Charting the Course

by Ted Chudleigh, M.P.P.
Parliamentary Assistant,
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THE GREAT LAKES HERITAGE COAST
Part of Ontario’s Living Legacy
Lake Superior, title page

Agawa Beach, right

Lake Superior and Agawa Beach photos:
Bill Howe, Superior Imaging
The Great Lakes Heritage Coast project, launched on January 27, 2000, aims to protect and promote one of the nine signature sites identified as part of Ontario’s Living Legacy. The Heritage Coast is a magnificent sweep of shoreline stretching from Port Severn to Pigeon River.

To facilitate the project, I appointed Ted Chudleigh, my former Parliamentary Assistant, as government lead. I asked Mr. Chudleigh to report back to me with suggestions for reaching the goal of long-term protection of the Heritage Coast’s significant values and natural resources, while promoting the tourism and recreation benefits of its scenic beauty and cultural heritage.

After a very ambitious series of community consultations, Mr. Chudleigh submitted this report to me with a number of recommendations. These recommendations include the preparation of a strategy for the Heritage Coast; continuing efforts to foster co-operation and partnerships; and the need to examine options for the longer-term implementation of the Heritage Coast. The government has accepted Mr. Chudleigh’s recommendations and is anxious to see them implemented.

This document outlines future directions for management of the Great Lakes Heritage Coast. I am pleased that we are moving forward, and I have asked Mr. Toby Barrett, my new Parliamentary Assistant, to guide this important initiative.

Hon. John C. Snobelen
Minister of Natural Resources
Message

To the people

of the

Great Lakes Heritage Coast

Morrison Creek Beach, Pukaskwa National Park

Photo: Bill Howe, Superior Imaging
The Great Lakes Heritage Coast is one of Ontario’s treasures. Last year, we asked the people of the coast to “Imagine the Possibilities.” They have far exceeded our expectations.

In addition to imagining the possibilities, we hosted meetings, gave presentations, held workshops, participated in discussions, and heard from people about their thoughts and visions for the Heritage Coast. We also experienced the coast. We drove, flew, paddled, hiked and swam parts of the coast.

What we learned is that we have one of the most unique natural landscapes that exists anywhere in the world! We now have the opportunity, as part of Ontario’s Living Legacy, to enhance it, to share it, to enjoy it and, above all, to protect it.

It has become clear to me that the success of the Great Lakes Heritage Coast will depend upon the continued involvement, commitment and leadership of those who share the vision to maintain and protect the quality and beauty of the coast. There is much more work to be done. To guide that work, I’ve recommended the preparation of a Heritage Coast Strategy – a strategy that will guide the actions of government and partners in the future.

As work continues and decisions are taken toward making this concept a reality, we all need to remember and uphold the visions and principles which received resounding support from the people of the coast. The Great Lakes Heritage Coast is a spectacular part of Ontario; let’s work together to keep it that way.

On behalf of Premier Mike Harris, Minister John Snobelen and the Great Lakes Heritage Coast project team, I would like to thank all of those people who shared their interest, support and consideration of this initiative. I hope you continue to imagine the possibilities and work together to develop the Heritage Coast concept.

The experience of meeting and working with people who are committed to protecting and enhancing this part of Ontario’s Living Legacy will remain a special part of my experience at the Ministry of Natural Resources. Thank you.

Ted Chudleigh, M.P.P.
Parliamentary Assistant,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
1997-2001
The vision
The Great Lakes Heritage Coast is an area of outstanding scenic beauty, with wild natural landscapes and cultural values that provide high quality experiences. This outstanding natural resource must be protected to ensure that it remains special and available to the people of Ontario.

The coast should be preserved in its wild and pristine state, and its ecological diversity and scenic beauty protected and restored for the benefit of current and future generations.

The outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities along the coast can contribute to stronger, more diversified economies within coastal communities.

Through co-operation among different levels of government, communities, Aboriginal peoples, resource industries and interest groups, the Great Lakes Heritage Coast will remain an outstanding, high quality natural resource and become one of the primary tourist destinations in the world.

*Denison Falls*

Photo: J.T. Cooper
guiding principles
During community discussions on a collective vision for the Great Lakes Heritage Coast, six important principles emerged. These form the guiding principles for planning and management of the Heritage Coast, with the overall principle being the protection of its natural beauty and its ecosystems.

**Protection**
The long-term protection of the wilderness beauty of the Heritage Coast and protection and restoration of its ecosystem is the number one priority. All future management actions should be considered within the framework and understanding of coastal ecosystems and their interactions.

**Balance**
To ensure the long-term future of the Heritage Coast, its pristine beauty and “accessible wilderness” must be maintained. Within this wilderness setting, efforts will be made to promote tourism use and strategically located tourism development that complements the collective vision for the coast.

