

## Chapter 2 • Alternatives

In planning for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, a set of contrasting alternatives were considered for implementing the heritage area in accordance with the vision, mission, and goals outlined in Chapter 1. This chapter describes the process through which potential alternatives for heritage area management were developed, the assessment of those alternatives, and selection of a preferred alternative. An analysis of the potential impacts of each alternative, were they to be implemented, is presented in Chapter 4, *Environmental Consequences*.

### 2.1 Development of Alternatives

The work on vision and goals in Chapter 1, *Purpose and Need*, laid the groundwork for developing heritage area alternatives. Following this work, the Commission and consulting team created four alternatives for heritage area implementation and management and reviewed those alternatives at a series of public workshops. The consideration of alternatives enabled the Commission and partners to test ideas and explore alternative approaches based upon differing priorities and interests.

The City of Niagara Falls and each of the Lower Niagara River communities located within the heritage area have different socio-economic makeup and community issues, needs, and objectives. Alternatives for the heritage area were sought and developed that were mindful of competing programmatic priorities.

Draft alternatives for the heritage area were first discussed with the Commission at a public meeting in May 2011. A Commission workshop on alternatives was held the following month. Based upon this workshop, the alternatives were further refined and were presented to the Commission, heritage area partners, and the interested public for discussion at the end of July 2011. There were two public workshops about the alternatives on July 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, and the Commission met to consider the public input and proposed alternatives on July 27<sup>th</sup>. The alternatives were emailed to partners for consideration in a July 2011 newsletter and posted on the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area website. These communications were followed with an August 31<sup>st</sup> Commission meeting. At the meetings and workshops held from May through August, the alternatives were presented and discussed using handouts and PowerPoint presentations. From May through August, the public was invited to and did voice concerns, suggestions, and support regarding the alternatives. The public review process greatly assisted the Commission and consulting team in exploring the depth and implications of the differing decisions that could be made. On August 31<sup>st</sup> at its meeting, the Commission selected a preferred alternative by voice vote.

The Environmental Assessment was subsequently finalized and issued for public review and comment using PEPC – the public comment website (formal name Public Education Public Comment) operated by the National Park Service, including a 30-day review process. Notifications of this review opportunity were sent to the public via press releases and email.

In greatly simplified form, the four alternatives that were developed represented one “no action” option and three different programmatic priorities:

### **Alternative A: Current Conditions Continue (No Action)**

This alternative assumes that existing conditions continue as they are, with current initiatives proceeding without the added component of a National Heritage Area. This serves as the baseline for comparison with the other alternatives and serves as the “No Action” alternative as required by National Park Service Director’s Order 12.

### **Alternative B: Focus on Heritage Interpretation**

This program alternative envisions a heritage area organization working primarily behind the scenes assisting partners as an organizer, facilitator, and coach. The primary focus would be creating a *high-quality interpretive experience* with secondary emphasis on other goals and strategies.

### **Alternative C: Focus on Heritage Product Development**

This alternative envisions an active, leadership role in which the heritage area organization is out front as a primary player within the region, actively engaged in a wide range of potential projects and issues focused upon *heritage development*. While still working closely with partners, the heritage area might initiate, manage, and develop projects on its own.

### **Alternative D: Focus on Visitor Experience**

This program alternative encourages the heritage area organization to focus on a series of specific, targeted projects that will provide *high-quality interpretation, visitor experience, and community engagement*. In most areas of activity, the heritage area organization would facilitate the work of partners in meeting its programmatic goals. In some specific areas where needed, however, it would play an active, leadership role.

Each of these alternatives presents a particular point of view, a strong focus on a particular set of objectives, and differing organizational construct. As the Commission and its partners explored the possibilities of each alternative, the following questions were discussed. Given a particular focus, which strategies and actions become most important and which become secondary? Given limited resources and capabilities, how would time and resources be spent under each alternative? What would get done immediately and what would take more time? What are the implications and impacts of these alternative points of view?

Through the exercise of discussing each alternative, strategies and actions were distilled to those that would achieve the desired results envisioned for each alternative. The form and character of the heritage area that each would create were then compared. These were then tested against both the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area’s mission and the purposes outlined in its authorizing legislation. Based upon this exercise, a preferred alternative was identified for further development and refinement. The four alternatives are more fully outlined below.

## **2.2 Alternative A – Current Conditions Continue (No Action)**

Under *Current Conditions Continue* the region would continue to develop without programming offered through the heritage area. Existing programs would continue to evolve as they are presently organized.

