

# 20. The Niagara International Peace Park: A Proposal

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## Introduction

Surely to those who will implement the purpose of the United Nations, it will be inspiring to execute their high duties in a locality steeped in traditions of peace and good-neighborliness, among peoples of various ancestry who have forged indissoluble bonds of international good will and co-operation, and who have made peace work (McGreevy 1994, 66).

This language was drawn from a 1945 proposal by an international committee to establish the United Nations at Navy Island near Niagara Falls, Ontario. This uninhabited Niagara River island was considered an ideal site for the world peace capital for its location at the international, peaceful, boundary between Canada and the United States. The spiritual qualities found in Niagara's natural environment further inspired the proposal and its promoters. While not chosen as the final site for the UN, the proposal reflects the historical significance of the peaceful, undefended, 3,145 mile / 5,000 km long border that joins Canada and the United States.

As Canada and the United States prepare to commemorate the Bicentennial of the War of 1812, one is reminded that peace was not always the condition along the Canada/U.S. border. After the War of 1812, Canada, Great Britain and the United States "were beggared by the conflict, their people bereaved, their treasure emptied, their graveyards crowded. In North America, the charred houses, the untended farms, the ravaged fields along the border left a legacy of bitterness and distrust" (Berton 1981, 424).

The 200 years that followed have witnessed allied Canada-U.S. engagements on the international stage: the entrance into historic treaties and agreements related to the Canada-U.S. boundary, defense, trade, the management of shared natural resources, the erection of national peace monuments and bridges, and the designation of the world's first international peace park. All testify to the lasting peace that has been forged between the two countries. The joint actions of the United States and Canada have left a lasting imprint on the global discourse of peace and cooperation.

Sir Winston Churchill, addressing the Canada Club (1939) in London at the dawn of WWII, reflected on the peaceful relationship between Canada and the United States stating "That long frontier from Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, guarded only neighbourly respect and honourable obligations, is an example to every country and a pattern for the future of the world" ([www.reagan.library.utexas.edu](http://www.reagan.library.utexas.edu)). These qualities can be found in communities all along Canada-U.S. border, but it is in the highly populated border regions where the military history, the shared natural environment, the pressures of international trade, and long-standing cultural and personal relationships find some of the richest and most complex expressions.

(Insert Figure 1 here)

Of these border regions, Niagara stands apart. The cross-border Niagara region has had a unique tradition of peace and conflict resolution before and after the War of 1812, and it is now organizing to articulate, claim, and celebrate that history. Among other traditions, the White

Roots of Peace of the Iroquois Nation, the African American civil rights movements, the history of treaties and a considered proposal to locate the United Nations at Niagara, all focus on the history of peaceful relations. Symbols of peace and friendship between Canada and the United States are evident in local monuments, agreements, festivals, bridges, official statements and individual relationships. Even in the post 9/11 world, the people of Niagara are working to maintain an open and friendly border in support of our strong economic partnership and cultural exchanges while addressing the security concerns of both nations.

Moreover, Canada and the United States are jointly responsible for the Great Lakes through the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, an agreement that set up the International Joint Commission to manage the waters and settle disputes. The cross border Niagara region shares the Niagara River and Niagara Falls as its center, and is bounded by Lake Erie and Lake Ontario on the south and north.

Niagara Falls was first proposed as an international park in 1878 and although that vision resulted in two separate but adjoining parks, the vision of an international park still inspires. The 19<sup>th</sup> century proposal remains viable today with the region's the history of peace and management of the environment. A shared park would facilitate better coordination and resource management in the face of climate change, cross-border political relations in a time of terrorism, economic partnerships in an expanding global market, and a celebration of our shared culture, yet unique differences, in a world increasingly interested in the balance between globalism and localism.

This chapter explores the possibility of establishing a Niagara International Peace Park. We first present the region and its history to build an argument of why Niagara is a good candidate for a Peace Park. This is followed by a discussion of the binational regional context and the work being done that would contribute to the designation criteria. We conclude with proposed next steps to achieve this goal.

## **Niagara: Cultural and Natural Heritage**

The binational Niagara region has a rich cultural heritage and natural heritage embedded in the historic stories of people and the land and their struggles and conflicts to live in Niagara.

## **Niagara as Contested Terrain: The Practice of War and the Practice of Peace**

Niagara has been the site of important North American episodes of conflict and peacemaking. In some cases, Niagara was the ground of battle; in other cases, the ground of reconciliation. This region, the only continuous theatre of battle during the War of 1812, will commemorate in 2013-2014 not only the war, but will mark two hundred years of peace between the United States and Canada/Great Britain following the end of the war. This peace does not just represent the absence of war, but reflects a concerted effort to maintain peaceful relations.

As a theatre for the practice of peace, Niagara hosted important Peace Conferences in 1864 and again in 1914 both of which contributed to new insights on issues of slavery, conflict resolution and hemispheric relations. Common sense and vested interest in friendly cross-border relations were strong enough to thwart actions of aggression such as the McKenzie Rebellion of 1837 and the infamous Fenian Raid on Fort Erie in 1866. As described below, Niagara was the ground from which the great peacemakers, the Haudenosaunee, developed the White Roots of Peace and it was also here in the cross-border region where the issues of slavery and civil rights were debated and resolutions enacted.

