

## *Part Four*



## *National Heritage Area Management Alternatives*

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## Part Four: National Heritage Area Management Alternatives



Visitors at Prospect Point in Niagara Falls State Park

### Introduction

In addition to evaluating the study area in terms of the National Park Service's interim criteria for national heritage area designation, the study team also developed a Heritage Tourism Needs Assessment and examined a range of pre-existing models for national heritage areas, both of which are described below. Drawing upon elements of these pre-existing models and in carefully considering the particular needs of the region, the study team prepared an array of four possible management alternatives. The study team also identified some opportunities for binational cooperation for future consideration. Beyond the continuation of current practices highlighted in Alternative 1, the management alternatives have many similarities.

### Heritage Development Needs

Through the review of existing studies and plans, and interviews with park managers, local elected officials, tourism and revitalization interests, and other local stakeholders, the study team developed a list of perceived heritage tourism needs. The heritage tourism needs are described on a region-wide basis, as well as for specific areas or interest groups. Many of these needs are addressed in greater detail as part of the analysis of heritage area criteria described in the previous section of the report. A matrix summarizing these needs follows.

Table 2: Summary: Niagara Falls — Heritage Area Needs Assessment

Location	Need Category	Specific Needs	
Niagara Falls Region	Tourism Development	Regional vision (consensus driven) Coordination/leadership/internal communication Marketing/external communication (guidebooks, brochures, websites, informational/directional signage)	Participation in mutually beneficial binational opportunities Infrastructure (dedicated coordinating body; visitor amenities; alternative transportation)
	Resource Management	Greenway/trail development (Niagara Gorge, Lower River, “lake to lake”) Interpretive signage Maximizing recreational potential of the Robert Moses Parkway	Programmatic/physical links among resources (incl. Erie Canalway NHC; Niagara Falls, Canada) More support for resource protection/preservation
City of Niagara Falls, New York	City/Parks Interface	Enhance opportunities to facilitate links among tourist resources and amenities Enhance opportunities for park/community partnerships	Minimize physical impact of Robert Moses Parkway as a barrier between city and Gorge
	Tourism Development	Regional tourism hub Visitor orientation (Niagara Experience Center concept)	Visitor amenities (info signage; food; rest areas)
	Downtown Revitalization	Links to city/parks interface	Links to tourism development
Points North (Porter/Youngstown/Lewiston)	Link to Niagara Falls	Maintain transportation corridor to Niagara Falls	Enhance physical/programmatic/marketing connections among resources
	Protect Community Character/Resources	Maintain rural/village character	Continue and enhance resource protection efforts
	Tourism Development	Marketing resources/visitor amenities Expand public awareness of resources	Improve coordination/linkages among resources and amenities in Niagara Falls region
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation	Resource Management	Additional capital improvement needs Additional research/planning needs	Interpretive signage/programming Improved links among Lower Niagara River units (e.g. Goose Trail)
	Visitor Management	Broadening visitor experience beyond the Falls Ensure resource protection/visitor safety	Alternative transportation/expanded people mover routes to expand visitor experience along Lower Niagara River
	Tourism Development	Marketing resources/programming Expand public awareness of resources beyond the Falls	Increase domestic visitation/foster repeat visitation Increase opportunities for partnership with other regional initiatives
New York Power Authority	Resource Management	Explore potential opportunities offered by NYPA relicensing Ensure security of power-generating facilities	Integrate the NYPA/power-generating story into the regional context



## Background on National Heritage Areas and Suitability Findings

Each national heritage area is unique because it is based upon preserving and interpreting the special landscapes and historical themes of specific places. Preservation and interpretation initiatives are managed by partnerships among federal, state, and local governments and private nonprofit organizations. The National Park Service plays the role of catalyst by providing technical and financial assistance, but it does not acquire new land or supersede the authorities of existing state or local governments or other agencies.

National heritage areas most comparable to a potential Niagara National Heritage Area are those focused on a specific geographical resource like a river or a canal, such as the Erie Canalway or the Hudson River Valley. These heritage areas are contrasted with more geographically scattered, thematically oriented sites, such as Motor Cities (MI) and Tennessee Civil War Battlefields National Heritage Areas. One of the objectives of most national heritage areas has been to transform an area into a tourism destination. Niagara Falls already is a destination; in this case, Niagara would use a heritage area designation to preserve natural and cultural resources and enhance the current visitor experience.

