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## Chapter 1 • Concept & Approach

Organizations and residents along the Lower Niagara River are creating the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area as a dynamic community partnership with the goal of enhancing the region's quality of life. The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area was designated by Congress in 2008 to recognize the national significance of the region's natural and cultural legacies. Focused upon telling the story of Niagara Falls and the Niagara River Gorge, the National Heritage Area seeks to strengthen community awareness of its history; support the stewardship of historic, cultural, and natural resources; and use heritage resources as a means through which to contribute to the regional economy.

As a community partnership, a wide range of organizations and individuals will participate in realizing the National Heritage Area's vision. Led by a coordinating entity, the heritage area will engage partners in activities and initiatives that are of interest to them and align with their missions, orchestrating the actions of many partners to achieve common goals. The National Heritage Area embraces the interests of its partners, builds upon existing initiatives, and connects interests and initiatives in ways that create new synergies.

This management plan presents the National Heritage Area vision and concept, and describes the program that has been crafted for its implementation. Each chapter of the management plan provides guidance to a particular area of activity, outlining the strategies and actions that partnership will use to shape its program over time. A companion document, *The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Environmental Assessment*, describes the planning process through which this management plan was developed.

### 1.1 What is a National Heritage Area?

National Heritage Areas are places that tell a rich and distinctly American story. Usually managed by a partnership of organizations and local governments with a single coordinating body, they pool resources (cultural, natural, and financial) to promote and conserve the region for the benefit of both present and future residents and visitors.

'National Heritage Area' is a designation for nationally distinguished, lived-in landscapes. As of 2012, Congress had designated 49 heritage areas, each governed by separate authorizing legislation unique to its resources and desired goals. Recognition signifies a region's significance to American history and culture and supports interpretation to show how a region's geography, people, and ways of life have shaped both the immediate vicinity and the nation. The heritage area concept offers a collaborative approach to conservation that does not compromise traditional local use of the landscape and local control. Designation comes with limited financial and technical assistance through the National Park Service.

Although there are many kinds of regional planning efforts across the country, only heritage areas seek to engage residents, governments, and organizations in telling their stories and working in partnership to protect special resources and reach out to the American public. They are grounded in a region's pride in its history and traditions, and in residents' involvement in retaining and interpreting the landscape for all. They advance economic development through an appreciation that a region's unique assets are fundamental to success – asset-based 'heritage development' – and by fostering cultural heritage tourism as one aspect of a region's economy.

As National Heritage Areas mature – the first was designated in 1981 – residents and visitors alike are increasingly enthusiastic in discovering the high quality of the experiences they offer. They appeal to all ages and interests. Some have opportunities for walking, hiking, biking, and paddling. Some have festivals to attend and museums to visit. Many provide volunteer opportunities, group tours, and multiple-day excursions and can also be visited in combination with more than 80 units of the National Park Service.

The collaboration a National Heritage Area inspires can strengthen communities in many ways. In a world where American democracy is held up as an example for so many, heritage areas connect us to our roots, our stories, and our places – the wellsprings that made us the strong country we have become today.

## **1.2 Designation of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area**

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area was designated by Congress on May 8, 2008 in Subtitle B of Public Law 110-229 following years of public discussion and recommendations of the *Niagara National Heritage Area Study* that was completed in 2005. The heritage area's enabling legislation is included as Appendix A of this plan. The purposes for which the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area was created, as delineated in Section 421 of the legislation, are:

- (1) to recognize the national importance of the natural and cultural legacies of the area, as demonstrated in the National Park Service study report entitled *Niagara National Heritage Area Study* dated 2005;
- (2) to preserve, support, conserve, and interpret the natural, scenic, cultural, and historic resources within the National Heritage Area;
- (3) to promote heritage, cultural, and recreational tourism and to develop educational and cultural programs for visitors and the general public;
- (4) to recognize and interpret important events and geographic locations representing key developments in American history and culture, including Native American, Colonial American, European American, and African American heritage;
- (5) to enhance a cooperative management framework to assist State, local, and Tribal governments, the private sector, and citizens residing in the National Heritage Area in conserving, supporting, enhancing, and interpreting the significant historic, cultural, and recreational sites in the National Heritage Area;
- (6) to conserve and interpret the history of the development of hydroelectric power in the United States and its role in developing the American economy; and
- (7) to provide appropriate linkages among units of the National Park System within and surrounding the National Heritage Area, to protect, enhance, and interpret resources outside of park boundaries.

