

Granot Loma Rocket Site

The Upper Peninsula of Michigan is known for its beautiful lakeshore and its abundance of recreational activities. There is no shortage of hiking trails, lakes, waterfalls, and things to explore. The U.P has hundreds of people come to visit and enjoy the beautiful scenery it has to offer every year, such as my family. We love driving up to the U.P to go on hikes and see how many waterfalls we can find. I think it is always so peaceful to find a new hiking trail to take an adventure on. The land is known for the undisturbed wilderness that it holds. Taking all this into account, the Michigan Aerospace Manufactures Association, MAMA for short, has proposed to place a vertical rocket launch site at Granot Loma, which is about 20 miles north of Marquette, right on the coast of Lake Superior. The community has shown lots of disagreement to this proposed plan, and a group of community members, called Citizens for a Safe and Clean Lake Superior, or CSCLS for short, has formed to voice their opinions.

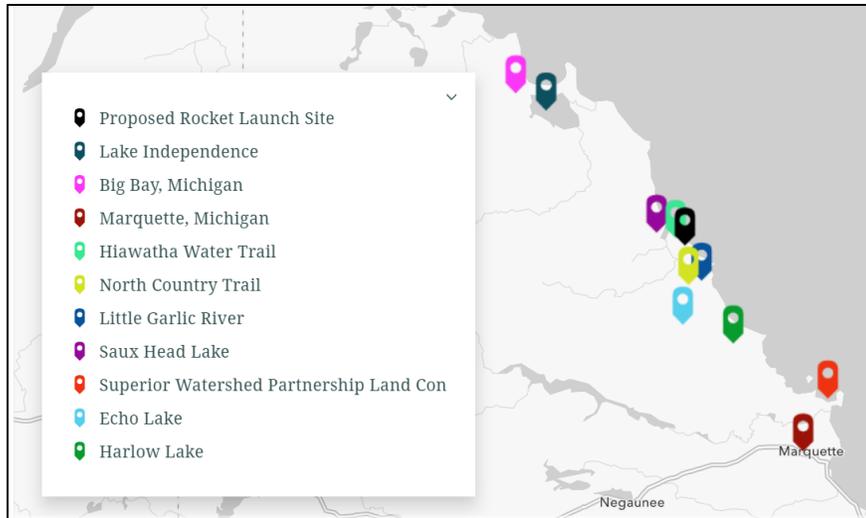
I spoke to Dennis Ferraro, the president of CSCLS about the rocket launch site and to hear more about CSCLS. Ferraro took time explaining the so called “bait and switch” that MAMA did to the community. The bait and switch is a term that Ferraro uses to explain how MAMA proposed one launch site and then switched to another. Ferraro says, “In 2018, MAMA finally convinced the legislator to give a \$2.5 million grant for the Michigan launch initiative.” MAMA proposed a horizontal launch site at the KI Sawyer Air Force Base, and this proposed launch site would produce hundreds of jobs for the Marquette county (Ferraro). This launch site gained support from Marquette citizens, and Ferraro states, “MAMA convinced the Marquette county board to get and send letters supporting the horizontal launch site at KI Sawyer.” After getting all the support for the horizontal launch site, in July 2020, MAMA announced the new proposed site, a vertical launch site at Granot Loma (Ferraro). In the article, “Not everyone is

thrilled about proposed rocket launch site in Michigan's Upper Peninsula,” by Eric Lawrence, he writes, “Sawyer International Airport, the former K.I Sawyer Air Force Base... has been considered for the site but rejected because flights would be over more populated areas.” In our interview, Ferraro elaborated a bit more on the change of plans and explains, “I think the reason they chose Granot Loma is because it’s on the lakeshore. This would eliminate any issues about traveling over populated areas when they shoot the rocket.” This is very frustrating for me, because there are still households in the Granot Loma area that would have to evacuate with each rocket launch. MAMA also promises hundreds of jobs to the Marquette community, but after some further research, I discovered that there will only be around five job openings for the launch sites, which is not something worth all the damage the launch site could cause.

