Thousand Islands Regional Assessment

Towns of Hammond, Orleans and Alexandria, Town and Village of Cape Vincent, Town and Village of Clayton, and Village of Morristown

New York State Department of State
Office of Planning and Development

February 12, 2015
Draft Report

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New York State Department of State, Office of Planning and Development
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February 12, 2015

This report was prepared for the New York State Department of State with funds provided under Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund Act.
Municipalities:
- Town of Hammond
- Town of Cape Vincent
- Village of Cape Vincent
- Town of Clayton
- Village of Clayton
- Village of Morristown
- Town of Alexandria
- Town of Orleans

Depending on the municipality, participants may have included Town Board members, Village Trustees, Town and Village Planning and Zoning Board Members, and Town and Village Historians.

Counties:
- St Lawrence County Planning Office
- Jefferson County Planning Office
- St Lawrence County Legislature
- Jefferson County Legislature

Organizations:
- Antique Boat Museum
- Town and Village Chambers of Commerce
- Hammond Business and Economic Committee
- North Country Chamber of Commerce
- Save the River
- Singer Castle
- St Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce
- NY State Bass Chapter Federation
- Thousand Islands Land Trust
- Thousand Islands Tourism Council
- Seaway Trail

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I. Executive Summary

Eight municipalities in the Thousand Islands region of northern New York State have partnered with the New York State Department of State’s Office of Planning and Development (DOS) to evaluate, promote and identify tools to protect the region’s unique scenic resources. The purpose of this two-year project is to provide the background and justification to propose designation of eligible portions of the Thousand Islands region as “Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance” (SASS). The Thousand Islands region possesses unique, highly scenic landscapes that are accessible to the public and recognized for their scenic quality. The proposed SASS designation provides for an additional visual assessment of projects that require state or federal actions in the Coastal Zone, including direct actions, permits or funding. The SASS report also provides suggestions for local land use tools that municipalities could consider for review of actions in both state and local areas of scenic significance, and supports tourism development and marketing in the Thousand Islands region.

The eight towns and villages that participated in this project extend from Cape Vincent in Jefferson County to the Village of Morristown in St. Lawrence County. Through coordination provided by the Town of Hammond, the municipalities organized a stakeholder team and retained a consultant to conduct the study. The consultant adapted New York State’s scenic evaluation methodology to local conditions incorporating natural and cultural factors, views and visual perception elements, and conducted a thorough visual inventory and assessment process. An on-line visual survey completed by more than 600 people helped the consultants interpret and adjust the state standards to reflect the ways that local residents and visitors value their scenic resources.

More than 52 miles of the Saint Lawrence River and 14 miles of tributary creeks were surveyed. Over 100 square miles of upland terrain were also assessed as part of the project. A total of 109 separate visual landscapes were inventoried and evaluated. Ten areas totaling 156 square miles were proposed for designation as Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance under New York State’s Coastal Management Program. Detailed descriptions of the potential SASS were prepared, along with an impact assessment and recommendations for reducing visual impacts in these areas.

An additional three areas with potential for designation as Scenic Areas of Local Significance were identified in the study. The eight participating municipalities have the option to consider oversight of Scenic Areas of Local Significance through local land use measures or regional initiatives. Recommendations for local and county employment of the scenic protection plan were also developed as part of the study.
II. Introduction

Five towns, three villages, businesses and community groups in the Thousand Islands have partnered with the New York Department of State’s Department of Planning and Development (DOS) to evaluate, promote and identify tools to protect the region’s unique scenic resources. The spectacular scenery of the Thousand Islands is central to the region’s quality of life, and to its economy. Guarding this resource for future generations and promoting the economy of the region is a central goal of the project, called the “Thousand Islands Regional Assessment”.

With technical support from the DOS and financial support from Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund, the eight partnering municipalities organized a public participation process, adapted State scenic evaluation methodology to local conditions and conducted a thorough visual inventory and assessment process. The inventory and assessment process is based on standards and criteria developed by the DOS. Landscapes of local, regional and State-wide significance are identified through a simple, straightforward process based on local participation and State scenic assessment standards.

Scenic Landscapes: One purpose for this project is to recognize and document what makes this region of New York State’s coastal area scenic and to use currently available tools to ensure that future large scale development projects are located and designed in a way that minimizes damage to the region’s scenic character and its economy. If scenic views are ruined, if large towers and tall buildings are built in inappropriate places, if wildlife habitat is damaged and the environment is degraded; the region’s tourist-based economy will suffer. Tourists come to see and visit historic castles and architecture; to boat and fish on the St. Lawrence River and its tributaries; and to bird watch, hike and hunt in natural areas. While people can travel to other places in the world for these activities, the unique scenic landscapes that combine historic, natural and recreational attributes are the reason that people come to the Thousand Islands for their vacation time.

The eight communities partnering in this project recognized that New York State’s Thousand Islands landscapes of castles on rocky islands, sweeping water views, and craggy, unspoiled shorelines shape the public perception of the region, many lesser known, less spectacular scenic areas have great potential for marketing and careful stewardship. These less well known scenic areas include portions of the Saint Lawrence River with fewer islands, tributary streams and their associated marshlands, bluffs and hills with distant views of the river, rolling woodlands dotted with small farms, sweeping expanses of open farmland extending inland from the river, and historic waterfront villages and boathouses with classic Thousand Islands architecture. These areas have great potential to blend existing land uses with future tourist activities.

Grants and Funding: The information generated by this project will also provide background and improve opportunities for grants. Designation as a Scenic Area of Statewide Significance greatly increases a region’s ability to obtain public grants and private foundation support for a range of projects. Grants including economic development, tourism promotion, land conservation, environmental restoration, historic preservation, downtown revitalization and sustainable transportation are among the many potential sources of funding that will be enhanced by state-wide recognition. Potential funding sources include the Federal Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP), the Northern Border Regional Commission, and applicable categories in the New York State Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) such as the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (DOS), NY Main St. (Office of Community Renewal), Market New York (Empire State Development), and Municipal Parks (Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation). Private investment in residential and commercial real estate, businesses, and infrastructure will also be encouraged by the fact that the region has been officially recognized as a unique and valuable asset to the entire state.

Method: Dodson & Flinker, a firm of landscape architects and regional planners, worked with the project team and local communities to inventory and assess the region’s scenic landscapes. The inventory and assessment was done using a method developed by DOS for use in the State’s coastal areas and previously implemented in the Hudson River Valley and in the Town of East Hampton on Long Island.

The visual assessment process emphasizes both natural and cultural factors in the landscape. In historic coastal landscapes, such as the Thousand Islands, human activities over the centuries have modified and often enhanced the scenic character of the land.

The methodology includes local public participation in the visual assessment process. Incorporating local residents’ perceptions of scenery in the evaluation process is as important as meeting State-wide scenic assessment standards. Understanding and documenting historical and cultural traditions helps in assessing scenic character, especially in communities with a long tradition of art, painting, photography, architecture, landscape architecture, and agriculture. And finally, developing a simple, straightforward assessment method based on solid data as well as on public participation ensures that the plan is practical, comprehensible and usable by both experts and the general public.

The visual assessment process consists of five steps:

1. **Inventory:** With the help of local residents, divide the region into separate areas based on their visual characteristics. This step does not involve rating the scenic quality of the areas. It is an objective process to inventory the different

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The visual assessment process consists of five steps:

1. **Inventory:** With the help of local residents, divide the region into separate areas based on their visual characteristics. This step does not involve rating the scenic quality of the areas. It is an objective process to inventory the different
types of visual features that distinguish one area from another.

2. Evaluation: After the inventory stage is complete, the region’s landscapes are evaluated for their level of scenic quality. The evaluation is based on state criteria and on local opinion. The state criteria rate scenery based on natural features such as terrain, water and vegetation; on cultural features such as villages, historic sites, farms and estates; and on other criteria such as recognition, views, visibility and lack of discordant features. Local opinion is gauged by asking meeting attendees and visitors to this web site to rank images of a variety of Thousand Islands landscapes. The results of this poll are combined with the state criteria to create a system to rank each landscape. The highest ranked landscapes are eligible for designation as “Scenic Landscapes of Local Significance”.

Islands landscapes. The results of this poll are combined with the state criteria to create a system to rank each landscape. The highest ranked landscapes are eligible for designation as “Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance” (SASS). The next highest are eligible for designation as “Scenic Landscapes of Local Significance”.

4. Recognition and Implementation of Scenic Areas at the Local Level: Outside of the Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance are areas which scored lower in the assessment process but still exhibit some important scenic characteristics, known as Scenic Areas of Local Significance. Through planning support provided by MJ Engineering, preliminary guidance was developed for local communities on optional local land use tools they can use to help sustain and promote both Local and Statewide Scenic Areas of Significance. These tools include revisions to local policies, local land use ordinances, infrastructure plans and voluntary conservation programs.

5. Promotion: For decades a central focus of promotional efforts in the Thousand Islands has been the region’s scenic beauty. Books, brochures, marketing campaigns and ads for businesses almost always feature striking photos of the area’s scenic vistas. If the Thousand Islands are designated one of the state’s top scenic destinations promotion of the region’s tourist trade and economy will be greatly enhanced. People and businesses will want to come to an area that has received a major scenic designation after a rigorous review and analysis process. The SASS designation should be cited in promotional materials and brochures. And visitors, investors, new businesses and new residents will be reassured to know that measures have been taken to conserve and enhance the scenery for future generations.

III. Background

A Tradition of Stewardship: The Thousand Islands have long been recognized as an area of exceptional scenic beauty. Appreciated for centuries by local residents, the region began to attract vacationers as early as the mid-Nineteenth Century. These early visitors built spectacular homes and castles on the islands and along the shoreline of the river. The care and creativity used by these early visitors in locating and designing homes and structures that fit in with the landscape created a tradition of land stewardship and creative design that continues today. The blending of nature and culture in the Thousand Islands is unique and can be a guiding force as the region takes steps to promote and manage its scenic landscapes in the future. Today people live, visit, and invest in the Thousand Islands, in part, because of the spectacular scenery. Our beautiful river and its many islands are an important part of our quality of life and of our economy.

State Initiatives: These early traditions set a high standard for safeguarding and overseeing the aesthetic character of the landscape that has continued to return dividends over the years. Early efforts, motivated in significant part by a desire to protect the Thousand Islands’ environment, scenic beauty and recreation, have resulted in the acquisition of areas of public park and conservation land.

New York State has long recognized the importance of scenic resources. The first broad based movement to recognize American scenic landscapes occurred in the mid-century through the work of the Hudson River School of painters. The American Romantic Landscape Movement which expressed itself in the arts, music and literature developed in New York State before spreading to the rest of the nation. The Castles and stately homes of the Gilded Age that grace the Thousand Islands are an outgrowth of this movement that emphasized the harmonious blending of nature and culture.

The New York State Legislature summed up compelling reasons to address management of scenic resources when they enacted New York State (NYS) Executive Law 42 in 1981, and established the Division of Coastal Resources to “achieve a balance between economic development and preservation that will permit the beneficial use of coastal resources while preventing the loss of living marine resources and wildlife, diminution of open space areas or public access to the wa-
The Federal Coastal Zone Management Act also recognizes the Federal Policy:

State’s waterfront areas. For more information about LWRPs in the Thousand Island's coastal zone, giving full consideration to ecological, cultural, historic and aesthetic values…. (16 U.S.C. s. 1452[2]) Federal use of the land and water resources of the coastal zone, giving full consideration to States that it is national policy "to encourage and assist the States to…achieve wise importation of aesthetic values in managing coastal resources. The Federal Act encourages guarding of Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance and discourages the character as a key coastal resource protected by law. The law's Policy #24 encourages the protection, enhancement or restoration of scenic areas outside of SASS that contribute to the scenic quality of these areas. The policy also discourages the location of inappropriate structures in scenic areas. Policy #25 encourages the protection of local volunteers.

New York State has also helped local communities sustain and restore their coastal resources through the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) provisions of Article 42. LWRPs have helped dozens of waterfront communities develop and implement revitalizations plans for their waterfronts, including consideration of scenic resources in local decision-making. This has resulted in new improvements and investments in community waterfronts including parks, public access, interpretive centers and other steps that have attracted new investments by businesses, tourism groups and municipal governments in New York State's waterfront areas. For more information about LWRPs in the Thousand Islands region see Section VII.

Federal Policy: The Federal Coastal Zone Management Act also recognizes the importance of aesthetic values in managing coastal resources. The Federal Act States that it is national policy "to encourage and assist the States to...achieve wise use of the land and water resources of the coastal zone, giving full consideration to ecological, cultural, historic and aesthetic values...". (16 U.S.C. s. 1452[2]) Federal policy therefore compels the State to shelter and oversee scenic resources as a vital component of the nation's coastal resources. The Federal Coastal Zone Management agency has supported New York State's work in this area.

Local Organization and Support played a critical role in the project. The project was guided by a project advisory committee with contributions from dozens of local volunteers.

Project Advisory Committee: Initial discussions between local communities and DOS resulted in the formation of a project advisory committee. The committee included representatives from a variety of backgrounds and interests in project decision-making. Led by Valerie Johnson, the committee has coordinated the project, reached out to involve others and has organized meetings and special events to promote the work. Over 60 people serve on the Advisory Committee and have played a critical role as project volunteers taking photos, providing historic information and advice on the project.

Advisory Committee members include elected officials, planning officials, local historians, members of recreational clubs, artists, business owners, and others with an interest in enhancing life along the shores of the Thousand Islands. The Advisory Committee met frequently during the course of the project to discuss task completion, public participation, scenic assessment and future implementation. Advisory Committee members also volunteered their time to assist with field work, data collection, historical research and public events. Numerous people and organizations have lent their support and expertise to the project including, the municipalities, St. Lawrence and Jefferson County legislatures and planning staff, local businesses and numerous non-profit organizations.

Volunteers: Many people signed up as volunteers on the project are full time residents, seasonal residents, representatives from business, local and county officials, tourism groups and non-profit organizations. More than ten hours of aerial footage of the region was donated by the Town of Hammond. In addition, volunteers attended workshops and meetings, provided information on the area and assisted the consultant team in a number of ways. Volunteers also participated in a day-long workshop in May to record valuable information on the Thousand Islands on maps of the study area. Volunteers have also helped manage and organize the project, providing important leadership and coordination. Volunteers will continue to play an important role as the project evolves in the future. Their work will include the promotion of the Thousand Islands and assistance with developing new lines of grant funding for capital projects and tourism marketing.
IV. Landscape Inventory

The goal of the landscape inventory phase of the project was to gather information on the location and objective characteristics of the Thousand Islands visual environment. The visual inventory consists of observing and documenting the relatively objective visual, physical and cultural characteristics of the landscape. These characteristics include physical character, cultural character, views, landscape composition and public accessibility.

Research and Data Collection: The Project Advisory Committee provided numerous reports and data for the project including comprehensive plans, zoning and subdivision regulations and open space plans. St. Lawrence and Jefferson County Planning Offices and the Thousand Island Land Trust (TILT) provided GIS information on resources, protected lands and sensitive habitats. The Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs, which address scenic resource issues, were also very useful. The Department of State provided information on its scenic assessment process and copies of the 1993 Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance document for the Hudson River Valley.

The consultants used recent (2010) ESRI world imagery ortho photos in project-base maps. Digital versions of the 7.5 minute USGS topographic quad sheets for the Towns and Villages, and a Digital Elevation Model from the NYS GIS Clearinghouse was also obtained for the project area. This allowed the planimetric data in the USGS quad sheets and Digital Elevation Model to be overlain and compared to the photographic data in the aerial ortho photos. Marine navigation charts and land use data from various local programs was also obtained.

With the help of the Advisory Committee, the consultants compiled a library of relevant publications, historic photographs, local guidebooks and histories. The Thousand Islands Trails Preservation Society prepared a report entitled “Scenic Views as Seen from the Thousand Islands Trails System” that provided excellent documentation on scenic quality in the more remote areas of the Town accessible by foot.

Inventory: After extensive field work, research and data acquisition the visual inventory was completed in the office by identifying the scenic components present in each scenic area subunit.

Base Maps: The consultants developed digital base maps of the study area using both USGS topo quad sheets and aerial photographs. The coastal area boundary, and other important features such as parks, conservation areas, scenic roads, historic districts and other features were identified on the maps. The base maps were used for field work, presentations and the compilation of final scenic assessment maps.

Field Work/Photography: In order to fully document the landscapes of the Thousand Islands, Dodson & Flinker conducted field work throughout the region in March, May and August of 2014. The purpose of the field trips was to gather data and information about the visual characteristics of the landscape. They were able to observe the area in winter, spring and summer. Area volunteers provided additional photographs of the area during peak fall foliage. The consultants took extensive field notes and photographs of their observations using the visual landscape categories described in the Table of Scenic Components and the Visual Evaluation Form. Field notes also identified the date, climatic conditions and other pertinent data relating to the field work. The following methods were used for field data collection:

- **Air Photos**: The Town of Hammond provided funding for ten hours of high resolution digital video of the entire region, providing the consultant team with an invaluable photographic archive of the region. A continuous series of photos of the shoreline as well as interior sections of the Towns and Villages were taken from an altitude of approximately 200’ to 1,500’. Photos were overlapped to ensure a continuous photographic record of the landscape. The photos are available for use by the participating towns and villages in digital format. Dodson & Flinker also made extensive use of on-line aerial photo sources such as Bing Maps and Google Maps which provide high resolution aerial oblique photo coverage of the region.

- **Car**: The consultants traversed the entire coastal and interior areas of the region by car, stopping as necessary to photograph specific sites. Roads leading to the water as well as elevated areas providing views of the coast were carefully investigated and photographed. Major highways as well as minor local roads were traveled to gain a complete understanding and visual record of the landscape as seen from roadways. All of the major and most of the minor roads from Cape Vincent to Morristown were travelled and documented over the course of three days of continuous driving.

- **Boat**: The consultant’s research vessel, the Wally D. was trailered to Thousand Islands in May and August to conduct a visual survey of the coastline from the water. The entire coastline of the river was visited and photographed from Cape Vincent to Morristown at a distance of one quarter to one half mile from shore. The Wally D. made two complete transits of the river and Lake Ontario shoreline with frequent side trips to visit clusters of islands and major river tributaries. Field evaluators took water level photographs of the coastline, including navigable bays and estuaries.

- **Hiking**: The evaluators covered certain areas on foot including state park and conservation lands, public hiking trails and accessible locations on some of the islands. Hiking provided a close-up view of the landscape not available from the boat, car or aircraft.

Identification of Visual Districts: Based on the preliminary site visits, Advisory Committee meetings and research, the Thousand Islands landscape was inventoried and divided into 15 Visual Districts, defined as large areas showing a consistent visual character. Some visual districts were based on prominent natural features such as Chippewa Bay, Grindstone Island or Lake Ontario. Others were shaped by a blend of cultural and natural features such as areas of farm and forest land. Creating large visual districts based on consistent character allowed the landscape to be divided into manageable areas for further field investigation and evaluation. The visual districts were identified on working field maps and in the GIS data base. Adjustments to the districts were made as a result of additional field work and the comments of the Advisory Committee.

The visual districts include the following:

1. Lake Ontario
2. Carleton Island
3. Cape Vincent Farm and Forest Land
4. Grindstone Island
5. French Creek
6. Clayton/Orleans Farm and Forest Land
7. Wellesley Island
8. American Narrows
9. Alexandria Farm and Forest Land
10. Chippewa Bay
11. Crooked Creek
12. Hammond Farm and Forest Land
13. Chippewa Creek
14. American Island
15. Morristown Farm and Forest Land

Identification of Visual Subunits: The 15 visual districts were further subdivided into 109 Visual Subunits, which are smaller areas of consistent visual character. The process to determine subunits is similar to the process to determine visual districts, but occurs on a much smaller, more detailed scale. The landscape was surveyed from the air, the water, by car and on foot to identify areas sharing common visual characteristics. No value judgments were used during this process - only the objective visual characteristics of each area were considered. The individual elements that make up the visual landscape, called scenic components, were identified and described in the inventory stage of work. These components include water, vegetation, topography, buildings and other natural and cultural features that shape the visual environment. The Table of Scenic Components developed by the DOS for state-wide use was used as a basis for identifying scenic components in Thousand Islands Scenic Resources Protection Plan.

Image Poll - Section 1 - Water Present?

Top 10  Overall  Bottom 10

Yes  100%  50%  No  74%

Rank  Average Rating  Rank  Average Rating
1  2.816  41  -0.321
2  2.730  42  -0.507
3  2.695  43  -0.536
4  2.697  44  -0.603
5  2.639  45  -0.746
6  2.607  46  -0.754
7  2.603  47  -0.928
8  2.526  48  -1.563
9  2.401  49  -1.781
10  2.399  50  -2.320

Above are the top 10 and bottom 10 photos from section one of the image poll along with the average rank of each photo. At the top left of the page is the number one image from this section.
Inventory notes were compiled in Microsoft Excel. The districts and subunits were mapped as shape files in ESRI’s ArcGIS, a geographic information system. Inventory notes and evaluation values, tabulated in Excel, were then joined to these shape files.

Identification of the Study Area Boundary: The New York Coastal Management Program defines the coastal boundary for the entire New York State coastline. This boundary varies in width, depending on terrain, hydrology, land use and other jurisdiction factors. In the Thousand Islands the coastal boundary is often located in close proximity to the river. This is due to the fact that much of the river’s shoreline consists of steep bluffs which limit views of inland areas. But because tall buildings or structures can be visible from considerable distances from the shoreline, the study area boundary was moved further inland. The study area boundary was located from one to three miles inland from the shores of the river and Lake Ontario for this reason. Adjustments to the official Coastal Area Boundary map would be proposed during the SASS designation process to reflect the visual districts that result from the data collection and analysis.

Coastal Viewshed: The coastal viewshed is defined as the area of the coastline visible from coastal water bodies such as the ocean, the sound, bays and estuaries. Conversely, the coastal viewshed includes areas of the coastline from which coastal water bodies are visible as well as the water bodies themselves. Viewsheds were calculated in ArcMap using the visibility tool, part of the ArcGIS 3-D Analyst Visibility Toolset. Two types of viewsheds were calculated: the primary viewshed and the secondary viewshed. The primary viewshed map shows areas that are visible from the river and its major tributaries today, not taking into account vegetation and buildings. Vegetation and buildings can be removed which is why the viewshed boundary does not include them. The secondary viewshed map shows areas in which tall structures over 100’ in height would be visible from the river. This secondary viewshed extends in a number of areas well back from the shore of the river.

As mentioned above, the principal program used to determine the coastal viewshed was ArcGIS 3D Analyst Visibility Toolset (Visibility Tool). The details of this procedure are below:

- **Input (elevation data):** Began with a digital elevation model smoothed to 40x40 meter resolution. This coarser DEM increased computation time and created a result that was meaningful at the relatively coarse scale of site analysis without adding unnecessary detail. Assumed viewer height of 1.7 meters. Input data spatial reference system: NAD 1927 UTM Zone 18N.

- **Input (viewpoints):** Created a shape file with 87 points distributed throughout the area of open river. Points were distributed for even coverage and to allow views into major bays and tributaries.

  - **Analysis:** Viewshed (no trees): Used “visibility” toolset with default settings unless otherwise noted above. The input DEM had x,y,z resolution in meters so no multiplier was used to scale Z values.

  - **Viewshed (100’ structure):** Created a “height above” analysis map in parallel with creation of the viewshed (no trees) dataset. This maps the minimum height that would need to be added to the elevation of a particular pixel for that pixel to be viewed from the viewpoints input. Classified “height above” values with a breakpoint at 30 meters (approximately 100’).

**Important Viewpoints:** Four different types of viewpoints were identified: key water views, minor water views, views from boats and views of upland areas. Viewpoints are frequently visited locations open to the public that provide exceptional, extensive views of the coastal region. Examples include parks, estates, bridges and sections of roads skirting the coastline or providing views from high elevations. Viewpoints on water include areas covered by excursion boats and other areas accessible by smaller boats. Key viewpoints can either be specific points or linear segments of roads, paths and river channels.

Key viewpoints were first identified with the help of local residents at a workshop held in May 2014 in Clayton. The workshop provided excellent guidance to the evaluators conducting the inventory of view points in the field. Determining the location and extent of views involved ground level field work supplemented by analysis of topographic maps and aerial photos. Additional field checking and input from Advisory Committee members provided supplemental information. Key viewpoints were added to the GIS database, including information on the direction, extent and character of the views.

**Visually Prominent Structures:** Visually prominent structures include both structures and landscapes radically altered by human activity visible over a wide area. They include tall buildings, transmission lines, wind turbines, bridges, communications towers, large highways, road cuts and large areas transformed by human activity, such as landfills and very large paved areas. Visually prominent features and landscapes were added to the GIS database, including information on the extent and character of their prominence. The positive or negative impacts of these features were not taken into consideration at this point in the study: only their location and objective visual characteristics (height, color, material, form) were inventoried.
V. Visual Survey

Summary: A public participation process was organized to ensure that the Thousand Islands scenic assessment process was based on solid foundations. While a remarkable continuity of visual values exists from region to region, important local variations also exist and need to be incorporated in visual assessment methods. The public participation process consisted of a web-based visual survey as well as a day-long brainstorming session with stakeholders from most of the towns and villages in the study area.

The goal of the visual survey was to incorporate the preferences of local residents in the scenic assessment process. The results of the survey were analyzed to determine the specific visual elements that contribute to positive or negative perceptions of the landscape.

Project Web Site: A web site for the project was created by Interactive Media Consulting (IMC) of Saratoga Springs. IMC worked closely with the project advisory committee and Dodson & Flinker to create a web site that explains the goals of the project, describes the process of identifying and caring for scenic landscapes and invites visitors to the site to participate in the process. A visual preference poll was available on the web site allowing visitors to rate a variety of Thousand Island landscapes on line. The involvement of a large number of participants through an on-line poll allowed the project team to determine the types of landscapes residents of the region view as scenic.

The web site also provides access to project data including aerial video footage, air and ground level photographs, maps of visual districts, subunits, coastal viewsheds, and views. The web site was designed to be user-friendly and serve as a tool for both project staff and the general public.

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Image Poll Results - Section 3

The survey results were consistent with our expectations. The second section of the survey included 10 sets of three images that participants ranked 1 (least scenic) to 3 (most scenic). Together with comments solicited after the poll, this section provided a more controlled and direct way of comparing our interpretation of the state system.

Breakdown of images:

1. Landform
2. Shoreline
3. Coastal Viewshed
4. Land Use
5. Historic Character
6. Water Feature
7. Architectural Character
8. Landscape Character
9. Vegetation
10. State of Upkeep

Above are two images from the landform category of the image poll. On the left is the image that we anticipated would be ranked as most scenic (“distinctive”), based on the New York State Table of Scenic Components. On the right is the image that we anticipated would be ranked as second most scenic (“noteworthy”). The survey results were consistent with our expectations.

The survey divided into three sections. In the first section participants rated images of typical Thousand Islands landscapes on a scale of +3 to –3, registering their likes and dislikes. Images included a variety of landscape types ranging from natural landscapes to historic sites to contemporary residential development and to strip commercial development along highways. Participants voted their “gut reaction” to each image. Respondents also submitted written comments about their preferences and concerns which have been summarized in the Appendices of this report.

The results of the first section of the visual survey have been analyzed by breaking each image down into its individual scenic components that are described in the state-wide evaluation methodology. These include natural features (landform, vegetation, water), cultural features (historic, landscape, architecture, discordant, ephemeral, settlement pattern and symbolism), views, landscape composition and public value. Breaking the survey down into specific scenic components allowed the results of the survey to be incorporated into the final scenic evaluation.

The second section of the survey included 10 sets of three images that participants ranked 1 (least scenic) to 3 (most scenic). Together with comments solicited after the poll, this section provided a more controlled and direct way of comparing our interpretation of the state system to respondents values. For example, one item in the state Table of Scenic Components is shoreline. In the state system, more varied shoreline geometries are considered more distinctive, while simpler shoreline geometries are considered less distinctive. We selected three images of shorelines, taken from a similar distance from shore, on the same partly cloudy day with slight chop in the water. One image showed a highly varied shoreline: what we would consider a distinctive shoreline based on the state system. Another image showed a shoreline with a little less variation: what we would consider a noteworthy shoreline. A final image showed a straight shoreline: a common landscape. We found that though some people had different opinions, the overwhelming majority of participants ranked the photos in a manner consistent with the state system.

The third section of the survey asked participants to rank the most scenic images from section two. This section provides an additional, more controlled process...
to support the kind of conclusions the consultant team drew from section one of the poll. Together with section one, the results of this section provide insight into what scenic components respondents feel play larger and smaller roles in scenic quality. 

Modification of the Table of Scenic Components Based on Visual Survey Results: The Table of Scenic Components was modified based on the results of the visual survey. As expected, the features present and visual preferences for these components in the Thousand Islands differed in some ways from other scenic areas in the state. For example, residents in East Hampton rated recent development in rural areas at the bottom of the scale, whereas respondents in the Thousand Islands showed a greater tolerance for development in rural areas. In addition, the physical characteristics of the landscape vary from region to region, requiring a modification of the Table of Scenic Components to match the features of a particular region. For example, on Long Island beaches and sand dunes play a major role in the visual landscape. In the Thousand Islands these features are of minimal important or are non-existent.

A Preference for Blended Natural/Cultural Landscapes: A striking feature of the survey results is the overwhelming preference for images that include both natural and cultural landscapes. In other scenic areas across the state, natural landscapes have tended to outweigh cultural landscapes. The difference in the Thousand Islands may be due to the sensitive – even artistic way that buildings are integrated into the riverscape, as well as due to the very high, if at times, quirky character of the Gilded Age architecture that dominates the most scenic areas of the river.

The most highly ranked image of the Rock Island light house is typical of the region's preference for combinations of nature and culture, artistically interwoven. Seven of the top ten images feature combinations of natural waterscapes with historic, carefully sited structures that respect rather than overwhelm their natural setting. Interestingly, none of the structures are contemporary and all hark from the Gilded Age era and before. The respondents clearly appreciate buildings carefully sited in the landscape which has interesting implications for the design guidelines and local implementation sections of this report.

Former grazing and pasture land, active farming, historic parks and greens, historic main streets, tree-lined residential streets, trails, swimming beaches, estate gardens all factored within the top 50 images. Clearly human alteration of the landscape can have a positive effect on scenery, especially in a community as rich in landscape history as the Thousand Islands. Cultural landscape factors include land use, historic character, architecture, landscape character, discordant features (“eyesores”), settlement patterns, ephemeral (temporary or transient) characteristics, and symbolic meaning. Respondents overwhelmingly preferred conservation, recreation or traditional land uses such as parks, preserved areas, farms, forests, working waterfronts and historic centers and neighborhoods. The state-wide table of scenic components was modified to reflect this unique regional perception.

Historic character of both landscapes and buildings had a strongly positive influence on the rating of the images. Elements such as historic farming, historic parks and commons, historic landmarks, streets and neighborhoods featured prominently in the highly rated images.

A Preference for Waterscapes: Natural features that factored in the survey include, above all, water. Out of the top 20 images, all but two feature water landscapes. This is consistent with surveys conducted throughout the world, where water is almost always the most highly-rated natural scenic factor. Humans usually like views of water, our most basic life-sustaining element. The Thousand Islands region is no exception. Views of water – the River, Lake Ontario, the tributary streams, marshes and lakes – predominated in the top-ranked images. The top-ranked image is a view of the Rock Island Light House with water surrounding the Canadian Shield rocks and shoals. The first image without water is #14, a view of an historic limestone house with a towering American elm. The presence of extensive views of water is almost always an important factor in raising the overall score of an image.

Section two of the visual survey provided more detailed information about respondent’s preferences for specific views of water, such as shoreline configuration and coastal viewed. In section two, respondents ranked an image of a varied shoreline as most distinctive, an image of a less varied shoreline as noteworthy, and a relatively straight shoreline as common. These visual preferences were consistent with the state table of scenic components. The distinctive image of shoreline from section two was ranked as the second most distinctive image overall in poll section three, suggesting that respondents were in agreement with the state system of values. The three images of coastal viewsheds were also ranked by respondents in a manner consistent with the table of scenic components. As expected, respondents preferred open sweeping views of the river to more limited views.

Land Use: By an overwhelming margin, the preferred land use in the survey consisted of small amounts of residential, especially historic residential development carefully sited in unspoiled natural settings. This reflects a strong preference for blending natural landscapes with limited amounts of development as long as the underlying scenic character of nature is preserved by the siting and

![Boldt Castle](Image)

![Alexandria Bay Waterfront](Image)

**Terrain and Geology:**
Survey respondents showed a strong preference for the hilly terrain characteristic of Canadian Shield geology, especially islands with pronounced relief as well as for bluffs along shorelines of the river and its tributaries. Hilly terrain created by Canadian Shield rock formations typified most of the highest rated images. Outcrops of the igneous and metamorphic Canadian Shield rocks also scored very high in section one of the poll. Areas underlain by limestone tend to be flat to moderately rolling, resulting in lower scores in the image preference poll.

The foundation of the visual character of the Thousand Islands has been created by the interaction of Canadian Shield geography with the waters of the Saint Lawrence River. The Shield covers almost half of Canada, including almost all of Quebec and Nunavut, and most of Ontario and Manitoba. It is Pre-Cambrian rock, some of the oldest geology in the world. Canadian Shield rock is typically rolling with a rounded profile and a thin coating of soil and pockets of vegetation. It's only connection with the United States occurs in the Thousand Islands where it extends to form the Adirondacks, bringing the rugged, sculpted visual character of the north to the sedimentary terrain of the region. This is why the Thousand Islands are geologically and visually unique. Perhaps it is no surprise, then that respondents in section three of the poll overwhelmingly ranked their site planning, poor architecture, excessive paving, lack of landscape planting and lack of relationship to the surroundings and historic context. The state-wide table of scenic components was modified to reflect this unique regional perception.

**Vegetation:**
Vegetation featuring mature forests, open meadows or fields, seashore vegetation and mature street trees was rated very highly by poll respondents. Evergreen trees bent towards the east by the strong westerly winter winds sweeping off Lake Ontario were particularly highly rated. Open marshes

**Landform:**
Survey respondents showed a strong preference for hilly, varied terrain with rounded islands and shoreline hills. Of the top ten images, eight included rolling terrain with moderate relief. Since the Thousand Islands region lacks dramatic topography, moderate terrain is proportionally more significant. Flat terrain, while occasionally included in highly-rated images, tended to predominate in the lower rankings. Of the bottom ten images, seven included flat terrain. The remaining three bottom-ranked images showed only low or moderately rolling relief. Similarly, in section two of the poll, the majority of participants ranked images of landform in a manner consistent with the statewide table of scenic components. The image ranked most distinctive included a steep shorefront bluff in an area with regionally high relief. The image ranked noteworthy showed a lower shorefront bluff. The common image showed a relatively flat shorefront underlain by limestone with limited bedrock outcrops. Because of the relatively modest landforms in the Thousand Islands, moderate hills and bluffs received higher rankings and greater importance in the region compared to areas such as the Hudson River. The state-wide table of scenic components was modified to reflect this unique regional perception.
along tributary streams scored very high as well. Low scrub vegetation, successional fields and areas of uniformly dense second growth vegetation scored lower in the poll results. Mixed mature deciduous/evergreen forests received very high scores. The highest-scoring vegetation in the survey featured islands or shorelines covered with dense, mature vegetation often with a preponderance of mature evergreen trees, including wind-swept pines. In section two of the survey, respondents preferred mature vegetation with prominent evergreen trees over younger, scrubby vegetation—consistent with the state value system. Houses, castles or garden structures were often tucked into the forest with trees framing or partially screening the structures. Of the top ten images in section one, nine contain mature trees on islands or along the shoreline, six of which screen or frame buildings tucked into the woodland. This symbiosis of buildings and trees is a strong tradition in the Thousand Islands extending back to the Gilded Age era of design and construction. These historic design principles can be applied today and could become guiding principles for future development in the region. The visual survey results for vegetation in the Thousand Islands were consistent with results in other areas of the New York State coastline. The state-wide Table of Scenic Components did not have to be modified in this category.

The lowest-ranked images in section one of the poll are notable for their general lack of vegetation. Highways, parking lots, median strips, lawns and weedy shrubs are the predominant type of vegetation in these images. Of bottom ten images, five lack vegetation or have vegetation of a scrubby or scattered character. Where mature trees are present they are often partially obscured by development occurring in the foreground of the view.

Discordant Features: Discordant features are features which, due to siting, form, scale, materials or usage, visually interrupt the overall scenic quality of the landscape. This discordance was reflected in the ratings in the visual survey. Many of the man-made “visually prominent features” described above were rated very low in section one of the visual survey. The exceptions to this low ranking were historic bridges, castles, passing ships and historic decorative towers and monuments. The lowest rated land uses were tall structures such as wind turbines or extensive areas of pavement such as wide highways lined by strip commercial development. Of the bottom ten images, all but two contain visually prominent, man-made features such as wind turbines, industrial style boat storage buildings, billboards and highway commercial strips. Again, a unique aspect of visual character in the Thousand Islands is the fact that prominent, man-made features can either be viewed as eyesores (highway strips, billboards) or attractive accents to the natural landscape (castles, historic bridges). The reason for this dramatic contrast lies in the type of prominent feature and the sitting and design of development and construction. Again, this offers lessons from the past that may be useful in guiding development in the future. The state-wide table of scenic components was modified to reflect this unique regional perception.

Cultural: As described above, cultural factors are strikingly present in the top rated images. This is in marked contrast to the East Hampton SASS where they were strikingly absent. Farming landscapes play an important role in the top rated images: pasture land, potato fields, hay fields, meadows and woodlots figure prominently in the highest-ranked views. The role of history and traditional architectural and landscape principles figures prominently in the region’s high esteem for cultural landscapes. Some of the positive influence of cultural landscapes is based on very old historic traditions such as the limestone houses, traditional post-and-beam homes and the historic light houses that line the river channels. A second and even more dominant influence was created by the architects, landscape architects and their clients who brought a unique way of locating and designing buildings in harmony with the dramatic landscape of the Thousand Islands. These influences have shaped development in the intervening years and continue in some new development today. In other areas these traditional cultural influences have not been as influential, leading to clear cutting of vegetation and the construction of high density development on small islands and sensitive shorelines. The state-wide table of scenic components was modified to reflect this unique regional perception.

Architecture: The top-ranked images in section one included buildings tucked into the natural landscape. Some highly prominent buildings such as the Boldt Castle which dominate the surrounding landscape were also highly rated. Respondents in section one and two showed a very strong preference for traditional
Thousand Islands architecture and a moderate dislike of modern or contemporary architecture. But Thousand Islands respondents showed a greater affinity for recent development than residents of other areas of New York State. This may be due to the relatively low amount of development in the region compared to Long Island or the Hudson River. All but two of the buildings included in the top-ranked 50 slides featured traditional Thousand Islands architecture. The two exceptions were a very carefully designed and sited modernist home and a recently built residence above a boat house. In contrast, nine structures built within the last fifty years were featured in the lowest ranked second half of the survey.