## **The War of 1812 and the Beginning of Peace**

The War of 1812 had its origin in the many conflicts and battles fought on the American

continent and in Europe. To the United States, the war was the final chapter in the Revolutionary War; to Canada, it was nation building. Still, like most wars, much was lost. In the end, the British returned Fort Niagara to the Americans and the Americans returned Fort Erie to the British; the borders remained the same as before the war. But all was not the same. Both sides of the Niagara River suffered greatly from the conflict.

(Insert Figure 2 here)

The first action took place on October 23, 1812 as General Van Rensselaer crossed the Niagara River at Lewiston, NY to attempt to capture Queenston. This battle was over quickly as the Americans were driven back across the river, leaving three hundred Americans dead and nine hundred captured. British Major General Isaac Brock lost his life along with less than one hundred English soldiers.

Buffalo, a small settlement at 1813, was burnt to the ground on a bitter cold day in December. This act was in response to the horrific burning and looting just three weeks earlier of Newark, the former Capitol of Upper Canada located at current day Niagara-on-the-Lake. The Forts along the Niagara River – Fort Niagara and Fort George standing on either side of the Niagara River at Lake Ontario, and Fort Erie at the confluence of the Lake Erie and the Niagara – were actively engaged in the battles. Many soldiers on both sides were lost in the Battle of Chippawa, Battle of Lundy's Lane, and later sieges on Fort Erie (Berton 1981; Percy, 2007). These battle fields and forts are commemorated and regularly receive visitors from both sides of the Niagara River.

After the signing of the Treaty of Ghent (1814) that ended the war, one of the first acts of peace was the signing of the Rush-Bagot Treaty of 1817 (Percy, 2007, 133). This was the only disarmament agreement reached between the two countries and limited naval forces in the Great Lakes. It was a significant act and established a precedent for future relations along the border that runs through these waters. The monument to this treaty today stands at Fort Niagara.

### **Deeper Roots of Peace: The Haudenosaunee**

The tradition of peace in Niagara reaches back centuries before Europeans set foot in the Americas.

A loose military alliance among the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawks and, after about 1720, the Tuscarora, the Haudenosaunee were probably the greatest indigenous polity north of the Rio Grande in the two centuries before Columbus and definitely the greatest in the two centuries after (Mann 2005, 370).

The traditional story of the Five Nations (later the Six Nations) recounts the emergence of a shamanic outsider, Daganawidah, who brought a message of peace to the warring tribes that lived in upstate New York and Southern Ontario between 1090 and 1150 AD. Daganawidah, the Peacemaker was assisted by the great orator, Ayenwatha. Together they brought the Great Law of Peace that granted powers to the council, but also outlined the limits of power. Among the Law's 117 codicils is a process for conflict resolution and requirement that all decisions to be made unanimously.

The White Roots of the Great Tree of Peace will continue to grow advancing the good Mind and Righteousness and Peace, moving into territories of peoples scattered far through the forest. And when a nation . . . shall approach the Tree, you shall welcome her here and take her by the arm and seat her . . . She will add a brace or leaning pole to the longhouse and will thus strengthen the edifice of Reason and Peace (Wallace 1986, 106).

The Niagara region played a major role in the ending of the Indian wars and the bringing of peace. Jikonsahseh from the Neutral Nation, lived along the Niagara Escarpment and was an early convert to the Great Law of Peace. She worked among the warring nations to end the cycle of violence and was so effective that Jikonsahseh or “Peace Queen” became a title and office in the confederacy through the centuries. This position ended however, with Caroline Mount Pleasant who died in 1892. Her family home, located on the Tuscarora Reservation, was burned to make way for the Robert Moses hydro power plant, and now lies at the bottom of the Niagara Power Project Reservoir (Wooster 2008, 19-20).

The Haudenosaunee used their diplomacy to maintain a position of power with Europeans even as pressure on their land by settlers increased. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, disagreements on strategies for managing relationships with the colonists – remain neutral, side with the Europeans (French or British), or support the patriots – divided the nation. The inability to stay within the Great Law of Peace and to maintain their union eventually caused the Iroquois to falter both in war and peace.

Yet the Great Law of Peace still serves the Six Nations who continue to hold their council. With the exception of Iceland’s Althing (930 AD), the Haudenosaunee have the oldest continuously existing representative parliament on earth (Mann 2005, 373). The people of the Haudenosaunee, like many pre-Columbian cultures in North America, had a tradition of functioning but limited government and personal autonomy unknown in Europe during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Mann 2005, 375) and some scholars maintain that the Great Law of Peace influenced the U.S. Constitution. Its foundation in democratic self-governance and individual freedom and the Haudenosaunee governance structure were well-known to the founders of the fledgling United States (Grinde and Johansen 1991; Mann 2005; Weatherford 1988).

