



P R E S S R E L E A S E

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**HANCOCK WHARF RESTORED FOR COMMERCIAL FISHING**

**York, Maine — November 9, 2010**— A historic York wharf will soon be repaired as a facility for commercial fishermen through a project of the Museums of the Old York and the Working Waterfront Access Pilot Program (WWAPP). Work will commence in November, with the facility ready early in 2011 for year-round use by three lobstermen. The project restores the wharf's three-hundred-year role in the town's economy while helping sustain a living part of York's heritage, its fisheries.

The John Hancock Wharf, one of several properties of the Museums of Old York, is named after the signer of the Declaration of Independence, who owned it in the 1790s. The ancient wharf structure at the site consists of wooden cribwork filled with stone and soil to create a platform across the tidal flats to the river channel. From the 1600s until the early 1900s, schooners and coastal vessels brought goods from around the world for sale to York residents, and carried products of local farms and fisheries to distant markets. Bridges constructed for light rail and automobiles blocked that section of the river to large boats by 1914. From then until 1980, three generations of a single York family berthed their lobster fishing boats at the wharf. Since 1980, it has been in seasonal use by recreational boaters.

Keeping the wharf in good condition was a mounting challenge after its heyday. Over the years, owners shored up the sides with stone rip rap, a cheaper alternative to replacing cribwork. Only a fifty-five-foot span of deteriorated cribwork survives on the west side of the wharf. Old York's board and staff have struggled to fund preservation of the structure, with nine other historic buildings competing for limited resources.

Working waterfront has dwindled in Maine in recent decades as the value of properties on the water has risen. Pricy homes have been built on former commercial piers. Recreational boaters willing to pay higher rent than fishermen have replaced them on many docks. York has lost three of its seven working wharves since the 1970s. Town Dock 1 is currently used by at least 26 commercial fishermen, who must wait in line to unload their catches. Fishing access on the York River has been so congested in recent years that some fishermen were pulling their boats up under the Sewall's Bridge to fuel up. Fishermen were leaving their vessels in gear, parking their trucks on the bridge and running a fuel line to their boats to avoid waiting in line at the town docks (a practice that has since stopped).

The WWAPP offered a way to fund repairs and return the Hancock Wharf to commercial use. In exchange for an agreement to keep the facility available for commercial fishermen, WWAPP will pay Old York \$255,000,

the difference in the value of the property with and without such a restrictive covenant. Old York hopes to raise an additional \$50,000 in private donations. The money will pay to repair the cribwork; raise the wharf's surface above the flood level; build a larger pier, a new bait cooler and additional floats capable of handling commercial activity; and create a maintenance fund. Old York will lease space on the renovated pier to three commercial fishermen.

Old York Executive Director Scott Stevens noted: "We are usually preserving relics from extinguished ways of life. It is gratifying to do a different kind of preservation, helping sustain a living tradition."

WWAPP tentatively approved Old York's proposal in July, 2008. Since then, Old York has gone through an extensive process to reach closure, including a property appraisal, a new survey and title confirmation, an environmental hazard assessment, and careful negotiations with the state over the terms of the covenant.

Old York's situation presented unique challenges. It was necessary to balance the ongoing operation of museum education programs and the George Marshall Store art gallery at the site with the concerns of residential neighbors and the needs of the fishermen. A task force of Old York staff and trustees, volunteers with ties to the fishing community, and neighbors helped steer the process and advise the board.

Marine Resources Commissioner George Lapointe said "Many of the other WWAPP projects have been focused on preserving existing commercial fishing access, the property owned by the Old York Historical Society presented an exciting opportunity to restore traditional fishing access that had been lost over the years, in a part of the state where the industry has really been squeezed. This small property will make a valuable contribution to easing pressure on other local commercial access spots, benefiting all fishermen in the area."

The WWAPP is jointly administered by the Land for Maine's Future Program (LMF), the Maine Department of Marine Resources and Coastal Enterprises, Inc. Increasing interest in the program from working waterfront property owner's supports estimates that there are approximately 100 commercial fishing properties in the state that remain unprotected and are critically important to much of coastal Maine's reliance on fishing for economic prosperity. The recent November 2 bond referendum (Question #3) has recapitalize the WWAPP program with an additional 1.75 million dollars and the state expects to solicit proposals for new projects in early 2011. For additional information on the WWAPP visit the website, [www.wwapp.org](http://www.wwapp.org).

The Museums of Old York is a private, nonprofit organization that operates nine historic museum buildings on six sites and a library and archives and presents educational programs. For more information on Old York, visit [www.oldyork.org](http://www.oldyork.org).

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