The legislation established boundaries for the National Heritage Area, designated that a Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission be created as the local coordinating entity for the heritage area, and directs the Commission to prepare a management plan specifying the goals, policies, strategies, recommendations, and actions needed to meet the heritage area's purposes. The federally designated Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission was seated in December 2010, and began work on the

heritage area management plan. *The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Environmental Assessment*, describes the background and planning of the National Heritage Area in additional detail.

The physical boundaries of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area are shown on its official map, referenced in its legislation (see Figure 1-1). The boundaries encompass the City of Niagara Falls and a narrow area of land extending north from the city along the east side of the Niagara River to Lake Ontario, including the Villages of Lewiston and Youngstown.

In addition, the National Heritage Area may include sites located in Niagara and Erie Counties that are related to one of the National Heritage Area's four interpretive themes, wish to participate in the heritage area program, and meet heritage area guidelines and criteria. The heritage area's themes and a regional perspective on interpretive partnerships are discussed in Chapter 2 of this plan, *Niagara's Interpretive Presentation*. While the heritage area has a special focus upon the area within its official boundaries, other aspects of its regional vision and responsibilities are included in each of its areas of activities as described in the various chapters of this plan.

### **1.3 Vision, Mission, and Goals of the National Heritage Area**

Using the National Heritage Area's legislation as a guide and in consultation with a wide variety of potential partners, The Niagara Falls National Heritage Commission developed a vision, mission statement, and goals for the heritage area that were reviewed and discussed at a number of public meetings and workshops. These elements provided a foundation for planning the heritage area.

#### **\*\*\*\*\*SIDEBAR: Vision for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area**

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area is an internationally recognized biosphere, cultural icon, and renowned destination of historical significance. It enables the growth of a sustainable regional economy and the conservation of its natural and cultural resources in ways that benefit and unite its people and places. Its natural splendor and meaningful heritage are shared with millions of delighted visitors and celebrated by its residents so that its environment and communities are thriving.

#### **\*\*\*\*END SIDEBAR**

#### **\*\*\*\*\*SIDEBAR: Mission Statement for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area**

The work of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area is to enhance public appreciation for the communities, significant historic and natural resources, and landscapes of the Niagara region. The National Heritage Area works through a network of heritage area partners who seek to make interpretive, environmental, economic, and social improvements that benefit residents and visitors alike. Where initiative is lacking, the National Heritage Area will take action to fill the gap. In pursuing this mission, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area encourages historic preservation, recreational access, and environmental recovery. We value authenticity, cultural diversity, high-quality design, energy efficiency, regional and cross-border leadership, open communication, and transparent operations.

#### **\*\*\*\*END SIDEBAR**

The following goals for the National Heritage Area are organized around nine topics that are tailored to the conditions within the region and key to meeting the purposes outlined in the enabling legislation.

1. **Heritage Area Management and Regional Positioning** – Work to extend the communication, coordination, and cooperation among governments, communities, and organizations that are essential to regional success in heritage tourism.
2. **Interpretation and Education** – Assure the creation of a high-quality educational and interpretive program, providing partners with a framework and opportunities to inform and inspire a wide range of audiences and nurture public appreciation for the diverse communities, cultures, resources, and environments in the Niagara region.
3. **Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism** – Offer and promote authentic regional heritage tourism opportunities that communicate a unified message and provide visitors with a transformational experience.
4. **Engaging our Young People** – Provide interactive and engaging opportunities for children, teenagers, and young adults that motivate them to develop knowledge and understanding of the community's important stories; learn useful skills and trades; and become the region's next generation of leaders.
5. **Outdoor Recreation** – Identify and support outdoor activities and programs, eco-tourism opportunities, and recreational access and facilities that enhance heritage area resources and amenities.
6. **Sense of Place, Sense of Community** – Maintain and improve sense of place and community by assisting in the recognition and restoration of significant resources and landscapes and supporting their preservation, conservation, and enhancement.
7. **Historic Preservation** – Maximize the heritage area's significant historic and cultural resources as working community assets.
8. **Nature and the River** – Support restoration and enhancement of the heritage area's natural environment that uses a sustainable approach and engages the public in appreciating the river and nature.
9. **Economic Revitalization** – Foster economic revitalization through advocating the principles and best practices of heritage tourism.

#### 1.4 The Heritage Area's Preferred Alternative

The work on vision and goals laid the groundwork for exploring alternative ways in which the National Heritage Area could be organized and implemented. Four alternatives were developed that enabled the Commission and partners to test ideas and explore alternative approaches based upon differing priorities and interests. Each of the four alternatives presented a particular point of view, a strong focus on a particular set of objectives, and differing organizational construct. The alternatives were discussed, adapted, and reviewed in a series of public workshops and resulted in the crafting of a Preferred Alternative.