### **Freedom and Civil Rights in Niagara**

One of the significant peace activities in Niagara was the region’s involvement in the civil rights movement. In part because of its adjacency to Canada where slavery was abolished by Imperial act in 1833, the Niagara Frontier of Western New York was a hotbed of abolitionist sentiments in the early and mid-19th century and the “underground railroad” to Canada lasted until the end of the U.S. Civil War. This region was also historically important for the struggle for civil rights in the U.S. in the early 20th century.

(Insert Figure 3 here)

African Americans settled along the Niagara River in Canada and a small number established residence in the City of Buffalo by 1828 and by 1831. In Buffalo, they formed two churches: the Vine Street African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Michigan Street Baptist Church. In 1843 the Vine Street AME Church hosted the National Conference of Colored Citizens. That same year abolitionists traveled to Buffalo to select a presidential candidate at the National Liberty Party Convention. James Birney of Buffalo ran under the banner of ‘no slavery in territories’ and an end to fugitive slave laws.

William Wells Brown was the first known African American community member in Buffalo active in transporting slaves across the Niagara River via his job as a steamboat worker (Farrison 1969). Helping refugee slaves would take on an added risk with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that required citizens of non-slave states to assist in the capture of fugitives living in their communities. In spite of this law, abolitionists in Western New York continued the Underground Railroad with the aid of such well-known individuals as Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas, and with many unknown participants. Estimates of how many fugitive slaves crossed through the Niagara Frontier on their way to Upper Canada in the period from 1830-1860 vary from 30,000 to almost 75,000 (Severance 1903, 188).

Almost 50 years later when Buffalo would host the Pan American Exposition of 1901, Reverend J. Edward Nash of the Michigan Street Baptist Church organized a protest against the portrayal of African Americans on the Midway (Armfield 2004). In 1905, a member of Nash's congregation, Mary B. Talbert, worked with W.E. Dubois to organize an event that started the 'Niagara Movement' (Lewis 1983). As Jim Crow laws still existed in 1905 Buffalo, the meeting was held just across the Niagara River at the Erie Beach Hotel in Ontario. Twenty-nine African American leaders acclaimed the *Declaration of Principles* of full civil liberties, abolition of racial discrimination, and recognition of human brotherhood. The Niagara Movement and their principles were the foundation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), formed a few years later in 1909.

The extent of Rev. Nash's role in the cause for equality was revealed in October of 1999 when members of the Michigan Street Preservation Corporation were granted permission to enter the Nash House at 36 Potter Street. Inside was a historic record of Buffalo's African American history, including a collection of Nash's personal papers containing his correspondence with Booker T. Washington and W.E. Dubois.

## **Niagara: The Falls, the River and the Escarpment**

The Niagara River flows between the United States and Canada as both separator and connector. The boundary was established at the end of the Revolutionary War and since the end of the War of 1812, the nation states on either side have never taken up arms against each other. This river is a symbol of stability and friendship as well as a shared resource and boundary between the two countries.

(Insert Figure 4 here)

The Niagara River, Niagara Falls and the Niagara Escarpment were formed over thousands of years through successive ice ages. One of the geological remnants is the Niagara Escarpment, a cuesta that runs 1,448 km from Western New York, through Ontario, and back down into the states in Wisconsin. The Canadian part of the Niagara Escarpment has been a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Canada since 1990, a designation that gave international recognition to the work of the Niagara Escarpment Commission that has had oversight of the resource since 1973. But the primary geological remnant of the successive ice ages is the Great Lakes, a basin of lakes and connecting channels that today contains 20% of the world's fresh water.

The Niagara River is not really a river at all, but a connecting channel that carries all the water from the upper lakes across the Niagara Escarpment into Lake Ontario. It is 56 km long, has an average flow of 6003 cubic m per second, and drops 99 m from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, 46 m of that drop occurring at the falls themselves. The world famous Niagara Falls and ecological rich Niagara Gorge were formed by the action of the river on the escarpment, and over the last 12,000 years, Niagara Falls has moved 11 km upstream, leaving the Niagara Gorge, a unique habitat because of the geological and ecological conditions (Eckel 2001).

## **The Conflicting Imaginations: Natural Wonder or Resource**

Niagara Falls has captured the human imagination in myth and in reality (McGreevy 1994). The Niagara River and Falls were a sacred place to indigenous people; they were a source of wonder reflected in drawings and literature to early Europeans; they are also known as the honeymoon capital of the world, the place of heroic acts (or foolish stunts); they are seen as the handiwork of God; and a source of energy. The Falls have generated conflicting imaginations and cultural battles have been fought over their meaning. The power of Niagara Falls, even today, attracts 12 million people annually.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, alternative visions fought for control over Niagara. One vision saw the falls as a natural wonder, a romantic vision of the Creator's hand revealed. The other vision saw the falls as a resource for their potential to fuel the growing nations by harnessing them for power or exploiting them for tourism. The tension between these two visions – technological utopian vision or natural wonder – inspired two of the most interesting and provocative stories of cooperation in the cross-border Niagara region.

