

Strategic Plan 2009

for

Central Almaguin

Discover the good life!



July 2009

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and municipalities of Sundridge,
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Executive Summary

In response to the construction of the upcoming four-lane highway that will by-pass Central Almaguin within the next year, the four municipalities of South River, Sundridge, Machar, and Strong have collectively created this regional strategic plan with a vision to help guide their decision making over the next three years. Through the strategic planning process, the region now has a mission statement and the recommendations summarized in the following table.

Mission Statement

Central Almaguin's purpose is to serve the best interests of the community by:

- n Respecting its special, small-town character and quality of life;
- n Providing the best public services;
- n Sustaining the public trust through open and responsive government;
- n Maintaining stewardship and preservation of its financial and natural resources;
- n Fostering business development by proactively attracting businesses and industries that will work cooperatively with Central Almaguin; and
- n Fostering tourism development by actively marketing the area and encouraging development of recreational and other attractions.

The top priority goal is Goal 1 since the new Economic Development / Tourism Officer will be responsible for spearheading or administering many of the other goals and objectives.

Focus	Recommendation
ED/ Tourism Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n Hire Economic Development Tourism Officer (EDTO) n Promote ED / Tourism Officer as first point of contact n Provide on-going training for EDTO n Direct EDTO to develop partnerships n Direct EDTO to act as chair or secretary of tourist activities n Direct EDTO to create, implement, and monitor new initiatives n Direct EDTO to tap into funding sources n Direct EDTO to locally promote the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund for starting new business n Direct EDTO to track marketing n Track success of EDTO
Marketing the Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n Create regional web site n Create high-quality brochures of tourist attractions/amenities n Create a map of the region n Promote the region when visiting other areas n Tell local businesses how you want them to promote the region n Support development of local radio n Update marketing materials regularly
Re-naming Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n Finalize name change – The Villages of Almaguin n Create a logo to use on all marketing materials that is describable, memorable, effective without colour, and is appropriate n Create a tag line such as “<i>discover the good life,</i>” “<i>stay for a while,</i>” or “<i>time well spent.</i>” n Use new name, slogan, and logo on all marketing materials n Keep up branding with the new name, slogan, and logo
Re-naming Hwy 124	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n Re-name Highway 124 to The Villages Road

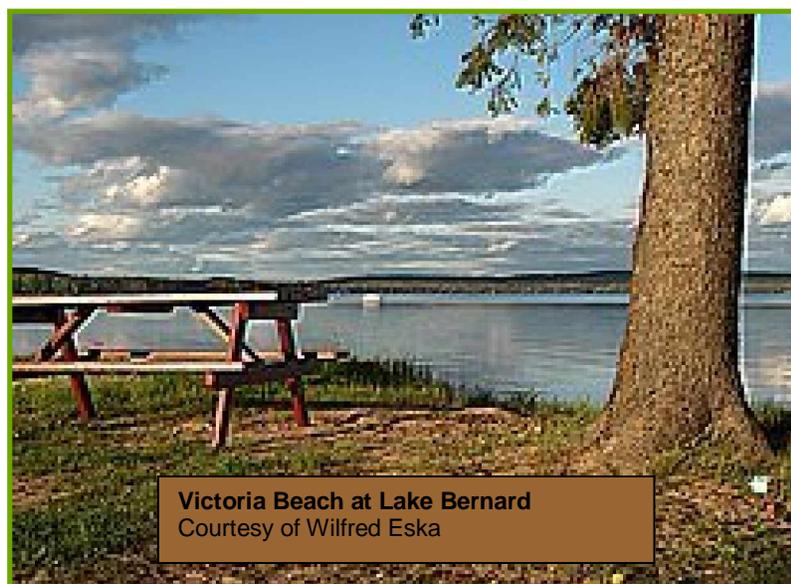
Mikisew Provincial and Algonquin Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Create a business plan to negotiate administration of Mikisew Provincial Park to open it earlier in season – include marketing, finance, human resources, and operations in the plan ▭ Market on park web sites ▭ Display tourist brochures of regional tourist attractions/amenities at parks ▭ Create signage to Algonquin Park and investigate costs of paving or upgrading road ▭ Create effective signage from highway
Trail System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Support bike train initiative ▭ Support snowmobile clubs ▭ Investigate potential for new trails
Building Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Municipalities meet and unify zoning by-laws
Highway Signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Create regional signage before by-pass complete ▭ Create business signage before by-pass complete ▭ Re-visit signage annually
Information Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Build new centre at shared northbound exit between Sundridge and South River ▭ Ensure centre has space to include EDTO ▭ Combine commercial ventures and other reasons to stop ▭ Employ regional name The Villages Information Centre ▭ Provide computer and Internet access to visitors ▭ Provide map of the region to visitors ▭ Track visitors
Other Tourism Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Create inventory and SWOT analysis of Central Almaguin's tourist attractions/amenities ▭ Build on existing services and address gaps ▭ Link with larger tourist attractions in broader region ▭ Support the regional Arts Council ▭ Continue to build on services
Airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Pave runway(s) ▭ Pursue MNR land transfer ▭ Maintain current airport ownership and governance ▭ Re-name airport to reflect branding of regional name – The Villages Regional Airport. ▭ Improve seaplane facilities ▭ Publish airport's attributes / web site in Water Aerodrome Supplement by Nav Canada ▭ Create airport development / land-use plan and business case for investment ▭ Implement development / land-use plans
Export-based Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Encourage local entrepreneurs to think about export-based businesses ▭ Develop marketing plan to target existing export-based businesses in other regions ▭ Work the plan
Labour Market Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Undertake first-hand labour-market research to determine fits/gaps and how to fill the gaps of the labour market with local business and industry
CABA Business Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Create a CABA business plan to guide future direction of the association ▭ Work the plan
Value-added Wood-product Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▭ Create a feasibility study to determine sustainability of various business models in this industry ▭ Work with private industry and government to help develop business models detailed in study

