

## **Niagara Region**

**REPORT TO:** Planning and Development Committee

**SUBJECT:** Canadian/American Partnership Approach to Promote the  
Niagara River Corridor as a 'Wetland' of International  
Importance

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.
2. That this report **BE CIRCULATED** to local area municipalities and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council with an overview of a partnership project between Canadian and American agencies to designate the Niagara River Corridor as a Ramsar Site and the region-wide benefits of this designation. Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance, designated under the Ramsar Convention.

This report on the Niagara River Corridor as a Ramsar Site aligns with Council Business Plan Theme 1: Responsive Region and Theme 4: Environmentally Responsible.

### **BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial or regulatory implications related with this report. The Niagara Parks Commission is the lead 'nominating' agency on the Canadian side. As the majority of the ground-work is being done by the SUNY Buffalo Law team at the University at Buffalo, there are no financial requirements at this time aside from staff time, which is within current budgets. At this time, Niagara Region's staff commitments are only required for Working Group meetings and documentation review.

Ramsar is voluntary, non-regulatory, and non-binding and therefore there are no legal or legislative implications associated with this designation. Wetland protection legislation is and will continue to be under the jurisdiction of the Ontario Ministries of Natural Resources and Environment and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

As this designation is non-regulatory, there would be no additional enforcement requirements or development limitations; just a commitment from landowners to follow sustainable practices. While the designation would encompass the entire Niagara River, each landowner/stakeholder is only responsible for its own property.

## **REPORT**

### Background

The Ramsar Convention is a voluntary intergovernmental treaty that is committed to encouraging education and sustainable development as a means of protecting global wetlands. The Convention uses a broad definition of the type of wetlands covered in its mission, including lakes and rivers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands and peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, near-shore marine areas, mangroves and coral reefs, and human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs, and salt pans. The purpose of this treaty signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is to promote conservation and wise use of wetland areas through local, national, and international sustainable development practices. These sustainable practices are a framework for maintaining ecological, hydrological, social as well as economic characteristics and functions of Ramsar sites. The criteria for obtaining Ramsar designation is provided in Appendix I. Sites must meet one of nine criteria.

### Opportunity to Designate the Niagara River Corridor

The Niagara River Corridor Ramsar Working Group has been working collectively with representatives from both Canada and the United States to determine the feasibility of designating the Niagara River Corridor as a Ramsar wetland site. Canadian representatives include The Niagara Parks Commission, Niagara Region, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and Brock University. American Representatives include Niagara River Greenway Commissions, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, SUNY Buffalo, and Buffalo Niagara Riverkeepers. Canada currently has 37 Ramsar designated sites, including Long Point and Point Pelee. If the Niagara River Corridor is designated as a Ramsar site, it will mark the first trans-boundary site in North America.

The Niagara Parks Commission has elected to be the lead 'nominating' agency on the Canadian side because they currently own and manage a significant portion of the Niagara River (Canadian side) up to the Canada/U.S border. The Niagara River consists of characteristics that satisfy several of the convention's criteria, making it eligible for ecological, hydrological, social and economic protection under Ramsar wetland designation.

To date, a wide variety of agencies have been included and consulted with on this initiative as noted above. It is anticipated that public consultation will be done in the

near future, and private residents living along the Niagara River will need to be consulted.

### Regional Benefits

This designation will allow for Niagara Region to further foster cooperation and partnership between the United States and Canada to ensure conservation both within and around the Niagara River Corridor. Such a partnership will allow Niagara Parks Commission and more broadly the Niagara region to showcase their image as an international leader in environmental and ecological sustainability.

The Ramsar designation of the Niagara River Corridor will promote increased public awareness of the River's importance through research and development. More specifically, the Niagara Parks Commission and its partners will have the potential to lead research and development programs alongside United States representatives to improve understanding of the River and preserve its ecological importance.

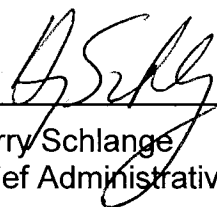
As a Ramsar site, the Niagara River Corridor will also open up greater opportunities for expanding tourism programming both along the river and throughout the region. This process will also provide opportunities for members of the public to participate in consultation processes and discussions pertaining to the significance of environmental and ecological conservation of the region.

### **Approved by:**



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Mary Lou Tanner, MCIP, RPP  
Acting Commissioner  
Planning and Development Services



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Harry Schlange  
Chief Administrative Officer

*This report was prepared by Pegah Tootoonchian, Policy Planning Student and reviewed by Katelyn Vaughan, Project Manager, Community and Long Range Planning; Curt Benson, MCIP, RPP, Acting Director, Community and Long Range Planning; and Bob Seguin, Director of Economic Development.*

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix I** Ramsar Designation Criteria and Niagara River Corridor  
Criteria Alignment

**Appendix I: Ramsar Designation Criteria and Niagara River Corridor Criteria Alignment**

<b>Ramsar Criteria</b>	<b>Ramsar Criteria Description</b>
1	Site is representative, rare or unique.
2	Site supports vulnerable or endangered species, or threatened ecological communities.*
3	Site supports keystone or endemic species.*
4	Site supports species at a critical stage in their life cycles (migration, breeding, and nesting).*
5	Site supports 20,000 or more water birds.*
6	Site supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species of water bird.
7	Site supports 1% of individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species.
8	Site supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish species.
9	Site is an important source of food, spawning ground, and nursery and/or migration path for fish.*

\* *Niagara River Corridor characteristics that align with Ramsar Criteria*