The “Free Niagara” Movement was formed in reaction to a utilitarian treatment of the falls on the U.S. side where factories and businesses were built along the rapids and property owners alongside the Niagara River built fences and charged people to see the falls. For people such as Frederick C. Church and Frederick Law Olmsted, this was a denial of the power and beauty of Niagara Falls. They and many others worked for over 15 years to protect this resource starting around 1869 and eventually were successful with the establishment of the Niagara Reservation. The Canadians had a different relationship with the falls and focused on tourism, leaving most industrial development to St. Catharines and Hamilton further up the isthmus.

Although there were many efforts to preserve the beauty of the falls, it was the Earl of Dufferin, then Governor-General of Canada, who first promoted the idea to establish an international park at Niagara in a speech to the Ontario Society of Artists in Toronto on September 26, 1878:

In your neighborhood there exists, as you are aware, one of the most wondrous, beautiful and stupendous scenes which the forces of Nature have ever constructed. Indeed, so majestic is the subject that though many skillful hands have endeavored . . . few have succeeded in adequately depicting its awe-inspiring characteristics. . . . Some weeks ago . . . I . . . suggested to him [the Governor of the State of NY]. . . that the governments of New York and Ontario, Canada, should combine to acquire whatever rights may have been established against the public and to form around the Falls a small international park (Horton 1947, 222).

Within four months of this speech, Governor Lucius Robinson addressed the NYS Legislature on Jan. 9, 1879:

The civil jurisdiction over the Falls of Niagara, as well as the shore and waters of the Niagara River, is divided between the State and the province of Ontario, Canada. But, in one sense, the sublime exhibition of natural power there witnessed is the property of the whole world. It is visited by tourists from all quarters of the globe, and it would seem to be incumbent upon both governments to protect such travelers from improper annoyance on either side (Horton 1947, 221).

Although talks did proceed between the governments, the subsequent actions were separate yet groundbreaking. The first conservation effort of natural resources in North America was created in separate acts by the NY State legislature and by the Ontario Government in 1885. The Niagara Reservation, the United States' first state park formally opened on July 15, 1885; Queen Victoria Park opened in 1887.

An entirely new principle was evoked in the establishment of the Niagara Reservation. This was the first time in history that a state of the Union had used public money to expropriate property for purely aesthetic purposes. It was without precedent in the United States, which explains the difficulties encountered by the preservationists. It was obvious in hindsight; it seemed radical – even insane – at the time (Berton 1992, 144).

Even with the establishment of parks on both sides of the border at Niagara Falls, early

industrialist still had visions of using the tremendous force of the falls. The water from the Niagara River moved through mill races and later through canals to produce power by mechanical devices. Jacob Schoellkopf saw the potential for manufacturing at Niagara Falls and expanded the Hydraulic Canal and early machinery to supply direct current (DC) electricity to the City of Niagara Falls and local businesses in 1881. But it wasn't until 1895 when Edward Dean Adams built the Adams Power Plant that first employed the technology of alternating current (AC) invented by Nikola Tesla, that hydroelectric power truly became available. The vision of an electric, clean, utopian world seemed at hand. The vision was summarized by Lord Kelvin: "I look forward to the time when the whole water from Lake Erie will find its way to the lower level of Lake Ontario through machinery . . . I do not hope that our children's children will ever see the Niagara cataract" (McGreevy 1994, 115).

(Insert Figure 5 here)

Once the technology was perfected, U.S. and Canadian financiers and industrialists developed power plants on both sides of the Niagara River – five of them located at Niagara Falls itself. Three additional power plants were built at the edge of the Niagara Escarpment downstream, Adam Beck #1 and #2, 1922 and 1951 and Niagara Power Project in 1961.

The Niagara power plants have had an agreement regarding the sharing of the waters of the Niagara River since the 1909 Boundary Waters. This treaty can be called the second 'Free Niagara' Movement because its enactment maintained water flows in the Niagara River by limiting the amount of water that could be diverted for hydroelectricity and to fuel the myriads of industries that followed the power.

Today, water withdrawals from the Niagara River for hydroelectricity are regulated by the Niagara Diversion Treaty of 1950 that stipulates how much water has to actually flow over the falls ("tourist water") and how much can be shared by the United States and Canada for hydroelectricity. These international agreements are acts that both protect the economic interests of the two nations, but also serve to preserve the natural resource shared between the two nations.

### **Love Canal and the Beginning of BiNational Environmental Protection**

Harnessing the formidable energy at Niagara brought great innovation, progress, industry, and also, unintended consequences. On the U.S. side of the Niagara River, the shoreline from Buffalo to Niagara Falls was lined with industry as were the waterfront communities of Hamilton and St. Catharines in Canada. Enormous wealth was built on hydroelectricity, the Erie and Welland Canals, and railroads.

