

**RESOLUTION OF THE
PROPOSED LAKE ONTARIO NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ADVISORY
COUNCIL
REGARDING COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
STATEMENT AND DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN
October 20, 2021**

Whereas, the Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) for the proposed Lake Ontario National Marine Sanctuary has explored and evaluated the idea of an eastern Lake Ontario (and alternative including the Thousand Island Region of the St. Lawrence River) National Marine Sanctuary.

Whereas, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Management Plan (DEIS/DMP) is a comprehensive document that addresses the many aspects of the proposed sanctuary.

Whereas, the DMP demonstrates how the SAC wants to ensure that diving, fishing, and water-related businesses can continue to occur while embracing the preservation of the rich maritime heritage and historical discovery.

Whereas, the sanctuary proposal demonstrates a commitment to honor the Indigenous nations who were the original stewards of the Great Lake Ontario.

Therefore, be it resolved, that we offer the following observations and comments on the DEIS/DMP:

- The proposed sanctuary is an excellent example of how four adjacent counties and municipalities can work together to advance a diversity of opportunities for the region. The areas are somewhat diverse in history and lifestyle, and will be bound by a cohesive bond connecting them all.
- The SAC supports both boundary alternatives, but has a preference for Alternative 1 (eastern Lake Ontario and the Thousand Islands region of the St. Lawrence River). The preference for Alternative 1 is based on the opportunity to manage and interpret an additional 20 shipwrecks, more opportunities for tourism, and connecting the Thousand Islands communities to eastern Lake Ontario communities. The SAC's support for Alternative 1 is contingent upon assurances that the shipping industry would not be adversely impacted and would be able to continue its operations unimpeded by sanctuary regulations and activities. The SAC encourages NOAA to develop and promote best practices for safety of vessels and diving operations. In addition, if the Thousand Islands region is included, the name of the sanctuary should reflect the addition of that region.

- The SAC embraces opportunities described in the DMP for further shipwreck discoveries, education programs, technology innovations, tourism potential, and local economic development.
- This designation would be incredibly positive, fostering the protection of maritime heritage resources from threats while empowering the public to access them. Designation would put the region in the company of only fifteen national marine sanctuaries in the U.S. from Olympic Coast to the Florida Keys, American Samoa and Thunder Bay. With a marine sanctuary, the potential is greatly increased for optimizing educational and historic programs as well as increasing cultural and recreational tourism to the sanctuary communities. With a functioning Lake Ontario National Marine Sanctuary, the area could partner in the 2025 celebration of the opening of the Erie Canal.
- Local colleges and K-12 schools will benefit from a wide variety of sanctuary activities, including remotely operated vehicle (ROV) development, historical preservation, and mapping of yet undiscovered shipwrecks. The robust potential for expanding areas of sciences and the arts including, but not limited to: biology, zoology, meteorology as well as the arts to include: music, performing and visual arts, drama and literature. The several colleges, including the SUNY schools, and towns that neighbor the Thousand Islands region would also benefit.
- Recognizing the public's interest in shipwrecks, the sanctuary could provide a destination for visitors and residents. There is an opportunity to embrace technology with augmented reality interpretation of historical events and the emerging development of virtual reality technology.
- The use of autonomous surface vessels, underwater autonomous vehicles, and remotely operated vehicles for underwater cultural resource inventory fieldwork will only increase the number of discovered historic shipwrecks. It is critical to protect these resources. The marine sanctuary gives the best option to do so.
- A new name for the proposed sanctuary should be considered once a preferred boundary alternative is selected.
- For the next step regarding the proposed rule, the SAC suggests that NOAA writes the regulatory language in the proposed rule in conformance with the regulatory concepts that were published in the DEIS. Once the public is able to see the exact regulatory language, it will be easier to comment on NOAA's approach.

The SAC wants to emphasize several of the points made in the draft documents as NOAA moves forward:

- Developing public education programs to promote the sanctuary, both locally and more broadly, will help promote understanding of what the sanctuary means and encourage involvement in sanctuary operations.
- NOAA's placement and maintenance of buoys on shipwrecks in the sanctuary will benefit access by divers and promote conservation of shipwrecks.
- Researching and documenting by NOAA, in conjunction with New York State and others, of the cultural resources within the sanctuary will increase knowledge and inform conservation of those resources.
- Some physical footprint in the sanctuary, whether it be one central and/or or several satellite resource centers/offices open during all seasons, will enable public education and outreach, and benefit year-round tourism in the area.
- NOAA's adoption of sanctuary regulations that enhance the state's regulations protecting underwater cultural resources will add another layer of protection and enforcement.

Therefore, be it further resolved, the Sanctuary Advisory Council for the Proposed Lake Ontario National Marine Sanctuary transmits this resolution to NOAA on October 20, 2021.