



# GEORGIAN BAY ISLANDS

NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA

## *Management Plan*



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Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada, 2010.  
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ISLANDS  
NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA

*Management Plan*

*2010*





## MINISTER'S FOREWORD



*Canada's national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas offer Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast unique opportunities to experience and understand our wonderful country. They are places of learning, recreation and inspiration where Canadians can connect with our past and appreciate the natural, cultural and social forces that shaped Canada.*

*From our smallest national park to our most visited national historic site to our largest national marine conservation area, each of these places offers Canadians and visitors several experiential opportunities to enjoy Canada's historic and natural heritage. These places of beauty, wonder and learning are valued by Canadians - they are part of our past, our present and our future.*

*Our Government's goal is to ensure that Canadians form a lasting connection to this heritage and that our protected places are enjoyed in ways that leave them unimpaired for present and future generations.*

*We see a future in which these special places will further Canadians' appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of Canada, the economic well-being of communities, and the vitality of our society.*

*Our Government's vision is to build a culture of heritage conservation in Canada by offering Canadians exceptional opportunities to experience our natural and cultural heritage.*

*These values form the foundation of the new management plan for Georgian Bay Islands National Park of Canada. I offer my appreciation to the many thoughtful Canadians who helped to develop this plan, particularly to our dedicated team from Parks Canada, and to all those local organizations and individuals who have demonstrated their good will, hard work, spirit of co-operation and extraordinary sense of stewardship.*

*In this same spirit of partnership and responsibility, I am pleased to approve the Georgian Bay Islands National Park of Canada Management Plan.*

Jim Prentice

Minister of the Environment



This plan has been recommended for approval by:



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Alan Latourelle  
Chief Executive Officer  
Parks Canada Agency



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Peter Froid  
Field Unit Superintendent  
Central Ontario Field Unit  
Parks Canada Agency

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Georgian Bay Islands National Park (GBINP) is located in southeastern Georgian Bay in the heart of Ontario's cottage country. The bay is home to the world's largest freshwater archipelago, the 30,000 Islands, and the park acts as a southern gateway into this area. Comprising 63 dispersed islands and shoals the total area of the park is 14 km<sup>2</sup> from the Centennial Group in the south to McQuade Island 50 kilometres northward. Situated just 150 km from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), GBINP is within a half-day's drive for millions of Canadians. Created in 1929 it is Canada's smallest national park straddling two natural regions and forms a core protected area of the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve. The park also has significant cultural value having been occupied continuously for over 5,500 years.

This plan replaces the park's 1998 management plan. In crafting this new plan Parks Canada consulted with the general public, stakeholders, the Cultural Advisory Committee (comprised of First Nations, Aboriginal groups and Métis representatives) and other partners. Their input influenced the content of the plan and is greatly appreciated.

This plan conforms to the 2008 Parks Canada Guide to Management Planning. It presents a park vision supported by four key strategies and related objectives and actions. Area-specific strategies and an implementation schedule round out the plan.

The park benefits from several opportunities. It is in good ecological condition and has major ecological significance. The park is uniquely positioned to reach out to Canada's largest urban area and significant populations of new and second generation Canadians. Two YMCA camps on Beausoleil Island provide an exceptional opportunity to reach Canada's youth.

Key challenges include: as a foundation for moving forward, determining current and potential visitor and stakeholder interests and needs; changing the perception of the park from a purely recreational venue to that of a nationally recognized heritage place offering world-calibre scenery and experiences; the park's small size and susceptibility to influences beyond park boundaries; proximity to major population centres and limited availability of suitable habitat for at-risk wildlife; responding to a general decline in traditional camping, and managing access and message delivery in a scattered island milieu.





## The Park Vision

In 2023, the Georgian Bay Islands National Park will be known as a place....

- Where people are offered a special opportunity to experience the natural characteristics of the largest freshwater island group in the world, with access to sheltered harbours and natural shorelines with rocky windswept landscapes and views.
- Where clean water and air, natural habitats, plant and animal diversity, rare species and human heritage are protected.
- Where people have the opportunity to learn about the Georgian Bay ecosystem, where lush hardwood forests contrast with the distinctly rugged Precambrian Shield; a place of rest and refuge that has been used by people for thousands of years.

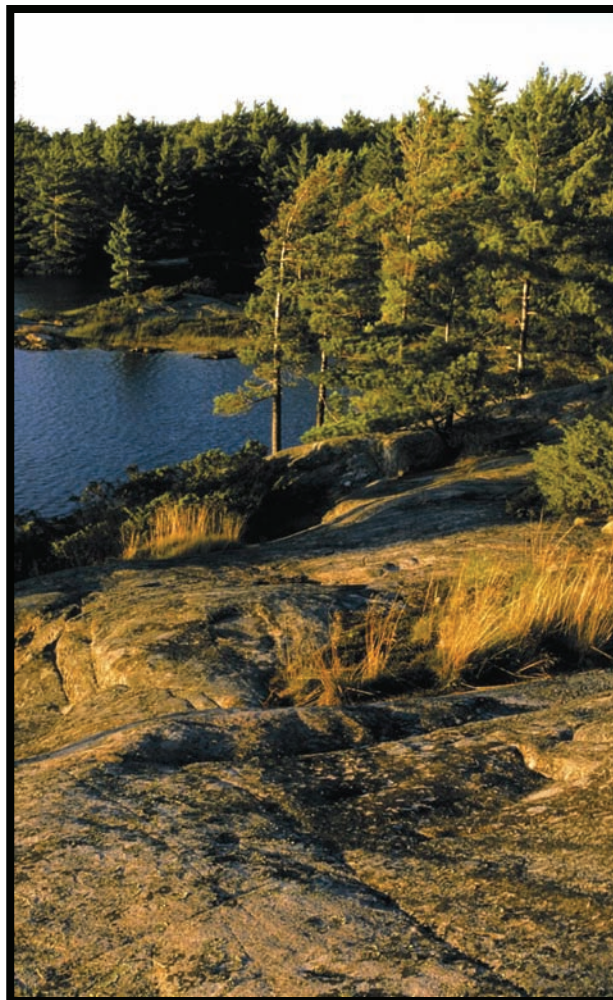
Four key strategies underpin this vision.

### Key Strategy #1

#### **Windswept White Pines & Rocky Shores: The Iconic GBINP Experience**

Experiences and educational programs will be enhanced by offering new remote camping experience packages on the north end of Beausoleil Island, by better communicating the attractiveness of autumn visits and by using-up-to-date social science to develop a menu of experiential offerings to be presented through improved promotional vehicles.

Visitor facilities and services will also be improved in the form of new interpretive hiking and biking trails, expanded *DayTripper* boat service, a more dynamic and current offering at Cedar Spring campground and renewed primitive campground and docking sites. YMCA camps will be managed to respect their cultural and natural settings while Aboriginal programming will be improved using knowledge gained from archaeological findings and oral histories. Facilities in Honey Harbour, the Welcome Centre at Lock 45 and the park's administration office in Midland will all provide off-site introductions to GBINP.



## Key Strategy #2

### Thinking Long-term: Protecting a Symbolic Canadian Landscape

The relationship between land and water provides the foundation for the park's unique visitor experience offer, one that cannot be found on the mainland. Actions will maintain ecological diversity through research, planning, stewardship and monitoring. The removal of infrastructure from Beausoleil Island, adjustments in public use areas and managing snowmobile use will help to improve natural habitat and expand the range of visitor experiences.

## Key Strategy #3

### Reaching Out: Building a Constituency for GBINP and Parks Canada

A strong and positive identity will be established for GBINP and Parks Canada through brand promotion using a variety of media. Collaboration with partners and presentations to regional citizen groups, businesses and local governments will cultivate a sense of appreciation for, connection to, and support for GBINP and the entire National Park system. The GTA is a particularly important market and the park will be actively involved in Parks Canada's urban outreach strategy.





## Key Strategy #4

### **Honouring the Past for Future Generations: Cultural Resource Management**

The park will continue to work with local First Nations, Aboriginal groups and Métis communities to further increase knowledge and awareness of GBINP's cultural heritage. A Cultural Resource Value Statement will be developed in collaboration with Aboriginal partners as will plans for mitigation, resource inventories, assessments and collections management and exhibition. The public will connect with the rich cultural and Aboriginal heritage of GBINP through expanded on-site programming for visitors to the park and YMCA campers. Continued outreach programming in Aboriginal communities will help restore a sense of connection to the park.



Area-specific strategies describe in greater detail how the four key strategies will be applied on Beausoleil Island, the northern islands and the out-of-park sites. This plan will serve to integrate resource protection, visitor experience and public understanding thereby creating a strong sense of appreciation and connection to place through protection and presentation.

Relocation of park infrastructure followed by natural restoration will improve the ecological integrity of Beausoleil Island while enhancing the visitor experience. Park involvement in regional ecosystem stewardship should maintain or improve the health of the regional ecosystem and therefore that of the park itself.

Looking to the future it is essential that there are strategies in place that make the park relevant to new, urban and young Canadians from the Greater Toronto Area. This will help to ensure support for the Agency's mandate in the years ahead. Social science research and trend analysis will be key in the development of relevant visitor experiences so that these new audiences can know and appreciate the park's natural and cultural heritage.

Public understanding will be enhanced by involving visitors more directly in heritage programming, particularly in relation to the Aboriginal heritage of Beausoleil Island. Participation in regional stewardship efforts and marketing to the GTA will enhance understanding of the park's role and importance thereby increasing support and establishing relevance.

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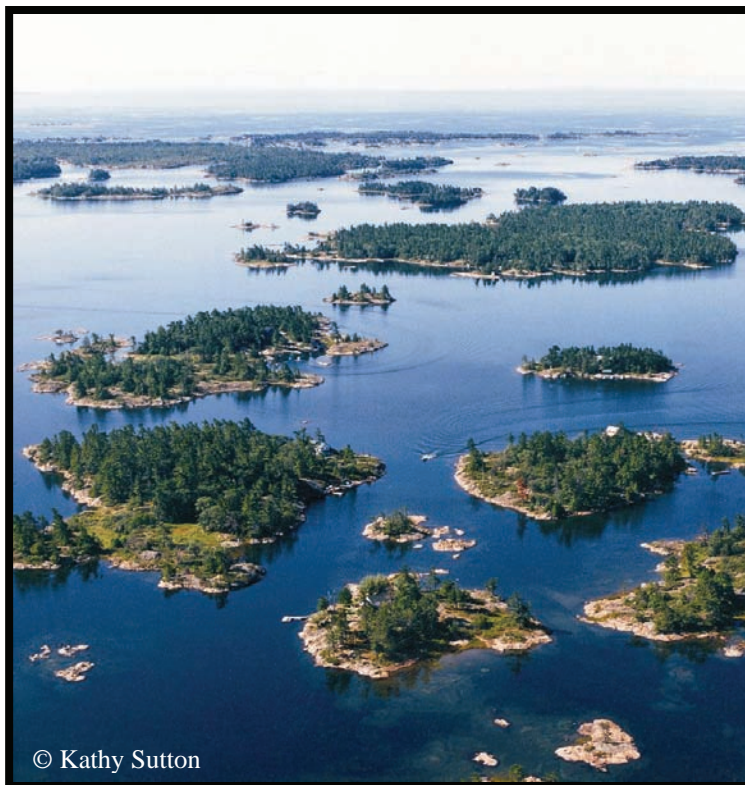


## INTRODUCTION

***“The National Parks of Canada are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment and shall be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for future generations.” (Canada National Parks Act, 2000).***

Parks Canada is responsible - to the government and the people of Canada - for administering a world-renowned system of national parks. Canada's national parks are established to protect, for all time, environments of outstanding natural beauty and ecological significance. Canadians have a strong sense of connection to their parks, and Parks Canada facilitates opportunities to discover, appreciate and understand these special places in ways that ensure they are available for future generations. The *Parks Canada Agency Act*, the *Canada National Parks Act*, and *Parks Canada's Guiding Principles and Operational Policies* set the context for this responsibility.

