

# Great Lakes Maritime Strategy



A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE  
U.S. COAST GUARD ON THE GREAT LAKES  
JANUARY 2023



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# Overview and Purpose

The United States Coast Guard is a multi-mission federal agency, one of the nation's armed services and the largest component of the Department of Homeland Security. Over the past 233 years, the Coast Guard and its predecessors merged or absorbed other agencies' missions, authorities and statutory requirements with its own.



The resulting amalgam of civil and military responsibilities, coupled with a diverse fleet of cutters, boats and aviation resources guided by an extensive command and control network, empowers the Coast Guard to protect the American public, maintain and secure our maritime equities, and preserve our marine environment.

The fundamental concepts that authorize and guide our actions in support of national objectives are provided by a set of national, Department of Homeland Security and Coast Guard plans, strategies and policies addressing the full spectrum of our principal, supportive and contingency operations.

The Coast Guard Ninth District's Great Lakes Maritime Strategy (GLMS) serves as a bridge between these broad national instruments of policy and doctrine, and the operational objectives of the Coast Guard's Ninth District, ensuring the safety, security and stewardship of the Great Lakes system as detailed in the Strategy's accompanying Vision Statement.

Most importantly, the GLMS puts forth six Strategic Priorities to inform and guide the Ninth District staff and field commands as they execute their daily missions on the Great Lakes meeting the unique challenges posed by its shared, seasonal and freshwater operating environment.

The GLMS is a dynamic, adaptive document. It provides a three-to-five-year framework and can be updated as necessary based on new and emerging threats or technologies. The Strategic Priorities will be incorporated into the annual Ninth District Operational Planning Direction for use by its major commands.

In addition to its internal use by the Coast Guard's Ninth District, the Strategy provides valuable information on the Coast Guard's roles and missions to our stakeholders who include: the general public, our elected Congressional Members, our U.S. and Canadian partner agencies, Tribal members, representatives of the maritime industry and other users of the Great Lakes and its marine transportation system.

The Ninth District's Coast Guard family, constituted by the men and women of our regular, reserve, civil servant, and auxiliary forces, is particularly well suited to serve and safeguard this critically important border region. The Coast Guard's multi-mission competencies and capabilities deliver tremendous value to the American public and its maritime interests on the Great Lakes.





# Economically & Environmentally Critical Region for U.S. & Canada

As the shared internal waters of two sovereign nations, the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway system are one of the most unique bodies of water in the world.



The region is characterized by its fresh water, its diverse communities, its domestic and international marine trade, and its immense recreational boating population. The Great Lakes Basin is governed by two nations, eight states, three provinces, numerous First and Tribal nations and hundreds of local communities. It is equally and passionately represented by multiple entities including commercial, industrial, recreational and environmental interests.

## Shared and Interconnected System of Binational Importance

The U.S. - Canadian maritime border environment includes shared transportation systems along a contiguous body of water that is a vital artery to the economies of both countries. The entirety of Great Lakes maritime border encompassing 1,500 miles is equivalent to the southwest border between Brownsville, Texas and San Diego, California.

This continuous, interconnected, and interdependent system shared by both countries, grants access to a wide variety of commercial and recreational vessels. Upon entering the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway system, a foreign-flagged commercial vessel may cross between U.S. and Canadian waters as many as 22 times while transiting the entire marine transportation system. Once a vessel is in the system, it has equal opportunity access to both countries.

As North America's industrial heartland, the Great Lakes region is the economic center of gravity for the U.S. and Canada and a major contributor to our respective economic strengths and health.

It supports not only a critical economic highway of agriculture, industrial and manufacturing goods but also a multi-billion-dollar outdoor recreation and

tourism industry. The Great Lakes also are home to a world-class fishing industry, valued at \$7 billion a year, with an estimated 180 species of native fish. The region's four-season climate, uniquely influenced by the Great Lakes, supports boating, fishing, diving, swimming, and other watercraft businesses are growing across the Great Lakes with significant numbers of new entities in urban and suburban locations.



It is a region of binational importance that has been the focus of significant international and domestic attention for more than a century. This reality requires a shared governance of the system as a whole.

## Diverse, Sensitive and Seasonal Environment

The Ninth District area of responsibility includes the federal navigable waters of the eight Great Lakes states and a diverse set of connecting waterways, including portions of the St. Lawrence Seaway, boundary lakes in Minnesota, parts of the Western Rivers and its tributaries, the New York State Barge Canal and historically navigable inland bodies of waters in many states. It consists of more than 6,700 miles of U.S. shoreline encompassing 86 counties along the shores.



The Great Lakes - the largest group of freshwater lakes on Earth - are true wonders of the world. They hold 21 percent of the entire world's surface freshwater, 84 percent of what is accessible in North America, and 95 percent of the supply in the United States. If spread evenly across the continental U.S., the six quadrillion gallons of precious freshwater they contain would cover the country in more than nine feet of water. The Lakes serve as a source of drinking water for more than 35 million citizens of the U.S. and Canada.

The sand dunes, coastal marshes, rocky shorelines, lake plain wet prairies, savannas, forests, fens, wetlands, and other Great Lakes landscapes contain globally unique and sensitive ecosystems that sustain a wealth of biological diversity. The region is home to more than 40 plant and animal species found nowhere else in the world and over 200 globally rare plants and animals.

The seasonal nature of the area of responsibility, including ice and sometimes harsh winter conditions, poses additional challenges to executing the Coast Guard's statutory mission mandates. The cyclic training and equipment preparations for the "soft" and "hard" water seasons continually test our personnel with different sets of operating conditions and their attendant risks.



The arrival of ice creates challenges in waterways management, aids to navigation, ice breaking, ice rescue and cross-border security like no other place in the Coast Guard.

### Did you know?

- Canada and the U.S. are the world's largest trading partners, to the tune of about \$1.7B in daily two-way trade.
- The Great Lakes region accounts for over 60% of the total U.S. and Canada two-way trade.
- Half of Canada's 20 largest ports are part of the Great Lakes Seaway system. On average, these ports handle 40% of Canada's total marine trade.
- If the Great Lakes region was its own nation, it would host the third largest economy in the world, just behind the United States and China.
- The Great Lakes support 1.5 million jobs and \$62 billion in wages annually.

## Did you know?

- The Great Lakes — Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie and Ontario — and their connecting channels form the largest fresh surface water system on earth.
- Nearly 25 percent of Canadian agricultural production and 7 percent American farm production are located in the Great Lakes basin.
- More than 35 million people live in the Great Lakes basin - roughly 10 percent of the U.S. population and more than 30 percent of the Canadian population.
- Covering more than 94,000 square miles and draining more than twice as much land, the water in these freshwater seas, if spread evenly across the contiguous 48 states, would be about 9.5 feet deep.
- From Lakes Ontario, the water from the Great Lakes flows through the St. Lawrence River all the way to the Atlantic Ocean, about 1,000 miles away.

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The Great Lakes are bodies of fresh water that are truly “Great.” When stacked end-for-end along the eastern seaboard, they stretch from New York to Florida. Thinking of them merely as “lakes” belies their size and complexity as well as the threats and challenges they present to those involved with their ensuring their safety, security and stewardship.