### **Heritage Area Management and Regional Positioning (A)**

- Intergovernmental coordination and heritage tourism efforts continue as currently organized; occasional collaboration across a wide range of community activities.

### **Interpretation and Education (A)**

- Existing interpretive sites continue to offer interpretive programming with occasional collaboration and coordination.
- Historical organizations continue independent programs.
- School programs continue under existing constraints of funding and curriculum.

### **Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism (A)**

- The City of Niagara Falls programming continues as scheduled.
- New York State Parks continues to implement recreation, interpretive and infrastructure programs on state park lands.
- Local initiatives continue in the villages and at existing heritage attractions and historic sites.

### **Engaging our Young People (A)**

- Schools and organizations continue to offer environmental and history programs for children and young adults on a limited and independent basis.

### **Outdoor Recreation (A)**

- Existing recreational trails are maintained and improved over time by individual agencies.

### **Sense of Place, Sense of Community (A)**

- Communities and municipalities continue individual efforts to develop and strengthen their sense of place.

### **Historic Preservation (A)**

- Local organizations continue to promote preservation within their respective communities.

### **Nature and the River (A)**

- Continued implementation of the Niagara River Greenway plan.

### **Economic Revitalization (A)**

- Local economic development organizations and municipalities continue to implement initiatives independently within their respective communities.

## **2.3 Program Elements Common to All Action Alternatives (B, C, and D)**

Through workshop discussions, it was determined that the program elements outlined below should be common to all of the proposed action alternatives (Alternatives B, C & D), though details of their implementation might be affected by the implications identified under the different alternatives. The following program elements are included in and should be read in tandem with Alternatives B, C, and D.

### **Heritage Area Management and Regional Positioning (Common)**

- Provide a forum to support heritage tourism collaboration, maintaining the vision and articulating goals.
- Engage with organizations and agencies, local to international, to recognize, preserve and promote the region's heritage resources and landscapes, including hosting activities and events.
- Seek official designations for significant cultural and natural resources; create or partner with organizations to preserve, enhance and interpret these resources.

### **Interpretation and Education (Common)**

- Collaborate with partners in developing an interpretive framework and plan and in networking attractions, to reach a wide range of audiences and nurture public appreciation for the region's communities, cultures, resources, and environments.
- Identify an interpretive hub and linkages for each of the four themes; stimulate coordinated landscape exhibits for each; and support partners' related interior programming.
- Support partners in implementing their sites' portions of the interpretive plan, beginning with a core program, with other experiences phased in over time.
- Assist local partners in establishing and supporting a central database of materials, publications and artifacts related to interpretive subjects and encourage scholarly research.
- Establish the Falls to the Fort as a regional interpretive connector to places and programs throughout Niagara and Erie counties and Canada.
- Provide interpretive content to visitors through easily accessible social media and other technological formats.
- Establish a comprehensive graphic identity, including signage, publications, website, and promotional materials. Materials related to each of the four themes would have identifiably distinct appearances coordinated within the same format (using elements such as color or icons).

### **Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism (Common)**

- Collaborate with partners to develop and implement programs, incentives, and standards for improving the overall visitor experience.
- Collaborate with partners in creating satellite orientation centers in Lewiston and Youngstown.
- Create an independent website providing a "virtual heritage area" that can be experienced world-wide; providing the social media applications needed to direct traffic to the website; linking to partner websites; and interfacing with the Niagara USA website.
- Brand and promote the National Heritage Area.

- Implement a comprehensive wayfinding system integrated with social media, GPS and digital mapping, and other technologies.
- Create maps for walking and driving tours.

**Engaging our Young People (Common)**

- Work with partners on interactive and engaging opportunities for children, teenagers, and young adults that use local history and historic sites to meet state curriculum requirements.
- Create a Junior Rangers Program encouraging children to visit and engage with sites.
- Provide internships for local college students.
- Enable youth organizations to use the region's history and resources for their objectives.
- Encourage local youth leadership organizations.

**Outdoor Recreation (Common)**

- Ensure eco-tourism opportunities through partnership efforts; support partners in providing eco-tourism opportunities, recreational facilities, and access that sustain and enhance heritage area resources and amenities.
- Provide technical assistance, grants, and organizational capabilities to relate recreational programming directly to the heritage area's interpretive themes.

**Sense of Place, Sense of Community (Common)**

- Assist in the recognition, restoration and enhancement of resources and landscapes.
- Support communities in using the Niagara River corridor to promote a regional sense of place.
- Integrate the Niagara River Greenway plan, City of Niagara Falls comprehensive plan, local plans of Lewiston, Porter, and the Tribal Nations, and other planning initiatives along the Niagara River Corridor with Commission goals.

