Abstract

This study explores the concept of ecotourism in terms of Honey’s (2008) seven principles of ecotourism (involves travel to natural destinations, minimizes impacts, builds environmental awareness, provides direct financial benefits to conservation, provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people, respects local culture, and supports human rights and democratic movements) and their application to the paddling industry of St. Lawrence Islands National Park (SLINP) and environs. SLINP and environs is located within the Thousand Islands Region of Eastern Ontario, and for the purpose of this research, includes all of the land and waterways along the St. Lawrence River extending as far as Jones Creek in the northeast to, but not including, Howe Island just southwest of Gananoque. The market and demand for paddle-based recreation in SLINP and environs is examined to determine if ecotourism is a feasible alternative to conventional tourism. Subsequently, Honey’s (2008) principles of ecotourism are applied to explore the role of paddle-based recreation within an ecotourism framework of the defined region. Specific recommendations were developed to better comply with these principles. General recommendations concerning the universal applicability of the principles were also prepared and included considerations for quality control measures and established tourism destinations. Ecotourism has traditionally been viewed as a panacea concept for developing countries to stimulate the economy, as well as, directly provide support for conservation efforts. This research instead examines the concept of ecotourism for a relatively sustainable, single activity within an established tourism destination of a developed country. If the recommendations are correctly implemented, the long term implications could include a reshaping of, first, the regional tourism industry and then, potentially the tourism industry at large, by encouraging a more holistic approach to tourism.
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List of Abbreviations

AT: Alternative Tourism
CBM: Community-Based Monitoring
CTC: Canadian Tourism Commission
FABR: Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve
FAPA: Frontenac Arch Paddling Association
FAPT: Frontenac Arch Paddling Trails
FSDA: Federal Sustainable Development Act
FSDS: Federal Sustainable Development Strategy
NBT: Nature-Based Tourism
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
PRTDF: Premier-Ranked Tourism Destination Framework for the Thousands Islands and St. Lawrence Seaway
SLINP: St. Lawrence Islands National Park
TIA: Thousand Islands Association
TIAC: Tourism Industry Association of Canada
TES: The Ecotourism Society
TIES: The International Ecotourism Society
UNWTO: United Nations World Tourism Organization
WTO: World Tourism Organization
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

As one of the largest economic sectors in the world, tourism accounted for US$919 billion worldwide in international tourism receipts in 2010 (WTO, 2011). The continual expansion and diversification of the tourism sector, since the 1950s, triggered a concern for the associated environmental impact. In this setting, ecotourism emerged as a viable alternative to mass tourism in the 1980s. Most commonly defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (TIES, 2010: para. 1), ecotourism is a concept that attempts to restructure tourists’ and operators’ values and perceptions by encouraging a more holistic representation of tourism. Although critics point to the definitional ambiguity and closely related affiliated terms (see section 2.2.) as evidence of the concept’s weakness, thirty years after ecotourism’s inception, examples in the field and academic discourse indicate the concept is still relevant. Honey, a leading ecotourism researcher and the executive director of the Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development in Washington D.C., asserts, “although ecotourism is indeed rare, often misdefined, and frequently imperfect, it is still in its adolescence, not on its deathbed” (2008: 33). Rather, ecotourism benefits from decades of research and on-site application which has led to numerous thoughtful interpretations of ecotourism (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987; Fennell, 2003; Fennell and Dowling, 2003; Hetzer, 1965; Laarman and Durst, 1987; Miller, 1978) including Honey’s (2008) seven ecotourism principles. For the purpose of this research, authentic ecotourism embraces all of the following principles: (1) involves travel to natural destinations; (2) minimizes impact; (3) builds environmental awareness; (4) provides direct financial benefits for conservation; (5) provides
financial benefits and empowerment for local people; (6) respects local culture; and (7) supports human rights and democratic movements (Honey, 2008). Although several of these principles may encompass various other types of alternative tourism, depending on the agency of definition and their motivations, ecotourism is insignificant without the principles and practices that add relevancy.

1.2. Context

The purpose of this research is to reconcile the principles of ecotourism with the paddling industry of St. Lawrence Islands National Park (SLINP) and environs. The larger geographical area of study is defined by the Thousand Islands Region which straddles the U.S.-Canada border along the St. Lawrence River extending from Kingston to Brockville (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Map of the Thousand Islands Region (from Thousand Islands Tourism 2011).](image)
SLINP and environs is located within the Thousand Islands Region and for the purpose of this research includes all of the land and waterways along the St. Lawrence River extending as far as Jones Creek in the northeast to, but not including, Howe Island just southwest of Gananoque (see Figures 2 and 3).
SLINP owns over 20 island and 90 islet properties and paddle-based recreation, or any mode of non-motorized water-based transportation involving a paddle as the main propelling agent, is becoming an important component of experiencing the region for both visitors and locals. The impact of this repeated visitation on the local environment became a concern for some farsighted stakeholders as issues related to shoreline degradation, island cleanliness, habitat destruction and trail hardening became apparent. Although these impacts cannot be directly attributed to paddlers, the issue of uncontrolled access to SLINP’s islands is directly affected by the park’s high visitor density (State of the Park Report, 2004). Not only did the research topic originate from this environmental concern, but the presence and support of local stakeholders proved to be a constant throughout the entire research process. After consultation with stakeholders to provide input into research objectives and design, it was apparent that a major knowledge gap existed in terms of marketing research for paddle-based recreation. Therefore, one of the primary objectives of this research was to provide market research concerning paddlers in the region and in doing so evaluate the feasibility of ecotourism from the perspective of demand. A questionnaire was distributed through various methods (see Chapter 3) and uncovered valuable information concerning respondents’ motivations, demographics and perceptions of paddling and ecotourism in the region. To balance the tourists’ perspective, interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders including park staff, NGO members and tourism operators. A literature review and document analysis were also completed. A themed analysis was conducted using the information accrued from the methods and recommendations were formulated based on these emergent themes. The recommendations were evaluated in terms of the research objectives to improve upon ecotourism for paddle-based recreation in SLINP and environs.
1.3. Rationale

Ecotourism has traditionally been viewed as a panacea concept for developing countries that, if done correctly, could stimulate economic development through tourism and at the same time help support conservation efforts. In other words, the natural environment is the attraction and it is this pristine, unadulterated setting that ecotourists are seeking. For this reason ecotourism is inherently paradoxical. The sense of exclusivity in visiting a pure environment is compromised by tourism and without proper management may destroy the very resource attracting tourists. However, it is the intent of this research to assess the viability of ecotourism for a relatively sustainable single activity, paddle-based recreation, in an already established tourism destination. Accordingly, the natural setting is viewed as neither the last frontier nor a challenge to be conquered, as commonly seen in ecotourism expeditions, but rather relatively accessible and developed. In this way, the principles of ecotourism are applied to an existent, not an emerging, tourism industry where modifications would need to be made to established networks and operations, not simply applied from inception. The inherent sustainability of paddle-based recreation when compared to the more common methods of experiencing SLINP and environs, large cruise boats and guided tours, can serve as a model with larger implications to the tourism industry if the principles of ecotourism can successfully be implemented. Honey’s principles of ecotourism are applied to a case study that is wholly different from common examples of ecotourism in the field but has the potential to kick-start a movement towards more sustainable tourism proceedings amongst industries with similar tourism profiles.
1.4. Objectives

Building upon the information above, the main objectives of this research are to:

1) Complete a scholarly literature review to provide a foundation, based in academia, for the remainder of the research including selection of the methods, questionnaire and interview design, analysis of the results and discussion, and formulation of the recommendations.

2) Assess the market and demand for paddle-based recreation in SLINP and environs to determine if ecotourism, according to the definition and principles defined above, is viable for the paddling industry and to provide valuable marketing research for regional tourism operations and organizations.

3) Explore the role of paddle-based recreation within an ecotourism framework, in terms of ecotourism principles, in SLINP and environs.

4) Develop recommendations for the paddling industry of SLINP and environs to better comply with the principles of ecotourism.

1.5. Structure

This report is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter served as an introduction to the research by outlining the context, rationale, objectives and report structure. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review that provides an in-depth examination of the concept of ecotourism including definitions, principles, related terms, ecotourists, criticisms, certification, and policy and planning in a broad sense and within the Canadian context. Chapter 3 describes the multi-method approach applied to this research; literature review, document analysis, questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Chapter 4 briefly summarizes the geology, geography and history of the Thousand Islands Region. The area of study, SLINP and environs, is also defined in this chapter.
Chapter 5 describes and analyses the relevant policies and initiatives with respect to paddle-based recreation in SLINP and environs. Tourism strategies of the Thousand Islands Region that are explored include the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands Official Plan and Economic Development Strategic Plan as well as Premier-Ranked Tourism Destination Framework: Regional Report. Sustainable tourism documents and initiatives from the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve and SLINP are highlighted and summarized. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of paddle-based recreation in SLINP and environs. Chapter 6 discusses the results of the questionnaire and interviews and integrates emergent themes exposed during the document analysis and literature review. Chapter 7 provides four general recommendations with broad implications followed by seven specific recommendations for paddle-based recreation in SLINP and environs. The recommendations are a culmination of findings from the literature review, document analysis, questionnaire and interviews. Lastly, Chapter 8 reiterates the major conclusions of the research, suggests opportunities for future work and provides a final thought.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0. Ecotourism

2.1. Defining Ecotourism

The concept of ‘ecotourism’ began as a reaction to conventional mass tourism in the late 1970s. At this time, not only were modes of transportation improving to facilitate easier travel to more remote destinations, but the International Labor Organization increased vacation time from one week per year to a minimum of three weeks paid vacation for the entire labour force (Honey, 2008). These factors coupled with shifting social patterns, like a growing middle class with larger expendable incomes, caused tourism to increase on a global scale; a surge that continues. In 1980, 277 million people traveled internationally compared to 684 million people in 2000, 922 million in 2008 and a projected 1.6 billion by 2020 (UNWTO, 2009). A new consciousness emerged, in part as a response to Gro Harlem Brundtland’s report entitled *Our Common Futures* (1987). The Brundtland Commission popularized the term sustainable development which was defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Commission, 1987: 54). Sustainable development offered a solution to the increasing impact mass tourism had on social and ecological networks.

Prior to Harlem’s publication, the relationship between tourism and the environment was perceived as one of conflict (Dowling, 1992). Simply stated, tourism developments were at the expense of the environment at large. Some scholars argue it was in this uncompromising setting that the concept of ecotourism was established. Hetzer (1965) used the term to describe the
complex relationship between travelers, the environments and the cultures with which they converge. He outlined arguably the first fundamental principles of ecotourism that would later shape the discourse of many definitions (see section 2.1.1.).

However, other scholars contend it was the emergence of the concept ‘sustainable development’ that altered the public’s perception of the tourism-environment relationship. Sustainable development appeared to orchestrate a paradigm shift that revealed this relationship could be one of mutual benefit. In this setting, alternative tourism (AT) materialized as a viable option to conventional mass tourism. Instead of emphasizing economical and technical tourism issues, AT focuses on natural and cultural resources while keeping the well-being of local people at the forefront (Fennell, 2003). As an umbrella term, AT encompasses different niche markets including, ‘responsible’, ‘appropriate’, ‘soft’, ‘pro poor’, and ‘eco’ tourism strategies (see section 2.2). Initially, ecotourism, as a subset of AT, was merely a term to describe the phenomenon of nature-based tourism in the 1980s (Wallace and Pierce, 1996) and was often vaguely defined as adventure tourism within a natural setting (Honey, 2008). Ceballos-Lascurain (1987), provided one of the first formal definitions of ecotourism, which was later adopted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as their official definition in 1996, as:

Traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas (as cited in Fennell, 2001: 18).

Laarman and Durst (1987), contemporaries of Ceballos-Lascurain, formulated a similar definition of ecotourism as a subset of nature-based tourism (NBT) where the “traveler is drawn
to a destination because of his or her interest in one or more features of that destination’s natural history. The visit combines education, recreation, and often adventure” (46).

Others argue that the term emerged much earlier, in Kenton Miller’s work from the late 1970s (Planning National Parks for Ecodevelopment: Methods and Cases from Latin America, 1978). The concept of ecotourism materialized under the guise of Miller’s notion of ecodevelopment via tourism and the potential for national parks in Latin America to contribute to both sustainable development and biological conservation (Honey, 2008). Miller (1994) argued that biological conservation efforts must consider ecological, social, economic, and political factors equally “in ways that are equitable and sustainable… as well as providing materially to human welfare” (464). Goodwin (1996) echoed Miller’s inclusion of sustainability as a whole with his definition of ecotourism;

Low impact nature tourism which contributes to the maintenance of species and habitats either directly through a contribution to conservation and/or indirectly by providing revenue to the local community sufficient for local people to value, and therefore protect, their wildlife heritage area as a source of income (288).

The complex and often debated context under which ecotourism was conceived has continued to plague the concept through time. The discrepancies over its origin, and subsequent definition, have in part led to a modern-day overwhelming surplus of definitions. It is rare to find a definition that does not include at least one trademark of ecotourism vernacular. For example, the most commonly used definition of ecotourism today is from the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) who define ecotourism as, “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (TIES, 2010). In 1991 when TIES was the Ecotourism Society (TES), it operated with ecotourism meaning, “purposeful travel to
natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem while providing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people” (TES, 1991). Although the definition has evolved, both include popular themes of ecotourism; that is a mix of value-based and activity-based components where both the industry operator and tourist have choices.

Fennell (2001) conducted a content analysis of 85 definitions of global ecotourism and found that the five most frequently cited themes are: (1) reference to where ecotourism occurs (natural areas); (2) conservation; (3) culture; (4) benefits to locals; and (5) education. Of the 85 definitions studied, 62.4% referenced natural areas, 61.2% made mention of conservation, 50.6% cited culture, 48.2% included locals and 41.2% incorporated an element of education (Fennell, 2001). Donahoe (2006) re-examined Fennell’s study five years later by conducting a thematic content analysis of 30 academic definitions and 12 Canadian private sector and governmental definitions. She found six recurring tenets that she argues may be considered the foundational framework for ecotourism as an applicable concept: (1) nature-based; (2) preservation/conservation; (3) education; (4) sustainability; (5) distribution of benefits; and (6) ethics/responsibility/awareness. Although there are slight differences in the results, Donohoe’s research confirmed Fennell’s (2001) observation that the definition of ecotourism is evolving and points to the contemporary addition of ‘ethics’ and ‘sustainability’ tenets to the definitional discourse as proof.

Weaver (2007) affirms that the tourism industry has indeed reached a near consensus on the core criteria of ecotourism and lists three themes similar to Fennell’s: (1) predominantly nature-based; (2) focus on learning or education; and (3) principle of practices of sustainability should be embraced by both visitors and operators. In yet another content analysis of ecotourism
definitions, Sirakaya et al. (1999) found 13 recurring themes amongst tour operators’ definitions including in order of most prevalent: environmentally friendly, responsible travel, educational travel, low impact travel, recreational and romantic trips to natural sites, contribution to local welfare, eco-cultural travel, sustainable/non-consumptive tourism, responsible-business approach to travel, community involvement, tourist involvement in preservation, ecotourism as a “buzzword” and contribution to conservation. Similarly, Newsome et al. (2002) argue an all-or-nothing principle with five mutually inclusive components. That is the experience must be nature-based, ecologically sustainable, environmentally educative, locally beneficial and at least satisfactory in terms of quality to be considered authentic ecotourism (Newsome et al., 2002).

Although the definitional components of ecotourism are becoming uniform, there is still much room for interpretation, situational application, and stretching of parameters within each component (Weaver, 2007).

Yet another method to navigate the multitude of definitions is to consider the different agencies of origin that can be further categorized into supply- or demand-side (Weaver, 2007). Honey (2008) suggests that the concept of ecotourism historically, stemmed from four different groups: (1) multilateral aid institutions; (2) scientific, conservation, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs); (3) developing countries; and (4) travelers and the travel industry. She attributes this multi-partied origination and their differing motives to the modern-day lack of a consensual definition. Fennell (1998) indirectly supports Honey’s argument when he concludes that the concept of ecotourism most likely originated independently in multiple locations as the industry began to respond to the demands and awareness of a more ‘eco-conscious’ society (as cited in Fennell, 2003). Sirakaya et al. (1999) analyzed the concept in terms of supply and demand and found that the supply-side is lacking in terms of operational definitions. Sirakaya et
al. (1999) contend that the demand-side of the tourism industry dominates the definitional literature and puts emphasis on components both inherent to their tourist-based research and ultimate cause.

There is obviously a plethora of definitions that could be examined and selected. I am, however, of the same opinion as Diamantis (1999) who stated, “the definition of ecotourism is not really necessary if the discussion focuses on the concepts rather than the issues implied by ecotourism” (93). For the simple purpose of creating a common basis of understanding, this study will define ecotourism using TIES definition (see above) in conjunction with Honey’s (2008) definition and corresponding principles,

Ecotourism is travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (often) small scale. It helps educate the traveler, provides funds for conservation, directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights (33).

Honey has been, and still is, one of the leading contributors to ecotourism literature since the 1990s. She was executive director of TIES from 2003 to 2006 and her background as an academic lends itself to neither the demand- nor the supply-side of the industry. This specific definition is the product of continual makeovers from 30 years of trial-and-error applications in the field. The definitional themes consistent with several content analysis studies discussed above are still present including local benefits, education, conservation, and natural areas. It is also a relatively modern definition that inherently encompasses contemporary nuances making application of Honey’s principles easier to translate for the tourism industry today.

Ecotourism as a tangible concept is at an interesting crossroads in the industry. Enough time has elapsed for a second wave of research to be conducted and subsequently the concept has
evolved. It seems only fitting for the self-proclaimed creator of the term, Ceballos-Lascurain, to reflect on his earlier thoughts, “Ecotourism is no longer a mere concept or subject of wishful thinking. On the contrary ecotourism has become a global reality” (as cited in Honey, 2002: 2). Or as Ziffer (1989), one of the pioneers of ecotourism, asserts, ecotourism is a concept that “ambitiously attempts to describe an activity, set forth a philosophy, and espouse a model of development’ (68).

2.1.1. Principles of Ecotourism

The seemingly endless definitional rhetoric has not only caused mass confusion for the operational-side of the industry, but it has also proved a challenge in terms of identifying legitimacy. In this way, the major struggle has been a matter of operational implementation and monitoring (Donohoe, 2006; Ross and Wall, 1999; Russell and Wallace, 2004). The actual application of a given ecotourism definition then often takes the form of adhering to a corresponding set of principles. Honey (2008) advocates for the all-or-nothing principle, meaning authentic ecotourism is only present if all of the predetermined principles are in effect.

Conversely, Orams (1995) views the application of ecotourism on a spectrum with the level of human responsibility dictating the passivity of the concept. For instance, concepts emphasizing ecotourists to take a more active role, by educating themselves or directly contributing to conservation of a natural area, are close to the high-responsibility pole on the continuum. As all ecotourism definitions and resultant principles would lie somewhere on this spectrum, Orams posits that this could be used as a measurement to gauge the authenticity of a venture. That is, according to Orams, the industry as a whole should be shifting away from passive forms of ecotourism and towards encouraging a more responsible ecotourist.
Another set of principles arose from attempting to evaluate ecotourism operations. Wallace and Pierce (1996) used TIES definition (see section 2.1.) of ecotourism to create six principles: (1) minimizes negative impacts to the environment and to local people; (2) increases the awareness and understanding of the area’s natural and cultural systems; (3) contributes to the conservation and management of legally-protected lands and other natural areas; (4) maximizes the early- and long-term participation of local people in the decision-making process; (5) directs economic and other benefits to local people; and (6) provides special opportunities for local people and tourism employees to utilize and visit natural areas.

However, it was arguably Hetzer’s (1965) work on ecotourism principles that provided the foundation for future discourse (Fennell, 2003). As one of the first sets of ecotourism principles ever published, Hetzer (1965) asserted that the four fundamental pillars of ecotourism were: (1) minimum environmental impact; (2) minimum impact on and maximum respect for host cultures; (3) maximum economic benefits to the host country; and (4) maximum satisfaction to visitors (as cited in Page and Dowling, 2002).