Preferred architectural styles include residential, commercial and waterfront structures dating from before the industrial revolution. The top-rated eight buildings are all designed in traditional architectural styles (Colonial, Victorian, Classical, Eclectic Castle or carefully designed Traditional Revival styles). The architecture of the Gilded Age including castles, Edwardian era mansions, substantial summer homes and early limestone cottages were all highly rated in the poll. The region’s famous limestone farm houses were especially highly rated and frequently mentioned in workshops and meetings. Early to mid-Nineteenth Century wood frame houses as well as stone waterfront warehouse and commercial buildings also received high ratings.

The iconic castles and large estate buildings typical of the Gilded Age in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries were the most highly rated as well as the most visually prominent of all the architectural styles in the region. Less imposing and less flamboyant and eccentric estates and large summer homes dating from the early Twentieth Century in Edwardian, Queen Anne, Edwardian and Colonial Revival styles were also highly ranked, especially when set in carefully designed landscapes. Architectural components of estate landscapes including park buildings, follies, stairways and courtyards were also highly rated.

The state-wide Table of Scenic Components did not have to be modified in this category.

**Ephemeral Characteristics:** Ephemeral characteristics are transient features or events in the landscape that are temporary, intermittent yet repetitive. These features have a direct impact on the perception of beauty in the landscape. The Thousand Islands are rich in ephemera due to the Saint Lawrence Seaway, extensive wildlife habitats, varied climate, the nearby presence of one of the Great Lakes, the presence of many farms and the extensive viewpoints created by the many islands and promontories in the river. The importance of ephemeral features was emphasized in meetings and workshops held in the region. Wildlife, sunsets and shipping were cited as important contributors to the region’s scenic quality. Shipping in particular was mentioned as a unique feature of the landscape, unique nationally and worldwide. It is highly unusual to have ocean going ships navigating such a narrow and scenic waterway. Sailors on the ships repeatedly mentioned how uniquely beautiful the Thousand Islands are compared to most waterways they navigate.

**State of Upkeep/Environmental Quality:** Run down, poorly maintained and shabby buildings and landscapes were rated poorly in the visual survey, especially if the poor condition of the structures also implied the presence of pollution or trash. On the other hand, ruins of historic architectural styles can have an element of the picturesque that can be viewed as a positive scenic element. Section two of the visual survey compared three degrees of upkeep and environmental quality. The results of the ratings for these upkeep images showed a clear preference for well maintained, environmentally clean landscapes and buildings as well as for picturesque ruins of historic buildings.

**Views:** A large majority of the top-scoring images consist of mid-range views over water towards islands and varied shorelines. Of the top ranked 25 views only three consist of long range views of open water or expansive areas of farmland. The remainder are mid-range views. This is in part due to the smaller visual scale in many parts of the region and in part due to the visual preferences of respondents. The Table of Scenic Components has been revised to reflect the regional preference for mid-range views with an emphasis on composition and variety over length and breadth. Coastal views also predominate in the top-ranked images. Of the 25

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Image: Grindstone Island
top-ranked images, all but 21 include views of water. Clearly, the presence of the Saint Lawrence River and its major tributaries are an important scenic element in Thousand Islands.

**Composition of Views:** The composition of views including framing, arrangement of visual elements and the juxtaposition of form, line, color and texture play an important role in the perception of scenery. The multitude of islands in the region creates numerous opportunities for a wide range of visual compositions to occur. Perhaps as a result composition played a very strong role in the visual survey results. Of the top ten images, eight showed strong composition with a variety of subjects in the near, middle and background areas of the image. Compositional factors in the landscape can be enhanced or reduced through the skill of the photographer. This survey attempts to avoid excessively composed, highly artistic images but no photograph can be completely neutral. The focus of this analysis is on compositional elements such as vegetation, contrasting forms and lines, structures and other graphic elements that predominate in a given landscape, not in the lens of the photographer.

**Background of Views:** Background elements in a view have an important effect on the image's overall rating. Positively ranked backgrounds include water bodies, woodlands, fields and meadows and historic structures. Negative background elements include many types of contemporary development, transmission towers, prominent structures, roads and billboards. In rating scenic quality, the presence of a nearby positive or negative background feature can play an important role. Important positive background elements in the Thousand Islands include the Interstate 81 Thousand Island Bridge, shoreline bluffs, wooded hills and Lake Ontario. Negative background elements include the Wolfe Island wind turbine complex, the Brockville high rise building, water containment and communications towers.

**Focal Points of Views:** Focal points, while similar to background views, tend to be more prominent objects or objects located in a more focused position in the landscape. The most highly rated focal points include prominent natural features such as small wooded islands, historic architecture, unique geology and major wind swept trees. Water frequently serves as a focal point, especially when framed or highlighted by other landscape features. Buildings and structures rate highly in the survey almost on an equal footing with natural focal points. Prominent landmarks such as the historic lighthouses, the castles, bridges, notable mansions and estate grounds received consistently high rankings. Negative focal points include utility lines, transmission towers, high-rise buildings, contemporary buildings and shoreline development.

**Other Factors Cited in the Legislation:** Specific, tangible factors such as topography, vegetation and architecture obviously have an important role in shaping scenic quality. But more abstract factors such as variety, unity, contrast and uniqueness also play an important role. Consideration of these factors is required in New York State's coastal scenic area designation process.

- **Variety** can be an important contributing factor to the creation of scenic quality: Images consisting of a wide range of positive visual elements will often be perceived as more scenic than images with few components, though this is not always the case. The highest-ranked image is an example of rich visual variety: it includes water, sky, diverse vegetation, unique cultural and architectural features as well as a wide range of colors, lines, textures and patterns. Other high-ranked images have similar amounts of visual variety either in terms of subject matter or visual variety. Of the top ten images, eight show a high degree of visual variety. Variety in and of itself is not always positive: variety of negative visual elements can create low scenic ratings. Image 48, for example, shows a high degree of visual variety but received a very low rating. This is due to the negative character of the varied elements of the image: industrial buildings, overhead utilities, parked cars and trucks, pavement and a single street tree.

- **Unity** refers to the visual cohesion and consistency of an image. A highly unified image contains elements that fit well together as a scene. Unity exists both in form (unity of shapes, lines, colors, textures and composition) as well as in content (unity of land uses, cultural factors, lack of discordant features, management). Of the top 20 images, 12 are highly unified and eight are unified; none have low unity. Image #1 is highly unified both in form and in content. The shapes, textures and lines of its visual composition weave the varied elements of the scene together in a cohesive visual scene. The content of the view is unified because it is a completely undisturbed natural scene whose individual components (sky, water, trees, wetlands) are compatible with each other and have a strong interrelationship. Of the lowest 20 images, 12 have low unity and 13 have negative unity (strong discordant factors). Image #48 is a classic example of an image with low unity. The visual forms in the image conflict with each other,
producing a jarring pattern of forms, lines and textures. While the content of the image: a highway commercial strip, is unified as a work of engineering, it is highly fragmented from an environmental, architectural land use and landscape perspective.

- **Contrast**, like variety, can be either beneficial or detrimental to visual quality, depending on the nature of the contrasting elements. Positive contrast creates a strong visual dynamic in an image by creating a dynamic juxtaposition of forms, lines and colors. Negative contrast pits conflicting and incompatible elements against each other to create visual discord. Of the top 20 images, 14 have high or very high positive contrast. Image #2 is a good example of strong positive contrast: the multiple small islands covered with dark evergreen trees contrast with the light tones of the water and the sky. On the opposite end of the spectrum, image #37 shows a lack of contrast between the various elements of the scene: the fields, woodlands and road merge together in a uniform scene.

- **Uniqueness** refers to the relative scarcity or special qualities of a landscape or visual feature. Highly unique landscapes are rare with few similar examples in the surrounding area. Uniqueness is usually a positive feature, but uniquely negative images also exist. Of the top 20 images, 14 are unique or highly unique based on the statewide table of scenic components. Of the lowest 20 images, 14 show either low or moderate uniqueness (common) or negative uniqueness. Images #46 (wind turbine complex) and #42 (rural hamlet in disrepair) are good examples of negative uniqueness: both images feature very unusual structures that received very low scenic ratings.

**Public Value:** The extent to which a landscape is recognized by the public and the frequency with which it is viewed have important indirect impacts on scenic quality. Public recognition of landscapes was determined by analyzing historic records, travel and tourism publications and discussions with advisory committee members and others. Visibility of landscapes was determined by the frequency of viewing: very high for heavily traveled roads, high for roads other and frequently used pedestrian and marine areas, moderate for infrequently traveled roads, trails or marine channels, and low for areas requiring extensive hiking, boating, off-road driving or flight to view. Highly recognized, highly visible landscapes and landscape features can receive higher levels of designation and protection than less recognized, less visible landscapes.

**Photo Conditions:** Perception of a landscape can be influenced by the conditions that exist at the time of viewing. The time of year, time of day, weather, aspect and atmospheric conditions need to be taken into account in evaluating a given view. The most favorable conditions include clear, sunny mornings and afternoons in the clean, sunny morning and afternoon in the late spring, summer or early fall. Least favorable conditions include cloudy, hazy, rainy weather in flat (midday) or dark light. Ephemeral effects such as sunsets, sunrises, wildlife, people or cars also need to be taken into account in evaluating an image. Every attempt was made to take all photos for the survey under similar, positive conditions (sunny summer weather). Unfortunately, this was not always possible. Compensation will be provided for overly enhancing or overly detracting environmental conditions. Most of the photos of the Thousand Islands were taken during clear, sunny conditions. Some were taken in hazy sunshine and a limited number were taken in overcast conditions. Photos of Cape Vincent were initially taken in hazy and overcast conditions resulting in unduly negative ratings. A third visit to the site at a later date benefited from clear, sunny conditions revealing the hidden beauty of this portion of the Thousand Islands.

The results of the survey show that photo conditions were not a major factor in the results. Of the top 25 images, 15 were taken in bright summer sunshine, six were taken in haze and four were taken in overcast weather. Of the lowest ranked 25 images, 17 were taken in bright sunshine, five in haze and three in overcast or cloudy weather.
of the scenic features is defined according to three levels of scenic quality: distinctive (scenery of national or statewide significance), noteworthy (scenery of regional or local significance) and common (not considered scenic).

Developed by DOS for use on the entire New York coastline and tested in the Hudson River Valley, the Table of Scenic Components is fine tuned to suit the unique conditions and perceptions of each region of the coast. In the Thousand Islands, the Table was modified based on the results of the visual survey. The preferences expressed in the public opinion poll influenced the way that the consultant applied the language of the table of scenic components to specific elements of the landscape.

The DOS Table of Scenic Components was modified to reflect Thousand Islands local preferences as follows:

- High scenic quality is often created by the interplay of natural and cultural features.
- Ephemeral characteristics, especially wildlife habitats and seaway shipping were seen as an important part of the visual experience.
- Historic architecture is seen as especially important in enhancing the scenic experience.
- Recent residential development along shorelines was found not as objectionable as in other regions in the state.
- Landform and terrain is appreciated on a more subtle level than hilly regions such as the Hudson River Valley.
- Residents of the area are highly attuned to the scenic beauty of their region.
- Water plays an even greater role in the perception of scenic quality in the region.
- Not surprisingly, islands play a dominant role in the appreciation of scenery.
- Playfulness in architecture and landscape is an important scenic feature as in the high ratings received by Gilded Age castles, whimsical towers and garden follies.
- A tolerance for recent waterfront development on islands and the mainland.
- A preference for waterfront as opposed to inland farm and forest landscapes.
- An awareness of the stark geological contrasts that underlie the visual landscape.
- A muted appreciation of the visual character of certain farm landscapes.
- A preference for waterfront as opposed to inland farm and forest landscapes.
- A strong awareness of iconic landscape features such as seaway ships, light towers, lighthouses and marine-related structures.
- Wind turbines can have major visual impacts and were added to the list of potential discordant features.

Please see the Appendices for the revised Table of Scenic Components.

Visual Assessment: With the completion of the inventory of the visual landscape and the determination of the public’s perception of scenic values, the actual scenic assessment process begins. The process is based on statewide assessment criteria development by DOS as modified by the results of local perceptions as expressed in the visual survey. Using the modified Table of Scenic Components, evaluators filled out the Visual Evaluation Form. The Form consists of a spread sheet listing all the visual elements of the Table of Scenic Components. The Visual Evaluation Form includes categories for natural and cultural features as well as the visual criteria from the New York State SASS legislation.

The scenic components identified in each subunit are rated based on the values described in the modified Table of Scenic components on a scale ranging from highest scenic quality (“Distinctive”), moderate scenic quality (“Noteworthy”) and low scenic quality (“Common”). A composite score for each subunit was determined by adding the individual scores for each scenic component found in the subunit. The basic premise of the method is to base the scenic rating system on the results of the public participation process and the state-wide evaluation methodology.

The assessment of the subunits was completed in ArcView, a geographic information system program that links data to maps and aerial photographs. A data table for each of the 109 subunits was created in ArcView (see the Table of Scenic Components in Appendix C). The scenic components in the table at left, described in detail in the Table of Scenic Components, were rated on a scale of +1 to +3 in the data table.

The GIS data table for each subunit also includes a subunit identification number, a brief description of the landscape and information on the visual absorptiveness and visual vulnerability of the subunit (see Appendix C). If a particular scenic component was not present in a given subunit, it received a neutral rating. This ensures that landscapes containing only a few, spectacular scenic features will not be overshadowed by landscapes containing many mediocre components.

Because water is such a major element in the visual landscape, both in the statewide methodology as well as in the regional visual survey, a multiplier of 2 was applied to subunit scores in areas where water dominates the visual environment and where shoreline configuration is a factor. This includes the Saint Lawrence River and its major tributaries.

A data analysis was conducted on the completed ArcView Data Table to determine the overall scenic rating (score) for each subunit. The frequency that each rating was applied to the scenic components within a subunit was determined by counting the number of ‘distinctive,’ ‘noteworthy,’ and ‘common’ ratings within each subunit. That is, visual subunits with more distinctive scenic components than noteworthy or common components were rated distinctive overall. Visual subunits with more noteworthy components than distinctive or common scenic components were rated noteworthy. Visual subunits with more common components than noteworthy or distinctive components were rated common.

Determining Scenic Areas: After each subunit was evaluated and given a scenic score, the results were mapped using ArcGIS. The highest-scoring subunits could be eligible as Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance (SASS) under the Coastal Management Program. These subunits meet stringent New York State criteria for scenic quality in the coastal zone. The next level of scenic scores are appropriate for designation as scenic areas of local concern. These areas could be given a measure of recognition and protection through local action of the Village or Town (zoning, subdivision regulations, special districts or other measures) or through County or other State and federal programs.

From our maps of rated visual subunits overall patterns of scenic quality began to emerge. While isolated pockets of scenery in individual subunits do exist, more typically, larger scenic areas consisting of several subunits tend to become apparent. Areas that predominantly featured distinctive visual subunits or groupings of distinctive visual subunits were designated as SASS areas. Visual subunits outside of these SASS areas were aggregated into Scenic Areas of Local Significance and named for the Visual District within which they are located.

In deciding the ultimate boundaries of the SASS and local scenic areas, difficult decisions need to be made concerning areas to include and exclude. A strict numeric interpretation is not undertaken because some less scenic areas may need to be included within designated scenic districts to ensure contiguous boundar-
existing data base. As conditions change, new information comes available and future studies are conducted at greater levels of detail, this new information can be added to the scenic resources data base to continue to grow and evolve over the years.

The Department of State will schedule a public hearing to present the final report. Public notice will be served through the required channels. If needed, revisions to the final report will then be made based on the input received at the public hearing. The final report and recommendations for SASS designations will then be submitted to DOS for review and approval by the Secretary of State. Upon acceptance the coastal area boundary will be amended to reflect the configuration of the SASS areas. Maps of the amended coastal area boundary will be filed with each county clerk and the clerk of each town and village within whose jurisdictions the identified areas are located.

Implementation of the SASS Program: The SASS designation does not add a new permit process. Instead, scenic resources are considered during the review of projects in the coastal area that come before a federal, state, or local agency for a permit, funding, or a direct action from their agency. In a community without an LWRP review of scenic resources at the local level is not required. When a permit or action is being considered, review of the project for consistency with the 44 policies of the New York Coastal Management Program is also required (this is the case even before SASS designation). SASS designation adds some additional review criteria for one of the policies, Policy 24 (Prevent Impairment of Scenic Resources of Statewide Significance). Below is a summary of the potential permit actions that could require an evaluation of the scenic resources identified in the SASS:

Federal Coastal Consistency Review:
- Applies to: Activities in the coastal area involving a Federal permit, Federal funding, or a direct action by a Federal agency (such as a Federal highway project)

Local Waterfront Revitalization Program areas within the project area are shown in blue.
- Who does it: New York State Department of State (DOS). DOS issues decisions on the consistency of a federal activity with the 44 coastal policies.
- Process: The NYS DOS conducts Federal "Consistency Review" and provides their findings to the applicant and the agency that is reviewing the permit application (such as U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a Federal wetland permit).

State Coastal Consistency Review:
- Applies to: Activities in the coastal area involving a State permit, State funding, or a direct action by a State agency (such as a NYS DOT highway project)
- Who does it: The New York State agency with jurisdiction for the permit that applies to the project (such as NYS DEC for a state-regulated stream or wetland permit).
- Process: The NYS agency conducts a "Consistency Review" and provides their findings to the applicant and the DOS.

Projects that are in the coastal area, already subject to the review process above, AND are in a designated SASS area would be reviewed using criteria in Coastal Policy 24 to determine whether the project could impair the scenic quality of the area.
SASS. This report describes the character and scenic quality of each SASS, providing guidance to the public and regulatory agencies as to which landscape elements should be protected and which actions could impair scenic quality.

VIII. Recognition and Implementation of Scenic Areas at the Local Level

Local Implementation: Local implementation measures can also be undertaken by communities willing to explore this approach. Further implementation of local protections could include the drafting of specific local land use policies and regulations to ensure that development will not cause degradation of the scenic character that each community sees as important to their future. Recommendations for participating communities have been prepared as a part of this report based on meetings held by Jackie Hakes of MJ Engineering with community representatives in November 2014.

Existing Land Use and Regulatory Tools by Community: The communities within the project study area are each unique and therefore each have different levels of land use regulations in place. The following table indicates the land use tools or regulations that currently exist within each community.

Potential Land Use Tools for Consideration: A variety of local land use tools exist to consider scenic resources within a community, while still allowing for growth to occur in a manner that is respectful of existing community character. Each community will need to determine which tools are most appropriate for their community. Some communities may already be utilizing these tools and may consider an update to incorporate information gathered during this effort. Other communities may wish to evaluate these tools more closely prior to considering implementation. Regardless, the implementation of land use tools would require a local municipal adoption process.

In considering possible land use tools for implementation, a series of community meetings were held in November 2014 with Planning Board and Town/Village Board representatives from each community within the study area. Following are the tools that garnered the most discussion and potential interest during those meetings:

1. Referencing the SASS and/or Scenic Areas of Local Significance (SALS) in Site Plan Review Regulations: For communities with site plan review regulations, one implementation item could include incorporating the SASS or SALS by reference in those regulations. This would assist to make the local Planning Board and applicants aware of significant scenic resources when planning for future development. Communities with an adopted Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) have similar references to the LWRP already included in their site plan regulations.

2. Design Guidelines: Design guidelines are intended to provide a clear and common understanding of a community’s expectations for the planning, design and review of development proposals. Design guidelines often address site layout (parking, access, stormwater, buffers, etc.) as well as building related design aspects (building placement, scale and massing). Establishing design guidelines for can assist in creating context sensitive development that works in concert with the surrounding environment and community character. Design guidelines also create predictability for property owners, applicants and the Planning Board. It should be noted that design guidelines are strictly guidelines and not standards. If a community chooses, design standards (which would be required) could also be considered. During the course of community meetings, however, guidelines seemed to be the most appropriate approach at this time. Design guidelines can be a standalone document or can be included in site plan review regulations.

Summary of Existing Land Use Regulations by Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town/Village</th>
<th>Comprehensive Plan</th>
<th>Zoning</th>
<th>Subdivision Regulations</th>
<th>Site Plan Review</th>
<th>Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP)</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Town of Cape Vincent</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive Plan Joint with Village</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Village of Cape Vincent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive Plan Joint with Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Town of Clayton</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive Plan Joint with Village; LWRP Joint with Village</td>
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<tr>
<td>Village of Clayton</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Comprehensive Plan Joint with Town; LWRP Joint with Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Town of Orleans</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive Plan Draft Available</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Town of Alexandria</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive Plan Joint with Village; Joint Town/Village Site Plan</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Village of Alexandria Bay</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LWRP Joint with Village</td>
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<tr>
<td>Town of Hammond</td>
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<td></td>
<td>LWRP Joint with Village</td>
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<tr>
<td>Town of Morristown</td>
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<td>LWRP Joint with Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Village of Morristown</td>
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<td></td>
<td>LWRP Joint with Town</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Note: Due to unanticipated scheduling conflicts, representatives from the Town of Orleans were unable to attend the community meeting.
There are additional land use tools that may also be considered, as appropriate. Some communities may already be implementing a version of these additional tools.

• **Comprehensive Plan:** A comprehensive plan identifies a community’s vision for the future and outlines recommendations to achieve that vision. While many communities involved in this effort have adopted comprehensive plans, consideration may be given to amending the comprehensive plans to incorporate information gathered and resources identified through this effort. This would assist Town and Village Boards as well as Planning Boards in ensuring future actions are advancing the protection of significant community resources and supporting the comprehensive community vision.

#### Comprehensive Plan

**Town Law §272-a**

**Village Law §7-722**

• **Zoning:** Zoning regulates land uses, siting of development and also addresses the density of development. It is a common and extensively used tool across New York State. In 2008, 71% of towns and 89% of villages in New York had adopted zoning regulations. Zoning is also where area and bulk standards can be incorporated to guide the placement of development on each parcel.

• **Area and Bulk Standards:** Communities with zoning may consider evaluating existing area and bulk standards for areas with scenic resources. These standards may include but not be limited to setbacks, height restrictions and minimum lot sizes. Many of these can be utilized to shape the form of development in a manner compatible with adjacent parcels. For example, a local roadway identified as a scenic area could still accommodate growth, but larger setbacks from the road could serve to create a buffer along the roadway and preserve that viewscape.

• **Shoreline Overlay District:** An overlay district is placed over an existing zoning district and often includes additional requirements intended to protect critical features or resources. A shoreline overlay district may include additional setbacks to protect the physical integrity of the shoreline (prevent erosion of the shoreline) and also protect views from the water. Visual buffers and setback requirements may also be included. Communities that currently have specific shoreline districts or shoreline regulations may consider evaluating those regulations to include additional protections.


#### Planning Initiatives:

- **Infrastructure Planning:** The placement of public infrastructure can also be considered in a way that avoids scenic impacts. As communities consider expansion of or upgrades to infrastructure such as sewer, water, utilities and roads, they could utilize this document to understand the most appropriate placement of infrastructure. Placement in a manner that focuses growth into activities centers can protect scenic areas, while also reducing public costs associated with infrastructure maintenance.

- **Smart Growth Practices:** Smart growth practices are generally reflective of historic growth patterns and forms. Smart growth approaches include focusing growth and development into existing village or neighborhood centers, often in a manner that is walkable. Such approaches typically include a mix of uses including residential, retail, commercial and civic uses. This approach creates a higher density center that may also make transit feasible during the summer season. By focusing growth into already developed areas, visual impacts on underdeveloped areas are minimized.

- **Open Space Planning Tools such as Transfer of Development Rights (TDR):** TDRs is a voluntary tool that involves coordination with the community, property owners and a third party to hold the development rights. To implement a TDR program, communities must identify areas to protect (sending areas) and areas to focus growth (receiving areas) in their comprehensive plan. This can be a complex tool, however, several communities in New York State are beginning to incorporate this tool as a way to protect active farmland and open space and focus growth into already developed areas.

- **Cluster Subdivision:** A cluster subdivision is a technique that concentrates housing units into one area, leaving larger areas open and undisturbed. Clustering allows for the same number of housing units as a conventional subdivision. This approach can reduce scenic impacts and reduce infrastructure costs, while still allowing for growth to occur. Some communities offer density bonuses for public benefits incorporated into the development such as affordable housing or publically accessible open space.

**Cluster Subdivision**

**Town Law §278**

**Village Law §7-738**

- **Local Land Use Board Member Training:** Providing opportunities for local land use board members to receive training specific to site planning and context sensitive design of new development would be beneficial. This training may also satisfy the New York State land use board member annual training requirements.

**Local Land Use Board Member Training**

**Village Law §7-701**

**Local Waterfront Revitalization:** Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs have been established or are in development in a number of Thousand Islands communities including the Village of Cape Vincent, the Village and Town of Morrisstown, the Village and Town of Clayton and the Village of Alexandria Bay with the Town of Alexandria. Scenic preservation and promotion are important elements of the LWPRs and have laid groundwork for the current study. Management of scenic resources is done in several ways in communities with an LWRP.

1) Local resources of scenic significance are highlighted in the coastal policies in Section III of the LWPRs. However, the LWPRs note that there are no statewide scenic areas. The scenic policies in the LWRP could be amended to recognize the SASS (if designated), making the justification for federal, state and local review of projects for scenic value more meaningful.

2) The LWRP is implemented through local laws and practices, which are mentioned in Sections II and V of the LWRP.

- **Local Coastal Consistency Law –** the checklist for a proposed project asks if there are scenic areas of statewide significance, if there are, the review board turns to the criteria in Policy 24 to review the project.

- **Many communities discuss the deficiencies in their local laws in Section II and V of the LWRP and subsequently revise their zoning, site plan law, and/or subdivision law to reflect the coastal policies.**

**Regional Coordination:** On-going coordination with local authorities and departments will ensure that scenic issues are taken into account on both local and regional projects ranging from highway improvements to health codes to infrastructure improvements. One recommendation would be to convene a group of stakeholders that would act as a sustainable advocate for the scenic character of the region. Working with local and regional groups, and the thousands who are involved in this effort. This would assist Town and Village Boards as well as Planning Boards in ensuring future actions are advancing the protection of significant community resources and supporting the comprehensive community vision.
mission of these groups along with protection of the environment, wildlife hab-
itat and water quality. They can play a major role in the implementation and
guidance of the SASS.

The Seaway Trail is a regional organization that promotes one of America’s first
recognized Scenic Byways. The Seaway Trail, consisting of Route 12 which par-
allels the shoreline throughout the study area, promotes tourism, provides in-
formation and advocates for the preservation of the region’s scenic resources.
Coordinating with the Seaway Trail and other regional tourism groups will be an
important part of future SASS implementation efforts. Emphasizing the impor-
tance of the stewardship of visual resources in the management of the trail will
be important to prevent roadside strip development and commercial sprawl from
damaging the character and reputation of this unique Byway. Preservation of
pristine, undeveloped segments of the Trail such as the section between Alexan-
dria Bay and Morristown could be a joint effort of the Seaway Trail and the SASS
program. The Seaway Trail is currently working on a Conservation Plan for the
Byway which could play an important role in implementing the scenic manage-
ment goals of the SASS as well as the scenic areas of local significance.

IX. Potential Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance Narratives

1. Lake Ontario Scenic Area of Statewide Significance

I. Location

The Lake Ontario Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) forms the west-
ernmost edge of the Saint Lawrence Scenic Region. It consists of the Lake Ontar-
io approaches to the Saint Lawrence River and the mainland shoreline of the lake
from Grenadier Island, Fox Island and Little Fox Creek in the south to Tibbetts
Point in the north. It features the open water of the lake and rolling farmland
bordering the lake and the river’s shoreline. The SASS is approximately 9 miles
in length and 8 miles in width.

The western and southern boundaries of the SASS are formed by the Cape Vin-
cent town boundary in Lake Ontario. The northern boundary consists of the
US/Canada border and the eastern boundary by Pleasant Valley Road. The Lake
Ontario SASS is entirely located in the Town of Cape Vincent and includes the
open water of the lake, the Charity Shoal lighthouse, Grenadier and Fox Islands;
Mud, Wilson and Fuller Bays, the Tibbetts Point lighthouse and gradually slop-
ing farm and forest land extending from Pleasant Valley Road down to the shores
of the lake and the upstream mouth of the river.

Consult the Area 1 Ratings map for detailed SASS boundaries. The Lake Ontario
SASS is located on the Cape Vincent and Cape Vincent South 7.5 minute US
Geological Survey maps.

II. Description

The SASS is comprised of subunits #19, #20 and #84.

The Lake Ontario SASS is dominated by the vast expanse of Lake Ontario and
the upstream inlet of the Saint Lawrence River. It forms the dramatic western
gateway to the Thousand Islands Scenic Area. The natural features of the SASS
include Lake Ontario, the inlet of the Saint Lawrence River, Grenadier and Fox
Islands, the mouth of Kents Creek, the Wilson Bay marshlands and an undulat-
ing shoreline consisting of four points and four bays. The limestone geology of the
SASS creates flat to gently sloping terrain. Grenadier Island features gently
rolling terrain with a mix of open fields and dense woodlands. Many of the fields
are in various stages of succession, creating a rich habitat for wildlife. Fox Island
is virtually flat and features large meadows, open wetlands and forested areas.

The unique geography, lake and river features, terrain, vegetation and history of
the SASS all contribute to the uniqueness and character of the landscape. The
mainland shoreline of the SASS includes active and successional farmlands slop-
ing down to a flat to gently rolling shoreline. The limestone geology of the main-
land has shaped a gentle landscape with gradual slopes extending from Pleasant
Valley Road to the lake and river inlet. The mainland landscape of rolling farm
and forest land is bisected by three stream valleys created by Little Fox, Kents and
Wilson Creeks. These small valleys create the undulating terrain that character-
izes the mainland portions of the SASS. The creeks and associated marshes also
provide unique nesting habitat for Black Terns and habitat for amphibians in the
Blanding Turtle Sanctuary. Most of the mainland portions of the SASS are
actively farmed. Some areas include recently abandoned farmland reverting to
successional vegetation. Small pockets of woodlands dot the hillsides and cover
extensive portions of the shoreline.

The Lake Ontario SASS is rich in cultural heritage including War of 1812 his-
toric areas, the Charity Shoal and Tibbetts Point lighthouses; historic stone farm
houses and estates and historic homes lining the river west of the Village of Cape
Vincent. The highly unique presence of large ocean-going ships crossing the lake
and entering the river in close proximity to the Tibbetts Point lighthouse is a dra-
matic and reliable ephemeral feature of the SASS. Grenadier Island was known
as Tonata by the native Mississauga Indians who farmed and fished for eels in the
surrounding waters.

Early European settlers established farms on the island and established a guard
post there during the War of 1812. The Charity Shoal and Tibbetts Point light-
houses date from the era of sail and steamship traffic on Lake Ontario and the

Tibbetts Point Lighthouse

St. Lawrence River from the Village of Cape Vincent
extensive areas of the SASS provide public access to vistas of the water and islands. The diversity of landscapes within the SASS creates a highly varied visual setting. The SASS has a unique abundance of water views as well as internal views of farmland, meadows and woodlands.

While the SASS is especially rich in natural scenic character, cultural factors also enhance the visual character of the landscape. The rolling farmland and cultivated fields create an open, expansive landscape that creates sweeping views out over the water punctuated by the major ships that ply these waters. Local roads run toward the lake and the river, providing linear views down the public right of way to the water. Small forests and woodlots accent the open farm landscape creating contrast and variety in the visual landscape. The natural landscape has been modified over the centuries by farming, resulting in a unique and highly scenic cultural visual character. Key historic landmarks such as the stone farm houses, waterfront estates, lighthouses and scenic roads create focal points in the cultural landscape of the SASS.

Thanks to recent preservation efforts, many of the natural and cultural resources of the SASS have been protected and some areas are open to the public. Approximately one third of Grenadier Island is in conservation, as well as all of the Wilson Bay marshlands and adjoining farm and forest land. Conservation of these remarkable areas will ensure the long-term presence of high scenic quality in the landscape.

A. Landscape Character

1. Variety

The Lake Ontario SASS contains a diversity of landscapes. The wide expanses of Lake Ontario, the narrowing inlet to the Saint Lawrence River, the highly indented shoreline, farmland sweeping down to the water and numerous historic landmarks create an environment of exceptional visual variety. Water is a predominant feature in the SASS. The diversity of water features includes the wide expanses of the lake, the narrower channel of the river, the many bays and inlets, rivers, streams and sheltered waters between the islands and the mainland. Narrow winding streams such as Kents Creek lead to wide expanses of marshland harboring high quality habitat for black terns, turtles and a wide range of waterfowl. Marshes and creeks drain into four major bays enclosed by peninsulas extending out into Lake Ontario. Rocky and sand beaches line the varied shoreline, alternating from sand to cobbles to outcrops of the native limestone. The two islands create embayments with framed views out into the open water landscapes of the lake.

The underlying limestone geology has created a varied terrain of rolling hillsides, river valleys and gradually sloping terraces extending down to the water’s edge. Being a softer rock than the underlying Canadian Shield igneous and metamorphic geology, the limestone has been carved into soft, rolling hills by the action of the glaciers and erosion. This erosion has sculpted the bays and peninsulas that have created a highly varied shoreline configuration throughout the SASS.

The cultural diversity of the landscape is also unique. Farmland cultivated for centuries creates a variety of pastoral landscapes providing expansive views out over the waters of the lake and river. Focal points such as the Tibbetts Point and Charity Shoal lightshouses create variety and diversity in the landscape. Historic estates and stone farm buildings also add interest to this striking natural setting.

2. Unity

The SASS is a relatively unified landscape, thanks to its high state of natural preservation, its strong cultural landscape elements, the nearly constant presence of the lake and river and the strength of its geological features. Human alteration of the SASS has usually served to enhance, rather than detract from, the visual character of the landscape. The cultural landscapes of the SASS such as its farmland, farms, historic hamlets and historic estates create a unified visual character. The historic structures, open pastures, meadows and meandering historic roads blend with or provide a pleasing contrast to the natural scenery of the SASS. Discordant features such as residential or vacation home development and mobile home parks do not significantly detract from the overall visual unity of the SASS.

On the other hand, the Wolfe Island wind turbine complex in Canada is a major discordant feature affecting northern portions of the SASS, lowering scenic character in this area in spite of outstanding natural and cultural features. The wind turbines disrupt the unity of the landscape in the areas where it is fully visible. The night time character and unity of the landscape is also affected by the night lighting on the turbines.

The relatively unified character of most portions of the visual landscape is enhanced by the fact that large tracts of conservation land on Grenadier Island, Tibbetts Point and Wilson Bay ensure that these areas are not marred by future development. The two historic lighthouses are also protected and well maintained for future generations. Farms in the upland areas create a highly unified landscape of fields, pastures and woodlots providing sweeping views of the Saint Lawrence River and Lake Ontario.

The fact that water extends throughout most of the SASS provides a great deal of visual unity to the landscape. A wide variety of water features including the great lake, the river, streams, marshland and embayments are woven together in a unified landscape of diverse water features. Views of unspoiled shorelines and islands extend the unifying presence of water into interior portions of the landscape as well. Given the important role of water in creating scenic quality, the
The northern portions of the SASS have full views of an extensive wind turbine complex on Wolfe Island on the Canadian side of the river. These tall structures with rotating blades and extensive night lighting have a major impact on the visual landscape of the area. While opinions on wind turbines vary, there is no question that these tall, moving, illuminated industrial structures have a major visual presence in the landscape. As such, they represent very significant discordant features that have a negative visual impact over a wide area which includes northern portions of the SASS. The wind turbines are especially visible from Tibbetts Point and the Saint Lawrence River sections of the SASS. In spite of this major visual intrusion, the northern portion of the SASS retains a relatively high scenic quality due to the other outstanding visual features of the landscape.

The decline of farmland in the SASS and throughout the region will affect the character of the visual landscape. In the Lake Ontario SASS farmland helps create the dramatic views of the water from upland areas. The disappearance of fields will gradually reduce the open character of the land and the views it provides. While successional farmland is not in itself a discordant feature, the loss of open areas and their views will negatively affect the visual landscape.

4. Freedom From Discordant Features

The central and southern portions of the SASS are relatively free of major discordant features, especially considering the extent, beauty and desirability of its coastline. In the past fifty years a number of vacation homes and year round residences have been built along the shoreline in portions of these shores that alter the visual character of the landscape. Mobile home parks and limited commercial development along sections of Pleasant Valley Road also create localized discordant effects in the landscape. Otherwise the central and southern portions of the SASS are relatively free of major discordant features. Grenadier and Fox islands have little, if any, discordant features.

The Lake Ontario SASS is replete with both natural and cultural landscape contrasts. The most dramatic natural contrast consists of the juxtaposition of the vast expanse of Lake Ontario with the more intimate landscapes of the Saint Lawrence River and the islands and bays of the coastline. The enormity of the lake creates an ocean-like visual landscape that envelopes the islands, bays and promontories of the shoreline. The gradual opening of the inlet to the Saint Lawrence River into the great lake creates a dramatic contrast between the land and the freshwater sea.

Further contrasts are created by the two islands that extend into Lake Ontario. Grenadier and Fox Island interrupt the openness of the great lake, creating contrast between open water and the hills and vegetation of these low-lying islands. Lake Ontario silhouetted by the trees on Fox Island creates an especially powerful contrast between the tenuous landscape and the seemingly limitless open water. The varied shorelines of the islands and the moderate terrain of Grenadier Island contrast starkly with the simple, flat expanse of Lake Ontario.

The highly varied shoreline configuration of the SASS provides further contrasts. The irregular pattern of bays and peninsulas created by erosion of the soft limestone bedrock creates a contrast of water and landscape forms. The steep valleys cut into the limestone by the creeks contrast with the flat to rolling farmland that predominates in upland areas. Woodlands and marshes stand out in contrast to the open farmland that extends in many areas down to the shoreline of the lake.

Cultural contrasts include the two historic lighthouses guarding the entrance to the Saint Lawrence River and the historic stone farm houses set in rolling fields and pastures. The many small local roadways that follow the shorelines or that traverse the uplands contrast with the natural landscapes that they traverse. Many of the upland roads lead straight down to the water, creating a dramatic contrast between farmland and the water of the lake and the river.

B. Uniqueness

The SASS is highly unique as the upstream gateway to the Thousand Islands. The confluence of the ocean-like landscape of Lake Ontario with the inlet to the Saint Lawrence River creates an unusual contrast of water features unlike any other in the region. This dramatic natural contrast is heightened by the presence of iconic cultural features such as the Tibbetts Point lighthouse that provide an unusual accent to dramatic natural phenomena. Sunsets at Tibbetts Point highlight this contrast in a unique way as the sun disappears into the seemingly endless waters of the great lake.

The interplay of land and water in the SASS is also unusual within the region. The relative openness of the farming landscape and the fact that it slopes down to the water in many places creates a unique interplay of land and waterscapes. Many of the local roads leading down to the water provide a distant vista of the lake and the surrounding islands visible from miles away. This interplay of water and landscape is heightened by the unusual bays and peninsulas that have been created by the erosion of the relatively soft limestone bedrock.

