

the NIAGARA ESCARPMENT FOUNDATION Bulletin

You may ask: Why publish an article about Wisconsin?

by Jim Molnar, NEF Director

In the first issue of its new *Bulletin*, the Niagara Escarpment Foundation is pleased to bring you an article by Mark Walter about how Wisconsin is learning about its part of the Niagara Escarpment.

Why publish an article about Wisconsin? Well, to start with, the Niagara Escarpment is not confined to southern Ontario alone. It begins in New York State near Rochester and end hundreds of kilometres west in Wisconsin, passing through Ontario and Michigan on the way. Some folks have called it the Great Arc, but I prefer to think of it as the Edge of the Big Salad Bowl. The Bowl is really a basin in the bedrock centred in lower Michigan and the more durable rock of the Niagara Escarpment forms its rim. If you go to Wisconsin, the rocks and cliffs and their plant communities are all the same as we see in Ontario, except that they face in the opposite direction since they are on the other side of the Bowl.

This step in the bedrock was created by our common geological and glacial heritage. It's the same Escarpment with the same human relationships to the land, and so in Wisconsin it has the same threats to its integrity as it does in Ontario. The report that Mark Walter describes in the article on the next page is Wisconsin's attempt to understand the nature of the Escarpment in their state --- what makes it special, and what threats it faces. It will be used to try to address those threats and work towards a means of protection.

The Niagara Escarpment Foundation was formed in 2001 by the Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment to undertake research and educational programs to promote awareness of the Niagara Escarpment.

Now if you think I'm going to say that Wisconsin is playing catch-up to us here in Ontario, and that we don't have anything to learn from them, well, I'm not. There are some differences in the way that Wisconsin does its land-use planning.

Decades ago, Wisconsin allowed the creation of regional planning commissions that carry out local and regional land-use planning. There are now nine of them in the state. They can set their own tax levies and do self-directed planning. For example, the Bay Lake Regional Planning Commission serves eight counties that are home to half a million people. The commissioners are a mix of local and state level appointments (sound familiar?), and they have 13 staff who work on local official plans and area-wide plans for things like transportation and water supply. Examples of regional planning in Ontario are more limited, such as the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

The Wisconsin inventory is another source of data on the flora, fauna and ecology of the Escarpment. In the future, I hope we can put our knowledge together. We can gain a lot from exchanging ideas with our friends and fellow dwellers in the Big Salad Bowl. ***And so from the opposite Edge of The Bowl, the Niagara Escarpment Foundation presents news from Wisconsin***

Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission Completes Inventory of Resources of the Niagara Escarpment in Wisconsin

by Mark Walter

The Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission recently completed a study of the Niagara Escarpment in Wisconsin under a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (*An Inventory and Assessment of the Resources of the Niagara Escarpment in Wisconsin*). The Niagara Escarpment, a geologic landform that crosses state and national borders, is a sickle-shaped ridge beginning in western New York state and running through central Ontario into Michigan, ending in south-central Wisconsin.

The Commission's study area covered a 150-mile corridor between 1,000 feet and several miles wide centered on the Niagara Escarpment from Door County to Dodge County in northeast and east-central Wisconsin. Portions of the Niagara Escarpment that are located within six counties were included within the study area.

The study focused on the Niagara Escarpment as a natural system with common issues of concern along its length. As a part of the study, the Commission collected and assessed the types of physical, social and regulatory data that were available for the communities in the six counties in the study area; identified deficiencies in data; and made recommendations for additional data collection. The inventory included a detailed analysis and description of the land use and land cover of the area, as well as the flora, fauna, geology, soils, wetlands and wildlife habitat on or adjacent to the Escarpment. The Commission conducted an analysis of the changes in population and housing to better identify the pressures from development on the Escarpment. The number and type of recreational facilities were inventoried to establish a linkage between the undeveloped areas

of the Escarpment as a potential recreational corridor. The study provides a summary of problems and recommended solutions, including delineation of environmental corridors, to mitigate impacts of development on key resources. A background of the history of settlement and development along the Escarpment was provided, as well as an analysis of the impacts to vital natural and unique resources above and below the Escarpment. The Commission conducted a Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis of the location and type of endangered resources along the Escarpment to determine which resources are unique to the Escarpment.

The Commission is using the information gathered for the study in its work in communities along the Niagara Escarpment in an effort to educate decision-makers and stakeholders about the importance of preserving the resources of the Escarpment. The Bay-Lake and East Central Wisconsin RPCs recently held a conference entitled *The Niagara Escarpment: Planning Practices & Smart Growth Strategies*, in an effort to further publicize the need for Escarpment resource protection. Both Commissions continue to work towards creating an awareness of the connection between the different areas of the Niagara Escarpment in an effort to protect and preserve this unique ecological feature.

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