This management plan, the second for Georgian Bay Islands National Park of Canada (GBINP), ensures that actions taken by park managers for protection, visitor experience and public education are integrated and mutually supportive and that expected results are clearly defined. The plan also ensures the effective use of public



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funds in park management by providing for the means to monitor and measure the effectiveness of the actions. As a strategic document, a management plan is not an end in itself; rather it provides a framework within which subsequent management, planning and implementation can take place.

Georgian Bay Islands National

Park is located in Southeast Georgian Bay in the heart of Ontario's cottage country. The bay is home to the world's largest fresh water archipelago, the 30,000 Islands, and the park acts as a southern gateway to this area. Comprised of 63 dispersed islands and shoals, the total area of the park is about 14 km<sup>2</sup> extending from the Centennial Group in Severn Sound northward 50 km to McQuade Island just west of Twelve Mile Bay. Beausoleil is the largest island at just under 11 km<sup>2</sup>. Other larger holdings include portions of Bone Island, Portage Island, and the recently acquired Tadenac property (2008).





The park and much of the archipelago are situated in the District of Muskoka, a ninety-minute drive from Canada's most densely populated region, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Given this proximity to the GTA, GBINP has a unique opportunity to offer many Canadians their first national park experience providing learning opportunities, promoting environmental stewardship and raising awareness of Parks Canada's mandate.

This management plan follows the completion of the 2004 State of the Park Report and replaces the previous management plan approved in 1998. The vision for GBINP's future and the planning initiatives proposed to achieve that vision were developed in cooperation with many partners. Parks Canada consulted with stakeholders, the Cultural Advisory Committee (comprised of First Nations, Aboriginal and Métis representatives) and others throughout this visionary process. Consultations with the public at large were held in the spring of 2005, through the winter of 2006 and in the spring of 2007. The actions outlined in the management plan have benefited greatly from public input.

## PARKS CANADA STRATEGIC OUTCOME

CANADIANS HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF CONNECTION, THROUGH MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES, TO THEIR NATIONAL PARKS, NATIONAL HISTORIC SITES AND NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREAS AND THESE PROTECTED PLACES ARE ENJOYED IN WAY THAT LEAVE THEM UNIMPAIRED FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.





## IMPORTANCE OF GEORGIAN BAY ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK TO THE NATIONAL SYSTEM

Canada is so vast, so diverse in its landscapes that it takes many places, each unique and special, to capture the physical essence of the country. To date there are 42 national parks, each with its own distinctive flora and fauna and its own individual character, adding to our understanding of the country as a whole. Georgian Bay Islands is a place to which people have been coming for thousands of years, a landscape which inspired the Group of Seven to create distinctly Canadian works of art. This is the land of the haunting call of the loon and the bittersweet splendour of autumn hills aflame with scarlet maples.

GBINP represents two natural regions within the National Parks system plan: the St. Lawrence Lowlands and the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Precambrian Region. Despite being Canada's smallest National Park it traverses a transitional zone between the two natural regions providing a variety of habitats and producing a great diversity of flora and fauna. GBINP offers Canadians the opportunity to experience and learn about these distinctive regions, for many in their own backyard.

When GBINP was created in 1929 it was the third National Park in Ontario. Even then people were concerned with natural habitat and scenic beauty being lost to industry and development. The construction of roads and railroads in the Muskokas brought both logging companies and wealthy tourists who purchased entire islands as private havens until Beausoleil was the last large island not under private ownership. When plans for a resort development became known the local population urged the federal government to acquire the island for permanent protection

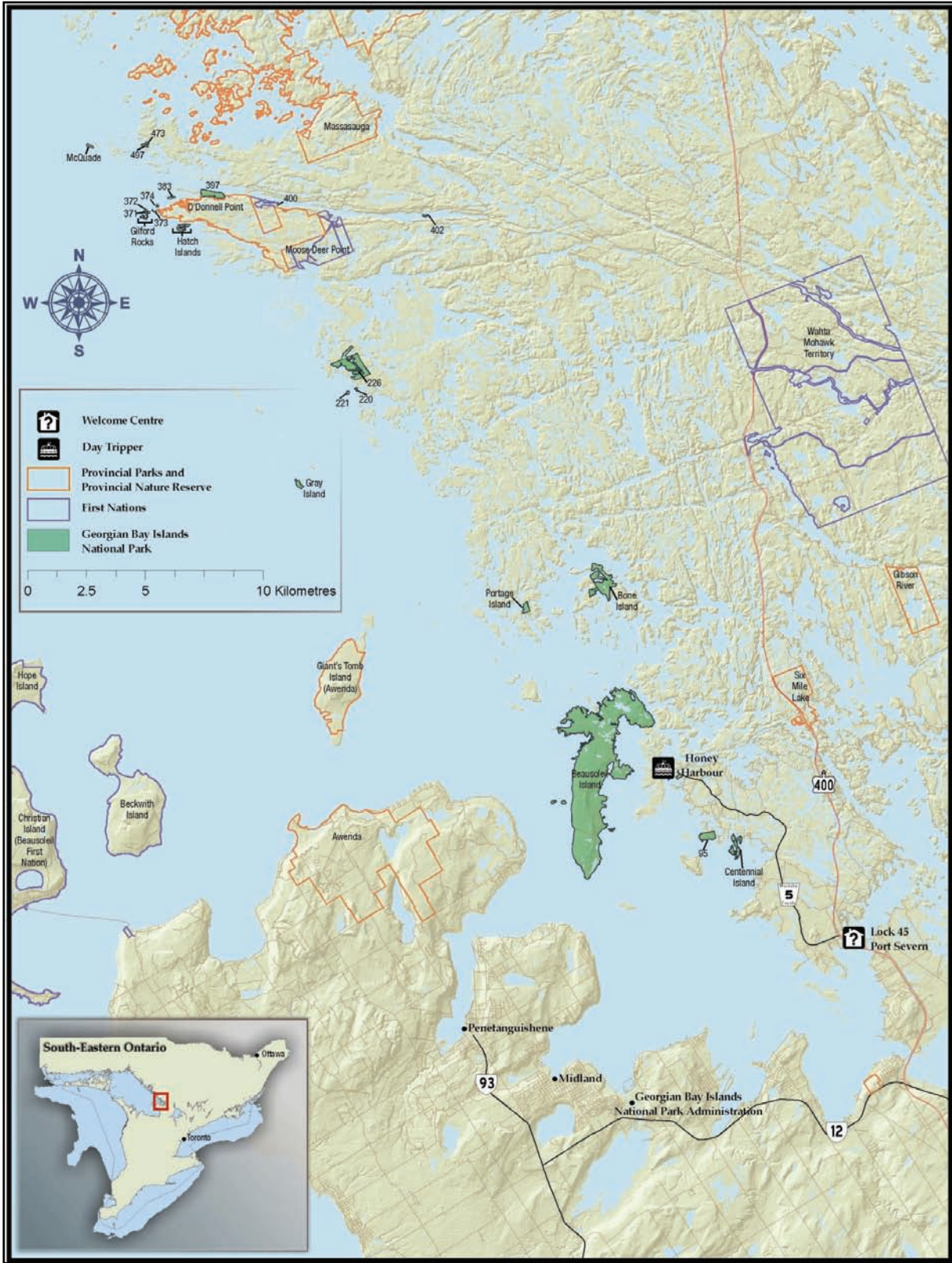
as part of the fledgling National Park system. Their foresight ensured that future generations could enjoy the clear blue waters, rocky shores and silent green forests of this magnificent place.

The park is a core protected area - along with five provincial parks - of the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve, designated under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program. The Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve Inc., made up of representatives from a number of stakeholder groups (including Parks Canada), co-ordinates biosphere reserve programs of conservation and sustainable development. GBINP plays an active role in promoting tourism, education, protection and environmental stewardship within the reserve.

Park staff demonstrate leadership in promoting regional conservation efforts through their active participation with environmental groups and associations and their committee work with the Biosphere Reserve. The park's Cultural Advisory Committee (see the next section) is a model for the integration of traditional ecological knowledge into environmental management. As well, park staff have established themselves as persons of first contact for the public, non-government organizations (NGOs) and other levels of government concerned with such things as shoreline protection and species at risk.



# GEORGIAN BAY ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK





## PLANNING CONTEXT / CURRENT SITUATION

This plan for Georgian Bay Islands National Park sets the course for a broader and more innovative visitor experience for the future while building upon the strong protection actions of the first plan (1998).

Visitors value GBINP for its sheltered harbours and spectacular rocky windswept landscapes. Located in cottage country, yet only 90 minutes from the Greater Toronto Area, the park is viewed as offering memorable visitor experiences and meaningful education opportunities in an unspoiled outdoor setting. This “wilderness in your own backyard” experience attracts visitors back every year: in 2006 over 45,000 people visited the park with 70%



being repeat visitors. The park’s visitor offer is generally focused on Beausoleil Island. The number of boaters grows yearly accompanied by a general increase in vessel size and demand for additional docks and mooring space.

The park’s major ecological restoration program will be completed in the near future and most operational infrastructure will be relocated to the mainland from Beausoleil Island. Reducing the infrastructure footprint on Beausoleil returns more land to a natural state allowing for a more natural visitor experience and easing ecological stress on adjacent habitats.

With the exception of a small land base located in Honey Harbour, GBINP is accessible only by boat. The 30,000 Islands is an extremely popular area for boating among permanent residents, seasonal cottagers and tourists. Beausoleil Island is less than a twenty-minute boat ride from many large marina facilities on the south-eastern shore making it a popular weekend boating destination.

GBINP’s *DayTripper* vessel provides access to non-boat owning visitors, offering them the opportunity to experience the park throughout the summer and into the fall. This service attracts a diverse clientele with an ever-increasing number of visitors from the GTA.

Research conducted at Point Pelee National Park has shown that people who visit National Parks often, especially as children, develop a strong sense of connection to place and are more receptive to becoming environmental stewards as a result. The two YMCA camps on Beausoleil Island are exceptional cases where this is being



achieved. Camp Kitchikewana and Camp Queen Elizabeth introduce over 4500 young campers per year to GBINP. As well, camp alumni groups participate in shoulder-season programs, demonstrating their connection to place and passing their experiences on to their children. The camps provide outstanding opportunities to facilitate discovery, share park messages and foster environmental stewardship among young Canadians. They have been operating for decades with Camp Kitchikewana pre-dating the establishment of the National Park itself. Operated by the Simcoe-Muskoka and London chapters of the YMCA, the camps are long-term partners with leases extending to the year 2022. Both are located within species at risk habitat and areas containing significant Aboriginal cultural resources. The park, in collaboration with the Cultural Advisory Committee and Parks Canada's Ontario Service Centre professionals, works to ensure that these resources are protected and used as experiential learning opportunities.

