

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 26, 2017

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross,

We write to express our strong opposition to reducing the boundaries of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary as part of the Commerce Department's review of National Marine Sanctuaries and Marine National Monuments designated or expanded since April 28, 2007^[1] in accordance with Executive Order 13795^[2]. The expansion of this sanctuary in Lake Huron in 2014, which was the result of a rigorous approval process with extensive public input, is critical to Michigan's economy and heritage.

The Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary has helped revitalize local economies in our state. The tourism and recreational opportunities supported by the Sanctuary have generated over 1,700 jobs, \$100 million in sales, and \$39.1 million in personal income to residents, according to a 2005 study. In 2008, the mayor of Alpena, Carol Shafto, testified before the United States House of Representatives that "Alpena, a very rural area 100 miles from the nearest freeway, is today a different place, a better place, since NOAA designated the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary...It is truly difficult to imagine Alpena not being part of a system that protects some of the most spectacular resources in the country." Modifying the expanded boundaries of the Thunder Bay Sanctuary will only reduce the area benefiting from the amazing resources and history that draw thousands of visitors to the region every year.

In addition to the economic benefits, Thunder Bay serves as an educational and historical underwater park that preserves 110 known shipwrecks and documents over 200 years of maritime history. The cold, clear freshwater preserves shipwrecks dating back to the nineteenth century. This trove of artifacts formed the basis for developing world-class historical and archaeological research programs focused around the Thunder Bay Sanctuary.

Stakeholder engagement and public feedback were integral to the process that resulted in the expansion of Thunder Bay. Local communities, not outside entities, initiate proposed expansions. Only after several local government and non-governmental organizations expressed interest in expansion did a Sanctuary Advisory Council working group recommend increasing the boundaries

[1] 82 FR 28827, available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/06/26/2017-13308/review-of-national-marine-sanctuaries-and-marine-national-monuments-designated-or-expanded-since>.

[2] The notice was issued pursuant to Executive Order 13795, 82 FR 20815, available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/05/03/2017-09087/implementing-an-america-first-offshore-energy-strategy>.

of Thunder Bay to include more historic shipwrecks and other maritime heritage sites. Local communities, state and federal agencies, and tribes all had multiple opportunities to make their voices heard throughout the process from the initial review to formal approval. Numerous public meetings and public comment periods were held during Thunder Bay's seven-year expansion process, which clearly demonstrates the ample effort made to consult with federal, state, and tribal groups and other stakeholders prior to expansion as required in the Federal Register Notice.

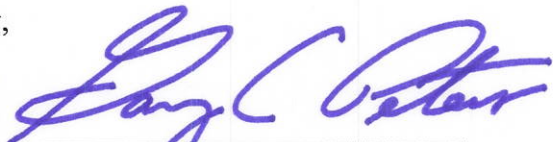
We would also highlight that Section 4(b)(i)(C) of the Federal Register Notice, which stipulates that the potential for oil and mineral production should be considered when reviewing marine sanctuaries, is not relevant to Thunder Bay. First, Congress enacted legislation in 2005 that permanently prohibits the issuance of any federal or state permits for new directional, slant, or offshore drilling in or under the Great Lakes.¹ Second, Michigan state law has banned oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes since 2002.² Finally, Thunder Bay is not on the Outer Continental Shelf, raising additional concerns about its inclusion in the review.

We strongly urge you to maintain the expanded boundaries of Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The decision to expand the Sanctuary in 2014 came after an extensive process that ensured thorough and transparent input from our constituents and all stakeholders. Michigan depends on its marine sanctuary to support the rural and coastal communities of northeast Michigan and preserve this unique area and cultural artifacts for future generations.


Sincerely,



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



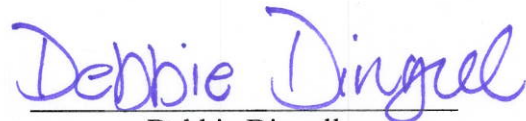
Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress



Fred Upton
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress



Dave Trott
Member of Congress

¹ Section 386 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-58).

² Mich. Comp. Laws §§ 324.33938, 324.32503.

cc:

EO 13795 Review

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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