

Backgrounder and Overview

**Sustainable Tourism
Development Project**

Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve

September 2006 through August 2007

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation and in collaboration with numerous partners including Parks Canada, the Tourism Industry Association of Canada and regional Chambers of Commerce and marketing partnerships, is embarking on a 52 week sustainable tourism development project.

The project is a major initiative to assess and develop the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve area (which includes the Thousand Islands and Cataraqui River section of the Rideau Canal regions) as a location and destination for sustainable tourism, as defined by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada. Sustainable tourism will integrate the economic, social, cultural and ecological attributes and needs of the region. The “Premier-Ranked Tourist Destinations: A Self Guided Workbook” is a manual to be used in an adaptive planning process for the evaluation of performance against measures defined in the framework. It addresses attributes/factors/conditions necessary if a destination is to be perceived as being among the Premier-Ranked in terms of attracting tourists. This assessment will identify weaknesses and gaps in the economic, social, cultural and ecological fabric of the region that should be addressed to enhance this area as a tourist destination. It will form the basis of associated projects to identify strengths and opportunities to be used in creating a sustainable and competitive tourism industry.

This project will conduct a complete tourism and heritage asset inventory of the Biosphere Reserve area; and a thorough overview of the social, cultural and ecological characteristic of the region. Individual municipalities, chambers of commerce, economic development offices, destination marketing organizations, national and provincial parks as well as the Biosphere Network have partial lists of local or member products and services but currently, no comprehensive database of all of the region’s comprehensive assets exists. Once the database is completed, the mix assets can then be evaluated on the adapted platform of the Premier-Ranked Tourist Destinations model. An evaluation and self-evaluation process will be co-ordinated through this project in partnership with Biosphere Network and the tourism industry partners from across the Biosphere Reserve region.

At the same time, a U.S. partner—the Thousand Islands International Tourism Council—is also planning to undertake a similar project. The Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve has other partners, including US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation. This will enable us to leverage the findings of this project to provide all partners with local, regional and bi-national information.

BACKGROUND

The Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve is one of 14 Biosphere Reserves in Canada. It was designated as a globally-significant ecological and cultural landscape in the Man and the Biosphere Programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2002. Biosphere Reserves exist to encourage the protection of those heritage assets and to serve as stimuli of sustainable development. They carry no jurisdiction or authority, and serve at the stewardship of their regional community. The Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve is an approximately 1,000 square kilometre region, covering all or part of 9 municipalities in 3 counties, roughly between the communities of Brockville, Gananoque and Perth in Eastern Ontario. It includes the Thousand Islands and lower section of the Rideau Canal. This region is a blend of agricultural, cultural, and ecological landscapes. It has challenges on all fronts, and opportunities in all areas as well. It has long been recognized as one of the foremost tourist areas in eastern North America, and has undergone some major capital investment and development in terms of major hotels, outdoor attractions and cultural and arts developments.

The Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve operates through a network of partnerships—the Biosphere Network. There are currently 45 partner – members and another 30 associated organizations, comprised of federal and provincial agencies, municipalities, chambers of commerce, and historical and conservation-based non-government organizations. The make-up of the Biosphere Network, and its non-jurisdictional framework, enable exceptional interaction and capacity sharing. The Biosphere Network has an elected Board of 19 members of the community of the partnership, and an Executive Director.

A fundamental aspect of the Biosphere Network is that it operates by consensus, with projects and programmes shared through networks of partners. Networks such as Local Flavours, outdoor educators, history and conservation have provided considerable benefit, integration and capacity-sharing in the Biosphere Reserve.

This region provides both opportunities as well as challenges. Existing retail and non-profit organizations like parks, museums, art galleries, restaurants, festivals/events are eager to move into the tourism industry but require assistance with training, product development and knowledge of the region's assets in order to do so. Private and public sector funds are being utilized for improved product marketing and training, but not necessarily in the most logical and measurable means and not in the context of sustainability.

In an effort to better understand and help develop a tourism industry that sustains the resources and heritage, in addition to the community, economy, infrastructure it is critical to understand the complexity of facets of this industry, the level of business maturity and capacity that each is at. The industry's future growth in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve is dependent on the best ways and means, and timing for the investment new dollars in development. This inventory gathering and assessment will then provide us with valuable information of what is ready, in development, or at a level of operation. It will also determine the strengths and weaknesses and gaps and opportunities in the industry.

There are a number of other projects presently underway in the Biosphere Reserve which will contribute to this project, and these include a highly significant Community Atlas text and mapping project, an economic and land use study of the Thousand Islands Parkway corridor, and developing a model for sustainable tourism in collaboration with Parks Canada and the Tourism

Industry Association of Canada. In addition, the recently completed Rideau Heritage Route will supply partial background information. There as well are broad initiatives such as Audubon-accredited golf course, Green Marinas and Green Hotel accreditations which can be linked to findings and future programmes. This project will collaborate with and greatly extend the value of the Premier-ranked Destination Programme currently being undertaken along the southern edge of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, in the Thousand Islands. While entirely compatible, the projects are not in any way redundant or repetitive.