Archaeological investigations within GBINP have only been carried out on Beausoleil Island and at Honey Harbour; it is not known if cultural resources exist on other park islands. Archaeological resources found on Beausoleil are exceptionally rich and diverse. The largest and best-known site to date is at Camp Kitchikewana because it requires archaeological mitigation. The site has been occupied continuously for about 5,500 years beginning in the Middle Archaic period. The two most significant periods of occupation were the Middle Woodland and the mid-19th century. The Middle Woodland period is significant because it involved almost every cultural group in Ontario and shows evidence of cultural contact and transition. The mid-19th century occupation is representative of the Canadian

government's early attempts to establish reserves for native peoples. Although this occupation was short-lived, it is directly associated with the various Aboriginal communities around Georgian Bay today.

There are also significant archaeological resources in the vicinity of Cedar Spring, including one of the earliest known reserve-period villages in all of Canada, at least four mid-to-late 19th century homestead sites and associated smaller sites. There are three burial sites on Beausoleil Island as well as the Cemetery of the Oak south of the Cedar Spring campground.



*Cultural Advisory Committee Meeting*

GBINP's long-established Cultural Advisory Committee provides an Aboriginal perspective on many park issues. The Committee members include representatives of Chippewas of Beausoleil First Nation, Chippewas of Rama First Nation, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, Wasauksing First Nation, Potawatomi of Moose Deer Point First Nation, Wahta Mohawks, the Georgian Bay Métis Council and the Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre. The Committee has assisted Parks Canada to develop a broader, more inclusive knowledge of the cultural and natural values of the park and the need to manage, protect and present these values appropriately.



Georgian Bay Islands completed its first State of the Park Report in 2004 with a strong focus on evaluating ecological integrity. The next State of the Park Report will apply equal scrutiny to actions related to public education and the visitor experience, thereby ensuring that all aspects of Parks Canada's mandate are being assessed by way of structured monitoring programs. Updated every five years, the report provides a snapshot of the condition of the park plus an assessment of trends.

In order to ensure that its management actions as they pertain to ecological integrity are having a positive benefit, GBINP has already implemented a monitoring program focusing on the state of forests, wetlands, lakes and Great Lake coastal environments that measure the health of the park.

The ecological integrity monitoring program is relatively young and Parks Canada is continually learning from these indicators to better understand the trends over time. Based on what is currently known the park is in relatively good ecological condition but is influenced by factors originating from the greater park ecosystem and beyond. The fact that GBINP is island-based does provide some degree of buffering but the park's small size ensures that it remains inherently integrated with the surrounding environment.

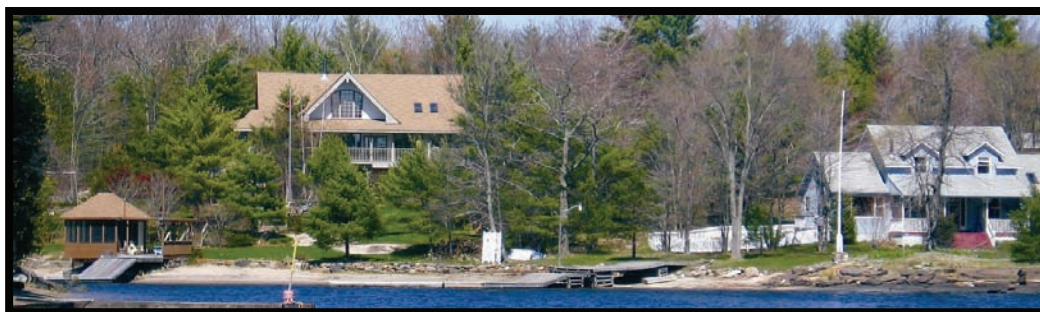
Growth and development in the region surrounding the park is significant with the population of Simcoe County projected to increase by 70% in the next 25 years (Ontario Ministry of Public Infrastructure,

2005). As well many baby-boomers are choosing to retire in the District of Muskoka, with associated development resulting in both habitat loss and increased wildlife road mortality. There is significant residential development in communities adjacent to the park, most notably Midland and Port Severn. Cottage development continues northward along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay despite the lack of road access.

Ten of the park's eighteen reptile species are considered to be "at-risk" by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). Large mammals and species requiring an extensive home range, including nesting songbirds, are particularly susceptible to habitat loss. Invasive species such as purple loosestrife and common reed are altering wetland ecosystems and there are increasing threats of non-native insects and disease.

Significant opportunities:

- The park will work with partners and stakeholders and use up-to-date and pertinent social science to re-define the National Park offering with the goal of attracting new visitors by creating unique natural and cultural experiences that cannot be found on the mainland.
- The park's proximity to major population centres is also an opportunity to introduce non-traditional visitors, new Canadians and urban youth to Canada's family of National Parks.



Shoreline development on Southeastern Georgian Bay





- A large proportion of the park's potential audience already has a significant awareness of environmental issues and is actively involved in conservation and protection activities. This has led to a strong sustainable development mindset where growth is desirable but is tempered with an appreciation for the natural attributes of Eastern Georgian Bay.
- GBINP is a core protected area of the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve (GBBR) which provides a focal point and framework for many partners, including Parks Canada, to work together toward common goals. The GBBR, with representation from First Nations, municipal and regional government, the provincial government, Parks Canada and private enterprise, fosters strong and credible messages of conservation, sustainable development and regional tourism.
- There is an opportunity to use social science and market trend analysis to re-design and re-capitalize the outdated Cedar Spring campground to offer unique and memorable visitor experiences for today and the future.
- The Honey Harbour property renewal will provide high quality visitor reception and *DayTripper* departures, complimenting the more efficient operations facility.
- The new Parks Canada Welcome Centre, located at Lock 45 on the Trent-Severn Waterway at Port Severn, a short distance from Highway 400 and 13 kilometres from Honey Harbour, provides an attractive and effective venue for introducing travellers to the Parks Canada system. It provides

reception and orientation services for GBINP as well as Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site in Gravenhurst and the Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Canal. Opened in 2007, it attracts over 200 people per day throughout the summer.



*A young visitor learns about the park at the Parks Canada Welcome Centre*

The key challenges facing Georgian Bay Islands include:

- Changing the perception of GBINP from a strictly recreational getaway to a nationally recognized protected area offering world-calibre scenery and memorable experiences.
- Size of the park: At approximately 14 km<sup>2</sup> the park is not an ecosystem unto itself and is therefore susceptible to influences beyond park boundaries. Despite its small size the park represents two natural regions with very different ecosystems.
- Many wildlife populations naturally shift away from major population centres, of which there are two in close proximity to the park, due to lack of suitable habitat. At-risk species are further limited by environmental and climatic factors that make the shorelines of eastern Georgian Bay critically important to many species.
- As an island park with no entry gate the park is challenged to ensure that appropriate permits are obtained, park messages are delivered and inappropriate use is prevented.
- The lack of social science data required to determine current and potential visitor and stakeholder interests and needs. This is necessary to ensure that park experience options are meaningful and relevant to Canadians.



*Spotted Turtle*

## VISION

Early in this plan's development the park consulted and worked with a wide variety of stakeholders, the Cultural Advisory Committee and staff to sculpt a vision that would look toward the future and convey the special character of this place. It has stood the test of time, having been scrutinized during open houses, public and stakeholder meetings, in newspapers and during presentations. Key strategies and actions described in this management plan portray the integrated relationship of all elements of Parks Canada's mandate and are intended to achieve this vision, which the park is proud to present:

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**By the year 2023, Georgian Bay Islands National Park of Canada will be known as a place....**

- **Where people are offered a special opportunity to experience the natural characteristics of the largest freshwater island group in the world, with access to sheltered harbours and natural shorelines with rocky windswept landscapes and views.**
- **Where clean water and air, natural habitats, plant and animal diversity, rare species and human heritage are protected.**
- **Where people have the opportunity to learn about the Georgian Bay ecosystem, where lush hardwood forests contrast with the distinctly rugged Precambrian Shield; a place of rest and refuge that has been used by people for thousands of years.**





## KEY STRATEGY #1

### WINDSWEPT WHITE PINES & ROCKY SHORES: THE ICONIC GBINP EXPERIENCE



This strategy involves visitor experience opportunities, activities and public education centred on the enjoyment of the special place that is Georgian Bay Islands National Park. A strong 'connection to place' based on meaningful natural and cultural heritage experiences is key to the long-term relevance of the park to visitors and the surrounding population. The park has three strong advantages that can help it foster connection to place:

- Proximity to urban audiences in the Greater Toronto Area positions GBINP to offer a 'gateway' National Park experience to first-time visitors.
- Access to the 30,000 Islands, the largest freshwater archipelago in the world, which is a unique experience.
- Two well-established youth camps located in the park create life-long connections for thousands of young people every year.

To capitalize on these advantages the park must upgrade its facilities, services and visitor offering to ensure that the needs of the public are being met and that experiences and stories are unique, relevant and meaningful.

Repeat visitation at the park is considerable, and is comprised of a large core group of boaters and a smaller core group of campers. While the demand for dock space is expected to remain high, camping numbers are generally decreasing. To reverse this trend GBINP must offer a unique, quality experience that cannot be found readily at numerous roadside camping facilities in the area and that considers the desires of potential clients.

To address changing demographics and trends in outdoor recreation GBINP is moving to revitalize the current visitor offer with new niche experiences. Although GBINP is a small park with access challenges there is an opportunity to offer high-quality experiences with a menu of options that connect first time visitors, such as urban Canadians, to a National Park.



**Objective #1:** *Develop and promote new experiences that connect people to GBINP.*

## Actions

- Social science serves to identify current levels of satisfaction and connection. In the future research and trend analysis will be used to develop and expand visitor opportunities
- Provide high quality visitor reception services at the Parks Canada Welcome Centre in Port Severn, the Midland office and Honey Harbour.
- Establish a park communications plan that will identify a variety of interpretive opportunities for each type of visitor facility.
- Offer packaged camping experiences at campsites on Beausoleil Island. Most gear will be supplied as park staff provides visitors with a varied and educational camping experience in a safe, organized and comfortable way.
- Increase autumn visitation to GBINP through marketing, enhanced *DayTripper* service and experience packages. Autumn in the park can offer significant quality experiences that are not currently being realized.
- Create a greater awareness and appreciation of the park's northern islands and promote their memorable experience qualities.
- Upon analysis of appropriate market research, explore opportunities to partner with third party operators (such as outfitters and expert guides) to offer packaged niche activities such as fall kayaking, birding or nature photography outings.

- Target-market the *DayTripper* experience, especially in the Greater Toronto Area, to encourage first-time urban visitors and/or new Canadians to have an island-based national park experience.
- Continue to administer Visitor Information Program surveys every five years to measure satisfaction levels and better understand the expectations of visitors.
- Work with tourism organizations to improve awareness of visitor experience opportunities at GBINP.
- Improve the quality and user-friendliness of pre-trip visitor experience information online and in traditional print media.



*The DayTripper provides non-boating visitors access to the park for day trips and camping.*

**Objective # 2:** *Improve experiential opportunities for park visitors by revitalizing and redefining park facilities & services.*

Modern and comfortable facilities, coupled with high service standards, are an integral foundation for the provision of inspired visitor experiences. Facilities are being strategically enhanced throughout the park and services are being continually evaluated and improved to make them more accessible and user-friendly.





