

USS Monitor and the *Monitor* National Marine Sanctuary as a Paradigm for the Management of the Submerged Cultural Resources

Thomas Street
Seminar Abstract

The United States Iron Clad Steamer *Monitor* was perhaps the most revolutionary warship ever commissioned by the United States Navy. Its design was a complete shift from the design philosophy that existed at the time of its construction. The *Monitor* sank off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina on December 31, 1862, shortly after engaging the CSS Virginia at the Battle of Hampton Roads.

The location of the remains of the *Monitor* was unknown for nearly 120 years. In 1973, the wreck was discovered by a team operating from a Duke University research vessel. The ship was found to be lying on the sea-bed approximately 16 miles southeast of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. The ship was determined to be at a varying depth of between 218 and 230 feet.

The United States Government, after a request from the State of North Carolina, designated the wreck site of the *Monitor* as this nation's first National Marine Sanctuary on 30 January 1975. The *USS Monitor* National Marine Sanctuary is jointly managed by the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration and the State of North Carolina. The first management plan for the *USS Monitor* wreck site was put into operation in 1983. It was composed of six parts and can be characterized as a balancing effort between protection of the site and the study of the wreck.

In 1987, NOAA discovered that the site was deteriorating at a far worse pace than earlier thought and the wreck might soon collapse into itself. NOAA, after prodding by the United States Congress, undertook an effort to study the best ways of preserving the vessel. In 1997, NOAA published the results in a document called "Charting a New Course for the *Monitor*." In this document, NOAA explored the various alternatives for saving the vessel and its culturally important artifacts. These options ran the gamut from the whole-scale raising of the vessel to leaving the ship on the sea-bed with no-intervention efforts. NOAA employed a weakened "cost-benefit analysis" in this analysis where it compared the benefits received from each course of action with attendant costs. The agency ultimately determined that the best course of action lay in shoring up the vessel while removing those items most culturally important because. This decision was largely made on cost constraints.

The *Monitor* Management Plan and the document "Charting a New Course for the *Monitor*" illustrate a sound prototype for the protection of other submerged cultural resources. To make this plan better, policy criteria should be developed to strengthen the "cost benefit analysis" used by NOAA. This evaluation was mostly done in a qualitative manner in comparing the costs and benefits of different actions. By using non-renewable depletable natural resources as a base, quantifiable measures can be developed to make

this “cost-benefit analysis” more exacting and dependable. This added evaluation can then be used in conjunction with the *Monitor* Management Plans in the preservation of other historically important cultural resources of the coastal zone.