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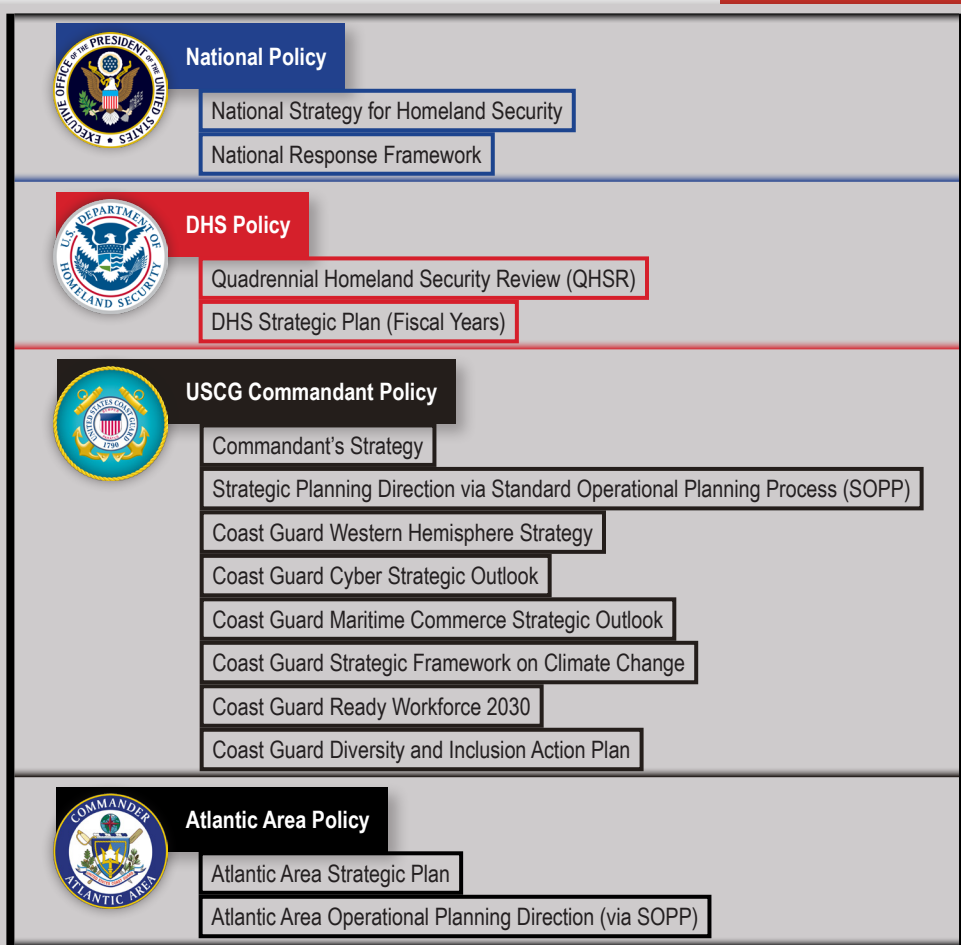


# Strategic Context and Guidance

The Ninth District arrived at our current organization, arrangement of forces and mission set through a long legacy of statutory mandates, customer and stakeholder requirements, external influences and evolving priorities based on opportunities and in response to challenges.

Additionally, an array of national, Departmental and Coast Guard strategy documents, doctrine and analyses inform and guide our current actions, establish priorities and commitments, and identify future areas of emphasis.

In addition to these principal documents which frame our strategic, operational and resource decision-making, our core values of **Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty** form the foundation upon which we perform our work, conduct ourselves and execute missions.



## Vision

We will maintain and safeguard the Great Lakes system and the commercial and recreational users that depend on it through the collaborative pursuit of safety, security and stewardship.



# Coast Guard Missions

The Coast Guard's diverse set of missions are regularly executed in the Ninth District to support our country's enduring maritime interests on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway.

We have a long legacy of marine safety, ice breaking, search and rescue, maritime law enforcement and border security missions. These missions protect those on the Great Lakes, protect us from threats delivered by the maritime mode and protect the Great Lakes and Seaway itself.

Our military, multi-mission, maritime force offers a unique blend of law enforcement, humanitarian, regulatory, maritime security and diplomatic capabilities. These capabilities support our three broad roles: **maritime safety**, **maritime security** and **maritime stewardship**.

