



# NIAGARA RIVER CORRIDOR, INTERNATIONALLY IMPORTANT WATER

Great Lakes Restoration Conference  
October 18, 2017

 University at Buffalo  
School of Law



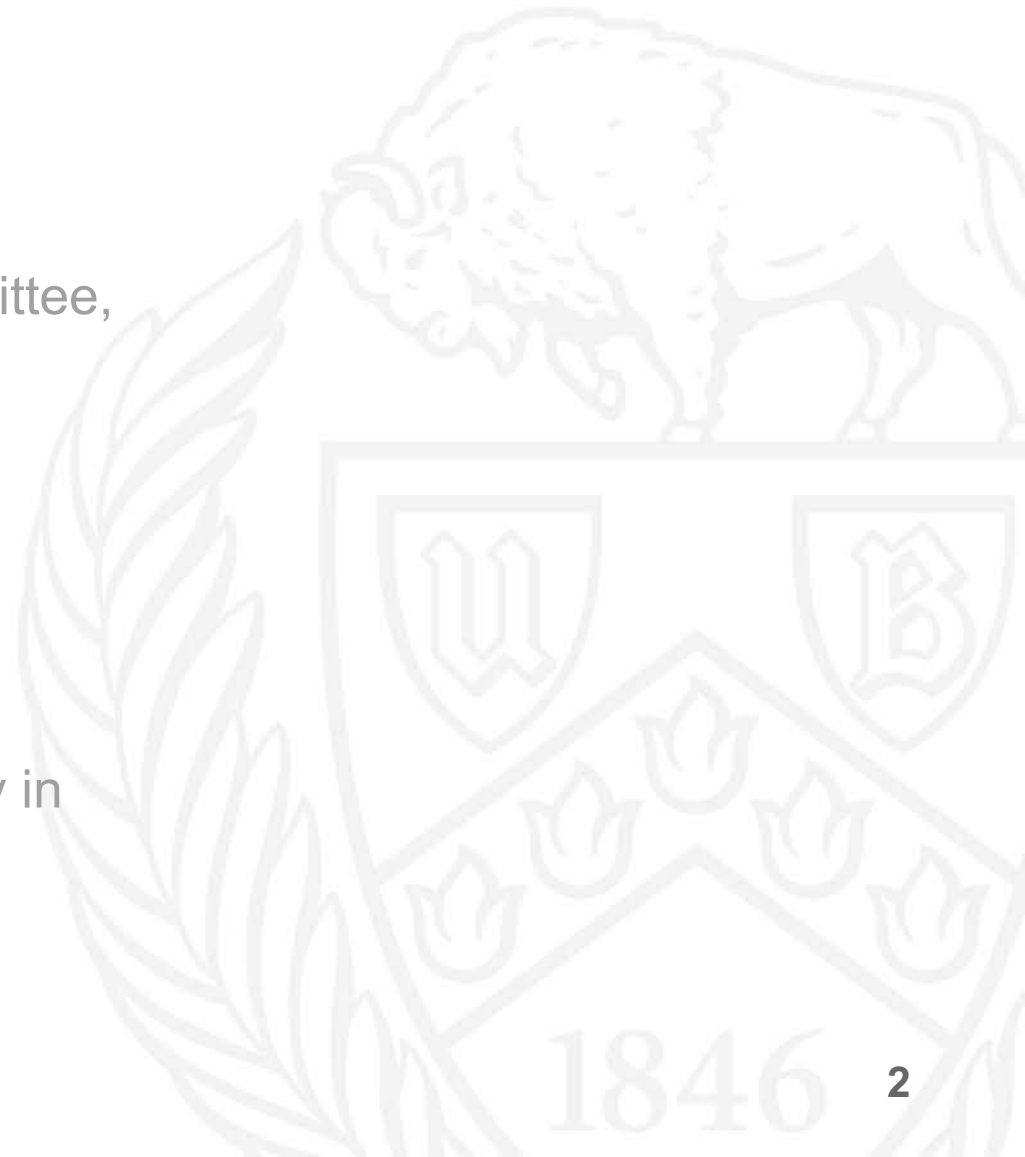
# Who We Are

Here today on behalf of:

- ◆ Niagara River Corridor Ramsar Site Steering Committee, represented by Co-Chair Jajeane Rose-Burney

Steering Committee receives research/technical support from:

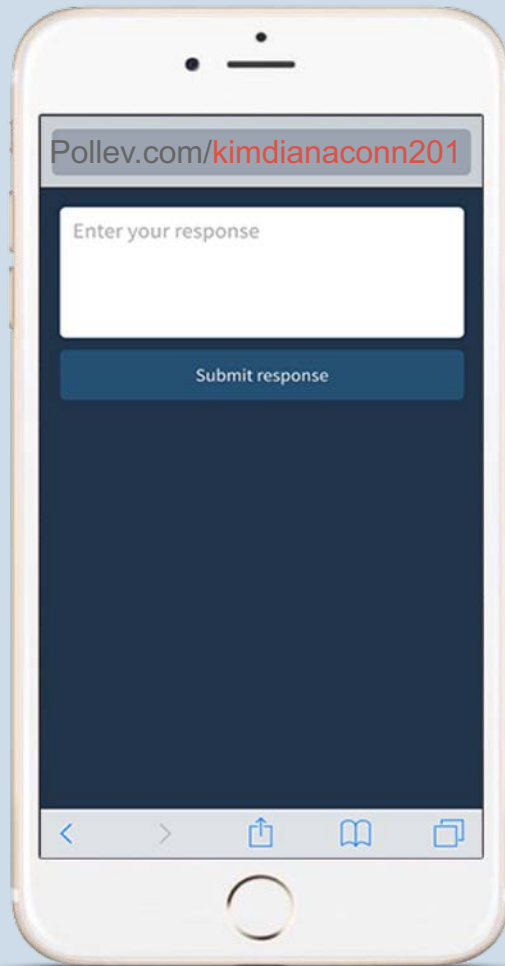
- ◆ Professor Kim Diana Connolly, U.B. Environmental Advocacy Clinic
- ◆ Student Attorneys Jacob Umoke and Heather Burley in the U.B. Clinic



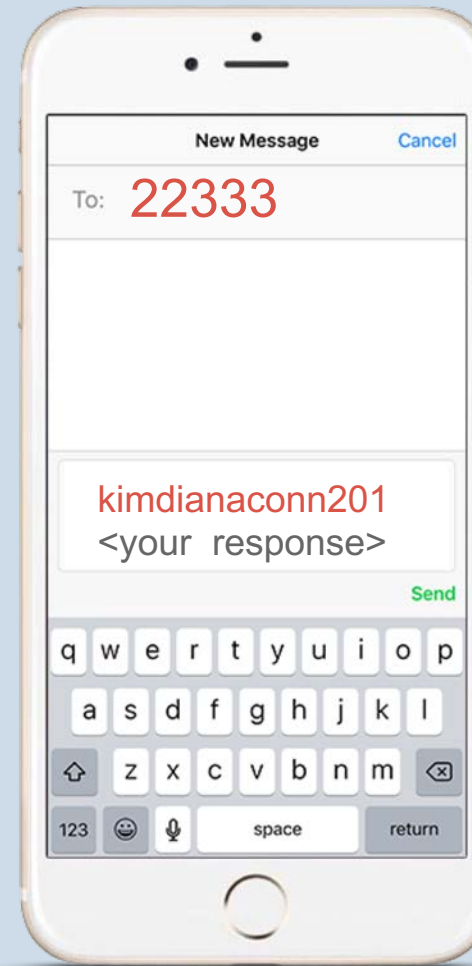
# Responding with Poll Everywhere

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*Wait for the question to appear, and respond with a click.*



