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Partnerships for Fisheries Innovation, Growth, and Change: An Update on Travels to New England, Collaboration with the Community Fisheries Network & Other Inspiring Fisheries Organizations



Left to right: D. Kasprzak, T. Peterson, K. Harrell, D. Kubiak at the fishermen's memorial in Gloucester.

A team from AMCC along with other Alaskan fishing friends embarked on an amazing voyage to Maine and Boston in early March. I accompanied the "Kodiak contingent" which included Dave Kubiak, AMCC's board chair, Theresa Peterson, AMCC's Kodiak Outreach Coordinator, and Darius Kasprzak, President of the Alaska Jig Association. All three of the Kodiak group are active fishers, which gave our group lots of "fish cred" to carry with us as we headed east. Linda Behnken, President of the Alaskan Longline Fishermen's Association and a member of AMCC's Board of Advisors also went on trip.

The purpose of the expedition across thousands of miles was to attend the annual **Community Fisheries Network** (CFN or Network) meeting, to experience the renowned Boston Seafood Show, and to meet and build relationships with groups and individuals who are on the leading edge of fishery innovations. The trip did not disappoint and was an extremely enriching experience for all of us. We got to rub elbows with folks that would make the "who's who in fisheries sustainability list," if one indeed existed.

AMCC has been active in the Community Fisheries Network for about two years. The Network was created by **Ecotrust**, based in Oregon, and **Island Institute**, based in Maine. Both organizations are fisheries powerhouses with unique and impressive community-driven approaches. The Network currently has **13 members** spanning the east and west coasts, with plans to grow. The goal of the Network is **"to increase the long-term sustainability of commercial fishing communities by building our business-planning acumen, the strength of our fishing stocks and marine ecosystems, our social networks, our economic resilience, and our ability to expand our markets through effective storytelling."** AMCC staff also attended a meeting of the Network in San Diego in 2012.

We have found our collaboration and participation in the Network to be incredibly valuable. The Network has allowed AMCC to build meaningful partnerships with organizations that have similar goals and values. They provide a dedicated space to talk about challenges, opportunities, and how we can generate solutions for local fishermen and our fishing communities by working together.

AMCC is currently working with the jig fleet in Kodiak on a project to build a brand, reputation and niche markets for jig-caught seafood products in a manner that increases the value for local fishermen and the community. The Network is also providing business planning and support for this challenging but very important endeavor. A main focus of the Network is to try and create a national brokerage of community seafood products. If successful, such a brokerage could be extremely beneficial to

conservation-minded, community-based fishermen in Alaska like the jig fleet who need assistance in distinguishing their products in the marketplace and deserve a fairer price.

Back in Boston, we also had the privilege of meeting face-to-face with folks from the [Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance](#) (NAMA), [Future of Fish](#), [Slow Fish](#), [Sea-to-Table](#), and [Red's Best](#). These groups and companies embrace bold and fresh approaches to fisheries change that are inspiring to AMCC. I even got to shake hands and meet sustainable seafood guru and chef [Barton Seaver](#), who now has a post at Harvard as the Healthy and Sustainable Food Program Director.



Dariusz Kasprzak at the Boston Seafood show.

The Boston Seafood show had plenty of tasty samples of new products to try. Yet, the spectacle brought home the need to work together to try and set community-based fisheries apart from the mass of seafood products that are questionably being labeled as “sustainable” and “local.” Increasing the value of products like Kodiak jig-caught seafood is not going to occur by trying to compete within the mass-scale, commodified marketplace. Seafood is a global industry with very large, well-heeled players that mostly operate based on one bottom line; the dollar. **Infusing the triple-bottom line approach is going to take time and dedication, but the demand and opportunity does exist to build new markets with consumers and buyers who share the social and conservation values embodied within community-based seafood products.**

Outside of the apparent abundance and diversity of species at the seafood show, what we were hearing and learned about the state of New England’s fisheries was grim. Most of the region’s fish stocks, with the exception of species such as lobster and scallop, are in extremely poor shape. **The future for local fishermen in the region is precarious, and made us thankful for what we still have in Alaska.**



Ed Backus & members of the Community Fisheries Network at the annual meeting in Portland, Maine.

This week in Kodiak, a number of our partners who are involved in the Community Fisheries Network will be descending on the Island to take part in ComFish, the annual commercial fishing trade show. AMCC is hosting a panel to share perspectives on catch shares from some of these organizations and partners from other parts of the country. As you may have heard, a new catch share program for groundfish is moving forward in the Gulf of Alaska to address persistent bycatch issues. **The program is likely to have dramatic impacts on the future of fisheries and communities like Kodiak in the Gulf. Great care must be taken to ensure the program is designed to avoid the negative impacts catch shares have had on communities and local fishermen.** In case you missed it, you can [read this piece](#) by AMCC’s fisheries program Director on the Gulf catch share program, or [check out this story](#) by Laine Welch that quotes Theresa Peterson, our Kodiak outreach coordinator.

In early May, AMCC staff and I will be attending the Managing [Our Nation’s Fisheries Conference](#) in Washington D.C. The meeting is being billed as a kickoff to the next round of reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. AMCC will continue to continue to forge ahead in generating solutions to the many challenges our communities and local fishermen face in the policy arena. We’ll also continue efforts to generate solutions in the marketplace that are critical to ensuring viable and profitable fishing opportunities for the future. Our long history of close collaboration with fishermen, tribes, communities, and fishing organizations in Alaska, will be complemented through new relationships with our partners down south, like the Community Fisheries Network, that help give us strength and inspiration to walk the path that lies ahead.

Check out some groups and approaches we are inspired by and learning from:

- [Community Fisheries Network](#)
- [Port Orford Ocean Resources Team](#)
- [San Francisco Community Fishing Association](#)
- [Penobscot East Resource Center](#)
- [Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance](#) (don't miss their “Who Fishes Matters” campaign)
- [Future of Fish](#)
- [Alaskan’s Own](#) (This Community Supported Fishery has just expanded to Anchorage!)

- [Cape Cod Hook Fishermen's Association](#)
- [Island Institute](#)
- [Ecotrust](#)

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