The Preferred Alternative that was selected was titled *Focus on Visitor Experience* and outlined a blended approach, with respect to the other alternatives considered, in achieving the heritage area's goals. In the Preferred Alternative, the National Heritage Area will concentrate upon the three topics of interpretation, visitor experience, and community engagement. Details of each of the alternatives considered are

included in Chapter 2 of the *Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Environmental Assessment*. The Preferred Alternative outlines conceptual strategies and recommendations for achieving each of the nine heritage area goals. These conceptual strategies and recommendations are presented in the chapters of the management plan where particular goals are addressed.

In the Preferred Alternative, the National Heritage Area will develop, coordinate, and enrich the interpretive experience from the ‘Falls to the Fort’ as a primary activity with connections to thematically associated sites in Niagara and Erie Counties. In addition, the National Heritage Area will play a leadership role in developing and maintaining a high-quality visitor experience, addressing visitor information, hospitality, transportation, wayfinding, and services. The role of the Commission and its staff, as the heritage area’s coordinating entity, will vary versus the role of partners depending upon the specific activity. Where existing organizations are able to lead, the Commission will play a coordinating, facilitating, and supporting role. Where existing leadership is lacking, the Commission will be an active leader and developer.

Community engagement will be an equally important focus of the National Heritage Area and will be incorporated into as many programming initiatives as possible. The National Heritage Area will engage residents through interpretive programming, research, educational initiatives, historic preservation, employment opportunities, and support for local businesses.

As outlined in Preferred Alternative, the National Heritage Area will implement a bold, creative partnership initiative combining world-class interpretive exhibits, living history, media presentations, and programming set appropriately into the authentic natural and community landscapes of the region. The National Heritage Area will provide residents with knowledge and understanding of the environment and landscape in which they live and will encourage exploration by visitors.

Following the selection of the Preferred Alternative, the Commission began development of the detailed management plan, describing the strategies, actions, and responsibilities of the Commission and its partners in the National Heritage Area’s implementation.

## **1.5 National Significance of the Heritage Area**

The Niagara Falls and Gorge are rich in beauty and in stories. They are significant to the nation as a natural wonder and as the site of key events in American history. The narrative of the Falls speaks to Native American, Colonial, European, and African American experiences in the region, and to the ascendancy and legacy of hydroelectric power in the United States. Nature, parks, trails, museums, urban neighborhoods, towns, and power plants are the physical components of the region that help people experience and absorb this history (NPS 2005).

In the late seventeenth century when Father Hennepin of France beheld the Falls and provided the world with the first written account of its dramatic landscape, Iroquois Confederacy and Algonquin tribes lived in the region and French and English fur traders operated there. During the eighteenth century French and British forces fought over control of the area and its access to the Ohio River Valley, the Great Lakes, and the interior of the continent. Fort Niagara, originally erected by the French in 1726 or earlier, became an English stronghold following the French and Indian War (NPS 2005).

At the end of the American Revolution, the Treaty of Paris (1783) awarded the eastern side of the Niagara River to the United States and established the international boundary between the United States and Canada down the center of the Niagara River, although British forces continued to occupy the Fort Niagara until after the Jay Treaty (1794). Following the establishment of treaties with the Native

Americans within the region, American settlers began moving into the region. The Tuscarora Reservation, established in 1797, remains today to the east of the Gorge and north of the City of Niagara Falls (NPS 2005).

The international boundary was bitterly contested but maintained during the War of 1812. The construction of the Erie Canal from Lake Erie to the Hudson River and New York City during the early nineteenth century, an engineering success story, diminished the importance of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River as a transportation corridor and with it the Lower Niagara River and portage around the Falls. The completion of the canal in 1825 and construction of the railroad to Niagara in 1838 made the Falls, the largest waterfall in North America, dramatically more accessible and a tourist destination (NPS 2005).

With the rise of tourism in the early nineteenth century came hotels, museums, tours, boat rides, souvenirs, and outrageous stunts – tightrope walkers crossing the Gorge on wires and people in barrels going over the Falls. Over time Niagara Falls became one of America's major travel destinations for families and for couples on their honeymoons. Uninhibited commercialism inspired a group of influential individuals led by Frederic Law Olmsted to lobby for preservation and restoration of Niagara Falls. After 15 years of effort, the Niagara Falls State Reservation was created in 1885, the nation's first state park. The process through which the state park was conserved and made available free of charge to visitors supported a national movement to use public money for the protection of land as public parks, and helped inspire the creation of the National Park Service (NPS 2005).

