

THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO HAVE A WATERFRONT TRAIL SYSTEM THAT LINKS LOCAL, COUNTY AND STATE PARKS TOGETHER FROM EVANGOLA STATE PARK AT THE SOUTHERN END OF ERIE COUNTY TO OLD FORT NIAGARA STATE PARK AT THE NORTHERN END OF NIAGARA COUNTY.



View of Lake Erie shoreline from bluff at Wendt Beach



Eighteen Mile Creek

5.0 WATERFRONT STRATEGY

5.1 COUNTY'S ROLE ON THE WATERFRONT

5.1.1 GENERAL

The potential for waterfront development continues to be the source of much attention and discussion within Western New York. Erie County has one of the most beautiful and historically significant waterfronts in all of the United States, including Lake Erie, the Niagara and Buffalo Rivers, Cattaraugus and Eighteen Mile Creeks and the Erie Canal, and yet much of the prime waterfront properties remain undeveloped or underutilized. Although economic development has not been as quick to start here as in other parts of the country, the County has become increasingly aware of the potential impact that a vibrant and successful waterfront will have on the future quality of life for residents and the potential lure it could have for tourists and visitors. However, given the large expense of maintaining waterfront properties, and given the current or projected fiscal difficulties facing many towns, cities and counties across the state, Erie County cannot be expected to handle all of this waterfront responsibility themselves. Partnerships for both funding and stewardship of waterfront parks and trails will need to be formed with local municipalities, and a strong pitch will need to be made to the State of New York to maximize the potential of our significant regional waterfront assets.

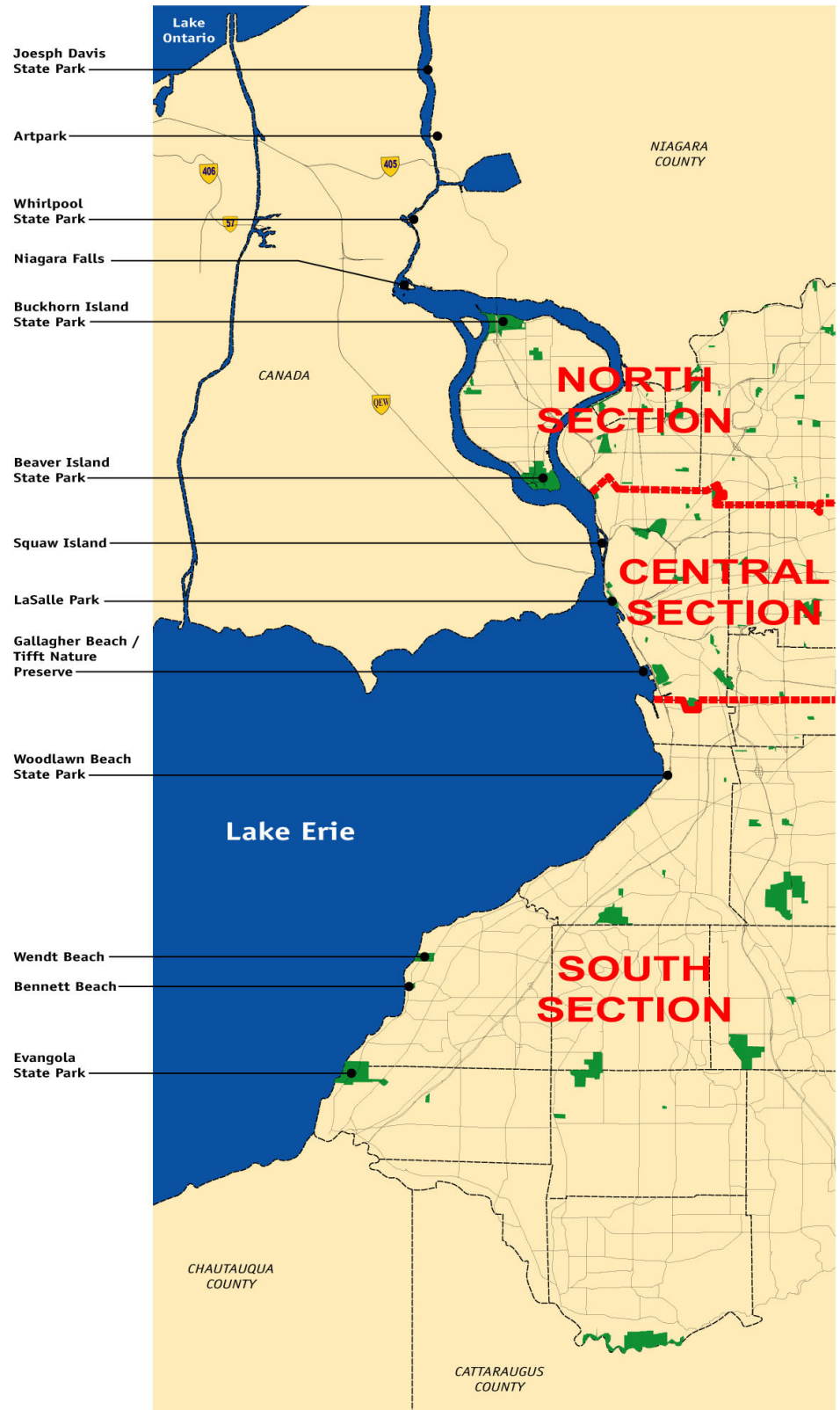
- *Given its regional significance, emphasis should be placed on strengthening partnerships between local municipalities and Erie County, and on encouraging more involvement from the State and Federal levels. Few counties and regions of the country have a linear trail system such as the Riverwalk or Canalway trail, and this should be seen as a wise investment and long-term stewardship effort by the State of New York, to compliment its many other area parks, recreation and historic preservation attractions.*
- *Erie County should partner with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation*

(NYSOPRHP) and the Niagara Parks Commission (Ontario) to enhance its role in the Eco-Tourism industry. This would elevate the county's visibility within the Niagara Region as a visitor destination for fishing, bird-watching, hiking, nature sight-seeing, water sports, etc.

5.1.2 NORTH SECTION

North of the City of Buffalo, Erie County has major involvement and investment in the Riverwalk waterfront trail system, which serves as the overall recreational “spine” linking numerous waterfront parks, including local, county and state facilities. The county also owns and operates Ellicott Creek Park along the Erie Canal, classified as a “Heritage Park,” and Isle View Park along the Niagara River.

- *The County should continue to promote regional trail efforts, while looking to partner with the State of New York for future trail enhancements, maintenance and marketing. This linear park and trail is certainly a regional asset that deserves attention and support at the highest levels of government. Given its significance, the county should look to develop partnering roles for the local communities, as*



well as with the State. Future emphasis should be placed on trail linkages to Niagara Falls.

- The proposed Canalway Trail system, which includes some existing county trail sections, is an integral part of the Erie Canal “National Heritage” corridor and thus should be considered for federal involvement. A section of the trail will pass directly through the county’s Ellicott Creek Park, and will link directly to the Riverwalk system. Erie County should remain a partner with Niagara County, State of New York and National Park Service (Federal Government) for all future planning efforts.*
- In addition to Isle View Park, the Cherry Farm Park is another significant property that deserves attention from both the county and state levels of government. This reclaimed Brownfields property could be seen as a national model for land reclamation, shoreline/habitat restoration and waterfront recreation.*
- The County should revisit portions of the existing Riverwalk alignment due to the fact that some stretches of the trail do not have much relationship to the water and travel along some very busy roadways (Along River Road from the Grand Island Bridge to Sheridan Drive). When constructed in the late 1970s, there were many impediments to linking the Riverwalk directly to the River due to active industries and land uses, however the past 20 years have brought with it many changes in land uses along this section of the waterfront and opportunities now exist in some areas for realignment and making a stronger and more aesthetically pleasing connection between the Riverwalk and the River.*

5.1.3 CENTRAL SECTION (CITY OF BUFFALO)

Erie County’s role in the central urban waterfront has been steadily increasing over the past few years. The County’s Riverwalk extends from the Tonawandas into the City of Buffalo and meanders its way

southward to the Erie Basin Marina and Erie Canal Harbor site. Numerous smaller park sites are linked by the Riverwalk, including two historic Olmsted Parks. Currently the County operates and maintains Tow-Path Park and Ontario Street Boat Launch, and agreement for operation are pending between the City and County for the new Squaw Island Park and existing Broderick Park – Underground Railroad Freedom Memorial. Two major waterfront development areas that warrant extensive county and state involvement are at the Inner Harbor (Erie Canal Harbor) and Outer Harbor, recently highlighted by the exciting news of a new 80-acre State Park at Gallagher Beach and the Small Boat Harbor.

- *Similar to the Northern section mentioned above, the County should also revisit much of the existing Riverwalk alignment and aesthetics along the City's urban waterfront due to the fact that some stretches of the trail travel behind buildings, do not have any relationship to the water and are considered isolated and dangerous. When constructed in the late 1970s, there were many impediments to linking the Riverwalk directly to the River due to active businesses and certain private property obstacles, however the past 20 years have brought with it many changes in land uses along the waterfront and opportunities now exist in some areas for realignment and making a stronger and more aesthetically pleasing connection between the Riverwalk and the River.*
- *The County should continue to extend its hand to the future operations and maintenance of the nationally significant Olmsted Park System, with two properties along the waterfront (Riverside and Front Parks), consistent with the recommendations outlined in the study recently completed by the Central Park Conservancy.*
- *Similar to the Cherry farm property in Tonawanda, the Squaw Island Park is a notable reclamation of a former Brownfields site, with great potential for shoreline restoration and habitat enhancement. The County's pending take over at this new park property will elevate*

the importance of this site to a regional level.