As the concept of ecotourism popularized, the literature became filled with original, interpreted and amended ecotourism principles. One of the most influential ecotourism documents, the Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism (2002), produced after the World Ecotourism Summit during the International Year of Ecotourism, recognized that not only does ecotourism embrace the principles of sustainable tourism but it also embodies the following specific principles: (1) contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage; (2) includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, and contributes to their well-being; (3) interprets the natural and cultural heritage to visitors; (4) encourages independent travelers, as well as organized tours for small size groups. TIES’ (2010)
asserts that those involved in ecotourism should follow six principles: (1) minimize impact; (2) build environmental and cultural awareness and respect; (3) provide positive experiences for visitors and hosts; (4) provide direct financial benefits for conservation; (5) provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people; and (6) raise sensitivity to hosts’ cultures political, environmental and social climate.

Slightly differing from TIES’ principles, Honey (2008) outlines seven characteristics that will be analyzed and applied for the purpose of this study. As described above, Honey has been a staple in the ecotourism world since the 1980s. She has led TIES and is currently co-director of the Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development in Washington, D.C. of which she also co-founded. Her principles are not only a product of her long history and experience both in the field and academia, but are also relatively modern. They are a combination of contemporary tourism trends with historic definitional themes. For these reasons Honey’s principles have been selected as the measurement with which to gauge authentic ecotourism ventures. Specifically, authentic ecotourism has the following seven characteristics (also shown in Appendix A):

(1) travel to natural destinations.

(2) minimizes impact. This includes minimizing the impact of development and tourist activity by choosing appropriate building materials, renewable energy sources, visitor management strategies, monitoring techniques and conservation plans.

(3) builds environmental awareness. This includes educational and interpretational material for visitors, educational training for guides and educating the greater public and surrounding community.

(4) provides direct financial benefit for conservation.
(5) *provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people.* This includes employment of local people, using an all-inclusive stakeholder approach to planning, management and policy development and fostering of partnerships.

(6) *respects local culture.*

(7) *supports human rights and democratic movements.* This principle is mostly related to ecotourism ventures in developing nations. It attempts to draw attention to political systems of the host countries and their people to foster an international understanding of “peace, prosperity, and universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all” (WTO as cited in Honey, 2008: 31).

### 2.2. Ecotourism vs. Affiliates

#### 2.2.1. Ecotourism: Finding its Niche

Much of the criticism of ecotourism stems from the ambiguity between so-called authentic ecotourism and the affiliated, and often times indistinguishable, terms. In many ways the tourism industry is separated into two streams of tourist activity; mass or conventional and alternative tourism (AT). So to fully understand the meaning of AT, mass tourism can be used as a gauge to determine exactly what it is not. Essentially mass tourism is driven and controlled by economics. Little attention is paid to ‘local’, whether it is the well-being of the local community, the tourist-generated revenue staying within the community, local culture and heritage, and local input in decision-making processes with regards to the local tourism industry. In general, mass tourism operations are equipped for large tourist groups. The environment is considered secondary especially when pitted against development projects and in that sense, long term impacts are generally an afterthought.
According to Wearing and Neil (1999), in a broad sense AT is an approach that “sets out to be consistent with [local] natural, social and community values and which allow both hosts and guests to enjoy positive and worthwhile interaction and shared experiences” (3). Reid (1999) views tourism as a spectrum based on consumptiveness of visitor activities on a given resource base. On one end of the continuum is mass tourism which comprises of the most consumptive activities and on the other end is ecotourism and non-consumptiveness. Along the spectrum from consumptive to non-consumptive is AT, adventure tourism, nature tourism and low-impact tourism, respectively (Reid, 1999). Reid regards AT as just that, a substitute for mass tourism but not necessarily an advocate for less-consumptive or more-sustainable visitor activities. In that sense, according to Reid the consumptiveness of an activity, in respect to a given resource base, is the distinguishing feature of each tourism type.

On the other hand, in Fennell and Dowling’s (2003) words AT “fosters sustainability through the process of selective marketing in order to attract environmentally conscious tourists who show respect for the natural and cultural components of tourism destinations and are conservation minded and culturally sensitive in their use of them” (2). So the next question is how does sustainability fit into the mix? Fennell (2003) suggests that sustainable tourism stemmed from the concept of sustainable development and that applying the concept of sustainability to the tourism industry can be achieved in both mass and AT operations. Butler (1993) makes an important distinction between sustainable tourism and sustainable development as applied to tourism. The former is defined as tourism that “is in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time” (Butler, 1993: 29). The latter is defined as tourism in a given area that “remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits
the successful development and wellbeing of other activities and processes” (Butler, 1993: 29). The differences are obvious. Sustainable development in the context of tourism puts a greater emphasis on a holistic approach to sustainability whereas sustainable tourism is concerned mostly with maintaining the longevity of tourist activity.

Fennel (2003) argues that instead of viewing tourism operations as either mass or AT, we can think in terms of sustainable or unsustainable practices. Fennel further proposes that, only a small percentage of mass tourism ventures are operating under sustainable principles. Conversely, most AT ventures are theoretically sustainable but because AT accounts for only a small percentage of the tourism industry the occurrence of sustainable tourism operations amongst the entire tourism industry is accordingly small. According to Fennell, ecotourism and socio-culture tourism are the two tourism types found under the umbrella term AT and are more often than not driven by the concept of sustainability. Christ et al. (2003) provides an all inclusive definition of sustainable tourism as a strategy that, “seeks to minimize the negative footprint of tourism developments and at the same time contribute to conservation and community development in the areas being developed” (5). I would purport that to most scholars ecotourism is a term that encompasses the concept of sustainable tourism but differs in that it adheres to a set of predetermined criteria which are dependent on the operational definition. A more contentious issue is regarding the scope of AT and where exactly ecotourism’s affiliated terms including: sustainable, nature-based, adventure, geotourism, appropriate, soft, hard, responsible, people to people, controlled, small-scale, cottage, green, fully-independent travel and pro-poor tourism fit into the tourism industry at large. The following is a more comprehensive look at nature-based tourism, hard and soft adventure tourism and geotourism.
2.2.2. The Affiliates

Nature-based tourism (NBT) refers to travel that is motivated by the enjoyment of a natural area. Often times this includes travel to national parks, wilderness areas or developing countries where biodiversity is concentrated (Olson et al., 2001). Honey (2002) adds to the definition of NBT that such natural areas are “unspoiled” while Laarman and Durst (1987) include a(n) education, recreation and adventure component to the definition. Although often used interchangeably with ecotourism, Laarman and Durst (1993) suggest that NBT can be viewed on both a micro- and macro-level; meaning that NBT can define individual NBT operations as well as the use of natural resources for tourism purposes. On a broad scale NBT can encompass certain mass, AT and ecotourism operations but using the narrower definition, NBT can be viewed as a subset of AT. For my purposes, ecotourism is a type of NBT that includes an element of tourist responsibility, conservation, preservation, sustainability and well-being of locals.

As with NBT, adventure tourism is a niche market created to accommodate the growing tourist demand. While NBT is thought to involve light recreational activities, adventure tourism is a category of NBT that requires certain athletic skills and includes an element of risk (Honey, 2008). The Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC) separates adventure tourism into hard or soft. Hard outdoor adventure enthusiasts are travelers that participate in one of the following activities; ice climbing, rock climbing, mountain biking, dog sledding, white water rafting, hang gliding, bungee jumping, heli-skiing, and scuba diving (Canadian Hard Outdoor Adventure Enthusiasts, 2003). Soft outdoor adventure enthusiasts are travelers who engage in at least one of the following activities; biking, motorcycling, kayaking or canoeing, motor boating, sailing, wind surfing, hiking/backpacking, horseback riding, hot air ballooning, cross-country skiing,
downhill skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling (Canadian Soft Outdoor Adventure Enthusiasts, 2003). Adventure tourism is unique in that it is solely defined by the recreational activity of the tourist (Honey, 2008). Although the debate is still ongoing as to the motivations of a tourist to engage in a risk-related activity, Priest (1990) posits that this element of uncertainty is also a distinguishing characteristic of adventure tourism. In other words, the activity is the attraction (Fennell, 2003) in adventure tourism whereas, the ecotourism hinges on the actual setting where the activity takes place, the outcome of tourists’ choices and actions on the environment (Honey, 2002).

2.2.3. Geotourism

As the most recent addition to tourism jargon, the term geotourism first appeared in a magazine article in 1995 and read, “The provision of interpretive and service facilities to enable tourists to acquire knowledge and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of a site beyond the level of mere aesthetic appreciation” (Hose, 1995: 17). With the appearance of the term in a National Geographic publication in 2002, its scope was further expanded into meaning travelling to experience “a destination’s geographic character—the entire combination of natural and human attributes that make one place distinct from another” (Stueve et al., 2002: 3). The exclusion of geological aspects in favor of geographical ones, caused critics to question the authenticity of the term as it resembled preexisting tourism types and further raised eyebrows regarding the motive: is it just a clever rebranding scheme (Hose, 2008)? It is apparent that there are two clear and often conflicting visions of geotourism: one involves travel to geological or geomorphological sites and the other understands ‘geo’ to mean geographical. Or in Buckley’s (2006) words, a motto for the latter description could read “geotourism: the new ecotourism” (583). However, if we return to geotourism’s roots and consider it a subset of AT that is travel to
a geological site involving an educational feature then it can be easily differentiated from ecotourism. Principles of ecotourism could even be applied to geotourism sites especially in regards to conservation efforts (Komoo, 1997).

Although there are several affiliated tourism types that I have not addressed, the terms discussed above are the most popular types of AT in regards to tourist volume, as well as, the most likely to be confused or used synonymously with ecotourism. The most uniquely ‘ecotouristic’ trait is the implementation and application of all seven principles (see Appendix A) in accordance with an operational definition that can be individualized from local to global endeavors.

2.3. Ecotourists

An ecotourist is a person engaging in “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” and personally embraces the principles of ecotourism (TIES, 2010). An ecotourist is much more than just a tourist visiting an ecotourism destination (Beaumont, 2011; Blamey and Braithwaite, 1997; Dolnicar et al., 2008; Page and Dowling, 2002); ecotourism is a philosophy. Honey (2009) stated in an interview with the International Ecotourism Club, “I see ecotourism as inherently a revolutionary concept that, properly done, holds out the possibility of transforming the way the travel industry operates and the way we travel” (Martha Honey interview with EcoClub, September 2008).

Much energy has been devoted to defining the ecotourist market. Some scholars hold that although there is definitely a demand for ecotourism products, ecotourists are not necessarily the consumers driving that market (Beaumont, 2011). Some even question the existence of a distinct ecotourist market all together (Beaumont, 2011; Sharpley, 2006). Pamela Wight, a Canadian ecotourism scholar, explains that poor definitional comprehension, incomplete market research
and the reality that ecotourism markets are not homogeneous, are the major barriers preventing a clear understanding of an ecotourist (as cited in Honey, 2008). The inability to define the typical ecotourist is a constant point of consternation echoed in the literature. In a 2011 study, Beaumont used three core criteria to define ecotourism: nature, learning and sustainability. Those identified as ecotourists indicated motivations that complied with the first two core criteria, but the study found that ecotourists did not have higher levels of pro-environmental attitudes, as many would assume, when compared to non-ecotourists (Beaumont, 2011). Blamey and Braithwaite (1997) also questioned the ‘green’ mindedness of ecotourists as their study revealed that less than 20% of identified ecotourists were actually environmentally conscious. However, in a similar study conducted by Luo and Deng (2008), a positive and direct relationship was found between NBT (used interchangeably with ecotourism in their study) motivations and environmental attitudes.

Common themes in ecotourists have emerged in the literature. Studies have consistently concluded that ecotourists have higher annual incomes, are better educated and are more interested in learning while traveling than conventional tourists (Dolnicar et al., 2008; Honey, 2008; Hvenegaard, 1994; Page and Dowling, 2002; Weaver, 2002). Honey (2008) adds that ecotourists are generally physically active, usually from either dual income or empty nester-type households, are slightly older (Dolnicar et al., 2008; Luo and Deng, 2008; Page and Dowling, 2002; Weaver, 2002), better informed, more experienced (Page and Dowling, 2002), more adventurous and travel independently or individually. Studies also indicate that females are over-represented amongst ecotourists (Luo and Deng, 2008; Weaver, 2002).

One of the first systematic studies to measure Canadian ecotourists’ motivations was by Eagles in 1992. Eagles amalgamated the results of three previous Canadian ecotourist surveys to create the database of Canadian ecotourists. Two categories of travel motivation were used;
social and attraction motivations and these results were compared against the Canadian Tourism Attitude and Motivation Study of 1983. The study concluded that Canadian ecotourists have clearly-defined travel motivations that differ considerably from conventional Canadian travellers. Some of the motivations that were significantly more important to Canadian ecotourists compared to general Canadian travellers were: wilderness and undisturbed nature, lakes and streams, being physically active, mountains, and national or provincial parks, respectively (Eagles, 1992). Conversely, the top-five ranked travel motivations for conventional Canadian travellers (non-ecotourists) were: visiting friends and family, shopping, nightlife and entertainment, amusement and theme parks, and resort areas, respectively (Eagles, 1992).

A trend began to emerge in ecotourism literature as scholars started thinking of ecotourists on a spectrum. The last two decades or so has seen ecotourists classified by level of interest in nature, amount of physical activity involved, frequency of travel, amount of education sought, importance of sustainability concepts and level of independence (Page and Dowling, 2002). Weaver (2002) undertook a study that interpreted the hard-to-soft ecotourist spectrum that was first introduced by Laarman and Durst (1987) and subsequently adapted by Lindberg in 1991 (as cited in Weaver, 2002). Weaver (2002) provided characteristics for both the ideal hard-core and soft ecotourists. The ideal hard-core ecotourist can be identified by strong environmental commitment, long specialized trips, enhancement of sustainability, small groups, physically active, emphasis on personal experience, few if any services expected and made own travel arrangements (Weaver, 2002). On the other end of the spectrum, the typical soft ecotourists can be identified by moderate environmental commitment, short multi-purpose trips, larger groups, less physically demanding, emphasis on interpretation, reliant on others to make travel arrangements (Weaver, 2002). In most cases found in the literature, the spectrum ranges
from strong biocentric outlooks, or hard-core ecotourists according to Weaver’s definition, to
travelers with more anthropocentric perspectives (Weaver, 2002).

Other scholars have sought to classify ecotourists by sub-dividing them into smaller
groups based on certain characteristics and motivations. For instance, Kusler (1991) identified
three groups of ecotourists: (1) do-it-yourself ecotourists; (2) ecotourists on tours; and (3) school
or scientific groups (as cited in Page and Dowling, 2002). Lindberg (1991) separated ecotourists
into four categories: hard-core, dedicated, mainstream and casual (as cited in Weaver, 2002).
Ballantine and Eagles (1994) classified authentic ecotourists as those satisfying three core
criteria; social motivation (educational component), attraction motivation (pristine environment)
and a time dimension (at least one-third of the trip is spent participating in natural experiences)
(as quoted in Beaumont, 2011). The inability to consistently pinpoint a distinct profile, has
caused cynics like Dolnicar (2008) to claim after reviewing ecotourism literature, that
researchers have only a limited understanding of who environmentally-friendly tourists really
are. However, as with any attempt at generalization, the results are dependent on type of activity,
time of year, length of stay, amount of expendable income, accommodations and destination
(Page and Dowling, 2002). It is obvious then that there cannot be an exact definition, but
ecotourists can be understood to be a specific type of traveler based on a range of qualities (Page
and Dowling, 2002). As Luo & Deng (2008) concluded after conducting primary research and
examining the literature on NBT motivation, gender, age and education are consistent predictors
of travellers’ motivations.

2.4. Criticism of Ecotourism

The majority of the literature points to the lack of a universally accepted definition and
corresponding principles as the foremost criticism impeding ecotourism as a concept. Not only
does this hinder the concept’s evolution, but it also instigates managerial and operational issues from all perspectives. One of the results is ecotourism being transformed into a panacea term that serves as the solution for all that is disagreeable with the tourism industry (Page and Dowling, 2002). The inherent purpose of ecotourism is spread thin as stakeholders can locally adapt it, by picking and choosing tenets that meet their needs, at a given time. This could allow tourism operations to completely redefine their tourism strategy and selectively emphasize different points of ecotourism while maintaining a ‘green’ status (Russell, 2004). In this way, ecotourism is shaped into a vague catchall buzzword that propagates the creation of loosely defined affiliated terms and adds more confusion to the mix (Fennell, 2003; Honey, 2008). Many critics point to this proliferation as evidence that ecotourism is merely a fad that will ultimately be replaced in the future by a new term with a synonymous definition (Honey, 2008). Thus, an already hazy situation is further complicated by an overabundance of definitions that causes actual application of the concept to be difficult to translate into reality. In other words, if a definition cannot be agreed upon or is tweaked at every tourism venture, how can that term be executed in a manner that is recognizable? And with such high aspirations placed on the term it is almost impossible for ecotourism ventures to deliver on all of the expected promises of a glorified definition.

Definitional ambiguity not only weakens the concept but also leaves the door open for inauthentic ecotourism and ‘greenwashing’. Greenwashing is the attempt to capitalize on the environmental movement by claiming ‘green’ business practices in marketing campaigns to attract eco-conscious travelers, when in reality it is just that, a marketing ploy. Honey (2008) identifies another unfavourable trend in ecotourism vernacular as ‘ecotourism lite’ or “simply conventional mass tourism wrapped in a thin veneer of ‘green’” (Honey, 2008: 68). Harvey argues that because ecotourism has been adapted by so many people in so many different ways
(as cited in Honey, 2008), ecotourism lite emerged as a way for tourism operators to profit from the ideals that ecotourism represents, on a superficial level, without having to make the fundamental changes (Honey, 2008). Because the tourism industry is inherently dependent on the revenue generated pre-departure, it is not difficult for tourism operators to simply claim to have adopted sustainable business practices. These ventures exploit the principles of ecotourism through clever marketing campaigns and branding schemes to attract tourists seeking an ecotourism destination. And because the concept is so hard to define, it is also difficult to monitor and measure elements of ecotourism which furthers this trend as borderline operations can feign compliance. To resolve this disparity between presentation and reality, Higham and Luck (2007) suggest the viability of ecotourism lies in placing the onus on the tourist to decipher the authentic from the inauthentic rather than assuming operations are honest in their assertions.

Finally, to many critics the concept of ecotourism is inherently paradoxal. To some critics ecotourism is already fundamentally flawed as it is resource-based (Russell, 2004) and dependent on natural areas. Most definitions involve travel to relatively pristine areas (Honey, 2008; TIES, 2010) and, to ecotourism critics, promoting visitation to these areas is inconsistent with the notion of conservation. Not only are there concerns with disturbing fragile and often remote ecosystems by exposing it to visitors, but as with any form of tourism, development is encouraged (Higham and Luck, 2007). In essence, the very resource ecotourism is attempting to protect, via the revenue generated from tourism, is the same means by which it may be harmed. For example, by definition ecotourism ventures should be small scale. As this would obviously be beneficial to the ecosystem, operators are presented with issues of economic viability and practicality as the number of tourists is projected to grow in accordance with human population (Higham, 2007; Wheeller, 1991).
To add to this, Wall (1997) suggests that the very nature of ecotourism as an “instigator of change” is hard to reconcile with all of the different objectives and perspectives involved (483). Ecotourism is meant to embrace the principles of sustainability, yet this statement in itself is seen as contradictory by some critics. At the most basic level, the goal of sustainability is to maintain continuity and, to some like Wall (1997), ecotourism cannot embrace this quality as it is inherently a driver of change. Wall (1997) further develops this notion by positing that all stakeholders want something from ecotourism and most commonly it is the environmental resource on which ecotourism is based. Some scholars have taken this idea even further by claiming that ecotourism is in effect both commodifying nature (Carrier and MacLeod, 2005; Cater, 2007; Munt, 1998; Rojek, 1998) and promoting western ideology (Cater, 2007; Wall, 1997). These critics see ecotourism operators as salespeople of unspoiled areas that offer nature as a product not an experience. In this setting, decision-making is based on values as monetary numbers are essentially assigned to aspects of the environment (Wall, 1997). The ethical issues that surround commodifying nature for the purpose of conservation via tourism are obvious. Some scholars purport that cultural commodification, or the boiling down of anything cultural into profits, is another result of ecotourism (Dorsey et al., 2004). What is important though is to recognize that, for the purpose of this research, authentic ecotourism ventures must adhere to all of the principles (see Appendix A) and in doing so, would prevent an emphasis on economical gain and instead promote a holistic approach to tourism.

