

State of the Basin

# Snapshot Report

A region-wide check-up on life in the Columbia Basin-Boundary Region



Photo: Louis Brockner

APPLIED & INNOVATION  
RESEARCH CENTRE Selkirk College

COLUMBIA BASIN  
**RDI**  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



# Welcome

The State of the Basin Initiative monitors and reports on indicators of social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region. The Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute (RDI) compiles the Snapshot report to provide an overview of current State of the Basin research. All State of the Basin reports and resources are available on the State of the Basin [webpage](#)<sup>1</sup>.

## USING RESEARCH TO IMPROVE REGIONAL WELL-BEING

Every day, Columbia Basin-Boundary residents and organizations make decisions that influence the future of our region. Basing decisions on contemporary research and statistical trends helps to ensure preparedness and success within a changing economy, society and environment. The primary goal of the State of the Basin Initiative is to provide access to useful data that our communities can take advantage of, with the ultimate goal of improving well-being in the region. Four objectives support this goal:

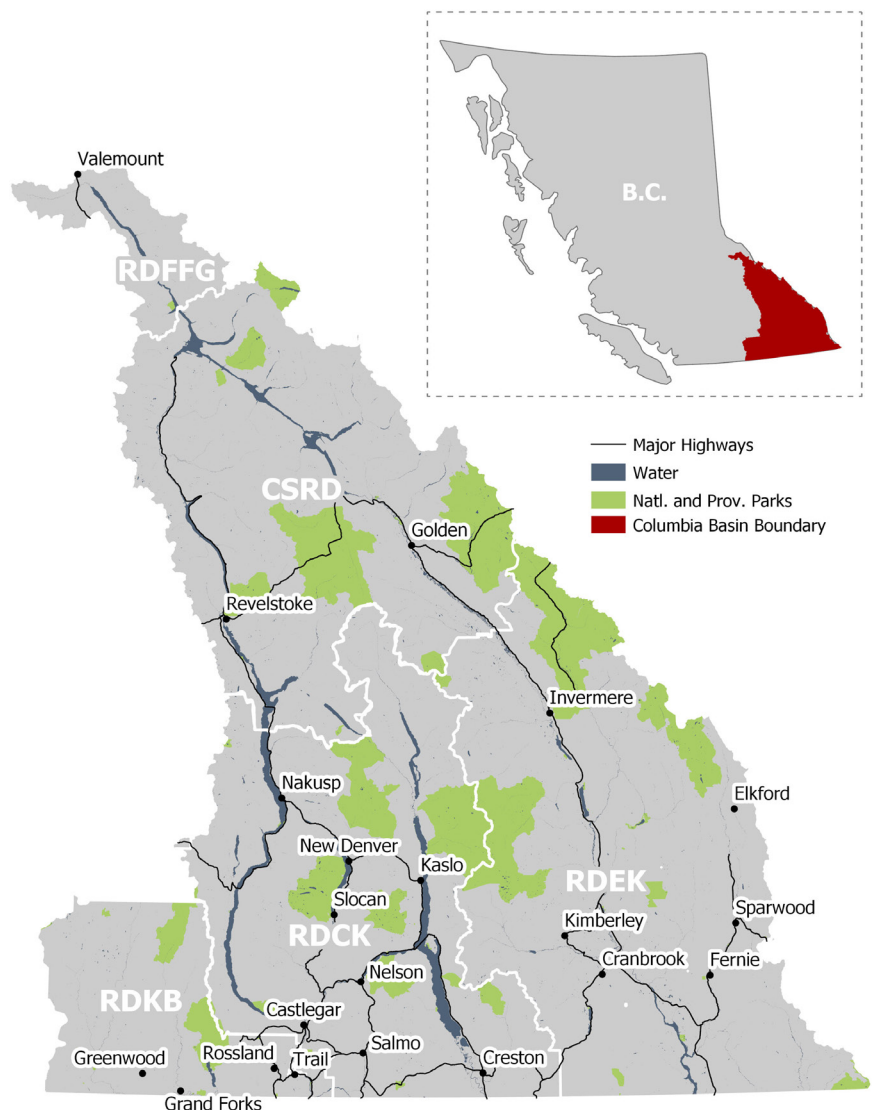
- **Inform** citizens and organizations about the people, natural environment, communities, and economy of the region by providing access to accurate, credible, and timely information;
- **Encourage** understanding of complex issues and trends over time, including future projections when possible;
- **Signal** whether conditions are similar or different within the region, and in comparison to other areas to highlight and celebrate areas of achievement, and to identify significant issues, ideally before they become critical; and
- **Motivate** discussion, information sharing, strategic evidence-based decisions, and collective action.