High westerly winds have shaped the landscape and especially the vegetation in unique ways at this downwind headland. Many of the trees have been stunted and blown into an easterly windswept position as a result of westerly winds, ice and sleet blowing off of Lake Ontario. This weather is not unique in the Thousand Islands but it is especially apparent on this, the westernmost tip of land facing the great lake.

D. Public Recognition

The Tibbetts Point lighthouse is one of the most well-known landmarks in the Thousand Islands. Famous for its historic architecture and expansive views of both Lake Ontario and the Saint Lawrence River, the landmark is a major destination and the westernmost terminus of the Seaway Trail. Views of the sunset over Lake Ontario are a well-known scenic feature in the region. The Charity Shoal lighthouse, while distant and inaccessible except by boat, is also a well-known historic landmark featured in brochures, postcards and web sites.

The rest of the SASS is not well known and remains a relatively quiet and undeveloped area off the beaten path of the Thousand Islands. While highly accessible due to a local road system located immediately adjacent to the shoreline, most of the SASS is little known to the general public. Some in the area would like to keep it that way while others would like the high scenic quality at the tip of the Thousand Islands to be more recognized.

IV. Impact Assessment

Proposed actions within a SASS that are subject to coastal consistency review under federal and State coastal acts must be assessed to determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource and whether the action would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of the scenic resource. Some local government activities in communities with federally-approved Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs are also subject to local coastal consistency review.
Policy 24. "Prevent impairment of scenic resources of statewide significance," provides that when considering a proposed action, agencies shall first determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource of statewide significance. The determination would involve:

1. a review of the coastal area map to ascertain if it shows an identified scenic resource which could be affected by the proposed action, and:

2. a review of the types of activities proposed to determine if they would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of an identified resource.

Impairment includes:

(i) the irreversible modification of geologic forms: the destruction or removal of vegetation; the modification, destruction or removal of structures, whenever the geologic processes, vegetation or structures are significant to the scenic quality of an identified resource; and:

(ii) the addition of structures which because of siting or scale will reduce identified views or which because of scale, form, or materials will diminish the scenic quality of an identified resource.

Policy 24 sets forth certain siting and facility-related guidelines to be used to achieve the policy, recognizing that each large scale development situation is unique and that the guidelines will have to be applied accordingly. The guidelines are set forth below, together with comments regarding their particular applicability to this Scenic Area of Statewide Significance. In applying these guidelines to agricultural land it must be recognized that the overall scenic quality of the landscape is reliant on an active and viable agricultural industry. This requires that farmers be allowed the flexibility to farm the land in an economically viable fashion, incorporating modern techniques, changes in farm operation and resultant changes in farm structures. Policy 24 guidelines include:

Siting large scale development such as highways, power lines, major subdivisions and bill boards back from the shoreline or in other inconspicuous locations to maintain the attractive quality of the shoreline and to retain views to and from the shore;

Comment: One of the most unique features of the Lake Ontario SASS is its abundance of undeveloped or sparsely developed shorelines. Keeping future large scale development away from these shorelines will be critical in maintaining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. It is recommended that future development be clustered away from the shoreline and visually sensitive open fields and meadows, especially in the very open, windswept western portions of the SASS facing Lake Ontario. Site plan review and open space development are valuable local land use tools that can achieve this goal. One example of site plan review criteria is preservation of shoreline vegetation to help new development blend in with its surroundings. Another example of site plan review criteria is design guidelines to ensure that clustering and other siting techniques achieve scenic preservation goals. Future open space development clusters could be sited and designed to reflect the historic patterns of existing hamlets such as Rosiere. Another technique for maintaining the visual character of the SASS is acquisition of vulnerable shoreline lands or conservation easements from willing landowners.

Probably the greatest threat to the future scenic character of the SASS is large scale industrial and infrastructure development within or nearby district boundaries. Large-scale projects, such as tall buildings, transmission lines, wind turbines, bridges, communications towers, should not be sited within the SASS district or within the district’s viewedash. Large scale industrial development should be sited well back from the bluff tops, and shoreline to greatly reduce the visual impacts. Modification of existing roadways, construction of new roadways, utility lines and other infrastructure often requires state or federal funding and/or permits and thus can come under the purview of this policy. Locating public infrastructure that scars sensitive coastal areas and facilitates inappropriate bluff top or shoreline development could greatly impair future scenic shoreline areas of the SASS.

Clustering or orienting new large scale structures to retain existing views, save open space and provide visual organization to a development;

Comment: The majority of the SASS consists of open water, wooded shorelines, islands, farm fields, meadows, marshes, forests and old pastures. Historic hamlets, farmsteads, houses and traditional summer homes punctuate but do not dominate the landscape except in a few heavily developed locations. A definite boundary usually remains between developed and undeveloped areas of the SASS district. Large expanses of farmland extend in a gradual slope down to the water’s edge. If this edge becomes blurred as a result of sprawling, large scale development, the visual character of the SASS could be damaged. Future large scale development should be clustered away from scenic resources such as Fox and Grenadier Islands, Tibbetts Point and the SASS’s open farmlands, leaving most of the SASS in a more natural condition. The siting and design of new large scale development can be achieved with local land use tools such as site plan review, clustering and transfer of large scale development rights as described in the local implementation section of this document.

Views from public ways, water access sites, shorelines and waterways are especially sensitive and should be protected from new large scale development, utility construction or signage whenever possible. The Lake Ontario SASS has some of the best, unspoiled waterfront roads in the Thousand Islands. Views from these roads should not be impacted by large scale development. Views from and of the bluffs, shorelines, islands and farmland should also be taken into consideration in locating new large scale development. Locating new large scale structures well back from shoreline farmland will protect the beauty of the coastal landscape and, in the long run, will enhance property values in the area.

Incorporating sound existing structures (especially historic buildings) into the overall development pattern;

Comment: Many of the historic structures in the SASS such as the Tibbetts Point lighthouse are currently conserved through public ownership and Historic District status. Others remain in private ownership. A few early Twentieth Century summer homes have historic architectural value and contribute to the visual character of the landscape. Much of the existing architectural design for modern residential homes is valuable and wholly compatible with historic designs and the natural setting of the Thousand Islands.

Much of the beauty of the residential development within the SASS was accomplished through the good taste of the homeowners and historic builders rather than by regulation and oversight by municipalities. Future preservation of these homes, their grounds and their surrounding natural setting would help to preserve the visual character of the SASS. Radical alteration or demolition of these homes or the large scale development of their grounds that is inconsistent with the visual characteristics of the viewedash could submit this beautiful area to the intensive shoreline development that has marred many other sections of the New York State coastline. Thus, it is recommended that individual owners and towns include these factors into account when renovating these historical and scenic resources and when planning for future development in the surrounding environment.

Removing deteriorated and/or degrading elements;

Comment: The SASS is relatively free of deteriorated or degrading visual elements. Few towers, very tall structures, derelict buildings or wide roads or parking lots detract from the scenic character of the landscape. Minor improvements to roads and parking lots would enhance the scenic character of the SASS. Signage and parking lots could be improved in certain areas. Overhead utilities could be buried, in possible, to improve views and visual character.

Post-WWII shoreline development is the main degrading element in the SASS. Development along the shoreline and tributary streams represents one of the major impacts on the scenic character of the SASS. Planting vegetation for screening, fencing and other measures could help reduce the visual impacts of any large scale development. Groins, bulkheads and erosion prevention structures along the shoreline reduce the scenic character of the area. These engineering struc-
Maintaining or restoring the original land form, except when changes screen unattractive elements and/or add appropriate interest;

Comment: The unique character of the SASS is relatively undisturbed and should be protected in future construction, infrastructure and large scale development projects. The landform of the SASS is largely in an undisturbed state and is the one of the underlying factors in the scenic quality of the area. A gentle gradient of farmland extends from higher portions of the Lake Ontario SASS down to the water. The contrast in elevation and the juxtaposition of water and land contributes to the beauty of the SASS. Alteration of important landforms such as coastal bluffs, rock ledges, stone outcrops, marshes, and tributaries would detract from the scenic character of the area. Use of berms to screen parking lots and unsightly large scale development is an acceptable modification of terrain if carefully designed to blend with the natural contour of the land. Alteration of natural terrain for large scale development and roads is of special concern. Development should be located away from sensitive geological features such as bluffs, hilltops, ridgelines, islands, and other unique geological areas.

Maintaining or adding vegetation to provide interest, encourage the presence of wildlife, blend structures with the site, and obscure unattractive elements, except when selective clearing removes unsightly, diseased or hazardous vegetation and when selective clearing, mowing, controlled burning or grazing creates or maintains views of coastal waters;

Comment: The wooded shorelines, small islands and open fields and meadows of the SASS are a vital component of its scenic character. The open farmland on gradual slopes extending down to the lake or river is an important visual feature of the SASS. These open fields with interspersed forests should be safe with and maintained whenever possible through tillng, grazing of livestock, controlled burning or mowing. Keeping the fields and meadows open not only benefits the scenic character of the area, but also plays an important role in maintaining varied wildlife habitat and ecological diversity in the region. The current agricultural practice of recovering vacant land for the production of field crops helps new structures blend into the predominantly natural landscape and plays a critical role in screening facilities and sites which would otherwise be discordant elements in the SASS.

Using appropriate materials, in addition to vegetation, to screen unattractive elements;

Comment: The SASS districts contain relatively few discordant elements. Fencing or screening could be used to screen parking lots, low utility structures and buildings. Taller discordant features are too large to be effectively screened with fencing. Painting such tall towers in light sky tones might reduce their negative visual impact. It is recommended that new construction be encouraged to use appropriate historic or native building materials. New or renovated overhead utilities located in sensitive scenic areas should be located underground, when possible, to eliminate their negative visual impact on the landscape. The failure to blend new structures into the natural setting, both within the SASS boundaries and in the viewshed of the SASS would impair the scenic quality of the areas.

Using appropriate scales, forms and materials to ensure that buildings and other structures are compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape.

Comment: Most structures located in the SASS districts are generally compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape because they are of a scale, design and material compatible with the historic landscape. Many of the structures are historic in nature. Construction of new buildings incompatible with the cultural character of the SASS as represented in historic structures may impair the scenic character of the area. Many of the older structures use native materials such as wood clapboards, shingles or stone construction. Most have pitched roofs, traditional fenestration and are sited unobtrusively on the land, avoiding hilltops, bluff edges and other prominent locations. Though many of the shorefront structures are large, their apparent mass has been reduced by designing the structures as a series of smaller, attached architectural volumes as seen at the Tibbetts Point lighthouse. This rambling, attached approach to residential design is typical of traditional Thousand Island architecture and is a major factor in reducing the visual impact of large, “mega-home” structures. Combined with sensitive site planning and design, the rambling, attached structures minimize obstruction of waterfront views from public roadways.

Locating very tall structures to avoid impacting scenic areas and views from scenic and historic coastal sites.

Comment: Very tall structures such as wind turbines and exhaust stacks will have major impacts on the scenic character of coastal landscapes. Over 600 Thousand Islands residents participated in the web-based visual preference survey in the summer of 2014. The survey results showed that wind turbine complexes on the Canadian side of the river have significant negative visual impacts on the region. Turbine images ranked among the least scenic images in the survey.

Consequently, massive industrial and infrastructure projects should not be built within the SASS district or within its surrounding viewshed. There are presently no techniques to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures because they are so tall, massive and frequently in motion.

Using shielded lighting fixtures at appropriate levels of illumination to preserve the Thousand Islands’ nighttime visual character.

The Thousand Island’s dark, unspoiled night sky with views of stars, the sea and wooded hills is a priceless visual resource. Due to its relatively low density of development, the region enjoys dark nighttime skies that could be affected by poorly designed new large scale development. The Lake Ontario SASS has particularly dark night skies due to the presence of the lake and the relative lack of development in the area. One exception to these dark skies are the flashing red beacons on the tops of the Wolfe Island turbine complex in Canada.

Light pollution from excessively bright, exposed lighting fixtures can block views of the night sky, blind motorists and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on large scale developments to be shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is provided without creating glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created by shielded fixtures also greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes by removing the bright harshness of many exterior light fixtures. Reducing the wattage of exterior lights is often possible without compromising safety or functionality and results in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or color-balanced light sources for large scale development will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the warm tones of incandescent bulbs while providing the efficiency of high intensity discharge or metal halide light sources.

It is recommended that existing town-owned lights, such as street lights or lights at public buildings and facilities, be gradually retrofitted to reduce glare and light pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction.
Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights that cast direct light onto neighboring properties or on the water. Large scale commercial facilities should avoid unshielded spotlights to illuminate parking lots, storage facilities or outdoor areas. Adding a simple metal shield to an existing spotlight can greatly reduce light pollution and glare. Often a series of lower, shielded lights can replace a single glaring spotlight. The greater expense for large scale developments is offset by the creation of a superior nighttime environment.

2. Carleton Island Scenic Area of Statewide Significance

I. Location

The Carleton Island Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) is northeast of the Lake Ontario SASS. It consists of the American section of the St. Lawrence River from the western tip of Canada’s Wolfe Island to the village of Cape Vincent and the inlet of the St. Lawrence River from the western tip of Canada’s Wolfe Island to the village of Cape Vincent. The scenic area includes the open water of the St. Lawrence, Carleton Island, and the river’s shoreline and smaller islands in this area. The SASS is approximately 13 miles in length and 3 miles in width.

The northern boundary consists of the US/Canada border. The southern border consists of a line just south of NYS Route 12E. The western boundary of the SASS is a line extending across the river channel that is approximately perpendicular to the shoreline and located between Tibbetts Point lighthouse and Cape Vincent Village’s historic center. The eastern boundary is an approximately shoreline-perpendicular line extending across the river just east of the tip of Wolfe Island.

Consult the Area 1 and 2 Ratings map for detailed SASS boundaries. The Carleton Island SASS is located on the St. Lawrence, Cape Vincent North and Cape Vincent South 7.5 minute U.S. Geological Survey maps.

II. Description

The Carleton SASS is comprised of subunits #13, 15, 16, and 17.

The most prominent features of the Carleton Island SASS are the dramatic agricultural landscape of Carleton and Wolfe Islands, the historic center of Cape Vincent, and the steep, straight shoreline cliffs known locally as the Palisades. The Carleton Island SASS is located between Tibbetts Point and Cape Vincent Village’s historic center. The eastern boundary is an approximately shoreline-perpendicular line extending across the river just east of the tip of Wolfe Island.

The Carleton Island SASS is located on the St. Lawrence, Cape Vincent North and Cape Vincent South 7.5 minute U.S. Geological Survey maps.

II. Description

The Carleton Island SASS is characterized by rolling hills and limestone bluffs—the surface expression of the limestone bedrock underlying the area. The mainland shoreline of the SASS includes active and successional farmlands sloping gently down to a flat to gently rolling shoreline in the western portion of the SASS, and nearly-vertical limestone cliffs known locally as the Palisades in the eastern portion of the area. Vegetation in the SASS is a mix of deciduous evergreen mature forest, lawn and street trees to east, varied residential streetscape in and around the Village of Cape Vincent and pasture/agriculture plantings on Carleton Island and visible from the SASS on the U.S. mainland and Wolfe Island.

Land uses range from distinctive historic town center and estates on the riverfront in and around Cape Vincent to more common exurban development in the eastern portion of the SASS, including some high density cottage/camp development on Cedar/Breeze Point.

A distinctive range of cultural features—historic and symbolically meaningful structures and sites—also exists in the Carleton Island SASS.

On Carleton Island, one of the most prominent features is Carleton Villa ruins—a privately owned 1894 structure that has been unoccupied for six decades and currently exists in significant disrepair. The island was also a battlefield in the War of 1812, when American forces took control of the island from the British. Prior to European settlement, the island was held by the Iroquois tribe. A number of American Indian and European burial grounds exist on the island.

III. Aesthetic Significance

The Carleton Island SASS is of statewide aesthetic significance by virtue of its unique landscape character, important historic structures and sites, high public accessibility and public recognition.

The landscape character of the Carleton Island SASS is heavily influenced by its unique geography on the threshold between the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. The rolling shoreline and sweeping coastal viewshed of the SASS is a transitional space between the open water and limestone geology of the Lake Ontario shore and the Canadian Shield landscape of myriad small islands and coves to the east. Here, as with the Lake Ontario SASS, strong winds from Lake Ontario have created the unique and startlingly beautiful form of eastward-sweped pines along the shore and islands.

Land uses in the SASS generally contribute positively to the area’s character. The Carleton Island and Canadian shorelines are notable for the large areas of relatively undeveloped land and agricultural land uses. These land uses provide contrasting vegetation color and form, and a mix of enclosure and openness that creates a visually strong landscape from the U.S. shoreline and from the St. Lawrence. Wind turbines on the Canadian shoreline and some areas of exurban development with little or no vegetation screening provide discordant features that negatively impact the character of the landscape, but these areas are relatively isolated.

The Carleton Island SASS benefits from its rich and celebrated history. This history manifests itself in a number of historic structures and sites that positively impact the visual landscape. These features include the stone houses and other historic residences in the Village of Cape Vincent and surrounds, the Gilded-age ruins at Carleton Villa, the 200 year old Horne’s Ferry, and the historic Fort Haldimand.

And, as with other parts of the Thousand Islands Scenic Area, the SASS benefits from positive ephemera—most notably the passage of large ocean-going vessels in contrast to the agricultural landscape and channels of the river.

Carleton Island
Thousand Islands Scenic Resources Protection Plan

Public accessibility of the SASS is quite high and contributes to the aesthetic significance of the area. Route 12 east and west of Cape Vincent provides nearly continuous, uninterrupted visual access to the St. Lawrence waterway in this area. Public parks like Cedar Point Park also provide areas of visual access. Horne’s Ferry provides views from the river. Because of the high level of accessible and scenic quality of the SASS, it is no surprise that the area is recognized by the public as a meaningful landscape with historic structures, important recreational landscapes, scenic ephemera, and important scenic areas.

The Carleton Island SASS includes two Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats:

The Carleton Island Featherbed Shoals designated habitat is one of the most extensive shoal habitat areas in the St. Lawrence River. The area exhibits rocky substrates and good water circulation leading to productive aquatic beds. These qualities combined with minimal human disturbance provide highly favorable habitat conditions for a number of fish and wildlife species.

St. Lawrence River Shoreline Bays designated habitat is a series of shallow water bays that support fish spawning and nursery areas, especially muskellunge. This SASS includes three of the bays: Peos, Millen, and Rose Bays.

A. Landscape Character

1. Variety

The physical and cultural features of the Carleton Island SASS are quite diverse, from old growth forests to historic agricultural land and village landscapes to more recent exurban development. This diversity of features creates a degree of visual variety that affords numerous opportunities for unique, scenic views.

Landform, vegetation, and land use are the most notably varied physical features in this subunit. Shoreline relief and geology in the SASS range from 5-20’ gently sloping river banks with small low limestone outcrops in the area around Cape Vincent and the western half of Carleton Island to 20’ and 60-80’ limestone bluffs on the northern side of Carleton Island and the U.S. shoreline east of Cedar Point. The interior of Carleton Island includes distinctive rolling hills. Vegetation is most diverse in the western half of the SASS. This includes a variety of agricultural plantings, open meadows and mature woodlands on Carleton Island, and mature and well-maintained urban vegetation and street trees in the historic Cape Vincent waterfront and the developed Rt. 12E corridor.

Land use is quite diverse in the Carleton Island SASS. The village of Cape Vincent and surrounding shoreline feature working waterfronts as well as professionally designed estate and vernacular exurban landscapes. To the east, the U.S. shoreline is characterized by low to medium density exurban development with areas of higher density cottages and campgrounds on Cedar and Breeze Point. Interspersed with these developed areas are state parks, such as Cedar Point and Burnham Point State Parks, open agricultural land, and undeveloped mature forestland. The interior of Carleton Island and the Canadian shoreline on Wolfe Island are especially notable for their large swaths of undeveloped land and agricultural land uses.

2. Unity

Despite the variety of physical and cultural features in the Carleton SASS, many features are consistently found throughout the area. These features help to provide a strong sense of visual continuity in this area.

The most prominent unifying element in the SASS is the St. Lawrence River. Full and screened views of the 6,000-15,000’ width river are consistent within the subunits of the SASS. With the exception of the small area of extremely straight shoreline west of Cedar Point, shorelines in the SASS are similarly varied. The shipping channel that passes through the SASS provides a unique daily experience of passing ocean-going container ships.

The limestone bedrock underlying the subunit also contributes to the sense of continuity within the SASS. This limestone, whether in small outcrops to 80’ cliffs, provides a consistent palette of color and texture throughout the area. The surface expression of this bedrock in the topography of the U.S. mainland, as well as Carleton and Wolfe Island, is responsible for the consistent pattern of rolling hills throughout the SASS.

Culturally, the SASS and area visible from the SASS are unified by the patchwork of active and successional farm land, agricultural structures, and historic stone homes and estates. Embedded in this patchwork are similar stories of American Indian empire building and life, European exploration and colonization, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Gilded Age.

Not all cultural features in the SASS are positive. Discordant features such as wind turbines and some areas of exurban development with little or no vegetation screening detract from the overall high degree of unity of the scenic landscape.

3. Contrast

The Carleton Island SASS has a number of physical and cultural features that provide contrasting color, form, texture, and symbolism. As with other scenic areas in the Thousand Islands, the most striking contrast is that of land and water. In summer, the St. Lawrence becomes a mirrored reflection of the sky or a dark mass of storm-driven waves. In winter and spring, this edge is made even more unusual in the state by the shifting and slowly moving mass of ice on the water’s surface. Whether viewed from historic village center, Route 12E, or from a wooded state park shoreline, the immensity and dynamism of the river in the Carleton Island SASS contrasts strongly against the subtly rolling topography of the U.S. mainland and Carleton Island. Viewed from the water, the gently curving shoreline and vegetation create a sharp division between water and sky.

The variety of vegetation and land uses in the SASS also create moments of striking contrast. The strongly defined edge between mature forest and open, rolling agricultural land, punctuated with bright red and white agricultural structures and stone farm houses, is a critical part of the visual character of Carleton and Wolfe Island. The large wind turbine complex on Wolfe Island, while sleek, startling and dramatic, creates discordant contrasts with the pastoral and historic village character of the Carleton Island SASS. The contrasts are most notable during the spring and fall migration of waterfowl as they divert and avoid the Wolfe Island industrial wind project.

Contrasts in culture exist throughout the SASS. For example, well-maintained historic residences and estates exist in juxtaposition to working farms and waterfronts, and more contemporary exurban development on the U.S. mainland and Carleton Island. The large ships navigating the St. Lawrence Seaway create dramatic contrasts with the pastoral and historic village landscape of the SASS.
4. Freedom From Discordant Features

The eastern portion of the Carleton Island SASS is relatively free of discordant features, except for the occasionally poorly sited cliff-side staircase or engineered shoreline on the U.S. mainland. Exurban development through most of this area is tastefully designed, for the most part, though at times expressing itself in more discordant forms, such as densely developed campgrounds and cottage complexes with little or no vegetation screening.

As with the Lake Ontario SASS, the major discordant features in this subunit are the wind turbines on Wolfe Island, which are visible to some extent throughout the western half of the SASS. To a lesser extent, marinas, power lines, and visible roadways are also discordant. Though these features do detract from the scenic quality of the landscape, they are geographically isolated to discreet areas within the SASS. The strong variety, unity, and contrast of other SASS features compensate for the negative influence of these discordant features in the visual landscape.

The Carleton Island landscape is the most free from discordant features in the SASS, with the exception of tall twin towers and some limited poorly sited development. The ruins of the Carleton Villa Ruins are as unique and startlingly beautiful as they are discordant. The island is relatively free from, and in many places, screened from view of, wind turbines, power infrastructure, and other discordant features.

B. Uniqueness

The Town of Cape Vincent and Carleton Island are unique in the state for their dramatic and unusual geography at the inlet of the Great Lakes to the St. Lawrence River seaway on the “northern coast” of the United States. The lake-river interface also provides one of the most spectacular bi-annual ephemeral activities, the spring and fall waterfowl migration along the river.

This natural and geographical relationship strongly influences the history of the area, from the history of the Underground Railroad to the numerous historical sites, including Fort Haldimand, associated with the Iroquois, France, Britain, and the United States wrestling for power and territory. Later, this same geographical context was the attraction of business and commerce leaders of their time, such as William O. Wyckoff, who invested his money made from Remington Typewriters into construction of lavish vacation homes here on the northern edge of the Empire State. At Cape Vincent, the seaway provides the unique opportunity to watch sea-going vessels as they prepare to cross the threshold between the sheltering bays and the open expanse of Lake Ontario.

In terms of the physical landscape, as with the Lake Ontario SASS, westerly winds have sculpted trees into easterly-bending windswept forms. The nearly perfectly linear limestone bluffs known locally as the “Palisades” on the eastern end of the SASS, adorned with relatively carefully-sited homes and staircases tumbling down to the river edge, are quite remarkable in the state.

C. Public Accessibility

Due to the proximity of local roads to the shore and private and public ferry service, the Carleton Island SASS is highly visually accessible to the general public. Public parks and historic sites, such as Cedar Point and Burham Point State Parks, located in the western section of subunit 13, allows for publicly accessible views of the St. Lawrence.

Workshop participants indicated scenic areas visible to the general public and well known scenic areas recognized by the public throughout the SASS. For example, the southern side of Carleton Island was indicated in workshop sessions to have at least one well known scenic area recognized by the public, though access to the island is limited to recreational boaters and views from Horne Ferry and other ferries and tour boats.

In particular, the stretch of Rt. 12 from Cedar Point to Tibbetts Point lighthouse provides full, 180 degree views of the St. Lawrence along its length. These views are made more dramatic in places by the relationship of the road and river. In many places the road is placed directly adjacent to the shoreline. Residences are located on the inland side of the road, with private water access provided in some cases by small docks and staircases on the river side of the road. This affords maximum views of the river from the roadway.

D. Public Recognition

The Village of Cape Vincent and Carleton Island are major destinations and vital cultural centers in the Thousand Islands region. The Carleton Island SASS was noted on workshop maps for its historic structures and cultural sites, estate buildings, unique or unusual scenic areas, and well known scenic areas recognized by the public.

Some examples include Beadles Point, which was recognized in workshop exercises as an important recreational landscape and a meaningful landscape. Cedar Point Park and the cliffs known as the palisades were noted as well known scenic areas recognized by the general public. The palisades were noted as a unique or unusual scenic area. The area west of Cape Vincent was mentioned for its historic association with the Underground Railroad.

IV. Impact Assessment

Proposed actions within a SASS that are subject to coastal consistency review under federal and State coastal acts must be assessed to determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource and whether the action would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of the scenic resource. Some local government activities in communities with federally-approved Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs are also subject to local coastal consistency review.

Policy 24, “Prevent impairment of scenic resources of statewide significance,” provides that when considering a proposed action, agencies shall first determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource of statewide significance. The determination would involve:

1. a review of the coastal area map to ascertain if it shows an identified scenic area which could be affected by the proposed action, and:
2. a review of the types of activities proposed to determine if they would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of an identified resource.

Impairment includes:

1. the irreversible modification of geologic forms; the destruction or removal of vegetation; the modification, destruction or removal of structures, whenever the geologic forms, vegetation or structures are significant to the scenic quality of an identified resource; and:
2. the addition of structures which because of sitting or scale will reduce identified views or which because of scale, form, or materials will diminish the scenic quality of an identified resource.

Policy 24 sets forth certain siting and facility-related guidelines to be used to achieve the policy, recognizing that each large scale development situation is unique and that the guidelines will have to be applied accordingly. The guidelines are set forth below, together with comments regarding their particular applicability to this Scenic Area of Statewide Significance.

In applying these guidelines to agricultural land it must be recognized that the overall scenic quality of the landscape is reliant on an active and viable agricultural industry. This requires that farmers be allowed the flexibility to farm the land in an economically viable fashion, incorporating modern techniques, changes in farm operation and resultant changes in farm structures. Policy 24 guidelines include:

Siting large scale development such as highways, power lines, major subdivisions and billboards back from the shoreline or in other inconspicuous locations to maintain the attractive quality of the shoreline and to retain views to and from the shore;

Comment: Unique features of the SASS include the historic village of Cape Vincent, Carleton Island and farmland extending down to a shoreline often...
transformed by residential development. Keeping future large scale development away from the shoreline, the village and Carleton Island will be critical in maintaining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of the St. Lawrence River. It is recommended that future large scale development be clustered away from the shoreline and visually sensitive open fields and meadows. Site plan review and open space development are valuable local land use tools that can achieve this goal. One example of a site plan review criterion is the preservation of shoreline vegetation to help new development blend in with its surroundings. Another example of a site plan review criterion is design guidelines to ensure that clustering and other siting techniques achieve scenic preservation goals. Future open space development clusters could be sited and designed to reflect the historic patterns of existing villages and hamlets. Another technique for maintaining the visual character of the SASS is acquisition of vulnerable shoreline lands or conservation easements from willing landowners.

Probably the greatest threat to the future scenic character of the SASS is large scale industrial and infrastructure development within or nearby district boundaries. Large-scale projects, such as tall buildings, transmission lines, wind turbines, bridges, communications towers, should not be sited within the SASS district or within the district’s viewed. Large scale industrial development should be sited well back from the bluff top, and shoreline to greatly reduce the visual impacts. Modification of existing roadways, construction of new roadways, utility lines and other infrastructure often requires state or federal funding and/or permits and thus can come under the purview of this policy. Locating public infrastructure that scars sensitive coastal areas and facilitates inappropriate bluff top or shoreline development could greatly impair future scenic shoreline areas of the SASS.

Clustering or orienting new large scale structures to retain existing views, save open space and provide visual organization to a development;

Comment: The majority of the SASS consists of open water, developed shorelines, a large island, an historic village, farm fields, marshes, forests and old pastures. Historic hamlets, farmsteads, houses and traditional summer settlements are sited well back from the bluff tops, and shoreline to greatly reduce the visual impacts. Modification of existing roadways, construction of new roadways, utility lines and other infrastructure often requires state or federal funding and/or permits and thus can come under the purview of this policy. Locating public infrastructure that scars sensitive coastal areas and facilitates inappropriate bluff top or shoreline development could greatly impair future scenic shoreline areas of the SASS.

Incorporating sound existing structures (especially historic buildings) into the overall development pattern;

Comment: Many of the historic structures in the SASS are currently conserved through public ownership and Historic District status. The historic village of Cape Vincent is well preserved and well cared for. Future preservation of these villages, homes, their grounds and their surrounding natural setting would help to preserve the visual character of the SASS. Radical alteration or demolition of these homes or the large scale development of their grounds that is inconsistent with the visual characteristics of the views and would submit this beautiful area to the intensive shoreline development that has marred many other sections of the New York State coastline. Thus, it is recommended that individual owners and towns take these factors into account when renovating these historical and scenic resources and when planning for future development in the surrounding environment. Large scale development inappropriate for historic villages, farmed islands or wooded shorelines should be located away from these visual resources.

Removing deteriorated and/or degrading elements;

Comment: The SASS is relatively free of deteriorated or degrading visual elements. Few towers, very tall structures, derelict buildings or wide roads or parking lots detract from the scenic character of the landscape. Some recent industrial and storage buildings along portions of the shoreline could be removed or rehabilitated. Minor improvements to roads and parking lots would enhance the scenic character of the SASS. Signage and parking lots could be improved in certain areas. Overhead utilities could be buried to improved views and visual character.

Development along the shoreline represents one of the major impacts on the scenic character of the SASS. Planting vegetation for screening, fencing and other measures could help reduce the visual impacts of any large scale development. Bulkheads and erosion prevention structures along the shoreline reduce the scenic character of the area. These engineering structures can be evaluated to determine if replacement with vegetation or bioengineering techniques would be appropriate.

Maintaining or restoring the original land form, except when changes screen unattractive elements and/or add appropriate interest;

Comment: The SASS has a variety of land forms ranging from the rolling hills of Carleton Island to the flat to gradually sloping gradients of the Village of Cape Vincent and the mainland shoreline. Both areas should be protected in future construction, infrastructure and large scale development projects. The landform of the SASS is largely in an undisturbed state and is the one of the underlying factors in the scenic quality of the area. The contrast in elevation on Carleton Island and the juxtaposition of water and land contribute to the beauty of the SASS. Alteration of important landforms such as the rolling hills of Carleton Island and the gentle mainland shoreline would detract from the scenic character of the area. The use of berms to screen parking lots and unsightly large scale development is an acceptable modification of terrain if carefully designed to blend with the natural contour of the land. Alteration of natural terrain for large scale development and roads is of special concern. Development should be located away from sensitive geological features such as bluffs, hilltops, ridgelines, islands, and other unique geological areas.

Maintaining or adding vegetation to provide interest, encourage the presence of wildlife, blend structures with the site, and obscure unattractive elements, except when selective clearing removes unsightly, diseased or hazardous vegetation and when selective clearing, mowing, controlled burning or grazing creates or maintains views of coastal waters;
Comments: The farmland, wood lots, shorelines and open fields and meadows of the SASS are a vital component of its scenic character. Maintaining the open farmland, particularly on Carleton Island should be a high priority to preserve the scenic quality of the SASS. Open farmland should be safe guarded and maintained whenever possible through tilling, grazing of livestock, controlled burning or mowing. Keeping the fields and meadows open not only benefits the scenic character of the area, but also plays an important role in maintaining varied wildlife habitat and ecological diversity in the region. The current agricultural practice of recovering vacant land for the production of field crops not only benefits farmers economically, but it also enhances the visual attractiveness of the contrasting natural and agricultural landforms. Both scenic and environmental goals could be achieved by implementing a program to maintain open meadows and to reclaim some of the open grasslands recently lost to successional scrub and forest growth.

The variety of vegetation and the consequent variety of texture and color in the SASS districts make a significant contribution to their scenic quality. A variety of vegetation, open fields and meadows and the smaller wooded areas all provide interest and contrast in the landscape. The wildlife supported by this vegetation also adds interest and ephemeral character to the land. Vegetation helps new structures blend into the predominantly natural landscape and plays a critical role in screening facilities and sites which would otherwise be discordant elements in the SASS. Planting of new screening vegetation in the camps and mobile home parks lining portions of the mainland shoreline could reduce negative visual impacts.

Using appropriate materials, in addition to vegetation, to screen unattractive elements;

Comment: Carleton Island has very few unattractive elements but the mainland shoreline has a significant number of very dense mobile homes and small camps may impact the scenic quality of the SASS. Fencing or screening could be used to screen parking lots, low utility structures and buildings. Taller discordant features are too large to be effectively screened with fencing. Painting such tall towers in light sky tones might reduce their negative visual impact. It is recommended that new construction be encouraged to use appropriate historic or native building materials. New or renovated overhead utilities located in sensitive scenic areas could be located underground, when possible, to eliminate their negative visual impact on the landscape. The failure to bend new structures into the natural setting, both within the SASS boundaries and in the viewsheds of the SASS would impair the scenic quality of the area. Screening of the few unsightly structures in the Village of Cape Vincent could be effective.

Using appropriate scales, forms and materials to ensure that buildings and other structures are compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape.

Comment: Many structures located in the SASS and especially on Carleton Island are generally compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape because they are of a scale, design and material compatible with the historic landscape. Many of the structures in the Village of Cape Vincent are historic in nature. Construction of new buildings incompatible with the cultural character of the SASS as represented in historic structures may impair the scenic character of the area. Many of the older structures use native materials such as wood clapboards, shingles or stone construction. Most have pitched roofs, traditional fenestration and are sited unobtrusively on the land, avoiding hilltops, bluff edges and other prominent locations. Though many of the shorefront developments are extensive, their negative visual impact is localized due to the low height and small size of the camps and mobile homes. On Carleton Island and the Village, the rambling, attached approach to residential design is typical of traditional Thousand Island architecture. It greatly helps reduce the visual impact of large, "mega-home" structures, especially when combined with sensitive site planning and design and at the same time it minimizes obstruction of waterfront views from public roadways.

Locating very tall structures to avoid impacting scenic areas and views from scenic and historic coastal sites.

Comment: Very tall structures such as wind turbines and exhaust stacks will have major impacts on the scenic character of coastal landscapes. Over 600 Thousand Islands residents participated in the web-based visual preference survey in the summer of 2014. The survey results showed that wind turbine complexes on the Canadian side of the river have significant negative visual impacts on the region. Turbine images ranked among the least scenic images in the survey.

Consequently, massive industrial and infrastructure projects should not be built within the SASS district or within its surrounding viewshed. There are presently no techniques to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures because they are so tall, massive and frequently in motion. Using shielded lighting fixtures at appropriate levels of illumination to preserve the Thousand Islands’ nighttime visual character.

The Thousand Island’s dark, unspoiled night sky with views of stars, the sea and wooded hills is a priceless visual resource. Due to its relatively low density of development, the region enjoys dark nighttime skies that could be affected by poorly designed new large scale development. Light pollution from excessively bright, exposed lighting fixtures can block views of the night sky, blind motorists and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on large scale developments to be shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is provided without creating glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created by shielded fixtures also greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes by removing the bright harshness of many exterior light fixtures. Reducing the wattage of exterior lights is often possible without compromising safety or functionality and results in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or color-balanced light sources such as energy efficient, shielded LED lighting for large scale development will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the warm tones of incandescent bulbs while providing the efficiency of high intensity discharge or metal halide light sources.

It is recommended that existing town-owned lights, such as street lights or lights at public buildings and facilities, be gradually retrofitted to reduce glare and light pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction. Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights to cast direct light onto neighboring properties or on the water. Large scale commercial facilities should avoid unshielded spotlights to illuminate parking lots, storage facilities or outdoor areas. Adding a single metal shield to an existing spotlight can greatly reduce light pollution and glare. Often a series of lower, shielded lights can replace a single glaring spotlight. The greater expense for large scale developments is offset by the creation of a superior nighttime environment.

3. Grindstone Island Scenic Area of Statewide Significance

I. Location

The Grindstone Island Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) is located in the western central section of the Saint Lawrence Scenic Region. It consists of Grindstone Island and surrounding islands, the Village of Clayton and adjacent islands, the mainland shoreline from the Palisades to Reed Point and the river from the southeast of Wolfe Island to the west entrance to the American Narrows. It also includes Thousand Islands Park and the west shoreline of Wellesley Island.

The southern boundary of the SASS consists of the mainland shoreline of the St. Lawrence River including the Village of Clayton, Barlelt Point and the lime-
Thousand Islands Scenic Resources Protection Plan

II. Description

The SASS is comprised of subunits #9, 7, 11, 12, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 107.

The Grindstone Island SASS is located on the Gananoque, Thousand Island Park, Saint Lawrence and Clayton 7.5 minute US Geological Survey maps.

The Grindstone Island SASS is dominated by Grindstone Island, Clayton and Thousand Island Park and the surrounding river and islands. It is a highly scenic and varied blend of islands of various sizes as well as the main channel of the river and two historic villages. The natural features of the SASS include the Saint Lawrence River, the highly indented shoreline of Grindstone Island and the western end of Wellesley Island, the woodlands and meadows in central portions of the island, the smaller islands that dot the SASS and the western shores of Wellesley Island. The unique geography, lake and river features, terrain, vegetation and history of the SASS all contribute to the uniqueness and character of the landscape.

