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Transportation, recreation, commercial fishing: no matter how you look at it, water, and access to it, is an integral part of our lives along the Gulf Coast. The livelihood of some, such as oystermen, boat makers, and charter fishermen, rely on ready access to the water. However, the market for waterfront residential property is as popular as ever, putting increasing pressure on the land available for open waterfront access.

The plight of working waterfronts is at the forefront of communities in many states, including our own. Maine, Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida communities are all struggling with the balance of traditional working waterfronts and newer residential waterfront development. Legislative actions at both the state and federal level have addressed working waterfronts. Maine Congresswoman Chellie Penigree introduced H.R. 2548, the Protect America's Working Waterfronts Act, which would provide Federal funding to protect working waterfronts in coastal states. During a hearing last week in Congress, Rep. Penigree said "The pressures facing working waterfronts are real and I have seen these pressures first hand. We are not doing enough. We need a federal grants program to help states. Many states have already recognized the need to protect working waterfronts and now it is time for the federal government to recognize them too." You can show support for this bill by contacting your House Representative and voicing support or asking him or her to co-sponsor the bill.

Alabama is one of the states that has recognized the need that Rep. Penigree speaks of. Last session, the Alabama Legislature, passed a joint resolution (HJR 656) to form the Alabama Waterfront Access Study Committee, whose goal is to research the status of the working waterfront in all of Alabama and recommend ways to "address issues of diversity of waterfront use and access in Alabama." The Committee has released its draft recommendations to the Legislature for public comment, and will hold three public meetings throughout the state:

- Tuesday, Oct. 13: Building 1, Aerospace Training Center Auditorium, Calhoun Community College, 6250 U.S. Highway 31 N, Tanner, Ala., 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- Tuesday, Oct. 27: East Room of Library Tower, Auburn University Montgomery, Montgomery, Ala., 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- Thursday, Nov. 12: Weise Marine Science Hall, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, 102 Bienville Boulevard, Dauphin Island, 36528, 6 p.m. to 8 pm.

Residents are invited to make comments at the public meetings, online or through the mail. Links to the draft recommendations and an online site for comments are available at <http://masgc.org/wwf>. Written

comments may be addressed to Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center, 4170
Commanders Drive, Mobile, AL 36615, Attn: Water Access Comments. The deadline for comments is 5
p.m., November 18, 2009.