

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 30, 2026

The Honorable Kevin E. Lunday
Commandant
United States Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave. SE
Washington, DC 20593

Dear Admiral Lunday:

We write to urge you to designate Coast Guard Air Station Traverse City and the surrounding Great Lakes operating area as a testing site for robotic and autonomous maritime technologies. Earlier this year, the Administration released its Maritime Action Plan: *Restoring America's Maritime Dominance*, directing the Coast Guard to make one or more such designations, including in the Great Lakes. Northern Michigan is an ideal location for this designation given that Coast Guard Air Station Traverse City already possesses the operational expertise, strategic location, and public-private partnerships needed to become the Coast Guard's premier site for testing autonomous maritime technologies.

Serving all five Great Lakes, Air Station Traverse City is uniquely positioned to support Coast Guard missions ranging from search and rescue to homeland security and disaster response. Combined with uncongested airspace, significant capacity for expansion, and a community that embraces Coast Guard families and operations, it provides an exceptional platform for continued investment and innovation.

- The station routinely operates alongside federal, state, tribal, local, and Canadian partners, providing an ideal environment to evaluate autonomous technologies during realistic, multi-agency operations.
- The Great Lakes encompass more than 10,000 miles of U.S. shoreline, major commercial shipping routes, ports, critical infrastructure, and an international maritime border, allowing autonomous technologies to be tested across the Coast Guard mission set.
- Northern Michigan's year-round, all-weather operating environment, including snow, ice, and opportunities for extreme lake conditions, enables autonomous systems to be evaluated under challenging conditions that closely resemble real-world operations.
- Late last year, Coast Guard Air Station Traverse City received an FAA Part 91 authorization to operate unmanned aircraft in Class D, E, and G airspace, validating the safe integration of UAS into the National Airspace System in support of search and rescue missions. With the regulatory framework already in place, the remaining need is investment in operational capabilities and autonomous systems.

Michigan's decades-long legacy as a manufacturing base with expertise in mobility innovation continues today with nearly 4,000 Michigan companies engaged in defense and aerospace work along with universities that are leading engineering and aerospace research. Traverse City has become the center of a growing public-private partnership dedicated to autonomous systems innovation. These partners are expanding Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) operations, applied research, workforce development, and commercialization efforts that can accelerate the transition of emerging technologies from testing to operational deployment.

- The Michigan Drone Association unites government, industry, academia, and defense partners to expand BVLOS corridors across the state and has partnered with NorthSky Consortium to position Northern Michigan as a national hub for uncrewed aerial systems and advanced air mobility. There is an existing BVLOS drone corridor connecting Alpena and Camp Grayling, providing critical infrastructure for routine autonomous operations. Efforts are underway to expand that drone corridor to Traverse City, allowing for BVLOS operations more than 100 miles across the width of the Northern Michigan peninsula.
- Northwestern Michigan College (NMC), an FAA Uncrewed Aircraft Systems Collegiate Training Initiative (UAS-CTI) institution, is building the workforce to support the growing uncrewed aircraft industry through a pipeline of highly trained UAS operators. Combined with one of only six state maritime academies in the nation, NMC creates a unique ecosystem where future mariners, Coast Guard personnel, researchers, and autonomous technologies can train, test, and advance next-generation unmanned maritime operations together.

Michigan has a proven track record as one of the nation's premier proving grounds for autonomous systems.

- The Department of the Army recently designated Michigan's National All-Domain Warfighting Center (NADWC) as one of the nation's premier testing and training sites for advanced unmanned aircraft systems. NADWC, anchored at Camp Grayling, is a one-hour drive from Traverse City and is central to Michigan's BVLOS corridor.
- Last spring, Michigan hosted the Uncrewed Triple Challenge to demonstrate autonomous operations across maritime, aerial, and ground domains, including autonomous maritime operations on Lake Huron. Nine teams, representing seven states and three foreign nations competed in this public-private partnership.
- Last month, Michigan hosted the Department of Defense Drone Dominance Gauntlet Phase II qualifying event, providing military-grade drone testing capabilities and support to dual-use tech companies.
- This month, the U.S. Navy launched Silent Swarm 26 on Lake Huron, a major annual two-week joint military experimentation event that brings together federal agencies, private companies, and research partners to advance payloads on autonomous maritime and airborne systems. Conducted as part of the Naval Surface Warfare Center Crane Division's scientific mission, the exercise aims to improve spectrum maneuver and resilience capabilities for military personnel while reinforcing Northern Michigan's position as an ideal location for maritime autonomy experimentation.

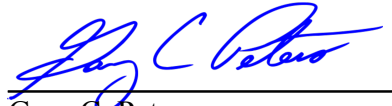
For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to designate Coast Guard Air Station Traverse City and the surrounding Great Lakes operating area as one of the Coast Guard's official testing areas for

robotic and autonomous maritime technologies. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with you to strengthen the Coast Guard's ability to harness emerging technologies in support of its vital missions across the Great Lakes and throughout the Nation.

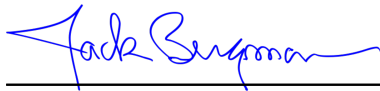
Sincerely,



Elissa Slotkin
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



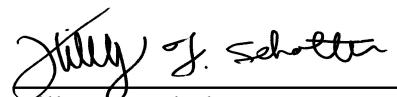
Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



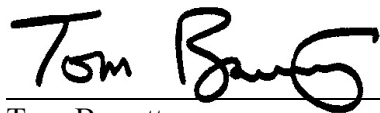
Haley M. Stevens
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Tom Barrett
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