

Support the Keep America's Waterfronts Working Act H.R. 2548 Protects & Expands Vital Boating Access Infrastructure

BACKGROUND

The loss of access to nation's waterways continues for boaters all across the United States. There are many reasons attributed to this crisis, including population increases, rising coastal property values, increasing residential development, and burdensome permit processes for marinas, among many others.

NMMA and the recreational boating community are very concerned with diminishing water access for recreational boaters and anglers. Nationwide, competition for limited access at boat ramps and marinas is increasing as these vital facilities go the way of alternative development. Recreational boating and fishing are valuable American traditions that bring important economic benefits to waterfront communities. NMMA is dedicated to protecting, preserving, and increasing recreational boater and fisher access to the waters of the United States.

ISSUE

Introduced by Rep. Chellie Pingree of Maine, H.R. 2548 amends the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 to establish a competitive matching grant program administered through the Department of Commerce. This important legislation would ensure the economic health of waterfront communities through the protection, preservation and expansion of the nation's working waterfronts.

The legislation would preserve access to coastal waters for commercial fishing operations and other water-dependent coastal-related businesses, including recreational boating access. Grants made under the legislation must provide for expansion or improvement of public access to coastal waters and be matched at 25% by non-federal funds. The act would authorize \$25 million, \$50 million and \$75 million to the states over three successive years. To be eligible for grant funding, a state would have to develop a working waterfront plan and appoint an advisory committee to oversee the program.

The legislation would create a federal grant program to acquire working piers and other points of waterfront access and provide funding for waterfront planning. The program is designed to allow states and local communities to support and protect places along the coast where commercial fishermen, boat builders, excursion and tour boat operators and other small businesses operate. By providing coastal states with federal matching grants to purchase development rights and make improvements to working waterfronts, this bill would go a long way in protecting the public's ability to access the nation's waters. This year, Congress began the process of reauthorization of the Coastal Zone Management Act, creating a significant opportunity for this bill to become law.

The Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife, chaired by Rep. Madeleine Bordallo (D-Guam), a cosponsor of the bill, held a hearing on H.R. 2548 in October of 2009. Despite significant bipartisan support, the Obama Administration has indicated it opposes the bill. NMMA is encouraging Members of Congress to support this legislation and help address the growing issue of the loss of water access for recreational boaters, and will also encourage the Obama Administration to reconsider its opposition.

For more information and to take action, please contact Jeff Gabriel (jgabriel@nmma.org; or 202-737-9776).