

**Jeff Burch M.P.P.**

Niagara Centre

OPEN LETTER

October 15, 2020

Hon. John Yakabuski, MPP
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
99 Wellesley Street, West
Whitney Block, Suite 6630, 6th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1W3

Hon. Lisa MacLeod, MPP
Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
438 University Avenue, 6th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Hon. Jeff Yurek, MPP
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
777 Bay Street, 5th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Dear Ministers Yakabuski, MacLeod and Yurek:

Given the drastic changes we see every day with climate change, I believe any initiative that promotes the protection of our wetlands including the Niagara River Corridor is imperative.

The Ramsar Convention is a voluntary Treaty, committed to promoting the conservation and wise use of water-based ecosystems through international engagement and collaboration. The Treaty was signed in Ramsar, Iran; in 1971. Canada signed it in 1981, the United States in 1987.

Niagara Falls and Fort Erie endorsed the Ramsar Designation in 2015 along with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and Ontario Power Generation. It's still under review by Niagara Regional Council but endorsed by its Planning and Economic Development Committee.

I was shocked to see the Niagara Parks Commission decided not to endorse this extremely important initiative that has been in the works for years by groups on both sides of the Niagara River. It must be stressed, that a Ramsar designation does not impose any restrictions on the management of any sites involved. It is non-regulatory and non-binding.

The U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as State and Local Governments celebrated the designation of the Niagara River Corridor as a Wetland of International Importance over a year ago.

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Given where the Niagara River was in the 1970's and 80's to where it is today is astounding and incredible work on both sides made it happen. A news article from May 7, 1987 had the staggering headline that Mist from Niagara Falls was toxic. "TORONTO (AP) _ A University of Toronto study says the romantic mist rising from Niagara Falls contains large amounts of cancer-causing chemicals, posing an unknown risk to 150,000 people living in the border area."

Decades of restoration efforts by provincial, state and federal governments as well as environmental groups helped to significantly improve the quality and ecological health of the Niagara River we see today. That must continue for future generations.

The MNR has the lead role for the care and management of Ontario's Crown land and water covering about 87 per cent of the province. Many of the province's significant wetlands are located on provincial Crown lands.

I am asking if the Ontario Government and Provincial Ministries involved will join me in endorsing the Ramsar Designation of the Niagara River and support our American friends in creating the first bi-national-transboundary Ramsar site in North America.

Sincerely,



Jeff Burch, MPP

Attach.

Copy: Jim Bradley, Niagara Regional Chair and Regional Councillors
Mayor Wayne Redekop, Town of Fort Erie and Council
Mayor Jim Diodati, City of Niagara Falls and Council
Lord Mayor Betty Disero, Town of Niagara on the Lake and Council
Wayne Gates, MPP, Niagara Falls
David Adames, Niagara Parks Commission CEO
Christine Hogan, Deputy Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Jacey Scott, Environment and Climate Change Canada
Jocelyn Baker, Canadian Co-chair, Niagara River Ramsar Designation Steering Committee
Jajean Rose-Burney, U.S. Co-chair, Niagara River Ramsar Designation Steering Committee

**Ministry of the Environment,
Conservation and Parks**

Office of the Minister

777 Bay Street, 5th Floor
Toronto ON M7A 2J3
Tel.: 416-314-6790

**Ministère de l'Environnement,
de la Protection de la nature et des
Parcs**

Bureau du ministre

777, rue Bay, 5^e étage
Toronto (Ontario) M7A 2J3
Tél. : 416.314.6790



357-2020-2754

December 4, 2020

Mr. Jeff Burch, MPP
Niagara Centre
c/o Mr. Mike Haines
Email: hainesm@ndp.on.ca

Dear MPP Burch:

Thank you for your letter to me, Minister Yakabuski and Minister McLeod endorsing the Ramsar Designation of the Niagara River.

I appreciate you sharing with me the materials regarding further support for the designation, including that of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and local municipalities.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is the provincial lead for wetlands, and I understand that you will be receiving a response from Minister Yakabuski on behalf of the government.

