A. Introduction

Created by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1968, the counties of Accomack and Northampton and the Town of Chincoteague make up the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission (A-NPDC), a regional organization. Tasked with supporting local planning and
community development efforts and providing technical assistance on behalf of the Commonwealth, the A-NPDC focuses on diverse issues of regional importance to the Eastern Shore of Virginia. The A-NPDC’s role is to assist Eastern Shore communities in economic development efforts and planning for retention and expansion of existing industries, including working waterfronts. Working waterfronts have historically been and continue to be a major source of income for Shore citizens.

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is a peninsula with 77 miles of Atlantic shoreline on the eastern side and a similar number of miles on the Chesapeake Bay or western side. This is more shoreline than any of the other planning districts participating in the project, and the high number of working waterfronts identified in the Inventory reflects this extensive shoreline. Working waterfronts are situated along both the Atlantic and the Chesapeake Bay shorelines, and water resources have historically been and are currently a major source of livelihood for many citizens.

Use of the resources on the ocean and bayside of the peninsula include aquaculture of clams, oysters, and salt water fish, commercial and recreational fishing, boating, swimming, surfing, and hunting. In addition, ecotourism, national defense, public safety uses, marine research, shipping and rail yards, boatbuilding, and support for offshore energy production are conducted out of the Shore’s working waterfronts.

The Eastern Shore seaside has pristine waters due mainly to the fact that it is relatively undeveloped. Fourteen barrier islands in the Shore’s coastal zone are protected from development by the Nature Conservancy’s Virginia Coast Reserve (VCR), in partnership with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Together, this partnership has created the longest continuous stretch of undeveloped Atlantic coastline in the United States. These pristine inshore waters are heavily used for shellfish aquaculture, commercial and recreational fishing, recreational boating and waterfowl hunting, and academic research. Additionally, the seaside is home to NASA, NOAA, and Navy operations on Wallops Island making the inshore waters critical for national defense.

B. History of Working Waterfronts in the Region

Before the advent of the railroad in 1884, almost all commerce on the Eastern Shore of Virginia was conducted by water. There were few interior roads. Many more working waterfronts existed in the 18th and 19th centuries, and most large farms on both the bayside and seaside had their own docks for shipping goods out to market, as well as off-loading seafood.

Numerous small towns had access to the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean via tidal creeks. Many of these creek landings have since silted in due to changes in land-use practices during the 19th and 20th Centuries, and others have been inundated due to rising water levels or shoaled in by storms over time as funding to dredge them became unavailable.
Tons of oysters were hand-tonged, patent-tonged, or dredged. By the turn of the 20th century, 10 million bushels of oysters were harvested and sent to market. All had to be off-loaded at the numerous working waterfronts situated on the shoreline. Sawmills made barrels in which to pack the catch, and icehouses in Cape Charles and Tasley provided the ice needed to keep it fresh. In addition, commercial fish landings were huge until the 1950’s. Commercial fishing continues today, but at a much smaller scale.

Blue crabs were packed in ice and shipped via steamer to Baltimore and Washington, as they are extremely perishable. Oysters were shipped as well, but many oysters were bound for New York City, where 100 years ago consumption of oysters was almost unbelievable by present-day standards. In New York City, the average was eight bushels per year or five oysters per day for every man, woman and child in the city of under 900,000 people (McHugh, J. L. p 49).

Today, working waterfronts on the Eastern Shore continue to be used to offload fish and shellfish, to use seed clam and oyster spat, recreational fishing vessels meet their clients, buying stations are located, shellfish are processed, and many serve as home ports for commercial fishermen and aquaculture businesses. Although working waterfronts have declined in number in the 20th and 21st centuries, the A-NPDC identified more than 200 sites that are still actively engaged as working waterfronts on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

