Panel Commentary
The Heritage Coast Planning Approach

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My task is to comment on the three papers in this initial session on *'The Heritage Coast Planning Approach'*. The paper's topics divide between that of John Marsh, which deals with the nature and problems of coastal protection in the U.K. and Western Europe, and those by Brian O'Donoghue and Evan Ferrari, which deal with coastal conservation stemming from Ontario's 'Lands for Life' exercise, with special reference to 'The Great Lakes Heritage Coast' (GLHC). Thus, we have examples of approaches to coastal heritage, differentiated in space and time, but with the potential for overlap, especially with respect to what might be learned in Ontario from the European experiences.

I knew that the U.K. has had considerable involvement in conserving parts of a highly varied coast; several friends have walked along coastal paths in southwest England and Wales. Similarly, I knew that the people of many Western European nations have strong attachment to their coastal areas, albeit for a wide range of purposes, and that conditions of ownership, designation and protection are variable, despite common membership in the European Union. Marsh's presentation provides us with more precise information on factors that threaten coastal integrity, and the institutional and legislative frameworks that have been applied in Europe and, specifically, in the U.K.

Of the cited eight 'Threats to the Coasts', all but the last (saline intrusion) can be identified with respect to the Great Lakes in Ontario, albeit more widely associated with regions of greatest population concentration around the lower lakes. Marsh's review of 'Coastal conservation in Europe' highlights a process going back to the mid-1970s, and including two enclosed seas (Mediterranean, Baltic), which have experienced problems similar to those affecting the Great Lakes system (IGU-UNESCO, 1986; Colborn *et al.*, 1990). Furthermore, various E.U. and other protocols suggest the complexity of managing coasts under shared jurisdiction-also a parallel with the Great Lakes.

Turning to the U.K., Marsh notes early coastal protection as part of National Parks, the subsequent array of national and international protocols, and the four types of protected area that are contributing to coastal protection. What emerges is a process that has grown piecemeal over 40 years, to accommodate changing requirements and threats to an often fragile resource, and which is only now being operated in a more consistent manner through E.U. protocols.

Marsh concludes with a set of suggested 'Lessons for Canada', in which he recognizes the varied nature of coasts from a protection standpoint, and suggests

the need for a range of proactive measures, including public and private cooperative involvement in taking responsibility for coastal protection. The lessons are particularly appropriate to guiding the initial stages of a coastal protection endeavour and, hopefully, avoiding problems experienced elsewhere. As such, Marsh provides a valuable entry into consideration of Ontario's recent designation of the 'Great Lakes Heritage Coast.'

Brian O'Donoghue's and Evan Ferrari's papers focus on the initiatives resulting from the 'Lands for Life' (now 'Ontario's Living Legacy') initiative, with particular reference to the GLHC. Here, I also refer to the document *The Great Lakes Heritage Coast: Charting the Course* (2001). My overall impression, which the two papers and the document seem to confirm, is that the designation and proposed protection of 4200 km. of the shorelines of Lakes Huron and Superior as the GLHC is currently a statement of political intent, rather than a tangible reality. Because of this, rather than highlight instances of particular 'threats' or the appropriateness of specific 'lessons', I want to concentrate my comments on the consideration of the problems of establishing coastal protection from the viewpoint that stresses the complexity and often contradictory nature of the term *heritage;* the many meanings of which, embedded in the proposal, I see as a problem focus.

At first thought, one might imagine that identification of a coast as heritage means that we are talking about a natural environment landscape of intrinsic worth, regardless of the human environment. However, as Marsh has made clear for the European context and as *Charting the Course* states, we are talking about something where heritage is as much human, as geological or ecological.

