

Georgian Bay Association (GBA) Position Paper

Potential to create a larger coastal municipality along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay



July 16, 2019

The Board of Directors of GBA is releasing this Paper to alert GBA member associations and their members of a potential opportunity to create a larger municipality along the eastern coast of the Bay, outline GBA's proposed position on the issue, and collect your input on it.

The Ontario government's review of 73 lower-tier municipalities in 8 districts and Simcoe County includes the District of Muskoka and hence the Township of Georgian Bay. The Province's plans are not clear yet, but amalgamation of all the municipalities in Muskoka is the most likely outcome to achieve the stated objectives of efficiency and effectiveness. GBA believes similar reviews could cover other districts in future, including Parry Sound, raising the threat of more townships along the coast being merged with larger inland municipalities and towns that have few shared interests with coastal communities.

GBA's key recommendation is that we all should be proactive in calling for a coastal municipality that covers all or most of the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve (GBBR), rather than see the coastal townships subsumed into several inland municipalities.

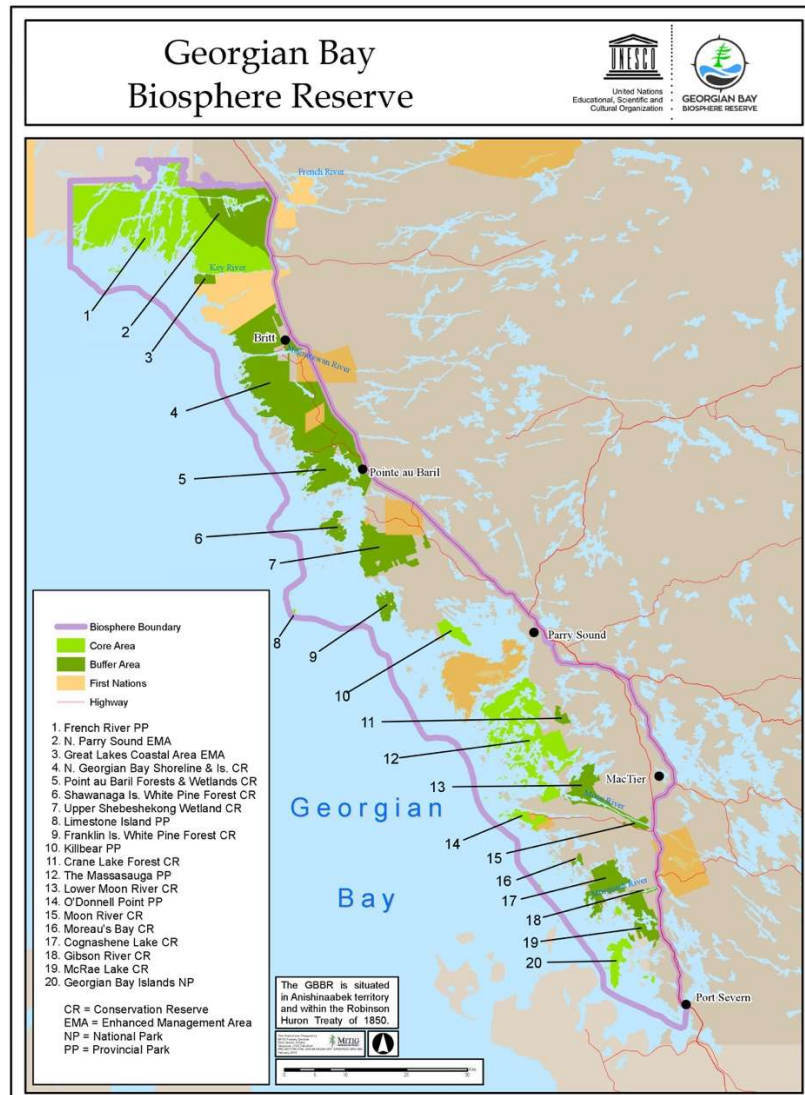
GBA believes that a coastal municipality that protects the Biosphere will provide the Ontario government with an opportunity to demonstrate strong support for the environment while consolidating and streamlining municipal governance for this area.

The coastal townships share a very similar vision for the region, and also share many values based on environmental protection and sound stewardship of the GBBR. Moreover, they have very different objectives, and municipal planning and service needs, than inland areas.