- Broderick Park is a small but extremely important site for Western New York. It is home to the Underground Railroad Freedom Memorial and deserves County, State and Federal attention and future involvement. Earlier investment by the City of Buffalo has established the framework for the memorial, however a lack of continued funding has halted any further phases of development of the site. Agreements are pending for the County to assume a much needed operations and maintenance role at Broderick Park.*
- One major waterfront park site that warrants a larger county role is at LaSalle Park. This 77-acre park sits at one of the most beautiful locations along the Erie county waterfront, and is home to many events, concerts and activities that serve a larger regional audience. A master plan has been established for LaSalle Park and early phases of construction have been completed. However, funding has now diminished and attention at higher levels of government are needed to allow this significant park maximize its full potential. The Riverwalk also travels through LaSalle Park and is in need of significant upgrades and repairs.*
- The County should continue its partnership role at the Erie Canal Harbor site, and work closely with the City of Buffalo and State of New York to provide an urban waterfront center that is vibrant and successful for years to come.*
- The Outer Harbor area is Buffalo and Erie County's greatest potential for economic rebirth and waterfront redevelopment. The County should continue to support the momentum currently underway with the establishment of Buffalo's first State Park. Further county involvement and partnership with the State of New York could expand upon its recent successes and extend the State Park holdings to Tiffit Nature Preserve and northwards towards Downtown Buffalo with a*

linear waterfront park and trail system and to Times Beach Nature Preserve. Other notable future developments in the Outer Harbor area could include a National Industrial Heritage Corridor along the Buffalo River and a greenway connection from the Lake into Olmsted's South Park and the County-owned Botanical Gardens.

5.1.4 SOUTHERN SECTION

South of the Outer Harbor and City of Buffalo limits, Erie County has been involved in the advancement of a lakefront recreational trail that would link the Riverwalk and Outer Harbor to points south and eventually to Evangola State Park. Emphasis should be placed on encouraging greater State of New York involvement and investment in this regional trail system, which serves as the overall recreational “spine” linking numerous waterfront parks, including local, county and state facilities. Two major county-owned facilities along the southern Erie County waterfront are Bennett beach and Wendt Beach. Given their proximity to Evangola State Park, and the current sharing of manpower and resources, it may make sense over the long term for Erie County to partner with the State on both of these properties for future operations and maintenance, marketing and capital expenditures.

- Similar to the northern reaches of the county's waterfront, the County should continue to promote regional trail efforts along the southern shoreline areas, while looking to partner with the State of New York for future trail developments, enhancements, maintenance and marketing. The proposed lakefront trail is considered a regional asset that deserves attention and support at the highest levels of government. Given its significance, the county should look to develop partnering roles for the local communities, as well as with the State.*
- Both Wendt and Bennett Beaches should be considered for increased involvement by the State of New York. This would follow the precedent set by the State at Woodlawn beach State Park, and put greater emphasis*

WATERFRONT

Erie County's series of waterfront parks and trails should be a **continuum of the great Olmsted tradition**. Buffalo/Erie County has a significant history of great parks planning and public spaces, which is highlighted by the unique series of historic parks, parkways and urban spaces designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. between the 1860s and 1890s. Buffalo's Olmsted Park System was the first of its kind in the United States.

Another world-class model of parks planning and connectivity is only a few miles away across the Niagara River. The **Niagara Parks System** in Ontario extends from Lake Erie (at Fort Erie near the Peace Bridge) through Niagara Falls and ends at Lake Ontario (at Niagara-On-The-Lake). This is a successful model of a park system with funding support from the Provincial level of Government, and numerous revenue-generating facilities that return dollars directly back to the operations and maintenance of the system.

Similar to what Erie County hopes to achieve with greater New York State involvement along the Lake and River shoreline, the **Ithaca area** is an example of where **New York State Parks** are clustered around unique natural water features, including Buttermilk Falls State Park, Allan H. Treman State Marine Park, Robert H. Treman State Park, and the nearby Taughannock Falls State Park. In addition, Letchworth State Park is a linear park that has preserved a unique natural feature of the Genesee River Gorge.

on Wendt and Bennett Beaches as significant regional attractions and the preservation of natural sand dunes, beaches and historic structures.

- *The County should consider working with State Parks on a seasonal marketing campaign that would link the major lake front park properties of the Outer Harbor, Woodlawn Beach, Sturgeon Point, Wendt beach, Bennett Beach and Evangola State Park.*

5.2 BACKGROUND STUDIES AND INITIATIVES

Erie County includes scenic lake and river systems, including extensive shoreline along Lake Erie and the Niagara River, which are significant regional attractions and economic assets. Waterfront land ownership is held by a number of interests, including State, County, local municipal governments and private landowners. It has been well recognized in New York State that a comprehensive approach to planning and development of the region's waterfronts is needed to ensure that an appropriate balance is achieved between the protection of natural resources, economic benefits, and recreational opportunities. A strategy to address the management and development of the County's waterfront parks was deemed an important component of this Master Plan.

The Erie County waterfront strategy needs to address all water's edges including lakes, rivers and canals. In particular the Lake Erie/Niagara River shoreline, the Buffalo River and the Erie Canal are key corridors that have been identified as paramount to environmental conservation, tourism potential and economic **RENEWAL** in Western New York. Several documents exist which provide over-arching or interrelated policies and guidelines to direct the waterfront strategy. As well, there are a number of key projects that are in the planning stages, particularly along the City of Buffalo waterfront, that currently have County support and involvement. These documents, in conjunction with the Parks Master Plan, need to be considered in the discussion of future land acquisitions, parks improvements or development on the waterfront.

Out of these past studies and planning initiatives comes the impetus for the current waterfront strategy, which includes an emphasis on some major guiding themes. These themes include:

- *Encouragement of greater New York State Involvement along the waterfront, in partnership with Erie County and local communities. This regional cooperation would elevate the waterfront to a higher level of recreational and tourism potential and develop it into an asset of statewide significance.*
- *Emphasis on waterfront access and trail linkages between destination parks and other area waterfront attractions. Tie into the Seaway Trail marketing efforts by New York State.*
- *Focus on maintaining and strengthening the momentum that has begun on Buffalo’s Outer Harbor with the establishment of a New York State Parks facility. Use parks and open space as a means to leverage public support and private investment.*
- *Preserving and enhancing the unique environmental systems along Erie County’s waterfront as a part of a growing regional EcoTourism market.*

A listing of specific studies and initiatives can be found in the sidebar columns over the next few pages.

5.3 REGIONAL WATERFRONT SITES

The following is a synopsis of waterfront sites (from North to South) that include County owned and/or managed sites, along with other sites that represent the regional waterfront system. Many of the projects have been achieved or are moving forward with County involvement. In the future the County is likely to be increasingly asked to participate in waterfront projects of significance, such as the Erie Canal Harbor (formerly the Buffalo Inner Harbor) and the Outer Harbor Lands. The projects identified below are projects that may warrant some level of County involvement under a partnership or collaborative arrangement with the State and Local governments. Given the statewide significance of the Erie County waterfront, including the Lake Erie shoreline, the Niagara River and Erie Canal, emphasis should be placed on increasing New



Commissioner’s Pond at Chestnut Ridge

Erie County waterfront initiatives and strategies should tie in to the efforts already in place or underway for the **Seaway Trail**. This scenic route is the **longest National Recreation Trail in the country**. It runs for 454 miles from the Pennsylvania border north along Lake Erie, the Niagara River and Lake Ontario to Massena and the St. Lawrence Seaway. Historic sites, scenic overlooks and natural wonders can be found along its length.

Although New York State has had facilities at Buckhorn Island, Beaver Island and Evangola State Parks for years, and the more recent Woodlawn Beach State Park, it is with the announcement of the State’s new involvement on Buffalo’s Outer Harbor (Gallagher Beach and Small Boat Harbor) that the vision of a comprehensive linear waterfront park system along Erie County’s shoreline is finally getting closer to becoming a reality. With future (potential) State involvement at such sites as Bennett Beach, Wendt Beach and the Cherry Farm, and more County/State involvement at such properties as Broderick Park, LaSalle Park, Times Beach, Tiffy Nature Preserve and the Olmsted Park System, etc., there would be a continuous series of major “nodes” along this linear park and trail system. As envisioned for many years, the precedent is being set for a major waterfront park, parkway and trail system that rivals Ontario’s Niagara Parks System and finally receives the attention it deserves at both the State and federal levels.

