



# Access Summit Shares Solutions

Photo by Michael Halminski

**D**avid Inscoe had watched the waterfront land rush of recent years gobble up boating access in his corner of North Carolina and it had him worried.

After all, not only does he lease a slip for his Island Packet 32 every year and use a nearby ramp to launch his 20-foot Hurricane deckboat for fishing and general gunkholing around Core Sound with his grandchildren, but he is in charge of economic development in Carteret County, which has attracted a healthy share of new boatbuilding operations and high-wage jobs.

Inscoe also served last year on a state committee to study and make recommendations on water access issues in North Carolina. But he was still surprised at how much company he had among people from around the country wrestling with similar issues when he attended Working Waterways and Waterfronts — A National Symposium on Water Access, in Norfolk, VA in early May.

This first-ever conference, conceived by BoatU.S. and presented in a joint effort of the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council and the Virginia Sea Grant Program, presented an array of tools and solutions — from the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf coasts, as well as the Great Lakes — that attendees like Inscoe could use to preserve boat yards, marinas and other boating access sites in their home areas.

“I had done enough research to know that there were problems in Florida and Maine, but I had no idea that nearly every coastal community in the country is dealing with the same problems,” Inscoe reports. “Speakers provided information and solutions that their communities and states have implemented to help preserve some traditional working waterfronts and even increase access.

“It really impressed me how huge the problem is and maybe more important, how many people are working — and working successfully — to solve it,” adds Inscoe, a

BoatU.S member.

Some 180 people joined him in Norfolk — boating industry representatives, waterfront community officials, educators, legal scholars and public policy leaders from around the nation — some to tell those success stories, others to listen and learn, and all to benefit from the many “how-to” techniques gleaned from the water access front.

And that, of course, was the point, as conference organizer, Tom Murray, explains.

“The goal of Working Waterways and Waterfronts wasn’t to belabor the problems or to fix blame for declining water access, but to find solutions to the challenges that face recreational boaters and commercial boating interests today,” says Murray, a marine business specialist at Virginia Sea Grant who also served as co-chairman. “Nearly every place you look, we’re dealing with a very different waterfront than what we’ve been used to.”

## The Focus Factor

Up until half-a-dozen years ago, depending on where you live, it had been business as usual on most of the nation’s waterfronts. Boaters could find slips to lease for a season, ramps for launching their boats every day and service yards to haul them for occasional repairs plus annual fit-out and lay-up chores.

Then something happened. Call it realignment of the economic stars that shone on a healthy economy and low interest rates, or blame it on the baby boomers who rushed to retirement or second home living on the water, or point a finger at real estate taxes that put the squeeze on businesses like marinas.

Indeed, all three factors and many others combined to shrink access to the water very quickly, access that the public had enjoyed — even taken for granted — through marinas, transient landings, launching ramps and fish piers. Water-dependant businesses like boatbuilders, charter compa-

nies and yacht brokerages began losing out, too. And with slip shortages in some areas, boat dealers lost sales.

The situation gave rise to the dictum that “the three most important words in recreational boating today are: access, access and access.”

But when Working Waterways and Waterfronts focused on solving the problems, three even more important words emerged: “planning, policy and partnerships.” The first, planning, generally describes the practice of land-use decision making — in this case, at the water’s edge — and policy is used in the sense of laws and regulations that feed into planning.

And partnerships?

“Well, that’s how you get it done,” says Joseph Donnelly, a long time BoatU.S. member who has no access problems of his own, with three boats at the dock behind his house on Maine’s York River.

Donnelly provided one of the conference success stories, describing how a broad partnership of interests saved one of the last fishing wharves in York from succumbing to residential development. They used what is known as a conservation easement to keep this piece of Maine’s waterfront “working” and it’s a process that depends on partners.

Moreover, according to Donnelly, partners must work planning and policy together to protect and expand access to the water, whether for recreational boating or for water-dependent commercial uses like the York lobstermen’s wharf.

