

National Marine Sanctuary Designation Process

In late 2015 Governor Scott Walker submitted an application to the Federal Government to designate a Wisconsin Marine Sanctuary in Lake Michigan on behalf of Port Washington, Sheboygan, Manitowoc, Two Rivers, and Mequon. The nomination was endorsed by a diverse coalition of organizations and individuals at local, state, regional, and national levels. This included elected officials, businesses, museums, and environmental, recreational, conservation, tourism, and educational groups.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is currently analyzing the public comments received in two rounds of public feedback in response to the Environmental Impact Statement and the Draft Marine Sanctuary Management Plan and preparing responses to the comments received. During the public comment period many people supported the proposed sanctuary, citing the tourism, economic, education, and shipwreck protection benefits. Others expressed concern about the impact to commercial shipping operations, dredging in the ports, and riparian rights along the beach.

In consultation with the State of Wisconsin and based on the public comments received from the general public, industry, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders, a Final Environmental Impact Statement, Final Management Plan and Final Rule will be prepared. Before the designation would become effective, the Governor has 30 days to review the documents. Congress also has 45 days of Congressional session to review the documents.

Should the sanctuary be designated, the sanctuary would be co-managed by NOAA and the State of Wisconsin, and a Memorandum of Agreement would be established. NOAA will also establish a sanctuary advisory council, made up of members from the public with meetings open to the public to gather input and advice on sanctuary management. National marine sanctuary advisory councils are community-based advisory groups established to provide advice and recommendations to the superintendent on issues including management, science, service, and stewardship.

The proposed 1,075-square-mile Wisconsin Lake Michigan National Marine Sanctuary would protect 37 shipwrecks and related underwater cultural resources that possess exceptional historic, archaeological, and recreational value. The sanctuary would also enhance heritage tourism within the coastal communities that have embraced their centuries-long maritime heritage. The nomination would also provide opportunities to foster education and research partnerships, increase tourism, and enhance economic development.

When I traveled to Alpena, Michigan to visit the Thunder Bay Marine Sanctuary, I had the opportunity to talk to Steve Kroll. Steve ran diver charters and was an early opponent of the Marine Sanctuary in Alpena. After it was established, Steve was surprised that he was allowed to participate on the advisory board. I could see the emotion that he displayed as he told this story and was near tears retelling the experience. Steve is now one of the biggest supporters of the Thunder Bay Marine Sanctuary. You can view his story on You Tube.

If you would like to know more about the proposed Wisconsin-Lake Michigan National Marine Sanctuary, view the NOAA FACTS FORUM hosted by Visit Sheboygan, Inc. and SEAS. The forum was held Thursday, September 21, 2017 at the Sheboygan Yacht Club. The forum video can be viewed at WSCS-TV video on demand.

An expert panel will address the “Myths and Facts” about Wisconsin-Lake Michigan National Marine Sanctuary and NOAA’s partnership with state, county, and local officials and residents. Leslie Kohler, Chairman of the Sailing Education Association of Sheboygan will moderate the discussion.

Panel Guests included Kiri Sarri, President/CEO, National Marine Sanctuary Foundation; Stephen D. Kroll, Diver and Member of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council; Mike Friis, Program Manager, Wisconsin Coastal Management Program; John Broihahn, State Archeologist Wisconsin Historical Society, Russ Green, NOAA Regional Coordinator, Proposed Wisconsin-Lake Michigan National Marine Sanctuary and Mayor Mike Vandersteen, City of Sheboygan.

Local Diver Steve Radovan discovered a new Lake Michigan Shipwreck. Read the recent article published in the Chicago Tribune.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-lake-michigan-marine-sanctuary-shipwrecks-met-20170915-story.html>

The Alpena News recently published an editorial on the proposed Wisconsin Marine Sanctuary highlighting the similarities to the experience of the City of Alpena in 2000.

<http://www.thealpenanews.com/opinion/editorials-and-columns/2017/09/the-similarities-between-sanctuaries/>