

FINAL

Access to the Waterfront: Issues and Solutions Across the Nation Abstract for Waterways Conference, May 2007

To be presented by Paul Anderson, Director, Maine Sea Grant (with Springuel and Schmitt from Maine Sea Grant both contributing extensively to content)

Over 140 Sea Grant agents, coastal zone managers and other individuals recently responded to a survey on coastal access issues throughout the country. The purpose of the survey, which was hosted by Maine Sea Grant and an advisory committee from the Sea Grant network and CZM programs, was to explore the causes and effects of coastal access conflicts throughout the country, and how Sea Grant programs and their partners are addressing these issues, and to identify success stories in protecting coastal access for a diversity of stakeholders. By covering the issues through the eyes of survey respondents, using a case study approach, the intent of the presentation is to offer a nationwide perspective on the scope of coastal access issues, which will inform discussion on a nationwide strategy for addressing coastal access conflicts through consolidated and targeted programming.

The presentation will start with an overview of the issues, including the loss of public access to and from the coast (“nowhere to swim, nowhere to land”), increasing demand and conflict, loss of commercial access to the water and water-dependent uses. These will be highlighted through a series of mini-case studies from around the country that cover the geographic and demographic scope of the issue. An overview of the survey results shows that threats to public access to the coast are occurring throughout the country. There are multiple drivers, including increasing population and development, rising coastal property values, second home and condominium development, and shifts in land ownership patterns from public to private, all of which lead to increased pressure on the public areas that remain and increased pressure on fragile coastal habitat with limited resources. According to survey respondents, ramifications of no action include decreasing access for the public, increased costs, pressure on resources, degraded habitat, and lack of stewardship and caring for the coast because fewer can access it.

Sea Grant programs, CZM programs and numerous other public and private entities throughout the country have developed a series of tools to address these issues. Solutions and approaches from various states include private entities protecting public access, land conservation tools (such as land trusts using easements and transfer of development rights, land bonds dedicated to working waterfronts or public access), taxation options, zoning and other municipal tools, mapping and inventories, public/private partnerships, public acquisition, litigation, planning, and education.

Finally, the presentation will cover a suite of next steps and recommendations that survey respondents have identified, including but not limited to the need for: a pool of funding for infrastructure maintenance, acquisition, code enforcement, planning, data collection (including spatial data such as historical access points conversion of uses, loss of land, etc.); a national coastal access clearinghouse Web site; and the role of various entities and organizations, ranging from Sea Grant programs to federal, state, and local governments stakeholders and others.