

# The Great Lakes Winter Commerce Act

**In Short:** The Great Lakes Winter Commerce Act codifies into law the U.S. Coast Guard's (USCG) responsibilities for icebreaking on the Great Lakes to meet the reasonable demands of commerce.

**Why is legislation needed?** Insufficient attention has been paid to facilitating the U.S. steel manufacturing industry's access to its supply of raw materials, especially iron ore and limestone shipped across the Great Lakes by vessels during the winter months. Great Lakes commerce has suffered in recent years due to inadequate USCG icebreaking capabilities during winter shipping seasons. Commercial vessel delays due to inadequate icebreaking in the 2018-2019 winter season alone cost businesses that depend on the region's maritime industry \$1.04 billion in economic activity. These economic losses resulted in the loss of the equivalent of 5,421 jobs dependent on the U.S.-flagged commercial fleet's ability to deliver cargo throughout the Great Lakes region during the winter. Similar problems occurred during the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 winters. USCG icebreakers also clear river mouth ice dams to prevent flooding of private property and erosion of shorelines, especially during the recent record high Great Lakes water levels.

The need to safeguard the shipping lanes and private property cannot be exaggerated. Annually, U.S. Great Lakes waterborne commerce supports more than 147,000 jobs in eight Great Lakes states, \$25.6 billion in economic activity, \$10.5 billion in wages, and \$4.6 billion in federal and state taxes. The Great Lakes waterways facilitate interstate and international commerce and the USCG opens ice-covered Great Lakes shipping lanes during the winter. Despite this, no U.S. law requires the USCG to break ice in the Great Lakes. Instead, a 1936 executive order signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt requires the USCG to conduct icebreaking "in accordance with the reasonable demands of commerce" without defining when, where, and what that is. Over time, and without Congressional consent, the USCG has narrowed its Great Lakes icebreaking priorities and reduced its Great Lakes icebreaking fleet to the point where it struggles to facilitate U.S. waterborne commerce on the Great Lakes even during average ice seasons.

**A reset is needed.**

## What does this Bill do?

1. Codifies into law the USCG's icebreaking mission in the Great Lakes requiring USCG to break ice to meet the reasonable demands of commerce.
2. Defines "reasonable demands of commerce" as "the safe movement of commercial vessels transiting ice covered waterways in the Great Lakes, when and where assistance is needed."
3. Requires the USCG to consult on icebreaking operations with commercial vessel operators.
4. Requires the USCG to report annually to Congress on each icebreaking season.
5. Facilitates the acquisition of a new Great Lakes Icebreaker (GLIB). The bill authorizes appropriations for the GLIB.

**It does not expand icebreaking into waterways used for ice recreation.**