The Thousand Island Tern Colonies designated habitat consists of vulnerable common tern nesting areas. Nesting sites in this SASS include the Eagle Wing group of islands, Gull Island, Tidd Island, and Navigation Light Northeast 16. While these island tern colonies are isolated from mammalian predators and human disturbance, predation by great horned owls and competition from ring-necked gulls has reduced populations.

The Eel Bay designated habitat is an extensive, undisturbed, shallow bay with beds of submersed vegetation unusual in the St. Lawrence ecological subzone. Eel Bay is an important fish spawning and nursery area, supporting northern pike as well as vulnerable species such as the pugnose shiner and black shiner. This habitat supports one of about five major concentrations in the St. Lawrence River for diving ducks during migration and provides common loon nesting habitat.

The Thousand Island Park and the surrounding river and islands. It is a highly scenic and varied blend of islands of various sizes as well as the main channel of the river and two historic villages. The natural features of the SASS include the Saint Lawrence River, the highly indented shoreline of Grindstone Island and the western end of Wellesley Island, the woodlands and meadows in central portions of the island, the smaller islands that dot the SASS and the western shores of Wellesley Island. The unique geography, lake and river features, terrain, vegetation and history of the SASS all contribute to the uniqueness and character of the landscape.

The SASS's western boundary extends across the river in a north/south orientation east of Wolfe Island. The northern boundary consists of the US/Canada border north of Grindstone Island. The eastern border of the SASS is located several hundred feet inland of the western shoreline of Wellesley Island as well as a wider section that includes the hamlet of Thousand Island Park.

Consult the Area 2 and 3 Ratings maps for detailed SASS boundaries. The Grindstone Island SASS is located on the Gananoque, Thousand Island Park, Saint Lawrence and Clayton 7.5 minute US Geological Survey maps.

The Saint Lawrence and Clayton 7.5 minute US Geological Survey maps.

The SASS's western boundary extends across the river in a north/south orientation east of Wolfe Island. The northern boundary consists of the US/Canada border north of Grindstone Island. The eastern border of the SASS is located several hundred feet inland of the western shoreline of Wellesley Island as well as a wider section that includes the hamlet of Thousand Island Park.

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The SASS's western boundary extends across the river in a north/south orientation east of Wolfe Island. The northern boundary consists of the US/Canada border north of Grindstone Island. The eastern border of the SASS is located several hundred feet inland of the western shoreline of Wellesley Island as well as a wider section that includes the hamlet of Thousand Island Park.
Natural features located in the developed portions of the SASS including the Village of Clayton, the hamlet of Thousand Island Park and the developed mainland shoreline are less unique and environmentally significant. However, the outlet of French Creek at the western edge of the Village of Clayton is an important environmental feature. Bartlett Point and the limestone bluffs known as the palsades at the western end of the mainland portion of the SASS that are relatively sparsely developed provide a respite from the more developed portions of the mainland shoreline in the subunit. The palsades form a nearly vertical 30° high limestone cliff along the waterfront.

The extensive cultural landscape of the Grindstone Island SASS includes the Village of Clayton, the historic Victorian summer colony of Thousand Island Park, late 19th and early 20th Century summer homes on the islands and the farmland and open meadows of Grindstone Island. Cultural features also include more recent, dense shoreline development in and around Clayton and on Round Island.

III. Aesthetic Significance

The Grindstone Island SASS is of statewide aesthetic significance by virtue of its exceptional landscape character, historic character, state of preservation, environmental character, uniqueness, public accessibility and public recognition. It is one of the most scenic areas of the region’s coastline, with remarkable scenery on Grindstone Island, the main river channel, the many smaller islands and the highly indented shoreline of points and bays. Images and descriptions of the SASS, especially the Village of Cape Vincent, Grindstone Island and Thousand Island Park are frequently featured in photographs, paintings, books, travel brochures and other publications. Views of the sunset from the Potters Beach on Grindstone and Eel Bay on Wellesley Island are well known.

The wide expanses of main river channel, the islands and a varied coastline of the SASS create a dramatic coastal environment. Open farmland on Grindstone Island extending to the shoreline provides sweeping views of the river. Public roads on Grindstone Island and along the mainland shoreline provide public access to vistas of the water and islands. The diversity of landscapes within the SASS creates a highly varied visual setting. The SASS has a unique abundance of water views as well as internal views of farmland, meadows and woodlands. Outcrops of Canadian Shield bedrock create small hills and valleys that produce a scenic, rolling landform. In contrast to Carleton Island, Grindstone is shaped by hard, ancient bedrock as opposed to softer limestone.

While the SASS is especially rich in natural scenic character, cultural factors also enhance the visual character of the landscape. The natural landscape has been modified over the centuries by farming, resulting in a unique and highly scenic cultural visual character. The rolling farmland and cultivated fields create an open, expansive landscape that creates sweeping views out over the water. Local roads run toward the lake and the river, providing linear views down the public right of way to the water. Small forests and woodlots accent the open farm landscape creating contrast and variety in the visual landscape. Key historic landmarks such as the stone farm houses, waterfront estates, lighthouses and scenic roads create focal points in the cultural landscape of the SASS.

Thanks to recent preservation efforts, many of the natural and cultural resources of the SASS have been protected and some areas are open to the public. Approximately one third of Grindstone Island is in conservation. Protection of these unique areas will ensure the long-term presence of high scenic quality in the landscape.

A. Landscape Character

1. Variety

The Grindstone Island SASS contains a diversity of landscapes ranging from town and hamlet centers to the meadows and farm fields of Grindstone Island and to the wild shoreline of Eel Bay. The highly varied shoreline configurations of the SASS, especially on Grindstone Island, create a high degree of variety along the waterfront. The patchwork quilt of fields, meadows, marshes and mixed hardwood/deciduous forests on Grindstone Island is shaped by a wide variety of vegetation types and configurations. The geology of the SASS is also quite varied, ranging from bedrock hillocks on Grindstone to the limestone palsades in the southwestern corner of the SASS.

The Village of Clayton is a highly varied town center environment featuring attractive streets, a variety of stores and businesses, a major new hotel and pleasant residential areas. Public access to the waterfront is excellent, allowing residents and visitors the opportunity to experience varied views of and access to the river. The hamlet of Thousand Island Park has a great variety of historic Victorian architecture in carefully maintained condition. The layout of the hamlet creates a wide range of streetscapes and house locations focused on a central green or common. A number of historic estates are located in the SASS including a dramatic Gilded Era estate and tower on Calumet Island as well as historic homes on Round Island and the smaller islands that abound in the area.

Water bodies range from the open waters of the main shipping channel, to the many bays and coves created by the Shield bedrock, creating a diversity of water environments. A number of small streams on Grindstone Island create highly scenic valleys with extensive open marshlands at the mouths of the streams. The main shipping channel bisects the SASS and features a wide variety of ocean-going ships passing by in close proximity to the shorelines.

2. Unity

The SASS is a relatively unified landscape, thanks to its high state of natural preservation, its strong cultural landscape elements, the nearly constant presence of the river and the predominance of its geological features. Human alteration of the SASS has usually served to enhance, rather than detract from, the visual character of the landscape. The cultural landscapes of the SASS such as its farmland, farms and hamlets and historic estates create a unifying visual character. The historic structures, open pastures, meadows and meandering historic roads blend with or provide a pleasing contrast to the natural scenery of the SASS. The Village of Clayton and especially Thousand Island Park are well preserved and managed historic settlements in a good state of upkeep and historic preservation. Discordant features such as intensive residential development, boat storage warehouses and towers do not significantly detract from the overall visual unity of the SASS.

The relatively unified character of most portions of the visual landscape is enhanced by the fact that there are large tracts of conservation land on Grindstone Island and the Eel Bay shoreline. Farms in the upland areas create a highly unified landscape of fields, pastures and woodlots providing sweeping views of the river and Grindstone Island. The periodic, but reliable, passage of ocean-going ships along the Seaway creates an ephemeral unifying feature to the landscape.

The fact that water extends throughout most of the SASS provides a great deal of visual unity to the landscape. A wide variety of water features including the river, streams, marshland and embayments are woven together in a unified landscape of diverse water features. Views of unspoiled shorelines and islands extend the unifying presence of water into interior portions of the landscape as well. Given the important role of water in creating scenic quality, the prevalence of water within and around the SASS is a very strong unifying factor.

3. Contrast

The Grindstone Island SASS is replete with both natural and cultural landscape contrasts. The most dramatic natural contrast consists of the juxtaposition of the river, islands and bays of the highly indented shoreline. Contrasting vegetation on Grindstone Island, including expansive meadows bordered by dense forests, enhances the striking beautiful visual character of the island. The highly varied and indented shoreline of the island creates dramatic contrasts between the land and the sea.

The highly varied shoreline configuration of the SASS provides further contrasts. The irregular pattern of bays and peninsulas created by the hard Canadian Shield bedrock creates a contrast of water and landscape forms. Woodlands and marsh-
es stand out in contrast to the open farmland that extends in many areas down to the shoreline of the river. Bedrock plunging into the deep waters of the river creates a contrast between rock and water that is striking.

Cultural contrasts feature the juxtaposition of two densely populated villages with the extensive natural areas on Grindstone, the Eel Bay shoreline and many of the smaller islands. The edges of these settlements are quite distinct, heightening the sense of contrast between the villages and the surrounding natural areas. The contrast of large ships navigating through narrow rocky channels is surprising and unusual, a key visual symbol of the Thousand Islands.

4. Freedom From Discordant Features

Taken as a whole, the SASS is relatively free of discordant features. While commercial boating facilities and winter storage buildings in Clayton as well as dense recent development along the mainland shoreline are discordant, these features do not detract from the highly scenic character that typifies most of the SASS. Grindstone Island is a remarkably well preserved remnant of the farm and forest landscapes that once typified the Thousand Islands. Most of the smaller islands in the SASS are relatively sparsely developed with the exception of Round Island.

The historic features of the Village of Clayton are relatively well preserved and free of major discordant features with the exception of some commercial waterfront structures. Most of the major discordant features of the village are located outside of the SASS along Route 12. Thousand Island Park is highly historic and remarkably free of discordant features with the exception of some recent development along the shoreline to the east of the historic center.

The SASS is free of major discordant features such as wind turbines, transmission lines, major highways and commercial strips. Intense recreational boating activity in the warm months can cause intermittent discordant features as the waters become crowded with recreational craft. Portions of the mainland shoreline in the eastern portions of the SASS are heavily developed with summer cottages and year-round residences, most built in the past 60 years. These developments typically occurred on farmland that once extended down to the shoreline of the river. They rated very low in the image survey and are discordant features in the landscape. But other than these relatively minor elements, the SASS is relatively free of discordant features.

B. Uniqueness

The SASS is highly unique as one of the best known and most scenic sections of the Thousand Islands. Grindstone Island in particular is an exceptionally beautiful landscape with many of the traditional scenic elements which have been developed or abandoned in other areas. The complex pattern of fields and woodlands on rocky knolls is unique, as is its high state of preservation and stewardship. The four creeks with extensive marshes at their mouths are unusual for such a relatively small watershed. They are formed in large part by the bedrock geology of the island. The very complex shoreline configuration is unique in the Thousand Islands, creating a very long shoreline with high visual quality. Potters Beach is one of the few naturally occurring sand beaches in the Thousand Islands. An island of the considerable size of Grindstone with relatively little development and a traditional farm and forest landscape is unusual in the Thousand Islands and the New York coastline in general.

The Village of Clayton, and especially the hamlet of Thousand Island Park, are distinctive settlements with strong historic character and attractive village architecture, streets and public spaces. Thousand Island Park is a unique Victorian summer colony with outstanding architecture in a high state of upkeep and preservation. Sitting on a wooded bluff, the hamlet is surrounded by wooded conservation land, creating an unusual contrast between relatively dense development and extensive tracts of woodlands and undeveloped waterfronts.

The Village of Clayton is unique as an historic commercial and recreational center. While the town contains a few discordant features, its general level of historic character and preservation is unusual for a village of this size. Unusual landmarks such as the Wooden Boat Museum and the Opera House typify the unique character of the village.

High westerly winds have shaped the landscape and especially the vegetation in unique ways. Many of the trees have been stunted and blown into an easterly windswept position as a result of westerly winds, ice and sleet blowing off of Lake Ontario. This phenomenon is not unique in the Thousand Islands but it is widespread in the SASS.

C. Public Accessibility

Public Accessibility in the SASS is excellent due to roadways that parallel the coastline, a number of state and local parks as well as extensive tour boat and water taxi services available in Clayton. Grindstone Island, while a relatively
isolated and sparsely developed island, has a network of public roads and is accessible by boats and a public dock. Many tour boats that are based in Clayton take thousands of visitors around much of the SASS in the warm months, providing visual access to most of the SASS, including the network of smaller islands that surround Grindstone.

Route 12 along the mainland shoreline offers intermittent views of the river. A network of smaller roads extends down to the river from Route 12 including Farm Road, Shore Drive, Lyellton Drive and Kehoe Road. Streets in the Village of Clayton provide both visual and physical access to the shoreline, many terminating directly at the shoreline. Pedestrian access to the riverfront in Clayton is especially well planned, thanks to town and village leadership and the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. Boats for hire provide access to Grindstone Island and many of the smaller islands in the SASS. Thousand Islands Park is accessible by car along Thousand Island Park Road which connects with Interstate 81.

D. Public Recognition

The Village of Clayton is a major landmark and one of the best known scenic villages in the Thousand Islands. A major hub for water access to the river, Clayton is a well-recognized recreational and commercial center for the region. Many sightseeing boats are based in Clayton and are well known to residents of and visitors to the area. The village is featured in promotional brochures, post cards, web sites and calendars featuring the Thousand Islands. Thousand Island Park, while less well known than Clayton, is also a recognized landmark in the region. Its well preserved Victorian Architecture and attractive village green are well known landmarks in the region and beyond. Grindstone Island, while accessible to the public, is less well known in spite of the fact that it is an extremely beautiful and varied island with a unique natural and cultural landscape.

IV. Impact Assessment

Proposed actions within a SASS that are subject to coastal consistency review under federal and State coastal acts must be assessed to determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource and whether the action would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of the scenic resource. Some local government activities in communities with federally-approved Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs are also subject to local coastal consistency review.

Policy 24, "Prevent impairment of scenic resources of statewide significance," provides that when considering a proposed action, agencies shall first determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource of statewide significance. The determination would involve:

(1) a review of the coastal area map to ascertain if it shows an identified scenic resource which could be affected by the proposed action, and:

(2) a review of the types of activities proposed to determine if they would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of an identified resource.

Impairment includes:

(i) the irreversible modification of geologic forms; the destruction or removal of vegetation; the modification, destruction or removal of structures, whenever the geologic forms, vegetation or structures are significant to the scenic quality of an identified resource; and:

(ii) the addition of structures which because of siting or scale will reduce the scenic quality of an identified resource.

Policy 24 sets forth certain siting and facility-related guidelines to be used to achieve the policy, recognizing that each large scale development situation is unique and that the guidelines will have to be applied accordingly. The guidelines are set forth below, together with comments regarding their particular application to this Scenic Area of Statewide Significance. In applying these guidelines to agricultural land it must be recognized that the overall scenic quality of the SASS is reliant on an active and viable agricultural industry. This requires that farmers be allowed the flexibility to farm the land in an economically viable fashion, incorporating modern techniques, changes in farm operation and resultant changes in farm structures. Policy 24 guidelines include:

Siting large scale development such as highways, power lines, major subdivisions and billboards back from the shoreline or in other inconspicuous locations to maintain the attractive quality of the shoreline and to retain views to and from the shore;

Comment: The Grindstone Island SASS is a diverse visual landscape ranging from open fields to dense forests to the historic Village of Clayton to the steep bluffs of the mainland shoreline. Most areas of the SASS are very vulnerable to poorly sited and designed large scale development. Keeping future large scale development away from the shoreline will be critical in maintaining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of the St. Lawrence River. It is recommended that future development be clustered away from the shoreline and visually sensitive open fields and meadows. Grindstone Island and the smaller islands of the SASS are so unique and sensitive that large scale development should not be located on these fragile visual landscapes. The Village of Clayton and some of the developed portions of the mainland shoreline are more resilient to new development, but even these areas are vulnerable to poorly sited and designed large scale development.

Site plan review and open space development are valuable local land use tools that can achieve this goal. One example of a site plan review criterion is the preservation of shoreline vegetation to help new development blend in with its surroundings. Another example of a site plan review criterion is design guidelines to ensure that clustering and other siting techniques achieve scenic preservation goals. Future open space development clusters could be sited and designed to reflect the historic patterns of existing hamlets. Another technique for maintaining the visual character of the SASS is acquisition of vulnerable shoreline lands or conservation easements from willing landowners.

Probably the greatest threat to the future scenic character of the SASS is large scale industrial and infrastructure development within or near district boundaries. Large-scale projects, such as tall buildings, transmission lines, wind turbines, bridges, communications towers, should not be sited within the SASS district or within the district’s viewshed. Large scale industrial development should be sited well back from the bluffs tops and shoreline to greatly reduce the visual impacts. Modification of existing roadways, construction of new roadways, utility lines and other infrastructure often requires state or federal funding and permits and thus can come under the purview of this policy. Locating public infrastructure that scars sensitive coastal areas and facilitates inappropriate bluff top or shoreline development could greatly impair future scenic shoreline areas of the SASS.

Clustering or orienting new large scale structures to retain existing views, save open space and provide visual organization to a development;

Comment: The SASS is diverse, consisting of open water, wooded shorelines, islands, farm fields, meadows, an historic village, marshes, forests and old pastures. The Village of Clayton as well as hamlets, farmsteads, houses and traditional summer homes punctuate but do not dominate the landscape except in a few heavily developed locations. A definite boundary usually remains between developed and undeveloped areas of the SASS. If this edge becomes blurred as a result of sprawling large scale development, the visual character of the SASS could be damaged. Future large scale development should be clustered away from scenic resources, leaving most of the SASS in a more natural condition. The siting and design of new large scale development can be achieved with local land use tools such as site plan review, clustering and transfer of large scale development rights as described in the local implementation section of this document. Smaller scale residential development could be encouraged to locate within existing centers such as the Village of Clayton.

Views from public ways, water access sites, shorelines and waterways are especially sensitive and should be protected from new large scale development, utility
construction or signage whenever possible. Views from and of the bluffs, shorelines, islands and farmland should also be taken into consideration in locating new large scale development. Locating new large scale structures well back from bluff tops and shoreline areas will protect the beauty of the coastal landscape and, in the long run, will enhance property values in the area. Because of its uniqueness, sensitivity and very high scenic quality, large scale new developments such as wind turbines and tall towers should not be located on Grindstone Island.

**Incorporating sound existing structures (especially historic buildings) into the overall development pattern;**

Comment: Some of the historic structures in the SASS are currently conserved through public ownership and Historic District status. The village of Clayton contains many historic buildings that could be incorporated in small scale new development in existing centers. Future preservation of these homes, their grounds and their surrounding natural setting would help to preserve the visual character of the SASS. Radical alteration or demolition of these homes or the large scale development of their grounds that is inconsistent with the visual characteristics of the viewed could submit this beautiful area to the intensive shoreline development that has marred many other sections of the New York State coastline. Thus, it is recommended that individual owners and towns take these factors into account when renovating these historical and scenic resources and when planning for future development in the surrounding environment.

**Removing deteriorated and/or degrading elements;**

Comment: The SASS is relatively free of deteriorated or degrading visual elements. Few towers, very tall structures, derelict buildings or wide roads or parking lots detract from the scenic character of the landscape. Minor improvements to roads and parking lots would enhance the scenic character of the SASS. Signage and parking lots could be improved in certain areas. Overhead utilities could be buried to improve views and visual character. Some commercial and industrial structures in the Village of Clayton and the surrounding area could be rehabilitated or removed to improve the visual quality of the area.

Post-WWII development is the main degrading element in the SASS. Development along the shoreline represents one of the major impacts on the scenic character of the district. Planting vegetation for screening, fencing and other measures could help reduce the visual impacts of any large scale development. Old, deteriorating bulkheads piers along the shoreline reduce the scenic character of the area. These engineering structures can be evaluated to determine if replacement with vegetation or bioengineering techniques would be appropriate.

**Maintaining or restoring the original land form, except when changes screen unattractive elements and/or add appropriate interest;**

Comment: The unique landform of Grindstone and the smaller islands is relatively undisturbed and should be protected in future construction, infrastructure and large scale development projects. The landform of the Village of Clayton has been altered over the centuries into a more urban landscape. Landform is one of the underlying factors in the scenic quality of the area. The contrast in elevation and the juxtaposition of water and land, especially on Grindstone and the smaller islands contributes to the beauty of the SASS. Alteration of important landforms such as coastal bluffs, rock ledges, stone outcrops, marshes, and tributaries would detract from the scenic character of the area. Landform preservation is less of a concern in the Village of Clayton. There the use of berms to screen parking lots and unsightly large scale development is an acceptable modification of terrain if carefully designed to blend with the contour of the village landscape. Alteration of natural terrain for large scale development and roads is of special concern. Development should be located away from sensitive geological features such as bluffs, hilltops, ridgelines, islands, and other unique geological areas.

Maintaining or adding vegetation to provide interest, encourage the presence of wildlife, blend structures with the site, and obscure unattractive elements, except when selective clearing removes unsightly, diseased or hazardous vegetation and when selective clearing, mowing, controlled burning or grazing creates or maintains views of coastal waters;

Comment: The wooded shorelines, small islands and open fields and meadows of the Grindstone and the smaller islands are a vital component of the scenic character of the SASS. They should be safe guarded and maintained whenever possible through tilling, grazing of livestock, controlled burning or mowing. Keeping the fields and meadows open not only benefits the scenic character of the area, but also plays an important role in maintaining varied wildlife habitat and ecological diversity in the region. The current agricultural practice of recovering vacant land for the production of field crops not only benefits farmers economically, but it also enhances the visual attractiveness from the contrasting natural and agricultural landforms. Both scenic and environmental goals could be achieved by implementing a program to maintain open meadows and to reclaim some of the open grasslands recently lost to successional scrub and forest growth. Preservation of forests and woodlands on Grindstone and the smaller islands is also important. Preserving street trees and planting new trees and other vegetation in the Village of Clayton can provide shade, variety and natural beauty to the village landscape.

Views from vista points in the SASS are disappearing due to the unrestrained growth of successional vegetation. Maintaining open meadows and clearings in the vicinity of viewpoints along the highway will help maintain the scenic character of the parkway. Maintaining lawns, meadows and fields will also preserve both a scenic and an historic landscape resource. Future agricultural practices that recover abandoned, vacant land should be encouraged and supported.

The variety of vegetation and the consequent variety of texture and color in the SASS make a significant contribution to their scenic quality. A variety of vegetation, open fields and meadows and the dense forests of the interior all provide interest and contrast in the landscape. The wildlife supported by this vegetation also adds interest and ephemeral character to the land. Vegetation helps new structures blend into the predominantly natural landscape and plays a critical role in screening facilities and sites which would otherwise be discordant elements in the SASS.

**Using appropriate materials, in addition to vegetation, to screen unattractive elements;**

Comment: Grindstone and the smaller islands contain relatively few discordant elements. Some discordant features exist in the Village of Clayton and adjacent areas. Fencing or screening could be used to screen parking lots, low utility structures and buildings. Taller discordant features are too large to be effectively screened with fencing. Painting such tall towers in light sky tones might reduce their negative visual impact. It is recommended that new construction be encouraged to use appropriate historic or native building materials. New or renovated overhead utilities located in sensitive scenic areas could be located underground, when possible, to eliminate their negative visual impact on the landscape. The failure to blend new structures into the natural setting, both within the SASS boundaries and in the viewed of the SASS would impair the scenic quality of the area.

**Using appropriate scales, forms and materials to ensure that buildings and other structures are compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape;**

Comment: Most structures located on Grindstone and the smaller islands are generally compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape because they are of a scale, design and material compatible with the historic landscape. Many of the structures are historic in nature. Construction of new buildings incompatible with the cultural character of the SASS as represented in historic structures could impair the scenic character of the area. Many of the older structures use native materials such as wood clapboards, shingles or stone construction. Most have pitched roofs, traditional fenestration and are sited unobtrusively on the land, avoiding hilltops, bluff edges and other prominent locations.

The scale of structures in the Village of Clayton is larger and more compact than buildings in the rural sections of the SASS. Though some of the shorefront buildings are large, their apparent mass has been reduced by designing the structures as a series of smaller, attached architectural volumes. This rambling, attached approach to residential design is typical of traditional Thousand Island architecture and is a major factor in reducing the visual impact of large, “mega-home” structures. Combined with sensitive site planning and design, the rambling, attached
Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights that cast direct light outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction. Pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded shielding will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the warm tones of sources such as energy efficient, shielded LED lighting for large scale developments in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or color-balanced light lighting is often possible without compromising safety or functionality and results greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes by removing the bright glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created by shielded fixtures also shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is provided without creating block views of the night sky, blind motorists and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on large scale developments to be present on techniques to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures because they are so tall, massive and frequently in motion. Using shielded lighting fixtures at appropriate levels of illumination to preserve the Thousand Islands’ nighttime visual character.

The Thousand Island's dark, unspoiled night sky with views of stars, the sea and wooded hills is a priceless visual resource. Due to its relatively low density of development, the SASS generally enjoys dark nighttime skies that could be affected by poorly designed new large scale development. Some glare and light pollution exists in the Village of Clayton and surrounding developed shorelines. Light pollution from excessively bright, exposed lighting fixtures can block views of the night sky, blind motorists and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on large scale developments to be shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is provided without creating glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created by shielded fixtures also greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes by removing the bright harshness of many exterior light fixtures. Reducing the wattage of exterior lights is often possible without compromising safety or functionality and results in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or color-balanced light sources such as energy efficient, shielded LED lighting for large scale development will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the warm tones of incandescent bulbs while providing the efficiency of high intensity discharge or metal halide light sources.

It is recommended that existing village-owned lights, such as street lights or lights at public buildings and facilities, be gradually retrofitted to reduce glare and light pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction. Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights that cast direct light onto neighboring properties or on the water. Large scale commercial facilities should avoid unshielded spotlights to illuminate parking lots, storage facilities or outdoor areas. Adding a simple metal shield to an existing spotlight can greatly reduce light pollution and glare. Often a series of lower, shielded lights can replace a single glaring spotlight. The greater expense for large scale developments is offset by the creation of a superior nighttime environment.

4. French Creek Scenic Area of Statewide Significance

I. Location

The French Creek Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) is named for a major tributary stream extending from its source approximately a half mile east of St. Lawrence Road in the Town of Clayton to its outlet at French Creek Bay in the Village of Clayton. The stream flows from southwest to northeast. The SASS consists of the creek itself, extensive bordering marshlands and shorelines consisting of a patchwork of dense forests, open meadows and farm fields. The SASS is approximately one mile wide and four miles long.

The borders of the SASS are shown on the SASS maps located in the appendices of this report. Starting at French Creek Bay at the creek’s mouth in Clayton, its northerly border is formed by Route 12 and Crystal Springs Road. Its southwestern border follows the upstream tributaries of the creek about one half mile east of St. Lawrence Road. The SASS’s southeastern border parallels French Creek Road for approximately 2,000 feet and then follows the top of a steep escarpment along Commode Road which it follows for approximately 2,000 feet. It then resumes its northeasterly course along fence lines paralleling Deferno Road for approximately 3.5 miles. The SASS boundary then merges with Deferno Road which it follows for approximately two miles at which point it heads north around the east side of Barrett Creek, ending at the point of beginning at French Creek Bay. Several roads traverse the SASS including French Creek Road and Bevins Road.

Consult the Area 2 Ratings map for detailed delineations of the SASS boundaries. The French Creek SASS is located on the St. Lawrence and Clayton 7.5 minute US Geological Survey maps.

II. Description

The SASS is comprised of subunit #74. Its upper reaches consist of several small brooks meandering through steep, densely wooded ravines cut by the brook into the soft underlying limestone bedrock. The middle section of the creek consists of a gently meandering stream running through extensive marshland. The banks of the stream in this middle section consist of gently rolling pastureland and farm fields interspersed with woodlands. The lower section of the creek meanders through narrow marshlands and steep wooded limestone bluffs.

The French Creek SASS consists of the valley of French Creek. The SASS consists of a the meandering waters of the creek, extensive marshlands, dense forests and meadows and farm fields extending down to the edge of the creek and its marshes. A pronounced, steep limestone escarpment approximately 120 feet in height forms the southeastern edge of the river valley. The escarpment provides a distinct visual boundary to the valley of the creek.

The valley of French Creek is primarily a sparsely developed natural environment influenced by cultural factors such as the meadows and farm fields that line portions of the creek and marshlands. Natural features include a wide variety of vegetation types including open marshlands, shrub swamps, early and late successional forests and meadows. The northern forest consists of a mix of eastern white pine, spruce and deciduous species such as red oak, white oak, green ash, hickory, red maple and sugar maple. Eastern white pines line many sections of the stream banks creating a striking visual effect along the water. These tall pines also serve as nesting habitat for ospreys, eagles and kingfishers that feed on fish from the creek.

The French Creek Marsh Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat is one of the four largest, undeveloped, coastal streamside wetlands on the St. Lawrence River, rare in this ecological subzone. The combination of open water, wetland vegetation, and uplands provides habitat for many fish and wildlife species. The marsh supports nesting areas for northern harrier and least bittern, feeding areas for common tern, and Blandings turtle habitat. The extensive beds of wetland vegetation support one of the most productive fisheries on the St. Lawrence River, including northern pike and pan fish.

Cultural features consist primarily of the active and abandoned farmland that lines many portions of the creek. The area has been farmed for centuries and this human activity has strongly influenced the banks of the river and the surrounding valley. Farm features include hayfields, pasture and cultivated fields. Zenda Farm, a property managed by the Thousand Islands Land Trust (TILT) is located in the northern portions of the SASS.

Considerable portions of early and late successional forest were once farm fields that have been abandoned and allowed to revert to forest. A small number of structures are located in the SASS along Route 12E. They consist primarily of post war suburban residences. Several older farm houses including Zenda Farm buildings are located along Crystal Springs Road. These structures are a very minor visual component of the SASS.
III. Aesthetic Significance

The French Creek SASS is of statewide aesthetic significance by virtue of its exceptional landscape character, cultural landscape character, state of preservation, environmental quality, uniqueness, public accessibility and public recognition. It is one of the most scenic tributaries of the St. Lawrence River. The SASS is almost entirely free of development. The natural features of the river valley are complemented with extensive man-made fields, meadows and pastures, creating a highly scenic pastoral setting. The linear layout of the fields and hedgerows accentuates the natural patterns of the creek. The gently rolling terrain of the SASS is framed by a steep hill on the north and an abrupt escarpment on the south, creating a spacious but enclosed valley with dramatic backdrops of steep terrain. The underlying limestone bedrock creates a gentle landscape.

The SASS is aesthetically significant because of its blend of open and forested landscapes, its gently rolling terrain, the steep hills and escarpments that frame it and its pastoral character. The mix of open landscapes such as meadows and fields as well as dense forests creates a high degree of visual variety. Many highly scenic views are created by the open character of the land punctuated with woodlands. The open portions of the landscape are quite varied, creating many scenic views out over the creek, the marshes and the farm fields. The variety of open and densely forested landscapes creates many opportunities for well composed views over a wide array of landscapes. The fact that the creek is bordered by open marshland creates long vistas up and down the stream framed by evergreen and specimen deciduous trees.

The SASS is rich in wildlife habitat which adds ephemeral interest and activity, enhancing the scenic quality of the landscape. Raptors, waterfowl and amphibians frequent the creek and are especially active during dawn and dusk. Cattle from nearby farms periodically graze in the meadows lining the creek's marshes, creating the pastoral character that typifies the SASS. Small curvilinear ponds dot the marshland, adding to the visual variety and composition of the visual environment. Thanks to past land conservation and preservation efforts, most of the natural and cultural resources of the SASS have been protected and some areas are open to the public. Approximately 90% of land along French Creek is in conservation. Conservation of this unique watershed will ensure the long-term presence of high environmental quality, uniqueness, public accessibility and public recognition. It assures continuing preservation of the landscape, enhancing its visual unity.

The French Creek SASS has exceptional natural and cultivated landscape variety. Existing and former agricultural activity in the valley have created a wide range of farmland types ranging from large, rectilinear hay fields to smaller riverside pastures to successional vegetation growing in abandoned farmland. Distinct hedgerows frame many of the fields adding geometric variety to the landscape. Farm animals and farming activity add ephemeral variety to the landscape. Several small farm houses and outbuildings add a degree of cultural variety to the landscape. The SASS's network of small roads extends into and through the landscape, creating additional cultural interest and variety.

The natural features of the landscape are extremely varied. While all of the valley is underlain by limestone, the formations of limestone are varied, ranging from gently rolling terrain in the valley and steep escarpments and hills framing the edges of the SASS. The river meanders throughout its length, creating constantly changing visual environments and views. Oxbow meanders cut into the marshland have created numerous curvilinear oxbow ponds which add variety to the extensive marshes lining either side of the river. The edges of the marshes have an extremely varied configuration created by numerous inlets, coves and peninsulas. The vegetation of the SASS is also highly varied, greatly enhancing its visual quality. The wide variety of vegetation types, heights, and densities consists of mature stands of Eastern White Pine, to mixed deciduous/evergreen northern forestland to successional fields, marshes and farmland. Natural ephemeral features such as ospreys, eagles and waterfowl add varied activity to the landscape.

2. Unity

The SASS is a highly unified landscape, thanks to its high state of natural preservation, its geological features, its vegetation and its agricultural land use. It is a visually self contained area: a small river valley framed by limestone bluffs and hills. Human alteration of the SASS has served to enhance, rather than detract from the visual character of the landscape. The cultural landscapes of the SASS, principally its farmland and farmsteads, create a unifying visual character. The relatively unified character of most portions of the visual landscape is enhanced by the fact that large tracts of conservation land on French Creek have been preserved. Virtually the entire SASS consists of conservation land which assures continuing preservation of the landscape, enhancing its visual unity. Farms in the upland areas create a highly unified landscape of fields, pastures and woodlots providing sweeping views of French Creek. The lack of development and the interplay of the meandering river, the marshlands and the upland mo-
saic of dense woodlands and open meadows and pastures create a highly unified landscape. The fact that water extends throughout most of the SASS provides a great deal of visual unity to the landscape. A wide variety of water features including the river, streams, marshland and embayments are woven together in a unified landscape of diverse water features. Views of unspoiled shorelines and islands extend the unifying presence of water into interior portions of the landscape as well. Given the important role of water in creating scenic quality, the prevalence of water within and around the SASS is a very strong unifying factor.

3. Contrast

The French Creek SASS contains extensive natural and cultural visual contrasts. The dark waters of the creek contrast dramatically with the light marsh grasses surrounding the water. This is a contrast of both color and texture in the landscape. The meandering form of the creek also enhances visual contrast. The dark pine trees lining the banks of the river and marshes create a strong contrast of visual tones. And the alternating patterns of dense woodlands and open fields create contrasting forms and light character in the landscape. The edges and shoreline of the creek and its many dendritic tributaries and oxbow ponds enhances contrasts within the SASS. The varying widths of the creek ranging from narrow stream to wider embayments also create contrast in the water landscape.

Cultural contrast consists primarily of the open farm fields and hedgerows that are interspersed with forest lands throughout the SASS. A significant aspect of the SASS’s visual quality is the fact that much of the land is open, allowing distant views out over the creek and the surrounding landscape. Part of this openness is due to the presence of many small fields, pastures and meadows leading up to the edge of the creek and its marshes. The irregular pattern of the fields creates contrasts as it abuts the adjacent forest land. The linear borders of the fields and hedgerows in certain areas also create a contrast between the linear geometry of the fields and the irregular geometry of the creek and the surrounding woodlands.

4. Freedom From Discordant Features

The SASS is relatively free of discordant features and is almost entirely preserved in conservation. The few discordant features consist of recent residential and commercial boating facilities at the mouth of the creek next to the Village of Clayton. The residential and commercial development occurs on the south side of Route 12E for approximately one mile west of the Village of Clayton. The development includes suburban houses, docks and commercial boating storage houses extending down to the creek’s shoreline. Another discordant feature consists of the algae blooms that occur in the creek in the warm months, covering much of the water with a green film. Other than the Route 12E development the SASS is almost entirely free of discordant features such as wind turbines, transmission lines, major highways and commercial strips. A quarry is located on a hill just north of Fish Pond Road but is not highly visible from most parts of the SASS. The creek, marshlands, meadows and forests of the SASS create an unbroken, unspoiled landscape. Human activity along French Creek has actually enhanced the visual quality of the landscape through farming practices that create fields, hedgerows, meadows and pastures that intermingle with the woodlands that line the banks of the stream.

B. Uniqueness

The unique beauty of French Creek makes it one of the most scenic tributaries of the St. Lawrence River. The mosaic of meadows and forests, the near total lack of development, the enclosed character of the valley and the meandering configuration of the creek and its oxbow ponds creates an unusually serene visual setting. The French Creek valley is a pastoral landscape blending grazing animals with open farm fields and dense mixed woodlands. In many cases the fields and meadows extend down to the edge of the creek and marshes, creating a unique visual blending of land and water. The range of successional vegetation is also unusual. Existing and abandoned farmland ranges from hay fields to pasture to meadows. Various stages of succession typify the wooded landscapes of the SASS, ranging from areas of shrubs to saplings to more mature second growth forests. The successional vegetation follows the patchwork pattern of the former farm fields. Hedgerows accentuate this geometric pattern in the landscape.

The geology of the SASS is unusual. A steep limestone bluff forms the southern edge of the SASS, transitioning to the rolling bottomlands of the stream valley. To the north, Hogback Hill is a heavily wooded glacial sand and gravel deposit that encloses the valley. These very different, contrasting landforms and geological features are in unusual proximity creating contrasting enclosures to the stream valley.

The fact that almost all of the SASS is in conservation is also unique. Zenda Farm and other conservation holdings ensure that the SASS will be well protected from development. The public access and conservation education provided by TILT at Zenda Farm is also unusual.

C. Public Accessibility

The SASS has excellent public accessibility both from a visual and a physical standpoint. Zenda Farm is visible from Route 12E and Fish Pond Road. The farm is accessible to the general public for hiking, nature study and educational activities organized by TILT. A number of smaller roads such as French Creek Road and Bevins road provide extensive views of French Creek and surround farm and forest land, especially at their crossings of the creek. The bridge crossing French Creek in the Village of Clayton provides views of the mouth of the creek. Because of the open nature of much of the SASS, large portions of French Creek are visible from adjacent roads. Hayfields, pastures and meadows provide visual access into the center of the SASS and to the water and marshlands of the creek. Path systems at Zenda farm allow visitors to walk through the scenic landscapes of the river valley.

