

Report on this year's Leading Edge conference in the Town of Mono, Oct 1-2, 2008

Sharmalene Mendis-Millard

- The two days were well-organized and packed with interesting presentations, fabulous organic, local food and wine, and Richard Murzin's entertaining banter and musical abilities. Margaret Wentz (Globe and Mail) and Roy McGregor (McLean's) were featured speakers.
- Don Ross and Christian Hart were panelists on an economic development session. Christian mentioned that in the province of Quebec, 14 provincial agencies decided to recognize BRs as experts of sustainable development, and the Ministry of International Relations is responsible for BRs and the BRs all have to report to them.
- Peter Etheridge was there with his wife from the Bay of Fundy, as was Roger Schroeder from Riding Mountain National Park

Presentation highlights:

- **Jim Birtch** presented an intriguing proposal for UNESCO Eco-Cities to compliment but not replace the biosphere reserve program, and to encourage the MAB programme to reincorporate an urban component. This proposal was presented in Madrid and Ottawa has agreed to be a pilot city for this project as part of their 'Choosing Our Future' planning initiative. See attached documents for review. Jim welcomes comments and suggestions – please email him at james.birtch@pc.gc.ca with your feedback.
- **Chris McLaughlin** from CONE gave a captivating presentation that touched on resilience and systems, and sent his best to Bob and George who were both quoted in his talk.
- **Don Ross** reported on Frontenac Arch, which currently has 80 partner organizations and has taken a “networks are us” and “we start conversations” approach. They coordinate several networks, including for education, trails and conservation. They are also involved in an ‘Eastern Ontario Visual Character Project’ in reaction to a decline in tourism numbers after SARS, 911, rising fuel prices, and the insularity of the US so as to develop tourism based on the landscape but “not lose the goose that laid the golden egg”. They are working an Integrated Community Sustainability Exercise so all municipalities are “working with the same song sheet”.

Key lessons learned from past experiences:

- Bring the whole community with you (e.g., by hosting ‘parties for the BR’ to celebrate successes)
- Champions are key
- If you want vast funding you get vast projects.
- Great topics need great speakers and the press there
- Facilitation is the best role for a biosphere reserve
- **Christian Hart** spoke of the necessity to work from the bottom up and to host a reunion party (after the Frontenac example) every two years for all those involved to set goals. 1/3 of the people on Lac St. Pierre's board has a tourism background and they are working toward developing labeling standards that are compatible with international standards and what is being done in BRs worldwide. They are developing a Guide Book on sustainable tourism and labels (how you can use it, when, where, and why) for each sector, and have developed different levels – bronze, silver, gold – that companies and operators can strive toward. This Guide Book will be very useful for BRs interested in Canada; a lot of work has gone into it!
- **David Brown** from the Department of Tourism and Environment at Brock University presented an interesting website to promote multi-sensory, sustainable and user-friendly tourism: www.niagaragreenbelt.com/index.php. The official launch date of the site is Nov 25, 2008.