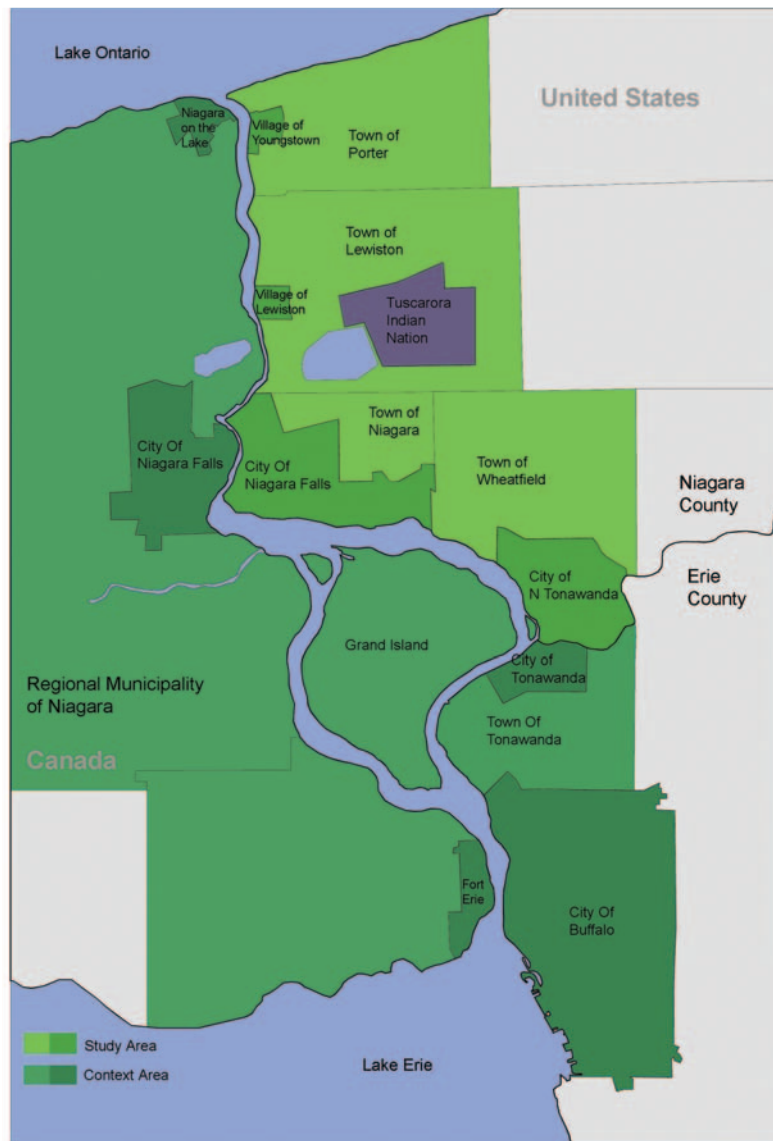
Most national heritage areas have multiple themes, similar to Niagara Falls. The Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area has three major themes: Nature and Culture, Corridor of Commerce, and Freedom and Dignity. The Essex National Heritage Area's themes are Early Settlement, Maritime, and Industry. These heritage areas demonstrate how a region can interpret several major themes effectively.

Niagara Falls possesses resources and stories that are quite unlike any found in existing national heritage areas. It would be the only national heritage area focused on an internationally acclaimed natural resource and the unique cultural resources and

stories associated with an international border. It affords the opportunity to examine our heritage in the context of our relationships with our Canadian neighbors who share not only Niagara Falls, but a common place-based heritage.



Whirlpool Jet Boat Tour: Lower Niagara Falls River



**Alternative 1:**  
Continuation of Current Practices ("No Action")  
Niagara National Heritage Area Study

The Urban Design Project  
School of Architecture and Planning



## Management Alternatives

### Alternative 1: Continuation of Current Practices

In developing alternatives for a national heritage area feasibility study, the National Park Service includes a management alternative that continues existing practices in the area. This describes the outcomes if no national heritage area is designated, and provides a benchmark for evaluating how impacts would change under other scenarios.

Under this alternative, no federal designation, additional federal funding beyond that provided through existing authorities, or additional authority for federal involvement would be pursued. Existing entities would continue, and possibly expand, their efforts to preserve and enhance heritage resources. The resources currently owned and operated by nonprofit organizations and local, state, and federal government would continue to be maintained and made available for public use under existing policies.

There would be no new NPS responsibility for providing funding and technical assistance for heritage planning and programs in the Niagara area. Federal programs, such as the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, the National Historic Landmarks program, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), would continue to be available to entities within the region on a competitive basis.

State and local government, private nonprofit organizations and foundations, and for-profit organizations would continue to be the primary sources of funds for the protection and interpretation of heritage resources. Existing heritage initiatives would continue. They would include the Niagara Area New York State Parks, Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative, Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation, Binational Niagara Tourism Alliance, Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, and many individual nonprofit organizations, communities, and economic development groups. Nothing would prevent existing organizations from working collaboratively to establish a non-federally designated heritage entity and programming.

