Great Lakes Small Harbor Coalition
Fact Sheet

What is the Great Lakes Small Harbors Coalition (GLSHC)?

The Coalition is a grassroots 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. The GLSHC now has 89 official Resolutions of Support from harbor communities and harbor advocate organizations in Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin. These Resolutions represent some 60 of the 119 Federal harbor communities and the collective voice of some two million citizens—it continues to grow!

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 a $6 million Michigan Regional dredging fund specifically sponsored by the GLSHC in the 2009 Omnibus Spending Bill (the balance was $20 million in the Corps of Engineers’ 2009 Operation and Maintenance budget and $19 million in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act). It also helped secure $1 million designated for dredging small harbors on Lake Superior in 2008. For 2010, the GLSHC again sponsored and received a $6 million Michigan Regional dredging fund, making a two year total of $12 million which has or will result in 26 harbor dredgings. The Coalition is pushing for a similar approach to harbor maintenance funding for all other Great Lakes States. Further, 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/infrastructure 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 a number of harbor communities in Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin, and led by Chairman Pro Tem Chuck May of Portage Lake, Michigan. Technical support and facilitation continues to be provided by the Great Lakes Commission, Sea Grant and Boating Industry Associations. 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 no dues, membership fees or paid staff. As the Coalition agenda develops, 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.