Thank you again for writing and please accept my best wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Yurek".

Jeff Yurek
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

c: The Honourable John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
The Honourable Lisa McLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and
Culture Industries



Legal and Legislative Services

February 12, 2016

Sent via email: jbaker@npca.ca

Ms. Jocelyn Baker, Project Manager
Niagara River Remedial Action Plan (RAP)
Watershed Management/Watershed Projects Division
Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority
250 Thorold Road, West 3rd Floor
Welland, ON L3C 3W2

Dear Ms. Baker:

Re: Niagara River Ramsar Designation

The Municipal Council of the Town of Fort Erie at its Council meeting of November 9, 2015 adopted by resolution, the following recommendation from the Council-in-Committee meeting of November 2, 2015:

That: Council supports the Ramsar Designation of the Niagara River, and further

That: Council directs staff to forward a copy of Report No. CDS-79-2015 to the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, City of Niagara Falls, Regional Municipality of Niagara, the Niagara Parks Commission, and the Fort Erie Environmental Advisory Committee.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura Bubanko", is written over the typed name.

Laura Bubanko, CMO, Dipl. M.A.
Manager, Legislative Services/Clerk
lbubanko@town.forterie.on.ca

LB:dlk

cc: R. Brady, Director of Community and Development Services

Mailing Address:

The Corporation of the Town of Fort Erie
1 Municipal Centre Drive, Fort Erie ON L2A 2S6
Office Hours 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Phone: (905) 871-1600 FAX: (905) 871-6411

Web-site: www.forterie.on.ca



February 11, 2016

Ms. Jocelyn Baker, Project Manager
Niagara River Remedial Action Plan (RAP)
Watershed Management | Watershed Projects Division
Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority
250 Thorold Road, West 3rd Floor
Welland, ON L3C 3W2

Dear Ms. Baker:

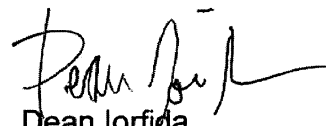
Re: Ramsar Designation for the Niagara River

I wish to confirm that on July 28, 2015, Niagara Falls City Council unanimously passed the following motion, in conjunction with a presentation by Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority officials:

That Council supports the Ramsar designation for the Niagara River.

I have included an excerpt of the related Council minutes and agenda. Please keep Council up to date on your efforts.

Sincerely,



Dean Iorfida
City Clerk

Working Together to Serve Our Community

Clerks Department
Ext 4271 Fax 905-356-9083
diorfida@niagarafalls.ca



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Press Release

Niagara River Corridor Recognized as 40th Wetland of International Importance by the United States

October 2, 2019

Contact(s):

Meagan Racey, 413-658-4386



Clean water relies on healthy wetlands. Not only does Niagara River have some of the most recognized waterfalls in the world, it supplies drinking water to nearly one million people and supports agriculture and industry along the waterway. Credit: Courtesy of Niagara Falls State Park Higher Quality Version of Image (<https://www.facebook.com/NiagaraFallsStateParkUSA/photos/a.228355113845130/3205798082767470/?type=3&theater>)

Niagara Falls, New York. – The United States side of the Niagara River Corridor, iconic for its world-renowned waterfalls and globally significant bird and fish populations, was today designated by the United States as a Wetland of International Importance under the world's oldest environmental treaty, the Ramsar Convention. Visited by millions of people, and the source of electrical power for vast populations of two countries, the Niagara River is vital to North America's economy. It is enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of boaters, hikers, anglers, birdwatchers and swimmers each year. The river is a laboratory for research and education that informs the world and it serves as a model of successful conservation and restoration in the midst of large cities.

"Anyone who has spent time around the Niagara River Corridor understands it is arguably one of the most incredible places in the world," said Congressman Brian Higgins. "This Ramsar designation formally solidifies, and highlights for the world, the Niagara River Corridor's standing as a site of international significance. I commend the local stewards who sought out and secured this designation."

