



St. George

SCUTTLEBUTT

Visiting & Living in a Working Waterfront Community



Town of
St. George, ME

Top Tips

to Support the Working Waterfront

For our working waterfront businesses to continue to succeed, we must all be understanding of the sights and sounds inherent in this way of life and take steps to protect the water quality and shoreline on which it depends.

- **Be patient with the sights, sounds, and smells of the working waterfront**—lights, traps and boats stored in yards, the smell of bait, the sound of pallets dropping, seaweed harvesting, boat engines, and more.
- **Be especially vigilant near busy wharves.** There may be slippery docks, truck traffic, and machinery backing up.
- **Be tolerant of clammers digging in the mudflats.** Maine law allows clammers to use private intertidal areas (from the low tide line to the high tide line) for fishing, fowling, and navigation. If you see clammers digging in this area, they aren't trespassing.
- **Before removing trees or vegetation near the shoreline, consult the Town's code enforcement officer.** Maine has strict rules about what can be cut down in the Shoreland Zone (within 250 feet of the water).
- **Clean up after your dog, make sure your septic system is functioning properly, and minimize the use of herbicides, pesticides, & fertilizer.** Fishing, harvesting, and aquaculture are severely affected when water quality is compromised.
- **Buy, eat, and promote a variety of local seafood products.** As Sir Walter Scott wrote, "It's no fish ye're buying, it's men's lives."



© Toni Small

St. George by the Numbers

- 25 square miles of land
- 125 miles of coastline
- 257 licensed harvester vessels in 2023
- 1000 boat moorings
- 1605 year of the first visit by English settlers (to Allen Island)
- 1803 year the Town of St. George was established
- 2594 year-round population

Local Governance

St. George has a **town meeting-select board-town manager** form of government. While the town manager directs the day-to-day of municipal operations, the Select Board is the main governing body. However, the voters are the ultimate decision-makers on major policy issues, ordinances, and the budget.

The Select Board is supported by about a dozen **volunteer-run committees**, including the Harbor Committee, the Budget Committee, the Planning Board, the Parks & Rec Committee, the Conservation Commission, and more. If you want to get involved in local government, attending these committees' meetings is a great way to do so—if you're a resident you could even become a member! Meeting dates and more information are posted on the Town website: **stgeorgemaine.com**.



What *is* the working waterfront?

Generally, the working waterfront is described as something that provides access to the water, such as wharves or piers. It is utilized for both recreation and commercial activities, including aquaculture. It can also describe marinas, boatyards, and other marine-related businesses that are reliant on waterfront for business activity as well as the people who work in these industries.

In 2024, commercial fisheries landings in St. George valued at **over \$40 million**

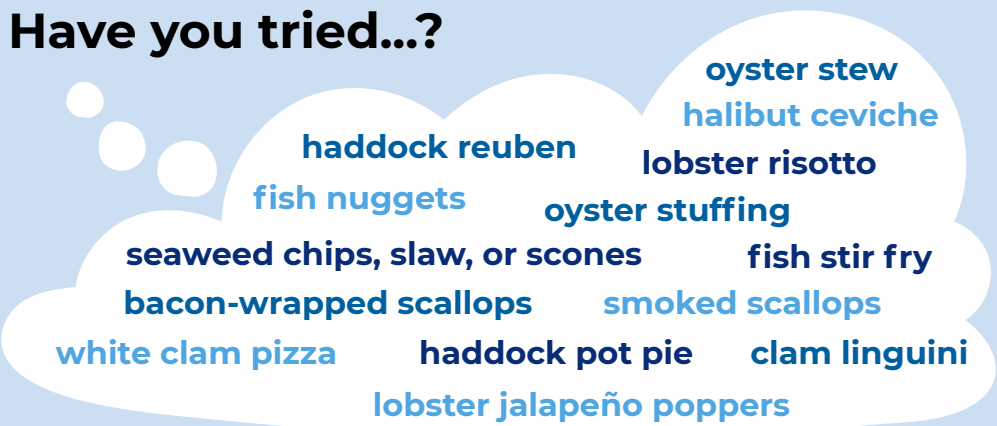
92% of business in St. George is associated with the **working waterfront**

When commercial fishermen talk about the working waterfront, they are often referring to the infrastructure necessary for them to conduct business, which can also include things like storage for gear and bait, trucks necessary to distribute product, and even ice, fuel, and marine stores.

