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INDIANA SHIPWRECK RESEARCH AND SITE EVALUATIVE STRATEGIES

Shipwrecks are a unique class of cultural resources. Random but dynamic marine environmental effects such as ice, wave, and sand action on Lake Michigan may largely influence the extent and direction of shipwreck site degradation in a predictable fashion. Assessment of the site deposition process requires a thorough evaluation of marine environmental impacts to, first, understand their interrelated sets of effect and, secondly, understand the dynamic nature of those effects on the shipwreck degradation process. The Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology is testing for such effects on four large Lake Michigan shipwreck sites (Pat Herner/Unknown 1, Muskegon, Car Ferry No. 2, and Unknown 4) to develop more efficient site evaluation strategies. Test data collected to date support the Hypothesis that late 19th and early 20th century and larger late 20th century man-made groyne structures placed into the lakebed may disrupt the normal Northeast to Southwest flow of bottom materials and result in substantial bottom depletion. The net effect of this disruptive action on shipwreck site context is an alteration in the direction of the horizontal plane of deposition. An understanding of groyne size, marine environmental factors, and subsurface geology is therefore essential to the formulation of Lake Michigan shipwreck site evaluations and our ability to predict the extent and direction of the site degradation process.