From this perspective, it is easy to understand how critics could expand on the idea of ecotourism as a promoter of a western elitist-type ideology (Cater, 2007). As such pristine areas become increasingly scarce, their value is heightened in terms of economics and social significance. Correspondingly the ability to discover and travel to these areas becomes limited to
those with economic means; the elite (Cater, 2007). Because many ecotourists are westerners traveling to developing countries, other terms like neo-colonialism and the Marxist reference to fetishism in capitalist systems have emerged in more socio-cultural critical reviews of ecotourism (Carrier and MacLeod, 2005; Dorsey et al., 2004; Munt, 1998). Carrier and MacLeod (2005) refer to the latter as the result of commodification and a so-called ‘tourist bubble’ or the manufactured presentation of an environment, at large. These two factors combine to create a saleable product that dissociates the social relations, systems and situations that are responsible for its existence and profitability (Carrier and MacLeod, 2005).

In response to some of these critiques, I would reiterate that definitional ambiguity and manipulation does not mean that ecotourism is dead or simply a passing fad; quite the contrary. Honey (2008) defends the future of ecotourism in saying “to abandon the concept because of its misuse or confusion is a classic case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater” (70). Instead Fennell (2003) supports that the concept of ecotourism is in fact in its infancy stages and as such more research is required for development and evolution of the concept. Daniel Janzen, a University of Pennsylvania professor agrees, “We’ve only just scratched the surface in realizing the potentials of ecotourism” (as quoted in Honey, 2008: 70). As most scholars agree one of the initial steps is to develop an operational definition (Fennell, 2001; Wallace and Pierce, 1996) to prevent “the proliferation of ecotourism from both inside and outside of definitional boundaries; thereby manifesting as one thing in theory – another in practice” (Donohoe, 2006: 193). However Fennell (2001) suggests a single inflexible definition may not be the answer. The inability to define ecotourism may be a broader reflection on the tourism industry itself as it is also tricky to define (Fennell, 2003). Simon (1996) recognizes the difficulty in defining ecotourism as it attempts to “describe an activity, set forth a philosophy, and refer to a model of
economic development” (192). Instead, Fennell (2001) proposes that the ideal definition of ecotourism would include core variables that could be regionally- or locally-adapted to better suit local values. Additionally, it is important to remember that for the purpose of this paper, in order for a tourism operation to be considered authentic ecotourism, it must adhere to all of Honey’s (2008) principles of ecotourism (see Appendix A). In this way, most of the concerns mentioned in the preceding discussion would be groundless.

2.5. Certification

Certification is defined as a “voluntary process that assesses, monitors, and gives written assurance that a business, product, process, or service conforms” to a set of standards and in most cases compliance is rewarded with a selective logo (Honey, 2002: 380). Historically, certification in the tourism industry was a method to measure visitor satisfaction based on specified criteria usually quality, health standards, and cost (Honey, 2002). With the proliferation of ecotourism in the 1990s, the impacts of tourism on socio-economic, local, and environmental networks, fields that were previously overlooked, started to become incorporated into certification vernacular (Honey, 2002). Font (2007) suggests, as of late, there has near consensus on the function of ecotourism certification, that is “the showcasing of good and best practices, and more attempts to measure eco and sustainable behaviour, set standards, certify those meeting the standards, and provide market benefits to them” (387).

At the most basic level ecotourism certification programs are meant to help translate the fundamental principles of ecotourism into operation and in doing so create transparency in the industry and generate market demand. In order for this to happen, ecotourism certification programs need to develop common global standards to promote authentic ecotourism products in hopes that the label will support these ventures that meet specific and regulated standards (Font,
The need for standardization was recognized at the World Ecotourism Summit in 2002. The resultant document, *The Quebec Declaration*, proposed a set of recommendations to national, regional and local governments that included the use of “internationally approved and reviewed guidelines to develop certification schemes, ecolabels and other voluntary initiatives geared towards sustainability in ecotourism… [that] should reflect regional and local criteria” (Quebec Declaration, 2002: 4).

In general terms, ecotourism certification has many possible benefits from facilitating dialogue between stakeholders, and maintaining markets by increasing the competition between tourism operations and products, to promoting environmental and social protection, and encouraging sustainability (Toth, 2002). There are also many motivating factors for tourism operators to seek certification including; increased pride and efficiency from workers having received higher level training, reduced liability from ongoing monitoring and upgrading of management systems, an improved public image and industry-wide credibility (Conroy, 2002; Toth, 2002).

The process by which organizations achieve ecotourism certification varies depending on the accreditation agency but it is always voluntary and generally conforms to one of two certification programs; process-based or performance-based (Honey, 2002; 2003). Process-based certification programs emphasize implementation of environmental management systems to monitor and improve performance and are more concerned with the process rather than the result (Honey, 2002; 2003). Because of this, the principle critique of process-based programs is the disregard for socioeconomic and cultural networks. Performance-based programs focus on achieving benchmarks established by an external agency that are uniformly applied to all seeking certification (Honey, 2002; 2003). In this way, certified businesses can be compared to one
another because there is a common unit of measurement versus process-based programs that are individualized for each applicant. Performance-based programs are generally less expensive to implement and are therefore more appealing to small- and medium-sized businesses.

Most criticisms of ecotourism certification stem from the methodology itself. For instance, the system of assessment can be first, second, or third party. First party assessment is conducted by the actual firm seeking certification. This usually means the company completes paperwork and returns it to the accreditation agency. Second party assessment involves a member from the accreditation agency either carrying out an onsite audit-like evaluation or reviewing submitted paperwork. Third party assessment involves an external agent, unaffiliated with the certifier or the certifiable candidate, conducting the audit or review. Third party assessment is viewed as the most credible mode of evaluation as it is the least likely to produce a slanted report.

On the same note, Toth (2002) questions the ecotourism certification process in its entirety. He argues it focuses too much on certification which he views as just one component of a whole system of “conformity assessment” and the ultimate goal of certification scheme is acceptance (2002: 83). There is a hierarchy of processes to reach that goal including; standards, assessment, certification, accreditation and recognition, respectively (Toth, 2002). In emphasizing only the certification component, Toth argues that ecotourism initiatives will continually fall short in achieving a credible and accepted conformity assessment system and not merely a certification program.

Establishing a legitimate certification scheme for the tourism industry is tricky. Not only are there global trade agreements that need to be considered, but tourism is a complex, multiple commodity system (Honey, 2003). Successful certification programs have been implemented in
other industries, like Fair Trade or Forest Stewardship Council, but again these are single goods markets with arguably less influencing factors and still, gaining market demand took time (Font, 2007). There are also issues associated with standardization including different contexts, cost of implementation, membership fees, accreditation processes, stakeholder involvement, measurement standards, government involvement and financial viability (Burgin & Hardiman, 2010; Font, 2007; Honey, 2002, 2003; Toth, 2002). In general, consumers and travelers need to assess each certification program on an individual basis and investigate the methodology used, sponsoring agency, evaluation process, affiliated organizations, and criteria measured (Honey, 2002).

As of 2010, there are over 100 international eco-accreditation programs covering a diverse range of criteria; most of which are promoted by non-profit organizations and rely on first party assessment (Burgin & Hardiman, 2010). It can be quite overwhelming for travelers and operators to choose the best option available. As a result, the Mohonk Agreement was drafted in 2000 by forty-five voluntary participants from the tourism industry representing twenty different countries and twelve different certification programs (Honey, 2002). The Mohonk Agreement is a framework for the certification of sustainable tourism and ecotourism. In this way, the Agreement both distinguishes the difference between sustainable tourism and ecotourism, and provides a standardized guide for development of a successful certification scheme. According to the Agreement, ecotourism certification schemes should establish standards for: (1) personal experiences of nature to foster an appreciation; (2) interpretation and environmental awareness of nature, local society, and culture; (3) contributions to conservation of natural areas or biodiversity; (4) economic, social, and cultural benefits for local communities; (5) community involvement; (6) locally-appropriate scale and design for infrastructure; and (7)
The Agreement was an important step in attempting to standardize certification programs and should continue to serve as the foundation for these programs.

The most notable Canadian environmental certification programs are Green Globe, Audubon Green Leaf, and the Blue Flag Program. Unlike Green Globe Certification, which covers all facets of the tourism sector, the latter certification programs apply to specific sectors, hotels and accommodations, and beaches and marinas, respectively. Green Globe Certification appoints an on-site independent third party auditor to work with sustainable tourism operations and their suppliers who voluntarily apply for certification. It was one of many sustainable initiatives that the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro produced, and now it operates in over 80 countries worldwide (Green Globe, 2011). Green Globe Certification Standard assessment is based on 337 compliance indicators within 41 individual sustainability criteria that are unequally distributed amongst sustainable management, social economic, cultural heritage and environmental fields (Green Globe, 2011). Although not specifically considered an ecotourism certification, Green Globe Certification Standard underscores the principles of ecotourism. For example, the program includes criteria involving community development, resource conservation, employee education, local employment and incorporation of culture (Green Globe Standard Criteria and Indicators, 2011).

2.6. Policy and Planning

Policy is defined as the broad scope of actions and statements by government indicating their areas of activity, priority and emphasis (Holtz and Edwards, 2003) which encompasses government action, inaction, decisions and non-decisions (Hall, 2003). Planning is intimately
linked to policy as it is the route through which policies are implemented (Fennell and Dowling, 2003). It attempts “to anticipate, regulate, and monitor change so as to contribute to the wider sustainability of the destination” and enrich the quality of the tourist experience (Page and Dowling, 2002: 197). Not only does ecotourism policy help standardize, regulate and manage ecotourism within a given region, but it also is meant to ensure the longevity of the resource with which tourism is based upon (Jenkins, 1991). Ecotourism policy is unique in that it spans across traditional boundaries of government departments and as Liu (1994) argues, it attempts to strike a balance between “development versus conservation, supply versus demand, benefits versus costs, and people versus the environment” (10). Further complicating ecotourism policy implementation is the different levels at which planning occurs; local, regional, national, international and global (Fennell and Dowling, 2003). According to Fennell and Dowling (2003) it appears that the regional level of policy creation holds the best track record for achieving tourism and environmental protection goals.

In general there are four types of documents in ecotourism policy: legislation, plans, reports/discussion documents and speeches (Edwards et al., 2003). In a study comparing ecotourism policies in the Americas, Edwards et al. (2003) concluded that tourism plans (e.g. strategies, marketing plans and tourism development plans) are the most comprehensive ecotourism policy statements because they are often detail-oriented and specific in terms of procedure, focus areas and geography. However, it is also important to consider the many different functions an ecotourism policy could have including conservation, monitoring policy implementation and management, encouraging collaboration, land-use planning, contributions to another policy, commissioning research and offering technical support (Edwards et al., 2003).
Repeatedly the literature emphasized the importance of a national ecotourism policy. Lui (1994) suggests it is the key to advancing the concept of ecotourism and Weaver (2001) stresses that the success of regional and national ecotourism plans are directly related to, and informed by, the existence of a broader national policy. Sofield and Li (2003) further suggest that plans must fit into existing governmental policies in order to be implemented. Edwards et al. (2003) reiterates that the existence of a governmentally-defined ecotourism was positively associated to the formation of ecotourism policy for their agency, state or country.

Other recurring themes in the literature were the inclusion of a multi-stakeholder approach and the encouragement of innovation in the policymaking process. A policymaking process that is all-inclusive in terms of social groups was heavily echoed in most of the literature. Edwards et al. (2003) agrees that policy creation must involve “all relevant stakeholders in a meaningful way” (307). Holtz and Edwards (2003) assert that having a solid understanding of the critical players involved is essential to successful policy formation. They go on to identify the six primary stakeholders for developing a biodiversity conservation policy: the public sector, the private sector, multilateral and bilateral donors, NGOs, local communities and indigenous people and consumers (Holtz and Edwards, 2003). It could be argued that the inclusion of these six stakeholders should be standard across all forms of ecotourism policy creation. Similarly, Hjalager (1996) asserts that innovation in policy is the key to preventing resource depletion via tourism (as cited in Fennell, 2003). Bramwell and Lane (2006) further argue that development of appropriate policies, with any emphasis on encouraging new ideas and critical reflection, are vital to fostering sustainable tourism practices and research. Edwards et al. (2003) sums up the importance of ecotourism policy when he says,
In order for ecotourism to achieve its full potential...government tourism agencies in the Americas need to...develop a vision, definitions, legal mandates, legislation and tourism plans...Only when we have the benefit of a clear and shared vision, and a plan for how to get there, will we begin to obtain the many possible benefits of ecotourism (306).

2.6.1. Canada and Sustainable Tourism Strategies

Historically, Canada has been promoting ecotourism-type ventures since the 1970s (Fennell, 2003). At the most basic level, the creation of Canada’s National Parks System Plan, devised at this time, signified a growing interest in nature-based and adventure tourism. Similarly, an ‘Ecotour Series’ was designed by Canadian Forestry Services to encourage the Canadian public to explore the country's landscape and foster a greater appreciation for “the economic and social importance of lands, forests, and wildlife resources, as well as associated environmental problems” (Ecotour of the Trans-Canada Highway, 1974-1984: 2). Using the Trans-Canada Highway as the exploration medium, ‘ecozones’, or areas with similar landscape features, were established and corresponding educational descriptions, interpretations, suggested stops and side trips, maps and brochures were provided for each leg of the tour. In this way, tourists could have an individual experience, including an educational component, in the Canadian landscape at their leisure with the potential of stimulating future interest and awareness. Although ecotourism was merely in its infancy during the height of Canadian ecotours, at the operational level the concepts are quite similar.

More than three decades later Quebec City, Canada was the site for the World Ecotourism Summit. It was the main event to celebrate the International Year of Ecotourism as declared by the UN in 2002. The summit was co-hosted by Tourisme Quebec and the CTC under the supervision of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and WTO. Delegates
from 132 countries representing all sectors of the tourism industry engaged in ecotourism-related discussions with the ultimate goal of generating specific ecotourism principles and concepts to help direct policy and management decisions into the future. After three days of discussions the Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism was drafted. Ecotourism was defined as a subset of sustainable tourism which attempts to equally consider the social, economic and environmental impacts of tourism. Ecotourism differs from sustainable tourism in that it adheres to the specific principles discussed above. Recommendations were also formulated and addressed to different agencies including national, regional and local governments, NGOs, the private sector, intergovernmental institutions and local and indigenous communities. In general, the Quebec Declaration served as an important consultation document for all sectors of the tourism industry as it was both cumulative and relatively modern.

According to the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), domestic and international tourists to Canada spent $71.0 billion in 2009 of which $29.2 billion contributed to Canada’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) accounting for 2% of Canada’s overall GDP (2009 Annual Report). In 2008 the tourism industry employed over 660,000 Canadians full-time and according to the Labour Force Survey, 1.66 million people, or 10.1% of the Canadian workforce, rely on tourism-related businesses for their livelihood (TIAC, 2008-2011 Business Plan). There are over 180,000 tourism-related businesses in Canada; 79% being small- and medium-sized enterprises with fewer than 20 employees (TIAC, 2008-2011 Business Plan). The CTC also reports that 87% of travelers interested in Canadian destinations consider environmentally-friendly tourism important; 81% regard Canada to be an environmentally-friendly destination. (CTC, Corporate Plan Summary 2010 – 2014).
In Canada, the modern-day tourism industry is largely influenced by the CTC and the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC). The CTC is a Crown Corporation entirely owned by the Federal Government of Canada. It acts as a national tourism marketing organization and reports to Parliament via the Minister of Industry. TIAC is a national advocate for the private-sector, representing the tourism business community on a national level. CTC and TIAC both recognize the significance of sustainable tourism in their tourism strategies. TIAC uses TIES definition of ecotourism (see section 2.1.) in their 2008-2011 Business Plan and further advocates that tourism-related participants adhere to TIES’ Ecotourism Principles: (1) minimize impact; (2) build environmental and cultural awareness and respect; (3) provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts; (4) provide direct financial incentives for conservation; (5) provide financial benefits and empowerment to local people; (6) raise sensitivity to host countries‘ political, environmental and social climate (TIAC, 2008-2011 Business Plan).

In 2005, TIAC partnered with Parks Canada and CTC to amend Canada’s Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism. The collaboration produced this definition,

Sustainable tourism actively fosters appreciation and stewardship of the natural, cultural and historic resources and special places by local residents, the tourism industry, governments and visitors. It is tourism which is viable over the long term because it results in a net benefit for the social, economic, natural and cultural environments of the area in which it takes place (TIAC, 2005: 1).

The report also created seven guidelines for the “sound management of Canada’s tourism experiences” in accordance with the concept of sustainable tourism: (1) protect natural and cultural heritage resources support; (2) promote appreciation and enjoyment; (3) respect and
involve host communities; (4) influence expectations and use; (5) minimize impacts; (6) raise awareness; (7) work together; and (8) contribute globally (TIAC, 2005).

TIAC has also been involved in fostering other sustainable tourism initiatives. For instance, TIAC created a Canadian Sustainable Tourism Advisory Council of which the CTC claims to be actively involved by holding a seat on the council and promoting tourism ventures that embrace sustainable tourism practices at large. In addition, they developed in collaboration with Parks Canada and CTC, *Green your Business: Toolkit for Tourism Operators* (2008) a guide for small- and medium-tourism enterprises to assist them in integrating sustainability into their business practices. Similarly, TIAC advocated for reducing Canada’s tourism industry’s carbon footprint by avowing to follow six principles including; encouraging responsible procurement and measuring and monitoring the ecological footprint of Canada’s tourism industry (TIAC, 2008-2011 Business Plan). TIAC also recognizes that there is a lack in “Government agenda that is conducive to a growing and sustainable tourism industry” (8) and called for concerted attention and immediate action from the Federal Government, among six other policy recommendations, in “positioning Canada as a green and sustainable tourist destination” (31).

In an attempt to ‘green’ development projects, Industry Canada produced the *Federal Sustainable Design and Tourism Industry: Sustainable Design Framework* in 2002 (Industry Canada, 2002). In this document several design concepts are presented to ensure that development, in a broad sense, does not devastate the natural ecosystem of a given area. These concepts were purposefully created so as to be cross applicable to the tourism industry, but meant to serve as more of a management tool for tourism operators with environmental sustainability as the crux. Industry Canada’s discussion of sustainable tourism in this light is
from a managerial perspective, meaning that all aspects of the tourist experience should be carefully planned and designed. The emphasis is on design concepts like material selection, facility siting, site development, and indoor environmental quality, not tourism-specific strategies. In terms of the principles of ecotourism (see Appendix A) and application to the tourism industry, the framework only roughly addresses methods to minimize impact and arguably build environmental awareness. In general, although Industry Canada has created an informative piece, it is merely suggestive in nature and also fails to address concepts inherent to a sustainable tourism industry.

The Federal Government developed the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy* (FSDS) in 2010 following the implementation of the *Federal Sustainable Development Act* (FSDA) of 2008. The strategy is meant to make environmental sustainability the priority in all levels of government decision-making processes by integrating environmental, social and economic considerations into policy development, implementation, monitoring programs, assessments and reducing our nation’s environmental footprint (Department of Justice Canada, 2008). Although the strategy may serve as an overarching reference for policy coherence it does not address tourism-specific development. In fact it does not address tourism in any manner. Instead it is merely a framework that is applicable only in a broad sense. For instance, the report is separated into four major themes; addressing climate change, maintaining water-quality and availability, protecting nature and shrinking the environmental footprint. The majority of the ensuing implementation strategies are either involving amendment of government actions or projects. And the remaining strategies are so lofty and vague that it is difficult to determine how exactly the private sector is supposed to proceed.
More applicable to the tourism industry is the document *Building a National Tourism Strategy: A Framework for Federal/Provincial/Territorial Collaboration* which was drafted in 2006 after consultations between tourism ministers and various stakeholders. The document provides a framework for creating a National Tourism Strategy and outlines objectives, challenges and priority actions to better promote Canada as a global tourism destination. The overall vision is to “Make Canada a sustainable and top-of-mind tourist destination, renowned worldwide for its exceptional and unique year-round, quality travel experiences” (Industry Canada, 2006: 3). Directing the Framework were five key principles, one of which called for the development of strategies to foster and encourage sustainable practices in the tourism industry.