How can you support local seafood?

- **Buy seafood directly** from fishermen or from local seafood dealers. The best way to find dealers is to ask around or check the St. George Message Board on Facebook, but you can also check out the St. George Business Alliance website (stgeorgebusinessalliance.com).
- **Ask restaurants** if they use local seafood. If not, politely suggest that they do!
- Most seafood freezes well (though not hake!), so **buy in-season and save it for the off-season**. You can also freeze fish in milk to help prevent freezer burn.
- **Try new seafood recipes**, or incorporate seafood into recipes you already know and love. (Ever had fish and potato hash for breakfast?)
- **Substitute** one type of seafood in a recipe for a similar type that can be bought locally (for example, fish cakes can be made with many different types of fish).

Have you tried...?

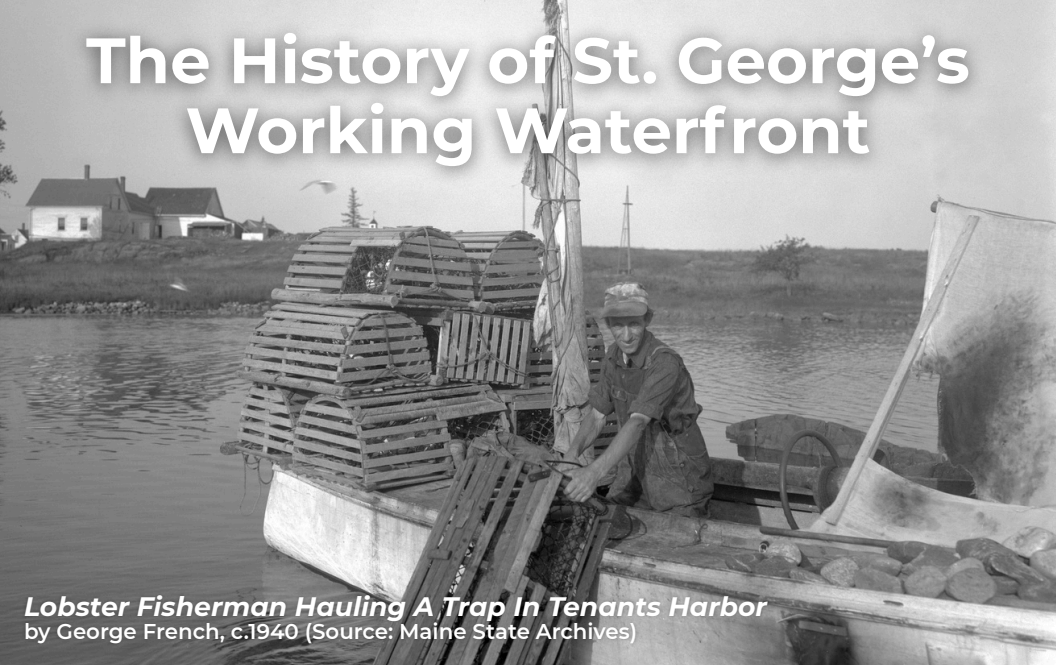


oyster stew
halibut ceviche
lobster risotto
haddock reuben
fish nuggets
oyster stuffing
seaweed chips, slaw, or scones
fish stir fry
bacon-wrapped scallops
smoked scallops
white clam pizza
haddock pot pie
clam linguini
lobster jalapeño poppers

The possibilities are endless! For more ideas, check out:

- seagrant.umaine.edu/maine-seafood-guide
- mainecoastfishermen.org/blog/categories/recipes
- fisheries.noaa.gov/insight/sustainable-seafood-recipes

The History of St. George's Working Waterfront



Lobster Fisherman Hauling A Trap In Tenants Harbor
by George French, c.1940 (Source: Maine State Archives)

The stretch of land now known as St. George has had an extensive and varied history of being valued for its marine resources. Archaeologists have unearthed artifacts and shell middens suggesting that Indigenous peoples utilized the land for its fishing opportunities long before European explorers set their sights on these shores. In fact, European settlement started later in St. George than in surrounding towns because the British king acknowledged that the peninsula was an important fishing ground used by the Abenaki.