D. Public Recognition

French Creek is not a well known Thousand Islands landmark but is recognized by local residents and naturalists as a uniquely beautiful and ecologically rich environment. Zenda Farm in particular is a popular gateway to the beauty of French Creek. The educational activities sponsored by TILT have increased the public’s recognition and understanding of the SASS. French Creek is also well known for the diversity of its wildlife habitats known for birding, environmental education, fishing and hunting. Scenic vistas of the SASS from Bevins Road and French Creek Road are well known to visitors and residents of the region.

IV. Impact Assessment

Proposed actions within a SASS that are subject to coastal consistency review under federal and State coastal acts must be assessed to determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource and whether the action would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of the scenic resource. Some local government activities in communities with federally approved Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs are also subject to local coastal consistency review.

Policy 24, “Prevent impairment of scenic resources of statewide significance,” provides that when considering a proposed action, agencies shall first determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource of statewide significance. The determination would involve:

1. a review of the coastal area map to ascertain if it shows an identified scenic resource which could be affected by the proposed action, and:

2. a review of the types of activities proposed to determine if they would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of an identified resource.

Impairment includes:

1. the irreversible modification of geologic forms; the destruction or removal of vegetation; the modification, destruction or removal of structures, whenever the geologic forms, vegetation or structures are significant to the scenic
quality of an identified resource; and:

(ii) the addition of structures which because of siting or scale will reduce identified views or which because of scale, form, or materials will diminish the scenic quality of an identified resource.

Policy 24 sets forth certain siting and facility-related guidelines to be used to achieve the policy, recognizing that each large scale development situation is unique and that the guidelines will have to be applied accordingly. The guidelines are set forth below, together with comments regarding their particular applicability to this Scenic Area of Statewide Significance. In applying these guidelines to agricultural land it must be recognized that the overall scenic quality of the landscape is reliant on an active and viable agricultural industry. This requires that farmers be allowed the flexibility to farm the land in an economically viable fashion, incorporating modern techniques, changes in farm operation and resultant changes in farm structures. Policy 24 guidelines include:

Siting large scale development such as highways, power lines, major subdivisions and billboards back from the shoreline or in other inconspicuous locations to maintain the attractive quality of the shoreline and to retain views to and from the shore;

Comment: The French Creek SASS is so undeveloped, environmentally diverse and scenic that large scale development would be inappropriate in the area. Since most of the SASS is protected in conservation, future large scale development of the few unprotected portions of the SASS would be inappropriate. One of the most unique features of the SASS is the abundance of undeveloped or sparsely developed shorelines. Keeping future small scale development away from the shoreline will be critical in maintaining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of the St. Lawrence River.

It is recommended that future development on the few remaining unprotected portions of the SASS be clustered away from the shoreline and visually sensitive open fields and meadows. Site plan review and open space development are valuable local land use tools that can achieve this goal. One example of a site plan review criterion is the preservation of shoreline vegetation to help new development blend from the contrasting natural and agricultural landforms. Both scenic and environmental goals could be achieved by implementing a program to maintain varied wildlife habitat and ecological diversity in the region. The current agricultural practice of recovering vacant land for the production of field crops creates or maintains views of coastal waters;

Incorporating or orienting new large scale structures to retain existing views, save open space and provide visual organization to a development;

Comment: The majority of the SASS consists of open water, marshlands, farmland fields, meadows, forests and old pastures. Future large scale development is inappropriate in this SASS. Small scale development on the few unprotected parcels should be clustered away from scenic resources, leaving most of the SASS in a more natural condition. The siting and design of new large scale development can be achieved with local land use tools such as site plan review, clustering and transfer of large scale development rights as described in the local implementation section of this document.

Views from public ways, water access sites, shorelines and waterways are especially sensitive and should be protected from new large scale development, utility construction or signage whenever possible. Views from and of the bluffs, shorelines, islands and farmland should also be taken into consideration in locating new large scale development. Locating new large scale structures well back from bluff tops and shoreline areas will protect the beauty of the coastal landscape and, in the long run, will enhance property values in the area.

Incorporating existing structures (especially historic buildings) into the overall development pattern;

Comment: Very few structures or homes exist within this largely undeveloped SASS. A few residences, some of them historic are located along roadways that traverse the SASS. The historic Zenda Farm buildings are unique and complement the natural beauty of the SASS. These buildings are preserved by the Thousand Islands Land Trust. The structures on the few remaining undeveloped portions of the SASS should be incorporated into any future small scale development patterns.

Removing deteriorated and/or degrading elements;

Comment: The SASS is relatively free of deteriorated or degrading visual elements. No towers, very tall structures, derelict buildings or wide roads or parking lots detract from the scenic character of the landscape. Minor improvements to roads and parking lots would enhance the scenic character of the SASS. Overhead utilities could be buried to improved views and visual character.

A handful of recent residential structures are the main discordant element in the SASS. Planting vegetation for screening, fencing and other measures could help reduce the visual impacts of any future development.

Maintaining or restoring the original land form, except when changes screen unattractive elements and/or add appropriate interest;

Comment: The unique character of the SASS is relatively undisturbed and should be protected in future construction, infrastructure and large scale development projects. The landform of the SASS is largely in an undisturbed state and is one of the underlying factors in the scenic quality of the area. The contrast in elevation and the juxtaposition of water and land contributes to the beauty of the SASS. Alteration of important landforms such as cliffs, rock ledges, stone outcrops, marshes, and tributaries would detract from the scenic character of the area. Use of berms to screen parking lots and unsightly development is an acceptable modification of terrain if carefully designed to blend with the natural contour of the land. Alteration of natural terrain for large scale development and roads is of special concern. Development should be located away from sensitive geological features such as cliffs, hilltops, ridgelines, islands, and other unique geological areas.

Maintaining or adding vegetation to provide interest, encourage the presence of wildlife, blend structures with the site, and obscure unattractive elements, except when selective clearing removes unsightly, diseased or hazardous vegetation and when selective clearing, mowing, controlled burning or grazing creates or maintains views of coastal waters;

Comment: The wooded shorelines, small islands and open fields and meadows of the SASS are a vital component of its scenic character. They should be safe guarded and maintained whenever possible through tilling, grazing of livestock, controlled burning or mowing. Keeping the fields and meadows open not only benefits the scenic character of the area, but also plays an important role in maintaining varied wildlife habitat and ecological diversity in the region. The current agricultural practice of recovering vacant land for the production of field crops not only benefits farmers economically, but it also enhances the visual attractiveness from the contrasting natural and agricultural landforms. Both scenic and environmental goals could be achieved by implementing a program to maintain open meadows and to reclaim some of the open grasslands recently lost to successional scrub and forest growth.
Views from vista points in the SASS are disappearing due to the unrestrained growth of successional vegetation. Maintaining open meadows and clearings in the vicinity of viewpoints along the highway will help maintain the scenic character of the parkway. Maintaining lawns, meadows and fields will also preserve both a scenic and an historic landscape resource. Future agricultural practices that recover abandoned, vacant land should be encouraged and supported.

The variety of vegetation and the consequent variety of texture and color in the SASS make a significant contribution to their scenic quality. A variety of vegetation, open fields and meadows and the dense forests of the interior all provide interest and contrast in the landscape. The wildlife supported by this vegetation also adds interest and ephemeral character to the land. Vegetation helps new structures blend into the predominantly natural landscape and plays a critical role in screening facilities and sites which would otherwise be discordant elements in the SASS.

Using appropriate materials, in addition to vegetation, to screen unattractive elements; Comment: The SASS contains relatively few discordant elements. Fencing or screening could be used to screen parking lots, and newer structures. It is recommended that new construction be encouraged to use appropriate historic or native building materials. New or renovated overhead utilities located in sensitive scenic areas could be located underground, when possible, to eliminate their negative visual impact on the landscape. The failure to blend new structures into the natural setting, both within the SASS boundaries and in the viewshed of the SASS would impair the scenic quality of the areas.

Using appropriate scales, forms and materials to ensure that buildings and other structures are compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape; Comment: Most structures located in the SASS are generally compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape because they are of a scale, design and material compatible with the historic landscape. Some of the structures are historic in nature. Construction of new buildings incompatible with the cultural character of the SASS as represented in historic structures may impair the scenic character of the area. Many of the older structures use native materials such as wood clapboards, shingles or stone construction. Most have pitched roofs, traditional fenestration and are sited unobtrusively on the land, avoiding hilltops, bluff edges and other prominent locations. Though many of the shorefront developments are large, their apparent mass has been reduced by designing the structures as a series of smaller, attached architectural volumes. This rambling, attached approach to residential design is typical of traditional Thousand Island architecture and is a major factor in reducing the visual impact of large, “mega-home” structures. Combined with sensitive site planning and design, the rambling, attached structures minimize obstruction of waterfront views from public roadways.

Locating very tall structures to avoid impacting scenic areas and views from scenic and historic coastal sites; Comment: Very tall structures such as wind turbines and exhaust stacks will have major impacts on the scenic character of coastal landscapes. Over 600 Thousand Islands residents participated in the web-based visual preference survey in the summer of 2014. The survey results showed that wind turbine complexes on the Canadian side of the river have significant negative visual impacts on the region. Turbine images ranked among the least scenic images in the survey.

Consequently, massive industrial and infrastructure projects should not be built within the SASS district or within its surrounding viewshed. There are presently no techniques to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures because they are so tall, massive and frequently in motion.

Using shielded lighting fixtures at appropriate levels of illumination to preserve the Thousand Islands’ nighttime visual character; Comment: The Thousand Island’s dark, unpopulated night sky with views of stars, the sea and wooded hills is a priceless visual resource. Due to its relatively low density of development, the region enjoys dark nighttime skies that could be affected by poorly designed new large scale development. Light pollution from excessively bright, exposed lighting fixtures can block views of the night sky; blind motorists and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on large scale developments to be shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is provided without creating glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created by shielded fixtures also greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes by removing the bright harshness of many exterior light fixtures. Reducing the wattage of exterior lights is often possible without compromising safety or functionality and results in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or color-balanced light sources such as energy efficient, shielded LED lighting for large scale development will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the warm tones of incandescent bulbs while providing the efficiency of high intensity discharge or metal halide light sources. It is recommended that existing town-owned lights, such as street lights or lights at public buildings and facilities, be gradually retrofitted to reduce glare and light pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction. Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights that cast direct light onto neighboring properties or on the water. Large scale commercial facilities should avoid unshielded spotlights to illuminate parking lots, storage facilities or outdoor areas. Adding a simple metal shield to an existing spotlight can greatly reduce light pollution and glare. Often a series of lower, shielded lights can replace a single glaring spotlight. The greater expense for large scale developments is offset by the creation of a superior nighttime environment.

5. Wellesley Island Scenic Area of Statewide Significance

I. Location

The Wellesley Island Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) is an area at the heart of the Thousand Islands Scenic Area. It consists of the interior of Wellesley Island, the elliptical bay known as Lake of the Isles and its tributaries, the steep, narrow river channel under the I-81 bridge, the small islands on the north side of Wellesley Island, and the parkway-like stretch of interstate 81 from the Thousand Islands Bridge to the U.S./Canadian Border. The SASS is approximately 7 miles east to west and 3 miles north to south. The northern boundary of the SASS is the U.S./Canadian border from Grandview Park through the area known as the International Rift to Westminster Park. The western, southern, and eastern boundary of the SASS is a line located approximately ½ to ¾ mile inland from the shoreline of Wellesley Island, representing the viewshed of the St. Lawrence River in this area. The SASS exists within the Town of Orleans and the Town of Alexandria Bay.

Consult the Area 2 and 3 Ratings maps for detailed SASS boundaries. The Wellesley Island SASS is located on the Alexandria Bay and Thousand Island Park 7.5 minute US Geological Survey maps.

II. Description

The SASS is comprised of subunits #38, 39, 40, 41, 107, and 109. The most notable features of the Wellesley Island SASS are Lake of the Isles and the International Rift waterfront, as well as the park and farm land at the core of Wellesley Island. The natural features of the SASS include the St. Lawrence River, the highly indented shoreline of the northern end of Wellesley Island and Lake of the Isles, the woodlands and meadows in central portions of the island, and the small islands on the northern shore of Wellesley Island. The geography, lake and river features, terrain, land use, upkeep, and vegetation of the SASS all contribute to the uniqueness and character of the landscape.

The Wellesley Island shoreline mirrors Grassendale Island’s rocky, indented shoreline featuring bays, headlands, shoreline marshes and exposed hillocks of Canadian Shield bedrock. The majority of the northern Wellesley Island shoreline is forested and features some of the tallest, steepest bedrock outcrops in the Thou-
sand Islands, reaching approximately 90' vertical in some locations. The rocky Wellesley Island shoreline is punctuated by windswept sentinel pines, creating ideal habitat for Ospreys, Eagles and other raptors. The steep, rocky relief of the northern shoreline of Wellesley Island and Hill Island funnels the St. Lawrence into the steep, fjord-like International Rift—a narrow channel in the vicinity of the U.S. and Canadian border in this area.

The interior of Wellesley Island consists of large open meadows and fields surrounded by steep, wooded hills. The island is bisected by Interstate 81, which has been carefully sited and maintained so that it possesses some of the elegance of a scenic parkway as it crosses the island. I-81 affords views of the island interior, highway outcrops, and Lake of the Isles. North and west of I-81, the landscape is primarily protected park land. This includes Wellesley Island State Park and Golf Course. Wellesley Island State Park manages several historic barns that were once part of the Bradley Estate.

South and east of I-81, land uses also include low-density exurban development and the golf courses and marina structures associated with the Islands Country Club. Boldt or Back Farm, on the eastern side of Wellesley Island, is one of the more prominent protected historic farms in the Thousand Islands region.

Lake of the Isles manages to remain a relatively tranquil water body, despite its proximity to a major international border crossing and highway. The shoreline has been lightly developed closer to I-81. On the south shore, a small marsh-fringed creek flowing into Lake of the Isles creates a visual focal point and an important habitat in the SASS.

Lake of the Isles is a designated Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat, one of the largest shallow bay and wetland ecosystems in the St. Lawrence River ecological zone. The sheltered, protected environment supports a significant concentration of many fish and wildlife species due to the limited connection to the St. Lawrence River. The extensive wetlands and undisturbed shorelines support Blandings turtles and are productive feeding and nesting grounds for waterfowl and marsh birds. The extensive, sheltered, aquatic vegetation supports many warm water fish species and is one of five major spring habitat areas for diving ducks.

III. Aesthetic Significance

The Wellesley Island SASS is of statewide significance by virtue of its exceptional landscape character, uniqueness, state of preservation and upkeep, public accessibility and public recognition.

The landform and vegetation of the SASS are among the most remarkable in the Thousand Islands Scenic area in variety and scale, with 60-90' Canadian Shield bluffs in some place straddled by even taller windswept pines and hardwoods. This muscular landscape gives way to a more subtle collage of marsh-fringed creeks and gracefully sloping shorelines within the Lake of the Isles.

The narrow channel of the International Rift west of Interstate 81 is one of the most distinctive passages on the St. Lawrence River, and likely also represents one of the more unusual, and beautiful, national borders. The narrow, steep valley is in places less than 10' shore to shore. The shadowy, intimate space of the channel is made all the more unusual by its depth and strong current—evidence of the immensity and power of the St. Lawrence as it makes its way through this small and geopolitically significant space.

In addition to the unique geographic context on the U.S./Canadian border, the Wellesley Island SASS also benefits from land uses that have preserved many acres of mature forest land, open meadows, and historic farm land. This is particularly true north and west of Interstate 81, which features the carefully designed and maintained landscapes of Grandview and Waterson Point Park. The Hill Island shoreline of Lake of the Isles is also protected from development as part of St. Lawrence Islands National Park.
Thousand Islands Scenic Resources Protection Plan

Culturally, the area is as notable for its large area of protected and curated wilderness uses as it is for its historic structures.

Landform and shoreline are distinctively varied throughout the area. Steep, 40-90’ bluffs delineate the highly indented northern edge of Wellesley Island and the small, rocky islands along its shoreline. These bluffs funnel the St. Lawrence into a dramatic gorge north of Route 81 on the Canadian border. The interior of the island features 10-40’ hills with rock outcrops, interspersed with low-lying marsh and meadows. Throughout, the form of the landscape is markedly shaped by the Canadian Shield igneous and metamorphic lithology prevalent here, as with other areas in the central area of the Thousand Islands Scenic Area.

Vegetation is also highly varied. In the northern and western sections of the island, mature mixed deciduous and evergreen forests border open meadows and agricultural fields. On the small islands along the northern shore, windwept pines predominate. East and south of Interstate 81, around the edge of Lake of the Isles, marsh grasses line several small winding creeks and soften the lines of protruding Canadian Shield bedrock. The Country Club and exurban development in the far eastern portion of Wellesley Island includes professionally designed and maintained golf-course lawns and specimen trees.

The landscape also includes structures and sites with a variety of important cultural and symbolic meaning. The neo-gothic architecture of Densmore Church is the physical expression of the Gilded Age architectural milieu that produced the region’s iconic Boldt and Singer Castles to the east, and less known Wyckoff Villa on Carleton Island to the west. Thousand Islands Country Club is also symbolically connected to the culture of leisure-class recreation that created many of the region’s iconic structures and landscapes, and that persists as a critical part of the Thousand Island’s tourist economy today.

Other culturally significant sites include the carefully managed wilderness areas in Grandview, Waterson Point, and Wellesley Island State Park. These areas preserve the landscape that predated Gilded Age and even European settlement and development of the region. They also provide important recreational opportunities for summer and year-round residents of the Thousand Islands.

2. Unity

The Wellesley Island SASS is also unified by some cultural and physical continuities within the visual landscape.

As with other areas in the Thousand Islands Scenic Area, the major unifying feature of the SASS is the St. Lawrence River. From larger hills and bluffs within the island’s interior and park land, screened to full views of the sweeping St. Lawrence are possible. In the more intimate waterways of the Intercontinental Rift and the Lake of the Isles, the ever-present current and the glint of open water between islands provide cues linking these spaces to the broad sweep of a mighty river.

The Canadian Shield geology throughout the Wellesley Island SASS gives a sense of continuity between the dramatic bluffs to the north of the island and the more subtle shoreline outcrops in the island’s interior and Lake of the Isles. The patchwork of mixed deciduous and evergreen forest links the protected northern and western island landscape to areas that are more developed to the east.

Several large and continuous land uses add continuity to the SASS. To the west, Wellesley Island State Park, one of the largest state parks in the region, provides a continuous approach and level of maintenance to the landscapes of the island. The Interstate 81 corridor also unifies the island’s landscape in terms of visual access. This important public artery provides access by car to many of the culturally and physically distinctive landscapes of the island.

3. Contrast

The Wellesley Island SASS is replete with landscape features that inject contrast—textures, colors, and forms into the visual landscape.

First and foremost, the varied boundary of water and land on the northern edge of the island and in the Lake of the Isles provides dramatic juxtapositions of light and shadow, texture, and even temperature. Many well-known scenic areas on Wellesley Island are made memorable, in part, from the drama of emerging from the shady wooded landscape of Grandview Park or Waterson State Park to encounter the brilliant reflection of a blue sky on the St. Lawrence far below your feet.

The Canadian Shield igneous and metamorphic rocks protruding through the forest, marshland, and meadows of Wellesley Island also inject sharp contrasts of color and form into the landscape. The smooth, solid mass and gray color of the Canadian Shield bedrock strikingly contrasts with the fine texture and light yellow color of the marsh vegetation on the edge of Lake of the Isles.

In this SASS where much of the landscape is preserved or protected as park land, architectural forms also tend to provide a stronger contrast against their context. Whether historic neo-gothic structures like Densmore Church, or more modest and newer exurban development on the edge of Lake of the Isles, the surrounding woodland and meadows tend to frame the few structures in this SASS as figures and focal points in the landscape.

4. Freedom From Discordant Features

Overall, the Wellesley Island SASS benefits from a visual landscape with few dis-
The landscape of Interstate 81 is also unique for its elegantly curving alignment, its careful siting through the interior of the island, and the lack of unsightly development marring views from the highway. This includes much of the Lake of the Isles, most of Interstate 81 on the island, and the narrower passage through the area known as the International Rift.

Interstate 81 is surprising for its lack of unsightly, sprawling development that usually accompanies major thresholds and border crossings on interstate highways. However, there are some transportation infrastructure, such as road signage, guard rails, road cuts into bedrock and clear cut/median vegetation that contrasts with the largely undeveloped landscape of the northern and western half of Wellesley Island.

B. Uniqueness

The geographic context of the Wellesley Island SASS, the high level of conservation, and the distinctive variety and unity of its physical and cultural features all make the Wellesley Island an unusually scenic landscape in the state of New York.

As mentioned earlier, the fjord-like landscape of the International Rift, and its role as an international border, make it extremely unique—locally, nationally, and internationally. The area around the Lake of the Isles is also quite unique aesthetically as well as ecologically. Several workshop participants identified this place as a unique or unusual scenic area in the region. Canada has also noted these unique qualities—protecting the northern shore of this water body as St. Lawrence Islands National Park.

The landscape of Interstate 81 is also unique for its elegantly curving alignment, its careful siting through the interior of the island, and the lack of unsightly development marring views from the highway. In this respect, I-81 bears a closer similarity to New York’s historic scenic parkways than to post-WWI highways.

C. Public Accessibility

The interior of the Wellesley Island SASS is highly accessible due to the presence of I-81, which, as a major public artery, allows easy access to the network of smaller roads criss-crossing the island. These roads take visitors to a number of publicly owned landscapes, from Grandview Park to Waterson Point Park. The interstate and the Thousand Islands Bridge to the south both provide broad views of the St. Lawrence, the Lake of the Isles, and the interior of Wellesley Island.

The most significant discordant feature in the Wellesley Island SASS is the tall concrete guard tower at the U.S. and Canadian border. The heavy material palette and unusual spiral geometry of the tower make it a strong focal point in areas where it is visible. This includes much of the Lake of the Isles, most of Interstate 81 on the island, and the narrower passage through the area known as the International Rift.

Proposed actions within a SASS that are subject to coastal consistency review under federal and State coastal acts must be assessed to determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource and whether the action would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of the scenic resource. Some local government activities in communities with federally-approved Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs are also subject to local coastal consistency review.

Policy 24, “Prevent impairment of scenic resources of statewide significance,” provides that when considering a proposed action, agencies shall first determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource of statewide significance. The determination would involve:

1. a review of the coastal area map to ascertain if it shows an identified scenic resource which could be affected by the proposed action, and:

2. a review of the types of activities proposed to determine if they would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of an identified resource.

Impairment includes:

1. the irreversible modification of geologic forms; the destruction or removal of vegetation; the modification, destruction or removal of structures, whenever the geologic forms, vegetation or structures are significant to the scenic quality of an identified resource; and:

2. the addition of structures which because of siting or scale will reduce identified views or which because of scale, form, or materials will diminish the scenic quality of an identified resource.

Policy 24 sets forth certain siting and facility-related guidelines to be used to achieve the policy, recognizing that each large scale development situation is unique and that the guidelines will have to be applied accordingly. The guidelines are set forth below, together with comments regarding their particular applicability to this Scenic Area of Statewide Significance. In applying these guidelines to agricultural land it must be recognized that the overall scenic quality of the landscape is reliant on an active and viable agricultural industry. This requires that farmers be allowed the flexibility to farm the land in an economically viable fashion, incorporating modern techniques, changes in farm operation and resultant changes in farm structures. Policy 24 guidelines include:

Siting large scale development such as highways, power lines, major subdivisions and billboards back from the shoreline or in other inconspicuous locations to maintain the attractive quality of the shoreline and to retain views to and from the shore;

Comment: The Wellesley Island SASS has a diverse range of landscapes including wooded shorelines, open fields, marshlands, golf courses, waterfront homes and estates as well as a limited access highway leading to the Canadian border. Keeping future large scale development away from the shoreline and other sensitive features will be critical in maintaining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of the St. Lawrence River. It is recommended that future development be clustered away from the shoreline and visually sensitive open fields and meadows. Site plan review and open space development are valuable local land use tools that can achieve this goal. One example of a
site plan review criterion is the preservation of shoreline vegetation to help new development blend in with its surroundings. Another example of a site plan review criterion is design guidelines to ensure that clustering and other siting techniques achieve scenic preservation goals. Future open space development clusters could be sited and designed to reflect the historic patterns of existing hamlets. Another technique for maintaining the visual character of the SASS is acquisition of vulnerable shoreline lands or conservation easements from willing landowners.

Probably the greatest threat to the future scenic character of the SASS is large scale industrial and infrastructure development within or nearby district boundaries. Large scale projects, such as tall buildings, transmission lines, wind turbines, bridges, communications towers, should not be sited within the SASS district or within the district’s viewshed. Large scale industrial development should be sited well back from the bluff tops, and shoreline to greatly reduce the visual impacts. Modification of existing roadways, construction of new roadways, utility lines and other infrastructure often requires state or federal funding and/or permits and thus can come under the purview of this policy. Locating public infrastructure that scars sensitive coastal areas and facilitates inappropriate bluff top or shoreline development could greatly impair future scenic shoreline areas of the SASS.

Clustering or orienting new large scale structures to retain existing views, save open space and provide visual organization to a development;

Comment: The majority of the SASS consists of open water, wooded shorelines, islands, farm fields, meadows, marshes, golf courses, forests and an interstate highway designated as a parkway. Houses and traditional summer homes punctuate but do not dominate the landscape except for a few heavily developed locations. A definite boundary usually remains between developed and undeveloped areas of the SASS. If this edge becomes blurred as a result of sprawling large scale development, the visual character of the SASS could be damaged. Future large scale development should be clustered away from scenic resources, leaving most of the SASS in a more natural condition. The siting and design of new large scale development can be achieved with local land use tools such as site plan review, clustering and transfer of large scale development rights as described in the local implementation section of this document.

Views from the parkway, water access sites, shorelines and waterways are especially sensitive and should be protected from new large scale development, utility construction or signage whenever possible. Views from and of the bluffs, shorelines, islands and farmland should also be taken into consideration in locating new large scale development. Locating new large scale structures well back from bluff tops and shoreline areas will protect the beauty of the coastal landscape and, in the long run, will enhance property values in the area.

Incorporating sound existing structures (especially historic buildings) into the overall development pattern;

Comment: Most of the structures in the SASS are either waterfront homes or buildings associated with the Canadian border crossing. A few early Twentieth Century summer homes have historic architectural value and contribute to the visual character of the landscape. Much of the existing architectural design for modern residential homes is valuable and wholly compatible with historic designs and the natural setting of the Thousand Islands. Much of the beauty of the residential development within the SASS was accomplished through the good taste of the homeowners rather than regulation and oversight by municipalities. Future preservation of these homes, their grounds and their surrounding natural setting would help to preserve the visual character of the SASS. Radical alteration or demolition of these homes or the large scale development of their grounds that is inconsistent with the visual characteristics of the viewshed could submit this beautiful area to the intensive shoreline development that has marred many other sections of the New York State coastline. Thus, it is recommended that individual owners and towns take these factors into account when renovating these historical and scenic resources and when planning for future development in the surrounding environment. Future expansion of the border crossing could incorporate existing buildings and roadways.

Removing deteriorated and/or degrading elements;

Comment: The SASS is relatively free of deteriorated or degrading visual elements. Few derelict buildings, parking lots detract from the scenic character of the landscape. A partially demolished former building complex and abandoned parking lot east of the Route 81 corridor is a deteriorated element that could be removed and either rebuilt or restored to a natural condition. Minor improvements to roads and parking lots would enhance the scenic character of the SASS. Signage and parking lots could be improved in certain areas. Overhead utilities could be buried to improve views and visual character. Post-WWII large scale development is another degrading element in the SASS. Development along the shoreline represents one of the major impacts on the scenic character of the SASS. Planting vegetation for screening, fencing and other measures could help reduce the visual impacts of any large scale development. Bulkheads and erosion prevention structures along the shoreline reduce the scenic character of the area. These engineering structures can be evaluated to determine if replacement with vegetation or bioengineering techniques would be appropriate.

Maintaining or restoring the original land form, except when changes screen unattractive elements and/or add appropriate interest;

Comment: The unique character of the SASS is relatively undisturbed except for the Route 81 corridor which has cut through the granite bedrock in places. The remainder of the landform in the SASS should be protected in future construction, infrastructure and large scale development projects. Except for the Route 81 corridor the landform of the SASS is largely in an undisturbed state and is the one of the underlying factors in the scenic quality of the area. The contrast in elevation and the juxtaposition of water and land contributes to the beauty of the SASS. Alteration of important landforms such as coastal bluffs, rock ledges, stone outcrops, marshes, and tributaries would detract from the scenic character of the area. Use of berms in the Route 81 corridor to screen parking lots and unsightly large scale development is an acceptable modification of terrain if carefully designed to blend with the natural contour of the land. Alteration of natural terrain for large scale development and roads is of special concern. Development should be located away from sensitive geological features such as bluffs, hilltops, ridgelines, islands, and other unique geological areas.

Maintaining or adding vegetation to provide interest, encourage the presence of wildlife, blend structures with the site, and obscure unattractive elements, except when selective clearing removes unsightly, diseased or hazardous vegetation and when selective clearing, mowing, controlled burning or grazing creates or maintains views of coastal waters;

Comment: The wooded shorelines, small islands and open fields and meadows of the SASS are a vital component of its scenic character. They should be safe guarded and maintained whenever possible through tillage, grazing of livestock, controlled burning or mowing. Keeping the fields and meadows open not only benefits the scenic character of the area, but also plays an important role in maintaining varied wildlife habitat and ecological diversity in the region. The current agricultural practice of recovering vacant land for the production of field crops not only benefits farmers economically, but it also enhances the visual attractiveness from the contrasting natural and agricultural landforms. Both scenic and environmental goals could be achieved by implementing a program to maintain open meadows and to reclaim some of the open grasslands recently lost to successful scrub and forest growth. Preservation of the SASS’s extensive woodlands and wooded shorelines is also a high priority.

Views from vista points in the SASS are disappearing due to the unrestrained growth of succession vegetation. Maintaining open meadows and clearings in the vicinity of viewpoints along the highway will help maintain the scenic character of the parkway. Maintaining lawns, meadows and fields will also preserve both a scenic and an historic landscape resource. Future agricultural practices that recover abandoned, vacant land should be encouraged and supported.

The variety of vegetation and the consequent variety of texture and color in the SASS make a significant contribution to their scenic quality. The wide range of vegetation, open fields and meadows and the dense forests of the interior all
provide interest and contrast in the landscape. The wildlife supported by this vegetation also adds interest and ephemeral character to the land. Vegetation helps new structures blend into the predominantly natural landscape and plays a critical role in screening facilities and sites which would otherwise be discordant elements in the SASS. Additional vegetation could be planted along the Route 81 corridor to screen out discordant features and add interest to the landscape. Future plantings should not obscure scenic views.

Using appropriate materials, in addition to vegetation, to screen unattractive elements:

Comment: The SASS contain relatively few discordant elements. Fencing or screening could be used to screen parking lots, low utility structures and buildings. At the border crossing security concerns limit the ability to screen unattractive elements. Taller discordant features are too large to be effectively screened with fencing. Painting such tall towers in light sky tones might reduce their negative visual impact. It is recommended that new construction be encouraged to use appropriate historic or native building materials. New or renovated overhead utilities located in sensitive scenic areas could be located underground, when possible, to eliminate their negative visual impact on the landscape. The failure to blend new structures into the natural setting, both within the SASS boundaries and in the viewed of the SASS would impair the scenic quality of the areas.

Using appropriate scales, forms and materials to ensure that buildings and other structures are compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape.

Comment: Most structures located in the SASS are generally compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape because they are of a scale, design and material compatible with the historic landscape. Some of the structures are historic in nature. Construction of new buildings incompatible with the cultural character of the SASS may represent a discordant feature in the SASS. Such structures may impair the scenic character of the area. Many of the older structures use native materials such as wood clapboards, shingles or stone construction. Most have pitched roofs, traditional fenestration and are sited unobtrusively on the land, avoiding hilltops, bluff edges and other prominent locations. Though many of the shorefront developments are large, their apparent mass has been reduced by designing the structures as a series of smaller, attached architectural volumes. This rambling, attached approach to residential design is typical of traditional Thousand Island architecture and is a factor reducing the visual impact of large, “mega-home” structures. Combined with sensitive site planning and design, the rambling, attached structures minimize obstruction of waterfront views from public roadways. While security and operational requirements are the highest priority at the border crossing, future structures and towers could be located and designed to respect the scenic character of the area. Locating very tall structures to avoid impacting scenic areas and views from scenic and historic coastal sites.

Comment: Very tall structures such as wind turbines and exhaust stacks will have major impacts on the scenic character of coastal landscapes. Over 600 Thousand Islands residents participated in the web-based visual preference survey in the summer of 2014. The survey results showed that wind turbine complexes on the Canadian side of the river have significant negative visual impacts on the region. Turbine images ranked among the least scenic images in the survey.

Consequently, massive industrial and infrastructure projects should not be built within the SASS district or within its surrounding viewshed. There are presently no techniques to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures because they are so tall, massive and frequently in motion. Tall towers and structures that may be required at the border crossing could, if feasible, be sited and designed to reduce visual impacts on the surrounding areas. Obviously security and proper functioning of the border crossing are of the highest priority.

Using shielded lighting fixtures at appropriate levels of illumination to preserve the Thousand Islands’ nighttime visual character.

The Thousand Island’s dark, unspoiled night sky with views of stars, the sea and wooded hills is a priceless visual resource. Due to its relatively low density of development, the region enjoys dark nighttime skies that could be affected by poorly designed new large scale development. Light pollution from excessively bright, exposed lighting fixtures can block views of the night sky, blind motorists and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on large scale developments to be shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is provided without creating glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created by shielded fixtures also greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes by removing the bright harshness of many exterior light fixtures. Reducing the wattage of exterior lights is often possible without compromising safety or functionality and results in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or color-balanced light sources such as energy efficient, shielded LED lighting for large scale development will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the warm tones of incandescent bulbs while providing the efficiency of high intensity discharge or metal halide light sources.

It is recommended that existing town-owned lights, such as street lights or lights at public buildings and facilities, be gradually retrofitted to reduce glare and light pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction. Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights that cast direct light onto neighboring properties or on the water. Large scale commercial facilities should avoid unshielded spotlights to illuminate parking lots, storage facilities or outdoor areas. Adding a simple metal shield to an existing spotlight can greatly reduce light pollution and glare. Often a series of lower, shielded lights can replace a single glaring spotlight. The greater expense for large scale developments is offset by the creation of a superior nighttime environment.

6. American Narrows Scenic Area of Statewide Significance

1. Location

The American Narrows Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) is located in the central section of the Saint Lawrence Scenic Region. It consists of the Rock Island lighthouse and surrounding islands, the Thousand Islands Bridge area, the American Narrows, the Village of Alexandria Bay and surrounding islands, Boldt Castle and the Manhattan, Deer, Summerland and Excelsior Island Groups. The western boundary of the SASS begins at Wellesley Island State Park, near the eastern edge of Thousand Islands Park, and extends across the St. Lawrence River.
to the Rock Island lighthouse and Reed Point at Fisher’s Landing. The boundary then heads east following the edge of the river’s viewshed to the Thousand Island Bridge. It then continues running east following the edge of the river’s viewshed to the Village of Alexandria Bay. It continues running eastward along the edge of the river’s viewshed to a point opposite Birch Island near the entrance to Goose Bay. At Birch Island, the boundary crosses the river in a northerly direction to the Canadian Border just east of Summertown Island. The boundary then heads west along the Canadian border to a narrow channel about ¾ mile west of Westminster Park. It then follows the edge of the river’s Wellesley Island viewshed heading back east, around the eastern tip of Wellesley Island. The boundary then runs westward along the river’s Wellesley Island viewshed to the Thousand Islands Bridge and the point of beginning at Wellesley Island State Park at the eastern edge of Thousand Island Park.

Consult the Area 2 and 3 Ratings maps for detailed SASS boundaries. The American Narrows SASS is located on the Thousand Island Park, Alexandria Bay, Redwood and Chippewa Bay 7.5 minute US Geological Survey maps.

II. Description

The SASS is comprised of subunits #1, 2, 4, 6, 26 and 37. The American Narrows SASS is dominated by the Thousand Islands Bridge, the American Narrows, Alexandria Bay, Boldt Castle and the many island chains east of Alexandria Bay. It is a highly scenic and varied blend of islands of various sizes as well as the main shipping channel of the river, a historic village, lighthouses, a castle and numerous islands. The natural features of the SASS include the Saint Lawrence River, the highly indented shoreline of American Narrows and the eastern end of Wellesley Island. Mixed hardwood/evergreen forests line much of the shoreline of both the mainland and the islands, especially areas inland from the residential shoreline development. Meadows and old agricultural fields are interspersed with the woodlands on both Wellesley Island and the mainland. These features are also located back from the forests and residential development that line the shore in many places. A number of small creeks and associated marshlands occur on both shores, leading into a wide variety of bays enclosed by promontories.

The American Narrows SASS features a highly varied shoreline configuration on both the mainland and the islands with many coves, bays, peninsulas and wetlands. Interior portions of the island feature a patchwork of mixed deciduous/evergreen woodlands interspersed with rolling meadows and pastureland extending down to the shoreline. This creates a scenic landscape rich in wildlife habitat. The SASS includes eight small creeks with extensive scenic wetlands at their mouths containing excellent habitat for waterfowl as well as aquatic mammals and amphibians.

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Reflecting this diverse shoreline configuration, the SASS contains several Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats:

A portion of the Thousand Islands Tern Colonies designated habitat is in this SASS, consisting of vulnerable common tern nesting areas on the Southeast Isle of Pines. These island tern colonies have been successful due to their isolation from predators and human disturbance.

Wellesley Island Pools designated habitat is an area with relatively large open water pools during the winter ice-in season. These pools support relatively large numbers of migratory birds during the winter months including bald eagles.

The St. Lawrence River Shoreline Bays designated habitat is a series of shallow water bays that support fish spawning and nursery areas, especially muskellunge. This SASS includes four of the bays that form an almost continuous three and a half mile habitat area: Grass Point, Cobb Shoal (or Moore Landing Marsh), Swan Bay, and Point Vivian Marsh.

Also located in this SASS is a small portion of the Goose Bay/Cranberry Creek designated habitat, one of the most important coastal freshwater wetland complexes in New York State. The habitat supports vulnerable Blanding’s turtles, northern barrier and least bittern nesting areas.

Numerous outcrops of Canadian Shield bedrock occur on both sides of the river as well as in forested areas of the island and along portions of the shoreline, creating a rugged, rolling landscape. Relatively little state or local conservation land or easements are located within the SASS though the many state parks provide a measure of conservation protection in conjunction with their recreational functions. Natural features in the developed portions of the SASS including the Village of Alexandria Bay and the developed mainland shoreline are less unique and environmentally significant.