C. Current Status of Working Waterfronts in the Region
In Accomack and Northampton Counties of Virginia, the term `working waterfront' means real property (including support structures over and adjacent to the water or inland property engaged in significant water-related activities) that provides access to coastal waters or that supports commercial fishing; recreational fishing businesses; aquaculture; ecotourism; national defense; public safety uses; marine research; shipping and rail yards; boatbuilding; support of offshore energy production; or other commercial, recreational, and industrial business. An initial inventory of these facilities conducted by A-NPDC during 2013-2014 identified 222 working waterfronts in the region (Figure 8). This number represents the greatest number of working waterfronts within any region in the Commonwealth.
Working waterfronts have a huge economic impact to the Eastern Shore economy. In terms of shellfish aquaculture, Northampton County is a clear leader among other Virginia localities. In 2013, Northampton County shellfish farms sold over $36.7 million in clams and oysters, and commercial fishermen unloaded over $5.7 million in wild caught finfish and shellfish for a total of $42,496,494 of seafood products across the County’s waterfront. The total economic impact
is estimated at $97.4 million in output that supported 987 jobs generating household and business incomes of $27.1 million (Murray, Thomas J. p.3).

On Chincoteague in Accomack County, commercial fishermen annually land millions of dollars worth of scallops, summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass, as well as many other species. Aquaculture of clams and oysters takes place in Tom’s Cove and several other areas around the island, as well.

In 2015, in Accomack County, VMRC issued 727 oyster harvesting and production licenses/permits, 246 clam harvesting and raising permits, and 477 licenses for crab harvesting or shedding. In Northampton County, 380 licenses were issued for oyster harvesting or production, 293 licenses for clams, and 299 for crabs. VMRC licensing fees for all permits (including other species) totaled $359,806 which amounted to $263,418 in Accomack County, and $96,388 in Northampton County, indicating a high level of water-related business activity.

The Shore’s working waterfronts are also used for recreational boating and fishing including but not limited to Chincoteague, Cape Charles, Onancock, Saxis, Wachapreague, Willis Wharf, Red Bank, Quinby and Oyster. Individuals also use the counties’ public boat ramps for harvesting clams, oysters, crabs, and fish. In addition, water-based tourism has been enhanced by the development of the Seaside Water Trail starting at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge and extending through the seaside coastal bays to Chincoteague and Assateague Island and the Captain John Smith National Historic Trail with landings in Cape Charles, Onancock, and Tangier.

There are several factors that have negatively affected working waterfronts on the Eastern Shore. Redevelopment pressure exists in specific locations in the region where growth and extensive tourism are occurring, including the Towns of Cape Charles and Chincoteague. Elsewhere on the Shore, the primary pressures on working waterfronts include governmental, flooding-related hazards, and shifts in seafood market economics. Governmental regulations related to declining fish stock landings impact business operations that in turn result in changes to coastal land use. Lack of flood insurance coverage is another contributing factor to the decline of working waterfronts, as many are not rebuilt after a storm.

Another factor that has negatively affected working waterfronts is navigability of the access channels to both bayside and seaside waterfronts. Many access channels have silted in due to storms, changes in land-use practices, and hard-scaping the shorelines near some channels. To address this problem, an Eastern Shore Regional Navigable Waterways Committee has been formed. The Committee will work with the US Army Corps of Engineers to identify critical needs and how to open these channels to ensure continued commercial access to working waterfronts.

Four case studies conducted in 2012 revealed examples of specific threats that continue to affect working waterfronts:
1. Thomas E. Reed Seafood – closed in recent years and was one of the last oyster shucking houses in operation on Chincoteague Island. The business is representative of a closed working waterfront with great redevelopment value owned by a waterman demographic that is reaching retirement age and interested in funding a retirement with sales from the property.

2. Tangier Island Crab Shanties – illustrates how flooding damage, rising sea levels, lack of insurance and regulations regarding crab harvesting threaten the ability of working watermen to continue their way of life. Also, rebuilding over water involves a permitting process that is regarded as prohibitive.

3. Eastern Shore Seafood Products – representative of a working waterfront not located on the waterfront that was dependent on the health of the sea clam population. This plant was closed due to a dip in sea clam populations resulting in low harvests combined with the expense of disposing of clam processing waste and reduced incomes limited by decreased permitted harvesting times.

4. King’s Creek Marina, Cape Charles – an historically-commercial harbor that was recently re-developed into a world-class recreational marina. Watermen are welcome at this facility, but the slippage rates were considered prohibitive and limited wharf space made offloading inconvenient.

