

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Socioeconomics: Visitor Centers

Management Issue

The Thunder Bay NMS (TBNMS) operates NOAA's Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center (GLMHC) and hosts a wide range of visiting researchers. The economic effects of these activities on the local and regional community need to be studied, quantified and used to inform future management decisions. Further, should sanctuary expansion occur, this analysis will help the sanctuary determine what kind of interpretive presence it should maintain in communities outlying Alpena.

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 60,000 visitors and researchers in 2009, the center has become a major driver of heritage tourism in Alpena and northeast Michigan. The sanctuary and GLMHC clearly have a positive cultural and economic impact on the city of Alpena and the northeast Michigan region. However, these effects have not been quantified or studied in detail.



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?

Scientific Approach and Actions

- Building on a 2007 ONMS pilot study, conduct a detailed study of the sanctuary and GLMHC socioeconomic impacts on the local and regional community.
- Further explore collaboration with the University of Michigan and ONMS to use graduate students to develop and deploy the study.

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.
- Should sanctuary expansion occur, data will help the sanctuary determine what kind of interpretive presence it should maintain in communities outlying Alpena.

Program References

- TBNMS Management Plan.
- Strategies ED-4 and 5.

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