5.2.1. NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF STATE, DIVISION OF COASTAL RESOURCES, COASTAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Prepared in 1982 (revised 2001) the New York Department of State, Division of Coastal Resources, Coastal Management Plan provides a comprehensive policy framework for review and approvals of waterfront projects, a number of which will have an influence on County initiatives. The Coastal Management Plan provides policies in the following areas:

- Development;
- Fish and Wildlife;
- Flooding and Erosion Hazards;
- Public Access;
- Recreation;
- Historic and Scenic Resources;
- Agricultural Lands;
- Energy and Ice Management;
- Water and Air Resources.

5.2.2 NEW YORK STATE OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION PLAN

The New York State Open Space Conservation Plan - NYSOSCP (2002) prepared by the New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation identifies policies and actions for conservation of open space lands, significant natural areas, and cultural heritage sites throughout the State. It encourages a collaborative working relationship between the state, the federal government and local governments to identify and protect a cohesive framework of open space lands for environmental protection and public recreational purposes. The Plan identifies major resource areas and conservation priority projects, for immediate attention by the Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation, and their partners. Resource areas pertaining to the Erie County waterfront are:

- Great Lakes Shoreline, Islands and Tributaries
- Niagara River Corridor
- New York State Canal Recreationway System

NYSOSCP RESOURCE AREAS IN ERIE COUNTY

The **Great Lakes Shoreline** is recognized as one of the region's most significant natural resources, both from public access / recreation and wildlife and fisheries conservation perspectives. Conservation strategies proposed

York State's future role in preserving and enhancing this vital waterfront asset. In addition, there may be specific sites, including the Erie Canal corridor, that may warrant future Federal support and involvement.

Recommendations, where proposed in earlier waterfront plans, are noted, along with updates where actions have been taken or where more current 'on the table' initiatives exist. Refer to Figure 5-1 for locations.

TOWN OF GRAND ISLAND

1. BUCKHORN ISLAND STATE PARK

New York State (New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation - NYSOPRHP)

Buckhorn Island State Park is a 895 acre state-owned natural environment area located at the northwest tip of Grand Island, and separated from the rest of the island by Burnt Ship Creek. Comprised of marsh, meadows, and woods, the site affords some of the best wildlife viewing along the Niagara River. Major improvements were initiated in 2001, including additional observation areas, parking areas and nature trails.

2. BEAVER ISLAND STATE PARK

New York State (NYSOPRHP)

Beaver Island State Park is a 951 acre state-owned multi-purpose park located at the southern tip of Grand Island. The park is open year round and offers beach swimming, picnicking, nature trails, cross-country skiing, sledding and tobogganing along with an eighteen hole golf course. The notable Casino Building, which burned a number of years ago, is slated for restoration / reconstruction in the near future. The park charges a per vehicle admission fee.

THE TONAWANDAS

3. ERIE CANALWAY TRAIL

Joint Venture

Stretching 363 miles from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes, with 83 locks, the Erie Canal has been recognized as one of the great engineering feats of the 19th Century, initiating an economic boom in the West. Today, it is also recognized as a significant heritage resource and a recreation amenity. The New York State Canal Corporation in conjunction with the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, local and state government agencies, and local volunteers, are working to complete the Erie Canalway Trail. The 524-mile bicycle path will cross New York State following the towpaths of the existing and previous routes of the Erie Canal. At present, more than 200 miles of trail are open and available for public use. Through Erie County, the Erie Canal Trail is partially developed in the City of Tonawanda, and the Town of Amherst. The trails are used for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, and in some sections, for horseback riding. No motor vehicles are allowed. The last remaining 4 mile segment between Tonawanda and Amherst will soon be completed. The project will include landscaping and signage at several trailheads, and will include links to the Riverwalk Trail and a segment from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo Amherst campus to Ellicott Creek Park in Tonawanda and two town parks in Amherst.



Ellicott Creek

4. ELLICOTT CREEK PARK

Erie County

Ellicott Creek Park is 165.0 acre County owned park in the Town of Tonawanda. One of the original County parks acquired and developed for multi-use in 1926, the park is located on the Erie Canal and is traversed by Ellicott Creek. It includes numerous heritage structures, a boat launch site for canoes and small water craft and is also connected to the *Ellicott Creek Trail*, which is a 7.5 mile town-owned trail system in Amherst.

Erie County Riverwalk



by the NYSOSCP for the Great Lakes Shoreline, Islands and Tributaries are:

- Recommendations made by the Great Lakes Basin Advisory Council for improving water quality and preservation of important open space resources within the Basin should be pursued;
- State, county and municipal governments should continue to purchase and develop access sites, including boat launches, along the Great Lakes;
- Important habitats should be protected and restored through strict enforcement of existing laws;
- More communities should be encouraged to prepare local waterfront revitalization programs under the State’s Coastal Management Program.

The **Niagara River Corridor** includes world-renowned, unique and scenic resources including the falls and gorge. The NYSOSCP recognizes the need for protection of the shoreline and its linkages, access, and scenic character, and identifies opportunities for a trail system linking state and local parks and historic sites, both in the US and in Canada. The Niagara River corridor is also officially designated an “Important Bird Area” for its significance as a migratory route for waterfowl. Nineteen species of gulls alone have been identified, representing almost half of the world’s 45 species.

Conservation strategies proposed by the NYSOSCP for the Niagara River Corridor are:

- Work closely with local communities, the NY Power Authority, Empire State Development Corporation, the City of Buffalo, Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, and New York Thruway Authority, the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, and Canadian agencies to complete and/or implement the recommendations of the various planning efforts including:

NIAGARA RESERVATION MASTER PLAN

NIAGARA GORGE ACCESS PLAN

NIAGARA RIVER REMEDIAL ACTION PLAN

BUFFALO INNER HARBOR WATERFRONT PROJECT

- Conservation easements, fee purchase, cooperative agreements, zoning and other strategies should be considered in protecting and maintaining the resource, developing trail systems, improving water quality and fishing opportunities and enhancing public access.

Completion of the 348 mile Erie Canalway Trail linking Lake Erie to the Hudson River, is a key

5. TONAWANDA “GATEWAY” PARK AND DEVELOPMENT

City of Tonawanda/North Tonawanda

Gateway Park is a newly renovated waterfront park on the Erie Canal in the Tonawandas. A component of the waterfront development located at the point where the Erie Canal meets the Niagara River is underway as a joint venture between the cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda. Called “Gateway Point,” the proposed development includes a museum to house Erie Canal memorabilia, historical boat museum, retail shops, restaurants, an Erie Canal Visitors Center, docking facilities for visiting pleasure craft and larger docking areas capable of mooring large historical ships.

6. ERIE COUNTY RIVERWALK SYSTEM

Erie County

The 13-mile Buffalo and Erie County Riverwalk extends along the Niagara River from Tonawanda through Buffalo. Beginning near Tonawanda’s Gateway Park, the Riverwalk traverses Niawanda and Isle View Parks before reaching Olmsted’s Riverside Park in Buffalo. Continuing south and crossing to Squaw Island, the trail continues to Broderick Park (Underground Railroad Freedom Memorial) and Bird Island Pier before crossing back over the Black Rock Canal, and continuing past or near other key desintation waterfront park sites; including Olmsted’s Front Park, LaSalle Park, before terminating just south of the Erie Basin Marina. The trail is proposed to continue southward, as waterfront revitalization takes place. Rest areas (“Windows on the Water”) include a River overlook near the General Motors facility, and periodic fishing spots along the historic Erie Canal retaining wall. Tow Path Park is a new 2.3 acre county-owned facility at the foot of Hertel Avenue, that also provides fishing opportunities.

7. NIA-WANDA PARK

City of Tonawanda

Nia-Wanda Park is a linear park located along the shore of the Niagara River on the site of the abandoned Erie Canal and Towpath, in the City of Tonawanda. The site connects to the County-owned Isle View Park at the outlet of Two-Mile creek and is primarily used for walking, biking, boat launching, fishing access, and picnicking. The multi-use Riverwalk trail traverses this narrow riverfront property.

8. VETERAN'S MEMORIAL PARK

City of Tonawanda

Veteran's Memorial Park is a large, multi-purpose park located on the banks overlooking the Niagara River in the City of Tonawanda. The site is adjacent to Nia-Wanda Park and Two-Mile Creek, and lies near the north end of the County-owned Isle View Park. The Park is noted for its large trees, playground and picnic facilities, and athletic fields. These park fields are also utilized by the adjacent Tonawanda Jr./Sr. School.

9. TWO MILE CREEK GREENWAY

Erie County

In 1999, the Two Mile Creek Trail was completed by the County, providing a key recreational link from the Riverwalk at Niawanda and Isle View Parks to Sheridan Park in Tonawanda. It will soon be extended south to reconnect with the Riverwalk at the foot of Sheridan drive.

10. ISLE VIEW PARK

Erie County

Isle View Park is 49 acre county-owned developed park located on the site of the abandoned Erie Canal and Towpath, in the Town of Tonawanda. The site was acquired by the County in 1959 and is primarily used for boat launching, fishing access, and picnicking. The multi-use trail is used for biking, rollerblading, strolling and cross-country skiing, and is connected to Nia-Wanda Park and the Two Mile Creek Greenway.