### *Elements Common to Alternatives 2 and 3: National Heritage Area*

Alternatives 2 and 3 would establish a Niagara National Heritage Area. The differences between the alternatives would relate to heritage area boundaries, overall goals, and how community needs are addressed. Despite differences between alternatives, each one would have common features, which are described below.

Under Alternatives 2 and 3 the management entity would be responsible for receiving and disbursing federal funds and would have authority to enter into agreements with the federal government. The management entity would be responsible for leveraging funds and in-kind services to match the federal financial assistance and be authorized to make grants to organizations carrying out projects identified in the heritage area management plan. Federal, state, local, and private historical and cultural sites and natural areas within the heritage area would operate under their own authority and, as appropriate, be a part of or work in partnership with the management entity. The NPS would provide financial and technical assistance to the heritage area's management entity to support the purposes of the national heritage area.

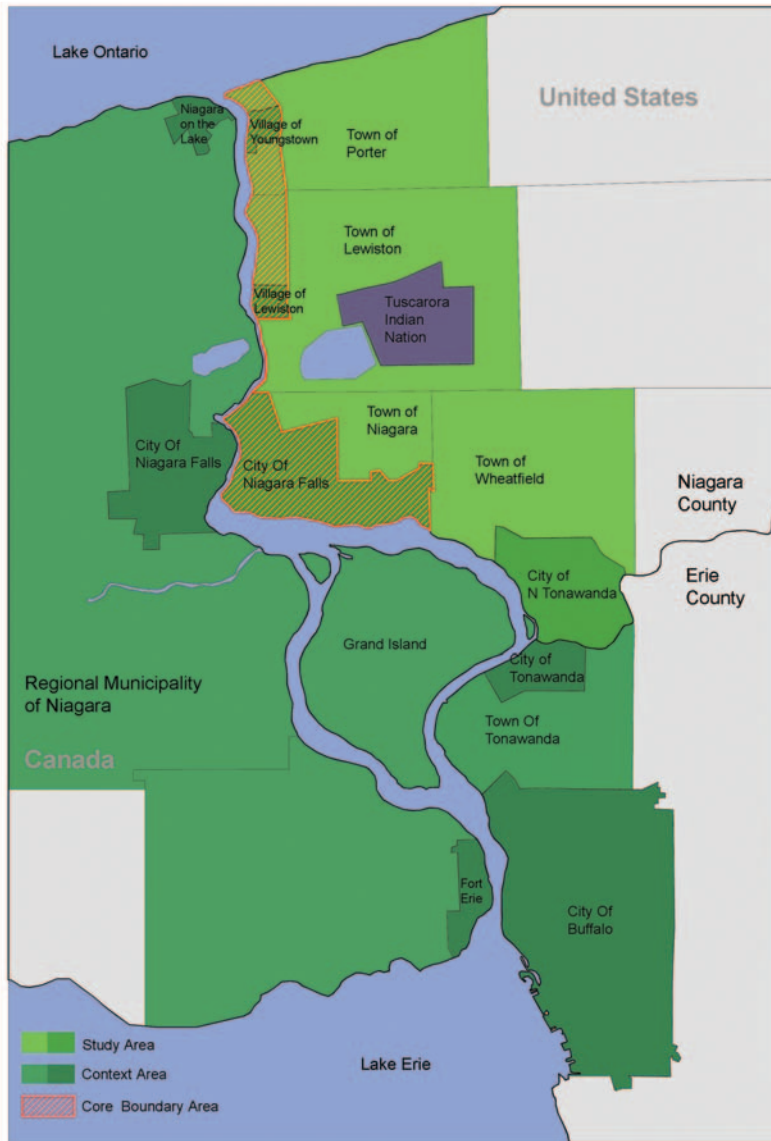
Under the following alternatives, the NPS could provide financial and technical assistance to the management entity of the heritage area and its associated partners in support of education, interpretation, historic preservation, planning, recreational trail development, and open space conservation. However, it is important to note that federal national heritage area monies could not be made available to the heritage area for land acquisition. NPS programs, such as the Northeast Regional Office, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance, the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, the Building Conservation Branch, and the Northeast Museum Services Center, could be available for project work subject to appropriated funds and NPS priorities. Many of these programs make their services available on a competitive basis.