Cultural features of the SASS include the historic Boldt Castle, the Village of Alexandria Bay, elegant summer homes and estates, historic light houses, golf courses, scenic rural roads and more recent shoreline residential development. Boldt Castle on Heart Island and associated buildings is one of the principal icons of the Thousand Islands. The castle has a major visual presence as seen from Alexandria Bay, Wellesley Island and the river proper. The two historic lighthouses located at either end of the SASS, Rock Island and Sunken Rock, frame either end of the SASS. These two lighthouses are also well known iconic structures.
Many state parks are located in the SASS. These include Keewadin, Wellesley Island, Grass Point and Mary Island State Parks. Golf courses such as the two courses at the Thousand Islands Country Club are located on Wellesley Island.

III. Aesthetic Significance

The American Narrows SASS is of statewide aesthetic significance by virtue of its rich, diverse and unique cultural features as well as its landscape character. The SASS contains the greatest amount and highest quality of gilded age architecture in the Thousand Islands. Its special historic architecture, state of preservation, environmental qualities, public accessibility and public recognition are amongst the most significant in the Thousand Islands. The SASS’s rugged geography, small creeks, terrain and vegetation create a scenic backdrop to the area’s unique cultural features.

The SASS is one of the most scenic areas of the region’s coastline, with remarkable scenery on the American Narrows, the main river channel, the many smaller islands and the highly indented shoreline of points and bays. Cultural features in the SASS including castles, elegant summer estates villages, lighthouses and hamlets are among the most beautiful and unique architectural features of the Thousand Islands. The shipping channel bisects the SASS bringing majestic ocean going vessels within close proximity of the SASS’s historic features and icons.

In addition to the SASS’s iconic architectural features, many less well known but very significant gilded age estates and large summer homes dot the river’s edge, especially the reach between the Thousand Islands Bridge and the Village of Alexandria Bay. These homes built in the late Nineteenth and the first half of the Twentieth Centuries feature beautifully designed residential architecture sensitively integrated with the rugged, wooded granite landscapes of the landscape. This greatly enhances the uniqueness and scenic quality of this section of the SASS.

Images and descriptions of the SASS, especially the Village of Cape Vincent, the American Narrows and Thousand Island Park are frequently featured in photographs, paintings, books, travel brochures and other publications. Views of the SASS’s landscapes and cultural features adorn postcards, promotional literature, web sites and books about the Thousand Islands. Images of Boldt Castle, the lighthouses and large ships in the channel are usually featured in publications and web sites about the area.

The narrow character of the main river channel, the many islands and the varied coastline of the SASS create a dramatic and visually accessible coastal environment. Public roads on Wellesley Island and along the mainland shoreline provide public access to vistas of the water and islands. Views from the Thousand Islands Bridge and the Alexandria Bay waterfront are particularly memorable and scenic. The diversity of landscapes within the SASS creates a highly varied visual setting. The SASS has a unique abundance of water views as well as internal views of farmland, meadows, golf courses and woodlands. Outcrops of Canadian Shield bedrock create small hills and valleys that produce a scenic, rolling landform.

Thanks to recent preservation efforts, many of the cultural resources of the SASS have been protected and some areas are open to the public. Fewer natural portions of the SASS are protected in conservation. Future increased conservation of these unique natural areas will ensure the long-term presence of high scenic quality in the landscape.

A. Landscape Character

1. Variety

The American Narrows SASS features a highly varied cultural landscape set in a rugged, forested setting. The range of architecture in the SASS is extremely varied and diverse, ranging from gilded age castles to large, historic waterfront estates, to the village architecture of Alexandria Bay and more recent shoreline residential development. The high quality of the architectural design of the historic castles and historic waterfront estates is particularly varied with a wide range of whimsical architectural styles beautifully integrated in the scenic, rocky landscapes. The buildings of the SASS epitomize the character of the Thousand Islands and the diversity of styles and sensitive approaches to the landscape that are iconic to the region.

Variety in the natural landscape is created by the highly varied configuration of the shorelines with many promontories, stream outlets and harbors. The many small islands that dot the river in the subunit create a high degree of visual diversity and embody the name “Thousand Islands”. The mix of dense woodlands with open farmland, meadows and golf courses, especially on Wellesley Island, creates a varied pattern of vegetation that enhances the area’s scenic quality. The geology of the SASS is also varied with most of the islands and Wellesley Island consisting of Canadian Shield/Frontenac Arch granites and portions of the mainland shoreline underlain by limestone.
Cultural landscape variety creates very high scenic quality in this SASS. The range of architecture extends from large stone castles from the gilded age to more recent shoreline residential development. Beautifully designed and sited summer homes built from the gilded age to the Great Depression are highly varied in their design and relationship to their landscapes. The village waterfront of Alexandria Bay contrasts with the surrounding forests and Boldt Castle. Passing ships in the narrow channel enhance the visual variety of the subunit.

The wide variety of water bodies ranges from the open waters of the main shipping channel, to the many bays and coves, to the island chains, creating a diversity of water environments. A number of small streams on both the mainland and Wellesley Island create small, scenic estuaries with extensive open marshlands at the mouths of the streams. The main shipping channel bisects the SASS and features a wide variety of ocean-going ships passing by in close proximity to the shorelines.

2. Unity

The American Narrows SASS is a unified landscape due to the consistently high quality and originality of its cultural features, the narrow character of the river and the consistent beauty of its landscapes. Some discordant features interrupt the overall high scenic character of the SASS but on balance are outweighed by the beauty of the architecture and landscapes.

The SASS contains the most and the best gilded age architecture in the Thousand Islands which adds a strong element of unity to this diverse landscape. Except for some of the shoreline development built in the last 50 years, the architecture of the SASS, especially from the Gilded Age is of the highest quality. The architects’ and owners’ respect for and creative use of the landscape as a design element is consistent throughout the older reaches of the river, especially just upstream of Alexandria Bay. While highly diverse, ranging from large castles to smaller estates, whimsical outbuildings and garden pavilions, the consistently high levels of siting and design unify these disparate structures. The Thousand Islands Bridge is a beautiful work of engineering dating from the 1930’s which adds a strong element of unity to this diverse landscape. Except for some recent shoreline residential development. Beautifully designed and sited summer homes built from the gilded age to the Great Depression are highly varied in their design and relationship to their landscapes. The village waterfront of Alexandria Bay contrasts with the surrounding forests and Boldt Castle. Passing ships in the narrow channel enhance the visual variety of the subunit.

The view from the small Village of Alexandria Bay to the massive, European-style Boldt Castle creates a striking contrast of styles, land uses and construction costs. The contrast is heightened when an enormous ocean-going freighter passes by, its engines sending out vibrations felt in nearby buildings and landscapes. The Thousand Islands Bridge also creates a dramatic contrast to the river and the surrounding landscapes. While the large bridge dominates the river scenery for over a mile on either side, its beautiful design creates a pleasing and awe-inspiring contrast to the area. The historic lighthouses at either end of the SASS contrast with the passing ships and the many groups of small islands that punctuate the riverscape. The small islands create contrasts in size, vegetation and island architecture.

The high level of cultural creativity in Alexandria Bay including water supply, communications and wastewater infrastructure in Alexandria Bay including water supply, communications and wastewater treatment impact the visual quality in places. High levels of recreational boat and jet ski traffic at times causing nautical congestion in the summer months can also disrupt the serenity of the river. But the boat traffic does create a lively and dynamic boating environment enjoyed by many. Boat docks and boat storage warehouses can create discordant features due to their size and bulk along the waterfront. Recent development in the Manhattan Island chain contrasts with the undeveloped character of adjacent Deer Island and Mary Island State Park.

B. Uniqueness

The SASS is a totally unique visual landscape. Very few places in the region or the state have a similar range of scenic visual features. It is fitting that the cover of this report features a large ship navigating past Boldt Castle with wooded islands and the Sunken Rock lighthouse in the distance.

The uniqueness of the SASS is based on a wide range of whimsically designed, historic cultural features set in a superb natural setting of islands, narrow channels and rocky, indented shorelines. The contrast of these features with the dynamic and at times discordant aspects of Alexandria Bay is also highly unusual. And in western portions of the SASS the beautifully engineered Thousand Islands Bridge built in 1937 and inaugurated by President Roosevelt creates a unique gateway to the area.

The extreme narrowness of the shipping channel in the American Narrows section of the SASS is very unusual, especially when large ships navigate within several hundred feet of the steep, rocky shoreline. Framed by the bridge and the rocky shores, the passing ships are an awe-inspiring sight. Other areas where ships pass in close proximity to the land occur at Boldt Castle and along some of the islands in eastern sections of the SASS.

While not totally unique, the many islands of the SASS, grouped into distinct chains, create a unique visual environment. It is unusual for this number of dis-
C. Public Accessibility

Public Accessibility in the SASS is excellent due the visual access provided by the Thousand Islands Bridge and the Village of Alexandria Bay. Motorists crossing the bridge and pedestrians strolling along the shoreline of the village have unprecedented views of some of the most spectacular features of the Thousand Islands. Physical access to the area is provided by numerous charter and tour boats docked in Alexandria Bay. Regular shuttle service Boldt Island. Thousand Island Park Road and a number of other local byways provide visual access to the scenery of the river for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. The many state parks in the SASS provide both visual and physical access to the water in some of the most scenic sections of the St. Lawrence. According to an experienced river pilot, sailors on ocean-going ships from many lands comment on the remarkable scenery of the Thousand Islands, especially as they pass through the dramatic, challenging American Narrows section of the river.

D. Public Recognition

The American Narrows SASS is by far the most recognized section of the Thousand Islands. In addition to the cover of this report it has appeared on countless travel brochures, postcards, web sites and YouTube postings. Boldt Castle is a highly recognized landmark that serves as a gateway to the region while providing a view of the Thousand Islands, shipping and natural features.

Impact includes:

1) the irreversible modification of geologic forms; the destruction or removal of vegetation; the modification, destruction or removal of structures, whenever the geologic forms, vegetation or structures are significant to the scenic quality of an identified resource; and;

2) theaddition of structures which because of siting or scale will reduce identified views or which because of scale, form, or materials will diminish the scenic quality of an identified resource.

Policy 24 sets forth certain siting and facility-related guidelines to be used to achieve the policy, recognizing that each large scale development situation is unique and that the guidelines will have to be applied accordingly. The guidelines are set forth below, together with comments regarding their particular applicability to this Scenic Area of Statewide Significance. In applying these guidelines to agricultural land it must be recognized that the overall scenic quality of the landscape is reliant on an active and viable agricultural industry. This requires that farmers be allowed the flexibility to farm the land in an economically viable fashion, incorporating modern techniques, changes in farm operation and resultant changes in farm structures. Policy 24 guidelines include:

Siting large scale development such as highways, power lines, major subdivisions and billboards back from the shoreline or in other inconspicuous locations to maintain the attractive quality of the shoreline and to retain views to and from the shore;

Comment: The American Narrows SASS is one of the most diverse in the study area. It includes the Village of Alexandria Bay, the Boldt Castle complex, the shores of the mainland and Wellesley Island and numerous groups of islands. Keeping future large scale development away from the shoreline will be critical in maintaining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of the St. Lawrence River. It is recommended that future development be clustered away from the shoreline and visually sensitive woodlands, islands, estates, summer homes and cottages. Site plan review and open space development are valuable local land use tools that can achieve this goal. One example of a site plan review criterion is the preservation of shoreline vegetation to help new development blend in with its surroundings. Another example of a site plan review criterion is design guidelines to ensure that clustering and other siting techniques achieve scenic preservation goals. Future open space development clusters could be sited and designed to reflect the historic patterns of existing hamlets. Another technique for maintaining the visual character of the SASS is acquisition of vulnerable shoreline lands or conservation easements from willing landowners.

Clustering or orienting new large scale structures to retain existing views, save open space and provide visual organization to a development;

Comment: The majority of the SASS consists of open water, wooded shorelines, islands and shoreline homes, many of them historic estates from the Gilded Age. Historic houses and traditional summer homes punctuate but do not dominate the wooded waterfront landscape except in a few heavily developed locations. Clustering new development away from historic and environmentally sensitive areas will help ensure that future large scale development does not impact historic structures and environmentally sensitive landscapes. The siting and design of new large scale development can be achieved with local land use tools such as site plan review, clustering and transfer of large scale development rights as described in the local implementation section of this document. Views from public ways, water access sites, shorelines and waterways are especially sensitive and should be protected from new large scale development, utility construction or signage whenever possible. Views from the Thousand Is-
lands, Bridge, Alexandria Bay and the Boldt Castle are extensive and vulnerable to degradation from poorly sited and designed new developments. Views from and of the bluffs, shorelines, islands and farmland should also be taken into consideration in locating new large scale development. Locating major new structures back from bluff tops and shoreline areas will protect the beauty of the coastal landscape and, in the long run, will enhance property values and the tourism industry in the area.

Incorporating sound existing structures (especially historic buildings) into the overall development pattern;

Comment: Some of the historic structures in the SASS are currently conserved through public ownership and Historic District status. Many remain in private ownership. The region’s best collection of late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century summer homes have major historic architectural value and contribute significantly to the visual character of the landscape. Much of the existing architectural design for modern residential homes is valuable and wholly compatible with historic designs and the natural setting of the Thousand Islands. Much of the beauty of the residential development within the SASS was accomplished through the good taste of the homeowners rather than regulation and oversight by municipalities. Future preservation of these homes, their grounds and their surrounding natural setting would help to preserve the visual character of the SASS. Radical alteration or demolition of these homes or the large scale development of their grounds that is inconsistent with the visual characteristics of the viewshed could submit this beautiful area to the intensive shoreline development that has marred many other sections of the New York State coastline. Thus, it is recommended that individual owners and towns take these factors into account when renovating these historical and scenic resources and when planning for future development in the surrounding environment.

Removing deteriorated and/or degrading elements;

Comment: The SASS has some deteriorated or degrading visual elements. Other than in portions of Alexandria Bay, few towers, very tall structures, derelict buildings or wide roads or parking lots detract from the scenic character of the landscape. Minor improvements to roads and parking lots would enhance the scenic character of the SASS. Signage and parking lots take these factors into account when renovating these historical and scenic resources and when planning for future development.

The SASS contains some discordant elements in Alexandria Bay. Fencing or screening could be used to screen parking lots, low utility structures and buildings. Taller discordant features are too large to be effectively screened with fencing. Painting such tall towers in light sky tones might reduce their negative visual impact. It is recommended that new construction be encouraged to use appropriate historic or native building materials. New or renovated overhead utilities located in sensitive scenic areas could be located underground, when possible, to eliminate their negative visual impact on the landscape. The failure to blend new structures into the natural setting, both within the SASS boundaries and in the viewshed of the SASS would impair the scenic quality of the area.

Using appropriate scales, forms and materials to ensure that buildings and other structures are compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape.

Comment: Most structures located in the SASS are generally compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape because they are of a scale, design and material compatible with the historic landscape. Many of the SASS’s structures are historic in nature. Construction of new buildings incompatible with the cultural character of the SASS as represented in historic structures may impair the scenic character of the area. Many of the older Gilded Age estates use native materials such as wood clapboards, shingles or stone construction. Most have pitched roofs, traditional fenestration and are sited unobtrusively on the land, avoiding hills, bluff edges and other prominent locations. Though many of the shorefront structures such are large, their apparent mass has been reduced by designing the structures as a series of smaller, attached architectural volumes. This rambling, attached approach to residential design is typical of traditional Thousand Island architecture and is a major factor in reducing the visual impact of large, “mega-home” structures. Combined with sensitive site planning and design, the rambling, attached structures minimize obstruction of waterfront views from public roadways.

Locating very tall structures to avoid impacting scenic areas and views from scenic and historic coastal sites.

Comment: Very tall structures such as wind turbines and exhaust stacks will have major impacts on the scenic character of coastal landscapes. Over 600 Thousand Island residents participated in the web-based visual preference survey in the summer of 2014. The survey results showed that wind turbine complexes on the Canadian side of the river have significant negative visual impacts on the region. Turbine images ranked among the least scenic images in the survey.

Using appropriate materials, in addition to vegetation, to screen unattractive elements;

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Consequently, massive industrial and infrastructure projects should not be built within the SASS district or within its surrounding viewshed. There are presently no techniques to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures because they are so tall, massive and frequently in motion.

**Using shielded lighting fixtures at appropriate levels of illumination to preserve the Thousand Islands’ nighttime visual character.**

The Thousand Island’s dark, unspoiled night sky with views of stars, the sea and wooded hills is a priceless visual resource. Due to its relatively low density of development, the region enjoys dark nighttime skies that could be affected by poorly designed new large scale development. Light pollution from excessively bright, exposed lighting fixtures can block views of the night sky; blind motorists and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on large scale developments to be shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is provided without creating glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created by shielded fixtures also greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes by removing the bright harshness of many exterior light fixtures. Reducing the wattage of exterior lights is often possible without compromising safety or functionality and results in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or color-balanced light sources such as energy efficient, shielded LED lighting for large scale development will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the warm tones of incandescent bulbs while providing the efficiency of high intensity discharge or metal halide light sources.

It is recommended that existing town-owned lights, such as street lights or lights at public buildings and facilities, be gradually retrofitted to reduce glare and light pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction. Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights that cast direct light onto neighboring properties or on the water. Large scale commercial facilities should avoid unshielded spotlights to illuminate parking lots, storage facilities or outdoor areas. Adding a simple metal shield to an existing spotlight can greatly reduce light pollution and glare. Often a series of lower, shielded lights can replace a single glaring spotlight. The greater expense for large scale developments is offset by the creation of a superior nighttime environment.

**7. Chippewa/Goose Bay Scenic Area of Statewide Significance**

**I. Location**

The Chippewa/Goose Bay Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) is an area to the east of the American Narrows SASS in the Thousand Islands Scenic Area.

It consists of the elliptical Goose Bay, the large, open Chippewa Bay to the northwest, and the broad expanse of the St. Lawrence near Grenadier Island, along with a number of small to medium-sized islands including Hemlock, Ironsides, Cedar and Dark Island. The SASS is approximately 11 miles east to west and 3 miles north to south.

The northern boundary of the SASS is the U.S./Canadian border from the western side of Grenadier Island (Canada)—near the area currently occupied by the Grenadier Island Country Club—to just east of the Bilberry Island (U.S.). The western boundary of the SASS begins as a line perpendicular to shore, extending across the St. Lawrence just west of Goose Bay near Birch Island (U.S.). The western boundary continues to the south and west along the marsh-fringed Cranberry Creek. The eastern boundary of the SASS is a line perpendicular to shore just east of Chippewa Bay in the vicinity of Conger Road on the U.S. mainland. The southern boundary is a line extending along the length of U.S. shoreline ¼ to ½ mile inland, representing the approximate viewshed from the St. Lawrence River in the SASS. The SASS exists within the towns of Hammond and Alexandria.

Consult the Area 2 and 3 Ratings maps for detailed SASS boundaries. The Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS is located on the Redwood and Chippewa Bay 7.5 minute US Geological Survey maps.

**II. Description**

The Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS is comprised of subunits #29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34. The SASS is dominated by the two of the most visually significant bays in the Thousand Islands Scenic Area: Goose Bay and Chippewa Bay. The physical features of the SASS also include the broad stretch of the St. Lawrence that is visible and accessible from these two bays, along with a number of smaller islands, inlets, small bays, peninsulas, and creeks including Cranberry Creek, Kring Point,
Chippewa Point, Cedar Island, Hemlock, Ironsides, and Dark Island. Cultural features include important public parks, iconic coastal views from the high hills and bluffs surrounding Goose and Chippewa Bay, and historic structures—most notably Singer Castle on Dark Island.

The physical landscape of the SASS is strongly influenced by the rugged and metamorphic Canadian Shield bedrock beneath the surface of this area. This geology expresses itself in dramatic bluffs overlooking Chippewa Bay and Goose Bay, as well as a number of small, steep-shored islands with sculpted exposed bedrock. The relief in this SASS is among the highest anywhere in the Thousand Island Scenic Area, with the bluffs west of Chippewa Bay rising 100-130’ from the river in under a quarter mile from shore in some locations. Just north of Goose Bay, the aptly named Ironsides Island features 40’ rocky bluffs oriented parallel to the river current. Vegetation in the SASS is diverse, ranging from mature deciduous and evergreen forest to lone sculpted pines to well-maintained formal garden plantings at Singer Castle. The edges of Goose Bay and Chippewa Bay feature areas of marsh grasses in and around protruding shoreline bedrock and extending back along gracefully curving, marsh-fringed creeks. Most notable among these are the length of Cranberry Creek and the mouths of Crooked and Chippewa Creek.

A number of professionally-designed historic and contemporary structures exist in the SASS, including the historic Singer Castle and Sister Island Lighthouse, as well as estates and large cottages on Cedar and Temagami Islands. Cedar Island is also notable for its importance for public access, as Cedar Island State Park comprises half of the island. The other major public landscape in the SASS is Kring Point State Park on the north side of Goose Bay. The latter is accessible by road, while the former only by private boat. The Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS also includes several well-visited and formally designed scenic viewpoints off of State Route 12.

The SASS contains several Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats:

The Chippewa Bay Tern Colonies designated habitat consists of rocky shoals and artificial structures that provide nesting habitat for Common Terns. Tern colonies in this SASS are located on Halfway Island Shoals and on two artificially created cays. A number of professionally-designed historic and contemporary structures exist in the SASS, including the historic Singer Castle and Sister Island Lighthouse, as well as estates and large cottages on Cedar and Temagami Islands. Cedar Island is also notable for its importance for public access, as Cedar Island State Park comprises half of the island. The other major public landscape in the SASS is Kring Point State Park on the north side of Goose Bay. The latter is accessible by road, while the former only by private boat. The Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS also includes several well-visited and formally designed scenic viewpoints off of State Route 12.

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A. Landscape Character

1. Variety

A number of physical and cultural features within the Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS contribute to a highly varied scenic landscape. These include the shoreline, vegetation, ephemera, and a range of professionally-designed and historic residential structures and landscapes.
The shoreline of the SASS is notable for its intricately varied geometry and the wide range of island forms and sizes. The shoreline is extremely indented, forming almost fractal-like geometries around Kring Point and Chippewa Point. Island forms include irregular small rocks and small islands that are only 100' or less across, like Rob Roy, Owatonna, Watch, and Diamond Island. They also include medium-sized and irregular islands like Atlantis Island and Cedar Island, 1000' - 2000' across. Other islands show more regular geometries, like the rectangular Ironsides Island. Oak Island, the largest island on the U.S. side, has a highly varied shoreline and is more than a mile long.

Bays in the SASS also range in size and form. The smallest, Blind Bay, is a roughly triangular bay that is several hundred feet across. Goose Bay is quite different—thousands of feet across, screened from the channel by a series of small to medium-sized islands, and taking the form of a gently curving ellipse. Chippewa Bay differs from both Goose and Blind Bay, as it is miles long and opens up in the north to an expansive view of the St. Lawrence, extending into Canada.

Vegetation in the SASS adds further variety to the scenic landscape. Mature mixed deciduous and evergreen forests cover Kring Point and Chippewa Point. Wind-swept pines crown some of the smaller islands. Marsh grasses line the mouths of Cranberry, Chippewa, and Crooked Creeks. Dark Island and a few of the other developed islands feature formal gardens and other landscape plantings.

Though much of the SASS is undeveloped or lightly developed, a range of architectural and landscape forms exist in the SASS. Small and medium sized islands have rustic cottages and small estates with rustic siting or professional designed landscapes. Dark Island has the famous Singer Castle and formal gardens. Kring Point and Cedar Island have regionally important state park landscapes.

In addition to these physical features, the Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS benefits from cultural ephemera. This ranges from private boats fishing the many bays, oves, and creek mouths, to the massive ocean-going container vessels traveling between Lake Ontario and the Atlantic Ocean.

2. Unity

The Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS is unified by a number of cultural and physical features within the visual landscape, including the St. Lawrence River, the preva-lence of public access and publicly recognized landscapes, and the consistently high level of maintenance and freedom from discordant features in the area.

The major unifying features of the SASS is the St. Lawrence River, with a fractal-like, varied shoreline and sweeping coastal views present along the open river and bays. From the larger hills and bluffs adjacent to Chippewa Bay and Goose Bay, full views of the St. Lawrence are possible, stretching 200,000' into Canada in some places. In the more intimate waters of Goose Bay, the views between islands provide cues linking this tranquil space to the open expanse of river between Kring Point and Grenadier Island. The consistently varied shoreline and diverse island forms—themselves an expression of the Canadian Shield geology throughout the SASS—also provides a sense of continuity from one area of the SASS to another. Ephemera like ever-present wildlife and passing container ships traveling between Lake Ontario and the Atlantic emphasize the continuity of the river and the connection between the St. Lawrence and global maritime trade.

Public access from Route 12 and publicly owned areas of Kring Point and Cedar Island also help to unify the SASS. Whether by bicycle, car, or boat, visitors have access to many of the most dramatic views in the area. These views, particularly the view from the high bluffs north of Chippewa Bay, are some of the most pow-erful and iconic in the entire region. Moreover, the high vantage point of these expansive views provide visitors with an almost map-like understanding of the shoreline and islands, helping to promote an understanding of the unity of the region's landscapes among casual spectators.

The SASS is also unified by its generally consistently high level of maintenance and general freedom from discordant features. The formal gardens on Dark Island are professionally maintained, with full and healthy planting areas and few areas of litter, graffiti, or damage to the historic site. Other private and public landscapes on islands and the shoreline are similarly vigorous and well-maintained. One exception is the shoreline around Kring Point State Park in Goose Bay, which workshop participants noted had some issues with weeds and milfoil. More generally, the SASS is largely free from discordant features, with surpris-ingly few areas of exurban development with little or no vegetation screening, large billboards, or tall, unsightly utilitarian structures.

3. Contrast

The Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS is replete with landscape features that inject contrasting textures, colors, and forms into the visual site. The presence of wa-ter, relief, bedrock, vegetation, architecture, and unique ephemera like container ships all contribute strong moments of contrast.

Relief and bedrock, combined with the presence of water, provide one of the major sources of contrast in the SASS. The 100-130' deep bluffs rising over Chippewa Bay, for example, contrast strongly with the flat-to-gently-roll- ing Chippewa Point and the marsh-fringed mouths of Chippewa Creek and Crooked Creek. Throughout the SASS, the steep rocky bluffs of Ironsides Is-land and other islands and peninsulas sharply contrast against the dark and dynamic surface of the St. Lawrence.

Vegetation also provides important moments of contrast in the SASS. The con-trast between forest and marsh is one of the most notable. The regular, finely textured, and light colored marsh grasses of Crooked Creek, Chippewa Creek, and Cranberry Creek contrast strongly against the more irregular mass of greens, browns, and greys that characterize adjacent mixed evergreen and deciduous for-est. In the formal gardens of Dark Island and other professionally-designed land-scapes, contrasts between evergreen and deciduous shrubs and trees and open meadows and lawns are the product of explicit curation and design. And, as with other SASS in the Thousand Islands Scenic Area, many of the rocky islands feature windswept sentinel pines that contrast strongly against the gray bedrock and the sky.

Architectural forms are still another source of contrasting color, texture, and ge-ometry in the SASS. The color of the bright orange roof of Singer Castle against a blue sky and framed by green estate plantings stands in archetypal of this sort of contrast. Other smaller rustic cottages similarly contrast against their backdrop of vegetation and Canadian Shield geology in texture, color, and form.

And, as with other areas of the Thousand Islands Scenic Area, passing container ships provide cyclical opportunities for dramatic contrasts of color and scale. The bright red and orange hulls of container ships tower above the small rocks, islands, and cottages along the U.S. shoreline in this area.

4. Freedom From Discordant Features

Overall, the Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS benefits from a visual landscape with few discordant features. This is due, in part, to the protection against develop-ment provided by Kring Point State Park and Cedar Island State Park. Easements and protection by the Thousand Islands Land Trust (TILT) on Oak Island and west of Crooked Creek in Chippewa Bay also contribute to the freedom from discordant features.

The major discordant features in the SASS are related to light to medium density exurban, camp, and marina development. This includes the boathouses, docks, and camp-type development on the eastern end of Kring Point and Schermer-Horn Landing; the lone condominium area off of Dubois Road overlooking Chip-pewa Bay; and moderate density exurban development with deck structures and boathouses just south of Chippewa Creek and around Blind Bay.

Another discordant feature mentioned by public workshop participants was the presence weeds and milfoil in the vicinity of Kring Point State Park in Goose Bay.

B. Uniqueness

Chippewa/Goose Bay is unique in Thousand Islands Scenic Area, as well as the state of New York for its dramatic, elevated coastal views and the backdrop of
these views—a unified yet highly varied mosaic of islands, bays, peninsulas, rocky bluffs and marshes-fringed creeks. These views are made even more distinctive by the high level of public accessibility and recognition.

In particular, the viewing areas along the tall hills north of Chippewa Bay provide the broadest, longest, and most dramatic elevated coastal views in the Thousand Islands Region. From this point of prospect, the scale, contrast, variety, and unity of the St. Lawrence becomes clear in a way only matched by aerial photography. Lower elevation views of Goose Bay from Route 12 and Kring Point are also unique in the region.

Views of the landscape closer in elevation to the river provide a very different, though equally remarkable, experience. In the dense clusters of islands around Goose Bay, for example, the small scale of the undulating shoreline and often smooth water surface has a somewhat otherworldly quality when you emerge into this intimate landscape from the open water of the main St. Lawrence channel.

In addition to, and contributing to, the unique views in the Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS is the relative freedom from discordant features found here. The limited areas of exurban development are generally sited so as to preserve a vegetative screen along the shoreline. Large utilitarian structures are not prominent in either the elevated views along Chippewa Bay or from recreational boats. Also, the SASS is unique for its high level of public accessibility and recognition.

C. Public Accessibility

This SASS is one of the most publicly visible and appreciated scenic landscapes in the Thousand Islands Scenic Area. This is attested to by the sheer number of scenic views, as well as recreational, symbolic, and historic landscapes noted on workshop maps within the bounds of the SASS. It is also no surprise given the proximity and elevation of NY Route 12 next to the dramatic landscapes of Chippewa and Goose Bay.

Three sites along NY12 next to Chippewa Bay were recognized by workshop participants as scenic areas visible to the general public. Two are formally designated pull-offs from Route 12. The third is the open view from Dubois Road. Schermerhorn Landing and the adjacent shoreline are both an important recreational landscape and known for striking views toward Chippewa Bay and Oak Island. Within Chippewa Bay, Cedar Island State Park, accessible only by boat but with public dock space, provides a rare opportunity for public access to views from an island in the center of Chippewa Bay.

Further south, on the southeast bank of Goose Bay, the overlook off of NY 12 was noted on workshop maps as a scenic area visible to the general public. The area between Goose Bay and Grenadier Island was also noted in workshops as being visually accessible from Kring Point State Park.

D. Public Recognition

The Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS is among the most highly recognized areas of the Thousand Islands Scenic Area. This was evident from responses by public workshop participants.

Singer Castle on Dark Island is the most publicly recognized architectural feature of the SASS. This castle and its formal gardens, along with Boldt Castle, serve as an iconic expression of Gilded Age architecture in the Thousand Islands region. It was noted as an important historic structure on workshop maps. Workshop participants also emphasized the unique beauty of Singer Castle at sunset, as the sun shines through the building by means of a series of large arched windows symmetrically positioned along either side of the structure.

In the area of Goose Bay, a boat ramp in Kring Point State Park was noted by workshop participants as a notable recreational landscape. Ironsides Island and Sister Island Lighthouses were noted as important components of the visual landscape in the subunit. Both features were recognized as unique or unusual scenic areas with intermittent activity that affects the visual landscape. In addition, Ironsides Island has one of the largest nesting colonies of Great Blue Heron in New York State and is recognized as a National Natural Landmark. Scow Island was recognized for its estate building/landscape.

The islands within Chippewa Bay were noted on workshop maps as the site of historic structures and other important buildings and landscapes. Areas in the Bay and on shore were recognized as well-known scenic areas recognized by the public. Several areas were noted as important recreational landscapes on the southwestern shore of Chippewa Bay. The mouth of Crooked Creek, near NY 12 was recognized as a scenic area visible to the general public on workshop maps. Cedar Islands State Park was noted as an important historic/cultural site and as a unique or unusual scenic area. Blind Bay was noted as a unique or unusual scenic area and as a historic structure.

The area of Crooked Creek that meets the St. Lawrence River at its mouth, has a walking trail, the Macsherry Trail, that is maintained by TILT and open to the public.

IV. Impact Assessment

Proposed actions within a SASS that are subject to coastal consistency review under federal and State coastal acts must be assessed to determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource and whether the action would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of the identified resource. Some local government activities in communities with federally-approved Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs are also subject to local coastal consistency review.

Policy 24, “Prevent impairment of scenic resources of statewide significance,” provides that when considering a proposed action, agencies shall first determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource of statewide significance. The determination would involve:

1. a review of the coastal area map to ascertain if it shows an identified scenic resource which could be affected by the proposed action, and:
2. a review of the types of activities proposed to determine if they would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of an identified resource.

Impairment includes:

1. the irreversible modification of geologic forms; the destruction or removal of vegetation; the modification, destruction or removal of structures, whenever the geologic forms, vegetation or structures are significant to the scenic quality of an identified resource; and:
2. the addition of structures which because of siting or scale will reduce identified views or which because of scale, form, or materials will diminish the scenic quality of an identified resource.

Policy 24 sets forth certain siting and facility-related guidelines to be used to achieve the policy, recognizing that each large scale development situation is unique and that the guidelines will have to be applied accordingly. The guidelines are set forth below, together with comments regarding their particular applicability to this Scenic Area of Statewide Significance. In applying these guidelines to agricultural land it must be recognized that the overall scenic quality of the landscape is reliant on an active and viable agricultural industry. This requires that farmers be allowed the flexibility to farm the land in an economically viable fashion, incorporating modern techniques, changes in farm operation and resultant changes in farm structures. Policy 24 guidelines include:

Siting large scale development such as highways, power lines, major subdivisions and billboards back from the shoreline or in other inconspicuous locations to maintain the attractive quality of the shoreline and to retain views to and from the shore;

Comment: One of the most unique features of the Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS is the abundance of undeveloped or sparsely developed shorelines. Keeping
future large scale development away from the shoreline will be critical in main-
taining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of
the St. Lawrence River. It is recommended that future development be clus-
tered away from the shoreline and visually sensitive open fields and meadows.
Site plan review and open space development are valuable local land use tools
that can achieve this goal. One example of a site plan review criterion is the
preservation of shoreline vegetation to help new development blend in with
its surroundings. Another example of a site plan review criterion is design
guidelines to ensure that clustering and other siting techniques achieve scenic
preservation goals. Future open space development clusters could be sited and
designed to reflect the historic patterns of existing hamlets. Another technique
for maintaining the visual character of the SASS is acquisition of vulnerable
shoreline lands or conservation easements from willing landowners.

Probably the greatest threat to the future scenic character of the SASS is large
scale industrial and infrastructure development within or nearby district
boundaries. Large-scale projects, such as tall buildings, transmission lines, wind
 turbines, bridges, communications towers, should not be sited within the
SASS district or within the district's viewedash. Large scale industrial develop-
ment should be sited well back from the bluff tops, and shoreline to greatly
reduce the visual impacts. Modification of existing roadways, construction of
new roadways, utility lines and other infrastructure often requires state or
federal funding and/or permits and thus can come under the purview of
this policy. Locating public infrastructure that scars sensitive coastal areas and fa-
cilitates inappropriate bluff top or shoreline development could greatly impair
future scenic shoreline areas of the SASS.

Clustering or orienting new large scale structures to retain existing views,
save open space and provide visual organization to a development;

Comment: The majority of the SASS consists of open water, wooded shore-
lines, many islands, farm fields, meadows, marshes, forests and old pastures.
Historic hamlets such as Chippewa Bay, Goose Bay and Schermerhorn Landing
are located along the shoreline of the SASS. Farmsteads, houses and tradition-
al summer homes punctuate but do not dominate the landscape. A definite
boundary usually remains between developed and undeveloped areas of the
SASS. If this edge becomes blurred as a result of sprawling large scale develop-
ment, the visual character of the SASS could be damaged. Future development
should be clustered away from scenic resources, leaving most of the SASS in
a more natural condition. The siting and design of new large scale development
can be achieved with local land use tools such as site plan review, clustering
and transfer of large scale development rights as described in the local imple-
mentation section of this document. Locating new development in or adjacent
to existing hamlets could revitalize these areas and preserve open space in the
SASS.

Views from public ways, water access sites, shorelines and waterways are espe-
cially sensitive and should be protected from new large scale development, utility
construction or signage whenever possible. Views from and of the bluffs, shore-
lines, islands and farmland should also be taken into consideration in locating
new large scale development. Locating new large scale structures well back from
bluff tops and shoreline areas will protect the beauty of the coastal landscape and,
in the long run, will enhance property values in the area.

Incorporating sound existing structures (especially historic buildings) into
the overall development pattern;

Comment: Many historic summer homes and camps are located along the
mainland shoreline and on the islands of the SASS. These historic structures
could be incorporated into new development if necessary. A few early Twenti-
eth Century summer homes have historic architectural value and contribute to
the visual character of the landscape. Much of the existing architectural design
for modern residential homes is valuable and wholly compatible with historic
designs and the natural setting of the Thousand Islands. Much of the beauty of
the residential development within the SASS was accomplished through the good
taste of the homeowners rather than regulation and oversight by municipalities.
Future preservation of these homes, their grounds and their surrounding natural
setting would help to preserve the visual character of the SASS. Radical altera-
tion or demolition of these homes or the large scale development of their grounds
that is inconsistent with the visual characteristics of the viewedash could submit
this beautiful area to the intensive shoreline development that has marred many
other sections of the New York State coastline. Thus, it is recommended that in-
dividual owners and towns take these factors into account when renovating these
historical and scenic resources and when planning for future development in the
surrounding environment.

Removing deteriorated and/or degrading elements;

Comment: The SASS is relatively free of deteriorated or degrading visual el-
ements. Few towers, very tall structures, derelict buildings or wide roads or
parking lots detract from the scenic character of the landscape. Minor improve-
ments to roads and parking lots would enhance the scenic character of the SASS.
Signage and parking lots could be improved in certain areas. Overhead utilities
could be buried to improved views and visual character.

Post-WWII large scale development is the main degrading element in the SASS.
Development along the shoreline represents one of the major impacts on the
scenic character of the SASS. Planting vegetation for screening, fencing and
other measures could help reduce the visual impacts of any large scale develop-
ment. Bulkheads and erosion prevention structures along the shoreline reduce
the scenic character of the area. These engineering structures can be evaluated to
determine if replacement with vegetation or bioengineering techniques would be
appropriate.

Maintaining or restoring the original land form, except when changes screen
unattractive elements and/or add appropriate interest;

Comment: The unique landform of the SASS is relatively undisturbed and
should be protected in future construction, infrastructure and large scale devel-
opment projects. The rugged, granite, Canadian Shield landform of the SASS
is largely in an undisturbed state and is the one of the underlying factors in the
scenic quality of the area. The contrast in elevation and the juxtaposition of water
and land contributes to the beauty of the Chippewa/Goose Bay SASS. Altera-
tion of important landforms such as coastal bluffs, rock ledges, stone outcrops,
marshes, and tributaries would detract from the scenic character of the area. Use
of berms to screen parking lots and unsightly large scale development is an ac-
ceptable modification of terrain if carefully designed to blend with the natural
contour of the land. Alteration of natural terrain for large scale development and
roads is of special concern. Development should be located away from sensitive
geological features such as bluffs, hilltops, ridgelines, islands, and other unique
geological areas.

