

Resources for Working Waterfronts in Georgia and Beyond



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Overview

Working waterfronts throughout the United States face a multitude of challenges, including an aging workforce, economic issues, storms and sea level rise, and encroaching development of coastal properties. In Georgia, much of the commercial fishing working waterfront infrastructure is focused around shrimping, and as the shrimping industry continues to face the aforementioned challenges, the working waterfronts in the state also struggle to remain operational.

This is especially true as coastal development on the Georgia coast continues to increase. All docks in the state associated with commercial fishing efforts are privately owned, and are therefore at potential risk of being sold to developers. Additionally, the negative impacts of increased storm severity and frequency, along with sea level rise, continues to damage working waterfront properties.

This document, meant to be a **starting point for future collaboration, research, and development**, will outline pertinent information on Georgia's waterfronts, highlight key successes of other state's addressing similar issues, provide opportunities for federal funding, and present suggestions for how to move forward. Ultimately, this report is meant to share relevant information to those who work in the working waterfront space. This is a collaborative effort between the National Working Waterfront Network (NWWN) and the University of Georgia Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant program, with funding going to a graduate student to conduct literature reviews and create the final report.

Link to Source	Key Information
National Working Waterfront Network (NWWN) Drivers of Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Article focused on providing background and context of the state of working waterfronts in the United States- Includes fisheries management, coastal development, cost of maintenance, and regulatory measures
NWWN Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- List of various documents and reports created by the NWWN, including links to each of them
The Sustainable Working Waterfronts Toolkit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Toolkit created by NWWN and other partners to provide key information on waterfronts as well as tools to use in protecting vulnerable waterfronts- Summary of the full toolkit available here
National Sea Grant Law Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Web page providing background information about working waterfronts and their surrounding communities- Includes links to various projects they have worked on such as history of the waterfronts, improving coastal access, and storm impacts on waterfronts
Ocean Climate Funding for Coastal Cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Funding guidebook created by the Urban Ocean Lab- Key opportunities have been included in the Federal

	Funding section of this report
Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Guidebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding guidebook created by the federal government detailing all funding opportunities created under the IRA - Key opportunities have been included in the Federal Funding section of this report

Georgia Commercial Fishing Waterfronts

Key Takeaways:

- Potential for policies to address commercial fishing waterfronts moving forward
- Some current grant options along with future opportunities to grow funding
- Good opportunities to connect with other organizations working toward similar goals

While there is current ongoing research focused on supporting working waterfronts moving forward in Georgia, these efforts are fairly recent when compared to other states. As a result, Georgia does not yet have an abundance of policies, incentives, or research specifically aiming to support or invest in the longevity of working waterfronts. Continued investment into this sector will help expand the knowledge base within the state and provide more opportunities in the future.

With increasing economic stress placed on fishers, fish processors, and the fishing industry as a whole in Georgia, knowing what resources are available is vital. The following is a starting point that includes only the most relevant sources found that can either be leveraged now, or in some way in the future. Hopefully, these resources will contribute to continued efforts to support the working waterfronts of the state, and future research into the political and legal landscape in Georgia.

Link to Source	Key Information
GA Department of Natural Resources Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple grant opportunities linked here, should keep an eye on this moving forward - Coastal Incentive Grant likely most relevant to working waterfronts - Georgia Conservation Tax Credit Program ended in 2021, but could be used as a model for future opportunities
OneGeorgia Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focused on providing support to rural communities - Economic development, infrastructure maintenance, machinery purchasing, land acquisition, etc - Limited to certain counties
Georgia Agricultural Tax Exemption (GATE) Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides sales tax exemptions for agricultural purchases

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not currently applicable to commercial fishing working waterfronts, but could potentially be leveraged in the future
Georgia Coastal Management Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goal to provide assistance and information to stakeholders about ways to promote sustainable development of coastal areas - Includes information on policies related to coastal hazards, resilience, disaster recovery/redevelopment, and more
Coastal Regional Commission of Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning and development agency with the goal of aiding coastal counties in Georgia to create plans and develop policies - Potential resource moving forward, especially for coastal planning and GIS services

Success of Other States

Key Takeaways:

- Maine: public outreach, taxation, funding
- North Carolina: taxation
- Alaska: youth development
- Florida: community aid, land acquisition

Other states also dealing with working waterfront issues have made various strides forward. In this report, Maine, North Carolina, Alaska, and Florida will be highlighted, though there is certainly work being done elsewhere. These states can be used as a basis for future efforts in Georgia, and can be used as a resource moving forward. Hopefully, **increased collaboration across states and agencies** will help facilitate the protection and support of working waterfronts in the United States.