Prior to the American Civil War, the Underground Railroad routed fugitives to the Buffalo Niagara region because of its proximity to Canada, where slavery had been abolished in 1833. Individuals and families escaping enslavement crossed the Niagara River to Canada and freedom. The village of Suspension Bridge, now within the City of Niagara Falls, was the site of John Roebling's phenomenal 1855 bridge that proved the feasibility of suspension bridge technology for both railroad and vehicle traffic. His bridge became a major crossing point of the Underground Railroad in the years before the war. Others crossed the river by boat from Lewiston and Youngstown, by bridge from Lewiston after its construction in 1857, and even by swimming.

The nineteenth century brought pioneers of a different kind to Niagara Falls. Innovative entrepreneurs and industrialists began to harness the water power of the Niagara River in the mid-1800s, and water-powered factories and mills were constructed along the river, canals, and gorge. In the 1880s, the emerging technology of hydroelectric generation heralded a transformation in American life. Niagara Falls was the scene of an intense and high-stakes competition in hydroelectric technology involving such names as Edison, Tesla, Westinghouse, and Kelvin. Entrepreneurs constructed the first large-scale hydroelectric power plants with the capability of generating large amounts of electricity. For the first time, electricity was produced in amounts large enough to power cities. Emerging electrothermic and electrochemical industries requiring amounts of power not before possible were drawn to Niagara Falls, which soon became an industrial center and the cutting edge location for industries that transformed twentieth century life.

Large modern factories were constructed along the river and gorge. The city expanded with an influx of white collar managers and blue collar workers of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Utopian visions at the dawn of the era of electricity predicted a gleaming future of plenty. Niagara Falls was to be the model city of the twentieth century.

Niagara Falls grew rapidly as an industrial center and a center of technology and innovation. By mid-century, however, new realities set in. Revolutionary developments in product creation by industry from

the early 1900s through the 1940s led to intense environmental degradation with the potential for significant harm to human health and the environment. Beginning in the 1960s with changes in technology, widespread availability of electricity from other power sources, and the transfer of manufacturing to overseas locations, plants began to close down, jobs were lost, and the population began to decline as people moved elsewhere for work. The link between hazardous waste and human health became evident, and conditions in Niagara Falls led directly to the awakening of a national environmental awareness and the development of governmental programs for brownfield remediation.

Today, the City of Niagara Falls is working hard and successfully towards building a new economy – one based upon service and tourism industries. The National Heritage Area, by protecting and illuminating the many natural, historical, and cultural treasures of the community, is one of several important initiatives in the region focused upon revitalizing the local economy and community.

## 1.6 The National Heritage Area Concept

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will create an **interpretive experience** that tells the region's story and encourages visitors to the Falls to explore the river corridor from LaSalle to Fort Niagara. High quality landscape exhibits will be installed at locations along the corridor presenting the heritage area's four primary interpretive themes and related storylines. The National Heritage Area's exhibit presentations will be world class and will be incorporated into the fabric of the landscape and the community in a manner that enhances community character and the quality of life for residents.

The proposed Niagara Experience Center, being developed by a separate non-profit organization, will serve as an introduction to the heritage area experience and will orient visitors to interpretive and transportation options. Existing historic sites, museums, and visitor attractions will be featured in the interpretive presentation and will have a leading role in interpretive programming. Heritage area interpretation will connect regionally to thematically related sites throughout Niagara and Erie Counties and in Canada through partnership initiatives.

National Heritage Area partners will collaborate in creating a high quality **visitor experience** that ensures visitors enjoy their stay and want to return. The National Heritage Area will welcome visitors into the heart of its communities, offering transformational experiences that exemplify the community they wish to be. Public and private partners will work together on programs, incentives, and standards addressing visitor information, hospitality, transportation, wayfinding, and visitor services resulting in a rich and cohesive visitor experience.

Throughout, National Heritage Area initiatives will emphasize **community engagement**. Regionally, the National Heritage Area will play a leadership role in historic preservation, interpretation, and heritage tourism, encouraging recognition of a regional vision and facilitating regional action. Locally, heritage area initiatives will support community revitalization and enhancement, focusing upon engaging residents and encouraging the use of heritage resources to build community character and heritage development to strengthen the local economy. The heritage area will support natural resource conservation and stewardship. Heritage area programming will proactively engage local young people in implementing its initiatives, building community awareness and appreciation.

### 1.6.1 Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles will shape implementation of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area.

**Community Interests:** Heritage area partners will work in the long-term interest of the communities, people, natural and historic resources, and environment.



