



CANADIAN GEOPARKS
— NETWORK —
MENTORING & GUIDING GEOPARKS

Canadian National Committee for Geoparks

GUIDELINES & CRITERIA FOR CANADIAN AREAS SEEKING UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK DESIGNATION

LAST UPDATED DECEMBER 11, 2017



CFES  **FCST**
Canadian Federation of Earth Sciences | Fédération canadienne des sciences de la Terre



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



UNESCO
Global
Geoparks

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These guidelines were last updated by the Canadian National Committee for Geoparks 7 April 2017.

SECTION I - Introduction and Overview

The initiative of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to support the development of Geoparks responds to the need for an international framework to formally recognize and enhance the value of geological heritage. Each year, more nations are seeking the means to give special recognition to their nationally important geological sites, which may not be suited for World Heritage or Biosphere Reserve designation and, as a consequence, have found that the UNESCO Global Geoparks program is the best solution to meet this global need. The Canadian National Committee is committed to the development of UNESCO Global Geoparks in Canada.

The overall goal of a Geopark is to integrate the preservation of significant examples of geological heritage within a strategy for regional sustainable socio-economic and cultural development, while safeguarding the environment.

To be eligible for UNESCO Global Geopark designation, sites must include internationally significant geological heritage elements consisting of:

- scientifically important, or especially striking, scenic, or unusual geologic phenomena;
- historically important sites where particular geologic features, rock types, landforms or type specimens of fossils were first recognized and described;
- outstanding examples of geologic features, structures, fossils, processes, and landforms; and/or
- historical sites where cultural events were tied to an area's geologic features, such as those in the history of geology, mining, and geology in early exploration and settlement.

This document provides guidelines for developing Geoparks in Canada, for inclusion in the UNESCO Global Geoparks program. Proposals will be evaluated under these guidelines by the Canadian National Committee for Geoparks and the UNESCO Global Geoparks program. These Canadian Guidelines are consistent with, and represent a Canadian perspective on the "UNESCO Global Geopark criteria (2017)"

SECTION II - Guidelines and Criteria for Geopark Application

A. Geopark size and setting:

UNESCO Global Geoparks must be single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education, research and sustainable development. A UNESCO Global Geopark must have a clearly defined border, be of adequate size to fulfil its functions and contain geological heritage of international significance as independently verified by scientific professionals.

B. Geopark Land Ownership Structure:

A Geopark is not a new form of land ownership or federal, provincial, territorial or local designation of public land. Instead, such a designation provides an opportunity to develop cohesive partnerships with common goals between land owners, managers, businesses, tourism interests, and other local organizations to promote an area representing significant geological processes, features, periods of time, a unified landscape, and historical themes linked to geology, or the outstanding geological beauty of an area – together as a partnership and team effort.

Sites that maintain public access and have an existing strong partnership among neighboring land owners and managers, or the potential to build a strong partnership, may qualify. Concurrence of all property owners is required through signatures included in the application submission. The designation of the land area as a Geopark does not affect the legal status of a property. Only federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and first nation laws remain applicable to ownership and management of the site(s). The role of UNESCO is oversight of the UNESCO Global Geoparks criteria and quality standards. UNESCO has no legal rights over local, provincial, territorial, federal, aboriginal or private ownership or management of a Canadian Geopark area. Instead, UNESCO is a global umbrella partnership that supports and internationally unifies the UNESCO Global Geopark program.

Types of Canadian sites that may be appropriate for inclusion in a Geopark:

- National Parks
- Provincial Parks
- Territorial Parks
- Municipal or regional lands/parks
- Aboriginal-administered lands
- Historical sites
- Provincial, territorial, local, and private conservation lands (including those managed by land conservation organizations)
- Scenic highways and byways
- Trails
- Private lands that offer public access, including those that charge admission to view geologic features

C. Management and Local Involvement

The important geological features within the Geopark area must be accessible to visitors, linked to one another scientifically, thematically, and educationally, and formally protected and managed through a comprehensive plan. A Geopark partnership between different types of managed lands (federal, provincial, territorial, regional, aboriginal, municipal or private) must recognize and adhere to each unique management plan for individual sites, but must also have a common strategic management plan for the entire Geopark partnership with established goals.

