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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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November 13, 2006

25767-754

Docket Management Facility (USCG-2006-2567)

U.S. Department of Transportation

Room PL-401

400 7th Street SW

Washington, DC 20590-0001

Docket #25767

On November 3, 2006, I delivered verbal comments at the public meeting held by the Coast Guard in Charlevoix regarding the proposal to establish live fire training zones in the Great Lakes.

Enclosed, please find my comments for submittal to Docket #25767. I appreciate the Coast Guard's consideration of the concerns raised, and look forward to working with the Coast Guard to address these issues.

Sincerely,

BART STUPAK
Member of Congress

BTS/jce

Enclosure

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**Congressman Bart Stupak
Coast Guard Live Fire Hearing
Charlevoix, MI
November 3, 2006**

I would like to thank everyone for attending this evening and providing your comments on this proposal. I am pleased that we were able to convince the Coast Guard to hold a public meeting here in Charlevoix, Michigan.

As the Co-chair of the Northern Border Caucus and founder and Co-chair of the Law Enforcement Caucus, I understand the need for security at our nation's borders. However, with seven proposed zones on Northern Lake Michigan, six zones on Lake Superior, and six on Lake Huron, I have serious concerns regarding the Coast Guard's proposal to establish permanent live gunfire training exercise areas on the Northern Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes are a popular recreational resource. Many Northern Michigan communities depend on access to the Great Lakes for boating, our drinking water, fishing, and other activities.

As I have traveled my district in recent weeks, I have heard from many of my constituents about their questions and concerns about live fire exercises. Only one person has expressed support for the proposal, while many, many more are against it. I am troubled by three major issues regarding the current proposal.

The first issue is the method and limited notice the Coast Guard will provide to the boating public. The Coast Guard's proposal to only notify the public via marine band radio and the federal register shows a bureaucratic mindset that is not in touch with the boating public. This limited notification with little advanced notice of when training exercises will take place, will not be adequate. Because of my concerns regarding the Coast Guard's narrow view of its duty to notify the public, I worked to include a provision in the FY 2007 Homeland Security Appropriations bill (P.L. 109-295) to improve public notification.

Congress expressed their support for expanded public notice when it approved the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bill on September 29, 2006. The President has since signed the bill into law. This legislation included an amendment offered by myself and Rep. Obey stating:

"The conferees are concerned Coast Guard's recent proposal to establish live-fire zones on the Great Lakes was not well-coordinated with the public, and therefore direct Coast Guard to provide public notice of safety zone closures for weapons training beyond just marine band radio to include notices to harbor masters and local media." (House Report 109-699, page 144)

I believe even more notice could be given.

The second major issue of concern that I have is the fact that several of these zones are in high traffic areas and will affect boating, fishing, and other activities on the Great Lakes. Most alarming, one of the zones covers part of the route used by the Beaver Island Ferry. During the summer months, the ferry makes up to four trips each day to the Island and back.

Requiring the Beaver Island Ferry, as well as other boat traffic, to divert their course around the zone will cause the ferry and its passengers unnecessary hardships due to increased fuel costs, travel time, possible higher priced tickets and decreased tourism to the island.

Live fire training zones in popular commercial, recreational, and fishing areas will only increase the interaction between private and commercial vessels with Coast Guard training exercises, further endangering the boating public and merchant mariners.

The third major issue of concern is the potential impact these zones could have on our Great Lakes' environment. I have heard from many area residents who are concerned that these training exercises will result in the addition of approximately 7,000 pounds of lead into our Great Lakes each year. I am not convinced that the affect of 7,000 pounds of lead will be negligible. I request that the Coast Guard conduct additional studies on the consequences of significantly increasing the amount of lead in the Great Lakes before approving this proposal.

The Great Lakes are a national treasure and we must do all we can to limit the introduction of any toxic substances into the lakes. We in the Great Lakes basin rely upon the lakes for our tourism, industry, recreation and drinking water. The introduction of 7,000 pounds of lead would likely not be allowed by any business wishing to discharge such a large amount of heavy metal into our lakes. I don't know why we should allow the Coast Guard to do so. As I have experienced before as a member of the Environment Subcommittee, when a problem has occurred in the past, the military has been very slow to take action to clean up pollution.

While I recognize that training will be necessary for our Coast Guard's men and women to be proficient on their weapons, I feel that 34 zones may not be necessary.

As additional concerns are raised through the public comment process, I encourage the Coast Guard do their due diligence to address these concerns and work to limit problems that may result from the establishment of live fire training zones.

In closing, Northern Michigan residents rely on the Coast Guard to be guardians of the Great Lakes without pollution or disrupting our way of life. I look forward to working with the Coast Guard to address these concerns.