Preserving the Working Waterfront: Oral Histories from Around the Nation

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National Working Waterfronts & Waterways Symposium
Tampa, FL • November, 18, 2015
Project Team

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The National Working Waterfront Network increases the capacity of coastal communities and stakeholders to make informed decisions, balance diverse uses, ensure access, and plan for the future of working waterfronts and waterways.

What are working waterfronts?
Working waterfronts are waterfront lands, waterfront infrastructure, and waterways that are used for a water-dependent activity, such as ports, small recreational boat harbors, fishing docks, and hundreds of other places across the country where people use and access the water.

Who are we?
- Municipalities
- State and Federal agencies
- Nonprofits
- Universities
- See Grant programs, Businesses, Industry Associations, and Individuals dedicated to supporting and enhancing our nation’s working waterfronts and waterways.

What do we do?
- Cooperate to research and celebrate our nation’s working waterfronts and waterways
- Provide our partners with access to the historical, economic, financial, and policy information and resources they need to address issues on working waterfronts and waterways at the local, state, regional, and national level
- Maintain and strengthen a diverse network of partners who collaborate internally and act as liaisons to their stakeholders and communities.

What can you do?
This website contains lots of information, data, and tools that individuals, communities, and governments at all levels can use to develop, inform, and enhance their sustainable working waterfront initiatives. The compilation of this information was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration. To learn more, follow the links below to access the various sections of the Sustainable Working Waterfront Toolkit:

- Financing
- Law & Policy
- Economics
- Tools in Action
- Historic Trends
- About the Toolkit (with links to the Final Report)

To stay informed about NWWN activities, sign up to receive our newsletter (see left column) and join the NWWN Community Center.
Case Study
Alabama Waterfront Access Study Committee Launches Waterfront Protection Effort

Location
Alabama coast, especially Mobile County though expanding inventory work to entire coast (two counties in Alabama and three in Mississippi).

Timeline:
2006 to present, the actual Study was conducted 2008-2011

Summary
A House Joint Resolution during the 2008 Legislative Session created the Alabama Waterfront Access Study Committee to identify the loss and potential loss of diversity along the shorelines of Alabama, and to document how these losses impact access to the state’s public trust waters, including:

- Gathering information about local land-use management and zoning, current shoreline development trends, and local tax rates;
- Collecting research and information from Alabama and other states and jurisdictions regarding incentive-based techniques and management tools used to preserve waterfront diversity; and
- Assessing the applicability of such tools and techniques to the coastal shorelines of Alabama.

In March 2010, the Committee submitted a final report to the Legislature proposing recommendations in several categories, which partners are working to implement. In a recent development (early 2012), the City of Gulf Shores implemented a new overlay district which allows for the re-establishment of water-dependent businesses and provides model language regarding traditional, commercial, and recreational working waterfronts. The Alabama Waterfront Coalition has been working informally to advance working waterfront efforts throughout the state. Partners are considering formalizing this entity to directly address and implement recommendations made by the Study Committee.

Transferability
The approach of a legislative task force dedicated to research and recommendations on waterfront challenges and opportunities is replicable in other regions. The primary challenge faced by the WASSC (legislative committee) was an unfunded mandate, but the partners’ dedication to the issue helped overcome this challenge. Having an organizational champion, such as the Mississippi Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, can help overcome the common problem of unfunded mandates.

As far as transferring tools from other regions to Alabama, some tools from other regions were not immediately transferable. For example, current use taxation was considered, but not recommended because Alabama’s low tax rate is an incentive that attracts businesses to the state.
Voices from the Working Waterfront

NOAA project documents efforts to preserve heritage of maritime communities.

Preserving the Working Waterfront: Oral Histories

“Voices from the Working Waterfront” will record and preserve oral histories that showcase successful community efforts to preserve these waterfronts through land-use planning, historic preservation, and financing mechanisms. Shown here: Valdez small boat harbor, Alaska.

