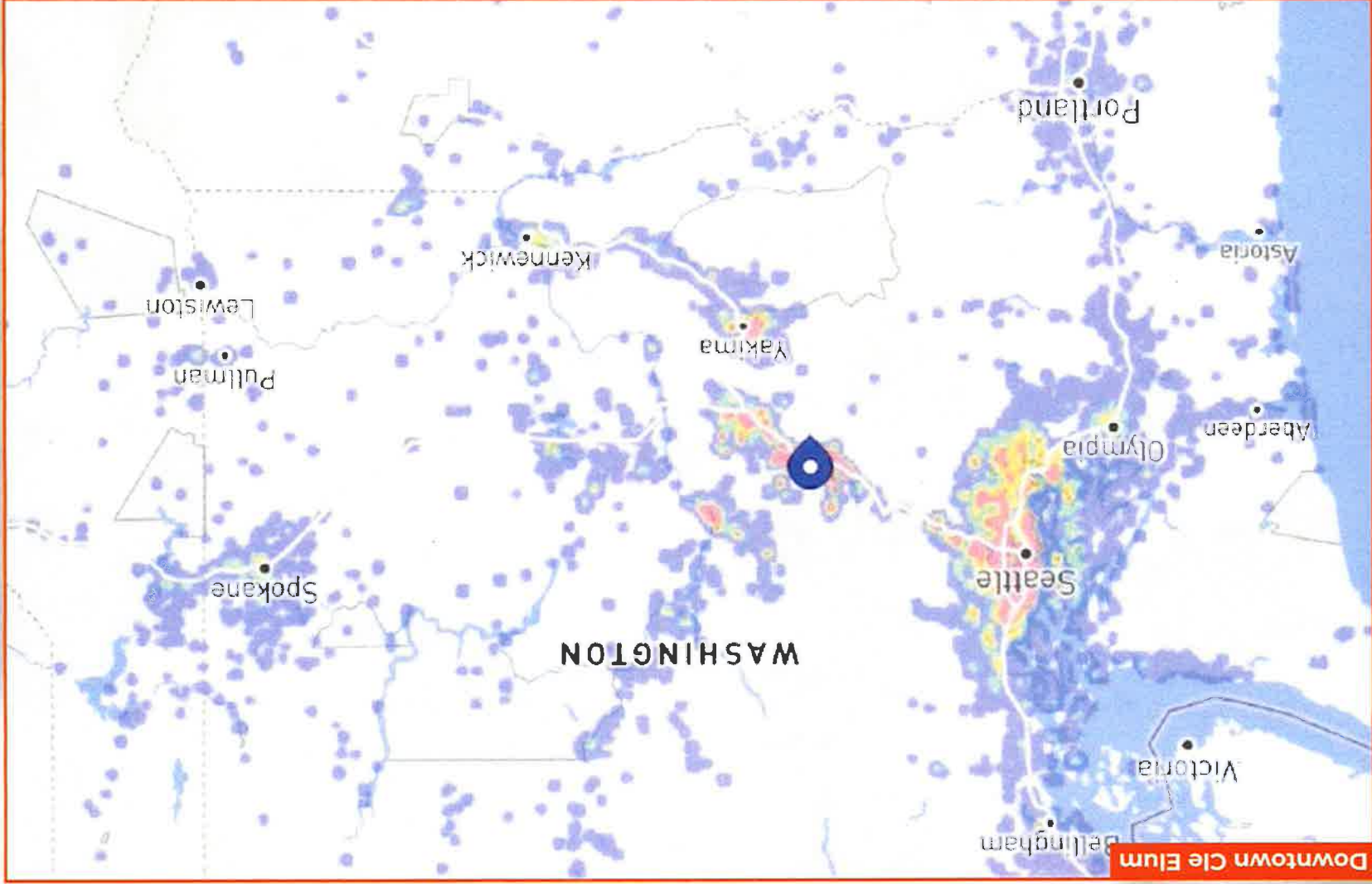


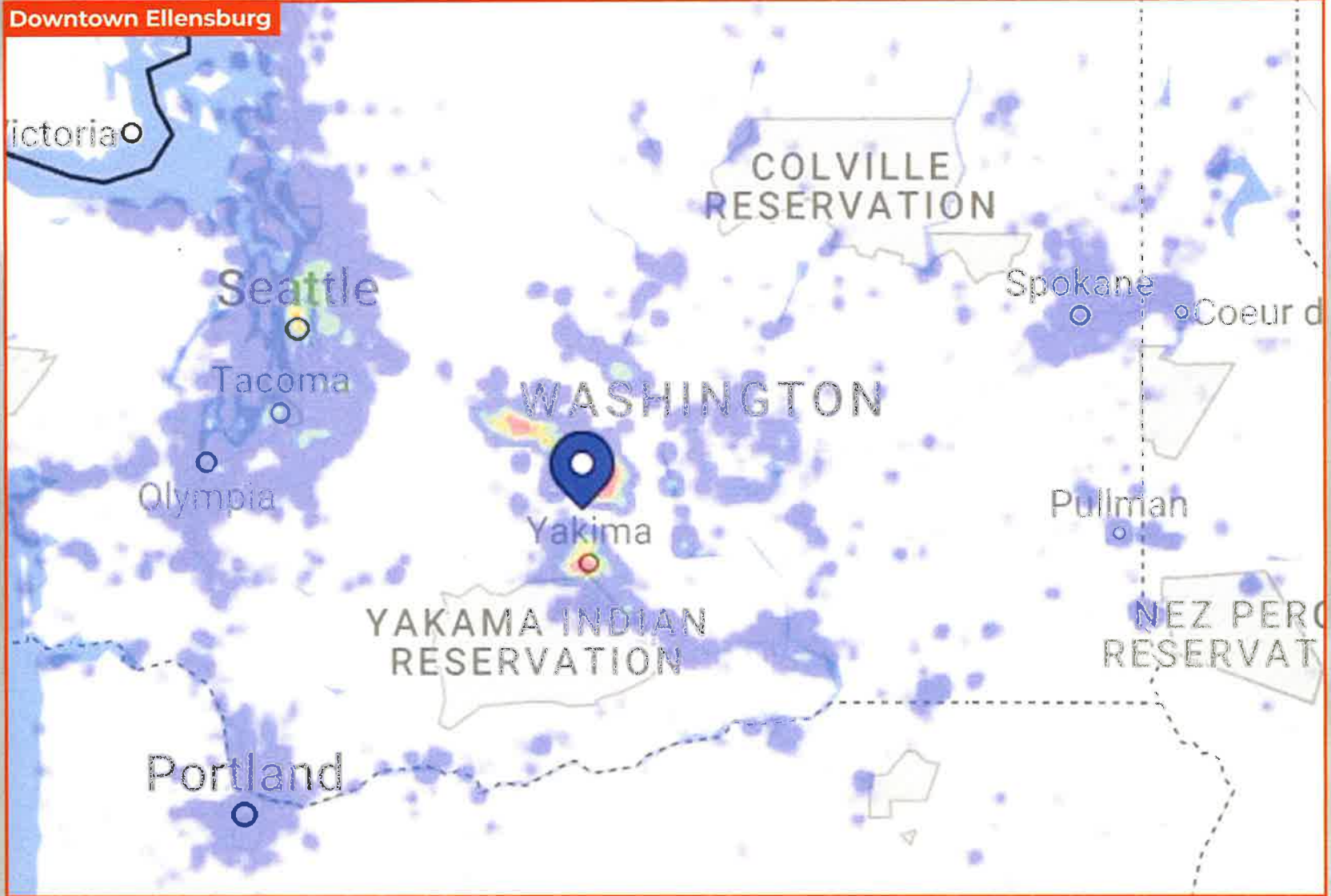




Washington State Horse Park

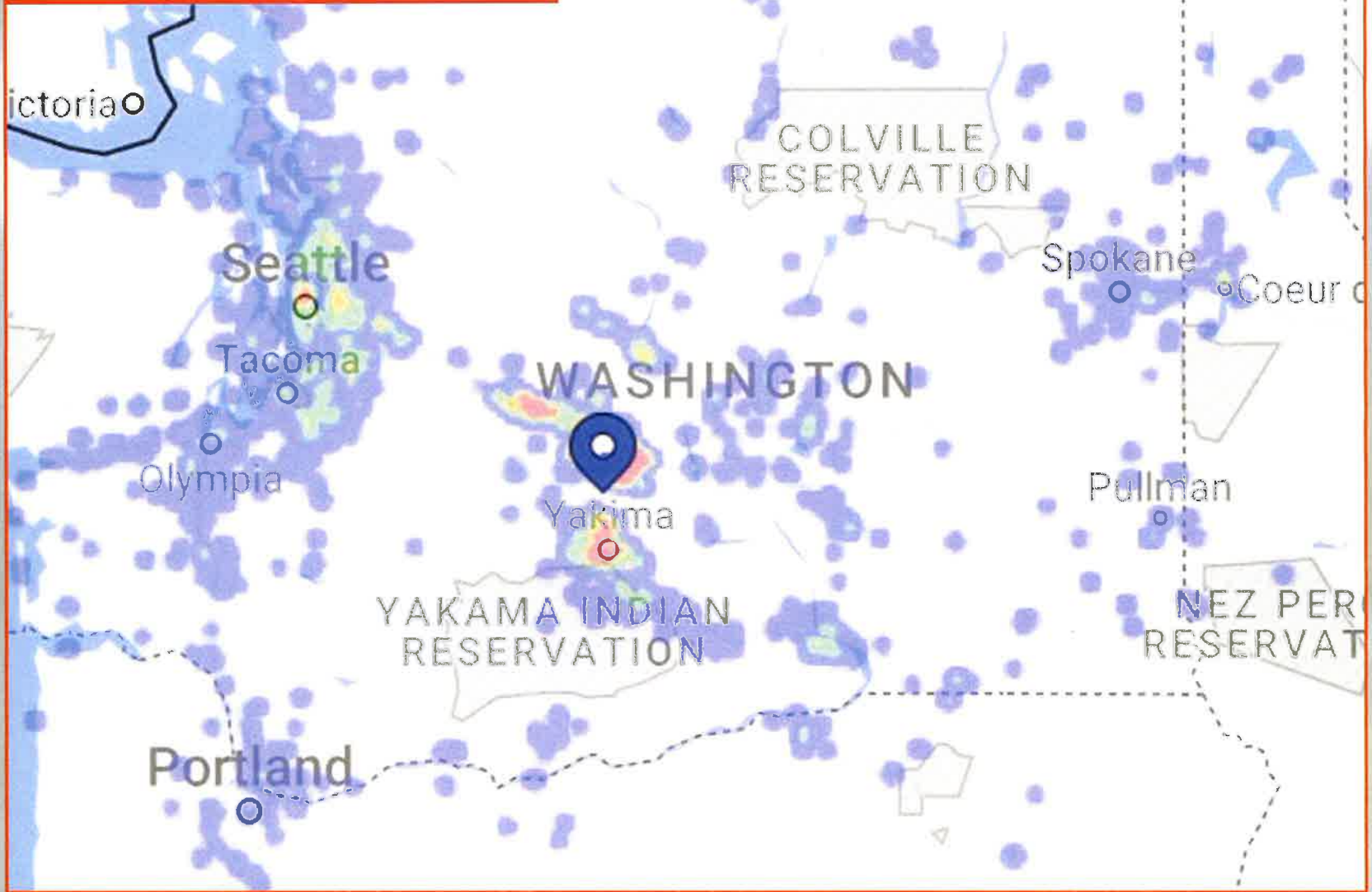


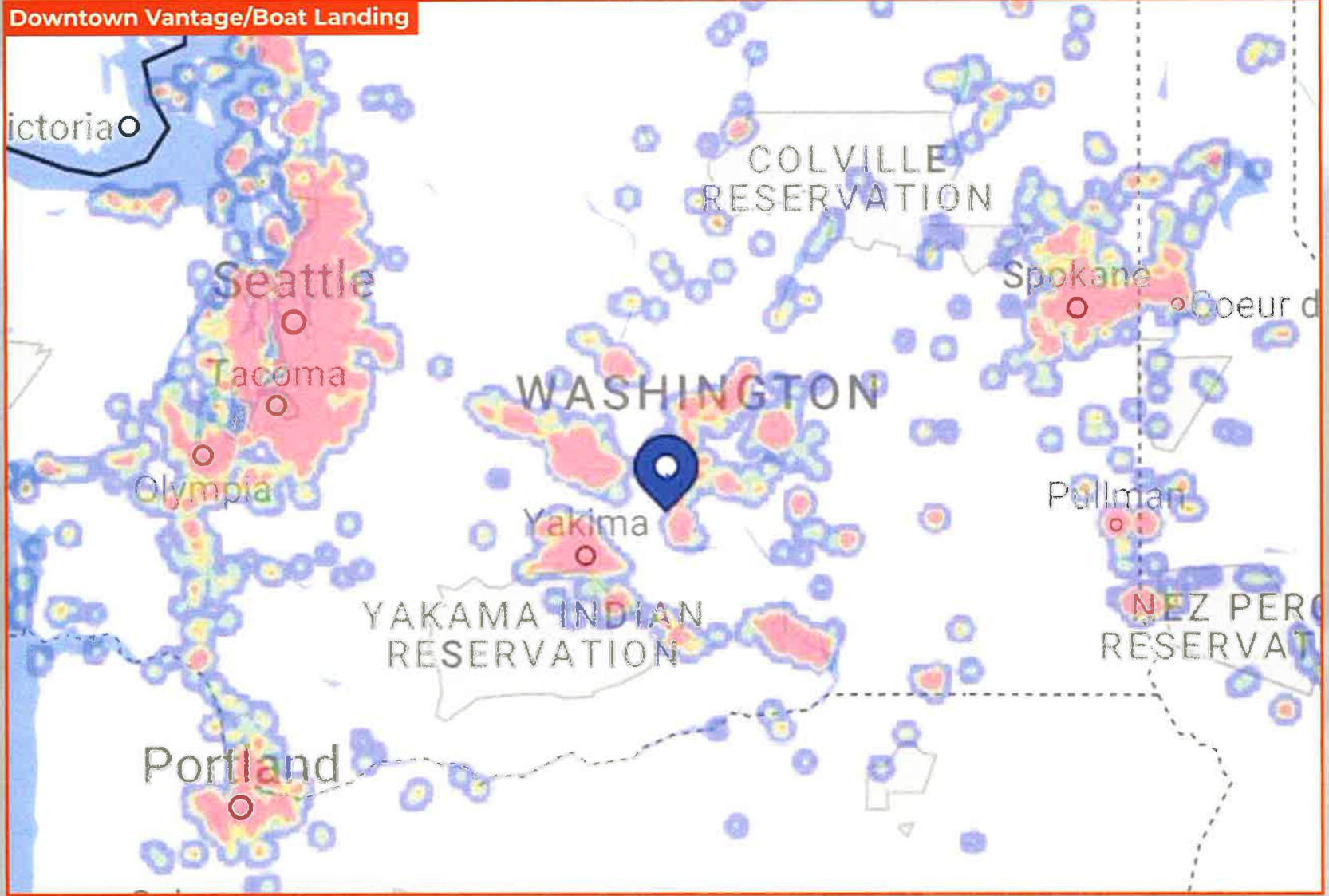


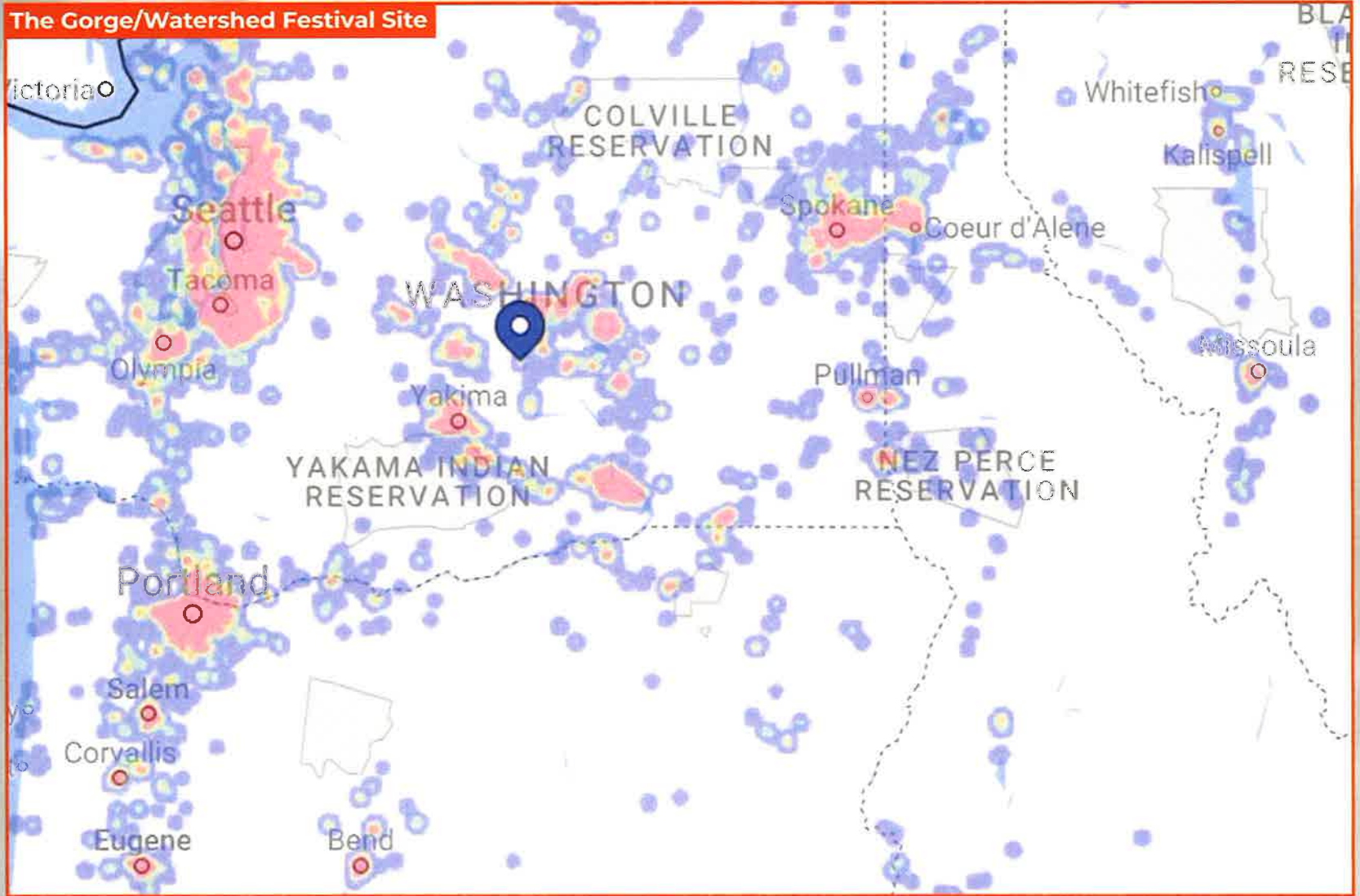




Kittitas Valley Events Center/Rodeo Grounds









KEY REGIONAL ASSETS INVENTORY

Kittitas County possesses a diverse range of tourism assets that shape its visitor economy and enhance the quality of life for residents. These assets span facilities, parks, trails, heritage sites, downtown districts, events, attractions, and museums. Understanding and promoting these resources is essential for strategic tourism planning, marketing, and sustainable visitor management.

Facilities

- Ellensburg Visitor Center - Provides resources and information on lodging, dining, attractions plus visitors can purchase event tickets, find maps, and obtain permits.
- Kittitas Valley Event Center – A versatile venue in Ellensburg, hosting the annual Kittitas County Fair and Ellensburg Rodeo every Labor Day weekend. The center includes multiple rentable spaces, barns, arenas, and RV hookups for events year-round.
- Washington State Horse Park (Cle Elum) – A premier equestrian facility that hosts competitions, clinics, and training events.
- Central Washington University (CWU) Facilities:
 - Student Union & Recreation Center (SURC) – A hub for conferences, student events, and public gatherings.
 - Nicholson Pavilion – Hosts CWU basketball, volleyball, and regional tournaments.
 - McConnell Hall Theater – Venue for theater productions, concerts, and lectures.
 - Museum of Culture & Environment – Features exhibits on regional history, sustainability, and cultural heritage.
- Snoqualmie Pass Visitor Center – Provides information on outdoor recreation, road conditions, and local attractions.

Parks & Open Spaces

- Lake Easton State Park – Provides camping, fishing, hiking, and boating.
- Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park – Located in Vantage, this park features petrified wood, interpretive trails, and a museum.
- Olmstead Place State Park – A preserved 19th-century homestead near Ellensburg with interpretive trails.
- Teanaway Community Forest – A state-managed forest supporting hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian activities.
- Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway – A protected corridor for hiking, birdwatching, and river recreation.
- Iron Horse State Park – A rail-trail park that follows the historic Milwaukee Road railway, offering hiking, biking, and horseback riding opportunities.