But the industry that dominated the Niagara River shoreline came with extraordinary environmental peril. The large chemical plants at Niagara were dumping untold gallons of chemicals directly into the river. The accumulation of chemical companies' dumping of toxins, in combination with the reduction in water flow resulting from diversions for greater hydroelectricity generation all began to show their effects in the 1950s with waning fish stocks, occasional oil slicks, detectable phosphorous concentrations and human feces in surface water.

In a wake-up call heard the world over, Niagara became the poster child for environmental degradation when in the late 1970s Love Canal became the first toxic waste disaster in America. Ironically, the canal was a failed utopian project of the early 1900s by developer William Love who envisioned a model industrial city based on hydroelectric power from Niagara Falls. Abandoned for many years, the canal was used during and after WWII by Hooker Chemical and the U.S. Army for dumping chemical waste that eventually overflowed into the adjacent communities causing serious health problems.

If there were a positive outcome to the environmental tragedy, it is in the new understanding of the consequences of toxins and the requirement of government responsibility for hazardous waste. From Love Canal originated the environmental justice movement that has grown across the world, and it was the impetus for the U.S. Superfund program to clean up toxic waste sites across the United States and the establishment of 'right-to-know' legislation to inform residents of the existence of hazardous waste in their neighborhoods.

While the magnitude of the toxic inputs to the Niagara River emanated from point sources in Western New York, point and non-point sources in the Niagara Peninsula also contributed to the problem. In 1973, the International Joint Commission (IJC), in an effort to improve the quality of water on the Great Lakes, identified the rivers and communities that were contributing the most concentrated pollution to the Lakes. Both the Buffalo River and the Niagara River were designated as AOCs (Area of Concern) and both sides of the Niagara River have had to address their contribution to the pollution. The differing inputs and clean-up demands led to a cooperative, yet separate, approach to the development of remedial action plans (RAPs).

In the decade that followed, a comprehensive toxics study led to the signing of the Niagara River Declaration in 1987 and with it, the development of the binational Niagara River Toxics Management Plan (NRTMP) to significantly reduce toxic chemical pollutants in the Niagara River with a stated goal of 50% reduction by 1996. A June 2002 assessment of the Niagara River Area of Concern by the IJC pointed to the NRTMP as a model for cooperation and a 'Great Lakes remediation success story,' all the while making clear that restoring beneficial uses in the Niagara will require more action, funding, binational coordination and public consultation (IJC 2002).

A priority of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is to protect the water resource from diversions and external threats such as invasive species. After four years of intensive negotiations aimed at building consensus around watershed management, the Great Lakes States and Provinces entered into a cooperative management agreement in 2005 to provide critical new protections to the waters of Great Lakes/St. Lawrence River system. The primary objective of the negotiating teams was to ensure the sustainable use of the binational resource for future generations while the management plan has created a new international model for multi-jurisdictional management and resource conservation.

### **'Parks for Peace' and Niagara**

We must ask ourselves if we are leaving for future generations an environment that is as good or better than we found. (Theodore Roosevelt, 26<sup>th</sup> President of the United States and NYS legislator credited with legislation creating the Niagara Reservation, America's first state park.)

The Niagara region has a history of peace and international cooperation following the armed struggle of 1812-1814 and clearly that practice of peace extends beyond the avoidance of war. In spite of tension and conflict the two nations have found ways to address and resolve differences. Many of the issues of border communities are federal in scope such as the protection of water quality, security, and international trade agreements, but these issues often come to the ground locally in places such as Niagara. The cross border work accomplished so far is a testament to the patience, ingenuity and imagination of governments and citizens to identify, negotiate, and mediate, and to come to agreements regarding political differences, economic interests, and environmental protection.

However, even with this rich Niagara history of peacemaking and conflict resolution, and with the extraordinary natural resources and efforts to work binationally to protect them, this region has not organized itself to bring any international designation to recognize the place, the history or the governance efforts, nor have we created substantive structures to facilitate and enable



much needed and broader cooperative agreements.

The idea of Niagara as an International Peace Park was first raised during a gathering at the Chautauqua Institution in August 2001. Canadian Maurice Strong, the former Director of the UN Environmental Program, leader of the '92 Earth Summit in Rio, and then, Vice Rector for the UN University for Peace, was the featured speaker. Strong spoke of the UN University for Peace's role in establishing Peace Parks and encouraged the small western New York delegation to pursue the idea of Niagara as an International Peace Park.

The IUCN 'Parks for Peace' Programme of protected areas seemed particularly relevant to our context.

Parks for Peace are transboundary protected areas that are formally dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and of natural and associated cultural resources, and to the promotion of peace and cooperation (Sandwith et al 2001, 3).

Responding to the environmental destruction and aggression that plagued many world regions in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as to the growing attention being given to environmental issues by the international community, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) began promoting Parks for Peace in 1997. The goals are to enhance regional cooperation, conserve biodiversity, prevent conflict, and support sustainable regional development. The designation does not separate political from environmental concerns. Long term action regarding the conservation of biodiversity and shared landscape level ecosystem management are enlisted as vehicles to protect sensitive environmental areas if conflict should occur, and to develop the relationships and agreements necessary to avoid conflict through increased cooperation and communication.

