

March 1, 2016

David Alberg, Sanctuary Superintendent
100 Museum Drive
Newport News, VA 23606

Mr. Alberg,

I am writing on behalf of the Advisory Council of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary to offer our unqualified support of NOAA's efforts to expand the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary off North Carolina's Outer Banks to include additional maritime heritage resources. There is so much in common between Thunder Bay NMS and the Monitor NMS that it reads like our own history to follow your efforts. Both MNMS and TBNMS have the specific purpose to protect nationally significant shipwrecks. While your mission has been more limited to the USS Monitor and to honoring the memory and service of Civil War sailors, Thunder Bay has been charged with the protection of a collection of shipwrecks that span hundreds of nautical miles and hundreds of years of history. In 2014, we underwent a boundary expansion that changed our area from roughly 400 to 4,000 square miles. The reasons why we did this are very similar in scope to what you are attempting to undertake, centered around resource protection and historic preservation.

We share an awesome responsibility for potentially endangered shipwrecks and associated artifacts. Our mission is to assure the preservation of cultural resources that, once destroyed, are lost forever to future generations. And we realized that the shipwrecks outside of our boundaries were as precious as those within our waters, if not more so. If we are truly MISSION focused, we felt expansion was imperative. Your proposed expansion would protect nationally significant shipwrecks that currently have little or no legal protection. We note that this includes one of America's only World War II maritime battlefields. These are unique resources dating back over perhaps hundreds of years. And, as is the case in Thunder Bay, what more MIGHT you discover as you begin to study the proposed area with historians, dive enthusiasts, researchers, educators and maritime preservationists? You will be protecting an important piece of America's history. This is both an awesome responsibility and an awesome opportunity.

Again, similar to here in the Alpena, Michigan area of Lake Huron, you will be enhancing local tourism as you become an even greater area for destination tourism. Our area has been boosted economically by persons who are engaging in a rather new activity – eco-tourism. Our boundary expansion has now included other coastal communities, other counties, other port cities and the benefit that was derived for our initial area has been expanded – the land based benefit that comes with protecting what many will never see but may enjoy through the work of those who write about what they learn or produce videos of newly discovered sites or who lecture about the treasures hidden from us until now. The possibilities for economic growth, tourism, educational programming, research, recreation, all are greatly enhanced. This is truly an exciting time.

If we can be of any assistance to you as you proceed with your proposed expansion, please do not hesitate to contact me or a member of the Thunder Bay team. We wish you well.

Sincerely,

Carol Shafto, Chair
Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council