**Historic Preservation (Common)**

- Develop historic context statements and engage researchers in using the region's historic resources as a living laboratory.
- Encourage local advocates in preserving historic resources, neighborhoods, and commercial centers.
- Encourage local governments to prepare/update preservation plans and historic inventories; and apply for the federal Certified Local Government (CLG) program with its planning grants and technical assistance.

### **Nature and the River (Common)**

- Support other organizations in restoring ecosystems along with plant and animal communities within and along the Niagara River, Escarpment, and Gorge.
- Encourage interpretation of Native American perspectives on relationships between culture and nature.
- Develop an incentive strategy to promote top-priority Niagara River Greenway projects.

### **Economic Revitalization (Common)**

- Coordinate with and support local organizations in economic development initiatives focused on heritage tourism.
- Participate in a “Buy Local” initiative that encourages consumers to purchase locally made goods and services.
- Facilitate and promote locally made food products, arts, and crafts as part of the heritage tourism economy.
- Train local residents in skills and trades necessary to provide the goods and services associated with a strong heritage tourism economy.

## **2.4 Alternative B – Focus on Interpretation**

Alternative B, *Focus on Interpretation*, concentrates on enriching the interpretive experience from the ‘Falls to the Fort’ with connections to thematically associated sites in Niagara and Erie counties. The heritage area would work primarily through existing partnership organizations and sites. This would be a bold, creative approach combining world-class exhibits, living history, media, and programming. Residents would gain added understanding of the landscape and visitors would be encouraged to explore.

### **Heritage Area Management and Regional Positioning (B)**

- The heritage area organization will play a coordinating, facilitating and supporting role in heritage tourism development and promotion with partner organizations taking the lead roles.

### **Interpretation and Education (B)**

- Work with State Parks to use the existing park visitor center as the primary hub for the four interpretive themes.

### **Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism (B)**

- Focus on assisting attractions, sites, and communities with authentic, accurate, and engaging interpretation and programs and stimulating superior customer service and visitor facilities.

### **Engaging our Young People (B)**

- Provide an expansive local history program for local school children that instills a sense of appreciation and pride for the community and environment in which they live.

- Create seasonal employment opportunities for young adults to implement interpretive programs.

#### **Outdoor Recreation (B)**

- Coordinate and support resource-based recreational programming offered by partnering organizations for residents and visitors,
- Encourage partners to maintain and improve existing trails and create new trail connections.

#### **Sense of Place, Sense of Community (B)**

- Promote physical and interpretive connections throughout the river corridor that strengthen the sense of regional identity.

#### **Historic Preservation (B)**

- Provide interpretive and educational programming that directly supports community preservation goals.

#### **Nature and the River (B)**

- Provide educational and interpretive programming that support environmental goals and objectives set forth in the Niagara River Greenway plan. Accord greater consideration to applications for funding that are consistent with the plan's goals.

#### **Economic Revitalization (B)**

- Promote and encourage interpretive programming in commercial districts serving both visitors and residents.

### **2.5 Alternative C – Focus on Heritage Product Development**

Alternative C, *Focus on Heritage Product Development*, envisions an active role in a series of initiatives focused on heritage development and community enhancement, especially a new interpretive center, extensive trails system, and network of high-quality interpretive exhibits. Like USA Niagara (the USA Niagara Development Corporation, a subsidiary of the state's Empire State Development Corporation), the heritage area would have a direct role in developing and implementing its core projects.

#### **Heritage Area Management and Regional Positioning (C)**

- The heritage area organization will become a strong leadership organization capable of raising major funds and implementing heritage tourism projects and programs on the ground. The organization would gain its strength from the interests and capabilities of thoroughly engaged partners. Serves as initiator, facilitator, and partner.

#### **Interpretation and Education (C)**

- Operate a central interpretive center near the park entrance with exhibits introducing the heritage area themes.
- Design, construct, and manage a comprehensive system of landscape interpretive exhibits along an extensive system of trails along the gorge and in communities.

### **Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism (C)**

- Design and implement a quality assurance program for visitor services and attractions.
- Create a program to train and certify guides to assist visitors and tour operators.
- Use the Niagara Falls central interpretive center as a transportation facility with multi-modal connections including pedestrian, bicycle, personal vehicle, rental car, and tour buses and visitor shuttles.
- Establish a regularly scheduled mobile visitor center shuttle system between the Falls and the Fort with interpretive content offered through guides, living history interpreters, and/or media presentations.