**Community Character:** Building community character is central to the National Heritage Area endeavor. Creating a high quality of life for residents will encourage visitors to come and will help strengthen the local economy.

**Authenticity:** Heritage area partners will support authentic places and seek authentic experiences associated with the region's heritage and its stories.

**Hospitality:** Heritage area partners will welcome visitors and make them feel at home within local communities.

**Partnership:** The National Heritage Area will work through a partnership structure; heritage area partners will welcome and respect each other's input, perspective, and capabilities.

**Communication & Transparency:** The National Heritage Area will maintain a policy of openness and frequent communication within its partnership, with other organizations, and with the general public.

**Planning:** Good planning is key to a successful endeavor. Every action the National Heritage Area and its partners undertake will be well planned for successful implementation.

**Resource Stewardship:** Historic preservation and natural resource conservation underlie much of what the National Heritage Area does and are a means through which it achieves its goals.

**Sustainability:** The National Heritage Area and its partners will promote ecological and economic sustainability in their planning and actions. They will seek economic sustainability in their organization and operations.

### 1.6.2 Using the Management Plan

This management plan is a reference document and guide that will be used by National Heritage Area partners over the 15-year period under which Federal funding support is authorized in the heritage area's enabling legislation. The plan outlines the National Heritage Area's vision and goals, identifies potential actions that support the vision and goals, and provides guidelines and processes for undertaking desired actions. Partners will consult the management plan over the life of the plan as a touchstone to shape their collaborative endeavor.

The policies, programs, and initiatives outlined in the management plan are intended to be flexible and to adapt to conditions, experience, and opportunities over time. Each chapter of the management plan describes initiatives in a particular area of activity involving one or more of the heritage area's goals. The plan's recommendations and guidelines will inform decision-making so that future decisions are consistent with the National Heritage Area concept and program.

Management plan chapters are organized broadly into two parts. The introductory part of each chapter summarizes the background and context for the topic being addressed. It includes the National Heritage Area's goals related to that topic as well as strategies from the Preferred Alternative that were developed to support those goals. It concludes with a statement on the **conceptual approach** to the topic.

The second part of each chapter addresses recommendations and initiatives which the National Heritage Area intends to undertake related to that topic. **Action statements** are used to identify specific activities.

These action statements are phrased broadly so as not to limit flexibility, as there may be multiple ways in which a desired action may be achieved. The implementation of actions will be dependent upon priorities, identification of an entity to take a leadership role in an action, and the availability of resources for implementation.

Associated with each action statement is a **discussion** of that action and area of activity. The discussion generally precedes the action statement and provides guidance to help shape the manner in which the action is undertaken. The discussions associated with each action statement will assist in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives. In some cases, the discussion describes specific processes to be used in undertaking an action, including guidelines, criteria, and benchmarks. In other cases, the discussions are more conceptual and intended to shape and inspire thinking. Some discussions record ideas and directions that were discussed during development of the management plan but which should not be considered mandatory.

Potential actions identified in each of the management plan chapters are listed and **prioritized** in Chapter 7, Management Implementation, and Business Plan. Responsible partners are identified for each action. The heritage area partnership will use this list to create, implement, and update work plans over the life of the management plan. Every year the National Heritage Area should assess what has been accomplished and make adjustments for the future. The management plan provides guidance for those adjustments.

Aside from identifying the initiatives to be undertaken, action statements may be used to **evaluate** the heritage area's effectiveness in reaching stated goals. For this reason, the action statements are brief and distinct from each other. Discussions, on the other hand, will not be used for evaluation.

### 1.6.3 Terminology

As discussed above, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area is a partnership endeavor that will be undertaken through the collaborative actions and initiatives of a wide variety of organizations and individuals. Throughout this management plan, the terms *Niagara Falls National Heritage Area* and *National Heritage Area* are used as the subjects of sentences delineating actions that will be taken. These terms are used to refer to the National Heritage Area partnership as a whole and not to any particular entity.

When referring specifically to the *Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission*, either its full title or the word *Commission* are used. Suggested roles and responsibilities of particular National Heritage Area partners are noted where appropriate in various portions of the plan and are summarized in Chapter 7, *Management and Implementation*. The voice of this document is that of the management plan as developed through a collaborative planning process. It is not that of the Commission, the National Park Service, or the consultant team.

## 1.7 Niagara's Interpretive Presentation

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will create a world class visitor experience along the Niagara River and Gorge that attracts visitors and encourages them to explore, providing benefits to the local and regional economy. Through the heritage area's interpretive initiatives, communities will be strengthened, residents will be engaged, and the region's natural and cultural resources will be recognized, preserved, and enhanced.