### **Contemporary Sustainable Planning Efforts**

The living quality of binational relationships and active cooperation is as important as the historic rationale for a Peace park. Over the past two decades, the cross-border Niagara region has seized and weathered shifts in policy with regard to the border, and continues forward. What follows is a brief summary of some of the contemporary efforts in the binational region -- first with attention to the cooperative efforts followed by planning and governance efforts on either side that demonstrate concern with sustainable development and that offer opportunities for more collaboration.

One of the most critical cross border stimulus that affected the Niagara Region was the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) of 1989, an economic policy aimed at deepening the economic integration between Canada and the United States. This has spawned an atmosphere of continual exploration with new forms of cooperation and reasons for cross-border arrangements at Niagara: strategic business alliances, cross-border marketing and promotion, international event planning, cooperative research and academic conferences, expanded sports and broadcast markets, emergency planning, border security, etc. A series of cross-border conferences and meetings (2000 – 2003) attracted a large and diverse audience to discuss a full range of environmental, economic, and equity issues that would make of Niagara a more clearly defined region. While not all cross-border pursuits in Niagara since the signing of the FTA have been successful nor have all strategies to achieve sustainability been implemented, each attempt has tested the merits of reaching cross-border. Important 'seeds of need' have been planted and a cross-border sense of 'region' has taken root.

The June 2001 Niagara Bi-National Region Economic Roundtable, organized by the Province of Ontario and the State of New York, called for "adopting a vision and strategy that facilitates a view of Niagara Bi-National as an internationally integrated economic region, capitalizing on

shared regional assets, building on our synergistic strengths of community; and resolving constraints to the binational region's collective well-being" (*Realizing a Vibrant Niagara BiNational Region* 2003, 5). The lack of any formal institutional capacity or network with a truly binational mandate underscored the need for greater regional coordination and capacity.

At the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new concepts about border management were emerging: 'Moving the border away from the border' and 'perimeter security' were notions generating lively debate (and a mix of views) in spheres of government, public and the media. These approaches became largely irrelevant with the tragic events of 9/11 that brought increased attention to borders throughout North America. A history of joint operational planning, communication, and overall plan readiness was evident in the December 2001 announcement of the Smart Border Action Plan by the U.S. and Canada.

Even so, the repercussions of 9/11 on the management of the Canada-U.S. border have significantly tested Niagara's 'sense of region.' Niagara area politicians at all levels of government have been at the forefront of the national agendas in both countries and leading on many of the border related policy recommendations, especially as concerns the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). While appreciative of the critical need for security at the border, efforts to advocate security responses tempered to the cross-border reality and the historic Canada/U.S. partnership have been bolstered by the strong support, advocacy and guidance of the regional tourism industry, business, academe and even members of the public for whom "home" is the entire cross-border region. Organizing to address the recent challenges has helped to fuel a renewed sense of direction in the cross-border Niagara region.

(Insert Figure 6 here)

All of this joint cross-border work manifests an emerging sense of region. Yet the efforts of municipalities and individual country initiatives are also important. The planning jurisdictions have evolved largely in parallel, not coincidentally (or in unison) yet have demonstrably complimentary initiatives. For example, on the U.S. side, the recent efforts surrounding the Greenway and the National Historic Designation for the Niagara Falls NY area are two complimentary efforts (i.e. complimentary to the Niagara Escarpment Plan and its eventual UNESCO recognition) with very similar objectives. In the latter example, clear statements are made regarding cultural and historic connectivity to Canada as part of the supporting rationale for the U.S. national historic designation. Taken together -- Canada, Ontario, and Regional Niagara on one side of the border, and United States, New York, and Erie/Niagara Counties on the other -- represent an emergent trajectory of the cross-border region sensibility.

In Canadian Niagara, the sustainability planning journey started with the Regional Policy Plan in 1970, one of the first North American plans to describe urban growth boundaries and model policies for agricultural and environmental protection. Next was the adoption of smart growth principles for brownfield and urban redevelopment, Model Urban Design Guidelines, and community design awards. *Smarter Niagara*, a process facilitated by a citizen advisory committee, has held a summit in each of the last six years focusing on the development and implementation of smart growth principles that apply to the current dynamics of the Region.

A recent assessment of Regional Niagara (CA) against the UN-endorsed Melbourne Principles clarified the necessity of cross-border dialogue. *Building Communities, Building Lives: A Blueprint for an Even Better, Smarter Niagara* (2004), a more contemporary plan prepared in partnership with Environment Canada, chronicles achievements where sustainability efforts are in place and identifies gaps in such directions. For Regional Niagara in Canada to move to the next level of sustainability, it is crucial to align environmental, social, economic, educational and cultural directions on both sides of the Niagara River. Niagara is regarded as one of the leaders in Canadian sustainability planning. This positions it for federal support as recent funding is tied a demonstrated commitment to 'integrated community sustainability planning.'