Maine

Key Takeaways:

- Public perception and education of the waterfronts is vital
- Good example of success in the working waterfront realm
- Leverage policies already in place to include waterfronts moving forward

Maine has achieved a lot of success in their efforts to improve the longevity of working waterfronts in their state over the past few decades, and has become something of a “gold standard” in this realm. There are a variety of programs funded by the state within various departments, some detailed below. Most of these programs started in the 1980s or 1990s, and others in the early 2000s. When comparing Maine to other states, a key factor in their success

was being able to pass these prior to the financial crash of 2008. Many of the programs have been renewed ever since. Importantly though, a new funding source was passed in May 2024.

Waterfronts were either explicitly included upon creation of funding programs or were later included as a separate category once the broader population of Maine learned how important those areas were and the risks they were facing. Using already established avenues for improving and preserving the waterfronts (such as funding, taxes, property rights, etc) is a strong theme for Maine. However, despite public approval of the importance of waterfronts, Maine has not passed any laws, policies, or tax incentives since the 2006 current use tax implementation. Working within the system already in place is important, as is **increasing public awareness** and improving public perception and support of waterfronts.

Link to Source	Key Information
Working Waterfront Access Protection Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Property owners can submit applications to the program and if accepted, the property cannot be developed and the property owner is paid for this agreement - Way to protect areas from coastal developments of new hotels, housing communities, etc
Maine Coast Fishermen's Association (MCFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Webpage for MCFA describing working waterfronts in Maine - Includes overview, goals, importance, and more of working waterfronts and showcases some of the projects they have worked on
State of Maine's Working Waterfront (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report on waterfronts in Maine using interviews, surveys, and more - Includes suggestions for future of working waterfronts (funding, risk evaluations, outreach, reassessments, etc) - Could be used as a method to conduct similar research in other states
Inventory Report Template	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standardized process Maine created to asses working waterfronts - Could be used by other states as well
Land for Maine's Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government agency that has been a major funding source for Maine waterfronts since 1987 - Includes money mainly from bonds but also some other assorted avenues, detailed here
Coastal Community Planning Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recurring opportunity funded by NOAA for projects aiming to help improve climate resilience, conduct vulnerability assessments, and more - \$50,000 max per grant for \$300,000 per year total
Small Harbor Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding source from Maine Department of

Program (SHIP)	<p>Transportation to build/rebuild waterfronts on public land that increase public access to waterfronts (can include commercial fisheries uses)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Up to \$250,000 grant
Accessing Maine's Coast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Website built to hold a large amount of information on laws and policies related to working waterfronts and public coastal land - Includes tax information, future development processes, access rights, and more - Could be a good idea to make a similar website for other states to have a compiled place for resources
Maine Rebuilding Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$60 million package - \$25 million of it going to rebuilding after January 2024 storms and increasing working waterfront resilience - Package focused on storm resilience in the face of climate change - Passed by Maine state legislation in May 2024

North Carolina

Key Takeaways:

- Present use taxation policy for North Carolina's working waterfronts
- Important for governments to promote new programs/policies and provide outreach and education to key stakeholder groups

North Carolina working waterfronts are facing similar issues, but have demonstrated resilience to harsh weather and do have some key programs in place. A Duke University master's student conducted a review of the North Carolina working waterfronts in 2008, linked below, and a more recent assessment was completed in 2020 by North Carolina Sea Grant. Both reports highlight the key issues and possible paths forward.

On the positive side, North Carolina does have special taxation rules for working waterfronts, although it has not been taken advantage of by many waterfronts, which is highlighted in the 2020 waterfront assessment. This emphasizes the **importance of outreach programs** to help raise awareness of new programs. Hopefully, this report will help spread the word and increase involvement in this opportunity to benefit working waterfront property owners.

Link to Source	Key Information
Working Waterfront Review Master's Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Working Waterfronts Preservation in North Carolina, and the Potential for Involvement by Environmental Defense Fund" - Presents review and overview of North Carolina working waterfronts, including highlight key issues

	(development) and recommendations for the future
North Carolina SB 646	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full state senate bill outlining tax relief for working waterfronts - Includes working waterfront definitions - This section outlines the present use taxation policy
Working Waterfront Property Tax Deferment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Website with application to qualify for the present use taxation policy above
"In the Wake of the Storms: Working Waterfronts and Access in Coastal North Carolina" (pdf)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Article addressing some of the topics included in the report here - 2020 report on North Carolina working waterfronts highlighting a continued decline in the number of fish houses, but general resilience to storm damage - Revealed that despite the tax breaks, only a few business owners actually knew about it, and even fewer were using it

Alaska

Key Takeaways:

- Grant program to encourage next generation to join the commercial fishing industry
- Working Waterfronts Bill created and submitted by U.S. senator Lisa Murkowski (AK)

Alaska has an array of city or county level reports that focus on economic development of the waterfront communities. These mainly focus on development laws and economics development. An official announcement of the Working Waterfronts Bill highlights the plethora of economic and environmental opportunities related to the Alaskan coastline, including the monetary value of commercial fishing endeavors in the state. This bill will be detailed in the Federal Funding section later in this report as well.

