

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary Socioeconomics Factsheet



Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary's value extends beyond the water as a regional economic engine.



According to a regional 2005 study, all tourism and recreation expenditures in the tri-county area adjacent to Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary had an economic impact of \$92 million in sales, \$35.8 million in personal income to residents, \$51.3 million in value added and 1,704 jobs.



Sanctuary staff work with local officials to recruit new businesses, as well as to expand existing operations. In the summer of 2011, Alpena Shipwreck Tours began glass-bottomed boat tours in the sanctuary. The company invested \$800,000+ in the 65' glass-bottomed vessel. The sanctuary has also worked with local groups to recruit and promote new outfitters, kayak tours, bike rentals, dive shops and charters.



The visitor center for Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary - Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center - is a major tourist destination for the region, hosting 97,000 visitors in 2015. The population of the City of Alpena is 12,000.



Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary integrates the needs of local businesses through the Sanctuary Advisory Council. Dive charter operators, dive store owners, charter fishing representatives, the community's small business representative and local government representatives, in addition to the tourism and economic development sectors, all have seats on this council.



The Thunder Bay Maritime Festival is an annual, day-long event drawing over 10,000 to Alpena and the sanctuary. The festival is free to the public and includes tours tall ships, research vessels and fishing boats docked along the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail.



The sanctuary (and the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center) is a hub for NOAA and other research conducted in Lake Huron. Researchers from around the country travel to Alpena to conduct field studies in the area. One such group, the Nobel Odyssey Foundation, spends in excess of \$25,000 in supplies, services and groceries for each of their annual, 10-day operations in Alpena.

Today, the sanctuary facility is an anchor for downtown Alpena that attracts tens of thousands of visitors, in addition to bringing our hidden underwater heritage to the attention of local residents. The transformation of this former industrial property has helped begin a shift from an industrial community – reliant on our deepwater port and the industry that surrounds it – to a more stable, diversified economy, bringing a sense of optimism for the future.

– Carol Shafto, Mayor
Alpena, Michigan
2010