

**STATEMENT OF
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**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS, ATMOSPHERE, FISHERIES,
AND COAST GUARD
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON S. 2281,
*THE THUNDER BAY NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY AND UNDERWATER
PRESERVE BOUNDARY MODIFICATION ACT***

May 6, 2008

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am Jefferson Gray, the Superintendent of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve (Sanctuary). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 2281, the *Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve Boundary Modification Act*.

The Sanctuary was designated in October 2000 for the purposes of providing long-term protection and management to the conservation, recreational, research, educational, and historical resources and qualities of a nationally significant collection of shipwrecks and other maritime heritage resources in the area. Along the lines of the maritime heritage resource protection goals of the Sanctuary, NOAA agrees with the underlying purpose of S. 2281, which is to provide federal protection to the shipwrecks, and other maritime heritage resources, located off Michigan's Presque Isle and Alcona Counties by incorporating them into the Sanctuary.

This proposal has widespread support in the local communities. On May 22nd, 2007, the Thunder Bay Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) recommended expanding the Sanctuary to a 3,662-square-mile area extending from Alcona County to Presque Isle County, east to the international border with Canada. Formal support for sanctuary expansion has been received from the City of Alpena, Alpena County, Alpena Township, Sanborn Township, Presque Isle Township, the City of Rogers City, Alcona County, Michigan Sunrise Side Travel Association, and the Sunrise Side Coastal Highway Management Council.

Support for Sanctuary expansion should not be surprising given the success we have had in managing the Sanctuary, building a strong partnership with the State of Michigan, and having a positive influence on the local community. Here are just a few of NOAA's recent accomplishments:

The ribbon cutting for the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail took place at the seventh annual Thunder Bay Maritime Festival in July 2007. The trail offered dockage for visiting tall ships and allowed visitors to the festival to tour the tall ship Highlander Sea. As part of the Sanctuary's education mission, twenty full-color historic markers are being developed to interpret shipwrecks, lumber mills, dock remnants, historic waterfront buildings and Great Lakes shipping to create a broader maritime heritage context for the sanctuary's shipwrecks.

NOAA sponsored the Great Lakes Regional Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) building competition in April 2007. The contest featured 12 teams of high school students vying for a spot at the Marine Advanced Technology Education Center's international ROV competition in St. John, Newfoundland. The Great Lakes Home School — first time competitors from Wolverine, Michigan — took first place at the regional event, and finished sixth overall. The competition is designed to inspire the next generation of underwater scientists and explorers to pursue careers in marine fields.

Sanctuary staff recently finished digitizing one of the nation's largest archives of 19th-century Great Lakes vessel data and maritime history documents. Volunteers contributed 3,500 hours to digitizing 15,000 Great Lakes vessel files. Digitization is the first step toward making the information searchable and useful for research and conservation purposes. The files are housed in Alpena County's George N. Fletcher Public Library, where staff are developing a searchable interface for the collection that will allow users to retrieve information using the Michigan Electronic Library or internet search engines.

In 2007, the Sanctuary's Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center in Alpena, Michigan, was presented with the Department of Energy's Federal Energy Saver Award. The purpose of the award is to promote wise energy and water use throughout the federal government by recognizing agencies that showcase cost-effective, energy-efficient, water-conserving and renewable energy technologies in their facilities. The center is on track to becoming a Gold Certified Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design building. This is only the fifth time NOAA has received the award since 1995. The Center not only serves to educate the public about the significance of shipwrecks and maritime heritage through exhibits, but it is also the headquarters for NOAA's Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The Center also won a Department of Energy "You Have the Power" award for energy conservation in 2006.

Senate bill S. 2281 would expand the sanctuary's boundaries to approximately eight times its current size of 448 square miles. The sanctuary's shoreline would also increase from 95 to 225 miles and subsequently include the cities of Alpena, Harrisville and Rogers City. Under this proposal an additional five state park properties, seven historic lighthouses and one lifesaving station would also be adjacent to the expanded boundaries.

More than 200 shipwrecks rest within the proposed expansion area. Magnificently preserved by the cold freshwater of Lake Huron, these archeological sites are one of the nation's best-preserved and historically-significant collections of shipwrecks. From

pioneer steamers to majestic schooners to modern freighters, these sites represent a microcosm of maritime commerce on the Great Lakes. Memorials to the men and women that worked the inland seas, these unique sites have tremendous historical, archaeological, and recreational value. They not only connect us to the past, but they also connect us to the Great Lakes — one of our most precious natural resources.

NOAA agrees that S. 2281 would add important protection to nationally and internationally significant maritime heritage resources that are vulnerable to human impacts and invasive species. This proposal has also received widespread support in local communities, as it would highlight these resources and provide additional opportunities for tourism and economic growth in Northeastern Michigan.

It is also important to note that NOAA is currently undergoing a management plan review for the existing Sanctuary. During the initial public scoping that was conducted as part of this process, significant public comment was received in favor of sanctuary boundary expansion. As noted above, the Thunder Bay SAC, which advises the Sanctuary Superintendent during management plan review, passed a resolution that recommended the sanctuary be expanded as soon as feasible. While there is public support for such an expansion, as a general matter NOAA prefers to see that significant actions such as these be vetted through public management plan and regulatory development processes rather than legislatively, as S. 2281 would do.

Again, NOAA supports the intent of S. 2281 and looks forward to working with the committee as the bill moves forward.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee.