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SENATOR DALE MILLER

23rd Ohio Senate District

Committees:

Environment & Natural Resources
Finance & Financial Institutions
Highways & Transportation
State & Local Government & Veterans Affairs
- Ranking Member

MEMORANDUM

TO: Docket Management Facility
USCG-2006-2567
U. S. Department of Transportation, Room PL-401
400 Seventh Street SW
Washington, DC 20590-0001

USCG-2006-25767-550

FROM: State Senator Dale Miller

RE: United States Coast Guard Safety Zone Proposal

DATE: October 31, 2006

2006 OCT -8 PM 2:39
OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATION
MANAGER

I am writing to express my strong objection to the proposal by the United States Coast Guard to create 34 safety zones for training and testing with live ammunition on the Great Lakes, including four such zones on Lake Erie. I am opposed for the following reasons:

1. The United States and Canada has observed the Rush-Bagot agreement not to arm vessels on the Great Lakes since 1817. This agreement has served both nations well. The safety zone proposal is in violation of the spirit and purpose, if not the letter, of that agreement. Noting that Canadian officials have expressed serious concerns about this proposal, it should be our nation's policy, in cooperation with Canada, to limit military activity on the Great Lakes to the lowest possible level.
2. Live weapons training and testing will damage the environmental quality of the Great Lakes. Of particular concern is the dumping of lead into the Great Lakes. According to a health-risk assessment commissioned by the Coast Guard, the training exercises could dump as much as 6,900 pounds of lead into the Great Lakes each year. Lead is a persistent toxic substance that has cumulative effects from additional discharges. Cleveland already has among the highest levels of lead poisoning in the country. We cannot afford to add any additional lead into our environment. Possible contamination from copper and other chemicals needs further study. I believe that the risk assessment studies completed so far are deficient in that they do not properly account for the fact that significant environmental contamination in the Great Lakes already exists, and any deliberate addition to that contamination would have harmful effects.
3. The proposed safety zones conflict with several major migratory bird routes, and the harm done to birds and other wildlife could be substantial.

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4. I do not believe that this proposal properly qualifies for an exception to the requirement for a full environmental impact statement under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and that it is imperative that such a study be done before a decision is made on this issue.

5. Lake Erie is the shallowest of the Great Lakes, and this fact causes additional environmental problems not shared by the other great lakes. Before any decisions are made on this issue, there needs to be an environmental impact statement or risk assessment study for Lake Erie specifically, as opposed to one in which data for all the Great Lakes are pooled.

6. The proposed safety zones will pose a threat to shipping, fishing, swimming, theme park enjoyment and other recreational and commercial activities on the Great Lakes.

7. The proposed training exercises do not make sense from a risk assessment standpoint. Of course, the possibility cannot be entirely discounted that there could be some kind of terrorist attack on the Great Lakes that could be averted through the enhanced capabilities that the training exercises might create. However, the likelihood of injury and loss of life to both military personnel and innocent civilians through accidents is probably far greater.

8. I believe that there are acceptable alternatives available, including dry land exercises, simulations, and use of existing live fire zones in the Atlantic. I also believe that the coast guard should reconsider whether there is sufficient benefit or advantage involved in arming coast guard vessels beyond the use of M-16 rifles by coast guard personnel.

In conclusion, the Great Lakes are the greatest source of fresh water in the world and an invaluable resource for drinking water, agriculture, commerce, and recreation. This plan would harm the environmental quality of the Great Lakes and threaten the safety and enjoyment of those using the Great Lakes for agricultural, commercial, and recreational purposes. If we allow this to happen, then our enemies will have significantly harmed us without firing a shot. I urge rejection of the safety zone proposal. As a minimum, I urge you to reject the idea that this plan qualifies for an exception to requirements for an environmental impact statement and that you require such statement before any decision is made.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of my concerns on this issue.

Dale Miller