Creating a world class visitor experience requires an integrated program of interpretation and heritage tourism. Chapter 2 of the management plan, *Niagara's Interpretive Presentation*, outlines how the National Heritage Area will create an interpretative presentation that engages visitors and residents.

The management plan's interpretive recommendations are organized into three parts: (1) actions that should be undertaken heritage area-wide to support the entire interpretive presentation, (2) actions for presentation of each of the heritage area's interpretive themes and storylines, and (3) actions for coordinating interpretation of heritage area themes regionally at affiliated sites in Niagara and Erie Counties.

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area interpretive presentation will create a range of interpretive experiences encouraging visitors to explore from the Falls to the Fort. The presentation will combine existing interpretation offered at visitor attractions with new landscape interpretation to be offered at locations within communities and all along the river corridor. This coordinated, high quality interpretive presentation will complement the level of quality envisioned for the Niagara Experience Center.

Within the City of Niagara Falls, the interpretive presentation will directly support the city's comprehensive plan by interpreting the city's history, enhancing public spaces, and encouraging visitors to explore. Downriver, the interpretive presentation will support implementation of community and Niagara River Greenway visions of linking communities and open space, enhancing community character, and supporting community downtown districts.

Each of the heritage area's themes and storylines will be interpreted in accordance with the concepts outlined in Chapter 2. For each of the interpretive themes, potential projects will be identified, prioritized, and organized based upon:

1. the ability of the project to present the theme and its key stories to visitors,
2. the timing within which the project can be implemented,
3. the capability of the heritage area and its partners to implement the project,
4. cost and the availability of funding, and
5. other potential issues and benefits particular to the project.

Partners who will be involved in the implementation of each project will be identified and engaged. Sources of funding for implementation will be secured, and a process for implementation will be developed and scheduled. An interpretive plan will be prepared for each interpretive project to be implemented in accordance with the guidelines for interpretive planning included in the plan.

### **1.8 Niagara's Visitor Experience**

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will develop and implement a broad-based heritage tourism program that will enhance the visitor experience in Niagara Falls and along the Lower Niagara River. The program will be focused upon existing visitors to the Falls as well as new visitors, encouraging them to explore the heritage area from the Falls to the Fort. Chapter 3 of the management plan, *Niagara's Visitor Experience* outlines recommended strategies and actions on tourism development, visitor experience, and marketing within the heritage area.

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will initially focus on the enhancement of the visitor experience to provide a consistent, high-quality regional experience. After such enhancements are in place, the National Heritage Area will increase its emphasis on marketing activities. The primary investment and emphasis will be devoted to tourism development infrastructure improvements in the area between Niagara Falls State Park and Old Fort Niagara. Thematically related attractions in Niagara and Erie

Counties will also be included in regional visitor experience packages, itineraries, and other tourism products and marketing materials to create a richer, even more compelling visitor experience for travelers.

The primary goal for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area's visitor experience is "to offer and promote authentic regional heritage tourism opportunities that communicate a unified message and provide visitors with transformational experiences." To accomplish this goal, heritage area partners will promote the National Heritage Area as an opportunity for a deeper, more meaningful experience of the landscapes and communities along the Niagara River corridor. Programs, incentives, and standards will be developed that will improve the overall visitor experience and link attractions together into a cohesive visitor experience.

While the recommended actions include both tourism marketing and tourism product development, it is anticipated that in many cases the National Heritage Area will play a leadership role for tourism product development and a supporting role for tourism marketing. Between the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation (NTCC) and the Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau (BNCVB) alone, millions of dollars are already being invested annually in marketing the Niagara Falls region. Conversely, there are no regional partners focused entirely on tourism product development for the Niagara Falls region. Thus, focusing on this role and the opportunity to build collaborative partnerships to build bridges between different constituencies will be a primary focus for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area's efforts related to the visitor experience.

Of all the tourism infrastructure needs discussed during stakeholder interviews, transportation rose to the top as one of the largest challenges. Accordingly, the management plan includes actions to address transportation through the development of multi-modal transportation offerings. A quality standards program to encourage and reward excellence, a region-wide hospitality training program, and a regional tourism pass are other critical steps the National Heritage Area can take toward addressing key tourism challenges. The development of supporting products and promotional efforts will round out the National Heritage Area's activities to expand and improve the Niagara visitor experience.