## Actions:

- Expand self-guided hiking and biking trails to facilitate enhanced opportunities for visitors to discover and learn about the hardwood forest, Great Lakes shorelines and Aboriginal history.
- Expand the *DayTripper* service to increase access to Beausoleil Island for visitors who do not have their own boat.
- Revitalize Cedar Spring campground, increasing visitation by 20% within 5 years. Investment will be based on changing trends in camping and market analysis of regional campgrounds and will be monitored and adapted to ensure that objectives are being met.
- Working with partners, explore the possibility of offering a natural/cultural experience where visitors not only enjoy natural surroundings but may also immerse themselves in the deep cultural roots of Beausoleil Island.
- Complete the program of renewing docks at primitive campsites and mooring areas to provide safe, eco-friendly docks that adapt to changing water levels.
- Maintain the existing docking and mooring areas, offering pleasure boaters a high quality, unique National Park boating experience. In light of the high demand for dockage, GBINP will explore opportunities to increase docking where ecological integrity and visitor experience will not be compromised and where it is economically feasible to do so.
- Develop a suite of indicators that will monitor the effectiveness of heritage education programs and visitor experience investments. Indicators will include VIP surveys, attendance statistics, revenue and website hits. Measures and thresholds will be established to effectively evaluate the state of the visitor offer and educational programs.

**Objective #3:** *Through partnership with the YMCA camps on Beausoleil Island, continue to foster GBINP experiences for urban and local youth.*

## Actions:

- Continue to work with YMCA camp management to ensure high quality memorable and educational park experiences while minimizing impact to ecological and cultural resources. This will be achieved through program development, staff training and co-operative management arrangements.
- Continue to monitor the effects of the two YMCA camps on the park's natural and cultural resources so that appropriate adjustments can be made at the long-term lease five-year review periods.
- Enhance the development and integration of Aboriginal programming related to the archaeological work at Camp Kitchikewana.



*Resource conservation staffer demonstrates wildlife tracking using radio telemetry for YMCA campers.*

## KEY STRATEGY #2

# THINKING LONG-TERM: PROTECTING A SYMBOLIC CANADIAN LANDSCAPE



The ecological integrity of Georgian Bay Islands National Park remains good and provides the foundation for unique, high quality visitor opportunities. The key to maintaining the ecological integrity of the park depends on the health of Georgian Bay and visitors must have the opportunity to appreciate the islands in their natural state in order to foster a sense of stewardship. As the population of Simcoe-Muskoka grows there is increased pressure on park resources due to habitat loss and wildlife mortality. For the smallest National Park in Canada this means that engaging in conservation partnerships is critical to maintaining a healthy ecosystem within the park boundary.



*The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, a threatened species.*

**Objective #1:** *Enhance the ecological integrity of Georgian Bay Islands National Park.*

**Actions:**

- Maintain native biodiversity and ensure that species at risk do not become extirpated from the park as a result of management actions.
- Participate in the development of recovery strategies for those species at risk found within the park and ensure that legal obligations under the Species at Risk Act are met.
- Land acquisition, in partnership with the Georgian Bay Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, will be considered to mitigate the effects of habitat loss and to create new opportunities for visitor experience.
- Change the zoning of Beausoleil Island in its entirety to Zone II 'Wilderness' with the exceptions of the Cedar Spring area and the two YMCA camps (see Zoning section, page 37).



- The impacts of invasive species will be mitigated to the furthest extent possible. Education and stewardship will be strategic in order to prevent incidental species invasions. Where populations have been established within the park a management strategy will direct the most appropriate course of action.



*Monitoring ecologist collecting data on tree health.*

- Continue to monitor the ecological condition of the park through the ecological monitoring program (see Section on Monitoring, page 40). This will establish a baseline for assessing the long-term trends in the health of the park. Indicators, measures and thresholds have been established to effectively evaluate the state of ecological integrity within the park.
- Develop a fire plan that addresses both the need for fire suppression as well as the potential for fire as a resource management tool. The plan will be developed in consultation with local and provincial fire management agencies, will take into account traditional knowledge, and will be in accordance with Parks Canada policy.
- The aquatic ecosystem within GBINP is small and fragile. In order to protect the aquatic resources of Fairy and Goblin Lakes sport fishing will be deferred to Georgian Bay and will remain closed in the inland lakes. These two small lakes provide limited habitat for warm water fish

species and are susceptible to incidental species introduction.

- There will be a gradual phasing-out of motorized use of the Huron Trail between Beausoleil Point and Cedar Spring over three years. Parks Canada will no longer groom or maintain the trail for snowmobile use and the trail will be redefined for non-motorized visitor appreciation and interpretation.

- Engage the public in active park resource management activities including restoration and invasive species control.
- The park will continue to groom the Huron and Rockview Trails north of Cedar Spring for snowmobile use. Maintenance of this trail is for the protection of park resources across the island.
- Parks Canada will continue to monitor the impacts of snowmobile use within the park, including the Portage Trail, in order to minimize impacts to the park.

**Objective #2:** *With the objective of maintaining ecological integrity in the park, inform, influence and involve others in the maintenance of environmental sustainability and wise land use decisions in the greater park ecosystem.*





## Actions:

- Support private land stewardship, especially on initiatives relating to species at risk.
- Contribute knowledge and expertise to regional land use planning within the greater park ecosystem in order to minimize external stressors on the park.
- Actively promote conservation easements and support the work of the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Georgian Bay Land Trust.
- Partner with groups such as the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve to promote protection of ecological values through environmental stewardship.
- Share scientific information to enhance decision making in the greater park ecosystem.

**Objective #3:** *Go Green! Increasing park operational efficiencies and employ quality environmental management practices.*

## Actions:

- Complete the removal of park infrastructure (i.e., staff housing, operations facilities and outdated public use structures) from Beausoleil Island. These areas will be restored using native species to increase natural habitat and help control invasive species.
- Relocate the majority of the operational infrastructure from Beausoleil Island to a re-designed Honey Harbour facility using “green building” technologies to reduce the environmental footprint. This project also involves the creation of additional green space in Honey Harbour for the enjoyment of local residents, cottagers and park visitors.
- Relocate Beausoleil Point campsite to Christian Beach, and convert Beausoleil Point to a day use area. Beausoleil Point

is seldom used as a campsite, is prone to vandalism and is difficult to service and maintain.

- Introduce a ‘pack in, pack out’ waste policy at Bone Island and Christian Beach. This initiative will help reduce the costs of waste collection as well as encourage a reduction in packaging.



*Stewardship practises on private lands surrounding the park play a key role in ecosystem health.*



## KEY STRATEGY #3

### REACHING OUT: BUILDING A CONSTITUENCY FOR GBINP AND PARKS CANADA



Awareness of Georgian Bay Islands National Park within the surrounding region is fairly low. Through educational outreach and working with the media there is a tremendous opportunity to reach out to regional residents to build awareness, appreciation and support for the park and the National Park system. There is value in having a nationally recognized treasure in your backyard. National Parks contribute to quality of life and the local economy and provide opportunities for recreation and connection with nature. There are also significant opportunities to increase connections with urban audiences given GBINP's proximity to the Greater Toronto Area.

**Objective #1:** *Establish a strong and positive identity for GBINP and build support for Parks Canada through regional outreach.*

**Actions:**

- Build a constituency of support for GBINP by cultivating awareness throughout the Muskoka-Simcoe region.
- Use the well-known, iconic “windswept white pines on pink granite rock” scenery of Eastern Georgian Bay as a brand to connect regional residents to GBINP.
- Seek out mutually beneficial opportunities with regional citizen groups, businesses and local governments as a means of cultivating a sense of awe, connection to, and support for GBINP and the National Park system.
- Develop and deliver an engaging GBINP outreach exhibit for use at special events and high-traffic pedestrian locations in the region as a means of improving awareness of the park.





- Expand upon relationships with local media to improve awareness of GBINP.
- Increase GBI focused in-school outreach programming within the District of Muskoka and Simcoe County and on-line.
- Become increasingly known as a community resource for information and guidance on ecological issues such as species at risk protection.



*Local residents and tourists learn about the park from signs in Midland and Penetanguishene harbours.*



*Outreach activity in Honey Harbour.*

**Objective #2:** Support Parks Canada's urban outreach strategy.

#### **Actions:**

- Based upon social science information, target singular opportunities for GBINP to engage specific GTA audiences.
- In partnership with National Office, Parks Canada's Ontario Service Centre and other National Parks and National Historic Sites contribute to an increased awareness of Parks Canada in the province. For example, attend urban events that reach GTA residents (i.e., Outdoor Adventure Show) and showcase GBINP as the closest National Park to Toronto.
- Use the strategic location of the Welcome Centre in Port Severn to engage regional audiences from the Greater Toronto Area.
- Integrate GBINP programs and messages into the Parks Canada - Ontario Outreach Education Team strategy.





## KEY STRATEGY #4

# HONOURING THE PAST FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS: CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



This strategy involves management of the park's extensive cultural resources with the participation of partners and stakeholders, especially the First Nations that consider Beausoleil Island as a cherished place. GBINP provides public education and park experience opportunities directly connected to these resources.

By linking past and present, our cultural heritage helps us appreciate the human experience and better understand who we are as Canadians. GBINP's cultural resources tell a 5,500 year-old story of human life in this area. The islands have been an important resting place and residence for First Nations for centuries. Within GBINP there are 14 known archaeological sites, thousands of artefacts and several cultural landscapes as well as associated archival records and oral histories. These cultural resources are part of an inherently important heritage and contribute significantly to the sense of place.

**Objective # 1:** *Honour the Aboriginal cultural heritage of GBINP in collaboration with First Nations and Métis in ways that respect their traditions and values.*

**Actions:**

- Continue to support and engage the Cultural Advisory Committee as an integral forum for discussion of Aboriginal projects and cultural resource management in GBINP.
- Involve regional Aboriginal communities in the management and presentation of related cultural resources and stories.
- Facilitate projects to enhance knowledge of the cultural resources in GBINP. This could include compiling oral histories or gathering traditional knowledge for presentation and conservation purposes.
- Help to provide opportunities for First Nations and Métis to visit GBINP for spiritual reconnection with the land and to pay respect to ancestors buried in the park.



**Objective # 2:** *Connect the public to the rich cultural heritage of GBINP.*

**Actions:**

- Determine public interests and engage them with stories about the rich Aboriginal heritage of GBINP.
- Continue to work with the YMCA camps to incorporate Aboriginal heritage themes into youth programming.
- Working with Elders and the Cultural Advisory Committee accommodate ceremonies, either for specific audiences or to the general public, as appropriate. For example, Water Ceremonies will continue to be offered in the park each summer.
- Continue to offer programs for youth from the First Nation communities in the southern Georgian Bay region at Camp Kitchikewana.
- Continue to reproduce key artefacts for use as tangible interpretive objects that help connect the public to Aboriginal heritage. According to an Elder, 'Holding an artefact is like shaking the hands of the person who made it.'
- Continue to publicly participate in regional Aboriginal and First Nations special events and Pow Wows.



