

# Annual Update

## *Municipality of Magnetawan*

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2025 – 2026

**James Murphy** CEO

*2025 Year in Review & Looking Ahead*

**Jennifer Montpetit** Director of Strategic Partnerships & Development

*Partnership Program Overview*



Passcode

**tourism**



# state of the union

# Who We Are

*Ontario's Regional Tourism Organization for the Great Canadian Wilderness*

Explorers' Edge (RTO12) is the provincial destination development organization for Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands (including Magnetawan), Loring-Restoule, Muskoka, Parry Sound, and South Algonquin.

Annual Budget 1.1 Million

We work across six mandated pillars:

- Marketing
- Product Development
- Workforce Development
- Partnership
- Governance
- Investment Attraction

**RTO 12**

One of 11 Ontario RTOs

**Est. 2010**

Serving the region for 15+ years

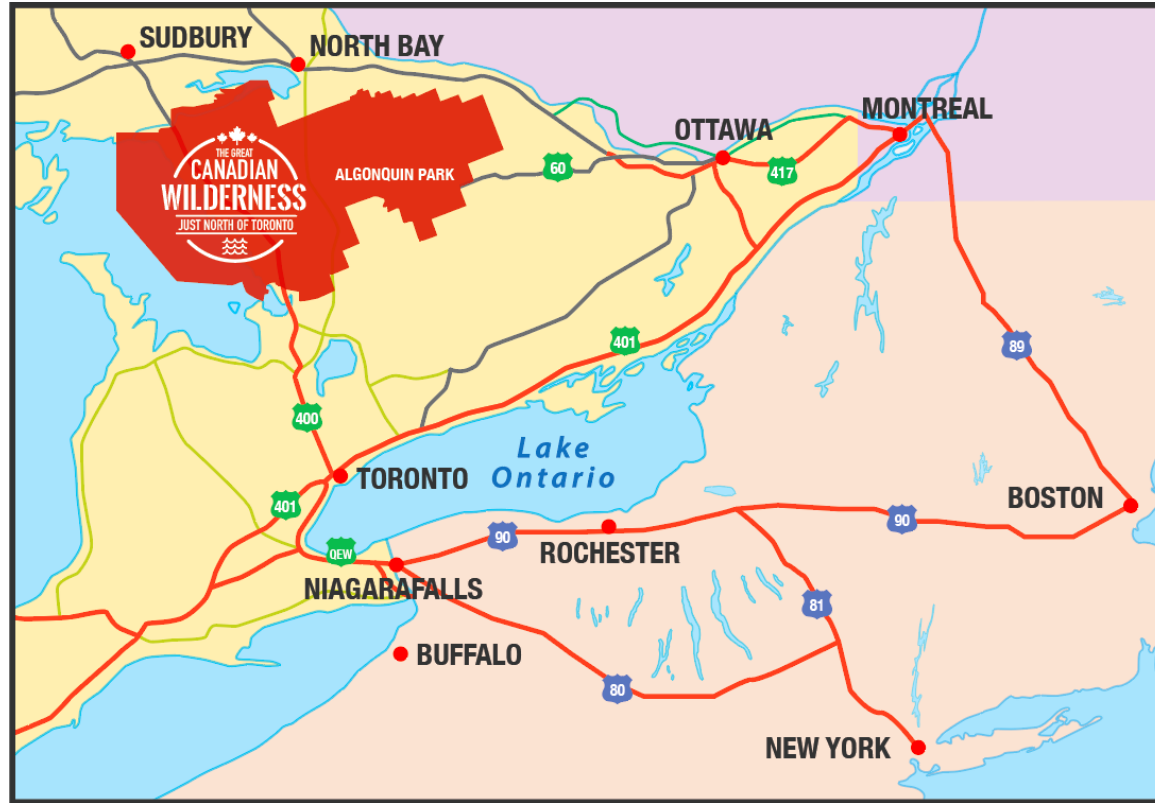
**6 Areas**

Incl. Magnetawan & Almaguin

**200+**

Partnerships delivered to date

## ABOUT EXPLORERS' EDGE



*We acknowledge the traditional lands of the Anishinabek, Algonquin, Métis, and Mohawk peoples.*

