

STATEMENT OF JOHN WESSELS, ACTING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, BUSINESS SERVICES,  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON NATIONAL PARKS, OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES CONCERNING H.R. 3532,  
THE MICHIGAN LIGHTHOUSE AND MARITIME HERITAGE ACT

September 7, 2006

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 3532, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the maritime heritage sites in the state of Michigan.

The Department does not support H.R. 3532. While Michigan is rich in historic treasures linked to its Great Lakes' heritage and the coastlines of the state are home to important resources such as wetlands, dunes, and threatened and endangered species and plants, we believe the best of these cultural and natural resources are already being conserved and interpreted for the enjoyment of the public. We also believe that a study of economic and tourism benefits covering the entire State of Michigan would be more appropriate for the State to conduct.

H.R. 3532 would authorize a study to determine the potential economic and tourism benefits of preserving, protecting, and interpreting the State's maritime resources. It would recommend management alternatives for the most effective long-term protection and interpretation of the resources. The study also would address ways to link communities, waterways, monuments, parkways, national and state parks, and state historic sites on the national, regional, state and local levels into a Michigan Maritime Heritage Destination Network. H.R. 3532 would require a report to be submitted to Congress not later than 18 months after funds are made available that describes the results of the study. The bill would authorize funding of \$500,000 for the study.

All four National Park Service (NPS) units in Michigan, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Keweenaw National Historical Park, Isle Royale National Park, and Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore already preserve and interpret historic maritime resources identified in the provisions of H.R. 3532. These parks contain historic maritime landscapes of a size and quality unique on the Great Lakes and rare elsewhere on the United States coastlines. The maritime heritage resources at all four NPS sites are interpreted and presented to the public in a variety of ways. Symbols of the maritime history of Lake Superior are preserved at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore at three former Coast Guard stations and the Au Sable Light Station, which is perhaps the finest example on the Great Lakes of late 1800's vintage masonry lighthouses. At Keweenaw National Historical Park, the majority of cultural resources are related to copper mining. Some of the success of that industry was attributed to the waterways of Lake Superior and the role that copper played in building ships and boats to this day. Thus, this site adds another dimension to the maritime heritage of the area.

Copper mining on the island of Isle Royale and the growth of Lake Superior shipping led to the establishment of four lighthouses around Isle Royale National Park. These lighthouses, three of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and numerous shipwrecks of both national and state significance scattered throughout Isle Royale National Park give clear indication of the traffic and danger the waters of Lake Superior posed to sailing vessels throughout history. The area was a base for a thriving commercial fishing industry from the 1830's until the park's establishment in 1931.

The maritime resources at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore include an 1858 lighthouse, three original Life-Saving Service /Coast Guard stations, eight historic rescue boats, and hundreds of museum artifacts. Cultural landscapes highlight the maritime and agricultural resources of the area. The waters of Lake Michigan have played a key role in the settlement of the state.

There are indoor and outside exhibits, walking tours, living history, boat tours and audio-visual programs at these park sites. Scores of school groups make trips to these sites where history comes alive to enhance their social science studies. During the summers, national park rangers, Volunteers-in Park (VIPs), and various park partners staff museums, visitor centers, and historic structures to provide the general public with enthusiasm and knowledge of the maritime heritage resources.

The state of Michigan also has made great efforts to preserve and protect important cultural and natural resources. Michigan has listed over one thousand sites on the National Register of Historic Places, which includes state parks, historic houses, commercial and residential areas, farm and factory complexes, cemeteries, monuments, as well as ships and shipwreck sites. The state has developed a database that includes the stories and details of wrecks and rescues of 1,500 shipwrecks as well as information on the 11 underwater preserves and other important historical facts. There are 120 lighthouses along the coastline, the oldest ones being over 180 years old. And Michigan established the first fresh water marine sanctuary in the Great Lakes area, the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve, to maintain stewardship over and interpret a large collection of shipwrecks. There are numerous museums, hotels, historic ships and boats, locks and ports, and underwater preserves related to the maritime industry.

The Great Lakes are a critical part of Michigan's economy and quality of life. Millions of people use the Great Lakes each year to enjoy beaches, good fishing and boating. Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Keweenaw National Historical Park, Isle Royale National Park, and Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore will continue to ensure that outstanding natural and cultural resources will be protected for generations to come.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.