Introduction

The four communities of Central Almaguin – South River, Sundridge, Machar, and Strong – have collectively created this regional strategic plan with a vision to help guide their decision making over the next three years, with the ultimate objective to guide the area’s growth and development. One of the drivers to creating this short-term plan has been the construction of the upcoming four-lane Highway 11 that will greatly impact each of the communities. Collectively, the Central Almaguin municipalities are joining together to increase their political persuasion to tackle this and other common issues. While still maintaining their independence and individual identity, the group has created the Central Almaguin Economic Development Association (CAEDA) and supported the Central Almaguin Business Association in an effort to promote sustainable economic development.

CAEDA engaged Precision Management to facilitate the strategic planning process that was funded by FedNor and Northern Ontario Heritage Funding Corporation. Over 50 partners and stakeholders were consulted to discuss the development of the strategic plan, the goals, and the actions steps required to meet them through community sessions and in-person and telephone interviews. Stakeholders represented a very broad cross section of the community – business owners, government workers, residents, and other interested parties. As a component of the project, Precision Management also provided a high-level labour-market analysis, an economic base analysis, and a high-level airport analysis to provide a solid footing to the whole plan.

Overall, CAEDA has strived to create a realistic plan to ensure the area thrives while preserving the quality of life and the environment. CAEDA representatives say this is not just a plan for the municipal governments – it requires commitment from all Central Almaguin residents – big business, small business, community groups, and individuals.



Victoria Beach at Lake Bernard
Courtesy of Wilfred Eska

The Region

Central Almaguin

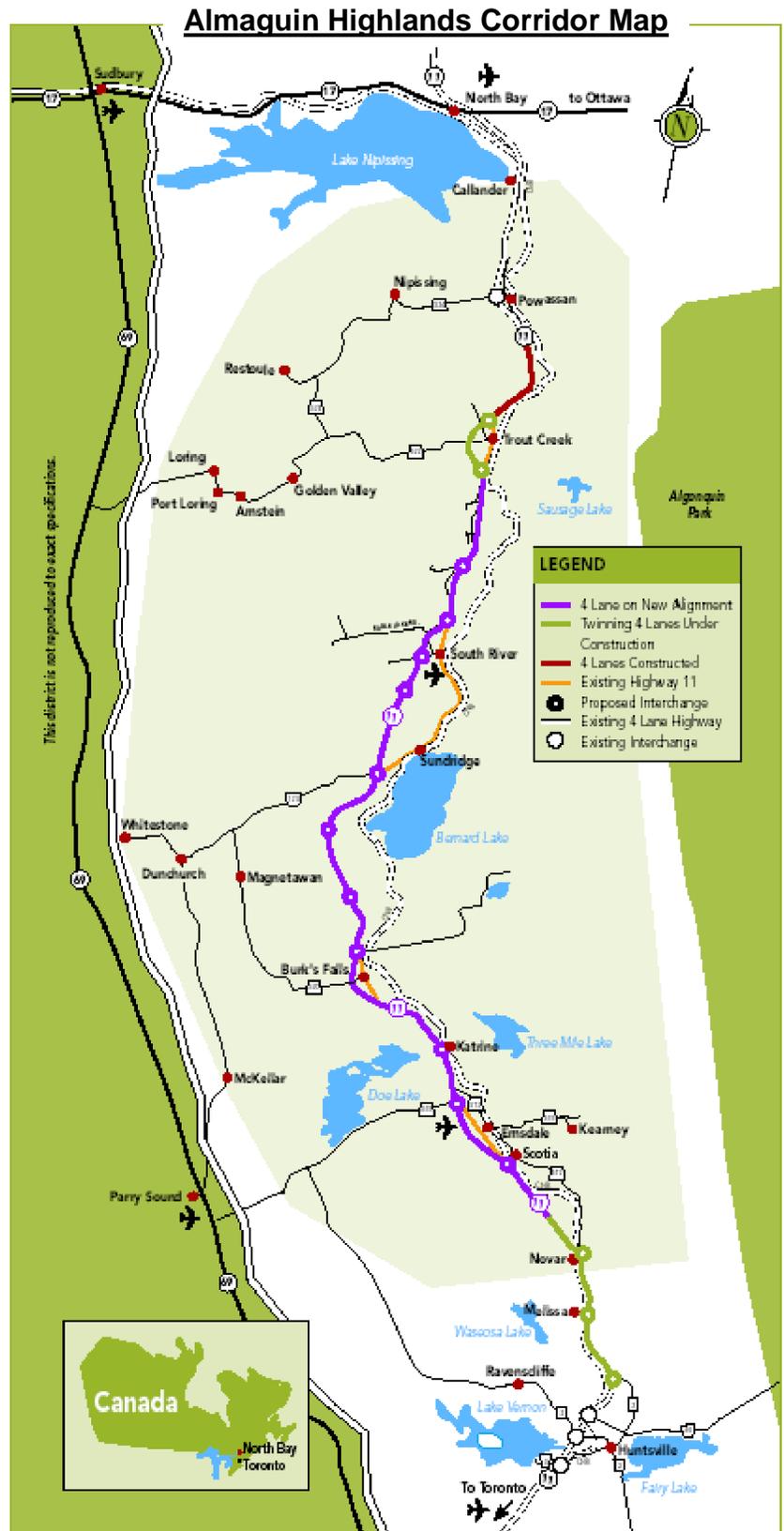
Central Almaguin, located along the Highway 11 corridor about a 45-minute drive south of North Bay and a half-hour drive north of Huntsville in the heart of Almaguin Highlands, consists of:

-  Village of Sundridge
-  Village of South River
-  Machar Township
-  Strong Township

Almaguin Highlands

Almaguin Highlands is a vast area covering approximately 8,000 square kilometres (3,000 square miles) and stretches northward from Muskoka to Callander. In the east, Almaguin Highlands borders Algonquin Park, Ontario's largest and oldest Provincial Park and according to a national survey, the second-most priceless park in Canada, after Banff National Park. To the west lies the shoreline of Georgian Bay and Parry Sound. Almaguin Highlands comprises the following 20 communities:

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Arnstein |  Magnetawan |
|  Bear Lake |  Nipissing |
|  Burks Falls |  Novar |
|  Callander |  Port Loring |
|  Commanda |  Powassan |
|  Emsdale |  Restoule |
|  Golden Valley |  South River |
|  Katrine |  Sprucedale |
|  Kearney |  Sundridge |
|  Loring |  Trout Creek |



Source: <http://www.burksfalls.net/VillageMap.htm>

Purpose

One of the goals of this strategic plan is to help CAEDA remain on track in respect to its mandate, embracing three components:

- n Setting out purpose with a mission statement understood by all community members;
- n Establishing goals that allow CAEDA to operate optimally; and
- n Acting as a guide to creating action or work plans, through which goals are met.

In terms of the first component, the mission statement below was based on a combination of feedback from the stakeholders, the CAEDA committee, and our knowledge of community and economic development.

Mission Statement

Central Almaguin's purpose is to serve the best interests of the community by:

- n Respecting its special, small-town character and quality of life;
- n Providing the best public services;
- n Sustaining the public trust through open and responsive government;
- n Maintaining stewardship and preservation of its financial and natural resources;
- n Fostering business development by proactively attracting businesses and industries that will work cooperatively with Central Almaguin; and
- n Fostering tourism development by actively marketing the area and encouraging development of recreational and other attractions.

Goals and Objectives

The top-priority goal is Goal 1 since the new Economic Development / Tourism Officer will be responsible for spearheading or administering many of the other goals and objectives.

Goal 1 – Economic Development / Tourism Officer:

To promote economic and tourism growth through development of the business base, and to enhance and create, implement, and monitor new sustainable opportunities in economic development and tourism

Working independently, the four communities of Central Almaguin would not be able to justify hiring an Economic Development / Tourism Officer (EDTO.) However, collectively, the region has strength and aligned goals that make this next step a necessity. Volunteers do not have the necessary time to devote to economic development, tourism, and marketing, and many burn out when asked to do too much. It is critical, especially given Highway 11's imminent by-pass, to hire someone dedicated to these tasks.

Short-term Objectives

1. **Hire Economic Development / Tourism Officer:** Hire someone with energy and personality and the ability to forge strong relationships. Job content can be taught – intrinsic enthusiasm and style cannot.
2. **Promote EDTO as First Point of Contact:** Market this person on all web sites, brochures, and other materials for both business and tourism. It is critical to provide a positive first-contact experience for all new comers.
3. **Provide On-going Training for EDTO:** Budget for training and conferences where best practices are shared.
4. **Direct EDTO to develop Partnerships:** Direct the EDTO to join a variety of committees such as Central Almaguin Business Association (CABA,) Almaguin Highlands Economic Development (AHED,) the new Arts Council, and other groups in nearby Almaguin Highlands communities. Central Almaguin shares a high level of labour inflows and outflows between communities in the broader region and shares reliance on tourism with those communities. As such, planning initiatives for Central Almaguin should complement ones for the greater region to help enhance the attractiveness of the area for investment.
5. **Direct EDTO to Act as Chair or Secretary of Tourist Activities:** Direct the EDTO to help build existing events and festivals such as the Sunflower Festival and the former Festival of the Arts.
6. **Direct EDTO to Create, Implement, and Monitor New Initiatives:** Direct the EDTO to establish new events and festivals in the area and to chair and oversee these events.
7. **Direct EDTO to Tap into Funding Sources:** Consider a variety of sources for tourism and marketing such as The Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation that provides marketing support to tourism operators and industry sectors and Ministry of Tourism that promotes festivals and events.

8. **Direct EDTO to Locally Promote the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund for Starting New Business:** \$125,000 is available without age limitation to start a business. Promote this on all municipality and regional web sites to encourage business growth from within the region.

Long-term Objectives

9. **Track Marketing:** Instruct the officer to create a system to track all marketing initiatives. This is not only key for future funding but also important to modify marketing approaches.
10. **Track Success of EDTO:** Ensure that the new recruit accomplishes key goals well and reward good behaviour with job flexibility (hours can be long with a lot of night and weekend work.) If goals are not met, determine the reasons and plan accordingly.

Goal 2 – Marketing the Region: To promote the region as a whole for tourism and economic development

In terms of economic development, the area has north-south, and east-west highway access, railway access, and air access – key for both existing and new business – and it is situated between the busy communities of North Bay and Muskoka. Businesses such as Bray Motors, Mac Lang, The Bear Chair, and Kent Trusses and more have thrived here. In terms of tourism, South River has the second busiest entrance to Algonquin Park, and busy Mikisew Provincial Park. Sundridge has Lake Bernard, and the region's high elevation gives the area a northern flavour with spruce groves, boreal chickadees, bogs etc. Residents and tourists see it as a very relaxing place that also boasts recreational facilities such as Hockey Opportunity Camp, Lake Bernard Girls Camp, and Eagle Lake Golf Course, to name a few.