Across the border in Western New York, the *Erie Niagara Regional Framework* (2004) has established a new foundation for nurturing vital urban centres throughout the two counties bordering the Niagara River, Erie and Niagara. The Framework proposes a mechanism for protecting valuable farmlands and sensitive ecological areas, and frames new strategies for the protection of fragile ecologies. Capacity for protection was boosted through the creation of the *Niagara River Greenway* (2004) to create a continuous green space from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario – a mirror to the Canadian Niagara Parks Commission (1885). The newly established Erie Canalways National Heritage Area (2000) and the U.S. Niagara Heritage Area (2008) centred at Niagara Falls reinforce the framework even while the Ontario *Places to Grow Act* (S.O. 2005) and the *Green Belt Act* (S.O. 2005) expand the smart growth planning across the entire region of Niagara.

Much of the impetus of a sustainable Niagara on the U.S. side has come from non-profits. The Western New York League of Women voters' program on the dynamics of sprawl received an award from National American Planning. "Partners for a Livable Western New York" have offered public forums and lectures on smart growth in the region. This work, in part, has formed the basis of acceptance for the first comprehensive plan in the City of Buffalo in 30 years, *The Queen City of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2003), as well as the new *City of Niagara Falls Comprehensive Plan* (2008), both grounded in the concept of sustainability.

A coalition of non-profit environmental organizations has brought a clear voice to environmental issues on the region's waterways under the leadership of the Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper. The non-profit environmental community convened by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo recently framed the Western New York Environmental Alliance (2009), a federation of more than 150 regional organizations to work on a shared agenda to protect and restore the environment.

U.S. communities on the Niagara River, struggling to restructure their economy from the largely manufacturing base, understand the consequences of a non-sustainable economy. Many sectors -- governmental, academic, and non-profit -- are demonstrating commitments to sustainability in the cross-border region, often in correspondence with Canadian efforts.

### **Planning the Niagara International Peace Park**

There have been a number of significant events and processes in the region since the turn of the millennium that have opened opportunities for more cross border collaborative efforts: a working group to do research and consider options; second, the formalizing of the BiNational Niagara Mayors Coalition s and the "Niagara 10" structures; and third, the planning and implementation of two major international events, the Centennial of the Boundary Waters Treaty (2009) and the Bicentennial of the War of 1812.

Given the awareness that there was no international recognition of Niagara Falls/Gorge and the challenge by Maurice Strong, a cross-border working group of individuals from both sides of the border representing the environment, tourism, cultural interests, academe, and government began to discuss the concept of Niagara as an International Peace Park in April 2002. The proposal that ensued was a vision for a new kind of park -- one that reaches across the region -- from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario and from the Welland Canal to the Erie Canal. Unlike Waterton-Glacier National Parks, where clear legal boundaries frame the parkland itself, people would live, work and play throughout the 'park land.' Sensitive natural areas would enjoy environmental protection and principles of sustainable development would be applied throughout this "park without borders."

In an effort to begin to frame the concept of Niagara as an International Peace Park, the self-named Cross-border Working Group crafted Draft First Principles for the binational Niagara Region that are closely aligned with the Parks for Peace criteria. They include reserving the

natural and cultural heritage, promoting sustainable economic development, fostering peaceful and creative cooperation, and fostering education and research.

With the leadership of the Consulate General of Canada in Buffalo and the Urban Design Project of the University at Buffalo, we have met with parties experienced with the Parks for Peace and other international designations and explored various options for designation, criteria, how long it would take to achieve, and what benefit might accrue to the binational region. A significant effort has been the formalization of the BiNational Niagara Mayor Coalition, a structure for cross border communication among the elected officials on both sides of the border. Organized in the late 1990s initially to consider international trade and joint infrastructure such as the bridges, its focus shifted after 9/11 to address the likely negative consequences of the WHTI (Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative). The mayors of the seven municipalities along the Niagara River regularly meet and work together to lobby in the interest of the binational region.

This mayors group was supplemented in 2007 by an expanded cross border leadership council, 'The Niagara 10,' that also included the elected officials of the two counties in Western New York and the Municipality of Regional Niagara. This group established an agenda for action – identifying projects, initiatives, campaigns and governance structures that would be facilitated by cross border planning. The Niagara 10 has been instrumental in achieving a series of new cross border effort in information sharing, emergency planning, shared events, and transportation connections.

The planning and conduct of important international events is an opportunity for cross border communication across sectors, shared information, and recognition of the region as an international border. It was the BiNational Niagara Mayors Coalition that issued the invitation to the IJC to hold the Centennial of the Boundary Waters Treaty in Niagara. The major commemorative event was held on June 13, 2009 on the Niagara Falls Rainbow Bridge and was attended by the U.S. Secretary of State and Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Significantly, the joint announcement at this meeting was the official opening of the 1987 U.S./Canadian Water Quality Agreement for a much needed update, something that many groups had been working to achieve for at least a decade. This event and its accompanying *Niagara Year of our Shared Waters* were facilitated by the participation of hundreds of groups across many sectors – art, culture, environmental, historical, youth, recreational, First Nations – with the support of all the municipalities on both side of the Niagara River. This event demonstrated the competence and capacity of the region to forge important relationships that will be required for the implementation of the upcoming commemoration of the War of 1812 now being planned. It has been proposed that the legacy project for the bicentennial international celebration be the institution of a Niagara International Peace Park through the IUCN Congress.

