

## Chapter 4 • Environmental Consequences

### 4.1 General Methodology for Assessing Impacts

This chapter provides an overview of the potential impacts of each of the four alternatives described in Chapter 2, Alternatives, of the Environmental Assessment for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area. As described in Chapter 1, Purpose and Need, the following impact topics by categories have been retained for analysis:

#### Natural Resources and Landscapes

- The Niagara Gorge and Escarpment, Unique Ecosystem
- Vegetation/Threatened and Endangered Plant Species
- Important Wildlife

#### Historic and Cultural Resources

- Historic Properties and Districts
- Native American Associated Sites other than Indian Trust Resources and Sacred Sites
- Archeological Resources
- Interpretive Facilities and Collections

#### Socio-economic Context

- Socio-economic factors, employment

#### Tourism and Visitor Experience

- Visitor experience
- Scenic and recreation resources

The *Environmental Assessment and Management Plan for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area* is conceptual and programmatic in scope. As a result of the plan's broadly defined policies and programs, this discussion of environmental impacts focuses on the types of consequences that could be associated with certain strategies, policies, and action items, rather than site-specific or project-specific impacts. If individual projects within the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area are undertaken in the future, they would need to comply with all applicable state and local requirements including, but not limited to zoning statutes, wetlands and/or waterway permits, and floodplain regulations. Future projects that receive federal assistance would require additional compliance under such laws as the National Environmental Policy Act and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act at the time they are undertaken.

The implementation of the management plan will depend upon the coordinated actions of a wide range of partner organizations and the public according to capacity, resources, and level of commitment and recognition. Therefore, while some of the impact topics discussed here may be analyzed quantitatively, the programmatic nature of the overall management plan and its implementation lends itself to a qualitative discussion of anticipated environmental consequences.

In this chapter, each impact topic will be described briefly, followed by an analysis of each alternative's anticipated environmental consequences associated with that impact topic evaluated on both a short-term and long-term basis.

The environmental impact analysis includes an assessment of beneficial and adverse impacts; direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts; and, to the extent possible, the context, duration, and intensity of impacts. Environmental impacts are evaluated and described comparatively in this chapter. The following terms are used to describe the general nature of an anticipated environmental impact:

- Beneficial – The impact is generally positive.
- Adverse – The impact is generally negative.

The following terms are used to describe the relative intensity of adverse environmental impacts:

- Negligible – The impact is barely perceptible or not measurable.
- Minor – The impact is slightly detectable and measurable but is either localized or would not adversely affect resources.
- Moderate – The impact is clearly detectable and could have appreciable adverse effect on resources.
- Major – The impact is substantial and highly noticeable or measurable.

The following terms are used to describe the duration of anticipated environmental impacts:

- Short-term – The impact within the first year.
- Long-term – The impact within a two to ten year timeframe or longer.

Environmental impacts may also be direct, occurring in the same place and at the same time as the proposed action or alternative; indirect, occurring at a time or in a space somewhat removed from the proposed action or alternative; or cumulative, occurring as the result of multiple actions over time.

The majority of environmental impacts that result from the four potential alternative futures for heritage area management and implementation are expected to be positive because of the management plan's focus on resource identification, protection, and enhancement. In the impact assessments outlined below, the beneficial impacts are described within a short-term and long-term framework.

## **4.2 Summary of Key Differences among the Alternatives**

Four potential alternatives for heritage area management have been developed. The alternatives, described in detail in Chapter 2, include one "Current Conditions" alternative and three "Action" alternatives:

- Alternative A, *Current Conditions Continue (No Action)*
- Alternative B, *Focus on Interpretation*
- Alternative C, *Focus on Heritage Product Development*
- Alternative D, *Focus on Visitor Experience*

Under **Alternative A**, *Current Conditions Continue*, (the no action alternative) the region would continue to develop without programming offered through the heritage area. Existing local and regional programs would continue to evolve as they are presently organized.