Short-term Objectives

1. **Create a Regional Web Site:** Use the new logo on this site. For the tourism side of the site, check out www.discovermuskoka.ca – it is extremely well done and provides an easily searchable, well laid out and visually appealing web presence that directs potential tourists to all services and amenities both for day trips and overnight stays.

In terms of economic development, the site should include community profile, transportation, tax information, and all other information pertinent to investment – plus it should sell the area with photos, testimonials, and examples of existing businesses.
2. **Create High-quality Brochures of Tourist Attractions/Amenities:** Ensure that the web site, logo, and tag line is clearly marked on these and display them at parks, information centres, businesses, and other attractions. Also use them at shows in cities where the region is being marketed.
3. **Create a Map of the Region:** Ensure that it is simple, looks attractive, and identifies where the region is relative to surrounding areas.
4. **Promote the Region When Visiting Other Areas:** Direct the EDTO to investigate how other communities such as Muskoka promote themselves outside their areas and to adopt best practices within budget constraints.
5. **Tell Local Businesses How You Want Them to Promote the Region:** When the EDTO personally drops off brochures of the region to area businesses, instruct him/her to use this opportunity to discuss how each and every one of them can sell the area.

6. **Support a Local Radio Station:** Local businesses currently support radio stations in North Bay, so there could be a good market for a local radio station to develop in the area that would also help market the region.

Long-term Objectives

7. **Update Marketing Materials:** Do this with regularity to ensure branding is tight.

Goal 3 – Re-naming Region: To promote the region externally

The name Almaguin is dear to many residents, and we recommend keeping this name in all businesses and organizations that use it to ensure their brand consistency. However, in terms of marketing the region externally, the communities have not done an effective job. Many outsiders have not heard the name. The name of the broader region of Almaguin Highlands rings of a Scottish community and is so large that even local residents are not sure of the exact boundaries. Also, the name Almaguin is a composite of three names and is often misspelled and mispronounced by outsiders. Good marketing names are easy to remember, easy to spell, distinctive, give a sense or feeling as to what they describe, and draw people in. We used the public and stakeholder consultation sessions to test names. One name some stakeholders wanted to associate with was Algonquin because Algonquin Park is recognizable world-wide. Many liked Villages because it is more small-community focused than the towns of Muskoka, and they liked West because Central Almaguin provides a gateway to the west side of Algonquin Park. Many did not want to associate with Muskoka because they believed that in the future, it was possible that the Muskokas would become overcrowded and may give a negative connotation. A number of stakeholders felt very strongly about keeping Almaguin in some form and that it simply needed better marketing. As a result, we recommend the region be called **The Villages of Almaguin** – a name that keeps the old name yet provides a sense of what the communities are with an easy-to-remember lead in. Keep in mind, the purpose of the name change is to increase visibility and provide a solid base for branding the area – it is not intended to change local names and associations.

Short-term Objectives

1. **Finalize Name Change:** Formalize the new regional name between the four municipalities.
2. **Create a Logo:** Use the new logo on all marketing materials, web, print, e-mail, highway and street signs, etc. A good logo is simple and memorable and should make you wonder, “Why didn’t I think of that?” Every iconic logo includes the following elements:
 - a) It is **describable** and therefore **memorable**
 - b) It is **effective without colour** (if it does not work in black, no amount of colour will rescue it)
 - c) It is **scalable** i.e., works when just an inch in size – vital for small items such as pens, badges
 - d) It is **appropriate** (identifies the business, using research to differentiate from competitors.
3. **Finalize a Tag Line:** A tag line will help market the area by further identifying reasons to visit. We listened to the stakeholders and what they thought were the most appealing attributes of the area. Accordingly, we recommend a tag line such as “**discover the good life**,” “**stay for a while**,” or “**time well spent**,” – a line denoting friendly people and a laid-back lifestyle.

4. **Use New Name, Slogan, and Logo on All Marketing Materials:** To ensure brand consistency, use the name, slogan, and logo on everything without exception.

Long-term Objectives

5. **Keep up Branding with the New Name:** Consistency is fundamental to good marketing.

Goal 4 – Re-naming Highway 124: To promote regional branding and promote the area to external parties

To support branding of the new regional name, the name of the new portion of Highway 124, should be changed as well.

Short-term Objectives

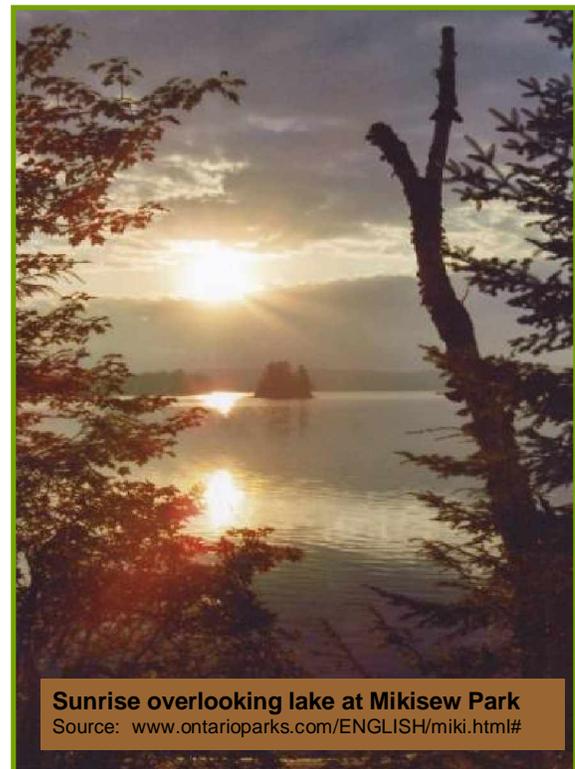
1. **Re-name Highway 124:** Use the same name you use for the region – **The Villages Road**.

