



# A Shared Canada-U.S. Vision of Conservation Success for the Great Lakes

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## Introduction

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) share very similar missions and are committed to maintaining the ecological integrity of the Great Lakes Ecoregion.

NCC is a Canadian nonprofit charitable organization incorporated in 1962 with a mission to protect areas of biological diversity for their intrinsic value and for the benefit of future generations. NCC is the lead conservation partner with the Government of Canada and Government of Ontario, as well as other provinces across the country, and is responsible for protecting 2 million acres of land across Canada, with a staff of 200 employees and a budget of more than CDN \$100 million.

NCC and TNC have identified the Great Lakes as a priority site for conservation action and have been engaged in a variety of partnership activities to support the conservation of this region. This ecoregion is recognized as a key area for biodiversity conservation because of its high diversity of globally rare habitat types, rare species and unique ecological phenomena. In 2005, NCC and TNC released the Binational Conservation Blueprint for the Great Lakes, which has served as a catalyst to foster a basin wide perspective on conservation in the ecoregion, identifying the 501 priority places for conservation shown below.



Both organizations launched campaigns in 2007 that will support Great Lakes conservation. TNC's "Campaign for a Sustainable Planet" has an initial, three-year goal of raising \$1.6 billion U.S. that will be invested in 57 identified campaign places around the world, including the Great Lakes. NCC launched a five-year campaign with a Canada-wide goal of CDN \$500 million for 90 identified campaign Natural Areas, primarily in the southern third of Canada.

Within the Great Lakes, 18 natural areas have been selected based on the Great Lakes Blueprint and will have completed Natural Area Conservation Plans (NACP), the equivalent of TNC's Conservation Action Plans (CAP). A number of NCC's existing and proposed Natural Areas represent the best examples of several Great Lakes ecosystems and represent the last undeveloped coastal ecosystems.

The total conservation funding need in the Canadian part of the Great Lakes basin exceeds \$125 million. NCC has already secured \$200 million for all of Canada from the federal government, a portion of which is available for implementation in the Great Lakes Basin. NCC also has a funding partnership with the provincial government to support conservation of these areas. Both partnerships require matching funds to be raised.

Given TNC's and NCC's complementary goals, respective fundraising strengths and urgent opportunities for Great Lakes conservation, enhanced collaboration will benefit and strengthen both organizations and our overlapping conservation missions.

### **New Opportunities for Great Lakes Conservation: *Northwestern Lake Superior Coast***

Given the common conservation goals of TNC and NCC, there has been a natural alignment of programs and partnerships over the last decade.

NCC and TNC have already successfully collaborated on many conservation planning projects, and have established an international reputation for successful alliance. As an example, TNC and NCC co-authored an article on the biodiversity of Lake Huron Islands that will shortly be published in the *Journal of Aquatic Ecosystem Health and Management*. In addition to the Binational Conservation Blueprint for the Great Lakes, the two organizations have also led: the Great Lakes Islands Project, Lake Ontario Biodiversity Strategy and State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference 2008 - Report on Nearshore Terrestrial Ecosystems.

In addition to conservation planning, the NCC and TNC partnership has been instrumental in several land protection projects in Canada. Indeed, these projects may not have succeeded without the unique qualities

of this partnership. These important land protection projects include: Belanger Bay, Manitoulin Island; Middle Island, Western Lake Erie; Pigeon River, Western Lake Superior; Hay Marsh, St. Joseph Island.

There are significant and immediate opportunities to build on this successful partnership to advance conservation planning and land protection in the Great Lakes. One of the key opportunities for conservation impact in the Great Lakes is in the Northwestern Lake Superior Coast Natural Area, within which a US entity currently owns more than 19,000 acres of key coastal properties and islands. This is a complex, bi-national project that requires a sophisticated and well-coordinated partnership that can work seamlessly between Canada and the US. This project presents a singular conservation opportunity to protect numerous islands and a substantial portion of priority shoreline (approximately 50 miles) that supports the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area (newly created by Parks Canada).

The land encompassed by this acquisition faces a number of serious threats if it is not brought into conservation ownership. Coastal areas are being rapidly developed for recreational residential development, an extension of what is occurring along Minnesota's Lake Superior coast. There is limited provincial or other local zoning to restrict land subdivision and development. Also, road construction is increasing fragmentation and access to fragile plant communities.

