

Alabama Waterfront Access Study Committee

March 3, 2009
Old Archives Chamber
Alabama Capitol Building
Montgomery, Alabama

Minutes

Attendees: Bobbi Walker, Charles Kelley, Ahmad Ijac for Samuel Addy, Brett Dungan, B.G. Thompson, Timothy Mulvaney, Dr. Michael Stovall, Cline Jones, Grey Brennan for Lee Sentell, Will Brantley for Barnett Lawley, Judith Adams for James Lyons, Joseph Rodriguez, Rep. Spencer Collier, Dr. Diane Hite, Jennings Byrd, Tracy Redding, Dr. LaDon Swann, Christian Miller, Marie Dyson, Jody Thompson

Chairman LaDon Swann convened the meeting at 10:00 am. Dr. Swann presented background information on the topic of waterfront access and working waterfronts, the goals and tasks of the Waterfront Access Study Committee, and a timeline the committee will follow.

Unfortunately, Michael Voiland was unable to attend the meeting to present the findings of a waterfront access committee in North Carolina due to weather, but will give the presentation at the next committee meeting.

The committee discussed the potential impacts of the recently passed federal economic stimulus package on the potential recommendations to the Legislature. "Shovel-ready" projects, those construction projects that would be completed within 2 years, would be considered for the 3-5 billion dollars of funding Alabama would receive. Suggestions for this type of project were as follows:

- Orange Beach charter fishing marina
- Bayou La Batre fish-drying facility

It was suggested the committee obtain guidelines from the Legislative Fiscal Office, and investigate what projects communities are planning to submit.

The committee discussed issues related to water access in Alabama and began discussing recommendations to be made in the final committee report. Rep. Collier stated that recommendations to the Legislature should include suggested resolutions or proposals for legislation which the Legislature could take action on in the short term, and these must be realistic, fundable, and attainable. The following comments were made:

- Encroachment of development affects nature-based tourism and quality of life. Public water access is important.
- Economy is slow now, but working waterfront and access needs to be protected – plan now for future generations.
- Balance heritage and growth.

- Investigate how other states used public funding to purchase working waterfront properties (such as North Carolina)
- Terms such as working waterfront and access need to be defined for Alabama.
- Country of origin labeling legislation for fish and shellfish – this is currently in subcommittee review
- Increase funding for US Army Corps of Engineers dredging projects, specifically waterbodies not on the regular schedule. Adapt tonnage reporting to better reflect economic values of shipping on waterways. There is inadequate dredge capacity in North America. Explore beneficial use of dredge material for waterfront access.
- Expand the working waterfront inventory to encompass the entire state.
- Complete an economic inventory of working waterfronts and waterfront access throughout Alabama. Include: tonnage shipped, jobs creation and retention; nature- and heritage-based tourism. This information would help to secure federal funding and federal budgeting. Some data already exists: Appalacicola- Chatahootchie-Flint waterway; Tennessee-Tombigbee; Alabama Port Authority through Sam Addy at University of Alabama; Seemoon Chang at University of South Alabama; Diane Hite of Auburn University has information on fishing licenses; Commercial Fishing information missing but easy to quantify.
- Property tax relief for working waterfront businesses, may include county-level ad valorem reform or tax development districts.
- Tie nature- and heritage- based tourism to working waterfronts; utilize information from Urban Land Institute report; tie in ADCNR coastal efforts, Alabama Scenic River Train; Scenic By-ways; federal Trails and Parks, including lands adjacent to federal waterways managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers and Department of the Interior. Identify lack of infrastructure key to success of nature-based tourism, such as Alabama Scenic River Trail.

Dr. Diane Hite presented the findings of the Auburn University inventory of working waterfronts in southwest Mobile County, funded by Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant in 2007. This inventory could be expanded for the remainder of the state. Jody Thompson and Marie Dyson shared Incentive-based techniques and management tools utilized in other states to protect waterfront access.

The committee suggested the following be invited to participate in the ad hoc technical committee to support the WASC: Alabama Department of Revenue and Finance, Alabama Development Office, ADECA, Mobile Chamber of Commerce. Chairman Swann will convene a meeting of the committee and the MASGC Legal Program and ADECA to learn more about Alabama's current tax codes and assessments. The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 pm.

All presentations, supporting documents, reports, and presentations are available at:
<http://masgc.org/wwf>