

# COASTAL CONNECTIONS



VOLUME 1/ISSUE 5

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION FOCUSED ON TOOLS FOR COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGERS

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2003

## COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROFILE



### Mike Wells

Manager

Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR)  
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**Hometown:** Upper Saddle River, New Jersey

**Education:** Bachelor of arts in environmental studies, University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB); master of arts in geography, San Diego State; Ph.D. in physical geography, UCSB/San Diego State

**Most fulfilling aspect of your job:** Interacting with leaders and citizens in the Mexican part of our watershed

**Most challenging aspect of your job:** Coordinating the activities of the 12 agencies that make up the reserve's management authority

**One work-related accomplishment you're proud of:** Eliminating *Carpobrotus edulis* (a highly invasive exotic weed) from two portions of Los Penasquitos Marsh Natural Preserve

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## THIS ISSUE'S FOCUS

# DOCKS AND PIERS

Regulating private docks and piers can be a sticky issue. How many is too many? What are the environmental effects? What about landowners' rights? There aren't simple answers to these questions since each coastal area has its own set of dock and pier concerns. But before you add "dock" and "pier" to your collection of four-letter words, know that progress is being made. Many states have developed dock and pier guidelines, and researchers continue to study the environmental, navigational, and aesthetic effects. Much of the following information on this progress stems from the small docks and piers workshop hosted by the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science in January. See page 3 of this newsletter for more on the workshop.

### What Are the Effects, Anyway?

Despite the lack of definitive science on the myriad potential effects of docks and piers, there are a number of environmental, navigational, and aesthetic concerns that researchers and coastal managers consistently note.

**Shading.** Because docks and other structures can cast shadows on water, the habitat there can be significantly disturbed. Submerged aquatic vegetation and marsh grasses may die from lack of light, and other marine creatures can be deterred from moving across the shade, changing the entire ecosystem. Suggestions for minimizing shading include setting requirements for dock height, width, and length, orienting docks in a north/south direction, and using grating to build docks so that light comes through.

**Pollution.** Most residential docks are made of chemically treated wood. These chemicals can leach into the water, possibly affecting marine species. Also, a dock in the water usually means a boat in the water. If this boat has an engine, fuel and other discharge can leak into the water, also affecting water quality.

**Navigation.** To help protect against the protrusion of docks into navigational paths, many states have resolved that a dock can't extend past 25 percent of the width of the waterway. The guidelines of many U.S. Army Corps of Engineers districts also prohibit docks that extend into federal navigation projects or traditional navigational paths.

**Aesthetics.** It's hard to say when a dock is or isn't "aesthetically pleasing." Much of this judgment depends on the existing level of development—how many buildings are near the water, how many docks are already there, etc. Another consideration is the users—are they primarily residents or visitors? If people come to a water body for its scenic views, adding a dock may cause them to go elsewhere.

### What Are States Doing about It?

Private dock management treads the fine line between public and private rights, so many state and local agencies have hesitated in developing firm regulations. But as more coastal areas have begun to detect impacts

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**One personal accomplishment you're proud of:** Canoe trip in the Canadian Arctic

**Things you do in your spare time:** Surfing (my true passion), canoeing, playing the ukulele, and hanging out at our cabin

**Family:** Wife, Dr. Marie Simovich; two dogs; three quarter horses; and a tiger salamander

**Favorite movie:** *Doctor Strangelove*

**In your CD player right now:** *Facing Future*, Israel Kamakawiwo'ole

*En la unión está la fuerza, or "in unity there is strength,"* may be the professional motto of Mike Wells, manager of the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve. As manager of the reserve, which crosses the Mexico/U.S. border, Mike has been deeply involved in unifying U.S. conservation efforts with those of Mexico. He recently invited two Mexican town officials to the reserve's management authority, and has a number of projects under way to conserve borderland.

*Komo mai kau mapuna hoe,* or literally "dip your paddle in" in Hawaiian, could be Mike's personal motto. An avid surfer, canoeist, and "closet Hawaiian," Mike has been known to dip his paddles into many a waterway. In the summer of 1994, he and three friends spent nearly a month canoeing through the Coppermine River, which leads to the Canadian Arctic Ocean. "It was probably the most memorable event in my life," says Mike. To relax after such adventures, Mike strums on one of the 14 ukuleles he collects. Mike and his wife, Marie, live in San Diego with their many pets.

