



# Virginia's Working Waterfronts

**A Postcard from Our Past, a Picture of Our Present, a Vision for Our Future**

## Value

*Virginia's working waterfronts are of great historic, economic and cultural value.*

Since the early 1600s, the bounty of Virginia's coastal waters has sustained a rich culture of seafood harvest and cultivation. Toward the middle of the twentieth century, the Chesapeake Bay is said to have supported up to 9,000 fulltime watermen. In 2013, approximately 3,000 licensed commercial fisherman and aquaculture permit holders relied on access to Virginia's working waterfronts.

Today working waterfronts continue to provide critical access to coastal waters for people engaged in commercial and recreational fishing, seafood processing, boat building, aquaculture and other water-dependent businesses.

## Challenges

*Unfortunately, they are disappearing. It's time to find solutions.*

Increasing demand for waterfront properties along Virginia's coast has resulted in an increase in property values and higher costs for traditional waterfront businesses. Because of these and other factors, Virginia is slowly losing its working waterfronts – an issue that may have long-term consequences for local economies, the environment, coastal culture and quality of life.

A loss of Working Waterfronts in these areas constitutes a potential loss of jobs for watermen (e.g. fishers, shellfish farmers) and the agriculture industry (timber and grain barges); a loss of the identity of the region; and a loss of support industry jobs (boat building, transport, seafood processing, etc.).

## Virginia Working Waterfronts Strategy

Aims to help communities:

- understand the long-term costs associated with loss of working waterfronts
- develop new policy tools to help communities manage increasing growth pressures, and
- build capacity to retain working waterfronts as a thriving component of local economic development for current and future generations.

Virginia CZM grants to VIMS/Virginia Sea Grant and four PDCs (NN,MP, HR,ES) during FY11 -13 enabled:

- defining working waterfronts,
- creating an inventory of existing working waterfront infrastructure throughout the coastal zone, and
- conducting an economic analysis of 4 different types of working waterfront infrastructure to demonstrate their economic importance to the community.

During FY14 & 15, Virginia CZM and it's partners will:

- identify and develop policy tools appropriate for local government adoption that will support retention of working waterfronts, and
- identify a locality to participate in a demonstration project that will test the feasibility of implementing the identified tools.

## Exploring Issues that Impact Water Dependent Uses and Looking for Solutions Together

While threats to the viability of our working waterfronts remain, there is growing recognition of the problem and an expanding list of possible solutions. Nationally, coastal states and localities are using planning, zoning, land conservation and acquisition, tax incentives, public improvements and state and local regulations to help preserve their working waterfronts. In many cases these initiatives are the result of a coalition of groups with similar interests including industry associations, nonprofit groups and government agencies. The Virginia CZM Program has partnered with VIMS – Sea Grant Marine Advisory Service to begin developing public policy designed to protect and enhance Virginia's working waterfronts. The first step in this process began with an exercise across the coastal zone, among regions with a tradition of commercial fishing and other water dependent activities, to derive their own definition of a working waterfront. Specifically, Accomack-Northampton, Hampton Roads, Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck planning districts started with the model definition developed by proposed legislation

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at the national level. Some PDCs adopted this definition while others tailored it to capture additional details of their region. Another step in the policy development process has been to conduct an inventory of existing working waterfront sites within these planning districts. Tom Murray, Director of Marine Advisory Services at VIMS was the project lead. The inventories captured precise location (including digital maps and photos), specialized support



Fisherman offloading at Guinea Landing in Gloucester County. Located near Gloucester Point, the Guinea area has historically been the center of the seafood industry in the county. It still remains the cultural core of the community. The watermen are known locally as "Guineamen." Image by Larry Chewning.

services, unique site features and in some cases planning effort toward future transfer of site ownership. In 2007, Virginia hosted the first national Working Waterfronts Symposium in Norfolk, which was sponsored by the Virginia CZM Program. In March 2013, the third national symposium was held in Tacoma Washington. Virginia is following the 2013 symposium with the February 2014 Virginia Working Waterfronts Workshop to feature issues faced by rural working waterfront communities in Virginia, and provide the opportunity for stakeholders to become directly involved in clarifying the issues and

challenges facing Virginia's working waterfronts and to develop strategic steps forward. The Virginia CZM Program has a long history of working to restore key coastal resources such as oysters and underwater grasses which provide habitat for many commercial fisheries. The Virginia CZM Program is designed to both protect resources and sustainable coastal industries. Investing in the restoration of our shellfish species and their habitats without ensuring that we could derive economic benefit from their harvest, would not be completing the job. So now it's critical that the program focus on protecting the land-side infrastructure that keeps our coastal communities and economies thriving.

Don McCann, owner of Tranquil Waters Marine Services, emphasized this need. "If this area wants to grow, you've got to look to the water as part of the equation for economic development," he said. Decisions need to be made about the use of the waterfront, McCann explained. "One of those [decisions] is the degree to which you preserve the working waterfronts tradition so that watermen, who are emblematic of what the bay is about, can continue in their chosen profession."

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## What Is a Working Waterfront?

The Keep America's Waterfronts Working Act of 2011, defines a working waterfront as:

real property (including support structures over and adjacent to the water or inland property engaged in significant water-related activities) that provides access to coastal waters or that supports commercial fishing, recreational fishing, businesses, boat building, shipping and rail yards, aquaculture, national defense, public safety, marine research, offshore energy production, or other water-related commercial, industrial, and recreational business.

## Virginia Working Waterfront Workshop Planning Team:



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