Goal 5 – Mikisew Provincial and Algonquin Parks:

To increase tourist traffic earlier in the summer and overall

Since tourism is a significant component of the local economy, the community needs to further capitalize on tourist and seasonal-resident markets. Market to tourists using the river entrance to Algonquin Park, situated about 20 kilometres from South River, to capture spending by these visitors enroute and returning from Algonquin Park.

One issue local business owners have had is with the consistently late-season opening and overall minimal marketing of Mikisew Provincial Park. Algonquin Park, on the other hand, is well marketed, and the entrance at South River represents its second-busiest entrance.



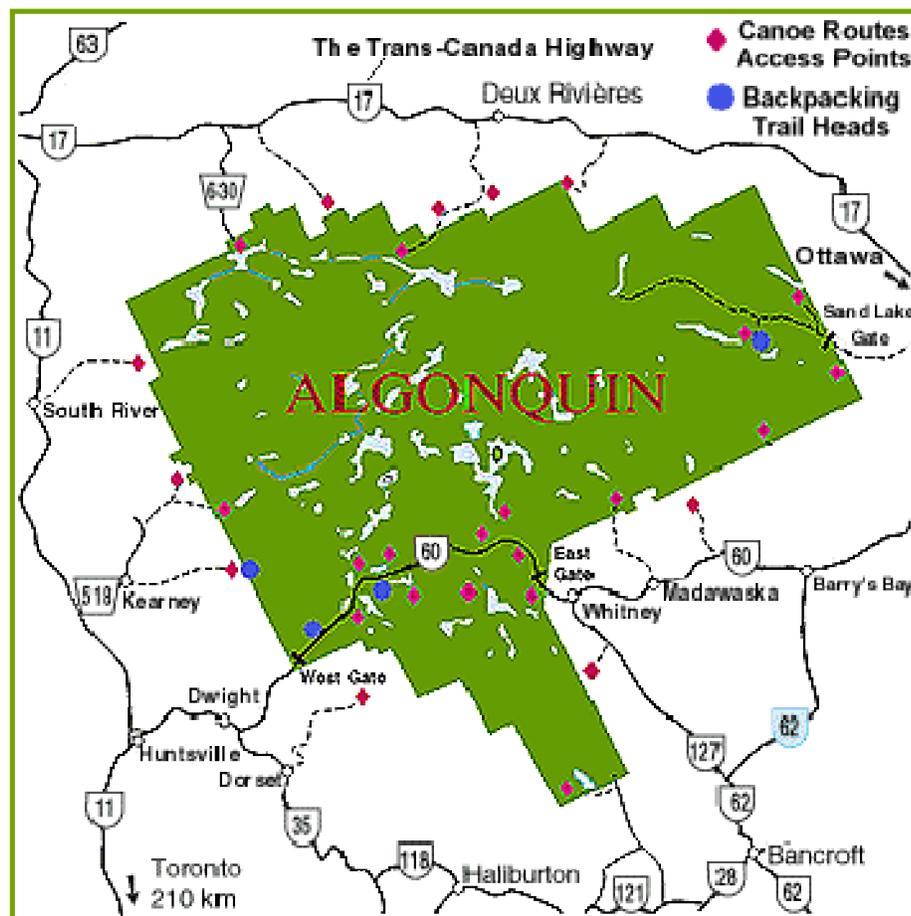
Sunrise overlooking lake at Mikisew Park
Source: www.ontarioparks.com/ENGLISH/miki.html#

Short-term Objectives

1. **Create a Business Plan that includes Negotiating Administration of Mikisew Provincial Park and Operating it:** Initiate a business plan for Central Almaguin to control park opening and better market and operate the park. Use precedents of Englehart's administration of Kap Kig Iwan Provincial Park and Geraldton's administration of Macleod Provincial Park provided to CAEDA to negotiate with the Ministry of Natural Resources to create an agreement for administration of Mikisew Provincial Park. Open the park earlier and actively market it through all marketing materials. Explore all facets of operating the park, including human resources, finance, marketing, upkeep, and operations, in the business plan.
2. **Market on Park Web Sites:** Advertise services and amenities in the region on the Local Services section of the Algonquin Park and Mikisew Provincial Park web sites.
3. **Display Tourist Brochures of Regional Tourist Attractions/Amenities:** Display brochures at Algonquin Park, Mikisew Provincial Park, tourist information centres in the region and the information centre closest to Central Almaguin.

Long-term Objectives

4. **Create Signage to Algonquin Park and Pave Road:** Analyse the cost and benefits of paving or upgrading the 27 miles of washboard road leading to the lake in the park.
5. **Create Effective Signage from Highway:** All attractions require adequate signage. Instruct the new EDTO to investigate costs and proceed within budget.



Goal 6 – Trail System: To promote regional tourism

There are 10 trails near South River, spread over 45 kilometres collectively as outlined in the table below. Stakeholders want the municipalities to continue to build on that system. There are also two snowmobile clubs in the area. Since snowmobilers bring a lot of money into the community when they visit due to travelling light and purchasing food, lodging, gas, and supplies on the go, these organizations and their trail systems should be supported.