11. CHERRY FARM PARK

NYSDEC/Town of Tonawanda

Located on the Niagara River, across from Grand Island, the 55-acre Cherry Farm site on River Road was once used both for disposal of steel manufacturing waste and as an industrial landfill site. The site was designated a hazardous waste site by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). In the mid-

objective of the **New York State Canal Recreationway System** and one of the priority demonstration projects for the NYSOSCP in Western New York. The canal is an important recreation resource for boating and fishing, and includes adjacent wetlands and wildlife habitat. Five of the state's largest cities are located along the Canal, and the corridor offers opportunities for a long distance trail system linking historic districts and sites. Through Erie County, the trail has been implemented through Ellicott Creek Park. It also links to Isle View Park and the Riverwalk trail system along the Niagara River.

Conservation strategies proposed by the NYSOSCP for the Canal Recreationway System, as they pertain to Erie County are:

- Continue to work with the Canal Recreationway Commission to foster local-state cooperation and coordination;
- Implement the Canal Recreationway Plan;
- Encourage communities along the canal to prepare local waterfront revitalization programs under the State's Inland Waterways Program;
- Enhance opportunities for public access and water related development consistent with public safety and canal operations;
- Relate restoration of villages and cities to the canal and its history;
- Coordinate with local and regional agencies to implement connections and extensions with other trail systems such as the Riverwalk, and State Park and Parkway systems along Lake Ontario and Erie.
- Ensure public access as a condition of all permits, leases and sales of canal lands;
- Work with the newly created Erie Canalway Heritage Corridor Commission (established by Congress) to enhance heritage tourism, education, recreation and development along the corridor.

NYSOSCP PRIORITY PROJECTS IN ERIE COUNTY

In addition to being identified as significant resource areas, the Great Lakes and Niagara River Access, Shorelines and Vistas, and the New York State Canal Recreationway System are identified as conservation priority projects. The **Buffalo River Corridor** is also identified as a conservation priority project in Erie County. The NYSOSCP recognizes the significance of the river corridor to enhance access to Lake Erie for recreation and fishing and to protect the vital wildlife habitat contained within the corridor and in the remaining floodplain forest area within metropolitan Buffalo. Other waterfront related conservation priority projects in Erie County are **Cattaraugus Creek** and its tributaries,

nineties a concerted effort was made to clean up the site, as part of a collaborative agreement to reduce toxic discharge to the Niagara River, by NYSDEC, the United States Environmental Protection Association, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Environment Canada. Using a comprehensive groundwater extraction and treatment system, combined with remedial measures to clean-up the shoreline and restore wetlands, the site was cleaned up to parkland standards through the joint efforts of the state, local agencies and the PRP Group (Potentially Responsible Parties). Future development of the site is proposed to include a range of outdoor recreation facilities, passive use areas, trails, and an interpretive center.

12. AQUA LANE PARK
Town of Tonawanda

Aqua Lane Park is a 5-acre town-owned, developed park on the Niagara River at the foot of Sheridan Drive. This small site is situated beside the Tonawanda Boat Harbor and is connected to the Riverwalk bike path.

13. STRAWBERRY ISLAND/MOTOR ISLAND
NYSDEC

The Strawberry Island and Motor Island Shallows is a 400-acre shallow-water habitat, located in the Niagara River, and officially designated as a New York State significant coastal fish and wildlife habitat. The area contains extensive beds of submerged aquatic plants and is used by a variety of migratory waterfowl and by muskellunge as spawning and nursery habitat, making the Niagara River muskellunge fishery one of the best in New York. A state funded shoreline restoration project was announced in 2001 that will stop the erosion of Strawberry Island and restore three acres of wetland habitat along the eastern and western arms of the island.

CITY OF BUFFALO

14. OLMSTED'S RIVERSIDE PARK
City of Buffalo

Riverside Park is a historic, 37-acre, city-owned park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., as part of the impressive park system

within the City of Buffalo. Originally situated overlooking the Niagara River and the Erie Canal, the park is now separated from the River by the NYS Thruway (I-190). This multi-purpose, developed park offers many passive and active recreational activities, including walking, picnicking and playgrounds, as well as baseball/softball fields, ice skating, swimming pool and wading pool, and a seniors center. The Riverwalk trail system passes near Riverside Park, connected by a trail linkage over the highway, linking it to other parks in Buffalo and Tonawanda. A series of new river overlook have been constructed along River Road providing views over the Niagara River. The park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is currently owned and operated by the City of Buffalo. The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, an independent not-for-profit community organization is responsible for the promotion, preservation, maintenance and restoration of the historic Olmsted system of parks and parkways. The current master plan for the park calls for landscape improvements and reinstatement of some of the park's former elements, as well as phasing out of some of the active recreation facilities in favor of a more authentic passive park setting in keeping with the original park design. The County is increasingly becoming more involved in the Olmsted parks (the Botanical Gardens were assumed in 1981) as the parks are seen to be a regional asset more compatible with the County's mandate for historic preservation and passive recreation. Discussions are ongoing between the City of Buffalo, Erie County and the Conservancy, over a possible increased role for the County within the entire historic Olmsted Parks system.

15. SCAJAQUADA TRAIL

Joint Venture - County, State, City of Buffalo

The Scajaquada Trail is an inland link connecting the Riverwalk to Olmsted's Delaware Park and Buffalo's Museum District/Olmsted Crescent (*"Arts, Parks and sciences in the Heart of Buffalo"* - *Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Historical Society, Buffalo Zoo, Burchfield-Penney Art Center, Forest Lawn Cemetery, Darwin Martin House, Forever Elmwood, etc.*). Opened in 1999, the Scajaquada Trail was a joint undertaking among the County, State, and City of Buffalo.

notable for its contributions to the salmonid fishery in Lake Erie, and the **Eighteen Mile Creek** and gorge, which also outlets to the Lake, for its significance as stop-over habitat for migratory songbirds and diversity of wildlife habitat.

5.2.3 HORIZONS ACTION PLAN FOR THE ERIE COUNTY WATERFRONT

A strategic plan already exists for the Lake Erie/Niagara River shoreline in the Action Plan for the Erie County Waterfront, undertaken by the Horizons Waterfront Commission in 1992. The plan defines a vision for the waterfront vision based on the following goals:

- To provide a waterfront that gives significant enrichment to the quality of life;
- To rejuvenate and sustain the waterfront as a clean, inviting, and healthy environment;
- To achieve a prosperous waterfront by pursuing economic development that advances environmental quality and enriches the quality of life.

The Horizons plan addresses recreation and open space, development opportunities and transportation issues for the entire waterfront, based on several key principles:

- Create and improve waterfront activity centers for people to enjoy. The plan proposes a series of nodes of activity along the waterfront, some focused on recreation and open space, others on residential or commercial development.
- Connect the centers to each other and to the community through a “greenway” system of landscaped boulevards, scenic roads, bike/hike trails, and transit stops.
- Humanize and bring to order the waterfront environment to capture the spirit and drama of the natural and man-made setting.

5.2.4 BUFFALO - FORT ERIE INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT GATEWAY

The Buffalo-Fort Erie International Waterfront Gateway Strategy is a collaborative effort between the border communities of Buffalo, on the US side, and Fort Erie, on the Canadian side. Conceived in 1998, the Gateway Strategy aims at revitalizing the waterfronts and neighborhoods of the two communities to encourage tourist visitation, and to improve economic conditions. The proposed Gateway plan includes recommendations for reconnecting

16. BUFFALO GREENWAYS

Joint Venture - City of Buffalo and County

The Buffalo Greenways Plan is an ambitious effort to connect (and reconnect) Buffalo’s parks and neighborhoods by a series of parkways and recreational trails throughout the city. This plan was first developed in the 1860s/1870s by Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., who conceived of a grand system of parks and parkways from the north side of the city to the south. An example of the northern system of trails and connections includes: Front Park via Porter Avenue to Columbus Park (*originally Olmsted’s Prospect Park*), to Symphony Circle and Kleinhans Music Hall, up Richmond Avenue through West Ferry Circle to Colonial Circle, to Bidwell Parkway to Soldiers Circle, to Lincoln and Chapin Parkways, to Delaware Park, via Humboldt Parkway to MLK Park, etc. Trails continue southerly from MLK Park, as well as the waterfront and Downtown areas, to South Buffalo, including linkages to Olmsted’s Cazenovia and South Parks, with linkages to such sites as the Botanical Gardens (*Erie County*) and Our Lady of Victory Basilica.

17. SQUAWISLAND PARK

City of Buffalo

Squaw Island park is a city-owned waterfront property located adjacent to the Black Rock Canal Locks and accessible by bridge from Niagara Street. Squaw Island Park is part of the Riverwalk trail system and is currently being redeveloped as a naturalized park for fishing, birdwatching and picnicking.

18. BRODERICK PARK - UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREEDOM MEMORIAL

Erie County

Broderick Park and the banks of the Niagara River hold a special place in Buffalo’s history. During the early to mid 1800s, this area was one of the crossing points for escaping slaves on their journey to freedom across the river in Canada. In 2000, the Broderick Park site took on *national significance* as the Underground Railroad Freedom Memorial, which includes a heritage memorial, commemorating the island’s role as one of the staging areas and destinations for the Underground Railroad. This impressive site is also a popular fishing access point, and offers informal seating areas,

naturalized plantings and a small concession building. The Bird Island Pier extends southerly from Broderick Park as a breakwater between the Niagara River and Black Rock Canal. Although currently owned and maintained by the City of Buffalo, negotiations are currently going on to transfer the operations and maintenance to the County. This is certainly one of the waterfront sites that deserves both State and federal involvement.