### **1.9 Approach to Community Engagement**

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will engage communities and residents and cultivate lasting public understanding and support in pursuit of the heritage area's mission, goals, and vision. Community engagement initiatives are outlined in Chapter 4 of the management plan. Just about every activity the heritage area undertakes will have a community engagement dimension. Many of the community engagement initiatives included in Chapter 4 are therefore actions that are identified in other chapters of the management plan, focusing on residents as the primary audience. The heritage area's community engagement strategy is particularly oriented toward educational approaches and programming for youth.

Engaging individuals and leaders, neighborhoods and communities, and organizations and institutions of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area is critical. The National Heritage Area must offer ways for residents to build their appreciation for the heritage area's resources, stories, and opportunities. That appreciation is critical in building support for community investment in preservation, interpretation, and development to support long term improvements. Moreover, residents themselves possess stories, affect the sense of hospitality that visitors experience, and can volunteer for the many activities that will need personal investments of time. Deep community engagement, therefore, can enrich the heritage area in many important ways.

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area is organized to incorporate community engagement aspects into practically all of its activities, encouraging all with a stake in the success of the heritage area to take

advantage of as many opportunities to build community engagement as possible. The National Heritage Area will seek to stimulate the creation of a rich and diverse program of community engagement through five strategies:

1. Creating visible programs and a public presence so that residents come to view the heritage area as a regular element of community life.
2. Encouraging well-designed, coordinated educational programs for residents, students, and visitors. While much of this overlaps with the interpretive programs described in Chapter 2, there are elements that may especially appeal to local audiences, including community-based arts and cultural programs and outdoor recreation – with activities in both of these including community events, from public lectures to festivals.
3. Encouraging community research, to record the detailed oral traditions that provide texture and life to community history and build community knowledge and pride. This activity should be supported by a well-provided-for central resource for archiving and accessing documentary and material collections, oral history, and research.
4. Creating a rich array of ways to reach and serve the youth of this region, encouraging them to gain knowledge and direct experience of heritage development and tourism in much the same way that youth education curricula now include environmental education. In terms of investing in the civic future of the heritage area for long term dividends, this particular element may be one of the best ways to spend the heritage area's resources – and there are many possibilities for such programming. This goes well beyond any ambition for youth education about the region's history and environment, although these provide a foundation for such programming. Engaging young people in leadership development and creating a deep understanding of community functions, needs, and priorities is a good investment in lasting leadership for the heritage area and its communities.
5. Aiding partners in coordinating and expanding their programs in all of these ways, the Commission expects to become a central, “first response” provider of technical assistance, clearinghouse for information, and other kinds of support for public and school-based education. Both visitors and residents will benefit from such activities, but the focus will be on residents.

### **1.10 Approach to Preservation, Conservation and Stewardship**

Chapter 5 of the management plan outlines a program through which the National Heritage Area and its partners will support the preservation of cultural resources, conservation of natural resources, and stewardship strategies for both. It also focuses on established best practices and recent innovations through which cultural and natural resources are preserved and conserved. The strengthening of local preservation and conservation efforts in identifying, designating, protecting, interpreting and promoting significant resources is a key factor in accomplishing the goals and objectives set forth by the heritage area. Success also depends upon the cooperation and collaboration of key cultural groups, academia, nonprofit organizations, the business sector, and governmental jurisdictions as important heritage area partners.

The National Heritage Area's approach to historic preservation will be implemented through activities at the regional, county, and local levels. Regionally, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will work in partnership with Preservation Buffalo Niagara on preservation initiatives in Erie and Niagara Counties with the National Heritage Area leading those initiatives within Niagara County. The two organizations

will collaborate as preservation leaders in a joint program that engages and coordinates other local and regional organizations with preservation interests within the two counties.

In Niagara County, as part of its regional program, the National Heritage Area will coordinate and lead a county-wide preservation network, engaging communities, local preservation organizations, and individual preservationists in an ongoing dialogue and forum that provides information, advice, and mutual assistance to participants. Through regular communications and workshops, network participants will be informed of each others activities, exchange information, and coordinate preservation initiatives. The National Heritage Area will provide advice and support to local preservation activities when possible and appropriate.

Within its legislative boundaries, the National Heritage Area will work directly with preservation interests within the City of Niagara Falls, Lewiston, and Youngstown to develop and implement preservation plans addressing a wide range of potential initiatives tailored to the needs of each community. The heritage area's initiatives related to interpretation, heritage tourism, visitor experience, and community engagement will support and help implement preservation strategies developed for the communities.

The National Heritage Area will support the initiatives of other local and regional leaders with respect to natural resource conservation and stewardship within the heritage area. In concert with the Niagara River Greenway, a number of local and regional conservation organizations are undertaking programs to study, rehabilitate, and enhance park, landscape, water, and wildlife resources along the Niagara River corridor. These important initiatives contribute substantially to the heritage area vision and will be embraced by the heritage area partnership.

