McClellanville, South Carolina

McClellanville, SC is a small fishing village with a population of less than 500 that has sustained itself economically by the commercial harvest of approximately 47 species. According to the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Services’ Social Indicators for Coastal Communities (Jepson and Colinib, 2018), McClellanville is more reliant on commercial fishing than any other town or city within the geographic region of Wilmington, N.C. to Key West, FL (The South Atlantic Bight). Not only does the town need commercial fishing to sustain itself, but the southeastern region needs McClellanville to continue to serve as a regional seafood hub to supply the U.S. with healthy, domestically-sourced protein.

As many traditional working waterfronts become vulnerable to high-end residential development, commercial activity, and climate change, much of the South Carolina commercial seafood industry has been affected by changes in waterfront property use. The changes make it increasingly difficult for commercial fishermen to secure dependable and affordable docking space, fuel, and ice. This is cause for concern among McClellanville, S.C. watermen and their community, as the town’s largest seafood business owner is approaching retirement and the future of the working waterfront along Jeremy Creek is uncertain. Since 2017, S.C. Sea Grant Consortium has collaborated with the Town of McClellanville, its citizens, industry partners, watermen, and local nonprofit organizations to develop and implement a comprehensive master management plan and viable business model to protect and sustain the cultural and economic values of the town’s working waterfronts.

The McClellanville Community Foundation (MCF) was formed as a non-profit to assist with working waterfront ownership and protection. The McClellanville Watermen’s Association (MWA) was formed to operate the working waterfront and act as stewards – organizing a cooperative ownership and operation business model of wholesale and retail seafood distribution. In December 2020, the watermen signed off on the “McClellanville Watermen’s Association’s Collective Commitments to Sustainability and Ethical Fishing Practice.” The document highlights the watermen’s commitment to stewardship of coastal waters and fishing grounds; legal and ethical practices in seafood harvesting and sales; and ethical and non-discriminatory labor practices.