Consistent with other national heritage areas, the management entity would be authorized to receive

up to \$1 million per year for 15 years; however the maximum total amount of funding could not exceed \$10 million. It would be required to provide a 50% match to the federal funding. After federal funding ceases, the national heritage area continues to exist, relying upon funding from other sources to meet its management responsibilities. The national heritage area also could obtain support from other funding sources, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) (administered by the Federal Highway Administration), state, and municipal agencies, and private nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

Through a heritage area management plan, the management entity would develop a comprehensive interpretive and preservation program for the heritage area's resources. Heritage area projects and grants could support a signage system, interpretive exhibits, planning and preservation for historic and natural resources, publications and brochures, interpretive planning for state parks and other participating organizations, and support for research, inventories, and documentation of heritage resources.





**Alternative 2:**  
National Heritage Area - Niagara Falls & Lower Niagara River  
Niagara National Heritage Area Study

The Urban Design Project  
School of Architecture and Planning



## Alternative 2: National Heritage Area — Niagara Falls and Lower Niagara River

This national heritage area alternative entails federal designation of Niagara Falls and the Lower Niagara River as a National Heritage Area. It would include the area above the Niagara Falls rapids to the mouth of the Niagara River, at Lake Ontario. The area's boundary would include the city of Niagara Falls, the villages of Lewiston and Youngstown, and portions of the towns of Lewiston and Porter. The Alternative 2 map demarcates the proposed boundary for this alternative.

The designated management entity could include a nonprofit organization, state agency or commission or a federal commission and would represent a cross-section of public and private interests, including the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, New York State Power Authority, the City of Niagara Falls, the Villages of Lewiston and Youngstown, the Towns of Lewiston and Porter, Niagara County, tribal, historic, cultural, and environmental organizations, economic development organizations, educational institutions, and private citizens. The coordinating entity would prepare a heritage area management plan, conduct public outreach, prioritize projects, and implement the plan in conjunction with its partners.



### *Alternative 3: National Heritage Area — Niagara Falls and Network of Thematically Related Sites*

This alternative includes the boundary in Alternative 2. In addition, the heritage area would include a network of sites thematically related to Niagara Falls in Niagara and Erie Counties. These additional sites would reflect the heritage themes of Natural Phenomenon, Recreation and Tourism, Power and Industry, and Borderland/Border Crossing. The Alternative 3 map demarcates the proposed boundary for this alternative.

Heritage area network members might include the Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society, which frequently mounts exhibits related to Niagara, including hydroelectric power and industry; sites associated with the Underground Railroad in Buffalo and Murphy's Orchard's program in Burt, New York. The heritage area could have programmatic relationships with thematically related sites on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls, although these sites would not be included in the national heritage area. Besides sites located in the immediate vicinity of Niagara Falls, such sites could include Fort George in Niagara-on-the-Lake and War of 1812 sites at Chippawa and Queenston Heights.

The heritage network might also undertake joint programming with both the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor and the nascent lake-to-lake greenway. The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, which stretches from the Hudson River to Lake Erie, borders the southern end of the proposed Niagara National Heritage Area and could become a helpful partner on specific projects. The designated management entity would include a similar cross-section of public and private interests to Alternative 2 and could include representatives of thematically linked organizations elsewhere in Niagara and Erie Counties.

A potential management entity under this alternative, as in Alternative 2, could include a representative nonprofit organization, state agency or commission, or federal commission.



**Alternative 3:**  
National Heritage Area - Niagara Falls & Network of Thematically-Related Sites  
Niagara National Heritage Area Study

The Urban Design Project  
School of Architecture and Planning



University at Buffalo  
The State University of New York

## Management Entity Models

Each heritage area has been created with its own organizational approach based upon existing institutions and management needs. The National Park Service is authorized to provide technical assistance and funding to heritage areas. These areas are not managed by the National Park Service. Management decisions are made and implemented by the local management entity. The National Park Service publicizes heritage areas through its website and nationally distributed brochures and publications. Most national heritage areas are located within close proximity to NPS units and have developed complementary relationships.

Management entities normally create committees of heritage stakeholders and interested citizens to provide advice and assistance in planning and programming. The experience of established national heritage areas has shown that such citizen input is critical to developing effective programs and policies.

The following section of this study describes three basic models for a management entity for national heritage areas—a federal commission, the state-established Niagara River Greenway Commission, and a designated nonprofit organization.

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has been created with its own  
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## Federal Commission

The federal commission has been used by the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, Blackstone Valley National Historic Corridor, Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, and the Delaware and Lehigh Canal National Heritage Corridor. A federal commission is established by Congress and representatives from a cross-section of public and private interests are appointed by the Secretary of the Interior based in part on local nominations. Commission seats for specific government agencies, nonprofit institutions, and representatives of the public are often identified in the authorizing legislation, securing more committed participation by state agencies and municipalities than might be the case if a private nonprofit organization managed the national heritage area.

The federal commission is desirable when active participation by the National Park Service is contemplated. Some commissions have assigned NPS staff as has happened with the Erie Canalway and the Blackstone River Valley.

