the weeks following the strike, and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has called for tighter oversight on ships passing through the waterway.

"Preserving our Great Lakes is a top priority for our state. I remain committed to getting the oil out of the water as quickly as possible, but in the meantime, these preventative actions will help to protect our most significant ecological and economic resource," Whitmer said in a press release.

However, last April was not the first time negligent boat activity has caused damage to utility infrastructure in the Straits. In April 1979, Consumers Power Co. lost power to some of its cables underneath the Straits. The cause: an anchor strike.

"Based on our inspection, it is assumed that a ship dragging (its) anchor accidentally hooked into the cables, resulting in the breaking of two cables and damaging of the third and fourth cables," reads a letter from the company to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The document is included as an attachment to the company's bottomlands easement with the state.

According to related documents, an outage occurred again in 1986. The documents do not suggest damage to Line 5 at those times, and Ryan Duffy, spokesman for Enbridge, told the News-Review that "last year's incident was the first incident with an anchor that we know of."

But Jennifer McKay, policy director for Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, said the Consumers Power documents are noteworthy because they show a clear record of more than one anchor strike in the Straits.

"We now know of multiple anchor strikes that have occurred to the Straits of Mackinac. This was not the first time this has happened. It's happened previously, and the damage that has occurred due to that can very easily happen again," she said in a phone interview.

She added that the layout of the infrastructure in the Straits means that when one of these anchor strikes occur, it is likely to hit multiple lines.

On Wednesday, Whitmer submitted an emergency order to the DNR that requires "specified vessels to take affirmative action to verify that their anchors and other equipment are secured immediately prior to passing through the straits."

She also sent a similar request to the U.S. Coast Guard, although the Coast Guard does not fall under state authority.

In a statement, attorney general Dana Nessel commended the move, also noting a history of similar anchor strikes in the past:

"This issue is of grave concern to me as my office only recently learned of several additional anchor strikes that have occurred on other lines in the Straits. The potential for damage from a loose anchor strike against the aging Line 5 infrastructure could be catastrophic for years to come. This is an essential but interim measure as we find a long-term solution to permanently shut down Line 5."

McKay also commended the move, but noted that there were "more proactive measures that Enbridge could take in the meantime." Many of those methods are listed in a June 30 report to the state, titled "Mitigating potential vessel anchor strike to Line 5 at the Straits of Mackinac."

Such methods include improved communication and awareness to passing ships, but also warning technologies like video and thermal cameras, acoustic technologies, and Automated Identification System technologies. The latter have the ability to track ships heading into the straits, and could warn ship crews and Enbridge officials when a potential risk is detected.

Duffy told the News-Review that Enbridge has provided funding for cameras to allow the Coast Guard to have real-time monitoring of ship traffic at the Straits, but said that was "the only one of those technologies in the report that moved forward to be included in the final agreements with the State."

He added: "Ultimately the tunnel would be the most significant safety measure for preventing anchor strikes moving forward," referring to a proposed concrete tunnel that would be built at the bottom of the Straits that could house the pipeline.

That tunnel was approved under Gov. Rick Snyder's administration, but plans have been delayed for legal reasons under Whitmer's tenure. The tunnel would take several years to complete.

New footage

Enbridge has received some scrutiny after Peters released previously unseen footage of the scene at the bottom of the Straits.

The footage, filmed in the weeks immediately following the strike, arguably shows a fuller picture of the scene beneath the Straits of Mackinac, including deep gouges along the bedrock, and a mark on the pipeline showing where the anchor likely struck and skipped over the line.

In May of last year, Enbridge released images showing some of the damage, but their scope was limited. When asked why the additional footage was not released earlier, Duffy said the footage was confidential because it was a part of an ongoing Coast Guard investigation.

The images released in May were only made available to the public after Enbridge obtained approval to release them from Coast Guard officials, he said.

Peters obtained the footage last fall after requesting it at a U.S. Senate Commerce Committee hearing.
Documents record multiple anchor strikes in Straits

The record of infrastructure-damaging anchor strikes in the Straits of Mackinac dates back years further than April 2018’s widely reported example, historical documentation shows.

Last year, on April 1, a vessel dropped its anchor along the bottom of the Straits, denting Enbridge’s Line 5 petroleum pipeline in three spots and releasing insulating mineral oil from an American Transmission Co. electrical cable.

Enbridge has since repaired the pipeline damage, and American Transmission is in the process of extended repairs, which are slated to wrap up in 2021. But recent events have brought renewed scrutiny. Earlier this week U.S. Sen. Gary Peters, D-Michigan, released new footage showing the scene at the bottom of the Straits in

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