The concept of sustainability surfaced again, this time under the section concerning challenges and opportunities of the Canadian tourism industry. The Framework advocates for a collaborative approach between industry and government to create a working sustainable tourism strategy, along with citing TIAC’s *Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism* as a valuable resource for guidance. The Framework asserts that responsibility should also be placed on operators and business owners “to be stewards of the environment and adopt quality practices” to ensure the longevity of the Canadian tourism industry (15). The next step outlined is to implement the “priorities of action”, none of which discuss sustainable tourism initiatives or strategies (20). The emphasis on sustainable principles as the backbone of all decision-making processes, as apparent in FSDS, is wholly lacking in this framework and requires immediate and concerted attention.

The Economic Action Plan of 2009, among other strategies to stimulate economic activity, provides measures to support the tourism industry mostly through increased funding. It provided the impetus for establishment of a Federal Tourism Strategy and Action Plan; a
recommendation made in the Framework. The Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism) is coordinating the efforts to create a Federal Tourism Strategy which is currently in development stages.

2.7. Conclusion

The literature review began with a historical account of the context under which ecotourism emerged. Definitions and principles from differing perspectives through time were considered and directly provided the foundation upon which this research was developed. For the reasons outlined above, Honey’s (2008) principles of ecotourism (see Appendix A) were selected as the guidelines to measure authentic ecotourism for this research. The following section addressed one of the major criticisms of ecotourism: the ambiguity between ecotourism and its affiliated terms. The most common types of alternative tourism (sustainable tourism, nature-based tourism, adventure tourism and geotourism) in terms of definitional misrepresentation and tourist volume were defined and distinguished from ecotourism. As market research into tourists of the region was one of the major objectives of this research, the literature on ecotourists was examined and revealed that some similarities exist between ecotourists. Specifically, the typical ecotourist is generally female, slightly older and better educated with a higher annual household income than compared to conventional mass tourists. The following discussion reviewed common criticisms of ecotourism to acknowledge the concept’s perceived weaknesses as well as avoid similar circumstances upon application of the principles in this research. Subsequently, the function, benefits, definition, requirements, criticisms and common eco-accreditation programs of ecotourism certification were examined. Common themes revealed from this section were drawn upon and directly applied in Chapter 7 of this research. Lastly, a comprehensive review of
the literature on ecotourism policy and planning was conducted. In general, the academic discourse maintained that a broader national policy, multi-stakeholder approach and opportunity for innovative thinking were absolute necessities for implementation of a successful ecotourism policy at a regional or state level. As Canada lacks a national ecotourism policy, relevant Canadian policies were presented and critiqued in terms of ecotourism. Policy documents and relevant initiatives specific to this research will be analyzed and discussed in Chapter 5. The literature reviewed not only provided substantial insight into ecotourism as a concept but also directly contributed, through triangulation, to Chapters 6 and 7.
Chapter 3

Methods

3.1. Introduction

This research follows a multi-method approach that includes a literature review, questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The use of several methods was adopted to provide a broad range of perspectives and was applied to enhance methodological triangulation or the credence of the findings through convergent agreement (Ma and Norwich, 2007). The methodology was designed in collaboration with a Research Advisory Committee comprised of regional stakeholders from both the paddling and tourism industry. During the initial stages of the research, three meetings were held with different participants including local business owners, NGO representatives, SLINP employees and municipality workers to help guide the direction of the study. As it was and is the intent of this research to be practical, these meetings and later communications with stakeholders were imperative in familiarizing myself with information gaps, relevant stakeholders and their relationships, the current state of paddling in the region, contentious issues in regional tourism and existing partnerships. Subsequent communication via email with members of the Research Advisory Committee for input on questionnaire construction and distribution, interview questions and data analysis took place throughout the entire data collection process from July 2010 to February 2011. The following section reviews the three different research methods used.
3.2. Scholarly Literature Review

Ecotourism was the main topic of the literature review with subheadings focusing on history and definition, affiliated terms, ecotourists, criticism, certification, and policy and planning. The literature review critically evaluated the existing literature in search of knowledge gaps, assumptions and trends to provide a basis of understanding for my research. The process also helped identify emergent trends, leading scholars and relevant research which guided questionnaire and interview design. Information was gathered using Queen’s library, Queen’s online library and academic databases, Google Scholar and the Kingston Public Library. The literature review was meant to provide not only a conceptual background but also a historical account of the development and evolution of ecotourism as a concept. To this extent sources were used from a range of decades to provide a more holistic understanding. Underlying themes exposed by the literature reviewed were used as references for formulating recommendations in Chapter 7.

3.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was initially added to the methodology as a suggestion by the Research Advisory Committee. As stakeholders with vested and sometimes differing interests in the research topic, a common complaint was a lack of market research into the type of tourist visiting the area. The questionnaire aimed to help address this knowledge gap by providing demographic, motivational, ecotourism- and paddle-specific data from paddlers in the Thousand Islands Region. It was designed in collaboration with the Research Advisory Committee after two meetings and during subsequent email communications. More specifically the questionnaire was meant to explore a few fundamental questions specific to the Thousand Islands region: Is
there a market for ecotourism amongst paddlers? Can the typical paddler be defined in terms of motivations, ecotourism values, preferred visitor activities and demographics (see Appendix H)? In general, the questionnaire was used to provide an overview into the current state of paddling and the paddler in the region with a focus on ecotourism.

The Thousands Islands Region was defined as the area of study for the questionnaire rather than SLINP and environs for two reasons. Firstly, it was assumed that paddlers in the broader geographical region of the Thousands Islands would also paddle into SLINP and environs as defined by this research. Secondly, it was assumed that the Thousands Islands Region would be a more recognizable geographical area to the respondents than SLINP and environs as SLINP and environs is uniquely defined for the purpose of this research. These may not have been correct assumptions as it could have been entirely possible for a respondent to paddle in the Thousand Islands region and not SLINP and environs. However, the majority of questionnaires were distributed in-person to help neutralize any statistical biases by addressing any confusion the respondent may have had that stemmed from any inaccurate assumptions.

The questionnaire was distributed from July 2010 to February 2011 and included seventeen questions. Seven different types of questions were used; dichotomous, multiple choice, rank-ordering, three-point Likert scale, contingency, and open-ended. In hopes of reaching a diverse audience, and the maximum number of potential respondents, a number of distribution methods were used including electronic and in person at a paddling festival, a paddling lecture series and at a local paddling company. In total, 146 questionnaires were started, 138 were completed; 32 from Paddle

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Distribution Site</th>
<th># of Questionnaires</th>
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<tr>
<td>Paddle Fest</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paddling Lecture Series</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Paddling Outfitter</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Website Hyperlink</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL =</strong></td>
<td><strong>138</strong></td>
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Fest held in Gananoque, Ontario on July 10th and 11th 2010, 24 from a paddling lecture series, 35 from the local paddling company and 47 from online respondents (see Table 3A). The questionnaire was accessible online as a link from a local paddling outfitter’s website. Respondents were not limited to one questionnaire per IP address to allow for more than one person per household or device to respond. To help prevent ineligible respondents from filling out the questionnaire online, a small description of eligibility requirements was provided; specifically least 18 years of age, participated in paddle-based recreation in the Thousand Islands Region since May 2010 and has not completed the questionnaire before. The eligibility requirements were the same for in-person distribution and were verbally asked to respondents before completion of each questionnaire.

As with any questionnaire there are inherent biases. Although several other paddling companies in the scope of this research were asked to house the questionnaires only one business accepted the offer. For this reason, the data may not be as random as I would have liked. Similarly, distribution at the paddling lecture series in the region for obvious reasons may have attracted a certain type of paddler (residing nearby, not a beginner, etc.) and again may have affected the results. However, because paddling in SLINP and environs does not have one single access point it was difficult to survey paddlers in action. The questionnaire was made accessible online in an attempt to be inclusive.

3.3.1. Selection of Data and Analysis

The 138 questionnaires were analyzed using an online program called Survey Monkey. The questionnaires that were not completed electronically were manually input into Survey Monkey and then downloaded into Microsoft Excel for further analysis. Survey Monkey allows for real-time viewing of results both individually and in aggregate (Survey Monkey, 2011).
Customized cross tabs and filters were applied to the results to uncover hidden trends and explore different perceptions more comprehensively (Survey Monkey, 2011). Generalizations were then made based on the sample population of paddlers. Inevitably there are some limitations as this sample population’s perceptions, attitudes and beliefs may differ from the actual population. Also, since paddle-based tourism is a dynamic market dependent on many external factors, like the weather and exchange rate, the sample population is difficult to estimate. Adding to the complexity are the independent paddlers who are equally as difficult to count as there are many different points to access the region.

The results of the questionnaire singlehandedly narrowed the scope of the research. The presence of local paddlers emerged as a major theme in the initial results of the questionnaire. For this reason, interview respondents were asked questions regarding local participation, partnerships, and contributions and how these ideas related to ecotourism and will be further discussed in both Chapters 6 and 7.

3.4. Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted using the long interview method outlined by MacCracken in *The Long Interview* (1988). The literature review provided the foundation for the research, as well as, helped with the construction and analysis of the interview. Eight interviews were conducted by phone from January 2011 to March 2011. The interviews were designed to last 20-35 minutes but ranged from 18 to 45 minutes in length. Interview respondents were associated with each of the following organizations: a municipality, Frontenac Provincial Park, SLINP, a small business owner, a paddling NGO, FAB, Paddle Canada and the Canadian Canoe Museum. The respondents were selected based on their knowledge of the research area and paddling
issues, their positions within various affiliated organizations as well as the potential to contribute a unique perspective. Other participants with the potential to make a meaningful contribution were contacted but an interview was not conducted because of unwillingness or unavailability to participate. This is a research limitation, but since the specific contribution of these respondents is unknown and trends were already beginning to emerge from the interviewed respondents the research is still able to provide a multifaceted perspective into the area of study.

Interview questions were asked in the same order to preserve conversational context but departure from the general framework of the interview was not discouraged. The interview was intended to be navigated and led by the respondent and leading questions were avoided. The open-ended questions of the interview explored perceptions of sustainable tourism and ecotourism and how these concepts related to their affiliation and them personally, feasibility of and barriers to implementation of an ecotourism framework in the paddling industry, the current state of paddling and paddlers, environmental management and the contribution of locals in regards to ecotourism (see Appendix G). All interviewees received a Letter of Information and Consent Form based on the requirements of the Queen’s University Ethics process allowing or disallowing the conversation to be recorded and their name to be used in the research.

3.4.1. Selection of Data and Analysis

Interview analysis followed MacCracken’s methodology outlined in *The Long Interview* (1988). MacCracken outlines a Four-Step Method of Inquiry beginning with an extensive review of the literature to “establish an inventory of the categories and relationships that the interview must investigate” (32). The next step is to review the cultural categories by uncovering assumptions, idiosyncrasies and associations that may plague the interviewer. This is followed by careful construction of the questionnaire and lastly, discovery of analytic categories or in
other words, administered research (MacCracken, 1988). All eight interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Analysis of the interviews concentrated on information relevant to the main objectives of the research. The results were discussed in terms of Honey’s (2008) principles of ecotourism (see Appendix A) to better assess the feasibility, successes and shortcomings with respect to ecotourism practices in the paddling industry. Using trends that emerged from both the literature review and the questionnaire results, the interviews were organized into themes and further categorized into one of Honey’s (2008) seven principles. As themes appeared, both new and reoccurring, the research objectives were revisited and assessed to help focus the research and results. The emergent themes were then coupled with results from the questionnaire and trends from the literature review.
Chapter 4

Contextual Background: The Thousand Islands Region

4.1. Geography and Geology

Encompassing SLINP, the Thousands Islands Region straddles the U.S.-Canada border along the St. Lawrence River as it joins with Lake Ontario, stretching from Kingston to Cornwall (see Figure 1). The Township of Leeds and Thousand Islands extends from Gananoque in the southwest, to Seeley’s Bay in the northwest, to near Charleston in the northeast and then down to the Rockport area in the southeast (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Map of the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands (from Thousands Islands Tourism 2011)
The Township is home to roughly 10,000 people and the St. Lawrence Corridor alone attracts over six million visitors annually (PRTDF, 2008). The international border crossing with the U.S. proves a valuable asset for the local- and regional-economies in terms of trade, jobs, real estate and tourism. Tourist attractions include water-based activities, land-based outdoor recreational activities, cultural and performance arts productions, visiting national and provincial parks, historic sites, and museums. In a 2004-2005 audit of tourist activity in the region, the largest percentage of visitors staying overnight (33% of Canadian visitors and 25% of American visitors) participated in water-based activities. In a three way tie, 17% of Canadian tourists (18% of Americans) visited exhibits, architecture, historic sites or (15% of Americans) a performance arts event or (12% of Americans) sunbathing/sitting on the beach (PRTDF, 2008). Tourism in the Thousand Islands will be further explored in the following chapter.

Although named the Thousand Islands, after a rough estimate by French explorers, the actual number of islands ranges from 1687 to 1830 depending on the water level or definition of an island (de Visser and Fleming, 1998; Ross, 2001; Thompson, 1996). Most of these islands are made of granite with the oldest rock formations being granite gneiss. This pinkish granite gneiss present in the Thousand Islands is an extension of the Canadian Shield, called the Frontenac Arch, and dates back to approximately 1.1 billion years ago. The youngest rock formations found in the region are the grey limestone layers formed 450 million years ago (de Visser and Fleming, 1998). Although the islands contain ancient rock, they were formed only 10,000 years ago as a result of the last glacial period. The land beneath the glaciers was depressed below sea level creating a large inland sea that allowed marine animals and saltwater to briefly occupy the area (Ross, 2001). As the ice of the last glacial period retreated northward, the marine inhabitants also
retreated, and eventually the land rebounded. The flooding water carved out the St. Lawrence River from the granite and caused the Thousand Islands landscape to emerge (Ross, 2001).

The geological history of the Thousand Islands helped create “one of the most ecologically-rich regions on the continent” (Ross, 2001: 27). The Frontenac Arch and St. Lawrence River provide two corridors through which vegetation and wildlife can migrate and settle. The Arch provides a north-south route that links the Boreal forest landscape with the southern Appalachian region. Similarly, the St. Lawrence River, located east-west, is the reason that the Thousand Islands includes landscape feature from both the prairies and Canadian Maritimes (Ross, 2001). Along with geological history, the varied soil and rock types, relatively moderate climate, and range of habitats shaped the Thousand Islands into an exceptionally diverse area (Ross, 2001).

The prevailing south-westerly winds cause most of the islands’ west sides to be comprised of pitch pine, white oak and juneberry trees with little wildlife (de Visser and Fleming, 1998; Ross, 2001). Further inland, white pine, red oak, hemlock, basswood, hickory and sarsaparilla are common (de Visser and Fleming, 1998; Ross, 2001). The wildlife here is mainly grey squirrels, meadow voles, porcupines, yellow warblers, orioles and woodpeckers (Ross, 2001). In places where the soil is deeper, rich forests exist and are home to maples, trilliums and many other wildflowers. The other end of the spectrum is also present. The barren, smooth rock ridge tops are characterized by sparse grasses and lichen (Ross, 2001). Other common wildlife found scattering the landscape include white-tailed deer, blue-spotted salamanders, minks, turtles, snakes, cottontail rabbits, coyotes, bats, mice and river otters. There is also a wide variety of bird species most notably waterfowls, hawks, Canada geese, blue jays, and the blue heron. Some species of the aquatic habitat include snails, waterfleas, molluscs,
clams, pike, carp, bass, chorus and leopard frogs, water snakes and dragonflies. It is estimated that there are between 85 to 90 species of fish alone (Ross, 2001).

4.2. History

The oldest trace of human life on the Thousand Islands is a primitive tool found on Gordon Island dating back to 7000 BC which was most likely owned by a nomadic group traveling through the region (Ross, 2001). When trade networks developed along the waterways and the landscape grew more diverse, the nomadic lifestyle was replaced by a more conventional, sedentary one. Two main cultural groups settled in the region; the Iroquois and Algonquins. Clashing between the groups often resulted in violence which culminated in a battle won by the Iroquois at Clayton that further enlarged their territory. However, soon after, in the early 1600s, French colonists arrived and aligned with the Algonquins whose land contained the most desirable furs. As the Iroquois were the natural opponent of this alliance, when the Dutch colonists appeared in the mid-1600s a quick partnership was formed but to no avail. The country of France waged war on the Iroquois’ in 1665 who were eventually forced to flee and French trading posts were established in this newly uninhabited area. The French’s control of the Thousand Islands continued into the late 17th century with establishment of a secure and navigable route through the waterways of the region that ensured access to the furs. However, the next fifty years were marred by the relentless conflicts that spanned continents between France and Britain. British troops eventually defeated the French and took control of the Thousand Islands region. Because the landscape was generally poor in terms of arable farmland, land grants were established to entice people to settle in the region during the late 18th century. Settlement in the Thousand Islands slowly grew and by the early 19th century roughly ten
thousand people had settled in the region (de Visser and Fleming, 1998). However while humans were prospering the environment was suffering as timber began to replace fur as the valued resource. Although the Thousand Islands were never clear cut, old growth oak and pine trees as big as two meters in diameter, were completely forested.

The early 19th century began with the United States declaring war on Britain with the British colony of Canada being the main objective (Ross, 2001). The War of 1812 lasted two years and the Thousands Islands was the site for many small confrontations taking place back and forth across the river, but a major battle never occurred here. Five years later in 1817, the Rush-Bagot Treaty was implemented that restricted the number of armed ships from the United States and Britain that could run in the Great Lakes (Ross, 2001). However, the St. Lawrence River continued to be a dangerous route and spurred the construction of the Rideau Canal in 1832 that essentially linked the St. Lawrence River to the Great Lakes (Ross, 2001). As the pockets of conflict around the region calmed, industries that were quietly developing during years of violence came into the forefront. Timber, agriculture, glassworks, stonemasonry and tourism (borne out of recreational hunting) were all important industries of the Thousand Islands in the 19th and into the 20th century (Ross, 2001).

The islands were originally owned by the Mississauga tribe of the Alnwick, a close relative to the Ojibwa people. The Crown held brief ownership before the Department of Indian Affairs came under jurisdiction in 1870 (de Visser and Fleming, 1998). At this time, the islands not selected for parkland or navigational aids, were put on the market and sold for as little as $50 (de Visser and Fleming, 1998). Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen of the British Royal Navy is credited as one of the first to thoroughly survey and map the islands of the St. Lawrence River. At the same time, in the 1820s, he also named many of the islands on the Canadian side
including the Admiralty, Lake Fleet and Navy Islands chains (de Visser and Fleming, 1998). In 1904, residents of the Thousand Islands encouraged the Federal Government to reserve the nine remaining unsold public islands for parkland; spurring the establishment of SLINP.

4.3. St. Lawrence Islands National Park and Environs: Area of Study

Established in 1904, SLINP is Canada’s third smallest national park, measuring roughly 20km\(^2\) in area (Parks Canada, 2009). Located in Eastern Ontario within the Thousand Islands region and UNESCO Frontenac Arch Biosphere (see Chapter 5), SLINP is a unique site rich in both biological diversity and landscape features. The Park is within driving distance of millions of visitors from southern Ontario, Quebec and the United States (see Figures 2 and 3). Accordingly, SLINP has one of the highest visitor densities of all Canadian National Parks (Francis and Leggo, 2004). In a five-year span from 2006 to 2010, SLINP’s number of visitors remained relatively consistent ranging between 56,230 in the 2005-2006 season to 42,440 in the 2007-2008 season (Parks Canada Attendance, 2010). The park includes over 20 island properties scattered across the St. Lawrence River which are must-see attractions for many visitors. Its landholdings can be divided into three areas connected by the Thousand Islands Parkway: Jones Creek, Landon Bay and Mallorytown Landing (see Figure 3).

For the purpose of this study, SLINP and environs is defined as the land and waterways along the St. Lawrence River extending as far as Jones Creek in the northeast to, but not including, Howe Island just southwest of Gananoque (see Figures 2 and 3). As noted, SLINP owns more than 20 island properties and 90 islets and because the islands are accessible only by water, water-based transportation is an integral component to park visitation and tourism of the region. As a result water-based activities have become an increasingly important component of
the overall SLINP visitor experience. Paddle-based recreation and its role in this research will be
discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

The Thousand Islands Region: Main Actors and Paddle-Based Recreation

5.1. Introduction

The following chapter outlines the main actors in the area of study to provide a general overview of the setting of regional tourism. Tourism documents and initiatives from the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands, the Thousands Islands Region, St. Lawrence Seaway, SLINP and FABR are presented and examined. Paddle-based recreation in the region is also profiled. The following discussion helps address objectives 2 and 3 of the research (see Chapter 1) by reconciling paddle-based recreation in the region with an ecotourism framework.