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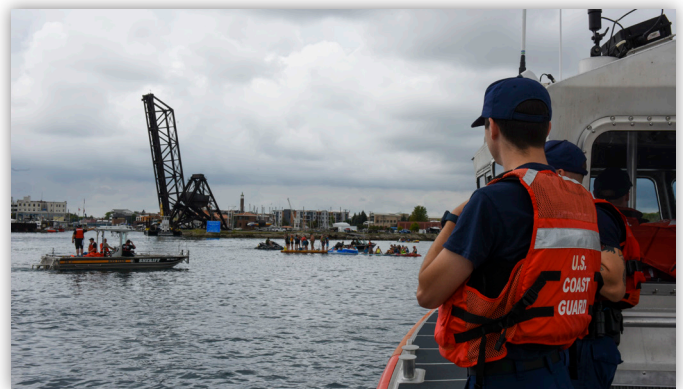
## Maritime Safety

A fundamental responsibility of our government is to safeguard the lives and safety of its citizens. The Coast Guard, in partnership with other federal, Canadian, state, tribal governments and agencies and with the assistance of the commercial and recreational users of the Great Lakes, ensures safety in the maritime domain through marine safety and search and rescue.

The **Marine Safety** mission seeks to improve maritime safety through a prevention program designed to address vessel lifesaving, firefighting, structural, stability, and navigational standards. This is achieved by conducting regulatory inspections aboard commercial vessels, educating the public on recreational boating safety and investigating marine casualties providing feedback for the regulatory process. Elements of this program require collaboration with Transport Canada and the St. Lawrence Seaway Corporations. Additionally, merchant marine credentialing ensures operators and crew are certified for their positions.

The **Search and Rescue** (SAR) mission has a long and proud heritage here on the Great Lakes, first prosecuted by the legacy U.S. Lifesaving Service beginning in the 1870s. When mariners find themselves in harm's way, a response from our strategically placed stations is quickly dispatched

under the command and control of one of our four Sector Commands. The U.S. Coast Guard and Canadian Coast Guard regularly assist each other by utilizing the nearest or most capable resource depending on the nature of the distress and its location.



The SAR mission minimizes the loss of life, injury, and property damage or loss on the Great Lakes by conducting search planning, coordinating SAR response and locating and rescuing mariners in distress. In the Ninth District, our small boat crews and aviators train so they are ready to deploy in "soft water" during the summer months. During the winter, when "hard water" exists, our Coast Guardsmen and women must be ready to apply a different set of skills and types of rescue equipment during SAR operations on the ice-covered lakes and rivers.

## Maritime Security

Maritime law enforcement and border control are some of the oldest missions of the Coast Guard and our predecessor agencies. Non-compliant vessel use of force tactics were bred on the Great Lakes during prohibition when rum runners took advantage of the Great Lakes geography to move illegal contraband.

An extensive 1,500-mile-long maritime border continues to present a conduit for the movement of illegal products, drugs and people, necessitating a narcotic, human smuggling and migrant interdiction mission on most of the lakes. Since the September 2001 attacks on our country, Coast Guard security resources and authorities protect us from threats delivered by the maritime mode through our ports, waterways and coastal security mission.



The **Drug Interdiction** mission reduces the supply of illegal narcotics to the U.S. by disrupting the maritime flow of illegal drugs. Interdiction and seizure of smuggling vessels carrying narcotics and other illegal contraband takes place along the maritime border, especially at chokepoints and where transits are short. The Ninth District relies on joint, interagency, and international partnerships and the intelligence community to conduct drug interdiction.

The **Migrant and Human Smuggling Interdiction** mission enforces U.S. immigration laws and international conventions against human smuggling through interdiction. Like drug smuggling, illegal migration and human smuggling on the lakes takes place where transit zones are short and unmonitored. The Coast Guard accomplishes this

mission in conjunction with other Federal, state, Tribal and local agencies, including U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, and the Department of State. During the winter season, the formation of ice can further facilitate the movement of drugs and humans across the border at certain locations.



