

# East Tawas/Tawas Bay Cruise Ship Proposal

September 20, 2024



Source: Jay Samuels

## **Introduction**

The East Tawas/Tawas Bay Cruise Ship Proposal is to make you aware of the City of East Tawas' interest in becoming a Great Lakes cruise ship destination. The proposal will explain why East Tawas and Tawas Bay are an ideal destination for both the ship itself and the visitors it brings.

## **East Tawas, Michigan**

East Tawas, Michigan is a community located on the shores of Tawas Bay and Lake Huron in northern Michigan. Along with its sister city, Tawas City, the two communities have a long and rich 162-year history as being a port city on Lake Huron for both recreational and commercial vessels including Great Lake freighters.

The two communities have a year-round resident population of approximately 5,000 people, but that population significantly increases during the summer months due to an influx of seasonal and second home residents who visit due to the proximity of Lake Huron. In addition, the two communities see a significant number of visitors as the area is a top draw for tourists from Detroit, Flint, the Tri-Cities, and Ohio during that same timeframe.

The economy of the Tawas area has changed many times over its history, but there has always been one constant and that is tourism. Even before roads connected East Tawas to the larger communities in southern Michigan, visitors were coming to the area via boat and by rail. With the advent of the automobile and a highway system, the way people travel to East Tawas is different, but what is not different is that they still come. The internet provides a significant opportunity to track interest in an area and according to SEMRUSH Analytics and MyMichiganBeach.com, the East Tawas area averages a monthly search volume of nearly 20,000 searches. In comparison, Alpena, MI located about 60 miles to the north and a current cruise destination averages a monthly search volume of nearly 16,000 searches.