## INDICATORS & DATA SOURCES

State of the Basin research draws on available data from a variety of sources including federal, provincial, and local governments, crown corporations and non-profit initiatives. The RDI collects this data from open access sources and through custom requests. While quantitative State of the Basin indicators help establish foundational knowledge of regional well-being, they only tell part of the story. Qualitative information, including the RDI's subjective well-being research, can further contribute to understanding the well-being of our communities and region.

## THE COLUMBIA BASIN-BOUNDARY

The Columbia Basin-Boundary region encompasses more than 8.6 million hectares of land in southeastern British Columbia. It includes the Regional Districts of Kootenay Boundary, Central Kootenay, and East Kootenay, as well as a portion of the Columbia Shuswap Regional District and the Village of Valemount. Three Development Regions also intersect the borders of the region. Basin-Boundary communities are home to approximately 173,000 people.<sup>2</sup>

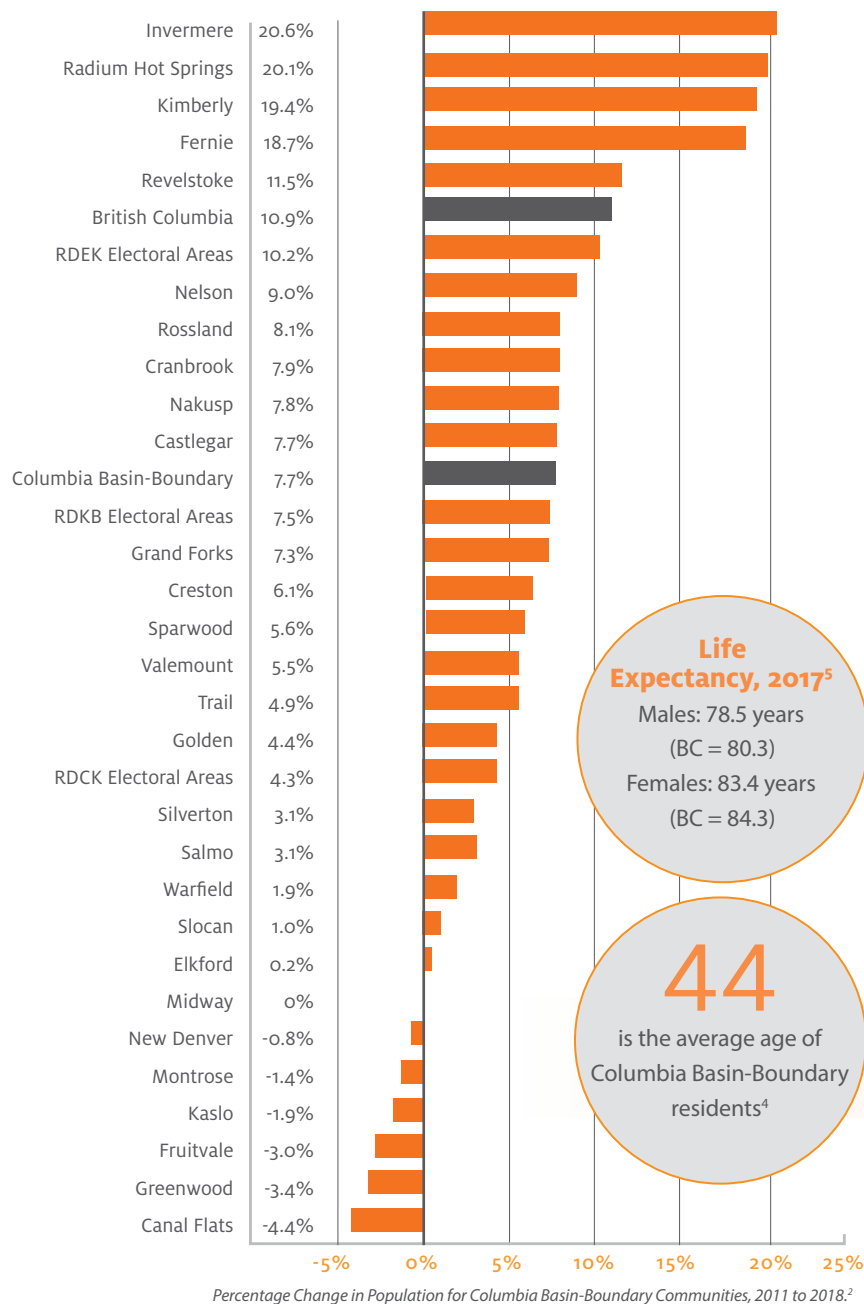


# Demographics

Demographic data provides insight on the population structures that compose our societies. Shifts in demographic proportions have important consequences for communities, as different population groups have varied needs and capabilities related to housing, education, employment, and social services.

