



**TESTIMONY OF  
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ON THE  
STATE OF NORTHERN BORDER PREPAREDNESS  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS RESPONSE AND COMMUNICATIONS**

**OCTOBER 28, 2011**

Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished guests. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss homeland security cooperation in the Great Lakes and along the shared maritime border of the United States and Canada.

As Commander of the Ninth Coast Guard District, I oversee Coast Guard operations throughout the Great Lakes region, which includes overseeing four Coast Guard Sector Commands in Buffalo, NY, Detroit, MI, Sault Ste Marie, MI, and Milwaukee, WI, and two Coast Guard Air Stations in Traverse City, MI and Detroit, MI, along with a fleet of nine cutters.

The Ninth Coast Guard District enjoys a unique vantage point with mission responsibility from Lake of the Woods, MI, to Massena, NY. The Great Lakes constitute a diverse and challenging maritime environment that exemplifies the necessity for fully integrated preparedness, response and communications. The Great Lakes first is a salt less and sensitive system; it is shared and seasonally challenging. The Great Lakes are a complex, interconnected and continuous maritime system with a wide range of environments – from open seas much more like oceans than lakes – to narrow rivers challenging even experienced navigators and providing easy border access. More than just an operating environment – the Great Lakes are a unique natural resource, and a bi-national treasure. Together they form the largest fresh water system on earth. With so many dependent on the Great Lakes as a resource, we treat all spills as significant.

The Great Lakes are shared by staunch allies, vital economic partners, and steadfast friends. With roughly ten percent of the U.S. population and more than 30 percent of the Canadian population living in the Great Lakes basin, local issues are often national, and typically bi-national, issues. Roughly 300,000 people and 1.5 billion dollars in trade cross our regional border with Canada each and every day. Once a commercial vessel enters the Great Lakes, it has equal opportunity access to both the United States and Canada. A vessel may cross the border 17 times or more while transiting the Great Lakes. They are shared waters of sovereign nations. Combined with tribal interests, eight states, three Canadian provinces, and hundreds of county and local stakeholders across the region – the jurisdictional complexity is enormous. Combined response protocols and shared capabilities across multiple jurisdictions are a mission necessity. Whether it is bridges, pipelines, power grids, or communication networks – critical infrastructure in the region is shared much more often than it is owned outright by any one state, community, or even nation.

There are few better examples of the shared nature of our maritime infrastructure than in the Detroit-Windsor Corridor. The Detroit River is a critical linkage for the entire Great Lakes system with the majority of foreign and domestic ships either arriving at or passing by the Port of Detroit. This transit corridor for the Great Lakes system supports the movement of more than 106 million tons of commodities between U.S. Great Lakes ports, and 16 million tons in Detroit alone. It accounts for approximately ten percent of all U.S. waterborne domestic traffic. On average, there are 40 daily commercial ship movements in the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers along the international border. These movements occur past and among more than 50 U.S. and Canadian waterfront facilities. Cross-border operations are a daily reality and necessity. The Coast Guard small boat station in Belle Isle – just outside metropolitan Detroit – is only yards away from our border with Canada and they cannot depart their dock without crossing into Canadian waters.

In August, we conducted a full scale exercise in this critical interagency and international waterway. The exercise brought together 70 partner agencies - Federal, State, Local, U.S. and Canadian - to respond to a simulated terrorist attack on a ship on the Detroit River between Detroit, Michigan, and Windsor, Ontario. The scenario, in which many of the 500 passengers were injured and 800,000 gallons of simulated oil were spilled, enabled these agencies to work side-by-side to improve their response and recovery capabilities. This exercise is just one example of the many that we conduct throughout the Great Lakes region, ensuring we and our partners are adequately prepared and can work together to counter the threats we face.

The Great Lakes operating area presents unique seasonal operational challenges. In some cases, borders that normally require a boat to cross can be accessed by vehicle or foot. Waterways that normally flourish with commercial and recreational vessel traffic can become restricted by unrelenting ice, requiring significant effort to keep open. Maritime preparedness and response is a complicated endeavor. It is made more so when that maritime domain becomes impassable by traditional patrol and response assets. When water freezes, oil spill response and recovery, port security patrols and deterrence, search and rescue, small boat, and flight operations all become more difficult.

Coast Guard combines several maritime functions – from regulatory and rescue to security and stewardship into one federal agency. The Coast Guard applies its authorities and allocates resources in a way that reduces risk and provides the level of reliable response our communities expect while ensuring we remain adaptive and flexible to respond to changing risks within an always dynamic maritime environment. The Service succeeds by empowering its people to act – to understand the resources available to them and apply those resources toward maritime risks and requirements.

Seasonal demands and limitations pose a special challenge to mission execution. In the winter, our crews are challenged to sustain qualifications due to ice conditions. There is no other place in the Coast Guard where we expect and train our crews to respond not just on “soft water” but also “hard water.” The Coast Guard must be creative and relentless – and pursue technology where appropriate – to ensure our crews master their respective crafts.