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Explorers' Edge website. On the left is the logo with the text "EXPLORERS' EDGE". To its right are menu items: "ABOUT US", "WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT", "PROGRAMS & RESOURCES", "PRESENTATIONS & EVENTS", "MEDIA RELEASES", and a blue button labeled "TAKE A COURSE >". Further right are links for "Course Login" and "Sign Up for Industry Newsletter". Below the navigation is a large banner with a background image of two people in a boat on a lake. The text on the banner reads "WOMEN IN TOURISM", "Know Your Worth. Tell Your Story", and "April 23, 2026". The Explorers' Edge logo is also present in the bottom right corner of the banner. Below the banner is a dark blue section with a white leaf graphic and the text: "WELCOME TO ALGONQUIN PARK, ALMAGUIN HIGHLANDS, LORING-RESTOULE, MUSKOKA, WEST PARRY SOUND DISTRICT AND SOUTH ALGONQUIN, ONTARIO."

## What's New

**TOURISM for POSITIVE IMPACT SERIES**

**EVENTS**  
**Creating Positive Impact: Learning Series for Tourism Providers**

Practical learning and shared inspiration for tourism with positive impact. Join us for an interactive learning and collaboration...

[READ MORE](#)

**Workforce Development Webinar**  
**Building Strong Tourism Teams**  
*Smart - Onboarding - Retention - Career Growth*

**EVENTS**  
**Optimizing Your Website for AI Travel Recommendations**

More travellers are now planning trips by asking AI tools for recommendations, not just using search engines. This...

[READ MORE](#)

**Workforce Development Webinar**  
**Building Strong Tourism Teams**  
*Smart - Onboarding - Retention - Career Growth*

**EVENTS**  
**Smarter Hiring, Stronger Teams, Better Retention.**

Building Strong Tourism Teams: Practical Strategies for Hiring, Onboarding, and Retention Finding and keeping great staff remains one...

[READ MORE](#)

The banner features a scenic aerial view of a lake with rocky islands. At the top left is the logo "THE GREAT CANADIAN WILDERNESS JUST NORTH OF TORONTO". At the top right are search and menu icons and a red button labeled "PACKAGES >". The main text reads "Welcome to the Great Canadian Wilderness" and "Discover all there is to see and do in this stunning region of Ontario, Canada." Below the text are five small circles, with the first one filled. At the bottom left is a decorative leaf graphic. The bottom right text reads "EXPERIENCE THE BEST OF ALGONQUIN PARK, ALMAGUIN HIGHLANDS, LORING-RESTOULE, MUSKOKA, WEST PARRY SOUND DISTRICT AND SOUTH ALGONQUIN."

## Spring to life in the Great Canadian Wilderness



# 2025 Regional Performance – CBRE

*Our region outpaced provincial accommodation trends throughout 2025.*

**80.7%**

July Occupancy Rate

*RevPAR up 12.3%*

**\$314**

August Avg. Daily Rate

*RevPAR up 7.3%*

**7–8%**

YTD RevPAR Growth

*Consistent Fall performance*

**40+**

Partnerships Executed

*Across all 5 sub-regions*

*"At a time when leisure travel is often one of the first areas affected by affordability pressures, these results reflect the strength of our destination and the value of the experiences delivered by our operators."*

# 2022 Regional Performance - MTCG

*Visitor spending fuels community vitality across the region.*

**\$1.324 B**

**Total Visitor Spending**

The region is generating substantial tourism revenue.

**4.40 m**

**Total Person Visits**

Strong overall demand across the region.