The key to success, says Donnelly, who is also vice chair of the York Harbor Board, is to “develop your case for policy changes as completely as you can, make your positions relevant to a wide range of interests and organizations, and enlist the broadest possible range of partners to gain public support for your water access project or your working waterfront cause.”

# BoatU.S. *Winners* BOATING ACCESS AWARD

## Launching Solutions

Many factors are part of the problem like rising real estate taxes tied to 'highest and best use' assessments that force marinas to sell out for residential development. The onerous permitting processes that stifle new construction or expansion of existing boating facilities to meet pent-up demand is also a factor

A panel of legal experts discussed regulatory options, including a bill now in Congress, the Working Waterfront Preservation Act (S.741), that would provide grant money to buy or maintain threatened commercial fishing facilities (see "Waterfront Bill Gets New Life," BoatU.S. Magazine, May 2007, pg. 9) but that might be expanded to include conventional marinas.

Another potential "fix" at the federal level is changing the Coastal Zone Management Act. That law, passed in 1972 and now up for congressional reauthorization, guides planning, zoning and development along the shores of the 34 ocean, Gulf Coast and Great Lakes states.

CZMA, as it's often called, should be amended with language specific to water access, attendees generally agreed. It should define the term "working waterfront" as facilities and infrastructure that serve recreational access, like marinas and launching ramps, as well as commercial facilities, like seafood landings, charter boat piers and haul-out yards.

That's one concrete piece of the solution puzzle that attendees took away from the conference, Murray noted, but another, less tangible outcome, should prove highly effective in the long run.

"You can't say enough about what's been gained by these people meeting each other, by all the networking that went on" Murray says. "Now that these leaders know each other, they can all build on the best of what's already out there, which can also lead to new approaches."

At press time Murray said a document outlining the full water access strategy as developed on the final day would be posted at [www.wateraccess2007.com](http://www.wateraccess2007.com) by mid summer. A CD with the entire conference proceedings will be available for purchase (at the cost of reproduction) from: Virginia Sea Grant, PO Box 1346, Gloucester Point, VA, 23062. ■

— By Ryck Lydecker



Photo by Cheryl Teagle Photography

BoatU.S. chairman, Richard Schwartz (far right) and Vice President Margaret Podlich (far left) flank 2007 Boating Access Award winners on the Norfolk waterfront.

The Association's first Recreational Boating Access Awards were presented by BoatU.S. Chairman Richard Schwartz during the "Working Waterways and Waterfronts" symposium, May 9-11.

The Award honors groups, government bodies, businesses, individuals or non-profit organizations that succeed in preserving or improving public waterway access for boaters.

"The winning approaches that we are honoring here today range from pub-

lic policy prescriptions to technological innovations, to public involvement, to legislative initiatives," Schwartz told the 180 people in attendance.

"These Access Award winners and their unique approaches to the problem show us that with creative thinking and concerted action we can gain better access to the water," Schwartz added. "And where we have access already, we can take action to preserve and protect it for the boating public."

**Shoreline Property Owners and Contractors Association, Seattle, WA**, for advocating common-sense, science-based permitting and regulation for the siting of boating facilities as well as development, construction and maintenance.

**The Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission, VA**, for its Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority which provides a model for local governments to address public water access on a regional basis.

**Carryover of the Carolinas, Wilmington, NC**, for a boatlift that provides access between biologically separate water bodies while minimizing environmental impacts. It allows boaters to use man-made canals that formerly could not be accessed.

**The City of Trenton, MI**, for transforming a contaminated industrial "brownfield" site into a much-needed transient marina on the Detroit River.

**The Port of Bellingham, WA**, for an industrial waterfront revitalization project that places recreational boating access at its core, meeting slip demand for the next decade while preserving the city's working waterfront.

**The North Carolina General Assembly**, for its Water Access Study Committee, which put forth substantive recommendations in April to protect and promote the state's working waterfronts.

**Scituate Marine Park, Scituate, MA**, for the development and operation of public facilities for boating access as a model for local governments to develop community supported, user fee-based boating facilities.