*Archaeologists have unearthed thousands of artefacts from high-use areas in the park as a mitigation measure.*



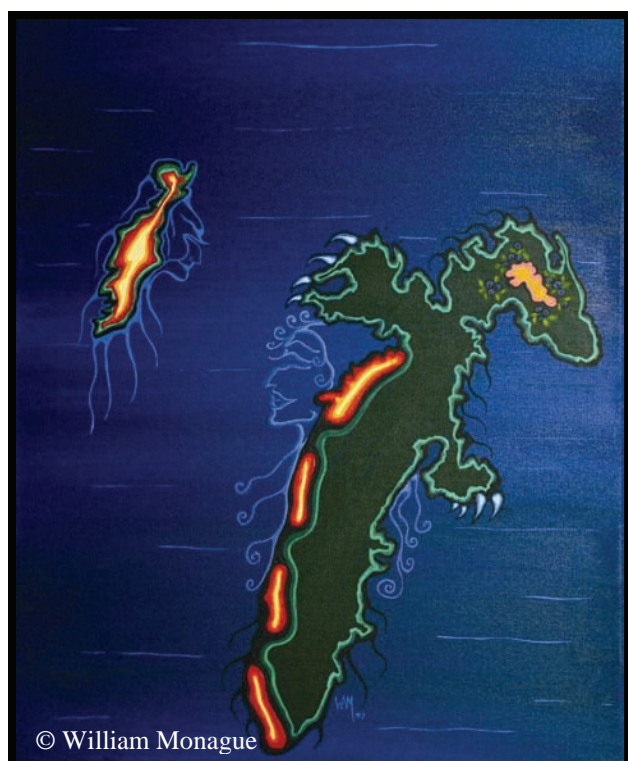
**Objective # 3:** *Protect the irreplaceable cultural resources of GBINP.*

**Actions:**

- Develop a Cultural Resource Values Statement (CRVS) in collaboration with First Nations and Métis.
- Upon completion of the CRVS, prepare a Cultural Resource Management Plan for GBINP that addresses cultural inventories, collection management, the preservation of oral histories, traditional knowledge and the identification and mitigation of threats to cultural resources.
- In partnership with the North Simcoe-Muskoka YMCA, continue to mitigate disturbance to cultural resources in high traffic areas on the leased land.
- Manage and exhibit historic objects in a culturally sensitive manner that respects First Nation and Métis community values.



*Visitors can participate in traditional Anishinabe ceremonies*



*Artist William Monague's work depicting Beausoleil Island and the Story of Fairy Lake.*





## AREA-SPECIFIC FOCUS

Previous chapters set out an integrated strategy for protection, visitor experience, public education and decision-making for Georgian Bay Islands as a whole. Managing the national park requires an attention to detail not possible on such a coarse scale. To allow for more detailed planning and management Parks Canada has divided the park into smaller areas. Goals and actions for each area are specific to that area and are consistent with the key strategies and objectives of the management plan. Their boundaries reflect a variety of factors – ecological similarity, connectivity, infrastructure, and the type and amount of human use.

In managing these smaller units Parks Canada integrates ecological, cultural, and visitor experience objectives.

- Ecological objectives include considerations about current and potential stresses and wildlife use (e.g., movement corridors, significant or rare habitats and the potential for human-caused wildlife displacement).
- Cultural objectives reflect considerations about maintaining and presenting historic features such as the cemetery, archaeological sites and cultural landscapes.
- Visitor experience objectives improve Parks Canada's ability to satisfy visitors by matching expectations with the available opportunities for experiences. They focus on facilities, natural and cultural settings, services and interaction with other visitors. They are based on visitor expectations, opportunities for solitude and self-reliance, interpretation, infrastructure, cultural resources and suitable activities.

Six area management units are identified for the park: the Cedar Spring area on Beausoleil Island; the northern islands; the remainder of Beausoleil; the Parks Canada Welcome Centre at Port Severn; the Honey Harbour property and the Midland administration office/property.

### 1. Cedar Spring



*Campsite in Cedar Spring*

Cedar Spring offers an island camping opportunity surrounded by lush hardwood forest along the Georgian Bay shoreline. This 87-site campground offers the highest level of facilities at GBINP including showers, washrooms, potable water, day-use facilities, interpretation media and access to numerous hiking trails. These amenities make Cedar Spring a facility well suited to families, novice campers or first time visitors who are looking for a safe and comfortable experience.

Historically the only options for getting to Cedar Spring were by personal boat or hiring a water taxi service. To address this challenge GBINP launched the *DayTripper* boat service in 2000 transporting visitors to and from the island during the summer. This initiative has proven successful and use of



the service has grown steadily as a result of marketing and word-of-mouth referrals.

The last major improvements to Cedar Spring took place in the 1970s and the campground facilities are now dated. Over the same period of time there have been significant changes in Canada that have impacted camping and outdoor recreation: increased urbanization, an aging population, increased immigration and ethnic diversity and youth gravitating to technology rather than nature.

Repeat visitation to the campground is quite high consisting of a small core group of campers. However, camping numbers are generally decreasing. To reverse this trend GBINP must develop a fresh and unique camping experience to distinguish it from the numerous roadside camping facilities available in the area. With a huge potential visitor base of urban Canadians only 90 minutes away in the GTA there is significant opportunity for increased use.

Transformation of the Cedar Spring camping experience requires a strategic approach that includes:

- Market research and prioritized product development
- Modernization of campground facilities



Visitor Services kiosk in Cedar Spring

- Integration of the camping product within the total visitor experience offering a menu of service options
- Product packaging and marketing

**Objective # 1:** *Revitalize the Cedar Spring camping and day-use offerings to better provide meaningful visitor experiences, to improve the efficiency of park operations and increase camping by 20% within 5 years.*

### Actions:

- Use current market research to guide development of high-quality and distinctive day-use and camping experiences at Cedar Spring to draw new visitors.
- Consolidate and modernize facilities to offer better services for visitors and to 'green' operations.
- Offer packaged camping experiences that could include roofed accommodations
- Redesign the total visitor experience to be more seamless and intuitive at all levels including: trip planning, information on the park website, orientation in Honey Harbour, interpretation offerings on the island and the return trip.
- Improve marketing for autumn season camping at Cedar Spring. Fall offers an outstanding experience with vibrant colours, tranquillity, pleasant weather and no bugs, yet it is significantly underutilized.
- Expand natural habitat on the island by consolidating and relocating park maintenance facilities from Cedar Spring.





- Continue to remove invasive species from the Cedar Spring area and restore disturbed areas to create a healthy and natural backdrop for visitor experiences.
- Using VIP surveys and visitor attendance statistics, monitor the effectiveness of investments and make necessary adaptations to ensure visitor satisfaction.

**Objective # 2:** *Provide a dynamic interpretive programming offer that engages visitors in the natural and cultural heritage of GBINP.*

**Actions:**

- Develop interpretive products in Cedar Spring that complement natural and cultural features to convey a sense of place. These will complement the exhibit panels that have recently been installed along island trails.
- Showcase ecological integrity projects through demonstration plots and interpretive signage.
- Offer innovative interpretive programs that engage visitors as participants.





## 2. The Northern Islands

Beausoleil Island offers the vast majority of visitor services and facilities at GBINP and for many it is the only part of the park that they knowingly experience. Yet it is the more remote northern islands which form the iconic image in people's minds when they think of Georgian Bay and the 30,000 Islands: crystal clear waters with vast shoals of contoured pre-Cambrian shield overlaid by weathered white pines and orange lichen. It is what inspired the Group of Seven in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and it is what draws visitors today. This pristine area between Bone Island and Twelve Mile Bay provides a refuge for a variety of rare species including the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, the Eastern Fox snake, the Spotted Turtle and the Five-lined Skink.

This 'northern' community is home to Moose Deer Point First Nation and long-standing cottage communities including Cognashene, Wa-wa-ta-see, and Go Home Bay. Some lands are protected through the Georgian Bay Land Trust and the Provincial Nature Reserve at O'Donnell Point. It is a top recreational boating destination in Canada in an area recognized by UNESCO in 2004 as a World Biosphere Reserve.

**Objective #1:** *Provide an inspirational wilderness experience in the remote northern islands.*

### **Actions:**

- Maintain this area of outstanding scenery in its natural wilderness state, continuing to offer unparalleled sensory experiences. Self-guided day-use experiences such as picnicking, exploration and swimming will be encouraged.

- Generate better awareness of the northern islands through a variety of media and at Midland, Honey Harbour and Lock 45 reception facilities.
- Offer the "virtual visitor" an experience of the northern islands. Current and future technologies will allow the scenery of the northern islands to be enjoyed and appreciated by a wide audience via the internet and at the Parks Canada Welcome Centre in Port Severn.



Hatch Islands

**Objective #2:** *The archipelago – understanding GBINP’s ecology.*

**Actions:**

- Use outreach education as a tool that allows people to experience and understand what makes GBINP so special. Themes such as “The World’s Largest Freshwater Archipelago”, “On the Roots of Mountains”, “Island Biogeography”, and “Shelters from the Storm”, can provide people with insight and connection to this area of the park. These themes will be presented to visitors at the Welcome Centre in Port Severn, on Beausoleil Island, at the administrative office in Midland and other venues throughout Simcoe-Muskoka.

- Greater stewardship efforts on adjacent lands will be encouraged and supported. This area is critical to species such as Eastern Foxsnake, Eastern Massasauga and the Spotted Turtle. In order for these species to survive a concerted effort must be placed on species at risk awareness and habitat protection.
- Foster an awareness and appreciation for the species that inhabit the northern islands and the habitat that sustains them. Employ educational and interpretive programs, both in the park and in regional communities, to facilitate this action.

**Objective #3:** *Ensure long-term protection and appreciation of the northern islands.*

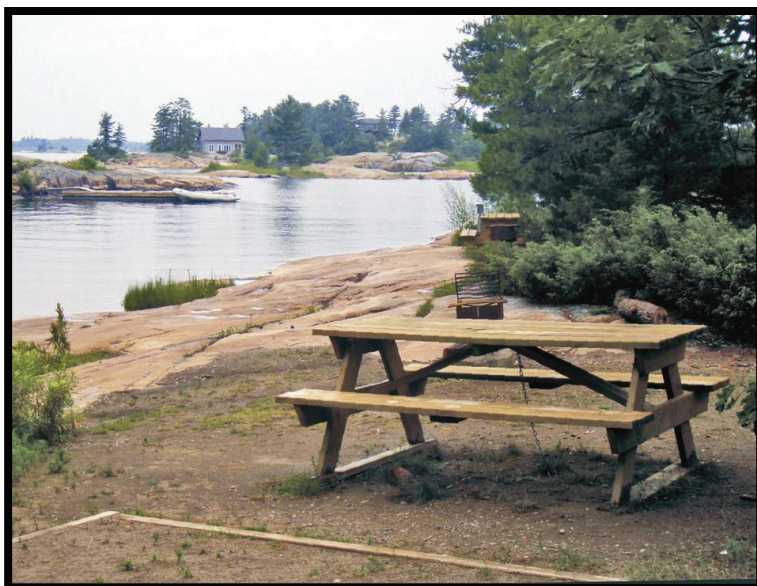
**Actions:**

- With a focus on Georgian Bay Islands, work with the Biosphere Reserve, individuals, associations and other levels of government to facilitate collaborative conservation planning in the area.
- Land acquisition, in partnership with the Georgian Bay Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, will be considered to mitigate the effects of habitat loss and to create new opportunities for visitor experience.
- Employ Species Observation Systems to record species on the park islands.
- Encourage joint monitoring efforts on private lands to detect ecological changes over a wider area.

## 3. Semi-Primitive Sites

Statistics indicate that the semi-primitive camping experience is one of the Park's most popular offerings. A variety of sites throughout the park offer the visitor a rustic, 'green' camping experience in a wilderness setting on the shores of Georgian Bay with an emphasis placed on self-reliance and solitude. Nine campgrounds and seven day-use/overnight mooring facilities provide a diversity of natural environments from the rugged grandeur of the Canadian Shield to the more subtle charm of the hardwood forest. Each site offers basic amenities including docks, vault toilets or composting toilets, picnic shelters, tent platforms or pads, hibachis or fire pits. These facilities are undergoing renewal with updates to signs, infrastructure and trails. New docks will accommodate fluctuating water levels that cycle over the long term.