**3.09 m**

**Overnight person visits**

Overnight travel is especially important because it typically drives higher local spending on accommodation, food, and experiences.

**879**

**Tourism Related Businesses**

Shows a broad tourism business base supporting the visitor economy

*“These numbers matter because they show tourism here is not just about visitors—it is about sustaining businesses, supporting jobs, and strengthening the communities that make our region distinct.”*

# The Organization – Community

*A Regenerative Approach*

*Investing in people, place and  
long-term community well-being*

Our approach to destination development is regenerative, designed to leave the region stronger, more inclusive and more resilient over time.

## **2SLGBTQI+**

Creating safer, more welcoming tourism experiences and stronger visibility for diverse communities.

## **Sustainability**

Encouraging practices that protect natural assets and strengthen long-term regional resilience.

## **Indigenous**

Honoring Indigenous perspectives and place-based knowledge in destination development.

## **Women in Tourism**

Supporting leadership, participation and opportunity across the visitor economy.



# engagement polls

# What We Accomplished in 2025

## Regenerative Travel Agency

Launched Ontario's first regenerative travel agency – offering immersive, bookable day experiences that drive direct economic impact to local communities, including Almaguin and Muskoka operators.

## Regional Tourism Summit

Hosted the 2025 Summit alongside the TIAO Provincial Summit, focusing on data-driven decision making, collaborative development, and rural destination innovation.

## Indigenous Youth Strategy

Launched the Indigenous Youth Tourism Entrepreneurship Strategy in partnership with Moccasin Trails and Stormy Lake Consulting, building the foundation for youth-led, culturally aligned experiences.

## Marketing Innovation

Deployed affinity-audience testing, multilingual campaigns, and niche-segment content (motorcycle touring, cycling, angling) with strong engagement and high return on spend.

## Workforce Development

Engaged 120+ students through SHSM partnerships, Co-Creation Labs, DIVA Dialogues, and the Catalyst Housing initiative to support regional labour force sustainability.

## 2SLGBTQI+

Diva Dialogues, market research with Destination Ontario and a destination audit with Canadian Queer Chamber of Commerce - CQCC

Supporting Almaguin Pride

# What We Accomplished in 2025



## Almaguin Star Party

Sold-out pilot validated demand for place-based, community-created experiences — a key proof point for the Almaguin Highlands and Magnetawan area as a dark-sky destination.

# Magnetawan Wayfinding & Heritage Signage

*Wayfinding & Signage Stream · Funded through the Explorers' Edge Partnership Fund*

## WAYFINDING & HERITAGE · MAGNETAWAN

### The Project

Magnetawan completed its first formal wayfinding and heritage signage initiative – strengthening visitor navigation while celebrating the town's rich local history.

### A Standout Feature

A commemorative plaque honours the Steamship Chainsaw Carving, celebrating the historical significance of steamships on the Magnetawan River and anchoring heritage tourism downtown.

### Where the Signs Are

Strategically placed at waterfalls, trails, parks, and the Village Green near Centennial Beach – connecting visitors to attractions, amenities, and local businesses.

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE

### Overwhelmingly positive

Residents and visitors alike appreciate the effort to preserve and share Magnetawan's history. Local businesses see it as a direct opportunity to engage new visitors.

## BUSINESS & VISITOR IMPACT

### Drawing foot traffic downtown

Tourism and hospitality businesses expressed strong support, seeing the signage as a direct tool to engage visitors and reinforce Magnetawan's identity as a heritage destination.

## WHAT THIS SHOWS

### Partnership + community pride in action

Strong social media engagement, with posts celebrating Magnetawan's history. Wayfinding, heritage, and visitor dispersal all working together in one project.

# Magnetawan Wayfinding & Heritage Signage

Wayfinding & Signage Stream · Funded through the Explorers' Edge Partnership Fund

ArtWork



Directional signage artwork – two entry-point sign posts guiding visitors from Hwy 520 into downtown Magnetawan

## THE PROJECT

Magnetawan's first formal wayfinding and heritage signage initiative – strengthening visitor navigation while celebrating the town's rich local history.

