



NIAGARA FALLS NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES



Alternative A: Current Conditions Continue (No Action)

This alternative assumes that existing conditions continue as they are, with current initiatives proceeding without the added component of a National Heritage Area. This serves as the baseline for comparison with the other alternatives and serves as the “No Action” alternative as required by the National Park Service.

Alternative B: Focus on Heritage Interpretation (Niagara’s Interpretive Experience)

This alternative envisions a heritage area organization working primarily behind-the-scenes to assist partners as an organizer, facilitator, and coach. The primary focus would be creating a *high quality interpretive experience* with secondary emphasis on other goals and strategies.

Alternative C: Heritage Product Development

This alternative envisions an active, leadership role in which the heritage area organization is out front as a primary player in the region, actively engaged in a wide range of potential projects and issues focused upon *heritage development*. Projects and programs that result under this scenario would be led by partners and the heritage area organization, in combination or not, as appropriate to each activity.

Alternative D: Targeted Heritage Projects (Enhanced Niagara Experience)

This alternative encourages the heritage area organization to focus on a series of specific, targeted projects that will provide *high quality interpretation, visitor experience, and community engagement*.

The three primary questions for consideration are:

1. Should the National Heritage Area be a coach and facilitator (Alternative B), should it be an active initiator (Alternative C), or should it be both depending upon the specific area of activity (Alternative D)?
2. Should the National Heritage Area have a strong single focus (Alternative B), a range of strong activities (Alternative C), or something in between (Alternative D)?
3. If in between, in which areas of interest should the National Heritage Area have a strong, leadership role (initiator/player) and in which should it have a facilitating and supporting role (coach)?

ALTERNATIVE A: CURRENT CONDITIONS CONTINUE (NO ACTION)

Under *Current Conditions Continue* the region would continue to develop without programming offered through the heritage area. Existing programs would continue to evolve as they are presently organized.

Regional Positioning (A)

- Intergovernmental coordination and heritage tourism efforts continue as currently organized.

Interpretation and Education (A)

- Existing interpretive sites continue to offer interpretive programming with occasional collaboration and coordination; historical organizations continue with their independent programs; school programs continue under existing constraints of funding and curriculum.

Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism (A)

- The City of Niagara Falls continues infrastructure initiatives and programming to enhance the visitor experience in the Falls Street district; New York State Parks continues to implement recreation,

interpretive and infrastructure programs on state park lands; local initiatives continue in the villages, at existing heritage attractions and historic sites.

Engaging our Young People (A)

- Schools and organizations continue to offer environmental and history programs for children and young adults on a limited and independent basis.

Outdoor Recreation (A)

- Existing recreational trails are maintained and improved over time by individual agencies.

Sense of Place, Sense of Community (A)

- Communities and municipalities continue to develop and strengthen their sense of place at their own discretion under individually established programs.

Historic Preservation (A)

- Local organizations continue to promote preservation within their respective communities.

Nature and the River (A)

- Continued implementation of the Niagara River Greenway plan.

Economic Revitalization (A)

- Local economic development organizations and municipalities continue to implement initiatives within their respective communities.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS COMMON TO ALL ACTION ALTERNATIVES

Certain program elements are common to all of the proposed action alternatives (Alternatives B, C & D) and are outlined below.

Heritage Area Management and Regional Positioning (A,B&C)

The heritage area organization will:

- Be a strong positive presence and **provide a forum to support heritage tourism collaboration across the region**, assuring long term leadership by maintaining the vision and articulating heritage area goals and objectives;
- **Engage and coordinate** with the applicable local, regional, national and international, organizations and agencies to recognize, preserve and promote the significant heritage resources and landscapes of the Niagara region;
- Host local, regional, national and international **activities and events** to recognize, preserve and promote the significant heritage resources and landscapes of the Niagara region;
- Seek **state, national and international designation** for the significant cultural and natural resources of the Niagara region. Create or partner with resource preservation organizations to preserve, enhance and interpret these resources; and
- [See program alternatives below.]

Interpretation and Education (A,B&C)

A high quality educational and interpretive program developed for the heritage area will:

- Provide partners with a **framework and opportunities to inform and inspire** a wide range of audiences and nurture public appreciation for the diverse communities, cultures, resources and environments in the Niagara region;

- Maintain an **inventory of materials, publications and artifacts** related to interpretive subjects within the heritage area;
- Encourage **scholarly research** on interpretive subjects within the heritage area;
- Establish the Niagara River corridor, from the Falls to the Fort, as a **regional interpretive hub** connecting to places and programs throughout Niagara and Erie counties and Canada;
- Collaborate with partners in developing a **comprehensive interpretive plan** for the heritage area around the four themes identified in the National Heritage Area Feasibility Study using existing sites and linkages;
- **Network attractions and publicly accessible sites** and resources within the heritage area and in outlying areas of Erie and Niagara counties;
- Provide easily accessible **personal and social media formats** with interpretive content for visitors; and
- [See program alternatives below.]

Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism (A,B&C)

The local coordinating entity for the heritage area will ensure an authentic visitor experience and promote regional heritage tourism opportunities by:

- Creating a **high quality website** for the NFNHA that will provide a virtual heritage area that can be experienced world-wide;
- Providing the **social media applications** needed to direct traffic to the website; that link to partner websites; and interface with the Niagara USA website for marketing and service;
- Creating a **graphic identity and brand** for the heritage area and the region; and
- [See program alternatives below.]

Engaging our Young People (A,B&C)

The local coordinating entity for the heritage area will seek to partner in providing interactive and engaging opportunities for children, teenagers, and young adults that:

- Collaborate with the **local school systems** to develop programs that use local history and historic sites to meet state curriculum requirements and support local attractions in providing **curriculum based programs** for schools in the region;
- Create a **Junior Rangers Program** for children to encourage them to visit and engage with sites in the heritage area;
- Allow local colleges and universities to **provide internships** for students in relevant programs that further the goals and objectives of the heritage area;
- Offer **scouting and other youth organizations** to use the history, landscapes and resources of the Niagara region as the means to achieving their program objectives;
- Encourage **local youth leadership organizations**, such as Leadership Niagara, in providing opportunities for achievement and advancing program objectives; and
- [See program alternatives below.]

Outdoor Recreation (A,B&C)

The local coordinating entity for the heritage area will identify and support outdoor activities and programs that:

- Provide **eco-tourism opportunities**, recreational facilities and access that enhance heritage area resources and amenities;
- Offer **resource-based recreational programming** for residents and visitors; and
- [See program alternatives below.]

Sense of Place, Sense of Community (A,B&C)

It is recognized that creating and maintaining a sense of place and community is vital to the success of the heritage area and the local coordinating entity will:

- Assist in the **recognition and restoration of significant resources** and landscapes and supporting their preservation, conservation and enhancement;
- Support communities in using the **Niagara River corridor** and associated resources as the vehicle to promote a regional sense of place;
- Collaborate with the **Greenway Commission** to support priorities identified in the Niagara River Greenway plan; **Niagara Falls** to support implementation of the city's comprehensive plan; and **Lewiston, Youngstown, Porter; and recognized tribal nations** to support community planning goals.
- [See program alternatives below.]

Historic Preservation (A,B&C)

The local coordinating entity for the heritage area will adopt established historic preservation principles and best practices to:

- Develop historic context statements for the region and engage researchers to use historic resources in the region as a **living laboratory**;
- **Encourage and support local organizations** and advocates in preserving historic resources, historic neighborhoods, and commercial centers;
- Identify and support projects and programs that are directly related to heritage area goals and purposes;
- Encourage local governments in the heritage area to prepare and update **comprehensive preservation plans**, maintain updated inventories of historic resources, and submit applications for the federal Certified Local Government (CLG) program to take advantage of historic preservation planning grants and technical assistance; and
- [See program alternatives below.]

Nature and the River (A,B&C)

The local coordinating entity for the heritage area will support restoration and enhancement of the region's natural environment and seek to engage the public in appreciating the river and nature by:

- Providing **support** to the work of other organizations in **restoring ecosystems** along with plant and animal communities within and along the Niagara River, Escarpment, and Gorge;
- Interpreting the **Native American perspectives** on relationships between the cultural and natural world; and
- [See program alternatives below.]

Economic Revitalization (A,B&C)

The local coordinating entity for the heritage area will use sustainable principles and heritage tourism best practices to:

- **Coordinate with and support local organizations** in economic development initiatives focused upon heritage tourism;
- Participate in a **“Buy Local”** initiative that encourages consumers to purchase locally made goods and services;
- Train local residents in the **skills and trades** necessary to provide the goods and services associated with a strong heritage tourism economy;
- Facilitate and **promote locally made food products, arts, and crafts** as part of the heritage tourism economy; and
- [See program alternatives below.]