To that end, the working group has determined that it is time to make some critical decisions and began an implementation process. Issues to be resolved include

1. Boundaries: Should there be an open park that encompasses the entire region of Niagara or should a designation be limited to existing governing entities such as the Niagara Parks Commission, the Niagara River Greenway, the Canal Commissions, and the Niagara Heritage Area? What is the best way to proceed?
2. Nominator: Obviously, parallel bodies on both sides of the border that have standing should make the formal request. But exactly who should forward the Resolution?
3. Jurisdiction: By whom should the designation be made and subsequently, who has responsibility to manage and operate? Niagara is an international border, but it is also the connector among local/regional entities within the framework of the Province of Ontario and State of New York.

Once these issues have been resolved through further consultation with others involved in Parks for Peace and with local/regional players, the Cross Border Working Group will prepare a detailed proposal and promotional materials. Further, it is anticipated that a resolution will be submitted to the 2012 IUCN Congress promoting the Niagara International Peace Park to bring international support to our cross-border efforts.

(Insert Figure 7 here)

## **Conclusions**

A significant advantage of working toward an international designation lies in the dialogue required to advance the vision. The process requires the coordination of efforts among officials, scholars and citizens to gather, cohere and present the region. Niagara already has some practice in binational cooperative work, but regional entities will have to articulate how it will work toward a sustainable future through: (1) conservation of natural and cultural heritage – landscapes, ecosystems, monuments and stories; (2) development that is innovative, vibrant, socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable; (3) cooperative structures and relationships among communities, agencies and nations; and (4) scientific and cultural research, monitoring, and education. Niagara will benefit from an organized and broadly based conversation about how it might achieve these goals and manage itself over time to ensure the balance among the ecology, economy, equity and culture of the region we share.

An International Peace Park status through the World Conservation Union's Global Peace Parks Initiative would provide the cross-border Niagara region with a progressive framework to conserve and manage its enduring and important connections -- the Niagara River and the Niagara Escarpment. The over-arching themes of sustainable development, protection, cooperation, and environmental stewardship would naturally support a broad range of initiatives currently underway: natural heritage initiatives, cross-border tourism and economic development and improved regional cooperation. Demonstrating environmental leadership embraced in the language of peace, the Niagaras draw from history to compose a new, embodiment of longstanding cooperation and enterprise.

The designation of this cross-border region as the Niagara International Peace Park would highlight the reputation of the region as environmental stewards of the internationally significant Great Lakes and Niagara River and demonstrate the on-going leadership of this region in tackling critical Canada/U.S. transboundary issues. Further, such a designation would support investment in the natural, physical and promotional asset base of the regional tourist economy, and position the region to take full advantage of important upcoming events such as the commemoration of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812 and the 1817 Rush-Bagot Treaty. All of these efforts require attention and academic investment in the region from our colleges and universities, focusing their attention on local as well as global issues. At its core, this proposal aims to carve out an International Peace Park characterized by the successful integration of a healthy environment with the often conflicting pressures of international trade, transportation, development, and, since September 11, border security.

By moving forward from parallel stewardship of shared natural resources to a point where environmental/whole-systems thinking truly informs political and economic decision-making, this first-world international peace park seeks to elevate the notion of environmental governance as a path forward to peace and prosperity.

Such could be the Niagara International Peace Park; a legacy of a 21<sup>st</sup> century symbol of peace between Canada and the United States.

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### **Figure List**

**Figure 1:** The Niagara River connects and divides the United States and Canada at Niagara. (Source: Urban Design Project)

**Figure 2:** The 'French Castle' at Old Ft. Niagara was built in 1759. The fort itself has stood at the entrance to the Niagara River for almost 300 years and remained an active military post until 1963. Today Old Fort Niagara receives over 100,000 visitors a year. (Source: Urban Design Project)

**Figure 3:** A map of the Niagara Region showing documented historic sites related to the War of 1812 and the history of African Americans in Niagara. (Source: Urban Design Project)

**Figure 4:** The Niagara River Gorge was formed by the erosion of the Niagara Escarpment and is today an ecologically rich habitat. (Photo by Ana Hernández-Balzac)

**Figure 5:** Looking at the Adam Beck Power Plant, Canada from the Niagara Power Project, U.S., together the largest generator of hydroelectricity in North America. (Photo by Ana Hernández-Balzac)

**Figure 6:** The Peace Bridge between Buffalo and Fort Erie was dedicated in 1927 as a symbol of Canada-U.S peaceful relations and economic partnerships. (Source: Buffalo Enterprise Development Corporation, 1997)

**Figure 7:** Niagara Falls lies in the center of the Niagara Region historically, geographically, and imaginally. (Source: Urban Design Project)