### A Standout Feature

A commemorative plaque honours the Steamship Chainsaw Carving, celebrating the historical significance of steamships on the Magnetawan River – anchoring heritage tourism in the heart of downtown.

### Where the Signs Are

Placed at waterfalls, trails, parks, and the Village Green near Centennial Beach – connecting visitors to attractions, amenities, and local businesses.

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE

### Overwhelmingly positive

Residents and visitors appreciate the effort to preserve and share Magnetawan's history. Businesses see it as a direct tool to engage visitors.

## BUSINESS & VISITOR IMPACT

### Drawing foot traffic downtown

Tourism and hospitality businesses expressed strong support, seeing the signage as reinforcing Magnetawan's identity as a heritage destination.

## SOCIAL & COMMUNITY PRIDE

### Strong social media buzz

Posts and photos celebrating the historical knowledge highlighted by the signage. Wayfinding, heritage, and visitor dispersal – working in one project.

# A.J. Casson & The Group of Seven

"Magnetawan Village" 1930 · One of the heritage interpretation panels installed through the Partnership Fund



**About A.J. Casson**

Alfred Joseph Casson, better known as A.J., was born in Toronto, Ontario in 1898. He became a commercial artist in his early twenties and later joined the Group of Seven in 1926 at the invitation of Franklin Carmichael. The same year he became an associate member of the Royal Canadian Academy. Casson is best known for his depictions of landscapes, forests and farms of southern Ontario, and for being the youngest member of the Group of Seven. Casson's style combined clarity of form, vibrant colour, and a deep respect for Canada's cultural roots.

A. J. Casson passed away in 1992 and is buried on the grounds of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, along with six other members of the Group of Seven.

*A.J. Casson & The Group of Seven*



**The Group of Seven**

Sometimes known as the Algonquin School, the Group of Seven was a group of Canadian landscape painters from 1920 to 1933. Believing that a distinct Canadian art style could be developed through direct contact with nature, the Group is best known for its paintings inspired by the Canadian landscape and initiated the first major Canadian national art movement.

**"Magnetawan Village" 1930**

Casson's landscape of Magnetawan depicts Saint George's Anglican Church, built in 1880, at the top of the hill, and the Magnetawan River in the foreground. A.J. Casson's painting captures the beauty of rural Ontario and solidifies Magnetawan's place within the broader story of Canadian art, linking our small community to a national legacy.

In a letter reflecting on his time in Magnetawan, A.J. Casson remembers camping on a farm with another artist. He recalls the farmer's wife bringing them soup or apple pie almost daily, and claims they had a wonderful time and a very successful sketching trip. He had hoped to return to Magnetawan and sketch the church once more. Casson painted numerous Ontario landscapes and villages in his unique style with strong compositions.

The painting is now part of a private collection. A print can be viewed in the lobby of the Municipal office, with special thanks to Dr. & Mrs. Ian Weir.




**Why this matters for Magnetawan:** Casson's 1930 painting depicts St. George's Anglican Church and the Magnetawan River — linking this small community to Canada's most celebrated art movement. This heritage panel is part of the Partnership Fund-supported signage program, deepening the visitor experience and reinforcing Magnetawan's identity as a place of cultural and historical significance.