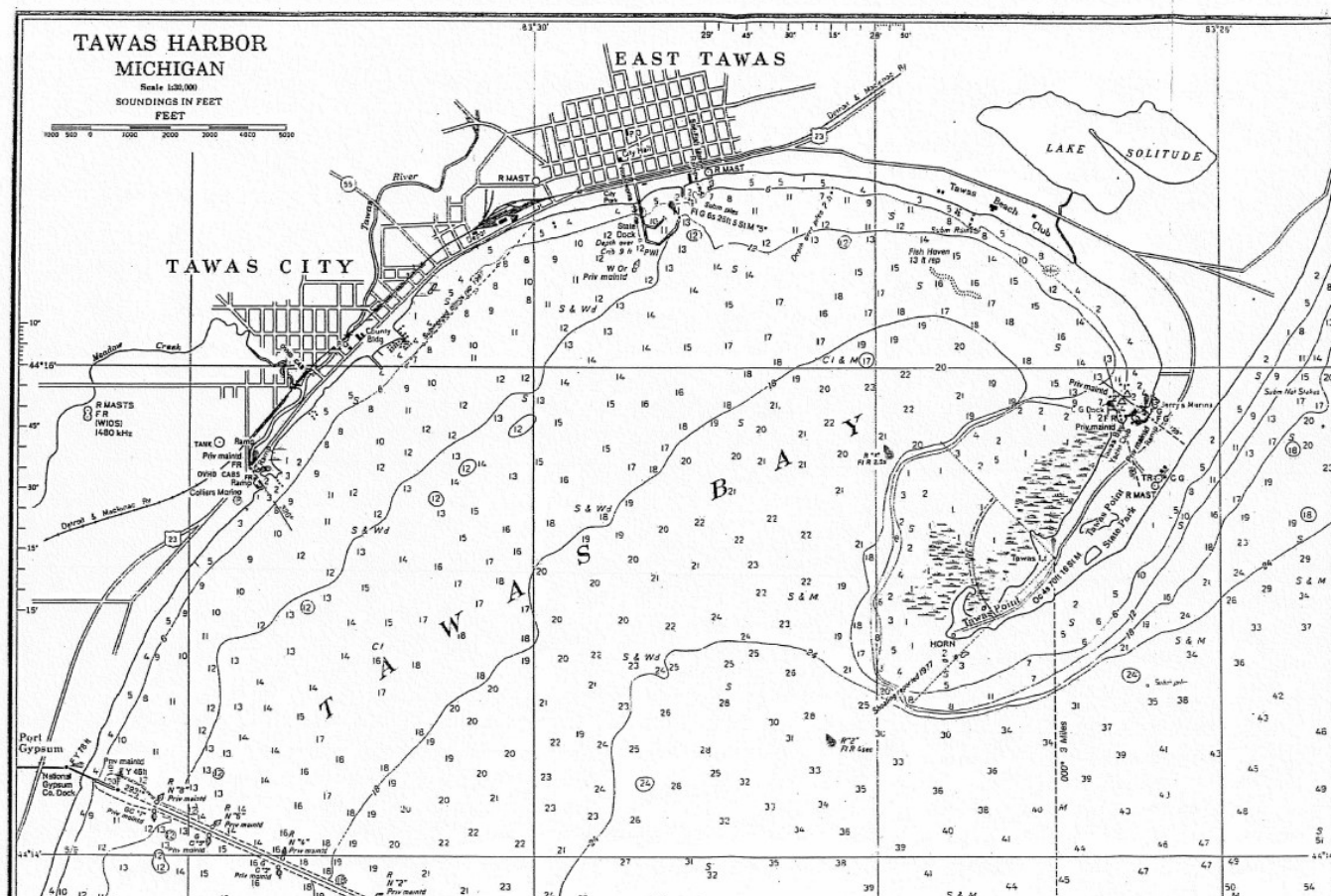
## **Tawas Bay**

Tawas Bay's maritime history is rooted in the geographical and botanical characteristics of the region colliding with the ballooning economic demand for building materials: wood and plaster. Logging in the 19th century was river based because the practice was to cut trees and float the logs to mills at the river mouths. Although only one river, the Tawas, flowed into our Bay, two other major logging rivers, the Au Gres and AuSable, flowed within short land-travel distance from the bay and a relatively long distance from their mouths and mills. As a result, Tawas Bay became an important maritime port supporting the logging activities on all three: receiving materials and shipping the finished product.

Concurrent with the development of the lumber industry, gypsum was discovered and a mining industry that continues today began. Sawdust and scrap wood from the mills used as fuel allowed the development of other products: gypsum was calcinated and converted into plaster, brine water from wells was reduced to salt, and sugar beets were refined into sugar. In the late 19th and early 20th century lath, bucket bolts, shingles, barrel stays, boards, framing lumber, wooden squares and rounds, plaster, salt and sugar were shipped. The Tawas Bay communities were also served by regularly scheduled passenger and packet freighters.

Currently there is an active gypsum shipping facility servicing 680-foot Great Lake freighters. The 180-foot NOAA's GREAT LAKES GUARDIAN is a frequent visitor to the East Tawas State Dock and in difficult weather situations, tugs and tows, freighters and pleasure craft seek shelter here. The Bay and its communities are able and ready to service and support a robust cruise industry. Its geographical and botanical characteristics make Tawas Bay an attractive destination with ease of access to beautiful rivers, forests, nature and historic sites.

### Tawas Bay Depth Chart



### East Tawas Dock/State Harbor

The East Tawas Dock and State Harbor has been a staple in the community since the lumbering era that drove the economy of the region from late 1800's into the early 1900's. The dock has seen upgrades over the years and today serves a much different purpose and that is to provide protection for Lake Huron recreational and smaller class commercial or educational vessels and the marina housing numerous recreational boats.

In 2010, Develop losco developed a study to evaluate the ability for the East Tawas Dock/State Harbor to support the mooring of Great Lakes cruise ships. The harbor provides for an excellent sheltered location for ships to harbor. Depths in the harbor range from approximately 20-25 feet at the entrance and 10-12 feet adjacent to the main pier and marina area.