**Alternatives B, C, and D** (the action alternatives) all work to promote the following goals: providing opportunities for learning about the significance of the Niagara Falls region through the fostering of close working relationships and partnerships; identifying, protecting, and promoting historic and cultural resources; enhancing and promoting the region's natural, recreational, and scenic resources; providing opportunities for interpretation, education, and research of the area's significant social and geologic history; and promoting heritage tourism and a positive visitor experience throughout the region. Though the alternatives share these goals, each of the three alternatives emphasizes them and their associated strategies to varying degrees.

**Alternative B**, *Focus on Interpretation*, envisions a heritage area organization working primarily behind the scenes assisting 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. The heritage area would implement this alternative through such activities as assisting attractions, sites, and communities with exhibits, living history, media, and programming.

**Alternative C**, *Focus on Heritage Product Development*, emphasizes an active, leadership role in which the heritage area's local coordinating entity 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*. While still working closely with partners, the heritage area might initiate, manage, and develop projects on its own. Projects undertaken under this alternative could include a new interpretive center, extensive trails system, and a network of interpretive exhibits. Among the alternatives, Alternative C is also most focused on stewardship. The local coordinating entity would seek opportunities to rehabilitate and restore blighted historic buildings and structures and enhance commercial centers and neighborhoods. It would also take an active role in restoring ecosystems along with plant and animal communities along the river.

**Alternative D**, *Focus on Visitor Experience*, is a hybrid of Alternatives B and C. Where existing groups can lead, the heritage area would play a facilitating and supportive role, as in Alternative B. Where no leadership exists, the heritage area would be an active leader and developer, as in Alternative C. Types of projects that could be undertaken under Alternative D could include supporting projects addressing economic development, community enhancement, and environmental quality; and operating a central interpretive center and working to fill gaps in such areas as hospitality programs and training, visitor transportation, and wayfinding.

Alternative B primarily addresses enriching the interpretive experience. Alternative C includes interpretation along with trail development, community revitalization, ecosystem restoration, and visitor services among its top priorities. Alternative B emphasizes a partnership role whereas Alternative C represents an organization developing and implementing projects directly.

Alternative D is a more robust version of Alternative B with elements of Alternative C. In Alternative D the heritage area has a broader focus and more opportunities to act as a leader than in Alternative B, and Alternative D relies more upon partnership opportunities than Alternative C. Neither Alternatives B nor D includes the direct involvement in revitalization and environmental stewardship work that is proposed in Alternative C. Due to its direct role in environmental stewardship, Alternative C is identified as the Environmentally Preferred Alternative in Chapter 2, *Alternatives*.

### 4.3 Natural Resources and Landscapes

The management, preservation, protection, and interpretation of natural resources, including policies and strategies for appropriate land and water resource management, is a primary purpose for which the heritage area was created. Each of the alternatives developed for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area seeks to achieve the goal of natural resource protection, but do so to varying degrees. Therefore, potential impacts that concern natural resources must be considered, including: the Niagara Gorge and Escarpment, Unique Ecosystem; vegetation/threatened and endangered plant species; and important wildlife.

#### 4.3.1 The Niagara Gorge and Escarpment, Unique Ecosystem

**Alternative A, Current Conditions Continue, Alternative B, Focus on Heritage Interpretation, Alternative C, Focus on Heritage Product Development, and Alternative D, Focus on Visitor Experience**, each would have an indirect, minor beneficial impact on the geological features, hydrology, habitats, or any other resources associated with the Niagara Escarpment and Gorge within the heritage area on a short-term basis. For Alternative A, no applications have been submitted for the next year of funding that address this impact topic. For the three action alternatives, the heritage area organization will be focusing on other goals and priorities during the first year.

**Alternative A, Current Conditions Continue** would have the same minor impact as the heritage area alternatives for the short-term because the ongoing implementation of the *Niagara River Greenway Plan* identifies the significance of this unique ecosystem, but does not require that funds be used to specifically implement projects related to its preservation and enhancement. Goals and objectives are provided in the greenway plan, similar to the heritage area that seek to preserve and enhance the Niagara Gorge and Escarpment, but are only achieved if an applicant seeking funding for a specific project chooses to do so. No applicant has submitted an application that would directly achieve such objectives to date. The fact that an applicant for funding through the greenway program may submit such an application in the future warrants consideration that a direct, moderate beneficial impact on the Niagara Gorge and Escarpment is feasible for the long-term under Alternative A.

