



NWWWS GR18 SENSE *of the* Symposium



*Keeping Waterfronts Working for the Next Century:
Sustainability, Recovery, and Prosperity*

**NATIONAL WORKING WATERFRONTS
AND WATERWAYS SYMPOSIUM**

MAY 14-17, 2018 | GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

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BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

In May 2018, more than 100 participants gathered at the Fifth National Working Waterfronts and Waterways Symposium in Grand Rapids, MI, to share ideas and information about working waterfronts. The theme of the event was “Keeping Waterfronts Working for the Next Century: Sustainability, Recovery, and Prosperity.”

The National Working Waterfront Network (NWWN) is a nationwide network of businesses, industry associations, nonprofits, local governments and communities, state and federal agencies, universities, Sea Grant programs, and individuals dedicated to supporting, preserving, and enhancing our nation’s working waterfronts and waterways. Participation in the NWWN is open to all individuals and organizations involved in working waterfront issues at the federal, state, and local level. Our mission is to increase the capacity of coastal communities and stakeholders to make informed decisions, balance diverse uses, ensure access, and plan for the future of their working waterfronts and waterways.

The 2018 symposium grew out of the work done at the four previous events, held in 2007 (Norfolk, VA); 2010 (Portland, ME); 2013 (Tacoma, WA); and 2015 (Tampa, FL). This was the first symposium held in the Great Lakes region, reinforcing the idea that waterfront communities in the eight Great Lakes states face many of the same challenges as working waterfronts elsewhere in the nation.

This document synthesizes the major themes of the symposium and the challenges and opportunities that were presented during the plenary talks and concurrent sessions. It also provides a sketch of participant demographics and a list of plenary events and field trips.

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SYMPOSIUM AT A GLANCE

PARTICIPATION

More than 100 participants gathered in Grand Rapids, MI, for the 4-day event. Participants came from 21 different states, with the majority hailing from Michigan, Maine, and Wisconsin. Sea Grant staff made up the largest proportion of the group, followed by participants from the academic and private sectors.

PLENARY SESSIONS

The opening plenary session set the stage for the symposium, and the closing plenary wrapped up with reflections collected during interviews with symposium participants.

MAY 15, 2018

Keynote: Jon W. Allan, Director, Michigan Office of the Great Lakes

“The Freshwater Coast: Connecting Communities to Nature and Nurturing Vitality”

Highlights:

- Conversations about coastal issues focus on national resources, fish, water quantity, and water quality —

but conversations must also include people and how people connect to place.

- The Great Lakes are a big, complex, hydrologically connected system that includes 8 states and 2 provinces. They don’t always agree, but they still find ways to work together.

