

Michigan Maritime Strategy

Simon Belisle, Office of the Great Lakes
MAGMA Advisory Council Meeting
March 20, 2026



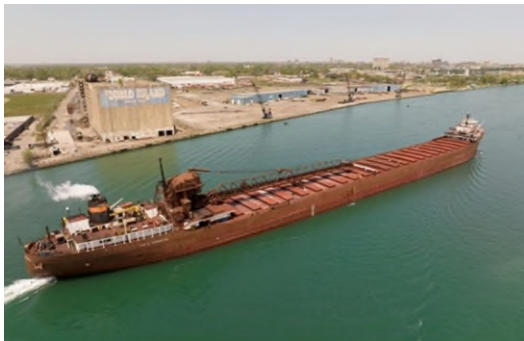
Office of the Great Lakes

- Created by statute in 1985
- Role (excerpts from statute):
- Advise the governor, the director, and the directors of other appropriate state departments on appropriate steps needed to coordinate state policy and state actions on the Great Lakes and to implement an ecosystem approach to this state's Great Lakes policies.
- Provide representation at the national level for this state's Great Lakes interests.
- Promote the wise use of the ports of this state and Great Lakes water transportation.
- Promote the Great Lakes tourism industry.



Michigan's Maritime Sector

Connecting communities, fueling trade, supporting industries



The Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority

Ports



33 active ports



57 million tons of cargo annually (2023)



\$4.7 billion contribution to the state economy



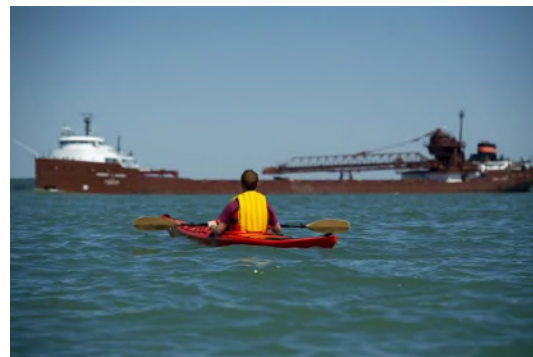
Supporting 17,000 jobs in commercial maritime

Michigan's Maritime Sector

Connecting communities, fueling trade, supporting industries

Recreation

- 83 recreational harbors
- \$11.7 billion in economic impact
- Supporting 45,010 direct jobs



Soo Locks

- 76 million tons moving through the locks, worth \$5.8 billion in economic value (2017)



Miranda Klemp – Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce

Creating Michigan Maritime Strategy

- Strategic alignment of state plans and priorities
- Maritime and Port Facility Grant Program
- Michigan Maritime Manufacturing Initiative (M3)
- Workforce Development Programs
- Smart Ships Coalition
- Maritime Executive Order
- Investments in Michigan ports



M3 Initiative



Lilypad solar-powered low speed leisure cruise boat rental Saugatuck



M/V Hudsongracht at the Port of Monroe, Sam Hankinson, Port of Monroe

Stakeholder Engagement

- 130+ stakeholders
- Interviews, facility visits, maritime champion group
- In-person workshop
- Many state agencies involved
- Stakeholder review of draft strategy
- Upcoming public input opportunity
- Final strategy early 2026



Dr. Thomas McKenney leads a small group discussion at the Maritime Strategy stakeholder workshop in March 2025 Credit: University of Michigan



Michigan Maritime Strategy

- 10 year forward looking statewide strategy, 5-year implementation plan
- Commercial and recreational aspects of maritime
- Inform and guide policy, decision-making, strategic investments in research and innovation, project and program development and coordination, education, and workforce development
- 15-month development process, extensive stakeholder engagement, interagency state agency team and stakeholders

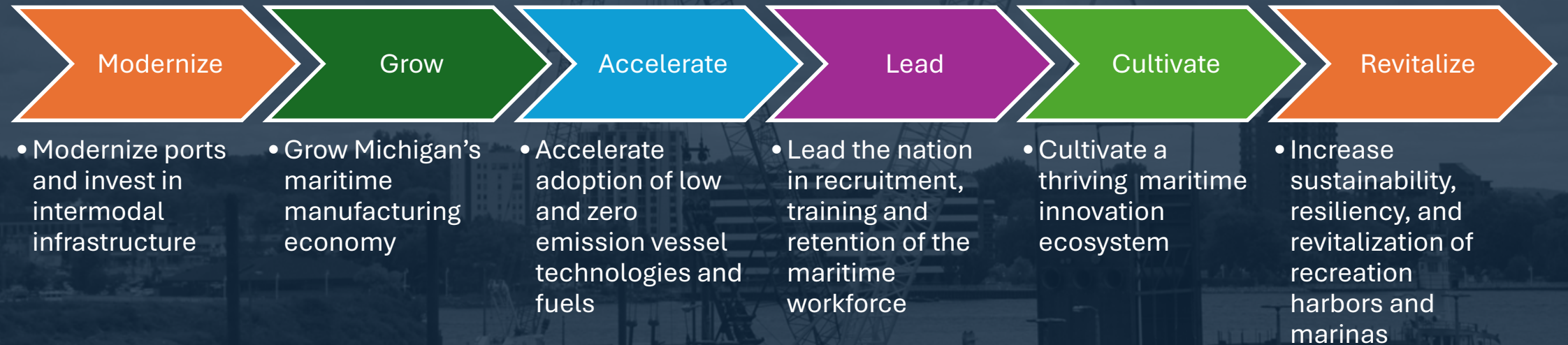
Maritime Strategy Vision

Michigan will lead the nation in sustainable, innovative, equitable, and collaborative maritime solutions, ensuring a robust maritime economy and healthy Great Lakes ecosystem.



