

Public Law 100-298  
100th Congress

An Act

Apr. 28, 1988  
[S. 858]

To establish the title of States in certain abandoned shipwrecks, and for other purposes.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

Abandoned  
Shipwreck  
Act of 1987.  
Maritime  
affairs.  
43 USC 2101  
note.  
43 USC 2101.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds that—

(a) States have the responsibility for management of a broad range of living and nonliving resources in State waters and submerged lands; and

(b) included in the range of resources are certain abandoned shipwrecks, which have been deserted and to which the owner has relinquished ownership rights with no retention.

43 USC 2102.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

For purposes of this Act—

(a) the term "embedded" means firmly affixed in the submerged lands or in coralline formations such that the use of tools of excavation is required in order to move the bottom sediments to gain access to the shipwreck, its cargo, and any part thereof;

(b) the term "National Register" means the National Register of Historic Places maintained by the Secretary of the Interior under section 101 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470a);

(c) the terms "public lands", "Indian lands", and "Indian tribe" have the same meaning given the terms in the Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1979 (16 U.S.C. 470aa-470ll);

(d) the term "shipwreck" means a vessel or wreck, its cargo, and other contents;

(e) the term "State" means a State of the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands; and

(f) the term "submerged lands" means the lands—

(1) that are "lands beneath navigable waters," as defined in section 2 of the Submerged Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1301);

(2) of Puerto Rico, as described in section 8 of the Act of March 2, 1917, as amended (48 U.S.C. 749);

(3) of Guam, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa, as described in section 1 of Public Law 93-435 (48 U.S.C. 1705); and

(4) of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, as described in section 801 of Public Law 94-241 (48 U.S.C. 1681).

## SEC. 4. RIGHTS OF ACCESS.

## (a) ACCESS RIGHTS.—In order to—

(1) clarify that State waters and shipwrecks offer recreational and educational opportunities to sport divers and other interested groups, as well as irreplaceable State resources for tourism, biological sanctuaries, and historical research; and

(2) provide that reasonable access by the public to such abandoned shipwrecks be permitted by the State holding title to such shipwrecks pursuant to section 6 of this Act,

it is the declared policy of the Congress that States carry out their responsibilities under this Act to develop appropriate and consistent policies so as to—

(A) protect natural resources and habitat areas;

(B) guarantee recreational exploration of shipwreck sites; and

(C) allow for appropriate public and private sector recovery of shipwrecks consistent with the protection of historical values and environmental integrity of the shipwrecks and the sites.

(b) PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS.—In managing the resources subject to the provisions of this Act, States are encouraged to create underwater parks or areas to provide additional protection for such resources. Funds available to States from grants from the Historic Preservation Fund shall be available, in accordance with the provisions of title I of the National Historic Preservation Act, for the study, interpretation, protection, and preservation of historic shipwrecks and properties.

## SEC. 5. PREPARATION OF GUIDELINES.

(a) In order to encourage the development of underwater parks and the administrative cooperation necessary for the comprehensive management of underwater resources related to historic shipwrecks, the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Director of the National Park Service, shall within nine months after the date of enactment of this Act prepare and publish guidelines in the Federal Register which shall seek to:

(1) maximize the enhancement of cultural resources;

(2) foster a partnership among sport divers, fishermen, archeologists, salvors, and other interests to manage shipwreck resources of the States and the United States;

(3) facilitate access and utilization by recreational interests;

(4) recognize the interests of individuals and groups engaged in shipwreck discovery and salvage.

(b) Such guidelines shall be developed after consultation with appropriate public and private sector interests (including the Secretary of Commerce, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, sport divers, State Historic Preservation Officers, professional dive operators, salvors, archeologists, historic preservationists, and fishermen).

(c) Such guidelines shall be available to assist States and the appropriate Federal agencies in developing legislation and regulations to carry out their responsibilities under this Act.

## SEC. 6. RIGHTS OF OWNERSHIP.

(a) UNITED STATES TITLE.—The United States asserts title to any abandoned shipwreck that is—

(1) embedded in submerged lands of a State;

(2) embedded in coralline formations protected by a State on submerged lands of a State; or

Cultural programs.  
Historic preservation.  
Environmental protection.  
42 USC 2103.

Grants.

43 USC 2104.

National parks, monuments, etc.  
Federal Register, publication.

43 USC 2105.

Public  
information.  
Historic  
preservation.

(3) on submerged lands of a State and is included in or determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register.

(b) The public shall be given adequate notice of the location of any shipwreck to which title is asserted under this section. The Secretary of the Interior, after consultation with the appropriate State Historic Preservation Officer, shall make a written determination that an abandoned shipwreck meets the criteria for eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under clause (a)(3).

(c) **TRANSFER OF TITLE TO STATES.**—The title of the United States to any abandoned shipwreck asserted under subsection (a) of this section is transferred to the State in or on whose submerged lands the shipwreck is located.

Gifts and  
property.  
Indians.

(d) **EXCEPTION.**—Any abandoned shipwreck in or on the public lands of the United States is the property of the United States Government. Any abandoned shipwreck in or on any Indian lands is the property of the Indian tribe owning such lands.

(e) **RESERVATION OF RIGHTS.**—This section does not affect any right reserved by the United States or by any State (including any right reserved with respect to Indian lands) under—

(1) section 3, 5, or 6 of the Submerged Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1311, 1313, and 1314); or

(2) section 19 or 20 of the Act of March 3, 1899 (33 U.S.C. 414 and 415).

43 USC 2106.

**SEC. 7. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS.**

(a) **LAW OF SALVAGE AND THE LAW OF FINDS.**—The law of salvage and the law of finds shall not apply to abandoned shipwrecks to which section 6 of this Act applies.

(b) **LAWS OF THE UNITED STATES.**—This Act shall not change the laws of the United States relating to shipwrecks, other than those to which this Act applies.

(c) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—This Act shall not affect any legal proceeding brought prior to the date of enactment of this Act.

Approved April 28, 1988.

**LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—S. 858:**

**HOUSE REPORTS:** No. 100-514, Pt. 1 (Comm. on Interior and Insular Affairs) and Pt. 2 (Comm. on Merchant Marine and Fisheries).

**SENATE REPORTS:** No. 100-241 (Comm. on Energy and Natural Resources).

**CONGRESSIONAL RECORD:**

Vol. 133 (1987): Dec. 19, considered and passed Senate.

Vol. 134 (1988): Mar. 28, 29, Apr. 13, considered and passed House.