



Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve



On October 7, 2000, historic shipwrecks, found and still undiscovered, received special protection through the designation of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and underwater preserve. The designation created the first Great Lakes marine sanctuary and builds on the existing state preserve designated in 1981. This 448-square mile sanctuary in Lake Huron is only the second sanctuary created solely to protect underwater cultural resources.

Lake Huron's unpredictable weather, its murky fog banks, and sudden gales coupled with the rocky shoals earned Thunder Bay the unfortunate name of "Shipwreck Alley". During the Great Lakes' 200-year history, scores of vessels ended their careers on the lake floor off Alpena, Michigan.

These underwater cultural resources preserved in time within the fresh, cold waters of Lake Huron, still have stories to tell of U.S. maritime history and commerce, its immigrants and natives, its earliest explorations and fur trade, westward expansion in the 1800's, and modern day lake trade. Perhaps even more intriguing are the many wrecks still undetected. The waters of Thunder Bay shelter countless mysteries, including the remains of many vessels that have yet to be located. Residents of and visitors to the Thunder Bay area on northeastern Michigan have long known what an extraordinary maritime history and treasures rest in their "backyard".

The Sanctuary promotes recreational uses of the resources that are compatible with resource protection; in fact, all National Marine Sanctuaries promote multiple uses. Access to Sanctuary shipwrecks is not restricted. The range of depth of the shipwrecks appeals to a variety of diver skill levels and also promises recreational opportunities for non-divers. The shallower wrecks can be viewed by snorkelers, kayakers and boaters. Glass-bottom boat charters also offer tours of the shipwrecks. Divers also have the opportunity to be transported to excellent viewing opportunities by local charter boats.

When completed, the 20,000 square foot Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center will attract an estimated 60,000 visitors per year to Alpena and will feature:

- ⇒ 7,000 sq. ft. of state-of-the-art shipwreck and Great Lakes exhibits
- ⇒ an auditorium for viewing films and real time underwater footage from shipwrecks
- ⇒ archeological conservation lab and climate controlled artifact storage
- ⇒ 2,000 sq. ft. of innovative education space
- ⇒ research facilities
- ⇒ administrative space

For additional information, please contact:

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