**Stewardship**
Stewardship initiatives that provide private land stakeholders with the tools they need to support the coastal ecosystem should be encouraged and supported. Stewardship should also encourage local initiatives and decision-making while providing effective grassroots guardianship.

**Education and Knowledge**
The coast presents a “living classroom” of global significance. It is important to accumulate new and existing information, use it effectively in decision-making and make it available for educational use throughout the coast.

**Development**
New sustainable development that takes place should complement the coastal ecosystem and be consistent with a collective vision for the Heritage Coast. Quality tourism facilities and infrastructure should be directed to existing communities. Crown shoreline and island development should generally be limited to recreational infrastructure, such as campsite facilities, trails, access points and docks.

**Management**
Management of the Heritage Coast must be guided by these principles and the collective vision for the coast, while recognizing and providing for regional differences. Co-ordination and co-operation among municipal, provincial and federal governments, First Nations and stakeholders are vital. Promotion of the coast will require significant efforts and resources to ensure increased use does not negatively affect the natural values of the coast.
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The concept of the Great Lakes Heritage Coast was established through Ontario’s Living Legacy. The wild and rugged coast was recognized as a spectacular natural landscape which should be protected. At the same time, its tourism opportunities should be promoted. Living Legacy identified that further discussion with stakeholders was necessary to determine how this could be accomplished.

The Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative began in January of 2000. The theme for the project – Imagine the Possibilities – was meant to encourage and challenge people along the coast to come forward with ideas to attract more tourists, build new businesses, strengthen communities and make the coast available to the world, while protecting its many and varied ecosystems.

Over the past year, extensive consultation was carried out with communities along the coast; this initially involved obtaining ideas and later entailed obtaining public reaction to draft recommendations. A number of common themes emerged throughout this consultation. These themes were presented in the Discussion Paper released in August of 2000 and now form the basis of the recommendations to the Minister.

The recommendations are outlined on pages three through seven. The appendix provides additional detail on these recommendations, the development of the Heritage Coast Strategy and its components, as well as more information on recommendations for co-operation and partnerships.
The main recommendations are the following:

- Accept the Vision and Guiding Principles;
- Develop a Great Lakes Heritage Coast Strategy;
- Promote co-operation and develop partnerships;
- Invest capital to improve infrastructure on the Coast;
- Refine the boundaries of the Heritage Coast; and
- Implement the Strategy.

1. Accept the Vision and Guiding Principles

The vision statement and guiding principles (identified at the beginning of this report), reflect sentiments expressed in the many community meetings and submissions received on the Heritage Coast initiative. There was significant public support for the use of this direction as the basis of decision-making. This direction should guide all future actions related to the Heritage Coast. It is hoped that the vision and principles will also influence the use of private, municipal and federal lands.

2. Develop Great Lakes Heritage Coast Strategy

Public discussion confirmed that a strategy should be developed for the Great Lakes Heritage Coast. This strategy would identify the short, medium and long-term actions to implement the vision for the Heritage Coast and are in keeping with the guiding principles. The key purposes of the strategy are to identify new economic opportunities in tourism and recreation that are based upon the natural attributes of the coast, and to determine the actions necessary to maintain the coast's wilderness characteristics, beauty and ecosystems.

The strategy will focus on the five areas identified in the Great Lakes Heritage Coast Discussion Paper: ecosystem protection; tourism development and infrastructure; tourism promotion; information and education; and private land stewardship (see pages 17-21 for more details). Specifically, the strategy will:

- evaluate the tourism market to identify demands that can be met on the coast;
- assess tourism opportunities within the coast associated with its natural assets and communities, and identify associated potential economic benefits;
- identify local opportunities for increased tourism and recreation development, including required infrastructure and facilities;
- develop strategies for marketing the coast;
- identify ways to protect the coast and its wilderness character;
- develop a distinct Aboriginal tourism component in co-operation with First Nations; and
- propose solutions to various coastal issues related to natural resource management.
A variety of approaches will be used to obtain public input on the strategy. A small Advisory Panel led by a government-appointed Chair should be established to assist in providing direction, and consideration should be given to the use of mechanisms such as workshops to obtain feedback from representatives of major stakeholder organizations. The specific program for obtaining public input will be developed with the advice of the Advisory Panel. The Ministry of Natural Resources will work with the Union of Ontario Indians to develop an approach for pursuing discussions with aboriginal communities.

It is also recommended that consultants be hired to assist in the development of the strategy. Several Ontario government ministries in addition to the Ministry of Natural Resources will have prominent roles in developing the strategy, particularly the ministries of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, and Northern Development and Mines.

The strategy will be submitted to the Minister of Natural Resources for approval.