Altogether, this project will lead to a stronger, more unified industry that leverages its resources more effectively for specific goal achievement that is noticeable to the community it serves.

RISK OF NOT UNDERTAKING THIS PROJECT

If this inventory and assessment is not undertaken at this point in time, the heritage infrastructure upon which the tourism industry of the region is built, will continue to be degraded to the point where the basis of tourism here declines beyond value. Capital and operating funds will continue to be spent haphazardly on product development, marketing, and training initiatives that do not sustain the fundamentals of either the resource or region, or best serve the needs of the community, industry and economy in the region.

The industry will continue to be fragmented in terms of its cultural and environmental resources, and its sustainable development. The impact will be noticeable in terms of flat or decreasing revenues, diminished natural and cultural capital, less effective land use planning, reduced customer service, low hotel/motel occupancy rates, out-migration and continued turnover in the labour market, and reduced quality of the various attractions in the region.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Staff positions:

- 1) Co-ordinator/Product Development & Researcher: Accommodations (1 x 52 weeks)
- 2) Database/Administrative Assistant (1 x 52 weeks)
- 3) Sustainable Tourism Product Development & Researcher: Attractions, Events, Ecological, Historical and Cultural Organizations, Businesses & Chamber of Commerce (2)

The participants will work under the supervision of the Programme Administrator of the Biosphere Network of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve. An Advisory Committee will be drawn from the partnership base of the Biosphere Network and from representatives from the tourism sectors in each community to provide overall guidance.

Planned activities are:

1. Identify relevant tourism databases
2. Identify ecological, cultural and historical assets and resources
3. Identify existing programmes of accreditation for sustainable or “green” business operations
4. Collect data from all sectors; assess, edit and collate entries
5. Conduct resource audit of selected sites, through adaptive planning uses of the format of the Premier Ranked Destination Programme
6. Communicate findings to stakeholders and participants, through workshops, newsletters
7. Develop a network mechanism which will support sustainable tourism and its initiatives
8. Make recommendations for future planning and create action plan
9. Complete project summary

EXPECTED RESULTS

The expected outcomes are:

1. Involve all relevant tourism organizations (public and private) and supporting tourism businesses in the development and implementation of a Sustainable Tourism Model;
2. Maximize economic viability, generating business and capitalizing on capacity of venues to accommodate increased visitation to the region;
3. Involve county and municipal governments in partnerships and networks, to ensure their participation in the protection of ecological and cultural heritage assets, and in frameworks of local and sustainable economic development;
4. Enable transferability of the Model to other regions by thorough documentation and communication of the process and results;
5. Develop mechanisms to measure the state of heritage assets;
6. Develop an enduring network and partnerships based on respect, integrity, empathy and transparency;
7. Develop a comprehensive database of sustainable tourism assets and services for the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve;
8. Complete adapted workbook process (resource audit, evaluation, interpretation, recommendations and action plans);
9. Develop a clear picture of the status of the Biosphere Reserve as a destination for sustainable tourism, the strengths and weaknesses supporting or constraining that status, and the directions that might be pursued to further improve success.

FABR MANDATE AND EXPERTISE

For a number of solid reasons, the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, which includes the Rideau Corridor/Thousand Islands region, is a natural choice as the focus for a project in sustainable tourism:

The operating entity of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve is the Biosphere Network. Through its Board, staff and members, the Biosphere Network will form the core of a project team which can confidently bring its experience and abilities to this project, and create the working environment needed to successfully convene and manage the development of the Sustainable Tourism Project, and the required network processes. The Biosphere Network has successfully developed and worked in a network of partnerships, which is now recognized by the community as a non-regulatory facilitator.

While the new Provincial Policy Statement introduces discussion of sustainable tourism, a working definition had not been presented. The definition for Sustainable Tourism as outlined below was originally developed by Tourism Industry Association of Canada and the Parks Canada Agency, in the spring of 2005. This project adopts that definition, and this proposal has been developed in accordance with that definition:

Sustainable tourism actively fosters appreciation and stewardship of the natural, cultural and historic resources and special places by local residents, the tourism industry, governments, and visitors. It is tourism which is viable over the long term because it results in a net benefit for the social, economic, natural and cultural environments of the area in which it takes place.