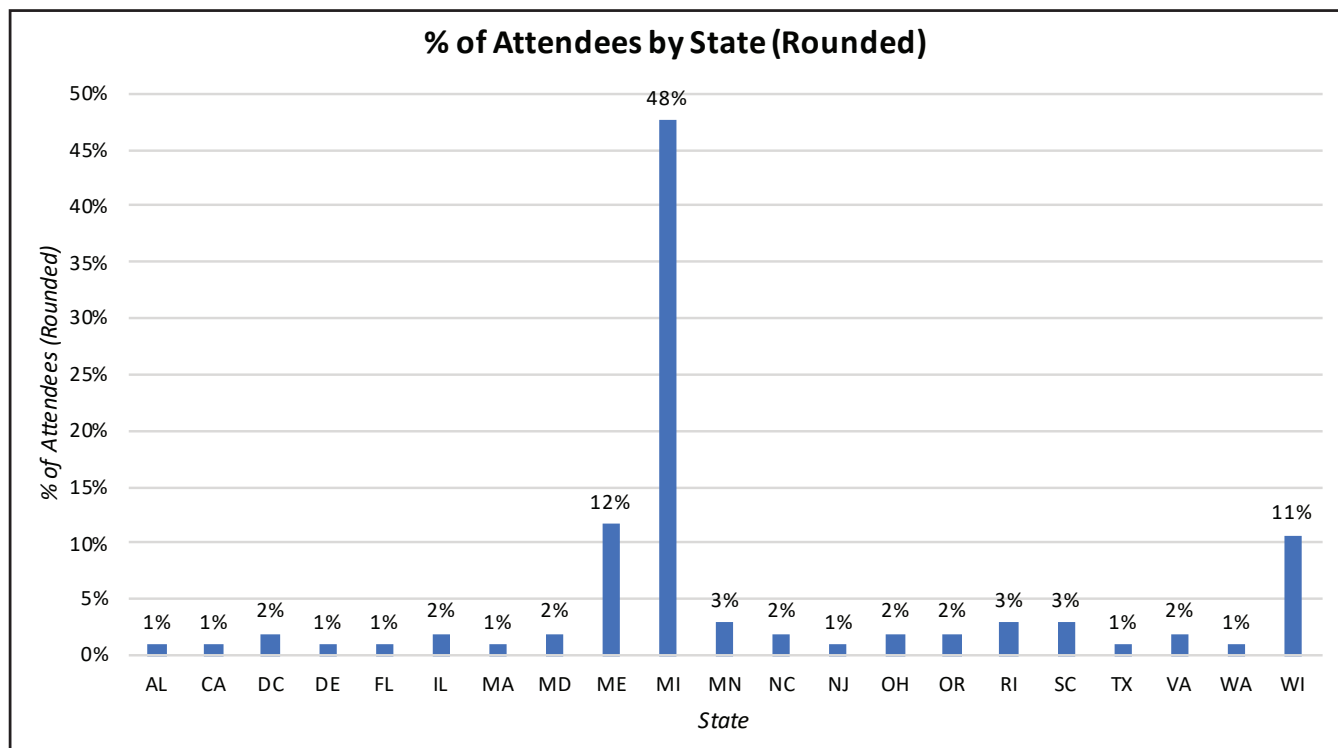
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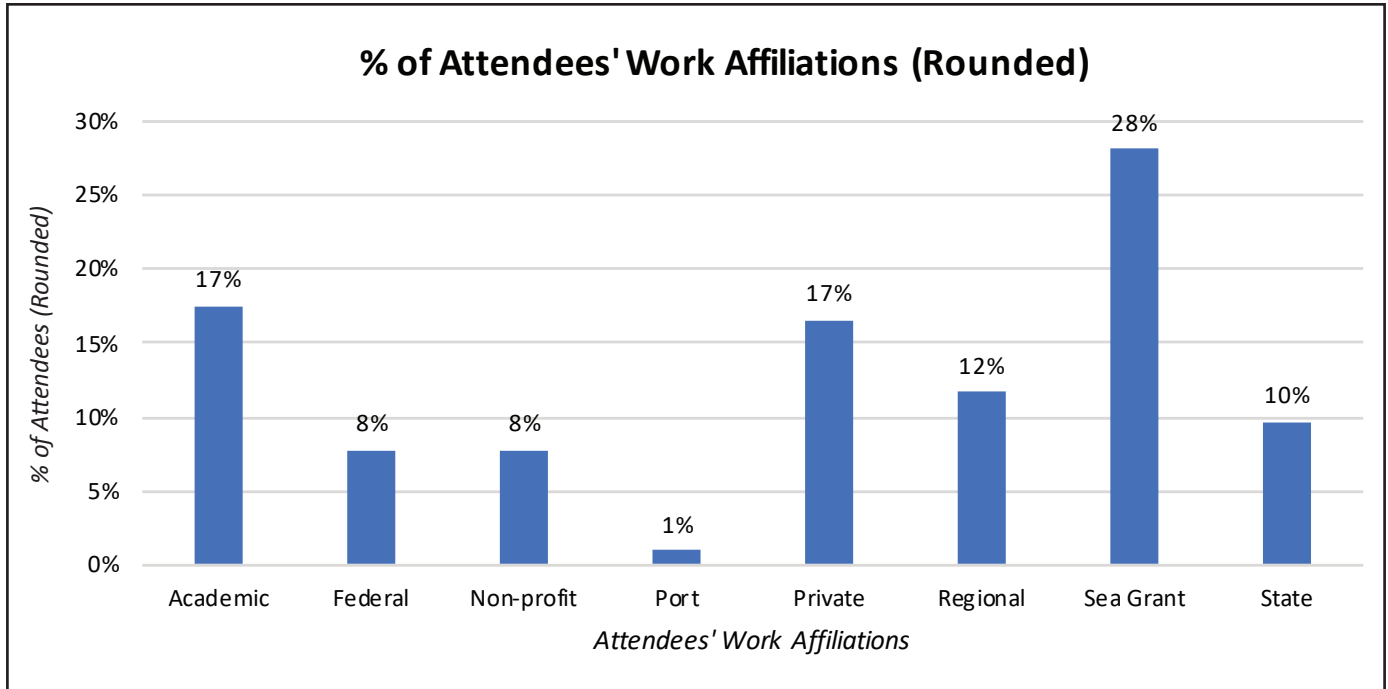
Natalie Springuel, Marine Extension Associate, Maine Sea Grant

