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JIM MATTHEWS/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN@JMATTHE79

The petroleum product barge Great Lakes unloads gasoline and diesel fuel at the U.S. Oil terminal on the Fox River in Green Bay.

Fuel crunch means icebreaking all winter

Coast Guard will keep channel open from lake to Green Bay

JEFF BOLLIER

USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

GREEN BAY - A broken gasoline pipeline could cut into on-ice recreational options in the bay of Green Bay this winter.

U.S. Venture Inc. has asked the U.S. Coast Guard to keep a 75- to 125-foot-wide navigable channel open from Lake Michigan to the Port of Green Bay through the end of January to ensure that the Kimberly-based company can continue to deliver gasoline and other petroleum products to the region.

The continued closure of the West Shore Pipe Line, which supplied gasoline to northeastern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan from Milwaukee, means U.S. Venture needs a channel to ensure ship access to its Green Bay

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USA TODAY NETWORK ILLUSTRATION

Pipeline

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terminal.

"We have a pipeline that's closed and there's a need to get petroleum products into Northeast Wisconsin," Brown County Port and Resource Recovery Director Dean Haen said. "U.S. Venture is interested in bringing in that product and it's cheaper to do so by water than truck."

U.S. Venture officials were not available for comment.

Normally, Haen and the port staff would be wrapping up the 2016 season about now. Instead, Haen is preparing for an extended season and prepping a public outreach campaign to warn people about the change in conditions this season.

"That's probably the biggest challenge — educating the public. The bay, in recent memory, hasn't really been open in the winter, so snowmobilers and ice fishermen use the bay," he said. "There may be snowmobilers who cross the bay, so we need to educate them that there will be a loose swath of ice."

Brown County Snowmobile Alliance President Mike Tilleman said the 10 clubs that form the alliance likely will discuss the issue with club leaders when they meet later this month.

Tilleman said he expects Coast Guard operations will impact only a handful of snowmobilers in the area.

"Not many people go across the bay because there's still some unsafe spots," Tilleman said. "A lot of people will ride to Door County on the edges of the bay. As far as the impact, it won't affect a majority of snowmobilers, but it will affect some."

Haen said he plans to contact bars, restaurants, fishing guides, bait shops, snowmobile clubs, tavern leagues and other venues to let them know about the change and to pass the information along to others.

In addition to Green Bay, the U.S. Coast Guard will keep channels open to Sturgeon Bay, Marinette and Escanaba, Mich.

"We don't want someone to decide to cross after dark when you can't see anything," Haen said.

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A crew member works on deck of the petroleum barge Great Lakes as it offloads gasoline and diesel fuel at the U.S. Oil terminal on the Fox River in Green Bay.



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The petroleum products barge Great Lakes is moored at the U.S. Oil terminal on the Fox River in Green Bay.

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The U.S. Coast Guard is planning to keep a channel open through the ice on Green Bay to keep fuel coming into the area.

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