

A Pilot Project for Assessing the Socioeconomic Issues Facing Maryland's Working Waterfront

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Introduction

Maryland's working waterfronts (WWFs) are an important part of the state's cultural, historical and economic livelihood. Unfortunately, the commercial fishing industry and water-dependent businesses are suffering from the loss of access to public trust waters around the state. The cause of this eroding access is both demographic and geographic which has resulted in a lack of affordable places for watermen and working waterfronts to continue to do business.

Working waterfronts distributed around the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays support a variety of fisheries and water-dependent businesses. The 2007 Maryland Working Waterfront Commission was created to recommend a strategy to preserve and protect commercial fishing access to public trust waters. The report noted that like most working waterfronts around the United States, Maryland is witness to a decline in access for a variety of reasons, many of which include; increased coastal population growth; declining profitability of the commercial fishing industry; rising real estate values; and other economic drivers and limited information exchange among stakeholders concerning issues.

As a follow up to that commission, The Chesapeake and Coastal Service (CCS), a division of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, developed a pilot project to identify working waterfronts for both water-dependent business and commercial watermen. CCS worked with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) to conduct community-level assessments in the Choptank River watershed, one of the WWF communities identified by the 2008 Working Waterfront Commission report (e.g. Tilghman Island, Hooper's Island, Deale Island, Kent Island, among others). The project goals were to clearly identify drivers causing the decline in working waterfronts, to conduct consistent working waterfront inventory assessments, and to develop a definition for Maryland working waterfronts. Project staff worked with waterfront community partners to: identify discrete issues facing working waterfronts in Maryland; provide information on the type of support data needed for a regional assessment and inventory; and provide a working definition for working waterfronts in Maryland. Efforts will support the preservation of existing and historic working waterfronts while also providing opportunities for new water-dependent uses to emerge.

Project Goals

The goal of the pilot project was to gain a better understanding of the constraints and issues facing Maryland working waterfronts, develop assessment methodologies that can be used statewide, and develop a working definition of Maryland's working waterfronts and water-dependent uses.

Methods

VIMS conducted the initial pilot study using existing technical staff to develop Maryland-specific methodologies. CCS worked with VIMS to find an appropriate pilot community, develop Maryland-specific methodologies, and work jointly through community engagement efforts.

The first step in developing local consensus on the definitions of working waterfronts entailed reviewing the definition contained in the proposed national legislation and discussing how Maryland may adopt or refine to meet more local priorities and economies. It was agreed that based on that definition the pilot inventory would consider working waterfronts defined as, “the infrastructure and places where commercial fisherman, charter fishing captains, tour boat operators, recreational fishermen, boat builders, and other small businesses conduct their business.”¹

Findings/Observations

For the most part the preconceived working waterfront definition satisfied those who were interviewed and provided feedback throughout the project. As in other regions, most thought first of commercial watermen as being the most important user of working waterfronts. That heritage and cultural value underlies most of the inventory sites as well as local interactions with community leaders.

Based upon the definition developed for Maryland at the outset of the project, consistent inventory assessments were completed for each community. The standardized field inventory data was collected by global positioning system (GPS) to spatially inform facility locations and their attributes. The primary specialized use of the facility was characterized consistently across communities and aligned with data on commercial fishing infrastructure and seafood related facilities obtained from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Primary field work utilized a standardized facility inventory form which included general and specialized services provided. Working waterfront data was inventoried for general services such as: fuel (gas/diesel), power, water, pump out, waste oil disposal, hauling capacity, winches or booms, repair, supplies, bathroom, ship’s store, etc. Specific services relevant for commercial fishing included: buying stations, fish off loading, fish packing, ice or freezer holds, refrigeration, bait, dredge/net repair, gear loading, gear storage, etc. Physical attributes were recorded such as: water access (depth); road access; parking; wharf condition; light vehicle access; heavy vehicle access; freight; etc. Combined, the comprehensive field data may help to ultimately define what makes a ‘prime’ working waterfront in Maryland.

As part of the field inventory, photographs were taken during the fieldwork with an integral GPS unit which geo-tags each photo with the unique position identifier. Photographs taken during the inventory identification were captured using a Nikon Coolpix P6000 and Canon Powershot SX230HS cameras with integral GPS units, which geo-tagged each photo with a unique position identifier. The Geodetic system for the cameras GPS function uses the WGS 84 (World Geodetic System 1984). The inventory report is provided as an attachment to this final report narrative. A total of 88 sites were visited and documented in the study region.

¹ The proposed ‘Keep America’s Waterfronts Working Act of 2009’ defined working waterfronts as “real property that provides access to coastal waters to person engaged in commercial fishing, recreational fishing businesses, or other water-dependent coastal-related businesses.” This definition includes fishing wharfs and shore-side infrastructure for fishermen, marina slips, boat launching ramps, and other access points to the water.

The inventory was identified during the first quarter of 2012, beginning with the creation of a list of businesses and county landing sites connected to the waterfront in the study area. Additional sites for consideration were provided by the Maryland Seafood Supplier Directory and buyers list, Maryland Boat Builders, and the Maryland Charter Boat Association. A letter of introduction was sent by DNR to licensed interests. Preliminary investigation helped also target several additional key sources of information, most prominently that of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, located in St. Michaels. Once a tentative list and locations were identified, the project team met with three representatives of the museum who were very helpful by reviewing the sites identified. Those individuals include: Pete Leshner, Chief Curator; Robert Forloney, Director of the Kerr Center for Chesapeake Studies; and Richard Scofield, Assistant Curator of Watercraft. Additional information was provided by Jay Newcomb, Dorchester County Council member; Tammy Broll, who is the Landings Officer for Talbot County; and informal conversations with watermen and seafood business owners.

