



Press Release

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For immediate release

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Country's Oldest Operating Fisheries Co-op Protects Their Fishing Heritage

Members of the Pemaquid Fishermen's Co-op, purportedly the oldest continuously operating fisheries co-operative in the country (62 years), recently signed a protective covenant that forever restricts use of their waterfront access real estate to the commercial fisheries. The culmination of a process that pays the Co-op for the development rights to their property, the sale of the covenant, which occurred on May 11, realizes the aspirations of the lobstermen members to preserve their working waterfront access to Pemaquid Harbor along Maine's midcoast in the Town of Bristol. For the sale of those development rights, the Co-op was paid \$265,400 as part of the Working Waterfront Access Pilot Program (WWAPP), a joint program of the Maine Department of Marine Resources and the Land for Maine's Future Program. The amount of the award was determined by an appraisal that adhered to strict standards, then was reviewed and approved by the Land for Maine's Future Board.

With 4.5 acres of land, 540 feet of rocky shoreline, a 2700-square-foot wharf and associated buildings and fisheries support facilities, the shoreline parcel has resisted the rapid pace of development of many nearby oceanfront properties into residential uses. As detailed in studies by Coastal Enterprises Inc. and the Island Institute earlier in the decade, the disappearance of important commercial fishing access properties along the entire coast threatens fishermen's livelihoods and the cohesiveness of Maine's seafaring communities. Estimates of the amount of remaining shorefront serving as working waterfront access place the total at no more than 20 linear miles in a coastal length of over 5000 miles, or less than one half of one percent. By 2050 the Maine State Planning Office predicts that much of the state coastline will be classified as suburban/urban putting the remaining commercial fishing access properties at risk.

For members of the Pemaquid Co-op, the award money will be put to good use through reinvestment in their business. Lacking a reliable means to keep lobsters in storage for prolonged periods of time, the Co-op plans to build a large, chilled seawater storage building on their shorefront so that they can land lobsters and store them for sale at higher market prices. Integrated into this plan, lobster boats will be outfitted with holding and handling systems that will transfer the lobsters directly to the chilled seawater tanks with a minimum of stress. In addition, hiring a part-time marketer will exploit the profitability of the higher grade of lobsters. And renovation of the wharf pilings and supports will carry the business forward without the requirement for expensive repairs in the foreseeable future.

According to Wayne Dighton, General Manager of the facility, the resulting improvement in the handling of lobsters will result in increased yield by significantly diminishing mortalities during storage and transport. Furthermore, they will be able to “time the sale” of the bulk of their catch during the months of December, May, and July when lobster prices are at their highest.

In addition to the program funds, owners of protected working waterfront like the Pemaquid Co-op can apply to their town’s tax assessor for property tax reductions that can be as high as 40-50 percent of the taxes applied toward the land portion of the property valuation. The Current Use Tax Law which emerged from the Maine Legislature about the same time as the 2005 bond issue which started the WWAPP, permits permanent property tax relief for owners of land on which 50-90% of the use is for commercial fisheries.

Although the Working Waterfront Access Pilot Program has 6 more proposals now under consideration (bringing the total to 20), the future of the program rests on passage of a new bond for the Land for Maine’s Future Program which includes funds for working waterfront protection. This bond issue is being considered by the Legislature and if approved, would be judged by Maine voters at the ballot box. Increasing interest in the program from working waterfront property owners supports estimates that there are approximately 100 important commercial fishing properties in the state that remain unprotected and are critically important to much of coastal Maine’s dependency on fishing for economic prosperity.

In comments made earlier in May, Governor Baldacci referred to the WWAPP by saying, “This program is another way to make critical investments in the future well-being of Maine families and the health of our coastal communities. Working

waterfronts define the character of Maine's coast for residents and visitors alike, and are critical to our heritage and economy.”

Remarking about the commitment of the Pemaquid Co-op to preserve their property for their off-spring and future generations of fishermen, Commissioner of the Department of Marine Resources, George Lapointe said, “I am impressed by the proactive approach the Pemaquid Co-op has taken to the challenging conditions facing the lobster industry at this time. I hope that their investment in innovative technology, combined with their new approach to marketing their lobsters will yield great benefits to the Co-op”.

Located within sight of the colonial fort at Pemaquid, the Co-op fishermen sense the history and heritage of the area that links them to their ancestry. Now that they are putting their traps into the water expecting a challenging season ahead, they work with the assurance that they are continuing that unbroken link by planning for their future as well as that of their families and their community.

For additional information on the Working Waterfront Access Pilot Program visit the website, www.wwapp.org.

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