**Objective #1:** *Maintain the semi-primitive camping experience in a natural setting.*



*Semi-primitive campsite at Honeymoon Bay*

### Actions:

- As part of the asset renewal program rehabilitate sites and provide tent pads or tent platforms, vault or composting toilets, hibachis and, in some sites, picnic shelters.
- Provide access to trails and directional signage that connect each campground to the 30 kilometres of park hiking trails that challenge all abilities and allow the visitor to explore a variety of areas in the park.

**Objective #2:** *Continue to offer day use and/or overnight mooring facilities in a Zone II setting at seven locations on Beausoleil Island and Bone Island.*

### Actions:

- Monitor water and noise levels at Little Dog dock and consider moving to a location with deeper water access.
- Consider expanding the docking capacity at McCabe Rock creating more deep-water access. An environmental assessment will assist in the design ensuring that the natural resources, water quality and visitor experience will not be compromised by increased use.
- Due to the remoteness of the site, designate the Bone Island dock specifically for vessels with washroom facilities. Garbage will be pack-in/pack-out and the existing toilet facility will be removed. These actions will occur in the third year of the approved management plan. The visitor offering will emphasize a self-reliant, environmentally friendly experience in a natural setting among the near-shore islands of Georgian Bay.



**Objective #3:** *Identify a variety of interpretive opportunities for each type of visitor facility.*

**Actions:**

- Continue to provide visitor information at each location primarily through non-personal interpretation, registration stands and publications including the Park Visitor Guide.
- Design and install new interpretive signage throughout the trail system highlighting natural and cultural features.
- By way of roving staff deliver informal educational/awareness messages at each site.
- Develop new interpretive programs with a special focus on geology, geography, species at risk, in-park monitoring and cultural heritage.

**Objective #4:** *Monitor the condition of the sites with particular emphasis at facilities where significant numbers of species at risk are observed to ensure the long-term health of the environment and at-risk wildlife.*

**Actions:**

- Ensure that the site renewal program employs environmentally friendly practices, products and construction materials.
- Replace existing crib docks with floating docks to remove the existing footprint on the lakebed and eliminate creosote-treated timbers. As a construction practice ensure that no chemically treated wood is used on structures below the water line.
- Limit soil compaction by installing tent pads/platforms at campgrounds and clearly define all pathways and trails.



*These recently renewed campsites feature permanent, raised tent pads that minimize soil compaction.*

## 4. The Parks Canada Welcome Centre at Lock 45 - Port Severn



*Parks Canada Welcome Centre, Port Severn*

Parks Canada opened a Welcome Centre in May 2007 to favourable reviews from boaters and day visitors. The building is ideally located in Port Severn at Lock 45 on the Trent-Severn Waterway. Lock 45 is the western terminus of the waterway on Georgian Bay, very close to Highway 400. For many Ontarians it serves as a first ever contact with Parks Canada. The Welcome Centre features a variety of stimulating displays including interpretive panels, artefacts, wildlife models and audio-visual presentations. Parks Canada staff are available to talk with visitors, answer questions and help with administrative tasks and trip planning. The Centre received approximately 7,000 visitors in its first season and continues to serve over 200 visitors per day.

The Welcome Centre enhances the reception offering for the park in Honey Harbour and cross-promotes the other Parks Canada offerings in central Ontario including the Trent-Severn Waterway NHS and Bethune Memorial House NHS. Many boaters are familiar with the Lock 45 facility and make regular stops throughout the boating season to rest and talk with lock staff. The addition of the Welcome Centre to

Lock 45 appeals not only to regular boaters but also to the many tourists who visit the Centre by car or who are staying at one of several local resorts within walking distance.

The physical location of the Welcome Centre also allows visitors to enjoy the area's natural beauty from a bench or sheltered picnic area overlooking the waterway. Much of the property surrounding the Welcome Centre has remained natural adding to the appeal of this site for those seeking wildlife-spotting opportunities.

**Objective #1:** *Provide high-quality visitor reception, information and orientation services to the park/site visitors and the travelling public at large.*

### **Actions:**

- Staff the Welcome Centre with knowledgeable persons able to provide quality services to destination travellers and the public at large during the summer operating season and the shoulder seasons. (May to October)
- Maintain and expand upon high-quality audio-visual tools that allow destination travellers and potential visitors to better plan their experiences.
- As a one-stop shop allow visitors to purchase park/site passes, make *DayTripper* reservations and purchase marine charts and Parks Canada related products.
- Effectively illustrate how central Ontario parks and sites are connected through the Parks Canada mandate and link these protected areas to Canada's family of National Parks, National Historic Sites and





National Marine Conservation Areas across the country.

- Monitor centre visitation, visitor type and visitor experience to assist in future site management.

- Target day visitors with specially developed programs designed to inspire them to visit the park or other Parks Canada sites in Ontario.

**Objective #2:** *Effectively enhance the visitor experience through a menu of interpretation and presentation offerings using a variety of personal and non-personal methods.*

### Actions:

- Provide high-quality audio-visual presentations allowing the public to experience areas they may not have an opportunity to visit such as the remote northern park islands, the underwater Mnjikaning Fish Weirs National Historic Site or lock stations further upstream.
- Offer personal interpretive programs during the summer months.
- Provide visitors with the opportunity to encounter live animals native to the area. As well, displays will include life-like reproductions of species at risk and Aboriginal cultural artefacts found in the park.



*Top: Welcome Centre staff are on hand to provide quality services to visitors, travellers and the general public.*

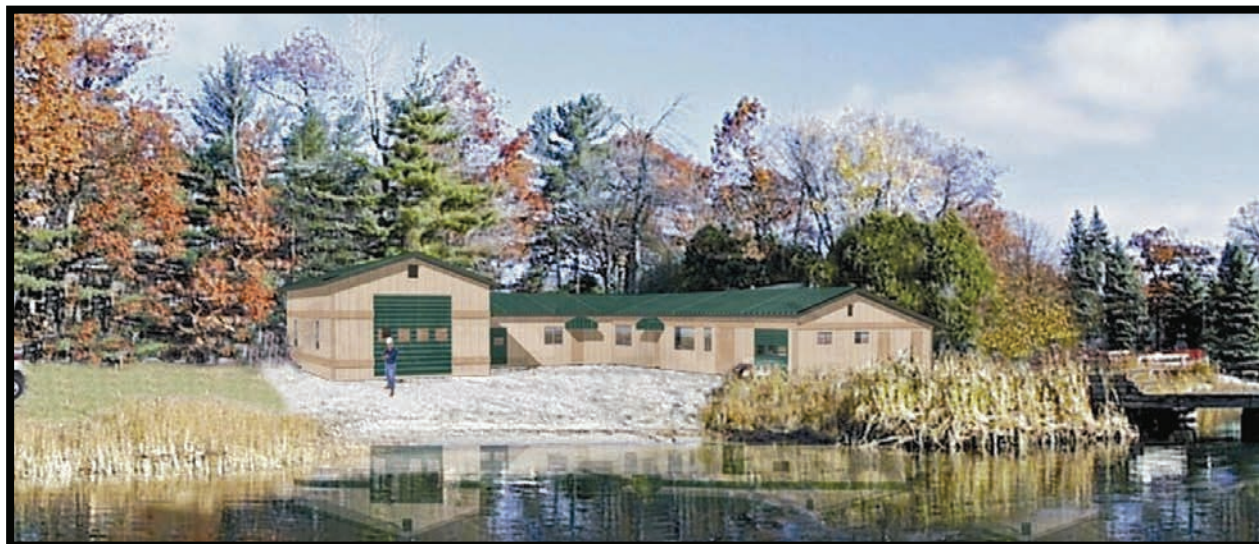


*Left: Interpretive exhibits at the Welcome Centre.*





## 5. Honey Harbour



*New facility in Honey Harbour.*

Honey Harbour has long served as a key launch point for visitors to Beausoleil Island and as a destination for travellers interested in the park. To improve ecological integrity and visitor experience the dated general works facilities are being removed from Beausoleil Island and a new Operations Facility is being constructed in Honey Harbour. To complement this, the Honey Harbour property will be redesigned to improve the visitor experience with better parking, washrooms, trails and picnic areas, docking for the *DayTripper* and interpretive media.

As a gateway to the park the Honey Harbour revitalization is a significant improvement to the total visitor experience at GBINP even offering a proxy experience, 'a taste of Georgian Bay', for visitors who will not actually travel to the park islands. It contributes to local tourism and the park will work with the community to define the visitor experience and develop interpretive messaging that conveys local cultural connections to the park.

From an operational standpoint the new compound in Honey Harbour will improve efficiencies and reduce costs. The compound will consolidate facilities and operate year-round without being subject to ice conditions that limit access to Beausoleil Island.

**Objective # 1:** *Redevelop the Honey Harbour property to become a gateway that welcomes visitors to GBINP.*

### **Actions:**

- Through site design improve access and parking for *DayTrippers* and visitors seeking information about the park.
- Develop signage that provides essential visitor information about GBINP.
- Create safe and comfortable picnic areas that allow visitors to rest before or after their park experience.



- Maintain one third of the property in a natural state where visitors can stroll through a rocky, treed area and down to the water experiencing 'a taste of Georgian Bay' from the mainland.
- Buffer visitor areas from park operations.
- Re-naturalize the shoreline to improve habitat for species and increase chances for visitors to view wildlife.

the Parks Canada Welcome Centre (nearby in Port Severn) and on Beausoleil Island.

- On-site interpretative signage will also focus on the shoreline restoration work on the property to encourage stewardship actions on privately owned shorelines.
- Encourage use of the trail offering visitors a proxy experience of GBINP if they are unable to visit the islands.

**Objective # 2:** *Connect visitors to GBINP and Parks Canada through discovery opportunities.*

**Actions:**

- Develop interpretive signage to raise awareness of GBINP by showcasing the iconic scenery, natural diversity and cultural heritage of the park. This signage will complement the interpretive exhibits at



*The redesigned Honey Harbour facility will improve the DayTripper visitor experience.*



## 6. The Midland Administration Office and Property



The park moved its administration functions from Honey Harbour to Midland, Ontario in the winter of 2004. Midland is a rapidly expanding town of 17,000 in Simcoe County. The cities of Orillia, Barrie and Wasaga Beach are within a half hour drive and the GTA is less than 90 minutes away.

The new office is located on the Wye River just inside the city's eastern limit and immediately adjacent to Ontario's Ste. Marie Park property. Significant natural and cultural attractions in the immediate vicinity include the Wye Marsh, Ste. Marie Among the Hurons, St. Louis Mission National Historic Site and the Martyr's Shrine. The Huronia Museum is 3 km distant in Midland and Ontario's 'Discovery Harbour' historic site is 10 km away in Penetanguishene. Awenda Provincial Park is also 10 km distant.

The Parks Canada property is 5.6 ha in area, extending 370 metres along the western shore of the Wye River from Ste. Marie Park on the south to the mouth of the river where it empties into Georgian Bay.

Within mere metres of major residential and commercial development, the mouth of the Wye River is home to a variety of reptile and bird species.

Visitors can enjoy the pathway that runs along the west shore of the Wye River. It is open to walkers, joggers and cyclists. The south 100 m of the path passes through a relatively cleared area where users get a full view of the river and its inhabitants. The north 270 m of the path winds through a hardwood forest of oak, maple and ash. A small creek runs through the property in this section and there are opportunities to access the riverbank. Map turtles and Painted turtles abound as well as Trumpeter swans, osprey and Great Blue herons. During migration it is common to observe Buffleheads, Mergansers, Goldeneyes, Caspian and Common terns and Canada geese from the parks property. This very popular walking trail leads from the town centre through the Parks Canada property and Ste. Marie Park and onto the Tay Township portion of the TransCanada Trail.





