The Maine Marine Trade Association (MMTA) and co-sponsors are working to assist and encourage boatyard and marina operators around Casco Bay to protect clean water and air. “Through this collaborative, voluntary program, boatyards and marinas get support for adopting best management practices and benefit from greater public recognition of their environmental stewardship,” explains Lucy Birkett, MMTA’s Project Coordinator.

Businesses use a checklist to help them determine strengths and areas for improvement in such areas as stormwater runoff, erosion and sedimentation, waste disposal, and boat pumpout. Before a facility is designated “clean,” the program’s Advisory Committee makes a verification visit. Those who qualify benefit from promotional and media opportunities, as well as a free resource guide. That guide complements a new booklet from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on best management practices for boatyards and marinas.

An oil collection bin at DaMillo’s Marina in Portland helps inspire sound environmental practices among customers and staff.

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Casco Bay Clean Boatyards and Marinas

Working waterfronts constitute a mere 25 miles of Maine’s 5,300-mile coastline, yet they supply the lifeblood of many coastal communities. They offer fishermen and their families an independent way of life and a heritage that defines their sense of place. The commercial fishing and marine trades that occur along working waterfronts contribute more than $800 million to the state’s economy and employ about 30,000 people.

The recent economic slowdown has not slowed the market for coastal Maine properties. Demand continues to be “very steady,” according to realtor Terry Sortwell of Land Vest in Camden: “we’re getting more calls than we were two years ago.” Great demand (largely from aging baby boomers seeking out second homes and retirement properties) and limited housing stock drive prices upward.

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(continued on page 3)
Maine Coastal Program agencies are renewing their efforts to protect vital, productive waterfronts. Fortunately, Maine’s nonprofit organizations, industries, and government gentrify working waterfronts have gained momentum. The value of the Maine Coast, certainly since 1604 and probably for many thousands of years before that, has been as a working coast. The value of the Maine Coast, for centuries to come, should be as a working coast.

What would the coast be like without lobster fishermen, draggers, scallopers, gill-netters, stop-seiners, weirs, mackerel traps, purse-seiners, dorboys, worm and clam diggers, sardine carriers, the commercial docks and wharves and marine railways, and all the rest of it? Just a lot of static scenery and a bunch of Clorox bottles playing at yachting.”

~ Ed Myers, Walpole, Maine 1980

This issue of Maine Coastline is dedicated to the memory of Ed Myers, noted aquaculturist and long-time friend of the coast, who passed away last summer. Expressing his vision back in 1980, Ed voiced his concern that Maine remain a working coast. Through all the economic cycles of the intervening 23 years, the demographic pressures to convert and gentrify working waterfronts have gained momentum. Fortunately, Maine’s nonprofit organizations, industries, and government agencies are renewing their efforts to protect vital, productive waterfronts.

Representatives of nonprofit organizations, industries, and government agencies are renewing their efforts to protect vital, productive waterfronts.

- The Maine Coastal Program is launching a Working Waterfront Initiative to provide municipalities with more technical support, fundraising assistance, workshops and web resources, and to improve coordination of access programs and grants.
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Working Waterfront Resources

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How Communities Can Support Commercial Fishing Access

- Make access a priority.
- Endorse strong town ordinances.
- Invest in waterfront facilities.
- Support your fishing community.
- Create a dedicated commercial fishing pier.
- Give priority to water-dependent uses along the waterfront.
- Support current-use taxation for commercial fishing properties.

In Maine’s latest coastal real estate boom, tax assessments for many shorefront property owners have doubled or even tripled. This trend puts long-time landowners in a terrible bind, according to Elizabeth Sheehan of Coastal Enterprises, Inc.: “There is the push to sell because they can no longer afford the annual tax burden, and the pull to ‘cash in’ on their land because market prices have risen so high.” That dynamic can force out water-dependent uses and year-round families who have held waterfront property for generations, leaving shorefront the exclusive domain of summer residents and recreational users.

Maine already leads the nation in the percentage of housing in vacation communities, with 15.6 percent of all houses used only seasonally (five times the national average—according to the 2000 census). Vacation homes are more than a third of all housing in some coastal communities, the Portland Press Herald reports. As more shorefront properties are converted to seasonal use, year-round residents who rely on the water for their livelihood are driven inland (as the accompanying map illustrates). Phippsburg, for example, now has 93 percent of its shorefront owned by non-residents, according to town selectable Proctor Wells.