- Irene Rhinehart Riverfront Park - A 117 acre park in Ellensburg that includes a two plus mile trail, wildlife viewing opportunities, interpretive signage, Cary Lake, picnic areas, volleyball, disc golf, and swimming.
- KEEN quality nature-based outdoor educational programming.



Trails

- Palouse to Cascades State Park Trail – A cross-state multi-use trail connecting the Cascade Mountains to the Columbia River.
- Coal Mines Trail – Connects Roslyn, Cle Elum, and Ronald, reflecting the area’s coal mining history.
- Easton Ridge Trail – A high-elevation hiking trail with views of Lake Easton and the Cascades.
- Kachess Ridge Trail – An alpine trail for hiking and mountain biking.

Heritage & Cultural Sites

- Ellensburg Historic District – Features well-preserved 19th-century architecture, art galleries, and historic storefronts.
- Roslyn Historic District – A National Historic Landmark, known for its coal mining heritage and preserved buildings.
- Thorp Mill – A restored 19th-century grist mill offering tours and educational programs.
- Northern Pacific Railway Depot (Cle Elum) – A historic railroad depot showcasing Kittitas County’s transportation history.
- Swiftwater Cellars – A winery housed in a historic coal mining site, blending history with viticulture.
- Coal Miners’ Memorial (Roslyn) – A monument honoring the miners who shaped the local economy.
- Douglas A Munro Memorial - Memorial/gravesite dedicated to South Cle Elum native and Signalman Firstclass in the US Coast Guard, Douglas Munro, who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Downtown Districts

- Ellensburg – The county seat, home to CWU, with a historic downtown featuring art galleries, dining, cultural attractions, a designated creative district, and Unity Park.
- Cle Elum – A historic downtown with boutiques, restaurants, and access to outdoor recreation.
- Roslyn – A former coal mining town, now known for its arts scene, breweries, and historic architecture.
- Kittitas – A small-town downtown hosting community events and historic landmarks.

Events

- Kittitas County Fair – Established in 1885, featuring livestock exhibits, entertainment, and contests, held annually at the Kittitas Valley Event Center.
- Ellensburg Rodeo – One of the top 25 rodeos in the U.S., occurring every Labor Day weekend, showcasing professional rodeo competitions.
- Ellensburg Music Festival – A summer music festival with regional and national artists performing in downtown Ellensburg.
- Dachshunds on Parade – A quirky community event featuring a dachshund parade, races, and costume contests.
- Winterhop Brewfest – A January craft beer festival featuring regional breweries and tastings.