The establishment of a Geopark area is a bottom-up process. It should be based on a strong local partnership with long-term public and political support. The initiative to develop a Geopark area partnership must therefore come from sites with a strong commitment to developing and implementing a partnership plan that meets the goals of local communities while showcasing and protecting an area's geological heritage. The Geopark development process, where appropriate, should involve site managers, local authorities, community leaders, private interests, aboriginal leaders, Geological Surveys, research and educational institutions, and tourism bodies. Partners should be representative of the scientific, conservation, and socio-economic communities of the area.

The designated Geopark must be clearly visible on the ground through consistent signage for visitors. Geopark activities within the boundary area should be publicized through the partnership, which should promote and manage activities as a whole, not in fragmented individual parts.

Sustainable tourism and other economic activities within a Geopark area are very important and must be carried out in communication with the Geopark partnership. Tourism activities must adhere to individual site management plans and authority and respect the cultural character of the area. In many regions, it will be necessary to involve the aboriginal community in the establishment of a Geopark area and partnership.

D. Economic Development

Sustainable development balances the use of resources to meet current human needs with environmental conservation, in order to ensure that the needs of future generations will also be met. Sustainable development links concern for the carrying capacity of natural systems with the social challenges facing humanity today, and in the future.

A strategic goal of a Geopark is to stimulate local economic activities and growth while protecting the resource through sustainable development. A Geopark must foster culturally and environmentally sustainable socio-economic development to promote local business, products, tourism, events, and partnerships. A Geopark should aim to strengthen public identification of the area within a geoscience and landscape framework, while promoting a better understanding of the area's geological heritage and its importance in history and society today. The Geopark partnership might also serve as a catalyst for technical assistance with the challenges of living with a region's geologic environment, for example in a region with permafrost, a floodplain, a seismically active area, or near an active volcano.

A key goal of a Geopark and area partnership is to promote various economic activities in order to stimulate or enhance tourism. Examples may include: wine tours tied to the geology, soils, and terrain; historic mining operations (even active mines); or sightseeing and photography tours. A Geopark area partnership should creatively link regional economic activities to the area's geological heritage and landscape and educate visitors and local residents about this linkage to the land. In many cases, aboriginal people have special cultural connection to specific features in the landscape that may also play a significant role in the development of a Geopark.

E. Education and Science

A Geopark must provide education and outreach activities to communicate geoscience and environmental concepts through a variety of methods such as museums, interpretive/education centers, trails, guided tours, publications, maps, student curricula, public presentations and lectures, and interactive, frequently updated websites. A primary goal is to promote geoscience education within local communities and to visitors by conveying the importance of the Geopark's geological heritage to students, teachers, local decision-makers, and the public, as well as visitors to the region.

New scientific understanding developed through research should be an integral component of the Geopark's education and outreach programs. A Geopark should encourage scientific research through cooperation with organizations such as universities, museums, the Geological Survey of Canada, and provincial and territorial geological surveys. Partnerships should also be developed with scientists in multiple disciplines who can support knowledge about a Geopark's geology and ecosystem. Student internships can provide important educational opportunities, and begin to build long-term scientific ties between the Geopark and future researchers. Information developed through scientific research should serve the Geopark by contributing to more effective management decisions.

F. Protection and Conservation

A Geopark is not a new type of designated public land and is quite different from a national, provincial or territorial Park, although such parks may be included within a Geopark's boundaries. A Geopark area partnership works to ensure protection of the area's geological heritage in accordance with the mandates of all levels of government to ensure its sustainability. Since geological resources are non-renewable, it is beneficial to have an area partnership monitoring conservation, protection, and education within a Geopark. Management decisions concerning the level of protection for specific sites within a Geopark area remain the responsibility of existing local, provincial, territorial or federal government systems, but should include input from the Geopark area partnership. Compatible economic uses within a Geopark area, through which its geologic features and heritage remain protected, may be an inherent component of a Geopark designation, including some uses that would disqualify a site for designation under other UNESCO programs, such as the World Heritage or Biosphere Reserve programs.