3. Promote Co-operation and Develop Partnerships

The success of the Heritage Coast Strategy, including its development and eventual implementation, requires the active involvement of stakeholders, such as existing resource industries, the various provincial ministries and the federal government. At the same time, there must be recognition of the considerable efforts undertaken by existing non-government organizations on activities along the coast, and support for the efforts of these organizations to protect and promote the Heritage Coast.

There are opportunities for enhancing the involvement of First Nations in the future direction of this initiative. Specifically, the Anishinabek Nation could participate in key phases of the project, such as inventory and information collection, strategy development and implementation. There may also be opportunities for Anishinabek youth to help in promoting tourism and stewardship along the coast. These and other subjects will be covered in future discussions between the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Union of Ontario Indians.

Existing resource industries provide the economic backbone of many communities along the coast. As this initiative is intended to build upon existing economies, the involvement of resource industries will be important in achieving the objectives of the Great Lakes Heritage Coast.

Opportunities for partnerships should also be explored with educational institutions, existing community and non-government organizations, industry, local communities and the provincial and federal governments. The Ministry of Natural Resources should continue to provide leadership by working with partners, as well as co-ordinating and facilitating government management actions that are consistent with the vision for the coast and its guiding principles.

Ted Chudleigh, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources, and Vernon Roote, Grand Council Chief, Anishinabek Nation (Union of Ontario Indians), in North Bay.
4. Invest Capital to Improve Infrastructure

The government announced in November of 2000 its intention to proceed with several of the capital projects outlined in the Discussion Paper. This included a commitment of $1.5 million to begin planning for four new visitor centres along the Heritage Coast. These include interpretive centres for Killbear, Killarney and Lake Superior provincial parks, as well as a Voyageur Centre for French River Provincial Park. At the same time, the government released new promotional materials for the Great Lakes Heritage Coast. These included a 66-page, full-colour profile of the coast, a 17-minute video, and a poster based on a painting by Ontario’s renowned landscape painter Cory Trépanier.

It is recommended that the government move ahead with other capital projects proposed in the Discussion Paper. Such projects include new directional and interpretive signage along the length of the coast, and other small-scale infrastructure improvements, such as trails, walkways, campsites, access points and docks. In particular, Parry Sound, Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay should be recognized as “Gateways to the Coast” and identified as such with the appropriate signage.

Future capital investment in the Heritage Coast should be directed by the strategy in a manner that ensures infrastructure is developed in the appropriate location and is consistent with the vision and guiding principles of the Heritage Coast.

An increased level of program integration and collaboration between the ministries of Economic Development and Trade, Environment, Natural Resources, Northern Development and Mines, Tourism, Culture and Recreation, and Transportation, as well as municipalities and First Nations, will be required to establish priorities and develop the co-ordinated approach that is needed to showcase the coast.

In addition, alternative sources of funding should be sought from sources such as the private sector, municipal and federal governments, and non-government organizations.
5. Refine the Boundaries of the Great Lakes Heritage Coast

The boundaries for the Great Lakes Heritage Coast are meant to reflect a community of interest and are not intended to be regulatory in nature. The goal is to establish the coast as a recognizable entity for the purposes of promoting coastal values and features. The boundaries help provide a focus for initiatives related to the coast. The Crown land use designations and permitted uses established within Ontario’s Living Legacy are not changed by this initiative.

The Great Lakes Heritage Coast includes the waters, lakebed and islands of Lake Superior, St Marys River, the North Channel of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay that are within the administrative boundaries of Ministry of Natural Resources districts located within the Heritage Coast.

It is recommended that the coast should also include Manitoulin, Cockburn and St. Joseph islands and surrounding waters. With the inclusion of these islands, the amount of shoreline on the coast increases from 2,900 to 4,200 kilometres. As well, the total area of land increases from 1.1 million to 1.46 million hectares.

The inland boundary generally follows Highways 69 and 17 from Port Severn to Thunder Bay, and Highway 61 south to the Pigeon River. In the absence of highways, it follows the inland boundaries of major parks, including the French River, Killarney and Lake Superior provincial parks and Pukaskwa National Park. For more detailed information on the boundaries of the coast, please refer to the map included at the back of this report.

Included within the coast are private lands and islands, as well as 25 First Nations. The coast initiative does not suggest any further regulation or control of these lands. Rather, they fall within the broad community of interest of the coast.
6. Implement the Strategy

The vast scale of the coast, its distance from markets, the presence of many small communities and a dispersed population necessitate a special effort to provide co-ordination, encouragement of partnerships, advice and assistance in resource protection and tourism development and promotion. There is a need to build linkages among communities, organizations and people that are dedicated to the future of the coast and to facilitate the focusing of government programs.