Maintaining or adding vegetation to provide interest, encourage the presence
of wildlife, blend structures with the site, and obscure unattractive elements,
except when selective clearing removes unsightly, diseased or hazardous veg-
tation and when selective clearing, mowing, controlled burning or grazing
creates or maintains views of coastal waters;

Comment: The wooded shorelines, small islands and open fields and meadows
of the SASS are a vital component of its scenic character. They should be safe guarded
and maintained whenever possible. Preserving the dense woodlands that cover
the shorelines and islands of the SASS is critical to the preservation of the area’s
scenic character. Maintaining existing woodlands in new development projects
could be an important factor in preserving the scenery of the SASS. Large scale de-
velopment projects that require clearing of extensive areas of shoreline and island
forests should be relocated inland or to other parts of the region.

Views from vista points in the SASS are disappearing due to the unrestricted
growth of successional vegetation. Maintaining open meadows and clearings in
the vicinity of viewpoints along the highway will help maintain the scenic character
of the parkway. Maintaining lawns, meadows and fields will also preserve both a
scenic and an historic landscape resource. Future agricultural practices that recover
abandoned, vacant land should be encouraged and supported.

The variety of vegetation and the consequent variety of texture and color in the
SASS make a significant contribution to their scenic quality. A variety of vegeta-
tion, open fields and meadows and the dense forests of the islands and mainland shorelines all provide interest and contrast in the landscape. The wildlife supported by this vegetation also adds interest and ephemeral character to the land. Vegetation helps new structures blend into the predominantly natural landscape and plays a critical role in screening facilities and sites which would otherwise be discordant elements in the SASS.

Using appropriate materials, in addition to vegetation, to screen unattractive elements;

Comment: The SASS contains relatively few discordant elements. Fencing or screening could be used to screen parking lots, low utility structures and buildings. Taller discordant features are too large to be effectively screened with fencing. It is recommended that new large scale construction be encouraged to use appropriate historic or native building materials. New or renovated overhead utilities located in sensitive scenic areas could be located underground, when possible, to eliminate their negative visual impact on the landscape. The failure to blend new structures into the natural setting, both within the SASS boundaries and in the viewshed of the SASS would impair the scenic quality of the area.

Using appropriate scales, forms and materials to ensure that buildings and other structures are compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape.

Comment: Most structures located in the SASS are generally compatible with, and add interest to the landscape because they are of a scale, design and material compatible with the scenic landscape. Many of the structures are historic in nature. Construction of new buildings incompatible with the cultural character of the SASS as represented in historic structures may impair the scenic character of the area. Many of the older structures use native materials such as wood clapboards, shingles or stone construction. Most have pitched roofs, traditional fenestration and are sited unobtrusively on the land, avoiding hilltops, bluff edges and other prominent locations.

Though some of the shorefront structures are large, their apparent mass has been reduced by designing the structures as a series of smaller, attached architectural volumes. This rambling, attached approach to residential design is typical of traditional Thousand Island architecture and is a major factor in reducing the visual impact of large, "mega-home" structures. Combined with sensitive site planning and design, the rambling, attached structures minimize obstruction of waterfront views from public roadways. Hamlets such as Schermerhorn Landing, Chippewa Bay and Goose Bay are good examples of appropriate scale in existing centers.

Locating very tall structures to avoid impacting scenic areas and views from scenic and historic coastal sites.

Very tall structures such as wind turbines and exhaust stacks will have major impacts on the scenic character of coastal landscapes. Over 600 Thousand Islands residents participated in the web-based visual preference survey in the summer of 2014. The survey results showed that wind turbine complexes on the Canadian side of the river have significant negative visual impacts on the region. Turbine images ranked among the least scenic images in the survey.

Consequently, massive industrial and infrastructure projects should not be built within the SASS district or within its surrounding viewshed. There are presently no techniques to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures because they are too tall, massive and frequently in motion.

Using shielded lighting fixtures at appropriate levels of illumination to preserve the Thousand Islands’ nighttime visual character.

The Thousand Island's dark, unspoiled night sky with views of stars, the sea and wooded hills is a priceless visual resource. Due to its relatively low density of development, the region enjoys dark nighttime skies that could be affected by poorly designed new large scale development. Light pollution from excessively bright, exposed lighting fixtures can block views of the night sky, blind motorists and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on large scale developments to be shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is provided without creating glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created by shielded fixtures also greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes by removing the bright harshness of many exterior light fixtures. Reducing the wattage of exterior lights is often possible without compromising safety or functionality and results in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or color-balanced light sources such as energy efficient, shielded LED lighting for large scale development will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the warm tones of incandescent bulbs while providing the efficiency of high intensity discharge or metal halide light sources.

It is recommended that existing town-owned lights, such as street lights or lights at public buildings and facilities, be gradually retrofitted to reduce glare and light pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction. Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights that cast direct light onto neighboring properties or on the water. Large scale commercial facilities should avoid unshielded spotlights to illuminate parking lots, storage facilities or outdoor areas. Adding a simple metal shield to an existing spotlight can greatly reduce light pollution and glare. Often a series of lower, shielded lights can replace a single glaring spotlight. The greater expense for large scale developments is offset by the creation of a superior nighttime environment.

8. Crooked Creek Scenic Area of Statewide Significance

I. Location

The Crooked Creek Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) consists of a major tributary stream extending from its source approximately a quarter of a mile east of Dutch Settlement Road in the Town of Alexandria to its outlet a half mile southwest of Schermerhorn Landing in the Town of Hammond. The stream flows from southwest to northeast. The SASS consists of the creek itself, extensive bordering marshlands and shorelines consisting of dense, primarily evergreen forests. It also includes farm fields along its southern and western borders. Its northern section consists of undulating, rocky Canadian Shield terrain interspersed with many small lakes. The SASS is approximately one and a half miles wide and three and a half miles long.

The borders of the SASS are shown on the SASS maps located in the appendices of this report. Starting at the mouth of Crooked Creek, the SASS's border heads north, paralleling the shore of Chippewa Bay along the bay's viewed boundary. At the mouth of Chippewa Bay the SASS border heads west, paralleling the shore of the St. Lawrence River along the river's viewed boundary. In the vicinity of Clouds Rest Island the border heads south, paralleling the shore of Goose Bay along the bay's viewed boundary. Just east of the hamlet of Goose Bay, the border heads southwest along a limestone escarpment that forms the edge of Crooked Creek's valley. Just east of the hamlet of Skinners Corners the boundary veers to the southeast following the hills that form the edge of the creek's valley. The boundary then intersects Dutch Settlement Road and follows this road approximately one half mile at which point the boundary trends north/northeast, following the wooded hills that enclose the valley of Crooked Creek. The boundary then intersects State Highway 12 and follows the highway back to the point of beginning at the mouth of the creek.

Consult the Area 3 Ratings map for detailed delineations of the SASS boundaries. The Crooked Creek SASS is located on the Redwood and Chippewa Bay.5 minute US Geological Survey maps.

II. Description

The SASS is comprised of subunits #46 and 47. In contrast to French and Chippewa creeks, Crooked Creek is shaped primarily by the very durable Canadian Shield granite bedrock that forms many of the islands in the St. Lawrence River. This is why Crooked Creek is crooked: it is constrained by the hard, rocky terrain that it flows through. Its narrow valley is also shaped by the underlying granite bedrock and features many steep hills and pronounced swales.
The upper reaches of the creek just north of Swan Hollow Road form a fan shaped network of small tributaries surrounded by extensive marshlands. This section of the creek flows around a number of low hills and promontories of granite bedrock. The upper section of the creek flows in a gradual arc around a peninsula of granite. The middle section of the creek is narrower, constrained by the granite peninsulas that jut out into the marshland. The meanders of the creek in this section are shaped by the granite bedrock, creating a jagged, crooked pattern. Dense, primarily evergreen forests border the creek in this section. The lower areas of the creek are bordered by wider areas of marshland. But the granite bedrock still controls the shape and flow of the creek until it exits into Chippewa Bay.

The Crooked Creek SASS consists of the valley of Crooked Creek as well as an area of very rocky, undulating granite terrain located north of Route 12. The SASS consists of the meandering waters of the creek, extensive marshlands and dense, significantly evergreen forests on hilly, rocky terrain. A pronounced, steep limestone escarpment forms the outer borders of the valley while granitic Canadian Shield bedrock shapes the valley itself. The granite terrain provides a distinct visual boundary to the valley of the creek. The hilly terrain north of Route 12 is reminiscent of the taiga covered landscapes of the northern Canadian bush. Many small ponds dot this rugged, rocky landscape covered by mixed evergreen/deciduous northern forests.

The Crooked Creek valley is surprisingly undeveloped with the exception of Route 12, a number of small, local roads and a small recent settlement at the local route 1 crossing of the creek. Route 12 has the character of a scenic parkway where it traverses the SASS. Very few if any residential structures are located in the SASS. Natural features include open marshlands, shrub swamps and dense woodlands growing on rocky, granite terrain. Eastern white pine and spruce predominate, especially along the banks of the creek. Deciduous species such as red oak, white oak, green ash, hickory, red maple and sugar maple are also abundant. The tall pines along the creek and in the rocky northern section of the SASS create nesting and hunting habitat for ospreys, eagles and kingfishers that feed on fish from the creek. Other than roadways and a limited amount of recent residential development, very few cultural features exist in the SASS. Over half of the SASS consists of conservation land, including the Thousand Islands Land Trust's Crooked Creek Preserve.

The SASS contains two Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats:

- The western edge of the SASS includes a small portion of the Goose Bay/Cranberry Creek designated habitat, one of the most important coastal freshwater wetland complexes in New York State. It includes vulnerable Blandings turtles, northern harrier and least bittern nesting habitat.

III. Aesthetic Significance

The Crooked Creek SASS is of statewide aesthetic significance by virtue of its exceptional landscape character, cultural landscape character, state of preservation, environmental quality, uniqueness, public accessibility and public recognition. It is a highly scenic tributary of the St. Lawrence River. The SASS is almost entirely free of development. The natural features of the river valley include wooded rocky hills, the waters of the creek, extensive marshlands bordering the creek, many small ponds and mixed evergreen/deciduous forests. The underlying Canadian Shield granite bedrock creates a rocky, hilly landscape of high visual quality. The ruggedness and scenic character of the terrain is due to its underlying geology that resembles the rocky islands of the St. Lawrence River.

The SASS is aesthetically significant because of its blend of open and forested landscapes; its dramatic rocky terrain, the steep hills that frame its valley and its relatively wild, undeveloped landscape character. The mix of open landscapes including waterways and open marshlands as well as dense forests and exposed bedrock outcrops creates a high degree of visual variety. Many highly scenic views are created by the open character of the land punctuated with woodlands. The open portions of the landscape are quite varied, creating many scenic views out over the creek, the marshes and the farm fields. The variety of open and densely forested landscapes creates many opportunities for well composed views over a wide array of landscapes. The fact that the creek is bordered by open...
The SASS is rich in wildlife habitat which adds ephemeral interest and activity, enhancing the scenic quality of the landscape. Raptors, waterfowl and amphibians frequent the creek and are especially active during dawn and dusk. Small ponds dot the northern half of the SASS, adding to the variety and composition of the visual environment. Wildlife in the Thousand Islands Land Trust’s (TILT) Crooked Creek Preserve includes American Bittern, Northern Harrier, Chestnut-Sided Warbler, Wood Duck, Red Fox and Beaver.

Thanks to past land conservation and preservation efforts by TILT and other groups and agencies, almost half of the natural and cultural resources of the SASS have been protected and some areas are open to the public. Protection of this unique watershed will ensure the long-term presence of high scenic quality in the landscape. Visual access to the SASS is enabled by a road system including Route 12 and a number of smaller local roads.

A. Landscape Character

1. Variety

The Crooked Creek SASS has exceptional natural landscape variety. The creek itself meanders extensively as indicated by its name. The many meander loops create visual variety and interest. The surrounding marshlands create an open landscape with many long views framed by mature Eastern White Pine trees lining the banks of the creek. In many locations the shoreline consists of exposed granite bedrock outcrops which create small cliffs that dive into the deep waters of the creek.

The natural features of the landscape are extremely varied. Because the valley is underlain by weathered and sculpted granite, the terrain of the SASS varies from steep hills to gently rolling landforms. A number of barren rocky hills add variety to the terrain of the landscape. The creek meanders throughout its length, creating constantly changing visual environments and views. The edges of the marshes have an extremely varied configuration created by numerous inlets, coves and peninsulas. Numerous small ponds in the northern half of the SASS create a highly varied visual environment.

The vegetation of the SASS is also highly varied, greatly enhancing its visual quality. The wide variety of vegetation types, heights, and densities consists of mature stands of Eastern White Pine, to mixed deciduous/evergreen northern forestland to successional fields, marshes and farmland. Natural ephemeral features such as ospreys, eagles and waterfowl add varied activity to the landscape.

2. Unity

The SASS is a highly unified landscape, thanks to its high state of natural preservation, its vegetation, its relative lack of development and its underlying granite geology. It is a visually self-contained area: a small river valley framed by granite bluffs and hills. The geology of the SASS shapes the entire character of the landscape, creating a unified visual environment. Dramatic outcrops of exposed granite occur throughout the SASS, especially in its northern half as well as along Crooked Creek. Vegetation also unifies the SASS. Most of the landscape is covered by a mixed evergreen deciduous northern forest with Eastern White Pines and spruces predominating in many areas. This gives the landscape a distinctively northern forest character, especially in the northern half of the SASS which in some ways resembles the “bush” of central and northern Canada.

The relatively unified character of most portions of the visual landscape is enhanced by the fact that large tracts of conservation land on Crooked Creek project extensive areas of the landscape. Almost half of the SASS consists of conservation land which assures continuing preservation of the landscape, enhancing its visual unity. The relatively small amount of development and the interplay of the meandering river and creek, the marshlands and the upland mosaic of dense woodlands and open meadows and pastures create a highly unified landscape. Only a small amount of recent development at the local route 1 crossing of the creek as well as the road cuts and car noise from Route 12 negatively impact the unity of this landscape.

The fact that water extends throughout most of the SASS provides a great deal of visual unity to the landscape. A wide variety of water features including the river, streams, dozens of small ponds, marshland and embayments are woven together in a unified landscape of diverse water features. Views of unspoiled shorelines and islands extend the unifying presence of water into interior portions of the landscape as well. Given the important role of water in creating scenic quality, the prevalence of water within and around the SASS is a very strong unifying factor.

3. Contrast

The Crooked Creek SASS contains extensive natural and cultural visual contrasts. The dark waters of the creek contrast dramatically with the light marsh grasses surrounding the water. This is a contrast of both color and texture in the landscape. The meandering, “crooked” form of the creek also enhances visual contrast. The dark pine trees lining the banks of the river and marshes create a strong contrast of visual tones. And the alternating patterns of dense woodlands and marshlands create contrasting forms and light character in the landscape. The edges and shoreline of the creek and its many dendritic tributaries and oxbow ponds enhance contrasts within the SASS. The varying widths of the creek, ranging from narrow stream to wider embayments, also create contrast in the water landscape. In the northern half of the SASS many ponds and dramatic barren granite hills create stark contrasts between water, rock and northern forest vegetation.

Cultural contrasts are created almost exclusively by the highly scenic state and local roadways that traverse the SASS. Route 12 resembles a scenic parkway with an attractive curving alignment through totally undeveloped landscapes. The highway’s Crooked Creek bridge provides lengthy vistas both up and downstream. The vistas are framed by dramatic granite outcrops and evergreen forests. Local byways such as Kring Point Road, Day Road and local route 1 provide visual access to the SASS with beautiful vistas along the creek and in the rocky upland areas.

4. Freedom From Discordant Features

The SASS is relatively free of discordant features and over half of it is preserved in conservation. No commercial and very little residential development occur in the SASS which is one of the most undisturbed landscapes in the study area. Only Route 12, the local byways and a small settlement at the route 1 crossing of the creek reflect human intervention in the landscape and these roads are all highly scenic. The extensive conservation holdings in the SASS ensure that much of the landscape will be protected for the enjoyment of future generations.

The very rocky terrain and remote location have undoubtedly helped to preserve the natural visual character of the SASS. The only discordant features of the SASS occur in the recent development at the local route 1 crossing of the creek. And the fact that Route 12 is a high speed highway that generates car noise and has cut through the granite bedrock in places also creates discordant elements in the landscape. Algae blooms and invasive weeds and marsh vegetation represent another type of discordant feature in the landscape.

Other than the Route 12 development the SASS is almost relatively free of discordant features such as wind turbines, transmission lines, major highways and commercial strips. The creek, marshlands, meadows and forests of the SASS create an unbroken, unspoiled landscape. The rugged, rocky, unspoiled character of the landscape harks back to an earlier era when large tracts of unbroken forests, ledges, ponds and creeks characterized the pre-development landscapes of the region.

B. Uniqueness

The unique beauty of Crooked Creek makes it one of the more scenic tributaries of the St. Lawrence River. The mosaic of granite rock outcroppings, ponds, creeks and forests creates a highly unified visual district. The relatively small amount of recent development, the enclosed character of the valley and the meandering configuration of the creek and its oxbow ponds creates an unusually serene visual set-
The northern half of the Crooked Creek valley is an unusually rugged, rocky unspoiled northern landscape, an outlier of the Canadian bush in the middle of the Thousand Islands.

As the name implies, Crooked Creek is unusually crooked, its many meanders twisted by the durable underlying granite bedrock that stubbornly resists erosion by the waters of the creek. This results in extreme and erratic meanders that are at times aligned in geometric patterns caused by the orientation of the underlying bedrock. The many barren granite hills and outcroppings in the SASS are so extensive as to be unique. While granite outcroppings are not at all unusual in the Thousand Islands, the number and character of these outcrops in the SASS is unusual. When combined with the area’s unique water features and vegetation, the visual effects are highly unique.

The fact that almost half of the SASS is in conservation is also unusual. Major sections of the creek and its valley are protected in conservation status. Almost all of the northern portion of the SASS is protected as are large portions of the southern half, including the creek and its surrounding marshes and shorelines. This amount of conservation is unusual in the region.

C. Public Accessibility

The SASS has excellent public visual and physical accessibility. Route 12 bisects the SASS and provides dramatic views up and down the creek from its crossing and bridge. While this highway is in certain ways a discordant feature, it does provide excellent visual accessibility to a particularly scenic stretch of Crooked Creek including views of dramatic bedrock outcrops and fully, tree lined shores. The scenic Parkway character of the highway also provides views of the rocky granite terrain and dense forest vegetation as it traverses upland portions of the SASS.

The fact that almost half of the SASS consists of conservation land also enhances public access to the visual landscape. The Thousand Islands Land Trust’s Crooked Creek Preserve and Macsherry Trail system that provides physical access to the northern half of the SASS. Other conserved portions of the SASS also provide a degree of public access.

Local streets such as Kring Point Road, Day Road, Indian Point Road and local route 1 also provide public visual access to the landscape. The route 1 crossing of the creek provides dramatic views up and down river.

D. Public Recognition

Crooked Creek is not a well-known Thousand Islands landmark but is recognized by local residents and naturalists as a uniquely beautiful and ecologically rich environment. The route 12 crossing of the creek is a recognizable landmark along the Seaway Trail. TILT’s Crooked Creek Preserve and Macsherry Trail are popular gateways to the beauty of the Crooked Creek landscape. The educational activities sponsored by TILT have increased the public’s recognition and understanding of the SASS. Crooked Creek is also well known for the diversity of its wildlife habitats which are used for birding, environmental education, fishing and hunting. Scenic vistas of the SASS from local route 1 and other local byways are well known to visitors and residents of the region.

IV. Impact Assessment

Proposed actions within a SASS that are subject to coastal consistency review under federal and State coastal acts must be assessed to determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource and whether the action would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of the scenic resource. Some local government activities in communities with federally-approved Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs are also subject to local coastal consistency review.

Policy 24, “Prevent impairment of scenic resources of statewide significance,” provides that when considering a proposed action, agencies shall first determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource of statewide significance. The determination would involve:

1. a review of the coastal area map to ascertain if it shows an identified scenic resource which could be affected by the proposed action, and;

2. a review of the types of activities proposed to determine if they would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of an identified resource.

Impairment includes:

(i) the irreversible modification of geologic forms; the destruction or removal of vegetation; the modification, destruction or removal of structures, whenever the geologic forms, vegetation or structures are significant to the scenic quality of an identified resource; and:

(ii) the addition of structures which because of siting or scale will reduce identified views or which because of scale, form, or materials will diminish the scenic quality of an identified resource.

Policy 24 sets forth certain siting and facility-related guidelines to be used to achieve the policy, recognizing that each large scale development situation is unique and that the guidelines will have to be applied accordingly. The guidelines are set forth below, together with comments regarding their particular applicability to this Scenic Area of Statewide Significance. In applying these guidelines to agricultural land it must be recognized that the overall scenic quality of the landscape is reliant on an active and viable agricultural industry. This requires that farmers be allowed the flexibility to farm the land in an economically viable fashion, incorporating modern techniques, changes in farm operation and resultant changes in farm structures. Policy 24 guidelines include:

Siting large scale development such as highways, power lines, major subdivisions and billboards back from the shoreline or in other inconspicuous locations to maintain the attractive quality of the shoreline and to retain views to and from the shore;

Comment: The Crooked Creek SASS is so undeveloped, environmentally diverse and scenic that large scale development would be inappropriate in the area. Since much of the SASS in protected in conservation, future large scale development of the few unprotected portions of the SASS would be inappropriate. One of the most unique features of the SASS is the abundance of undeveloped or sparsely developed shorelines. Keeping future small scale development away from the shoreline will be critical in maintaining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of the St. Lawrence River.

It is recommended that future development on the few remaining unprotected portions of the SASS be clustered away from the shoreline and visually sensitive open fields and meadows. Site plan review and open space development are valuable local land use tools that can achieve this goal. One example of a site plan review criterion is the preservation of shoreline vegetation to help new development blend in with its surroundings. Another example of a site plan review criterion is design guidelines to ensure that clustering and other siting techniques achieve scenic preservation goals. Future open space development clusters could be sited and designed to reflect the historic patterns of existing hamlets. Another technique for maintaining the visual character of the SASS is acquisition of vulnerable shoreline lands or conservation easements from willing landowners.

The Crooked Creek SASS is so undeveloped, environmentally diverse and scenic that large scale development would be inappropriate in the area. Since much of the SASS in protected in conservation, future large scale development of the few unprotected portions of the SASS would be inappropriate. One of the most unique features of the SASS is the abundance of undeveloped or sparsely developed shorelines. Keeping future small scale development away from the shoreline will be critical in maintaining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of the St. Lawrence River.

Probably the greatest threat to the future scenic character of the SASS is large scale industrial and infrastructure development within or nearby district boundaries. Large-scale projects, such as tall buildings, transmission lines, wind turbines, bridges, communications towers, should not be sited within the SASS district or within the district’s viewshed. Large scale industrial development should be sited well back from the bluffs tops, and shoreline to greatly reduce the visual impacts. Modification of existing roadways, construction of new roadways, utility lines and other infrastructure often requires state or federal funding and/or permits and thus can come under the purview of this policy. Locating public infrastructure that scars sensitive coastal areas and facilitates inappropriate bluff top or shoreline development could greatly impair future scenic shoreline areas of the SASS.
Clustering or orienting new large scale structures to retain existing views, save open space and provide visual organization to a development;

Comment: The majority of the SASS consists of open water, marshlands, farm fields, meadows, forests and old pastures. Future large scale development is inappropriate in this SASS. Small scale development on the few unprotected parcels should be clustered away from scenic resources, leaving most of the SASS in a more natural condition. The siting and design of new large scale development can be achieved with local land use tools such as site plan review, clustering and transfer of large scale development rights as described in the local implementation section of this document.

Views from public ways, water access sites, shorelines and waterways are especially sensitive and should be protected from new large scale development, utility construction or signage whenever possible. Views from and of the bluffs, shorelines, islands and farmland should also be taken into consideration in locating new large scale development. Locating new large scale structures well back from bluff tops and shoreline areas will protect the beauty of the coastal landscape and, in the long run, will enhance property values in the area.

Incorporating sound existing structures (especially historic buildings) into the overall development pattern;

Comment: Very few structures or homes exist within this largely undeveloped SASS. A few residences, some of them historic are located along roadways that traverse the SASS. The structures on the few remaining undeveloped portions of the SASS should be incorporated into any future small scale development patterns.

Removing deteriorated and/or degrading elements;

Comment: The SASS is relatively free of deteriorated or degrading visual elements. No towers, very tall structures, derelict buildings or wide roads or parking lots detract from the scenic character of the landscape. Minor improvements to roads and parking lots would enhance the scenic character of the SASS. Overhead utilities could be buried to improved views and visual character.

A handful of recent residential structures are the main discordant element in the SASS. Planting vegetation for screening, fencing and other measures could help reduce the visual impacts of any future development.

Maintaining or restoring the original land form, except when changes screen unattractive elements and/or add appropriate interest;

Comment: The unique character of the SASS is relatively undisturbed and should be protected in future construction, infrastructure and large scale development projects. The landform of the SASS is largely in an undisturbed state and is the one of the underlying factors in the scenic quality of the area. The contrast in elevation and the juxtaposition of water and land contributes to the beauty of the SASS. Alteration of important landforms such as bluffs, rock ledges, stone outcrops, marshes, and tributaries would detract from the scenic character of the area. Use of berms to screen parking lots and unsightly development is an acceptable modification of terrain if carefully designed to blend with the natural contour of the land. Alteration of natural terrain for large scale development and roads is of special concern. Development should be located away from sensitive geological features such as bluffs, hillslopes, ridgelines, islands, and other unique geological areas.

Maintaining or adding vegetation to provide interest, encourage the presence of wildlife, blend structures with the site, and obscure unattractive elements, except when selective clearing removes unsightly, diseased or hazardous vegetation and when selective clearing, mowing, controlled burning or grazing creates or maintains views of coastal waters;

Comment: The wooded shorelines, small islands and open fields and meadows of the SASS are a vital component of its scenic character. Dense woodlands line most of the shores of Crooked Creek. These woodlands should be preserved as vital parts of the environment and scenic character of the SASS. The relatively few farm fields and meadows in the SASS should also be safe guarded and maintained whenever possible through tilling, grazing of livestock, controlled burning or mowing.

Views from vista points in the SASS are disappearing due to the unrestrained growth of successional vegetation. Maintaining open meadows and clearings in the vicinity of viewpoints along the highway will help maintain the scenic character of the Parkway. Maintaining lawns, meadows and fields will also preserve both a scenic and an historic landscape resource. Future agricultural practices that recover abandoned, vacant land should be encouraged and supported.

The variety of vegetation and the consequent variety of texture and color in the SASS make a significant contribution to their scenic quality. A variety of vegetation, open fields and meadows and the dense forests of the interior all provide interest and contrast in the landscape. The wildlife supported by this vegetation also adds interest and ephemeral character to the land. Vegetation helps new structures blend into the predominantly natural landscape and plays a critical role in screening facilities and sites which would otherwise be discordant elements in the SASS.

Using appropriate materials, in addition to vegetation, to screen unattractive elements;

Comment: The SASS contains relatively few discordant elements. Fencing or screening could be used to screen parking lots, and newer structures. It is recommended that new construction be encouraged to use appropriate historic or native building materials. New or renovated overhead utilities located in sensitive scenic areas could be located underground, when possible, to eliminate their negative visual impact on the landscape. The failure to blend new structures into the natural setting, both within the SASS boundaries and in the viewshed of the SASS would impair the scenic quality of the areas.

Using appropriate scales, forms and materials to ensure that buildings and other structures are compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape.

Comment: Most structures located in the SASS are generally compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape because they are of a scale, design and material compatible with the historic landscape. Some of the structures are historic in nature. Construction of new buildings incompatible with the cultural character of the SASS as represented in historic structures may impair the scenic character of the area. Many of the older structures use native materials such as wood clapboards, shingles or stone construction. Most have pitched roofs, traditional fenestration and are sited unobtrusively on the land, avoiding hilltops, bluff edges and other prominent locations. Though many of the shorefront developments are large, their apparent mass has been reduced by designing the structures as a series of smaller, attached architectural volumes. This rambling, attached approach to residential design is typical of traditional Thousand Island architecture and is a major factor in reducing the visual impact of large, “mega-home” structures. Combined with sensitive site planning and design, the rambling, attached structures minimize obstruction of waterfront views from public roadways.

Locating very tall structures to avoid impacting scenic areas and views from scenic and historic coastal sites.

Comment: Very tall structures such as wind turbines and exhaust stacks will have major impacts on the scenic character of coastal landscapes. Over 600 Thousand Islands residents participated in the web-based visual preference survey in the summer of 2014. The survey results showed that wind turbine complexes on the Canadian side of the river have significant negative visual impacts on the region. Turbine images ranked among the least scenic images in the survey. Consequently, massive industrial and infrastructure projects should not be built within the SASS district or within its surrounding viewshed. There are presently no techniques to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures because they are so tall, massive and frequently in motion.

Using shielded lighting fixtures at appropriate levels of illumination to preserve the Thousand Islands’ nighttime visual character.
The Thousand Islands’ dark, unspoiled night sky with views of stars, the sea and wooded hills is a priceless visual resource. Due to its relatively low density of development, the region enjoys dark nighttime skies that could be affected by poorly designed new large scale development. Light pollution from excessively bright, exposed lighting fixtures can block views of the night sky, blind motorists and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on large scale developments to be shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is provided without creating glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created by shielded fixtures also greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes by removing the bright harshness of many exterior light fixtures. Reducing the wattage of exterior lights is often possible without compromising safety or functionality and results in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or color-balanced light sources such as energy efficient, shielded LED lighting for large scale development will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the warm tones of incandescent bulbs while providing the efficiency of high intensity discharge or metal halide light sources.

It is recommended that existing town-owned lights, such as street lights or lights at public buildings and facilities, be gradually retrofitted to reduce glare and light pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction. Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights that cast direct light onto neighboring properties or on the water. Large scale commercial facilities should avoid unshielded spotlights to illuminate parking lots, storage facilities or outdoor areas. Adding a simple metal shield to an existing spotlight can greatly reduce light pollution and glare. Often a series of lower, shielded lights can replace a single glaring spotlight. The greater expense for large scale developments is offset by the creation of a superior nighttime environment.

9. Chippewa Creek Scenic Area of Statewide Significance

I. Location

The Chippewa Creek Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) consists of a major tributary stream extending from its upper reaches near the intersection of Sand Street and Ireland Road in the Town of Morristown to its mouth at the southwestern corner of Chippewa Bay. The stream flows from northeast to southwest. The SASS consists of the creek itself, extensive bordering marshlands and shorelines, mixed northern hardwood forests, farm fields and pastures. Its northern section consists of undulating, rocky Canadian Shield terrain interspersed with many ponds. The SASS is approximately four miles long and one a half miles wide.

The borders of the SASS are shown on the SASS maps located in the appendices of this report. Starting at the mouth of Chippewa Creek, the SASS’s border heads to the north along Route 12. At Pleasant Valley Road the SASS border heads east along the treeline at the top of a steep limestone escarpment the runs for four miles all the way to the intersection of Sand Street and Ireland Road. It then heads south paralleling the top of several limestone escarpments for approximately three miles to its intersection with Oak Point Road. The boundary continues westward, following the treeline at the top of the limestone escarpment for three miles back to the point of beginning at Route 12.

Consult the Area 4 Ratings map for detailed delineations of the SASS boundaries. The Chippewa Creek SASS is located on the Chippewa Bay, Hammond and Morris-town 7.5 minute US Geological Survey maps.

II. Description

The SASS is comprised of subunit #52 and 55.

Steep, wooded limestone escarpments form the edges of the Chippewa Creek valley throughout the SASS while the valley itself is underlain by Canadian Shield granite. The juncture of these two rock types, known as an unconformity in geological terms, lies both sides of the valley. Flat to moderately rolling farmland borders the northern and southern boundaries of the SASS.

The upper reaches of the creek follow a narrow strip of woodlands bordered by farmlands. As the creek flows westward its woody valley becomes wider, eventually covering a width of over one mile. Small farms with fields, pastures and meadows are located in flatter areas of the rocky, hilly valley. In the western reaches of the creek the bordering limestone escarpment becomes increasingly pronounced, reaching over 70’ in height east of the creek’s intersection with Route 12.

The Chippewa Creek SASS consists entirely of the valley of the Creek. It includes the meandering waters of the creek, extensive marshlands and dense, forests and farms on hilly, rocky terrain at the bottom of the valley. A pronounced, steep limestone escarpment forms the outer borders of the valley while granitic Canadian Shield bedrock shapes the valley itself. The granite terrain creates a distinctive, rugged terrain that contrasts sharply with the surrounding flat farmland on limestone bedrock.

The Chippewa Creek valley has relatively little development, its main land use consisting of forests and small farms. Route 12 at the western border of the SASS has the character of a scenic parkway where it traverses Chippewa Creek. Few post WWII residential structures are located in the SASS occurring mainly in a small hamlet along Sand Street.

Natural features include open marshlands, shrub swamps, limestone escarpments and dense woodlands growing on rocky, granite terrain. Northern hardwoods pre-dominate with scattered occurrences of pine and hemlock. Deciduous species such as red oak, white oak, green ash, hickory, red maple and sugar maple are abundant with white birch, grey birch and aspen favoring areas along the escarpments. The SASS, especially areas along the creek create nesting habitat for ospreys, eagles and kingfishers that feed on fish from the creek. Cultural features within the SASS include roadways, farms, historic cemeteries, older farmsteads and a limited amount of recent residential development. None of the SASS is preserved in conservation.

The SASS contains the Chippewa Creek Marsh Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat, one of the four largest, undeveloped, coastal streamside wetlands on the St. Lawrence River. The marsh contains favorable habitat for many fish and wildlife species, including nesting areas for the northern harrier. The extensive wetland vegetation provides spawning and nursery area for many fish species including northern pike, largemouth bass and pan fish.

III. Aesthetic Significance

The Chippewa Creek SASS is of statewide aesthetic significance by virtue of its exceptional landscape character, cultural landscape character, state of preservation, environmental quality, uniqueness, public accessibility and public recognition. It is a highly scenic tributary of the St. Lawrence River. The SASS is sparsely developed with small farms and a limited amount of contemporary development. The natural features of the river valley enhance the scenic character of the SASS. They include wooded rocky hills, steep limestone escarpments, the waters of the creek, extensive marshlands bordering the creek, many small ponds and mixed evergreen/deciduous forests. The underlying Canadian Shield granite bedrock creates a rocky, hilly landscape of high visual quality. The ruggedness and scenic character of the terrain are due to its underlying geology that resembles the rocky islands of the St. Lawrence River. The limestone bluffs and adjacent flat farmland creates a strong visual contrast with the granite terrain of the creek’s valley.

The SASS is aesthetically significant because of its blend of open and forested landscapes; the dramatic limestone bluffs that frame its valley, the rolling hills of its valley and its pastoral character made up of a mosaic of small farms and dense woodlands. The mix of open landscapes including waterways and open marshlands as well as dense forests and exposed bedrock outcrops creates a high degree of visual variety. Many highly scenic views are created by the open character of the land punctuated with woodlands. The open portions of the landscape are quite varied, creating many scenic views out over the creek, the marshes and the farm fields. The variety of open and densely forested landscapes, farmland and historic structures and cemeteries creates many opportunities for well composed views over a wide array of landscapes. The fact that the creek is bordered by open marshland creates long vistas up and down the stream framed by evergreen and deciduous trees.
The SASS is rich in wildlife habitat which adds ephemeral interest and activity, enhancing the scenic quality of the landscape. Raptors, waterfowl and amphibians frequent the creek and are especially active during dawn and dusk. The intricate patterns and ecological edges created by the SASS’s natural and cultivated landscapes enhance wildlife habitat and diversity. Since very little conservation land occurs within the SASS, the visually unspoiled character of the landscape is the result of a lack of development pressure, the presence of active farmland and the rugged character of the terrain.

A. Landscape Character

1. Variety

The Chippewa Creek SASS has exceptional natural and cultural landscape variety. The creek itself meanders extensively through bordering marshlands. The many meander loops create visual variety and interest. The surrounding marshlands create an open landscape with many long views framed by the mixed northern hardwood/pine forests lining the banks of the creek. In some locations the shoreline consists of exposed granite bedrock outcrops which create small cliffs that dive into the deep waters of the creek.

The natural features of the landscape are extremely varied. Because the valley is underlain by weathered and sculpted granite, the terrain of the SASS varies from steep hills to gently rolling landforms. A number of rocky hills add variety to the terrain of the landscape. The river meanders throughout its length, creating constantly changing visual environments and views. The edges of the marshes have an extremely varied configuration created by numerous inlets, coves and peninsulas. The steep exposed limestone escarpments that form the edges of the valley in places reach over 70’ in height.

The vegetation of the SASS is also highly varied, greatly enhancing its visual quality. The wide variety of vegetation types, heights, and densities consists of mature stands of Eastern White Pine, to mixed evergreen/deciduous northern forest with eastern white pines and hemlocks predominating in many areas. A number of small farms within the valley also unify the landscape, creating a pastoral landscape of fields, pasture and meadows surrounded by dense forest lands.

The relatively small amount of development and the interplay of the meandering river, the marshlands and the upland mosaic of dense woodlands and open meadows and pastures create a highly unified landscape. Only a small amount of recent development along a private road as well as the road cuts and car noise from Route 12 negatively impact the unity of this landscape.

The fact that water extends throughout most of the SASS provides a great deal of visual unity to the landscape. A wide variety of water features including the creek, tributary streams and marshland are woven together in a unified landscape of diverse water features. Views of unspoiled shorelines and farmland lining the banks of the creek extend the unifying presence of water into interior portions of the landscape as well. Given the important role of water in creating scenic quality, the prevalence of water within and around the SASS is a very strong unifying factor.

2. Unity

The SASS is a highly unified landscape, thanks to its relatively high state of natural preservation, its vegetation, its farmland, its relative lack of development and its underlying granite geology. It is a visually self contained area: a small river valley preserving, its vegetation, its farmland, its relative lack of development and its unique visual character. A small hamlet of more recently built homes around a private road contains some discordant features. Algae blooms and weed growth resulting from nutrient runoff and eutrophication can occur in the warm months, creating a discordant feature on the normally clear waters of the creek. Route 12 is located several hundred yards to the west of the SASS. Road noise from the highway detracts somewhat from the character of the northern half of the SASS the many ponds and dramatic barren granite hills create stark contrast between water, rock and northern forest vegetation. The dramatic difference between the surrounding limestone and the rolling granite hills of the valley itself create a dramatic visual as well as geological contrast.

