

**Working Waterways and Waterfronts – Welcome Comments**  
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**Boat Owners Association of The United States (BoatU.S.)**

On behalf of our conference sponsors, the steering committee and our hosts in this historic port city of Norfolk, VA

Welcome you to Working Waterways and Waterfronts, what we've planned as the first National Symposium on Water Access. I am with BoatUS – the Boat Owners Association of The United States – and I want to tell you briefly how we got here; just how this conference came about.

My organization, as the name implies, is a membership association of recreational boaters – 670,000 members, nationwide. BoatUS members come from every walk of life, community of interest and sphere of influence imaginable. So you can be sure that if something of significance – for good or for ill – is happening on the water, our members let us know about it.

A few years ago we began hearing from BoatUS members that they were losing marina slips, launching ramps, service yards, anchorages, transient landings in many areas and for a whole host of reasons that we are going to be exploring – grappling with, even – in the next three days.

This is a problem – access to the water – that faces not just recreational boaters and anglers but, depending on where you look, commercial fishermen, charter fishing captains, tour boat operators, yacht brokers and vessel chartering companies, not to mention all manner of small businesses that depend on the working waterfront for life and livelihood, all face this problem.

I serve on a federally chartered advisory body called the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council. We represent both the business and the consumer sides of recreational boating and sport angling as well as the conservation community, state natural resource management agencies and private business.

We advise the Secretary of the Dept of the Interior, through the director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, on matters relating to boating and fishing, and the contributions that these activities make to marine and aquatic resource conservation.

This Council met in Nov. 2005 to lay out a To-Do list of strategic issues it could address over the next few years and we came up with 12. At the top of that list was the issue of access to the water. As one of my colleagues on the Council said at the time, “We can do all sorts of good works for boating, for fishing and for conservation, but if you can’t get to the water, it’s all for naught.”

We then whittled that list down to four priority concerns and there, at the top of the list and by unanimous vote, was Water Access.

So then the question became, what should – what could – this advisory body do relative to the water access issue?

Later on it hit me. I’d begun to notice in recent months – often hearing about it from our members, in fact – that local jurisdictions were coming up with various ways to deal with the loss of working waterfronts and finding, or at least exploring, ways to achieve balance with respect to water access.

Like politics, all water access is local. So this is a problem that elected officials, appointed planning bodies, state and local governments have had to grapple with in an effort to best serve the interests of widely varied constituencies.

This was going on – somewhat in isolation; it seemed to me – in many parts of the country, and in a variety of forums. So, I thought, why not bring together the collective experience and wisdom of policy makers, industry leaders and elected officials who have been dealing with the water access issue. Get them all under one roof to see what’s worked, and what might work elsewhere, and then make this body of knowledge widely available to others.

At BoatUS we have worked for a long time with Virginia Sea Grant on a variety of issues so I discussed my idea for a conference with my good friend Tom Murray, Marine Business Specialist at Virginia Sea Grant and, to make a long story short, Tom put before the Council, at its Spring meeting in March 2006, a proposal to host a water

access symposium. The Council then voted, unanimously, to provide the seed money to begin planning this event.

That seed money brought in additional sponsors and as you've seen, we have no less than 19 sponsors from a wide range of interests. They are all noted in your program and on the poster at the back, and I hope that when you see one of those "Sponsor" ribbons going by, you will thank the person wearing it for supporting this conference.

In any case, Tom also quickly assembled a Steering Committee to plan the conference and, with a couple of exceptions, everyone on the Committee is here today. So I would like us to thank them for their hard work to make this symposium the success that we are all confident it is going to be. From the national network of Sea Grant institutions we have:

Bob Swett	Florida Sea Grant
Leigh Taylor Johnson	California Sea Grant
Jim Murray	NOAA National Sea Grant Program

Now these Steering Committee members also serve on the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council:

Monita Fontaine	NMMA (also a sponsor)
John Sprague	Marine Industries Association of Florida
Julie McQuade	immediate Past Pres. – SOBA (also a sponsor)
Doug Hobbs	Staff Coordinator – SFBPC

Representing the Coastal States Organization, another conference sponsor, is:

Jim Connors	Maine Coastal Program
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Participating on the Abstract Review Team, along with Jim and Julie McQuade, were:

Dylan Jones	NMMA
Brian Efland	North Carolina Sea Grant

Three Committee members could not be here:

Natalie Springuel,	Maine Sea Grant
Jack Thigpen	North Carolina Sea Grant (but NC SG is well represented. They are also a conference sponsor)
Bob Goodwin	Washington Sea Grant, who is in well-deserved retirement.

Now, anyone in the room who did not stand up – the rest of you – please, during the breaks, at the meals and in the evening receptions, when you see one of these Steering Committee members – they all are wearing colored name badges – take a moment to let them know what you think of this conference.

Tell them what brought you here, what you hope to take home with you – because their work is not done. They want your feedback and they will be directly involved in the Friday morning strategy session as well as in all the follow-up that we expect will come out of this conference.

But now the work – for all of us in this room – is just getting started – so let me introduce the conference co-chair and the man who really did all the heavy lifting to put this event together, Virginia Sea Grant's Tom Murray.