Alaska also appears to be placing an emphasis on addressing "graying of the fleet" by encouraging and aiding the **next generation of fishers** to enter the workforce and get trained in commercial fishing. The aging population of commercial fishers is an issue facing most working waterfronts, and Alaska's development program could be used as a model for other states to build from.

Link to Source	Key Information
Alaska Marine Conservation Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Website dedicated to providing information and resources related to Alaska's working waterfronts - Focus on community-building and fishermen's network to provide support - Grant program to promote next generation of fishers to

	enter the workforce (Young Fishermen's Development Act)
Kenai Waterfront Revitalization Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Example of a city level waterfront evaluation - Does not focus on commercial working waterfronts, but the coastal area as a whole - Focus on economic development, zoning laws, etc
Announcement of Working Waterfronts Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Official announcement of Working Waterfronts Bill from Senator Murkowski - Short overview of Alaska waterfronts including their challenges and their importance - More information in Federal Funding section

Florida

Key Takeaways:

- Economic and technical aid for Florida's working waterfronts
- Funding opportunity for land acquisition

Florida's commercial working waterfronts also face a multitude of challenges and issues, and the state has a few programs that have been successful in aiding coastal communities. Damage from storms and hurricanes to docks and harbors is a big problem, and will likely intensify in the coming decades.

To help coastal communities address key problems, the Waterfronts Florida Program was created in 1997 by the Florida Coastal Management Program. Since then, 24 communities have applied and been accepted into the program and therefore **receive technical and financial assistance** to protect, conserve, and enhance their working waterfronts. The Waterfronts Florida Program also created guides for waterfront revitalization and produced case studies of successful communities, both linked below.

Link to Source	Key Information
Waterfronts Florida Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides guidance and monetary benefits to local governments in coastal areas focused on enhancing working waterfronts - Requires communities to apply for and be accepted into the program
Best Management Practices for Waterfront Revitalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Created by the Waterfronts Florida Program - Outlines types of waterfronts (working, recreational, private) and best practices to revitalize them - Could be used as a resource for other states as well

Case Studies Waterfronts Florida Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Details of various communities who have taken part in the Waterfronts Florida Program
Stan Mayfield Working Waterfronts Grant Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grant used to purchase land parcels to be used only for commercial fisheries uses or other ocean products - Goal is to promote and establish working waterfronts and prevent further coastal development that would threaten the working waterfronts

Federal Funding Opportunities

Key Takeaways:

- Most grants currently focused on port infrastructure or storm risk mitigation
- Multiple new waterfront-focused legislations introduced into Congress in 2023 and 2024

Since the passing of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in 2021, also called the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in 2022, millions of dollars in federal funding have become available to various sectors. Importantly, multiple **opportunities were created for maritime operations** including port development, storm repairs and flooding mitigation projects, and more. The following are a few of the funding sources that were **most relevant to working waterfronts at the time of this report**, including opportunities not funded directly through the IIJA or IRA.

Please note that while similar, the Keep America's Waterfronts Working Act (reintroduced in 2023), Working Waterfront Preservation Act (introduced in 2023), and Working Waterfronts Bill (introduced in 2024) are all different (in bold and detailed in table below). None have made it out of both houses of Congress as of May 2024. However, while still in Congress, some money has been secured for the Working Waterfront Preservation Act under the Fiscal Year 2024 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Bill (detailed below), which will hopefully lead to the passing of the full act in the coming months.

Link to Source	Key Information
Reauthorization of the Maritime Administration (MARAD) - 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$1.35 billion package - Supports the Port Infrastructure Development Program (see below), Small Shipyard Grant Program, and Maritime Environmental and Technical Assistance Program - Could be used to expand cold storage at ports, increase available pool of maritime workers, and creates a Maritime Workforce Working Group
Port Infrastructure Development Program - 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$2.25 billion between 2022 and 2026 - \$450,000,000 available in 2024 - Supports development of large and small ports

