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## Report 2025-049

**Report Title:** Regional Tourism Organization 8 Update

**Committee Name:** Economic Development, Tourism and Planning

**Committee Meeting Date:** March 5, 2025

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**Approved by:** Jennifer Moore, CAO

**Council Meeting Date:** March 19, 2025

**Strategic Plan Priorities:** ☒ Innovate for Service Excellence  
☒ Ignite Economic Opportunity  
☐ Foster a Thriving Community  
☐ Propel Sustainable Growth  
☐ Champion a Vibrant Future

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### Information Report

**That** the Economic Development, Tourism and Land Use Planning Committee receive Report 2025-049 'Regional Tourism Organization 8 Update' for information; and

**Further That** the Committee recommend that County Council receive this report for information."

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### Purpose

This report summarizes the role and function of Ontario Regional Tourism Organizations with a specific focus on Regional Tourism Organization 8 (RTO8).

### Background

The Province of Ontario is [divided into 13 tourism regions](#) each led by a [regional tourism organization](#). Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) are independent, not-for-profit

organizations governed by a Board of Directors. It is up to each RTO to determine its own board structure and membership. They determine if they are membership-based and if membership fees will be implemented.

The Board is responsible for developing annual business plans and determining how to use the region's funding. The Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTGC) reviews the business plans and funding is provided to the RTO in accordance with the transfer-payment agreement requirements. All RTOs have signed transfer payment agreements that hold them accountable to the Province for how funding is used and for growing tourism in the region. These agreements include the requirement to regularly report to the MTGC.

Ontario's Regional Tourism Program mandates that RTOs develop and deliver strategies to meet the following destination management priorities (pillars) in their region:

- Product Development;
- Investment Attraction/Investor Relations;
- Workforce Development and Training;
- Marketing; and
- Partnerships.

The MTGC strongly encourages RTOs to work with all tourism partners including Destination Ontario, other regions, local and regional economic development agencies, sector-based organizations, First Nation governments and Indigenous tourism organizations, municipalities, and other organizations on matters of mutual interest. Strong partnerships and a coordinated approach are vital to the future sustainability of tourism across the province.

### Role of RTOs

RTOs lead tourism growth through Destination Development by working collaboratively with a broad spectrum of stakeholders to grow tourism's economic impact at the regional level through improved coordination, investment, and planning across Ontario's tourism regions.

RTOs provide a leadership and coordination role, supporting competitive and sustainable tourism regions by equipping regions to attract more visitors, generate more economic activity and create more jobs across the province. RTOs focus on reducing duplication where possible through strategic coordination, to respond to industry challenges and bring sector concerns and ideas to the MTGC / other ministries and/or appropriate tourism associations for input and feedback.

### **Consultations**

Various consultations occur on a regular basis with economic development and tourism colleagues from member municipalities and Regional Tourism Organization 8 to ensure any opportunities for efficiencies and collaboration are explored and pursued.

### **Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations**

N/A

## **Discussion / Options**

### **RTO Funding**

RTO funding is intended to build on (not replace or compete with) municipal and other existing supports for tourism.

The current RTO funding formula was developed 14 years ago based on roofed accommodations (hotel/motel/cottages), and consists of two components, a base and partnership allocation.

#### ***Proportional Base Funding***

Base funding is the allocation amount the RTO receives to complete the activities as listed under the TPA, maintain the RTO's operation and support its business plan. This funding is calculated based on historical tourism data, such as overnight visits. It is noted that RTO8 is currently the second lowest funded RTO in the province.

#### ***Partnership Allocation***

RTOs are eligible to receive additional funds from the MTGC where the RTO can demonstrate it has secured funds from eligible partners in support of regional activities. Partnership funding is capped at 20 per cent of the proportional allocation to a maximum of \$1.5 million. RTOs are encouraged to engage with multiple partners.