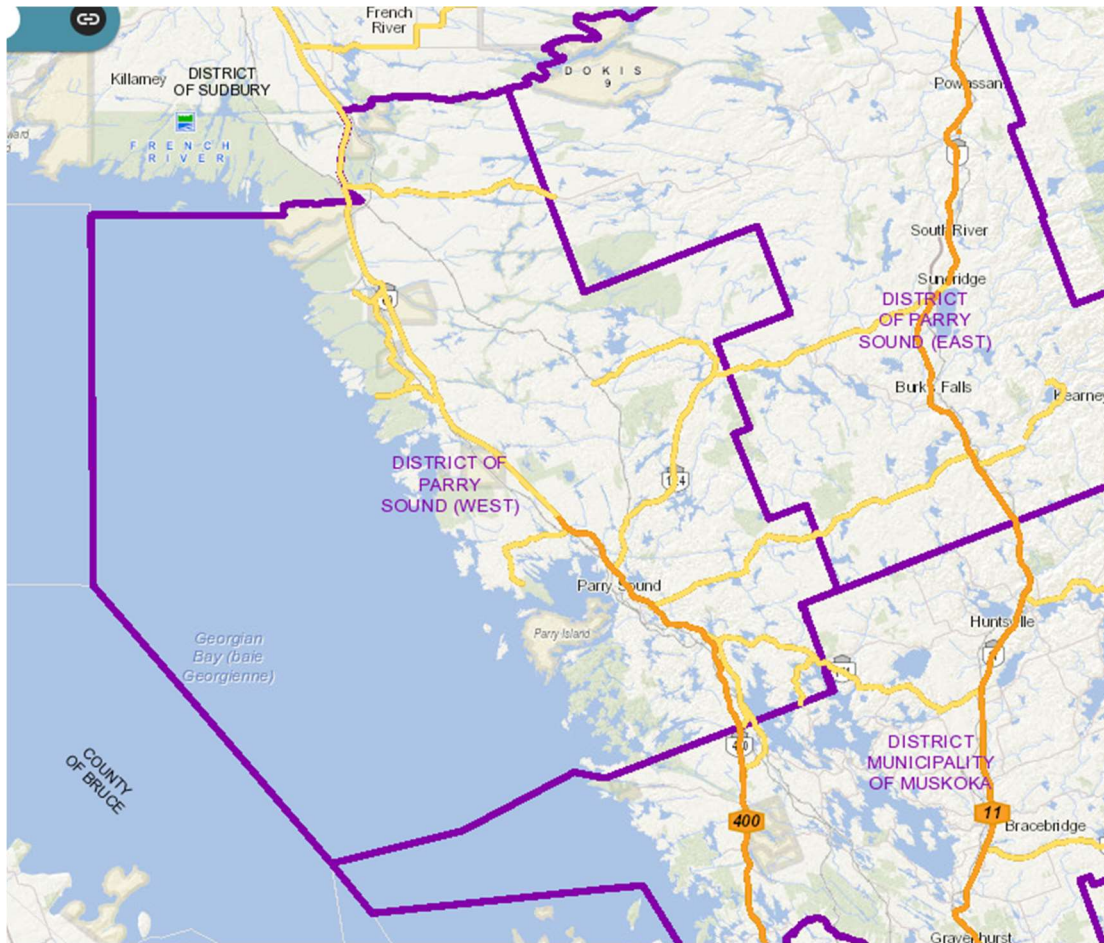
The Ontario government should recognize the unique nature of this shared vision and shared needs by ensuring that any municipal restructuring recognizes and protects the GBBR. The GBBR is a UNESCO biosphere reserve that encompasses the eastern coast of Georgian Bay and stretches approximately 175 kilometres from the Severn River to the French River. It contains the largest collection of freshwater islands in the world. The "30,000 Islands" and coastline sustain important ecosystems for migratory and island-nesting birds, rare species and their habitats. The area is home to 840 native plant species, 170 types of breeding birds, 44 mammal species and 34 species of reptiles and amphibians.