“Collecting Stories at the Symposium”

Highlights:

- Springuel and her colleagues collected nearly 30 interviews as part of a larger project of mapping ocean stories.
- Waterfront experiences are deeply personal, but waterfront issues are interconnected with larger communities, industries, and trends. Island communities encapsulate this dichotomy
- Waterfront users are united in their concern for the future: gentrification, climate change, economic uncertainty, shifting priorities, and more. Resilient communities can absorb these changes without being blindsided.





FIELD TRIPS: DOWNTOWN WATERFRONT TOURS

On the second day of the symposium, participants took part in four field trips around the region to experience first-hand examples of working waterfronts.

- **Grand Rapids:** Grand Rapids is Michigan's second-largest city and boasts an impressive downtown with an emphasis on its relationship to the Grand River. This field trip explored the NWWWS host city through a walking tour that highlighted the city's efforts to restore beauty and public access to this striking riverfront.
- **South Haven:** Located where the Black River meets Lake Michigan, South Haven offers historical adventures alongside a dense and expansive recreational and commercial waterfront.
- **Muskegon:** Muskegon is a working waterfront in its truest form, featuring a cross-lake car ferry to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Participants visited science labs and research vessels; commercial docking and fishing operations; recreational marinas; and ongoing redevelopment of former coal-fired power plant and paper mill brownfield sites.

- **Grand Haven and Saugatuck:** This trip explored two of west Michigan's most popular summer beach destinations. Grand Haven and Saugatuck offer many recreational boating and coastal tourism opportunities along bustling boardwalks.

INTERVIEW PROJECT

COLLECTING STORIES AT THE 2018 NATIONAL WORKING WATERFRONTS AND WATERWAYS SYMPOSIUM

Symposium attendees have important stories to tell about valuing and protecting the nation's working waterfronts and waterways. At the 2018 symposium, a team of oral historians, made up of NWWN members and college students, was on hand to record participants' stories. The team presented the interview highlights at the Symposium's final morning plenary session.

A total of 27 interviews were conducted with 30 people. Though their stories were diverse, all interviewees shared a commitment to planning for a future that enables people to continue to make a living based on access to the sea and Great Lakes. Most of the interviews were

15-25 minutes long and centered around the following questions:

- What is your working waterfront story?
- What makes your working waterfront important in your community?
- How could the NWWN help you in the future?

Some key words came up repeatedly in many of the interviews, highlighting widespread dependence and reliance on working waterfronts and both uncertain and hopeful views toward the future; for example:

- Resilience
- Communication
- Historical value
- Collaboration
- Vulnerability
- Investment

“Waterfronts are deeply personal”
— Matt Campo, Red Bank, NJ

“In thinking about where you walk and how you walk and how you interact, you approach the world differently, and that sparks my imagination.”
— Bill Needelman, Portland, ME

“Working waterfront, it’s a lifeline.”
— Nick Battista, Rockland, ME

“We’ve done so much for so little for so long, we’re qualified to do anything with nothing.”
— Peter Huston, South Bass Island, OH