- Ellensburg Farmers Market – A weekly market (May–October) featuring local produce, crafts, and artisan goods.
- Roslyn Farmers Market – A seasonal market featuring local vendors, live music, and food trucks.



- Cle Elum Pioneer Days – A heritage festival celebrating Cle Elum’s mining and railroad history, with parades and reenactments.
- CWU Homecoming & Family Weekend – Draws alumni, students, and visitors for sports, concerts, and campus events.
- CWU Wildcat Athletics – Hosts football, basketball, volleyball, and other sports competitions at Nicholson Pavilion & Wildcat Stadium.
- Winterfest (Suncadia) – A holiday celebration featuring Christmas markets, light displays, and community parades.
- Roslyn’s Coal Miner’s Festival – A heritage festival honoring coal mining history, including music, historic tours, and traditional food.
- Roslyn Mountain Ale Festival - Features breweries from around the Pacific Northwest and includes live music at The Roslyn Yard.

Attractions

- The Summit at Snoqualmie – A major ski and snowboard destination drawing winter sports enthusiasts.
- Wild Horse Renewable Energy Center (Vantage) – A wind farm visitor center offering educational tours on renewable energy.
- Waptus Lake & Pete Lake – Scenic alpine lakes popular for hiking, fishing, and camping.
- Manastash Ridge Viewpoint – A hiking destination offering panoramic views of the Kittitas Valley.

Museums

- Kittitas County Historical Museum (Ellensburg) – Preserving artifacts and accounts from the county’s pioneer history.
- Roslyn Museum – Dedicated to coal mining heritage and immigrant communities.
- CWU Museum of Culture & Environment – Showcasing Native American history, sustainability, and regional culture.
- Clymer Museum & Gallery (Ellensburg) – Featuring Western American art, including works by John Clymer.
- Gallery One Visual Arts Center (Ellensburg) – A contemporary arts space supporting regional artists.
- Telephone Museum (Cle Elum) – Exhibits on early telephone technology in Kittitas County.
- Carpenter House Museum (Cle Elum) - Historic home built in 1914 featuring original decor and furnishings. Also includes Cle Elum history and rotating art exhibits.
- Washington State Ski & Snowboard Museum (Snoqualmie Pass) – Preserving the history of winter sports in the Cascades.
- Ginkgo Petrified Forest Interpretive Center (Vantage) – A museum and outdoor exhibit showcasing petrified wood and prehistoric geology.

Nearby Attractions (Outside Kittitas County, but Relevant to Visitors)

These destinations are just outside the county but closely tied to visitor experiences in Kittitas County.