In a recent study of 25 coastal communities, 84 percent of towns identified shorefront property tax relief as the most important strategy for preserving commercial fishing access. A recent Land Trusts/Wetlands report to the Legislature urged the State to slow the rise in shorefront property taxes: “This is a critical issue that needs to be addressed by the Maine Legislature, and should be included...in any discussion of property tax reforms.”

When first introduced by referendum four years ago, the current-use bill failed by less than a 1 percent margin. The idea still enjoys strong support among many municipal and state representatives and owners of working waterfronts.

The Legislature’s Taxation Committee plans to address specific bills within the context of a broader tax reform package, possibly forged in cooperation with the Governor’s office—which seeks to build consensus on principles that guide tax reform.

“Now is an important time for coastal citizens to weigh in,” says CEI’s Sheehan. “Those who desire property tax reform that supports working waterfronts should communicate their views to legislators and to the Governor’s Office.”

David Keeley Receives Top Award

Maine State Planning Office Acting Director, David H. Keeley, has received the Jones Memorial Award for Coastal Steward of the Year. The annual Jones Award is named in memory of North Carolina Congresswoman Walter B. Jones, who was a strong supporter of coastal management during his years in office. This award honors an individual who exemplifies strong, sustained leadership in coastal protection and management. Through more than 25 years of work on coastal policy and planning, David Keeley has achieved many notable successes—helping to create the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve and the international Gulf of Maine Program, and directing the Maine Coastal Program for many years. Congratulations, David!

Working Waterfronts

(continued from page 1)

Rising property assessments fuel the trend toward shorefront gentrification already evident along much of the Eastern seaboard. Open lands are increasingly built out to the water, and working waterfronts are converted into luxury homes. A recent State Planning Office study predicts that if current trends continue, nearly all of Maine’s coast up to Mount Desert Island will be classified as suburban/urban within 50 years.

“Coastal communities view development and rising property taxes as the dominant force threatening their working waterfronts,” observes Elizabeth Sheehan of Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI) who with Hugh Cowperthwaite authored the recent Coastal Program report, Preserving Commercial Fishing Access. “That impact is felt differently in each community depending on the strength of local ordinances, municipal commitment to protect access, and the overall strength of marine businesses.”

The recent report found that 80 percent of the communities surveyed recognize their increasing vulnerability and are planning or already working to take action. “Community commitment is critical to sustaining thriving working waterfronts,” says Maine Coastal Program Director Kathleen Leyden. “The State has supportive policies and laws in place and is devoting more resources to this issue, but it’s going to take a core of committed local citizens and leaders to forge lasting solutions.”

The report offers town guidance in their work to support continued commercial fishing access (see sidebar). “We don’t have any one-size-fits-all tools available,” Sheehan says, “but we do have a wealth of creative approaches that communities are trying—which may become models in the months and years ahead.”

“Part of the challenge now,” Leyden affirms, “is to improve the flow of information and ideas among coastal communities so that each town can benefit from the experience of others.” The Coastal Program also is working closely with the Department of Marine Resources and CEI to expand the scope of CEI’s Working Waterfront Loan Fund so fishing businesses and marine trades along the length of Maine’s coast can secure low-interest loans to improve their operations. “That financial and technical support,” Leyden notes, “can help long-time waterfront businesses successfully weather the changes ahead.”

Maine Working Waterfront Coalition Forms

With concerns mounting over the future of working waterfronts, concerned individuals and organizational representatives have formed a coalition that will support related policy measures, planning, investment and education. “It’s encouraging to see such a broad array of industries, nonprofits and agencies working together” says Jim Conners of the Maine Coastal Program. “Collectively, they represent a potent force for change.” Coalition members are advocating for a tax reform package that assesses properties related to commercial fishing on their current use rather than their “highest and best use” (the typical standard for assessments). They would like to see the language of L.D. 38 (A Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Protect the Commercial Fishing Industry) used in a broader tax reform bill, with the required Constitutional Amendment reference scheduled for next fall’s general election. For more information on the Coalition’s work, contact Elizabeth Sheehan at 207-772-5356 or mes@ceimaine.org.

