

## **THE FATE OF WORKING WATERFRONTS AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA: THE ALABAMA EXPERIENCE**

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Traditionally, the coastal counties of Alabama have relied on access to the water for their livelihood. Generations of families, based in towns like Bayou La Batre, Alabama, operate fishing boats, seafood processing facilities, boat yards, and support industries. These water-dependent industries have tremendous economic impacts both on the county and the state. Water-dependent interests in the area are wide-ranging, including commercial fishermen and shipbuilding facilities, a large charter fishing fleet, and heavy industrial shipping, with a large demand for recreational access in addition. These traditional fishing villages involve large participation from Vietnamese and Laotian communities (Bayou La Batre, AL: 51.7 percent white, 23 percent Vietnamese, 9.5 percent other Asian; approx. 1,500 total residents).

Fisheries and other related activities have tremendous economic impacts. According to the University of South Alabama, the economic expenditures related to fishing and non-consumptive activities (water-related tourism, charter fishing, birding, etc.) around Mobile Bay, AL, equals \$3 billion per year <sup>[1]</sup>.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated traditional fishing areas of coastal Alabama. According to the University of South Alabama, the economic losses to the commercial fishing industry in Bayou La Batre, AL, alone totaled \$112.25 million.

In response to constituent concerns, AUMERC held workshops in Biloxi, Mississippi, and Bayou La Batre, Alabama, in October 2006 to inform and discuss working waterfront issues. Attendees included business, industry, political leaders, and fishing representatives. AUMERC continued to help organize an Alabama group of water-dependent businesses and other stakeholders. Involved interests have included commercial fishing and related industries, charter fishing, recreational fishing, tourism, environmental groups, and heavy industry.

Over 40 stakeholders from a wide range of interests have formed the Alabama Working Waterfront Coalition. AUMERC provides the group with technical support and facilitates the group. To meet the needs of the stakeholders, AUMERC produced a fact sheet and Web site, facilitated discussions with the state legislative delegation, provided press contacts through local and national media outlets, and acted as a liaison to local and

national actions and potential partners. To meet needs identified by the stakeholders, MASGC funded an Inventory of Working Waterfront in Mobile County, Alabama.

Produced by Auburn University, the inventory of the current working waterfront in Mobile County, Alabama, was completed in January 2008. Along with mapping the working waterfront as a baseline study, the inventory included a survey of working waterfront businesses. The results from the study serve the dual purpose of a baseline for progress and an educational tool.

Future actions include broadening Alabama Working Waterfront Coalition membership, increasing community involvement and awareness, the formation of a state-level working waterfront committee and the proposal of current use legislation for working waterfronts in Alabama.

### **Reference**

- [1] Chang, Semoon and S. Canode, 1999. Toward Valuation of the Mobile Bay: A Study, CBER Research Report #44. University of South Alabama Center for Business and Economic Research for the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program. [http://www.mobilebaynep.com/site/news\\_pubs/news/Documents/Characterization%20Reports/Valuation%20of%20Mobile%20Bay.pdf](http://www.mobilebaynep.com/site/news_pubs/news/Documents/Characterization%20Reports/Valuation%20of%20Mobile%20Bay.pdf)

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