A federal commission can increase the visibility of the heritage area, but it can take longer to implement board changes in composition because it requires changes in the commission's membership to be made by the Secretary of the Interior. The federal commission can be established for a limited period of time with the intention of its evolving into a private nonprofit organization. For example, the Shenandoah Valley National Battlefield Federal Commission was given three years to develop a management plan for the national heritage area. The management plan called for the creation of a nonprofit Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation to take over from the federal commission as the management entity. The Blackstone River Valley and the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridors are both examining options for moving toward a nonprofit management entity, among other alternatives, since the existing authorization of the commissions is lapsing.

A federal commission follows certain rules of accountability related to openness, public involvement and organizational transparency. This includes adherence to provisions of the Federal

Advisory Commission Act (FACA), which requires advance public notice of meetings, posting of agendas, and specific rules for voting.

Federal commissions may have memberships that can range as high as 27 (Erie Canalway) or 19 (Blackstone). Such a commission might meet quarterly, with more frequent meetings of a smaller executive committee or subcommittees to handle day-to-day management matters or specific tasks.

### *State Agency or Commission*

Heritage commissions or agencies established by state government have been used as a national heritage area management entity. A state agency or commission managing a national heritage area seems to be most appropriate when a state organization with compatible responsibilities is already in place. One example where a state agency acts as the management entity is the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, which is managed by the Hudson Valley Greenway (a public benefit corporation of the State of New York).

In the Niagara Falls area, a state commission has emerged that could serve as a management entity for the Niagara National Heritage Area—the Niagara River Greenway Commission. Enacted by New York State legislation in 2004, the commission initiated its work in early 2005. New York State has expressed its desire to have the Niagara River Greenway Commission serve as the management entity for the Niagara National Heritage Area. According to the legislation, the Niagara River Greenway Commission is “a cooperative regional organization established to work with participating state agencies, municipalities, organizations and residents in order to implement or cause to be implemented a linear system of parks and conservation areas that will ... redefine the Niagara Riverfront by increasing landside access to the river; creating complementary access to the greenway from the river; augmenting economic revitalization efforts, and celebrating the region’s industrial heritage.”

The greenway commission has 14 members, eight of whom are appointed by the governor and six of whom are ex officio seats representing the heads of state agencies, including the Secretary of State, the commissioners of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Environmental Conservation, Transportation, and Economic Development, and the chairperson of the New York State Power Authority. The eight governor’s appointees are supposed to be residents of communities abutting the Niagara River and represent various local interests. The greenway commission would also have at least two advisory committees, one made up of local officials and another made up of local citizens representing civic, commercial, educational, recreational, and conservation organizations.

The mission of the greenway commission is to develop a plan and an Environmental Impact Statement for a Niagara River Greenway. The plan would entail recommending boundaries for the greenway, identifying existing lands along the Niagara River dedicated to open space and recreation, recommending acquisition of additional lands, providing an economic analysis of steps necessary for developing the greenway, and identifying opportunities for celebrating the region’s industrial heritage. The greenway commission would not actually manage the proposed greenway nor would it acquire land by eminent domain. The plan is supposed to be completed within two years of the startup of the commission.

A benefit of designating the Niagara River Greenway Commission as the management entity for the Niagara National Heritage Area is that it would avoid having to create an additional organization undertaking projects in the Niagara Region relating to history, culture, environmental protection, and recreation. The greenway commission could develop and implement a national heritage area management plan while also creating a Niagara River Greenway. The tasks and the constituencies are similar.

Since the state's Niagara River Greenway Commission has been established for the distinct purpose of creating a greenway along the Niagara River, its enabling legislation does not cover the broader range of preserving heritage resources and interpreting heritage themes, as described in the Niagara National Heritage Area Study. In order for the greenway commission to manage a national heritage area it may have to be authorized to expand its responsibilities to cover historic and cultural resource protection and heritage area programming. Implementing the "heritage network" concept described in Alternative 3 would require adopting boundaries extending inland from the Niagara River, as well as the ability to work with thematically related sites. The greenway commission would have to ensure that its board membership includes the full spectrum of heritage area interests within the designated national heritage area boundary.

### Nonprofit Organization

Regional nonprofit heritage organizations tend to be most appropriate where there is an existing regional nonprofit heritage organization or an organization emerges through the heritage area planning process that represents the desired cross-section of community organizations and interests. A broad local consensus is required in identifying a regional nonprofit organization to become the national heritage area management entity. A nonprofit management entity is more appropriate when an active role for the NPS is not projected.