Significant European settlement of the area began in the 18th century. By the early 19th century, **shipbuilding** and **granite** quarrying were major industries. Local shipyards built multi-masted, ocean-going schooners, which became the lifeblood of the region's economy, transporting granite, lumber, and other goods to markets far and wide.



**Canned fish from
Port Clyde Packing Company**
(Source: Herring Gut Coastal Science Center)



Canneries began to open in the late 19th century and operated into the 20th century, employing hundreds of people to process lobster, clam, mussels, and sardines. However, the shipbuilding and granite industries had declined in the area by the mid-1900s, and the canneries had mostly waned by the start of the 21st century. The last quarrying operation closed in 1968, and the sardine factory in Port Clyde closed in 1970, both due to fires.

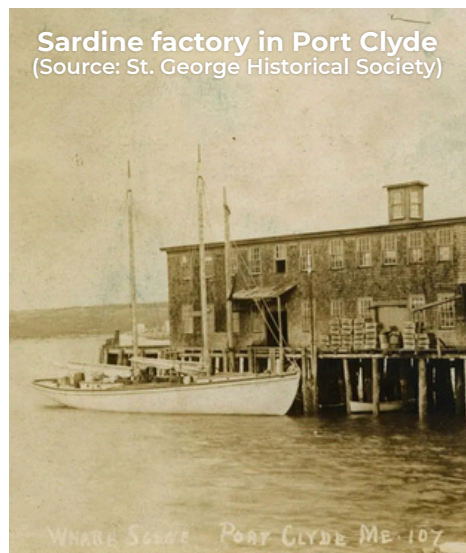
Fishing was a mainstay of the community throughout all of these changes, both for subsistence and selling, but the industry has experienced

changes of its own. **Groundfishing** sharply declined in the late 1900s, and **lobstering** grew in its place. Today, lobstering still dominates the local working waterfront, but other types of commercial fishing and harvesting persist.

“Yes, things have changed, but change is really the only constant; it is what you do with change that counts.”

-Glen Libby, *CAUGHT.
Time. Place. Fish.* (2016)

Sardine factory in Port Clyde
(Source: St. George Historical Society)



What's caught in St. George?

The working waterfront is a lot more than just lobsters! In fact, lobstering didn't become as dominant as it is today until the late 1900s, and diversification has always been a mainstay of the fishing economy as populations of shrimp, sea urchins, groundfish (such as cod) and other species grow and wane. Fishermen often harvest multiple types of seafood throughout the year as they watch the seasons and the market.

Here are some of the species with the highest harvest values in St. George. Though only part of Spruce Head falls within St. George town lines (and most of the Spruce Head landings are within South Thomaston), Spruce Head landings are included in these numbers since St. George fishermen commonly land their catch there, as well.

American Lobster

Season:

Year-round (peak May - Nov.)

Local harvest value:

\$40.3 million per year



© Maine Coast Fishermen's Association



© Island Institute

Atlantic Menhaden (Pogies)

Used as bait!

Season:

May/June - Nov.

Local harvest value:

\$1.3 million per year

Soft-Shell Clams (Steamers)

Season:

Year-round (peak May - Oct.)

Local harvest value:

\$169k per year



© Katherine Cart



© Toni Small

Atlantic Bluefin Tuna

Season:

June - September

Local harvest value:

\$54k per year

Atlantic Halibut

Season:

May - June

Local harvest value:

\$17k per year



© Karan Cushman

Harvest values averaged over 2020 to 2024 (Source: Maine DMR)

What else do St. George fishermen harvest? A lot! Elvers, scallops, flounder, Jonah crabs, haddock, monkfish, oysters, pollock, kelp, and the list goes on.

What's that?

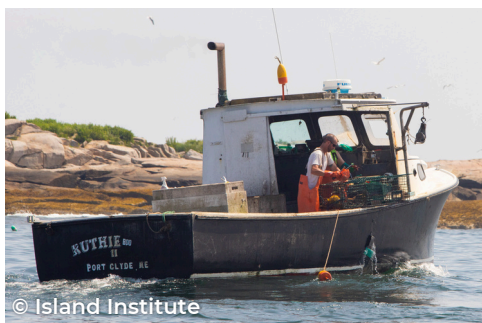
Wharves are beautiful and full of activity, but they can be slippery, rickety, and potentially hazardous. Forklifts beep, generators hum, pallets are dropped, bait trucks are noisy and smelly, boats have bright lights so they can see and be seen, and things are often moving quickly. If you live near a wharf or are just visiting to buy some lobsters, **pay attention to what's going on, watch your step, and recognize that fishermen are working hard** to provide the best seafood in the world.

