



# Committee Report

<b>To:</b>	Warden Milne and Members of Grey County Council
<b>Committee Date:</b>	February 23, 2023
<b>Subject / Report No:</b>	EDTC-CW-04-23
<b>Title:</b>	Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy
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<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Randy Scherzer
<b>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</b>	All
<b>Status:</b>	

## Recommendation

1. That report EDTC-CW-04-23 regarding the Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy be received for information.

## Executive Summary

Grey County is a renowned four-season tourism destination. Familiarization and popularity of our region grows year over year as more visitors discover our unique offerings. To mitigate current and future impacts and strategically position the Beaver Valley Corridor (one of the region's most popular tourism drivers and a UNESCO biosphere reserve), Grey County, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of The Blue Mountains and Regional Tourism Organization 7: BruceGreySimcoe have partnered, with funding from the province, to develop the first Sustainable Tourism Strategy and three-year Action Plan. This strategy seeks to find alignment among stakeholders, understanding that biosphere reserves focus on balancing nature conservation with sustainable development for and with communities.

## Background and Discussion

An application was submitted to the Tourism Economic Development & Recovery Fund in April 2021, with approval received in August 2022. In December 2022, following a request for proposals process, Bannikin was awarded the contract to develop the region's first Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan.

The Beaver Valley Corridor is located at the southern tip of Georgian Bay, and cuts into the Niagara Escarpment. It begins near the Village of Flesherton at the south end, and includes the communities of Kimberley, Eugenia and Thornbury in the north. The Corridor includes the Bruce Trail, Beaver River, and several natural landmarks including Old Baldy, Duncan Crevice Caves

and Eugenia Falls. The area's location and inherent natural features make it very appealing for recreational enthusiasts as well as a diverse array of visitors.

Visitor amenities and tourism infrastructure are limited, there is no consistent branding and positioning, and there is confusion between the multiple public and private landowners, user groups and land stewards around role and responsibility, creating barriers to making the area market-ready.

To date, limited attention has been focused on realizing the Corridor's place as a strategic regional and provincial asset for rural economic development and diversification. As such, an opportunity exists to research and develop a Sustainable Tourism Strategy and three-year Action Plan. As a biosphere reserve, this strategy seeks to find alignment among stakeholders, understanding that biosphere reserves focus on balancing nature conservation with sustainable development for and with communities. To guide the process, the project partners with guidance from the Bannikin team have set the following project goal:

By late-Fall 2023, project partners Grey County, RTO7, the Town of The Blue Mountains, and the Municipality of Grey Highlands, alongside regional stakeholders, have co-developed a sustainable tourism strategy to envision the desired future state of the Beaver Valley Corridor along with a three-year action plan to initiate first steps.

Stemming from this goal, this project will build a strategy and action plan to address the following objectives:

1. To understand the background and context surrounding tourism in the Beaver Valley corridor
2. To gather insight, input, and feedback from a breadth and diversity of stakeholders
3. To identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges for tourism in the Beaver Valley
4. To co-create a sustainable tourism strategy with long term vision for the Beaver Valley corridor and confirm what action to take in the next few years
5. To establish a clear understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and resources required for implementing the actions identified.

The timing for this undertaking is critical. Our partners recognize the importance of the Beaver Valley as one of Ontario's iconic natural splendours. Several factors inform the need and timeliness for this project. Among these is significant visitor growth to the Beaver Valley in recent years, planned re-development of significant properties in the Beaver Valley, and infrastructure and space constraints and challenges across the corridor related to Municipal services and visitor volume.

These factors, among others, require immediate action to mitigate negative visitor impacts and resident conflicts and strategically plan for the future, knowing the popularity of the Corridor is not going to reverse.

The project involves four phases; the team is currently on step one:

1. Project Initiation, Management, and Communications (Begins Q1)
2. Research and Engagement Planning (Begins Q1)
3. Market Research and Landscape Assessment (Begins Q2)

#### 4. Strategy Development and Implementation Planning (Begins Q3)

A range of stakeholders will be engaged across the project and include, but not be limited to, visitor-facing businesses, residents from all municipalities and rural areas across the Beaver Valley corridor, community groups, and tourism organizations and partners active in the corridor.

As per the contribution agreement, work is expected to be complete in Q4 of 2023 with final reports submitted by December 31, 2023.

## Legal and Legislated Requirements

None.

## Financial and Resource Implications

Funding of \$50,000 for this project was included in the 2023 budget. Partner revenues of \$40,000 from Grey Highlands, Town of The Blue Mountains, RTO7 and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport will offset the majority cost.

## Relevant Consultation

- ☒ Internal - Manager of Economic Development & Tourism
- ☒ External – Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of The Blue Mountains, Regional Tourism Organization 7, Bannikin, Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport

## Appendices and Attachments

None.