Community consultations confirmed the need to examine initiatives to help co-ordinate activities on the Heritage Coast.

The strategy will identify tourism opportunities on the coast; possible roles for government, the private sector and other stakeholders; and what is required to realize these opportunities. Decisions and actions will be required on the part of all parties to achieve the potential of the coast.

The strategy will identify a range of actions that will contribute to the vision for the coast. Some actions can be undertaken immediately, while others would take place in the medium or longer term. The latter may require further information, analyses, or discussions with stakeholders or other levels of government.

The strategy will provide a framework for future decision-making by government, stakeholders and the private sector, and provide the business case to support the ongoing investment of resources in the Great Lakes Heritage Coast concept.

As the Heritage Coast Strategy is developed, the following should be identified:
- special implementation needs;
- common coastal opportunities;
- appropriate delivery mechanisms.

The Advisory Panel will be asked to assist the Chair in advising the Minister of Natural Resources on the need for any additional or alternative delivery mechanisms for the Heritage Coast.
Since being appointed government lead of the Great Lakes Heritage Coast in January 2000, I have had the privilege of travelling the length of the coast on many occasions. I have come to appreciate the coast’s tremendous potential and the great love for the coast expressed by the people who took the time to participate in the consultation process.

When I released my Discussion Paper in August of 2000, the response was overwhelming. That document outlined a possible vision for the coast which was soundly endorsed during the fall of 2000. The vision, which is found at the beginning of this report, truly captures the way people feel about this unique part of the world.

With the help and ongoing participation of people across the coast, the Great Lakes Heritage Coast can become one of the world’s premier tourist destinations. While I am pleased with what we have accomplished to date, there is much that remains to be done in making the coast’s possibilities become realities. This report is just the next step in achieving that goal.

I urge and invite interested individuals and groups to work with Toby Barrett and the project team in the preparation of a strategy to realize our vision.

My thanks to the many individuals who helped to make my job easier by sharing freely of their knowledge and expertise. Particularly gratifying was the willingness of prominent residents and former residents of the coast to support the project as champions. They are:

Pierre Berton         Author and Historian
Roberta Bondar       Astronaut
Ken Danby            Artist
Phil and Tony Esposito Professional Hockey Players
Charlie Farquharson   Historian and Raconteur
Domenic Filane       Olympic Boxer
Dr. Fred Gilbert     President of Lakehead University
Al Hackner           Champion Curler
Curt Harnett         Olympic Cyclist
Bob Izumi            Sport Fisherman
Greg Lotysz          NFL Football Player
Gary & Joanie        Outdoor Writers
McGuffin             McGuffin
Ted Nolan            Professional Hockey Coach
Bobby Orr            Professional Hockey Player
Gary Polonsky        President of Durham College
Paul Shaffer         Late Night Bandleader
Morley Torgov        Author

I am proud of what we have achieved and believe that future generations will reflect with gratitude on the legacy we have left them – a legacy for the ages.

Ted Chudleigh, M.P.P.
A vision for the future
The Basics

The Great Lakes Heritage Coast includes:

- 4,200 kilometres of shoreline and 1.46 million hectares of land (with the inclusion of Manitoulin, Cockburn and St. Joseph islands)

- Approximately 300,000 people in more than 20 communities

- 25 First Nations

- 71 new and existing parks and protected areas
Background

1.0 Overview

Ontario’s Living Legacy was announced by Premier Mike Harris in March 1999, and includes the biggest expansion of the province’s parks system in Ontario’s history. The Great Lakes Heritage Coast project was launched on January 27, 2000, and is the centrepiece of Ontario’s Living Legacy. The Great Lakes Heritage Coast is one of nine featured areas identified in Living Legacy, and will allow all Ontarians to experience the beauty, tranquility and uniqueness of natural Ontario.

Minister Snobelen named me, as his Parliamentary Assistant, to be the project lead. The theme for the project – Imagine the Possibilities – was meant to encourage and challenge people along the coast to come forward with ideas to attract more tourists, build new businesses, strengthen communities and make the coast available to the world, while protecting its many and varied ecosystems.

The vision identified in Ontario’s Living Legacy for the Great Lakes Heritage Coast was to:

- protect the coast’s scenic beauty and its natural ecosystems;
- promote the potential for recreation, tourism and other economic benefits through a network of parks and protected areas;
- ensure development is compatible with the overall intent for the area; and
- foster co-operation, education, public information and partnerships with other levels of government, Aboriginal communities and interest groups in the planning and management of the coast.

Just over a year and a half from the launch of the project and after considerable public consultation, I am now releasing my recommendations on the Great Lakes Heritage Coast. I have considered the comments and suggestions received over the course of my consultations and envision an exciting future for the Great Lakes Heritage Coast.