Lobster buoys are brightly colored and mark where a lobsterman's traps are set. Lobstermen keep an eye out for lobster buoys on the water to steer clear of rope in the water. Be mindful of lobster buoys to stay safe and keep lobstermen from losing their expensive gear, which may end up washing on shore.

Each lobsterman has a unique design for their buoys—visit the Marshall Point Lighthouse Museum to see designs from past decades!



Lobster traps are the foundation of lobstering. They were historically made of wood, but most lobstermen today use traps made of wire mesh. It's common to see traps stacked on the docks and in folks' yards—that's how you know you live in a lobstering community!



© Island Institute

Lobster boats come in all shapes and sizes. Each lobster boat is an independent small business. Along with the owner of the vessel is often a crew of one or two people that help tend the traps.

Clamming takes place in the intertidal zone (also known as the mudflats). You may see clammers with rakes, sleds, and buckets.



© Island Institute



© Erin Dent

Fishermen often work in the dark, so the **lights** on boats and wharves are crucial to seeing each other, navigating, and completing their work.

St. George has no noise or light ordinance. If we did, it would make it a lot harder for fishermen to do their work!

Aquaculture—especially seaweed and oyster aquaculture—is a growing part of the local working waterfront. You may see a variety of **aquaculture gear** in the water, including ropes, buoys, floating cages, and more!