**Alternatives B and D**, while encouraging and advocating the protection of environmental resources in the Niagara Gorge and Escarpment by heritage area partners, does not ever directly involve the heritage area organization in implementing actual environmental preservation or enhancement projects. However, the natural environment is a primary interpretive focus for the heritage area under the Natural Phenomenon heading and any interpretation efforts pursued under Alternative B and D likely enhancing and expanding opportunities for the public to appreciate and enjoy the natural resources associate with the gorge and escarpment. For this reason, the two alternatives are likely to both have a indirect, moderate beneficial impact over the long-term.

Since ‘short-term’ is defined in this chapter as the activities and projects that happen within the first three years of implementation of the heritage area program, this timeframe would not be sufficient to allow any actual environmental preservation or enhancement projects to be executed under **Alternative C**. However, a long-term timeframe (3-10 years) would provide opportunity for the heritage area organization to move forward with specific environmental enhancement projects that would likely have a direct, moderate beneficial impact on the Niagara Gorge and Escarpment under Alternative C.

It should be noted that no specific project that preserves or enhances the gorge and/or escarpment is identified in the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Management Plan. Each of the three action alternatives outlined in the management plan describes broadly defined policies and strategies rather than site-specific projects and proposals. These broad policies, guidelines, and strategies will, in general, support the protection of natural resources. If site-specific projects are proposed following the adoption of the management plan, supplemental environmental assessments will be required to meet federal, state, and local requirements.

#### 4.3.2 Vegetation/Threatened and Endangered Plant Species

Through the Niagara River Greenway Plan, **Alternative A**, *Current Conditions Continue*, places high importance on conserving natural resources and developing recreational resources related to the Niagara River. Intergovernmental cooperation in and support for programs and projects related to the river would continue without the heritage area. Efforts to implement the Niagara River Greenway Plan have thus far not focused on the stabilization and enhancement of vegetative communities or the conservation of threatened and endangered plant species although funding for such projects and programs is feasible. Therefore, the impact on vegetation and threatened or endangered plant species under Alternative A is an indirect, minor beneficial impact for the short-term. The fact that an applicant for funding through the greenway program is likely to submit such an application in the future warrants consideration that a direct, moderate beneficial impact on the Niagara Gorge and Escarpment is probable for the long-term under Alternative A.

**Alternative B**, *Focus on Heritage Interpretation*, and **Alternative D**, *Focus on Visitor Experience* would primarily focus on creating a high-quality interpretation experience. The natural environment is a primary interpretive focus for the heritage area under the Natural Phenomenon heading and any interpretation efforts pursued under Alternative B and D would likely enhance and expand opportunities for the public – visitors and residents alike – to learn about and appreciate the vegetative communities and rare plants associated with the Niagara River and its uplands. This awareness is likely to create interest in related natural history and environmental projects. For the short-term, the first year will require the heritage area organization to focus efforts on program startup so its effect on these resources under these two alternatives will be indirect and of minor benefit. For the long-term, through its positive focus on education and engagement, Alternative B and D would have an indirect, moderate beneficial impact on vegetation and identified threatened and endangered plant species.

**Alternative C**, *Focus on Heritage Product Development*, the heritage area organization would take an active role in restoring significant ecosystems including plant communities along the river and its uplands. In addition, basic interpretive activities and programs would be provided as part of Alternative C. This alternative would thereby have a direct, moderate beneficial impact on vegetation along with identified threatened and endangered plant species in the heritage area over the long-term. For the short-term, the first year will require the heritage area organization to focus efforts on program startup so its effect on these resources will be indirect and of minor benefit.

Among the factors contributing to the degradation of vegetation and threatened or endangered plant species, is intensity of use. Over the decades, the development of the City of Niagara Falls as an urban and industrial community has had a severe negative impact upon the river corridor's natural resources. The heritage area management plan supports current community goals of preserving and restoring remaining natural areas. Most of the region's remaining natural areas, including rare and endangered plant species, are located within the parks along the river and in its gorge.