Consensus underlies the dilemma facing working waterfronts retention, in that most understand the economic dislocations and hardship that has faced a commercial fishing industry, the earnings for which really determine the value (derived demand) of the working waterfront asset in use. Decades of declining commercial fishing harvests which have occurred for myriad environmental and economic reasons, have left much of the traditional infrastructure compromised from a financial standpoint. That situation, in the face of what was unfettered coastal development at the end of the last century and the beginning of the new, led to pressures for redevelopment away from traditional uses and the loss of historic pieces of working waterfronts.

There clearly is a view among the industry and local communities that such circumstances are not irrevocable and that with recovery of commercial fishing stocks, and as a result the harvesting sector, renewed economic activity will bolster the remaining working waterfront parcels. Further, there is optimism that the growth in shellfish aquaculture will bring new economic support to the harvesting (growing) sector which will in turn serve to derive demand for working waterfront infrastructure needed to engage in this growing industry.

A meeting was held on October 9, 2012 in St. Michaels, Maryland to extend the information about the project and obtain input relating to any potential for its refinement, discuss missing sites, and generally discuss implementing a working waterfronts initiative in Maryland.²

A presentation on this collaborative project was submitted and approved for delivery at the "National Working Waterways & Waterfronts Symposium" in March 2013.

² Entitled "Taking Stock of Maryland's Working Waterfronts" Tuesday October 9, 2012. Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, 213 North Talbot Street, St. Michaels, Maryland

Conclusions & Recommendations

For the most part, counties throughout the watershed have done a commendable job maintaining public waterfront access for both commercial and recreational interests. Additionally, numerous marinas and repair facilities, as well as small, privately owned docks, were identified that serve both recreational interests, as well as the commercial fishing fleet.

It is with high expectations that this document will help to provide a foundation from which future decisions can be made regarding the most important nodes, or concentrations of water-dependent industries, and what steps should be taken to ensure that access is provided for future generations. At the year 1 project completion meeting in St. Michaels, participants provided very thoughtful input on the project and how such efforts may be improved in the future. To summarize:

- A suggestion was provided for having the university/extension involved at this point [building trust through Extension], and in future inventories and to conduct a public meeting at the beginning of the project (a kickoff meeting).
- Continue working with local officials at the outset so project team members may have such references if needed.
- When approaching properties owners ask, “What do they gain?” “How is business?” They are happy to talk about their business.
- The research team must show a legitimate interest in their business to gain access to information on the sites as well as the outlook for current uses. People who are most interested are those that unload and load onto the water-dependent facilities.
- Next steps should include identifying places in Maryland that are more at risk and revisit the report and work done by Maryland’s Working Waterfront Commission. DNR will work with Virginia and Maryland Sea Grant on next steps and future inventories.
- There was some discussion about options for preserving working waterfronts, including land use planning, conservation easements, and overlays. The report by the WWF Commission outlines some of these options for Maryland.



Taking Stock of Maryland's Working Waterfronts

Public meeting to learn about a pilot program in the Choptank

**Tuesday, October 9, 2012
7:30-9:00 p.m.**

**Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum
213 North Talbot Street, St. Michaels, Maryland**

Goals of the Meeting

- Provide an overview of Maryland's current pilot project on working waterfronts in the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal bays
- Share the results of Maryland's working waterfront inventory of the Choptank River
- Provide an opportunity for partners to comment and give information to help refine the pilot inventory
- Discuss the project's next steps

Working waterfronts (WWF) are distributed around the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal bays and support a variety of fisheries and water-dependent businesses. The 2008 Maryland Working Waterfront Commission report noted that like most areas around the United States, Maryland is seeing a decline in working waterfronts likely due to increased coastal population growth, declining profitability of the commercial fishing industry, rising real estate values, and other economic drivers, along with limited information exchange among stakeholders.

The Maryland Coastal Program is leading an effort to inventory WWF and discuss community socio-economic reliance on these unique sites. This public meeting is being conducted with waterfront community partners as a first step to identify issues facing working waterfronts in Maryland.

The meeting will primarily discuss the first-year results

of consistent inventory assessments completed for each community. The standardized field inventory data was collected by global positioning system (GPS) to provide facility locations and their attributes. The primary specialized use of the facility is characterized consistently across communities and aligned with data on commercial fishing infrastructure and seafood-related facilities obtained from the Maryland Fisheries Service. Primary fieldwork utilized a standardized facility inventory form, which includes general and specialized services provided. Working waterfront data are inventoried for: (1) general services such as: fuel (gas/diesel), power, water, pump out, waste oil disposal, hauling capacity, winches or booms, repair, supplies, bathroom, ship's store, etc.; (2) specific services relevant to use for commercial fishing: buying station, fish offloading, fish packing, ice or freezer holds, refrigeration, bait, dredge/net repair, gear loading, gear storage, etc.; and (3) physical attributes such as: water access (depth), road access, parking, wharf condition, light vehicle access, heavy vehicle access, freight, etc.

Combined, the comprehensive field data will help define what makes a "prime" working waterfront in Maryland. As part of the field inventory, photographs are taken during the fieldwork with an integral GPS unit which geo-tags each photo with the unique position identifier. The summary for each facility will include an overview of current zoning and, to the extent possible, a discussion of the viability of the facility in its current use.

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