In November, 2002, UNESCO recognized the Thousand Islands-Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve as a unique area of natural and cultural heritage, validating the community's intention to protect, promote, and celebrate the richness of this heritage while it strives to maintain and develop the economic base needed to ensure a high quality of life. Biosphere Reserves are "areas of terrestrial and coastal/marine ecosystems, or a combination thereof, which are internationally recognized within the framework of UNESCO's Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB)" (Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves). Reserves are nominated by national governments and must meet a minimal set of criteria and adhere to a minimal set of conditions before being admitted to the Network. Each Biosphere Reserve is intended to fulfill three complementary functions: a conservation function, to preserve genetic resources, species, ecosystems and landscapes; a development function, to foster sustainable economic and human development, and a logistic support function, to support demonstration projects, environmental education and training, and research and monitoring related to local, national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development.

There is a significant heritage asset base within the region. There are significant provincial holdings including the Parks of the St. Lawrence, the Thousand Islands Parkway, Upper Canada Village; and the Charleston Lake, Frontenac, and Murphy's Point Provincial Parks. Within this area are highly regarded Parks Canada Agency holdings, including St. Lawrence Islands National Park, the Rideau Canal National Historic Site, and the national historic sites of Fort Wellington, Fort Henry, and Bellevue House. There are approximately 100 National Historic Sites and Monuments Board Commemorations. In addition, there are numerous municipal parks and sites and an unparalleled richness of museums, built structures such as mills, and cultural events run by organizations and partnerships. Rather than treating these assets in isolation, the Sustainable Tourism Project will integrate them into the fabric and community of the region, communicating their values and their programmes to the tourism industry, residents and visitors alike.

Several highly significant initiatives already underway within the region are foundations upon which the project can be built, and the industry renewed. Linking these initiatives to this sustainable tourism project could be mutually beneficial and provide the project with high profile and enhanced potential for success. The initiatives on which the project can build include:

- UNESCO designation of the Frontenac Arch as a Biosphere Reserve.
- UNESCO consideration of the Canada-nominated Rideau Canal National Historic Site as a World Heritage Site.
- Outstanding heritage interpretation by SPLC at Upper Canada Village and Fort Henry
- Rideau Cultural Heritage Tourism Route
- Algonquin to Adirondack's Conservation Initiative
- St. Lawrence Islands National Park doubling in size, with opportunities for landscape rehabilitation
- Biosphere Reserve Community Atlas Project
- Fort Henry National Historic Site conservation and renewal
- Twinning of Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve with the Baotianman Biosphere Reserve of China
- Sustainable integrated development planning of Thousand Islands Parkway, through Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve initiatives

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Evidence of community support is indicated by the involvement of tourism partners, government at all levels, and the community at large in various initiatives and meetings held to date. Working groups exist for projects such as the Thousand Islands Parkway Corridor study, the Biosphere Reserve Community Atlas, Local Flavours and other initiatives, which can contribute to both process and results of this project.

All stakeholders acknowledge that the critical component to any future development is having a complete tourism industry database of all current products and services and assessing these products and services. The Sustainable Tourism Project will identify gaps as well as opportunities for business and sustainable development planning. A list of Biosphere Network members can be found at the end of this document.

Job Description

Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve

Sustainable Tourism Development Project

Ecological, Historical & Cultural Resources Analyst(s) (2 positions, 52 weeks)

Applicants must be EI recipients or EI eligible

The Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and in collaboration with numerous partners including Parks Canada, the Tourism Industry Association of Canada and regional Chambers of Commerce and marketing partnerships, will

conduct a 52 week project designed to strengthen the tourism industry by enabling it to better sustain its underlying resources.

The project will assess and develop the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve area (which includes the Thousand Islands and Cataraqui River section of the Rideau Canal regions; from Brockville and Gananoque in the south, and beyond Westport and Verona to the north and west) as a location and destination for sustainable tourism. As defined by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, sustainable tourism will integrate the economic, social, cultural and ecological attributes and needs of the region. The Ontario Ministry of Tourism's Premier-Ranked Tourist Destinations process is to be used in an adaptive planning process for assembling data and information, and to evaluate performance measures. This assessment will quantify the economic, social, cultural and ecological character and assets of the region. It will identify weaknesses and gaps in the knowledge and protection of, and business opportunities that exist within the economic, social, cultural and ecological assets of the region that should be addressed to sustain and enhance this area as a tourist destination. It will form the basis of associated projects to identify strengths and opportunities to be used in creating a sustainable and competitive tourism industry, as defined by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada.

Currently, no comprehensive database of all of the region's comprehensive assets exists. This project will conduct a complete tourism and heritage asset inventory of the biosphere reserve; and a thorough overview of the social, cultural and ecological characteristic of the region. Individual municipalities, businesses, chambers of commerce, economic development offices, destination marketing organizations, national and provincial parks as well as Biosphere Network members will be contacted in the data gathering process. A database will be developed to capture and house information. Once the database is completed, the mix of assets can then be evaluated on the adapted platform of the Premier-Ranked Tourist Destinations model. An evaluation process will be coordinated through this project in partnership with an Advisory Committee Biosphere Network and tourism industry partners from across the biosphere reserve region.