2.0 Consultation

The Great Lakes Heritage Coast project was the subject of extensive consultation. Immediately after the launch of the project in January of 2000, a series of meetings were held with key community leaders from various communities along the coast. Meetings were held in Thunder Bay, Terrace Bay, Michipicoten, Spanish, Sault Ste. Marie, French River, Parry Sound and Port Severn. Representatives were also present from Red Rock, Nipigon, Rossport, Schreiber, Marathon, White River, Blind River, Elliott Lake, Espanola, Killarney, Georgian Bay, the Archipelago, Muskoka and other municipalities.

From this process emerged a number of themes, such as the need for a common vision, ecosystem protection, tourism opportunities, Crown land management, parks, boundaries of the coast and a consideration of longer term needs.
A second round of meetings was held in March and April. These sessions were held in Thunder Bay, Terrace Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Wawa, Parry Sound, Spanish and Manitoulin Island. The project team also established 12 drop-in centres to provide information about the project. The centres were located at the municipal offices in Marathon and Port Severn, as well as MNR offices in Thunder Bay, Nipigon, Terrace Bay, Wawa, Sault Ste. Marie, Blind River, Espanola, Sudbury, Killarney and Parry Sound.

Consultations also took place with other provincial ministries, and discussions were held with the Union of Ontario Indians to ensure Aboriginal involvement.

This initial round of discussions led to the preparation and release of the Discussion Paper in August 2000.

Following the release of the Discussion Paper, I revisited the coast with the project team for further discussions. Meetings were held in 22 communities, and almost 500 people who live, work and use the coast attended. During this stage of the project, 82 formal presentations were made.

Consultation on these ideas in the early fall indicated broad support for the proposed vision statement and guiding principles as well as for the preparation of a coastal strategy, and the need to examine possible long-term co-ordination. Concerns were expressed pointing to the need to clarify the mandate of the initiative, better link this initiative to the existing resource-based economy, commit to continued public consultation, clarify the hierarchy of principles ensuring that the promotion of tourism does not come at the expense of the environment, and clarify boundaries, permitted land uses and the intent of the “Area of Influence.” Overall, the project team and I received strong support for the recommendations in the paper.

Based on the comments received, this “Charting the Course” report was prepared for submission to the Minister. As is indicated in the report, there will continue to be opportunities for consultation as the project moves forward and a strategy is prepared.

2.1 Mandate

The framework for the planning and management of Crown lands is provided by Ontario’s Living Legacy Land Use Strategy. It establishes the Great Lakes Heritage Coast as a premier Signature Site that has a range of highly significant values that warrant special strategies. In addition, the strategy indicates that the coast contains extremely significant tourism and recreation potential that merits increased planning and promotion, and that further work is required to define the scope of the Heritage Coast, the associated policies, and implementation needs. Ontario’s Living Legacy Land Use Strategy
establishes ecosystem protection, tourism promotion and partnerships as being the long-term goals for the coast. It also identifies the permitted use for Crown lands and conditions for further development. As well, it establishes the ground rules for the Heritage Coast initiative.

The Ministry of Natural Resources is committed to undertaking further detailed planning for each of the new provincial parks, conservation reserves, and enhanced management areas within the area of the Heritage Coast. Planning for these areas will be consistent with the overall direction provided for the Heritage Coast in the Living Legacy Land Use Strategy and with direction from the Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative.

It is important to note that the Great Lakes Heritage Coast is not establishing new land use policies. Land use activities on Crown lands within the Heritage Coast will be consistent with Ontario's Living Legacy Land Use Strategy.

2.2 Some General Considerations

Building on the Resource Economy

The communities along the Heritage Coast developed and prospered based on the use of the region's natural resources. Forestry, mining, and other resource industries have been the economic mainstay of many communities for most of this past century and remain the major employers in many centres. Industries related to water, such as hydroelectric generation, transportation and fishing, as well as rail transportation have also been important.

The future of many coastal communities is clearly linked to the continuance of a strong resource-based economy. Government decisions through Ontario’s Living Legacy support the continuation of these critical industries to benefit both the local and provincial economies, and particularly the people who live and work along the coast.

The history of resource development on the Great Lakes Heritage Coast includes many stories of ingenuity and innovation that led to the establishment of local communities. These could be recognized as a tourism theme. As well, environmental practices undertaken by coastal resource industries should be highlighted and encouraged.
The Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative is intended to build upon the resource-based economy of Northern Ontario. Tourism has the potential to provide diversity to local economies and jobs and economic benefits to many small coastal communities.