**Web voting**



**Text voting**

*If responding by text message, start a new text message. You'll put the phone number or five digit code in the "to" line. Type in this username followed by your answer in the body of the message.*



## Are you already familiar with the "Ramsar Treaty?"

Yes

No

I have heard  
of it but I'm  
not familiar

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# Ramsar: Overview

- The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, or Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty.
- Signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971. The Secretariat in Switzerland.
- Mission: *the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world.*
- “Wetlands”– defined by Ramsar Treaty– includes rivers, lakes, reservoirs, bays among others.
- A Ramsar Site is a “Wetland of International Importance.”



# Ramsar: Overview

- 169 member nations
- Over 200,000,000 hectares of wetlands on over 2,160 nominated sites
- 37 Ramsar Sites in Canada and 38 in the U.S.
  - Examples include Long Point and Point Pelee on Lake Erie, and the San Francisco Bay / Estuary



# Ramsar: Overview

- 0 Ramsar recognition is **voluntary, non-regulatory, and non-binding**.
  - (The non-regulatory nature of Ramsar does benefit sites, as we will discuss.)
- 0 Member nations recommend the nomination of sites to the Ramsar Secretariat.
  - Canadian Wildlife Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- 0 A site must meet at least one of nine established criteria.
- 0 Ramsar nomination packages speak to: 0
  - The ecological criteria of a proposed site 0
  - The endorsement of landowners 0
  - The endorsement of a state wildlife/natural resource agency, and 0
  - The endorsement from a member of Congress







# Benefits to Great Lakes Region

- Ramsar recognition of Niagara River Corridor would:
  - ✓ Better possibilities for funding of improvement projects in the Great Lakes Region
  - ✓ Increase in tourism in the Great Lakes Region
  - ✓ Increase awareness of the importance of the Niagara River Corridor and Great Lakes region—locally, nationally and internationally