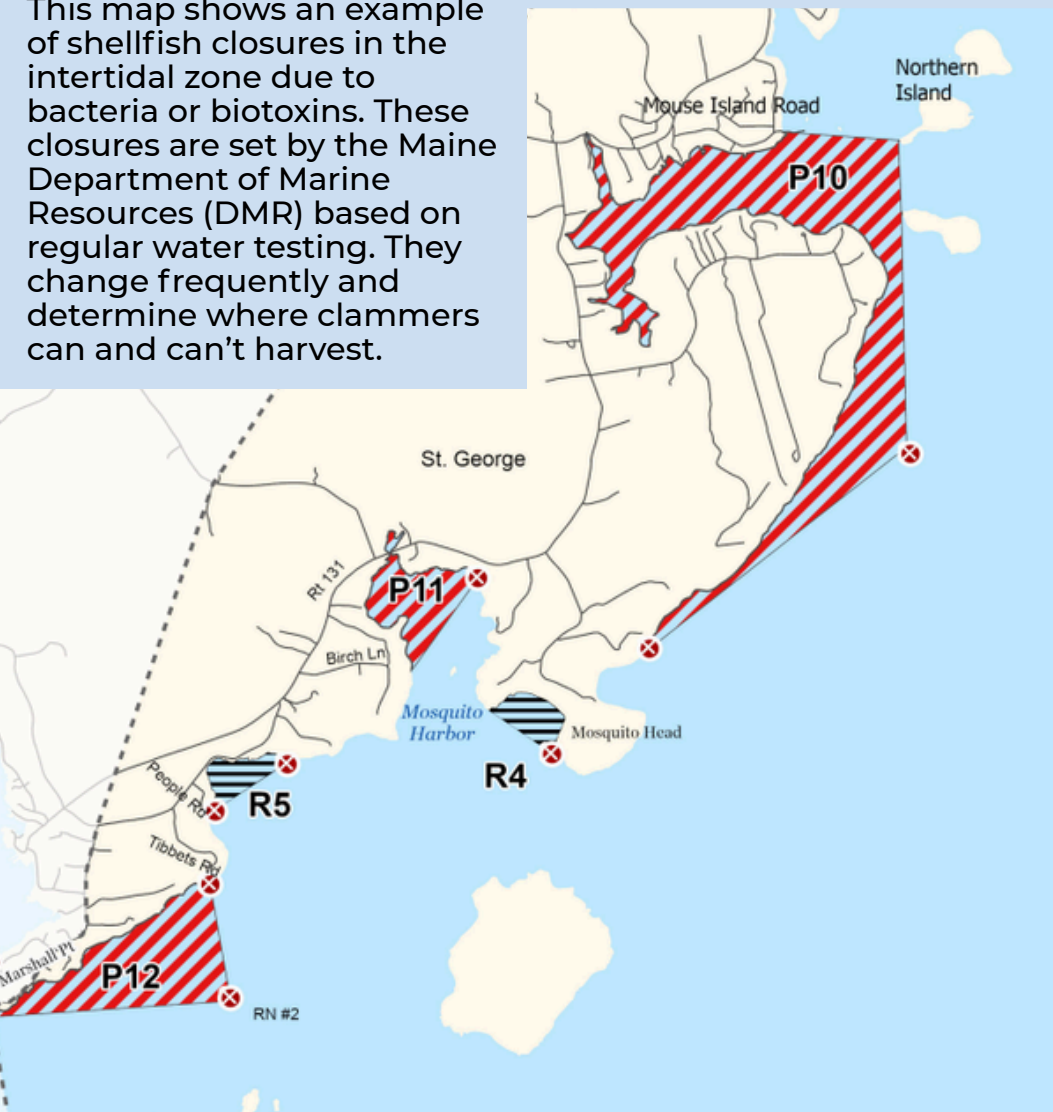


Oyster cages
© Jeff Schroeder

What we do on land directly impacts the sea.

Rain and snow that falls on land can carry pesticides, fertilizers, dog waste, and other harmful materials to the sea (or to the groundwater). This can have a significant impact on marine life. For example, dog waste left near the shore often leads directly to mudflat closures for clammers.

This map shows an example of shellfish closures in the intertidal zone due to bacteria or biotoxins. These closures are set by the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) based on regular water testing. They change frequently and determine where clammers can and can't harvest.



Help Keep Our Fisheries Healthy

What you do in your yard has an impact on the health of our local fisheries and ecosystems, as well as the quality of your well water! Here are a few tips to limit runoff and protect water quality:

- Clean up after your pets. Dog waste can contaminate the intertidal zone and directly lead to closures for clammers.
- Trees and other vegetation are essential in controlling and retaining water on your property. (And removal of vegetation near the shoreline or wetlands may be limited by ordinances—check with the Code Enforcement Officer).
- Avoid using pesticides and herbicides.
- Minimize lawn area, and keep a vegetated buffer at the shoreline in order to filter runoff.
- Minimize the need for fertilizer by using a mulching blade on your mower set at 4 inches, and leave the clippings to become nature's fertilizer.
- Use rain barrels and vegetated swales to conserve water.
- Help your well to recharge by watering plants by hand.
- If you must use a sprinkler, set a timer and limit use.
- Get your septic system & well inspected.



Aquaculture

St. George has several aquaculture farms, mainly cultivating oysters, scallops, and various types of seaweed, such as sugar kelp (all of these products may be wild-harvested, as well!). These farms are family-owned, and some use aquaculture to stabilize their earnings across seasons and in varying conditions while others are exploring it as a primary business.

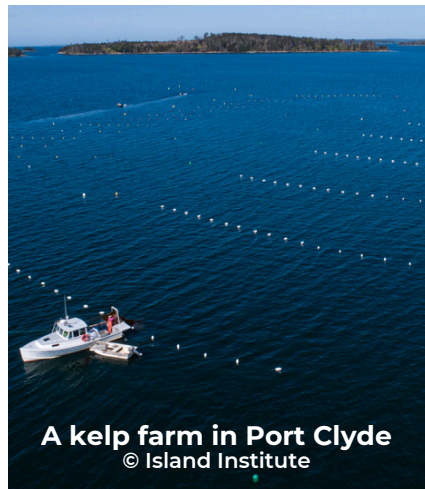
Mainers have always been creative in making a living from the sea. If you see aquaculture cages, ropes, buoys, or other gear in the waters around the peninsula, know that you're witnessing the intersection of innovation and tradition, driven by local, hardworking folks.