According to the study, the main pier is in overall good condition. The pier is constructed with both a sheet pile wall segment that is in very good condition and a wood crib segment that is in adequate condition. The steel sheet pile wall portion is currently the jurisdiction of the United State Army Corp of Engineers, and the wood portion including the marina area is currently the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Any commercial use of the dock would require a “use” permit from the either of the of entities depending on the section of dock used.

The study goes on to say the dock itself can support the docking of smaller cruise ships with upgrades either outside or inside the pier. While repairs have been made and reconfiguration of the marina has occurred since the report was developed, the mooring system including the two pile clusters and fenders that was recommended has not been completed. This upgrade is still desirable and if a cruise line could commit to East Tawas as a port destination, the community would look to secure funds to make this upgrade and work with the United State Army Corp of Engineers.

The study was developed at a time when it was thought that a cruise ship would need to use the dock to deliver passengers to the port. Since then, and being used elsewhere along the Great Lakes, cruise lines are now anchoring offshore and tendering people from the cruise to the docking location. The current configuration of the East Tawas Dock provides ample opportunities for the docking of a tender boat to bring passengers to shore.

In summary, the East Tawas Dock/State Harbor is adequate to supporting the tendering of people from a cruise ship anchored in Tawas Bay. Additionally, with upgrades, the East Tawas Dock/State Harbor is adequate to support the docking of the cruise ship.

### East Tawas Dock/State Harbor Aerial



Source: Jay Samuels

# ROWE PROFESSIONAL SERVICES



The East Tawas shopping district is conveniently located across the street providing dozens of shops, boutiques, bars and restaurants. At this point, you are located within one mile of 16 different eateries, and specialty shops providing items such as clothing, gifts, jewelry, coffee, candy, and chocolate. In addition, the community also provides a hospital, banking/ATM, post office, and grocery stores that can help provide the necessities. Downtown East Tawas offers cruise goers a delightful shopping experience. The following map shows the variety of shops located in the downtown.



If you are a history buff, within a short walk of the downtown and the beach is the Iosco County Historical Society Museum. The Museum is a two-story Victorian home that offers an insight into the local history of the Tawas area including its rich maritime history.

East Tawas and the surrounding area provide many different opportunities for excursions. Besides a walkable downtown and beach area, a tour of the historic Tawas Point Lighthouse and Tawas Point State Park is a key highlight. The State Park can be reached by our bike trail that stretches 13.1 miles along Tawas Bay or is a short 10-minute drive. The state park also offers hiking trails that are popular for world renown bird watching and is surrounded by the white sandy beaches of Tawas Bay and Lake Huron. This spot is also notably used for wind surfing and kite flying. In addition, there are opportunities to enjoy the waters of Tawas Bay and Lake Huron if you are interested in charter fishing, wave runners/jet skis, and kayaking. Also, if your cruise goers are golfers or want to try golfing, there is an award-winning golf course 10 minutes away from downtown East Tawas and a golf simulator establishment downtown.

Additionally, within 20 miles of downtown East Tawas there are many other possible options for excursions by bus such as canoeing and kayaking the famous AuSable River. Also, along the river there are the scenic overlooks and historical sites of Lumberman's Monument & Iargo Springs. On the way back to East Tawas, a stop in the riverfront/lakefront town of Oscoda and their downtown shopping district and beach area is also an option.

Whether cruise goers want to stay close to the dock and enjoy the walkable area of East Tawas or take excursions to see additional sites in the East Tawas area, there are multiple opportunities to enjoy East Tawas as a cruise ship destination.

### **Downtown East Tawas/Tawas Bay Aerial**



Source: Jay Samuels

## Downtown East Tawas Businesses



Source: Iosco County News Herald

## Summary

East Tawas and Tawas Bay are the perfect Great Lakes cruise ship destination that is not being utilized. As discussed above, Tawas Bay is more than adequate for anchoring and the East Tawas Dock/State Harbor is more than adequate for delivering visitors to downtown East Tawas. East Tawas provides visitors with beautiful beaches, a walkable downtown for shopping, and numerous excursion opportunities.