Preservation of working waterfronts is vital to the economies of A-NPDC member jurisdictions, Accomack and Northampton Counties and the Town of Chincoteague, because of the revenues they produce, the jobs they create, and circulation of the profits and wages in the Shore’s economy. Continued access to high quality growing waters and important offshore fishing grounds is critical to maintaining the economic base developed to support the aquaculture and commercial fishing industries and continue its export base for future economic development.

D. Working Waterfront Project Background
The A-NPDC began its Working Waterfront Initiative to preserve and enhance working waterfronts in its region in 2012. The first steps of this initiative were to develop baseline datasets and identify needs. As part of its Coastal Resource Program Technical Assistance Grant from the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (VCZMP) and NOAA, the A-NPDC conducted a needs assessment for transient boating facilities in the region. Soon thereafter, the A-NPDC, Northern Neck PDC, Hampton Roads PDC, and Middle Peninsula PDC partnered on a VCZMP/NOAA grant to map and inventory working waterfronts in their respective jurisdictions and to organize a summit in 2014 to present their findings and recommendations for tools that have potential for preserving working waterfronts. After conducting these baseline assessments, the A-NPDC conducted case studies of working waterfront facilities that had recently ceased operations or were under significant economic duress VCZMP/NOAA funds in 2013 and conducted an additional case study looking into impacts of local ordinances and
policies upon current working waterfronts in 2015.

These projects and their outcomes are described in greater detail below:

1. **Transient Boating Marinas Needs Assessment, 2012**

   From this needs assessment, the A-NPDC made the following suggestions for future efforts to both maintain and enhance the current service level for transient and working waterfronts on the Eastern Shore:
   
   - Provide information to interested facilities regarding the Virginia Clean Marina Program.
   - Investigate the possibility of the Eastern Shore becoming the state’s first “Clean Marina Region” in the Virginia Clean Marina Program.
   - Research how many privately-owned facilities plan to continue to operate and exist after the current owner/operator decides to retire.
   - Research why marina owners are wary of the grant programs and use the conversation for educational purposes between the agencies and the marinas.
   - Facilitate development of a dredging plan for the Eastern Shore that provides funds, sets priorities, and creates a schedule that is equitable.
   - Study locations for additional lodging opportunities and solicit private sector interest.
   - Look for solutions (perhaps wireless broadband) to solving poor cell phone coverage.
   - Encourage transient and working waterfront owners and operators to consider accommodating for elevated sea levels and increased flooding when undertaking construction to replace or upgrade dock infrastructure.

2. **Working Waterfronts Inventory and Virginia Working Waterfronts Summit, 2013-2014**

   The intent of this project was to compile an inventory of waterfront dependent industries throughout the study area of the Eastern Shore of Virginia, including the Counties of Accomack and Northampton and the Towns of Accomac, Belle Haven, Bloxom, Cape Charles, Cheriton, Chincoteague, Eastville, Exmore, Hallwood, Keller, Melfa, Nassawadox, Onancock, Onley, Painter, Parksley, Saxis, Tangier, and Wachapreague.

   One hundred and seventeen working waterfronts were completely inventoried (98 in Accomack County and 19 in Northampton County). The results of the Working Waterfront Inventory listed all infrastructure documented in the region with an ID Number and Location, maps, photos, and an information sheet detailing latitude and longitude, water depth, and equipment and services available at each location. Another 105 working waterfronts were identified, but no further information was gathered about them because of limits on staff time. The A-NPDC also plans to compare this inventory to the one Northampton County is currently developing and incorporate any additions as necessary.
At the Summit on February 26, 2014, over 150 watermen, business owners, local staff and elected officials, and others seeking information on the preservation and revitalization of the decaying working waterfronts in Virginia participated in the workshop. Guest speakers from private and public groups covered topics related to working waterfronts such as: tools and case studies, laws, economics, zoning, legacy planning, and emerging markets.

