

Working Waterways & Waterfronts 2010

Sense of the Symposium

Across the United States, coastal communities are experiencing changes that affect the physical and social structure of working waterways and waterfronts—those shorelines that support access to and from the water, and water-dependent industries such as commercial fishing, maritime trade, and recreational tourism activities. Recognizing that communities could learn from each other’s challenges and successes in addressing water access issues, and new, emerging uses of waterfronts, Virginia Sea Grant, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, and the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration hosted the first national symposium in Norfolk, VA, in May 2007.

The second symposium in September 2010, hosted by Maine Sea Grant with numerous partners (listed on next page) and sponsors (listed at www.wateraccessus.com) highlighted the many continued and expanded successes in addressing local and regional access issues, while providing a forum for identifying solutions at the national level.

This “sense of the symposium” document summarizes key THEMES that emerged during the three days of discussion, presentations, field trips, and interaction in Portland, Maine. The conference program, including abstracts, speaker biographies, and presentations, is available at www.wateraccessus.com.

Founding Partners

NOAA Sea Grant
Virginia Sea Grant
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Island Institute
Maine Coastal Program
Coastal Enterprises Inc.
States Organization for Boating Access
Coastal States Organization
National Sea Grant Law Center
Maine Working Waterfront Coalition

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Defining “Working Waterfront”

The 2007 symposium identified the key elements of a working waterfront: water dependency, commercial enterprise, and a balanced diversity of successful businesses.

Yet the terms “working waterway” and “working waterfront” mean different things to different people, and their definitions must remain focused, but broad and flexible to incorporate these different perspectives as well as to address emerging uses of America’s waterways and waterfronts.

Themes of the 2010 Symposium

Three key themes emerged during the symposium, which are described on the following pages.

PROGRESS: Stakeholders working to address working waterfront issues have come a long way since the 2007 symposium. There are success stories to share and best practices to recommend.

OPPORTUNITY: Existing programs, policies, and efforts provide opportunities to incorporate working waterfront interests.

FLEXIBILITY: The Nation’s waterfronts remain crowded and competitive, but they are dynamic zones that evolve over time. Flexible, adaptive solutions to working waterfront challenges will be able to address and balance new uses and emerging issues.

Time for a National Entity

Symposium participants who attended the final day’s strategy session reached consensus that a national effort is needed, and strategized about the function and form of such an entity. A subcommittee of volunteers agreed to continue the discussion.

THEME: PROGRESS

The 2010 symposium illustrated how much progress has occurred since 2007.

Much progress has been made in developing solutions and moving from strategy to implementation. The conversation about working waterways and working waterfronts has evolved and become focused. Just as the symposium in 2007 informed national policy, the work in 2010 will be applied outwardly across the country and upward to the national level.

While some states and regions are further along than others, “best practices” for working waterway and waterfront preservation can clearly be identified:

- ✓ Craft a vision. Successful communities have a vision for their waterfront, for the future of their place in the world. The vision may suggest the amount of funding required and appropriate funding sources.
- ✓ Forge partnerships. The issue is too much for any one person or entity or state to take on. Federal and state agencies need to work together and with communities. Partnerships can leverage funding.
- ✓ Provide incentives. Through partnerships and leveraged funding, working waterfront users can be offered incentives to move to or stay on the waterfront. Communities can be encouraged to promote and preserve their existing working shorelines.
- ✓ Be transparent. Be clear about the vision for a waterfront, and how that vision will be realized.
- ✓ Balance uses and promote diversity. “Water-dependent” is the key here when examining uses of waterways and waterfronts. Does the use require access to or from the water?
- ✓ Tell a good story. Make solutions personal and local and share your stories.
- ✓ Think tactically and creatively. There is no limit to the ways working waterfronts can survive and thrive into the future.

THEME: OPPORTUNITY

There are numerous examples of opportunities to create awareness of the role of working waterways and waterfronts in coastal communities, including engaging in and supporting existing and proposed programs and policies. This list describes policies or processes that may be being pursued or may have been successful in certain communities or states, and therefore could be shared as an informational, “lessons-learned” format, as suggested by Symposium participants. Sea Grant is not advocating for or against passage of any law, regulation, or policy.

The National Ocean Policy and related planning processes like marine spatial planning.

Reauthorization/amendment of the Coastal Zone Management Act and Federal Emergency Management Act.

Tax policy incentives.

Land-use planning incentives.

Emergency planning/disaster response and preparedness.

Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration.

Small Business Administration.

National working waterfront legislation and model state-level policies.

The current economic climate represents the opportunity for communities to evaluate their waterfronts and create visions for the future. Coastal communities can learn from and build alliances with inland communities, who also confront issues of transition in natural-resource based industries like farming and forestry, and the downtown revitalization movement.

THEME: FLEXIBILITY

Both the definition of working waterfronts and the approach must be flexible to respond to emerging issues and the evolution of the nation's waterways.

At the forefront of the symposium in 2007 were the losses of traditional waterfronts, in particular commercial fishing and related industries, due to residential development pressures and rising land valuations. Maine's working waterfront had constricted to just 20 miles. North Carolina faced 100 approved subdivisions and 34,000 home permits along the shoreline. While these particular threats may have weakened in the recent economic slowdown, new waterfront issues have emerged: the increasing popularity of cruise ships, development of wind and ocean energy, transportation, etc.

