

**Water Access 2007: A Conference on Working Waterways & Waterfronts**  
**May 9-11, Norfolk, VA**

**Conference Plenary Panel**  
**Remarks by Thomas J. Dammrich**

In the opening remarks, one speaker mentioned that we have an economics problem. He said that waterfront property was finite and demand was growing, therefore the cost was rising rapidly chasing out public access. We need a paradigm shift in how we think about water access and waterfront property. Land is a finite resource as well. Our forefathers had the foresight to set aside large amounts of land as open spaces for the enjoyment of the public and today we have vast networks of local parks, state parks, national parks, forest preserves, national forests and more. We need to adopt this paradigm for waterfront property as well to insure Americans have access to the water.

I believe there are many misperceptions about the boating industry and the boating public and so I would like to begin by painting a picture of boating and the boating public.

The boating industry is a \$37 Billion industry. Sales of new boats and engines are about \$15.7 billion a year. Pre-owned boats total \$11 billion a year. Boating accessories are \$3 billion a year. The boating industry is large and diverse and encompasses manufacturers, dealers, brokers, distributors, retailers, boat yards, surveyors, insurance, finance, marinas and more. In all, the boating industry is responsible for over 480,000 direct jobs in this country.

But it doesn't stop with spending on the boats. Boaters take trips, buy groceries for the trips, stay in hotels and eat in restaurants. Boaters and boating account for another 480,000 indirect jobs in our economy. That is almost one million jobs in the US.

New boat sales have been declining about 1% per year for the past decade. And, though 72 million people went boating in the past year, that is 7 million or 10% fewer than 10 years ago (1997). Why? Most likely, because they are spending more time surfing the internet. Americans are spending less and less time outdoors. This is not only seen in boating participation numbers but in the participation numbers of all outdoor activities and in visits to our national parks.

There are 17 million boats in use in the US today. And the perception is that most boaters are wealthy people with big boats and lots of money to spend on them. The fact is, 95% of the 17 million boats in use are trailerable boats—26 feet or less in length. So, access is not just about marinas, it is clearly about boat ramps and related trailer parking as well. And, 75% of these boat owners has an annual household income of less than \$100,000. Boaters are predominantly middle class Americans. People who enjoy boating as a great way to spend time and connect with family and friends. People who want to get away from the stresses of life on land and enjoy relaxation on the water. People who enjoy the outdoors or want to go fishing.

So, this is not only about the economics of boating and boating access, it is about the social benefits of the boating lifestyle enjoyed by Americans. And, it is about the resource. Boater, fishermen and hunters are the original conservationists in this country and the people who provide most of the funding for resource conservation. We need to make it easy for Americans to enjoy the outdoors, not difficult. How much appreciation for our resources will people have who have never used them?

Water access is the major topic of conversation for everyone discussing the future of the recreational boating industry. Diminishing water access is one of the most critical stumbling block to the boating industry's "Grow Boating" efforts and the growing lack of access is the greatest threat to the sustainability of the boating industry.

NMMA and the entire boating community are coming together in support of efforts like this conference and Grow Boating's Water Access Task Force to find potential solutions to slow or mitigate, and reverse, the trends that are threatening marinas and boating access sites.

This 35-member task force meets works to identify issues, threats and potential solutions, then convert that information into strategies to preserve, promote and grow access for recreational boating.

Currently, we are focused on five specific areas. Others at this conference will suggest other potential areas of focus. If we can bring this diverse group together by the end of the week to coalesce around a few areas of focus, we can create change.

Our first strategic goal is to build a dynamic and flexible communications network on a grassroots level to give boating access advocates greater contact with each other and to resources available to protect access. This conference can add greatly to the achievement of this goal: the first national symposium bringing together people concerned about water access to discuss and create tools to use in addressing the access problem on a grassroots level and to forge contacts among the water access community nationwide.

