

THE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT LEGACY PROJECT

Creating an Environmental Resource Inventory, Restoration and Use Plan for the Niagara Escarpment

Prepared for:

Greenway Ecological Standing Committee



Prepared by:

**Western New York Land Conservancy
Ecology and Environment, Inc.**

Greenway Ecological Fund Standing Committee

Award Guidelines and Application Requirements

1. (a) Organization name and mailing address:

**Western New York Land Conservancy
P.O. Box 471
East Aurora, NY 14052-0471**

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- (b) Federal ID number and/or Charities Registration number:

Federal Id# 22 - 3160426 Charities Registration # 05-27-68

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- (c) Point of contact for the project:

Nancy Smith, Stewardship Manager

2. Evidence of consultation with:

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- (a) the Niagara River Greenway Commission regarding a project's consistency with the NRGP;

The Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project won unanimous support and a finding of consistency from the Niagara Greenway Commission on March 20, 2012. A copy of the Commission's determination letter was forwarded to the GESC by Mr. Belue on March 21, 2012, and is included herein as attachment (A). The Commission included no comments or questions requiring a response from the Western New York Land Conservancy (WNYLC).

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- (b) the chief elected officer, or a designated representative, of any municipal, county and Indian Nation affected by the proposed project;

Based on the following map of the Niagara Escarpment, we have consulted with affected parties by contacting the following municipalities on or before May 17th: Village of Lewiston, Town of Lewiston, Town of Cambria, City of Lockport, Town of Lockport, Town of Royalton and Niagara County.



NIAGARA ESCARPMENT – NIAGARA COUNTY, NEW YORK

The support letters and resolutions that we have received thus far from the Town of Royalton, the Village of Lewiston, the Town of Cambria and the Town of Lewiston are included as attachment (B).

c) appropriate State and Federal agencies (collectively, Consulting Parties as provided for in Article V).

Based on guidance from Tim Depriest in a May 16th email, this requirement is not applicable to the Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project as the project will not require a permit.

For purposes of this section, evidence of consultation will include:

(a) A list of all materials submitted to the Consulting Parties by the project proponent including a copy of the Application submitted to the Niagara River Greenway Commission;

Each municipality was provided with a letter briefly describing the project, a copy of the Niagara Greenway Commission Proposal and a Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project summary piece. A copy of this consultation package is included as attachment (C).

(b) Copies of written comments provided by Consulting Parties to the project proponent; and

Neither the Greenway Commission nor any of the consulting parties have provided comments or questions requiring a response from the WNYLC.

(c) Documentation describing the manner in which the project proponent addressed the Consulting Parties' comments. In "addressing" comments from a consulted party, the project proponent should demonstrate that it has an understanding of the comments and should indicate whether the proponent agrees or disagrees with the comments and why. It is not required that the proponent agree with the consulted party. However, if the proponent has changed its proposal to accommodate a comment, this accommodation should be noted.

Not applicable.

3. An operation and maintenance plan for the proposed project or an explanation as to why an operation and maintenance plan is not needed for the proposed project;

As this project consists of a comprehensive survey, identification of significant resources and a set of conservation and restoration priorities and recommendations, an operations and maintenance plan is not applicable. A project schedule is included as attachment (D).

4. A description of the project's consistency with the NRGPs, including a discussion of the project's relationship to the principles, goals, and criteria established by the NRGPs;

On March 21, 2012 the Niagara River Greenway Commission unanimously deemed the Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project consistent with the Niagara River Greenway Plan based on its alignment with the principles, goals and criteria that define the Plan.

The Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project addresses the following principles, goals and criteria of the Niagara River Greenway Plan:

Note: Appropriate excerpts from the original Niagara River Greenway Commission application are included below with additional comments in italics.