Intense visitor use of the parks due to Niagara Falls' attraction as a tourist destination has also negatively impacted the vegetation within remaining natural areas. While none of the alternatives is anticipated to result in an increased number of visitors to the parks overall, some actions may result in changes to the ways specific areas are used, including the possibility of more intense uses in ecologically fragile areas, such as along trails. Planning and implementation of future projects must therefore be cognizant of such changes relative to the capacity of the natural areas to absorb them and include steps for mitigation and protection.

In addition, the construction of new projects such as trails, landscape exhibits, and visitor facilities has the potential for short-term adverse impact due to construction activities. Any potential short-term adverse impacts should be fully assessed and mitigated as future site-specific projects undertaken in support of the plan are proposed, planned, and reviewed.

#### 4.3.3 Important Wildlife

Like Subsection 4.3.2 above, the implementation of the Niagara River Greenway Plan may encourage the stabilization or enhancement of certain significant wildlife populations. Examples of viable projects include the proposed fish hatchery or birds of prey observation tower in Lewiston. Since high importance is placed on the conservation of natural resources associated with the Niagara River in the greenway plan, **Alternative A, *Current Conditions Continue***, would exist without the heritage area program and should be considered to have a direct, moderate beneficial impact for important wildlife populations over the long-term. Since no applications have been submitted for the next year of funding in the greenway program that address this impact topic the effect for the short-term is indirect and of minor benefit.

**Alternative B, *Focus on Heritage Interpretation*** and **Alternative D, *Focus on Visitor Experience***, proposes a high-quality interpretive program that would inform visitors about the special or unique nature of certain wildlife populations in the heritage area. Any efforts to develop interpretive programs on natural history would likely include important wildlife populations associated with the Niagara River and its uplands. Creating a sense of appreciation for such animals would likely have an indirect, moderate beneficial impact on important wildlife populations found within the heritage area over the long-term. The first year will require the heritage area organization to focus efforts on program startup so its short-term effect on important wildlife populations under these two alternatives will be an indirect, minor beneficial impact.

As with the plant communities mentioned above, **Alternative C, *Focus on Heritage Product Development***, the heritage area organization would take an active role in restoring significant ecosystems including important wildlife populations along the river and its uplands. As part of Alternative C, basic interpretive activities and programs would be provided. This alternative would thereby have a direct, moderate beneficial impact on wildlife in the heritage area over the long-term. However, the short-term impact on important wildlife would be of indirect, minor benefit since the heritage area organization would focus efforts on program startup issues during the first year.

#### 4.4 Historic and Cultural Resources

The management, preservation, protection, and interpretation of historic and cultural resources are a primary purpose for which the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area was created. Therefore, all of the proposed management alternatives seek to achieve this goal but do so with varying degrees of priority and effectiveness. This section discusses historic properties and districts;

Native American associated properties (excluding Indian Trust Resources and sacred sites); archeological resources; education; and interpretive facilities and collections.

#### 4.4.1 Historic Properties and Districts

Under **Alternative A, *Current Conditions Continue***, local organizations would continue to promote preservation within their respective communities. Important work has been done to inventory, rehabilitate, and restore historic buildings, but there is a significant amount of work yet to be completed. However, existing private and public resources focused on historic preservation cannot fully address the historic preservation needs of the heritage area. Alternative A, therefore, would have a direct, minor beneficial impact on historic buildings and districts for both the short-term and long-term.

**Alternative B, *Focus on Interpretation***, would likely have a direct, minor beneficial impact for both the short-term and long-term on the historic buildings and districts throughout the heritage area. Alternative B would provide interpretive and educational programming that directly supports community preservation goals. This would likely increase public appreciation and support for recognizing, rehabilitating, and restoring both public and private historic buildings.