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from docks, some states have tightened their reins. In order to do so without infuriating residents, many states have developed regulations or guidelines that make it easier for someone to obtain a dock permit, all the while meeting recommended environmental, navigational, and aesthetic standards.

In Wisconsin, for example, the state's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) allows waterfront property owners to place a dock on their property without a permit if they do not violate specific width, length, depth, and boat-density conditions. Allowing property owners this freedom seems to have increased their sense of responsibility of the area. Boaters and dock owners "are aware of the issues and will let [DNR] staff know if there is a problem with a specific structure," says Mike Friis, nonpoint source and public access coordinator with the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program.

Maine has also tried to make the process easier. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has developed a "permit-by-rule" process in which those seeking a dock can bypass the full permitting process if they prove their dock won't have significant environmental and aesthetic impacts. The Maine application also includes a one-page habitat characterization checklist so that applicants can more easily classify the affected habitat. "Having people fill out the short checklist really helps us determine what they can do," notes Judy Gates of Maine's Division of Land Resource Regulation. "It saves people the aggravation of finding out late in the process that they have a sensitive habitat and will be denied a permit."

### Is It Working?

There are undoubtedly problems with some of these systems, but overall, both states believe they've at least made some headway. But what many coastal managers are seeking is some authoritative science to back up their regulations. "If we are telling people 'no' to a dock," explains Gates, "we have to know why." More research may be able to justify agency regulations so that citizens will be more accepting of them. But until then, as Maine, Wisconsin, and other coastal states demonstrate, you can at least work toward the common denominator between coastal managers' and dock owners' concerns.

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## DOCKS AND PIERS INVENTORY LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND POLICIES

If you've been hoping for a quick reference about the residential dock and pier policies of other states, look no further. The dock and pier laws, regulations, and policies of four southeastern states—Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina—are now available in a comprehensive inventory produced by the NOAA Coastal Services Center. *Residential Docks and Piers: Inventory of Laws, Regulations, and Policies for the Southeastern United States* includes information from each state about such topics as

- Environmental impacts of concern
- Statutory authorities
- State and local permitting processes
- Dock dimension requirements

Arranged in an easy-to-read tabular format, the inventory also includes contact information for each of the four states. To get a copy of the residential docks and piers inventory, call Melissa Patterson at (843) 740-1200, or e-mail her at [Melissa.Patterson@noaa.gov](mailto:Melissa.Patterson@noaa.gov).

## COMING SOON!

**Dock and Pier Visualization Project.** The NOAA Coastal Services Center and the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management are developing 3-D computer visualizations showing the effects of adding docks to a water body under different buildout scenarios. Expect more information about the project in fall 2004.

**Small Docks Workshop, Part 2.** The National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science is hosting a second small docks and piers workshop. This workshop will concentrate on the management of docks and piers. Look for the report of the workshop in early 2004. For more information, e-mail Allison Castellan at [Allison.Castellan@noaa.gov](mailto:Allison.Castellan@noaa.gov).

## A NATIONAL VIEW

### DOCK AND PIER TOP CONCERNS

An informal poll of 23 coastal states on their top dock and pier concerns found that—not surprisingly—environmental impacts are of chief importance when deciding how to regulate the construction and use of docks. Over half of respondents' top three concerns were related to the environmental effects of docks, while a quarter dealt with navigation, ownership and rights, and aesthetic issues. Although many of these issues are closely related, here's a look at how they ranked individually:

1. Cumulative effects of several docks
2. Shading
3. Water quality
4. Navigation impediments
5. Ownership/public and private rights
- 6.\* Fragmentation of habitat  
Aesthetic effects
- 7.\* Public access  
Construction impacts
- 8.\* Impacts of boating use  
Endangered species protection  
Better understanding of all effects  
Overdevelopment

Other concerns: proper restoration, boats docked illegally, floating vs. fixed docks, practical alternatives to private docks, and altered hydrology.

\* The responses listed under these numbers were tied.

## WHERE TO FIND MORE

Many state agencies and other organizations have developed brochures, reports, and other materials about building and permitting docks and piers. While this list is by no means exhaustive, these materials may help those agencies looking to do something similar.

**"Residential Dock Guidelines,"** brochure, Office of Long Island Sound Programs. Call (860) 424-3034 to request a copy.