Strategic partnerships are vital component of Coast Guard mission success. The Coast Guard cannot meet every mission priority alone. Our missions demand that we seek out sustainable partnerships at every level of maritime interest. The complexity and shared interests of the Great Lakes region has spurred many longstanding regional partnerships. Such initiatives should be strengthened in order to harmonize mutually supportive goals. And where needed, the Coast Guard should grow new

partnerships. The Coast Guard adds value with our unique combination of maritime authorities and capabilities that can bring civil, law enforcement and military communities together in shared solutions.

Partnerships are particularly important here in the Great Lakes. The U.S. – much less the Coast Guard – does not ‘own’ the entirety of the Great Lakes system in which we operate. The Coast Guard deals with the challenges, complexities, and opportunities of the international border every day and is well suited to help inform national maritime policy with Canada. Successful mission execution in the Great Lakes requires effective bi-national cooperation and governance.

President Obama and Prime Minister Harper recently issued the “Beyond the Border” declaration articulating a shared vision for perimeter security and economic competitiveness. It recognizes the interdependence of our security and economic relationships with Canada. From search and rescue to pollution response and icebreaking – the Coast Guard has solid partnerships and time-tested procedures to work seamlessly with Canada. We need to bring that same collaborative spirit and trust to security and law enforcement concerns.

A number of bilateral initiatives already exist. For example, the Integrated Border Enforcement Team (IBET) remains a critical collaboration mechanism across our shared border with Canada. Each IBET establishes an integrated, bi-national law enforcement capability from both Canada and the United States. These intelligence-led partnerships facilitate information sharing and operational collaboration to detect, deter, and interrupt cross-border threats and criminal enterprises. Of the 15 IBET regions across our shared border, seven are in the Great Lakes area of responsibility. There are five core IBET agencies: the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, U.S. Coast Guard, Canada Border Services Agency, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). These core agencies liaise with provincial, state, and local law enforcement partners to help assure seamless and integrated operations in countering cross-border crime. Similarly, through our partnership with Transport Canada (TC), the Joint Initial Verification Team (JIVT) enables Coast Guard marine inspectors to work alongside TC personnel to visit hundreds of foreign flagged vessels each year in Montreal, Canada. These visits are critical to ensuring regulatory compliance of vessels entering the Great Lakes system.

With 42 federally recognized tribal nations in the eight states that comprise the Great Lakes region, tribal partnerships are indispensable to mission execution. Many of these first nations have a strong maritime heritage and history that we must respect and acknowledge if we are to be successful. I’m especially proud of our efforts to enhance the safety of commercial tribal fishing. We operate together with the Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority (CORA) and Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) to enhance the safety of tribal fishing vessels. CORA and GLIFWC enforcement officers attend Coast Guard fishing vessel safety training and we regularly conduct joint vessel examinations and waterborne patrols.

Similarly, we are continuing work to ensure that the Integrated Cross-border Maritime Law Enforcement Operations framework agreement signed by Secretary Napolitano in 2009 is poised for success upon final approval by Canada’s parliament. Last April, training for Coast Guard and CBP officers also involved the St. Regis Tribal Police Department. Providing law enforcement presence on the Mohawk Akwesasne Reservation along the St. Lawrence River in upstate New York, they are critical partners to ensuring adequate preparedness and response in an area of vital strategic interest to the entire Great Lakes region.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recently promulgated a Maritime Operations Coordination Plan. It builds on the success of Area Maritime Security Committees and creates regional coordination mechanisms – ReCoMs - for the express purpose of enhancing maritime operational coordination. In the Great Lakes, the Coast Guard has already solidified a Great Lakes ReCoM that strengthens partnerships with our DHS peers. It includes the recent renewal and approval of Standard Operating Procedures for Coordinated Air and Maritime Operations throughout the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes ReCoM unifies the effort of the entire Coast Guard Ninth District with the CBP Office of Air and Marine Northern Region, four CBP Border Patrol Sectors, four CBP Offices of Field Operations, and five ICE Homeland Security Investigation (HSI) regions. It is the first time Great Lakes DHS leaders have memorialized such a partnership and provided written guidelines to enhance operational effectiveness irrespective of individual agency boundaries. It will be strengthened in the weeks and months ahead by the involvement of Canadian, State, tribal, and local partners.

Mr. Chairman, there is hard work to be done. But it is work the Coast Guard can and will do to accomplish its mission. That is the true value of the Coast Guard in the Great Lakes and beyond - to apply our unique combination of maritime functions to those duties assigned, build sustainable mission partnerships, and to do so to the very best of our ability every single day. The Coast Guard cannot eliminate every maritime risk. But through the active involvement of hundreds of partners with a stake in the safety, security and stewardship of the maritime domain, the Coast Guard is committed to deter incidents before they happen and ensure the Coast Guard is well-prepared to respond to them should they occur.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.