



NIAGARA  
PARKS  
FOUNDATION

# Niagara Parks Foundation

Update from Chair Debbie Whitehouse

Presentation to Niagara Parks Commission - April 10, 2025



# Niagara Parks Foundation

- Launched in April 2022
- Registered charity governed by a Board of Directors, established to support and advance stewardship initiatives of Niagara Parks
- 7-member board:
  - **Chair:** Debbie Whitehouse
  - **Vice-Chair:** Sue-Ann Ramsden
  - **Members:** Michele-Elise Burnett, Sylvie Chartrand-Rafi, Bob Gale, Blair McArthur,
  - **Treasurer/Secretary:** David Adames
  - **Special Advisors:** Robert Brooker and Robert McIlveen



# Mission

Preserving the priceless nature and heritage along the Niagara River corridor for the enjoyment of the public and future generations

The Niagara Parks Foundation provides the unique opportunity for members of the public and corporations to actively contribute to one of the world's most beloved public spaces



# Priority Projects of the Foundation



**Tree Planting**



**Children's  
Garden**



**Indigenous  
Programming**



**Old Fort Erie  
Archaeology**



**Children's  
Programming**

2023/2024

*highlights*

AT A GLANCE



## Dufferin Islands Visitor Experience and Ecological Enhancement Initiative

- \$400,000 grant through TD Canada Bank's Ready Commitment program funded the three-year plan
- Year two was completed in 2024, highlights include:
  - Ongoing removal of invasive species
  - Installation of eight beaver cones to prevent blockages and flooding
  - Five wildlife feeding signs installed
  - 100m of shoreline restored using bio-engineering techniques
  - 5,000 native trees, shrubs and wildflowers planted
  - 2,000 trees planted along upper moraine to expand tree canopy
  - Restoration of three degraded islands
  - Working with a Landscape Architect to redesign the central picnic area



## Launch of Rekindling All Our Relations Indigenous Audio Tour

- Supported by the Foundation, Indigenous Tourism Ontario and FedDev Ontario.
- Free, self-guided audio tour of the Niagara Glen, curated by Michele-Elise Burnett and audio-engineered by William Riech Jr.
- Tour blends music from renowned Indigenous artists with narratives rooted in Indigenous teachings.
- Since launching in June 2024, the audio tour has been downloaded by over 1,100 users.



# Tree Planting

## Soil Analysis Program through Vineland Research and Innovation Centre

- Soil samples taken from future planting sites to guide the selection of tree species to ensure optimal growing conditions.

## Niagara Falls Tourism Donation for Rendez-Vous Canada

- Niagara Falls Tourism funded the planting of 1,100 trees in preparation for hosting the Rendez-Vous Canada conference in 2027
- The donation was matched by Trees for Life and 2,000 trees were planted between Dufferin Islands and Rapidsview Park.
- 25 environmental sustainability students from Brock University were recruited to assist with the planting.

## Community Tree Planting Day

- On October 26, 2024, volunteers joined together to plant over 250 trees as part of a local reforestation project outside of Old Fort Erie.





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TREES FOR LIFE

## Trees for Life Grant \$70,000

- Niagara Parks' Toonies for Trees point-of-sale donation program has steadily grown, raising over \$40,000 in 2024.
- The Niagara Parks Foundation is grateful to receive a grant through Trees for Life that will match up to \$70,000 toward tree planting in 2025-26 (estimated 5,000 trees).
- This will help the program's impact extend even further to support tree planting at Niagara Parks.
- In 2024, 7,351 trees were planted across Niagara Parks properties.
  - Funds raised through Toonies for Trees supported the parks in exceeding the annual tree planting goal by over 50%.



## Niagara Community Foundation \$20,000

- The Foundation is proud to receive \$20,000 in funding from the Niagara Community Foundation's 2025 Environmental Grant.
- The funding will support restoration work along the moraine including the removal of invasive species and planting over 7,500 native plants.

Announcement from NCF [here](#)





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Canada

## Federal Economic Development Agency - \$100,000

- In September 2024, the Niagara Parks Foundation was named a recipient of \$100,000 in funding from the Government of Canada through FedDev Ontario for the development of a new outdoor artificial skating loop.
- The funding was announced for 11 tourism organizations across the Niagara Region and surrounding areas that are diversifying their offerings and attracting new visitors to the region.
- The outdoor artificial skating loop is planned for the Artist Garden space outside of the Niagara Parks Floral Showhouse.

# The Children's Garden

- Joint project to build Niagara's first Children's Garden – a two-acre interactive garden space for children of all ages and abilities to connect with nature.
- Currently in a research and development phase including:
  - Focus groups with local educators
  - Public engagement
  - Consultation with Indigenous groups
  - Consultations regarding accessibility and inclusion considerations
  - Engaging with prospective donors
  - Researching existing Children's Gardens and leveraging relationships with partner organizations through the American Public Gardens Association (APGA)





# Focus Groups

Number of sessions to date: 4

Consulted:

- Royal Oak School, NOTL
- Niagara Catholic District School Board
- District School Board of Niagara
- Brock University (Faculty of Education)

Total Workshop Participants: 24

**Next Steps:**

- Focus groups will continue including input from schools and organizations outside of the Niagara region.
- Ensure we have multiple perspectives reflected in our feedback, including from more urban areas.

# March Break Activation for Families

- During March Break, an activation was hosted in the auditorium space at the Butterfly Conservatory.
- Children were invited to create illustrations about what they enjoy most about nature.
- Parents invited to engage with staff about the project and participate in a brief online survey.
- Public survey now available on the Children's Garden webpage [here](#).



# Project Timeline:

Fall 2024 – Spring/Summer 2025:

- Focus groups, public engagement, research, donor prospect meetings

Fall 2025:

- Detailed design to be finalized based on input from focus groups/engagement
- Site preparation

Spring 2026:

- Construction to begin

Summer 2028:

- Opening of the Children’s Garden





## Next Steps

- Additional focus groups and consultation sessions to inform plans for:
  - Indigenous storytelling
  - Accessibility and inclusion
- Teacher Open House event (April 10) at Niagara Parks Power Station will include a sign-up sheet for an online focus group session.
- Public engagement through online survey.
- Continue to meet with prospective donors.
- Formation of a campaign cabinet to support the project.
- Official launch of capital campaign.



# Earth Day Celebration Tuesday, April 22

- 10:30 a.m. – Auditorium and plaza space at the Butterfly Conservatory.
- In celebration of Earth Day and the Foundation's 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of its launch.
- Public event to share updates from the past year and announce plans for the Children's Garden.
- Event will include a tree planting ceremony led by Nokimis (Grandmother) Cindilee and walking tours of the proposed location of the Children's Garden.
- Guests will receive a complimentary tree sapling to plant in their own communities in honour of Earth Day.





# Thank you!

Thank you to the Commission for your ongoing support and to the Niagara Parks staff who have generously invested their time and energy to the Foundation.

Together, we are helping to preserve the environmental and cultural heritage of the 56-kilometre Niagara River Corridor.



# Questions and Comments





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