5.2. Tourism Strategies of the Thousand Islands Region

5.2.1. Official Plan of the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands

In the Township’s Official Plan (2006), tourism development and support of tourism-related businesses was identified as one of the foundations around which the document was drafted (Official Plan, 2006). The plan aims to expand upon the existing tourism market by further developing the area as a “recreational and vacation hub” for the mutual benefit of both residents and visitors (15). Although the “hub” aspect is not defined, the plan outlines six areas of action to promote its development: (1) encourage collaboration with all relevant stakeholders including government bodies, non-profit groups and business organizations; (2) enhance key recreational and tourism attractions like St. Lawrence River and “extensive lake system…and other trail systems and various conservation and public park facilities” (19); (3) create linkages between recreational trails, tourist attractions, points of interest and areas of scenic or
environmental interest; (4) promote the area as a multi-season recreational center and undertake and support regional studies into tourism, recreation, heritage, community improvement and economic development; (5) encourage tourism initiatives; and (6) encourage public-private partnerships in tourism-related projects (Official Plan, 2006).

The Official Plan also identifies SLINP as the highest priority with respect to land-use decisions as it is considered a major contributor to the local tourism industry. Ecotourism is briefly mentioned as a type of tourism that should be encouraged by “taking advantage of compatible features like the path system on the Thousand Islands Parkway” (55). No other mention of ecotourism is made in the entire document. The definition of ecotourism is not provided so not only is it unclear what “compatible features” are, but also how ecotourism would take advantage of said features. Simply recognizing the concept of ecotourism is insufficient when the terms are not defined. This propagates the perception that ecotourism is merely a buzzword as well as severely segmenting the document which causes a major lack of continuity. The six areas of action described above could be presented within an ecotourism framework to create a unified and cohesive strategy.

5.2.2. Economic Development Strategic Plan for the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands

In a similar document also drafted in 2006, the Township’s Economic Development Strategic Plan contains a section entitled ‘Building on our Competitive Strengths’ and listed five key areas to which the Township will focus on economic development. One of these keys was the ‘Natural Environment and Ecotourism’. Five recommendations were presented to promote more growth in this area. The strategy underscores the importance of a holistic approach to managing the natural environment as a means to capitalize on the potential economic
sustainability of NBT through conservation, preservation and educational opportunities (Economic Development Strategic Plan, 2006). The first recommendation calls for a complete inventory audit of all assets and resources related to the natural environment and ecotourism of the area. The second recommendation requires identification of the appropriate market segments including inland waterway users, trail users, winter-season users and persons related in eco-education and tourism related to the biosphere (Economic Development Strategic Plan, 2006). The other three recommendations include improvement of the trail systems, creating partnerships with FABR and considering the potential of utilizing the Ontario Trillium Foundation, a charitable grant making foundation and agency of the Government of Ontario, for projects concerning this area of study (Economic Development Strategic Plan, 2006). Again, although this document is more thorough in terms of implementation strategies than the Official Plan, it is still lacking in cohesion in terms of the principles of ecotourism and clearly projected outcomes.

5.2.3. Premier-Ranked Tourism Destination Framework (PRTDF): Thousand Islands - St. Lawrence Seaway Regional Report

Perhaps the most relevant document for this study is *Premier-Ranked Tourism Destination Framework (PRTDF) for the Thousand Islands and St. Lawrence Seaway* (2008); an initiative developed by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism to assist locations identified as “more attractive than the rest” in development related to tourism (PRTDF, 2008: 3). The end result was an assessment report complete with recommendations. The report focused on collaboration between involved organizations for collective development of the five designated “common core attractors” including the Thousand Islands and St. Lawrence River experience and outdoor recreation (10). Immediate, mid-term and long-term recommendations were made. Most relevant to this study were the long-term recommendations that focused on development of the Seaway
Trail. The Seaway Trail is a series of connected roads and highways that extend from Pennsylvania to the U.S.-Canada international border along the St. Lawrence Seaway. PRTDF proposed that the Seaway Trail can act as the medium to connect various attractions and green experiences “like cycling and hiking… [that] have little impact on the environment and more and more consumers are looking for green tourism opportunities”. Although ecotourism was not directly mentioned, the consumer demand for ‘greener’ tourism alternatives coupled with less intrusive activities, when compared to more conventional methods of experiencing the natural environment, were recognized.

5.3. Frontenac Arch Biosphere (FAB) Reserve

5.3.1. General Information

UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme is an Intergovernmental Scientific Programme adopted in the 1970s to promote an interdisciplinary approach to research focusing on the economic, social and ecological issues associated with biodiversity loss and prevention of that loss. One of the key foundations upon which this tenet is built is encouraging a more sustainable way of living and a more meaningful relationship with our environment. The Frontenac Arch Biosphere (FAB) is one of 15 Canadian Reserves and 564 globally to receive UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme designation. FAB spans approximately 2700km across “perhaps some of the most bio-diverse land in Canada” including five forest regions, the southern portion of the Rideau Canal a World Heritage Site, and the Thousand Islands (FABR, 2011). The area encompasses SLINP, a portion of the Rideau Heritage Route, Frontenac Provincial Park and Charleston Lake Provincial Park (see Figure 5).
Although FAB does not have any legal authority, it empowers the local community by creating partnerships, presenting workshops and sharing and receiving knowledge through the Biosphere Network, collectively (FABR, 2011). As a not-for-profit organization, FAB operates with a volunteer board of directors whose main concern is sustainable community development. Sustainable development is defined in terms of sustainability’s four pillars; environmental, social, economic and cultural sustainability (FABR, 2011).

5.3.2. Sustainable Tourism Initiatives

In two separate initiatives, FAB demonstrated its commitment to sustainable tourism by receiving National Geographic Society’s Geotourism Charter and establishing a national model for sustainable tourism in collaboration with numerous partners. National Geographic’s Geotourism Charter was bestowed on FAB in 2010 and, at the time, was only the ninth such designation worldwide. Geotourism is defined as “tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place - its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-
being of its residents” (Geotourism Charter, 2011: 1). The Geotourism Charter is based on 13 principles including tourist satisfaction, community involvement and benefit, conservation of resources and interactive interpretation. It is said to be “sustainable tourism energized” as some say it combines both sustainable tourism and ecotourism into a more comprehensive term which also adds a sense of place element (Geotourism Charter, 2011: 1). After a year of exploring the principles of the charter and their implications, FAB completed the paperwork in January 2010 to receive the National Geographic’s Geotourism Charter.

The second initiative undertaken by FAB began in 2006 and involved collaboration with Parks Canada, TIAC, the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, and regional Chamber of Commerce. The goal was to formulate a national sustainable tourism model for “promotion and identification of sustainable tourism opportunities” (Building a National Model for Sustainable Tourism, 2006: 1). Sustainable tourism was defined using TIAC’s definition as,

…tourism [that] actively fosters appreciation and stewardship of the natural, cultural and historic resources and special places by local residents, the tourism industry, governments, and visitors. It is tourism which is viable over the long term because it results in a net benefit for the social, economic, natural and cultural environments of the area in which it takes place (Building a National Model for Sustainable Tourism, 2006: 1).

Three phases were outlined for each year of the project, culminating in the actual writing of the model which upon completion will adhere to four key principles: viability, voluntary, transferability and capability.
5.4. St. Lawrence Islands National Park (SLINP)

5.4.1. Tourism Management Strategies

SLINP visitor management strategies are bound by Canada National Parks Act which essentially reworks the definition of sustainability by stating that, “…parks shall be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (National Parks Act, 2000: 2). The Act also put a premium on ecological integrity asserting that “Maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity…shall be the first priority of the Minister when considering all aspects of the management of parks” (National Parks Act, 2000: 5). Parks Canada has recognized the inherent relationship between the public and the environment by attempting to balance tourists’ needs with ecosystem protection by aiming to enhance “public understanding, appreciation, enjoyment and protection of the national heritage” (Parks Canada Guiding Principles and Operational Policies, 2009: 8).

SLINP indirectly recognizes the concept of ecotourism in their newly drafted 2010 Management Plan. The Park’s Vision underscores the importance of sustainability with respect to environmental management and the role that partnerships and community involvement play within that system. In general, the term sustainable is used so often and in so many different contexts that its meaning is often blurred. It is clear that the ultimate goal of SLINP is to be sustainable but the approach to attain that goal is not clearly defined and under-represented in the document.

The Plan describes three Key Strategies to achieve that vision, each having their own set of objectives. The most pertinent to this area of study is Key Strategy 2 which is to explore new landscapes, markets and opportunities. Under this strategy, objective 2 is to undertake a leadership role in the promotion of sustainable tourism (SLINP Management Plan, 2010). The
plan recognizes that sustainable and adventure tourism are fast growing markets within the tourism industry. SLINP is also described as a leader by example in promotion and implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives like conducting an economic impact assessment that can be combined with FAB’s sustainable tourism model, encouraging partnerships with the community and other stakeholders, and promoting clearly defined tourism packages within the region for different types of tourists (SLINP Management Plan, 2010). Although this is the only section that specifically addresses sustainable tourism ideals, the plan is a 62-page document that provides thorough and quite lofty objectives for all aspects of SLINP management - some of which align with the ecotourism principles described in this study (see Appendix A). For instance, a major focus in the plan is improvement upon and development of environmental monitoring programs. Not only is this an important component of authentic ecotourism, but it also helps the Park identify changes and trends concerning ecological integrity, cultural resources and visitor experiences. Monitoring will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 7.

5.5. Paddle-based Recreation in SLINP and Environs

The FAB reserve is home to an extensive river and lake system that established the area as a popular destination amongst the paddling community at large (see Figure 5). From the proximity to urban centers to the presence of parklands to the diverse landscape features, paddling in this area offers an essentially unfettered semi-wilderness experience in clean water. Paddling has turned into a major tourist attraction for the area. The local tourism industry echoes this demand as there are at least five Canadian companies that provide watercraft rentals for use within the Thousands Islands region. There are also several paddling associations’ with
headquarters in the area including Paddle Canada, Frontenac Arch Paddling Association and Cataraqui Canoe Club.

In a recent initiative spearheaded by FAB and in collaboration with different stakeholders within the paddling community, major paddling trails were identified and plan to be developed for safe navigable use. The multi-stakeholder volunteer committee called Frontenac Arch Paddling Trails (FAPT) selected four trails: Frontenac Provincial Park, Rideau Canal National Historic Site, Gananoque River Trail and Thousand Islands (see Figure 6). In regards to paddling, SLINP and environs would only include the Thousand Islands trail as identified by FAPT. The Rideau Canal National Historic Site is part of the Rideau Canal that connects Kingston to Ottawa via locks that have been in operation since 1832.

Figure 6: Map of Frontenac Arch Paddling Trails (from FAPT 2011)
The historical significance of the Rideau Heritage Route, which includes the Canal and surrounding towns and villages, was recognized and designated by UNESCO a World Heritage Site in 2007. The Gananoque River Trail is also unique in that it crosses many major communication and transportation corridors in Canada including Highway 401, the TransCanada Pipeline, power lines and the rail line. At present, only the Rideau and Thousands Islands trails are fully navigable without impinging on private land.

FAPT is part of a greater FAB reserve initiative launched in 2009 entitled Explore the Arch. The initiative is meant to highlight the Biosphere Networks ultimate goal of fostering sustainable communities. Not only will trails, maps, services and other features of land and water be developed, but educational information concerning culture, ecology and history will also be made available in hopes of enriching visitors’ experiences. In this way, Explore the Arch will serve as a sort of search engine for everything FAB-related with input from interested stakeholders being a key contributing factor to this knowledge base.

As noted, SLINP owns over 20 island properties, most of which are equipped with a dock at least 100m in size and are therefore accessible by water. Of the three land properties that SLINP owns, only Mallorytown Landing has a dock and boat launch. SLINP management is aware of these shortcomings for paddlers and accordingly one of the many key actions listed in the Park Management Plan is to develop canoe- and kayak-friendly opportunities for Landon Bay, Jones Creek and other island properties lacking the appropriate infrastructure (2010). Park management also intends to connect all three landholdings with a trail network designed in collaboration with FAB, private landholders and St. Lawrence Parks Commission (SLINP Management Plan, 2010).
Paddle-based recreation is an activity with the potential to generate social learning, local empowerment, a sense of place within the community and build placed-based connections and appreciation for the natural environment including SLINP and environs (Wattchow, 2007; 2008). Former Director General of Canadian Parks Services, Jane Roszell reflects, “Parks Canada has recognized the concept that knowledgeable and responsible citizen action is integral to a clean and healthy environment” (Roszell, 1996: 32). Collaborative planning (Edwards et al., 2003; Healey, 2006; Reed, 1999) that includes all interested stakeholders and individuals in the planning process and greater park ecosystem management including the region adjacent to the National Park are all important elements.
Chapter 6

Results and Discussion

6.1. Introduction

Analysis of eight interviews, academic literature, regional policy documents, tourism initiatives and 138 surveys (146 started) revealed many interesting trends that help draw conclusions on the research objectives (see Chapter 1). The following section will explore these emergent themes and directly relate them to the research objectives. The ensuing discussion is separated into two major categories based on objective 2 and 3: (1) explore the regional paddling market and the tourist demand; and (2) assess the viability of paddle-based recreation as an ecotourism industry. To better address objective 2, the market assessment section is further separated into demographics, paddle-based recreation, motivations and ecotourism demand. Although there is some overlap, most of the conclusions made about paddlers’ demographics, part of the first objective, are based on the results of the questionnaire. Whereas the interviews were used mainly to uncover perceptions of paddle-based recreation and ecotourism, more related to the third objective. Results pertaining to the second objective will be discussed in terms of Honey’s (2008) ecotourism principles (see Appendix A). To maintain anonymity, the respondents’ names will not be used. Instead each interview was numbered from one to eight and will be used after quotations and ideas to help maintain clarity and avoid confusion. Because the interview process was the last method conducted, many trends made apparent from the questionnaire and literature review were integrated into the interview design. It is important to note that prevalence of these trends in the interviews may not necessarily be representative of their perceived importance as without prompting some topics of conversation may not have occurred naturally. This chapter integrates the findings from all of the methods to provide
additional support to each conclusion presented. Combining all of these findings, Chapter 7 discusses recommendations that were formulated to fulfill the fourth objective.

6.2. Assessing the Paddling Market

6.2.1. Demographics

As the demographic questions of the questionnaire were the most sensitive in nature, they were placed at the end of the questionnaire. This way if any respondent did not wish to disclose particular information they could submit the survey and other valuable data would not be lost. Some of the general demographic information garnered from the questionnaire is as follows. Of the 137 respondents, 136 (99.3%) indicated they were residents of Canada. One respondent was a resident of the United States. Males represented 72 (52.9%) respondents while 64 (47.1%) respondents were female. The age, annual household income and level of education of the respondents are depicted in Tables 6A-C.
The demographic results of the questionnaire could be used to profile potential ecotourists visiting the region. To be eligible for this questionnaire all of the respondents had to have participated in paddle-based recreation while visiting the region. Therefore all of the respondents who are classified as ecotourists in this study already belong to a smaller demographic based on preferred tourist activity (paddling). Respondents were asked to indicate whether they considered themselves an ecotourist based on TIES definition (see section 2.1). Of the 136 respondents who answered this question, 126 (92.6%) would classify themselves as an ecotourist; whereas 11 (8.1%) indicated they would not. It is important to note that respondents’ answers may not be reflective of their actual actions. Respondents’ may have perceived that a positive response was more correct or moral than the alternative, or respondents’ may aspire to behave more like the definitional requirements and chose accordingly. On the other hand, respondents’ behaviour may align with ecotourism principles but they disagreed with an aspect of the definition and therefore, would not consider themselves an ecotourist.

Taking all of these biases into consideration, of the 126 ecotourists some generalizations can be made that will prove useful for the tourism and paddling industries in the region. The majority of ecotourists, 51 respondents (40.8%), were over the age of 55. Similarly, 80 respondents (64.0%) had received at least a bachelor’s degree and 64 (51.2%) respondents declared an annual household income of over 75,000 CAD. These demographic findings are supported by the literature that asserts ecotourists generally have higher annual household incomes and are better educated than conventional travellers (Dolnicar et al., 2008; Honey, 2008; Hvenegaard, 1994; Page and Dowling, 2002; Weaver, 2002). Although there is evidence that females are over-represented amongst ecotourists (Luo and Deng, 2008; Weaver, 2002), results revealed that male respondents who considered themselves ecotourists slightly outnumbered
female respondents 63 (50.8%) to 61 (49.2%), respectively and therefore would not be significant.

One of the most important pieces of information uncovered by the questionnaire was the presence of local paddlers in SLINP and environs. For the purpose of this research, local was defined as within the cities of Kingston and Brockville, and the Township of Leeds and Thousand Islands which comprises the communities of Gananoque, Lyndhurst, Rockport, Ivy Lea, Outlet, Seeley’s Bay, Morton and Charleston area (see Figures 1-4). Although this region is larger than the defined area of study, Kingston and Brockville were included because both urban centers are less than 30kms away from a given point of SLINP and environs. To provide a general survey of paddlers, the close proximity of Kingston and Brockville not only allow for easy access to the waterways but also is convenient enough for respondents to contribute to the local community through attendance, volunteering or participation at local events or financial support. For these reasons, respondents from postal codes corresponding to the cities of Kingston and Brockville are considered local for the purpose of this study.

According to the 132 postal codes provided by respondents, 96 (72.7%) are local paddlers. A similar open-ended question, contingent upon respondents indicating it was not their first time paddling in the region, asked respondents to indicate their motivation(s) for revisiting the region. Of the 102 respondents, 71 (69.6%) indicated they were local. The small discrepancy in results of these two questions could be evidence of the first time local paddlers in the region. Moreover, if a respondent had not previously paddled in the region, they would not have been directed to the second part of that question and thus, would not have had the opportunity to disclose their motivation(s) for revisiting the region. Also, the question was open-ended so respondents who were locals may have opted for a different reason for revisiting the region like
the beauty of the landscape (17 respondents, 16.7%). The proportionately large number of local paddlers may also be credited to the modes of distribution of the survey that were, in large part, more accessible to locals. To help offset this disparity, there were several distribution locations and also the questionnaire was made available online. Nevertheless, the data reveal that over 70% of the paddlers surveyed are local to the area. This fact alone helped narrow the scope of the study and in doing so drove the remainder of the research, namely interview design and analysis and formulation of the general recommendations. The contribution of locals to ecotourism became a major theme of the research and subsequent recommendations.

6.2.2. Paddle-Based Recreation

Questions concerning paddle-based recreation were placed at the beginning of the questionnaire because they were considered by the researcher to be the easiest to answer and the least intrusive. Paddle-specific questions were asked to help better understand the paddling market and in turn, address the second objective of the research. Paddling questions concerning the last time the respondent had paddled in the Thousand Islands region sought to help define the paddling community and subsequently uncover their motivations, desires and behaviours. The results could help contribute to paddling programming, developing infrastructure, marketing and promotion, and collaboration between stakeholders. The majority of respondents (75, 51.4%) rated their paddling skill level as intermediate; beginner and advanced roughly split the remaining responses (37, 25.3% and 34, 23.3%, respectively). Almost half of the respondents (70, 47.9%) paddled in a group with 2 to 5 people, including themselves. Individual paddlers accounted for 34 respondents at 23.3%. The literature supports that both small group sizes and independent travelers are characteristic of ecotourism ventures (Honey, 2008; Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism, 2002; Weaver, 2002). Larger groups of 6-9 and more than 10,
represented 28 (19.2%) and 14 (9.6%) respondents, respectively. 94 respondents (64.4%) did not paddle with a guide and for 108 respondents (74.0%) it was not their first time paddling in the region. According to respondents’ postal codes, 72.7% of respondents are local and this is echoed in the responses indicating the cause for their return. In this open-ended question, 71 respondents (69.6%) stated that the reason for their return was because they resided in the region. The natural beauty of the landscape (16.7%), the variety of paddling opportunities (6.9%), family (2.9%), friends (2.0%), recreation (1.0%) and a specific paddling outfitter (1.0%) represented the remainder of responses.