19. BIRD ISLAND PIER

United States Army Corps of Engineers

The breakwater between the Niagara River and Black Rock Canal is known as the Bird Island Pier. The pier is accessible from Broderick Park and can be walked for almost 2 miles along the river's edge. This pedestrian route affords unique and awesome views of the Lake, River and Canal from beneath the Peace Bridge and off-shore from LaSalle Park. To highlight, the Niagara River is an Important Bird Area (IBA), and is one of the best places in North America for viewing gulls and waterfowl. The site is well known by Niagara Region birders as one of the few viewing locations along the built-up Buffalo riverfront. It is also a popular spot for fishing.

20. PEACE BRIDGE INTERNATIONAL GATEWAY-JOINT VENTURE

Peace Bridge Authority, City of Buffalo, Federal

A collaborative effort between Buffalo and Fort Erie, Ontario, aimed at revitalizing the waterfronts and neighborhoods of the two communities to encourage tourist visitation and to improve economic conditions. This gateway enhancement project is tied to the current investigations for ways of improving the fixed transportation link between the two countries including potential redevelopment or "twinning" of the existing Peace Bridge or developing a second new bridge location.

21. OLMSTED'S FRONT PARK

City of Buffalo

Front Park is a 25.5-acre city-owned Olmsted park in the City of Buffalo listed on the National register of Historic Places. Located overlooking the Niagara River and Lake Erie (and NYS Thruway), the

downtown areas to the waterfront through a green network of trails, treed boulevards, parks, and 'windows on the water.

5.2.5 ERIE CANAL HARBOR (FORMERLY BUFFALO'S INNER HARBOR)

Redevelopment of Buffalo's Inner Harbor has long been a longstanding anchor of past waterfront revitalization plans. The recently revised plan on the table has been reworked following a comprehensive engineering review, and includes an increased emphasis on the historical significance of the Erie Canal, and the area's 19th and 20th century industrial history. The plan includes re-watering of the historic Commercial Slip at the terminus of the Erie Canal to accommodate commercial passenger vessels, tall ships, and tour boats. Funding commitments for the Inner Harbor Project were made in 2002, by the City of Buffalo, Erie County and the State. An update of the Harbor Plan is expected in 2003.

5.2.6 BUFFALO OUTER HARBOR PROJECT

Since the decline of industrial and manufacturing businesses along the Lake Erie waterfront, through the 1980's, there has been much discussion over the future of South Buffalo's outer harbor lands. Since 1999, the City of Buffalo, Erie County and the Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation have been leading an initiative to rejuvenate the over 1200 acres of former heavy industrial lands to new recreational and economic uses. The site is considered one of Buffalo's best opportunities to boost economic and commercial development. Most of the land is currently controlled by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA). The NFTA originally acquired the property in the 1950's in anticipation of the need to expand Buffalo's port facilities; however the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959 made that expansion unnecessary.

Using successful waterfront developments in Baltimore, Chicago and Cleveland as examples, one recent idea integrates environmental restoration, parkland, new public amenities, housing and commercial initiatives. Various combinations of mixed use have been proposed, with emphasis on retail, recreational, residential and light industrial, and a commitment to maintaining public access. As of January 2003, New York State has committed funds for a **new**

park was once widely used for ceremonies and other civic displays, but is now increasingly encroached upon by the surrounding road network, which includes access to the Peace Bridge. Today, the framework of the historic Olmsted design remains, although roadway alterations and the addition of playing fields and park maintenance structures have changed its character and uses. The present master plan for the park calls for restoring greenspace within the park; however proposed changes in the Peace Bridge area, including a new or updated bridge, and changes to the Customs area, could further alter the park, either positively or negatively depending upon the bridge alternative selected. Currently owned and operated by the City of Buffalo, discussions are ongoing between the City of Buffalo, Erie County and the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, over whether the County will assume responsibility for the entire Olmsted Parks system in future years.

22. FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT BOATHOUSE

Joint Venture – City of Buffalo/Erie County

A Frank Lloyd Wright-designed boathouse, originally designed for the University of Wisconsin but never constructed, will be built on lands on the Black Rock channel. The boathouse is to be constructed adjacent to the West Side Rowing Club, at an estimated cost of \$4.1 million. The boathouse reconstruction is being achieved through collaborative efforts by the Frank Lloyd Wright's Rowing Boathouse Corp., a non-profit organization, and various government agencies. Buffalo State College provided the parcel of land, which was slated for its Great Lakes Research Center, in return for other waterfront land donated by the state Division of Military Affairs. Erie County has designated \$200,000 in funding for the boathouse, and an additional \$800,000 toward the Research Center. The boathouse will be used as a working boathouse by the rowing club, and cross-marketed as a tourist attraction with other Wright sites: Graycliff and the Darwin H. Martin House.

23. COLONEL WARD PUMPING STATION

City of Buffalo

Located at the north end of LaSalle Park the Colonel Ward Pumping Station building is a magnificent industrial heritage structure. Within the overall master plan for LaSalle Park, it was recommended that

the great hall of the building be adaptively reused as a shared-use facility, such as a Buffalo Visitor's Center or an Industrial Heritage Museum. However, after the events of Sept. 11, 2001, security issues are now of primary concern for such vital facilities, which would likely preclude such a "public" venture at this time.

24. LASALLE PARK

City of Buffalo

LaSalle Park is a 77-acre city-owned multi-purpose park in the City of Buffalo, strategically located on Lake Erie at the junction of the Niagara River. Currently Buffalo's premier waterfront park, the site houses festivals and concerts, and provides numerous sports fields, as well as biking, rollerblading and strolling on the Riverwalk. Soccer fields run by Delaware Soccer club are also located in the park. A comprehensive master plan was completed a few years ago and construction has been completed on initial phases of the park work.



Ohio Street Park

25. BUFFALO AND ERIE COUNTY NAVAL MILITARY PARK

City of Buffalo

The Naval Military Park and Museum is located on the Buffalo River and is home to the destroyer *U.S.S. Sullivans* (listed on the *National Register of Historic Places*), the missile cruiser *U.S.S. Little Rock*, and a submarine, the *U.S.S. Croaker*. The Park is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and is operated as a non-profit organization supported by memberships and donations, admission fees, ship's store, events bookings. The park hosts overnight encampments for up to 225 youth, berthed aboard the USS Little Rock. The Naval Park is slated to be relocated in the near future, but will remain a vital part of the new Erie Canal Harbor project.

26. ERIE BASIN MARINA

City of Buffalo

Erie Basin Marina is one of the favorite spots for Western New Yorkers during the warmer months. The park is a city-owned facility offering seasonal and transient docking, a boat launch and other services for recreational watercrafts in the City of Buffalo. Located at the foot of Erie Street near the heart of Buffalo's downtown, the Erie Basin lands include an observation tower and public greenspace.

State Park on the Outer Harbor to include both **Gallagher Beach** and the **Small Boat Harbor**. This would be combined with a proposed **waterfront recreational trail** and other additional parkland expansion in the future. Another proposal at the north end of the outer Harbor is for the development of **Times Beach** into a Nature Preserve.

5.2.7 CITY OF BUFFALO COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The City of Buffalo Comprehensive Plan recommends a series of Action steps relating to the South Buffalo waterfront area, including:

- Create a waterfront focal point at the terminus of Main St. on the Lake Erie waterfront, to be developed as a mixed use waterfront village, including office commercial, residential, recreation and open space;
- Continued financial support for the development of Gallagher Beach;
- Promotion of the Seaway Trail as an attraction for City, region and state and protection of the corridor through development controls as a National Scenic Byway;
- Creation of Gateways on Fuhrmann Boulevard, Tiftt Street and the City limit, through signage, landscaping and site amenities;
- Promotion of Tiftt Nature Preserve, including improved connections to Times Beach;
- Implementation of the Times Beach Master Plan as a Nature Preserve destination area.
- Completion of a Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan.

A component of the South Buffalo project is the improvement of transportation infrastructure in the Southtowns area, and this has been the subject of several studies and initiation of a scoped Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process. Original proposals for the Southtowns Connector called for an inland expressway and tunnel system to replace the Buffalo Skyway/Route 5. A recent report issued by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) refocuses the terms of reference for the project to better meet local land use plans and brownfields restoration objectives, including:

- Improving road access to specific developable sites within the Southtowns industrial area, including the Outer Harbor, Bethlehem Steel

It is located close to Waterfront Village, a mixed use development located adjacent to Buffalo’s Central Business District. The Buffalo River frontage also serves as the departure point for cruise boats that tour the Black Rock Canal and Lake Erie.

27. BUFFALO RIVER CORRIDOR - INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE TRAIL

City of Buffalo

The historic grain elevators are located along the Buffalo River just south and east of Downtown Buffalo. Once a bustling industrial area, the elevators and industrial buildings stand as fascinating reminders of the area’s history as one of America’s greatest working waterfronts. These impressive structures have been studied and admired worldwide by architects, structural engineers and history buffs as one of the great innovations in architectural design form and use of materials. Innovative re-uses for the buildings have been investigated in conjunction with a visioning session on the South Buffalo Redevelopment Plan and other planning efforts. Ideas have included a national industrial heritage park along the river, to multi-media presentations on the granary façades, as well as the incorporation of an industrial heritage trail that would run along the Buffalo River, linking to lakefront lands.

