

Great Lakes Small Harbor Coalition Fact Sheet

What is the Great Lakes Small Harbors Coalition?

The Coalition is an organization created by and for small Great Lakes harbors to advocate for sufficient resources, primarily federal funds, for maintaining navigational access to small harbors through adequate dredging, and thus maximizing the economic benefits and quality of life provided by Great Lakes small harbors.

How and when was the Coalition formed?

The Coalition stemmed from an informal meeting held in November, 2007 involving representatives of about 20 small harbors in Michigan, and facilitators from the Michigan Boating Industry Association, Michigan Sea Grant and the Great Lakes Commission. From that meeting, the Michigan Small Harbors Coalition was born and grew to over 45 member harbors – representing 1.5 million citizens - and supporting entities within a year. In 2009, the Coalition voted to invite membership from small harbors throughout the Great Lakes, and thus rename itself the Great Lakes Small Harbors Coalition.

How is “small harbor” defined?

Initially the Coalition was aimed at federally authorized “shallow draft” (under 14 feet of depth, as defined by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) recreational harbors, which under current federal policy are not allowed to be included in the Corps’ operation and maintenance budget for dredging, and thus must seek Congressional adds, i.e. earmarks, for federal dredging appropriations. The Coalition has since broadened membership to include harbors of any size that support the goals and objectives of the organization.

What has the Coalition accomplished?

Coalition efforts, when it was the Michigan Small Harbors Coalition, contributed to federally authorized harbors in Michigan receiving dredging appropriations totaling \$45 million for 2009, including \$6 million in the 2009 Omnibus Spending Bill, \$20 million in the Corps of Engineers’ 2009 Operation and Maintenance budget and \$19 million in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Stimulus Bill). It also helped secure \$1 million designated for dredging small harbors on Lake Superior in 2008. The Coalition has joined forces with the Lake Carriers’ Association, the American Great Lakes Ports Association and the national coalition Restoring America’s Maritime Promise (RAMP) to reform the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund by assuring that fees paid into the fund by freight shippers be applied to their intended purpose of supporting maintenance dredging in the nation’s federally authorized harbors.

How does the Coalition function?

To date, the Coalition has held two general meetings annually in centrally located venues. It is currently governed by a Leadership Group comprised of representatives of about six member harbors, led by Chairman Pro Tem Chuck May of Portage Lake, Michigan. Technical support and meeting facilitation continues to be provided by the Great Lakes Commission, Michigan Sea Grant and the Michigan Boating Industry Association. A more formal governance structure, including bylaws and an elected board and officers, is currently under consideration. To date, all Coalition activity has been volunteer; there are as yet no dues, membership fees or paid staff. As the Coalition agenda develops, however, some means of generating revenue for an operating budget may be considered.

How does a harbor join the Coalition?

At present, the only requirement of membership is formal approval of a resolution supporting the Coalition’s goals and objectives by the municipality in which the harbor is located, typically a city, township, village or county.