- **Excellence.** *The WNYLC's long term vision is to ensure that the Niagara Escarpment is a visible, preserved, enhanced, and when possible – accessible, iconic community showpiece. An eventual linkage with Canadian and Wisconsin portions of the Escarpment would make this not only an ecological, geological and cultural treasure but also a bi-national community resource.*
- **Ecological Integrity.** *In 2007 the Great Lakes Commission identified the Niagara County portion of the Niagara Escarpment as one of the region's top five most important habitats for protection and restoration efforts. It is also specifically identified as a priority in the 2006 "New York State Open Space Conservation Plan" because of the "diversity of significant habitats along the length of the Niagara Escarpment in Niagara County." The Niagara Escarpment spans over 750 miles of unusual habitat that has received little attention, no resource inventories, and no special protection in New York State. In contrast, the portion in Canada has been given Biosphere Reserve status by the United Nations and active plans for protection are underway in Wisconsin.*
- **Connectivity.** *The Niagara Escarpment is specifically identified as an interconnection point in the Niagara Greenway Plan (p. 44). Interconnection points are described as*

important “connecting features that represent “an opportunity for creating both physical and conceptual linkages between the Greenway and rest of the Buffalo-Niagara region. They have the potential to draw both residents and visitors to the Niagara River corridor.”

The Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project will provide information on potential ecological connections by identifying wildlife corridors, and areas that may be important for breeding terrestrial birds and other wildlife.

- **Restoration.** The project will develop a plan that will highlight and prioritize areas suitable for restoration efforts in accordance with the Niagara River Greenway principles.
- **Authenticity and Celebration.** *The Niagara Escarpment has the sense of “place” that is a key defining feature of Niagara County.*
 - *Erosion along the escarpment is responsible for the gorge at Niagara Falls.*
 - *The escarpment contains some of the best exposures of 500 million year old fossils found anywhere in the world as well as threatened, rare and endangered plants and unique ecological communities.*
 - *The escarpment helps create the micro-climate and soil conditions that make possible Niagara County’s soft fruit belt and successful vineyards.*
 - *There are important stories and cultural heritage implications from the escarpment’s role in the Underground Railroad.*

What is missing is the information needed to strategically preserve, restore and celebrate this unique geologic feature for wildlife habitat and future generations.

- **Partnerships.** The project team, led by the WNYLC and E & E, will seek partnership and cooperation from a number of groups and agencies. A partial list of groups includes the Buffalo Audubon Society, Audubon of New York, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, *Niagara Frontier Botanical Society*, Niagara Soil & Water Conservation District, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Niagara Frontier Habitat Council. The Tuscarora Nation has been contacted because of their ownership and stewardship of part of the Escarpment, as well as their historical interest in the Escarpment.

Local colleges will be contacted including SUNY Buffalo, *SUNY Geneseo*, Buffalo State College, Niagara University, and Niagara County Community College. The connection with local institutions will be enhanced by the proposal to hire an intern from a local university to work on this project. This will also enhance efficient use of the project budget.

- **Community Involvement.** *The Land Conservancy has contacted the Tuscarora Nation and the seven municipalities that are impacted by this project to ask for their input and support.* Local planning and preservation groups including the Niagara County Planning Department, Niagara County Parks and Recreation, and planning and parks offices from the local towns will be invited to join the steering committee. *Local community vision and engagement will be critical to the long term success in our effort to*

preserve and restore the Niagara County portion of the Escarpment. Additional support letters are included as Attachment E.

- **Extend Olmsted’s Legacy.** *Land identified in this project has great potential for inclusion in a Frederick Law Olmsted-styled emerald necklace of parks, preserves and open spaces. The WNYLC is very interested in contributing to the successful implementation of this vision. The keynote speaker at the WNYLC’s 2012 Annual Meeting talked about a similar effort undertaken by the Finger Lakes Land Trust.*

Matching Funds/Leveraging. The following grants, investments and donations will supplement the funds that the WNYLC is requesting from the Greenway Ecological Fund Standing Committee:

- **Existing Funding for the Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project:**
 - :2012 New York Environmental Protection Fund/New York State Conservation Partnership Program administered by Land Trust Alliance: \$38,400 for a two year long project focused on stewardship, habitat restoration and acquisition along the Niagara Escarpment.
 - USFW: \$67,000 for habitat restoration, total award—\$119,000. \$52,000 used in October 2011 to complete first Niagara Escarpment acquisition
 - HSBC: \$11,000 for operating costs in coordinating land projects (grant originally \$18,000—utilized \$7,000 to complete first Niagara Escarpment acquisition)
 - Rotary Club of Lockport: \$1,500 for signage a the Niagara Escarpment Preserve
- **Funding for the Escarpment already invested**
 - Land Trust Alliance: \$16,800
 - First Niagara Bank: \$1,500
 - Hahn Family Foundation: \$15,000 for staff time to acquire the first Niagara Escarpment parcel and secure grassland restoration sites for the USFW grant
 - Private donations totaling \$15,000 utilized for the acquisition of the first NE parcel.
- **Consideration of other Planning Efforts.** *In addition to the 2007 Great Lakes Commission report and the 2006 “New York State Open Space Conservation Plan” referenced above, the Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan specifically calls for support of the Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project and working with land trusts to protect unique and significant open space resources (page 5 of Chapter X, the Implementation Plan included as Attachment F).*

