

Public Announcement 11_21_05

Maine Working Waterfront Access Pilot Program Created

Passage of the \$12 million Land for Maine's Future Bond establishes a unique working waterfront protection program, funded by a \$2 million set-aside for projects that protect strategically significant working waterfront properties whose continued availability to commercial fisheries businesses is essential to the long-term future of this economic sector.

The Maine Working Waterfront Access Pilot Program is aimed at protecting waterfront land with the facilities, capacity, and services needed to support commercial fisheries businesses. Commercial fisheries businesses are defined as enterprises directly or indirectly concerned with the commercial harvest of wild or aquacultured fish or shellfish.

Financial grants up to 50% of the acquisition costs for the property will be available to private businesses, cooperatives, municipalities, organizations qualified to hold conservation easements under Maine law, or other qualified organizations for projects that will provide permanent access use by commercial fisheries businesses.

Property acquisitions can include conservation easements, access easements, development rights, full title or other permanent interests in the land. To assure the access use is permanent and secure, the grant will include a provision that the property may not be used, altered or developed in a manner that precludes its use by commercial fisheries businesses. In addition, the State will retain a permanent right of first refusal on the property.

The Department of Marine Resources will administer the pilot program in conjunction with the Land for Maine's Future Board. The State Planning Office and Maine Department of Transportation will provide assistance. To aid in the development of the program the Commissioner of DMR will organize a Review Panel to advise on the operation of the program, including evaluating and recommending applicants for participation in the program.

The enabling statute creating the pilot program establishes a set of selection criteria to be used to evaluate projects for funding support. These criteria include considerations of the economic significance of the property, the availability of alternative waterfront access properties, the degree of community support, the level of threat, and the utility of the proposed property for fisheries uses.

Given the limited funds only a few projects will be able to be funded over the next two years. As a pilot program an effort will be made to find exemplary projects that are ready to go that fulfill the purposes of the program. The program is intended to support existing fishing businesses that can permanently provide working access for fishermen, including cooperatives and fishing related businesses such as commercial wharfs and marinas. The program is also available to municipalities working to protect and secure fishing access sites and facilities.

The Department of Marine Resources plans to have the program up and running early in 2006. A call for proposal will be issued at that time with a full description of the application criteria and evaluation process. The first project grants are expected to be awarded later in the year.

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