### **Engaging our Young People (C)**

- Create an Ambassadors Program to engage local young people in presenting their communities to visitors.
- Participate with the Student Conservation Association in establishing a program for environmental and outdoor recreation enhancements.

### **Outdoor Recreation (C)**

- Design, restore, construct, and manage a comprehensive trails system from the Falls to the Fort with connections into adjacent communities.
- Develop cooperative leases and/or concession relationships with State Parks and other partners to facilitate implementation of the comprehensive trails system.
- Develop and promote resource-based recreational programming for residents and visitors using the trails system.

### **Sense of Place, Sense of Community (C)**

- Work with the villages of Youngstown and Lewiston and to implement projects that preserve and enhance village centers and neighborhoods.
- Assist the City of Niagara Falls and neighborhood organizations in implementing the vision for the 'City in the Garden' as outlined in the city's comprehensive plan.

### **Historic Preservation (C)**

- Support local advocacy organizations in preparing a regional preservation plan for the heritage area, building on state and local plans.
- Perform the role of a non-profit historic preservation advocacy organization to lead implementation of the regional preservation plan.
- Actively seek opportunities to stabilize, rehabilitate and restore historic buildings and structures in the City of Niagara Falls to revitalize neighborhoods and commercial districts.

### **Nature and the River (C)**

- Take an active role in restoring ecosystems along with plant and animal communities along the river.

### **Economic Revitalization (C)**

- Working with local partners, implement a small business development program focused on providing high-quality visitor services and the arts. Work closely with business associations in Youngstown and Lewiston and in the Falls Street, Third Street, Pine Avenue, Upper Main, Niagara Street area, and LaSalle districts of Niagara Falls.
- Offer financial assistance in the form of grants and micro-loans for tourism related small business startups.
- Create a heritage tourism institute for the benefit of local residents in learning about local history, the natural environment, and heritage tourism.

## **2.6 Alternative D – Focus on Visitor Experience (Preferred Alternative)**

Following the initial discussion of alternatives with the Commission, Alternative D was created to provide a more robust version of Alternative B by incorporating appropriate elements from Alternative C as well as other elements that may be identified through public and partner review and discussion. Under *Focus on Visitor Experience*, the National Heritage Area would concentrate upon the three topics of interpretation, visitor experience, and community engagement.

As outlined in Alternative B, the heritage area would 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 heritage area would play a leadership role in developing and maintaining a high-quality visitor experience, addressing visitor information, hospitality, transportation, wayfinding, and services. The heritage area’s role would vary depending upon the specific activity. Where existing organizations are able to lead, the heritage area would play a coordinating, facilitating, and supporting role as outlined in Alternative B. Where existing leadership is lacking, the heritage area would be an active leader and developer, as in Alternative C.

Community engagement would be an equally important focus and would be incorporated into as many programming initiatives as possible. The heritage area would engage residents through programming, research, educational initiatives, historic preservation, employment opportunities, and support for local businesses.

The *Focus on Visitor Experience* alternative would be a bold, creative initiative combining world-class interpretive exhibits, living history, media presentations, and programming set appropriately into the authentic natural and community landscapes of the heritage area. This would be Niagara’s ‘experience center without walls’ providing residents with knowledge and understanding of the environment and landscape in which they live and encouraging exploration by visitors.

### **Heritage Area Management and Regional Positioning (D)**

- The heritage area organization will play a lead or partnering role, filling critical gaps in creating high-quality interpretation and visitor experience in such areas as hospitality pro-

grams and training, wayfinding, and visitor information and services. The organization will play a coordinating, facilitating, and supporting role in economic development, community enhancement, and environmental quality.

#### **Interpretation and Education (D)**

- Operate a central interpretive center with exhibits introducing the heritage area themes.
- Plan and implement a comprehensive system of landscape interpretive exhibits along an extensive system of trails along the gorge and in communities.

#### **Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism (D)**

- Play a major role in creating a high-quality visitor experience along the river corridor by assisting attractions, sites, and communities with authentic, accurate, and engaging interpretive programs.
- Collaborate with existing organizations in developing and implementing programs and standards for improving the overall visitor experience.
- Establish a certified quality designation and logo that can be displayed by qualifying businesses and attractions.
- Create a program to train guides to assist visitors and tour operators.
- Coordinate with existing transportation services to assure multi-modal access including pedestrian, bicycle, personal vehicle, rental car, and tour buses and visitor shuttles.

