



Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO  
on Improving Public Recreational Boating Access  
in the New York City Waterfront

**Before the Committee on Waterfronts**

*January 14, 2010*

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am Roland Lewis, president of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance. The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance is a coalition of over 380 organizations working together to transform the New York Harbor and its waterways into a world class resource for work, play, transit and education.

A tremendous opportunity to plan diverse recreational activities at and on the New York/New Jersey waterways is at hand. Because the water is cleaner than it has been in many years, people are rediscovering the joys of swimming, boating, fishing and simply finding refreshment in the vistas and fresh air. But there's much more that can be done. There are shockingly few places to dock a boat in our harbor, especially for recreational or educational purposes. Whole cities, neighborhoods and towns have been disconnected from the water that surrounds them in the metropolitan area.

The role of government agencies in waterfront management, funding, maintenance, and programming is not always clear, and this has led to missed opportunities. There are waterfront parks with no boat access, waterfront schools with no rowing or sailing programs, and waterfront neighborhoods with no docks or landings.

But, exciting new initiatives are bringing New Yorkers to the water. For example, the NYC Water Trail now connects 160 square miles of rivers, bays, creeks, inlets and ocean in the five the boroughs and is being expanded under the leadership of Dorothy Lewandowski, borough commissioner of Queens for the NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation.

MWA is working with government and its alliance partners to dramatically increase the opportunities for New York and New Jersey residents to get from land to water and from water to land. The MWA Open Waters Initiative is being undertaken to help millions of citizens throughout the metropolitan area discover a whole new way of interacting with our one-of-a-kind waterfront. The prime vehicle for accomplishing this is the construction of Community EcoDocks for neighborhoods all around the New York Harbor. A Community Eco Dock is a floating dock that will rise and fall with the tide, making it accessible to all types of vessels.

This project is exciting because the docks will be the entryway for countless New Yorkers and New Jersey residents to discover a whole new way of interacting with the water that surrounds them. Community Eco Docks would not only serve as a docking station for large educational vessels to land, such as the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, but are small enough to be accessible to people using human-powered water craft. Communities such as Bay Ridge, Astoria, and Mott Haven too long cut off from their waterfront, would have a way to get to and use the harbor and waterways. And visitors on boats would have the ability to visit these great neighborhoods.

The uses of Community Eco Docks are many and include:

- Locations for community programs and festivals.
- Connections to region-wide water trails within the New York Harbor and to upland destinations.
- Gathering places for kayakers, historic boats and leisure boats.
- The access needed for the Hudson River-based ship and boating programs to visit docks of New York City that are rarely if ever accessible by these iconic and historic vessels.
- Places for anglers.
- Areas for eating and playing for children and families looking for a neighborhood location to enjoy the water.
- The natural, place-based connections that local schools are in need of for curriculum enhancement, science programming, environmental education, and youth stewardship programs.
- Destinations for environmental education, and science and math education including programs in aquatic biology, water chemistry, water craft design, invasive species monitoring, fish netting, aquatic habitat monitoring, and tidal observations.
- Locations for citizen monitoring programs that are essential to the larger effort of identifying the local processes that result in pollution and negatively impact people, the water and wildlife.

- Community assets that can lead to the formation of adopt-a-waterfront and adopt-a-watershed programs.

These simple but invaluable community docks are flexible, cost-effective to build and maintain, and have great potential to promote local economic development. MWA and a dedicated group of environmentalists, mariners and community groups have been working with governmental agencies such as the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation to make Community Eco Docks, also known as “Quad Landings” a great legacy of the 400th birthday of our metropolis.

This initiative has been kicked-off with funding through Councilmember Gentile for the first pilot Community Eco-Dock to be located in Bay Ridge at the 69<sup>th</sup> Street Pier. Over the next several months, this dock will be designed and constructed by the New York City Parks Department and will serve as the City’s first Community Eco-Dock. Through this project we have the opportunity to develop a replicable model for constructing, maintaining, and operating docks for multiple purposes at a variety of New York City waterfront locations and neighborhoods.

MWA’s next steps are to work with its partners to continue to raise funds for docks at Parks Department and other locations. In addition, we are working with Parks Department and other government and nonprofit partners to knit together a broad network of docking and access sites throughout and across the harbor. The network of access sites

will include locations on the New York City Watertrail, private marinas, publicly owned city marinas, various watertrails currently in place or planned in New Jersey, as well as New Jersey docking and public access sites. This broad, harbor-wide network will be accessible as a set of harbor-based watertrails for waterfront recreational access, spanning across both sides of the Hudson River and the Harbor.

The importance of recreational sites cannot be overstated, but neither can the opportunities to coordinate docks and docking locations with other New York City and regional efforts to address maritime and waterfront issues. Specifically, the New York City Economic Development Corporation and the New York City Department of Transportation have undertaken the Comprehensive Ferry Study to examine the location and viability of a citywide ferry system. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey is moving forward with a similar ferry study as well. Also EDC is going forward with the next phase of its Maritime Support Services Location Study that examines the infrastructure needs for our working waterfront. All of these waterfront efforts should coordinate closely with the burgeoning movement to reclaim our waterfront for recreational and educational purposes.

A perfect opportunity to create this holistic plan of waterfront and maritime uses for our region is the update of New York City's Comprehensive Waterfront Plan which will be carried out by the New York City Department of City Planning pursuant to the legislation adopted by the City of New York last year by the end of 2010. MWA, other civic organization, as well as numerous New York City agencies will be providing input

to the New York City Department of City Planning throughout 2010 to ensure that this fundamental planning document the City uses for waterfront decision making reflects the new and many opportunities to open our waters to better access.

The dream of lively, fun, healthy waterfront recreation within reach of all metropolitan residents will become a reality when we embrace these opportunities and coordinate at many levels to ensure access to our waterfront.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.