**Objective #1:** *Provide high-quality, year-round visitor and reception services to residents of North Simcoe County and the visiting public.*

**Actions:**

- Serve as the main point of contact for prospective visitors by telephone, through written correspondence or in person.
- Take reservations for the Cedar Spring campground and the *DayTripper*.
- Serve as the communications hub for visitor services between the Welcome Centre at Lock 45, Honey Harbour and the park.
- Present the park inside the building using maps, photographs, display cabinets and interpretation panels.

**Objective #2:** *Facilitate a high quality visitor experience through the careful provision of sound environmental and protection practices.*

**Actions:**

- Manage the property in accordance with its significant ecological value. In partnership with adjacent land owners prohibit motorized recreational vehicles.
- Encourage and facilitate visitor experience by providing directional signage, discreet interpretive panels and comfortable benches at scenic spots along the riverbank.
- Leave a minimum of 80 per cent of the land area in its natural state, providing habitat for species that significantly enhance the visitor experience.
- Work with adjacent land owners, including the Town of Midland and Ste. Marie Park, to ensure a consistent visitor friendly approach to land management along the final stages of the Wye River before it empties into Georgian Bay.



*Top: View of the Wye River*

*Left: Cyclists using the Wye River Trail*



## PARTNERSHIP AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

National Parks are for the benefit of all Canadians. People who care about the future of Georgian Bay Islands National Park were essential in sculpting the long-term vision for this Management Plan, and continual engagement with such people is necessary to achieve this vision. Park staff work with numerous public, private and governmental organizations in the advancement of sustainable tourism and heritage conservation.

### **GBINP Partners**

GBINP staff work closely with the Cultural Advisory Committee and value the Committee's perspective in matters of park management. The Committee will continue to play a key role in the park's engagement of First Nations and Aboriginal peoples. Quarterly formal meetings will continue throughout the life of the plan to ensure that regional First Nations and Aboriginal groups have a forum that allows for meaningful contributions to park management.

The Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve is an organization promoting the coordination and cooperation of sustainable development and conservation initiatives along Eastern Georgian Bay. The park Superintendent will sit as a member of the GBBR advisory board, while other management staff will continue to sit on other conservation and sustainable development committees. Past

workshops have facilitated improved collaboration in the areas of community planning, species at risk awareness and environmental stewardship that



benefit the entire region. Shared stewardship and promotional activities are of benefit to both the park and the eastern shore of Georgian Bay and this activity will continue throughout the life of the plan. Long-term benefits to the park include healthy ecosystems in lands adjacent to the park and increased targeted tourism opportunities

The two YMCA camps (London and Simcoe-Muskoka chapters) are also active partners. These camps provide unparalleled opportunities to deliver key Parks Canada messages to receptive target audiences (including urban youth) thereby encouraging connection to place and a sense of relevance. With lease agreements in place until 2022, GBINP will continue to work with the camps to ensure high quality experiences that help form life-long memories.

Other partners include:

- Species at Risk Recovery Teams (Massasauga rattlesnake, Foxsnake, Hognosed snake, Forked Three-Awned Grass)
- Severn Sound Environmental Association
- The Township of Georgian Bay
- The Town of Midland
- The Town of Penetanguishene
- Muskoka Tourism Marketing Agency
- Southern Georgian Bay Chamber of Commerce
- Southeastern Georgian Bay Chamber of Commerce
- Queen's University
- Georgian Bay Land Trust





- Georgian Bay Association
- Tomahawk Club
- Tadenac Club
- Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre
- Kids for Turtles
- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Ontario Parks
- McMaster University
- Canadian Boaters Alliance
- Delewana Inn
- Georgian Queen
- Miss Midland
- Six Mile Lake Conservationists Club  
Naturalists

There are a variety of ways that members of the public can stay informed of park activities and express their views on park programs and management decisions. These include:

- The park information line at [Info.GBI@pc.gc.ca](mailto:Info.GBI@pc.gc.ca)
- The annual park Visitor Guide
- Reception areas in Midland, the Parks Canada Welcome Centre, and kiosks in Honey Harbour and on Beausoleil Island
- Park brochures distributed to a variety of Information Centres in central Ontario
- Links on partner and stakeholder web sites
- Information Bulletins
- Media articles
- The Park Website



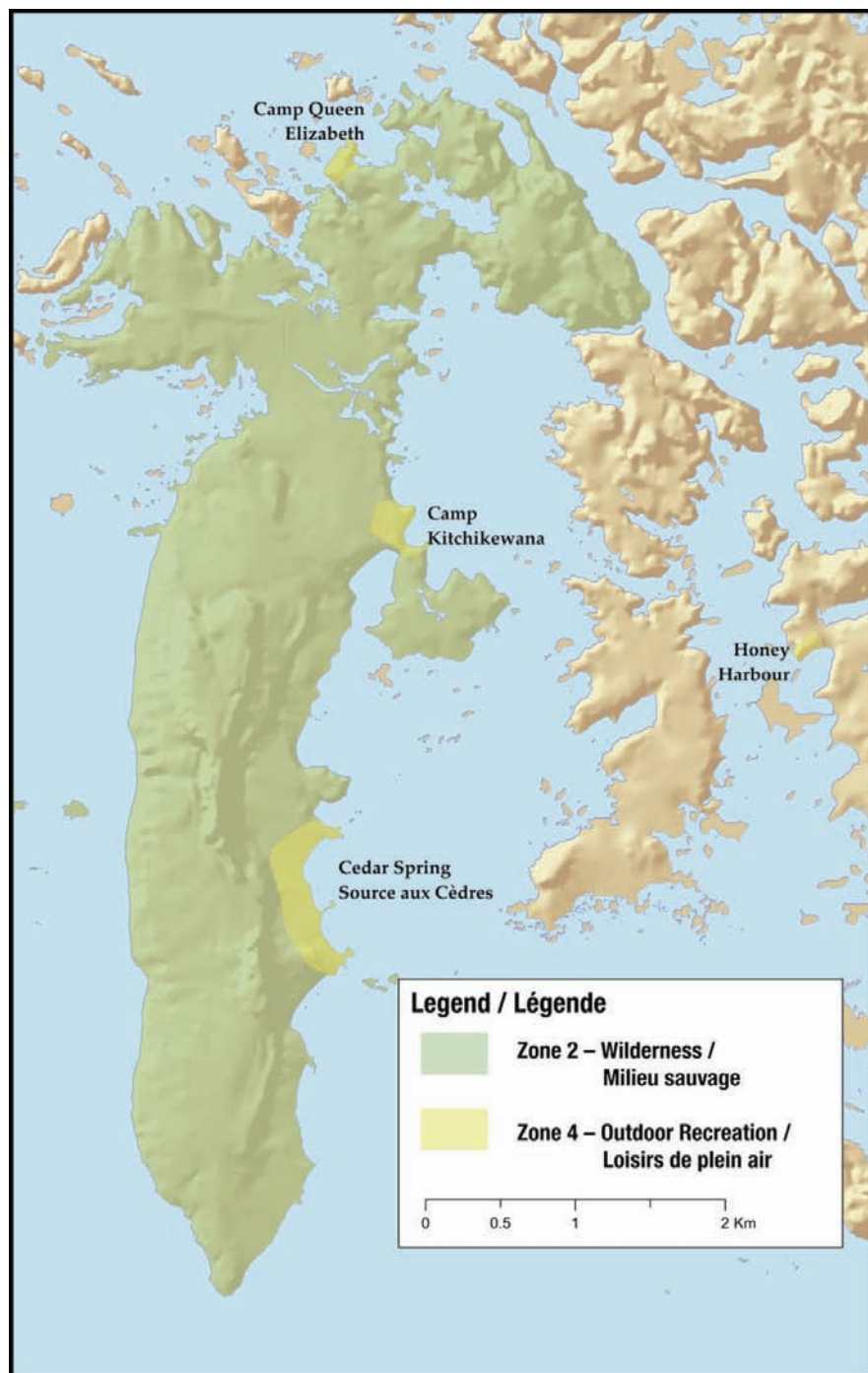
*Species at Risk partnership with Beausoleil First Nation*



## PARK ZONING

Parks Canada uses a zoning system to recommend the types of activities that are appropriate in specific areas based on ecological and cultural resource sensitivities and the types of visitor experiences that can be sustained in the long-term. As such, zoning is a valuable tool in the translation of

general policy into park-specific application. It sets limits on what activities can occur and where they can occur in the park and provides a graphical summary of the management objectives for those areas. Parks Canada uses a system of five zones ranging in intensity of use from Special Preservation to Park Services.



Based on the assessment of resource constraints and visitor experience opportunities the following zoning scheme will be adopted by GBINP.

### Zone I: Special Preservation

This designation will apply to all islands without visitor facilities within the park, that is, all islands except Beausoleil and a portion of Bone Island. These zones preserve fragile, rare or unique natural resources in need of a greater degree of protection. Motorized access is not permitted in this zone. Public use is encouraged and access is managed to ensure that protection is not compromised.

### Zone II: Wilderness

This designation applies to moderate and low visitor use areas on Beausoleil Island and to the docking area on Bone Island. These areas are highly representative of the natural region and are managed for the preservation of natural and cultural resources and for the facilitation of meaningful visitor experiences.



Visitors have the opportunity to enjoy a wide range of recreational activities and experiences that require a natural setting. Basic services and facilities will continue to be available to support these activities while encouraging self-reliance and environmentally friendly practices. Over the life of this management plan snowmobile use will continue to be permitted along designated trails on Beausoleil Island only. These trails, including the northern portion of the Huron Trail, the Rockview Trail and the Portage Trail will be groomed for purposes of regulation and resource conservation only.

## Zone IV: Outdoor Recreation

This designation will apply to the Cedar Spring campground, Camp Queen Elizabeth II and Camp Kitchikewana areas. These limited areas allow for a wider range of services and visitor experience opportunities while ensuring protection. Motorized access is permitted.



*The Cedar Spring campground will be considered Zone IV: Outdoor Recreation.*



## ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS

Parks Canada will continue to administer Georgian Bay Islands National Park from its office in Midland.

A new operations facility has been constructed in Honey Harbour providing improved facilities for staff and visitors alike.

The Parks Canada Welcome Centre at Port Severn will continue provide reception services for the park while playing a key role in raising awareness of and appreciation for Parks Canada's mandate.



*Visitor reception services and park administration are located at the Midland Administration Office.*





## MONITORING

Management planning is not a static process. Monitoring of the on-going implementation of the plan provides an evaluation of the planned actions to determine that they are effective in achieving the key strategies. The park utilizes two types of monitoring: condition and management effectiveness.

The current State of the Park report concentrates on the state of ecological integrity in the Park. The next State of the Park Report will also evaluate public outreach education and partner/stakeholder relationships and the facilitation of visitor experiences.

### Condition Monitoring

Condition monitoring is designed to answer the question “What is the current state of the park?” It is a snapshot of long-term trends that serves to determine if the park’s ecological condition, visitor experience offer, and public outreach education programs and partner/stakeholder relationships are improving, deteriorating or remaining relatively stable.