#### **Engaging our Young People (D)**

- Provide an expansive local history program for local school children that instills a sense of appreciation and pride for the community and environment in which they live;
- Create an Ambassadors Program to engage local young people in presenting their communities to visitors.
- Create seasonal employment opportunities for young adults to work with interpretive programs and businesses.
- Maintain an awareness of regional scholastic, research and conservation projects to identify ways for students to address heritage area goals.
- Partner with local trades organizations to teach young adults the skills necessary to create a restoration economy in the region.
- Participate with the Student Conservation Association in establishing a program for environmental and outdoor recreation enhancements.

#### **Outdoor Recreation (D)**

- Through partnership efforts, map, enhance, rehabilitate, and promote a seamless multi-use trail network from the Falls to the Fort.

- Encourage partners to restore and improve existing trails and create new trail connections linking parks, historic sites, attractions, communities, and neighborhoods.
- Promote a rich array of outdoor recreation opportunities that facilitate interaction with and learning in the natural world, including such activities as boating, fishing, birding, camping, and guided educational hiking tours.

#### **Sense of Place, Sense of Community (D)**

- Develop and assist heritage area communities and program partners in developing specific projects and events that create an unusual or unique sense of place.
- Place interpretive exhibits at regional transportation terminals such as the train station and airport to promote the heritage area.

#### **Historic Preservation (D)**

- Support local advocacy organizations in preparing a regional preservation plan for the heritage area, building on state and local plans.
- Assist local partners in establishing and supporting a central database for historical information, documents, and research.
- Maintain a clearinghouse of grant opportunities and other financial incentives for funding historic preservation projects and revitalizing local business districts across the Heritage Area.
- Collaborate with local partners in establishing and implementing an oral history project coordinated with the central database and research program noted above.
- Support comprehensive local efforts to stabilize, rehabilitate and restore historic buildings and structures in the National Heritage Area to revitalize neighborhoods and commercial districts.

#### **Nature and the River (D)**

- Provide educational and interpretive programming that support environmental goals and objectives set forth in the Niagara River Greenway plan. Accord greater consideration to applications for funding that is consistent with the plan's goals.
- Participate in and encourage local initiatives for restoring ecosystems along the river.
- Create and promote opportunities for visitors to enjoy local agricultural products, foods and beverages.
- Encourage appreciation of the region's agriculture resulting from the unique microclimate and natural resources, including Native American perspectives.

#### **Economic Revitalization (D)**

- Working with local partners, implement an aggressive small business development program in commercial areas focused on providing high-quality services to visitors and residents, with special attention to arts initiatives.

- Integrate interpretive programming into commercial districts serving both visitors and residents.
- Create a heritage tourism institute for the benefit of local residents in learning about local history, the natural environment, and heritage tourism.

## **2.7 Alternatives Considered But Dismissed**

The following alternatives were proposed but dismissed as part of the planning process:

### **National Park Service Facility**

Establishing a permanent facility operated by the National Park Service within the heritage area boundary was considered, but dismissed as a viable alternative. The Commission concluded that the lack of existing federal land conducive for facility development; constraints in the current funding of federal programs; and the presence of several New York State Park properties and facilities providing public access to the falls, gorge and other significant resources in the heritage area made this alternative difficult to implement.

### **New York State Parks Operating Partner**

The idea that the heritage area organization would partner with New York State Parks in the development and operation of state park facilities within the heritage area boundary was proposed, but dismissed as a viable alternative. The Commission felt it had an obligation to forge productive partnerships among all potential local, regional, and state organizations that have a stake in the national heritage area.

### **Combine National Heritage Areas**

The western terminus of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor is located in Niagara County just east of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area. Its close proximity would be convenient for the merging of both heritage area initiatives. This alternative was dismissed because the two heritage areas are at different stages of implementation; communicate a different series of interpretive themes; and at 524 miles in length the current size of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor presents management challenges that a merger would only exacerbate.

## **2.8 Mitigation Measures**

The *Environmental Assessment and Management Plan for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area* is conceptual and programmatic in scope. As a result of the plan's broadly defined policies and programs, this discussion of environmental impacts focuses on the types of consequences that could be associated with certain strategies, policies, and action items, rather than site-specific or project-specific impacts. If individual projects within the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area are undertaken in the future, they would need to comply with all applicable state and local requirements including but not limited to zoning statutes, wetlands and/or waterway permits, and floodplain regulations. Future projects that receive federal assistance would require additional compliance under such laws as the National Environmental Policy Act and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act at the time they are undertaken.

