

**For Immediate Release**

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**East Tawas area increases efforts to attract cruise ships by joining international cruise marketing organization**

*Leaders determined to have region become destination in coming years*

(EAST TAWAS, MI) – East Tawas area tourism leaders took another step forward in their mission to bring cruise ships to the region by joining an international cruise marketing program called Cruise the Great Lakes. Tawas Area Chamber of Commerce officially joined the organization in December.

Founded in 2018, Cruise the Great Lakes is the region's cruise marketing program focused on attracting more passengers. It is a forum to bring together the states, provinces, cruise lines, ports, convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, associations, and others to work toward shared goals. The program is an initiative of the Chicago-based Council of Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers, which unites the chief executives from the eight states and two Canadian provinces bordering the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

Just last month, Cruise the Great Lakes announced that Great Lakes cruises are projected to welcome over 22,000 individual passengers, representing a nearly 10% increase from 2024. It also projects more than 700 port visits planned, up almost 30% from last year.

East Tawas tourism officials hope its region will soon welcome some of those passengers. Efforts were re-ignited in 2024 to pursue cruise ships as municipal, and tourism officials determined East Tawas and Tawas Bay had suitable anchoring and shuttling features for the intimate Great Lakes cruise ships to use.

"We have worked diligently to ensure we meet the requirements that cruise lines seek in potential port destinations," said **Rich Castle, President for Develop losco and community affairs manager for Consumers Energy's Northeast Michigan region**. "We are eager to leverage our Cruise the Great Lakes membership and lure cruise lines to our region. We have amazing

experiences and attractions to offer a cruise passenger while providing the requirements for cruise ships to anchor in the bay, so we are very hopeful.”

Castle, along with Tawas Area Chamber of Commerce executive director and chairperson of the Develop Iosco Tourism & Recreation Committee Samantha Duvall, has led the effort, which includes other stakeholders such as the East Tawas Business Association, the City of East Tawas, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The parties have all joined forces to submit proposals to cruise lines in hopes of attracting interest.

“We have a wonderful group that is championing our effort to pursue the region as a cruise destination,” **said Samantha Duvall, executive director of the Tawas Area Chamber of Commerce.** “And now, with our Cruise the Great Lakes membership, we have even more support and leverage. We are excited to welcome cruise passengers to our beautiful region eventually!”

Alpena is the only Michigan-based Lake Huron destination for Great Lakes cruise ships, although Saginaw Bay tourism groups are also working to attract visitors. Many cruise lines have itineraries that pass the area, either toward Mackinac Island or Detroit.

“The East Tawas area has a strong maritime past and is very much a tourist destination, so we are eager to help them pursue this endeavor,” **said Cathleen Domanico, Tourism Director for Cruise the Great Lakes.** “Cruise passengers would have a delightful time visiting and enjoying the culture, history, and natural resources the East Tawas region provides. We will do all we can to give our Sunrise Coast members a chance to become a destination.”

If successful, cruise passengers could give the region a tremendous economic boost. Last month, Cruise the Great Lakes officials announced it anticipates more than \$230 million in economic impact across the area in 2025, reflecting a 15% increase from 2024.

“The beauty and diversity of our region continue to attract visitors from around the world,” **said Anne Sayers, Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism and Chair of Cruise the Great Lakes.** “With more ships and ports on the itinerary, the positive economic contributions of Great Lakes cruising will continue to be felt across the region.”

2025 marks the return of Victory Cruise Lines to the Great Lakes, highlighting the increasing variety of vessels navigating the region. Cruise lines scheduled to operate on the Great Lakes in 2025 include Pearl Seas, Viking, St. Lawrence Cruise Lines, Ponant, Hapag-Lloyd, and Victory.

“As we look to 2025, we’re excited to see continued growth in the Great Lakes cruise sector,” added Domanico. “We forecast this upcoming season to be even stronger than 2024, both in terms of passenger numbers and economic impact, which underscores the appeal of cruising in the Great Lakes.”

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#### **About Develop Iosco**

<https://develop-iosco.org/>

Develop Iosco is a 501-c-3 nonprofit volunteer organization serving as a convener and facilitator for economic development activities within Iosco County related to business development. As an economic development organization, DI promotes Iosco County as a place for business growth to improve the quality of life for current and new residents.

#### **About Tawas Area Chamber of Commerce**

The mission of the Tawas Area Chamber of Commerce is to encourage and support economic development and success by creating collaborations to grow membership, support tourism, and foster opportunities that ensure a vibrant community for those who work, live, and play here.

#### **About Cruise the Great Lakes**

[www.cruisethegreatlakes.com](http://www.cruisethegreatlakes.com)

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