

Great Lakes Science Ships

Sailing into the 21st Century

Credit: Duluth Shipping News



The Great Lakes science vessel fleet is a valuable tool for both the U.S. and Canada to ensure the sustained health of the Great Lakes ecosystem.

What is a Great Lakes "Science Ship" or "Science Vessel"?

Government, research and educational vessels dedicated to the study and exploration of the Great Lakes ecosystem.



Every year, these dedicated ships and operators enable scientists and educators to:

- Gather scientific data essential for restoring and sustaining the living resources of the North American Great Lakes and their habitats.
- Monitor the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem.
- Study new threats to the environment.
- Protect a \$4 billion dollar Great Lakes fishery.
- Provide environmental program managers and government officials with the key information needed to make sound policy decisions.
- Educate a new generation of scientists.
- Build public appreciation for the largest freshwater basin ecosystem on Earth.

Where are the ships located?



Average age and costs of current fleet

The average Great Lakes research vessel is more than 30 years old, much older than typical commercial fleets. The 40 different agencies, universities, other organizations and the crews operating these ships should be praised for their ability to maintain such a long service life. However, even with the best care, all of these ships will eventually need to be replaced with more modern and efficient designs. There has been limited action to address this problem and only a few of the oldest ships have been replaced during the past decade. A September 2001 report prepared for the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Council of Lake Committees concluded that even

considering these newer vessels, only 56 percent of vessels over 30 feet in length will be able to meet the needs of agencies and researchers during the next 20 years unless action is taken.

In the face of limited budgets and staff reductions, maintenance and repairs to some of these vessels have become more often reactive than proactive. Vessel managers must meet some very serious challenges to continue maintaining a safe environment for the crews and scientific staff that work on these ships. In addition to seeking support for fleet modernization, expanding cooperative and collaborative efforts is viewed as a critical step toward meeting the challenges of the future.