Again the amount of local paddlers was represented in a contingency question that asked respondents to indicate their length of stay in the Thousand Islands region. Respondents must have indicated that they stayed longer than 1 day and 1 night to be directed to a more specific question that included a local option. If local respondents chose to skip this question based on a perception that it was directed to tourists, they would not been able to indicate that they, in fact, reside in the region. Of the 141 total responses, 104 (73.8%) respondents spent more than 1 day and 1 night. Of the 104 respondents directed to the contingent question, 71 (68.3%) respondents indicated that they lived in the region (see Figure 7). There may have been part-time residents amongst the surveyed population and it is unclear how they may have responded to the question. These results suggest that improvements could be made in such areas as place branding,
marketing and promotion as well as product integration, to enhance the amount of time non-locals are spending. This data also provides valuable information for tourism operators and officials in the region.

6.2.3. Motivations

Lastly, in hopes of uncovering paddlers’ motivations, respondents were asked to indicate from a list of nine characteristic(s) what most attracted them to paddle in the region. Of the 125 responses, 83 respondents (66.4%) chose the environmental aesthetic as one of the main motivators. The rest of the results, in percentages, are as follows: visiting parks or protected lands (52.0%), your connection to the environment (50.4%), physical challenge (34.4%), the specific paddling company or outfitter (33.6%), cost (32.0%), educational opportunities (25.6%), cultural experience (24.8%) and media (1.6%). A written response to the ‘other’ option was provided by 22 respondents and produced a range of answers including convenience, local and enjoyment on the water.

Figure 8: Activities Questionnaire Respondents Participated in While in the Thousand Islands Region

Activities by Respondents' Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Might participate</th>
<th>Will participate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiking</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic site/museums tours</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic walking tours</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live theatre/music</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorsized water sports</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddling</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock climbing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snorkeling/scuba diving</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statue Tour</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting park or protected areas</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual/performing arts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

76
In a related question the results revealed other activities paddlers participated in while visiting the region. In a two part question, respondents were asked to indentify activities they had participated in in the last two weeks and any activities they planned on participating in in the next two weeks. The combined results of 136 responses are depicted in Figure 8. Paddle-based recreation was the most popular activity with 124 respondents. However, one of the three eligibility requirements for respondents was to have paddled in the Thousand Islands since May 2010. An inherent flaw with surveying is revealed here as all 136 respondents did not indicate their participation in paddling. This could be reflective of careless reading on the respondents’ part or dishonesty about their eligibility or simply a poorly-designed question.

Of the respondents who indicated that they had paddled in the region, hiking and visiting parks or protected areas were the only two activities that over 50% of the respondents had participated in at 59.8% and 54.3%, respectively. Less than 50% of the same population of respondents were not going to participate in any of the same activities listed in the next 2 weeks. The highest number of respondents at 43 (36.4%) indicated that they would partake in paddling in the next two weeks.

When these responses are compared to respondents who participated in a more conventional tourist activity like a scenic boat cruise or tour, the results reveal that the latter group of respondents engaged in more activities. Over 50% of these respondents had already participated in or attended parks or protected areas (80%), hiking (76.9%), cycling (76.0%), historic sites/museums (68.2%), festivals (66.7%), live theatre/music (63.6%), motorized water sports (60.0%), camping (52.4%) and visual/performing arts production (52.4%). This could be reflective of the large amount of local paddlers in the region. The assumption is then that local paddlers would participate in fewer activities. The assumption is confirmed when the activity of
local respondents are focused upon. The only activities that more than 50% of the local respondents had participated in were paddling (87.0%), hiking (74.6%) and visiting parks or protected areas (56.7%). Similarly, more than 50% of respondents did not expect to participate in any of the activities accept hiking (56.1%) in the following 2 weeks. However, there is significant potential to expand the tourist market to local paddlers by encouraging them to participate in other activities which may include incorporating these other activities with paddling into integrated tourism packages. The design of such packages should reflect the results of respondents’ motivations for visiting the region by inclusion of beautiful scenery, educational components, parks and protected area. This is further discussed in Chapter 7.

6.2.4. Ecotourism Demand

As mentioned above, 126 respondents (92.6%) would consider themselves an ecotourist according to TIES’ definition (see Chapter 2). The following question provided a list of ecotourism characteristics and asked respondents to indicate the importance of each on a three-point Likert scale using important, unimportant or neither important nor unimportant. The results are ranked in terms of the importance of each characteristic according to 135 respondents (see Table 6D). The most important characteristic to respondents is their connection to nature followed by the natural beauty of the landscape; a theme that also emerged from analysis of interviews and several other questions discussed above. There was not a significant difference in results for this question when comparing ecotourists to those respondents who did not identify themselves as such. In the following question that asked respondents to rank their top three most important characteristics, of the 130 answers, connection to nature was the most popular first place ranking with 47 (36.2%) respondents. The natural beauty of landscape was ranked by 34
(26.4%) respondents as the second most important characteristic. Presence of protected lands and outdoor recreational opportunities both garnered 20 (15.9%) third place rankings.

Further analysis of the data reveals that the four characteristics most often ranked in the top three are: (1) natural beauty of landscape (88 respondents, 67.7%); (2) connection to nature (71 respondents, 54.6%); (3) outdoor recreational opportunities (44 respondents, 33.8%); and (4) presence of protected lands (41 respondents, 31.5%). Understanding the characteristics that paddlers’ value provides valuable information that is pertinent across many different facets of the tourism industry like marketing, branding and program design that will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

The questionnaire revealed that ecotourists exist in the region but are ecotourists willing to pay more money for an ecotourism-type venture? Results indicate that 104 (75.9%) respondents would indeed be willing to spend more on an ecotourism-based trip. The subsequent question uncovered that of those 104 respondents, 61 respondents (58.1%) would be willing to spend 10-20% more per adult, as a percentage of the trip’s total cost on a seven day/night
ecotourism trip. The other results are as follows: less than 10% more (14 respondents, 13.3%); 20-30% more (19 respondents, 18.1%); 30-40% more (8 respondents, 7.6%); 40-50% more (1 respondent, 1.0%); and more than 50% per adult (2 respondents, 1.9%). It should be noted that an unwillingness to pay more for an ecotourism trip is not necessarily reflective of an unwillingness to participate in ecotourism. Some respondents may believe ecotourism should not cost more than conventional tourism and as a result selected that they would not spend more.

The interviews also revealed a unanimous perception amongst respondents that there is a market demand for sustainable tourism. The literature review revealed that there was some consternation amongst critics of ecotourism that it was merely a passing fad (see Chapter 2). Although some respondents agreed that ecotourism may be a trend, many added they thought this eco-conscious type of travel would only increase in the future. A municipal worker in the tourism industry confirmed that “there is definitely a demand. There is a group of tourists that do…come in looking for cultural, historical or natural areas” (5). Another respondent reiterates that people prefer to visit a destination that “they know is somehow positively impacting the community…rather than just taking something of that region and not giving anything back” (2).

Although the interview respondents were encouraged about the concept of ecotourism, it became apparent that many were unclear or have strikingly different perceptions of the concept as defined by this study. One respondent claimed to “struggle” (4, 6) with the term while another found “it hard to get my head around the notion” (4). This uncertainty is echoed in the literature which shows that since inception of the term, more than 25 years ago, there is still much confusion about its meaning amongst both experts and tourists (Blamey, 2001; Donohoe, 2006; Honey, 2009) and the proliferation of literature on the subject has further added to this ambiguity (Weaver and Lawton, 2007).
When prompted to define ecotourism the interviewees’ responses were quite diverse. One respondent defined ecotourism as “just implying adventure tourism” (2). Another thought of ecotourism as non-motorized tourism that does not require a lot of energy, in terms of carbon output and has “minimal impact on the environment, promotes education and awareness, stewardship of the natural environment” (3). The variety of responses may have affected the subsequent direction of each interview but the respondents’ personal perceptions and initial thoughts were valued over their comments on the researchers’ choice of definitions and the conversational dialogue wanted to be preserved. However, many of the responses included similar definitional elements of ecotourism. For example, all eight respondents incorporated an environmental aspect to the definition including such responses as “consuming less resources than it uses” (4) and “visitation into the area that is managed appropriately so it is minimal impact” (7). A slight correlation was noticed between the definitional themes cited and the respondents’ affiliation. For instance, parks representatives spoke of sustainable tourism in terms of environmental conservation with a time element. Again this viewpoint that the tenets included in ecotourism definitions are dependent on the agency of origin is consistent with the literature (Fennell, 1998; Honey, 2008; Sirakaya et al., 1999) and was addressed in Chapter 2.

6.2.5. Conclusion

The results confirmed that there is a market for ecotourism amongst the paddling community. Furthermore, although some confusion existed over the term, respondents indicated a willingness to participate in ecotourism ventures and thus implied that paddle-based recreation as an ecotourism option is viable in the region. These paddlers would be willing to participate and on average pay 10-20% more per adult per week-long trip. Similarly, the majority of paddlers in the area are local. These local paddlers may have skewed the data as many did not
participate in other activities +/- 2 weeks from when they paddled in the region. Another common sentiment that emerged is the respondents’ appreciation, recognition and value of the region’s natural beauty. What can only be described as a shared affection for the landscape unique to this region is echoed in the interviews as well. Using the results of the demographic questions, a typical paddler in the region was defined as an ecotourist, over the age of 55, having received at least a bachelor’s degree and with an annual household income of at least 75,000 CAD. The largest number of paddlers, paddled in a group of 2-5 people, rated their skill level at intermediate and did not paddle with a guide. Further implications of these results will be explored in combination with analysis of the interviews in Chapter 7.

6.3. Exploring Underlying Themes in Terms of Ecotourism Principles

Emergent themes were identified and categorized into one of Honey’s seven principles of ecotourism (see Appendix A) to explore the role of paddle-based recreation within an ecotourism framework in SLINP and environs. Most themes are applicable to more than one principle and as such should not be viewed as mutually exclusive but rather as one component contributing to an overall ecotourism product.

6.3.1. Travel to Natural Destinations

Results of the interviews exposed what can only be described as a shared acknowledgement and appreciation of the region’s unique natural environment; a theme also consistent with the questionnaires. One of the respondents, who has paddled around the world, indicated that his favourite canoe trip in the whole country is in this region because of the “geography really…there is an amazing back-to-the-land experience available” (4). Another indicated that this area “is an exceptionally-rich region. There are very few areas in Southern Ontario in particular that have essentially a complex of natural assets” (2). Many respondents
indicated that the region’s beautiful natural setting is or should be the main attraction of the area (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8) and that paddle-based recreation is the medium through which visitors can experience it (4, 6, 8). Several also suggested that wanting to experience the wilderness is a characteristic unique to paddlers (1, 3, 4, 8). One respondent stated that most paddlers “don’t want to see all of the urban and developed areas… [they] want to see more pristine wilderness environment” (3). At times many respondents would hint at the paradoxical nature of ecotourism (4, 7), revealing the struggle between encouraging visitation to the area and the potential destruction this increase in volume could have on the resource which people are coming to visit. However, in general, “more paddlers on more water more often” (1) was a common sentiment as the inherent sustainability of paddle-based recreation is preferable over more consumptive recreational activities, such as a motorized boating, to many respondents. Similarly, respondents indicated that greater promotion of paddle-based recreation in the region was an area that needed improvement. One respondent indicated that having a thriving paddling market would “diversify access to this place…and increase demand as far as access goes” (6).

In terms of the principles of ecotourism, the general feeling from the questionnaire and interviews was that paddle-based recreation can act as the medium for visitors to access the region’s natural environment. And it is the region’s incomparable and wholly unique natural setting that is the true attraction.

6.3.2. Minimizes Impact

The most apparent sentiment from respondents when discussing the potential for paddle-based recreation to fit into an ecotourism framework was that paddling was an ideal candidate. The inherent sustainability of paddle-based recreation was addressed by one respondent (8) in terms of the tendency for smaller group sizes (the largest group of questionnaire respondents
paddled in a small group of 2-5 people) and minimal infrastructure required, minimal use of resources and environmental impact when compared to other modes of travel to experience the region. One respondent took this idea further and suggested that the paddling industry “should be getting more attention as a sustainable tourism opportunity because it does inherently meet a lot of the definition of ecotourism” (7).

Not only this, but one respondent indicated that promotion of ecotourism in the paddling industry has more direct effects as it can act as a “profile-raising mechanism for developing sustainable tourism in the region... [and] a lever for the concepts of sustainability and tourism for the community” (2). A similar response was elicited from one respondent who asserted that the concept of ecotourism could serve “as a marketing tool for organizations… [because] people are making a lot more conscientious decisions with their purchasing habits” (3) and this in turn could drive environmental management decisions in the paddling industry.

Beyond the low impact nature of paddle-based recreation, respondents spoke of other initiatives aimed to minimize the stress of paddling on the regional environment. More than one respondent identified the partnership between a local outfitter and SLINP. SLINP trains the outfitter’s employees for the Level 1 Island Steward Program which places volunteers on park-owned islands to greet water-based visitors. The stewards are meant to serve as informants on services and facilities available, rules and regulations, safety procedures, the park system and the natural resources and cultural history of the region. The outfitter also keeps a daily record of the number of clients accessing the islands during the paddling season. There are also annual meetings between the two aimed at knowledge sharing where data and other information is disseminated like changes in regulation, results of research, and identification of species at risk. One respondent explains that the outfitter’s staff “is an extension of their (SLINP’s) enforcement
Attempts to manage the environmental impact of paddle-based recreation are not mandatory and accordingly, require an energetic and farsighted leader to both initiate and spearhead partnerships. Because some critics still question the economic return of ecotourism ventures (see Chapter 2), some tourism operators may be skeptical to enter into partnerships if there is no tangible economic benefit. There is not a single access point to experience the islands and it is difficult to monitor volume and usage from independent paddlers. For these reasons, the requirements of this principle could be better satisfied in the region and the associated recommendations will be discussed more comprehensively in Chapter 7.

6.3.3. Builds Environmental Awareness

The respondents agreed the biggest contributor to building environmental awareness is the development of water trails. Within this, it was generally thought that one of the biggest barriers preventing ecotourism in the paddling industry was lack of infrastructure. One respondent claimed there are not “a lot of obvious put in places and trailheads. It is not officially well-supported and could be better” (1). Although it was granted that paddle-based recreation does not, in general, require a lot of infrastructure when compared to other modes of transportation, one respondent reiterates “the whole situation for paddlers could improve if there were some infrastructure things in the region” (2). Using all of the respondents suggestions, development of the trail system entails but is not limited to; numbering and naming the trails, improvement, maintenance and creation of infrastructure, signage and portages. Water trail development was considered vital to respondents because it will ultimately promote paddle-based recreation in the area and one of the underlying themes was “just getting more people out on the water” (8).
Dissemination of information was another common topic of conversation. Some respondents indicated that improving and diversifying access to the type of information identified above was needed. As discussed in Chapter 5, it is the ambition of FAPT to develop the trail system and as it occurs make this information accessible online (FAPT, 2011; see Figure 6). One respondent suggested that internet-based information was the way of the future as “more people will be using their Smartphones, tablets or digital devices that will become waterproof somehow... [and] you can see exactly where you are and on the internet that information should pop up, eliminating the need for physical signs” (1).

SLINP can serve as a role model for the region with both history and experience in terms of environmental awareness and advocacy. A respondent summarized that one of the park’s main mandates is “to ensure the integrity of the environment...so that it remains a part of our Canadian identity and part of our culture and part of our landscape” (6). The park is involved in many different outlets to promote environmental awareness including engaging with the local community, working with school groups and children, encouraging best management practices and practicing sustainability (SLINP, 2010). The Island Steward Program discussed above is one example of an initiative contributing to environmental awareness in the region.

As one of the park’s primary partners FAB reserve is also active in supporting environmental advocacy. FAB reserve runs community workshops, assists in development of community-tourism strategies and strives to builds, as one respondent indicated, “a conversation amongst likeminded groups” (2); all aimed at fostering sustainable community living.

One respondent indicated that the paddling industry, in general, “could work to build better environmental and ethical practices into our programs and in turn our membership would learn more about that” (3). This thought was shared by another who suggested that a partnership
between Parks Canada and paddling outfitters could be one of mutual benefit (8). Parks Canada’s mandate underscores the importance of public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the natural landscape. Outfitters also have a captive audience in their clientele and, in a respondent’s words, the outfitters “need content and stories to be able to tell and… they [Parks Canada] need that story to be told” (8).

6.3.4. Provides Direct Financial Benefit for Conservation

Authentic ecotourism ventures are commonly associated with protected lands because user fees can be directed towards conservation. As of late, user fees in national parks have been a point of contention amongst the paddling community at large. Two respondents (3,8) independently mentioned user fees and both agreed that rising costs could in fact prove a barrier to encouraging paddle-based recreation at SLINP’s islands. One respondent summarizes their perspective, “Paddlers are, let’s face it, notoriously cheap. I know they would still pay, but they don’t want to pay a lot” (3). Results of the questionnaire revealed that, in fact, the largest group of paddlers (26.7%) have an annual household income in is 75,000-99,999 CAD (see Table 6B).

The other respondent that mentioned the user fees addressed the importance of keeping these fees low enough to attract and maintain paddlers and outfitters in saying, “if it [user fees] are too expensive then we [paddlers] have to go somewhere else… the fees to the national parks have been difficult for us to swallow for some time” (8). Although commercial fees at a national park are frozen at 2008 rates until March 2011 and commercial fees at 2009 rates until March 2012, national parks have been attempting to move towards operating in a revenue neutral area. The implications are that user fees will be used to offset some of the operation costs which are largely government funded. Both respondents felt strongly that to keep paddle-based recreation...
accessible in SLINP and environs user fees needed to be kept low enough to sustain the local paddling community and also “be attractive enough for paddlers to come” (3).

Obviously increasing user fees would increase the portion allotted towards conservation efforts, but as the respondents indicated, this would also compromise the ability of outfitters and paddlers to access SLINP’s islands and as such might jeopardize the unique experience that comes with visiting a national park. To combat this potential revenue loss that SLINP will incur, data from the questionnaires and interviews suggest that there are enough local paddlers to engage in community-based conservation efforts. More specific community-based initiatives will be discussed in Chapter 7.

6.3.5. Provides Financial Benefits and Empowerment for Local People

To better describe the themes exposed from the interviews, this principle is subdivided into two groups; financial benefits for local people and empowerment of local people. The inclusion of the terms “local” and “community” into the discussion was made by every respondent. Depending on the respondents’ affiliation, the way in which locals can contribute or are contributing within an ecotourism framework differed. In terms of economics, some respondents (1, 6) cited that their organizations hired mostly locals as their knowledge of the area was easily transferable to the visiting tourist. Other respondents (4, 5, 8) made mention that local business owners can benefit from paddle-based recreation through tourism packages. This could mean anything from simple cross-promotion on local businesses’ websites to creating a single point of purchase integrated tourism product that includes paddle-based recreation with other activities and/or attractions. One respondent further expanded on this idea positing, “wouldn’t it be neat to have some sort of collaboration of businesses along the way… so I can purchase something that would allow me to bring my suitcase to the B&B and get in a canoe there and
paddle [to the next B&B] and maybe my stuff is taken around in a van” (4). These types of integrated packages would require a deeper commitment to collaboration and partnerships amongst businesses in the tourism sector than currently observed but could in their own modest ways create jobs and generate revenue. Other barriers stand in the way of such packages like completion of the trail system, property ownership and some infrastructure issues but there is definitely economic potential.

The emphasis on financial benefits for locals again highlights the difficulty in universal application of ecotourism according to Honey’s (2008) principles (see Appendix A). In general, this principle aims at maximizing the financial receipts for locals by discouraging foreign investors. Again this is a more common occurrence in developing nations that are attempting to use ecotourism as the means for economic growth and inherently less applicable to established tourism centres. Stanford University President and environmental science professor, Donald Kennedy explains a similar situation, saying, this is “not the familiar story of poor locals whose need for economic development is being fought by affluent outside conservationists” (Honey, 2008: 158).