	including cold storage, loading and unloading, processing, and more
Keep America's Waterfronts Working Act - Passed the House in 2020, Reintroduced in 2023 (Pingree and Wittman)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resubmitted by representatives Pingree from Maine and Wittman from Virginia in December 2023 - \$50 million for grant programs, \$50 million for loan programs - Funding for working waterfront preservation and enhancement - Creation of a Working Waterfront Task Force housed at the Department of Commerce
Working Waterfront Preservation Act - In Congress 2023 (Collins and Reed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submitted by senators Collins from Maine and Reed from Rhode Island in November 2023 - \$20 million grant program - Goal to support purchase or maintenance of working waterfront property - Requires recipients to permanently protect an area as working waterfront
FY 2024 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Bill - 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$15 million package - \$10 million through Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to repair damage from recent storms - \$5 million supports Working Waterfront Preservation Act (see above) by creating new grant program at Economic Development Administration to support working waterfronts
Working Waterfronts Bill - In Congress 2024 (Murkowski)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submitted by senator Murkowski from Alaska in February 2024 - Goals to improve the blue economy and reduce impacts of climate change moving forward - Includes grants for cold storage and processing plants, working waterfront infrastructure development grants, establishes ocean clusters, provides tools to address invasive marine species, and much more
Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities - 2021 (FEMA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yearly application, funding varies each year (2023 was \$1 billion) - Focused on hazard mitigation projects - Could be used for working waterfronts protecting themselves from storm damage - Also includes a variety of other grant opportunities on the webpage
Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant Program - 2021 (FEMA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yearly application, funding varies each year (2023 was \$800 million) - Must be insured by National Flood Insurance Program - For projects aiming to reduce or eliminate flood risk
Clean Ports Program - 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$3 billion from Inflation Reduction Act

(EPA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grants for zero-emission port equipment, infrastructure, and air quality planning at ports - Goal to reduce diesel pollution and increase community engagement
Climate-Ready Fisheries - 2022 (NOAA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$349 million investment - Provides support from NOAA to conserve protected species and build fisheries management systems - Goal to increase resilience of communities and fisheries in the face of climate change
Ocean Based Climate Resilience - 2022 (NOAA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project-based funding until 2026 - Provides money to support projects in various sectors - Could leverage this for disaster risk or ecosystem service assessments
RAISE Grants (DOT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant Program - \$14.3 billion for 25 rounds of funding - Could be applied to port infrastructure reinvigoration or rebuilding
United States Marine Highway Program - 2021 (DOT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transportation grant for projects to enhance maritime transportation - Could potentially be used for port reinvigoration or rebuilding
Ferry Boat Program - 2021 (DOT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yearly application, funding varies each year (over \$170 million in 2023) - Grants for improving ferry terminals and ferry operations in the United States - Georgia has utilized this in prior years

Moving Forward

At the federal level, stakeholders should keep tabs on the following potential funding sources:

1. [Keep America's Waterfronts Working Act](#) (Pingree, Wittman - Dec 2023)
2. [Working Waterfront Preservation Act](#) (Collins, Reed - Nov 2023)
3. [Working Waterfronts Bill](#) (Murkowski - Feb 2024)

These three sources could become **key avenues** for grants, loans, and more in the coming years if they are passed. Additionally, taking advantage of the current opportunities to improve ports and working waterfronts, especially their resilience to climate change, storm damage, and coastal development, will be key moving forward. Taking some time to look through this report and identify programs that may be applicable to you or your organization's work may provide monetary benefits during the next cycle of applications.

At the state level, Georgia's working waterfronts have a lot of potential to improve, expand, and preserve their status. Looking toward **other states for guidance and collaboration**, such as those included in this report, will help direct future efforts. Additionally, states not included in this report may also help direct the future of Georgia's waterfront work. South Carolina Sea Grant, for example, has conducted [various surveys](#) of their state's working waterfront and the communities that interact or rely on them.

Improving education and outreach programs to **raise awareness** for working waterfronts and the challenges they are facing in Georgia will likely be vital. Maine is a perfect example of a state that has been able to pass bipartisan legislation to support their working waterfronts due to the public awareness of the issues facing them. That awareness has come through years of outreach and community engagement work from coastal communities to inland areas.

Additionally, diving deeper into Georgia's tax laws and finding creative ways to leverage them to the advantage of working waterfronts may **create new tax breaks or benefit opportunities**. This is also an avenue through which Maine and North Carolina have achieved regulatory change to support waterfronts, and adjusting the wording of current laws is often simpler than trying to pass entire new ones.

Improving **collaboration between stakeholders** and across different sectors has also been important in the fight to protect working waterfronts in successful states. Engaging with the resources already available, including the National Working Waterfront Network, and with fisheries operations across the state and beyond can help foster collaboration and community building, leading to stronger networks and hopefully connections to future opportunities.