Rick Lydecker commented that as all politics is local so are all water access decisions. This leads us to our second strategic goal which is to do a better job of influencing local decision-making to preserve and grow access. We must do a better job of educating local and state community planners about the economic and social benefits of recreational boating and get them to integrate boating access into the land-use planning process so that recreational boating is viewed as preferred choice for waterfront development.

To do this, we need to create an advocacy "tool-kit" that can be used by boating access advocates to convey and publicize the value of marinas, access facilities and water-dependent development to communities, planners and local decision makers. And we are hopeful that this conference will highlight and provide some of the tools already available to address the problems facing boating access and working waterways.

A third goal outcome we would like to see is a commitment to create new opportunities for boating access by partnering with the federal, state and local governments to access waters on public lands. Federal, state and local governments are the largest owners of waterfront property in the US. Last fall, NMMA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with US Forest Service to promote and encourage boating on Forest Service waters. NMMA is also pursuing similar agreements with the Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service.

In addition, we are reaching out to and partnering with various national Brownfields development groups such as the Urban Harbors Institute and the National Association of Development Organizations to promote boating access in the redevelopment of former industrial sites across the country.

We hear about counties in Florida that have lost half of their marina slips. In Rhode Island, for every slip and mooring in the state there are three people waiting for one. In Chicago, we hear about multi-year waiting lists for a slip or mooring in Chicago harbors. But this is all anecdotal evidence. We need to promote the scientific measurement of boating access and measure the economic benefit that recreational boating brings to a community.

NMMA is working with Dr. Ed Mahoney of Michigan State University on the development of a flexible index of boating access nationwide entitled the Boating Access Surveillance and Indexing System. We are providing funding to launch at MSU, a new Center for the Spatial Study of Recreational Industries. They will be hiring quantitative geographers and GIS specialists to create an Index of Boating Access, not unlike the Consumer Price Index and other indexes based on a basket of sample sites rather than a complete inventory of all sites.

In addition, NMMA has worked with MSU in developing and implementing economic-impact studies of the value of marinas and water access to communities so boating access advocates have solid economic data to present developers and local decision makers. By June 1 of this year, a web site managed by MSU will have a template for producing economic impact studies at no cost that will describe the economic impact of adding, losing or changing marinas and boat ramps in a community.

We must also examine and recommend better, more efficient use of waterfront space and technology. This creation best practices in access development will match design and construction techniques with the decreasing availability of water front space and future boat designs to ensure that access facilities make the most efficient use of limited space.

Finally, perhaps our most challenging outcome we seek is to improve the policy, permitting and regulatory environment governing marina and boating facilities development. The overlay of multiple regulatory bodies involved in permitting is a nightmare. We must find a way to streamline the process. It simply should not take a marina owner 8 years to get the permits to build or expand their marina.

We need every state to have a strategic plan for boating infrastructure and improvements and to fund these plans for boating infrastructure development and improvements.

We were asked to focus our remarks to access to the water not access on the water. But, I cannot close without recognizing that navigational dredging is a vital aspect of boating access and is in a sorry state nationwide.

The Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway is a mess and needs immediate dredging in several areas. The President's FY08 budget asks for **\$4.871 Billion** in total Corps funding. NMMA, and our partners, have lobbied for a figure closer to \$8 billion, that is more appropriate in light of critical navigational dredging needs. And, we need the Army Corps of Engineers to be funded for dredging of small harbors. If I can get my boat into the water, but I can't get out of the harbor, I don't have access to the water.

The task of finding solutions to the problems facing recreational boating access and working waterfronts is significant if not daunting and there is a lot of work to do in changing the paradigm that defines waterfront development and use.

The recreational boating industry stands ready to elevate the status of boating access in the minds of developers and decision makers that are reshaping our nation's waterfronts for private use to the exclusion of the boating public.

We hope this landmark conference, with stakeholders from across a broad range of disciplines and interests will coalesce and begin working in concert on this issue and we will all benefit from these efforts to grow access.

Thank you.