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Banff Marathon is Canada's first UN Sports for Climate Action member

JORDAN SMALL

BANFF – Going green has gotten Banff Marathon recognized on the world stage.

The annual marathon that prides itself on its sustainable initiatives was accepted to the United Nation's Sports for Climate Change last month, which "aims at supporting and guiding sports actors in achieving global climate change goals," according to the UN climate change website.

The Banff Marathon started off being effected by a catastrophic climate event and over six years later it's Canada's first member of the UN initiative and only one of 100 worldwide, joining organizations such as Paris 2024 Summer Olympics and the New York Yankees.

"We were ahead of the curve in terms of our programs and being leaders in sport in this particular area," said Paul Regensburg, Banff Marathon race director.

"Most people agree sustainability is the way to go. If you can find a way to still have an amazing event experience and be sustainable, which is possible nowadays, that's the best of both worlds."

He added before the marathon started in 2013 (officially debuting in 2014 due to the devastating Southern Alberta Floods), organizers underlined sustainability and stewardship of Canada's first national park as major priorities, which aligns with the Sports for Climate Change objectives.

"It's amazing [to be recognized] and a real testament to the efforts of the organizing committee and the participants and sponsors for the event," Regensburg said. "It's a lot of work to be that responsible in the sustainability department."

Partnered with SustainDriven, a locally-based environmental sustainability company, which added the know-how of running the eco-friendly event after its work during the 2014 Alberta Winter Games in Canmore.

Each year, the committee for the Banff Marathon, which dubs itself as the World's Greenest Marathon, adds to its list of green initiatives.

In 2019, in which runners from 31 countries participated, it highlighted use of electronic event bags and bio-digestible water cups or "corn cups," the waste diversion from landfills (Towards Zero Waste), being carbon neutral, education and engagement, working with local companies to minimize the environmental footprint and working with suppliers and sponsors to



Runners take part in the Banff Marathon, dubbed the World's Greenest Marathon. RMO FILE PHOTO

follow the same standards as organizers.

A full list can be found at banffmarathon.com.

"What I love about Paul Regensburg is he let's me be the 800-pound gorilla in the sustainability area," said Joey O'Brien, SustainDriven president.

"If we didn't have a platform to accomplish this off, we couldn't do it ... My company's vision statement is we wish to be able to explain to our grandchildren in 20 years how we had a material influence on the climate crisis."

Banff Marathon, through SustainDriven, applied to Sports for Climate Change initiative after the UN's COP24 conference in Katowice by showcasing the work completed each year at the race, which had 100 per cent waste diversion in 2018.

"Six years of research, we're ahead of everyone else," O'Brien said. "I don't take any of the credit, it was that incredible committee of world-class people that we put together for the 2014 Alberta Winter Games, but I basically just adopted the model ... but it is world-class, and nobody seems to be able to do what we do."

In March, O'Brien will head to London, England to begin volunteer work with the UN as part of the partnership pledge with Sports for Climate Change.

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