TRAIL	SUB-REGION	CLOSEST TOWN	LENGTH	DIFFICULTY	PRIMARY ACTIVITY	CHARACTER
Forgotten Trails	Near North	South River	20 km	•	Cycling - Roads & Paths, Four Wheel Driving	Scenic
Lakeside Trail - Mikisew Provincial Park	Near North	South River	0.5 km	•	Hiking & Walking	Scenic
Loxton Beaver Trail	Near North	South River	8.5 km loop	••	Hiking & Walking, Cycling - Off-Road, Equestrian, Snowshoeing & Backcountry	Natural
Maple Canyon Trail	Near North	South River	2.3 km	••	Hiking & Walking	Scenic
Martin Pond Trail	Near North	South River	4 km	••	Hiking, Walking, Cross Country Skiing, Snowshoeing, Backcountry	Natural
Mikisew Provincial Trail	Algonquin Park Region	South River	3.2 km	••	Hiking & Walking, Canoeing & Kayaking	Natural/Scenic
Moose Mountain Trail	Near North	South River	2 km loop	•••	Hiking & Walking, Snowshoeing & Backcountry	Natural
Old Dog Trail	Near North	South River	1.7 km	•	Hiking & Walking	Scenic
One-a-Day Trail	Algonquin Park Region	South River	1 km	•	Hiking & Walking, Cycling - Off-Road, Snowshoeing & Backcountry	Natural
Tower Trail	Algonquin Park Region	South River	2 km	•••	Hiking & Walking	Natural

Short-term Objectives

1. **Support Bike Train Initiative:** A group in South River is pursuing attracting the bike train to the area from Toronto, which can bring approximately 40 cyclists to the region for a day and impact area spending. Provide regional support for this initiative.
2. **Support Snowmobile Associations and Trail Systems:** The Near North and Almaguin each have a snowmobile club. Support these groups in their efforts to maintain and grow their trails.

Grow Trail System

Long-term Objectives

3. **Investigate Potential for New Biking and Walking Trails:** Local stakeholders believe there is potential to add to walking and biking pathways with the falls and bridges. Investigate potential sites and investigate all funding sources.

« *“There is huge potential for walking and biking pathways with the falls and bridges. The train trellis bridges are beautiful.”*

– Business owner, Sundridge

Goal 7 – Zoning By-laws: To encourage economic development of the region

As independent bodies, each municipality within Central Almaguin has slightly differing zoning by-laws. To unify the area and better market itself to outside investment, it is important for the municipalities to agree on unifying the zoning by-laws.

Short-term Objectives

1. **Unify Municipal Zoning By-laws:** Representatives of the four municipalities should meet and agree on one set of zoning by-laws for the region.

Goal 8 – Highway Signage: To promote the region, businesses, attractions, and amenities

Tourism-Oriented Directional Signing (TODS) for Central Almaguin and for specific tourist businesses is required on the new section of Highway 11. The TODS program offered through the Ministries of Tourism and Transportation (www.ontariotods.interstatelogs.com) allows qualifying tourist operators to place their business signs along Provincial roadways. Additionally, composite signs are allowed for themed areas that meet the following criteria:

- è Have a set of cultural, physical, and social characteristics that create a sense of regional identity;
- è Contain an adequate tourism infrastructure to support tourism development (including all utilities, roads, business services, and other social services necessary to support tourism businesses and to cater to tourists' needs);
- è Be larger than just one community or attraction;
- è Contain existing attractions, or have potential to support developing sufficient attractions to draw tourists.

Short-term Objectives

1. **Create Regional Signage:** Create welcoming signs using the new name, logo, and tag line and ensure they are ready before the date the highway by-passes the community.
2. **Create Business Signage:** While the Ministry of Transportation allows four businesses to be advertised on a sign, we do not recommend this many. Choose one business or at maximum two that have the greatest draw to the area. Passing motorists only have a brief moment to read the sign, so words must be at a minimum and visuals must be quickly identifiable. Ensure they are ready well in advance of the highway by-pass.

Long-term Objectives

3. **Re-visit Signage Annually:** Ensure messaging and visuals are up-to-date.

Goal 9 – Information Centre: To promote regional businesses and to increase tourist traffic, both day trips and overnight stays in the area

Based on the economic base analysis, we conclude that tourism is a very important industry for Central Almaguin, so Central Almaguin needs to increase the area's capture of the tourist market visiting the broader region, including Algonquin and Mikisew Provincial Parks, day trips, and cottagers using the area as a service centre. The complicating issue is that Sundridge and South River will be bypassed by the new four-lane section of Highway 11, although there will be an interchange at Highway 124, leading to Sundridge, and interchanges to the north and south of South River. It is likely that traffic on the new portion of Highway 124 will be considerably lower than the level currently passing through Sundridge along Highway 11, likely reducing spending by transient travellers for highway commercial/impulse purchases because current exposure to traffic will be lost. However, highway improvements may result in higher volumes of tourist traffic using the new Highway 11, and there may be opportunities to capture a larger portion of tourist spending at non-highway oriented tourist attractions and facilities in Central Almaguin. Nonetheless, this will require a focused marketing approach and strategy and ensuring the right mix of tourist amenities to attract day-trip and overnight visitors. To help off-set the loss in transient traffic and the resulting economic impact for Central Almaguin, it is very important that Central Almaguin is marketed well and that marketing approaches and materials create a compelling story for why a side-stop is worthwhile to Central Almaguin for transient traffic or day-trips in the broader area.