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Gaining Vital Waterfront Access

In securing shore access sites, it helps to be creative and persistent. At a recent Fisherman’s Forum seminar, panelists shared several interesting strategies for acquiring waterfront access.

Westport Island: Forming a Co-op

When a prime piece of shorefront property—complete with boat shop and travel lift—came up for sale, lobstermen on Westport Island began talking among themselves. Lobsterman Dana Faulkingham recalls that gradually the conversation turned from wishful thinking to practical planning. Seventeen lobstermen began to work toward forming a cooperative that could secure the property. They hired a trustworthy business attorney who helped guide them through the incorporation and licensure process. It paid off, Faulkingham says, “to write a good set of by-laws because you need to live by them.”

In three months, they were in operation—ready to make an offer on the property. Co-op members fought the eminent domain battle that arose when the group sought and received loans from Farm Credit of Maine and Coastal Enterprises, Inc. Three months after the Northwest Cooperative formed, it celebrated the purchase of its new property. Now, Faulkingham says, “we have a stable site to get fuel and bait and offload their catch, but also a property that they believe in. We have a good way to get shore access.”

The dedicated committee that formed to acquire shore access in Addison was determined to succeed. They sought block grants and persuaded town residents to help fund the purchase of an appropriate parcel. But that land sold to another buyer. The group was determined to succeed. They sought block grants and persuaded town residents to help fund the purchase of an appropriate parcel. Billings also recommends working with a kayak and canoe launch. The waterfront now draws both residents and visitors, with up to 30 or 40 people there at all times of day. In a recent community survey, 35 percent of respondents said that SHIP worked, “If you want evidence that SHIP works,” says DOT’s Kevin Rousseau, “just visit the waterfront in Bucksport.”

When Their SHIP Comes In

Many coastal municipalities have come to rely on Maine’s Small Harbor Improvement Program (SHIP), which funds projects that improve public access and marine transportation along Maine’s coast and tidal rivers. “SHIP fills a critical need,” explains Kevin Rousseau of Maine’s Department of Transportation (DOT), “because public marine infrastructure is expensive to maintain. If we’re serious about keeping the character and culture of the coast, then we need to invest in thriving waterfronts.”

For more than a decade, coastal communities had a backlog of needed harbor projects but no funds to complete them. That changed in 1995 when Maine voters passed a transportation bond that included funds for SHIP grants. Since that time, SHIP has dispersed a total of $3.77 million, funding 62 projects.

Continued SHIP funding depends on Legislative approval of a transportation bond slated to go before voters in November. If the bond passes, an additional $1 million should be available for grants by summer 2004. Municipalities that are considering an application then, Rousseau suggests, can begin by securing the needed local cash match (25 percent of total project cost) and writing up a detailed scope of work. For more information on SHIP, call 207-624-3560 or e-mail Kevin.Rousseau@maine.gov.
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Priced Out of the Market

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We'll provide more details on these initiatives in upcoming issues. If you have other ideas for how to carry forward Ed Myers' vision of an intact working coast, please let us know. In the meantime, visit one of the state's 53 fishing ports this summer, talk to one of Maine's 10,300 commercial fishermen and consider the importance of this $740 million dollar industry to Maine.

Kathleen Leyden
Maine Coastal Program Director

Maine Coastal Program

Maine Coastline is published twice a year by the Maine Coastal Program at the State Planning Office. 

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Maine Coastline is available online at www.mainecoastalprogram.org/news.htm

Writing and Layout
Headwaters Writing & Design
Camden, Maine
www.hwaters.com

June 2003

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The 2003 annual fishing poster (produced by Coastal Enterprises, Inc., Maine Fishermen’s Wives Association and The Groundfish Group) depicts the vital connection between thriving fisheries and healthy working waterfronts.

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Writing and Layout
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For more information contact Maine Sea Grant Extension at 207-646-1555 x115 or kristen.whiting-grant@maine.edu.

2003 Maine Beaches Conference

Challenges & Opportunities for Coastal Communities

Wednesday July 9, Thornton Academy, Saco

Topics to include:
✔ Creating a storm-resistant community
✔ Best Management Practices for coastal property owners
✔ New Maine regulations
✔ Water quality at swimming beaches

Registration fee (incl. lunch): $12 (by June 27) or $15 (after June 27)

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