- Snoqualmie Falls (Snoqualmie, WA) – One of Washington’s most iconic waterfalls, just west of Kittitas County.
- The Gorge Amphitheatre (George, WA) – A world-famous outdoor concert venue, attracting music lovers from across the region.



TOURISM STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES IN KITTITAS COUNTY

Kittitas County's tourism industry is shaped by its natural landscapes, historic communities, outdoor recreation opportunities, and cultural assets. As tourism continues to grow, it presents both opportunities and challenges for local businesses, residents, and government agencies. A clear understanding of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) is essential for effective planning and long-term sustainability.

This analysis identifies key factors driving tourism in Kittitas County, highlights current gaps and limitations, and explores strategic opportunities to maximize economic benefits while mitigating negative impacts. With increasing visitation, sustainable tourism management will be critical to ensuring that both visitors and residents continue to benefit from the county's tourism economy.

The following SWOT analysis provides a foundation for future tourism investments, infrastructure planning, and marketing strategies, helping Kittitas County capitalize on its strengths while addressing challenges that could limit long-term success.

Strengths

Diverse Outdoor Recreation & Natural Environment: Kittitas County is home to exceptional outdoor assets, including Snoqualmie Pass, Yakima River Canyon, KEEN Helen McCabe Park, Teanaway Community Forest, Cle Elum Lake, and the Palouse to Cascades State Park Trail. These resources provide opportunities for hiking, skiing, water recreation, mountain biking, and fishing, making the county a year-round outdoor recreation destination.

Sport Tourism & Event Infrastructure: Major events like the Ellensburg Rodeo, Winterhop Brewfest, Cle Elum Pioneer Days, and the Washington State Horse Park contribute to Kittitas County's tourism economy. Additionally, the region's sports fields, rodeo grounds, and expanding recreation centers make it an attractive location for sporting events and tournaments.

Rich History & Cultural Heritage: Communities such as Roslyn, Cle Elum, and Ellensburg preserve the county's coal mining, railroad, and agricultural history, drawing visitors interested in heritage tourism. Museums, historical sites, and agritourism ventures add to the county's unique character.

Agritourism, Food, & Wine: With farms, orchards, and wineries expanding in popularity, Kittitas County benefits from a growing agritourism sector. Farmers markets, tasting rooms, and culinary tourism opportunities in towns like Ellensburg and Thorp enhance the visitor experience.

Strategic Location & Transportation Access: Kittitas County is located at the geographic center of Washington State, with Interstate 90 serving as a major travel corridor connecting Seattle to Eastern Washington. This accessibility strengthens the county's appeal as a weekend getaway destination.

Central Washington University (CWU) in Ellensburg is a major driver of tourism, attracting students, families, and visitors for academic events, conferences, and cultural activities. The university contributes to the local economy through its tourism and hospitality programs, athletic events, and year-round visitor engagement.

Four-Season Destination: Tourism occurs year-round, but visitor education and marketing could better emphasize the county's appeal beyond peak summer and fall months.



Weaknesses

Gaps in Lodging Availability & Quality: Limited lodging in eastern (Vantage) and western (Cle Elum, Roslyn) parts of the county hinders overnight stays. Some accommodations in Ellensburg need reinvestment and rebranding to align with modern traveler expectations.

Limited Awareness & Packaging of Experiences: Visitors often fail to recognize the full range of experiences available across the county. Limited coordinated packaging of outdoor recreation, agritourism, and cultural offerings to encourage multi-day visits.

Aging or Underdeveloped Facilities: Event venues such as the Kittitas Valley Event Center and Rodeo Grounds require upgrades to remain competitive for larger-scale events. Trail connectivity gaps between outdoor recreation areas limit seamless visitor movement.

Workforce & Housing Pressures: Seasonal workforce shortages in hospitality and recreation impact service quality. An acute lack of affordable housing for tourism workers, particularly in Roslyn, Cle Elum, and Snoqualmie Pass inhibit the tourism industry and the communities overall.

Opportunities

Enhancing Trail Connectivity & Outdoor Access: Kittitas County has an opportunity to expand and improve trail systems, connecting key recreational areas to better distribute visitor impact. Priority trail projects include:

- Palouse to Cascades Trail
- Mountains to Sound Greenway Trail
- Coal Mines Trail (linking Cle Elum, Roslyn, and Ronald)
- Yakima River Canyon trails
- KEEN quality nature-based outdoor educational programming

Developing Sport Tourism Infrastructure: Investments in sports fields, recreation centers, and multi-use event venues could increase sporting event visitation, particularly in Ellensburg and Cle Elum while enhancing community infrastructure for residents.

Strategic Marketing & Visitor Education: Refining marketing strategies to highlight all-season tourism rather than reinforcing peak-period congestion. This includes educating visitors on responsible recreation practices to mitigate environmental impact. Visitor education can encourage visitors to explore beyond Snoqualmie Pass and the Cascades into less crowded areas of the county.

Tourism Revenue to Support Community Infrastructure: Kittitas County has strategically reserved tourism funds, creating an opportunity to invest/reinvest in infrastructure (based on recommendations in this plan) that benefits both residents and visitors. Potential reinvestments could include trailheads, signage, public transit options, and downtown revitalization efforts in the short run and new community sport/athletic facilities in the long term.



Leveraging Strong Tourism Partnerships: There is a significant opportunity to expand collaboration among tourism organizations, local government, and outdoor advocacy groups that can enhance tourism management. Key partners include:

- Downtown Associations in each of the communities and other local business groups.
- Washington Trails Association and outdoor recreation nonprofits such as KEEN and the Mountain to Sound Greenway Trust.
- Neighborhood associations, including Snoqualmie Pass.
- State and federal land agencies managing national forests, rivers, and public lands.

Threats

Visitor Overcrowding & Community Pushback: Rapid increases in visitation to Upper Kittitas County (Roslyn, Cle Elum, Snoqualmie Pass) are straining infrastructure and leading to resident concerns about quality of life. Short-term rentals have surged, leading to conflicts between visitors and permanent residents in certain neighborhoods.

Infrastructure Challenges & Accommodation Gaps: Limited availability of hotels, campgrounds, and visitor services in key areas limits overnight stays. Parking congestion and traffic impacts from tourism-heavy periods, particularly along I-90 and in historic downtowns.

Environmental & Land Use Pressures: Increased outdoor recreation has led to trail erosion, habitat degradation, and waste management issues. Ongoing drought concerns may impact water-based recreation and agritourism operations.

Competition from Other Washington Destinations: Nearby counties are aggressively investing in tourism marketing, trail networks, and hospitality development. Kittitas County must continue to differentiate itself while shifting from promotion to visitor management in high-traffic areas.

SWOT Summary

Kittitas County's tourism industry is at a critical juncture. While natural assets and outdoor recreation continue to be a major draw, a balanced approach—one that supports economic benefits while managing visitor impacts by enhancing infrastructure, refining tourism management, and ensuring long-term sustainability will be necessary.



TOURISM BRAND AUDIT – KITTITAS COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Overview

Tourism branding in Kittitas County is anchored by several platforms, most notably the Central Washington Outdoor brand and the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce’s tourism portal. These efforts have established a strong visual identity and thematic focus, particularly around outdoor recreation and access to public lands. However, the presence of multiple, uncoordinated digital domains and inconsistent brand messaging have created challenges in presenting a unified countywide identity.

Strengths

- The Central Washington Outdoor platform offers a visually striking and professionally managed brand that effectively markets outdoor recreation in Kittitas County. It resonates well with the region’s identity and serves as a strong regional anchor.
- The Chamber of Commerce has maintained a wide-reaching presence that supports events, businesses, and regional marketing, giving the brand operational depth and community relevance.
- Survey responses highlight widespread community appreciation for the county’s outdoor assets, historic character, and quality of life – all of which reinforce key brand themes.
- The visual consistency and tone of Central Washington Outdoor are modern, accessible, and well-aligned with current tourism marketing trends.

Weaknesses

- A lack of centralized brand governance has led to fragmentation. Multiple websites—each targeting parts of the county or different tourism audiences—create confusion for visitors and dilute search engine performance.
- There is a slight disconnect between the current branding and the full range of experiences Kittitas County offers, particularly cultural, heritage, agritourism, and small-town exploration beyond outdoor recreation. The Central Washington Outdoor site icon and photography focus on the Cascades both in style and visual content. This may create conflicts in parts of the county with the most acute tourism pressure.
- While Central Washington Outdoor emphasizes the region’s natural beauty, the brand does not fully capitalize on the county’s wide array of outdoor experiences or establish clear visual or emotional connections to other users.
- Some residents surveyed expressed concerns about uneven representation of communities, especially in Upper County and Snoqualmie Pass, contributing to a sense that the brand may be targeting a “saturated” market in high season.



