

S²cience

Shipwrecks & Wreck

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Hulls of old wooden ships lie peacefully at the bottom of the Great Lakes, carrying untold stories of lake travel in days past.

They whisper their secrets to people like Louis Twardzik, who are fighting to keep many of the estimated 3,000 Great Lakes shipwrecks preserved for all to enjoy.

Twardzik, a professor of the Department of Parks and Recreation Resources at Michigan State University, talks of areas where clusters of shipwrecks have been declared "underwater preserves" — and of one proposed for an area around the Manitow Islands west of the Leelanau Peninsula along a formerly popular trade route.

Each preserve area covers 100-300 square miles, experts say.

"We've got some famous wrecks," Twardzik said. "There was just so much activity on these lakes during those days. It's the interesting clustering that makes it desirable to preserve these."

MICHIGAN'S COLD, fresh water is a natural preservative for the wrecks, which can decay in ocean salt water, he added. "We have a preservative here they don't have in any other parts of the world. Our wooden ships are preserved."

"That's why we have such a unique opportunity to keep our culture."

Underwater preserves will be the topic of a special segment during Natural Resource Days, part of Agriculture and Natural Resources Week March 24-27 at MSU.

The preserve program is scheduled 4-5 p.m. Wednesday, March 25, at the Hology Center on the university's East Lansing campus, and is open to the public.

It will be preceded by a morning meeting of the Michigan Underwater Salvage Committee comprised of various state-wide groups and agencies, including the state Department of Natural Resources. This committee oversees all "underwater preserve" designations, making recommendations for a joint decision by the DNR and other state agencies.

Westland resident William Kenner is the public represent-

ative sitting on the salvage committee.

He became interested because, as a diver, he wanted to preserve the shipwrecks. "There's a lot of divers that don't like to see wrecks stripped," he said. "I happen to be one of them."

KENNER SAID he is happy with the progress made by the committee — considering there is little funding for Michigan's preserve-movement. "I'm happy," he said. "I don't expect any fast progress on it all."

There are no physical walls around the preserves, Kenner explained. "The preserve in itself is just an artificial entity on paper." Although current legislation affects all the lake bottoms, rules are stricter in the designated preserves, where DNR permits must be pulled before anything can be removed.

Four underwater preserves currently designated in Michigan — in Alpena, the Mackinac Straights, in Michigan's Thumb, at Munising in the Upper Peninsula and one scheduled to be designated at Whitefish Point this year — are different from underwater "parks", which are popular in parts of Japan and in the Virgin Islands.

Parks allow visitors to walk underwater in a structure and view the underwater environment. Preserves such as these in Michigan, are not accessible except to divers. Official "preserve" status keeps people from taking items they might normally remove for keepsakes, Twardzik said.

Although designated a "preserve," each is managed differently depending on the nearby community, Twardzik said, although they do get "minimal" DNR law enforcement. "There's no responsibility for it, and no money. They let the local people do with it as they will."

A local community or group petitions the state salvage committee for a preserve area, and following committee discussions and public hearings a decision is made.

Divers voiced perhaps the most vehement opposition when the state began studying the establishment of preserves in 1972, Twardzik said. Today, they lend the committee support.

Preserves came into being because of scavenging efforts.

"It became blatant in recent years with the increased amounts of divers bring the stuff up . . . making coffee tables or whatever," he said. "It became bad enough that we passed legislation protecting these areas."

SOUTHFIELD RESIDENT Bill Dykman, past president of the Michigan Skin Diving Council, said sentiment in his groups used to run 80 percent in favor of picking over the Great Lakes wrecks.

Today, 80 percent of the diving community want the artifacts saved. When Dykman began diving 28 years ago, scavenging was not the problem it is today.

There are "less and less good wrecks" for divers, according to Bill King who teaches diving for the YMCA in Farmington Hills. "I think you'll find most divers, as I am, for the preserves."

Today's Great Lakes divers police themselves, and local charter companies in the preserve areas watch for foreign boats and unknown divers, he added.

