



Excellence in Environmental Stewardship Year-in-Review 2019

Environmental Stewardship Action Plan

Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) released their strategic plan in 2018 to guide directions over the coming decade and ensure long term success. It highlighted the NPC's role and responsibility for environmental and cultural stewardship, precipitating the partnership with Brock. A multi-year planning process was foundational to the Excellence in Environmental Stewardship Initiative (EESI) and began immediately. An inventory and situational analysis was initially carried out to determine 'where we are'. Consultation and engagement with NPC staff was then undertaken to figure out 'where we want to go' as well as 'how we will get there'. This involved multiple workshops with staff from across NPC that were facilitated by Brock students. These collective efforts culminated in a strategic plan for environmental stewardship which sets forth the goals and objectives for environmental stewardship within the Niagara Parks for the next decade. The collaborative planning process continues and next focuses on a framework to make the plan operational.

Inaugural Round Table



On October 23, 2019, individuals from the NPC and Brock University gathered at Legends on the Niagara Golf Course for an inaugural roundtable event. This is the first in a series of events made possible via the EESI. At the roundtable an orientation to the EESI was provided, findings from recently completed research and their implications were discussed, and updates on progress of projects associated with the partnership were shared.

Experiential Education Opportunities for Brock Students



(From left to right)

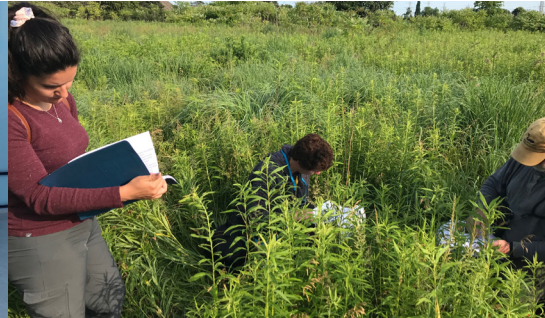
During the fall of 2019 the SSAS 5P01 student cohort visited the NPC with Dr. Jessica Blythe to learn more about the EESI. Upon arrival at the Niagara Parks Nature Centre they were joined by Corey Burant (Project Manager, Forest Health, Parks Planning & Properties), Heather Gorman (Manager of Education & Programming), and Nate Wheeler (Shift Supervisor, Niagara Glen Nature Centre). Corey provided the students with an overview of the partnership, while both Heather and Nate introduced the students to the Nature Centre and the programs offered. Master of Sustainability candidate, Samantha Witkowski, provided fellow students with an overview of her research at the Niagara Glen lookout. Students were also excited about the opportunity to visit Journey Behind the Falls, an NPC attraction. For some of the students, it was the first time they had ever experienced Niagara Falls.

For more information visit: brocku.ca/esrc/environmental-stewardship-initiative

Research Activities

SSHRC Insight Development Grant

Lead by Dr. Julia Baird
(Spring/Summer 2019)



In the spring of 2019 Dr. Julia Baird (Principal Investigator), Dr. Marilynne Jollineau (Co-applicant) and Dr. Ryan Plummer (Co-applicant) were successful in securing funding (\$69,621) from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to conduct research comparing different approaches in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of environmental stewardship initiatives. The NPC is a partner in this research and staff have provided essential supports throughout the research.

Ecological outcomes from environmental stewardship efforts are typically evaluated using expert field measurements, which can be costly in terms of dollars, time and expertise. Therefore, rigorous evaluation of outcomes is often not conducted. This research project aims to examine alternative methods of evaluating ecological outcomes (including expert field assessment, citizen scientists, stakeholder perceptions and remote sensing technologies) of environmental sustainability initiatives in order to determine their efficacy. Each group participated in a data collection day in July 2019, which involved completing questionnaires that asked participants to assess various aspects of the sites, including an overall evaluation of the health of the sites. The sites being investigated are located in Niagara Parks and findings from the study will have important scholarly and applied implications.

Master of Sustainability Thesis Research

“Understanding Perceptions of the State of the Environment in Relation to Ecological Measures: Intergroup Differences and the Influences of Environmental Interpretation”

Angela Mallette, Master of Sustainability Graduate

Angela’s research focused on four research areas - environmental assessments (best approach towards assessments), perceptions in conservation (insights from social science), group differences (in perception of the environment) and environmental interpretation (effectiveness of interpretation programs). She undertook her research in two parts: the first involved ecological assessment and the second involved surveying visitors and experts. The Niagara Glen Nature Centre was the site of her research and NPC staff provided valuable support. Beyond comparing outcomes of the independent ecological assessments and visitor perceptions, Angela’s research encourages a holistic approach to the environmental assessment that includes ecological measurements as well as social perspectives. The monitoring of visitor perceptions and ecological assessments can shape management at the Niagara Glen Nature Centre as well as within Niagara Parks.

Additional NPC research projects with results to come in 2020!

- Measuring How People Perceive and Value Niagara Parks: A Baseline Assessment for the NPC - *Dr. Jessica Blythe*
- Exploring the Environmental Stewardship Network of the Niagara Parks Commission - *Dr. Julia Baird & Dr. Sherman Farhad*
- Examining Intergroup Differences and Participation in Monitoring and Evaluating Scenic Vistas and Trails in Niagara Parks - *Samantha Witkowski, Master of Sustainability Candidate*