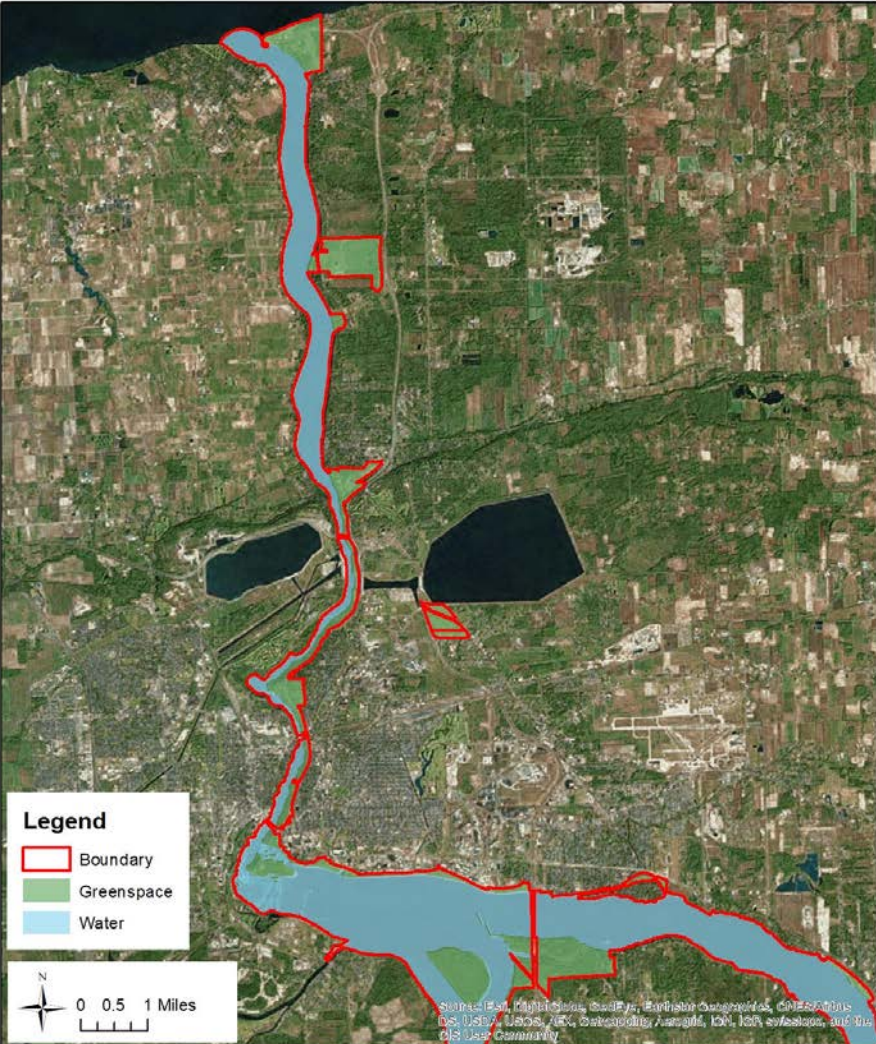
# Niagara as a Ramsar Site

- Proposal to Nominate the Niagara River Corridor: (
  - The river itself – shore to shore, lake to lake
  - Riparian areas / protected greenspaces along the river
  - Area: 37 sq. mi. (20 sq. mi. in US and 17 sq. mi. in Canada)
  - First Transboundary Ramsar Site in North America (
- Nomination Project of Niagara River Corridor involves: (
  - Steering Committee, comprised of active Canadian and U.S. members
  - Advisory Group, comprised of dozens of stakeholders