28. BUFFALO RIVER PARKS - OHIO STREET, SMITH STREET, AND BAILEY AVENUE

Erie County

In 1997, several new sites (former industrial properties) along the Buffalo River were naturalized through a cooperative effort by the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning, the Buffalo and Erie County Private Industry Council and the West Seneca Youth Bureau-Americorps Program. Students participated in a seven week long national youth employment and training program, working to clear land, create trails and plant vegetation at the three parks. Program funding was provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Labor through a Coastal Watershed Management Project, Wetlands Protection Project and Employment and Training Program. Additional funding for the new parks to provide public access to the river and improve fish and wildlife habitats was provided by a number of local, state and federal agencies. An additional trail connection, overlook area and river side remediation

/ enhancement project was completed adjacent to Erie County's Smith Street site by the owners of the Buffalo Color Corporation.

29. SENECA BLUFFS

Erie County/City of Buffalo

Seneca Bluffs is located on the east side of Seneca Street immediately south of the bridge over the Buffalo River. As part of a larger NYS funded strategy to improve water quality and restore wetland habitats in the Great Lakes watershed, Erie County and the City of Buffalo are working together to restore the Buffalo River corridor. The Seneca Bluffs project will restore 15 acres of mixed floodplain habitat on the Buffalo River, reduce erosion of the bluffs, and treat stormwater runoff.

30. SOUTH BUFFALO REDEVELOPMENT AREA

Joint Venture – City of Buffalo/County, State

The City of Buffalo is proceeding with the South Buffalo Redevelopment project, which is one of the largest brownfields initiatives in New York state and has maintained its commitment to the redevelopment of the former steel/industrial lands in the development of its new Comprehensive Plan (2002 Draft). The project covers almost 1200 acres and includes the redevelopment of the former Republic Steel and Union Ship Canal areas, The project includes transportation plans to construct a direct roadway from the I-90 and accommodation of the potential Southtowns connector project.

31. HISTORIC BUFFALO LIGHTHOUSE

Buffalo Lighthouse Association

The Buffalo Lighthouse is located at the mouth of the Buffalo River at the north end of the Outer Harbor lands. The site is situated on lands owned and occupied by the Coast Guard and is licensed to the Buffalo Lighthouse Association for restoration. Built in 1833 to replace a smaller lighthouse constructed in 1818, the lighthouse is listed in the *National Register of Historic Places*. In support of the Association's efforts to preserve and restore the lighthouse, the City of Buffalo has developed a shoreline promenade at Lighthouse Point.

- Lands, Republic Steel and the Union Ship Canal site lands;*
- Reconfiguring Route 5/Fuhrmann Boulevard/Ohio Street road system along the Outer Harbor lands into a system of waterfront boulevards and arterials;*
- Providing adequate service for commuter/commercial traffic between the Southtowns and Downtown Buffalo; and,*
- Improved bus service, park and ride facilities, and pedestrian/bicycle trails, including the Industrial Heritage Trail through the historic granary / industrial waterfront area.*

With the magnitude of the Outer Harbor Lands project, it is envisioned that a multi-level governmental approach to the planning and development of the lands will be required, including the support and involvement of Erie County. In recent months, at both the State and Federal level, support has been indicated for the project along with a commitment to address land ownership issues, and investigate funding opportunities.

32. TIMES BEACH NATURE PRESERVE

NFTA/City of Buffalo

Times Beach is strategically located near the north end of the Outer Harbor on Lake Erie, at the mouth of the Buffalo River. It is at the north end of Fuhrmann Boulevard. The site is informally accessed for birding (particularly shorebirds) and other wildlife viewing. In 2001 the US Army Corps of Engineers initiated a study to investigate the potential impacts of opening up the site for public access. Opportunities being investigated range from simple trails to a more elaborate boardwalk system including interpretive stations and an educational center. The potential for a fishing pier is also being investigated, although preliminary investigations indicate that this would need to be a substantial structure due to wave and ice action. The City of Buffalo Comprehensive Plan recommends the development of a detailed development plan for the site, with improved connections to the Tiff Nature Preserve. Future consideration should be given to extending the New York State Parks land holdings along the entire Outer Harbor to encompass Times Beach as an appropriate addition to this State waterfront park facility.

33. BUFFALO OUTER HARBOR WATERFRONT TRAIL

Erie County/City of Buffalo/New York State/Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA)

As part of continued efforts toward a Lake Erie recreational greenway, an 8.5-mile bike and pedestrian pathway will be constructed, extending from the former DL&W railroad terminal at the foot of Main Street to Gallagher Beach on Fuhrmann Boulevard. The trail will continue where the Riverwalk currently ends downtown, connecting the Erie Basin Marina, HSBC Arena and other Inner Harbor features with Tiff Nature Preserve and the Small Boat Harbor to the south. The trail is a cooperative venture led by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority involving the City of Buffalo and Erie County, and funded through grants provided to the State through the Federal Transportation Enhancements Program (TEP). The trail will be located on a 75-to-90-foot-wide “green belt” that will be created from reclaimed industrial brownfields along the harbor’s edge. Design work will begin in 2003 with completion expected in 2004.

34. SMALL BOAT HARBOR - NY STATE PARK

Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) / New York State

The Small Boat Harbor, along with adjacent Gallagher Beach, has just been designated as the first NY State Park facility along the City of Buffalo's waterfront. Currently, the NFTA owns and operates this small craft harbor off Fuhrmann Boulevard in the South Buffalo Outer Harbor area. This recent State Park announcement has elevated these important properties to statewide significance and has given new life to new development prospects along the Outer Harbor and other sites along Erie County's waterfront.

35. GALLAGHER BEACH - NY STATE PARK

Joint Venture, New York State/ Erie County

In recent years the County and the State have collaborated on the redevelopment of Gallagher Beach including a boardwalk, improvements to jet ski and wind surfing launch sites, development of sunbathing and picnicking areas and the resurfacing of parking areas. The site is located at the south end of the Outer Harbor. Recent announcements by New York State will see the transfer of control of Gallagher Beach and the adjacent Small Boat Harbor properties from the NFTA to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP). This designation includes approximately 80-acres of Buffalo's Outer Harbor area as a New York State waterfront park and recreation area, with a connecting linear waterfront park that extends from the Small Boat Harbor to beyond Gallagher Beach near the City of Lackawanna border. The beachfront would be developed to become a full-service swimming and sunbathing beach and the boat harbor would be improved to increase its regional appeal and commercial viability. This recent State Park announcement has elevated these important properties to statewide significance and has given new life to other new development prospects along the Outer Harbor and other sites along Erie County's waterfront.

36. TIFFT NATURE PRESERVE

City of buffalo /Buffalo Museum of Science

Tifft Nature Preserve is 264.0-acre city owned nature preserve in the South Buffalo area. Located on brownfield lands formerly occupied by industrial canals and slips, the Preserve includes 75

acre of marshland, and open water ponds, along with woodlands, thickets, and grassy fields, and is on a primary migration route for waterfowl, warblers and passerines. The site is the largest nature preserve in the City of Buffalo and one of the largest and only urban nature preserves within any city in the United States. This site is managed by the Buffalo Museum of Science. The City of Buffalo Comprehensive Plan recommends the improvement of connections between the Tiffit Nature Reserve and Times Beach at the mouth of the Buffalo River. Given the proximity of the Tiffit Nature Preserve to Gallagher Beach, Small Boat Harbor and Outer Harbor Development area, this site is also a prime candidate for a New York State takeover and inclusion in a major waterfront State Park facility.

CITY OF LACKAWANNA

37. REDEVELOPMENT OF BETHLEHEM STEEL PROPERTY

Private/Public Joint Venture

The former Bethlehem Steel Company occupied over 2000 acres of land in Lackawanna. In 1998, the Bethlehem Steel Corporation announced a comprehensive Land Redevelopment Plan that could eventually convert 1,100 acres of its landholdings into a commercial/industrial area, with a distribution and transshipment center. The development would include 485 acres of greenway and recreational uses designed to reconnect the community with the waterfront, including: a new regional marina, the realignment of Smokes Creek; enhancement of the Route 5 corridor; new public access via a Greenway along Smokes Creek. Much of the site may be contaminated from former industrial uses, and as such is subject to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations for site clean-up. In 2002, the EPA announced that it would remove portions of the site from a federal agreement requiring Bethlehem Steel to investigate all of its lands at this time for environmental contamination, freeing up the company to undertake the assessment and remediation of a 102 acre site. After the necessary remediation work, Erie County, the City of Lackawanna and New York State will work to redevelop the parcel into an industrial park.