First Nations Involvement

The Great Lakes Heritage Coast includes the traditional lands and reserves of 25 First Nations. These First Nations are largely affiliated with the Union of Ontario Indians through the Robinson-Superior and Robinson-Huron treaties.

First Nations have raised the matters of Aboriginal rights, treaty rights and land claims, as well as the potential effects of the Heritage Coast initiative on traditional values and uses. The Anishinabek Nation and other individual First Nations have also expressed interest in the potential opportunities provided by the Heritage Coast concept. Information was provided by the Union of Ontario Indians on its Turtle Island initiative in Germany, and similar tourism-related ventures may be possible on the coast. Many First Nations are working on economic development projects related to tourism and aboriginal cultures that are complementary to the key objectives of the Great Lakes Heritage Coast.

The Great Lakes Heritage Coast project team has arranged with the Union of Ontario Indians to disseminate information about this initiative to member First Nations and to provide the opportunity for the identification of common issues and opportunities for discussion with the Ministry of Natural Resources. One result of these efforts was the receipt of a written submission from the Union of Ontario Indians in response to the Discussion Paper. In a recent meeting with Grand Council Chief Vernon Roote, this submission was discussed, as were potential opportunities for enhancing the involvement of First Nations in the future direction of this initiative. Specifically identified was the possibility of the Anishinabek Nation participating in key phases of the project, such as inventory and information collection, strategy development and implementation. There may also be opportunities for Anishinabek youth to help in promoting tourism and stewardship along the coast. These and other subjects will be covered in future discussions between MNR and the Union of Ontario Indians.

It is important to note that nothing within the Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative is intended to affect Native land claims and Aboriginal or treaty rights.
Distinctive Areas

Three distinctive areas have been identified along the coast. They are: Lake Superior; the St. Marys River and North Channel of Lake Huron/Manitoulin Island; and Eastern Georgian Bay.

- The Lake Superior area is characterized by large areas of wilderness shoreline, sparse development, spectacular landscapes and scenery and abundant wildlife populations. It is bounded by the cities of Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, with a number of smaller communities and First Nations spread along the coast. There are a number of large existing federal and provincial parks, and recreation tends to be land-based because of issues associated with safety on Lake Superior, a large and cold lake. While there is little tourism infrastructure in the area and it is distant from southern Ontario population centres, a number of communities are anxious to diversify their economies. From a management perspective, there are many possibilities to promote tourism opportunities associated with Aboriginal culture, scenic viewing, trails, fishing and hunting and, to a lesser extent, boating. Infrastructure development should also be a priority.

- The St. Marys River/North Channel and Manitoulin Island area enjoys a significant First Nation presence, which contributes to its cultural richness. The area has a large stretch of sheltered water which has made it a traditional boating area with a number of excellent marinas and boating facilities from Little Current, Spanish, Blind River, Thessalon, Hilton Beach, Richards Landing, to Sault Ste. Marie. As a result, recreation tends to be water-oriented. The St. Marys River has recently been designated as a Heritage River and is one of the most biologically diverse areas on the Great Lakes. Manitoulin Island, largely made up of private land, is heavily accessed in summer, and its major link with southern Ontario is through the ferry at Tobermory. Much of the north shore and islands in the North Channel are identified as new parks or conservation reserves. This area would benefit from increased marine-related infrastructure, such as access points, boat-in campsites, docking facilities and site maintenance. As well, promotion of Aboriginal culture and off-season activities, such as touring, snowmobiling and hiking, would be beneficial.

Kama Bay Lookout, Lake Superior
• The Eastern Georgian Bay area hosts a number of Aboriginal communities and is heavily used for recreational purposes. Historically, it served as the gateway for the voyageurs as they travelled north. The southern half of the bay has many cottages, and residents have formed a large, well-organized and active cottage association that is concerned with the environment. The association is involved in initiatives related to a biosphere reserve, marine patrols and water quality monitoring. Various forms of boating are popular in the south. There are a number of communities along the Highway 69 corridor, including Parry Sound, where there is significant potential for new tourism-related business opportunities. The northern portion is less developed. A large part of the area has been designated as new parks or conservation reserves. In addition to heavy use pressures, there are concerns about environmental degradation, such as noise pollution, water quality issues, and a decline in quality of fishing and air pollution. From a management perspective, there is a need to address environmental and use issues in conjunction with the cottage association and municipalities. As well, current marine-related infrastructure should be maintained and improved. Careful management and development of the new protected areas on Eastern Georgian Bay will enhance tourism possibilities.
3.0 Develop Great Lakes Heritage Coast Strategy

Throughout public discussions, there was a great deal of support for the preparation of a strategy for the coast. It was clearly recognized that further thought and consideration would be necessary to determine how best to protect the natural attributes of the coast and to promote its opportunities.