A Geopark should explore and demonstrate methods of best practices for conserving the area's geological heritage while balancing economic development and tourism. The Geopark should contribute to the conservation and protection of significant geological sites and specific natural features and processes such as representative rock types, minerals, fossils, unique landforms, regional landscapes, and vegetation that protects such features.

Geological sites and individual features within a Geopark may illustrate scientific disciplines such as solid earth sciences, economic geology and mining, engineering geology, geomorphology, glacial geology, physical geography, hydrology, mineralogy, paleontology, petrology, sedimentology, seismology, soil science, speleology, stratigraphy, structural geology, volcanology or any other specialty related to earth science.

G. Management Authority

Local, provincial, territorial or federal management authorities within the Geopark area should ensure appropriate site protection measures within individual site management plans, in cooperation with the appropriate agencies, to guarantee effective conservation and protection and provide necessary monitoring and maintenance of the proposed area. Sites remain under the sole jurisdiction of the landowners and managers, whether private, or local, state, aboriginal, provincial, territorial or federal agencies. UNESCO does not have any type of management authority over the Geopark area but may recommend the termination of a site's inclusion in the UNESCO Global Geoparks program.

Limitations:

A Geopark area must respect all Canadian local, provincial, territorial and federal laws, especially those related to the protection of geological heritage and artifacts. Sites must not participate in the direct sale of rocks and geological objects* within the Geopark boundary (regardless of their origin), and should actively discourage the illegal and unsustainable sale of geological material, minerals, and fossils. However, appropriate collecting of geological materials for scientific or educational purposes may be permitted within the Geopark boundary if the management plan allows for such activity in a regulated manner. If a “rock-shop” or gift shop sells prohibited rock material items, they would not be permitted to be part of the Geopark management or to be promoted or associated with the Geopark in any way. Exceptions lie where a site can make a clear case that the local rock and fossil material being sold is sourced legally and in a regulated and sustainable manner and where it has been an on-going cultural practice. In such circumstances, a special case can be made to the Canadian National Committee for Geoparks, which will then inform the UNESCO Global Geoparks Program.

**Geological objects refer to specimens of rock, minerals and fossils of a type that are commonly sold in “rock-shops.” It does not refer to material for normal industrial and household use which is sourced by quarrying and/or mining and which will be subject to regulation under local, state, or national legislation.*

SECTION III - Canadian Geopark Application Requirements & Procedure

The first step in becoming an Aspiring Geopark in Canada involves sending a Letter of Intent to the Canadian National Committee for Geoparks (CNCG). The letter should demonstrate the following:

- Internationally significant geological heritage within the proposed territory
- Strong community leadership in the project
- Agreement to explore the geopark designation from major stakeholders (levels of government, land owners, tourism, education, aboriginal leaders, others?)

The CNCG confers regularly to review letters of intent and provides feedback in a timely manner. If the committee agrees, the territory is acknowledged as being an “Aspiring Canadian Geopark”.

The next step consists of the full geopark application. Applications may be submitted at any time, but the ideal time is during fall or winter (no later than 31 March) if the objective is to have onsite evaluation in the following summer. This facilitates planning of onsite evaluations of successful

applications for the following year. The application must be concise and comprehensive, not exceeding 50 pages (including photos and maps) in either English or French.

NOTE: UNESCO can only process two geopark applications per country per year. Therefore, the CNCG may receive more than two applications but it will not be able to submit more than two applications to UNESCO Global Geoparks per year.

A. Application Contents:

- statement of interest
- site photos
- brief summary of the proposed Geopark area, with map
- description of geosites within the proposed Geopark
- plans for future Geopark management and marketing
- plans for educational and interpretive programs
- list of management team and partners
- indication of relevant land ownership and administration
- application schedule and preparations
- any additional relevant information
- completed initial draft of self-evaluation document provided by UNESCO Global Geoparks

If, following a positive review of the application, the CNCG considers the applicant to be an appropriate candidate for Geopark designation; a site visit will be conducted at an appropriate time by at least two members of the CNCG. Travel and accommodation costs are to be borne by the applicant. Following the site visit, which is intended to assist the applicant in preparation of the final plans for the UNESCO evaluation the applicant, revises the application into a final form acceptable to the UNESCO requirements. Once selected, the two recommended Canadian Geopark applications must then be ratified by the Canadian Federation of Earth Sciences and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO). After final approval, CCUNESCO will forward their application to the UNESCO Secretariat for consideration with a letter from CCUNESCO and CNCG.

