

Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve

Frequently Asked Questions



What is a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve?

Biosphere reserves are internationally recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Biosphere reserves are experiments in sustainable development where conservation activities are combined with ongoing economic and community development and their experiences are showcased to the world.

What is the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve?

Designated by UNESCO in 2004, the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve (GBBR) is one of over 660 biosphere reserves throughout the world and one of 18 in Canada. The eastern coast of Georgian Bay is also known as the "30,000 Islands" and is considered the world's largest freshwater archipelago.

Our biosphere reserve covers 347,000 hectares of shoreline ecosystem stretching from the Severn River to the French River. It contains over 100 species of animals and plants that are at risk in Canada and Ontario, including unique reptiles and amphibians.

All UNESCO biosphere reserves are meant to be models of sustainable development by:

- Contributing to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species, and biodiversity
- Fostering sustainable development, and
- Supporting environmental education, training, research, and monitoring.

The 18 biosphere reserves in Canada are listed below along with the province or territory that it is in and their year of designation:

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|---|---------------------------------------|
| - Mont Saint-Hilaire- Quebec 1978 | - Redberry Lake- Saskatchewan 2000 |
| - Waterton- Alberta 1979 | - Lac-Saint-Pierre- Quebec 2000 |
| - Long Point- Ontario 1986 | - Southwest Nova- Nova Scotia 2001 |
| - Riding Mountain- Manitoba 1986 | - Frontenac Arch- Ontario 2002 |
| - Charlevoix- Quebec 1988 | - Georgian Bay- Ontario 2004 |
| - Niagara Escarpment- Ontario 1990 | - Fundy- New Brunswick 2007 |
| - Clayoquot Sound- British Columbia 2000 | - Manicouagan Uapishka- Quebec 2007 |
| - Mount Arrowsmith- British Columbia 2000 | - Bras d'Or Lake- Nova Scotia 2011 |
| | - Tsá Tué- Northwest Territories 2016 |
| | - Beaver Hills- Alberta 2016 |

You can read more about them at: <http://www.biospherecanada.ca/>

Does a biosphere reserve actually “reserve” land like a park?

No, it is not a wilderness area or land set aside to exclude people or their activities. For UNESCO’s world biosphere reserve program a special geographic area is recognized for its unique environment where communities are committed to living in balance with nature. Biosphere reserve organizations have no legal or regulatory powers and they do not affect existing private property, municipal jurisdictions or crown land. However, there are several provincial parks and one national park within the boundaries of the biosphere reserve these areas make up the core protected areas of the reserve. A full map of the biosphere reserve is on our website:

<https://www.gbbr.ca/about-us/gbbr/>

Who is in charge of the biosphere reserve?

The GBBR is a registered charity with a handful of full time employees that works to protect the environment, create vibrant communities and support a healthy economy. Working with many partners across the region, the GBBR relies on grants, members, and donations to achieve its mandate of conservation, education, and sustainable development. The GBBR also has a volunteer Board of Directors that meets monthly to advise on and steer the goals of the GBBR. We acknowledge the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and celebrate Indigenous languages within the GBBR. We are active on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram all with the handle @GBayBiosphere.

What does the GBBR do to support Indigenous culture?

The GBBR’s Cultural Advisory Circle shares Indigenous perspectives and builds a network of groups across our diverse communities. We support Indigenous language revitalization through youth, elder, and community activities. We are honoured to participate in powwows and other cultural ceremonies, and we are learning how to put reconciliation into action.

What are some of the key programs and projects of the GBBR?

Some of the main education programs are the lessons-in-a-backpack program that encourages the use of school grounds for nature education, and the kids-in-the-biosphere program which is designed to encourage kids and their families to learn more about Georgian Bay. Additionally, our Best for the Biosphere guide provides information to community members on how to use their gardens to provide habitat for wildlife and native plants, and our Life on the Bay guide is for property owners interested in reducing their environmental impact. You can read more about our programs at: <https://www.gbbr.ca/> Furthermore, our ongoing State of the Bay project works to track and make sense of changing environmental trends and to provide that information to the public in a meaningful way through our ecosystem report published every five years (2013 and 2018) for more on the state of the bay project go to: <https://www.stateofthebay.ca/>

Are there other biosphere reserves in Ontario?

Yes, there are three other biosphere reserves in Ontario: Long Point, Niagara Escarpment, and Frontenac Arch. The GBBR works with the Long Point and Frontenac Arch biosphere reserves on an ecotourism initiative called Amazing Places. The Amazing Places program highlights unique and special spots in the biosphere reserves that can handle increased visitation. Creating a 'bucket list' of great places to visit when you are in a biosphere reserve and encouraging people to explore locally within Ontario. To learn more about amazing places go to:

<http://visitamazingplaces.ca/>

Where does GBBR stand on particular issues?

The role of the GBBR is to educate, support research and monitoring, and to increase communication and awareness. We are a non-advocacy group; we highlight best practices and promote them. While we are often approached to take a 'stance' on particular issues we are neither experts nor have jurisdiction to make decisions, instead we have policies in place to facilitate dialogue.

Is the biosphere reserve the same thing as the Georgian Bay Land Trust or Georgian Bay Forever?

No, the GBBR is separate from other organizations like the Georgian Bay Land Trust, the Georgian Bay Association, and Georgian Bay Forever. However, working with partners is an important part of our mandate and the above-mentioned organizations and the GBBR form the informal group called "GB5". As a group we work together on larger-scale projects that can fulfill all of our mandates.

Where did the Biosphere Reserve concept come from?

As explained on UNESCO's website the origin of Biosphere Reserves started in 1968 at the "Biosphere Conference". As the first intergovernmental conference regarding how to balance the need for conservation and the need to develop natural resources, this foreshadowed the modern day concept of sustainable development. This conference was instrumental in the start of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere program that started in 1970. One of the original Man and the Biosphere objectives was to establish a coordinated global network of sites representing all of the major ecosystems of the planet. As a result of this goal, the idea of biosphere reserves was started, they are representative landscapes in which genetic resources can be protected, and where research on ecosystems as well as monitoring and training work can be conducted. In reference to the programs name these sites were called "Biosphere Reserves". You can read more about the Man and the Biosphere program at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/>

Why do we need biosphere reserves like the GBBR?

Biosphere reserves are important to conserve the biodiversity of species from plants and animals to micro-organisms. These living things make up the biosphere and while we need to build strong economies and develop resources we also need to maintain natural systems and the services they provide for generations to come. The GBBR designs tools to integrate development and conservation through our education and outreach programs. The GBBR and biosphere's across the world work to preserve unique landscapes and to encourage sustainable development, this is why we need biosphere reserves.