The GLHC 'Vision Statement' identifies it as:

> *" an area of outstanding scenic beauty, with wild natural landscapes and cultural values that provide high quality experiences. The outstanding natural resource must be protected to ensure that it remains special and available to the people of Ontario. The coast should be preserved in its wild and pristine state and its ecological diversity and scenic beauty protected and restored for the benefit of current and future generations.*
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> *The outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities along the coast can contribute to stronger, more diversified economies within coastal communities. Through cooperation among different levels of government, communities, Aboriginal peoples, resource industries and interest groups, the Great Lakes Heritage Coast will remain an outstanding, high quality natural resource and become one of the primary tourist destinations in the world".* (Lands for Life, 2001 : vii)

This statement indicates that, although the Heritage Coast may be presented first as a natural landscape, its heritage is defined in much wider, cultural and economic terms.

In addition to the natural landscape, the statement variously identifies 'cultural values', 'restoration', and 'diversified economies' based on 'recreation and tourism opportunities', and a political context, that includes various levels of government and stakeholder groups, as well as globalization.

In a recent text, Graham *et al.,* (2000) explore heritage from a mix of cultural, economic and political standpoints and they raise questions, which seem relevant here. Definition(s) are crucial. The simplest *definition* of heritage is as 'the contemporary use of the past'. In this case we may ask, whose past?; defined for what group, to what purpose? In cultural heritage terms, the Great Lakes, especially the upper lakes, are pre-eminently part of First Nation heritage, accumulated over thousands of years. How is First Nation culture and its set of 25 reserve lands, to be incorporated into the provincially designated area? Will Aboriginals continue to be marginalized, or be empowered by the process?

A second, much shorter, but currently dominant cultural heritage is that of Europeans, who have plied the lakes and occupied the shoreline for less than 400 years. Their coastal heritage of fur trading, fishing, mining and logging (protection), plus the facilities to support these activities, has created a highly differentiated coastal zone (Environment Canada, 1993, 1994). Many elements, however, have been in decline for decades. Is it planned to reconstruct the many fishing stations, ghost settlements such as Spragge or Depot Harbour?

Besides First Nations, and other permanent residents, there are many seasonal residents and visitors. What about today's cottagers, many of whose association with the coast goes back generations. How inclusive will the cultural definitions be? Whose past(s) will be celebrated, and/or reconstructed, along this coast?

Each group has different attachments to and images of the coastal zone, some of which are not necessarily compatible (viz; 'Group of Seven' landscape versus beach condos). I was fortunate, recently, to be an examiner for an excellent PhD dissertation in environmental history, which explored the succession of land uses and users, and the images held, of the island and mainland shore zone between the Severn River and the North Channel in Georgian Bay (Campbell, 2001). What this study revealed was both the complexity of, and the contestation between different groups with different attachments to that region, and not least, the varied viewpoints as to the need for, or wisdom of, placing specific designation and/or regulation on segments of the region.

Turning to the economic context of heritage; as noted, the vision guiding the establishment of the GLHC sees it as an engine of economic growth and as a major

contributor to the world's second largest industry, tourism. This reflects economic and political reality. Northern and Shield Ontario is a 'have not', resource-based region. It is hard to imagine the population wanting to forego any potential economic benefits of this heritage resource. Many shoreline communities are declining; they will press for tangible development, to incorporate it, to access it, to promote and exploit its values.

Additionally, this coastal zone is politically complex; it includes many separate jurisdictions. It is fragmented between 20 non-native and 25 native communities, by public (provincial and federal) and private (individual and company) land jurisdiction and ownership. Will attempting to place all of these currently distinct units within a unifying 'heritage' framework resolve or exacerbate the problems? If attempts to integrate and protect a similar linear zone, i.e., the Niagara Escarpment, are a guide, then, at the very least, there will be conflict

In summary, what I think both Marsh's review of the European coastal protection efforts, and the stated vision of the GLHC suggest is that, despite the worthy goal of protection of a physical element of intrinsic value, what one faces (on an ongoing basis) are the paradoxes and dualities of heritage. Graham *et al.,* (2000) note the frequent occurrence of 'heritage dissonance', namely the lack of agreement and consistency to its meaning. The likelihood of dissonance in the case of the GLHC seems highly likely; partly as the outcome of an overtly political process, partly because of conflicting goals, and partly because of the mix of cultures over 4200 km of shoreline.

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