



RESOLUTION

Adopted October 5, 2023

Dredging Shallow Draft Recreational Harbors in the Great Lakes Basin

Whereas, dredging is vital to ensure safe navigation for shippers engaged in maritime commerce and recreational boaters who utilize ports, harbors and shipping channels in the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River; and

Whereas, in the U.S. Great Lakes basin there are 141 federally authorized harbors, 60 of which are deep draft commercial harbors and 81 are shallow draft recreational harbors; and

Whereas, these 141 harbors are authorized under the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 which gives authority to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to protect navigable waters in the United States and provides for the development and use of harbors including construction, maintenance, and dredging; and

Whereas, the USACE estimates that there is currently a dredging backlog in shallow draft recreational harbors of approximately three million cubic yards of material; and

Whereas, the USACE estimates that this backlog could be addressed and all of the shallow draft recreational harbors could be adequately dredged at a cost of around eight million dollars annually; and

Whereas, deep draft commercial harbors have historically taken precedence over shallow draft recreational harbors when the USACE establishes its annual workplan for dredging projects; and

Whereas, increased funding availability over the past two years (though Congressionally directed spending, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)) has allowed the USACE to fund dredging and structural repair projects at several federally authorized shallow draft recreational harbors; and

Whereas, over the past several years, dredging costs have risen substantially while the number of dredgers working in the Great Lakes has decreased, presenting management and budgetary challenges to the USACE; and

Whereas, the decrease in number of available dredgers combined with an increased workload in the Great Lakes have created scheduling challenges for dredging projects that must also adhere to in-water work restrictions associated with environmental windows regulations; and

Whereas, in 2021, the GLC completed a multi-year project to evaluate science-based strategies for environmental windows for dredging in Lake Michigan which considered opportunities for collaborating with the states, the USACE, and resource management agencies regarding establishing, reviewing, and implementing environmental windows; and

Whereas, even with the additional federal funding opportunities to support dredging projects in shallow draft recreational harbors, states, provinces, and communities should think creatively about ways to address dredging and harbor maintenance needs in small harbors, especially those that are not federally authorized.

Therefore, Be It Resolved, that the GLC applauds the U.S. Congress and the Biden Administration for the increased funding for dredging in the Great Lakes which has allowed the USACE to implement more dredging projects resulting in a reduction of the dredging backlog; and

Be it Also Resolved, that the GLC calls on Congress to appropriate adequate funding to maintain and dredge the 81 shallow draft recreational harbors in the Great Lakes and provide guidance and direction to the USACE to this end; and,

Be it Also Resolved, that the USACE should review and revise its methodology for estimating costs for future dredging projects to account for cost increases that have occurred since 2020; and

Be it Also Resolved, that the USACE should evaluate the small business set aside program for dredging to review the threshold limit and to consider how it affects federal costs by decreasing competition; and

Be it Also Resolved, that the GLC should work with its party states and provinces to seek funding for continuing the dialogue, with all of the states and provinces, on a more coordinated approach to reviewing, evaluating, and implementing environmental windows for dredging; and

Be It Finally Resolved, that the GLC should work with the states and provinces to explore new and cost-effective approaches, to fund dredging and harbor maintenance projects (especially in non-federally authorized small draft recreational harbors), including county-based regional partnerships, shared dredged management programs, beneficial reuse of dredged materials in construction, public private partnerships and special improvement districts.

*Adopted at the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Great Lakes Commission, October 3-5, 2023, held in Oregon, Ohio.
The resolution was passed unanimously.*