**Alternative C, *Focus on Heritage Product Development***, could have a direct, major beneficial impact on historic buildings and districts over the long-term. Under Alternative C, the heritage area organization would create and implement a regional historic preservation plan, and actively seek opportunities to stabilize, rehabilitate, and restore historic buildings and structures in the City of Niagara Falls and throughout the heritage area, where many worthy buildings stand in need of attention. The short-term impact on historic properties would be of direct, moderate benefit as the heritage area organization begins program implementation during the first year.

**Alternative D, *Focus on Visitor Experience***, would likely have a direct, moderate beneficial impact on the historic buildings and districts in communities throughout the heritage area for both the short-term and long-term. Under Alternative D, the heritage area would immediately begin educating residents and visitors about the significance of resources, as in Alternative B, but would also actively encourage and support the actions of partners in the preservation of resources throughout the course of the program.

#### 4.4.2 Native American Associated Properties

Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 3175 requires that any anticipated impacts to Indian Trust Resources and Assets by a proposed project or action by agencies within the department be explicitly addressed in environmental documents. The federal Indian Trust responsibility is a legally enforceable obligation on the part of the United States to protect tribal lands, assets, resources, and treaty rights, and it represents a duty to carry out the mandates of federal laws with respect to federally-recognized Native American tribes. No such resources or assets were identified within the heritage area. However, there are certain resources and features in the heritage area that are associated with Native American history. It is the desire of the Niagara Falls Heritage Area Commission to identify and interpret these properties as part of the overall heritage area program.

Under **Alternative A, *Current Conditions Continue***, properties associated with Native American history in the heritage area would not receive any additional attention or focus unless addressed by an individual agency or organization. Any existing interpretation and programming would likely continue in isolation at established venues associate with tribal interests, state and local

parks, and other heritage attractions. The status quo and lack of programmatic cohesion represented by Alternative A would result in an indirect, minor beneficial impact for these properties for both the short-term and long-term.

**Alternatives B, C, and D** support several initiatives that could specifically benefit properties associated with the Native American story. Each of the action alternatives seek to identify specific cultural and natural resources related to the interpretive themes for the heritage area on an ongoing basis. As such resource are identified the heritage area will develop partnerships with organizations to preserve, enhance, and interpret these resources as part of the overall plan to develop an interpretive framework. This will require state, local and tribal governments to prepare and update preservation plans and historic inventories. Technical assistance for these efforts is potentially available through the National Park Service. All three action alternatives will likely have a direct, minor beneficial impact for properties associated with the Native American story in the short-term as the heritage area seeks to develop and implement programs during the first year. As partnerships are formed and specific plans are implemented it is anticipated that any of the three action alternatives will have a direct, moderate beneficial impact for properties associated with the Native American story over the course of the heritage area program.

#### 4.4.3 Archeological Resources

Under **Alternative A**, *Current Conditions Continue*, New York State Parks will continue to protect and interpret archeological resources located on state lands; and national, state, and local laws will continue to protect archeological resources both within and outside of park lands. These conditions also hold true for **Alternatives B, C, and D**. With the lack of specific additional initiatives, however, Alternative A is anticipated to have a negligible impact upon archeological resources for both the short-term and long-term.

**Alternatives B, C, and D** support several initiatives that could specifically benefit archeological resources. Each of the action alternatives seeks official designation for significant cultural and natural resources; creates or joins with organizations to preserve, enhance, and interpret these resources; collaborates with partners in developing an interpretive framework and plan and in networking attractions; and encourages local governments to prepare and update preservation plans and historic inventories, and seek planning grants and technical assistance through the Certified Local Government program. All three action alternatives will have a direct, minor beneficial impact for the short-term.

**Alternative B**, *Focus on Interpretation*, proposes to enrich the interpretive experience and in this way could enhance such sites as the Lower Landing Archeological District in Artpark State Park maintaining a direct, minor beneficial impact throughout the duration of the heritage area program. **Alternative C**, *Focus on Heritage Product Development*, and **Alternative D**, *Focus on Visitor Experience*, would also interpret and promote recognition of significant archeological sites but in addition would implement a preservation plan for the region that could have additional benefits with respect to the identification and protection of archeological resources. Both can therefore be anticipated to have a direct, moderate beneficial impact upon archeological resources for the long-term.