Opportunities

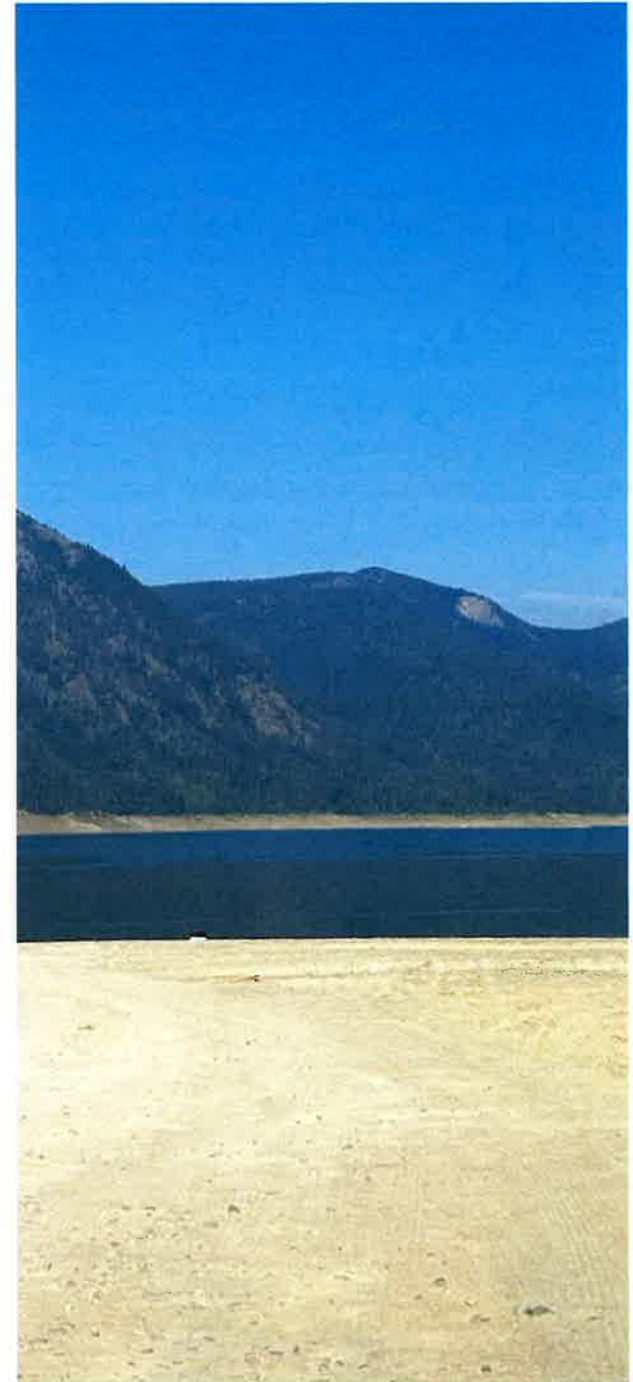
- Unify the tourism web presence under a coordinated countywide platform that links local efforts, eliminates redundancy, and elevates a singular, inclusive Kittitas County identity.
- Build upon Central Washington Outdoor's visual identity while expanding messaging to include agritourism, heritage tourism, cultural events, and off-season opportunities.
- Implement a branding strategy that better connects the county's geography to broader regional tourism narratives, from the Cascades to the Yakima Canyon and the Columbia River. This also allows for a focus on both the communities and the agricultural story of Kittitas County.
- Leverage community pride and resident input to craft place-based messaging that reflects not only what visitors want to experience—but how locals want to be represented. This form of visitor management helps users understand how to experience the county and gives voice to residents.

Threats

- Brand confusion caused by overlapping or competing domains risks undermining search visibility and sending visitors to partial or outdated resources.
- Continued emphasis on one dimension of tourism (outdoors) may neglect emerging markets or discourage longer, more diverse stays.
- A lack of coordination between tourism stakeholders could make future campaigns harder to scale or fund without clear leadership or alignment.

Conclusion

Kittitas County's tourism brand is visually strong and thematically aligned with its most iconic assets, but it risks being undercut by digital fragmentation and a narrow scope of messaging. A unified strategy—both in identity and infrastructure—will ensure that the brand speaks with one voice, tells a fuller story, and grows sustainably with community support.





FEASIBILITY OF A TOURISM PROMOTION AREA (TPA)

Under Washington State RCW 35.101, a Tourism Promotion Area is a designated area within a county or city where lodging businesses agree to impose an assessment on themselves, typically collected per room night. The purpose of a TPA is to fund tourism promotion and marketing activities that benefit those same businesses by increasing overnight stays.

How a TPA is Formed

1. **Initiation:** A petition must be filed by lodging businesses representing at least 60% of the proposed assessments (not just the number of businesses, but the actual share of the assessments they would pay).
2. **Public Process:** The legislative authority (city or county) must conduct hearings, adopt a resolution of intent, and ultimately approve the TPA by ordinance.
3. **Assessment Structure:** Funds are collected by the jurisdiction (e.g., the county) and must be used strictly for tourism promotion activities, which can include advertising, public relations, events, and more.

Potential Flaws or Barriers in Kittitas County

While a TPA can be an effective tool in many Washington communities, several factors make it impractical or unfeasible in Kittitas County at this time:

1. Lodging Distribution & Fragmentation

- Kittitas County's lodging market is highly geographically dispersed, with significant concentrations in Cle Elum/Roslyn, Ellensburg, and Snoqualmie Pass, but far fewer properties in the eastern portion of the county.
- The lack of density in some areas makes meeting the 60% petition threshold difficult without strong consensus in Upper County, which may be hard to achieve based on local sentiment.

2. Stakeholder Sentiment

- Stakeholder and survey input suggests mixed feelings about increasing tourism promotion, especially in areas already experiencing high visitation and quality-of-life impacts.
- The RSW's specific use for the funds is for tourism promotion so using the funds for infrastructure would be pushing the limits for the purpose of the TPA.

- Lodging operators in Snoqualmie Pass and Roslyn/Cle Elum have raised concerns about overtourism, housing pressures, and infrastructure strain, making them potentially unsupportive of funding further promotional efforts.

3. Administrative Complexity

- A TPA must be clearly administered, with funds accounted for separately from lodging taxes. Kittitas County does not currently have an entity fully structured to manage this type of restricted-use fund without administrative buildup.

4. Strong Financial Position

- By strategically reserving lodging tax funds to invest in implementation of this plan, the county currently enjoys a strong financial position including a healthy fund balance and positive net revenue annually based on current income and expenditures.
- As current funds are strategically invested and reinvested adding a new layer of funding could be seen as premature or duplicative.

Conclusion

While TPAs have been effective in destination-focused cities or resort communities in Washington, Kittitas County may not currently meet the practical or political conditions for its formation. Stakeholder sentiment, geographic dispersion, and administrative limitations suggest that other approaches—such as strategic reinvestment of existing funds and improved coordination among tourism partners—may be more immediately impactful. Kittitas County may want to monitor legislation that allows for amendments to the RSW to allow TPA funds to create affordable and workforce housing opportunities to serve the tourism industry and pursue a TPA for that purpose. This has been a recent trend in other states where tourism pressure is heightening housing issues.



RECOMMENDATIONS

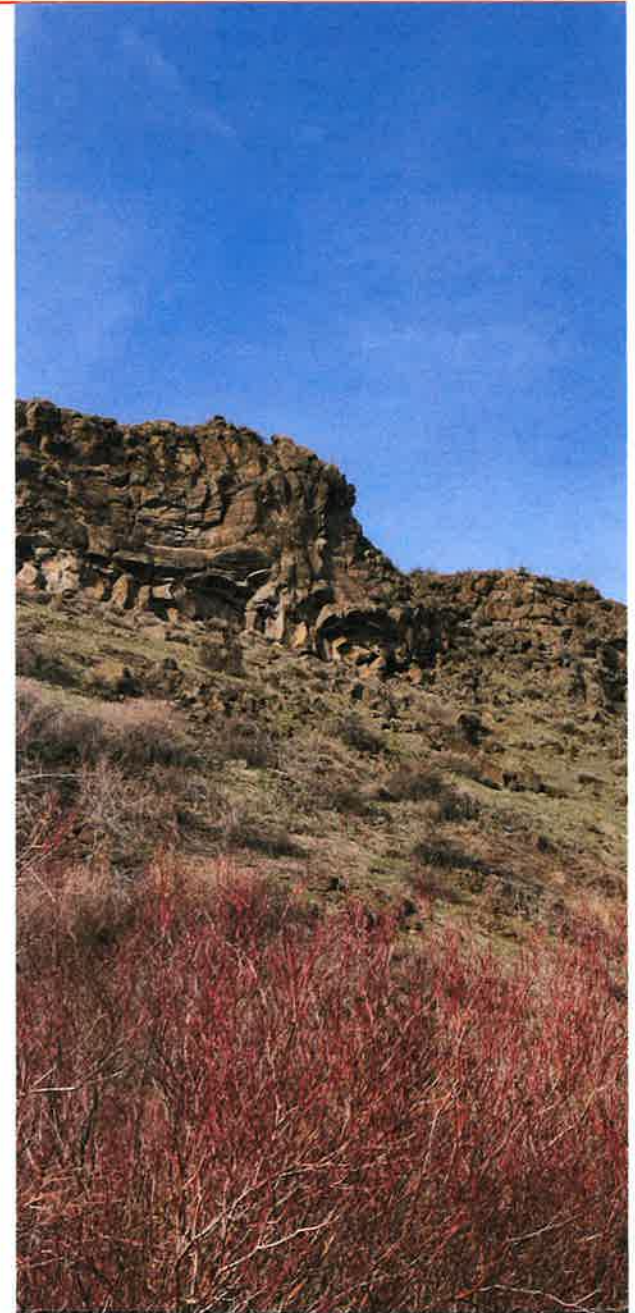
Kittitas County is at a pivotal moment in its tourism development, with opportunities to enhance visitor experiences, manage growth, and better align tourism with community values. This section outlines key recommendations in three primary areas:

- Product Development and Infrastructure
- Marketing and Messaging
- Organization and Funding

The county's natural assets, outdoor recreation, and cultural amenities have positioned it as a premier destination in Central Washington. However, challenges such as seasonal fluctuations in tourism, infrastructure gaps, and growing resident concerns necessitate a strategic approach to ensure that tourism remains a sustainable economic driver. These recommendations provide a framework to improve visitor experiences, maximize economic benefits, and maintain Kittitas County's unique character.

By strengthening tourism management practices, improving infrastructure, and refining marketing efforts, the county can support a more balanced, year-round visitor economy while preserving its quality of life.

As the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce and its partners have the opportunity to pursue sustainable, innovative tourism development by addressing key infrastructure needs, refining its visitor experience, strengthening tourism management, and ensuring that growth aligns with community values. The following recommendations have been developed based on industry best practices, local priorities, community feedback, and opportunities unique to Kittitas County. Implementation matrices for Short Term, Medium Term, and Long Term Recommendations that provide timelines, responsibilities, and KPIs is included at the end of this section.





1. Product Development and Infrastructure

Recommendation 1.1:

Upgrade the Event Center and Develop Sports/Recreation Facilities

The plans to upgrade the event center and to develop sports/recreation centers in Cle Elum and Ellensburg rose to the top of the list for major capital investment based on survey results, stakeholder interviews, and market opportunities.

Short-Term Actions (Immediate - decisions and final planning on these capital investments should be completed within 12-18 months with a goal of having these three projects completed and opened/reopened within 3-4 years)

1.1a: Invest in the renovation and modernization of the Kittitas Valley Event Center and Rodeo Grounds to improve functionality, attract larger-scale events, and support year-round tourism.

As a county owned facility that currently supports tourism activity and with needed upgrades and improvements provides an opportunity to increase visitation, investing in the Event Center should be a top priority. This project is tailor made for investment from lodging tax funds and meets the dual goals of serving residents while supporting and attracting a wide range of events and meetings. Because the city receives the bulk of the lodging tax revenue generated by visitors and events held at the Event Center, Ellensburg should be a partner in these investments.

1.1b: Prioritize the development of indoor sports/recreation centers that can support tournaments, events, and visitors and leverage partnerships to expand the availability of sports fields and other event venues (e.g. - CWU, Roslyn/Cle Elum/Ellensburg/Kittitas school fields, courts, etc.) that can accommodate regional tournaments while enhancing local communities and quality of life. **The proposed sport/recreation centers in Cle Elum and Ellensburg should be the top priority.**

The current proposed recreation center projects in Ellensburg and Cle Elum can accomplish the goals of increasing year round tourism, providing positive economic impact, and enhancing quality life by serving residents. The facility proposed in Ellensburg will have an excellent ability to attract events due to the fact that all spaces can be used to serve local residents and host and support tournaments and events. The facility proposed in Cle Elum can be used to host smaller regional indoor events that need gym space. While the aquatics space is not likely to attract swim meets and other aquatic events with only 6 lanes in the pool, it will be attractive to visitors who do not have amenities associated with their lodging and the county could charge out of town day use fees to generate additional revenue. Therefore, this facility will primarily serve residents (which meets the important goal of enhancing quality of life) but still have an ability to support events and visitors. Because these two facilities can and will serve all residents of the county and include different/complimentary amenities and spaces, these two projects should be considered together as a single initiative. In other words, one is no more important or beneficial than the other.



A Word on Potential Economic Impact of Capital Investments:

The scope of this study did not include economic impact projections. However, based on proprietary information and data available to the consultants related to spending patterns by sport tourism visitors and event/meeting visitors, the county can expect a very conservative average direct expenditure range of \$150-300 per multi-day visitor with a multiplier effect of at least 1.47 at the facilities discussed above. For the new facilities, a reasonable and conservative expectation of economic impact based on new visitors is:

New Visitors	Direct Expenditures	Indirect/Induced Effects	Total Output
per 1,000	\$150,000-300,000	\$70,500 - 141,000	\$220,500-441,000
per 10,000	\$1,500,000-3,000,000	\$705,000-1,410,000	\$2,205,000-4,410,000
per 50,000	7,500,000-15,000,000	\$3,525,000-7,050,000	\$11,025,000-22,050,000

While there is not a valid method to predict new visitors given that a variety of factors affect future visitation (market demand, marketing, relationship building with event organizers, investment in event recruitment, etc.), within 3-5 years of all facilities being developed, it is reasonable and attainable for the county to expect those facilities to attract and support 50,000+ new visitors per year (Snohomish County reported 144,000+ sport tourism visitors alone in 2023) generating total economic output of \$11-22 million annually. The per 1000 and per 10,000 visitor impact numbers are included as a way to demonstrate and measure impact based in smaller increments and can be used and scaled as needed to gauge the potential economic impact of all new multi-day visitors.

1.1c: Invest in operations/marketing efforts to assist existing tournament organizers

Along with continuing to work with other facility providers like CWU, the cities, and the school districts for facility use to support the attraction of tournaments, supporting existing events with marketing and operational funds will allow the county to maintain current visitation related to sport tourism. Additionally, by continuing to develop existing relationships and forming new relationships with tournament organizers over the next several years, the county will be in a strong position to attract larger events from the region and even potentially on the national level when new facilities are developed and become available.

Recommendation 1.2:

Invest in Visitor Management and Education through Coordinated Infrastructure and Education Efforts

As visitation increases across Kittitas County—particularly in the Upper County and along key recreational corridors—the need for intentional and coordinated visitor management is becoming acute. Currently, a variety of local, state, and federal entities are involved in managing visitor access and experience, but there is no unifying strategy or consistent approach across jurisdictions.

Five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) of the Kittitas County lodging tax revenue should be formally dedicated to visitor management tools including, but not limited to, infrastructure, policy creation, staff support (liaison between groups), with clear priorities for education, signage, trash and restroom facilities, and other basic infrastructure. These foundational improvements will enhance the visitor experience, protect natural resources, reduce the strain on local communities, and inform the public and the county on future land access and use.



Short-Term Actions (Immediate/within 1 year)

- **Form a Visitor Management and Education Working Group** composed of public land managers (such as USFS, DNR, BLM), local governments, recreation nonprofits, and the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce to align messaging, prioritize needs, and share responsibility for visitor-facing infrastructure.
- **Establish a dedicated portion of lodging tax funding** for visitor management, focused on education, maintenance, and essential services.
- **Launch a coordinated visitor education strategy**, led by the Chamber, to promote respectful recreation, highlight shared values, and reduce pressure on sensitive areas.
- **Improve basic infrastructure** through grants at high-traffic areas with clear needs:
 - Consistent, branded signage at trailheads and attractions
 - Trash and recycling receptacles
 - Portable or permanent restrooms
 - Defined parking areas where feasible

Medium-Term Actions (2–5 years)

- **Expand the County’s infrastructure grant program** to support nonprofits and public partners in implementing physical improvements tied to visitor management.
- **Expand and improve trail connectivity** to better distribute visitors across the county. Priority projects include:
 - Palouse to Cascades Trail
 - Mountains to Sound Greenway Trail
 - Coal Mines Trail (linking Cle Elum, Roslyn, and Ronald)
 - Yakima River Canyon trails
 - KEEN quality nature-based outdoor educational programming

- **Support and better manage ORV opportunities** through signage, designated access points, and user education in partnership with land agencies.
- **Adopt consistent signage and wayfinding standards** across agencies and jurisdictions, reinforcing safety, rules, and access expectations.
- **Begin data collection** on visitor volumes, facility usage, and pressure points to inform future planning and infrastructure investments.