Other respondents (1, 3, 7, 8) indicated that volunteerism was one of the best ways to contribute to the sustainability of paddle-based recreation in the region. Literature on the topic supports that volunteerism can provide a sense of empowerment for individuals through increased physical function, life satisfaction, enhanced self-esteem and well-being (Morrow-Howell et al., 2009; Taylor and Pancer, 2007). Some regional paddling projects where respondents indicated volunteers were needed included; taking on stewardship roles, maintaining campsites, portage trails and access points, constructing maps, writing content for brochures and websites, building infrastructure and information collection and dissemination.
Finally although the concept of social capital was never identified by name, many respondents (2, 5, 6, 8) noted the value in social networks amongst the paddling community, affiliated tourism organizations, and their environment at large. There was a sense amongst some respondents (2, 6) of a domino-like effect with respect to paddle-specific initiatives and the potential for generating social capital. For instance, it was a shared belief that the value in development of such ideas like creating a unique local brand, or a sense of place of the region, would promote a culture of pride in the community and this would reflect on visitors and so on. Social capital, as a sociological concept, will be explored in greater depth in the Chapter 7 as it is my belief that it is fundamental to the success of ecotourism in the region.

6.3.6. Respects Local Culture

Not only is it the aim of ecotourism to reduce the environmental impacts of tourism, but another objective is to be less culturally intrusive. Given that paddle-based recreation is the focus, one way to interpret the local culture is the local paddling community. Three interviewees (3, 4, 8) referenced a tension between different interest groups affected by paddle-based recreation. The major source of conflict mentioned was between non-motorized and motorized recreationists. It was the general perception that this conflict is in large part a result of the clashing recreational values causing what one respondent called “goal interference” (8). Although this is not unique to the area, the conflict seems to be compounded due to the heightened water traffic in SLINP and environs in the summer months. One respondent indicates this could discourage visitors with limited paddling experience to participate but suggests the greater challenge is educating all users more comprehensively because “so many of these users are transient and from far away” (3). It should be noted that all three respondents recognized that paddlers were not the innocent party in terms of water safety, and equal attention should be paid
to educating them as well. One interviewee summarizes, “there is a kind of education function that needs to occur here” for stakeholders to realize “they shouldn’t get mad at organizations when they start holding up their conservation issues or agendas…there needs to be some sort of shared agreement on what our objectives are and those kinds of conversations aren’t conversations that happen naturally” (4).

The other type of tension that the interviews revealed was a kind of resistance to expansion of the paddling industry amongst different user groups; namely private landowners, non-motorized and motorized recreationists. One respondent referenced the friction wrought out of a previous attempt to develop a trail that went “horribly, horribly wrong” (4) because not all stakeholders were consulted. The respondent explained “there is a kind of reluctance and I think a fear maybe that it will be sort of a mass-tourism-type area that people are thinking with paddling” (4). Again this conflicting perception of SLINP and environs’ usage amongst user groups is a barrier to development of the paddling industry. The general feeling on the issue was that greater communication between all user groups was needed and “work needs to be done to kind of sell the idea of a low impact environmentally-speaking but potentially moderately impactful economic activity” (4) to the area. One respondent nicely phrased, that the paddling industry could benefit “through a promotion of culture” (5) or a type of local branding unique to the area and paddling community.

6.3.7. Supports Human Rights and Democratic Movements

Authentic ecotourism requires “political stability and democracy, as well as national leadership and planning” (Honey, 2008: 441). Relatively speaking, the Canadian government is politically stable. Traditionally this principle is geared towards developing nations and as such
political-tourism issues like international trade policy, political dissention and corruption, repression, racism and discrimination are less relevant to this research.

This was the least discussed subject in the interviews. A loosely-related topic of conversation concerned the encouragement of local paddling groups because, as one respondent believed, “anything that happens by grassroots organizations the advantage is that that is something that tends to stick a bit more because it is citizen-driven” (2). Further to this, it was a common sentiment (2, 4, 6, 8) that an agency was required to take on a leadership role to foster communication between citizen-based padding groups. One respondent indicated “anyone can push up the stem of an umbrella and invite people under it… [but] you need to have some sort of neutral or semi-neutral organization” to support these conversations and “the attitude of collaboration takes time to develop” (4).

Along with the discussion of stimulating interest in paddle-based recreation, it was a shared objective for some respondents (1, 3, 4, 6, 8) to create all-inclusive access to the water and land for paddling purposes. Accessibility has a plethora of related implications that were mentioned by respondents like liability, property ownership, associated costs of participation and social and psychological barriers to be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 7

Recommendations

7.1. Introduction

A multi-method approach was adopted for this research in order to explore a variety of stakeholders’ perceptions. Tourism is a dynamic industry and it was critical that the research was not only informed by many different stakeholders but also utilized various methodologies to facilitate a more holistic look into the area of study. In this way, the triangulation method was applied to emergent themes from the literature review, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and questionnaires. It was the intention of this research to discover if ecotourism is a viable option for the paddling industry in the region through the questionnaire process and then provide baseline information by assessing each principle of ecotourism as defined by Honey (2008). Since this multifaceted approach delves into a range of sociological and scientific material, the scope is accordingly quite broad. In order to truly grasp the nature of ecotourism, an in-depth analysis of each ecotourism principle is still required. It is the hope that this research will stimulate greater interest into the subject area and induce future work with a focus on research into individual ecotourism principles. Analysis of the results uncovered interesting conclusions. This section will explore four major recommendations with broad implications followed by paddle-specific recommendations for SLINP and environs in terms of Honey’s (2008) ecotourism principles.
7.2. General Recommendations

7.2.1. Expand and Encourage Local Participation

The most glaringly obvious theme which became clearly evident with analysis of the results was the absolute necessity of local participation in ecotourism. Although it is apparent that locals are engaging in the paddling industry, improvements can be made in terms of promotion and expansion in the ways in which locals participate. The interviews helped expose the potential for local paddlers to contribute to ecotourism within the region. The prevalence with which each interviewee referred to “local”, “community” or “partnerships” was taken to signify the value respondents placed in local contribution, in a broad sense. Couple this with the results of the questionnaire which revealed that over 70% of the respondents were local (within a 30km distance) and the influence local paddlers could have on propagating the concept of ecotourism within the industry are both huge and immediate. Jones (2005) agrees that “a high level of community control is desirable to maximize benefits to the community” (304). The ways in which locals can participate may vary from passive to active engagement but the easiest way to get involved is through volunteerism. Examples of paddling projects in which volunteers are needed include collection of data, clean-up efforts, monitoring programs, contributing financially to conservation, taking on stewardship roles, maintaining campsites, portage trails and access points, building maps, content writing for brochures and websites. Specific ways in which SLINP and environs locals can contribute to ecotourism principles through participation in paddle-based recreation initiatives are discussed below.

Local participation within the paddling industry of the region is a promising realm to consider social capital theory. Although not a new theory, social capital is said to have been reintroduced into mainstream academia in the 1990s by Robert Putnam (1993). The multitude of
definitions and meanings of social capital that exist are equivalent to that of ecotourism, but the basic idea is that there is value to actors that engage in social networks. Putnam (1995) defines social capital as the “features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (as cited in Jones, 2005: 304). Putnam (1995) is also credited with coining the associated terms bonding and bridging. Bonding refers to the internal connections made within a social organization usually between homogeneous actors whereas bridging describes connections made that are external to the group commonly between heterogeneous actors. In general both bridging and bonding are present in a given social organization, but bridging in particular demonstrates the importance of external collaboration in the generation of social capital (Jones, 2005).

Social capital is pertinent to this study as research suggests it has been a central concept in successful sustainable endeavors including environmental protection (Jones, 2005; Pretty and Ward, 2001). Social bonds can improve upon environmental management by creating a set of standards, norms and regulations but also by enhancing trust which affords actors the confidence to engage in these social networks rather than monitoring the actions of others perceived as untrustworthy (Jones, 2005). There is also evidence that a high level of social capital builds a greater sense of community through reciprocity and can mediate individual actions with negative impacts (Pretty and Ward, 2001). Finally, Jones (2005) purports that social capital used as “an analytical framework does appear to facilitate a more dynamic, explanatory, and detailed analysis of ecotourism ventures” (321). However, it is important to note that local participation is not the only medium with which to generate social capital. Furthermore, the following recommendations were formulated with specific reflection upon the implications to social capital.
7.2.2. Strengthen and Develop Partnerships

Because there is a diverse group of stakeholders with vested interest in the paddling industry of SLINP and environs, it is imperative that an ethic of cooperation and collaboration is fostered. Not only will partnerships be the principle element in several of the recommendations below, but partnerships also have the potential to build social capital. Some of the major stakeholders include but are not limited to SLINP, private landowners, FAPA, FABR, FAPT, municipal government, tourism operators, local paddlers, Paddle Canada, Ontario Parks, Thousand Islands Association and local business owners.

One of the most promising partnerships could be between Parks Canada and Paddle Canada. Given that Paddle Canada has acknowledged that there is room for improvement in terms of how their organization is contributing to ecotourism principles, a national union between Parks Canada and Paddle Canada could prove to be a symbiotic relationship. As well as generating media attention and brand recognition that comes with aligning two national agencies, there is potential to build Parks Canada’s knowledge of culture, conservation and environment into paddling programs and inherently support ecotourism principles by reaching a broader audience. Similarly, FABR as a not for profit organization could serve a leadership role in facilitating partnerships and collaboration specific to this area of study.

7.2.3. Promote Ecotourism in SLINP and Environs

Although a balance is meant to be struck between the principles, the results exposed that there was an underlying skepticism in terms of economic return for tourism operators adopting an ecotourism framework. In other words, the rationale for following a more sustainable framework was unclear to some respondents if it was not profitable. The general perception is that a large investment is necessary to comply with ecotourism practices yet the profit of such
investment in terms of tourism receipts is unknown. Couple this with the lack of a coherent understanding of the term ecotourism amongst interview respondents and reservations to adopt ecotourism principles and practices are understandable. Although there can never be a guarantee of financial success, the questionnaires and interviews indicated that there is a market of ecotourists amongst paddlers that are, on average, willing to pay 10-20% more per adult per week. There must be greater promotion of ecotourism principles in SLINP and environs to attract ecotourists as well as educate local tourism operators to combat the perception that investments in the name of ecotourism are not profitable.

In the same vein, the interviews highlighted an opposition from some stakeholders that promotion of ecotourism within the paddling industry will cause a “401 of canoes” (4), as one respondent indicated. Again it is apparent that the principles of ecotourism are not fully understood and by promoting a unified understanding of ecotourism such fears can be addressed. As the amount of authentic ecotourism options increases, it is the long term aspiration that this type of paradigm shift may have a domino effect and propagate behavioural change within the conventional tourism industry.

7.2.3.1. **Develop a Regional Ecotourism Strategy**

The most obvious barrier to implementation of an ecotourism framework in the region is the lack of a tourism strategy encompassing and elucidating ecotourism principles and practices. Casual mentions of ecotourism in regional strategies (see Chapter 5), is not enough to propagate change in the tourism industry at large. Development of a regional ecotourism strategy should be done in consultation with all stakeholders. The recommendations, addressing the principles specifically, are detailed methods to ensure compliance with the principles of ecotourism, as defined in this study, and should be the main components of the ecotourism strategy. The
following is a list of general considerations that should be addressed and agreed upon in stakeholder meetings to develop the most comprehensive and holistic ecotourism strategy:

- Establish an advisory committee made up of stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to help guide the proceedings and promote collaborative planning (Edwards et al., 2003; Fennell and Dowling, 2003; Honey, 2008; Hvenegaard, 1994)
- Develop a charter/code of practice (Bramwell and Lane, 2006; Cohen, 2002)
- Establish an informative, interactive and comprehensive website (Allen, 2007; Quebec Declaration, 2002; WTO, 2001)
- Adoption of regionally-adapted ecotourism certification standard including third-party on-site assessments (Fennell, 2001; Toth, 2002; Mohonk Agreement, 2000)
- Award operators and other tourism service providers for best practises (Honey, 2002; 2008)
- Annual monitoring of projects (Conroy, 2002; Honey, 2008; Moyer et al., 2008)
- Periodic re-evaluation of the strategy and outcomes (Hvenegaard, 1994)
- Encourage further research into ecotourism (Buckley, 2004; Clifton and Benson, 2006)

7.2.4. Modify Ecotourism Principles

The last generalized recommendation is the amendment of Honey’s principles of ecotourism to be more applicable to a wider variety of scenarios. Through examination and theoretical application of said principles, two barriers preventing ecotourism, as a concept, for SLINP and environs were uncovered. The two recommendations stated below were formulated with the goals of encouraging more operators to choose ecotourism as the mode of operation and greater applicability to regions and tourism operations comparable to the area of study. It is important to note that hoping to expand the number of ecotourism options does not imply that the
requirements of ecotourism should be decreased. Instead, it is the researcher’s belief that in creating a framework for ecotourism, attainability across regions should be a constant in terms of the depth and comprehensiveness of the implications of a given tourism operation. In fact, it is believed that regional adaptation is necessary (Fennell, 2001) to ensure both the integrity and longevity of ecotourism.

7.2.4.1. Greater Relevance to Established Tourism Destinations

Honey’s seventh principle, *supports human rights and democratic movements*, is inherently most applicable to developing nations attempting to use ecotourism as a tool to stimulate economic growth (Clifton and Benson, 2006). Although the message is globally pertinent, it propagates the notion that ecotourism ventures must be rooted in a degree of social injustices to be authentic. Established tourism destinations insinuate a degree of longevity and in this case democratic and sociopolitical stability. For example, one of the best examples of tourism-driven support of human rights was the boycotting of South Africa under apartheid. International trade, travel and investments ceased and this blatant support of anti-apartheid movements directly helped South Africa progress towards social equality (Honey, 2008).

Regardless of country of origin, the argument can be made that tourism ventures can always support democratic movements but this principle proved to be the least discussed in the interviews and questionnaires. It could be argued that lack of accessibility to paddle-based recreation for lower income visitors, especially with the projected rise in user fees to access SLINP, is a pertinent issue. However, the questionnaire revealed a relatively even distribution of respondents’ annual household incomes (see Table 6B). The highest and lowest income brackets both represented 9.2% of respondents with the remaining three brackets ranging from 16.8% to
26.7% of respondents. Thus suggesting that at present paddle-based recreation is a relatively affordable activity.

As Honey insists authentic ecotourism ventures must adhere to all of the principles. This affects the ability of the paddling industry in SLINP and environs’ to be authentic since the region is an established tourism destination. Instead this principle propagates the traditional perception of ecotourism as the instrument of developing nations to attract foreign tourists, investments and trade. As an alternative considerations should be made for altering the status quo of an established tourism operation rather than focusing on compliance at creation of a tourism operation. Moreover, this principle is tailored to the politically unstable climate under which most ecotourism operations are established and because of this is less relevant to existing operations in stable democratic nations.

7.2.4.2. Include Quality of Experience

Although Honey advocates for the ‘all or nothing principle’, implying an authentic ecotourism venture is one which adheres to all of the principles, this does not ensure a quality experience for the tourist. In theory an authentic ecotourism venture, by definition, could be lacking in overall quality as perceived by visitors. There are degrees with which each principle can be fulfilled, that level of fulfilment should be a factor influencing the designation of an operation as authentic ecotourism. Attention should be paid to the demand-side variables that influence ecotourism principles. The nature of tourism is such that most of the excursion is pre-purchased, authentic ecotourism ventures falling short of meeting the designated ideals may continue to operate. Not only may tourists leave unhappy but ecotourism’s name could be tarnished. Accounting for the overall quality of the experience in ecotourism principles may entice more operators to adopt said principles with the belief that this quality control measure is a
tourist attraction (Dodds, 2008; Orams, 1995). Evaluating quality is not only difficult to measure quantitatively but it is also inherently subjective. Regional agreement of standardized quality criteria upon adoption of ecotourism principles may negate this barrier.

7.3. Recommendations to Better Align Paddle-based Recreation in SLINP and Environs with the Principles of Ecotourism

7.3.1. Travel to Natural Destinations

7.3.1.1. Develop a Local Brand

According to the questionnaire, the environmental aesthetic was the most popular (66.4% of respondents) purpose for paddlers to return to the region. Results of the interviews also exposed what can only be described as a shared acknowledgement and appreciation of the region’s natural environment. To enhance the overall ecotourism experience, this shared regard for the landscape, unique to this region, should be reflected in development of a local place brand. As brand experience will be affected by even those individuals not directly involved in the tourism industry, all stakeholders should be included in the decision-making process. The region’s brand hinges upon the natural resource as the attraction or the “umbrella place brand” shared by all stakeholders in the region (Allen, 2007: 62). To ensure brand strength, a hierarchy of core attributes of the region should be clearly defined in collaboration with all stakeholders. Allen (2007) is one of many researchers who suggest the key to developing a successful place brand is careful and deliberate stakeholder management as well as government inclusion as the main stakeholder. This will create a solid foundation upon which long-term aspirations can be met and built upon. Stakeholders should also consider pre-visit, visit and post-visit experiences in both the physical and virtual realms. The region’s website is in dire need of updating;
consistent and intriguing visuals, current information, easy navigation, and ecotourism-specific information should be immediately included.

There is an overlap in recommendations. Local participation and input as well as partnerships are absolutely necessary to develop a comprehensive place brand. Allen (2007) supports the importance of bridging social networks when he reiterates that the organizations responsible for brand creation “need to be executing more than ad campaigns; they need to be liaising with a broader spectrum of organizations” (64). If executed correctly, the implications to social capital creation are obvious. A local branding scheme can also be used in collaboration with the adoption of a certification standard to strengthen brand recognition amongst both travellers and the tourism industry (Cohen, 2002).

In accordance with development of a local brand with the natural resource as the crux, there should be larger regional promotion of paddle-based recreation as a medium to experience ecotourism. In other words, there is potential for marketing efforts to advertise paddle-based recreation as one part of the whole experience. In this way, the regional tourism industry can think beyond the “river tourism strip” (Economic Strategic Plan, 2006: 40) and begin to link different nature-based activities. The questionnaire revealed that over 50% of local respondents also hiked and visited parks in the two weeks before paddling in the region. This is indication enough that not only does the network of waterways need to be fully completed (FAPT is currently working towards this; see Chapter 5 and Figure 6), but there is also potential to build other activities into paddling programs. For instance, creation of a new trail or amalgamation of existing trails to link both paddling and hiking complete with signage, access, infrastructure, published maps and safety measures. This type of tourism package would facilitate both independent and guided ecotourists looking for that outdoor experience through different
mediums (paddling, hiking, cycling, etc.) but all with the primary focus being on the region’s local brand: the unique, incomparable natural setting.

As paddle-based recreation is inherently more sustainable than conventional tourism methods of experiencing the landscape, there needs to be promotion of paddling as an ecotourism option offered by this region once the principles are fulfilled. The interviews suggested that most of the respondents’ organizations were not even discussing sustainability with respect to paddle-based recreation let alone ecotourism principles. Obviously before any attention can be put into more specifics, these agencies need to begin considering ecotourism as the modus operandi. The development of a regional strategy and subsequently place branding of the region will bring these stakeholders together and begin that conversation towards authentic ecotourism.

7.3.2. Minimizes Impact

7.3.2.1. Develop and Implement a Community-Based Monitoring Program (CBM)

Given that the majority of paddlers are local, the manpower is present and evidently willing to participate. Development and implementation of a CBM is an ideal way for local paddlers to contribute to conservation and ensure the longevity of paddling in the region as well as generate social capital (Jones, 2005). For this research monitoring will be defined as “a set of activities that involves observing and describing changing conditions, identifying the potential causes of those changes, and translating data into useful information” (Moyer et al., 2008: 641). The goal is to provide the baseline data against which to measure, track and mitigate change to the area of study (Moyer et al., 2008). It is proposed that the specific subject of monitoring be discussed and agreed upon by stakeholders. Some examples of paddle-specific monitoring projects that would define the baseline data for each indicator include monitoring of trail erosion,
loss of vegetation, changes in animal behaviour, carrying capacities for each island, visitor impacts and water quality. The ambition is to provide the workforce and data to SLINP to bolster their existing database and concurrently strengthen that partnership. The literature suggests that several elements are important indicators of the success of a CBM project including: (1) adaptive; (2) publicly accessible results; (3) mandate-supported; (4) inclusion of all stakeholders; (5) participatory decision-making; (6) results-oriented (as cited in Moyer et al., 2008). Similarly, there are opportunities to engage paddlers participating in a guided tour in the data collection process. There are some obvious shortcomings like accuracy of collected data, analysis of data and funding but the potential to mitigate the impacts of paddling in the region should not be ignored.

