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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. The Town of Dauphin Island is working to maintain its own working waterfront that has traditionally defined the community while encouraging other small business and tourism to grow.

Recently, legislative actions at both the state and federal level have addressed working waterfronts. In the past week in Congress, the House added language from the Working Waterfronts Preservation Act to HR5451, the Coastal Zone Management Act Reauthorization. This would create a fund that would assist communities in preserving traditional working waterfront access. The Alabama Legislature, before its adjournment, passed a joint resolution (HJR 656) to form the Alabama Waterfront Access Study Committee, to be lead by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and the goal 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.”

Both of these legislative actions recognize the importance and urgency of working waterfront access both in Alabama and across the nation.