The **Ports, Waterways, and Coastal Security** (PWCS) mission protects people and property in the Great Lakes marine transportation systems (MTS) by preventing, disrupting, and responding to terrorist attacks, sabotage, espionage, or subversive acts. Activities under PWCS include preparedness planning and exercises, initiatives to enhance the resilience of MTS including critical infrastructure and key resources, the execution of anti-terrorism and counterterrorism activities, and initial recovery efforts after attacks. The Coast Guard's Sector Commanders, serving as the Federal Maritime Security Coordinators, ensure their region's Area Maritime Security Plan is maintained and the requirements of the industry's Vessel and Facility Security Plans are enforced. PWCS especially relies upon the Coast Guard's broad authorities and long-standing partnerships with governmental, maritime industry, and international partners.





# Maritime Stewardship

The maritime environment of the Great Lakes region is the largest and one of the most valuable freshwater resources on Earth. In addition to providing drinking water to more than 35 million citizens of the U.S. and Canada, it is also a region of extraordinary recreational activity, viable commercial and recreational fisheries and serves as an efficient transportation mode vital to our two countries' economies. Our stewardship role has expanded to include enforcing laws intended to protect the environment for the common good.

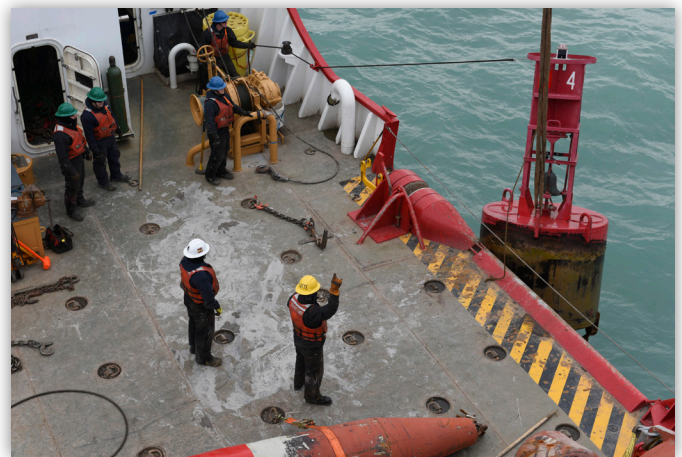
The Coast Guard helps preserve the Great Lakes' **Living Marine Resources** through the protection of sensitive marine habitats, sanctuaries and endangered species. The Coast Guard's efforts ensure the sustainability of the fish stocks for the vibrant recreational fishing business and a small but important commercial fishing industry sector. Furthermore, our highly effective bi-national ballast water enforcement program has greatly reduced the risk of the introduction of aquatic nuisance species through ballast water discharge.



The **Marine Environmental Protection (MEP)** mission includes planning, preparations, and operations to prevent, enforce, investigate, respond to, and mitigate the threat, frequency, and consequences of oil discharges and hazardous substance releases in U.S. waters. This mission includes distinct but complementary functions across the prevention, preparedness, and response spectrum.

Under the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan, the Coast Guard is the predesignated Federal On-Scene Coordinator for oil and hazardous substance incidents in Great Lakes waters. In addition to developing local contingency plans with the states and broader regional plans with the Environmental Protection Agency and Canadian Coast Guard, we are responsible for coordinating effective response operations to all-hazards in the maritime domain.

We regularly exercise these plans with a diverse group of government and commercial entities and potentially affected stakeholders to ensure our readiness and maintain our response competencies.



The Coast Guard's support to the Great Lakes Marine Transportation System through its fixed and floating **Short-Range Aids to Navigation System** is vital to the national economies of the U.S. and Canada and the billions dollars of business that takes place between the world's two biggest trading partners. We work closely with the Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. and Canadian St. Lawrence Seaway Corporations as we facilitate the safe and efficient movement of commerce.

