

July 18, 2023

Ms. Ellen Brody
Great Lakes Regional Coordinator
NOAA'S Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
4840 South State Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48108-9719

Re: NOAA-NOS-2023-0039

Dear Ms. Brody,

We write to express our strong support for the designation of a new national marine sanctuary in the Lake Erie Quadrangle. Sanctuary designation would preserve and raise national awareness and appreciation of a historically-significant collection of shipwrecks and other maritime heritage and cultural resources; foster partnerships with researchers and educators to discover additional wonders beneath the waves and tell the story of our past; and create business and job opportunities from tourism and outdoor recreation.

The Pennsylvania waters of Lake Erie were one of the mid-19th century's busiest waterways and linked the Upper Great Lakes to the rest of the world. These waters supported goods and resources flowing in and out of the interior of North America, the Great Lakes' largest commercial fishing fleet during the 19th century, some of the earliest shipbuilding on the Great Lakes, and major Naval Yards during the War of 1812.

Shallow waters and sudden extreme storms often made these waters treacherous; Lake Erie is believed to have more shipwrecks per square mile than any other freshwater location. The proposed sanctuary encompasses an area where 196 ships, nearly every type of vessel that operated on the Great Lakes, are reported to have been lost. Many of these known shipwrecks have not yet been identified. In addition to the historical significance of these shipwrecks, the shores of Lake Erie were home to numerous Indigenous Peoples whose history is now buried under the waters of the lake. Sanctuary designation would protect these historically-significant and non-renewable maritime heritage and cultural resources.

Sanctuaries foster partnerships with researchers and educators to increase awareness and discover additional wonders beneath the waves. A sanctuary in Lake Erie would create opportunities for partnerships with educational institutions and regional organizations for STEAM research, monitoring, education, and career workforce development programming. There are rich opportunities for research in marine archaeology and marine science, including further identifying and studying vessels that have been reported lost, water quality monitoring, and invasive species research.

A sanctuary will enhance and expand the tourism industry, one of the leading economic drivers of the region. Lake Erie provides opportunities for numerous recreational activities on and along the water. Lake Erie is Pennsylvania's only Great Lakes shoreline habitat and has the most abundant fish population in the Great Lakes. Recreational fishing, which depends on the health and preservation of these waters, contributes significantly to the local economy.

The waters of Lake Erie's Eastern Basin span more than 200 years of our nation's history, and deserve recognition as a national treasure. A sanctuary here would foster new opportunities for exploration, education, research, and tourism that benefit the state's coastal communities and bring increased attention to the Great Lakes' role in the growth of our nation. We urge NOAA to designate the proposed Lake Erie National Marine Sanctuary to preserve and celebrate these underwater national treasures so current and future generations can enjoy and appreciate these special places.

Sincerely,