Aerial view of U.S. Coast Guard Station Manistee and the S.S. City of Milwaukee in Manistee Lake, MI. Photo courtesy of MDOT

Draft Maritime Strategy Goals



Modernize ports and invest in intermodal infrastructure

1.1 Leverage Michigan ports to attract new commercial trade

1. Secure sustained funding for Michigan's Maritime and Port Facility Assistance Office and associated grant program
2. Invest in port facilities and port infrastructure that can better and more efficiently handle bulk and containerized goods.
3. Invest in safe, reliable, and well-maintained first- and last-mile truck and rail connections at Michigan ports.
4. Study and support regional and national efforts that aid freight and logistics network optimization.
5. Assess and invest in upgraded and resilient ferry infrastructure improvements to ensure reliable transport of goods, services, and people to island communities.



Modernize ports and invest in intermodal infrastructure



1.2 Support and invest in port clean energy transitions

1. Conduct a statewide review of energy use, emissions, and charging infrastructure capacity at ports.
2. Conduct port planning and develop port plans to increase operational efficiency and reduce emissions.
3. Upgrade port infrastructure, electrify or hybridize cargo handling equipment to reduce operational emissions.
4. Expand public-private partnerships for innovation demonstration terminals, in existing facilities or in a new location, as a testbed for alternative fuel technologies and energy sources.
5. Expand ship power capabilities at ports and support standardization of ship power connections.
6. Establish collaborations with energy providers and utilities to assess and develop plans to ensure electrical grid preparedness for increased maritime demand.

Grow Michigan's maritime manufacturing economy

2.1 Position Michigan as a national powerhouse for marine component manufacturing, ship repair, and shipbuilding

1. Combine a marine supply chain mapping study with the expansion of the M3 initiative's supplier matching and development program to identify and grow Michigan's marine manufacturing capacities, connecting new and existing suppliers to emerging opportunities.
2. Explore opportunities to support naval ship repair and vessel component construction using advanced manufacturing technologies.



Grow Michigan's maritime manufacturing economy

2.2 Advance Michigan as the premier site for designing, building, and testing autonomous maritime systems

1. Leverage existing public and private test sites, innovations zones, and networks to test marine technologies.
2. Explore creating new test sites and zones.
3. Attract marine autonomy companies and establish new production facilities in Michigan to grow the state's autonomous vessel manufacturing sector.
4. Leverage initiatives like the Smart Ships Coalition and national policies to support autonomous maritime R&D and channel funding for system design and production.



Accelerate adoption of low and zero emission vessel technologies and fuels

3.1 Identify and invest in opportunities to advance marine fuel alternatives

1. Assess the feasibility and scalability of using biofuels in ships, considering limitations, existing value chain, supply chain efficiency, engine impacts, vessel storage, and sustainability.
2. Identify areas where Michigan can lead in developing and adopting alternative marine fuels for commercial and recreational uses.
3. Provide incentives and support for marine fuel innovation, strengthen collaboration across the fuel value chain, and enhance programs that grow fuel infrastructure to promote local use.



Accelerate adoption of low and zero emission vessel technologies and fuels

3.2 Support a clean energy transition for freighters and oceangoing vessels

1. Deploy advanced data tools to support operational planning and integration between vessels and shore-side facilities to improve efficiency.
2. Invest in and expand local alternative marine fuel bunkering infrastructure to support cleaner shipping.

Accelerate adoption of low and zero emission vessel technologies and fuels

3.3 Support a clean energy transition for ferries

1. Evaluate and leverage findings from previous ferry electrification studies and explore hybridization technologies to identify new opportunities and guide next steps.
2. Create funding programs and/or policies to help public and private ferry owners adopt hybrid and electric technologies and demonstrate viable business models while building on past Michigan ferry electrification studies.
3. Pursue federal Ferry Boat Program funding and expand the Michigan Comprehensive Transportation Fund to support new ferry construction and conversions.
4. Support and accelerate the clean energy transition for harbor craft and other vessels that align with ferry-related technology and infrastructure development.

Accelerate adoption of low and zero emission vessel technologies and fuels

3.4 Support a clean energy transition for recreational boating

1. Attract and support electric boat manufacturers to establish and grow operations in Michigan through workforce development and business attraction.
2. Collaborate with research and innovation hubs to develop, commercialize, and advance clean energy transitions for recreational boats through technological advancement, manufacturing, and innovative design.
3. Expand electric charging and alternative marine fuel infrastructure at marinas and ensure grid readiness.
4. Establish funding programs that support the retrofitting of existing fleets of boats to cleaner energy alternatives and offer incentives for companies and startups to support clean energy transitions in recreational boating.
5. Market and promote recreational boating opportunities that use renewable energy or other new technologies, such as boat rentals and clubs moving towards electric boats and alternative marine fuels in their fleets and partner with Michigan towns to promote marina EV charging infrastructure.