### **1.11 Approach to Community Revitalization**

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will participate in and support community revitalization, planning, and economic development at the local, county, and regional levels. Chapter 6 of the management plan, *Community Revitalization*, outlines ways in which heritage area programs and initiatives will support revitalization in each of the heritage area's communities. The success of community revitalization will rely heavily on coordination and collaboration with existing partners and programs. In all of its activities, the National Heritage Area will advocate for an economic development approach that integrates resource stewardship and heritage tourism principles and values.

The National Heritage Area will assist partners in developing and implementing projects and programs that contribute to the revitalization of communities within the heritage area. Inherent in this effort is the understanding that the special sense of place for each community must not only be preserved but substantially enhanced. A community's function, role, and contribution in the context of the larger region are also important to identify and develop. In this period of governmental austerity, it is important now more than ever to collaborate with both public and private partners to establish programs, incentives, and standards that will improve the quality of life for the region's residents.

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will support community revitalization through three broad strategies:

1. The National Heritage Area will collaborate with national, state, regional, and local organizations in implementing regional strategies for economic development, environmental stewardship, and enhancement of quality of life. The National Heritage Area will support recent state-wide initiatives focused upon economic revitalization in Western New York and will work with other

organizations in advocating regional approaches to community identity and economic cooperation.

2. Regionally, the National Heritage Area will play a leadership role in activities related to interpretation, heritage tourism, and historic preservation. Heritage area interpretation will embrace a regional perspective that will help broaden community awareness and cooperation. Regional interpretation will be undertaken through partnerships between communities, organizations, and sites in Niagara and Erie Counties as well as in Canada. Interpretive programs will attract visitors and help support the regional economy.
3. Locally, within its legislative boundaries, the National Heritage Area will orchestrate a coordinated set of programs encouraging visitors to explore heritage area communities. By focusing upon visitor experiences in the historic commercial cores of Youngstown, Lewiston, and Niagara Falls, heritage area programs will directly support small business development and the enhancement of community character. National Heritage Area programs and projects in all areas of activity will be tailored to local community revitalization goals and strategies.

Many of the programs and initiatives that will support community revitalization within the National Heritage Area are described in other chapters of this management plan. Chapter 2 on interpretation, Chapter 3 on visitor experience, and Chapter 5 on historic preservation and natural resource conservation are particularly significant. These various programs and initiatives work together in combination to support revitalization strategies in each of the three heritage area communities. The National Heritage Area will work with each individual community to shape its programs to community interests and needs.

### **1.12 Management, Implementation, and Business Plan**

A business plan for management and implementation of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area is included in Chapter 7 of this management plan. The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area is a collective effort, involving a wide variety of organizations and entities with a stake in the heritage area's success. The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission serves as the heritage area's coordinating entity, but the 'National Heritage Area' includes all of the initiative's partners.

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission communicates the management plan's vision and provides a forum for key players affecting heritage development in the region. It seeks success through strong communications, visible, well-designed programs, empowerment of partners, and articulation of high standards for the visitor experience. It spends federal funds—including but not limited to sharing those funds with partners through matching grants—and raises other funds to implement the management plan.

Chapter 7 of the management plan describes how the National Heritage Area is organized and will function including both the Commission and partners. With respect to the Commission, the chapter describes its role as coordinating entity, how it is to be structured, how it is to engage in partnerships—framing most of its programs around the concept of “partner development”—how it is to communicate with the public and do its part in raising the funds necessary to implement this plan, and how it is to organize its operations.

With respect to partners, the plan describes programs and activities in which various partners are expected to participate and play leading roles. Several key partnering organizations, most of which have a seat on the commission, are described, and the heritage area's 'partnerships system' is outlined.

A strategic plan is also presented in the chapter. The strategic plan is simplified version of the entire management plan, addressing the actions discussed in detail in the preceding chapters, but boiled down to a simple understanding of priorities for the next two to three years. A chart that lists all of the actions in the plan accompanies the chapter with priorities indicated and the roles and responsibilities of partners identified.

Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion of how the National Heritage Area expects to measure and evaluate its work, that is, to understand its progress toward the promise of the plan and how well it has managed its funds in the public interest. The Commission is the “keeper of the flame,” the organization that communicates the vision for the National Heritage Area. It must monitor implementation of the management plan, which is designed to help the region achieve the heritage area’s vision and goals, and organize adjustments as circumstances and opportunities suggest.