ALTERNATIVE B: FOCUS ON INTERPRETATION (NIAGARA’S INTERPRETIVE EXPERIENCE)

Under *Niagara’s Interpretive Experience* the National Heritage Area would concentrate upon the single task of developing, coordinating, and enriching the interpretive experience from the ‘Falls to the Fort’ with connections to thematically associated sites in Niagara and Erie Counties. The heritage area would work primarily through existing partnership organizations and sites. *Niagara’s Interpretive Experience* would be a bold, creative initiative combining world-class interpretive exhibits, living history, media presentations, and programming set appropriately into the authentic natural and community landscapes of the heritage area. This would be Niagara’s ‘experience center’ without walls providing residents with knowledge and understanding of the environment and landscape in which they live and encouraging exploration by visitors.

Heritage Area Management and Regional Positioning (B)

- [The heritage area organization will] play a **coordinating, facilitating, and supporting role** in aspects related to heritage tourism promotion and development with partner organizations taking the lead roles.

Interpretation and Education (B)

- Collaborate with State Parks to use the existing **park visitor center as the primary hub** for interpretive experiences to be offered along the entire river corridor. Introduce each of the interpretive themes and the interpretive networks and experiences associated with each.
- Collaborate with partners in **Lewiston and Youngstown** to create interpretive centers or hubs introducing the heritage area in new or existing venues within their communities.
- Identify and develop the necessary interpretive and educational infrastructure and programming including: 1) an interpretive **hub for each** of the four themes; 2) **interpretive trails** through the river corridor and communities linking interpretive sites related to each of the four themes; and 3) coordinated, **high quality landscape exhibits** providing comprehensive and engaging interpretive experiences around each theme. Support the development of **interior interpretive experiences** at appropriate partnering sites.
- Once the plan is developed, the heritage area would **coordinate, guide, and assist partners** in implementing the portions of the interpretive experience to be located on their respective sites. The project would begin with a **core program** of sufficient quality and extent to be successfully promoted to residents and visitors. Additional experiences would be **phased in** over time.
- Establish a **graphic identity** for the *Niagara’s Interpretive Experience*, including signage, publications, website, and promotional materials. Materials related to each of the four themes would be coordinated

but have identifiably **distinct appearances** within the same format (using elements such as color or icons).

Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism (B)

- **Collaborate with existing organizations** in developing and implementing **programs and standards for improving the overall visitor experience**.
- Play a primary role in **assisting attractions, sites, and communities** with high quality and engaging interpretive experiences and programming that are authentic, accurate, and engaging.

Engaging our Young People (B)

- Provide a **local history program** for local school children that instill a sense of appreciation and pride for the community and environment in which they live.
- Create **seasonal employment opportunities for young adults** that are residents and students in the Niagara region to implement planned interpretive programs.

Outdoor Recreation (B)

- Coordinate and **support resource-based recreational programming** offered by partnering organizations for residents and visitors.
- Provide **technical assistance, grants, and organizational capabilities** to relate recreational programming directly to *Niagara's Interpretive Experience*.
- **Encourage partners** to restore and improve existing trails and to create new trail connections where they do not now exist.

Sense of Place, Sense of Community (B)

- Promote **physical and interpretive connections** throughout the river corridor that strengthen the sense of regional identity.

Historic Preservation (B)

- Provide **interpretive and educational programming** that directly supports community preservation goals.

Nature and the River (B)

- Provide **educational and interpretive programming** that support environmental goals and objectives set forth in the Niagara River Greenway plan.

Economic Revitalization (B)

- Integrate **interpretive programming** into commercial districts serving both visitors and residents.

ALTERNATIVE C: HERITAGE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Under *Heritage Development* the National Heritage Area would take an active role in a series of initiatives focused upon heritage development and community enhancement. A new interpretive center, trails system, and network of high quality interpretive exhibits would be at the core of its activities. Like USA Niagara, the heritage area would have a direct role in developing and implementing its core projects.

Heritage Area Management and Regional Positioning (C)

- [The heritage area organization will] become a **strong leadership organization** capable of raising funds and implementing heritage tourism projects and programs on the ground. The organization would gain its strength from the interests and capabilities of its partners, who are to be thoroughly engaged.

Interpretation and Education (C)

- Operate a **central interpretive center near the park entrance** with exhibits introducing the heritage area themes and the new system of trails and landscape interpretive exhibits and collaborate with partners in **Lewiston and Youngstown** to create interpretive centers in new or existing venues.
- Design, construct, and manage a **comprehensive system of landscape interpretive exhibits** along the trails system noted above and within communities.
- Create a **certified guides program** to assist visitors and tour operators.

Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism (C)

- Play a major role in creating a high quality visitor experience along the river corridor such as programs offered by the National Park Service. Establish **guidelines** and create **incentives**. Establish a **certified quality designation** and logo that can be displayed by qualifying businesses.
- Use the Niagara Falls central interpretive center as a **transportation hub** for visitors and tour operators. Provide access to multiple means of transportation, walking, bike, rental car, guided tour, and public. Establish a regularly scheduled **mobile visitor center shuttle system** between the Falls and the Fort.
- Implement a **wayfinding signage** system that uses the region's graphic identity.

Engaging our Young People (C)

- Create an **Ambassadors Program** to engage local young people in presenting their communities to visitors.
- Participate with the **Student Conservation Association** in establishing a program for **environmental and outdoor recreation enhancements**.

Outdoor Recreation (C)

- Design, restore, construct, and manage a **comprehensive trail system** from the Falls to the Fort with connections into adjacent communities.
- Develop **cooperative leases** and/or concession relationships with State Parks and other partners to facilitate implementation.
- Develop and promote resource-based **recreational programming** for residents and visitors using the Niagara River trails system.

Sense of Place, Sense of Community (C)

- Actively work with the villages of Youngstown and Lewiston and to implement projects that preserve and enhance **village centers and neighborhoods**;
- Assist the City of Niagara Falls and neighborhood organizations in implementing the vision for the **'City in the Garden'** as outlined in the city's comprehensive plan.

Historic Preservation (C)

- Develop a **comprehensive preservation plan** for communities along the river corridor.
- Perform the role of a **non-profit historic preservation advocacy organization** within the heritage area to lead implementation of the preservation plan.
- Actively seek out opportunities to **stabilize, rehabilitate and restore** abandoned and blighted historic buildings and structures in the City of Niagara Falls.

Nature and the River (C)

- Take an active role in **restoring ecosystems** along with plant and animal communities along the river.

Economic Revitalization (C)

- Working with local partners, implement an aggressive **small business development** program focused upon providing high quality visitor services and the arts. Work closely with business associations in

Youngtown and Lewiston and in the Falls Street, Third Street, Pine Avenue, Upper Main, Niagara Street area, and LaSalle districts of Niagara Falls.

- Create a **heritage tourism institute** for the benefit of educating local residents in local history, the natural environment and heritage tourism.
- Offer financial assistance in the form of **grants and micro-loans** for tourism related small business startups.

ALTERNATIVE D: TARGETED HERITAGE PROJECTS (ENHANCED NIAGARA EXPERIENCE)

Following the initial discussion of alternatives with the Commission, Alternative D was created to provide a more robust version of Alternative B by incorporating appropriate elements from Alternative C as well as other elements that may be identified through public and partner review and discussion. Under *Enhanced Niagara Experience*, the National Heritage Area would concentrate upon the three topics of interpretation, visitor experience, and community engagement.

As outlined in Alternative B, the heritage area would develop, coordinate, and enrich the interpretive experience from the ‘Falls to the Fort’ as a primary activity with connections to thematically associated sites in Niagara and Erie Counties. In addition, the heritage area would play a leadership role in developing and maintaining a high quality visitor experience including visitor information, hospitality, transportation, wayfinding, and services. The heritage area’s role would vary depending upon the specific activity. Where existing organizations are able to lead, the heritage area would play a coordinating, facilitating, and supporting role. Where existing leadership is lacking, the heritage area would be an active leader and developer.

Community engagement would be an equally important focus and would be incorporated into as many programming initiatives as possible. The heritage area would engage residents through programming, research, educational initiatives, historic preservation, employment opportunities, and support for local businesses.

The *Enhanced Niagara Experience* alternative would be a bold, creative initiative combining world-class interpretive exhibits, living history, media presentations, and programming set appropriately into the authentic natural and community landscapes of the heritage area. This would be Niagara’s ‘experience center without walls’ providing residents with knowledge and understanding of the environment and landscape in which they live and encouraging exploration by visitors.

Heritage Area Management and Regional Positioning (D)

- [The heritage area organization will] play a **lead role** and fill critical gaps **in creating a high quality visitor experience** in such areas as visitor information, hospitality programs and training, visitor transportation, wayfinding, and visitor services. The organization will play a **coordinating, facilitating, and supporting role** in activities related to **economic development, community enhancement, and environmental quality**.

Interpretation and Education (D)

- Operate a **central interpretive center for the heritage area** near the entrance to the Niagara Reservation State Park with exhibits introducing the heritage area themes and providing information on and access to the system of attractions, trails, and landscape interpretive exhibits throughout the heritage area and the region.

- Collaborate with partners in **Lewiston, Youngstown, Porter and the Indian nations** to create interpretive centers or hubs introducing the heritage area in new or existing venues within their communities.
- Identify and develop the necessary interpretive and educational infrastructure and programming including: 1) an interpretive **hub for each** of the four themes; 2) **interpretive trails** through the river corridor and communities linking interpretive sites related to each of the four themes; and 3) coordinated, **high quality landscape exhibits** providing comprehensive and engaging interpretive experiences around each theme. Support the development of **interior interpretive experiences** at appropriate partnering sites. Provide easily accessible **personal and social media formats** with interpretive content for visitors.
- Once the plan is developed, the heritage area would **coordinate, guide, and assist partners** in implementing the portions of the interpretive experience to be located on their respective sites. The project would begin with a **core program** of sufficient quality and extent to be successfully promoted to residents and visitors. Additional experiences would be **phased in** over time.
- Establish a **graphic identity** for the *Niagara's Interpretive Experience*, including signage, publications, website, and promotional materials. Materials related to each of the four themes would be coordinated but have identifiably **distinct appearances** within the same format (using elements such as color or icons).

Visitor Experience and Heritage Tourism (D)

- Play a leadership role in creating and maintaining a high quality visitor experience along the river corridor. Fulfill and exceed visitor expectations for programming associated with the National Heritage Area and National Park Service brands. Establish **visitor experience guidelines** and create **incentives** for their implementation. Identify and promote **best practices** for heritage tourism and visitor experience. Establish a **certified quality and sustainability designation** and logo that can be displayed by qualifying businesses and programs.
- Create and implement a **heritage-area-wide transportation plan** oriented to visitors and residents. Use the Niagara Falls central interpretive center as a **transportation hub** for visitors and tour operators. Provide multi-modal transportation access and connections including pedestrian, bicycle, personal vehicle, rental car, tour buses, and visitor shuttles.
- Establish a system of **mobile visitor centers** between the Falls and the Fort. The mobile visitor centers would be shuttles with interpretive content offered through guides, living history interpreters, and/or media presentations. They would be operated on a regular schedule and could be initiated through partnerships with local tour operators.
- Implement a comprehensive **wayfinding signage** system that uses the region's graphic identity. Coordinate with recommendations in the Niagara River Greenway plan and Seaway Trail.
- Create a map or **series of maps that provide walking and driving tours** for the heritage area.
- Work with the existing system of tour operators to **provide trained "step-on" guides** that are available to tell the heritage area story to tour groups.

Engaging our Young People (D)

- Create an active local youth component within the **Ambassadors Program** noted under the Heritage Tourism section above. Recruit, train, and certify young adults within the community to be ambassadors, capable of interacting with and assisting visitors throughout the heritage area. Through the Ambassadors Program, provide **seasonal employment opportunities for young adults** through local businesses providing visitor services and through heritage area programming.

- Maintain an awareness of **regional scholastic initiatives**, research programs and conservation projects that may provide opportunity for students to assist the heritage area in implementing its goals and objectives;
- Partner with **local trades organizations** in developing a program that teaches young adults the skills and trades necessary to create a restoration economy in the Niagara region.

Outdoor Recreation (D)

- Through partnership efforts map, enhance, rehabilitate and promote a **comprehensive trail network** throughout the heritage area that links parks, historic sites, attractions, communities, and neighborhoods.
- Encourage and assist partners in **restoring and improving existing trails** and in **creating new trail connections** where they do not now exist.
- Provide **technical assistance, grants, and organizational capabilities** to relate recreational programming directly to the heritage area's interpretive experience.

Sense of Place, Sense of Community (D)

- Assist heritage area communities and program partners with specific projects and events that create an **unusual or unique sense of place**.
- Place NFNHA **exhibits at regional transportation terminals** such as the train station and airport to promote the heritage area.

Historic Preservation (D)

- Assist local partners in establishing and supporting a **central database** for historical information, documents, and research.
- Collaborate with local partners in establishing and implementing an **oral history project** coordinated with the central database and research program noted above.

Nature and the River (D)

- Create and promote opportunities for visitors to enjoy **local foods** and beverages in appreciation of the region's agriculture resulting from the unique microclimate and natural resources.

Economic Revitalization (D)

- Focus especially upon support for **small business development** in commercial areas that provide visitor services.