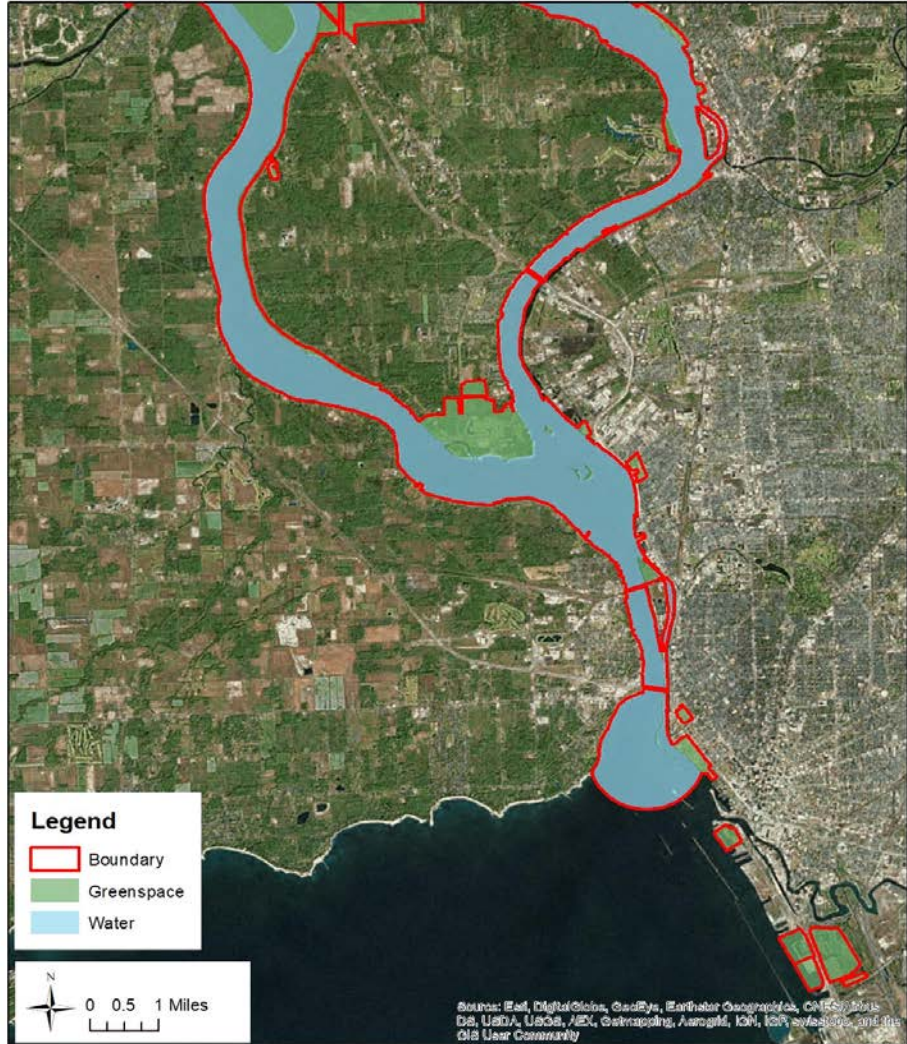




## Niagara Corridor Ramsar Site Potential Boundary - North



