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Letters to the Editor

# Letter: Georgian Bay Geopark proponents acknowledge concerns

The Georgian Bay Geopark Initiative apologizes to Manitoulin councils for poor consultation, requesting a meeting to clarify the project's exploratory, non-regulatory nature.

## There is concern the initiative moved ahead without sufficient consultation

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is an open letter to the Mayor and Council of Island municipalities and has been reprinted here at the author's request.*

Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

I am writing on behalf of the Georgian Bay Geopark Initiative to acknowledge the concerns that have been raised by Manitoulin municipalities and to request a more direct conversation.

We understand that there is concern that the initiative moved ahead without sufficient consultation and that references to Manitoulin Island in our materials may have created the impression of participation or support where none had been given. We take that seriously.

The Georgian Bay Geopark Initiative is an early-stage, non-profit effort exploring whether parts of Georgian Bay and the North Channel may one day support a UNESCO Global Geopark designation. It is not a designated 0 today. It is not a regulatory body. It does not control land use, tourism policy, or municipal decision-making. Its role is to explore whether a future Geopark concept could have value for communities through education, stewardship, and sustainable tourism.

We recognize that this has not been clearly understood in all cases, and that our communications and outreach have not been sufficient in parts of Manitoulin. That is something we are now trying to correct.

In particular, we understand the concern that geological mapping and Deep Time zone references may have been interpreted as implying municipal inclusion, support, or consent. That was not the intention. The purpose of those materials was to illustrate the geological story of the wider region, not to suggest that any municipality had agreed to participate in the initiative.

At the same time, we accept that if communities read those materials differently, then we have a responsibility to listen and respond more carefully.

Our purpose in writing is not to argue past the concerns that have been raised, nor to ask for support before there has been proper dialogue. It is to acknowledge that Manitoulin municipalities are entitled to a direct explanation of what the initiative is, what it is not, and what role, if any, your community would wish to have in any future discussions.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to: listen directly to your concerns, • clarify the exploratory and non-regulatory nature of the initiative, • discuss how Manitoulin has been referenced in current materials, • and determine whether there is any constructive path for further discussion.

If council is willing, we would be pleased to arrange a meeting at your convenience. We are also prepared to review the specific references to your community in our public-facing materials as part of that discussion.

The Georgian Bay Geopark Initiative was created to explore whether the globally significant geology of Georgian Bay and the North Channel could become the foundation for a stronger regional platform for education, stewardship, and sustainable local development.

In practical terms, the initiative is intended to help residents, visitors, educators, and communities better understand how the region's geology has shaped its landscapes, ecosystems, waters, and cultures over time. It is also intended to support more informed stewardship, stronger public education, and a more 'careful approach to tourism, one that protects sensitive places rather than exposing them to unmanaged pressure.

We recognize that trust has to be earned, and that the first step is a more respectful and direct conversation. We would welcome that opportunity.

Sincerely,

Mike Robbins

Chair

Georgian Bay Geopark Initiative