5. A description of the project’s consistency with other State and Federal laws or regulations where applicable;

As the project does not include active management or impacts to lands and waters, consistency with environmental laws or regulations is not applicable.

6. A description of the project proponent’s efforts and/or opportunities to obtain matching funds;

As described under Matching Funds/Leveraging above.

7. A statement that the Greenway funds requested will not be used to defray: (1) any obligation existing as of August 31, 2007 or (2) operation and maintenance costs associated with any project existing as of August 31, 2007;

No funding provided by the Greenway Ecological Standing Committee will be used to defray any obligations or operations and maintenance costs associated with any projects existing as of August 31, 2007.

8. A description of current and proposed land ownership associated with the project; and

The following lists all of WNYLC owned properties, with Escarpment properties highlighted in blue.

WESTERN NEW YORK LAND CONSERVANCY			
Current Fee Properties			
Property Name	Town/City	County	Size (acres)
Brompton Woods	Amherst	Erie	1.5
Brown's Marsh	Wellsville	Allegany	43.4
Dyke Creek Valley	Wellsville	Alleghany	36.9
Hillside Acres	Sheridan	Chautauqua	46.4
Kenneglenn Scenic and Nature Preserve	Wales	Erie	131
Mulholland	Wellsville	Allegany	84.4
Niagara Escarpment Preserve	Lockport	Niagara	36.5
Roxberry	Clarence	Erie	26.1

Spring Brook Fen	Concord	Erie	11.7
Stolle Road Swamp	Elma	Erie	28.6
Waterman's Swamp	Napoli	Cattaraugus	10
Wildhaven	Wellsville	Allegany	130.9

The 36.5-acre Niagara Escarpment Preserve, acquired in October of 2011, is an excellent example of the unique habitats found along the Niagara Escarpment, and is the WNYLC's first Escarpment acquisition (see Attachment G). It contains 1000 linear feet of the escarpment, two plants that are considered threatened in New York State (a grove of paw paw trees, *Asimina triloba*, and giant yellow hyssop, *Agastache nepetoides*), a large number of hackberry trees (*Celtis occidentalis*), which are unusual for the area, and other vulnerable species such as ebony spleenwort (*Asplenium platyneuron*).

In addition to the WNYLC's fee properties in Niagara County, the WNYLC also protects three Niagara County properties, covering 180 acres, with permanent conservation easements: the 75-acre Lytle Nature Preserve in Lockport, the 12-acre Singer Farm in Newfane and the 93 acre Human Road Farm in Cambria. By the end of 2012 the WNYLC expects to finalize conservation easements on the 56-acre Walker Farm in Gasport and the 49-acre North Tonawanda Audubon Preserve in North Tonawanda.

In total, including fee properties and conservation easements, the WNYLC protect 64 properties covering 4757 acres in the eight counties of western New York. WNYLC proposes to use information provided by this study to guide future acquisitions of additional properties or conservation easements along the Niagara Escarpment.

9. An overall project budget and cash flow summary including all phases for which relicensing greenway funds would be sought.

Task	WNYLC	E & E	Project Cost
Task 1: Project Management and Stakeholder Coordination	\$20,000	\$19,509	\$39,509
Task 2: Desktop Resource Inventories	\$4,000	\$78,126	\$82,126
Task 3: Field Surveys	\$14,000	\$103,510	\$117,510
Task 4: Environmental Resource Inventory and Restoration and Use Plan for the Niagara Escarpment	\$17,000	\$60,528	\$77,528
TOTAL PROJECT COST	\$55,000	\$261,673	\$316,673