This economic highway on the Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway is a complex system that relies upon our short-range aids to navigation, navigation schemes and standards, support for mapping and charting, pilotage information and vessel traffic services. The recreational users of the waterways benefit from these services as well. We also ensure





any bridges on the lakes or connecting waterways will not impede the flow of marine traffic.

In the wintertime, our fleet of domestic icebreakers joins Canadian Coast Guard ice-breaking ships on our interconnecting waterways ensuring ships transporting the critical energy, construction and other bulk commodities vital to our two countries' economics continue to move as the lakes freeze over.

The Coast Guard's ability to ensure maritime safety, security, and stewardship makes us truly a unique instrument of national strategy. We not only safeguard our Great Lakes and the maritime community, we safeguard our economic prosperity.



## Principles of Coast Guard Operations

The Principles of Coast Guard operations complement the Department of Defense's Principles of Joint Operations and accommodate the distinctions between war-fighting and law enforcement and security operations. These principles apply across the full range of missions:

- Clear Objective
- Effective Presence
- Unity of Effort
- On-Scene Initiative
- Flexibility
- Managed Risk
- Exercise Restraint

The Great Lakes Maritime Strategy's vision for the Ninth District is executed through the conduct of Coast Guard missions with areas of emphasis and opportunity categorized across six Strategic Priorities. These priorities include distinct activities and emerging issues as well as reiteration of the keenly important emphasis placed on operational performance and readiness.

Ninth District staff and field commands must pursue these Strategic Priorities, and their respective Tasks, in the daily execution of their missions. All or some of these Strategic Priorities will be incorporated in the annual Ninth District Operational Planning Direction to further inform the Major Commands in the development of their operational and planning documents.



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## 1. Ensure Preparedness for Emerging Threats and Challenges

The Great Lakes have historically served as a catalyst for innovation and, as result, borne witness to a variety of revolutions across the environment. With ingenuity and progress comes the need to predict, prevent and mitigate the impacts new threats and challenges may bring. To this end, the Ninth District will prioritize efforts in order to:

- a. Maintain preparedness to respond to all threats and hazards in the maritime environment.
- b. Continue to support research, development and deployment of aerial and underwater remotely operated systems and other technologies to support Ninth District's mission set.
- c. Ensure coordination with regional partners in the prevention of aquatic nuisance species introductions via the maritime mode.

## 2. Enhance Cooperation and Stakeholder Relationships

This region benefits from the strong bonds forged between stakeholders serving in the public and private sectors, and these unique relationships have been at the forefront of the success, adaptability and cordiality enjoyed in the Great Lakes maritime region. Continued deliberate collaboration will further galvanize the reach and impact of these interactions and the Coast Guard will actively work to:

- a. Leverage partnerships to enhance safety and security for the shared border.
- b. Collaborate with Canadian, Tribal, federal, state, local and industry stakeholders to bolster regional all-hazards response capabilities, create a seamless interface for holistic maritime domain awareness and prevent a transportation security incident.
- c. Focus joint contingency planning, drills and exercises on mass rescues, security incidents, worst case and most probable discharges of oil or releases of hazardous substances into the Great Lakes.



### 3. Maintain the Safe, Secure and Efficient Usage of the Great Lakes Marine Transportation System

As a system of interconnected, binational waterways, the Great Lakes are enjoyed by a wide variety of commercial, recreational and governmental enterprises daily. From small streams and rivers to the open water and depths of the lakes themselves, careful attention and management is needed to allow for safe and equitable access to these reaches by interests that are sometimes competing in nature or intent. To particular focus, the Ninth District will:

- a. In collaboration with Canada, execute prevention and response initiatives that ensure safe navigation, enhance vessel safety and minimize adverse effects upon the marine environment.
- b. Prepare for increase in waterways management activities associated with growth in vessel traffic, wind farms and autonomous vessels.
- c. Increase and improve methods of informing mariners of navigational hazards and changes to aids ensuring timely and clear communications.
- d. Develop and implement a recreational boating safety strategy focused on boater education, shared use of waterways with commercial users of confined waterways and enforcement of standards and regulations.



