

STATEMENT OF
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MARINERS' MUSEUM

Before the

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES ACT

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Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Timothy Sullivan. I am the President of The Mariners' Museum in Newport News, VA, and the former President of the College of William and Mary in Virginia. I have worked closely with National Marine Sanctuary Program during my time as Museum President and have been keenly aware of their work at the *Monitor* National Marine Sanctuary for the past decade. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this oversight hearing on the reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

As you are aware, The Mariners' Museum has considered NOAA and the National Marine Sanctuary Program a key partner for more than two decades in the important work of preserving and protecting the story of the most famous and arguably most significant shipwreck in United States naval history—the U.S.S. *Monitor*. Designated our nation's first National Marine Sanctuary in 1975, the *Monitor* holds a special place in the history of not only Virginia and North Carolina, but to the nation as a whole as she played an important role in the preservation of the Union during the difficult years of the American Civil War. In the 1980s, The Mariners' Museum was selected to serve as the official repository for artifacts recovered from the wreck site of the *Monitor* as NOAA began the process of selective recovery of key artifacts from the shipwreck which ultimately would include the ships engine, propeller and most significantly, her revolutionary revolving gun turret and cannons.

During the years of major artifact recovery, between 1998 and 2002, NOAA and the United States Navy recovered literally thousands of artifacts from the shipwreck along with the remains of two United States sailors lost the night the *Monitor* sank on New Year's Eve 1862. Working together, NOAA and the Mariners' Museum have developed a world-class facility to house and display these important artifacts,

dedicated solely to the preservation of the *Monitor* story. That facility I am proud to say opened last March to rave reviews. Today, The USS *Monitor* Center at The Mariners' Museum has become one of the premier maritime attractions in the country if not in the world and the conservation department has set the standard for scientific treatment of large, complex artifacts recovered from a marine environment. With an international team of conservators and the newly completed laboratory complex, the 200+ tons of material recovered from the *Monitor* are undergoing desalination and chemical and electrochemical processes. Through viewing platforms and internet webcams and blogging, the public is given a unique opportunity to watch the ongoing conservation efforts. Thus the partnership between NOAA and The Mariners' Museum is serving as a model of private/public efforts to preserve our nation's maritime heritage.

The *Monitor* Center has also done much more than just preserve history. It has also helped shape the future – our future. Through our partnership with the Sanctuary Program, NOAA has also helped protect our local heritage, our tourism, and our economy and has helped our community better understand the challenges and threats our oceans face. The Sanctuary Program has brought enhanced recreational opportunities, educational initiatives, research capabilities and economic development to our community. Working with our partners at NOAA, the *Monitor* Center has become a major tourist attraction and point of pride for the communities of Hampton Roads and most certainly for the City of Newport News. In fact, attendance at our facility has almost doubled in the year since the USS *Monitor* Center opened and tens of thousands of school children have been inspired by the story of the *Monitor* and her famous Battle of the Ironclads in Hampton Roads in 1862. In addition to the work on the USS *Monitor*, we have also had the terrific opportunity to work with NOAA on other projects and initiatives and have benefited greatly from the Sanctuary Program's ongoing work around the country in promoting and preserving our nation's maritime heritage. Twenty plus years after we began our partnership with NOAA, I can tell you that our community and our Museum are stronger because of NOAA and the Sanctuary Program and we look forward to the next twenty years working together.

As a museum dedicated to telling the story of man and the sea, NOAA's work in preserving and uncovering our Nation's maritime heritage—wherever it may be—is of keen interest to The Mariners' Museum. At the core of our mission, The Mariners Museum is about preservation. I believe NOAA has done a tremendous job in preserving our nation's maritime heritage within the protected waters of our National Marine Sanctuaries, and I believe they are doing truly important work for our Nation in discovering, documenting and cataloging new marine heritage resources in our oceans and great lake waters. But I am worried about what can be done to quickly afford these resources protection once they are discovered. Our Nation's maritime heritage is at risk from looting, illegal salvage, damage and loss. Additionally, once a site is disturbed—either by natural or human forces—the deterioration of the site accelerates considerably. Thus prompt action is needed to assure that proper preservation and conservation efforts can be undertaken as quickly as possible.

As NOAA and the Sanctuary Program continue their important work of cataloging our Nations' marine heritage resources, little can currently be done to protect those important discoveries unless they lie within the boundaries of an established National Marine Sanctuary. I would therefore respectfully urge the committee and the congress to find ways to improve the efficiency of the process for designating sanctuaries and amending designation documents after a sanctuary is designated. I further urge you to

develop a new process for designating sanctuaries or special areas of conservation for submerged cultural resources for expedient preservation efforts

Even as we speak, Archaeologists from the National Marine Sanctuary Program are working in the waters off the coast of North Carolina to document and discover ships lost during the Second World War during the Battle of the Atlantic including three German U-Boats. Many of the discoveries being made are important to our national story, and yet once the divers leave the site, very little can be done to protect them from looting as they are not protected by the National Marine Sanctuary Act. In fact the sites which have been visited by these archaeologists in the past few weeks show unbelievable destruction by looters and souvenir hunters in spite of the fact that these sites are war graves. From the Museum's perspective, these NOAA-sponsored expeditions are important to the Museum as they become the content for new exhibits, programs and educational initiatives, but they are only the first step. As I consider the success we have had with Monitor, I can only wonder what the site of the *Monitor* would look like today if the Sanctuaries Act had not been put into play to protect the wreck shortly after the *Monitor* was discovered. I have no doubt that had the United States government not moved swiftly after the wreck was positively discovered in 1974, that there would be little left to protect today. I believe we must work to strengthen the National Marine Sanctuary Act so that new maritime heritage discoveries can be quickly protected just as the *Monitor* was.

As this demonstrates one of the main pillars of working with a sanctuary or with the System is partnerships. As we have experienced and no doubt many others have as well, working with NOAA and the Sanctuary System is a positive experience when two or more groups are focused on a common goal or vision. Great things have come out of this type of approach and no doubt great things will come in the future.

I want to also make a statement about the importance of the National Marine Sanctuary System to this Nation's ocean conservation ethic. As far as Federal leadership, it's all we have. As the only Federal agency dedicated to protecting living as well as cultural and historical resources of the sea, Sanctuaries protect our oceans just as the Park Service is focused on terrestrial conservation. If we have learned anything from the terrestrial or land experience of conservation related ethics, and the dimension, its about places, special places. Sanctuaries are these special places. We need this continued leadership and partnership is important to the Mariners Museum and many others like us.

As president of an institution that has for more than 75 years dedicated itself to preserving our maritime past, I urge you to pass reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuary Act and to include those amendments that would strengthen the National Marine Sanctuaries Program's ability to protect our Nation's maritime heritage and to improve the efficiency of the process for designating sanctuaries and amending designation documents after a sanctuary is designated. I strongly encourage you to develop a new process for designating sanctuaries or special areas of conservation for submerged cultural resources for quick preservation efforts. And lastly, I urge you to lift the moratorium on the designation of new sanctuaries and to help find ways to identify and prioritize new maritime heritage sites considered for designation.