Several national heritage areas are managed by nonprofit organizations. Quinebaug-Shetucket is managed by the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc. It has a governing board of 15 members representing local organizations and state government officials. The organization has over 230 members, who elect board members annually. The Essex National Heritage Area is overseen by a large 118-member commission, with representation from each municipality and every relevant business, tourism, preservation, educational, and environmental organization in the region. The commission is a privately incorporated body having 501(c)(3) status under the United States tax code. A 23-member Executive Committee oversees the operations of the heritage area. The Essex National Heritage Area Commission ensures that a wide array of community, economic development, and heritage interests have input into the management of the area, while having a smaller executive committee oversee the day-to-day operations of the heritage area.

The federal commission, the state commission, and the nonprofit organization can name committees of heritage stakeholders and interested citizens to provide advice and assistance critical to planning and programming. The experience of established national heritage areas has shown that such citizen input is invaluable to developing effective programs and policies.



Table 3: Summary Matrix of Management Alternatives

Feature	Alternative One	Alternative Two	Alternative Three
<b>Concept</b>	Existing programs in Buffalo-Niagara Region continue.	Core National Heritage Area approach, with coordinated heritage planning, events, projects, interpretation and marketing.	Core National Heritage Area coordinates with network of thematically related sites in region on coordinated heritage planning, events, projects, interpretation and marketing.
<b>Suggested Boundary</b>	None	Boundary would encompass city of Niagara Falls, village of Lewiston, village of Youngstown.	The boundary would encompass: city of Niagara Falls, village of Lewistown, and village of Youngstown; other thematically-related sites in Niagara and Erie Counties could be heritage area members.
<b>Management Entity Type</b>	No new management entity	Entity may follow federal commission, state commission, or nonprofit organization models.	Entity may follow federal commission, state commission, or nonprofit organization models.
<b>Special Features</b>	There are several existing heritage-related initiatives that would continue, including: New York State Parks, Niagara Tourism & Convention Corporation, Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative, Binational Niagara Tourism Alliance, as well as efforts from individual communities and sites.	Involves heritage stakeholders in Niagara Falls area.	Possible representation from outside core area. Involves heritage stakeholders in Niagara Falls area and at other thematically related sites. Can develop broader heritage linkages to Buffalo/Erie County, Niagara County, and Canada.

## Other Heritage Initiatives Considered But Not Recommended

### *National Heritage Area with Cooperative Partnership between National Park Service and Niagara Area New York State Parks*

This study explored the alternative of, in addition to creating a Niagara National Heritage Area, establishing a cooperative partnership between the National Park Service and the Niagara-area New York State Parks. This partnership would have authorized additional NPS financial and technical assistance to state parks administered by New York's OPRHP along the Niagara River Corridor because of their outstanding national significance. These state parks would be critical anchors of a Niagara National Heritage Area. The partnership would assist special projects intended to preserve and enhance natural and cultural resources, improve the visitor experience, and relate to identified heritage themes. Since the New York Power Authority, under the current Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing process, is providing significant funding over a period of 50 years to the State for rehabilitation of Niagara-area state parks in conjunction with the Niagara Greenway Commission, the additional contemplated federal financial assistance is no longer necessary.

### *State Heritage Commission*

Some states, including New York, designate and implement very successful state heritage areas. In the process of this study, no interest was demonstrated by public officials or the general public for designating a state heritage area at Niagara Falls. Since Niagara Falls serves as a major gateway to the United States, and its resources are internationally significant, national heritage area designation appears to be the more appropriate alternative for consideration. Niagara Falls, additionally, represents an exceptionally important component of our national story, not just that of the State of New York. Designation as a national heritage area would more fully reflect the national, indeed, international value

of the resources of Niagara Falls and the region's contributing role to our nation's history and heritage.

### *American Heritage River*

The American Heritage River program provides a salaried coordinator working under the auspices of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This coordinator can work with local partner organizations and help obtain outside financial resources for local projects. The American Heritage River program is based on an executive order, not a federal law, so it is subject to change from administration to administration.

During the initial call for applications, in 1998, an application was submitted for the 35-mile Niagara River to become an American Heritage River, but it did not receive designation. The original application to obtain American Heritage River status for the Niagara River proposed program goals of increasing opportunities for public recreation on the American banks of the Niagara River, the development of river-oriented tourism amenities, and improved appreciation of the region's rich heritage. These efforts were intended to improve the local quality of life as well as upgrade the visitor experience along the Niagara River. The American Heritage River application was submitted by the Greater Niagara Elected Officials Partnership with coordination done by the City of Niagara Falls, New York and the Niagara Falls Area Chamber of Commerce.

Communities included in the Partnership were the City of Niagara Falls, the Towns of Niagara, Wheatfield, Porter, and Lewiston, and the Villages of Lewiston and Youngstown.

The American Heritage River program has successfully encouraged binational cooperation between the United States and Canada along the Detroit River, which is the only formally designated binational heritage river. The Detroit River, which flows between Lakes St. Clair and Erie and like the Niagara River is actually a strait, received American Heritage River designation in 1998. The program has funded a project coordinator to develop projects with partner organizations along the river. In 2001, the federal agency Canadian Heritage designated the Detroit River a Canadian Heritage River.

The two national programs have instigated public improvements and upgraded access on their respective sides of the Detroit River as well as providing binational coordination of the river projects. Projects have included an International Wildlife Refuge on an island in the river and a Tall Ships parade.

The American Heritage River program is making no new designations. As of now, no entities in Canada are contemplating nominating the Niagara River for Canadian Heritage River designation.

### *National Wild and Scenic River*

This approach would have the potential for designation of the Niagara River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers System of the NPS, established by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968. This program was enacted by the federal government to preserve rivers with important wild, scenic, and recreational characteristics. This program is primarily designed to conserve the river itself, with a program area generally stretching up to 1 mile from the river's high-water mark. The program area may stretch further inland from the river to deal with any outstanding remarkable resources that may be directly affected by actions related to the river. There are two man-

agement approaches for Wild and Scenic Rivers: federally managed and partnership managed. The federally managed Wild and Scenic Rivers are mainly in the West, where a federal agency, such as the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, completely owns the riverbanks. The partnership rivers, which are the predominant model in the East, are most appropriate where there is a mix of private and public land ownership. They have a project coordinator, usually employed by the NPS, who works with a local advisory council. The advisory council includes representatives from abutting communities, the county, state, and federal governments, and tribal and major nonprofit organizations. The advisory council either has to create a new nonprofit organization or develop a cooperative agreement with an existing nonprofit organization to manage funds allocated to the program. The advisory council decides how the limited funds should be allocated.

Given the local needs identified in this study, the Wild and Scenic Rivers program does not seem to be appropriate for Niagara Falls and the Niagara River. The program is intended to allow a local



Geological Feature in the Niagara Gorge





Lewiston-Queenston Bridge

citizens group to provide input on federal actions directly affecting the river, including Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) permits, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects, and federal highway projects. The local needs identified in this study have more to do with heritage interpretation and preservation, tourism, local quality-of-life amenities, and economic development. In addition, the amount of funding for Wild and Scenic Rivers tends to cover only the salary of a coordinator, organizational overhead, and some small project grants. It is significantly less than the maximum of \$1 million allowed to national heritage areas. It should be noted that this does not constitute a finding of ineligibility for the Niagara River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

### *Preserve America*

Preserve America is a White House Initiative started in 2003 in cooperation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Department of Commerce. The Preserve America program

combines recognition of communities and individuals/organizations seeking to use historic preservation for community and economic development with funding programs offered through Save America's Treasures, the Economic Development Administration of the Department of Commerce, and the Cooperative Conservation Initiative of the Department of the Interior. The Executive Order 13287: Preserve America directs federal agencies to build partnerships that promote historic preservation and economic development and that use heritage tourism to promote preservation.

The Preserve America Community designation provides recognition. Some targeted funding may be available for heritage tourism efforts under the Cooperative Conservation Initiative. The Economic Development Administration (EDA) has not set aside specific funds for Preserve America heritage tourism projects, but will consider its objectives in making awards from its regular grant programs. Dedicated staff funding is not generally available. As in the Wild and Scenic Rivers program, funding available through the Preserve America program



is significantly less than the maximum of \$1 million allowed under national heritage areas. Communities in the region would still be eligible to apply for this program.

### *National Natural Landmark*

Niagara Falls has not been designated a National Natural Landmark (NNL). The only evidence that it was even considered for designation is the “Survey of Potential National Natural Landmarks of the Eastern Central Lowlands Physiographic Province of the United States,” Vols. I & II (no date). This report includes an appendix of sites rejected for possible NNL designation, including Niagara Falls. No reasons were given for rejecting the sites. The document describes the four levels of priority ratings, noting that “Not Recommended” implies that “these are sites which apparently do not qualify as potential national natural landmarks as other better examples were selected during the screening process in lieu of them.” Current NPS staff does not believe that this survey would preclude future consideration of Niagara Falls as an NNL.

### *World Heritage Site*

The United States and Canada already have shared World Heritage Sites/Biosphere Reserves at Waterton Lakes–Glacier International Peace Park, in Alberta and Montana, and at Kluane/Wrangell–St. Elias/Glacier Bay National Park/Tatshenshimi-Alsek, in Yukon, British Columbia, and Alaska.

