Reversing the Tide: The Alabama Working Waterfronts Initiative

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Like many coastal states, Alabama faces threats and disturbances to its ecological, economic, social and cultural structures. Natural and technological disasters, as well as the economic recession have impacted coastal communities that rely on access to the water for their livelihoods. In addition, coastal Alabama has experienced population growth and land use competition for waterfront access.

Economic Impacts of Working Waterfronts in Alabama:

Commercial shellfish landings/Dockside Value: 36 mil lbs/$45 mil
Economic impact of shellfishing: $196 mil
Commercial fishing jobs: 8750
Number of commercial and recreational fishing licenses: 486,000
Recreational fishing jobs: 4900
Beach Visitors/Impact: 4.5 mil/$2.3 bil
Port of Mobile Rank/Impact: 9th largest in U.S.; $10.3 bil

As reported in the AWASC Final Recommendations, 2010 and NMFS, 2009

Water-dependent businesses along the Alabama coast are wide-ranging. Generations of families based in traditional fishing towns operate fishing boats, seafood processing facilities, marine vessel construction and repair, and other support industries. As diverse as they may be, these working waterfronts have one thing in common: their tremendous impact upon Alabama's economy and socio-cultural heritage.

Influenced by the efforts of MASGC and AUMERC, the Alabama Legislature created the Alabama Waterfronts Access Study Committee in May 2008. Led by MASGC and comprised of stakeholders and state agencies, the WASC produced recommendations of management-based tools and techniques to preserve the State's working waterfronts. MASGC and AUMERC are working to implement some of these recommendations.

To educate local communities on national efforts on the topic, AUMERC/MASGC held a Planners Forum in 2010. Thirty-one regional and local planners participated and learned from experts in Maine and Florida. National and local efforts and specific examples were discussed. A similar workshop is planned for Mississippi.

As a result of the Planners Forum, AUMERC, MASGC, and the Sea Grant Legal Program partnered with the City of Gulf Shores to develop plans for a Working Waterfront District along the Intracoastal Waterway. This partnership resulted in the passing of the Waterway Village Overlay District in May 2012.

AUMERC and MASGC are continuing to work with communities and stakeholders to implement aspects of the WASC Recommendations to the Legislature.

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