B. Format of formal Geopark application

(1) Map and site description:

- a. Identification of proposed Geopark area and boundaries
- b. Total proposed land area
- c. Scientific description of all geologic sites within the proposed Geopark, including information documenting geologic significance, outstanding geologic features and processes, role in the regional ecosystem, historical information, and links to the area's history and economy
- d. Summary of information on the area, including geography, economics, population, infrastructure, community information, cultural heritage, archeology, natural landscape, ecology, flora, and fauna

- (2) Management structure:
 - a. Description of the management system for the Geopark as a whole, including names and affiliations of key officials
 - b. Detailed explanation of land ownership and management of each individual site within the proposed Geopark
 - c. List of partners and their proposed role in Geopark management, including those linked to the Geopark through:
 - i. Tourism
 - ii. Concessions
 - iii. Education and interpretation in schools, universities, or individual Geopark sites
 - iv. Science and resource management at educational institutions, geological surveys, or Geopark sites
 - v. Curation and display of specimens in museums and/or Geopark visitor centers
 - vi. Local/provincial/territorial/aboriginal government
 - vii. Non-profit organizations such as land trusts or cooperating associations
 - viii. Public land management and authority
 - ix. Volunteerism by individuals and organizations
 - x. Business activities
 - d. Relevant individual site management plans
 - e. Education plan
 - f. Sources and commitment of funding
 - g. Visitor facilities
 - h. Monitoring plans
 - i. Geopark partnership management plan
- (3) Sustainable development strategy and goals for the proposed Geopark
 - a. Geopark area marketing plan
 - b. Tourism plan
 - c. Outline of local community involvement
 - d. Long-term vision and desired goals/outcomes of the Geopark partnership
- (4) Significance of the proposed Geopark, and justifications for its inclusion in the UNESCO Global Geoparks Program.
- (5) Signatures or written consent that all relevant parties, partners, land owners, and land managers are in support of the area's application for Geopark designation. If the area of a Geopark partly or wholly overlaps with an area already specially identified, such as a World Heritage Site, a Biosphere Reserve, a National, Provincial, Territorial or Municipal park, or aboriginal-administered lands, then clearance and approval must have been received from the parties with which the Geopark overlaps.
- (6) Cover letter

C. UNESCO Approval Process and On-site Evaluation

Once the official applications are received by the UNESCO Global Geoparks Secretariat at UNESCO, the applications will be reviewed thoroughly by an independent panel of experts, starting with a desktop evaluation of the submitted application. Once the application passes the desktop review, UNESCO will send an independent evaluation team of 2 individuals to ground-truth the application and perform a full site evaluation to ensure site authenticity. All travel, accommodations, and local transportation costs associated with the on-site evaluation must be covered by the host site. Prior to the evaluation mission, the team of experts will contact the host site to discuss the scope and schedule of the site visit.

The site evaluation team will submit a report including its recommendation on whether or not to designate the territory as a member of the UNESCO Global Geoparks **Program**. The evaluation mission findings will be assessed by the UNESCO Global Geopark Council which meets annually. If the Council approves the application and site evaluation report, the proposed Geopark is then vetted by the member states of UNESCO. If the application passes this vetting period, it will then be awarded membership in the UNESCO Global Geoparks program. The UNESCO Secretariat will notify the applicant along with CCUNESCO and CNCG with an official letter and formal certificate. The entire UNESCO assessment and approval process generally takes 18 months.

