

Mapping Maine's Working Waterfront

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Final report

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Project Narrative

Mapping Maine's Working Waterfront is a collaborative project led by the Island Institute that brings together community members, nonprofit, state, and federal organizations to form the Working Waterfront Mapping Group. Throughout the past 15 months this group has met their goal to address the lack of geographic information available to support working-waterfront policy and planning at state and local levels.

The Island Institute and partner organizations coordinated and carried out data collection working with Maine's coastal community leaders, implementing data standards that the Working Waterfront Mapping Group finalized back in July 2005. The data collection phase of this project involved visiting each of the 142 coastal Maine communities and

working with town officials to transfer local knowledge about water access to spatial and attribute data, so that organizations locally and regionally can use the information to protect this valuable resource.

Overall, this project has been very well received. Town officials not only participated but also began to think of ways to better plan to protect water access using the data created through this project. For example, while identifying waterfront access they are also thinking about the places where access is currently available but not guaranteed and protected long-term and how this geographic information can be used as a tool to help protect that access. Several towns have also expressed interest in learning more about how they can use GIS and geographic information to create and store better local information.

Throughout the project the Working Waterfront Mapping Group has been collaborating well. The roles of these collaborating organizations vary; some are sharing in the data collection work while the majority is working to advise the project, provide community contacts, and inform key decisions about the project's progress. Throughout the data collection phase the Group has discussed important topics such as data sharing and data consistency issues, and has worked together to resolve these issues in a way to satisfy all interested organizations.

Throughout project development, methodology design, data collection and analysis there have been a number of challenges and successes that have been vetted through the Working Waterfront Mapping Group. The first major challenge was ensuring, before data collection began, that we understood exactly what types of data would be useful to inform local, regional as well as statewide planning efforts. This was accomplished by convening our working group to identify the type of data that was critical to each group. Not only was it important to gather information meaningful for each type of stakeholder but it was also critical to structure the data collection in such a way as to capture the very large range of the type of access points across the entire coastline. This challenge was met through well thought-out survey questions for each access location.

During working group meetings, the most critical question was how to gather enough access information for meaningful planning without advertising and potentially exploiting the use of privately owned access points. We found that the best way to resolve this sensitivity issue was to ensure local community buy-in and participation. The overwhelmingly positive response from communities across the coast is a testament to the gravity of the access situation in Maine. Because local public participation was so critical to information gathering, making sure that all of the right stakeholders from each community were involved in the process was a slow but very important process. While this meant a slower process, it also created a higher-quality product as a result.

One of the biggest milestones is the formation of relationships and high level of collaboration happening at the local community level. Through this project, community leaders are finding the opportunity to evaluate the current state of water access in their town and identify areas that require improvement or work. By collaborating with the

Working Waterfront Mapping Group, community leaders not only reflect on the state of their communities' access but also receive the geographic resources and tools to aid in decision-making.

Ultimately the project was accomplished by working hand-in-hand with local community leaders in each of the participating coastal communities. The data collected were around critical-access infrastructure on a local level and from a community perspective. Creating both strong relationships with community leaders and delivering a meaningful data product were critical to the successful implementation of this project in Maine, and would be necessary for similar projects undertaken in other coastal states.

Next Steps

This project's activities are continuing to grow and transform. While the data collection and coordination aspects are completed, collaborations among organizations are continuing as we find new ways to use and disseminate the findings from this project. Organizations from the Working Waterfront Mapping Group are now working together to find ways to help organizations use the data gathered through this and other studies to identify access sites that should become priorities for protection, and to leverage funds to assist in this effort.

A larger emerging project also includes working with communities to use this and other geographic resources for required harbor management tasks. This larger project requires a great deal of local training and technical support as well as work within local constraints of technology infrastructure and software needs. In addition, the organizations comprising the Working Waterfront Mapping Group will continue to collaborate to find innovative ways to use the waterfront access data developed through this project, and other creative tools to continue to work to protect and conserve Maine's working-waterfront access.

Feedback on Cooperative Agreements Program

The Cooperative Agreements Program has been a useful way to learn more about the NSDI, Geospatial One-Stop, and other national initiatives. The CAP coordinator was helpful and informative during our contact throughout the project period.

I appreciated the opportunity to learn about other funded CAP grant programs at the kick-off event at the beginning of the funding period. It would be interesting to have some type of follow-up to learn from the successes/challenges of our cohort of projects.

Attachments

Attached please find our final financial report as well as a one-page fact sheet summarizing the data findings from this project.