Short-term Objectives

1. **Build New Centre at Shared Exit between Sundridge and South River:** The optimal location to build a regional information centre is along the new highway where the greatest traffic will occur. People from the north are more aware of South River and Sundridge, so it makes sense to situate the information centre at the northbound most southerly exit on the new highway – by Sundridge. However, investigate the possibility of the north bound exit between Sundridge and South River too and make the decision based on land availability, cost, etc.
2. **Ensure Centre has Space to Include ED / Tourism Officer:** If using the existing South River Information Centre, expand the space. If building a new one, ensure there is room to permanently house the EDTO to provide the best first-contact exposure to people visiting the area.
3. **Combine Commercial Ventures and Other Reasons to Stop:** Give visitors multiple reasons to stop, such as ice cream sales, artisans, farmers market, RV dumping station.
4. **Employ Regional Name:** Name the centre using the new regional name – **The Villages Information Centre**.
5. **Provide Computer and Internet Access to Visitors:** This will provide parents with more time while their children search the Internet. With the new Tim Horton's in Burks Falls, the region needs reasons for travelers not to simply stop there a rest break and then drive straight to North Bay. There has to be a good reason to stop at the information centre.
6. **Provide Map of the Region:** Distribute this to visitors.

Long-term Objectives

7. **Track Visitors:** Maintain accurate attendance records to track visitor volume and use to modify marketing approaches.

Goal 10 – Other Tourism Measures:

To increase regional tourism year round

Based on the economic base analysis, we conclude there are opportunities for adding new services and facilities related to tourism and seasonal residents/cottagers and small segments of the economy through niche-product development and entrepreneurship.



Short-term Objectives

1. **Create Inventory and SWOT Analysis of Central Almaguin’s Tourist Attractions/Amenities:** Include an assessment of gaps and improvements needed to attract tourists, which would include the existing outdoor recreation market already attracted to facilities in the broader area such as Algonquin and Mikisew Provincial Parks, and tourists using facilities such as B&B’s. The region needs to further understand the existing market, its perceived strengths and weaknesses, and the amenities needed to increase the length of visitation by this market.
2. **Build on Existing Services and Address Gaps:** Direct the EDTO to oversee analysis of ways to improve Central Almaguin’s tourism potential, including opportunities to build on existing services and address gaps. Niche tourist-oriented retail offerings and enhancing retail areas (theming and/or streetscaping, etc.) may help create a stronger draw to the area. Also, there is potential to expand outdoor adventure and recreation offerings in the area, with some stakeholders suggesting attractions for children such as a skateboard park, which would draw parents looking for attractions for their kids when they vacation.
3. **Link with Larger Tourist Attractions in Broader Region:** Direct the EDTO to tap into marketing opportunities at those attractions. Cross promote whenever possible.
4. **Support the Regional Arts Council:** The arts community can be a big draw in terms of tourism in the area, so support the Arts Council representatives in their efforts to build their community and businesses.

Long-term Objectives

5. **Continue to Build on Services:** Direct the EDTO to incorporate community / business building into his/her responsibilities to ensure continuous improvement.

Goal 11 – Airport: To enhance the South River/Sundridge Airport facility and operations to improve economic development and tourism in the area

Given the area's demographics and relatively high levels of disposable income from local cottage owners and resort dwellers, the airport is a potential economic driver for Central Almaguin. The South River / Sundridge Airport was established in the 1930's by the federal government and then transferred to the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR.) MNR sold the runways and 200 acres of adjacent land to the Village of South River for about \$200 in 1981 but retained some as Crown land to support airport operations. In 1982, the Village of South River signed an ownership



and maintenance agreement with four other municipalities: the Village of Sundridge, and the Townships of Machar, Strong, and Joly. These five municipalities continue to own and operate the airport, and provide basic funds for airport operations and maintenance.

There are two turf runways, and the land is adjacent to the South River and Forest Lake. This unique asset allows seaplane operators to fly aircraft to the nearby lake and taxi to the edge of the airport via the river. Many other airports in the region do not have this capability. Tourism, summer camps, and business attract aircraft traffic, creating modest revenue through fuel sales and tie-down fees. In addition to buildings, there are land parcels adjacent to the hangars east of Runway 12-30, which can be developed, and interest has been expressed in leasing this land. Several aircraft operators park aircraft on land west of Runway 12-30 to avoid paying aircraft tie-down fees to the airport. To move towards a revenue and expense neutral position for the airport, the municipalities have been seeking joint tenancy with MNR for these lands so aircraft tie-down revenues can be collected. Joint tenancy would allow MNR to continue using the land for their infrequent fixed-wing and rotary-wing operations, which support their fish stocking and fire patrols.



The South River/Sundridge Airport has several prospects for growth. The Muskoka Tourist Region is rapidly expanding north towards South River and Sundridge, especially with Highway 11's expansion. This will likely increase tourism in Central Almaguin with its recreation, nearby lakes, and Algonquin Park. The airport has many competitive advantages. Demand for development land at Muskoka Airport is exceeding supply, so the South River/Sundridge Airport could capture some of this demand and compete with nearby

Muskoka and North Bay airports with its lower fees. However, the current turf surface runways limit the airport's potential because most aviation operators may be reluctant to invest at an airport without paved runways. If at least one of the runways were paved, the airport's competitive advantage could increase dramatically. The resulting investment could create additional jobs in the area and provide increased revenue for the airport and the municipalities.

