

## TERRITORIAL PARKS, COASTAL GUARDIANS AND OTHER CONCEPTS FOR FIRST NATIONS INVOLVEMENT IN THE GREAT LAKES HERITAGE COAST

*Mike Robbins*

Partner, The Tourism Company  
146 Laird Drive, Suite 201  
Toronto, ON M4G 3V7  
Phone: (416) 696-2792  
Fax: (416) 696-5115  
mrobbins@tourismco.com

### ABSTRACT

*The Great Lakes Heritage Coast (GLHC) is a policy statement that identifies the Great Lakes coast for special planning and management consideration (Government of Ontario, 2001). This policy statement supports a comprehensive approach to the protection and enjoyment of the significant values that are found along the coast. The Heritage Coast policy recognizes the internationally significant natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational values of the Lake Superior and Lake Huron/Georgian Bay shoreline within the planning area. In this presentation, results of work involving the GLHC initiative is discussed. As part of the GLHC Coastal Protection and Tourism Strategy, The Tourism Company visited 25 First Nations along the Coast. In this paper, the following is covered: current First Nation attitudes towards the GLHC and parks and protected areas; First Nation interests in coastal protection and tourism; First Nations, ecotourism and protected areas – an assessment of the synergies; opportunities to involve First Nations in the GLHC; challenges for GLHC stakeholders in developing strong relationships with First Nations; and, models for successful and relevant government/First Nation relationships.*

### INTRODUCTION

In 2002 – 2003, the Tourism Company was part of a multi-disciplinary consulting team retained by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) to prepare a coastal protection and tourism strategy for the *Great Lakes Heritage Coast Signature Site* (GLHC). The Tourism Company was responsible for the tourism planning component as well as the involvement of First Nations.

The resulting GLHC strategy was based on the overriding objective to focus on coastal protection and restoration. The consulting team viewed tourism both as an important form of economic development as well as a tool for coastal protection—a means to create employment for local people as well as a means to generate financial support for conservation and preservation initiatives and educate visitors to be more environmentally and socially responsible.

The intent of this paper is to review some of the key findings and recommendations regarding First Nations involvement in coastal protection, stewardship and tourism, and to raise some new concepts for consideration.

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## THE ABORIGINAL COMPONENT OF THE GREAT LAKES HERITAGE STRATEGY

The purpose of the Aboriginal component of the GLHC strategy development process was to begin to listen to each of the individual First Nation communities and work toward defining an appropriate consultation process for all 25 First Nations, with an aim to involve First Nations in the GLHC Strategy.

The Tourism Company, and associate consultants, travelled the Coast by boat and car and visited 21 of the 25 First Nation communities. A short presentation was made by the Tourism Company on the Aboriginal tourism opportunity followed by open discussions. A wide range of input was received from these community visits with discussion around environmental and cultural issues and on tourism plans and opportunities. The second step involved two 'information sharing' sessions, along the Coast, with invitations going to each of the First Nations. Through this process all but one of the First Nations along the Coast provided input on issues, concerns and ideas.

Through the community visits the consultants discovered that there is great potential for Aboriginal tourism development in each and every community; they also discovered there is a significant amount of product already in place or planned. The levels of product already in place varied across the three sub-regions—Georgian Bay, the North Channel and Lake Superior.

There are some excellent models for Aboriginal tourism along the Coast (i.e., Endaa Aang Eco-Cabins, Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, De-bah-ja-ma-jig Theatre Company, Serpent River Trading Post), and there is tremendous potential to develop more products and diversify product offerings. There is strong interest in most of the communities. The First Nations are eagerly embracing the principles of ecotourism.

There are three regional Aboriginal tourism organizations active along the Coast in developing and marketing tourism product. The first is the Northern Ontario Native Tourism Association (NONTA) active throughout northern Ontario, the second is G'Nadjiwon Ki in southern Georgian Bay, and the third is Waubetek Business Development Corporation active on Manitoulin Island.

In almost every one of the community visits the consultants had to overcome initial reluctance or negative feelings toward the *Ontario's Living Legacy* (OLL) process and the resulting designation of the Heritage Coast. Once the discussions progressed beyond this initial reluctance, issues were identified ranging from a discussion of overriding issues for First Nations to environmental restoration and protection issues and cultural sensitivity/protection issues.

### *Overriding Issues/Considerations*

- Land claims;
- Lack of trust with provincial overnment;
- Decisions made without First Nations input;
- Protected areas compromising future options;
- Grass roots consultation is required;
- Individual communities must be treated equally to other communities; and,

- Process must be culturally sensitive.