#### *Ecological Integrity*

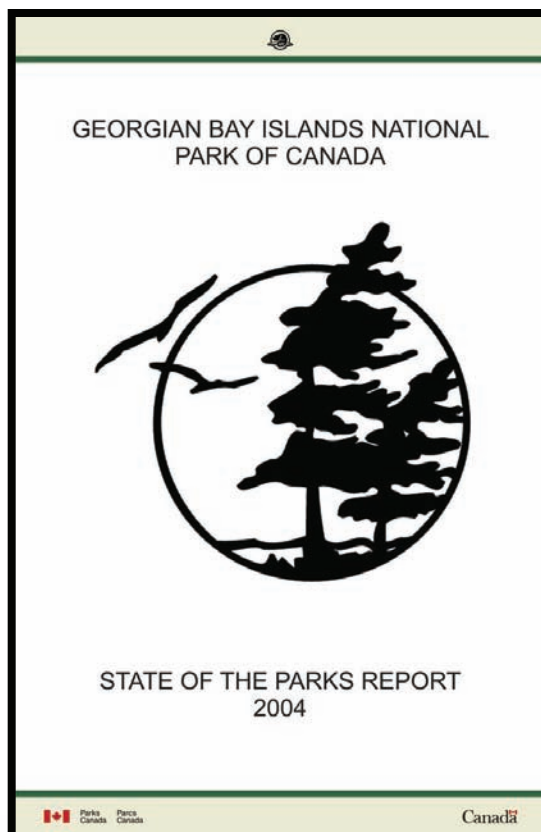
GBINP staff evaluate the condition of ecological integrity in the park using four broad indicators as determined by the approved State of the

Park Report: forests, wetlands, lakes, and Great Lakes shorelines. Each indicator has a suite of measures reflecting the park’s biodiversity and ecological function. The long-term trend of these indicators is measured against a desired threshold.

Measures provide management with an understanding of trends in ecological condition, and all management decisions take ecological integrity into consideration. The Park is considered to be in good condition, although there is concern regarding incremental changes beyond management’s jurisdiction that can have consequences within the Park. Such is the case for species-at-risk and invasive species. In these instances the Park will continue to work with other governing agencies and private landowners to mitigate possible threats to Park resources.

#### *Visitor Experience*

A successful visitor experience offer is one that establishes a strong sense of connection, and GBINP will strive to ensure that visitors leave the Park with positive memories of meaningful experiences. This will be achieved through astute investments in visitor services, facilities, activities, programs and staff. During the course of the management plan Parks Canada will implement a structured monitoring program that will measure the state of visitor experience offerings.



## *Public Outreach and Education*

The success of Parks Canada Public Outreach and Education programming will be monitored at a national level, and GBINP will implement activities that conform to national baselines. Generally the public will have an understanding of the Park and Parks Canada through public outreach programs where they receive information that is of interest to them when they want it through a variety of media. As well, interested partners and stakeholders will have the opportunity to join the Park and the Agency in joint initiatives that meet mutual interests.

## **Effectiveness Monitoring**

Effectiveness monitoring evaluates the specific results of direct management action. These are shorter-term performance evaluations used to determine if management decisions leading to actions are achieving the intended results.

## *Ecological Integrity*

Specific actions related to ecological integrity that will be monitored include:

- Control and eradication programs for invasive species.
- The effects of over snow use on the Portage Trail
- The restoration of the Operations Compound at Cedar Spring.
- The renewal of the Cedar Spring Campground and Day Use Facilities.



*Cedar Spring Campground*

## *Visitor Experience*

Management decisions related to Visitor Experience will also be monitored for effectiveness. For example, as a result of an action has the quality of the visitor experience and therefore visitor satisfaction been improved? Has the action resulted in greater use of a trail or a facility, with perhaps an associated increase in revenue? Effectiveness is measured both qualitatively and quantitatively, and the desired results are twofold – an increase in the quality of the visitor experience thereby creating a sense of personal connection, combined with a prudent expenditure of public funds.

Several indicators are used to monitor visitor satisfaction and the effectiveness of management actions at GBINP:

- The Visitor Information Program (VIP) survey, conducted every five years, assesses visitor satisfaction levels concerning various aspects of park facilities, services and programs. Parks Canada strives to have over 85% of visitors satisfied with their experience, and over 50% very satisfied with their experience.



- Visitor statistics can be used to infer satisfaction through repeat visitation (visitors are satisfied with the experiences and make the decision to return) or new growth areas that suggest park products are meeting user demands and expectations.
- Direct feedback through visitor comments and public consultation exercises.
- The tracking of revenue generated from Personal Use Fees.
- The introduction of the catered camping experience and reaching new audiences.
- Promotional activities designed to increase autumn visitation.

Other visitor experience ventures alluded to in the plan but not yet fully developed will, when implemented, be scrutinized for their effectiveness in the same fashion.

### *Public Outreach Education*

Public outreach and communication is essential for generating awareness and understanding of GBINP. The objective is to encourage support for and promote the

relevance of GBINP to park visitors, communities and the Canadian public. Monitoring the effectiveness of public education programmes has traditionally done by tracking relevant statistics, but understanding the effectiveness of education has been difficult. The park will move away from measuring “outputs” to measuring “outcomes”. To determine the effectiveness of education and outreach actions, the Park will:

- Through the use of feedback mechanisms ensure that audience learning objectives are achieved and Parks Canada’s goals are met.
- Continue to keep detailed statistics tracking the number of personal contacts made, and evaluate trends for the future.
- Over the course of the plan track the number of requests for services from educational institutions, other levels of government, non-government organizations, the private sector, and various partners and stakeholders.
- Use outreach education to increase awareness of the park with stakeholders and partners thereby creating better opportunities for greater involvement.



## SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

A strategic environmental assessment (SEA) was completed on this management plan in accordance with the *2004 Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals*. This summary includes a brief discussion of the scope, potential environmental effects, mitigation, residual environmental effects and any follow-up monitoring.

The SEA considered the potential environmental effects of proposed management plan actions on the following environmental components: forests, Great Lakes coast, aquatics, wetlands, visitor experience, regional ecological context, education and outreach, cultural resources and Aboriginal relationships. Cumulative effects of proposed actions on existing ecosystem stressors were also examined. Impacts were evaluated on the lands and waters situated within the Greater Park Ecosystem looking ahead 15 years, with a focus set on the next five year period.

Many of the actions proposed in the Plan are likely to result in positive environmental effects. Some of these include:

- Increased visitor appreciation and understanding of the park ecosystems as a result of proposed improvements to interpretation programs, boater access and services.
- Vegetation restoration and reductions to air and noise pollution due to the phasing out of snowmobile use on portions of the Huron Trail.
- Inclusion and enhanced participation of First Nation's and Métis partners from the cooperative development of a Cultural Values Statement as the basis for development of a Cultural Resources Management Plan.
- An increase in habitat and biodiversity resulting from the removal of facilities and the restoration of those sites to natural conditions.

The SEA identified the following adverse environmental effects on key components as a result of implementation of proposed management plan actions:

- Loss of vegetation associated with an expansion of self-guided trails.
- Potential release of fuels along maintained snowmobile trails.

Given the strategic nature of management plans, the SEA proposes mitigation measures and enhancements at a broad level. The Plan recognized that consolidating existing infrastructure will reduce the human footprint on the Park and the planting of native vegetation following infrastructure removals at Beausoleil Island will assist with regenerating the site. Encouraging the use of green technologies in any future developments will reduce energy consumption. With regards to any future development at the Park, the SEA recommends proper site development is taken into account and best management practices be employed for all phases of development. The SEA identified only positive residual effects as a result of Plan implementation. These are expected primarily from removal of existing facilities and subsequent restoration of these sites.

Some of the proposed management plan actions may require additional project-level environmental assessment under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* or Parks Canada policy. Any proposed infrastructure developments (e.g. relocation of facilities to Honey Harbour, and the expansion or relocation of docking facilities at McCabe and Little Dog) may be subject to further assessment. Where appropriate, project specific follow-up monitoring should support the existing monitoring program for the Park.

Overall the SEA concluded that the direction proposed in the management plan is consistent with Parks Canada policy and that the majority of the proposed actions will result in positive environmental effects on key components. No adverse residual environmental effects are expected as a result of Plan implementation.





## APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF PLANNED ACTIONS

Implementation of a management plan is directly linked to the Field Unit’s annual business plan, where resources are specifically allocated for plan implementation. The following summarizes the actions proposed in this management plan and their priority in terms of implementation. High priority items will be completed within the next five years.

<b>Key Strategy #1</b>	<b>Windswept White Pines &amp; Rocky Shores: The Iconic GBINP Experience</b>
	Applying social science research and trend analysis, re-define the visitor experience offer to accommodate current and future demands.
	Establish a park communications plan that will provide a dynamic interpretation and programming offer to fully engage visitors in the natural and cultural heritage of GBINP.
	Increase autumn visitation to GBINP through effective marketing, enhance DayTripper service and experience packages (i.e. camping).
	Revitalize Cedar Spring campground, modernizing the facility based upon changing trends in camping and market analysis of regional campgrounds.
	Improve the quality and user-friendliness of pre-trip visitor experience information online and in traditional print media.
	Re-define the Huron Trail between Cedar Spring and Beausoleil Point for interpretation and non-motorized visitor use.
Complete the dock and primitive campground renewal programs.	
<b>Key Strategy #2</b>	<b>Thinking Long-term: Protecting a Symbolic Canadian Landscape</b>
	Complete the removal of park infrastructure from Beausoleil Island and restore these areas using native species thereby increasing habitat and improving the visitor experience.
	Convert Beausoleil Point to a day use area.
	Introduce a “pack-in, pack-out” waste policy at Bone Island dock.
Work with stakeholders in the development and implementation of recovery strategies for species at risk and meet legal obligations under the Species at Risk Act.	

<b>Key Strategy #3</b>	<b>Reaching Out: Building a Constituency for GBINP and Parks Canada</b>
	Complete the re-development of the Honey Harbour property as a welcoming gateway for visitors to GBINP and for the enjoyment of local residents.
	Apply the well-known and iconic “windswept white pine on pink granite rock” scenery of Georgian Bay as a brand to connect regional residents to the Park.
	Develop an engaging GBINP outreach exhibit for use at special events and high-traffic pedestrian locations in the region as a means of improving park awareness.
	Develop high quality audio-visual presentations allowing the public to experience areas of the park they may not have the opportunity to visit (ie. remote northern islands).

<b>Key Strategy #4</b>	<b>Cultural Resources: Honouring the Past for Future Generations</b>
	Develop a Cultural Resource Values Statement (CRVS) in collaboration with First Nations and Métis communities. Upon completion, prepare a Cultural Resource Management Plan for GBINP that addresses protection and presentation.
	Support and engage the Cultural Advisory Committee as an integral forum for Cultural Resource Management and traditional knowledge.
	Involve regional Aboriginal communities in the management and presentation of related cultural resources and stories.

Long-term/On Going	Prevent incidental species invasions through education and stewardship. Prepare a strategy to mitigate the effects of and manage established populations.
	Monitor the ecological condition of the park using the ecological monitoring program. Establish a baseline for assessing long-term trends in park health.
	Partner with groups such as the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve to integrate environmental conservation and sustainability through stewardship initiatives and act as a community resource for information and guidance on ecological issues.
	Build a constituency of support for GBINP as a national treasure “in your own backyard” throughout the Simcoe-Muskoka region.
	Increase in-school programming within the District of Muskoka and Simcoe County.
	Create a better awareness and appreciation of the Park’s northern islands and promote their memorable qualities.
	Contribute to an increased awareness of Parks Canada in Ontario in partnership with National Office, Parks Canada’s Ontario Service Centre and other Ontario National Parks, National Marine Conservation Areas and National Historic Sites.
	Explore opportunities to partner with third party operators such as outfitters and expert guides to offer packaged niche activities such as fall kayaking, birding or nature photography outings.