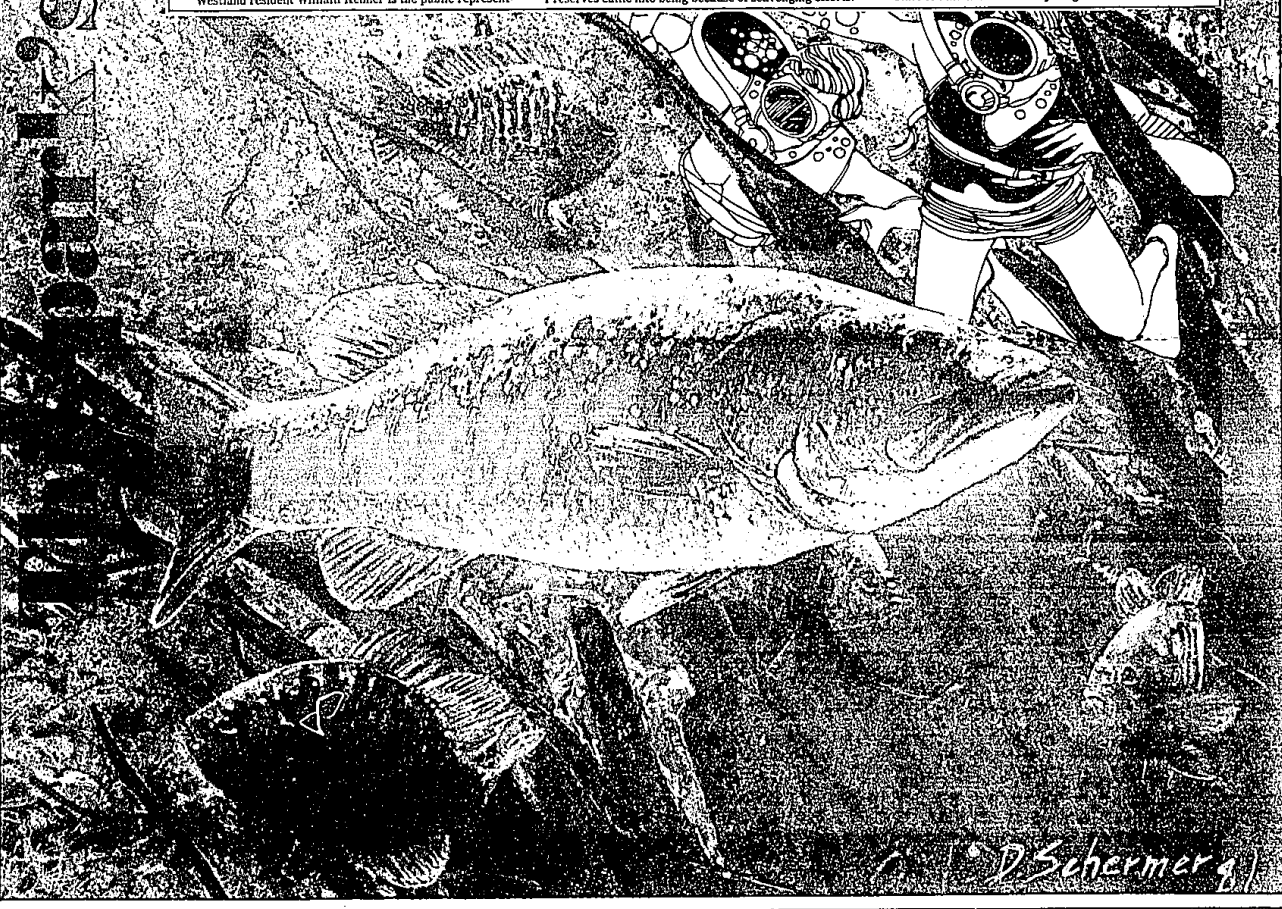
The DNR studied significant Great Lakes shipwrecks in 1972, followed by an individual study in 1976 which showed 28 wrecks in Thunder Bay alone. State legislation allowing underwater preserves was finally passed in 1980.