Only a half-hour drive from the international border, Canadian properties along western Lake Superior are increasingly appealing to Americans seeking a less expensive second home in a natural setting. New Canadian lots are actively being marketed to Americans as affordable second home properties. For example, vacant lakefront lots in Cook County, Minnesota cost between \$75,000 and \$200,000 per acre. On the Canadian side one can buy approximately 200 acres (or one mile of shoreline) for \$500,000. In Cook County, rapid changes in land use are taking place, and the price of undeveloped rural property has risen nearly 400% in eight years.

These significant threats mean that now is the time to act to preserve this special place. The land owner has signed an option that gives us the right to acquire this property in stages within the next 18 months, with the first closing scheduled to occur in October 2008.

### **Enhancing Our Partnership**

The Northwestern Lake Superior Coast project offers an excellent example of how effective conservation in the Great Lakes can occur through the NCC-TNC partnership. Indeed, NCC and TNC may be uniquely positioned to implement actions that cannot be done

by government or other conservation organizations.

While the Northwestern Lake Superior Coast Project is the most immediate large-scale conservation project that requires the NCC-TNC alliance, other land protection projects in Ontario that are critical for biodiversity conservation in the Great Lakes are also known. Areas such as Eastern Georgian Bay, Frontenac Arch and Southern Manitoulin Island Coast would also benefit from coordinated efforts due to their large size and high proportion of US landowners.

In addition to land protection, there is a greater role for NCC and TNC to direct planning and priority setting in the Great Lakes. For example, based on the success of the Lake Ontario Biodiversity project, both federal governments have supported a similar initiative in Lake Huron. Similar projects could be extended to the other Great Lakes.

The next decade of conservation action in the Great Lakes will shape this region forever. The effectiveness and scope of our actions will be strengthened by enhancing our partnership. The desired outcomes of this partnership will include, but not be limited to the following:

- **A Network of Protected Areas:** Support the creation of new protected areas (including aquatic protected areas) and lead private land/ water conservation.
- **Sustainable Land and Water Use:** Promote sustainable land and water use through effective legislation, policy and industry standards in agriculture, mining and quarrying, renewable energy and forestry, and act as a role model by developing best management practices.
- **Abate Key Threats:** NCC and TNC will work together to identify and mitigate threats to biodiversity which have a broad scope and require a basin-wide, ecosystem approach. This includes aquatic invasive species and climate change.

Through collaborative science and actions, and coordinated funding for global priorities, NCC and TNC will work together to ensure the Great Lakes is among the best managed ecosystems in the world. To enhance our partnership, NCC and TNC will employ the following key strategies:

- 1. Establish and Communicate Conservation Priorities:** Continue to identify priority biodiversity targets and conservation actions from a basin-wide perspective.
- 2. Land and Water Protection:** Fund and implement site-based conservation plans in Canada and the US.
- 3. Lake Basin Planning:** Work within existing lake-based management organizations to inform

conservation priorities and leverage funding.

- 4. Improving Great Lakes Policy:** Work to coordinate and synchronize key policies, legislation and standards.
- 5. Coordinated Priority Funding:** Develop a bi-national fundraising strategy.

To better enable these strategies, NCC and TNC are developing a Memorandum of Understanding. The purpose of this agreement is to facilitate cooperative efforts by NCC and TNC to align and leverage both organizations' fundraising and conservation efforts for the benefit of biodiversity conservation in Canada. This MOU will help to support important biodiversity conservation projects in the Great Lakes, and help to support TNC-Canada's program to conserve large intact northern forests.

To stimulate support for international projects like this, The Nature Conservancy recently announced the formation of Catalyst Fund for International Conservation. The Fund was created by donors interested in jumpstarting our ambitious global conservation objectives by creating a matching opportunity for significant gifts to projects outside the United States.

Gifts of at least \$250,000 for our international work will be matched at a rate of 50 cents for each dollar contributed. These limited matching funds will be awarded in the order that qualifying applications are received. At present, there is \$7 million in The Catalyst Fund, and a number of qualifying gifts have been received already.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is planning to establish a similar catalyst fund for Canadian conservation, to capitalize on a unique and time-limited opportunity to secure multiple matching gifts.

### Key Challenges for Discussion

- How do we best engage the resources of each organization to protect the Great Lakes?
- How can TNC support NCC's need for private funds to match government investment?
- How can we identify and address NCC's priority capacity needs (e.g. private sector fund-raising, aquatic ecology)?
- How can we support each other in building our partnerships with funding and create leverage for that funding?
- How can we better work together in engaging and informing public policy?
- How do we foster cross-border exchange of experiences?