The East Tawas community is very interested in becoming a Great Lakes cruise ship destination and is interested in discussing this opportunity further. We are happy to meet in person either at a destination convenient for you or in East Tawas where we can showcase the community and the amenities discussed in this proposal. If those options are not ideal, we could meet via a virtual meeting.

If you are interested in discussing Tawas Bay and East Tawas as a Great Lakes cruise ship destination, please make contact with the following individual. We hope to hear from you!

Develop Iosco  
Attn: Rich Castle  
[info@develop-iosco.org](mailto:info@develop-iosco.org)  
231-735-3619



# Appendixes

1. Develop Iosco – Letter of Support
2. East Tawas City Council – Resolution of Support
3. East Tawas Downtown Business Association – Letter of Support
4. Oscoda Area Convention & Visitors Bureau – Letter of Support





**Re: Letter of Support: Tawas Bay Cruise Line Proposal**

August 19, 2024

To whom it may concern:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Develop Iosco, Inc., we offer this letter of support for Tawas Bay Cruise Line Proposal that will represent a significant economic investment in Iosco County.

Develop Iosco serves as the economic development organization in Iosco County by convening and facilitation economic development activities within Iosco County related to business development. We recognize that attracting a cruise line to Tawas Bay will significantly increase tourism that will boost the economy in Iosco County and give us the opportunity to share our relaxing atmosphere with cruise line passengers for the first time. Iosco County has many different outlets for passengers to enjoy. Everything from hiking and biking, dramatic overlooks of the AuSable River Valley, shopping in our downtowns, relaxing on the beach or watching birds, we have something for everyone.

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. The Tawas Bay Cruise Line Proposal exemplifies an opportunity that Develop Iosco wholeheartedly supports. We hope you will consider Tawas Bay as a stop on you trip through the Great Lakes.

Sincerely,

Christopher Martin  
Executive Director  
Develop Iosco, Inc.  
[executivedirector@develop-iosco.org](mailto:executivedirector@develop-iosco.org)

Gloria Brooks  
President, Board of Directors  
[president@develop-iosco.org](mailto:president@develop-iosco.org)

PO Box 9, East Tawas MI 48730  
[www.develop-iosco.org](http://www.develop-iosco.org)

**CITY OF EAST TAWAS  
COUNTY OF IOSCO**

**Resolution of Support for the City of East Tawas in Preparing an Application  
to be a Port of Call for Great Lakes Cruise Ships**

At a regular meeting of the East Tawas City Council held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of September, 2024, the following resolution was offered by Council member Baker and seconded by Council member Leslie.

**WHEREAS**, the City of East Tawas is committed to fostering economic development, enhancing tourism, and promoting our unique natural and cultural resources; and

**WHEREAS**, Great Lakes cruising represents a growing segment of the tourism industry, attracting visitors who seek to explore the scenic beauty and rich history of the Great Lakes region; and

**WHEREAS**, the establishment of East Tawas as a port of call for Great Lakes cruise ships would potentially bring significant economic benefits to our community, including increased business for local shops, restaurants, and attractions, as well as the creation of new jobs; and

**WHEREAS**, Develop Iosco, a local organization dedicated to economic and community development, has expressed interest in preparing an application for East Tawas to become a port of call for Great Lakes cruise ships; and

**WHEREAS**, the City Council of East Tawas recognizes the value and importance of partnering with Develop Iosco in this endeavor to enhance our community's profile and opportunities;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the City Council of East Tawas hereby supports Develop Iosco in preparing an application to request that the City of East Tawas be designated as a port of call for Great Lakes cruise ships;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the City Council of East Tawas authorizes and encourages Develop Iosco to collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including cruise line operators, port authorities, and other partners, to ensure the successful preparation and submission of the application;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the City Council commits to providing any necessary support and resources to Develop Iosco in this initiative, including but not limited to, assistance with logistics, promotion, and community outreach.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that a copy of this resolution be sent to Develop Iosco, the Iosco County Board of Commissioners, and other relevant entities to inform them of the City Council's support for this initiative.