Regarding the Great Lakes islands: “Replicating what the Island Institute does in Maine [by] creating a network of Great Lake communities...they could benefit from talking to each other and sharing information. They have more in common with each other than they do, many times, with the adjacent mainland.”
— Matthew Preisser, Lansing, MI

“Just getting together and learning from one another is a huge benefit.”
— Kathy Evans, Muskegon, MI

All recorded interviews are available on the NWWN website and the NOAA Voices from the Fisheries online database. This project was coordinated and sponsored by a trio of Maine-based organizations, including Maine Sea Grant, Island Institute, and College of the Atlantic, in partnership with the National Working Waterfront

Network. Thanks to students Ela Keegan, Katie Clark, Corina Gribble, and Hattie Train for their great work on this project.

KEY THEMES

The theme of the 2018 symposium was “Keeping Waterfronts Working for the Next Century: Sustainability, Recovery, and Prosperity.” Through plenaries, presentations, panel discussions, field trips, interviews, and informal conversations, participants shared the challenges and solutions facing their communities and industries. They discussed their latest research findings and their hopes for the coming generations of waterfront users.

This document pulls together the major takeaways from the four-day symposium, gathered into four categories: Culture, Economics, Ports and Partnerships, and Resilience. Each category includes a distillation of current challenges facing working waterfronts and communities, along with some opportunities for growth and solution-seeking.

CULTURE

Throughout the symposium, a series of sessions touched on tourism, historical preservation, oral history projects, and waterfront festivals.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

- ***A sense of identity or “working waterfront culture” is not always unified in communities.*** Working waterfronts mean so many things to so many people that it is difficult to define a unified sense of identity. The cultural dimensions of working waterfronts are complex and based on differing values. Where one group might prioritize industry, another might prioritize recreation. While one sector might value small-scale water-dependent businesses, another might reflect a history of large-scale industrial use. These differing values based on past and emerging uses make reaching consensus around priorities more difficult. What works in one place will not necessarily work in another, so applying best practices can be challenging.
- ***You don’t value what you don’t know.*** Industrial waterfronts are often outside the well-traveled zones of a city or community, which results in residents not having a relationship with these places and not necessarily understanding their value.

How a community defines “working waterfront” impacts that community’s vision for the future. If a community doesn’t recognize the value of their working waterfront, or if they simply don’t define it as a recognizable asset in their community, they won’t emphasize it in the future. Fishermen and other waterfront workers often feel invisible in the decision-making process.

- ***Gentrification continues to occur on working waterfronts.*** Concerns over gentrification of waterfronts emerge when new uses fail to consider a site’s history. Finding the balance between celebrating historically important industrial uses of the waterfront and emerging less-industrial uses, such as residential or recreational, is complex. Housing prices are skyrocketing as wealthy residents settle on waterfronts, taking up space that was previously working and driving up prices near waterfront businesses. Low income workers must often commute at least 10-20 miles out. The underlying or core issue is lack of communication between newcomers and those who have been in these working waterfront communities for generations. There needs to be more dialogue to bridge the disconnect between conflicting parties, find compromise, and support local businesses and workers.
- ***Numerous environmental and social impacts of increased recreational use continue to exist and need to be addressed.*** In some areas of the country, the rise in numbers and type of recreational boating has been an economic boon and has fostered new connections with the water and maritime industries. The environmental and social impacts on waterfronts have risen as well. As waterway use increases, so does the need for improved public access, maintenance of waterway infrastructure, public safety, and environmental protection.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ***Community planning and stakeholder engagement enhance understanding of the working waterfront.*** Because working waterfronts can have diverse stakeholder groups, comprehensive planning, master planning, or similar public engagement planning processes across multiple disciplines offer unique opportunities to develop consensus around shared values. Starting with a definition of a community’s working waterfront is a critical first step in enabling that community to plan for their working waterfront’s future. Asking where they are located, what their demographics are,

who works there, who uses them...these are good questions to help define the importance of that space. Authentic industrial working waterfront at all scales (from small local fishing harbors to major trade-based ports) is good for tourism.