A final report from the summit recommended holding another summit in 2 years and generated the following themes:

- Working waterfront business owners and local governments need to collaborate
- Comprehensive Plans are advisory tools
- Real estate taxation policy can stifle or enhance working waterfronts
- Planning and zoning may be extremely constructive tools
- Clear distinctions should be made between water-dependent enterprises
- Legal and policy tools must be in place that anticipate emerging business models
- Man-made infrastructure beyond the shoreline must be considered
- The working waterfront culture must be recognized as an important asset
- The working waterfront community must coalesce around a shared vision
- Succession planning is essential for individual or privately owned water-dependent enterprises
- All sectors of the working waterfront community should be represented

3. **Four Case Studies** – King’s Creek, Cape Charles; Thomas E. Reed Seafood, Chincoteague; Tangier Island Crab Shanties; Eastern Shore Seafood Products, Mappsville, 2013

These case studies identified threats to working waterfronts from redevelopment (King’s Creek and Reed Seafood), sea level rise and storm damage (Tangier Island Crab Shanties), and government regulations and dips in wild caught sea clam populations (Eastern Shore Seafood and Tangier Island).

4. **Willis Wharf Zoning Case Study 2015**

This study examined the planning, zoning, and fiscal policies of Willis Wharf, Virginia with the purpose of informing state and local leaders how best to support, protect, and preserve working waterfronts. The input received from Willis Wharf property owners was synthesized with the outcomes of the assessment of current County zoning and tax policies to present recommendations for planning and policy tools.

Recommendations included options related to leadership and zoning policies, regular review to monitor regulatory and industry-related changes, options for technical and financial assistance, and outreach. Specifically, it is recommended that Willis Wharf property owners continue to work with Northampton County on a regular basis to continue the planning process that has been in place since 1994. This process has resulted in the
implementation of measures that have ensured the longevity of working waterfront businesses in Willis Wharf. Furthermore, it is recommended that additional assessments and plans be developed with input from Willis Wharf property owners and the Willis Wharf Harbor Committee to maximize the benefit and value of parcels owned by Northampton County to ensure adequate access to the water and to adequately meet the needs of working waterfront businesses. Finally, there are fiscal policy tools available that that could potentially be used by Northampton County to meet future needs of the growing waterfront industry and ensure that waterfront infrastructure is adequately maintained for years to come. It is recommended that Northampton County consider these tools as a means of ensuring the longevity and productivity of working waterfront businesses in Willis Wharf.

Additionally, the A-NPDC has conducted other efforts that indirectly benefit working waterfronts. Projects supported with VCZMP/NOAA funding include a regional Transportation Infrastructure Inundation Vulnerability Assessment in 2015 which identified vulnerable roads and railways which working waterfronts in the region depend upon. The A-NPDC has developed and maintains two regional economic development plans: the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and the Stronger Economies Together Plan, which include specific strategies for enhancing water-based and dependent industries that rely upon working waterfronts. Aside from A-NPDC efforts Accomack and Northampton County adopted a joint resolution in 2015 to establish the Eastern Shore Regional Navigable Waterways Committee to coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on dredging, coastal restoration and coastal resilience activities.

E. The Future of Working Waterfronts in the Region

The Eastern Shore’s goal is to retain its current working waterfronts, to facilitate expansion and improvement of existing locations, and to encourage development of new facilities.

The A-NPDC reviewed the twelve working waterfronts stressors identified through the project. Three of the twelve stressors were not considered to be realistic for preserving working waterfronts on the Eastern Shore: local government purchase of commercial processing facilities to retain them, decreasing local taxes to expand businesses, and stakeholder meetings on legacy planning. The tools for the remaining nine stressors were recommended. These include development of policies and regulations, zoning, planning, mapping and inventory, land conservation, transfers and acquisitions, private agreements, using the General Powers of the Counties (Code of Virginia 15.2-1200) and reinstatement of state funding and set asides for public waterfront infrastructure use to include grants and loan programs (Code of Virginia 58.1-2289 Disposition of Tax revenue generally (D)...one and one-half cents per gallon on fuel used by commercial fishing, oystering, clamming, and crabbing boats shall be paid to the Department of Transportation to be used for the construction, repair, improvement and maintenance of the public docs of this Commonwealth used by said commercial watercraft.).
The Working Waterfronts Inventory only included detailed information for facilities with direct access to the water and these surveys were not completed for an additional one hundred five (105) facilities that were either not located on the water or did not have information readily available. A-NPDC recommends completing the inventory in the near future and using it as a baseline to plot changes the region’s working waterfront facilities. The inventory would also be useful as a tool for prioritizing improvements to working waterfronts infrastructure.

