

Scuba Diving: OPPORTUNITIES FOR LAKE HURON



FINGER LAKES SCUBA

The southern Lake Huron coast is a fantastic setting for outdoor exploration. Promoting the region’s natural assets can help build vibrant communities and support local economies. This series of fact sheets profiles different outdoor recreation activities that could appeal to residents and visitors of Michigan’s Thumb. We hope this information will help guide regional planning, business development and marketing efforts throughout the region. **Here we focus on scuba diving – providing details on what is involved in the sport, who participates, and what is unique about diving in Lake Huron.**

WHY DIVE IN LAKE HURON?

With wildlife, shipwrecks, clear water and nearshore dives, the waters of southern Lake Huron create a unique environment for scuba divers. Underwater life abounds, including colorful sunfish and unusual species like the longnose gar. The area offers a large collection of shipwrecks, and is home to two of Michigan’s 12 underwater preserves. Many of the wrecks are in close proximity to each other and are easily accessed by charter or private boat. The fresh water of Lake Huron helps to preserve the wrecks better than saltwater, and the lake’s clear water offers excellent visibility – often up to 50 feet! With many shipwrecks at different depths, the area offers dives for recreational as well as technical divers.

How Popular is Scuba Diving?

In 2010, 2.7 million Americans went scuba diving at least once, but the number of people with dive certifications is substantially higher. In Michigan, 3 percent of households participated in scuba diving and owned scuba gear in 2007. Scuba is also popular around the globe. The Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), one of two major certification agencies, certifies close to 1 million new divers each year worldwide.

Like many activities that require specialized equipment, participation in scuba diving has declined in recent years. According to one study from 2010, the number of people in the U.S. who participate in Scuba diving at least once per year has decreased by 37 percent since 2001. However, worldwide, the number of new people becoming certified by PADI has remained fairly steady over the past 10 years.

Who Scuba Dives?

A snapshot of U.S. divers:

- **Participation:** 32% of divers make more than eight dives per year.
- **Gender:** 72% are male.
- **Age:** 57% are 35 years old or over.
- **Income:** 65% have a household income of at least \$75,000 per year.
- **Education:** 59% have a college degree or higher.
- **Geography:** 12.2% live in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio or Wisconsin.

Economic Impact

Few reliable studies have measured the economic impact of scuba divers. The best studies are dated and provide a large spending range. Although not perfect, they can be used to create a general picture of spending behavior.

- In 1996, scuba diving had grown to a \$2.6 billion industry in the U.S., with \$650 million spent annually on equipment and the rest spent on trips (travel, lodging, dining, boat hire, etc.).

- Scuba diving in New York’s Great Lakes region stimulated more than \$108 million in spending in 1999. That breaks down to:
 - \$47 million on diving-related expenditures, which tends to be spent close to home.
 - \$61 million trip-related expenses such as boat and auto fuel, food and lodging.
- How much money individual divers spend on trips depends on local prices, the type of boat used, distance to dive sites, and whether divers are from out of town. Table 1 summarizes spending estimates conducted between 1996 and 2003, using 2005 dollars.

TABLE 1. DAILY DIVE-RELATED SPENDING

State	Resident	Non-resident
Texas	\$206 - 268	\$216 - 319
Florida	\$40 - 74	\$80 - 104
California	\$76 - 273	

Source: Pendleton and Rooke 2006

RECREATION PROFILE: Scuba Diving



Why do People Scuba Dive?

A survey of U.S. divers in 1999 identified some of the most common reasons for scuba diving:

- Viewing underwater animal and plant life.
- Exploration and adventure.
- To learn about underwater environments.
- To develop diving skills.
- Relaxation and change from everyday life.
- To see historic ship wrecks.
- Social interaction.
- Personal challenge and fitness.

What Other Activities do Scuba Divers Enjoy?

A recent study estimated the percentage of U.S. divers that participate in other activities:

- Snorkeling 54%
- Running/jogging 40%
- Road bicycling 38%
- Camping 34%
- Freshwater fishing 33%
- Hiking 30%
- Wildlife viewing 24%
- Sailing 22%
- Camping (RV) 21%
- Kayaking (recreational) 15%
- Kayaking (sea/touring) 7%

Some people in the dive industry believe that “Scuba is the new yoga.” Diving shares some similarities with yoga, which could be used to promote the sport for stress relief.

- The body is more relaxed underwater in a gravity-free environment.
- Both activities focus on slow breathing.
- The only noise you generally hear underwater is the sound of your breath.