Long-Term Actions (5+ years)

- **Construct new trailheads, rest areas, and public facilities** in underserved recreation corridors based on identified gaps and growth trends.
- **Coordinate seasonal or permanent shuttle or transit solutions** for high-traffic corridors if needed.
- **Evaluate emerging technology solutions**—such as live parking capacity signage, QR code wayfinding, or visitor flow monitoring—but only after foundational infrastructure is in place and managed effectively.

This approach prioritizes the basics (like trash, restrooms, signs, and shared rules) while laying the groundwork for longer-term innovation. It also recognizes that successful visitor management in Kittitas County will require shared ownership among many public and nonprofit partners.



Recommendation 1.3:

Expand and Improve Lodging Options

The supply and quality (in some cases) of lodging options was identified as a need in the survey and by stakeholders. Increasing and improving lodging options to support new visitors related to increased sport tourism, agritourism opportunities, and expanded meeting and events in the lower county and to better serve and manage upper county visitors will be vital to the success of this plan.

Medium-Term Actions (2-5 years with initial planning by end of year 1):

- **Encourage the development of new accommodations in high-demand areas**, particularly in Cle Elum, Roslyn, and Snoqualmie Pass.
- **Provide incentives for the rehabilitation of existing hotels in Ellensburg** to modernize and elevate the visitor experience.
- The Lodging Tax Advisory Committee should work with the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce to **identify potential private sector partners to encourage the development of eco-lodges and sustainable accommodations**, particularly in areas near trailheads and outdoor recreation hubs and other assets that attract tourism. For example, encourage additional private development like the Vantage Grand Resort.

Recommendation 1.4:

Support Agritourism Expansion*

Growing and curating agritourism experiences provides an opportunity to capture new and additional visitors primarily for the lower part of the county where pressures from tourism are less acute.

Medium-Term Actions (2-5 years with initial planning by the end of year 1):

- **Foster new farm-to-table experiences**, agricultural tours, and farm stays that promote Kittitas County's agricultural heritage.
- **Fund an agritourism marketing campaign** effort managed by the Kittitas Chamber of Commerce that links local farms, wineries, and farmers' markets into cohesive visitor experiences.
- **Develop culinary tourism partnerships** that highlight the county's beer, wine, and food offerings.

**The Chamber of Commerce has an Agritourism Advising website that provides resources for current agritourism operators and individuals considering developing new agritourism attractions that can be expanded as necessary and appropriate as new initiatives and resources are developed and become available.*



2. Marketing and Messaging

Kittitas County has an opportunity to shift its marketing approach from tourism promotion to visitor management, ensuring that visitors discover lesser-known experiences, visit in the shoulder seasons, and respect the values of local communities.

Recommendation 2.1:

Curate the Visitor Experience Beyond the Peak Season

With a “shoulder” season occurring between January and June for most of the county, there are opportunities to create new events and packages to promote events, itineraries to drive new visitation across the year and outside of peak season.

Short-Term Action (1-2 years)

The DMO should **launch marketing campaigns that expand visitation beyond peak periods**, emphasizing:

- Fall foliage and harvest experiences
- Winter outdoor recreation beyond skiing (e.g., snowshoeing, winter wildlife viewing, and holiday markets); expand winter sport focused events
- Spring wildflower hikes and farm visits
- Create a “Get Off the Highway and Get Downtown” campaign that encourages pass-through visitors to explore the walkable downtowns of Ellensburg, Roslyn, Cle Elum, and Kittitas
- Develop itineraries and promotions that package and highlight history, culture, and arts

Recommendation 2.2:

Align Visitor Values with Community Priorities

Many issues identified in stakeholder interviews centered around visitor behavior and negative interactions with visitors, particularly with guests staying in short-term lodging in residential areas. Additionally, there was feedback indicating that the county, and Ellensburg in particular, don’t take full advantage of marketing and promoting the area to CWU students and their families.

Medium-Term Actions (2-5 years with initial planning by end of year 1)

- **Promote responsible tourism and recreation messaging**, encouraging visitors to respect the environment, practice trail etiquette, and contribute to the local economy.
- The Kittitas Chamber of Commerce should **develop a “Visit Like a Local” campaign**, highlighting community values and promoting businesses that align with sustainable tourism practices.
- **Strengthen partnerships with CWU** to educate students and visiting families about local tourism opportunities, agritourism, and downtown businesses.



Recommendation 2.3:

Expand Target Markets for Meetings and Small Events and Sport Tourism

With the proposed capital projects including renovations to the events center and the development of the sports/recreation centers, the county and Chamber will need to create marketing and promotional campaigns. For meetings and small events it will be important to focus on a relaunch after the events center is closed for renovations in order to recapture and grow that market. The proposed recreation centers create new markets for indoor events and will need intentional campaigns and engagement with event operators.

Short-Term Action (Year 1)

- **Form a meeting planners work group** composed of meeting venues from Snoqualmie Pass, Suncadia, Roslyn, Cle Elum, Ellensburg, Vantage, and the Chamber of Commerce to align messaging, prioritize needs, and share responsibility for a promotion plan to attract small and medium size meetings.

Medium-Term Actions (begin 18 months before opening/reopening facilities)

- **Create a promotions plan** to attract small and medium-sized meetings to appropriate facilities throughout the county, leveraging existing facilities at CWU, the Event Center, Suncadia, Swiftwater, Senior Center, etc. and regional hotels with a particular emphasis on winter and spring months.
- **Package corporate retreats and adventure-based team-building** programs to appropriate facilities throughout the county and leveraging existing facilities to attract business travelers seeking unique experiences.
- **Develop facility promotional materials and webpage** and identify and engage appropriate regional sports/recreation event organizers to secure events upon opening of new facilities.

Recommendation 2.4:

Utilize Digital & Smart Tourism Strategies

These recommendations support, are embedded in, and absolutely vital to other recommendations related to visitor management, education, and engagement. These tools and initiatives will also provide key data for tracking KPIs.

Medium-Term Actions (2-5+ years with initial planning by end of year 1)

- The Kittitas Chamber of Commerce as the DMO should **create a real-time visitor information platform** that can be shared with tourism partners. The strategy should include:
 - Crowd monitoring tools for popular outdoor destinations
 - Interactive digital guides with trail maps and local business recommendations
 - Augmented reality storytelling for historic downtowns and heritage sites
- **Strengthen Kittitas County's search engine presence and social media engagement** to ensure visitors can easily find accurate, up-to-date tourism information.

These tools and initiatives support and are related to the other visitor use management/visitor education and engagement recommendations and strategies and will provide data for tracking of KPIs.



3. Organization and Funding

To ensure the long-term success of Kittitas County's tourism industry, it is essential to evaluate funding mechanisms, governance structures, and workforce development strategies.

Recommendation 3.1:

Strengthen Local Tourism Governance & Collaboration

While there are many great public, private, and nonprofit organizations working on tourism in Kittitas County, successfully implementing the recommendations of this plan will require an all hands on deck approach that can be accomplished by creating a Tourism Advisory Committee to assist with initiatives moving forward.

Short-Term Actions (Immediate/within 1 year then ongoing)

- Formalize the role and procedures of the Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (LTAC) to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment with tourism priorities.
- **Enhance collaboration** between tourism organizations, outdoor recreation groups, and local governments and enhance oversight by expanding a **Tourism Advisory Committee*** including key partners:
 - Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce (the DMO)
 - Kittitas County and the municipalities
 - Ellensburg, Cle Elum, Roslyn, and Downtown Associations
 - Washington Trails Association, KEEN, and the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust and other nonprofit partners
 - Neighborhood associations, including Snoqualmie Pass
 - State and federal land management agencies
- The Tourism Advisory Committee should **include the Visitor Management and Education Working Group** described earlier that focuses on visitor management, education, and sustainable tourism practices. This group's initial priorities should include:
 - **Making recommendations for funding and implementing a round of initial destination/visitor use management initiatives** including responsible visitation/visitor promotional campaigns; promote areas with lower use and promote low use times; add signage, restrooms, and parking improvements at high use areas, explore feasibility of permits/fees and trail closure and rotations; experiment with technology solutions like cameras to provide real time information to visitors.
 - **Developing a Tourism Ambassador Program** to educate local businesses, frontline workers, and community members about visitor experiences and opportunities.
 - **Create a communication strategy** to ensure that messaging to visitors is consistent and responses to residents' concerns is based on data.
 - **Hold a State of the Tourism Industry event annually** to provide updates, celebrate successes, and address issues and concerns.
 - **Reviewing the National Park Service's Visitor Use Management Framework and Jackson Hole's Sustainable Destination Management Plan*** (and other similar plans) for guidance.