TOWN OF HAMBURG

38. WOODLAWN BEACH STATE PARK

New York State

Woodlawn Beach State Park is a large natural sand beach, located on the easternmost shore of Lake Erie in the Town of Hamburg, just south of Lackawanna's Bethlehem Steel property. It is the largest sand beach closest to Buffalo and, as such, often attracts shorebirds in the fall. A small corridor of underbrush that covers the dunes along the beach provides cover for migrant birds in spring and fall. Two small streams empty into Lake Erie near the north end. A new beach-related facility including restrooms, concessions and meeting rooms was recently completed by the State. This impressive new facility can serve as a model for the potential facility for Erie County's Bennett Beach property.

39. WANAKAH BEACH

Town of Hamburg

Currently, a Visitors Center for the Seaway Trail is proposed for the Waterworks site, located on Rte 5 in the community of Wanakah. The project is funded in part by grants from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP), and the Federal Transportation Enhancement Program, and funds from the Town of Hamburg. Site redevelopment for the three-phase project will include redevelopment of the building to house the visitor center facility, creating direct access to 400 feet of beachfront, construction of an observation deck and a fishing platform. Other site improvements include seawall repairs and upgrades, repairs to the foundation of a building, and the realignment of rip-rap.

40. ATHOL SPRINGS LAKEFRONT AREA

Town of Hamburg

Athol Springs is a small portion of the Town of Hamburg, a little less than 8 miles south of Downtown Buffalo and 2-miles south of Woodlawn Beach State Park. A previous waterfront plan proposed a lakefront promenade adjacent to waterfront restaurants and commercial area. Situated on a bluff overlooking Lake Erie, the area is promoted by birders for observation of gulls and other waterfowl.

41. HAMBURG TOWN PARK

Town of Hamburg

Hamburg Town Park is a 13-acre town-owned developed park located on Lake Erie, in the hamlet of Mount Vernon just south of Athol Springs. The park includes a beach, walking/biking and nature trails, picnicking and other related facilities and is promoted along with Athol Springs for its birdwatching opportunities. The sandy beach is patrolled and offers safe swimming, a snack bar, change rooms and rest rooms. Adjacent to the swimming area is a boat launch; with a special area reserved for windsurfers. The park is limited to use by Town of Hamburg residents only.

42. EIGHTEEN MILE CREEK

Town of Hamburg/Town of Eden/Town of Evans

The New York State Open Space Plan identifies this as a significant area. Protection of the creek mouth and gorge within a nature preserve area. Eighteen Mile Creek is a jewel along the Erie County waterfront and is renowned for its geological and prehistoric significance.

TOWN OF EVANS

43. STURGEON POINT MARINA

Town of Evans

Sturgeon Point Marina is a town-owned facility offering docking, mooring, loading and other services for recreational watercrafts in the Town of Evans. Owned, operated and maintained by the town, the site includes hard surface launching ramps, parking for 100 cars and trailers, plus 167 single cars. Fishing and picnicking, are also available. Sturgeon Point is has an undeveloped shoreline area adjacent to the marina and is accessed via Sturgeon Point Road.

44. WENDT BEACH

Erie County

Wendt Beach is a 178.0-acre county-owned multi-purpose park located on Lake Erie. The park is located on the former Wendt estate and includes the old Wendt mansion, a historic structure that was also once used as a stagecoach stop. The park includes two distinct halves; the western section includes the mansion and its various outbuildings, a shale beach, vegetated dunes, natural woodland areas, and other beach related facilities. The easternmost section includes wide open, level lawn areas that is primarily used for soccer throughout the summer and fall months. Although the approach and grounds are still characteristic of an estate property, parking, maintenance and storage facilities crowd the mansion and diminish its potential ambience. The park with its heritage aspects and waterfront setting, has the potential to be a regional draw but is in need of restoration. The park was selected as one of the detailed design components of the Master Plan. Given Wendt's large size, lake access, recreational potential and its proximity to Evangola State Park, it is recommended that the State of New York become a partner with the County in the future development and enhancement of this park. *Refer to Volume 2, Section 3.0 for the Specific Park Master Plan and recommendations.*

45. BENNETT BEACH

Erie County

Bennett Beach is 47.5-acre county-owned waterfront park on Lake Erie in the Town of Evans. Located at the mouth of Big Sister Creek, the park includes a fine sand beach (*one of the last remaining natural sand beaches on the eastern end of Lake Erie*) and a backshore picnic area, with natural dune and creek environments. However facilities are limited and aging, and do not serve the beach area well. The site offers tremendous potential as the County's premier passive, beach-oriented park (similar to Woodlawn Beach State Park). The park was selected as one of the detailed design components of the Master Plan. Given Bennett Beach's lake access, natural sand beach and dunes, and its proximity to both Wendt Beach and Evangola State Park, it is recommended that the State of New York become a partner with the County in the future development and enhancement

of this unique waterfront park. Refer to Volume 2, Section 3.0 for the Specific Park Master Plan and recommendations.

46. EVANS TOWN PARK

Town of Evans

Evans Town Park is an 11.0-acre town-owned developed park located on Lake Erie. This multi-purpose park offers many diverse forms of recreation, including swimming and beach activities, tennis, volleyball, basketball, baseball, rolloer hockey, horseshoes, picnicking and playgrounds. These activities are supported by a comfort station.

47. LAKE ERIE BEACH

Town of Evans

Lake Erie Beach Park is 5.3 acre town-owned and developed park in the Town of Evans. Redevelopment of Lake Erie Beach represents the Town's foremost priority for revitalizing its waterfront. Facilities include a guarded beach, play areas, picnicking and fishing access. A previous waterfront plan recommended improvements to the beach, support facilities, and parking to promote revitalization of commercial sites along Lakeshore Road. A pedestrian bridge over Muddy Creek was constructed, to allow public access to approximately 5.0-acres of shoreline. The project includes a picnic area, lighting, landscaping and other associated site improvements.

TOWN OF BRANT

48. EVANGOLA STATE PARK

New York State

Evangola State Park is 733-acre state-owned park located in the Towns of Brant and Evans. Its main attraction is its beautiful shoreline and natural sand beach, lined with low shale cliffs, located on Lake Erie. The park offers a guarded beach for safe swimming, nature trails, picnic facilities, baseball and soccer fields, tennis and basketball courts and 80 campsites. Snowmobiling, hunting and cross-country skiing are also offered.

5.4 POLICY DIRECTION

5.4.1 WATERFRONT PLANNING

The waterfront strategy for the Erie County parks should build on the goals and recommendations provided in previous waterfront plans for the Erie County Waterfront. Due to changes in the economic picture over the last ten years, specific components relating to market demand and economic projections need to be updated. Notwithstanding this, the principles and underlying framework for a comprehensive and linked system of waterfront activity centers are still viable.

Although major work still needs to be undertaken on key projects such as the **Outer Harbor** and the **Erie Canal Harbor** (*Buffalo Inner Harbor area*), progress is being made and a number of significant projects, by all levels of government, have been undertaken along Lake Erie, the Niagara River, and the Erie Canal. These individual projects continue to build toward an overall waterfront recreational system. Efforts toward a linked system of waterfront recreation sites and amenities needs to be coordinated within a planning strategy that promotes sound decisions in land use planning, transportation and environmental management.

5.4.2 MANAGEMENT OF THE WATERFRONT RECREATION SYSTEM

The waterfront County Parks and their inter-linking recreational trails and greenways are key destinations within the overall waterfront plan, which also includes state and local parks and landholdings. In 1999 the County agreed to take over management of three City of Buffalo waterfront parks: Broderick Park, Ontario Street Boat Launch, and Tow Path Park. Although small in scale, these sites nonetheless contribute as ‘*windows on the water*’ or as part of the linear Riverwalk trail system contribute to the overall waterfront greenway system. Broderick Park is also significant for its historic role in the Underground Railroad (*site of the Underground Railroad Freedom Memorial*). The County has also partnered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation on several sites along the Buffalo River

that were targeted for environmental clean-up and/or demonstration projects.

New projects aimed at revitalizing the waterfront and adjacent neighborhoods, such as the Erie Canal Harbor Project, the Buffalo Outer Harbor Trail, and the Buffalo-Fort Erie Waterfront Gateway have recently been initiated, with Erie County financial involvement. As waterfront revitalization efforts continue, the County can increasingly expect to be asked to partner in other similar undertakings, and has demonstrated its commitment in the past through financial contributions on a number of projects that generate matched funds from State programs.



While funding has been made available for capital development in the past by the County and the State, a corresponding increase has not been seen in operational funding at the County level. The County has further taken on responsibilities for parks that were previously maintained by the City of Buffalo. Given the current climate of limited resources, and the higher costs associated with the management of the waterfront sites, it may not be possible for the County to continue to increase its waterfront landholdings in a significant way, unless a corresponding increase in operational funds is provided. Redevelopment of Wendt Beach and Bennett Beach alone, assuming that development costs can be secured, will generate a significant increased demand on County operational and management resources, and the balance of the parks within the County system are equally needy. There is an expectation, and an acceptance by the public, that the New York State Parks, e.g. Woodlawn Beach State Park and Evangola Beach, are based on a nominal user pay system. However, there is a corresponding expectation that the facilities provided at the State parks are of a quality that warrants a fee payment. The County waterfront parks do not currently charge for admission; however neither are the facilities up to the standards provided at the State parks.

