

July 14, 2006

For Immediate Release

Erin Seiling: 804/684-7167

Tom Murray: 804/684-7190

National Forum to Address Water Access Issues

Market Forces Squeezing Out Traditional Uses

Local government officials, coastal management planners, legal scholars and boating industry representatives will gather in Norfolk, Virginia next May to explore solutions to the loss of water access that is hindering recreational boaters, commercial fishermen and water-dependent businesses around the nation's coasts.

"Working Waterways & Waterfronts – A National Symposium on Water Access," is set for May 9 – 11, 2007 at the [Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel](#) under the auspices of the Virginia Sea Grant Program. The conference will bring together experts in many fields to delve into issues that surround the rapid conversion of working waterfronts – marinas, boat repair yards, fish piers and charter fishing docks – to other uses such as private residential developments and non-water dependant businesses.

Rising real estate taxes tied to "highest and best use" assessments and escalating property values fueled by the public's desire to live by the water are driving the conversion. Water-dependent businesses, such as haul-out service yards, seafood handling facilities and boat builders, are losing access to the water as well. These losses compound the challenges that decision-makers at all levels of government face in trying to balance population growth, public services and economic development with the demand for public access to, and on, the water.

"This conference is designed as a forum to educate decision makers, management agency staff and water-dependant business owners to deal with these trends and to foster constructive dialogue about the nations' changing waterfronts," said, Virginia Sea Grant economist, Thomas J. Murray, conference organizer and co-chairman.

The conference is sponsored by the Sport Fishing & Boating Partnership Council, a federally chartered advisory body, the Coastal States Organization, the Boat Owners Association of The United States, the National Marine Manufacturers Association, the States Organization for Boating Access, and other Sea Grant organizations.

Working Waterways & Waterfronts will examine local, state and national-level initiatives to address water access challenges and support water-dependent industries. Academic research findings and viewpoints from industry specialists will also be featured with the aim of developing new approaches to providing and managing access to the water.

Find updated conference information on the Web at www.wateraccess2007.com.

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