

By: Jody A. Thompson, Environmental Educator  
Alabama Sea Grant/Auburn Marine Center

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.

Other states have experience with this issue. Maine, Florida, and Connecticut have all taken measures to ensure access to their waterfronts remains for those who depend on it. In some cases, such as with the City of Orange Beach, land or marinas have been purchased by governments for this purpose. In addition, Senate Bill 741 has been introduced in Congress. This bill, if approved, would provide states with funds to purchase property or interest in property to provide access for commercial fishing and the aquaculture industry.

In coastal Alabama, a group of concerned stakeholders, representing interests in commercial and charter fishing, tourism, boat building, retail business, seafood processing, and real estate, have formed the Alabama Working Waterfront Coalition. The goal of the group is to maintain a sustainable working waterfront. In partnership with Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant, the AWWC has contracted with Auburn University

to conduct an inventory of the working waterfront in Mobile County. This will serve as a baseline for the waterfront as well as an educational tool.

A growing community is one of balances and compromises. It is up to the members of communities along the Gulf Coast to set its own priorities regarding working waterfronts. Efforts should be made to ensure that all parties and economic interests, recreational, commercial, and residential, have the access they need to our waterways.