Michigan's law is the only one in the country that does not restrict a diver's right to participate in the sport, Dykman said. Other states restrict the divers and "divers fight them (the laws) greatly." People have sued claiming that federal admiralty laws supercede the state laws.

To counter these efforts, legislation has been proposed at a national level — still pending after six years — that would give control of all shipwrecks to states with underwater preserve bills.

Despite state legislation and the continued study of wrecks and preserve areas in Michigan, the project still has little coordination and little support, Twardzik contends.

"We have a resource out there that is recognized as being important," he said. "We don't have the necessary leadership — state or national — to do anything about it."



Tax checkoff aids threatened species



By Neal Haldane
staff writer

It's a taxing time for endangered and threatened animals and plants in Michigan.

The state has less than 350 nesting pairs of loons.

The bluebird population is 10 percent of what it was 50 years ago.

And while the bald eagle population has rebounded, only 125 nesting pairs call Michigan home.

Coming to the rescue of these species and others are Michigan residents who allocate a portion of their state income tax refund to the non-game wildlife fund.

In the three previous years, the non-game wildlife checkoff on state tax forms has generated more than \$1 million for the preservation of a variety of animal and plant species, said Dick Lehman of the Department of Natural Resources. He is the

public affairs coordinator for the fund.

"The money is given to species that are in need of special attention," Lehman said. "Without it (the checkoff), we would not have the money to fund these programs."

Taxpayers who have a refund coming can check off line 32b (or 16b on the EZ form) and donate a portion of their refund to the fund. In the past two years, 100,000 Michigan residents have taken part, Lehman said.

"IT'S NOT a unique program to Michigan. There must be 40 other states that have a checkoff program. It's a most convenient way to do it. It's money they might not otherwise miss."

The programs receiving funding cover a wide variety of plant and animal groups, according to Betty Challis of the Michigan Audubon Society.

"For so many years we concentrated on game animals," Challis said about license fees and taxes going to manage animals that are hunted. "Game animals constitute about 6-7 percent of all wildlife."

"It's always been my opinion that it's unhealthy to focus on such a small percentage of wildlife. What we need is a diversity of wildlife," said the Southfield resident who represents the Audubon group on the Michigan Environmental Council.

And the fund is helping preserve that diversity, said Bob Healy, president of the Detroit Audubon Society. "It's a very broad-based environmental activity," Healy said. "There's something for everybody. Somewhere along the line, someone will have an interest."

Locally, Healy said there has been great deal of interest in introducing peregrine falcons in downtown Detroit. The program has already started

in Grand Rapids and this summer will be extended to Detroit, Healy said.

Five young birds will be housed on the Guardian Building in Detroit and will be free to fly and hunt in the downtown area, Lehman said.

"PEOPLE WILL enjoy seeing the birds in flight over the Detroit River — people that might not otherwise get a chance to get in the outdoor world and see that," he said.

Falcons are not the only bird garnering attention. The public is being asked to help encourage bluebirds to nest in the state.

"Certain species seem to generate a great deal of publicity," Healy said. "People have said, 'I haven't seen a bluebird in years.' The bluebird population has decreased because of the increased use of pesticides and the elimination of nesting sites, Lehman said. To counteract the decline, work-

shops have been conducted throughout the state to discuss the bluebird situation and provide information on how to build artificial nesting sites.

Another project receiving funds involves the location and banding of young bald eagles to study the habits and survival rates of the birds.

Loons also are receiving attention as the state attempts to increase their numbers in the northern Lower Peninsula and Upper Peninsula nesting sites.

While the tax checkoff fund has generated needed revenue, there is a problem with coordinating non-game activities with existing state personnel, Challis said.

"One of the biggest flaws in the program is the lack of staff to make the programs work," she said. "You can have lots and lots of projects but if you don't have the staff, they never get off the ground."