** It is recommended that the Tourism Advisory Committee meet at least quarterly*

** Consider identifying a consultant to complete a customized visitor use management/sustainable destination management plan for Kittitas County.*



Recommendation 3.2:

Maximize the Impact of Tourism Funding

Kittitas County is in the enviable position of having strategically built a healthy fund balance in LTAX as well as positive revenue over expenses annually that will allow the county and lodging tax committee to immediately move forward with the recommendations in this plan in impactful ways. Additionally, the difference between current annual revenue and expenditures will allow the county to remain in a strong position financially in the LTAX account while providing an ability to be flexible and responsive to any changes in circumstances and priorities in the future.

Short-Term Actions (1-2 years):

- Conduct an assessment of available tourism funds and develop an investment strategy that prioritizes infrastructure/capital projects, visitor services, marketing/promotions, and sustainable tourism projects.

In addition, the county and committee should adopt a fund balance policy of keeping at least 1 year of typical spending (currently under \$1 million) in reserve.

Finally, as the LTAX fund has been generating approximately \$2 million annually and the county has been spending slightly under \$1 million annually, the county should commit to spending \$200,000-250,000 annually on non-capital initiatives and recommendations and \$250,000-500,000 annually on capital projects related to this plan and other needs identified in the future. The county may consider issuing revenue bonds to leverage a portion or all of the \$250,000-500,000 in annual capital project money if deemed appropriate.

- The LTAC grant scoring system and application is ready to be deployed. Continue to fund the annual event application process up to \$300,000.
- Fund the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce to launch training, new marketing platforms, the smart tourism strategies, and the infrastructure grant to manage visitors and promote sustainable tourism at the current level plus additional funds related to new strategies and recommendations in this plan.

Medium-Term Action (2-5 Years):

- Continue the small capital infrastructure grant application and scoring system to fund recommendations from this report and future needs like additional signage, new and additional crowd monitoring technology, and portable restrooms at high use areas.

Long-Term Action (5+ Years):

- Begin the next round of large capital projects like continued expansion of sport tourism facilities, trails/trail connections, permanent restrooms, other visitor support facilities, and any new major projects identified by the LTAC and Tourism Advisory Committee.



Recommendation 3.3:

Support Workforce Development & Housing Solutions

The related issues of the availability of and turnover in staff along with a lack of affordable and workforce housing are critical issues, not only in Kittitas County, but nationally. Unfortunately, these issues are extremely complicated and complex but opportunities for partnerships and new funding mechanisms to support affordable and workforce housing may provide solutions.

Short-Term Actions (1-2 years):

- **Explore a partnership with CWU to provide summer housing** options for seasonal tourism staff.
- **Advocate for policies and incentives that encourage affordable workforce housing** in key tourism areas such as Roslyn, Cle Elum, and Snoqualmie Pass. In addition to identifying local funding sources, several states have recently enacted legislation that allows TIF districts and lodging/accommodations taxes to fund affordable and workforce housing. As mentioned in the section on the feasibility of a TPA, if the State of Washington were to allow TPA funds to be used for affordable/workforce housing, the feasibility of reaching the 60% threshold would likely increase as lodging operators have a vested interest in the availability of housing for their staff.

Medium-Term Action (2-5+ years):

- **Launch a Tourism and Outdoor Recreation career pipeline** through local high schools, community colleges, and CWU to cultivate a skilled tourism workforce. Multiple public school districts around the country have classes and programs across hospitality, tourism, and outdoor recreation. Teton County Schools has recently launched a program related to the outdoor recreation industry and tourism that may act as a model for Kittitas County. Working with the community college system and 4-year schools like CWU to create a pipeline from high school to associate's and bachelor's degrees in the areas of hospitality, tourism (with a focus on sustainable tourism), and outdoor recreation can build a pipeline with on and off ramps for students across all levels.

Other Organizational Recommendation to Consider

The county should consider hiring a full-time visitor management coordinator to lead plan implementation and initiatives moving forward. As lodging tax revenues grow, consider professional service agreements or hiring additional necessary and appropriate full time staff. The cities should be a partner in proportionally funding additional future staff growth.



TOP-LEVEL KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

While specific KPIs should be determined for all recommendations, it is most important to identify and monitor top-level KPIs to evaluate the overall tourism industry in Kittitas County. The county, LTAC, and Chamber should look at KPIs annually and also monitor a 3-year average trend. These top level KPIs should include:

- Tracking annual lodging tax collections
- Tracking annual lodging tax expenditures (current/historic) and expenditures related to plan implementation moving forward
- An annual tourism report that provides visitation numbers and visitor expenditures/impacts like the one provided by Placer.ai or other sources (many states provide an annual tourism impact report by county)
- Conduct ongoing Placer.ai (or other location based data technology) analysis of a sample of current/existing and future attractions, key recreation areas, and events
- Economic impact analysis of current and future attractions and events
- Conducting the resident survey 18 months after implementation begins and then every two years thereafter

IMPLEMENTATION MATRICES

The following 3 implementation matrices illustrate immediate/short-term actions (Year 1), medium-term actions (2-5 years), and long-term actions (5+ years). While not every strategy or initiative is included in the matrices, these are the most critical steps that will ensure the plan is successfully implemented over time

Immediate/Short-Term Implementation Steps (Year 1)

Recommendation/Strategy/Task	Responsible Party(ies)	KPI(s)	Status
Expand Tourism Advisory Committee and include a Visitor Management and Education Working Group and Tourism Ambassador Program (3.1 and 1.2)	County/LTAC Chamber Partners	Plan implementation progress Conduct resident survey 18 months after implementation begins then every 2 years	
Determine funding levels and finalize plans for renovations to the Event Center and new sport/recreation facilities in Cle Elum and Ellensburg (1.1a and 1.1b)	County/LTAC Cities	Planning complete within 1 year Projects complete and open within 3-4 years Track events and usage Economic impact analysis	
Fund and implement a round of initial destination/visitor management and education initiatives (1.2 and 3.1)	County/LTAC Cities Partners Land Managers	Placer.ai metrics for sites where initiatives are implemented (looking back and forward) Resident survey Data collected from new technology	
Develop and launch marketing/promotion campaigns to expand visitation beyond peak seasons (2.2) and operations/marketing funds to support current sport tourism events (1.1c)	CHamber	Advertising metrics Visitation trend data (Placer.ai or similar) Event and attraction attendance data	
Adopt fund balance policy (1 year average spending = approximately \$1 million), set aside \$500k from current fund balance for initial plan implementation, allocate remaining fund balance to event center and sport/recreation centers (1.1, 1.2, 3.1, 3.2)	County/LTAC Chamber	Adoption within 1 year	
Support workforce/affordable housing by exploring partnership with CWU and advocating for policies and incentives (3.3)	County/LTAC Chamber Partners	Track legislation/policy efforts at state level	

Medium-Term Implementation Steps (2-5 years)

Recommendation/Strategy/Task	Responsible Party(ies)	KPI(s)	Status
Continue small capital improvements through the small infrastructure grants for consistent signage and wayfinding, trail access improvements, data collection, technology, etc. (1.2 and 3.2)	County/LTAC Tourism AC Chamber Partners	Create and track improvements plan	
Expand and improve lodging options (1.3)	County/LTAC Chamber Partners	Track projects through building permits	
Support agritourism expansion (1.4)	Chamber Tourism AC	Increase in ag tourism operators Placer.ai (or similar) visitation studies	
Align visitor values with community priorities (2.2)	Chamber Tourism AC Visitor Mgt and Ed Workgroup	Resident survey	
Expand target markets for meetings, small events, and sport tourism (2.3)	Chamber Cities Tourism AC	Events secured and attendance numbers Hotel room nights generated Placer.ai (or similar) visitation studies Economic impact analysis	
Utilize digital and smart tourism strategies (2.4, 1.2)	Chamber Visitor Mgt and Ed Workgroup	Data tracking through technology adopted	
Begin planning for tourism and outdoor recreation career pipeline (3.3)	County Chamber Schools/Partners	Proposal completed between years 3-4	

Long-Term Implementation Steps (5+ Years)

Recommendation/Strategy/Task	Responsible Party(ies)	KPI(s)	Status
Continue progress by funding new large capital infrastructure improvements with adjustments as deemed appropriate (1.2 and 3.2)	County/LTAC Tourism AC Partners	Priorities/new priorities based on Placer.ai (or similar) visitation studies and resident survey results	
Coordinate seasonal shuttle/public transportation options (1.2)	County Tourism AC Visitor Mgt and Ed Working Group Partners	Track ridership levels over time	
If proposal is accepted, launch tourism and outdoor recreation career pipeline program (3.3)	County Schools Tourism AC	Program begins by year 5 or 6	