



RTO3 Destination Sustainability Certification and Stakeholder Committee Formation

In September 2022, Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association (HHBRTA) – RTO3 and known as The Heart of Ontario, began its journey to destination sustainability certification. The support and funding of the Travel Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) was pinnacle in the engagement with GreenStep Solutions as we embarked on our goal to deliver sustainable tourism certification.

TIAO's lead on a sustainable tourism initiative to progress sustainability across the province, supporting Ontario in becoming the most sustainable province by partnering with GreenStep Solutions – the only Canadian-based organization to offer Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) – Recognized certification standards and assessment tools for the entire tourism industry, to create the Advancing Sustainable Tourism in Ontario project, a province-wide sustainable tourism initiative, to achieve Destination Certification for Tourism Regions 1-11 in Ontario.

Through the assessment and verification process, RTO3 has gained a deeper understanding of how our destination and its performance is based on a set of criteria that have been carefully designed to measure our progress in four key categories: Management, Social and Economic, Natural and Cultural, and Environmental.

The result has established a baseline of our region's current performance, resulting in a Bronze score assessment that is based on the sustainable evidence collection process. Our journey continues as we comply with GreenStep Solutions' criteria guidelines and its Sustainability Framework, committing to measuring and improving our performance through the following next steps:

- The formation of our RTO3 Destination Sustainability Stakeholder Committee (RTO3DSSC)
- The Development of the RTO3 Sustainability Action Plan
- Identifying and building our sustainability values, vision, and strategic goals
- Improvement of our baseline score and measurement, and identifying areas of improvement and opportunity to reach Gold scoring
- Building a compelling communications plan that reaches stakeholders, business operators, partners, our communities, interest groups, and visitors
- Maximizing the scope of our impact by signing the Sustainable Tourism 2030 Pledge; as well as encouraging business operators to pledge and promote their sustainability values
- Establishing a RTO3 Sustainability Action Plan Tracker to monitor the progress of plan's benchmarks

- Any other goals and areas of development that are identified by the RTO3DSSC

PROJECT BACKGROUND:

The GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Destination Standard (GSTDS) began with extensive research to identify best practices and internationally recognized sustainability indicators for tourism destinations. Sources included GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) Destination Criteria, UN World Tourism Organization Indicators for Sustainable Development, the Canadian Indicator Framework (part of Canada's Agenda 2030), and the UN Sustainable Development Goals - 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Criteria and indicators from these sources were compiled, considered, refined, and prioritized to create the 117-question assessment for destinations that covers all four key sustainability pillars, while also being flexible enough to be applicable to destinations and tourism regions of all sizes, globally. This standard has been formally recognized by the GSTC, to be deemed equivalent to the GSTC Destination Criteria and is in alignment with global best practices for sustainable tourism destinations.

Interested in joining the RTO3 Destination Sustainability Stakeholder Committee? We would love to hear from you...

HHBRTA is looking for regional engagement of **8** participants to serve on our RTO3 Destination Sustainability Stakeholder Committee. Our sustainability efforts and partnership with GreenStep Solutions is an integral part of our regional growth and your contribution is immeasurable.

- Your service on this committee will include attending in-person or virtually (some meetings, including the first two meetings will be in-person and located within the regional boundaries of Hamilton Halton Brant). The meetings will be approximately 1.5 - 2 hour sessions, especially the first 2 meetings will be 2.5 hours.
- The committee will be required to develop the RTO3 Sustainability Action Plan in compliance with GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Framework. This committee is a volunteer committee of stakeholders living and/or working within our geographical boundaries.
- The committee shall meet regularly which is determined by the committee or as identified in the RTO3DSSC Terms of Reference, with the exception of the initial GreenStep led Action Planning Meetings and Action Plan Wrap Up (3 meetings in February 2024).

If you have strong interest and/or professional experience in sustainability, please let us know about you today.

Please email Maureen Beatty, Executive Assistant at Maureen.beatty@theheartofontario.com or secondarily, Bev Scott, Manager, Business and Visitor Experiences Development at bev.scott@theheartofontario.com to learn more the committee and the recommended areas of expertise, exposure and knowledge.

Our first meeting will take place in-person on Thursday, February 01, 2024 at 1:00 to 3:30 pm ET. Location to be determined in Hamilton Halton Brant Region. If you are interested, please reach out asap.

We can't wait to hear from you!