# Marketing That Works for Magnetawan

*Reaching high-value visitors through targeted digital, content, and niche campaigns*

## 2025 MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS

- Affinity-audience targeting – high return on modest spend
- Multilingual campaigns reaching Québec audiences
- Niche segment content: motorcycle touring, cycling, angling
- Shoulder-season storytelling outperformed expectations
- High dwell time on curated itineraries signal packaged travel demand
- Great Canadian Wilderness brand amplified across social & digital
- Website analytics: deep consumer interest in experience-based travel

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR MAGNETAWAN

- Magnetawan is featured under the Almaguin Highlands – a key growth destination
- Visitors seeking authentic, rural, off-the-beaten-path experiences
- Dark sky, paddling, trails and rural charm align with top traveller priorities
- Quebec visitation is growing – bilingual content amplifies reach
- Shoulder season campaigns extend your local visitor economy
- Bookable experiences through the Travel Co. can feature Magnetawan operators

# 2026 Priorities & Looking Ahead

01

## Grow the Regenerative Travel Agency

Expand bookable packages beyond Muskoka into Almaguin Highlands — creating new revenue streams and visitor dispersal into Magnetawan and area.

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02

## Deepen Partnership Co-Investment

2026/27 Partnership Program prioritizes collaborative projects, experience creation, and Travel Co. integration. Magnetawan operators are encouraged to apply.

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03

## Advance Regenerative Community Initiatives

Expand youth-led, support women in tourism, create inclusive space for community and visitor

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04

## Sustainability & GreenStep Expansion

Support more operators in achieving GreenStep certification, Climate Hero status, Rainbow Registry, and Truth & Reconciliation commitments.



EXPLORERS' EDGE  
**PARTNERSHIP  
PROGRAM**

PART TWO

# The Partnership Program

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*Jennifer Montpetit*

Director of Strategic Partnership and Development, Explorers' Edge

*Tourism for Positive Impact · Community Connections · Building Partnerships That Matter*

# A Legacy of Collaboration

*The Partnership Fund has been building community connections since 2013*

**2013**

Program Launched

Ontario Ministry allocated dedicated co-investment funding alongside core RTO funding.

**200+** Total Partnerships Delivered

**2014–2017**

160+ Partnerships

Rapid growth across marketing, product development, workforce training, and wayfinding.

**50%** Co-Investment Match Available

**2018–2022**

Regenerative Strategy

EE adopted a Regenerative Tourism Strategy – partnerships became drivers of resilience and community benefit.

**5** Distinct Funding Streams

**2022–2025**

200+ Partnerships

Expanded to 5 streams; new focus on social media, image development, and experience creation.

**13+** Years of Regional Collaboration

# What We Fund

*Up to 50% co-investment match across five funding streams*

## 1 Product & Experience Development

Fund large-scale tourism projects, research, and workforce initiatives. Includes new bookable experience creation for the Explorers' Edge Travel Co.

## 2 Image Development

Custom photo and video assets produced through our Agency of Record – professional quality content for your business.

## 3 Communications & Marketing

Co-fund marketing campaigns and social media advertising to reach new audiences at regional scale.

## 4 Wayfinding & Signage

Large-scale navigation infrastructure that helps visitors discover your corner of the region.

## 5 Trade Show Support

Partial reimbursement of booth costs at relevant tourism trade shows and travel buyer events.

## Core Principle

*Co-investment means shared ownership – not a grant. Together we do more than either of us could afford separately.*

# Collaboration in Action

*Real results from real collaboration across Muskoka, Parry Sound, and Almaguin*

## EVENTS & ECONOMIC IMPACT

### Ontario 55+ Winter Games - Huntsville

EE co-invested in a registration platform and wayfinding signage. Result: 1,000+ athletes, 10 venues, and an estimated \$1.5M economic impact.

## SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

### Friends of the Muskoka Watershed

'Peer Under the Surface' lake cruises and ASH restoration forest walks – turning environmental science into a compelling visitor experience.

## VISITOR DISPERSAL

### Town of Parry Sound - Cruise Ship Shuttles

A shuttle partnership dispersed cruise ship visitors directly into local shops, restaurants, and cultural spaces – exactly what strategic dispersal looks like.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

### Commanda Museum Summerfest

Partnership support brought visitors into contact with the region's Indigenous and settler heritage, building cultural resonance and community pride.