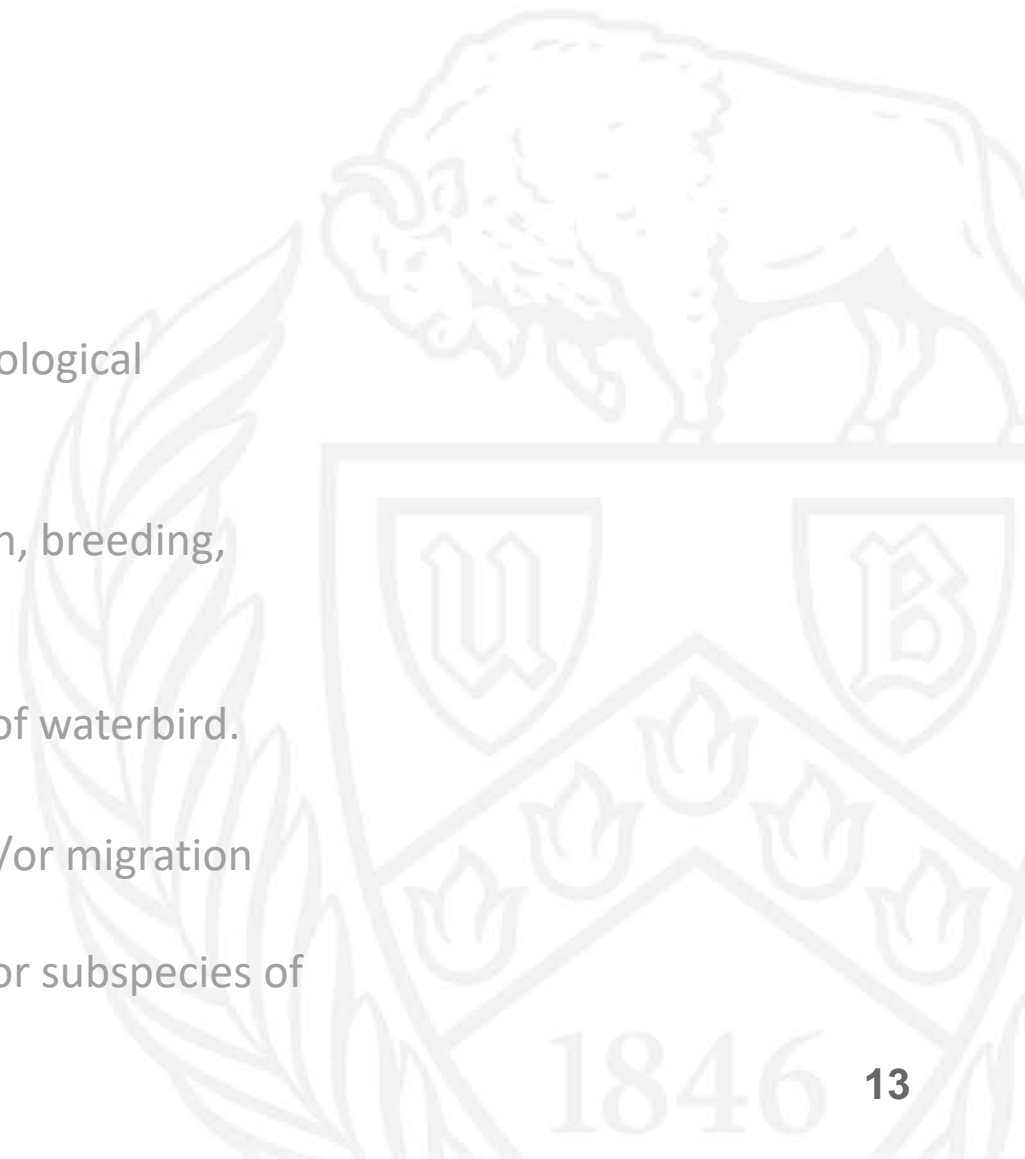
## Niagara Corridor Ramsar Site Potential Boundary - South