- ***Public access enables better understanding of the working waterfront.*** Public access is unanimously regarded as one of the most important priorities for engaging support for the working waterfront. Access takes many forms. In addition to access to the water for recreation, fishing, and other commercial enterprises, public access to the working waterfront itself enables people to better understand its value for the community. Projects that enable people to witness or experience the working waterfront offer an opportunity for increased support. Examples include linking industrial sites to public walkways. Genuine community relationships create the public will and political capital to do difficult things.
- ***Telling the story of working waterfronts is a powerful tool.*** Oral histories, maps, and video are just some of the many tools that can help the working waterfront story come forward and be heard by more people, thereby enabling working waterfronts to continue to feature prominently in a community or urban area’s future. Identifying the central story helps solidify community identity. The local oyster farming industry, or a region’s heritage of lighthouses and shipwrecks, or the culture of an island-based working waterfront, can all be shared through various storytelling tools such as thematic trails and audio storytelling walks. Stories can strengthen people’s connections to maritime industries, both past and present. A better understanding of the heritage of an area can help to shape the present and future. Boats can be a gateway for the public to understand the heritage of an area.

ECONOMICS

For context, coastal economy means all of the economic activity in a coastal state, county, and/or community. Blue economy refers to all water-dependent economic activity.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

- ***We need a better understanding of the economics of our working waterfronts.*** Underutilized areas of the waterfront are highly prized areas for development. Waterfronts can be caught between competing interests, especially as residential

and recreational demands continue to grow. Clean-up and infrastructure projects can bring hefty price tags. However, leveraging reindustrialization projects to revitalize waterfront communities can pump money back into local economies.

- ***Island communities across the country face unique challenges to sustaining their communities and culture.*** Island communities are often reliant on their mainland communities. However, they may be marginalized and their needs not acknowledged by their mainland communities. Island communities are often geographically remote and may be on the front lines of environmental, social, and economic challenges, including effects of rising sea levels, aging populations, lack of infrastructure, and lack of medical services. Their economies may also heavily rely on a single industry such as tourism or fishing.
- ***Inland water infrastructure is underfunded.*** Riverine waterways and inland water infrastructure offer massive economic impacts but are funded at 60 percent of what is needed. There is a wide economic net cast in local communities that lie along inland transport routes. Capital costs and maintenance costs are lower when compared to freight.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ***Better access to data can help support working waterfronts.*** Communities are making informed decisions about the future of their working waterfronts through their increased capacity to access and use economic data. Coastal, marine, and Great Lakes economic data available through ENOW at the national, state, and county level can now be tailored to help address local working waterfront questions. “Estimating the Local Marine Economy” is a newly developed NOAA Office of Coastal Management training and set of resources that were shared at the Symposium. The resources are available to stakeholders across the country.
- ***We are developing a better understanding of blue economy.*** U.S. coastal gross domestic product (GDP) accounts for about 46 percent of national GDP, of which about 2 percent is from the blue economy. Each major sector of the U.S. economy has a portion that is based in the blue economy of oceans and the Great Lakes. NOAA’s Economics: National Ocean Watch (ENOW) is a readily available and up-to-date source for this data.

- ***“Blue places” and place-based development are untapped.*** Place-based ecological restoration and development in the Great Lakes offers economic value that has been untapped. Research has shown a 6-to-1 return on investment into restoration efforts, with value coming from improvements in ecological function and real estate value.
- ***Bringing history to life can enhance tourism.*** Communities and organizations are using historical features and stories to connect people to the waterfront. Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary in Michigan protects shipwrecks and boosts tourism and local businesses by focusing attention on the area’s educational and historical value. Leipsic, Delaware, brands itself with its small town “Built on water” image to attract tourists and build community pride.
- ***Engaging stakeholders in waterfront planning will support efforts to secure capital resources.*** Planning needs to occur at a scale that is relevant to stakeholders and their diverse interests and needs. Effective waterfront planning empowers all stakeholders to contribute their knowledge when allocating capital resources and accommodating multiple uses.

PORTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

“When you lose a deep draft port, you won’t get it back so it goes to another use.”

CURRENT CHALLENGES

- ***There is a lack of communication among working waterfront stakeholders.*** In many communities, ports and harbors go relatively unnoticed. There’s a lack of understanding about their role, and decisions about the future of waterfront infrastructure rarely include all potential stakeholders at all parts of the process. Decision-makers aren’t always nimble enough to address challenges or opportunities in a timely or inclusive manner. Fishing communities particularly feel left out of local decision-making processes. Fundamentally, there’s a lack of communication between long-time waterfront workers and newcomers.
- ***The working waterfront workforce is aging and homogenous.*** The largely white and male waterfront workforce is aging. Without strategies for recruiting and retaining younger, more diverse workers, waterfront industries are approaching a crisis. This

phenomenon also extends to island communities, where declining populations and high living costs are making it hard for communities to thrive.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ***Revitalization of industrial sites offers opportunities to avoid displacement.*** Industrial working waterfront sites that have been abandoned offer a unique opportunity for redevelopment without displacing previous user groups.
- ***Revitalization efforts provide for new waterfront uses and increase public access.*** In the Great Lakes region, the clean up and reuse of former industrial sites is providing major opportunities for waterfront revitalization, including a mix of new recreational and tourism-related uses. Symposium participants highlighted communities that have cleaned up and reused their waterfronts and incorporated multiple community goals, including resilience (Muskegon, MI; Detroit, MI; and Toledo, OH).
- ***Community and stakeholder partnerships drive long-term planning.*** Communities and stakeholders need to create innovative partnerships and start devising long-term strategies for the sustainability of ports and working waterfronts. Through dedicated visioning processes, communities can come to see harbors as assets, not liabilities. Planning efforts should yield specific goals, such as supporting water-based recreation, making strategic investments in harbors, and building governance tools. A final product could be a coastal community plan that includes a place-making strategy and value-creation analysis. These can be shared in print (such as the Michigan Sea Grant Sustainable Small Harbors guidebook) or through webinars and livestreams.
- ***Advocates for working waterfronts need to thoughtfully engage diverse audiences.*** Improve dialogue between conflicting parties to find compromise and momentum. Find common ground and start with background information. Engage a wide array of stakeholders in a conversation about the impacts and benefits of a working waterfront. Emphasize shared history and values. Frequent face-to-face contact, graphics, data, GIS mapping, and storytelling are important tools to help an audience connect with the history and value of working waterfronts. Maine Oral History Project is a great example. Target specific audience groups, such as decision makers, local workers, and the transportation sector. Put numbers on the table to emphasize the economic impact of proposed and existing projects. Use opportunities at forums and conferences to tell stories of maritime industry.
- ***Industries can develop a diverse workforce.*** Develop specialized training programs. Advertise the fishing industry for women and young workers. Shape a working environment where women, young workers, and other minority groups feel welcome, safe, and respected.
- ***Advocates for working waterfronts need to seek creative solutions.*** Build trust among groups that might not naturally come together to talk about waterfront issues. Focus on individual, concrete challenges that can be addressed through specific actions. Are there new solutions to old problems, or old solutions to new problems? Find strategies for stabilizing local businesses and workers during fluctuations in demographics, funding, environmental conditions, and other outside influences.
- ***Conversations should recognize parallels and differences between marinas and recreational harbors.*** Recreational marinas and harbors are more publicly visible than industrial, working, or vacant waterfronts. Recreational harbors are integrated into community and economic development planning as strategic assets. Finite state resources are being invested strategically for public access to water amenities, such as harbors of refuge. Harbors and waterways can be well-maintained and support sustainable recreational and commercial use. Transferrable tools and resources are used to support development of a shared vision that integrates the harbor into the community's future. Michigan Sea Grant's Sustainable Small Harbors project presents a model for how communities can overcome barriers to economic, social, and environmental sustainability of small harbors. Clean Marina and Clean Boating programs in various states help educate marina owners about environmental best management practices, including coastal storm preparation and response.