### 4. Protect the Cyberspace of the Great Lakes Marine Transportation System

The challenges presented by the confluence of technologies and information in cyberspace are myriad. While the regimes managing many of these interactions, and those who may seek to exploit them, may exist outside of the Coast Guard's span of control, the Ninth District will be vigilant to:

- a. Implement cybersecurity regulatory requirements and facilitate industry compliance.
- b. Collaborate with the maritime industry and regional committees to develop or enhance cybersecurity plans and exercises to detect, respond to, and recover from cybersecurity risks that may cause transportation security incidents.
- c. Increase familiarity and expertise of Ninth District personnel with cybersecurity aspects of Coast Guard missions, including enhancement of operational readiness to identify cyber incidents within the MTS and employ optimal response resources.

## 5. Optimize Mission Readiness and Execution

The professional men and women of the Coast Guard deserve the highest levels of support and training we can provide to ensure they are able to safely and effectively accomplish every mission as well as adjust to the diverse elements framed in the other Strategic Priorities captured herein. As such, it is of equal importance and priority that the Ninth District:

- a. Ensure our personnel are well-trained, proficient and properly equipped for every mission across all seasons and share ice rescue and vessel inspection training opportunities with partners.
- b. Ensure our personnel possess the strength of spirit that enables members to accomplish the mission with honor.
- c. Support implementation of enterprise-wide diversity and inclusion initiatives.

## 6. Ensure Support for Shore Infrastructure, Operational Resources and Personnel

Our Ninth District staff and field units need adequate facilities and sufficient resources to successfully execute their assigned mission sets. Coast Guard members and their families deserve the full suite of health, safety and welfare programs available from the Mission Support organization and, as such the Ninth District, Base and Civil Engineering Unit Cleveland will:

- a. Ensure appropriate allocation of resources to meet emergent response requirements.
- b. Increase resiliency at shore facilities and other infrastructure for climate change impacts.
- c. Support members' and families' medical readiness, resiliency, work-life balance and career education and progression.
- d. Optimize shore portfolio and recapitalize aging infrastructure and assets.
- e. Support and augment Coast Guard recruiting and retention programs.





# Great Lakes Maritime Strategy Governance

Primary ownership and governance of the Great Lakes Maritime Strategy (GLMS) lies with Ninth District staff. Annually, the District Senior Leadership Group (DSL), the District's Division Officers and field commanders will review the GLMS to both validate the Strategic Priorities and their respective Tasks and assess the implementation progress of the Tasks as applicable. Relevant measures for the Tasks can be developed and monitored as appropriate. Changes, additions or deletion to the Strategic Priorities and Tasks can be recommended during this annual review.

As previously mentioned, the Strategic Priorities and their Tasks will be incorporated into the Ninth District's Operational Planning Direction (OPD). These priorities, coupled with other guidance in the OPD, provides overarching direction for operations within the Ninth District. Any approved modifications to the GLMS' Strategic Priorities or Tasks proposed by the DSL will be incorporated into the current OPD until the next iteration of the GLMS is promulgated.

In addition to the annual highlights from our field units, the GLMS Annual Report will include a report on the progress and events related to the Strategic Priorities and their Tasks.









**The last thing an explorer arrives at is a complete map that will cover the whole ground he has traveled, but for those that follow, his map is the first thing with which they will begin. So it is with strategy... we must get our theory clear before we can venture in search of practical conclusions.**

*Sir Julian Corbett, 1911 British Naval Historian and Strategist*




**We will maintain and safeguard the Great Lakes system and the commercial and recreational users that depend on it through the collaborative pursuit of safety, security and stewardship.**

*Vision Statement - Great Lakes Maritime Strategy 2023*







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