

# The Region's Waterfront—The Final Frontier

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Last summer I took a ferry to Sandy Hook, NJ, part of the 26,000-acre Gateway National Recreation Area (GNRA) established in 1972. As a barrier beach, Sandy Hook has wide swimming beaches on its ocean side and rich tidal marshes along its Raritan Bay shoreline, with forested, historic trails for biking, hiking, walking, or roller blading. You can swim, sail, fish, windsurf, or sit on the beach or in a restaurant, and watch the container ships on the horizon transporting goods through Ambrose Channel, while passenger ships head out to open water—all with the backdrop of the New York City skyline.

Our region's waterfront is in the midst of a major transformation that was foreshadowed by GNRA. Before European settlement the area contained vast tidal wetlands, coastal ponds, and estuarine creeks that by the mid-19th century became industrial waterfronts with piers and rail access projects, a development pattern that continued through the post-World War II era. The 1960s and '70s saw a new planning vision as the region's port became more centralized, waterfront industry declined, and redevelopment opportunities became apparent. Is the region's waterfront now in its "final frontier?" If so, this makes waterfront planning and decision-making

## Toward Designing a Waterfront for Everyone

- **Preserve the region's maritime ecology and restore key native habitats.**
- **Provide public access and marine recreation.**
- **Redevelop the waterfront, increasing property value and investment while removing industrial pollutants.**
- **Protect port access and water-dependent industrial areas with suitable upland staging lands for waterborne commerce.**
- **Improve water and sediment quality.**
- **Design shore-parallel highways and rail corridors to allow public access and recreation.**
- **Celebrate waterfront history and cultural centers.**

all the more vital with respect to designing the places where we import goods, live, work, recreate, and protect our natural resources.

Our waterfront—accessible to millions of people by ferry, train, subway, bus, bike, or car—is one of the more diverse and extensive coastlines in the country with a spectacular range of uses. For decades, the region's population has been migrating to the waterfront to take advantage of these opportunities, and this pattern continues to accelerate. Our shoreline open spaces and the remaining designated natural areas will, hopefully, be protected in perpetuity. Residential and

open space uses that continue to develop are not likely to be displaced in the future. Thus, we can envision future waterfront land pattern as a mix of open space, residential, commercial, industrial, and transportation with protected natural areas. These objectives are found in New Jersey and New York State coastal planning and many of the Local Waterfront Revitalization Plans of New York State, and municipal master plans prepared by coastal communities throughout the region. Although some plans need updating, they provide an excellent guide for local, state, and federal decision-makers for project implementation.

