

**Ministry of Tourism**

Minister

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**Ministère du Tourisme**

Ministre

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December 18, 2009

Dear Tourism Partner:

I am pleased, after extensive consultation with our tourism partners, to announce the new tourism regions for the province. This week, the McGuinty government approved a proposal for 13 tourism regions across Ontario, with the northern region sub-divided into three sub-regions. This is a major step in creating a stronger, more coordinated and competitive tourism industry with increased economic capacity. It is also a positive move that will help ensure Ontario's tourism industry continues to grow and enjoy future economic success. The regional map of Ontario's 13 new tourism regions can be found on the Ministry of Tourism's website at: [www.ontario.ca/tourism](http://www.ontario.ca/tourism).

As you are aware, the regional boundaries were developed based on the feedback that we have received since the release of the Tourism Competitiveness Study's final report, *Discovering Ontario*. Please be assured that we took into account all input received, including feedback from the Ontario Tourism Summit, the 17 planning sessions held throughout the province this past spring as well as written submissions and a number of individual meetings that were held. We heard from you that regions need to be sustainable, capture unique experiences and integrate existing brands and partnerships. We also recognized and took into account other important factors like the tourist's perspective, travel patterns, common markets, natural landforms and existing infrastructure. Furthermore, we heard – and I concur – that tourism boundaries should be viewed as permeable and cross-regional cooperation must continue.

The creation of the tourism regions also brings us closer to establishing Regional Tourism Organizations (formerly called Destination Marketing and Management Organizations). In the near future, Ministry staff will be issuing a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) to help identify one Regional Tourism Organization in each region to lead and grow the industry and ensure it remains strong and competitive well into the future. I expect the RFEI and Guidelines to be posted on the Ministry of Tourism's website in January 2010. Ministry staff are also planning an information session in January 2010 for interested parties. As details become available, they will also be posted on the website.

To support the industry through the transition, I am pleased to advise you that Destination Marketing Fees that were in place on March 26, 2009 and that can be validated, will be replaced by transition funding effective July 1, 2010, concurrent with the introduction of the Harmonized Sales Tax. The transition funding for existing Destination Marketing Fees will be available during the transition period and will be flowed through the Regional Tourism Organizations.

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Of course, we recognize that the tourism industry requires a sustainable source of funding. That is why, as I mentioned in my letter of November 16, our government announced an amendment to the *Retail Sales Tax Act* through the Ministry of Finance Fall Budget Bill. This legislation will allow for a similar approach to the current collection of Destination Marketing Fees through the collection of a Regional Tourism Levy. This would enhance the industry's ability to garner consistent funding, in addition to the \$40 million in ongoing funding for the tourism regions. As we continue to determine the details of implementing this legislation, we will continue to consult with you and all of our partners across the province.

I want to thank you for the feedback you have provided to date in developing our regional tourism strategy. I am committed to ensuring that the process will continue as a collaborative industry-government partnership. Our new tourism regions and Regional Tourism Organizations will help us reach our shared goal of building a stronger, more competitive industry.

Finally, I want to wish you and your family best wishes for an enjoyable holiday season and much success for 2010.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Monique M. Smith  
Minister