The Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute (RDI) was formed in 2010 as an eight year partnership between the Columbia Basin Trust and Selkirk College (Columbia Basin Trust, 2010). The purpose of the RDI is to promote and support informed planning and decision making in the Columbia basin, strengthening rural communities within the region (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2012). This includes monitoring and reporting on a range of indicators and trends (e.g., employment levels, environmental conditions), supporting local communities, providing relevant information, and conducting new, relevant research on a variety issues impacting the region (Columbia Basin Trust, 2010).

The RDI evolved from two key initiatives: the Columbia Basin Trust’s *State of the Basin* and Selkirk College’s *Regional Innovation Chair*. The State of the Basin, launched in 2008, was an indicator report for the Columbia basin (Columbia Basin Trust, 2008). The Regional Innovation Chair was established in 2006 and focuses on rural economic development (Selkirk College, n.d.). The RDI brings these two initiatives together. The region covered includes: Regional Districts of East Kootenay, Central Kootenay, Kootenay Boundary (The Kootenay Development Region), as well as Revelstoke, Golden, Valemount and Columbia Shuswap Regional District Areas A and B (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2012). In total this accounts for 161,741 people and 9% of British Columbia’s land mass (*ibid.*).

Two advisory boards support the RDI, one in the East Kootenay and one in the West Kootenay-Boundary. The purpose of these boards is to advise the RDI on research priorities (e.g., identifying relevant issues), to help disseminate research findings and outcomes, to connect the RDI with stakeholders in the region (e.g., enhancing partnerships), and to advocate on behalf of the RDI (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2012). Selkirk College provides the infrastructure and
the specific capabilities of the RIC and CBT provides existing information, knowledge, and funding (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2012).

There are seven key areas that the RDI supports (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2012):
- The collection and use of indicator research, including economic, social, cultural, and environmental indicators.
- Ongoing analysis of indicators, affording trend analysis and connecting plans and planning processes.
- Providing economic development groups with research, best practices, tools, and processes.
- Rural revitalization research with networks at the local, provincial, and national level.
- Economic diversification, as sought thought promotion of innovation and knowledge transfer.
- Support for ongoing research based on regional priorities that supports informed decision making.
- Fostering collaborative partnerships with existing organizations, networks, and exports, that leads to informed decision-making.

There are three key areas of research at the RDI, each with its own respective partners and linkages. Innovation and knowledge transfer is intended to identify and promote research partnerships (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2012). This includes partnerships with local, provincial, and federal government, chamber of commerce, the regional innovation councils, and other regional groups. The second research area is the state of the basin, intended to provide a current snapshot of regional well being, as well as allowing for the study of trends over time (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2012), partnering with Statistics Canada and BC Stats. Lastly, rural revitalization provides and tests best practices, tools, and approaches and uses a wide range of partners (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2012).

Currently the RDI is heading forward on a project entitled The Digital Basin: Geospatial Mapping of Environmental Indicators and Assets. The purpose of this project is to provide an online portal that allows exploration of environmental and sustainability research and planning within the region. This will expand on the state of the basin indicators, bringing in information from other similar projects previously conducted in the region (e.g., mapping of industrial, commercial, and agricultural lands in the region). The result will be an interactive online mapping system, providing a tool for evaluating development and making land use decisions that are integrated with community sustainability objectives and that reflect the relationship between land use patterns and environmental impact. In addition to providing both information and a tool, this will help to build stakeholder capacity.

The RDI website includes write-ups on the communities within the region, as well as a wide-reaching resource database providing a number of information pieces and resources for users (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2012). Regional news and innovation features on the website share activity and success within the region as well. The RDI links economic development with the surrounding land and environment. While there is a socio-cultural component, it is not as dominant as the other two aspects. The RDI illustrates the potential role for academic institutions within regions as a close partner serving to benefit the region.

Visit the RDI website for further information and resources: [http://www.cbrdi.ca/](http://www.cbrdi.ca/)
References