## COLUMBIA BASIN-BOUNDARY POPULATION

**172,960** people live in the Columbia Basin Boundary Region, which is **3.46%** of British Columbia's (BC's) total population.<sup>2</sup>



### Life Expectancy, 2017<sup>5</sup>

Males: 78.5 years  
(BC = 80.3)  
Females: 83.4 years  
(BC = 84.3)

**44**

is the average age of  
Columbia Basin-Boundary  
residents<sup>4</sup>



Population projections for our region show a percent increase of **+5.04%** from 2018 to 2041. BC's increase is **+26.97%**.<sup>3</sup>

### Percent changes in Columbia Basin-Boundary populations by 2041<sup>3</sup>

Youth (0-19): **-3.55%**  
(BC = +15.81%)

Working Age (20-64): **-6.09%**  
(BC = +15.50%)

Senior (65+): **+40.19%**  
(BC = +76.32%)



**Marital status** for people aged 15 years and older show that 62% of people in our region are married or living common law.<sup>4</sup>

Total net migrants into the Kootenay Development region in 2017/18 was **+1,325** people.<sup>6</sup>

**3.6%** of our population belongs to a visible minority group, which is well below the provincial average of 30.3%.<sup>4</sup>

**People with South Asian, Filipino and Chinese ethnicities make up the greatest proportion of the visible minority population in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region.<sup>4</sup>**



# Economy & Workforce

The state of the economy is a topic of interest in discussions regarding well-being. Economic success can impact the level of civic prosperity and is dependent on a skilled and engaged workforce.

## WHAT IS A LIVING WAGE?

A living wage is the hourly amount a family needs to cover basic expenses such as food, clothing, rental housing, childcare, transportation and small savings to cover illness or emergencies. Living wages in BC decreased in 2019 due to the provincial government's investments into childcare.<sup>9</sup>

## LIVING WAGES IN THE COLUMBIA BASIN-BOUNDARY, 2019<sup>9</sup>

Cranbrook	\$14.38/hr
Columbia Valley	\$15.92/hr
Nelson	\$18.46/hr
Greater Trail	\$18.83/hr
Revelstoke	\$18.90/hr
Minimum wage	\$13.85/hr

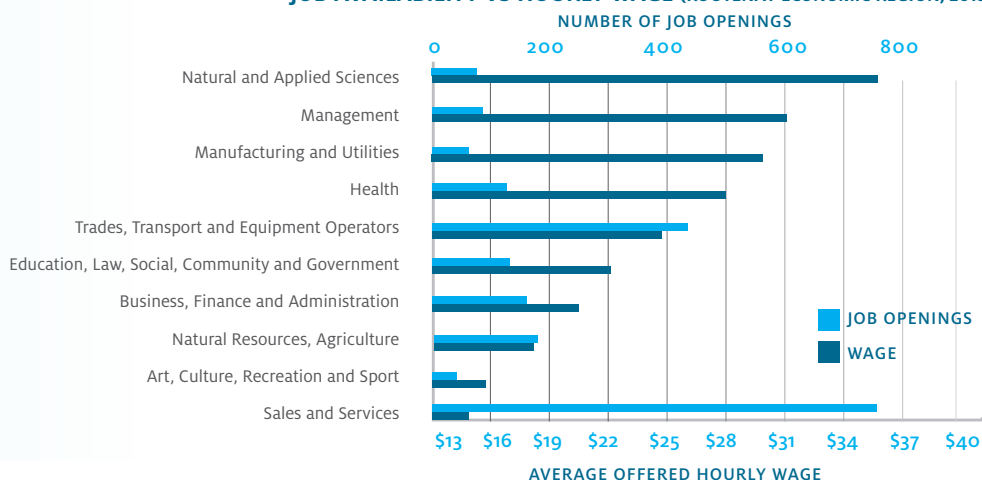


On average, 15% of Columbia Basin-Boundary residents, or 16,830 families, were considered low income in 2016. The average of median after-tax income for these families ranged between \$26,624 per year for families with no children to \$47,320 for families with three or more children.<sup>10</sup>



*Jobs in the Retail and Wholesale industries employ the greatest number of people, closely followed by Health Care and Social Assistance in both our region and the province.<sup>12</sup>*