Lead the nation in recruitment, training and retention of the maritime workforce

4.1 Launch a maritime education and workforce development initiative to boost Michigan's engineering, mariner, and skilled trades capabilities and capacities

1. Build partnerships among the state, colleges, universities, and the Maritime Academy with education systems to develop a holistic approach to growing maritime workforce capabilities.
2. Evaluate current programs and identify gaps to improve maritime career pathways.
3. Expand funding for skilled trade and community college programs that support maritime jobs.
4. Promote Michigan as a hub and destination for maritime workforce development and careers and develop maritime career awareness initiatives and career pathway programs to attract and retain workers.



Lead the nation in recruitment, training and retention of the maritime workforce

4.2 Establish a campaign that promotes maritime careers

1. Build partnerships among the state, colleges, universities and colleges, the Maritime Academy, business, industry with education systems to integrate maritime related careers into K-12 curriculum to foster career awareness, workforce readiness, and promote long-term career pathways and opportunities.
2. Utilize national maritime related industry and business association programs, resources, and funding to market engineering, mariner and skilled trades careers and career preparation programming.

Cultivate a thriving maritime innovation ecosystem

5.1 Invest in and expand Michigan maritime technology test and demonstration zones, integrating land- and water-based assets, in collaboration with industry and research partners

1. Invest in maritime test and demonstration zones—including an innovation terminal at an existing or new facility—to evaluate and promote emerging technologies and alternative fuel solutions.
2. Partner with other states and Canadian provinces to formalize transportation corridors. Partner with federal agencies to co-fund corridor infrastructure and sustainable marine fuel bunkering.
3. Market and promote Michigan maritime innovation zones and corridors and offer incentives to companies developing and operating new technologies and vessels.

Cultivate a thriving maritime innovation ecosystem

5.2 Support and fund Michigan-based maritime research and development

1. Invest in and support R&D efforts that can strengthen the current maritime innovation ecosystem and make Michigan a global leader in maritime innovation.
2. Investigate unique opportunities to establish global maritime R&D leadership by leveraging Michigan strengths in areas such as advanced nuclear technology for applications including vessel propulsion.



Cultivate a thriving maritime innovation ecosystem

5.3 Connect and build upon maritime startups to create a regional innovation hub

1. Position Michigan as an incubator and launch pad for maritime startups by offering incentives, supporting partnerships, and connecting local startups with industrial partners.
2. Expand existing maritime innovation partnerships including the Blue Tech Innovation Zone and Smart Ships Coalition.
3. Establish Michigan-based Maritime Prosperity Zones created to spur investment in maritime infrastructure.



Increase sustainability, resiliency, and revitalization of recreation harbors and marinas

6.1 Support sustainable recreational harbor and marina development

1. Promote the use of the Sustainable Small Harbors Tools and Tactics Guidebook and provide funding to support additional harbor towns in developing and implementing waterfront revitalization and placemaking plans.
2. Prioritize infrastructure repairs, upgrading of public recreational harbors and their land-side access, and sustainable harbor maintenance practices and technologies to increase resiliency, maintain navigation, and ensure long-term sustainability.
3. Promote and encourage compliance with EGLE Marina guidebook and marina development best practices that protect public trust resources and preserve publicly accessible waterfronts.
4. Enhance public access to waterfronts through installation of accessible boat and kayak launches, promoting water trails, and creating accessible shoreline entryways for all abilities.



Increase sustainability, resiliency, and revitalization of recreation harbors and marinas

6.2 Expand marine sustainability practices

1. Create a sustainable funding model for recreational boating / Waterways Fund.
2. Secure sustainable funding and increase promotion of the Michigan Clean Marina Program.
3. Continue and expand the Clean Boats, Clean Waters program
4. Expand boat washing stations at all public marinas and state managed boat launches to inform recreational boaters about preventing the spread of invasive species.
5. Support pollution prevention practices at recreational harbors and marinas by promoting best management practices that reduce fuel and oil spills, minimize stormwater runoff contamination, improve waste and materials management, and prevent the release of pollutants during vessel maintenance, storage, and operation.



Implementation and Governance



INTERDEPARTMENTAL
COORDINATION



MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT AND
COLLABORATION WITH MARITIME
INTERESTS



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND 5-YEAR
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Michigan Mobility Fellowship Program

- 15-month fellowship
- Will support the implementation of the maritime strategy
- Leadership development, mentorship, and statewide networking
- Opportunities to engage with leaders in transportation, innovation, and community development
- Hands-on work advancing Michigan's mobility future
- [Michigan Mobility Fellows Program - CEDAM](#)



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Scan to access the Maritime Strategy



Aerial view of the docks and recreational watercrafts at the marina at J.W. Wells State Park in Cedar River, MI. Photo: Tyler Leipprandt and Michigan Sky Media LLC in cooperation with the MI DNR.