As shown on the map below, the GBBR area includes:

- The western coastal part of the Township of Georgian Bay – *GBA Associations: Honey Harbour, Cognashene, Madawaska Club at Go Home Bay, Wah Wah Taysee & Twelve Mile Bay;*
- Township of the Archipelago – *GBA Associations: Manitou, Woods Bay, Sans Souci & Copperhead, South Channel, Pointe au Baril, & Bayfield Nares;*
- Township of Carling (Carling) – *GBA Associations: West Carling, North Sound & Deep Bay;* and
- The unorganized townships of Harrison, Wallbridge, Henvey and Mowat (the unorganized townships) – *GBA Association: south part of Key River area.*



Currently the GBBR region consists of two municipalities and four unorganized townships in Parry Sound District, and one municipality in the District of Muskoka. The former are grouped into the West Parry Sound District service area, along with the Town of Parry Sound and other inland municipalities, as shown in this map:



The unique ecology of this coastline and its islands extends along the north shore of Georgian Bay and into the eastern part of the North Channel, in the Municipality of Killarney – *GBA Associations: north part of Key River Area & Northern Georgian Bay* - and the Township of Northeastern Manitoulin & the Islands – *GBA Associations: McGregor Bay & Bay of Islands*. The same dynamics apply to residents in this northern area, with one notable difference – well over 50% of the seasonal residents are US citizens, who cannot vote and must rely on their local associations and GBA to be their voice.

About 85% of inhabitants of our area can only access their properties by water, and the vast majority are seasonal, rather than permanent, residents. There are limits on the services that can, practically, be delivered to water access only properties. In addition, residents predominantly favour environmental protection over economic development which has created strong shared values amongst these coastal communities.

The concept of a Georgian Bay coastal municipality, which includes the immediate watershed, is not a new idea. When the Township of the Archipelago was created in 1980, the plan was for it to encompass the entire GBBR area. For various reasons this did not occur and the smaller two-part footprint, divided by Carling, resulted. Later attempts in 1996 and 2000 did not meet with success, but the reports provided at the time give us a wealth of useful and still relevant information and direction.

More recently a group of individuals from the southern part of the Bay commissioned Dr. Robert Williams, Public Affairs Consultant, to examine options for the Township of Georgian Bay (TGB) in light of Ontario's review of Muskoka District. His report recommends:

That the western area of the Township of Georgian Bay be joined with shoreline municipalities to the north to establish a complete, coherent and independent governance arrangement for coastal Georgian Bay and that the resulting municipality undertake responsibility for services on a regional-scale either on its own or in partnership with the West Parry Sound municipalities.

The guiding principle in the formation of the Township of the Archipelago (ToA) was and still is protection of the environment. This is encapsulated in ToA land use planning policies, which aim to control growth, limit development and ensure that the built form blends with the landscape wherever possible. The ToA has been consistently well managed, has maintained a policy of fiscal prudence, and, as a result, is financially strong with substantial reserves.

A successful strategy adopted by ToA has been to partner with neighbouring municipalities and the District of Parry Sound, wherever practical, to deliver certain services cost effectively. These include: the location of its administrative office; some solid waste collection and disposal facilities; healthcare, ambulance and long-term health care; social services; road maintenance; and recreational and cultural facilities. These partnerships reduce service delivery costs for both ToA and their partners.

The primary ToA services that their water access only residents receive are planning and solid waste collection. They have no requirement to provide water supply or wastewater systems. This efficient and effective model is, in our opinion, the one that should be followed by the coastal municipality being recommended. It would be supported by the shared values of its constituent communities, which are well aligned on issues such as planning, the environment and waste management. They also have a good understanding of the logistics and limitations of providing municipal services to water access only properties. Furthermore, ToA is currently split into two areas by Carling, and a consolidated, contiguous coastal municipality would therefore assist administration and delivery of services.

GBA therefore suggests that the threat of potential amalgamation of our coastal municipalities with inland municipalities can be turned into an opportunity to achieve the long-held vision of an Eastern Georgian Bay coastal municipality.

If the consensus view is to pursue this vision, it will provide essential support to enable GBA, and others, to advocate for the best municipal structure that protects the Bay and serves the interests of our coastal communities, in upcoming discussions with the Ontario government and the municipalities.

GBA would like to hear your association's views on this issue. Please send any questions and comments to Rupert Kindersley, Executive Director at: rkindersley@georgianbay.ca