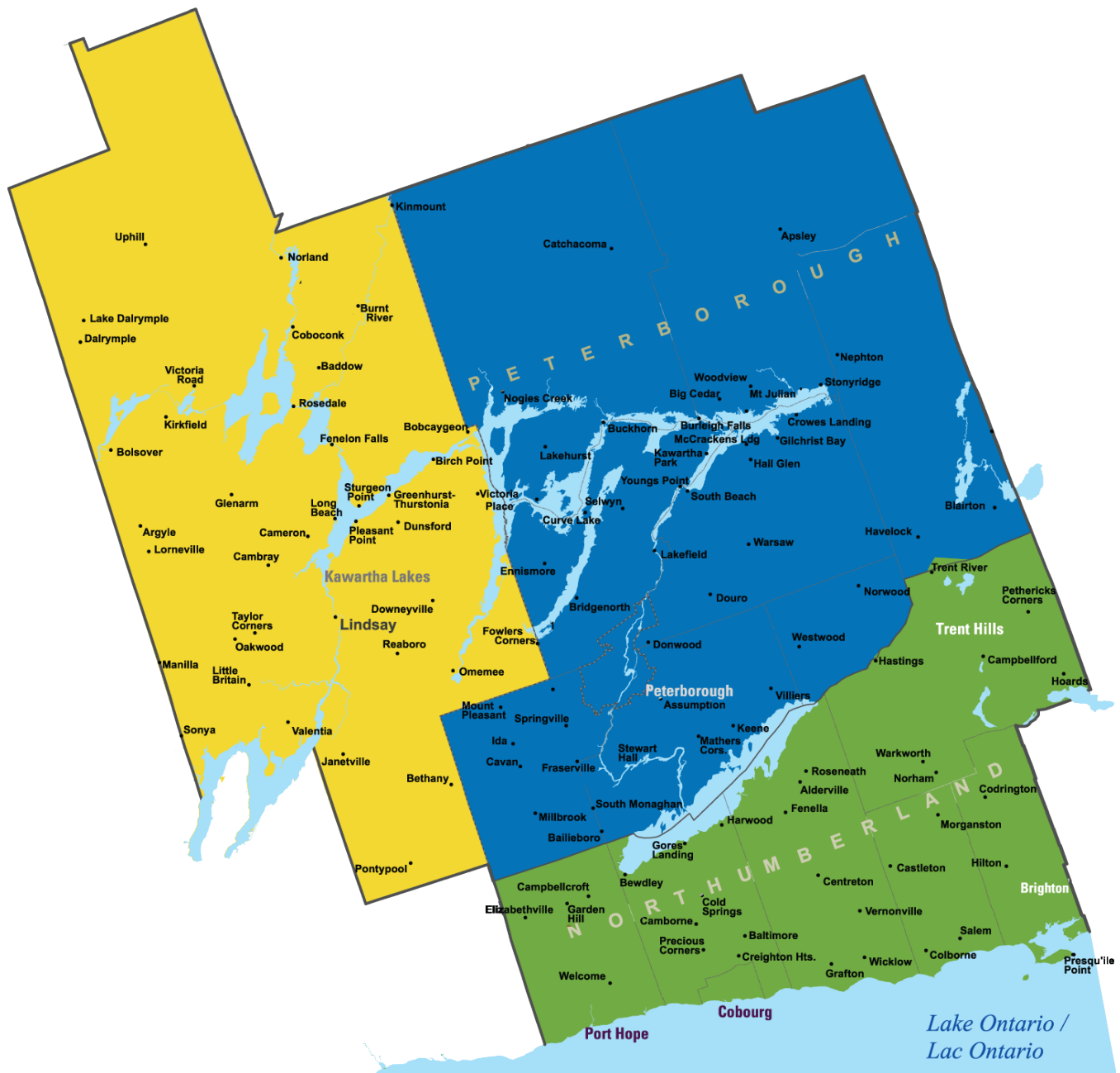
Published expenditure estimates for the Ministry of Tourism Culture and Gaming for 2024 to 2025 indicate total funding for Tourism Regions for this period to be \$19,954,200 to be divided up among the individual RTOs.

### **RTO Mandate**

RTOs are responsible for supporting tourism through destination marketing, development and management across its entire region. Regional Tourism Organization 8 (RTO8) is comprised of four Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs):

- Kawartha Lakes
- Northumberland County
- The City of Peterborough
- Peterborough County

DMOs are responsible for tourism marketing, development and management at a sub-regional level.



## RTO8 and Northumberland County

In recent years Northumberland County has benefitted from its ongoing collaboration with RTO8. Specifics include:

### *Partnership Fund Program*

RTO8's focus is to help businesses build their capacity to be successful at growing the visitor economy within the region which in turn, creates vibrant communities and compelling destinations. Each year, RTO8 works hand-in-hand with tourism partners dedicated to growing the visitor economy. RTO8's Partnership Fund initiative is designed to collaborate with the region's tourism businesses to grow tourism within the Kawartha Northumberland region.

Northumberland County businesses and organizations that have benefitted from Partnership Funding in the past two fiscal years:

- Business & Entrepreneurship Centre Northumberland
- Campbellford BIA
- Chrome on the Canal
- Cultivate
- Fells Meadows
- IncrEdible Edible Festival
- Municipality of Port Hope
- Northumberland Hispanic Culture Club
- The Branch Ranch
- Treetop Trekking & Haute Goat
- Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce
- Trent Hills Pride
- Warkworth Community Service Club
- Westben
- Northumberland County Tourism – In 2024 Northumberland County Tourism received funds for seasonal photography and videography (and associated editing) in support of tourism businesses, experiences, and natural heritage assets throughout Northumberland County. In 2023 RTO8 contributed financially to the design, development and delivery of the Northumberland Tourism Wellness Experience Development program.