Fish

SEEN ON LAKE HURON DIVES

Bass: Rock, Smallmouth, White, Largemouth

Bluegill Sunfish

Brook Silverside

Burbot

Catfish: Brown Bullhead, Channel

Chubs: Horny Headed, Creek

Darters: Blackside, Rainbow

Longnose Gar

Muskellunge

Mottled Sculpin

Northern Pike

Perch: Log, Yellow, White

Round Goby

Salmon: Chinook, Coho, Pink

Shiners: Emerald, Spottail

Stickleback: Brook, Nine Spine

Suckers: Black Buffalo, Longnose, Northern Hog, Red Horse, White

Trout: Rainbow, Brown, Steelhead

Trout Perch

Walleye

Whitefish

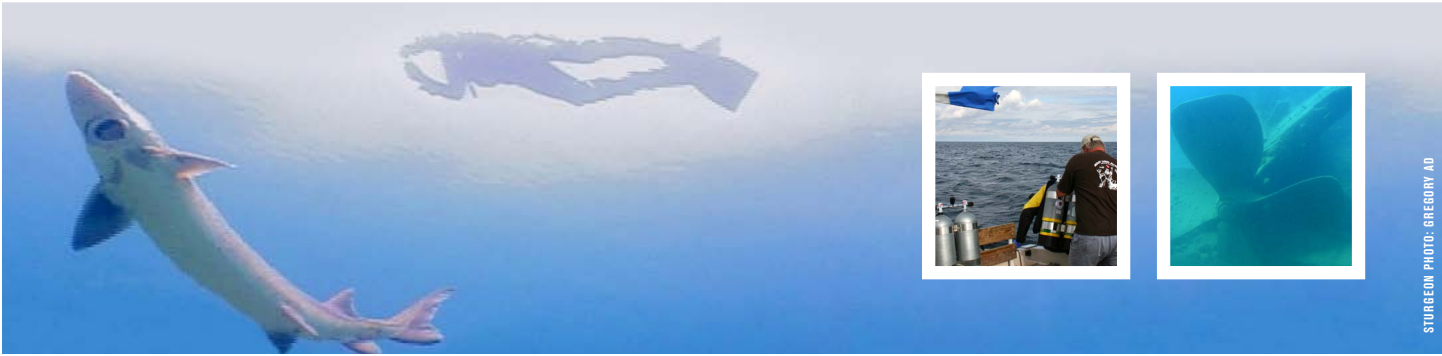
Canadian Freshwater Scuba Diving

A recent study surveyed Canadians who went freshwater snorkeling or diving during trips between 2005 and 2007. These divers and snorkelers tended to be affluent, male (62%) and young to middle-aged. Most were young singles, young couples or mature families (with teenage children). Canadian freshwater scuba divers travel extensively throughout Canada, as well as the U.S., Mexico and the Caribbean, most often staying in campgrounds or coastal resorts.

This group of divers is more likely than the average Canadian pleasure traveler to participate in several other outdoor activities. They are active in skilled and strenuous activities both while

traveling and at home. They also pursue more cultural and entertainment activities in a typical year and are especially likely to attend sporting events and live art performances, and take part in educational participatory activities while on trips.

Like most vacationers, these scuba divers take vacations to relax and take a break from their day-to-day environment. Compared to other pleasure travelers, scuba divers are more likely to seek out vacations that offer novelty, are intellectually stimulating, are physically challenging and enrich their family relationships.



STURGEON PHOTO: GREGORY AD

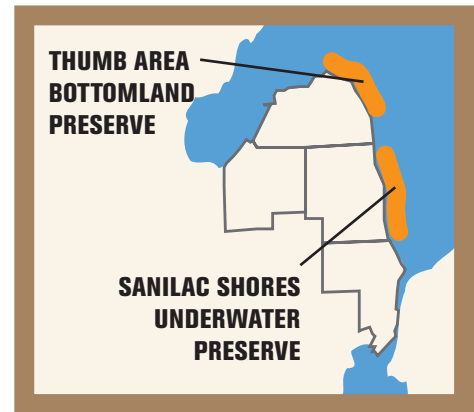
DIVE OPPORTUNITIES IN SOUTHERN LAKE HURON

SANILAC SHORES UNDERWATER PRESERVE

Some of the most exciting and accessible shipwreck diving in Michigan can be found within this 163 square mile area in Lake Huron. Most ships are still intact and offer unparalleled exploration for both the recreational and technical diver. Seventeen different shipwrecks are in the preserve, including seven in waters less than 60 feet deep.

- **REGINA:** a 250-foot steel package freighter that sank during the Great Storm of 1913 and became one of the most famous wrecks in Lake Huron. The vessel is upside down and rests in 80 feet of water.
- **SPORT:** a 57-foot, steel-hulled tugboat that sank in the storm of December 1920. Michigan's first underwater historical marker was placed here to represent its significance.
- **CHECOTAH:** a schooner that sank while being towed in 1906. Advanced divers are able to see many historical artifacts.
- **NEW YORK:** a steamer that sank in rough seas of 1876. This advanced dive is especially interesting because of the vessel's oscillating steam engines.