## JOB AVAILABILITY VS HOURLY WAGE (KOOTENAY ECONOMIC REGION, 2018)<sup>7</sup>



## AVERAGE OFFERED HOURLY WAGE, 2018<sup>8</sup>

Kootenay Region: \$20.75 • British Columbia: \$20.51 • Canada: \$20.95

The **total number of businesses** in our region in 2018 was 38,080. This was the first year since 2011 to see a decline in the total number of businesses across the Columbia Basin-Boundary region.<sup>12</sup>

There were 729 **business starts** in our region in 2018.<sup>13</sup> Kootenay Boundary Electoral Area A saw the greatest increase in the number of businesses from 2007 to 2018 and Nakusp saw the greatest decrease.<sup>12</sup>



Unemployment rate (2018): Kootenay Economic region 5.3% • BC 4.7% • Canada 5.8%.<sup>11</sup>

The average median **annual household income** in the Columbia Basin-Boundary in 2016 was \$66,480, which was less than the provincial average of \$69,995.<sup>4</sup>

**New building permits** with a value of more than \$397 million were issued in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region in 2018.<sup>14</sup> Only 9 out of 26 communities in the region (Golden, Nelson, Canal Flats, Sparwood, Rossland, Fernie, Grand Forks, Salmo and Trail) have surpassed the level of spending on building prior to the 2008 recession. Building activity in the region has not yet fully recovered since the recession, but spending has been increasing annually.

There were

2,248

**job vacancies in our region in 2018, with a 3.4% vacancy rate in the Kootenay Economic Region compared to 4.6% in the province.<sup>7</sup>**

# Infrastructure

Housing, transportation, water distribution and waste disposal are essential structural systems which dictate many aspects of well-being within our communities. Well-functioning infrastructure is needed to support a healthy economy, population, and natural environment.



**146 drinking water advisories** came into effect in 2018.

Including the 100 existing notices from previous years, the total number of notices in 2018 reached 246.<sup>18</sup>

The most common **reason for an advisory** was due to “unacceptable water quality results (microbiological)”, followed by “untreated drinking water at risk of containing pathogens” and “excessive turbidity compromising treatment and water quality”.<sup>18</sup>

## PRIMARY METHOD OF TRAVEL AND COMMUTING TIME TO WORK OR SCHOOL BY COLUMBIA BASIN-BOUNDARY RESIDENTS, 2016<sup>4</sup>

Method of Travel	Central Kootenay	East Kootenay	Kootenay Boundary	Columbia-Shuswap	Fraser-Fort George	British Columbia
Vehicle (as a driver)	77.6%	79.1%	83.0%	79.5%	84.4%	70.5%
Vehicle (as a passenger)	6.3%	6.3%	4.5%	6.0%	6.3%	5.5%
Public transit	1.3%	3.2%	1.3%	1.1%	2.5%	13.1%
Walked	10.7%	7.3%	8.2%	6.8%	4.7%	6.8%
Bicycle	2.2%	2.2%	1.5%	4.2%	0.9%	2.5%
Other method of transport	1.9%	1.9%	1.6%	2.5%	1.2%	1.7%
Duration of Travel						
Less than 15 minutes	46.9%	55.2%	46.9%	55.7%	44.3%	28.8%
15 to 29 minutes	28.1%	21.5%	33.0%	23.6%	41.7%	32.9%
30 to 44 minutes	14.3%	12.1%	8.0%	9.8%	8.1%	20.3%
45 to 59 minutes	5.1%	4.1%	2.6%	3.5%	2.0%	8.8%
60 minutes and over	5.7%	7.2%	4.3%	7.4%	4.0%	9.1%

**Rental vacancy rates in 2018 were 1.3% for Cranbrook and 0% for Nelson, both well below the recommended balanced rate of 3%.<sup>20</sup>**

**The 2018 median property value for single family residences in our region was \$304,100.<sup>19</sup>**

In 2017 and 2018, a total of 38 **major transportation projects** took place in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region. These projects cost more than \$224 million.<sup>16</sup>

## 2017 PER CAPITA WASTE DISPOSAL RATE <sup>17</sup>



**506 kg/person**  
British Columbia



**555 kg/person**  
Central Kootenay



**571 kg/person**  
Kootenay Boundary



**585 kg/person**  
East Kootenay



**610 kg/person**  
Columbia Shuswap



**796 kg/person**  
Fraser Fort-George

**Total local government spending** on solid waste management, recycling, transportation, water services and sewer services equated 26% of total expenditure in 2017.<sup>15</sup>

# Environment

Sustaining a healthy environment is essential to support the well-being of all life within our region. Natural systems provide the foundation for all built systems and structures within our societies and economies, and influence the level of achievable growth and prosperity within them. The unique and diverse landscapes of the Columbia Basin-Boundary provide habitat for a multitude of species, land to grow food, harvestable resources and clean air and water for everyone.

