

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COLLABORATIVE PROJECT WILL MARKET BC MARINE TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

COURTENAY – A \$29,400 grant from the Island Coastal Economic Trust is helping the BC Ocean Boating Tourism Association create a coordinated, region-wide marine tourism marketing program, leading to more marine tourists, longer stays, and extended visitor seasons.

With some of the most attractive coastal waters in the world, a focused effort that brings together stakeholders - marinas, boat charters and tours, tourism associations, destination marketing organizations, and more - will help the BCOBTA develop marketing messages, strategies, and a functional interactive website.

“Coastal BC offers a world-renowned boating experience, but with every community promoting itself independently, we weren’t taking advantage of our full potential,” said Phil Kent, Chair of the Island Coastal Economic Trust. “Picture the waters from the Salish Sea north to Prince Rupert as a highway up the coast of British Columbia, and you’ll see that if we all work together, marketing efforts across jurisdictions will help the entire coastal region.”

ICET has previously invested in upgrades to marinas, wharves, and harbours across its region, including Port McNeill, Powell River, Comox, Ladysmith, and more. With revitalized infrastructure, coastal communities can now work together through the BCOBTA to publicize the services and amenities that attract marine visitors.

“The expected outcome of this project is a marine-tourist increase of 10-15% over the next decade, with an increase in international visitation, length of stay and an extension of the traditional marine tourism season into the ‘shoulder’ seasons,” explained David Mailloux, Chair of the BC Ocean Boating Tourism Association. Project Manager Michael McLaughlin reports that enthusiasm is high in the marine tourism industry. “Clearly, marina operators see increased marine tourism as an important growth opportunity that also contributes to the local economy.”

With the many investments in marine infrastructure made over the past several years, communities are looking forward to the collaborative efforts with the BCOBTA.

“Port Hardy has invested heavily in its marine infrastructure for all sectors with the marine tourist always in mind,” said Rick Davidge, District of Port Hardy Chief Administrative Officer. “Most recently, in 2013, we completed a new marine recreation facility which will serve boaters and also serve kayakers as a launching site for the BC Marine Trail.”

The BCOBTA project links not only coastal communities in the ICET region, but also communities right across B.C.'s stunning coastline. It also builds on the strength of the province's international brand and reputation, and markets our marine tourism opportunities as world-class destinations.

"Tourism is a vital part of our communities and our economy – generating \$13.5 billion and employing more than 127,000 people. We welcome initiatives like this that raise awareness about the beautiful coastal waters of BC while keeping our marine tourism products fresh, innovative, and world-leading to potential visitors," said Minister of State for Tourism and Small Business Naomi Yamamoto.

The total budget for the project is \$108,000, and has an anticipated completion date of March, 2015.

About the Island Coastal Economic Trust

The Island Coastal Economic Trust is a \$50 million endowment established in 2006 by the Government of British Columbia to help diversify the economies of central and northern Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast.

ICET is guided by a Board of Directors and two Regional Advisory Committees which include more than 50 locally elected officials and MLAs and five appointees. This exceptional team of leaders collaborates to set regional priorities and build vital multi-regional networks.

Through a community-centred decision-making process, ICET has approved \$47 million for over 100 economic infrastructure and economic development readiness projects on the Island and Sunshine Coast since implementing its grant program in 2007. ICET investments have leveraged over \$260 million in incremental funding into the region.

A full overview of ICET can be found at www.islandcoastaltrust.ca

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