It was often stated that protection of the coastal ecosystem was essential. The environment is the building block on which all else stands. Management of the coast requires improved knowledge based upon good resource inventories and resource science. Public education and training would be a key part of this effort. Co-operation among government agencies would be necessary, as would the involvement of coastal residents. Assistance and support from municipalities, First Nations and non-government organizations could also help.

The prospect of developing and promoting tourism opportunities was generally well received, particularly by municipalities and the business community. Many local initiatives and projects were identified which would be consistent with tourism promotion of the coast.

Providing access to the coast’s resources through infrastructure improvements was also a focus of discussion. The need to improve infrastructure was often noted, particularly with regard to marine areas, such as channels, safe harbours and marinas, access points, docks and campsites; highway-related structures, such as picnic sites, viewpoints, signs and interpretive centres; and lodging and restaurants.

Many people expressed concern that development be carried out responsibly and in such a way that it would not jeopardize ecological values and the wilderness character of the coast. Most agreed that development should be focused in existing communities.

The strategy will include a short, medium and long-term action plan, and provide direction on the best approaches to realize the vision for the coast based upon the guiding principles. It will address ecosystem protection; tourism and recreation development and promotion; partnerships; and implementation. It will define roles and opportunities for government, the private sector, municipalities, and tourist associations. It will build a business case in support of the tourism potential of the coast and identify opportunities for partnerships.

To develop a strategy that works for all stakeholders, and to carefully assess the many ideas and opportunities that have been identified, the government will seek the advice of external tourism experts and draw upon coastal experiences throughout the world.

Initial priority will be given to identifying tourism opportunities and steps the government and private sector must make to realize these opportunities within the scope of the ecological protection goal for the coast. The strategy will also address the following:

- ecosystem protection;
- tourism development and infrastructure;
- support of tourism promotion;
- information and education; and
- private land stewardship.
a) Ecosystem Protection

The message that was heard most consistently during the consultations on the project was the need to protect and rehabilitate the coast. A healthy coastal environment is the foundation on which sustainable tourism depends.

A number of initiatives have been undertaken over the years to identify environmental and resource needs on the Great Lakes. As well, ongoing government programs have responsibility for ensuring ecosystem protection. One of the challenges will be to facilitate the implementation of existing strategies and co-ordinate programs.

With the co-operation of partners, the strategy should:

- establish an integrated and comprehensive natural resource information system for the coast;
- highlight and promote existing resource programs to ensure the restoration and maintenance of natural ecosystems, and the minimization of environmental impact and user conflict associated with tourism development;
- improve co-ordination of resource management activities to ensure protection of coastal values;
- ensure local resource management planning recognizes the protection of coastal values;
- define the role of specific Crown lands and protected areas in providing new tourism and recreational opportunities; and
- address specific issues regarding the use of tourism-related natural resources.
b) **Tourism Development and Infrastructure**

The Great Lakes Heritage Coast has tremendous tourism potential. While many tourist sites along the coast are active in seeking visitors and regularly upgrade facilities, there is still much that could be done to promote a unified approach to bringing facilities up to world-class standards. Efforts to promote the Great Lakes Heritage Coast both domestically and internationally will not be successful in the long run if the appropriate infrastructure is not in place.

The strategy should:

- identify or provide for the identification of necessary tourism facilities and infrastructure, including:
  - Great Lakes Heritage Coast interpretive signage;
  - water-based infrastructure improvements, such as docks, marinas, access points and mooring areas;
  - Crown-land-related improvements, such as trails and backcountry campsites;
  - highway-related facilities and improvements, such as special signage, rest stops, lookouts and interpretive plaques;
  - opportunities for new private sector development, including community-focused opportunities as well as those which may be associated with Crown land (lodges, remote camps);
  - potential major public capital projects associated with communities;
  - community projects creating linkages to the Heritage Coast; and
  - facilities within Ontario Parks such as trails, interpretive centres, and campgrounds.
• identify mechanisms the government, communities and organizations can use to maintain and continue to reinvest in facilities in the future.

c) Tourism Promotion

The Heritage Coast has all the attributes of a world travel destination and should be suitably marketed provincially, nationally and internationally. The provincial government has a supportive role to play in helping the coast gain world profile.

The strategy should:

• assess tourism market demand and tourism opportunities on the coast;
• identify the tourism product and market niche and identify common themes and partnerships;
• identify strategies for the development and marketing of four-season tourism and recreation opportunities;
• incorporate currently planned economic development proposals;
• encourage the private sector to establish standards and guidelines for coastal services, such as hotels, motels and restaurants;
• identify actions that businesses can take to promote the coast, to upgrade facilities and provide for reinvestment;
• identify how marketing for the coast could be integrated with broader provincial and federal marketing campaigns; and
• develop a Heritage Coast identity.

d) Information and Education

Considerable information about the coast is available, but has not been consolidated for ease of access and reference. In order to promote the coast as a unified and identifiable entity to both residents and visitors, there is a need to gather existing data, add to it and make it easily accessible. Related to this endeavour is the possibility of using the same information in educational efforts that will raise awareness of the coast and promote widespread support for its goals.