The following action steps are recommended to ensure that working waterfronts remain economic drivers on the Eastern Shore of Virginia:

**Short Term Recommendations:**

- Establish a Public Access Authority that will preserve water access. The 2014 Virginia General Assembly passed the Eastern Shore Water Access Authority Act which is codified in the Virginia Code Section 15.2-7400-7425, which authorized both counties to form the Eastern Shore Public Access Authority. The Board of Supervisors of both counties should analyze the process for forming such an authority. The Authority would have as its objectives that which is described in the Act, including identification of each county’s land, air and water territorial bounders, in order to encourage development of a master plan for public access infrastructure.
- Complete the Eastern Shore Working Waterfronts Inventory and update it as uses change to track trends involving the region’s working waterfronts. Compare to Northampton County’s new inventory and incorporate additions.
- Present the completed inventory to the Eastern Shore Regional Navigable Waterways Committee (ESRNWC) and to the localities as a tool to prioritize improvements to working waterfronts infrastructure.
- Respectfully request that the ESRNWC facilitate development of a dredging plan for the Eastern Shore that provides funds, sets priorities, and creates a schedule that is sensitive to commercial interests.
- Present recommended preservation and planning tools outlined by the federal initiative to A-NPDC participants’ governing bodies: Accomack County, Northampton County, and Chincoteague (see www.WaterAccessUs.com for toolkit).
- Stress the need for aquaculture training on the Shore and facilitate development of a two-year associates’ or certificate program at the community college or VIMS to fill this need.
- Share identified stressors developed by the Working Waterfronts Steering Committee with localities.
- Develop a stakeholders group that can be apprised of all developments and attend workshops and meetings. VMRC license holders are suggested as a starting point.
• Evaluate current policy and suggest changes to regulations that will continue to protect water quality as well as allow water-dependent industries to thrive in new and current locations.

• Develop and present to localities model comprehensive plan language that reinforces the commitment to strengthening the aquaculture industry and preservation of working waterfronts infrastructure.

• Analyze permitting processes in both counties to suggest possible opportunities for reducing turnaround times.

• Research how many privately-owned facilities plan to continue to operate and exist after the current owner/operator decides to retire.

• Research why marina owners are wary of the grant programs and use the conversation for educational purposes between the agencies and the marinas.

• Work with local state representatives to develop legislation for consideration at a future General Assembly session that would enable the creation of a Virginia Working Waterfronts Designation Program that would allow for specific vital uses at state, local, and privately-owned working waterfront facilities determined to be of critical economic, heritage, and cultural importance.

• Develop zoning tools such as a working waterfront district designation or a local commercial seafood overlay district that will make it easier for commercial enterprises to expand or improve their facilities to better their business prospects.

• Provide information to interested facilities regarding the Virginia Clean Marina Program and Boating Infrastructure Grant.

• Investigate the possibility of the Eastern Shore becoming the state’s first “Clean Marina Region” in the Virginia Clean Marina Program.

**Long Term Recommendations:**

• Study locations for additional lodging opportunities and solicit private sector interest.

• Look for solutions (perhaps wireless broadband) to solving poor cell phone coverage.

• Encourage working waterfront owners and operators to consider accommodating for elevated sea levels and increased flooding when undertaking construction to replace or upgrade dock infrastructure.

• Research and present for consideration the steps similar areas have taken or plan to pursue to preserve working waterfronts including but not limited to:
  - Develop a Coastal Living Policy
  - Develop a policy to protect working waterfronts infrastructure
  - Use of legal and policy tools that anticipate emerging business models such as the growth of the shellfish industry
Research how distinctions could or should be made between water-dependent enterprises and their activities and needs ashore as contrasted with engaging in economic pursuits in public waters.

Find ways to promote working waterfront culture so that it is universally recognized as an important asset.