Working waterfront efforts have to look to the past to understand the value of cultural heritage and traditional uses, while looking to the future to plan for new and multiple uses (including, for example, new or restored fisheries), and remaining open to new, previously unforeseen opportunities.

When the question is asked, "What does the working waterfront look like in the 21st century?" the answer includes a flexible and expanding perspective of "mixed (water-dependent) use" in context and at different scales. It is still a crowded coast. A forward-looking view accounts for the fact that the need for access and working waterfront presence is increasing, not decreasing, as energy development, aquaculture, tourism, and other new uses sometimes replace small-scale, family-owned support businesses and traditional fisheries. For example, the demand for Small Harbor Improvement Program (SHIP) funds in Maine is greater than the amount of funding available. Changes in energy supply and demand influence marine transportation networks of ferries, short sea shipping, etc. Education also plays an increasing role in a diverse waterfront, including research laboratories, aquaria, and educational programs that connect the next generation to the coasts and waterways. In the future, tools that maintain flexibility will be crucial because they allow for multiple activities and will survive multiple generations of use.

A NATIONAL ENTITY?

The themes identified during the 2010 symposium—PROGRESS at the local, state, and national level, the OPPORTUNITY represented in current national policymaking, including the National Ocean Policy and upcoming reauthorization of the Coastal Zone Management Act, and FLEXIBILITY in defining and addressing working waterfront needs—support the need for a national presence focused on working waterways and waterfronts, beyond the occasional symposium.

On Thursday, September 30, sixty or so of the symposium's 220 attendees participated in a strategy session focused on next steps. They divided into small groups to discuss the need and opportunity for a national working waterfront entity to enhance shared knowledge and practice in working waterfront activities.

The following questions were posed to each group, and then the groups came together to share their conversations.

Q. Is it time for a national coalition?

Q. What would be the function/objective of a nationally-organized entity or network, and the needs that such a group could address?

Q. How would a coalition/network be structured (and funded)?

Q. Are there existing entities that could take on this role, or models from other sectors?

The consensus among these participants was that the time has come for a national coalition/network of some type. Any national group must maintain as broad a definition of working waterways and waterfronts as possible, to include recreation, tourism, private industry, shipping and trade along with commercial fishing activity. This definition must be flexible to accommodate new and emerging uses of the waterfront.

The identified needs of such an organization divided into two areas: education and advocacy, which would serve two distinct functions, as outlined below.

The 2010 Symposium included many different waterfront stakeholders, and participants identified the area that best fit the mission and goals of their affiliated institutions. For example, Sea Grant, as host and organizer of the symposium, is a federal program that partners with states to support marine and coastal scientific research and education. As such, Sea Grant is a non-advocacy, non-partisan organization that is positioned to serve in an educational, informational capacity in a national working waterfront effort.

Education

Participants agreed that the most important function of a national presence is to serve as a clearinghouse of information, to share success stories and best practices (e.g., waterfront zoning and legal templates), to support local and regional efforts (provide technical assistance),

and raise awareness of working waterfronts to outside interests (including state and federal lawmakers). This education function could be so broad as to include research and policy analysis.

The following research needs were identified:

- Summarize return on investment in working waterfronts at the national level. For example, North Carolina invested \$20 million for \$71 million worth of property. How do these stories aggregate at the national scale?
- What is the national economic impact of working waterfronts?
- Evaluate incentive programs.
- Determine public perceptions and values of working waterfronts.
- Assess regional implications of national policies.

As an education/outreach organization, a national entity would be charged with bringing in new partners. The cross-cutting nature of the working waterfront issue, as demonstrated by the diversity of interests represented at the symposium, highlights the opportunity to engage other organizations and efforts to share information. Other groups who may not realize they share common ground include conservation, agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, inland fisheries, affordable housing, private industry and small business. Partnering would leverage efforts rather than compete with groups who have similar goals.

Advocacy

The second function, with slightly less agreement than the need for an information sharing and education role, is that of advocacy and lobbying. Symposium participants noted that water-dependent interests need to present a unified legislative stand, backed by factually-sound information, on such issues as Congressional bills and program reauthorizations. A newly-formed independent policy-focused group could identify opportunity in current and future federal legislation, and develop, respond to, and analyze national policy, congressional activity, and federal decisions. Other than increasing funding streams, a policy coalition could identify needs for new tools and programs. It was noted that action has been taken in both the House and Senate to increase funding for working waterfronts, and a coordinated effort could help get more support (co-sponsors) to help pass national legislation.

The following entities were cited as examples of potential partners and/or models for a national coalition:

American Association of Port Authorities
Boat US
California Association of Harbormasters
Coastal States Organization
Congressional Caucus
Island Institute
Land Trust Alliance
Main Street America

National Marine Manufacturers Association
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Seafood Marketing Coalition
National Waterways Conference
Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation
Smart Growth Network
The Coastal Society
Urban Land Institute
Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Waterkeeper Alliance

Forward Momentum

How these different functions are resolved is the task of members of an ad hoc workgroup, who will be exploring the formation and structure of a national entity or perhaps two separate entities. To date, the workgroup consists of representatives from the following organizations:

Island Institute
Coastal Enterprises, Inc.
Urban Harbors Institute
Florida Sea Grant
Maine Sea Grant
Virginia Sea Grant

For the latest updates, visit www.wateraccessus.com.

Sincere thanks to participants in the 2010 Working Waterways and Waterfronts National Symposium on Water Access for their time and dedication to America's working coasts.