

Water Access 2007
A National Symposium on
Working Waterways & Waterfronts

The symposium was held in Norfolk VA, on 9 – 11 May 2007. There were 170 attendees and sponsors from Government, industry and the academic community. The purpose of course was to discuss the problem of diminishing waterway access and possible solutions. Common problems were rising land costs, skyrocketing taxes, increased insurance, conversion of facilities to condominiums and local regulations limiting public access. The meetings were broken up into various interest panels with presentations by people experienced in local access issues. Case studies were given to show attendees what has been done in various parts of the country and how these solutions could be brought home. The leadoff Plenary Panelists including Ryck Lydecker, Boat U.S. moderator; Thom Dammrich, President, NMMA; Rod Moore, Exec. Director, West Coast Seafood Processors Association; Katherine Andrews, Exec. Director, Coastal States Organization and David Kennedy, Director, NOAA Office of Coastal Resource Mgmt. Additional panels included: Successful Local Initiatives, Legislative/Legal Panel, Technical Studies and Tools to Address Access, State Initiatives and Local Case Studies.

Thom Dammrich made the following points: We have National Parks but not waterfront, the significant contribution to our economy from the 72M boaters in the US. Seven areas to concentrate on: 1. Build an access communications network. 2. Get boat access integrated into local planning. 3. Work with all levels of Government. Government is the largest owner. 4. Promote measurement of boating access and economic impact. 5. Improve policy of regulatory permitting for boat access. 6. Plans are needed by state for boating infrastructure. 7. Dredging – “Can’t get there.” (Presumably he meant the lack of funding for civil works dredging.)

Rod Moore of California. Indicated commercial fish markets are gone. Eighty percent of seafood is now imported. California has one seafood processing plant and has lost much working waterfront.

Katherine Andrews. Eighty percent of people live within one hour of the coast. Discussed the Coastal Zone Management Act and felt it needed revision. Thirty-four states are participating. A new CZM plan will be developed and OMB is interested in making it more effective. A new bill will be prepared by the end of this year.

Paul Anderson, Director, Marine Sea Grant Program – Different issues on different coasts. Conducted a survey, found loss of access for commercial fishing. Access issue getting worse. Working waterfront people cannot afford to live there. Maritime Zoning Districts has been successful in Annapolis, Maryland, protecting public access and stimulating business. Safe harbors have been added on Lake Superior. Need more public education and outreach.

Mike Voiland, North Carolina. The NC General Assembly established by statute, a water access study committee, charged to “study the loss of diversity of uses along the coastal shore line of NC and how these losses impact access to the public trust waters of the state.” NC has made progress in preserving water access.

In addition to NC, Maine and Florida are doing a lot to preserve waterfront. For its many miles of coastline Maine has very little working waterfront but is trying to preserve what they have. In Palm Beach County, FL, 60% of the people voted for a \$50M bond issue for waterway improvements. Florida has also passed the 2005 Working Waterfront Legislation which among other things requires local governments to address public access through the comprehensive planning process.

I admit going to the conference expecting the worst but was surprised to learn of how much has already been accomplished in many state and local initiatives. This is but a synopsis of the Panels and some of the speaker comments. An excellent publication “Access to the Waterfront: Issues and solutions Across the Nation” was prepared by the Maine Sea Grant Staff. I will check to see how it can be obtained but do have 2 copies if anyone wants one. Also the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences (VIMS) is preparing final conclusions and recommendations from the Symposium on CD for distribution this summer to all attendees.

I attended the NOAA Stakeholders Forum on May 23 which was very good and I will send a report later. Right now I am working on finalizing my talk at the Small Vessel Security Summit.

Earl

Earl Waesche
Legislative Director
National Boating Federation
Phone: 410-573-1494
Fax: 603-806-5900