Duties and Responsibilities:

1. Review existing and developing databases pertaining to the hospitality, accommodation and tour sectors in the research area;
2. Develop and use a database for compiling entries of regional tourism businesses;
3. Prepare detailed list of all participants to be surveyed in the analysis of economic, social, cultural and ecological assets of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve;
4. Complete a survey of participants in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve regarding the economic, social, cultural and ecological assets;
5. Adapt and complete the relevant sections of the Resource Audit of the Premier-ranked Destination format of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism;
6. Complete a SWOT analysis for sustainable tourism measurement;
7. Identify existing accreditation programs and ranking systems for "green" operations of golf courses, marinas, accommodations etc.;
8. Liaise with all partners and participants in developing a vision statement and sense of place towards the sustainable tourism model in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve;
9. Liaise with all partners and participants for general communications of results and project progress;

10. Provide support to the Advisory Committee (minutes, agenda's and communications);
11. Assist the Advisory Committee in completing workshops with partners
12. Complete analysis of survey results;
13. Assist in develop a network and partnerships of stakeholders and participants, based on respect, integrity, empathy and transparency

Requirements:

- Research skills
- Survey and or statistics methodology
- Good communication, phone and interviewing skills
- Tourism knowledge/background
- Good command of the English language
- Ability to analyze data and draw conclusions
- Computer and Internet literate
- Ability to multitask various projects at once
- Ability to work as a team player as well as independently
- Must provide own police clearance
- Must have a valid drivers license

Location of Work:

- Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve offices, 19 Reynold's Road, Lansdowne
- Will be expected to travel throughout the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve to complete the work as outlined above, with mileage reimbursed

Hours of Work:

- 40 hours per week, Mon-Fri, occasional evenings required for meetings

Skills Required:

- database development, computer skills, research, technical writing, organizational and communication skills, team work, tourism knowledge

Supervisor: Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve Programme Administrator

Job Description

Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve

Sustainable Tourism Development Project

Business and Heritage Infrastructure Analyst(s) (2 positions, 34 Weeks)

Applicants must be EI recipients or EI eligible

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Duties and responsibilities:

1. Review existing and developing databases pertaining to the hospitality, accommodation and tour sectors in the research area;
2. Assist in the preparation of a detailed list of all participants to be surveyed in the analysis of economic, social, cultural and ecological assets of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve;
3. Complete a survey and gather information into the database of participants in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve regarding the economic, social, cultural and ecological assets; assess, edit and collate entries;
4. Liaise with all partners and participants for general communications of results and project progress;
5. Assist in developing a network mechanism which will support sustainable tourism and its initiatives;

6. Provide support to the Advisory Committee (minutes, agenda's and communications);
7. Assist the Advisory Committee in completing workshops with partners;
8. Assist in develop a network and partnerships of stakeholders and participants, based on respect, integrity, empathy and transparency.

Requirements:

- Research skills
- Survey and or statistics methodology
- Good communication, phone and interviewing skills
- Tourism knowledge/background
- Good command of the English language
- Ability to analyze data and draw conclusions
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Hours of Work:

- 40 hours per week, Mon-Fri, occasional evenings required for meetings

Skills Required:

- database development, computer skills, research, technical writing, organizational and communication skills, team work, tourism knowledge

Supervisor: Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve Programme Administrator

Member Organisations of the Biosphere Reserve

Adirondack to Algonquin Association
Arthur Child Centre
Barbara Heck Foundation (Landon Bay)
Brockville Field Naturalists
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
Canadian Thousand Islands Heritage Conservancy
Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority
Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario
Chamber of Commerce/1000 Islands-Gananoque
Charleston Lake Association
Charleston Lake Provincial Park
Delta Mill Association

Ducks Unlimited
Eastern Ontario Model Forest
Friends of Charleston Lake Park
Front of Leeds and Lansdowne Historical Society
Frontenac County Stewardship Council
Gananoque Forestry Advisory Committee
Gananoque Historical Society
Gananoque Waterfront Development Committee
Gananoque River Waterway Association
History Alive , Brockville
Kingston Field Naturalists
Lanark and Leeds Green Community
Leeds County Stewardship Council
Lower Beverley Lake Association
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Rideau Waterway Land Trust
Rural Leeds 2000
Save the River
South Frontenac Township
St. Lawrence County Planning Office
St. Lawrence Islands National Park
St. Lawrence Parks Commission
Thousand Islands Area Residents' Association
Thousand Islands Association
Thousand Islands River Heritage Committee
TLTI Communities in Bloom
Town of Gananoque
Township of Front of Yonge
Township of Leeds and Thousand Islands
U.S Fish and Wildlife Service
United Counties of Leeds and Grenville
Upper Canada District School Board
Waterfront Working Group
Wildlife Habitat Canada