



Media Release

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Tourism Development Expands in Ontario's Biosphere Reserves with Provincial Support

Norfolk County, ON – The Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport has announced \$52,400 in project funding for three of Ontario's biosphere reserves – Long Point Biosphere Reserve, Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve and Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve – to support sustainable tourism advancement for the emerging biosphere tourism sector.

“Our government is pleased to support three of Ontario's biosphere reserves this year. Through the Tourism Development Fund, we will help to launch *Amazing Places*, a project that will promote tourism in these unique regions, help to conserve their ecosystems and contribute to their local economies,” says Michael Chan, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Under the provincial Tourism Development Fund program, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport supports investment attraction, product and experience development and industry capacity building.

“The funds will support a feasibility and pilot project called *Amazing Places* which will highlight the biosphere regions' unique environmental significance for interpretation and trail planning, that replicates a successful model from the Fundy Biosphere Reserve in New Brunswick,” says Dr. Rebecca Pollock, manager of the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve.

“UNESCO biosphere reserves are internationally recognized landscapes that have the potential for communities to attract tourists to unique ecosystems in a way that creates a sustainable destination, supports local economies, while protecting the environment for future generations,” says Pollock.

“As the project grows, it will encourage people to get out and explore the *Amazing Places* in Ontario's biosphere reserves, highlighting unique biodiversity, topography, landscapes or views that depict the character of each region,” says Sarah Matheson, executive director of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve. “It builds on our existing sustainable tourism initiatives.”

The feasibility project will map existing and potential trails to guide visitors within and beyond the biosphere reserve boundaries. Eventually the *Amazing Places* sites will be searchable with digital maps, and use smartphone technology for navigation and nature interpretation, including educational ecotourism videos.

“When we launch the *Amazing Places* nominations this spring for the public to submit their own favourite places,” says Matheson, “we will ensure they meet strict criteria but at the same time

are accessible to the widest range of visitors possible. We expect that familiar places will be nominated but others that are equally spectacular but less well known will make the list. We want to showcase as many as possible to the people who live and visit our UNESCO World Biosphere Reserves.”

The project supports the Ontario Trails Strategy and the provincial commitment to support the development and promotion of trails across the province.

“Each of our biospheres has been involved with trails projects in the past,” says Andrea Kilian, Sustainable Tourism project manager at the Long Point World Biosphere Reserve. “In Long Point, we have the Norfolk Trails initiative, in Frontenac Arch there are detailed trails map on the *FAB Experiences* website, and in Georgian Bay a trails symposium was held recently to link tourism and trails organizations. This funding allows us to coordinate one product, *Amazing Places*, at a provincial level, which continues to engage our local stakeholders but is more accessible to visitors in, and to, Ontario as a whole.”

In addition, ministry funding will support sustainable tourism best practices workshops that will present to local businesses the sustainability principles in tourism planning, with a focus on the environmental, social, cultural, and local economic values, and developing high-quality, high-value niche experiences for Ontario’s biosphere reserves.

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Additional Information:

UNESCO World Biosphere Reserves are landscapes where communities work to balance conservation and sustainable development. There are currently 16 biosphere reserves in Canada in a world network of over 600 in 117 countries, whose overall goal is to improve the relationship between people and their environment by promoting the conservation of biodiversity and fostering sustainable development initiatives.