#### 4.4.4 Interpretive Facilities and Collections

The Niagara Falls region has a significant number of facilities offering interpretation as well as collections of archival materials and artifacts. Under **Alternative A**, *Current Conditions Continue*, sites offering interpretation and organizations responsible for collections would



continue to work independently with occasional, self-initiated collaboration. Programming would remain limited and financial resources would continue to be scarce. Organizations responsible for collections would continue to be overwhelmed, and collections would remain inaccessible because of the lack of resources needed to inventory them and make them available to researchers and the public. Alternative A would therefore have a negligible impact upon interpretive facilities and collections.

**Alternative B**, *Focus on Interpretation*, **Alternative C**, *Focus on Heritage Area Development*, and **Alternative D**, *Focus on Visitor Experience*, would each concentrate upon enhancing interpretation and connecting interpretive sites through the heritage area's four interpretive themes. In addition, each would assist local partners in establishing and supporting a central database of materials, publications, and artifacts related to interpretive subjects and would encourage scholarly research. Each of these alternatives can therefore be expected to have a direct, moderate beneficial impact upon interpretive facilities and collections for both the short-term and long-term.

#### 4.5 Socio-economic Environment

In **Alternative A**, *Current Conditions Continue*, local economic development organizations and municipalities continue to implement initiatives independently within their respective communities. Important projects have been developed and more are underway, although severe economic hardship has affected and continues to affect the City of Niagara Falls and the region as a whole. Through USA Niagara, the State of New York is making significant investments that are intended to assist the city with the economic revitalization of its downtown. A variety of other public and private organizations are also working toward the economic and cultural revitalization of the city and region. Despite great difficulty, through these initiatives, Alternative A is anticipated to have an indirect, minor beneficial impact for the short-term and a direct, moderate beneficial impact on the socio-economic environment of the region as efforts lead to job creation over the long-term.

Each of the **three action alternatives** is designed to support and enhance current economic, social, and cultural initiatives. Their programs related to heritage tourism and community engagement, especially with respect to young people, are specifically intended to have positive economic and social impacts for residents. They include programs to support curriculum standards in area schools as well as internships, leadership programs, and collaborative programs with local youth organizations. For the short-term (first year), however, the impact of the heritage area on job creation is expected to be minimal thereby representing an indirect, minor beneficial impact.

In **Alternative B**, *Focus on Interpretation*, the main goal is networking and improving the interpretive and programming capability of sites. Enhanced interpretation and associated educational programs and employment opportunities for residents related to heritage tourism would have an indirect, minor beneficial impact upon the socio-economic environment for the long-term.

Under **Alternative C**, *Focus on Heritage Product Development*, the heritage area organization would be actively engaged as a major player in economic revitalization through heritage tourism. A wide range of initiatives is proposed in which it would take a leadership role as in the model of USA Niagara. These initiatives would benefit the City of Niagara Falls as well as the villages of Lewiston and Youngstown. In particular, Alternative C envisions an aggressive role in supporting small business initiatives related to heritage tourism, including offering grants and micro-loans to

tourism related start-ups. The scale of the long-term economic challenges within the region is, however, large. Should the heritage area organization be able to achieve sufficient traction on the wide range of projects proposed under Alternative C, it could be expected to have a direct, moderate beneficial impact on employment in the local economy as well as other socio-economic conditions.

**Alternative D, *Focus on Visitor Services***, emphasizes similar initiatives as those proposed under Alternative C, but the heritage area organization would serve as a promoter and facilitator of partner initiatives rather than undertaking the initiatives directly. Alternative D would therefore be expected to have a less aggressive, but still result in a direct, minor beneficial impact on employment in the local economy and other socio-economic conditions.

## 4.6 Tourism and Visitor Experience

Tourism and the visitor experience on the American side of the Niagara River has been the domain of New York State Parks, their selected vendors, and loosely organized private tourism interests in the area. With the creation of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, public and private sector interests are joining forces in creating and implementing a shared vision for regaining lost tourism market share and improving the community's position as a visitor destination. This united approach to tourism requires the revitalization of Niagara Falls, New York along with coordination and cooperation among governments, businesses and organizations in the region to create a high-quality visitor experience based upon the assets and amenities that exist within the heritage area boundary.