NOAA recently initiated a project called “Voices from the Working Waterfront,” which will record oral histories about efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of these unique and often historic maritime communities.
Advisory Committee

- Joshua Wrigley, NOAA Voices of the Fisheries
- Flaxen Conway, Oregon Sea Grant
- Amy Evans, Southern Foodways Alliance
- Sarah Garcia, Port of Gloucester
- Barbara Garrity-Blake
- Madeleine Hall-Arber, MIT Sea Grant
- Amanda Holmes, Fishtown Preservation Society
- Jennifer Ise, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service
- Bonnie McCay, Rutgers University
- Carrie Pomeroy, California Sea Grant
Ten Stories

Portland, ME  |  North Carolina
Tremont, ME   |  Panacea, FL
Maine (Statewide)  |  Fishtown, MI
Gloucester, MA  |  Gig Harbor, WA
Virginia  |  San Francisco, CA
Preserving the Working Waterfront Oral History Collection

Do you want to be inspired by working waterfront champions who have made a difference in their communities? Then check out the NWNN’s oral history collection and audio slideshow series “Preserving the Working Waterfront.”

Ten people around the nation were interviewed to learn why and how they are helping protect working waterfronts. View stunning archival and current images of working waterfront communities, including wharves, piers, docks, marine industry, shipyards and more, as planners, fishermen, elected and municipal officials, and advocates each tell their working waterfront story in their own words. Why do these people care so deeply about working waterfronts? What are the tools they are using to protect them?

The full interviews and transcripts are archived in the NOAA’s Voices from the Fisheries available at https://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/humandimensions/voices-from-the-fisheries/index.

The audio slideshows are available on the NWNN’s YouTube Channel [https://www.youtube.com/user/WorkingWaterfront/videos] You can view the slide shows as a series or each can be viewed individually.

Each slideshow is about 4 to 5 minutes long.

This project was made possible by a NOAA Preserve America award and generous in-kind support from project partners: NOAA, National Sea Grant Law Center, and Maine Sea Grant.

Oral Histories

Oral History: Identifying the Working Waterfront Economy in Gloucester
Sarah Garcia, former Community Development Director and Harbor Planning Director, Gloucester, Massachusetts, was interviewed to document the community's experience in completing an economic assessment to better understand the economic contribution of waterfront activities. Ms. Garcia discusses the history of Gloucester, the long-standing polarization around waterfront issues, and the harbor planning effort which included the economic assessment. For Gloucester, the economic assessment was key to understanding the value and continued economic importance of the community's waterfront.

Oral History: Revitalizing Panama’s Working Waterfront
Shane Miller, Vice-Chairman of the Panama Waterfronts Florida Partnership, was interviewed to document Panama, Florida’s experience as a designated Waterfronts Florida Partnership Community. The Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program was created by the Florida Coastal Management Program in 1997 to address the physical and economic decline of traditional working waterfront areas. Designated communities receive technical assistance to develop and implement community-visioned plans to revitalize and preserve the working waterfront. Ms. Miller discusses the Panama’s history as a tourist destination, its efforts to develop the Panama 2020 Vision Plan, and several activities that resulted from the Plan (e.g. a waterfront overlay zone, boat-building classes).

Oral History: Preserving Gig Harbor’s Net Sheds
Peter Hatch, Senior Planner for the City of Gig Harbor, Washington was interviewed to document the City’s experience with the establishment of a historic waterfront net shed Association. Mr. Hatch worked on the volume creation of net sheds. Mr. Hatch discusses the community’s efforts to preserve.
Voices from the Fisheries

The Voices from the Fisheries Database is a central repository for consolidating, archiving, and disseminating oral history interviews related to commercial, recreational, and subsistence fishing in the United States and its territories. Oral history interviews are a powerful way to document the human experience with our marine, coastal, and Great Lakes environments and our living marine resources. Each story archived here provides a unique example of this connection collected from fishermen, their spouses, processing workers, shore-side business workers and operators, recreational and subsistence fishermen, scientists, marine resource managers, and others—all among NOAA’s fishery stakeholders.

Separately, each History provides an in-depth view into the professional and personal lives of individual participants. Together, they have the power to illuminate common themes, issues and concerns across diverse fishing communities over time. The Voices from the Fisheries Database is a powerful resource available to the public to inform, educate, and provide primary information for researchers interested in our local human experience with the surrounding marine environment.
Questions? Comments?

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