## DOWNTOWN ACTIVATION

### Bracebridge BIA - Autumn Festival

A downtown activation partnership created a seasonal draw that extended the visitor season and boosted local merchant traffic.

## TRAILS & NATURE

### Wild Co / Four Points

Nature-based experience partnership building bookable outdoor products that connect visitors to the wild landscapes of the region.



# support discussion and action

# Why Partnerships Matter

## FOR YOUR BUSINESS

- Access expert guidance and professional execution support
- Increase visibility through co-marketing and regional campaigns
- Develop new, bookable visitor experiences
- Build resilience and diversify your revenue streams

## FOR MAGNETAWAN & THE REGION

- Spread visitor traffic beyond traditional hotspots
- Strengthen local communities and rural economies
- Support sustainable and regenerative tourism practices
- Build a tourism ecosystem where operators lift each other up
- Increase Magnetawan's visibility within the Great Canadian Wilderness brand

*"Strong communities make strong destinations."*

# Who Could Magnetawan Partner With?

*Strong communities make strong destinations – think beyond your business*

## CREATIVE

### Artists & Makers

Co-create experiences, feature local artisans in guest programming, or commission works that tell the Magnetawan story.

## LOCAL FOOD

### Farmers & Growers

Farm-to-table dining, market visits, harvest experiences – connecting guests to the land behind their meal.

## COMMUNITY

### Non-Profits & Orgs

Environmental stewardship, cultural heritage, wellness – meaningful ways for guests to give back to Magnetawan.

## TOURISM

### Other Operators

Bundle accommodations with activities, cross-promote, co-host events, and extend visitor stays.

## DOWNTOWN

### BIAs & Chambers

Tap into events and local networks to enrich the visitor experience in downtown Magnetawan.

## CULTURE

### Indigenous Partners

Culturally respectful partnerships honouring Truth & Reconciliation while offering authentic regional experiences.

# Regenerative Travel Agency

- It **challenges the old “heads in beds”** model by arguing that more visitors alone is not enough if communities, culture, and the environment are not also benefiting.
- It **pushes tourism organizations beyond awareness marketing** and into accountability, asking how tourism dollars are actually flowing and who is truly benefiting.
- It **makes people uncomfortable because it questions business as usual**, including short-term thinking, vanity metrics, and growth that may look good on paper but leave little lasting value locally.
- It **forces harder conversations about equity and power**, including who gets included, who gets funded, whose stories are told, and whether Indigenous and community voices are genuinely shaping tourism.
- It **raises the bar for industry leadership** by expecting tourism to be regenerative, inclusive, and responsible, not just profitable or promotional.

**THE GREAT CANADIAN WILDERNESS**  
JUST NORTH OF TORONTO

Special Offers Search

STAY | EAT | DO | REGIONS | BLOG | EVENTS | DIRECTIONS | **PACKAGES >**

# Welcome to the Great Canadian Wilderness

Discover all there is to see and do in this stunning region of Ontario, Canada.

● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

**EXPERIENCE THE BEST OF ALGONQUIN PARK, ALMAGUIN HIGHLANDS, LORING-RESTOULE, MUSKOKA, WEST PARRY SOUND DISTRICT AND SOUTH ALGONQUIN.**



# End-of-session “state of the union”

# Let's Build Something Together

*Who in your community are you not yet working with — and what could you build together?*

**Co-Invest. Collaborate. Create Regional Impact.**

## Get in Touch

**James Murphy, CEO**  
[james@explorersedge.ca](mailto:james@explorersedge.ca)

**Jennifer Montpetit, Director of Strategic Partnership  
& Development**  
[jennifer@explorersedge.ca](mailto:jennifer@explorersedge.ca) | [explorersedge.ca](https://explorersedge.ca)

**Partnership Program**  
[explorersedge.ca/current-projects](https://explorersedge.ca/current-projects)

## Interested in 2027/28 funding?

Reach out now — the operators who come to us early with a clear idea have the strongest outcomes.