# Niagara as a Ramsar Site

## The nine Ramsar Criteria

1. \$Is representative, rare, or unique.
2. \$Supports vulnerable or endangered species, or threatened ecological communities.
3. \$Supports keystone or endemic species.
4. \$Supports species at a critical stage in their life cycles (migration, breeding, nesting).
5. \$Supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.
6. \$Supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species of waterbird.
7. \$Supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish species.
8. \$Is an important source of food, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path for fish.
9. \$Supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species.

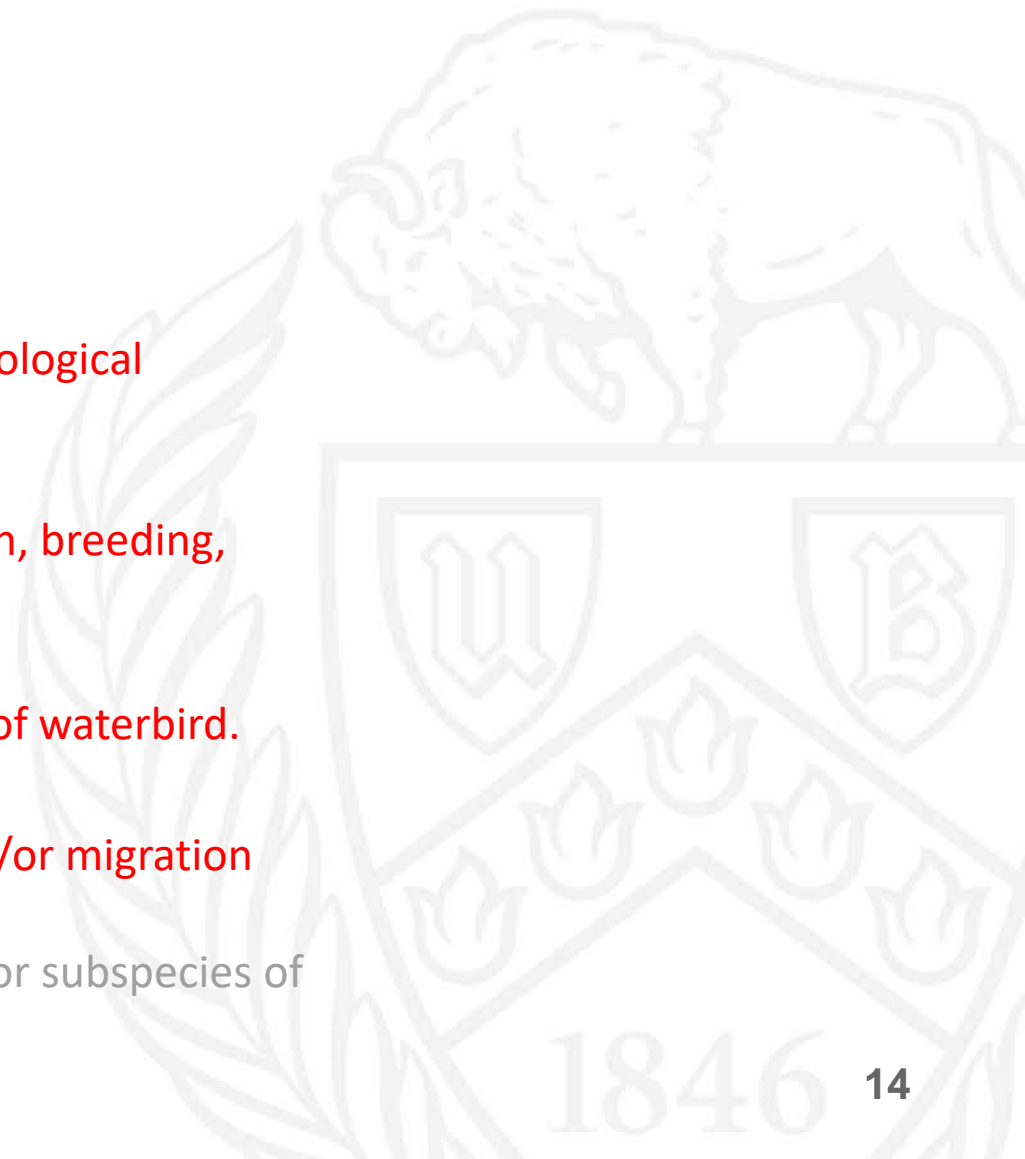




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# Niagara as a Ramsar Site

- Supports at least:
  - 338 species of birds
  - 102 species of fish
  - 35 species of mammals
  - 14 species of reptiles
  - 17 species of amphibians
  - 12 species of mussels
  - and 734 species of plants.
- Of these species:
  - 30 are listed in CITES (Conv. on Int'l Trade in Endangered Species) (
  - 7 listed on IUCN Red List (Int'l Union for Conservation of Nature)
  - 1 protected federally, 54 protected in NYS



## Niagara as a Ramsar Site

- %A globally significant Important Bird Area (IBA) %
  - More than 120,000 waterbirds: single day observations have exceeded 100,000 gulls and 20,000 waterfowl %
  - %More than 1% of the total population of at least six waterbirds:
    - » Canvasback %
    - » Greater Scaup %
    - » Red-breasted Merganser %
    - » Bonaparte's Gull %
    - » Herring Gull
    - » Ring-billed Gull %



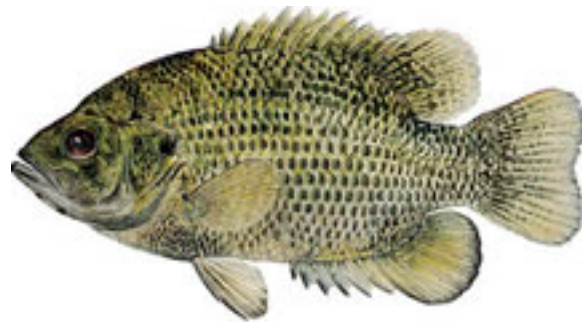


# Niagara as a Ramsar Site

- At least 89 species of indigenous, freshwater fish &
- At least 41 species of fish spawn in the river



▲ Largemouth Bass



▲ Rock Bass



▲ Sturgeon



▲ Northern Pike



▲ Walleye



Share some of your memories/ experiences with the Niagara River Corridor

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## Why Niagara?

