Purpose of the Study.
The Midland Bay Landing Development Corporation (MBLDC) initiated a feasibility study to determine if a UNESCO Global Geopark designation for Midland and the region of North Simcoe was attainable, what the geographic area and vision would be, the potential benefits, the process, approximate costs and next steps required.

UNESCO Global Geoparks Introduction.
UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas featuring internationally significant geology and linkages to a region's culture and history. To obtain a designation a region must establish global geological significance and operate as a Geopark for a year while meeting UNESCO’s requirements in areas such as education, community involvement, tourism, conservation and governance. There are 165 parks in 41 countries including 5 in Canada.

The Canada Geopark Network.
The Canada Geopark Network (CGN) is Canada’s governing body for UNESCO Geoparks. Regions in Canada that are seeking UNESCO designation can apply to CGN and if they are judged to be strong candidates are given preliminary recognition as an “Aspiring Geopark”. Aspiring parks can then access extensive support, research and guidance from CGN. There are currently seven ‘Aspiring Geoparks’ in Canada. BrandTrade applied and successfully obtained ‘Aspiring Geopark’ status from CGN for Georgian Bay.
Executive Summary.

a) The Opportunity.

There is a significant, long-term opportunity for The Region of North Simcoe - Midland, Penetanguishene, Tiny, Tay and Beausoleil First Nation (BFN) - to achieve UNESCO designation and become the first and foremost UNESCO Global Geopark in Georgian Bay. The primary reasons are:

The Canada Geopark Network believes Georgian Bay could be one of the world’s most significant UNESCO Geoparks and has already recognized the region as an ‘Aspiring Geopark’.

The region of North Simcoe can qualify for UNESCO designation because it represents a unique sampling of the Bay’s geological diversity as well as having a long and unique record of human habitation, history and culture driven by this geology.
North Simcoe is in the strongest most advantageous position of all regions of Georgian Bay to be the destination and gateway for Geotourism. It is within two hours of 4 million people and blessed with excellent and related attractions, parks, marinas, trails and natural assets to build on.
b) The potential for significant and ongoing economic benefits for the region are excellent:

The UNESCO Geopark designation will provide North Simcoe with a powerful, all encompassing Branding and Marketing platform for attracting new levels of year round tourism, investment and economic growth.

SEE BELOW THE REBRANDING OF DEVON ENGLAND: http://www.englishrivierageopark.org.uk/

Based on worldwide Geoparks research, communities experience measurable increases in tourism, job creation and new business start ups.

One multi country study showed an average of 18 people were direct employees of Geoparks not including indirect employment in food and beverage, accommodation, retail and tour related businesses.

There are additional opportunities related the Geopark plan for North Simcoe that should be pursued (see below) including a Geopark Institute based in the region.

c) The prospects for community support are very good.

Organizations across the region have already expressed support for the Geopark concept subject to details on implementation. This included the Georgian Bay UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.
UNESCO emphasizes that First Nations should be key actors in the identification, management, sustainable development, and brand identity of a Geopark.

Surveys of Canadian and global Geoparks showed participating communities were strongly supportive.

The Geopark Management Tool Kit provides guidelines for effective engagement of citizens and businesses including best practices regarding indigenous collaboration.
d) **The Costs to develop and operate a Geopark vary but are achievable.** Development funding will not be required from Municipal Governments. Federal and Provincial Governments, Foundations and the private sector are the primary sources.

Based on a survey of Geoparks, the cost, excluding in kind contributions, to prepare and launch a Geopark prior to designation ranges from $153,000 to $250,000.

Cost variations are driven by geographic scope, scale, and ambition for the Geopark, existing infrastructure and programs in place and the level of volunteer activity.

Municipalities in North Simcoe will not be expected to provide funding for the development phase.

The Geopark in Whistler BC raised 80% of development funding from federal and provincial sources for geo-site development, trail systems and infrastructure.

The annual operating costs for a designated Geopark range from $170,000 to $900,000.

e) **The work to develop and launch a Geopark is typically overseen by a Steering Group.**

The Steering Group leads a process of enrolling key stakeholders through a vision and strategy, keeping them informed through the process, raising funds and developing a launch and Geopark operations plan.

The Group would eventually set up a not for profit entity to oversee the launch and management of the Year One Geopark.

The steering group should be made up of highly committed members with strong knowledge of Geoparks and the region.

Municipalities would provide input during the development process but the Steering Group would operate independent of Government.
f) **Launching a Year One Geopark within 18 to 24 months is feasible and should begin as soon as possible. Recommended next steps include:**

An effective working group has already emerged in the process of this project. They should form the core of the Steering Group and establish terms of reference and a plan to be vetted by CGN with input from Municipalities.

The Steering Group oversees the development of a Geopark vision and strategic package to raise funds and enlist support.

The Group initiates and oversees major funding/partnership outreach and enrollment.

With funding in place, Steering Group would develop a Management, Governance, Marketing and Operations plan for Geopark launch following UNESCO guidelines.

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g) **There are three opportunities to immediately explore that would significantly enhance the Geopark and the economic and social benefits to the region. (see page 21)**

A Georgian Bay Geopark website and mobile app to showcase the region and select sites from around the Bay to the public, students and educators in Canada and globally.

A Georgian Bay Geopark Institute as both a website and a facility; a source for Geopark content and collaboration, and a destination for tourists, schools and researchers.

Development of Geopark Sites (research, imagery, local content). University of Toronto with the Midland Cultural Centre have applied for a two year grant to do this work.