Representatives from the Niagara River Greenway Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, University at Buffalo, the binational Niagara River Corridor Ramsar Site Steering Committee, New York State Parks, and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, joined Congressman Higgins, local officials, and community members to celebrate the designation at the Goat Island on Oct. 3, 2019.

"The Niagara River has captivated American and global citizens alike as a national symbol, a cultural landmark and as a milestone in America's modern conservation movement," said Steve Guertin, the Service's Deputy Director. "It's only fitting that one of the most recognizable waterfalls in the world be included in the Ramsar convention's wetlands of international importance."

The Niagara River Corridor joins 39 other U.S. wetlands, including the recently designated Elkhorn Slough, and more than 2,300 other wetlands around the world to become part of a network that formed as a result of the treaty, signed in Ramsar, Iran in 1971.

"This designation will draw attention to the Niagara River, beyond just the Niagara Falls, enhancing the quality of life for the region's residents and increasing the breadth of appreciation for this amazing natural resource," said Greg Stevens, Executive Director of the Niagara River Greenway Commission, the organization that spearheaded the river's nomination along with the bi-national Steering Committee formed in 2014. "Every day, hundreds of kayakers, birdwatchers, anglers and other visitors enjoy the fish, migratory birds, world-renowned waterfalls and history of the Niagara River Corridor. The corridor has long been recognized by local, state and federal organizations as exceptional, and this designation is consistent with the state approved Niagara River Greenway Plan."

The designation was approved by the U.S. Department of State and the Service this year.

"We are thrilled to see the local community come together with federal, state, and local governments to support recognition of the

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Niagara River as a Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance," said Marcia Bernicat, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. "The Niagara River corridor is a shining example of how public-private partnerships foster solutions that benefit both people and the environment."

The ecology of the corridor has been shaped by millennia of human activity, from indigenous civilizations to urban development and global tourism and transportation. Bloody battles were fought during the War of 1812 along the Niagara River Corridor. It was at Niagara that freedom was won for the many thousands of slaves travelling the Underground Railroad. The raw beauty of the Niagara inspired the creation of the continent's first state and provincial parks and innovative efforts to harness the brute force of the river established Niagara as the birthplace of hydroelectric energy.

Despite the region's advances, two centuries of industrialization and population growth along the Niagara River Corridor led to serious environmental degradation, yet the river and its people are resilient. The infamous Love Canal helped to spur the environmental justice movement, and plans are being implemented to reverse past and prevent future degradation. Today, the river is healthier than it has been in generations, and conservation in concert with economic development is leading to the region's renaissance.

"There has been overwhelming support for this designation from communities along the Niagara River since day one," said Jajeen Rose-Burney, Deputy Director at the Western New York Land Conservancy and the U.S. co-chair of the binational Steering Committee. "The designation highlights the ongoing restoration of the health of the Niagara River. It will help everyone see that the river is one of the most important natural places on Earth."

To be designated as a part of the Ramsar Convention, a wetland must meet at least one of nine criteria, including hosting more than 20,000 shorebirds at a time, serving as fish nursery habitat, and supporting threatened species. The convention emphasizes a wise-use principle, the maintenance of wetland's ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development. In the U.S., the Service has emphasized the overlapping priorities of jobs, recreation, education and conservation in the wise use of wetlands.

"It was an honor to lead 11 semesters of University at Buffalo School of Law Environmental Advocacy Clinic student attorneys to support this designation," said Professor Kim Diana Connolly from University at Buffalo School of Law, a legal expert on the Ramsar Convention. "Students performed top-notch legal and policy service-learning work over six years, and supported an innovative partnership among the leading environmental intuitions, local elected leaders, state, federal, and national governmental leaders, and the community at large. This is an exciting and well-deserved moment for western New York and the Ramsar community."