### 4.6.1 Visitor Experience

In **Alternative A, *Current Conditions Continue***, local private and public efforts to offer visitor experiences, interpretation, and visitor services will continue as they currently exist. Niagara Falls is a world-class visitor destination, and many of the attractions on the New York side, such as the Maid of the Mist and Cave of the Winds, are well appreciated and of high quality. The City of Niagara Falls, the villages of Lewiston and Youngstown, and associated sites seek to engage visitors to the Falls and encourage them to explore and stay longer. Without additional assistance, however, current conditions are likely to have a negligible impact upon improving the overall visitor experience.

Creation of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area is specifically intended to enhance and improve the visitor experience beyond the Falls and to encourage visitors to explore. **Alternative B, *Focus on Interpretation***, would undertake specific initiatives in networking sites, increasing partner collaboration, establishing a national heritage area brand, and assisting partners in creating engaging interpretation and programming. Through its interpretive initiatives, Alternative B can be expected to have a direct, moderate beneficial impact upon visitor experience within the region for both the short-term and long-term.

**Alternative C, *Focus on Heritage Product Development***, and **Alternative D, *Focus on Visitor Experience***, include programs outlined under Alternative B, but both have a stronger, more comprehensive focus on visitor experience, including interpretation, visitor services and facilities, transportation, community enhancements, quality assurance programs, resource protection, and more. As discussed previously, Alternative C takes a direct, active role in implementing programming, while Alternative D works more collaboratively with partners. If successful, both

alternatives can be expected to have a direct, moderate beneficial impact for the short-term and a direct, major beneficial impact on visitor experience within the heritage area over the long-term.

#### 4.6.2 Scenic and Recreational Resources

Niagara Falls is known for its scenic qualities. State and local parks, hiking and walking trails, car-touring routes, boat tours, and other resources and activities provide diverse opportunities for experiencing the region's scenic qualities and for recreation by residents and visitors alike. Each of the alternatives presented in this plan supports the preservation and enhancement of scenic resources and opportunities for recreational activities.

Under **Alternative A**, *Current Conditions Continue*, state parks and local government would continue to offer recreational opportunities to visitors and residents. Scenic resources would also be preserved through the Niagara River Greenway's stewardship of natural resources and trail development. However, efforts would be piecemeal and lack a united vision for resources and facilities in the heritage area. Therefore, these on-going efforts would have a direct, minor beneficial impact on scenic and recreational resources over both the short-term and long-term.

In **Alternative B**, *Focus on Interpretation*, the heritage area organization would work primarily through existing partners and sites on enhancing resource-based recreational programming; encouraging trail maintenance, trail improvements, and new trail connections; providing engaging interpretation; and encouraging superior customer service and visitor facilities. It would play a coordinating, facilitating, and supporting role in these activities. With this supporting role in the enhancement of scenic and recreational resources, Alternative B would have an indirect, minor beneficial impact for the short-term and an indirect, moderate beneficial impact over the long-term.

Under **Alternative C**, *Focus on Heritage Product Development*, the heritage area organization would take an active role in raising funds for and implementing projects that enhance scenic qualities and recreational opportunities. It would design, restore, construct, and manage a comprehensive trails system from the Falls to the Fort. It would develop and promote resource-based recreational programming for residents and visitors using the trails system. It would create a program to train and certify guides and tour operators in an effort to enhance the level of customer service; support a transportation center focused on multi-modal touring opportunities – walking, biking, car, tour bus, and shuttles; and establish a mobile visitor center. The first year will require the heritage area organization to focus efforts on program startup so its effect on these resources will result in a direct, minor beneficial impact for the short-term. However, the cumulative impact in implementing this alternative over the course of the heritage area program would have a direct, major beneficial impact for the long-term.

