



## Great Lakes MARITIME Task Force

### SUCCESS STORY Icebreaking

In 1936, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 7521 which required the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) to break ice in the Great Lakes “keeping open to navigation by means of icebreaking operation, in so far as practicable and as the exigencies may require, channels and harbors in accordance with the reasonable demands of commerce.” The Executive Order was strategically important as war approached and national security mandated the need to move raw materials from the upper Great Lakes to the steel mills and other manufacturing facilities on the lower lakes. However, over the years the USCG has allowed its icebreaking resources to atrophy and reduced its’ icebreaking services on the Great Lakes by slowly eliminating assets and lowering their performance measures to justify the reduction. Vessels have been stranded for days in ice and economic impacts have been staggering to include the loss of \$2 billion in economic activity and over 10,000 jobs between the years of 2013 and 2019.

GLMTF first raised the alarm in the late 1990’s when the USCG planned to decommission their only heavy Great Lakes icebreaker USCG Cutter (USCGC) MACKINAW (WAGB-83) without a replacement. The need for heavy icebreakers is vital to be able to move commerce when ice is present on the Great Lakes during the limited shipping season. GLMTF applied constant pressure across government agencies and through Congressional engagement. Dozens of letters were sent to members of Congress advocating the necessity of a heavy Great Lakes icebreaker. Eventually the money was



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appropriated for the USCG to acquire a replacement which was commissioned in 2005 after construction was completed in Marinette, Wisconsin.

However, the trouble with adequate icebreaking “meeting the reasonable demands of commerce” continued, as the aging fleet of smaller icebreakers suffered from numerous breakdowns taking them off the water during critical times. With a small fleet of only eight to cover the entire Great Lakes, each USCG icebreaker was critical to moving

\*[www.americanmaritimepartnership.com/u-s-maritime-industry/the-jones-act/](http://www.americanmaritimepartnership.com/u-s-maritime-industry/the-jones-act/)

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### IN 2013 THE USCG REALIZED **THE RIGHT ANSWER**

WAS TO PERMANENTLY ASSIGN THE

**USCGC MORRO BAY**  
FROM NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT  
TO CLEVELAND, OHIO

commerce. Casualties to the vessels mounted and GLMTF recognized there was no bench strength for the aging icebreakers and therefore no dependability for the safety of the mariners and the deleterious economic impacts. The East Coast had excess icebreaking capacity and not being utilized appropriately for their icebreaking design. In 2003, GLMTF members advocated to the USCG, and once again Congress, to reassign an excess icebreaker from the East Coast to where it was truly needed on the Great Lakes. In 2013 the



USCG realized the right answer was to permanently assign the USCGC MORRO BAY from New London, Connecticut to Cleveland, Ohio. Without GLTMF involvement in the effort, it is unlikely the USCGC MORRO BAY would still be operational and would definitely not be performing a mission it was designed to do – icebreaking.

The fight continues, however, as the nearly 50 percent reduction in icebreaking assets between the U.S. and Canada since 1979 is taking a toll on Great Lakes ports, facilities, and the commercial vessels and their crews. GLMTF continues to advocate for another heavy Great Lakes icebreaker and for transparent USCG icebreaking performance measures. The introduction of the “Great Lakes Winter Commerce Act” in Congress in 2020 and again in 2021 will codify the USCG icebreaking mission into law eliminating any ambiguity in the 1936 Executive Order and will provide the path for clear performance goals which consider the needs of commerce to move critical winter cargoes. No longer will incomplete measurements be used to cover up the icebreaking mission on the Great Lakes which is grossly under resourced. Through the assistance of the steel industry, Great Lakes ports, shoreside and shipboard labor, vessel operators, and the shipbuilding industry, a massive initiative has been underway to educate all Congressional members of the importance of icebreaking on the Great Lakes. With GLMTF in the lead, there is growing optimism that the Great Lakes will finally be a priority for USCG icebreaking.

### THE INTRODUCTION OF THE

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IN CONGRESS IN 2020 AND AGAIN IN 2021

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