The tourism industry in the Niagara region supports more than 50,000 jobs and generates nearly \$900 million annually in direct labor income. Hundreds of thousands of people in both the United States and Canada receive their drinking water from the Niagara River, which also serves as a key resource for agriculture and industry. The river has long been a hotspot for training the next generation of conservationists; important centers of research and education are housed in the region's leading academic institutions.

"In 2016, the Niagara River watershed was awarded the Thiess International Riverprize, a global recognition of the Niagara's waters and the community's efforts to restore it," said Jill Jedlicka, executive director of Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper. "This Ramsar designation is another great step towards elevating the international profile and importance of protecting the Niagara River, and the two Great Lakes it connects. Decades of restoration efforts by state and federal agencies and environmental groups have helped improve the quality and ecological health of the river, and this designation will help all of us to be effective stewards for generations to come."

Learn more about the Ramsar Convention. (<https://www.ramsar.org>)

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov (<https://www.fws.gov/>).

For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/> (<https://www.fws.gov/>). Connect with our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/usfws>), follow our tweets (<https://twitter.com/usfws>), watch our YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/usfws>) and download photos from our Flickr page (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfws/>).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Home Page (<https://www.fws.gov>) | Department of the Interior (<http://www.doi.gov/>) | USA.gov (<http://www.usa.gov/>) | About the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (https://www.fws.gov/help/about_us.html) | Accessibility



Chair and Board Members

Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority

250 Thorold Road West; 3rd Floor

Welland, ON L3C 3W2

November 8, 2019

Dear Chair and Board Members:

As requested by the Niagara River Ramsar Designation Steering Committee, I am writing to provide you with information that aims to clarify the regulatory implications of Ramsar site designation in Canada and the responsibilities of management authorities of those sites once designated.

The global network of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites) is one of the cornerstones of the Ramsar Convention. Canada currently has 37 Ramsar sites covering over 13 million hectares and representing 80% of the total wetland area in Canada. Ramsar sites are located in all Provinces and Territories. Should the nomination of the Niagara River Ramsar Site be successful, it will be the first transboundary Ramsar site in North America.

As you may be aware, designation as a Ramsar site in and of itself offers no legal protection. Ramsar designation is voluntary and carries with it no financial support or regulatory implications. In fact, the designation of a site serves to highlight the values of the Site but affects neither the management regime nor resource use for these areas or for lands adjacent to the Ramsar site.

A Ramsar site designation is a "good faith" designation to maintain the ecological character of a site in the context of wise use. Ramsar defines wise use of Ramsar sites as "the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development". At Canadian Ramsar sites, typical activities that occur include recreational activities such as boating, bird watching, consumptive activities such as hunting and fishing, and agriculture. The aim is not to prohibit activities, but rather to encourage activities in the framework of "wise use".

Site managers, those responsible for the management of the lands/waters within the boundaries of the Ramsar site and named on the Ramsar Information Sheet are required to assure the maintenance of the ecological, hydrological, and socioeconomic characteristics and functions of the Site and promote the wise use of resources on this wetland area. Site managers are also responsible for communicating any human-induced changes on the site that affect ecological character to the Administrative Authority (Environment and Climate Change Canada). Additional guidance material on the wise use of wetlands and management planning for Ramsar sites can be found on the Secretariat's website at www.ramsar.org.

I hope you find this information helpful. Ramsar is a co-operative endeavour and Canada's success in implementing the Convention is due in large part to partnerships. We thank you for your interest and dedication in this pursuit. If you have any further questions on the Ramsar Convention or the nomination of Ramsar sites in Ontario, please contact Graham Bryan at Graham.Bryan@canada.ca or 416-739-4918.

Sincerely,



Grant Hogg

Executive Director, Conservation Partnerships and Programs
Environment Climate Change Canada

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Canadian Acting/Head of Administrative Authority and National Focal Point

Cc: Jocelyn Baker, Canadian Co-chair, Niagara River Ramsar Designation Steering Committee
Jajeane Rose-Burney, U.S. Co-chair, Niagara River Ramsar Designation Steering Committee