7.3.3. Builds Environmental Awareness

7.3.3.1. Increase the Amount and Quality of Interpretation

Results of the questionnaire revealed that 64.4% of respondents did not paddle with a guide. This is concerning from an interpretation standpoint. It is important that independent paddlers are receiving a similar interpretive experience as paddlers on guided tours to enhance the quality of the ecotourism experience. For the purpose of this study interpretation is the medium through which a message is communicated and generally refers to protected areas with a wide variety of natural and cultural resources (Ham, 1992). Furthermore, the literature into the topic espoused that quality interpretation can provide support for conservation management, help manage visitor impact, generate a greater appreciation for the local environment and culture, increase visitors’ awareness and encourage appropriate visitor behaviour (Yamada, 2011). In collaboration with all stakeholders, it is proposed that further efforts be taken towards providing visitors with quality interpretive material for paddle-based recreation as an ecotourism venture.
Non-personal interpretation such as brochures, signage, self-guided trails, maps, charts and access to information are integral parts for promoting and sustaining the local paddling industry. Furthermore it is recommended that the interpretive facilities are designed with attention to: (1) increasing visitors’ awareness about the local environment and paddling industry; (2) promoting behavioral change in both visitor and locals; (3) clearly communicating the paddling industry’s goals and objectives to visitors and residents; and (4) orienting visitors to the area (Yamada, 2011).

Tour guides are another method of offering an interpretational experience to a visitor (Yamada, 2011). According to Wearing and Neil (1999), a quality guided tour offers several benefits to ecotourism such as promotion, recreation, education, management, conservation and economy. In other words, tours guides are an extension of that interpretation and can help facilitate other ecotourism principles. It is imperative that paddling guides have training to properly broadcast ecotourism principles including cultural, historical and environmental educational information. Again the obvious partnership is between tour guides and SLINP. As the front-of-the-line workers, guides are the primary interpreters in guided tours and SLINP has the information that needs to be distributed. This type of collaborative knowledge sharing, to be further discussed below, is imperative in the success of collectively beneficial action projects. An authentic ecotourism venture would then include well-trained paddling guides to interpret cultural, local, and environmental information and promote ecotourism principles to the visitors. Training or standardization of the amount of education required by a paddling guide are suggestions that can be discussed in stakeholder meetings but in general, improvement in this principle is required in SLINP and environs.
7.3.4. Provides Direct Financial Benefit for Conservation

7.3.4.1. Develop, Promote and Market Volunteer Tourism Opportunities

One of the benefits that can be accrued from a strong partnership between commercial paddling operators and SLINP, especially, is the potential for volunteer tourism opportunities. In its essence volunteer tourism aligns conservationists with volunteer tourists who provide the manual labour for the project. In this way, both human and financial capital is generated towards conservation research. Buckley (2004) agrees that the most efficient way to increase protected-area funding is through partnerships between protected area management agencies like parks and commercial tourism operators. The literature provides some tasks volunteers have preformed including data collection, data entry, sample processing and trail marking. The benefits are mutual and include affording volunteers the opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture, engage in rewarding educational opportunities and make a difference. Similarly, researchers have access to a captive audience to disseminate information and free labour, while tourism companies benefit from additional marketing that can help to distinguish them in the highly competitive ecotourism market (Brightsmith et al., 2008). Success in the industry has come from larger research projects coordinated through a volunteer recruiting agency that places volunteers with researchers staying on average of 12 days (Brightsmith et al., 2008).

For this region it is purported that smaller-scale projects with tasks that can be completed on day excursions have exciting potential. Obviously this is dependent on the nature of the project and foremost to consider is the ease with which volunteers can collect accurate and usable data. Some coordination needs to be done beforehand based on the projects requirements like number of volunteers, volunteer training, amount of funding, and equipment but there is promising opportunity to build volunteer tourism into paddling programs. Initiating this type of
program would not be difficult as benefits are mutual, partnerships have already been established, funding would be minimal on day excursions and the local manpower is present and willing, according to the results of this study. Tourist volunteers may even be able to contribute to the recommended CBM discussed above. There is almost complete transparency demonstrating how ecotourism-generated monies are contributing to conservation efforts.

**7.3.5. Provides Financial Benefits and Empowerment for Local People**

The literature review, questionnaire and interviews revealed that there is a concern amongst stakeholders related to the economic activity generated by paddle-based recreation. When compared to other motorized user groups on the waterways, paddle-based recreation as a single activity may not be able to contribute as significantly to the local economy. The differing scale of entrepreneurship is a concern in terms of economic stimulation as well as goal interference of the participant. It may be that the inherent nature of paddle-based recreation in the region as a comparatively undeveloped market in terms of infrastructure and economic return is the characteristic that attracts most paddlers. I think tourism in the region requires both markets along with other water-based tourism activities to provide visitors with a variety of options. In this way, it is the hope that some visitors may be diverted away from less sustainable activities and towards more sustainable activities. This may also foster a greater understanding of each user group as there will be more crossovers between water-activities. I recognize that paddle-based recreation may not have the economic prowess to sustain the tourism industry in the region, but I believe motorized water-based activities will never be replaced. Therefore it is imperative that the region offers more sustainable water-based options for visitors and promotes these ventures to divert some potential motorized recreationists, as well as encouraging motorized water-based operations to incorporate more sustainable practices into their business.
7.3.5.1. Collaborative Knowledge Sharing

Similar to creating meaningful, synergistic partnerships collaborative knowledge sharing will enable stakeholders to learn, improve their product, project a consistent message and brand to the consumer and better understand other stakeholders perceptions. According to Bartol and Srivastava (2002) knowledge sharing refers to the action in which actors diffuse relevant information to others across a network (as cited in Yang, 2007). The following are forums in which collaborative knowledge sharing can take place amongst stakeholders in the region:

(a) creation of a standardized database for network sharing amongst tourism operators in the region – including disclosure of marketing research and public access to results;
(b) development of an online reference centre for information on ecotourism ventures in the region for both tourists and tourism operators (Buckley, 2004);
(c) connection of paddling routes through the region to create a more seamless experience – requires involvement of local stakeholders and authorities especially where property ownership, liability and insurance issues are concerned.

7.3.6. Respects Local Culture

7.3.6.1. User Group Conflict Management Techniques

The conflict on SLINP and environs’ waterways is mostly between motorized and non-motorized recreationists. In general, it is the clashing values of these two groups that threaten their ability to fulfill their original recreational goals. Whitfield and Roche (2006) reiterate that the social conflicts stem from the status of many motorized boat operators “as outsiders in coastal communities” and the divergent motives of these boaters (excitement, speed) and the more traditional coastal users seeking relaxation and tranquility (564). The questionnaire revealed that the respondents were attracted to paddle in the region because of the environmental
aesthetics (66.4%), presence of protected lands (52.0%) and their connection to the environment (50.4%). Although there are no data from motorized recreationists to compare these results to, the same general perception was expressed from interviewees; that paddle-based recreationists are looking for a more serene setting with the intention of experiencing a connection to the environment.

The major issues are conflict and competition, noise disturbance, safety and overcrowding (Whitfield and Roche, 2006). The most logical solution would be to separate high conflict areas by developing designated paddle-specific routes that promote the crossing of channels at the shortest possible distances. This information then needs to be published, distributed and communicated to multiple user groups. There needs to be much better communication between groups to foster an ethic of cooperation and in turn, develop a better understanding of each other. This could be indirectly in the form of prominently displayed signage, especially around launch sites, or more actively discussed in workshops and meetings. User groups can also improve upon their relationships with locals and perhaps shed stereotypes by participating in community events (Whitfield and Roche, 2006).

The most notable boaters’ group in the region is the Thousand Islands Association (TIA) which is a group of 1500 sailors, power boaters and cottage owners. TIA’s main area of concern is helping users avoid shoals by purchasing, maintaining and positioning markers on the water. There is potential for TIA to expand its area of concern to include an educational component for its members on user group awareness. TIA could also extend its membership to paddle-based recreationists to facilitate better understanding of the motivations and concerns of each group.

Lastly, the summer months are by far the most heavily populated in terms of water traffic in the region. Benefits could be accrued from expending some energy into promotion in the
shoulder seasons namely May, June, September and October in hopes of lessening the crowd and subsequently, averting potential conflicts and any safety concerns. Any option would be a welcome addition to the current lack of attention paid to ameliorating user group conflicts. In general, the literature into the topic agrees that education of user groups is the most important requirement to improve safety for all (Jones, 2000; O’Connor and O’Connor, 2003; Whitfield and Roche, 2006).

7.3.7. Supports Human Rights and Democratic Movements

The limitations of applying this principle to SLINP and environs were discussed in the general recommendations above. The implications, according to Honey (2008), are difficult to analyse with respect to the area of study as the principle originated from the prevalence of developing nations that use tourism to “bolster(s) the economies of repressive and undemocratic states” (Honey, 2008: 31). Again, the struggle to apply this to SLINP and environs stems from the fact that from inception it was not designed for democratic and relatively stable socio-political states. In this context, this principle is the least relevant of all of the principles. I recognize that in other contexts, perhaps similar to this area of study, this principle is very relevant and the concepts behind it resonate deeply. I am not suggesting that this principle should be removed. Instead I propose that the ideas behind the principle are maintained, but reworked to be more applicable to existing tourism destinations like consideration of pro-democracy groups and grassroots movements.

7.3.7.1. Involvement of Locals Required

Ecotourism hinges upon the intimate and continual involvement of the local stakeholders in the tourism industry. In other words, the tourism industry should be such that it encourages and fosters the inclusion of all local stakeholders. The argument can be made that it is a
stakeholders’ human right to be involved in any decision-making process that is perceived as impactful to them. Therefore in order to support human rights, it is the duty of all relevant stakeholders including but not limited to; SLINP, NGOs, individual paddlers, private land owners, community groups, tourism industry officials, tourism operators and government representatives to make the appropriate concessions to include all stakeholders with a perceived interest in any decision-making process concerning the area of study.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1. General Conclusions

By analysing the extent to which Honey’s (2008) principles of ecotourism (see Appendix A) can be applied to a specific visitor activity in an established tourism destination, my research has contributed to the examination of the universal application of ecotourism. The trends and themes that were exposed helped contribute to the academic discourse into ecotourism assessment in the field. Specifically, it was revealed that partnerships and local contribution are considered essential in all phases of an ecotourism project. A general willingness to participate was also exhibited by study participants. Additionally, questionnaire and interview respondents alike emphasized that there is a demand for ecotourism options amongst visitors to the region. More specifically this research addressed the objectives stated in Chapter 1 by;

- Applying the seven principles of ecotourism to paddle-based recreation in SLINP and environs to assess the current state of paddling in the region and highlight the areas of weakness, concern, and strength in terms of ecotourism principles.
- Creating recommendations to extend the boundaries of ecotourism as a concept and in turn strengthen its regional applicability.
- Exploring demand- and supply-side perceptions and opinions into the subject area through interviews and questionnaires.
- Presenting an in-depth analysis of the academic discourse, regional tourism strategies and initiatives and then directly applying that information to explore the role of paddle-based recreation within an ecotourism framework.
- Providing market research into paddle-based recreationists in SLINP and environs that is valuable to the regional tourism industry in general.
- Providing site-specific recommendations to advance paddle-based recreation in SLINP and environs as a potential ecotourism destination.
8.2. Opportunities for Future Work

In order to provide a holistic assessment of ecotourism for the area of study, it was necessary to explore all of the principles of ecotourism with respect to paddle-based recreation. However, this also proved to broaden the scope of the research and limit the intensity with which each topic could be examined. As each principle encompasses a variety of indicators, there are many opportunities for future research within each field. To strengthen this research’s findings the following is a list of suggestions, that is not meant to be comprehensive, for further studies;

- Community development of a certification program
- Leadership roles in community decision-making processes
- Local adaptation of ecotourism principles into a regional tourism strategy
- Longitudinal studies and monitoring of implemented recommendations
- The role of CBMs in ecotourism ventures
- The role of different levels of land ownership in ecotourism partnerships
- The role of Parks Canada in promoting ecotourism through paddle-based recreation
- Tourist market research
- User group management of the waterways to promote safe paddle-based recreation

8.3. Final Thoughts

Ecotourism has the potential to propel the tourism industry into a new approach of operation. However, the concept has continually been discussed in terms of developing countries and their economic development while inadvertently excluding the remainder. During a time where a premium has been put on ‘green’ alternatives, there needs to be more of an emphasis on modifying the existing rather than only implementing during creation. In this way established tourism destinations can begin to adopt more sustainable business practices that align with
ecotourism principles. Compounding this is a perception that seems to exist amongst tourism operators that sustainability is all-or-nothing and as a result a sense of discouragement already exists because there are simply too many variables to manage. It is my belief that authentic ecotourism ventures must subscribe to all of the principles of ecotourism, but the broad scope of most principles do allow for creativity and innovative thinking. However concessions need to be made not only for regional modifications of the principles but also to encourage those operators to in the least move towards a state of partial compliance. In the end ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism and in its simplest form aims to maintain longevity of the resource with which tourism is founded upon.
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## Appendix A
Honey’s (2008) Principles of Ecotourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles of Ecotourism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Involves travel to natural destinations</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Minimizes impact</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Builds environmental awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Provides direct financial benefits for conservation</td>
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<td>5. Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Respects local culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Supports human rights and democratic movements</td>
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Appendix B
Interview Guide

The following questions were general topics covered by the interview. The interview followed MacCracken’s method of semi-structured interviews (see Chapter 3). The questions were flexible and dependent on the responses given, therefore, the guide below serves as a general framework.

1. How would you define ecotourism and sustainable tourism?
2. Do you think ecotourism is a viable option for the 1000 Islands Region, in general?
   a. What do you think is the most important aspect with respect to the 1000 Islands?
   b. Do you think there are any barriers preventing this?
3. Is your organization doing anything to contribute to an ecotourism-type framework?
4. How do you envision locals contributing to this type of model?
5. What could your organization improve upon in terms of ecotourism?
   a. Are there any challenges to overcome?
6. How do you see paddle-based recreation contributing to this model?
7. Do you think adoption of an ecotourism-type framework is viable for the paddling industry in the region?
   a. Why?
   b. Do you think there are any barriers preventing adoption of an ecotourism model in the Region?
8. What do you think is the most important aspect of ecotourism with respect to paddling in the Region? Why?
9. How do you think local paddlers and organizations could contribute to your ecotourism model?
   a. Are there any barriers/challenges?
10. How do you think the concept of ecotourism could drive environmental management decisions in the paddling industry?
    a. How could locals fit into this framework?
11. Is your organization working in collaboration with any local group?
12. Are there any changes you would like to see with respect to the current state of the paddling industry?
    a. Barriers?
Appendix C
Questionnaire

Ecotourism Assessment: Applying the Principles of Ecotourism to Paddle-based Recreation in St. Lawrence Islands National Park and Environs

1. How would you rate your paddling skill level?
   - Beginner
   - Intermediate
   - Advanced

2. Including yourself, how many people did you intend to paddle with today?
   - 1
   - 2 - 5
   - 6 - 9
   - 10+

3. Are you currently paddling with a guide?
   - Yes
   - No

4. Is this your first time paddling in the Thousand Islands Region?
   - Yes
   - No

   4(a). If you answered ‘No’ to question #4, please specify on the line below what caused you to return to this region.
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

5. Are you spending more than one day and one night in the Thousand Islands Region?
   - Yes
   - No

   5(a). If you answered ‘Yes’ to question #5, how long are you staying in the Thousand Islands Region?
   - Less than 3 days
   - 4 – 7 days
   - 8 - 14 days
   - More than 2 weeks

6. What characteristic most attracted you to paddle in the Thousand Islands Region? (Check all that apply)
   - Cost
   - Cultural experience
   - Educational opportunities
7. In the last 2 weeks have you participated in or attended any of the following activities in the Thousands Islands Region? (Check all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camping</td>
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<td>Cycling</td>
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<td>Festivals</td>
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<td>Hiking</td>
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<td>Historic sites/museums</td>
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<td>Historic walking tours</td>
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<td>Live theatre/musicals</td>
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<td>Motorized water sports</td>
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<td>Paddling (kayaking, canoeing, rafting, etc.)</td>
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<td>Rock climbing</td>
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<td>Rowing</td>
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<td>Sailing</td>
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<td>Scenic boat cruises or tours</td>
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<td>Snorkelling/scuba diving</td>
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<td>The Ag Tour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting parks or protected areas (St. Lawrence Islands National Park, etc.)</td>
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<td>Visual/Performing arts productions</td>
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8. In the next 2 weeks do you plan to participate in or attend any of the following activities in the Thousand Islands Region? (Check all that apply)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camping</td>
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<td>Cycling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Live theatre/musicals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Motorized water sports</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Paddling (kayaking, canoeing, rafting, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
9. If ecotourism is defined, in a broad sense, as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (The International Ecotourism Society, 2010) would you consider yourself an ecotourist?

☐ Yes
☐ No

10. Below are a number of characteristics of ecotourism. Please read each one and indicate whether you consider it an important element if you were planning an ecotourism-based trip.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection to nature</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Neither important nor unimportant</th>
<th>Not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural experiences</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational opportunities</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical places/museums</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mode of transportation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural beauty of landscape</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Outdoor recreation opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical activities available</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presence of protected lands (parks, reserves, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of accommodations, restaurants, services, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of place</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:________________________</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10(a). If you indicated that 2 or more characteristics were ‘Important’, please rank them with 1<sup>st</sup> being the most important ecotourism characteristic and 3<sup>rd</sup> being the 3<sup>rd</sup> most important.

1<sup>st</sup> - _________________________
2<sup>nd</sup> - _________________________
3<sup>rd</sup> - _________________________
11. Would you be willing to spend more money on an ecotourism destination versus a regular destination?
   - Yes
   - No

11(a). If you answered ‘Yes’ to question #10, how much more money, as a percentage of the trip’s total cost, would you be willing to spend on a 7 day/night ecotourism-based trip?
   - Less than 10% per adult
   - 10-20% per adult
   - 20-30% per adult
   - 30-40% per adult
   - More than 50% per adult

12. Are you aware that the Thousand Islands Region offers some ecotourism options?
   - Yes
   - No

12(a). If you answered ‘Yes’ to question #12, have you already participated in or would you be willing to participate in one of these ecotourism options?
   - Yes
   - No

12(b). If you answered ‘Yes’ to question #12, please specify on the line provided how you were made aware.
   ____________________________________________

13. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male

14. What is your age?
   - 18 - 25
   - 26 - 35
   - 36 - 45
   - 46 - 55
   - 56+

15. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - Some high school
   - High school diploma/GED
   - Some college or university
   - College Diploma
   - Bachelor’s Degree
   - Master’s Degree
   - Doctoral Degree
16. What was your household’s total annual income in Canadian dollars for the most recent calendar year?

☐ Less than $25,000
☐ $25,000 - $49,999
☐ $50,000 - $74,999
☐ $75,000 - $99,999
☐ $100,000 - $119,999
☐ More than $120,000

17. Are you currently a resident of Canada or U.S.A?

☐ Yes
☐ No

17(a). If you answered ‘Yes’ to question #17, please write your postal code/ZIP code on the line provided. ______________________________

17(b). If you answered ‘No’ to question #17, please write your current country of residency on the line provided. ______________________________

THANK YOU
Appendix D
Research Ethics Approval

July 28, 2011 Ms. Juliene McLaughlin

School of Environmental Studies
Biosciences Complex, Room 3134 Queen’s University
Kingston, ON K7L 3N6

GREB Romeo ref. #: 6003205
Title: GENSC-036-10 - Ecotourism Assessment: Applying the Principles of Ecotourism to Paddle-Based Recreation in St. Lawrence Islands National Park and Environs

Dear Ms. McLaughlin,

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB) has reviewed and approved your request for renewal of ethics clearance for the above-named study and the title change. This renewal is valid for one year from July 5, 2011. Prior to the next renewal date you will be sent a reminder memo and the link to ROMEO to renew for another year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period. An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s).

You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours. Report to GREB through either ROMEO Event Report or Adverse Event Report Form at http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html. You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures. Your request for protocol changes will be forwarded to the appropriate GREB reviewers and/or the GREB Chair. Please report changes to GREB through either ROMEO Event Reports or the Ethics Change Form at http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely, Joan Stevenson, Ph.D. Professor and Chair General Research Ethics Board

c.c.: Dr. Heather Jamieson and Dr. Graham Whitelaw, Supervisors and Co-Applicants