Regional Challenges

- Shifting land ownership and waterfront development have negatively impacted working waterfronts in areas with growing tourism economies.
- Viewshed issues have arisen between landowners and clam and oyster growers.
- Natural hazards such as sea level rise and storm surge in tandem with aging infrastructure and navigability have reduced the working capacity of working waterfronts.
- The watermen demographic is aging and fewer young people are going into business within the industry.

Regional Value

- Since colonial times, working waterfronts have been essential infrastructure to the Eastern Shore's economy.
- Clam and oyster aquaculture industries have historically been key sources of income for Eastern Shore citizens who have access to growing areas and off-loading sites.
- Many of the Eastern Shore's waterfront towns have made investments into enhancing and preserving their public harbors, and Accomack and Northampton Counties maintain numerous public facilities used by working watermen.

King’s Creek Marina and Cape Charles Harbor: Meeting the Needs of Watermen

King’s Creek Marina and the Cape Charles Harbor together provide valuable recreational and commercial waterfront access, welcome residents and visitors, and help maintain the historic and economic vitality of this Eastern Shore community.

Located on the north side of the town of Cape Charles, King’s Creek Marina, once known as King’s Creek Harbor, was purchased by a private developer, who put in all new facilities with floating docks. Prior to the sale, the waterfront was primarily used by commercial watermen. The fees at this site were lower than in the Town Harbor on the south side of Cape Charles. The

Virginia Working Waterfront Workshop

Exchange ideas and potential strategies to keep Virginia’s waterfronts working!

Wednesday, February 26, 2013
Virginia Institute of Marine Science
Eastern Shore Community College (satellite location)

Register Today! Space Limited!
Call—Beth Polak, Virginia CZM Program, (804) 698-4260
Kings Creek Harbor waterfront also had a marine rail line that enabled the watermen to haul their boats for painting and other work. Selling the waterfront for redevelopment however was a logical step for the private owner. The facility was in a state of partial decline with narrow and rotting docks, primitive restroom facilities, and the severely shoaled channel was a challenge to keep open. The King’s Creek Marina Site is zoned as “Planned Unit Development (PUD) – Special Commercial”, which was exactly what the developer needed for the housing development, shops, restaurant, and marina. When the developer bought King’s Creek Harbor, there was concern that the watermen would not be welcome after redevelopment. Commercial uses are allowed, but the fees are viewed as prohibitive by watermen, and the floating docks are not conducive to gear loading or off loading. Almost all commercial watermen began working out of the Cape Charles Town Harbor.

The move of many commercial watermen from King’s Creek Marina to the Cape Charles Town Harbor benefited the harbor. Partly due to an increase in use of the working waterfront provided by the harbor, the Town of Cape Charles has been able to acquire funds and make many improvements to the harbor, including new bulkheads, docks, a bath house, and two launch ramps.

The Cape Charles Town Harbor serves commercial watermen as its first priority, with transient and seasonal boaters as second priority. Challenges for watermen and subsequently for the vitality of the working waterfront remain. The seasonality of crabbing—winter crab dredging was closed in 2008—has impacted activity in the Harbor. During the winter months, there are few commercial watermen in the harbor. Tangier Island crabbers will be in Cape Charles as soon as the season opens and will follow the crabs north as the season progresses.

Redevelopment of King’s Creek Harbor proved to be a boon for the town. King’s Creek Marina is a world-class recreational marina and is a revenue-generating asset for the Town of Cape Charles. While the improved, publically-owned and operated, Cape Charles Town Harbor—a designated Harbor of Refuge—will be an asset for commercial watermen in perpetuity.

**Contacts:**

Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission  
Curtis Smith  
23372 Front St, Accomac, VA 23301  
(757)787-2936 ext. 114