D. Timeline for Submission of Geopark Application to Designation

Annual Application Submission Timeline:

- A Letter of Intent to the CNCG is a prerequisite of the application process. This is typically prepared 3-5 years in advance of the application;
- Applications (after the Letter of Intent has been officially approved) are accepted by the CNCG from October - May;
- Once an application is accepted as likely to lead to a geopark designation, then a site visit by at least two members of CNCG will be scheduled at an appropriate time (usually summer) and at the expense of the applicant;
- With CNCG and CCUNESCO endorsement, a Letter of Intent is submitted to the UNESCO Secretariat by July 1 of application year
- Documentation is finalized through an iterative process between the applicant and CNCG, by October;
- CNCG and CCUNESCO approves final documentation by October each year;
- With CNCG and CCUNESCO endorsement, applications are submitted by CCUNESCO on behalf of the applicant to the UNESCO Secretariat deadline is December 1 of each year);
- UNESCO Secretariat verifies completeness of application documents;
- UNESCO Secretariat in cooperation with IUGS executes scientific desktop evaluation completed in April of each year;
- UNESCO site evaluation field missions begin in May each year;
- UNESCO Council reviews site evaluation recommendations annually
- Successful applications are vetted by member states of UNESCO
- UNESCO Secretariat informs applicants the following April

E. Related documents

1. Statutes and Operational Guidelines of the UNESCO Global Geoparks
[English](#) | [Français](#) | [Español](#) | [Russian](#) | [Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) (PDF)
2. [Application dossier \(PDF\)](#)
3. [1-page geological and geographical summary template \(doc\)](#)
4. [Self evaluation form](#)

SECTION IV - UNESCO Global Geoparks

A. History

UNESCO's work with geoparks began in 2001. In 2004, 17 European and 8 Chinese geoparks came together at UNESCO headquarters in Paris to form the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) where national geological heritage initiatives contribute to and benefit from their membership of a global network of exchange and cooperation.

On 17 November 2015, the 195 Member States of UNESCO ratified the creation of a new label, the UNESCO Global Geoparks, during the 38th General Conference of the Organisation. This expresses governmental recognition of the importance of managing outstanding geological sites and landscapes in a holistic manner.

B. Commitment to the network

Geoparks that are members of the UNESCO Global Geopark collaborate as a global team to:

- preserve geological heritage for present and future generations
- inform the public about issues in the geological sciences and their relationship to the environment
- encourage and monitor sustainable development within the local community
- foster multi-cultural bridges for heritage and conservation and the maintenance of geological and cultural diversity
- stimulate research
- contribute actively within the Global Geoparks Network through joint initiatives (e.g. communication, publications, exchange of information, participation in meetings, and common projects)
- contribute local articles to the Global Geoparks Network Newsletters, books and other publications
- contribute to and actively participate in the International Geoparks Conference usually organized every two years by the Global Geoparks Network, with the support of UNESCO

Collaboration among Geoparks is an important component of the Global Geoparks Network. UNESCO encourages international cooperation between Geoparks especially in the fields of education, tourism, sustainable development, protection of fossils and artifacts, and regional planning.

C. Use of Logos

A specific logo has been created for members of the UNESCO Global Geoparks program. The official logo is provided to each new geopark upon being awarded designation. UNESCO Global Geoparks are automatically members of the Global Geopark Network (GGN) and may also use the GGN Logo. It is important to note both logos can only be used after the successful evaluation of the application and upon receipt of the official letter of approval from the UNESCO Secretariat. Use of the logos will link the territory with an identity and other UNESCO Global Geopark members and the Network. It is strongly recommended and is essential to create a common image for all Geoparks throughout the world by using the official logos.

D. Revalidations

As explained in the “Statutes and Operational Guidelines of the UNESCO Global Geoparks” (2015), the status of each UNESCO Global Geopark shall be subject to a periodic review every 4 years. This evaluation will be based on progress reports prepared by the Geopark authorities concerned in cooperation with supporters of the original proposal. The review will be forwarded to the UNESCO Secretariat and Council as well as CCUNESCO and CNCG.

SECTION V – Canadian National Committee for Geoparks (CNCG)

The Canadian National Committee for Geoparks works with areas in Canada and Aspiring Geoparks to provide guidance on attaining the designation of UNESCO Global Geopark. A complete list of members can be found on the website.

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These guidelines were last updated by the Canadian National Committee for Geoparks 7 April 2017.