The new proposed launch site comes with lots of concerns from the Marquette community, mainly about the environment. In Andrew Lacombe’s article, “Proposed vertical rocket launch site near Marquette evokes emotions amid unanswered environmental questions,” he writes, “Gavin Brown, MAMA Executive Director... says the spaceport would only launch small lift class vehicles into low-earth orbit... making the site’s footprint much smaller than other existing U.S. facilities.” MAMA claims that the Granot Loma rocket site would strive to be a carbon negative site, and be the world’s first green spaceport (LaCombe). Ferraro disagrees with this, as he told me, “this plan is going to be a lot more extensive than what MAMA originally said it would be. They referred to it as a green rocket launch site, and its not going to have any impact whatsoever. Well that’s just false. Some of the plans they have state they want to have multiple rocket launch pads, and each of these pads have to be 250 acres of cleared land.” Furthermore, the rocket launch will cause erosion, and it will cause an impact on the groundwater and local streams in the area as well (Ferraro). The launch site is also planned to be

placed on hydric wetlands. But as Ferraro explains to me, “Wetlands are protected. They are the key to preventing erosion, and they are important for filtering water. MAMA will have to get a special permit just to build on the wetland”.

The Granot Loma site is also in a close proximity to many areas that tourists love to go experience nature at. The launch site is right next to the Hiawatha Water trail, which is a big trail for kayakers in the summer, and it is also about a mile from the Little Garlic river which is a big place for trout fishing, that feeds into the Big Garlic river. The site is also two miles away from the North Country trail, and the Noquemanon trails, which are huge trails in the U.P for hikers and tourists. It is within three miles of the Superior Watershed Partnership Land Conservancy Eagles Nest Coastal Community Forest, and the Echo Lake nature preserve, and it also is within four miles of the Harlow lake granite overlook (Ferraro). In our interview Ferraro told me, “This is going to be very loud and disruptive for an area that it surrounded by natural quiet areas that people come to visit...These are areas where people come to be in nature.” The Upper Peninsula is a get-away area for travelers to come and experience undisturbed nature, and adding this rocket launch site right in the middle of a major area, takes away from this experience. As someone who traveled up here quite often before choosing to reside in Marquette, I am extremely upset about the lack of environmental concern that MAMA is showing. If a rocket launch went haywire, it could contaminate the beautiful beaches and even Lake Superior, making it unsafe to swim in.



Here is a map I created to help show to proximity of the launch site to some of popular places in the area

Seeing that there are so many environmental concerns, many are wondering what the point of the rocket launch site even is. The need for establishing an aerospace industry in Michigan involves the automotive industry. Eric Lawrence writes in his article, “From the UP to space: Site near Marquette picked as rocket launch site, “The auto industry needs access to space to make its self-driving car dream a reality. The continuous communications connections needed for fully autonomous driving requires satellites, and Michigan, with its northern location, means satellites could find spaces in orbit that are underserved by more southern launch sites. Plus, Michigan’s proximity to large bodies of water provides an essential safety component.” In order to advance the self-driving car industry, Michigan needs satellites to communicate with the cars, and launching satellites straight from Michigan, would help improve the chances of being able to advance. “The Upper Peninsula is a climate refugee. MAMA is green-washing the whole thing. The Upper Peninsula is for resource and recreation, and to make a launch site this extensive, you would have to industrialize it. The risk of explosion is very high, and this will contaminate the lakeshore. MAMA thinks nothing bad is going to happen” (Ferraro). The community of Marquette does not think that advancing the auto industry is worth all the risks and damage it will cause to the environment in the Upper Peninsula.

Denis Ferraro, president of CSCLS, is determined to bring public awareness to his community about what the proposal of the Granot Loma vertical rocket launch site could mean for the Upper Peninsula. Ferraro talks about how MAMA was extremely secretive about their plans, which makes everyone wonder what else they are hiding. The interview helped open my eyes to the background of the rocket launch plans and how frustrating it is for the Marquette community. The environmental damage and concerns the rocket launches would cause are one of the main concerns for CSCLS and the county of Marquette, and the lack of benefit for the community is concerning as well. The damage the rocket could cause outweighs the good that the rocket could do for the Marquette community and for Michigan.

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