## ECOSYSTEMS AND SPECIES AT RISK

There are **131 red listed species** (meaning they are extirpated, endangered, or threatened) in the region, including 38 animals, 90 plants, and 3 fungi. Our region is also home to **28 threatened ecosystems**.<sup>21</sup>

## SNOWPACK



Snowpack in our region in 2018 was within or above the normal range in the winter, and more than twice the normal range in some locations in the early spring. In the Kootenay Boundary region, these high rates of early-spring snowfall (up to 238% of normal in May of 2018) largely contributed to the catastrophic floods in Grand Forks.

Snowpack in 2019 was below the normal range in most locations throughout the winter and spring.

The Kootenay Boundary region overall had the highest percent of normal snowpack in the region in 2018, and the lowest in 2019.<sup>24</sup>

## INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive species are a significant indicator of environmental health; monitoring and controlling the spread of invasive populations in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region is important to ensure the threat to our natural ecosystems and economies remains as negligible as possible.

133 species of invasive plants **have been confirmed** throughout the Columbia Basin-Boundary region as of 2018.<sup>32</sup>

In 2018, there were 38,000 watercraft inspected for **zebra and quagga mussels** in BC – of these watercraft, 1,700 were considered high risk of mussel contamination, 238 were quarantined and 25 were confirmed to have the invasive zebra and quagga mussels, two of which were destined for the Kootenay region. These preventative efforts continue to prove successful as the invasive mussels have not yet been discovered in our water systems.<sup>33</sup>

**Southern Mountain caribou populations in our region remain in serious jeopardy, with decreases expected for all local herds.**<sup>22</sup>

The charts below show the estimation year and the estimated population.

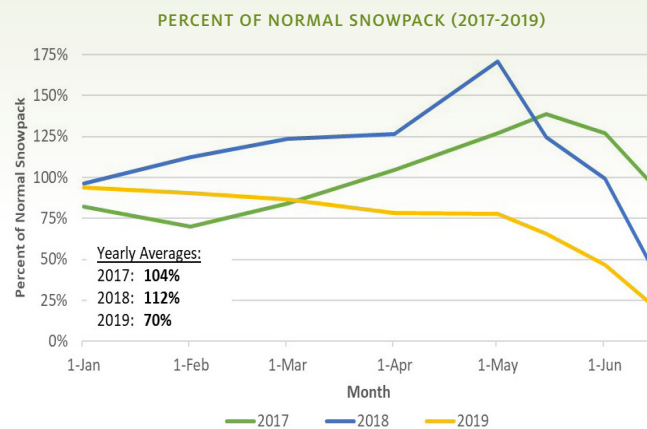
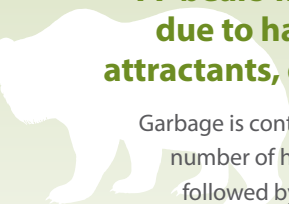
2018	3	South Selkirks	2016	4	South Columbia
2018	4	South Purcells	2016	1	Monashee
2018	31	Central Selkirks	2011	11	Frisby-Boulder
2017	147	North Columbia	2008	3	Central Rockies

## Total population: 204

More than \$8 million was spent by the province in 2017/18 on caribou recovery initiatives.<sup>23</sup>

**77 bears were destroyed in 2018 due to habituation and wildlife attractants, down from 94 in 2017.**

Garbage is continually associated with the largest number of human-bear conflicts in our region, followed by livestock and fruit trees/berries.<sup>31</sup>