- **PHILADELPHIA:** a 236-foot steamer that sank after a collision with the Albany (a 267-foot steel steamer) in 1893. The ship is mostly intact and rests in 130 feet of water.
- **CHICKAMAUGA:** a double-deck schooner, 322-foot long, rests a half-mile east of the Harbor Beach harbor and is a popular site for less experienced divers.
- **JOHN MCGEAN:** a large steel freighter, which went missing after the Great Storm of 1913. It now lies upside down in 195 feet of water.



Two of Michigan's 12 underwater preserves – the Sanilac Shores and Thumb Area preserves – are located off the coast of the Thumb.

The Great Storm of 1913

One of the most destructive natural disasters ever to hit the Great Lakes occurred in November 1913, often referred to as the “Big Blow” or the “Freshwater Fury.” The storm was a blizzard with hurricane-force winds up to 80 mph, created by two emerging arctic storm fronts and the lakes’ warm waters. Historically this was the longest storm of its magnitude, lasting four days. The storm resulted in 250 known deaths and up to 19 shipwrecks. Lake Huron was hit the worst with swirling snow, hurricane-speed winds, and devouring waves. The snowfall paralyzed Lake Huron’s coast, leaving snowdrifts up to 4 feet deep.

During the storm, eight large lake freighters sank, taking their entire crews with them. The wrecks include: Argus, James Carruthers, Hydrus, John A. McGean, Charles S. Price, Regina, Isaac M. Scott, Wexford. Many of these have become popular dive sites.

THUMB AREA BOTTOMLAND PRESERVE

The preserve was established in 1984 and covers approximately 276 square miles of lake-bottom extending from near Port Austin to near Harbor Beach. Weather systems from Saginaw Bay and Lake Huron collide at the tip of Michigan’s Thumb, causing many vessels to sink in this area. The preserve includes 19 major shipwrecks and likely many unknown wrecks, most of which are in deep waters (100-200 feet).

BEGINNER DIVES, DEPTHS AND NEAREST TOWN

Charles A. Street	10 Ft.	Forestville
Marquis	15 Ft.	Port Hope
Sweetheart	20 Ft.	Port Huron
Eliza H. Strong	22 Ft.	Lexington
Chickamauga	32 Ft.	Harbor Beach
John Breeden	45 Ft.	Lexington
Queen City	45 Ft.	Port Huron
Sport	45 Ft.	Lexington
F.B. Gardner	55 Ft.	Port Sanilac

ADVANCED DIVES, DEPTHS AND NEAREST TOWN

City of Genoa	64 Ft.	Port Huron
Charles S. Price	75 Ft.	Port Huron
Regina	77 Ft.	Lexington
Col. A. B. Williams	80 Ft.	Forestville
Mary Alice B	92 Ft.	Port Sanilac
North Star	96 Ft.	Port Sanilac
Canestio	98 Ft.	Lexington
Goliath	104 Ft.	Harbor Beach

RECREATION PROFILE: Scuba Diving



MORE ABOUT THE SPORT OF DIVING

Dive Equipment and Charters

Scuba diving requires specialized equipment for breathing underwater, controlling buoyancy and maintaining body heat. Most dive shops offer a full range of rental equipment. Scuba gear can be rented in Port Sanilac, Port Huron and a variety of shops in southeast Michigan. Out-of-town divers often charter a dive boat, which can help them safely locate shipwrecks. Dive charters leave from Grindstone City, Harbor Beach, Port Sanilac and Lexington, charging \$85-100 for a half day, two-dive trip.

Scuba Certification

PADI and NAUI (National Association of Underwater Instructors) are the leading agencies for scuba diving certification. Certification from either agency is widely recognized nationally and internationally. Certification is for life, but many charter boats, resorts and shops ask divers to show proof of recent activity with a logbook. A number of dive centers in Port Huron and southeast Michigan offer of certification classes.

The most common certification is open water, which trains people to dive in waters up to 60 feet deep through a series of classroom lessons and practice dives in pools and lakes. Advanced open water certification enables divers to go down to 100 feet. There is also a wide range of specialized dive certifications for rescue, wreck, deep, technical, night and river diving.

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Michigan Dive Businesses, including: Gregory AD and Go with the Flow Productions, Four Fathoms Dive Charter; Explorer Charters; The Great Lakes Diver; All Seasons Diving Company, Dive Inn Watersports

The Southern Lake Huron Assessment is evaluating potential opportunities for the coastal region of Michigan's Thumb.

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