Short-term Objectives

1. **Pave Runway(s):** Lobby the government for runway pavement to increase the airport's competitive advantage that will increase private investment in the airport, potentially creating additional area employment.
2. **Pursue Land Transfer:** To increase revenues, continue to actively pursue MNR for joint tenancy of Crown airport lands adjacent to municipally owned land.
3. **Maintain Current Airport Ownership and Governance:** Based on the current size, scale of operations, and apparent success of the current airport management structure, we recommend the site continue to be owned and operated by the five local municipalities, with the airport committee continuing to oversee operations and future site development. This will ensure the airport's future use meets the interests of the municipalities.
4. **Re-name Airport:** Re-name the airport to reflect branding of the new regional name and to reflect the regional significance of the airport – **The Villages Regional Airport**.
5. **Improve Seaplane Facilities:** Further exploit seaplane operations by improving the aircraft launch ramp and constructing a small floating dock to temporarily station visiting aircraft. Also procure a small aviation-fuel storage tank near the seaplane base to attract additional seaplane activity and increase revenues related to fuel sales.
6. **Publish Airport in Water Aerodrome Supplement:** To complement activities such as fly-ins that bring small aircraft operators to the area, increase airport exposure to the aviation community by publishing the airport and its web site www.flyalmaguin.com in the Water Aerodrome Supplement by Nav Canada. This document catalogues all designated seaplane bases in Canada, and is frequently consulted by seaplane pilots during flight planning and operations. This could dramatically increase seaplane activity while providing increased revenues to the airport in fuel sales and aircraft storage.
7. **Create Airport Development / Land-use Plan and Business Case for Investment:** Develop a business case and development plan for site planning and economic development and a land-use plan. The business case will quantify the economic impact of developing the airport, especially if one or both runways are paved. Although significant capital would be required to pave, the business case would indicate the secondary economic spin-offs to the region and quantify the return on investment, plus identify the number of local jobs that may be created as a result. The business case could help the airport obtain government funding for capital investments that would help promote private investment. The plan would show progressive development of airport facilities based on current and forecast demand over 25 years to identify short and long-term developments. The land-use plan would include the highest and best-use airport planning principles that identify lands required for development of the airside system, navigational aids, operational facilities, airside and groundside land parcels and airport reserve lands. Overall, the plan would allow short-term plans of leasing land to private and commercial investors to not adversely affect long-term site development.

Long-term Objectives

8. **Implement Development Plans:** Follow through with recommendations made by airport planner's airport land-use and development plan.

Goal 12 – Export-based Business: To increase export-based business to bring new money into the economy

Central Almaguin has a small local economy highly dependent on tourism. Between 2001 and 2006, it lost a significant level of manufacturing jobs (concentrated in wood-product manufacturing,) while the level of jobs in population-serving sectors increased. Export-based businesses bring new money into the economy such as The Bear Chair Co. manufacturing, other industrial businesses, and tourism-related businesses.

Short-term Objectives

- 1. Encourage Local Entrepreneurs to Think about Export-based Businesses:** Direct the EDTO to promote the Northern Ontario Heritage Corporation's \$125,000 program for new business, distributing their program flyers and talking to people in the communities about new business ideas.
- 2. Develop a Marketing Plan to Target Existing Export-based Businesses in other Regions:** Direct the EDTO to create this plan.



Long-term Objectives

- 3. Work the Plan:** Direct the EDTO to implement the plan on an ongoing basis and to modify as required.

Goal 13 – Labour Market Research: To identify the fits and gaps of the local labour market with existing and proposed businesses and to determine the best plan to fill the gaps

We have prepared a high-level labour market overview but first-hand research of businesses labour market needs now and over the next five years is still needed.

Short-term Objectives

- 1. Undertake First-hand Labour Market Research:** Interview local business owners from various sectors to determine the types of employees they need now, the types of retirement issues they face, and the shortfalls they expect over the next three to five years in order to address training and education requirements in the area.

Goal 14 – CABA Business Plan: To promote, enhance, and grow regional businesses and to attract new business

The Central Almaguin Business Association (CABA) does not have a current business plan and should have a detailed plan to coordinate strategy within the region and with the greater region of Almaguin Highlands.

Short-term Objectives

2. **Create a CABA Business Plan:** Take the pulse of local businesses and community members and create a realistic, actionable business plan that will help support local businesses, attract new ones, and enhance regional tourism.

Long-term Objectives

3. **Work the Plan:** Direct the EDTO to implement the plan on an ongoing basis and to modify as required.

Goal 15 – Wood Value-added Manufacturing: To develop the forestry industry through value-added manufacturing by growing regional businesses and attracting new business

Central Almaguin is in the heart of hardwood country that would lend itself to production of high-quality wood-product manufacturing. There is a demand, for example, for bio fibre in the form of wood pellets and chips to heat businesses and homes respectively. Companies in British Columbia ship wood pellets as far away as Germany where wood resources are scarce. Tom Bryson, Senior Forest Technician of Westwind Forest Stewardship Inc., oversees use of Crown land forests in Central Almaguin. He advises that approximately 50 percent of the land base in Central Almaguin is Crown land and 50 percent is private. The percentage of private land is higher in Machar and Strong. Between Crown and private lands, there are ample resources in the area to create value-added wood products.

Short-term Objectives

4. **Create a Feasibility Study:** Study the sustainability of creating new business based on value-added wood manufacturing to ensure the economic feasibility of pursuing business in this industry and to study the best business models to pursue.

Long-term Objectives

5. **Work with Private Industry and Government:** Direct the EDTO to work with CAEDA committee members on pursuing the business models created in the feasibility study.

Analyses Created for Strategic Plan

The following analytical documents were created for Central Almaguin as part of the strategic planning process and available on each municipal web site:

- ▭ Labour Market Overview: by Precision Management
- ▭ Economic Base Analysis: by EDP Consulting in partnership with Precision Management
- ▭ Airport Analysis: by LPS AVIA Consulting in consultation with Precision Management

Thank You

We extend our appreciate to many members of the Central Almaguin communities, CAEDA, CABA, and the South River / Sundridge Airport Committee for their valuable input.