## Native freshwater mussels vs. invasive mussels

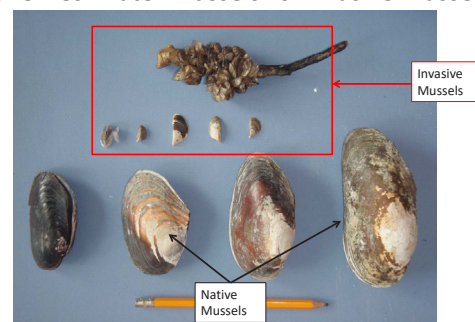
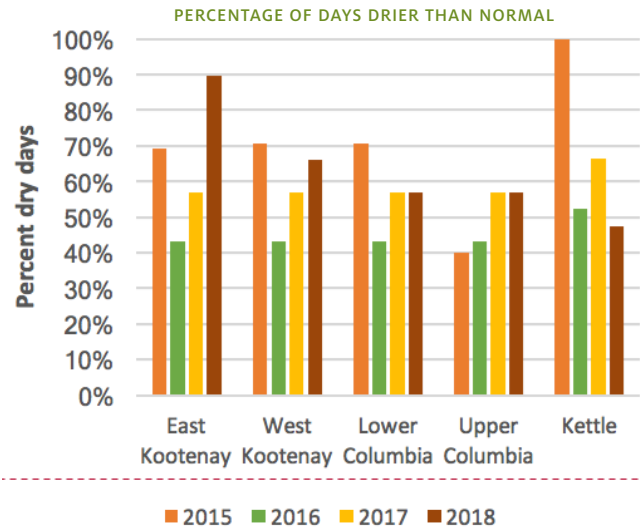


Image: [https://bcinvasives.ca/documents/2019-03-27\\_IMDP\\_webinar\\_FNL.pdf](https://bcinvasives.ca/documents/2019-03-27_IMDP_webinar_FNL.pdf)

# Environment



**Total BC Fires (2018): 2,117**  
**Hectares burned: 1,354,284**  
**Total cost: \$615 million**  
**Person caused: 535 (25.3%)**  
**Lightning caused: 1,489 (70.3%)**



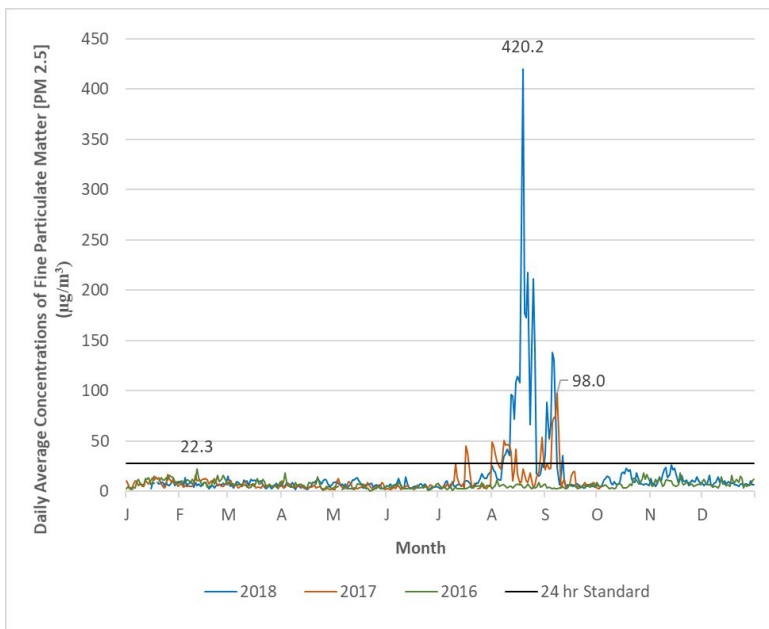
## DROUGHT

Drought is a recurrent feature of climate involving a deficiency of precipitation over an extended period of time, resulting in a water shortage. In 2018, 63% of days on average (Jun-Nov) were drier than normal in our region.<sup>25</sup>

## FIRES

2018 was the most severe **fire season** in British Columbia on record.<sup>26</sup> Fires in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region were smaller but more numerous in 2018 compared to 2017.<sup>27</sup> 151 fires burned 72,856 hectares of forest within our region in 2018, compared to 85 fires that burned 104,165 hectares in 2017.<sup>27</sup>

*Due to forest fire activity, air quality across the province decreased dramatically in 2018 compared to previous years. Daily fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) concentrations in Castlegar rose to dangerous levels<sup>28</sup> up to 420 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, far above the 24-hour standard of 28 µg/m<sup>3</sup>.<sup>29</sup> Peak concentrations of fine particulate matter in Castlegar were more than twice as much as Golden or Valemount in August of 2018.<sup>28</sup>*



The forestry sector is an important economic driver in our region. More than 17,994 hectares of forest were **logged** in 2017 in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region.<sup>30</sup>



# Education & Learning

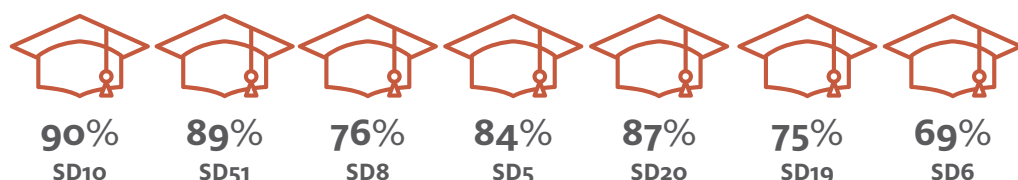
Education is a key determinant of social capacity, as it provides people with the knowledge and skills required to participate in society, contribute to communities and promote personal health and well-being. The accumulated knowledge within our communities will help determine the future of the Columbia Basin-Boundary region.