RESILIENCE

CURRENT CHALLENGES

- ***We need to better our understanding of coastal resilience and climate change as it affects working waterfronts.*** Coastal resilience is the ability to respond to, withstand, and adapt to the impacts of hazardous events, such as coastal storms,

erosion, and water level extremes. Resilience to current and future hazards is an important consideration for additional waterfront investments, as well as the operation and maintenance of marinas. Working waterfront communities are challenged by nuisance flooding, storm surge, sea level rise, and lake level changes. In addition, shifts in fish populations and altered shipping routes due to arctic ice melt are indirect impacts from climate change.

- ***Resilience is a critical issue for working waterfronts.*** Working waterfront communities have a history of adapting to changes that are often brought on by external forces. The capacity for resilience increases with cultural memories of previous successful adaptations. As new hazards emerge, such as coastal storms, erosion, and water level extremes, working waterfront communities can draw on this capacity.
- ***Climate change and increased water levels threaten our working waterfronts.*** Increased coastal storms are costing waterfront facilities millions of dollars in damages. Extremely high water levels due to climate change are threatening the viability of waterfront uses.
- ***There is a need for comprehensive resilience planning of our working waterfronts.*** Coastal resilience and economic resilience are both important components of the Blue Economy, and there are current efforts to define how waterfront industries and technologies contribute to this fast-growing portion of the economy.
- ***Building community capacity enhances resilience of our working waterfronts.*** Small harbor communities have a particular need to build capacity to enhance resilience. The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program provided comprehensive support to coastal communities to assist in their efforts to become more resilient. Starting with a local assessment of resilience opportunities, the program helps communities understand hazard impacts and implement next steps for improving local hazard mitigation planning.
- ***Marinas have special resilience concerns and opportunities.*** Marina sustainability and resilience go hand in hand and are important when considering marina siting, operation, and maintenance. Best practices to promote sustainability and resilience in siting marinas and their operation and maintenance are offered through Michigan's and Ohio's Clean Marina programs.
- ***Local economic data is important for resilience planning.*** Approximately 25 symposium participants took part in NOAA's training for identifying your local waterfront economy. This is valuable information to inform economic development and resilience planning at the community waterfront scale. Improved availability of data and tools for local vulnerability assessments and strategies is promoting waterfront design based on current best available data regarding coastal flooding.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ***Existing resilience planning tools enhance working waterfront resilience.*** The Waterfront Alliance developed Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines (WEDG), a voluntary rating system and guidelines to address waterfront challenges at the project scale. Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance developed the Ports Resilience Index (PRI) to assist ports in identifying their vulnerabilities to a range of hazards. Rutgers University's Resilience Planning for Water-Dependent Uses project piloted a guide for Mid-Atlantic coastal communities on how to locate and assemble data from federal, state, and local sources to inform local land use planning to improve the resilience of water-dependent uses and their supporting infrastructure. NOAA's Digital Coast has data, tools, and training, such as GIS-based vulnerability assessment tools.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The 2018 National Working Waterfronts and Waterways Symposium planning team members selected a future-facing theme: “Keeping Waterfronts Working for the Next Century: Sustainability, Recovery, and Prosperity.” Rather than only dwelling on challenges, attendees shared opportunities for preserving and enhancing working waterfronts. New approaches and tools, such as Michigan Sea Grant’s Sustainable Small Harbors toolkit and NOAA’s ENOW economic valuation tool were some of the many approaches and tools discussed at the symposium and available to the NWWN. More importantly, relationships were formed and strengthened and lessons were shared that offer support and innovative ways of thinking about working waterfront challenges.

Participants are encouraged to continue to engage with the network and to realize that efforts to preserve and enhance their local working waterfronts are part of efforts taking place all over the country. The NWWN offers a way to tie relationships and tools together for these important efforts. The Symposium Steering Committee looks forward to seeing everyone at the next National Working Waterfronts Symposium!

Be sure to actively use the newly enhanced National Working Waterfronts Network website:

www.nationalworkingwaterfronts.com

— *Mark Brederland, Symposium Chair*



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