Cultural contrasts are created by the farm fields, pastures and buildings that are scattered throughout the SASS. Several historic stone houses and a unique historic cemetery contrast with the surrounding woodlands, fields and limestone bluffs. Local roads that wind through the valley also create cultural contrasts. In several areas vistas are framed by dramatic granite outcrops and northern forests. Local byways such as Pleasant Valley Road, Sand Street Road, Newell Road and Hyde Road provide visual access to the SASS with beautiful vistas along the creek and in the rocky upland areas.

4. Freedom From Discordant Features

The SASS is relatively free of discordant features. A small hamlet of more recently built homes around a private road contains some discordant features. Algae blooms and weed growth resulting from nutrient runoff and eutrophication can occur in the warm months, creating a discordant feature on the normally clear waters of the creek. Route 12 is located several hundred yards to the west of the SASS. Road noise from the highway detracts somewhat from the character of the northeastern portions of the SASS. The Route 12 bridge is also visible from this section of the SASS. Other than these relatively minor discordant features, the SASS is remarkably scenic and well preserved as a consequence of historical agricultural use and relatively low development pressure.

B. Uniqueness

The unique beauty of Chippewa Creek makes it one of the more scenic tributaries of the St. Lawrence River. The mosaic of granite rock outcroppings, limestone cliffs, creeks and forests creates a unique visual district. The relatively small amount of recent development, the enclosed character of the valley and the meandering configuration of the creek create an unusually serene visual setting.

The SASS exemplifies to a high degree the unusual geological contrast between two very different and contrasting rock types: the geologically more recent Limestone bluff overlooking Chippewa Creek
limestones and the ancient granites of the Frontenac Arch. The Arch spans the
Thousand Islands, connecting the vast Canadian Shield with the Adirondacks. The interaction of these two geological phenomena are especially apparent along Chippewa Creek due to the very visible limestone cliffs which rest on the underlying granites of the Arch. The cliffs in particular are unique: they enclose most of the creek’s valley and are unusually vertical and high. The limestone bedrock is fully exposed on many of the cliffs. The junction of the limestone and underlying granite, known to geologists as an “unconformity” represents a geological time difference of over a billion years.

Chippewa Creek consists of a unique blend of farmland, woodlands and marshlands, creating a pastoral river valley. Similar but less extensive than at French Creek, the mix of farm and forest lands along a creek is nevertheless unusual in the region and creates a high level of visual quality.

C. Public Accessibility

The SASS has considerable public visual and physical accessibility. Route 12 passes just to the west of the SASS and provides dramatic views of the lower portions of Chippewa Creek for the many cars that pass by on this major highway. Sand Street Road/Route 134 crosses the creek in its wider, central section, providing views up and down stream. Ireland Road crosses the upper creek providing more limited views of the brook. New Road, Chippewa Creek Road and Pleasant Valley Road provide intermittent views of the creek and extensive views of the rest of the SASS. No hiking trails or conservation lands exist within the SASS but a degree of physical and visual access is available to boaters, hunters, fishermen and snowmobilers.

D. Public Recognition

Chippewa Creek is a moderately well known Thousand Islands landmark and is recognized by local residents and naturalists as a uniquely beautiful and ecologically rich environment. The Route 12 crossing of the creek is a recognizable landmark along the Seaway Trail. Chippewa Creek is also well known for the diversity of its wildlife habitats known for birding, environmental education, fishing and hunting. Scenic vistas of the SASS from local route 134 and other local byways are well known to visitors and residents of the region. Chippewa Creek is also recognized as a major tributary of Chippewa Bay.

IV. Impact Assessment

Proposed actions within a SASS that are subject to coastal consistency review under federal and State coastal acts must be assessed to determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource and whether the action would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of the scenic resource. Some local government activities in communities with federally-approved Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs are also subject to local coastal consistency review.

Policy 24, “Prevent impairment of scenic resources of statewide significance,” provides that when considering a proposed action, agencies shall first determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource of statewide significance. The determination would involve:

(1) a review of the coastal area map to ascertain if it shows an identified scenic resource which could be affected by the proposed action, and:

(2) a review of the types of activities proposed to determine if they would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of an identified resource.

Impairment includes:

(i) the irreversible modification of geologic forms; the destruction or removal of vegetation; the modification, destruction or removal of structures, whenever the geologic forms, vegetation or structures are significant to the scenic quality of an identified resource; and:

(ii) the addition of structures which because of siting or scale will reduce identified views or which because of scale, form, or materials will diminish the scenic quality of an identified resource.
Policy 24 sets forth certain siting and facility-related guidelines to be used to achieve the policy, recognizing that each large scale development situation is unique and that the guidelines will have to be applied accordingly. The guidelines are set forth below, together with comments regarding their particular applicability to this Scenic Area of Statewide Significance. In applying these guidelines to agricultural land it must be recognized that the overall scenic quality of the landscape is reliant on an active and viable agricultural industry. This requires that farmers be allowed the flexibility to farm the land in an economically viable fashion, incorporating modern techniques, changes in farm operation and resultant changes in farm structures. Policy 24 guidelines include:

Siting large scale development such as highways, power lines, major subdivisions and billboards back from the shoreline or in other inconspicuous locations to maintain the attractive quality of the shoreline and to retain views to and from the shore;

Comment: The Chippewa Creek SASS is so undeveloped, environmentally diverse and scenic that large scale development would be inappropriate in the area. One of the most unique features of the SASS is the abundance of undeveloped or sparsely developed shorelines, marshlands and forests. Keeping future small scale development away from the shoreline will be critical in maintaining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of the St. Lawrence River.

It is recommended that future smaller scale development be clustered away from the shoreline and visually sensitive open fields and meadows. Site plan review and open space development are valuable local land use tools that can achieve this goal. One example of a site plan review criterion is the preservation of shoreline vegetation to help new development blend in with its surroundings. Another example of a site plan review criterion is design guidelines to ensure that clustering and other siting techniques achieve scenic preservation goals. Future open space development clusters could be sited and designed to reflect the historic patterns of existing hamlets. Another technique for maintaining the visual character of the SASS is the acquisition of vulnerable shoreline lands or conservation easements from willing landowners.

Probably the greatest threat to the future scenic character of the SASS is large scale industrial and infrastructure development within or nearby district boundaries. Large-scale projects, such as tall buildings, transmission lines, wind turbines, bridges, communications towers, should not be sited within the SASS district or within the district’s viewed. Large scale industrial development should be sited well back from the bluff tops, and shoreline to greatly reduce the visual impacts. Modification of existing roadways, construction of new roadways, utility lines and other infrastructure often requires state or federal funding and/or permits and thus can come under the purview of this policy. Locating public infrastructure that scars sensitive coastal areas and facilitates inappropriate bluff top or shoreline development could greatly impair future scenic shoreline areas of the SASS.

Clustering or orienting new large scale structures to retain existing views, save open space and provide visual organization to a development;

Comment: The majority of the SASS consists of open water, marshlands, farm fields, meadows, forests and old pastures. Future large scale development is inappropriate in this SASS. Small scale development on the few unprotected parcels should be clustered away from scenic resources, leaving most of the SASS in a more natural condition. The siting and design of new large scale development can be achieved with local land use tools such as site plan review, clustering and transfer of large scale development rights as described in the local implementation section of this document.

Views from public ways, water access sites, shorelines and waterways are especially sensitive and should be protected from new large scale development, utility construction or signage whenever possible. Views from and of the bluffs, shorelines, islands and farmland should also be taken into consideration in locating new large scale development. Locating new large scale structures well back from bluff tops and shoreline areas will protect the beauty of the coastal landscape and, in the long run, will enhance property values in the area.

Incorporating sound existing structures (especially historic buildings) into the overall development pattern;

Comment: Relatively few structures or homes exist within this largely undeveloped SASS. Several farms and farmsteads are located in the valley of Chippewa Creek and generally contribute to the scenic character of the landscape. A few residences, some of them historic are located along roadways that traverse the SASS. Future small scale development of the SASS could incorporate these existing structures, especially historic structure in the overall development plans. The hamlet at the Oak Point Road stream crossing could incorporate existing structures in future small scale development projects.

Removing deteriorated and/or degrading elements;

Comment: The SASS is relatively free of deteriorating or degrading visual elements. No towers, very tall structures, derelict buildings or wide roads or parking lots detract from the scenic character of the landscape. Minor improvements to roads and parking lots would enhance the scenic character of the SASS. Overhead utilities could be buried to improve views and visual character. Some deteriorated structures in the SASS could be removed or renovated if desired by the owners.

A handful of recent residential structures are the main discordant element in the SASS. Planting vegetation for screening, fencing and other measures could help reduce the visual impacts of any future development.

Maintaining or restoring the original land form, except when changes screen unattractive elements and/or add appropriate interest;

Comment: The unique character of the SASS is relatively undisturbed and should be protected in future construction, infrastructure and large scale development projects. The landform of the SASS is largely in an undisturbed state and is the one of the underlying factors in the scenic quality of the area. The contrast in elevation and the juxtaposition of water and land contributes to the beauty of the SASS. Alteration of important landforms such as bluffs, rock ledges, stone outcrops, marshes, and tributaries would detract from the scenic character of the area. Use of berms to screen parking lots and unsightly development is an acceptable modification of terrain if carefully designed to blend with the natural contour of the land. Alteration of natural terrain for large scale development and roads is of special concern. Development should be located away from sensitive geological features such as bluffs, hills, valleys, and island, and other unique geological areas.

Maintaining or adding vegetation to provide interest, encourage the presence of wildlife, blend structures with the site, and obscure unattractive elements, except when selective clearing removes unsightly, diseased or hazardous vegetation and when selective clearing, mowing, controlled burning or grazing creates or maintains views of coastal waters;

Comment: The wooded shorelines and open fields and meadows of the SASS are a vital component of its scenic character. They should be safe guarded and maintained whenever possible through tilling, grazing of livestock, controlled burning or mowing. Keeping the fields and meadows open not only benefits the scenic character of the area, but also plays an important role in maintaining varied wildlife habitat and ecological diversity in the region. The current agricultural practice of recovering vacant land for the production of field crops not only benefits farmers economically, but it also enhances the visual attractiveness from the contrasting natural and agricultural landforms. Both scenic and environmental goals could be achieved by implementing a program to maintain open meadows and to reclaim some of the open grasslands recently lost to successional scrub and forest growth.

Views from vista points in the SASS are disappearing due to the unrestrained growth of sucsessional vegetation. Maintaining open meadows and clearings in the vicinity of viewpoints along the highway will help maintain the scenic character of the highway. Maintaining lawns, meadows and fields will also preserve both a scenic and an historic landscape resource. Future agricultural practices

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that recover abandoned, vacant land should be encouraged and supported. Pre-
erving the wooded shorelines of the SASS is also important. The dense forests
that line many sections of the creek contribute to the environmental diversity and
scenic character of the SASS.

The variety of vegetation and the consequent variety of texture and color in the
SASS make a significant contribution to their scenic quality. A variety of vegeta-
tion, open fields and meadows and the dense forests of the interior all provide
interest and contrast in the landscape. The wildlife supported by this vegetation
also adds interest and ephemeral character to the land. Vegetation helps new
structures blend into the predominantly natural landscape and plays a critical
role in screening facilities and sites which would otherwise be discordant ele-
ments in the SASS.

Using appropriate materials, in addition to vegetation, to screen unattractive
elements;

Comment: The SASS contains relatively few discordant elements. Fencing or
screening could be used to screen parking lots, and newer structures. It is rec-
ommended that new construction be encouraged to use appropriate historic or
native building materials. New or renovated overhead utilities located in sensi-
tive scenic areas could be located underground, when possible, to eliminate their
negative visual impact on the landscape. The failure to blend new structures into
the natural setting, both within the SASS boundaries and in the viewshed of the
SASS would impair the scenic quality of the areas. Some existing development
would benefit from new plantings to screen unsightly elements.

Using appropriate scales, forms and materials to ensure that buildings and
other structures are compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape.

Comment: Most structures located in the SASS are generally compatible
with, and add interest to, the landscape because they are of a scale, design and
material compatible with the historic landscape. Some of the structures are
historic in nature. Construction of new buildings incompatible with the cul-
tural character of the SASS as represented in historic structures may impair the
scenic character of the area. Many of the older structures use native materials
such as wood clapboards, shingles or stone construction. Most have pitched
roofs, traditional fenestration and are sited unobtrusively on the land, avoid-
ing hilltops, bluff edges and other prominent locations. Though many of the
shorefront developments are large, their apparent mass has been reduced by
designing the structures as a series of smaller, attached architectural volumes.
This rambling, attached approach to residential design is typical of traditional
Thousand Island architecture and is a major factor in reducing the visual im-
pact of large, “mega-home” structures. Combined with sensitive site planning
and design, the rambling, attached structures minimize obstruction of water-
front views from public roadways.

Locating very tall structures to avoid impacting scenic areas and views from
scenic and historic coastal sites.

Comment: Very tall structures such as wind turbines and exhaust stacks will
have major impacts on the scenic character of coastal landscapes. Over 600 Thou-
sand Islands residents participated in the web-based visual preference survey in
the summer of 2014. The survey results showed that wind turbine complexes
on the Canadian side of the river have significant negative visual impacts on the
region. Turbine images ranked among the least scenic images in the survey.

Consequently, massive industrial and infrastructure projects should not be built
within the SASS district or within its surrounding viewshed. There are presently
no techniques to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures because they are
so tall, massive and frequently in motion.

Using shielded lighting fixtures at appropriate levels of illumination to pre-
serve the Thousand Islands’ nighttime visual character.

The Thousand Island’s dark, unspoiled night sky with views of stars, the sea and
wooded hills is a priceless visual resource. Due to its relatively low density of
development, the region enjoys dark nighttime skies that could be affected by
poorly designed new large scale development. Light pollution from excessively
bright, exposed lighting fixtures can block views of the night sky, blind motorists
and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on
large scale developments to be shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is
provided without creating glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created
by shielded fixtures also greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes
by removing the bright harshness of many exterior light fixtures. Reducing the
wattage of exterior lights is often possible without compromising safety or func-
tionality and results in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or
color-balanced light sources such as energy efficient, shielded LED lighting for
large scale development will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the
warm tones of incandescent bulbs while providing the efficiency of high intensity
discharge or metal halide light sources.

It is recommended that existing town-owned lights, such as street lights or lights
at public buildings and facilities, be gradually retrofitted to reduce glare and light
pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded
outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction.
Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights that cast direct light
onto neighboring properties or on the water. Large scale commercial facilities
should avoid unshielded spotlights to illuminate parking lots, storage facilities or
outdoor areas. Adding a simple metal shield to an existing spotlight can greatly
reduce light pollution and glare. Often a series of lower, shielded lights can re-
place a single glaring spotlight. The greater expense for large scale developments
is offset by the creation of a superior nighttime environment.

10. American Island Scenic Area of Statewide Significance

I. Location

The American Island Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS) forms the
easternmost section of the St. Lawrence Scenic Region. It consists of Amer-
ican Island, riverfront sections of the Village of Morristown and Towns of Mor-
ritown and Hammond, Old Man Island and Crossover Island and its lighthouse.

The northern boundary of the SASS consists of the Canadian border. The east-
ern border of the SASS crosses the river at Morristown Point, approximately one
quarter mile downstream of Bogardus Island, the downstream limit of the Thou-
sand Islands. The southern boundary of the SASS includes the historic Village
of Morristown and then runs westward parallel to and approximately 1,600 feet south
of Route 12. At Conger Road the boundary heads north across the river to the
Canadian border.

Consult the Area 4 Ratings maps for detailed SASS boundaries. The American
Island SASS is located on the Morristown and Chippewa Bay 7.5 minute US Geo-
logical Survey maps.

II. Description

The SASS is comprised of subunits #36, 65 and 64.

The American Island SASS consists of the open waters of the St. Lawrence River,
tall bluffs along its banks and four small islands: Crossover Island, American Is-
land, Old Man Island and Bogardus Island, the easternmost or downstream limit
of the Thousand Islands. American Island and Bogardus Island are immediately
adjacent to groups of Canadian Islands that have a strong visual presence on the
SASS. A number of very small islands and rocky ledges and shoals are located in
the vicinity of Oak Point and Crows Nest.

The banks of the river in the SASS generally consist of high, wooded bluffs rang-
ing from 30 to 50’ in eastern sections of the SASS to over 100’ in height in its
western section. Waterfront residential development occurs along most of the
shoreline, particularly near the Village of Morristown and at Oak Point. West-
ern sections of the SASS generally have lower density residential development. Jacques Cartier State Park is located in the central section of the SASS and includes a bathing beach, RV campground, and an amphitheater. Route 12 and local roads provide intermittent views out over the river and islands.

Inland sections of the SASS typically consist of deciduous, sparsely developed woodlands. Route 12, a scenic highway parallels the shore of the river in the central and western sections of the SASS. A local roadway runs parallel to the shore, providing access to the many waterfront homes in the SASS. The southern edges of the SASS consist of a mix of woodlands and farm fields.

The historic Crossover Island Lighthouse is located at the point where the shipping channel crosses over from the American side of the river to the Canadian side. This is an important navigation point in the coastal boundary because along the majority of the SASS the shipping channel is located on the Canadian side of the river, running through the many island chains that occur there.

The Village of Morrisstown is an historic village with tree-lined streets, historic homes and a small port. The village is located on a steep hillside, providing numerous views out over the river including the Three Sisters Islands and the City of Brockville, Canada. The town contains an historic windmill and the scenic Bayside Park.

The SASS contains two Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats, American Island Pools and a portion of the Chippewa Bay Tern Colonies. American Island Pools is an area containing relatively large open water pools during the winter ice-in season. These pools attract major concentrations of migratory birds during the winter months and provide wintering area habitat for bald eagles. American Island itself includes large trees which are a primary roosting site for bald eagles on the American side of the St. Lawrence River.

The Chippewa Bay Tern Colonies in this SASS are located on Whalebak Island and on an artificial structure, Navigation Light 156. These locations have become critical breeding habitat for common terns due to their isolation from predators, fluctuating water levels, and human disturbance. Navigation lights in the Thousand Island region support the highest hatching success rates in the world for the common tern.

III. Aesthetic Significance

The American Island SASS is of statewide aesthetic significance by virtue of its exceptional landscape character, historic character, state of preservation, environmental character, uniqueness, public accessibility and public recognition. It is an important scenic area of the region’s coastline, with attractive scenery on American Island, the main river channel, the smaller islands and the bluff lined shorelines. The relatively small number of islands on the American side of the river is counterbalanced by a much larger number of islands that abut the SASS on the Canadian side that form a significant part of the SASS’s viewshed.

The wide expanses of main river channel, the islands and the bluff lined coastline of the SASS create a scenic coastal environment. Public roads along the mainland shoreline provide public access to vistas of the water and islands. The diversity of landscapes within the SASS creates a varied visual setting. The SASS has an abundance of water views as well as internal views of farmland, meadows and woodlands. Views of sunsets over the Canadian islands and shoreline are highly scenic. The shoreline and upland areas of the SASS are dominated and shaped by the flat to rolling limestone bedrock. Canadian Shield granites are absent along the shorelines but do occur outcrop on most of the islands. Upland portions of the SASS consist of flat to rolling farmland with steep wooded bluffs and residential development along the shoreline. Views of the river from the Village of Morrisstown, the riverside roadways and the islands provide sweeping vistas of the waterway. Several turn-outs off Route 12 provide high level views from the top of the bluffs out over the river.

While the SASS is especially rich in natural scenic character, cultural factors also influence the visual character of the landscape. The natural landscape has been modified over the centuries by farming, resulting in attractive visual character. Local roads as well as Route 12 run parallel to the lake and the river, providing intermittent views of the water. Small forests and woodlots accent the open farm landscape creating contrast and variety in the visual landscape. Historic landmarks such as historic stone waterfront houses, estates, lighthouses and scenic roads create focal points in the cultural landscape of the SASS.

Very little conservation land exists within the SASS. Jacques Cartier State Park consists of a large segment of public lands in the center of the SASS. Much of the park is in a natural state, though intensive RV campgrounds along the shoreline impact the visual quality of the park’s riverfront. Other than the state park, most of the SASS’s shoreline is lined with residential development, somewhat reducing the scenic quality of the area. However a significant number of homes are tucked...
into the woods, thus reducing their visual footprint.

A. Landscape Character

1. Variety

The American Island SASS contains a diversity of landscapes ranging from steep wooded bluffs to small rocky islands to an historic town center. The St. Lawrence River dominates the SASS. The river is narrower in the SASS and has much steeper and more prominent banks than other parts of the region. The varied shoreline configurations of the SASS, especially on American Island and other smaller islands, create variety along the waterfront. The geology of the SASS is also quite varied, ranging from bedrock islands to the limestone bluffs along the waterfront to the flat to rolling terrain of the upland plateau.

The Village of Morristown is an historic town center featuring attractive streets, several stores and small businesses and pleasant residential areas. Public access to the waterfront is noteworthy allowing residents and visitors the opportunity to experience varied views of and access to the river in the Village of Morristown, Jacques Cartier State Park and from the local and state roads that line the shoreline bluffs.

Water bodies range from the open waters of the main shipping channel at Crossover Island, to the bays and coves of the islands to the wooded bluffs along the shoreline. The main shipping channel, with the exception of areas in the vicinity of Crossover Island, is located on the Canadian side of the river. At the crossover point at the western edge of the SASS, large ships pass very close to the shoreline, creating a varied and contrasting ephemeral visual character.

2. Unity

The SASS is a relatively unified landscape due to the constant presence of the river, the consistently steep, wooded shorelines, the intermittent islands and the consistently narrower breadth of the river. The limestone geology of most of the mainland shorelines and uplands creates a unified foundation to the SASS. Tall wooded bluffs line most of the shoreline while most of the small islands in the SASS are uniformly granitic, Canadian Shield type landforms. The consistently high numbers of islands on the Canadian side of the river that are clearly visible from the American side create a unified backdrop to the landscape. Most of the islands near Brockville, Canada are owned by the city and preserved as conservation land.

The shoreline of the river undulates in a consistent pattern throughout the SASS with a number of coves, peninsulas and bays such as Point Comfort, Oak Point, Blackstone Bay and Delack Point. This creates a unifying visual effect in the landscape.

Unifying cultural factors in the landscape include the presence of shipping, especially at Crossover Island lighthouse, the historic village of Morristown and the riverside roadways. Route 12 follows the river’s shoreline in most of the SASS, creating a parkway character. Some aspects of the highway as well as the residential development that lines much of the shore disrupt the unity of the landscape in places.

3. Contrast

The American Island SASS contains both natural and cultural landscape contrasts. The most noticeable natural contrast consists of the juxtaposition of the small islands with the points and bays of the undulating shoreline. The steep wooded bluffs lining the river contrast sharply with the open water of the St. Lawrence. The many Canadian islands which are clearly visible from and in relatively close proximity to the American side contrast with the open character of other sections of the SASS.

While most of the shipping channel is located on the Canadian side of the river, large ocean-going ships are still clearly visible due to the narrower width of the river in the SASS. The ships appear to weave in and out of the many islands, creating a contrasting ephemeral visual effect. The pronounced points of land along the river contrast with adjacent bays and coves. In upland portions of the SASS the dense woodlands contrast with areas of flat to rolling open farmland creating a contrast of vegetation types and spatial environments.

The city of Brockville with its church spires and a visually discordant high-rise apartment building contrast with the surrounding wooded shorelines. Aside from the apartment tower, the city’s skyline is attractive and contrasts with the

Morristown with Bogardus Island and Brockville, Canada in the distance; Source: Bruce Dana Aerial Photography
many protected Canadian islands visible from the American side of the river.

4. Freedom From Discordant Features

While relatively high in visual quality, the SASS would have higher quality scenery if it had fewer discordant features. The tall apartment building in Brockville, highly visible from the eastern portions of the SASS, disrupts an otherwise beautiful city skyline of church steeples and attractive residential and commercial districts. The tall block of the apartment building now dominates the city's waterfront with negative visual impacts on the American side of the river.

Residential development lines much of the mainland shoreline. While many homes blend in with and complement the wooded character of the shoreline, other structures detract from the visual character of the waterway. High density areas of camps and small homes line sections of the shoreline in some areas of the SASS creating discordant features in the landscape. Development of a large RV campground and large parking lot at Jacques Cartier State Park has reduced the visual character as well. In spite of these discordant features the SASS still retains a high level of scenic quality.

B. Uniqueness

The St. Lawrence River is unusually narrow in most areas of the SASS averaging between and mile and a half in width. High wooded bluffs lining most of the shoreline of the SASS also create unusual contrasts in this section of the river. The relative narrowness of the river and the steepness of its banks create a strong sense of visual enclosure not seen in most other portions of the Thousand Islands. While other sections of the river have narrow channels created by large islands, this SASS features narrowness of the entire river. Interestingly the inlet of the river at Cape Vincent is also narrow, resulting in narrowness at both ends of the Thousand Islands.

Because of the narrow width of the river and the tall height of the bluffs, the Canadian shoreline and particularly the Canadian Islands are much more visible from the American mainland than in other sections of the study area. Brockville, Canada, highly visible from the American shoreline is the only city in the Thousand Islands and one of the few Canadian settlements visible from the American mainland.

C. Public Accessibility

Public Accessibility in the SASS is excellent due to roadways that parallel the coastline, a major state park, an historic waterfront village and several highway overlooks. Route 12 along the mainland shoreline offers intermittent views of the river and adjacent farm and forest land along the top of the bluffs. A network of smaller roads parallel the top of the river bluffs. These roads include River Road, Point Comfort Road, Blackstone Bay Road and Riverledge Road. Streets in the Village of Morristown provide both visual and physical access to the shoreline, many terminating directly at the waterfront. Bayside Park along the Morristown cove provides an attractive pedestrian character to the village waterfront. The SASS is accessible by boat with boat launches in the Village of Morristown and at Jacques Cartier State Park.

D. Public Recognition

The SASS is moderately recognized by the public. The area is well known as the downstream limit of the Thousand Islands. Bogardus Island is well known as the first (or last) Thousand Island. Jacques Cartier State Park is one of the most popular state park destinations in the Thousand Islands and the Village of Morristown is well known as an historic center and small port. Crossover Island lighthouse and the crossing of the shipping channel from close to the American shore to close to the Canadian shore is a locally notable feature of the river. Brockville, highly visible from the American side of the river, is the largest and most recognized city in the Thousand Islands.

IV. Impact Assessment

Proposed actions within a SASS that are subject to coastal consistency review under federal and State coastal acts must be assessed to determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource and whether the action would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of the scenic resource. Some local government activities in communities with federally-approved Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs are also subject to local coastal consistency review.

Policy 24, "Prevent impairment of scenic resources of statewide significance," provides that when considering a proposed action, agencies shall first determine whether the action could affect a scenic resource of statewide significance. The determination would involve:

(1) a review of the coastal area map to ascertain if it shows an identified scenic resource which could be affected by the proposed action, and:

(2) a review of the types of activities proposed to determine if they would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of an identified resource.

Impairment includes:

(i) the irreversible modification of geologic forms; the destruction or removal of vegetation; the modification, destruction or removal of structures, whenever the geologic forms, vegetation or structures are significant to the scenic quality of an identified resource; and:

(ii) the addition of structures which because of siting or scale will reduce identified views or which because of scale, form, or materials will diminish the scenic quality of an identified resource.

Policy 24 sets forth certain siting and facility-related guidelines to be used to achieve the policy, recognizing that each large scale development situation is unique and that the guidelines will have to be applied accordingly. The guidelines are set forth below, together with comments regarding their particular applicability to this Scenic Area of Statewide Significance. In applying these guidelines to agricultural land it must be recognized that the overall scenic quality of the landscape is reliant on an active and viable agricultural industry. This requires that farmers be allowed the flexibility to farm the land in an economically viable fashion, incorporating modern techniques, changes in farm operation and resultant changes in farm structures. Policy 24 guidelines include:

Siting large scale development such as highways, power lines, major subdivisions and bill boards back from the shoreline or in other inconspicuous locations to maintain the attractive quality of the shoreline and to retain views to and from the shore;

Comment: The mainland shoreline of the SASS is typified by tall wooded bluffs dotted with homes and summer camps. The island shorelines are undeveloped or moderately developed with scattered residences. Keeping future large scale development away from the shoreline will be critical in maintaining the visual character of the SASS as well as the environmental health of the St. Lawrence River. Large scale development would cause major visual damage to the SASS. It is recommended that future development be clustered away from the shoreline and visually sensitive wooded bluffs.

Site plan review and open space development are valuable local land use tools that can achieve this goal. One example of a site plan review criterion is the preservation of shoreline vegetation to help new development blend in with its surroundings. Another example of a site plan review criterion is design guidelines to ensure that clustering and other siting techniques achieve scenic preservation goals. Future open space development clusters could be sited and designed to reflect the historic patterns of existing hamlets. Another technique for maintaining the visual character of the SASS is acquisition of vulnerable shoreline lands or conservation easements from willing landowners.

Probably the greatest threat to the future scenic character of the SASS is large scale industrial and infrastructure development within or nearby district boundaries. Large-scale projects, such as tall buildings, transmission lines,
wind turbines, bridges, communications towers, should not be sited within the SASS district or within the district’s viewshed. Large scale industrial development should be sited well back from the bluff tops, and shoreline to greatly reduce the visual impacts. Modification of existing roadways, construction of new roadways, utility lines and other infrastructure often requires state or federal funding and/or permits and thus can come under the purview of this policy. Locating public infrastructure that scars sensitive coastal areas and facilitates inappropriate bluff top or shoreline development could greatly impair future scenic shoreline areas of the SASS.

Clustering or orienting new large scale structures to retain existing views, save open space and provide visual organization to a development;

Comment: The majority of the SASS consists of open water, wooded shorelines, steep bluffs, islands, farm fields, meadows, marshes, forests and old pastures. The historic village of Morristown, hamlets, farmsteads, summer homes and camps punctuate but do not dominate the landscape except in a few heavily developed locations. If the wooded bluffs become the location of sprawling large scale development, the visual character of the SASS could be damaged. Future large scale development should be clustered away from scenic resources, leaving most of the SASS in a more natural condition. The siting and design of new large scale development can be achieved with local land use tools such as site plan review, clustering and transfer of large scale development rights as described in the local implementation section of this document.

Views from the many public ways that parallel the river, water access sites, shorelines and waterways are especially sensitive and should be protected from new large scale development, utility construction or signage whenever possible. Views from and of the bluffs, shorelines, islands and farmland should also be taken into consideration in locating new development. Locating new large scale structures well back from bluff tops, or preferably outside of the SASS altogether will protect the beauty of the coastal landscape and, in the long run, will enhance property values in the area.

Incorporating sound existing structures (especially historic buildings) into the overall development pattern;

Comment: A few early Twentieth Century summer homes have historic architectural value and contribute to the visual character of the landscape. Many more recent camps and summer homes line the wooded bluffs of the SASS. New development should incorporate these sound existing structures. Much of the beauty of the residential development within the SASS was accomplished through the good taste of the homeowners rather than regulation and oversight by municipalities. Future preservation of these homes, their grounds and their surrounding natural setting would help to preserve the visual character of the SASS. Radical alteration or demolition of these homes or the large scale development of their grounds that is inconsistent with the visual characteristics of the viewshed could submit this beautiful area to the intensive shoreline development that has marred many other sections of the New York State coastline. Thus, it is recommended that individual owners and towns take these factors into account when renovating these historical and scenic resources and when planning for future development in the surrounding environment.

Removing deteriorated and/or degrading elements;

Comment: The SASS is relatively free of deteriorated or degrading visual elements. Few towers, very tall structures, derelict buildings or wide roads or parking lots detract from the scenic character of the landscape. Minor improvements to roads and parking lots would enhance the scenic character of the SASS. Signage and parking lots could be improved in certain areas. Overhead utilities could be buried to improved views and visual character.

More recent development along the shoreline represents one of the major impacts on the scenic character of the SASS. Planting vegetation for screening, fencing and other measures could help reduce the visual impacts of any large scale development. Bulkheads and erosion prevention structures along the shoreline reduce the scenic character of the area. These engineering structures can be evaluated to determine if replacement with vegetation or bioengineering techniques would be appropriate.

Maintaining or restoring the original land form, except when changes screen unattractive elements and/or add appropriate interest;

Comment: The unique character of the American Island SASS is relatively undisturbed and should be protected in future construction, infrastructure and large scale development projects. The landform of the SASS is largely in an undisturbed state and is one of the underlying factors in the scenic quality of the area. The contrast in elevation and the juxtaposition of water and land contributes to the beauty of the SASS. The geological contrast between the limestone bluffs and the granite islands is unique and should be respected in new development projects.

Alteration of important landforms such as coastal bluffs, rock ledges, stone outcrops, marshes, and tributaries would detract from the scenic character of the area. Use of berms to screen parking lots and unsightly large scale development is an acceptable modification of terrain if carefully designed to blend with the natural contour of the land. Alteration of natural terrain for large scale development and roads is of special concern. Development should be located away from sensitive geological features such as bluffs, hilltops, ridgelines, islands, and other unique geological areas.

Maintaining or adding vegetation to provide interest, encourage the presence of wildlife, blend structures with the site, and obscure unattractive elements, except when selective clearing removes unsightly, diseased or hazardous vegetation and when selective clearing, mowing, controlled burning or grazing creates or maintains views of coastal waters;

Comment: The wooded shorelines, small islands and open fields and meadows of the SASS are a vital component of its scenic character. Woodlands on the steep bluffs are an important visual element of the SASS and should be preserved whenever possible. Planting of new trees and woodlands as part of new development projects would help reduce future visual impacts. Trees and woodlands on American Island and other small islands could be preserved to maintain the scenic character of the area.

Fields and farmland could be safe guarded and maintained whenever possible through tilling, grazing of livestock, controlled burning or mowing. Keeping the fields and meadows open not only benefits the scenic character of the area, but also plays an important role in maintaining varied wildlife habitat and ecological diversity in the region. The current agricultural practice of recovering vacant land for the production of field crops not only benefits farmers economically, but it also enhances the visual attractiveness from the contrast of natural and agricultural landforms. Both scenic and environmental goals could be achieved by implementing a program to maintain open meadows and to reclaim some of the open grasslands recently lost to succession scrub and forest growth.

Views from vista points in the SASS are disappearing due to the unrestrained growth of Successional vegetation. Maintaining open meadows and clearings in the vicinity of viewpoints along the highway will help maintain the scenic character of the parkway. Maintaining lawns, meadows and fields will also preserve both a scenic and an historic landscape resource. Future agricultural practices that recover abandoned, vacant land should be encouraged and supported.

The variety of vegetation and the consequent variety of texture and color in the SASS make a significant contribution to their scenic quality. Street trees and shrubs along the historic streets of Morristown play an important role in the scenic character of this historic village. Maintaining and replanting historic street trees will ensure that the scenic character of the village is preserved for future generations. A variety of vegetation, open fields and meadows and the dense forests of the bluffs all provide interest and contrast in the landscape. The wildlife supported by this vegetation also adds interest and ephemeral character to the land. Vegetation helps new structures blend into the predominantly natural landscape and plays a critical role in screening facilities and sites which would otherwise be discordant elements in the SASS.
Using appropriate materials, in addition to vegetation, to screen unattractive elements;

Comment: The SASS contain relatively few discordant elements. Fencing or screening could be used to screen parking lots, low utility structures and buildings. Taller discordant features are too large to be effectively screened with fencing. Painting such tall towers in light sky tones might reduce their negative visual impact. It is recommended that new construction be encouraged to use appropriate historic or native building materials. New or renovated overhead utilities located in sensitive scenic areas could be located underground, when possible, to eliminate their negative visual impact on the landscape. The failure to blend new structures into the natural setting, both within the SASS boundaries and in the viewshed of the SASS would impair the scenic quality of the areas.

Using appropriate scales, forms and materials to ensure that buildings and other structures are compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape.

Comment: Most structures located in the SASS are generally compatible with, and add interest to, the landscape because they are of a scale, design and material compatible with the bluffs, forests and rocky islands. Some of the structures are historic in nature. Many historic buildings are located in the Village of Morris-town. Construction of new buildings incompatible with the cultural character of the SASS as represented in historic structures may impair the scenic character of the area. Many of the older structures use native materials such as wood clapboards, shingles or stone construction. Most have pitched roofs, traditional fenestration and are sited unobtrusively on the land, avoiding hilltops, bluff edges and other prominent locations. Though many of the shorefront developments are large, their apparent mass has been reduced by designing the structures as a series of smaller, attached architectural volumes. This rambling, attached approach to residential design is typical of traditional Thousand Island architecture and is a major factor in reducing the visual impact of large, "mega-home" structures. Combined with sensitive site planning and design, the rambling, attached structures minimize obstruction of waterfront views from public roadways.

Locating very tall structures to avoid impacting scenic areas and views from scenic and historic coastal sites.

Comment: Very tall structures such as wind turbines and exhaust stacks will have major impacts on the scenic character of coastal landscapes. Over 600 Thousand Islands residents participated in the web-based visual preference survey in the summer of 2014. The survey results showed that wind turbine complexes on the Canadian side of the river have significant negative visual impacts on the region. Turbine images ranked among the least scenic images in the survey. Consequently, massive industrial and infrastructure projects should not be built within the SASS district or within its surrounding viewshed. There are presently no techniques to mitigate the visual impacts of these structures because they are so tall, massive and frequently in motion.

Using shielded lighting fixtures at appropriate levels of illumination to preserve the Thousand Islands' nighttime visual character.

The Thousand Island's dark, unspoiled night sky with views of stars, the sea and wooded hills is a priceless visual resource. Due to its relatively low density of development, the region enjoys dark nighttime skies that could be affected by poorly designed new large scale development. Light pollution from excessively bright, exposed lighting fixtures can block views of the night sky, blind motorists and degrade the character of evening landscapes. Requiring exterior lighting on large scale developments to be shielded will ensure that adequate night lighting is provided without creating glare and light pollution. The indirect lighting created by shielded fixtures also greatly enhances the character of nighttime landscapes by removing the bright harshness of many exterior light fixtures. Reducing the wattage of exterior lights is often possible without compromising safety or functionality and results in less energy consumption. Specifying color-corrected or color balanced light sources such as energy efficient, shielded LED lighting for large scale development will ensure that the color of nighttime lights matches the warm tones of incandescent bulbs while providing the efficiency of high intensity discharge or metal halide light sources.

It is recommended that existing town-owned lights, such as street lights or lights at public buildings and facilities, be gradually retrofitted to reduce glare and light pollution, when feasible. Building codes can be modified to require shielded outdoor light fixtures as part of any new large scale development construction. Large scale developments should avoid unshielded spotlights that cast direct light onto neighboring properties or on the water. Large scale commercial facilities should avoid unshielded spotlights to illuminate parking lots, storage facilities or outdoor areas. Adding a simple metal shield to an existing spotlight can greatly reduce light pollution and glare. Often a series of lower, shielded lights can replace a single glaring spotlight. The greater expense for large scale developments is offset by the creation of a superior nighttime environment.

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