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF**, the City Council of East Tawas has caused this resolution to be duly adopted by a majority vote of its members on the date first above written.

**RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED**

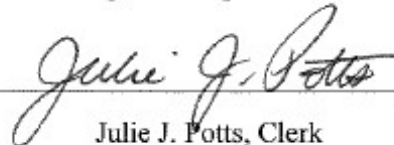
YES: Baker, B. Bolen, L. Bolen, Eklund, Kolts, Leslie and Mooney

NO: None

ABSENT: None

**CERTIFICATION**

I, Julie J. Potts, Clerk of the City of East Tawas, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and complete copy of a resolution adopted by the East Tawas City Council at a regular meeting held on June 5, 2023 and that said meeting was conducted and public notice of said meeting was given pursuant to and in full compliance with the Open Meetings Act, being Act 267, Public Acts of Michigan, 1976, and that the minutes of said meeting were kept and will be or have been made available as required by said Act.

  
Julie J. Potts, Clerk



Rebecca Buchanan  
President  
East Tawas Business Association

Rich Castle  
Community Affairs Manager - NE Michigan  
Consumers Energy

Dear Rich,

I am reaching out on behalf of the East Tawas Business Association to express our keen interest in welcoming Great Lakes Cruise Ships to our town and to explore the potential for a mutually beneficial partnership.

We are excited about the opportunity to collaborate with Great Lakes Cruise Ships to bring more visitors to East Tawas. Our town is well-equipped to accommodate cruise passengers, with a variety of local attractions, dining options, and retail establishments that cater to diverse interests.

We are confident that East Tawas would be a valuable addition to cruise itineraries and a memorable destination for passengers. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss how we can work together to create an exceptional experience for guests and explore the logistics of making East Tawas a stop on Great Lakes cruise routes.

Thank you for your work in making East Tawas a potential destination. We look forward to the possibility of partnering with Great Lakes Cruise Ships and are happy to provide any additional information or assistance needed.

Warm regards,



Rebecca Buchanan  
President  
East Tawas Business Association



Allen Tubbs  
Vice President  
East Tawas Business Association



Aimee O'Connor  
Treasurer  
East Tawas Business Association



Ariana Conklin  
Secretary  
East Tawas Business Association



Rich Castle  
Community Affairs Manager – NE Michigan  
Consumers Energy

August 29, 2024

Dear Rich,

We are reaching out on behalf of the Oscoda Area Convention and Visitor Bureau to express our deep interest with the proposed port in East Tawas for Great Lakes Cruise Ships. With our proximity to East Tawas, and with everything our area has to offer visitors, we look forward to working together in creating a destination choice for these cruise ships.

With our scenic River Road Byway including Lumberman's Monument, Iargo Springs, Canoer's Memorial, and the Pure Michigan designated Highbanks Trail, we can offer an outstanding and unique outdoor adventure for the cruise ship passengers while in port. A stop in Oscoda, a PureMichigan TrailTown, to visit our retail shops and various dining establishments would also add to this extraordinary itinerary on the Sunrise Coast.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss ways to collaborate and establish the Oscoda area as an addition to East Tawas as a desirable itinerary choice for the passengers. We look forward to showcasing all of the possibilities the Oscoda Area has to offer and to provide any assistance and participate in these discussions moving forward. We're excited to be a part of your work to establish a port for the Great Lakes Cruise Ships in East Tawas, and we fully support these efforts.

Please let us know how we may be able to assist as the proposal moves forward.

Sincerely

Tim Kellstrom  
President  
Oscoda Area CVB

Tom Wdowik  
Vice President  
Oscoda Area CVB