

The Portfields Initiative: Revitalising port and harbour communities

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“Portfields” is a federal interagency effort focused on the redevelopment of brownfields in port and harbour communities with an emphasis on development of environmentally sound port facilities, environmental restoration and community revitalisation. Reuse of abandoned or underutilised properties in port communities can provide jobs and spur economic development by enhancing port infrastructure and improving the flow of commerce. In addition, port redevelopment can be done in a manner that protects human health, protects and restores critical habitat, ensures homeland security and provides a better quality of life for community residents. Portfields is led by the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), along with the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Economic Development Administration, and the U.S. Maritime Administration.

In 2003, three Portfields pilots were selected: New Bedford, Massachusetts; Bellingham, Washington; and Tampa, Florida. The goal of the pilots is to produce on the ground results by enhancing coordination among federal, state and local partners and improving the delivery of financial and technical resources. By building local capacity and leveraging programs, these pilots are producing new models which are transferable to other coastal communities.

Why Portfields?

According to the American Association of Port Authorities, ninety-five percent of U.S. foreign trade travels through the nation's ports, contributing \$780 billion to the economy and employing 16 million people. Maritime trade is expected to double in the next 20 years. Many underutilised brownfields are located in and around port communities. Redevelopment of these areas is a critical solution to the many challenges facing ports, and can be a catalyst for enhancing port capacity and infrastructure, and waterfront and community revitalisation. There is a need for better coordination among federal, state, and local agencies to leverage resources and support port revitalisation.

To sustain and enhance our nation's economy...

America's coasts and waterways play a vital role in the nation's economy and quality of life. The benefits that ports bring to the communities they serve extend far beyond the boundaries of the waterfront. The ports serve as gateways to domestic and international trade, connecting the U.S. to the global marketplace.

To protect human health and the environment...

Coastal areas and associated waterways represent some of the nation's most valuable environmental resources, providing habitat for almost one-half of the nation's protected, threatened, and endangered species. The location of ports within these rich and sensitive environments generates a variety of environmental and human health challenges, such as contaminated sediments, habitat degradation, storm water runoff, air quality, oil spills, and potential introductions of non-native species. Environmental quality is essential for sustaining coastal and marine ecosystems, commercial and recreational fisheries, and the economic vitality of port communities.

To promote smart growth and clean up urban shorelines...

As undeveloped land in ports becomes increasingly scarce, ports must look toward revitalising abandoned or underutilised properties. In the U.S., approximately 10 to 15 percent of the estimated 500,000 brownfields are located along waterways and within coastal communities. Cleaning up and redeveloping these brownfields can put land back into productive use, enhance the economy, and create jobs. Smart growth planning and brownfields redevelopment can reduce sprawl which impacts air and water quality, habitat and open space, and community quality of life.

To ensure public access...

With nearly one-half of the country's population living near a coast, communities benefit from having access to waterfront areas for recreation and leisure activities. Redeveloping urban waterfronts improves the quality of life for citizens, and is an important strategy for community revitalisation.

To provide for increased maritime trade...

The capacity of many ports is strained by increased maritime trade and the increasing size of cargo and cruise vessels. Maritime trade is expected to double over the next 20 years. Ports must increase their capacity, deepen and maintain channels, and enhance infrastructure to allow for the efficient movement of goods from the water to highway, air, and rail.

To enhance homeland security...

As gateways to the global marketplace, port communities play a key role in homeland security. Ensuring the security of cargo, including more than seven million containers moving through U.S. ports each year, is a considerable challenge borne by ports. Ports also support the mobilisation, deployment, and supply of the U.S. military forces.

Portfields pilots

The Portfields pilots were selected due to their commitment to implementing innovative approaches to waterfront planning and revitalisation, the unique set of needs they represent and the overall value that federal assistance will add to the ports' successful redevelopment. Each of the pilot ports identified high priority projects to focus on through the Portfields Initiative.

New Bedford

The Port of New Bedford is located on Buzzards Bay in southeastern Massachusetts. The City has a rich maritime heritage, and served as the location for Herman Melville's famous novel, “Moby Dick.” The city's strong seafaring legacy continues today. Home to one of the largest active fishing fleets on the east coast, the Port of New Bedford also provides passenger ferry service and cruise ship docks, and is a centre for recreational boating on Buzzards Bay. The Port of New Bedford is a State Designated Port Area, which protects the industrial uses in the lower harbour. Through Portfields, New Bedford is improving the overall health of the harbour environment and the public's ability to use the resource, while facilitating economic revitalisation.



An aerial view of the Port of New Bedford.

Portfields project

Navigational Dredging: New Bedford/Fairhaven Harbor includes one of the most complex Superfund sites in the country. Due to high levels of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination in the harbour, navigational dredging has not occurred in 30 years. Channels are shoaled to levels above authorised depths, limiting the size of ships and volume of cargo that can enter the harbour, which in turn negatively impacts the local economy. New Bedford is applying a simplified procedure known as the “state enhanced remedy” under the Superfund cleanup programme to streamline the dredging process. This mechanism streamlines permitting for navigational dredging by linking dredging to the clean up of the Superfund site, saving both time and money. A team consisting of New Bedford and the Town of Fairhaven, NOAA, Environmental Protection Agency, US Army Corps of Engineers, and Massachusetts’ Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Marine Fisheries, and Coastal Zone Management Program, initiated the Port’s dredging under the state enhanced remedy. Portfields has also helped leverage \$5 million from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and \$200,000 from the private sector for navigational dredging. As New Bedford Mayor Frederick Kalisz states, “The Portfields initiative has generated the momentum for us to implement key provisions of the New Bedford Harbor Cleanup plan that will enable navigational dredging of New Bedford Harbor that would otherwise have been impossible”. Navigational dredging will create economic opportunities for the port while also enhancing the harbour’s environmental quality.