Oyster cages
© Jeff Schroeder



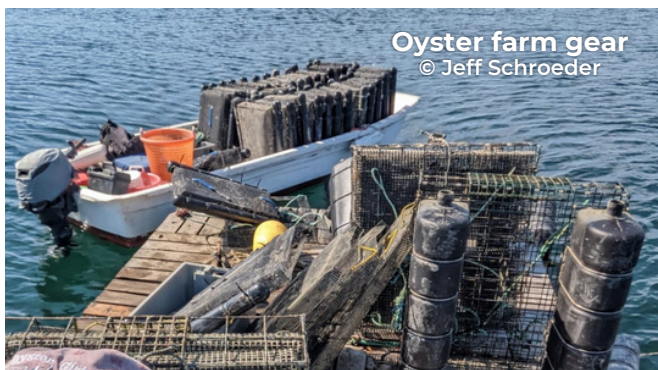
Farmed oysters
© Toni Small



A kelp farm in Port Clyde
© Island Institute



A scallop in its shell
© Island Institute



Oyster farm gear
© Jeff Schroeder



Kelp harvesting in Spruce Head

© Island Institute



© Island Institute

Seaweed Harvesting

Wild seaweed must typically be harvested at low tide, and farmed seaweed requires swift action to move it from farm to processing facility. Both mean that farmers may be working at all hours of the day and night. Please be patient if you notice noises or lights, and know that seaweed harvesting is complicated and highly regulated—if you see someone harvesting, they likely went through a lot of preparation to be there.

Most of the seaweed harvested in St. George is sold for natural fertilizer, much of it to Europe, but some is sold to companies that turn it into food products. You may be surprised at its versatility in food! It can be fresh, frozen, dried, rehydrated, or powdered, and there are endless ways to incorporate it into both new and old recipes.

Though the number of aquaculture leases changes frequently, in July 2025 there were **40** active aquaculture leases in St. George. Of these, 37 were “limited purpose aquaculture” (LPA) leases. LPA farms are small (less than 400 sq. ft.), must be renewed yearly, and can only grow certain species and use certain types of gear.

Did you know?

Aquaculture has environmental benefits as well as economic ones. Sea farms may filter water, create habitat, or absorb carbon dioxide in the water that otherwise could contribute to ocean acidification.

For more information, check out the Maine Seaweed Council (seaweedcouncil.org) & the Maine Aquaculture Association (maineaqua.org).



Preserving Access

As a homeowner, there are things you can do to help protect and maintain access to the waterfront for fishermen.

What are Public Access Easements?

Formal agreements by coastal property owners to allow shellfish harvesters or fishermen to traverse their property for waterfront access. Easements stick with the property even when ownership changes, effectively preserving access to the waterfront for future generations.

What are Right-of-Way Agreements?

Similar to public access easements, except they are NOT permanent. They are flexible agreements that preserve waterfront access for limited periods of time and only to specific individuals, if desired. This is a good way for a coastal property owner to allow working waterfront access on their property temporarily without fully committing to a public access easement.

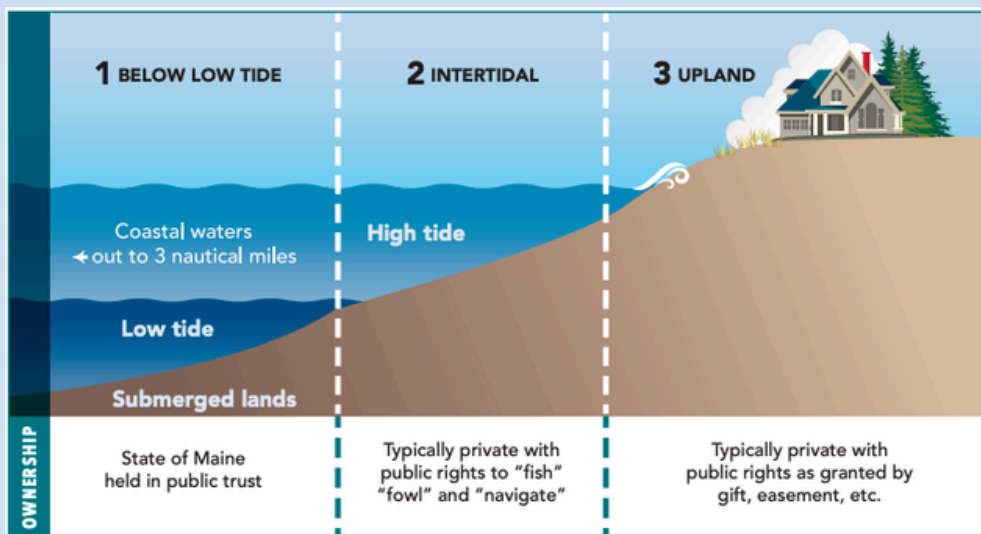
Maine's Landowner Liability Law protects landowners, should someone become injured while using their land. Since the law was enacted in 1979, no landowner in Maine has been found liable, or at fault, for accidents that have occurred on their land by persons who are using those lands. (Source: umaine.edu/accessingthemainecoast)