### *Environmental Issues*

- Many environmental restoration issues along the Coast (i.e., Depot Harbour, chemical sites near Serpent River);
- Some communities lack basic infrastructure;
- Impact of uncontrolled tourism a concern;
- Want eco-friendly development; and,
- Need to share information for more effective co-management of resources.

### *Cultural Issues*

- Protection of sacred sites;
- Avoid exploitation of First Nations values;
- Preservation of traditional knowledge;
- Revive interest in culture with younger generations; and,
- Capitalize on economic opportunities.

### *Conclusions*

- Some First Nations indicated that they would support the GLHC only if they have a full partnership role;
- Implementation cannot be led/controlled by a government ministry;
- Require a documented and agreed to plan for consultation and involvement;
- MNR has to demonstrate willingness to consider new models for resource management;
- A government-to-government relationship is essential; and,
- There is a need for more consistent communication with First Nations.

### *Ideas for Consideration*

- Application of seven Grandfather Teachings throughout Coast – teachings of humility, wisdom, truth, honesty, bravery, love and respect;
- Use of traditional place names and use of elders' names;
- Territorial Parks – idea of a park under management of First Nations;
- Assistance for community-based tourism plans;
- Use 7th generation timeframe – every word spoken and every action undertaken today impacts on seven generations; and,
- Management Board with First Nation positions.

A number of case studies that were conducted as part of the overall strategic planning process pointed out some useful models for partnerships between First Nations and government, as well as First Nations and environmental groups (ENGO's). Several models are discussed subsequently.

## **THE QUU'AS WEST COAST TRAIL SOCIETY**

The Quu'as West Coast Trail Society is a non-profit joint venture among the Pacheedaht, Ditidaht and Huu-ay-aht First Nations, each of which have Reserve Lands along the West Coast Trail. Quu'as has

a joint venture relationship with Parks Canada for the planning and management of the West Coast Trail, one of the three main areas within Pacific Rim National Park on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The joint venture was initiated in 1996 when the Chiefs of the three First Nations decided that they should take over contracting within the park. The relationship is unique in that it covers more than just the management of the park. The relationship is a business partnership with career training for positions within Parks Canada and mentoring assistance for new Aboriginal business ventures. Some of the funding comes from Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC). The relationship allows for the individuality of each community and the differing levels of economic development progress.

### HAIDA GWAI, QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS

In 1981 the Skidegate Band Council and the Haida Nation set up the *Haida Watchman Program* in response to concerns about the potential for vandalism and other damage to old Haida village sites. The program began with several volunteers using their own boats to travel to the sensitive sites where they would camp for the summer season. They acted as both guardians for the preservation of the sites natural and cultural values, and they presented visitors with an introduction to Haida culture.

Following six years of negotiation the *Gwaii Haanas Agreement* was signed establishing a co-operative management relationship. Common objectives for the care, protection and use of Gwaii Haanas were defined. It also provided the framework to make recommendations on planning, management and operations issues to both the government of Canada and the Council of the Haida Nation. This framework provided for the formation of the Gwaii Haanas Archipelago Management Board, with equal representation from the Haida and Parks Canada, the body charged with the consensus-based decision-making process.

Two other interesting case studies in BC involve First Nations working together with ENGO's to prepare conservation area designs and plans for their traditional territories:

- Great Bear Rainforest—25% of world's intact temperate rainforest; and,
- Taku River Wildlife Conservation Project—the largest unprotected river watershed in North America.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INVOLVING FIRST NATIONS IN THE GLHC

Recommendations for involving First Nations in the GLHC included the following:

- New models of partnership are required—i.e., co-management of protected areas, concept for Territorial Parks, incorporating traditional ecological knowledge in resource management decisions etc;
- The GLHC strategy must be a living document to enable First Nations involvement;
- The strategy must respect traditional ecological knowledge in First Nation communities; and,
- First Nations must be part of a successful coastal strategy.

The following two quotes provide further insight into the First Nations' perspective:

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*“Indigenous peoples are not mere stakeholders, but internationally recognized holders of collective and human rights, including the rights of self-determination, informed consent, and effective participation. Indigenous peoples are not objects of tourism development. We are active subjects with the rights and responsibilities to our territories and the processes of tourism planning, implementation, and evaluation that happen in them. Indigenous peoples must be the natural resource and wildlife managers of our own environments.”* (Excerpt from the Working Document of the International Forum on Indigenous Tourism, Oaxaca Mexico, 2002)

*“...it must not be forgotten that interests of the Anishinabek Nations in our forests, lands, water and air are not only economic. The Anishinabek Nation interests include spiritual, traditional, educational and social components as well.”* (Excerpt from Sucker Creek Submission to the OLL Process, 1999)

## REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL READINGS

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