The strategy should:

• identify an approach to information management which provides for the inclusion of coastal information from various sources, including the federal, provincial and municipal governments, research bodies and non-government organizations, and which provides for the maintenance, sharing and distribution of that information;
• explore research needs related to the Great Lakes Heritage Coast and identify how the project could promote and support world-class research; and
• explore ways of effectively transferring Great Lakes information to the public through the education system and other partners.

e) Private Land Stewardship

While the majority of the Heritage Coast is Crown land, large areas of the shoreline are privately owned. Private shorelands are concentrated around Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and southern Georgian Bay.

The inclusion of private land in the Great Lakes Heritage Coast is a key part of achieving the vision for the coast. In some cases, significant natural heritage or ecological values are found on private lands and on the lakebed in front of these lands. In other cases, private lands may be developed as part of the tourism infrastructure with facilities such as motels, marinas, restaurants, or retail centres.
Flowerpot Cove, Pancake Bay

Photo: Peter Burtch
Within organized areas, and areas subject to planning boards, municipalities will continue to be responsible for the planning and regulation of private lands through the Municipal Act and the Planning Act. In unorganized areas not covered by planning boards, landowners will be encouraged to use their lands in accordance with the vision and guiding principles of the Heritage Coast.

The role of the Heritage Coast with respect to private lands will be to support and encourage municipalities and landowners to manage their lands consistent with the vision of the Heritage Coast through the provision of information, advice and expertise.

The strategy should:

- encourage municipal planning that will ensure the protection of coastal values;
- examine implementation of a Great Lakes Heritage Coast advisory service for private landowners and local municipalities; and
- examine existing incentive programs, such as the Conservation Land Tax and Managed Forest Tax Incentive programs, to determine how they might be applied to the coast.

3.1 Promote Co-operation and Develop Partnerships

Many agencies are involved with different aspects of the Great Lakes coastal ecosystem and its communities, including federal government departments; the International Joint Commission; provincial agencies such as the ministries of Economic Development and Trade, Environment, Natural Resources, Northern Development and Mines, Tourism, Culture and Recreation and Transportation, and the Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat; First Nations;
municipalities and conservation authorities. These agencies and organizations have different mandates related to the management of natural resources and many have ongoing programs directed to natural resources such as lands and waters, minerals, fish, wildlife, and forests. As well, many individuals and non-government organizations have a deep commitment to the coast.

The success of the Heritage Coast initiative requires the active involvement of stakeholders and the various provincial ministries, as well as the close co-operation of federal agencies.

In the preparation and implementation of the strategy, the Heritage Coast initiative should:

- explore opportunities for partnerships with educational institutions, existing community and non-government organizations, industry, local communities and the provincial and federal governments, and identify how to encourage the creation of partnerships as a way of doing business. Identify necessary support mechanisms and develop a possible “Charter” involving partners and government;

- seek a common understanding and working relationship with all government organizations that are working on the management of coastal resources, including those at the bilateral, international and federal levels;

- recognize the considerable efforts undertaken by existing non-government organizations on activities along the Coast and support efforts of these organizations to protect and promote the Heritage Coast;

- recognize the ongoing efforts of municipalities and economic development organizations, and work with these organizations;

- work to resolve jurisdictional issues between the federal and provincial governments related to boat mooring and navigation so that the ecosystem is protected while providing for boater safety;

- help co-ordinate trail development and location to ensure coastal values are protected, and work with partners and other government ministries to resolve trail issues;

- encourage the co-ordination of tourism programs and tourism-related infrastructure between communities, particularly facilities such as trails, access points, safe harbours, and information/service/adventure centres; and

- examine partnership opportunities for the development of education programs, such as best practices for recreational and industrial users and/or shoreline property owners, and training courses that develop quality customer service.
The recommendations in this report have been approved by the Minister of Natural Resources. The Ministry will begin to implement these recommendations by taking the following actions:

- Establish the Advisory Panel;
- Commence the preparation of the Heritage Coast strategy, which includes compiling existing natural resource, recreation and tourism information, and hiring consultants to assist in the development of the strategy;
- Begin communication and consultation efforts on the next stage of the project;
- Continue to contribute toward and promote improvements to the tourism and recreational infrastructure along the coast; and
- Make special efforts to increase public awareness and raise the profile of this initiative.