Waterfront Revitalisation: The Portfields’ partners are helping New Bedford develop a revitalisation plan for the Hicks-Logan waterfront neighbourhood, which will create needed housing and job opportunities as well as open space with waterfront and recreational boating access. In addition, New Bedford has received a \$200,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to cleanup lead-contaminated soil at the brownfields site. Following cleanup of the site, the City plans to restore habitat and turn the property into a waterfront park.

Bellingham

The Port of Bellingham is located on the northern edge of Puget Sound between Seattle, Washington and Vancouver, British Columbia. The Port is comprised of more than 1,500 acres, including waterfront, commercial, and industrial areas, and commercial airports. More than 200 companies operate on port properties – major industries include marinas, industrial manufacturing, ship building and repair, break bulk cargo, seafood processing, cold storage, and passenger ferries. The Port of Bellingham and the community are cooperatively engaged in a coordinated economic revitalisation and environmental restoration effort within the Bellingham Bay and waterfront.



Bellingham’s plan for a new marina and a revitalised waterfront.

Portfields project

Waterfront Revitalisation: The Portfields federal partners are helping the Port build on its existing planning efforts to address significant environmental contamination and revitalise idle and abandoned waterfront properties. The Port of Bellingham recently completed a new vision and multi-year action plan for revitalising the city’s waterfront. The plan will help the community respond to significant losses in heavy industry and increasing demand for commercial and recreational opportunities. A large component of the revitalisation effort centres around 137 acres of waterfront property recently acquired by the Port from Georgia Pacific. Over the next several years the Port will be undertaking the cleanup of contaminated upland and sediment sites, and will be implementing a comprehensive programme of maritime improvements. The Port’s plans to redevelop the waterfront include a new marina, a regional sustainable development centre, improved public access (trails, parks), and mixed-use buildings, as well as the restoration and protection of natural habitat. The Portfields partners are working closely with the Port of Bellingham to streamline permitting, plan restoration, provide visibility, and leverage resources.

Tampa

Located on Florida’s Gulf Coast, Tampa is the gateway for nearly half of all seaborne commerce in the State. Lying at the northeast corner of Tampa Bay, an estuary of national significance, the Port of Tampa strives to ensure that its large-scale diversified enterprises operate safely and responsibly within this fragile ecosystem. As one of the largest tonnage ports in the U.S. and the largest in Florida, the Port of Tampa annually handles 3,700 vessels and up to 50 million tonnes of cargo with phosphate, petroleum, and coal being the top three commodities. The Port accounts for 108,000 jobs and \$13 billion in spending with more than 11,000 trucks entering and exiting the Port daily. The Port is also a major cruise ship homeport, handling more than 830,000 passengers in 2004. The Tampa Port Authority controls 2,500 acres of port owned lands and is responsible for managing the sovereign submerged lands of Tampa Bay within Hillsborough County, including some of the most important migratory bird nesting islands in the State.



Portfields partners and coastal managers take a boat tour of the Tampa projects at the 2004 Tampa kickoff meeting.



Bellingham Bay in the foreground with the main downtown core of Bellingham and Mt. Baker in the background.

Portfields project

Stormwater Management: Tampa is serving as a national model for innovative stormwater management by designing and building a network of drainage ditches, retention ponds, and filtration wetlands that will improve water quality and enhance habitat within Tampa Bay. NOAA provided \$45,000 to the Tampa Port Authority (TPA) for planning and design of stormwater improvements on TPA property. This project has involved the development of a Geographic Information System (GIS) to collect and convert property boundary and topography data layers to determine where stormwater runoff travels from each individual parcel. This GIS work will help the Port identify properties best suited for installation of best management practices (BMPs) for stormwater management improvements. The GIS component will be followed by site specific engineering designs for BMPs. A variety of partners are involved with this project, including the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, and Photo Science Geospatial Solutions. This partnership is already providing opportunities to leverage funds for on the ground BMP installation.

Next steps

Portfields is building on the success of brownfields cleanup and redevelopment efforts over the past decade. Port communities face a number of unique challenges that require strong partnerships at all levels of government and the private sector. By applying a collaborative, integrated approach, the Portfields Initiative is leveraging public and private resources, providing more efficient delivery of services, and developing creative solutions to support port revitalisation. The experience in each of the pilots is providing opportunities to transfer innovative tools, best practices, and lessons learned to other port communities. Learning from both the successes and hurdles encountered over the last two years, the Portfields partners are planning to actively transfer the best practices and lessons learned to other port communities. A series of regional peer-to-peer workshops, bringing together interested port communities with Portfields pilots and key federal, state and local agencies is being planned for late 2005. Updates on the Portfields Initiative will be made available through the Portfields web site at <http://www.brownfields.noaa.gov>.

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Both authors work for NOAA's National Ocean Service (NOS). The NOS works to preserve and enhance the nation's coastal ecosystems by protecting, restoring, and managing coastal and ocean resources while supporting commerce and transportation.

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