PUBLIC TO PRIVATE LOSS OF THE WATERFRONT

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Publicly accessible marinas, boatyards, and boat ramps statewide are being lost to private land uses. This trend is exacerbated by the lack of physical space for new public access to the water and an increase in registered boaters.

In 2003, 978,225 vessels were registered in the State of Florida, up 29.5% from 1997 and up 51.7% from 1987. This does not account for visiting boaters from other states, which is estimated at 4.3 million participants. To focus just on boat ramp access for a moment, the following are excerpts from 2004 news stories: The Miami Herald reported that Miami-Dade County has more than 50,000 registered boats and 56 ramps at six marinas, from "They call it ramp rage," Miami Herald, July 4, 2004. Palm Beach County has 550 parking spaces for the 26,000 boat trailers registered in the county. from "Boaters having trouble finding launch access," Palm Beach Post, July 5, 2004 (Public to private conversions of marinas, boat ramps, and boatyards in Florida: Strategies to address diminishing working waterfronts and waterway access in Florida, University of Florida 2005).

A preliminary estimate of salt water boat ramp facilities indicates an increase from 1,055 in 1998 to 1,075 ramps in 2004, with ramp lanes increasing from 1,328 to 1,373 over the same period. During the period 1987 to 2004, salt water marinas decreased statewide from 1,201 to 1,066. While marina slips increased slightly from 49,499 to 50,585, dry storage declined from 33,476 to 31,856 over the same period (Working Waterfronts, report 2005-122). One manifestation of the conversion to private use is

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"dockominiums", exclusive dockage for those who can afford it. For example, in the Jacksonville area, Harbortown, a converted marina, charges $101,000 for a slip that fits a 40ft boat ("Up the river without a paddle", The Times-Union, April 5, 2004).

A 1997 Florida Sea Grant report, prepared for Charlotte County, evaluated infrastructure and boating demographics from the period 1981-1991 in order to make demand projection for 2010. The report concluded that by the year 2010, there would be a need for 5,918 slips/racks (up from 2,497 in 1991), and 86 boat ramp lanes (up from 35 in 1991). The report also evaluated and selected suitable sites to meet the anticipated boater demands for shoreside facilities (Planning for Public Boating Access: A Geographic Information Systems Approach to Evaluate Site Suitability for Future Marinas, Ramps and Docks, Antonini et al., 1997). Unfortunately, many of the sites selected for future shoreside facilities have fallen by the wayside due to the high cost of waterfront land coupled with private land use development pressures.

Current opportunities for financial assistance to promote or preserve working waterfronts for public access include the Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program, the Florida Boating Improvement program, the Florida Recreational Development Assistance Program, the Land and Water Conservation Program, the Boating Infrastructure Grant Program, and the Florida Communities Trust. In addition, the inland navigation districts (in our case the West Coast Inland Navigation District) have the capacity to provide funds to alleviate access pressure by use of taxes generated through ad valorem taxes.

The University of Florida document identified above sites several possible options for preserving and increasing access.

At the State government level:

1. The creation of a tax deferral program for working waterfronts; and
2. Amending the submerged lands statutes to further promote the goal of ensuring submerged lands of the state be used for public assess facilities.

At the Local government level:

1. Local tax policies to allow "Use-value" or "income-based" taxation based on income producing capacity which could prevent "mom and pop marinas" from being forced to sell;
2. Comprehensive planning – adding requirements to preserve and enhance public access to the water; and
3. Zoning, which can guide, control, and assure water dependent uses of the waterfronts.

Waterfront marinas, boatyards, and boat ramps are vital in providing public access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state. It is important that they are preserved.

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