**StrongStart BC** is a play-based early learning service offered at no cost to families across the province. In our region, there are 35 StrongStart program locations for families with young children.<sup>35</sup> In 2017/18, StrongStart BC attendance was 29,534 in our region, and serviced 1,937 children.<sup>36</sup>



The Provincial Government forecasts most school districts in the Columbia Basin-Boundary to have increases in student enrollment over the next decade.<sup>37</sup>

AVERAGE HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES, 2018<sup>37</sup>  
REGIONAL AVERAGE: 81% • BC AVERAGE: 81%



**27.5%**  
of K-12 students in our region felt that they were satisfied with what they were learning in school in 2017/18.<sup>37</sup>

**Students with special needs** constitute 12% of the student body throughout school districts in our region.<sup>37</sup>

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENT BODY WHO IDENTIFY AS INDIGENOUS, BY SCHOOL DISTRICT<sup>37</sup>

- Southeast Kootenay (SD5) **18%**
- Revelstoke (SD19) **13%**
- Kootenay Columbia (SD20) **15%**
- Arrow Lakes (SD10) **20%**
- Kootenay Lake (SD8) **21%**
- Boundary (SD51) **30%**
- Rocky Mountain (SD6) **20%**

DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HEADCOUNT FOR PUBLIC COLLEGES<sup>55, 56, 57</sup>

Institution	2008/09	2017/18	Percent Change 2008/9 to 2017/18
Okanagan College			
Domestic Students	19,090	18,940	-0.79%
International Students	940	1,715	82.45%
Selkirk College			
Domestic Students	12,015	9,565	-20.39%
International Students	290	1,345	363.79%
College of the Rockies			
Domestic Students	12,025	9,925	-17.46%
International Students	160	590	268.75%
All BC public post-secondary institutions			
Domestic Students	162,245	127,090	-21.67%
International Students	5,445	21,485	294.58%

**Student headcount across all school districts in our region in 2018 was 20,691, and is projected to increase by 2,127 students (10.3%) by 2028.**

There are

**184**

childcare facilities in the Columbia Basin-Boundary.<sup>34</sup>

— As of May 2019



Overall **student enrollment has been decreasing** at all public post-secondary institutions in our region.

At all institutions, **domestic student enrollment** has decreased over time while **international student enrollment** has increased rapidly.



# Community & Society

A sense of belonging and connection to community are fundamental aspects of social well-being. The vitality of a community is associated with the overall health and well-being of its residents and the level of citizen engagement. A healthy community is safe, connected and contains all necessary resources to achieve and maintain mental and physical well-being.