Within the emerging waterfront parks and greenway system that is underway, there is a potential pattern of ownership/management of the waterfront sites emerging. The **Outer Harbor Project** is expected to include a State-run park component that will build on the existing network of State parks on the Niagara River/Lake Erie shoreline. As recently as January 2003, New York State has announced its intention

to manage Gallagher Beach and the Small Boat Harbor as new State Park facilities. The addition of this parkland in close proximity to the significant natural environment area of the Tiffit Nature Reserve (which is currently managed by the Buffalo Museum of Science), suggests that these lands should all be considered as an integrated State park. It is conceivable that Wendt Beach and Bennett Beach might also fit with this state system, either as official State Parks, as a shared partnership between the State and County, or redeveloped and managed similar to the State run system.

Conversely, the smaller waterfront sites that contribute to the overall waterfront greenway trail system, or as public access points, may be more suited to management by local governments. Notwithstanding the City of Buffalo’s difficulties in the past, and the transfer of management of several of its waterfront sites to the County, future County decisions concerning new waterfront land acquisitions, or the assumption of management, should ensure adherence to the mission and mandate of the Erie County parks system. With discussions over the assumption of the Olmsted Parks (which closely fits with the County’s role), the County may wish to revisit the management of the smaller waterfront sites and the linear parks along Buffalo’s waterfront with the City, or consider increasing operations and maintenance budgets to ensure a high quality standard of management.

5.5 WATERFRONT PARK SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

The following are general recommendations that apply to the County waterfront landholdings. Specific park by park recommendations for key waterfront sites can be found in Volume 2, Section 3.0, Specific Park Master Plans.

5.5.1 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Niagara River has been designated the First Globally Significant Important Bird Area (IBA) in the region (as identified by the National Audubon Society, US partners in the global IBA program). Significant habitat sites, or “stopovers” already exist on Grand Island (Buckhorn



Wendt Mansion



Bennett Beach Park

Recommendation 5.1 – Build on the planning policies set out in previous waterfront plans. Update the policies to be consistent with the County’s Park’s current Mission Statement. Recognize that an accessible and connected waterfront, linked to a regional greenways system is a powerful marketing and tourism opportunity.

Recommendation 5.2 – The County should assume a leading role in working with the state and local governments toward the protection of the Lake Erie and Niagara River waterfront environment, and the preservation of public open space, through consistent and appropriate land use planning, urban design and development controls that address environmental conservation, ecological enhancement, public access, and water-based recreation.

Recommendation 5.3 – The County should continue to work with the state and local governments to implement recommendations for waterfront revitalization contained in the Horizons Plan and other waterfront strategies, including such projects as the Buffalo Inner Harbor, the Buffalo Outer Harbor, completion of the Canalway Trail system, the Buffalo-Fort Erie International Gateway, and other projects as they arise.

Recommendation 5.4 – In contemplating acquisitions of new County waterfront sites, or assumption of management of existing sites, the County should consider the role and function of the waterfront park designations (Destination Parks, Windows on the Water, and Linkages). The lands should contribute towards an overall strategy that builds economic renewal of the waterfront communities, promotes waterfront recreation and protects significant environmental and heritage resources.

Recommendation 5.5 – The County should enter into discussions with the waterfront partners – State, County, Buffalo Museum of Science, City of Buffalo, Local governments – to develop a cohesive

Island State Park) and at the Tiff Nature Preserve. Other regional sites under consideration for development, (Times Beach, Buffalo Outer Harbor lands, Cherry Farm Park, etc.) also provide significant opportunities for the incorporation of naturalized, habitat areas that support the IBA.

Several of the County waterfront parks: the Buffalo River Parks, Wendt Beach, and Bennett Beach, include natural environment areas that contribute to the system. Towpath Park included naturalization measures in the original master plan which were never implemented. These sites and other County waterfront parks and open space areas could also provide some contributions to the IBA. The County should incorporate an underlying ecological framework for its waterfront park system, and the development of wildlife areas and specialized waterfowl and migratory bird habitat enhancement areas should be considered in the development/redevelopment of new waterfront sites. For existing small parks and open space areas, this may be limited to the encouragement of meadow and regeneration areas through reduced mowing in specific locations. For larger sites, the design should incorporate measures that target specific habitat types, such as wetland or forest habitat.

5.5.2 ACCESS AND LINKAGES

The existing network of waterfront parks, particularly through Buffalo, is not easily accessed from the main streets and lacks a cohesive system of directional signage. In conjunction with the establishment of a new County Park logo, and the development of a comprehensive family of signs, special waterfront directional signs should be developed and located along major roads and throughout neighborhoods to cue visitors and ‘remind’ residents that the waterfront (Lake or River) is nearby, and to offer wayfinding to highlighted waterfront destinations.

The Riverwalk system has improved public accessibility to the water and provides an almost continuous corridor. The Riverwalk is now almost 25 years old and, when built, traversed behind numerous active businesses with little relationship to the water’s edge. However, land uses have changed in some areas of the trail, providing opportunities for the County to revisit the trail alignment and potentially improve the aesthetics of the overall trail setting and

experience, with respect to aesthetic fencing, buffers, and shaded rest areas.

There is a growing interest by the public in low intensity, water and nature based recreation, and a number of the County's river and canalfront parks are well situated to support this. The waterfront park system should be examined for additional opportunities to provide additional fishing access points and 'soft' canoe / kayak launch sites that are accessed and serviced by existing facilities (parking, washrooms, trails).

5.6 CONCLUSIONS

Given its role within the overall planning of the region, the County needs to assume a leading role in working with other levels of government to ensure that waterfront development is undertaken in a comprehensive and unified manner. The waterfront strategy should build on past waterfront planning efforts, and work towards the underlying principles of economic renewal, public accessibility, recreation enhancement and environmental conservation.

It would appear that there is a role to be played for all levels of government, Local, County, and State, both in planning and implementing the waterfront recreation system as well as in managing and maintaining the existing parks and the ones to follow. Capital investment that is not followed by adequate maintenance is money wasted, and will not achieve the vision of a premier waterfront park system. Therefore, it will be important for all stakeholders to rationalize the roles and responsibilities not only for purchase and capital development, but for the ongoing management of the various sites, to be in keeping with their mandate for the provision of recreation.

The County should continue to encourage the State to assume a prominent role in the management of significant sites that are in keeping with the overall State Park system and open space conservation objectives. This includes a recommended future State role at such sites as Times Beach Nature Preserve, Tiffitt Nature Preserve and extended Outer Harbor/waterfront trail system area (*as an extension of the current Gallagher Beach and Small Boat Harbor State Park proposals*), and may extend in the future to Wendt



Towpath Park



Wendt Mansion



Bennett Beach Park

system of ownership and management for the Lake Erie/Niagara River waterfront park system that reflects the mandate of each level of government, and ensures a system of high quality, well managed and financially sustainable parks

Recommendation 5.6 - Waterfront parks redevelopment and upgrading, should be undertaken with a view to establishing an ecological framework throughout the system that supports the significant migratory bird corridor (Important Bird Area) along the Lake Erie and Niagara River corridors. With the assistance of naturalist organizations, the County should identify specific opportunities within new and existing parks to be implemented as part of a management strategy or at the time of redevelopment.

Recommendation 5.7 - Review the existing Riverwalk trail route alignments with waterfront landowners to ensure maximum connectivity, in light of land use changes.

Recommendation 5.8 - Develop a waterfront signage and wayfinding system that identifies all waterfront access points, and promotes a unified waterfront image.

Recommendation 5.9 - Investigate opportunities within the County waterfront parks for improving fishing access and providing soft launches for canoeing and kayaking.

Beach and Bennett Beach. Alternately, from a “dollars and cents” level of thought, as redevelopment of Wendt and Bennett Beaches take place the County may wish to consider a user-pay system similar to that in place in the New York State Parks to ensure that adequate future funds are available to manage and operate these vital waterfront sites to the highest quality.

The County-owned and/or managed waterfront park system already represents a significant part of the County park operational costs. The ability of any planned waterfront revitalization to generate tourism potential and economic renewal for the region will be substantially based on the quality of the recreational experience for prospective residents and visitors. This will require a high standard of park development, accompanied by a high standard of management and maintenance. Many of the existing County-owned parks are in need of redevelopment or upgrading. The County has also assumed management of several smaller, and fairly recently developed parks from the City of Buffalo, which are also in need of restoration and improved maintenance efforts.

Future County decisions concerning new waterfront land acquisitions, or the assumption of management of existing parks and open space areas, should therefore consider the mission and mandate of the Erie County Parks System, and should ensure the provision of adequate funds to manage and operate them to a high standard.

Specific recommendations for parks improvements are provided in Volume 2. However, as a general note it is recommended that visual and physical connections within the existing waterfront park and trail system be improved, through:

- *Wayfinding signs with consistent waterfront image or logo- along Riverwalk trail corridor, on main thoroughfares at intersections with connecting roads leading to waterfront access points, along scenic rural routes in rural areas (in tandem with the Seaway Trail signage).*
- *Improvements to physical trail connections - road crossings, trail corridors, (shade, fencing, views to lake, rest areas), revisiting trail routing where land uses have changed;*
- *Improved fishing access and opportunities for canoe/kayak launching, employing “soft” launches rather than paved ramps.*