

Sen. Carl Levin
Testimony – Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Oversight Hearing of 2008
Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard Subcommittee of the Committee on
Commerce, Science & Transportation

Thank you Senator Cantwell and thank you Commerce Committee members for allowing me to testify this morning.

The Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, located in Lake Huron near Alpena, Michigan, has been a resounding success since it was created as a unique federal-state partnership back in October 2000. It has preserved the proud maritime history of the Great Lakes, offered educational opportunities to children, adults, maritime history enthusiasts, and researchers, and provided a fascinating site for divers and snorklers to explore.

NOAA initially proposed that the sanctuary cover an area twice as big as was established in 2000, but the proposal had to be scaled back to address concerns raised by some in the local community. Now, community leaders and residents agree that it is time to expand the sanctuary; numerous local units of government have expressed their support for an expansion through resolutions.

Last year, I introduced legislation (S. 2281) that would expand the sanctuary, bringing even greater benefits to the local community, historians, and people from across the country who take advantage of the artifacts and educational resources made available there.

The current sanctuary includes 448 square miles of water and 115 miles of shoreline, and the expansion would include 3,722 square miles and include 226 miles of shoreline.

Thunder Bay has been a regular byway for ships traveling on Lake Huron, and it earned the name “Shipwreck Alley” because the geography and weather patterns in the bay led to over 300 shipwrecks. The sanctuary currently protects 116 shipwrecks; the expansion would protect an

estimated additional 178 shipwrecks. Additionally, the sanctuary and interprets the remains of commercial fishing sites, historic docks, and other underwater archaeological sites.

This expansion is needed to protect the maritime history of Michigan and the Great Lakes. Historically, this region was influenced by the demand for natural resources. Because local roads were so inadequate, the Great Lakes became an important passageway and trading route for settlement and industrialization.

The expansion would protect a number of historically significant sites that can illuminate the history of commerce on the Great Lakes. For example, it would protect the *Cornelia B. Windiate*, a three-mast wooden schooner which is one of the Great Lakes' most intact shipwrecks. The ship sank in December 1875 when bound from Milwaukee to Buffalo with a cargo of wheat, and was featured in an episode of *Deep Sea Detectives* on The History Channel.

This and other shipwrecks are not only historically important, they are very popular with divers. Because deep water sites are often well preserved in the cold freshwater, they contain many artifacts and provide a treasure of information about the past. Many of the shallow water wrecks are accessible by snorkelers, boaters and kayakers.

In 2005, NOAA opened the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center in Alpena, an educational station and visitors' center that traces maritime history in the Great Lakes. As you know, families, school groups and history buffs can even explore the shipwrecks by live video feeds from divers in the sanctuary, extending the reach of the vast educational opportunities in the sanctuary not only to large numbers of visitors each year, but to people around the country who visit the other 13 NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries.

Visitors to Thunder Bay can also view artifacts and interpretive exhibits and watch films about Thunder Bay and all of our Nation's Maritime Sanctuaries. Also, scientists from around the world dock their vessels in the Thunder Bay River as they use the facility for their research.

The Sanctuary has also been a real asset for the local community, and the community has responded in kind. Since the establishment of the Sanctuary, local citizens have worked with the sanctuary to improve the Alpena County George N. Fletcher Library, to provide volunteers at festivals and outreach events, and to help digitize the Thunder Bay Sanctuary Research Collection.

Since the time glaciers receded leaving the two pleasant peninsulas that form Michigan, the Great Lakes have shaped my home state. Physical boundaries are only the beginning. From the Native Americans who lived around and explored the lakes and adjacent land, to the European settlers who developed trading routes for furs, then lumber, and eventually automobiles that Michigan shipped around the world, the Great Lakes hold the story of Michigan's history. One part of that story is being preserved at the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and that Sanctuary deserves to be expanded.

I hope that the committee will support this effort, and I appreciate your consideration.