#### 2025-2026 Partnership Fund Program

Projects applying for funding from [RTO8's 2025-2026 Partnership Fund Program](#) must take place between May 1, 2025 and February 1, 2026. Applications will be accepted between March 3 and March 31, 2025. All received applications will be assessed following March 31, 2025. Notifications will be sent to applicants mid-April.

RTO8's 2025-2026 Partnership Fund Program's estimated allocation is \$114,000.00 from the MTCG.

#### Data Reporting

RTO8 commissioned reports based on mobile movement data within specified geofenced areas to provide a deeper understanding of population movement patterns. The data, linked to Environics Analytics' demographic, segmentation, financial, behavioural, and psychographic consumer information, provided insights into the ongoing changes in the movement and behaviour of visitors to specific communities within RTO8.

[Northumberland County Reports](#) covered visitor data pre- (2019) and post-COVID (2022) for the communities of:

- Brighton
- Campbellford
- Cobourg
- Hastings
- Port Hope
- Warkworth

RTO8 has commissioned visitation and economic impact reporting for the same communities for the 2024 fiscal year.

## Development And Training

### *Acceler8 Business Success Program*

The [Acceler8 Business Success Program](#) is geared to existing tourism sector businesses within the Kawarthas Northumberland region. By working with seasoned business experts, accommodators, retailers, attractions and food & beverage providers within RTO8 have access to one-on-one long-term coaching to help address key business challenges and opportunities. Twenty-four (24) Northumberland County businesses have benefitted from participation in the program since 2022.

## Marketing

### *Trent-Severn Trail Towns*

The Northumberland Communities of Campbellford and Hastings are part of the [Trent-Severn Trail Towns](#) group of communities. The Trent-Severn Waterway continues to receive international attention, most recently thanks to its inclusion on the New York Times' list of [2025 Destinations: 52 Places to Go This Year](#). To be certified as a Trent-Severn Trail Town Business, tourism operators (retail, accommodations, food and beverage businesses) must be located within 2 km of a designated Trail Town (Campbellford and Hastings in Northumberland County).

### *Taste of the Trent-Severn*

There are currently 12 Northumberland County restaurants featured on the [Taste of the Trent-Severn](#) map and 20 'Tastes'. There is no charge to participate in Taste of the Trent-Severn program. Interested businesses within the RTO8 region must simply create a new culinary item (or re-name an existing item) that highlights/celebrates the Trent-Severn Waterway and sign up with RTO8. Note that there are no proximity restrictions to participate provided that a business is within RTO8.

### *Butter Tart Tour*

The [Butter Tart Tour](#) started in 2012 as a way to celebrate the quintessential Canadian treat, promote visitors from the GTA and our surrounding areas and to highlight the culinary feats of the amazing bakers and artisans. Today, the tour consists of more than 50 tart providers across the City of Kawartha Lakes, Northumberland County and Peterborough City and County. There are currently 12 Northumberland County businesses featured on the Butter Tart Tour. Businesses interested in becoming a new stop on the tour can [review the program guidelines](#) and apply directly with RTO8.

### *Annual Fall Routes Campaign*

The overall goal of the annual Fall Routes campaign is to increase the awareness of Kawarthas Northumberland as a top Ontario fall destination and to drive traffic to industry partners through the [FallRoutes.ca](#) website. Northumberland County's Fall colours drives, restaurants, Pick-Your-Own farms, bakeries, Fall Hiking & Cycling, paddling routes and waterways, and the Northumberland Hills Studio Tour were all promoted in the 2024 campaign. In addition, Northumberland was mentioned in 7 pan-regional itineraries and several blogs.

### *Sustainable Tourism*

Featured Northumberland's [Westben](#) in its [Sustainable Tourism video series](#).

### *Annual Maple Campaign*

Featured several Northumberland County businesses and events in its Maple campaign with the Globe & Mail (print and digital) as well as promotion on RTO8's [maple maps and itineraries](#).

### *Destination Ontario Spotlight*

RTO8 partners with Destination Ontario to drive consumers to theme-aligned bookable experiences. Ad units drive consumers directly to businesses' experience booking pages. Northumberland County businesses featured include: Dancing Bee, Haute Goat, Treetop Trekking and Westben to name a few.

### *Cycling in Ontario Guide*

RTO8 promotes cycling in Northumberland County with its annual investment in the [Cycling in Ontario Guide](#).

It is noted that all costs for RTO8's marketing campaign and activities are covered within their own budget. There is no cost to DMOs or businesses.

### **Financial Impact**

In RTO8's 2023 to 2024 fiscal year Northumberland County Tourism received \$7,261.67 and intends to submit another application for the 2024 to 2025 fiscal year.

### **Member Municipality Impacts**

N/A

### **Conclusion / Outcomes**

This report provides an overview of Ontario's Regional Tourism Organizations and recent promotional activities and initiatives undertaken by Regional Tourism Organization 8 (RTO8) in relation to Northumberland County.

### **Attachments**

N/A