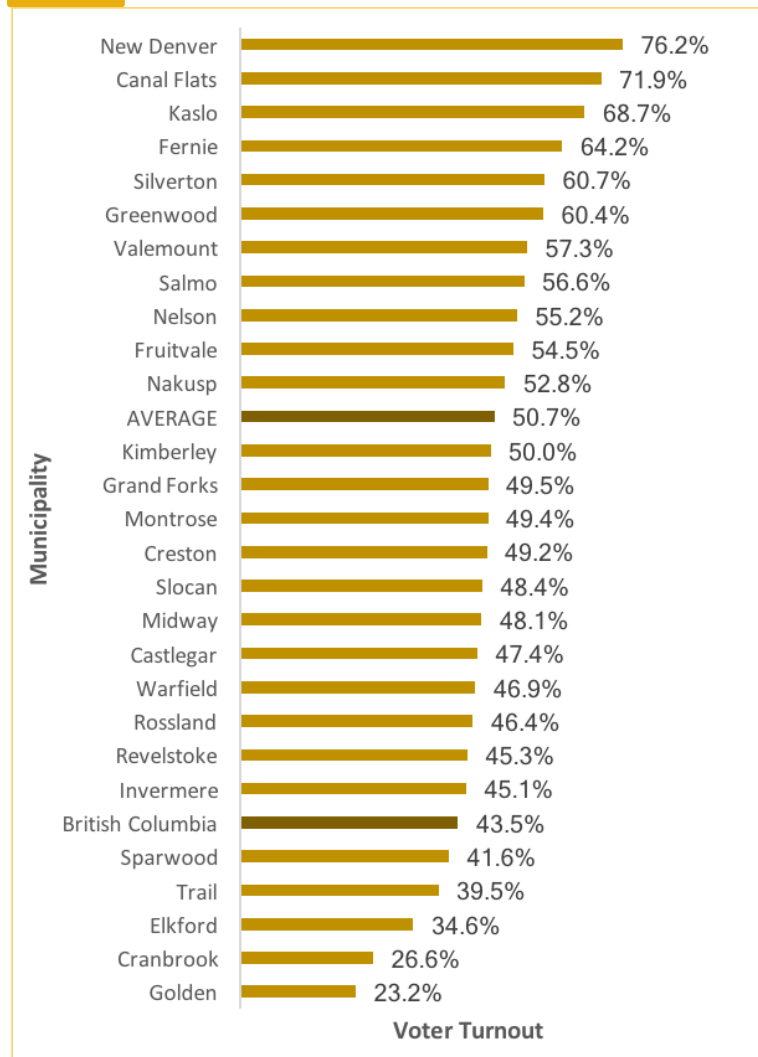
## PUBLIC SAFETY

**Crime rates** (including violent crimes) in our region were at their lowest in 2014 since 1998. Crime severity fluctuates annually in our region, but has decreased 37% from 1998 to 2017. We continue to be well below the provincial average on the crime severity index.<sup>38</sup>



## AVERAGE VOTER TURNOUT

The average voter turnout for local government elections in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region was 50.7%, which is considerably higher than the provincial average of 43.5%.<sup>39</sup>



There are approximately 35 weekly Farmer's Markets in our region, some of which run year-round.<sup>42-46</sup> Choosing food that is locally grown supports local community members and farmers, local economies, and food security.



18.7% of Columbia Basin-Boundary tax filers made donations to registered charities in 2017.<sup>40</sup>

Average annual donations were \$1,180.<sup>40</sup>

**A baby's weight at birth** is an indicator of maternal and newborn health and nutrition. From January 1st, 2017 to March 31st, 2018, **low birth weight babies** accounted for 4.8% of live births in our region.<sup>41</sup>

# Arts, Heritage, Culture & Recreation

Arts and culture are complex and powerful means to express individuality, creativity, and the unique ways in which we choose to live. Cultural well-being can be recognized as the emotional and spiritual prosperity sustained by the freedom to retain, interpret, and express art, history, heritage, and tradition. Abundant recreational and outdoor opportunities in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region foster our regional and cultural identities, and aid in the sustenance of emotional, spiritual and physical well-being.

**41.3%** of Columbia Basin-Boundary residents actively use their library cards. In 2017, the average person in the Columbia Basin-Boundary visited a library 8 times, borrowed 9 items, attended 1 program and was supported with \$35 from local government toward their local library.<sup>48</sup>



Municipal and Regional District government **spending on parks, recreation and culture** in 2017 equated 16.2% of total expenditure, slightly higher than the provincial average of 16.0%.<sup>15, 47</sup>



**Arts, Cultural and Music Festivals** bring people together for days of fun and connection. There are more than 180 annual festivals or special events which take place in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region.<sup>53,54</sup> Art, music, theatre, recreation, environment, food and culture are just some of the things Columbia Basin-Boundary residents get together to celebrate.

Most people who vacation in our region are from other Canadian provinces.<sup>49</sup>



*Visiting national, provincial or nature parks ranked the top activity in our region for international travelers, while domestic travelers preferred hiking/backpacking or going to the beach.<sup>49</sup>*

*Our region hosts about 11% of total tourism seen throughout all BC regions.<sup>49</sup>*

**Visitation to provincial parks in our region was more than 1.6 million in 2017.** Percent change in visitation between 2016/17 and 2017/18 fluctuated drastically between parks, with the lowest percent change of -45% for Summit Lake Park and the highest percent change of +48% for Johnstone Creek Park. Average change was +1.62% for all parks.<sup>51</sup> **Visitation to national parks and historic sites** in our region was more than 2.5 million in 2017.<sup>50</sup>

**Arts councils promote art and culture by hosting events and funding local artists. There are 18 arts councils in the Columbia Basin-Boundary.<sup>52</sup>**



# Learn More

The Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute (RDI), at Selkirk College's Applied Research and Innovation Centre, is a regional research centre with a mandate to support decision-making by Columbia Basin-Boundary communities through the provision of information, research and capacity building support. Beyond the State of the Basin, the RDI engages in fee for service and grant funded research initiatives in partnership with communities and organizations across the region.

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