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NIAGARA RIVER CORRIDOR ONE STEP CLOSER TO RECEIVING NEW GLOBAL RECOGNITION

[4-18-2019], Niagara Falls NY - The Niagara River is one step closer to being recognized under an international Convention as a Wetland of International Importance. The listing of a site under the Ramsar Convention is a source of pride for the site's community and a major draw for eco-tourism. "This is an exciting advancement for the region. The Ramsar honor will put the Niagara River on par with other Ramsar sites like the Everglades and the Galapagos Islands" said Greg Stevens, Executive Director of the Niagara River Greenway Commission.

The Niagara River Ramsar Binational Steering Committee, made up of local environmental experts and advocates, has been working on this nomination for six years. This January, with the support of the Steering Committee and University at Buffalo School of Law Environmental Advocacy Clinic, the Niagara River Greenway Commission presented a 98-page nomination package for the U.S. side of the river to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Washington, D.C. Together, they are continuing to work with the Fish & Wildlife Service to prepare for an official nomination from the U.S. government. If approved, that nomination will go to the Ramsar Secretariat in Switzerland to be added to the list of Ramsar sites around the world.

A video celebrating this nomination can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZYKEa9knTg&feature=youtu.be>

"The Niagara River is known the world over," said Professor Kim Diana Connolly, director of the Environmental Advocacy Clinic at the University at Buffalo School of Law. "Many of us are aware of how wonderful the Niagara River ecosystem is, but to be honored on a global scale would be an incredible boost both ecologically and economically. These are world-renowned wetlands in our own backyard."

Being on the Ramsar site list serves to recognize and promote the importance of the site, while not imposing any new regulations or restrictions on landowners, either public or private.

The Niagara River is uniquely qualified for Ramsar. The Convention sets out nine criteria; the Niagara River meets eight of nine criteria on the U.S. side, and all nine on the Canadian side. If both sides of the river are added to the list of Ramsar sites, the combined sites would be the first transboundary Ramsar site in North America.

From any perspective, the Niagara River Corridor is outstanding. It carries an incredible amount of water between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, including over Niagara Falls. Along the way, it supports marshes at Tiff Nature Preserve, Strawberry Island, and more. The Niagara River supports hundreds of species of plants and animals and is key to mating and migration habits. Because the river stays mostly unfrozen through winter, it is essential to the survival of nearly a hundred species of water birds. There is also a significant human element. The river provides fresh drinking water, electricity, and a variety of recreational opportunities and access to nature. The Niagara River corridor is located on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples. The river attracted early European settlers, leading to its role in the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Niagara Falls is already a major tourist draw, and Ramsar recognition would increase those numbers. "The Niagara River Ramsar site will host as many or more visitors each year than any other Ramsar site in the world," according to Stevens.

Paul Dyster, the Mayor of the City of Niagara Falls on the US side, has championed this proposal from day one. “The Niagara River is key to our bi-national region’s well-being. Millions of people drink from it, visit as tourists, and swim, boat, and fish in it. By marking its importance as a Ramsar site, we can help ensure that the Niagara River will be a source of sustenance, celebration and community for the generations that follow.”

“Working with Mayor Dyster illustrates that the securing of the Ramsar designation is truly a bi-national effort. The Niagara River watershed is critical to the long term sustainability of our communities, and to the health of the Great Lakes Basin,” explains St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik and Director with the Great Lakes & St. Lawrence Cities Initiative. “Many organizations, academia and volunteers are working to protect and conserve the Niagara River and this designation will further strengthen all of our collective efforts.”

Mark Mistretta, Western District Director for the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation said “Western New York is fortunate to have the Niagara River in our backyard and this designation would support what we already know, the Niagara River is a wonderful place to get closer to nature. Ramsar designation would be a wonderful validation of that and help us grow as an eco-tourism destination.”

Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Basil Seggos said, “The Niagara River is a treasured natural resource that provides critically important habitat for fish and water birds. Designating this river as a significant Ramsar site bolsters the collaborative efforts of New York State and our local and federal partners to protect, conserve, and restore this biodiverse and globally significant ecosystem.”

The Steering Committee and their D.C. counterparts are thrilled that the Niagara River corridor is on the precipice of inclusion on the international list. The Niagara River will rank among the top of this elite community, and will add to Western New York’s growing list of accomplishments.

More information is available at <http://www.law.buffalo.edu/beyond/clinics/environmental-law/niagara-river-corridor.html>

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