Through its actions, programming, and support, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission may directly undertake or have a direct relationship with partners who are undertaking projects that have a physical impact upon communities, landscapes, and resources. In its programming, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission will therefore establish criteria and guidelines that will assure that projects and initiatives it pursues and supports meet

basic goals and standards for resource and environmental protection, preservation, and stewardship. In addition to other criteria and guidelines outlined in the management plan, these criteria and guidelines will include:

- Compliance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations for resource evaluation, protection, and stewardship;
- The inventory of natural, cultural, and historic resources for any property undergoing physical development or being managed under programming supported by the heritage area;
- Compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties in all projects, programs, and initiatives;
- Plans for the avoidance of adverse impacts upon natural, cultural, and historic resources or for the mitigation for such impacts;
- Coordination of projects with other community plans and planning goals and priorities;
- Where archeological resources may be impacted, survey and testing to identify archeologically sensitive areas, avoidance of archeologically sensitive areas, and data recovery or other appropriate mitigation measures of sensitive areas where avoidance is not possible;
- Cultural landscape inventory, assessment, and treatment plans for landscapes being preserved or affected by heritage area programming;
- Programs and initiatives that enhance community character and support community revitalization in accordance with resource protection and adaptive reuse strategies;
- Minimizing site disturbance and removal of vegetation for landscape construction projects;
- Maximizing the preservation and support of healthy ecosystems and native plant communities;
- Avoidance of wetlands, floodplains, flood zones, and adverse impacts upon waterways, stormwater management systems, and waters;
- Support for alternative forms of transportation; and
- Support for sustainable programs for energy use and consumption.

## 2.9 Comparison of Alternatives

The table below shows a side-by-side comparison of how each of the alternatives evaluated in this management plan and environmental assessment meets the goals outlined in Chapter 1. Chapter 4, *Environmental Consequences*, presents an analysis of the potential impacts of the four alternatives evaluated in this Environmental Assessment. Also the identification of the Environmentally Preferred Alternative and selection of the Preferred Alternative are presented in Chapter 4.

(INSERT PAGE FOR TABLE; Figure 2-1, Alternatives Comparison Table)

## 2.10 Environmentally Preferred Alternative

In accordance with the DO-12 Handbook, the NPS identifies the environmentally preferable alternative in its NEPA documents for public review and comment [Sect. 4.5 E(9)]. The environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources. The environmentally preferable alternative is identified upon consideration and weighing by the Responsible Official of long-term environmental impacts against short-term

impacts in evaluating what is the best protection of these resources. In some situations, such as when different alternatives impact different resources to different degrees, there may be more than one environmentally preferable alternative (43 CFR 46.30).

Alternative C, *Focus on Heritage Product Development*, is the Environmentally Preferred Alternative among those alternatives considered for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area. Alternative C would include significant, direct efforts for the preservation and conservation of historic, cultural, and natural resources by the heritage area's local coordinating entity. While the other alternatives considered also thoroughly support environmental goals and are environmentally friendly, Alternative C has the most aggressive and direct actions for implementing its programming, including those related to the preservation, protection, and enhancement of historic, cultural, and natural resources. Based upon this aggressive, direct level of activity in comparison to the other alternatives, Alternative C is the Environmentally Preferred Alternative.

### **2.11 Selection of the Preferred Alternative**

At the meeting of the Commission on August 31, 2011, at Power Vista on the Niagara River Gorge, Alternative D: *Focus on Visitor Experience* was selected as the Preferred Alternative by a unanimous voice vote of the eleven commissioners present.

Alternative D provides a realistic and energetic approach that blends initiatives and approaches from both Alternatives B and C. In general, Alternative B, which focuses upon interpretation and works primarily through partners, was not thought to be strong enough and did not address some important issues related to the heritage area. Alternative C, on the other hand, was thought to be too ambitious, unrealistic in terms of its scope, and not attuned to the partnership potential within the heritage area.

Alternative D: *Focus on Visitor Experience*, emphasizes interpretation, visitor experience, and community engagement. Where existing groups can lead, the heritage area will play a facilitating role, aiming for a world-class interpretive experience. Where no leadership exists, the heritage area will be an active leader and developer, focused on developing a high-quality visitor experience. Alternative D was felt to be the way to initiate the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area mission and most effectively begin to share the role and significance of Niagara Falls in American history as outlined in the heritage area's enabling legislation.