World Heritage Sites recognize cultural landscapes with powerful religious, artistic, or cultural associations. The World Heritage List requires national governments to nominate areas and submit a management plan. Niagara Falls would require two separate national applications. World Heritage Site designations are most useful for places needing to implement a conservation plan. The nomination process can be complicated. The benefits include a heightened profile for the site, technical assistance, and international support for conserving it.

The Niagara Escarpment was designated a biosphere reserve by UNESCO 1990. The designation is only for the portion of the Escarpment in Canada, not New York State. The Niagara Escarpment

Commission is a regulatory body that oversees protection and new development at the Niagara Escarpment in Canada.

Parties on both sides of the Niagara River are focusing on the International Peace Park designation as their vehicle for binational heritage coordination and are not seriously pursuing World Heritage Site designation.

## **Potential for Additional Binational or International Initiatives**

Two major reasons have emerged for promoting binational coordination for a Niagara National Heritage Area: (1) the resources and heritage themes of Niagara Falls, the Niagara River, and the surrounding natural and cultural landscapes are common to both the United States and Canada; (2) there have been growing efforts in recent years to foster coordination of resource management, tourism, heritage development, and economic development between communities in both countries.

A 1998 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the National Park Service and Parks Canada called for binational coordination in preserving and interpreting common sites of natural and heritage importance.

The MOU listed 12 sites and themes to be addressed by the National Park Service and Parks Canada, including the Underground Railroad. Although Niagara Falls was not on the list, the MOU stated that appropriate sites could be added later.

The National Park Service study team has not found support for establishing a formal binational Niagara National Heritage Area because of the governmental complexities related to dual management, but it has found support for less complex and non-binding alternatives for coordinating heritage development efforts between the two countries:

### *Binational Heritage Partnership*

This partnership would be informal and would not require special legislation by bodies in either the United States or Canada. The partnership would

meet on a regular basis to coordinate heritage activities, promotion, planning, and interpretation. This partnership could build upon the Binational Niagara Tourism Alliance (established 2000) efforts, including binational destination advertising and brochures, and the “Doors Open Niagara” Weekend, which held coordinated open houses at heritage sites on both sides of the border in the fall of 2002 and 2003. Key partners could include state and provincial agencies, federal agencies, tourism promotion organizations, municipal governments, and heritage sites and attractions managed by non-profit and for-profit entities. The Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership, which is helping to spearhead this binational alliance, also has developed a collaborative heritage tourism program with Michigan, near Detroit, focusing on the themes of the Underground Railroad, maritime history, and the auto industry.

The binational partnership could function in an ad hoc manner. No government-sanctioned governance structure would be established, and no programmatic requirements would be imposed on organizations in either country. The partnership would be driven by the common interests of participating organizations. Funding would be obtained from various sources on a project-by-project basis. The flexibility of this arrangement would make it easier to ally with other organizations, including those from Buffalo and in Ontario.

### *International Peace Park*

An International Peace Park would be a permanent, more formal entity than a binational heritage partnership. Nevertheless, it would pursue similar goals as the binational partnership. The International Peace Park is a relatively new designation of the World Commission on Protected Areas, which operates under the United Nations. It has been used in trans-boundary areas with important cultural and natural resources, including World Heritage Sites and world biosphere reserves.

It is also intended to promote and celebrate peaceful interactions between peoples and nations. A steering committee of interested organizations and individuals in the Niagara Falls Region, spearheaded by Kerry Mitchell of the Canadian Consulate in Buffalo, has drawn up a Draft Statement of Principles for establishing an International Peace Park in the binational Niagara Region. The Peace Park concept draws on the “Rethinking the Niagara Frontier” report developed by the Urban Design Project of the University of Buffalo and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust of Toronto. This report identified the theme of “War, Peace, and Freedom” as one of the core heritage themes for the binational region.

The proposed International Peace Park would encompass Erie and Niagara Counties in New York and the Regional Municipality of Niagara in Ontario. It could provide an umbrella for a range of heritage and environmental conservation and economic and community development initiatives.

The Peace Park could establish an identity and shape a course of development for the binational region. The International Peace Park would serve as a convening and coordinating mechanism for conservation and development interests on both sides of the Niagara border. The Peace Park advocates regard their effort as long term, anticipating that they might achieve International Peace Park designation in time for the bi-centennial of the War of 1812, a central event in the development of the binational region.

Priority for Peace Parks is given initially to areas declared by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites. Niagara Falls and the Niagara River Gorge is not a World Heritage Site, nor is it on the tentative list of United States or Canadian sites. Currently the only two natural properties in the eastern United States designated as World Heritage Sites are Everglades National Park and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The majority of sites in the eastern United States are cultural properties.