

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Socioeconomics: Visitor Centers and Regional Presence

Management Issue

The Thunder Bay NMS (TBNMS) operates NOAA's Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center (GLMHC) and hosts a wide range of visiting researchers. Additionally, the sanctuary was expanded in 2014 from 450 square miles to 4,800 square miles, and the sanctuary is seeking to create a presence in locations outside Alpena. The economic effects of these activities on the local and regional community need to be studied, quantified and used to inform future management, outreach and public interpretation decisions.

Description

In 2005, the TBNMS opened the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center (GLMHC) in Alpena, Michigan. This 20,000 square foot NOAA facility features a visitor center, major exhibit, gift shop, theater, distance learning/education space, visiting researcher housing, and conservation lab. Welcoming over 80,000 visitors and researchers in 2013, the center has become a major driver of heritage tourism in Alpena and northeast Michigan. Additionally, in 2014, the sanctuary expanded its boundaries nine-fold and now encompasses several more counties. The sanctuary and GLMHC clearly have a positive cultural and economic impact on the city of Alpena and the northeast Michigan region.



The popular "Shipwreck Century" exhibit at the GLMHC offers an immersive learning experience for all ages. The center is a heritage tourism anchor in northeast Michigan. Photo credit: TBNMS

Questions and Information Needs

- 1) How does the presence of the sanctuary and the GLMHC contribute to the local and regional economy and quality of life in northeast Michigan?
- 2) Can the GLMHC be used as a model for other ONMS sites and MPAs in similar geographic areas?
- 3) What are the knowledge, attitude, and perceptions of sanctuary management strategies and regulations?

Scientific Approach and Actions

- Building on a 2007 ONMS pilot study, the sanctuary and University of Michigan in 2014 conducted a detailed assessment with the goal of describing the economic activity in the region that is associated with the sanctuary.
- In light of 2014 sanctuary boundary expansion, and the eventual expansion of its research, outreach and interpretive efforts, work with the University of Michigan and other partners to develop a long-term measuring tool for sustained sanctuary economic impacts.

Potential Key Partners and Information Sources

State of Michigan; University of Michigan; Alpena Community College; Cities of Alpena, Harrisville, Presque Isle, Rogers City among others.

Management Support Products

- Socioeconomic data, analysis, report.
- Publications, such as "Economic Assessment of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Communities," which outline recommendations to Sanctuary managers regarding how they can help support local economic growth and improve resource protection at the same time

Planned Use of Products and Actions

- Data will help TBNMS better market the sanctuary and GLMHC, and tailor/enhance its education and outreach efforts.
- Data will contribute to community, regional and state efforts to market northeast Michigan as heritage tourism destination.
- Data will help the sanctuary determine what kind of interpretive presence it should maintain in

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For More Information -- <http://www.sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/assessment>

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communities outlying Alpena.

Program References

TBNMS Management Plan.

- Strategies ED-4 and 5.

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