***Dock Design with the Environment in Mind: Minimizing Dock Impacts to Eelgrass Habitats,*** CD-ROM, Dave Burdick and Fred Short. Contact Steve Adams at (603) 749-1565 or [steve.adams@unh.edu](mailto:steve.adams@unh.edu). The cost of the CD is \$5 plus \$1 for shipping.

**"Pier Planner,"** brochure, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Available on-line at the DNR Web site, [www.dnr.state.wi.us](http://www.dnr.state.wi.us).

***Environmental and Aesthetic Impacts of Small Docks and Piers: Workshop Report,*** National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science. The Web site includes a searchable database of dock and pier references. Download a copy of the report at [www.nccos.noaa.gov](http://www.nccos.noaa.gov) or contact John Wickham at [John.Wickham@noaa.gov](mailto:John.Wickham@noaa.gov) for a hard copy.

**"Texas Coastal Permitting Assistance for Individuals and Small Businesses,"** pamphlet, Texas Coastal Coordination Council. Available at [www.glo.state.tx.us/coastalpermits/](http://www.glo.state.tx.us/coastalpermits/) or from the Permit Service Center at (866) 894-3578.

**"Survey of Coastal Residents' Perceptions of Docks" and "Survey of Dock Owners' Perceptions of Docks,"** South Carolina Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management. Contact Steve Snyder at [snyderhs@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:snyderhs@dhec.sc.gov) or (843) 744-5838, ext. 113, for copies. The residents' survey is also available on-line at [www.scdhec.net/eqc/ocrm/pubs/survey.pdf](http://www.scdhec.net/eqc/ocrm/pubs/survey.pdf).

***Preparing a Boating Facility Siting Plan: Best Management Practices for Marina Siting,*** Florida Department of Community Affairs. This manual can be downloaded on the Department of Community Affairs' Web site, [www.dca.state.fl.us/fdcp/DCP/](http://www.dca.state.fl.us/fdcp/DCP/), or ordered by phone at (850) 487-4545.

*Coastal Connections* is a publication of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Services Center, produced for the coastal resource management community. Each issue of this free bimonthly newsletter focuses on a tool, information resource, or methodology of interest to the nation's coastal resource managers.

Please send us your questions and suggestions for future editions. To subscribe or contribute to the newsletter, contact our editors at

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# NEWS AND NOTES



## OCRM Launches New Clean Marina Web Site

NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management has unveiled its new Clean Marina Web site, located at <http://cleanmarinas.noaa.gov>. The site provides technical help to coastal managers and marina operators interested in reducing nonpoint source pollution from marina activities. For more information, contact Allison Castellan at [Allison.Castellan@noaa.gov](mailto:Allison.Castellan@noaa.gov).

## Waquoit Bay Risk Assessment Available

The Environmental Protection Agency has issued a report on the 10-year assessment of nitrogen loads in Waquoit Bay, Massachusetts. The study provides an example for conducting a watershed-scale assessment and for reducing nitrogen in estuaries. Read the report at [www.epa.gov/ncea/](http://www.epa.gov/ncea/).

## Coastal and Estuarine Science News Debuts

The Estuarine Research Federation has developed a new on-line publication, *Coastal and Estuarine Science News*. The publication features summaries of selected articles from the scientific journal *Estuaries*, highlighting the management applications of the articles' scientific findings. To subscribe or read the latest issue, visit [www.erf.org/cesn/](http://www.erf.org/cesn/).

## Transitions

**Glenn Seaman** has retired as director of Alaska's Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR)... **Dave Fuge** is the new director of the Louisiana coastal management program. He replaces **Terry Howey**... **Brad Gane** has been selected as the new director of the Georgia Coastal Management Program... **Jaime Kooser** of the California Coastal Commission has been named the manager of the proposed San Francisco Bay NERR.

## Accolades

The National Marine Educators Association selected NOAA Coastal Services Center director **Margaret Davidson** as the 2003 recipient of the Marine Education Award. Davidson was also selected by the American Society of Agronomy to present at its annual meeting... The **Mississippi Department of Marine Resources** won a first place Gulf Guardian Award for its derelict crab trap removal program... **Pamela Tom** of California Sea Grant was selected by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as a reviewer for FishPort, a new Web site on fish and seafood safety.

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