What are Working Waterfront Covenants?

These are legal agreements between the owner of a waterfront property and one or more holders to ensure permanent access to, and affordability of, the waterfront real estate for commercial fishery uses. Holders are typically Maine DMR but can be another governmental entity or nonprofit organization. A right of first refusal is granted to the holder of the covenant, allowing the holder to direct any potential future sale of the property. They are permanent agreements that prevent the future alteration or development of waterfront property in ways that restrict its use for commercial fishing activity.

Be tolerant of clambers digging in the mudflats—though waterfront homeowners generally own to the low tide line, Maine law still allows people to use the intertidal zone (from the low tide line to the high tide line) for fishing, fowling, and navigation. To support clambers even further, consider preserving access by one of the means listed here.

For more info on preserving access and your rights as a property owner, see: umaine.edu/accessingthemainecoast



Recreational Fishing



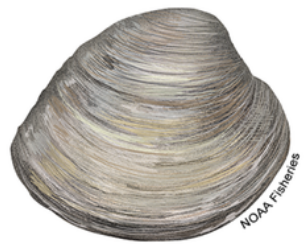
Striped Bass

Fishing for striped bass ("stripers") is common in the waters around St. George. Maine's striped bass regulations cover all Maine coastal waters up to the head of tide in all rivers, and in most cases you need to register for a fishing license. Note that it is **unlawful** to fish for, take, or possess striped bass **in federal waters** (waters greater than 3 miles from shore).

To learn more about recreational saltwater fishing regulations and licenses, visit: maine.gov/dmr/fisheries/recreational

Clams

Want to try your hand at harvesting your own clams? First you'll need a license. Recreational clamming licenses for St. George **residents** are issued by the St. George Town Office. You can obtain either a one-day license or a one-year license.



Commercial clam licenses and **non-resident** recreational licenses are issued through the Warren Town Office: warrenmaine.org



Navigating the Working Waterfront

When boating recreationally, it's extremely important to exercise caution and awareness around fishing vessels. Below are just a few tips—make sure to do your own research on safe practices!

- When planning your route, consider tides, weather, wind, the season, and local events.
- Respect public launch sites, including parking rules.
- Avoid launching from or landing on private property. If you're interested in exploring islands, check out the Maine Island Trail Association: mita.org/explore-the-trail
- Stick to shallow water (hug the coastline) when possible to avoid bigger boats.
- Keep lobstermen's routes in mind. Looking out for their buoys can help you steer clear of where they'll be fishing.
- Be aware that it can be difficult to see kayakers from a commercial boat, especially from their "blind side" (this is often, but not always, port side).
- An airhorn can be used as a last minute measure to alert larger vessels of your presence.
- Outfitting your boat and gear with reflective tape can help with visibility.

NOTE

This guide was published in July 2026. As laws, ordinances, or other details may have changed since then, readers should confirm information before acting on it.

Additional Resources

Town of St. George

stgeorgemaine.com | 207-372-6363

St. George 2025 Comprehensive Plan

available on the town website

St. George Business Alliance

stgeorgebusinessalliance.com

Herring Gut Coastal Science Center

herringgut.org

Maine Coast Fishermen's Association

mainecoastfishermen.org

Maine Department of Marine Resources

maine.gov/dmr

Island Institute

islandinstitute.org

St. George Historical Society

stgeorgehistory.com

Maine Sea Grant

seagrant.umaine.edu

Accessing the Maine Coast

umaine.edu/accessingthemainecoast

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