

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2020

Located in northwestern Lake Huron, Thunder Bay is adjacent to one of the most treacherous stretches of water within the Great Lakes system. Unpredictable weather, murky fog banks, sudden gales, and rocky shoals earned the area the name "Shipwreck Alley." Today, the 4300-square-mile Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary protects one of America's best-preserved and nationally-significant collections of shipwrecks. Fire, ice, collisions, and storms have claimed over 200 vessels in and around Thunder Bay. To date, nearly 100 shipwrecks have been discovered within the sanctuary.

THUNDER BAY NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY



Visit thunderbay.noaa.gov for more information.

Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail expansion

Until 2020, the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail signs covered only a few miles of shoreline. It now expands across three counties, covering 150 miles along the sanctuary coast. Funded by Michigan's Department of Transportation and Natural Resources, the sanctuary developed content and designed 115 outdoor interpretive signs and coordinated installation with local governments and state parks. Vivid details about vessels found in the sanctuary are featured along with nearby lighthouses and geological formations, increasing awareness of NOAA's mission to protect the Great Lakes' rich maritime heritage.



Sanctuary visitors read interpretive signs along the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail. Photo: NOAA

Sanctuary increases lakebed mapping capacity

Through recent equipment acquisitions, vessel upgrades, technical training, and pilot project success, the sanctuary has significantly increased its hydrographic survey capacity. Hydrographic data from the sanctuary is utilized by resource managers and archaeologists. Improved quality and scope is also beneficial to academic, government, and research partners. The scientific data will be used for nautical chart updates, benthic habitat characterizations, geological studies, archaeological exploration, and more.



Lake bottom mapping coverage in the sanctuary. More than 80% remains to be surveyed. Photo: NOAA

Film festival celebrates our ocean and great lakes

Over a span of five days in three coastal cities in January 2020, the sanctuary hosted the eighth annual Thunder Bay International Film Festival. With more than 1,000 people in attendance, the sanctuary screened 60 new films and highlighted many attending filmmakers, inspiring Great Lakes and ocean enthusiasts. Past festival successes have inspired filmmakers to focus on sanctuary and Great Lakes topics, including maritime heritage, environmental issues, and adventure. Fourteen Great Lakes-themed films produced by Michigan filmmakers were featured.



Audiences interact with filmmakers at the Thunder Bay International Film Festival. Photo: Nick Smock

Virtual programs reach new audiences

As sanctuary visitor centers closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities for innovative outreach took center stage. With a focus on interactive and engaging experiences, staff explored new avenues to share and promote sanctuary missions and goals. From popular podcasts and regular radio programs to television broadcasts and classroom virtual visits, sanctuary archaeologists reached thousands of people around the world. The key to success of these programs, some of which continue in series format, is presenting a diversity of topics including scientific diving, filmmaking, shipwreck stories, and exploration.



Excerpt from an interactive, virtual program discussing sanctuary natural and cultural resources. Photo: NOAA

Looking Ahead

- Ocean Exploration Trust will continue mapping unexplored areas of Lake Huron. Deploying the latest in autonomous survey technology, the project continues a multi-year partnership to search for shipwrecks, important fish habitat, and geological features.
- With educators and families looking for new ways to provide students with outdoor experiences, sanctuary staff will develop innovative and interactive field trip programs with the local glass bottom boat tour operator, so students may experience the sanctuary's history and ecology firsthand.
- The sanctuary will further develop and codify an existing citizen science program to inspire stewardship and engage diverse user groups to assist in the research, documentation, and monitoring of maritime heritage resources.

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM



- National Marine Sanctuary
- ▲ Marine National Monument
- Proposed National Marine Sanctuary

Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic Maps.

The National Marine Sanctuary System is a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters. The network includes a system of 14 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.