**Alternative D**, *Focus on Visitor Experience*, supports the same range of project discussed under Alternatives B and C: enhancing recreational programming, trails, transportation options, and customer service. The difference is that in Alternative D, the heritage area organization would take a more active role than proposed in Alternative B and a less active role than is proposed in Alternative C. Under Alternative D, the heritage area would have a direct, minor beneficial impact after the first year. Over the long-term, Alternative D has a direct, moderate beneficial impact with a greater beneficial impact than Alternative B and a less direct beneficial impact than Alternative C as it is not always the project leader charged with originating or implementing the project.

#### 4.7 Tables Summarizing Environmental Impacts

Table 4-1: Summary of Short-term Environmental Impacts for All Alternatives

	<b>Alternative A: Current Conditions Continue</b>	<b>Alternative B: Focus on Interpretation</b>	<b>Alternative C: Focus on Heritage Product Development</b>	<b>Alternative D: Focus on Visitor Experience</b>
<b>Natural Resources and Landscapes</b>				
Niagara Gorge & Escarpment, Unique Ecosystem	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>
Vegetation/Threatened & Endangered Species	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>
Important Wildlife	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>
<b>Historic and Cultural Resources</b>				
Historic Properties and Districts	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>
Native American Associated Properties	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>
Archeological Resources	<i>Negligible Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>
Interpretive Facilities and Collections	<i>Negligible Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>
<b>Socio-economic Factors</b>				
Employment	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>
<b>Tourism and Visitor Experience</b>				
Visitor Experience	<i>Negligible Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>
Scenic and Recreational Resources	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>

Table 4-2: Summary of Long-term Environmental Impacts for All Alternatives

	<b>Alternative A: Current Conditions Continue</b>	<b>Alternative B: Focus on Interpretation</b>	<b>Alternative C: Focus on Heritage Product Development</b>	<b>Alternative D: Focus on Visitor Experience</b>
<b>Natural Resources and Landscapes</b>				
Niagara Gorge & Escarpment, Unique Ecosystem	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>
Vegetation/Threatened & Endangered Species	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>
Important Wildlife	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>
<b>Historic and Cultural Resources</b>				
Historic Properties and Districts	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Major Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>
Native American Associated Sites	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>
Archeological Resources	<i>Negligible Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>
Interpretive Facilities and Collections	<i>Negligible Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>

<b>Socio-economic Factors</b>				
Employment	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>
<b>Tourism and Visitor Experience</b>				
Visitor Experience	<i>Negligible Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Major Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Major Beneficial Impact</i>
Scenic and Recreational Resources	<i>Direct Minor Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Indirect Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Major Beneficial Impact</i>	<i>Direct Moderate Beneficial Impact</i>

#### 4.8 Adverse and Cumulative Impacts

As outlined above, there are no anticipated adverse impacts associated with the impact topics retained for detailed analysis. In large measure, this is due to the beneficial nature of the heritage area purpose and program as directed in Niagara Falls National Heritage Area enabling legislation. The alternatives discussed above are related to broad programmatic initiatives, the details of which will be developed with local partners over time. The alternatives do not provide site-specific details or recommendations. Should future initiatives with the potential for site-specific impacts be undertaken by the heritage area organization and its partners, all federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and review procedures will be followed by those partners with respect to those initiatives.

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area is one of several current initiatives in the region that seek to promote resource stewardship, community and economic development, and heritage tourism. The heritage area will be working in coordination with the programs of local, regional, and statewide organizations that are described in Chapter 3 of this plan. Together, these programs and initiatives will have a cumulative beneficial impact upon the region. No adverse cumulative impacts related to these types of cooperative programs are anticipated.

Any further analysis of impacts for construction of new trails or structures (including those for restoration efforts and the interpretive center mentioned here above) can only be handled once specific locations have been chosen, and at this point none have. Current projects involving trails or structures being undertaken by partners that are supportive of the heritage area goals predate the management plan process and are undergoing environmental assessment under separate review processes.

In the future implementation of any of the alternatives in which a subsequent action would have a recognizable direct impact on an aspect of the cultural or natural environment (e.g., the construction of a new trail at a specific location), the project sponsor or applicant involved in the action would conduct the site-specific planning required for protection of the resources and would not implement that action until the appropriate environmental analyses were completed and the appropriate permits, if required, are obtained.