

ATTITUDES OF A SCUBA DIVING POPULATION
CONCERNING
GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF UNDERWATER RESOURCES

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Abstract

This report reviews the findings of a survey of Mid-western divers' attitudes towards government regulation of underwater resources. Of the sampled population, 85% favor some restrictions on salvaging shipwreck booty. Shipwreck divers strongly prefer designating no-salvage or park-preserve areas while the combined shipwreck and general diving populations are about equally split between regulations involving permits and designating a protected area. We recommend that some compromise policy be investigated which would provide for the preservation and management of underwater resources.

Since the early 1600s the Great Lakes have served as a major transportation route for people and their commodities. The ships that ventured across these Lakes influenced settlement patterns, life-styles, and industrial development throughout this region. Unfortunately, many ships, and often their crews, met their demise in these waters.

Approximately 3,000 shipwrecks lie in Michigan's Great Lakes waters.¹ The cultural, scientific and recreational value of these potential resources is not generally recognized. As a consequence, the shipwrecks, along with their artifacts, are being destroyed rapidly by people and nature.

As improvements in underwater equipment continue and knowledge increases, more and more people are exploring the underwater environment in safety and comfort. In order to protect our underwater resources, regulatory policies should be designed and implemented.

Recreation planners, historians, archaeologists, scientists, sport divers, and others have expressed concern over the preservation of shipwrecks. This concern has prompted the State of Michigan to draft legislation for the regulation of resources resting on the bottomlands of the Great Lakes which are under its jurisdiction. In recent years, two such bills have been passed in the House, but have not been voted on by the Senate. Similar legislation² is currently being drafted: "...to preserve abandoned property of historical or recreational value on the bottomlands of the Great Lakes." In addition to state-wide regulation, some concerned people have proposed underwater parks-historical preserves as a vehicle for protecting shipwrecks and other underwater resources in specifically designated areas.

The development of underwater resource policy and management plans requires information of many kinds. Unfortunately, only minimal data is currently available. An important input into policy formulation is the degree of its acceptability to those people who will be most directly impacted. In the case of a shipwreck regulatory policy, diver activity would be affected. Thus, divers' opinions concerning legislation should be an important consideration to policy makers. This report provides some information with respect to divers' attitudes towards government regulation. The research supporting this report is but one product of a larger investigation into the feasibility of underwater park-preserves for Michigan's Great Lakes.

¹Warner, Thomas D. and Donald F. Holecek, "Underwater Parks: An Unexplored Recreation Frontier?" Parks and Recreation, 13 (November 1978), 20.

²Substitute for House Bill No. 4064

In the summer of 1978, the authors surveyed a population of scuba divers³ in the Michigan-Ohio-Indiana area.⁴ Methodology and data concerning the population can be found in that report. Scuba divers were asked to what extent they thought the state government should control government-owned wrecks.⁵ The divers were asked to select the statement which most closely corresponded to their position on government regulation. Table 1 summarizes their selections. As the third and fifth items in the Table are quite similar, they can be combined into one category and retitled the "underwater park-historical preserve" option. The percentage of all respondents favoring this option is 38% (35.6% and 45.2% of the non-shipwreck and shipwreck subpopulations respectively favor this option). The underwater park-historical preserve option and the permit system of regulation are clearly the most popular. Although less than 15% of responding divers appear to be against any significant government intervention in the use of shipwrecks, there appears to be no favored regulatory policy alternative.

In conclusion, the results of the survey indicate that 85% of the sampled population favor some restrictions on salvaging shipwreck booty. Shipwreck divers strongly prefer designating no-salvage or park-preserve areas. However, the combined shipwreck and general diving populations are about equally split between regulations involving permits to remove anything of historical or recreational value, and designating a protected area.

The support for government intervention evidenced in these data is encouraging to those interested in the future of historically and recreationally valuable shipwrecks, but the failure of any one regulatory option to achieve a most favored status poses a potential problem for policy makers. The difference of opinion as to how the use of shipwrecks should be regulated may account for the difficulties the State of Michigan has encountered in establishing legislation or rules needed to accomplish regulation. With clear support for some form of regulation in the diving community, it would appear that some compromise policy is feasible and should be pursued actively.

³A scuba diver is one who uses portable breathing devices to enable free underwater swimming.

⁴Holecek, Donald F. and Susan J. Lothrop, "Shipwreck vs. Non-Shipwreck Scuba Divers: Characteristics, Behavior and Expenditure Patterns," in press, Michigan Sea Grant Technical Report.

⁵The State of Michigan supported by an Attorney General's opinion claims ownership of all abandoned property, including shipwrecks, on the bottomlands of Great Lakes within its territorial waters.

Table 1

RESPONDING DIVERS' VIEWS
ON THE ROLE OF STATE GOVERNMENT
IN CONTROLLING SHIPWRECK SALVAGE ACTIVITY --

	All Respondents Selecting Option		Non-Shipwreck Divers Selecting Option		Shipwreck Divers Selecting Option	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Minimal Control	41	14.0	31	14.2	10	13.7
Allow salvage of items that can only be taken without tools	32	11.0	20	9.1	12	16.4
Ban all salvage in selected areas	54	18.5	36	16.4	18	24.7
Require permits to salvage anything of historical or recreational value	108	37.0	90	41.1	18	24.7
Allow salvage without restriction or permit in all but designated areas	57	19.5	42	19.2	15	20.5
TOTAL	292	100.0	219	100.0	73	100.0



REFERENCES

- Holecek, Donald F. and Susan J. Lathrop. "Shipwreck vs. Non-shipwreck Divers: Characteristics, Behavior and Expenditure Patterns," in press. Michigan Sea Grant Technical Report.
- Warner, Thomas D. and Donald F. Holecek. "Underwater Parks: An Unexplored Recreation Frontier?" Parks and Recreation, (November 1978).