- The Niagara River is a place of rare ecological and cultural significance.
- The river, its natural resources, habitats, and ecological services are threatened.
- The Ramsar Site recognition has proven to:
  - Improve possibilities of national and international funding
  - Create opportunities for tourism
  - Increase awareness of the importance of the wetland, locally, nationally and internationally

# Why Niagara?

- Alignment with strategic planning initiatives:
  - Niagara River Remedial Plan (in Canada, Ramsar is noted specifically in the Federal Niagara River RAP Governance Agreement Application to the Great Lakes Sustainability Fund (GLSF), and the RAP coordination agreement between the NPCA and the province.
  - NYS's Great Lakes Action Agenda
  - NYS's Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Strategy for Prosperity
  - The Niagara River Greenway Plan
  - The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area plan
  - The Niagara River Important Bird Area (IBA) conservation plan



## Legal Impact of Ramsar Recognition

- Ramsar recognition is considered an honorary endorsement of the ecological significance of the site
- It is **voluntary** and **non-regulatory**
- Ramsar recognition of the Niagara River Corridor will not impose any legally enforceable restrictions on landowners or affect sovereignty rights.

# Legal Impact of Ramsar Recognition

- ' Any and all treaty obligations have been fulfilled
  - ✓ US has already nominated sites
- ' Managers of site are supposed to assure wise use
- ' Wise use in places like San Francisco has benefitted and not limited activity on-site
- ' There has been no litigation regarding Ramsar in the United States

## Study of U.S. Ramsar Sites (Gardner and Connolly 2007)

- Study done to assess whether Ramsar Convention's non-regulatory approach benefits sites
- The United States already has many federal and state laws that protect wetlands
- Benefits found:
  - Increased Funding Opportunities
  - Support Site and Surrounding Area Protection &
  - Science and Tourism

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## ARTICLES

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The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Assessment of International Designations Within the United States

by Royal C. Gardner and Kim Diana Connolly





# San Francisco Bay/Estuary

- Recognition date: 2013
- Area: 1,600 square miles
- Federal, state, and private ownership
- Ecosystem services of SF Bay:
  - ✓ Flood and erosion control,
  - ✓ Pollution control / water quality
  - ✓ Carbon sequestration (\$20-200/acre/year)
  - ✓ Habitat for target wildlife species
- Annual regional values/impact:
  - ✓ Commercial fishing: \$12.2 million
  - ✓ Sport fishing: \$65.5-\$98.3 million
  - ✓ Hunting: \$5.5-\$6.7 million
  - ✓ Water transportation: \$48.8 million
  - ✓ Mineral extraction: \$39.7 million
  - ✓ Oyster shell mining: \$5.4-\$7.2 million
  - ✓ Shipping & ports: \$2.0 billion
  - ✓ Amenity values: \$1.83 billion in income



## Blue Economy of Buffalo Niagara

- Western New York has access to just over 20% of the world's fresh surface water in a global climate with increasingly scarce water resources.
- Local water resources are central to:
  - ✓ Recreation
  - ✓ Eco-tourism
  - ✓ Fish and wildlife
  - ✓ Manufacturing
  - ✓ Waste processing
  - ✓ Power generation
  - ✓ Trans-shipment
  - ✓ Drinking water



If any audience members know of wetlands or waters in the Great Lakes Region or beyond that qualify and would benefit from Ramsar recognition, feel free to get in touch with the U.B. Environmental Advocacy Clinic at:

**[law-environmentalclinic@buffalo.edu](mailto:law-environmentalclinic@buffalo.edu)**



## Personal Experiences:

- **%Heather's Childhood Memories:** The Need for Sustainable Development.
- **%Jacob's Experience:** The Uncertain Future of Our Wetlands and the Need to Conserve our Natural Heritage.

## CONCLUSION: + SUPPORT RAMSAR RECOGNITION OF + NIAGARA RIVER CORRIDOR! +

*As a water-inspired destination for millions of the world's people each year, and as a critical Canada-US border shaped in so many different ways by these waters, and as our home, and the future home of many of our children, we owe it to ourselves, to our countries and to the world to recognize and reveal the strength, fragility, and the life giving attributes of our water.*



Help spread the word about Ramsar nomination for the Niagara River  
by..."

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# THANK YOU! (

# THE END

