

Bagaduce Watershed Association Summary of Presentation by Robin Alden at our Annual Meeting - August 22, 2017

What you will read below is an attempt to summarize the most salient points about Robin Alden's presentation at our annual meeting. Needless to say, these remarks are based on our notes: we may have inadvertently "interpreted" what Robin said and we may have missed some points entirely. The audience included about 47 interested and engaged BWA members and guests. A number of our members who could not attend asked for a brief report of the presentation. Here it is.

Jim Saltonstall introduced Robin and quoted her impressive resume. Robin has been an innovative, creative leader in the area of marine resources in Maine. She has held numerous positions and won regional and national awards for her work. The title of her presentation was: "Local Ecology, local stewardship: what climate change is teaching us about fisheries."

Historically, there were abundant resources (lots of different varieties of fish, and lots of fish), so there seemed to be little need for scientific study or for regulation.

As fish stocks declined, state and federal governments got involved in licensing and permitting regulation to "help" regulate the industry. Almost always, this regulation was put in place by legislators who were not fishermen and there was very little attempt to include the local knowledge and experience of fishermen. In recent years, there continues to be regulation, but at least in Penobscot Bay and further East, there has been increasing consideration of what the local fishermen are experiencing and what science is proving, namely that fish stocks "move around, do not stay constant." This work to include science and local stewardship has been the main work of the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries (MCCF), of which Robin is executive director. In her work, she reaches out to local fishermen, marine biologists, and state regulators in an effort to integrate knowledge from many sources to improve local sustainability - making it possible for local fishermen to make a living.

It used to be that if there were many "parent fish", with plenty of babies, and fishing stocks would be plentiful. Things have changed. How?

- Maine waters are subject to global warming - the Gulf of Maine has experienced one of the fastest sea warming rates in the world
- the warmer waters have changed the mix - the kinds of fish that thrive, the ways that fish stocks have tried to cope with changing conditions. Some of the "traditional" fish stocks may be less in evidence, and new species are moving in. This is often a "bad" development; the proliferation of green crabs, for instance.
- the ground fish, so abundant in earlier times, are "moving around." They are still there, but research has shown that they move from "region to region." The result is that regulators in Augusta often say "there are plenty of fish", but local fishermen dispute this knowledge, claiming that there are plenty of fish in some

areas, almost none in others. This requires a different approach to regulation and understanding.

- Local stewardship has become increasingly important: using local knowledge to help regulate the fish resources and help properly train local fishermen, to observe and to fish.

Assuming the above, how is the best way to “manage” the fisheries? The lessons Robin has learned would seem to apply to many areas in our lives today, including our Bagaduce Watershed Association (BWA). It relies on collaborative research and management.

- Build TRUST so that all constituencies can learn from each other. Easy to say, very hard to achieve and it often takes incredible PATIENCE.
- Develop good, reliable, applicable SCIENCE on which to make decisions.
- Build CAPACITY: abundant resources require good science and good governance.
- rely on COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP. The local community will “buy into” a program only if it has been involved and sees the logic and advantages of compliance. And the local community has both a lot to contribute through local knowledge and a lot to gain as local employment, pride and sustainability are at stake.

At the end of her presentation, Robin had some specific thoughts about the work of the BWA.

- She stressed that the Bagaduce is part of Penobscot River watershed. Its contributions are important to the natural cycles of the larger watershed, Penobscot Bay and the Gulf of Maine.
- Robin noted that we should be very proud of the work recently approved to move ahead on the dam removals and alewife restoration projects at Wight and Pierce ponds. “These alewife runs are part of the community’s heritage and economy, and the alewife is a primary link in the food chain needed to feed the birds, seals and groundfish” (Ellsworth American, August 24, 2017). She stressed that these projects are all interrelated. This work has come about because of the initiative and energy of Penobscot resident Bailey Bowdoin, the collaboration among three towns (Brooksville, Penobscot and Sedgwick) and among many independent non-profits who have contributed fund-raising and scientific expertise, the knowledge and perseverance of concerned fishermen and of state and national governments.
- Collaboration: the issues before us are complicated and need our collective knowledge and support. No one organization can do it all: we have to help one another and be willing to take a lead role at appropriate times. In order for these projects to be successful, we must strive for TRUST (no surprise, she noted that trust is fragile and takes hard work and long hours to develop), understand that it will take TIME to develop initiatives and implement them, we will need to LISTEN carefully to one another to really understand the valid concerns/suggestions/comments made by varying persons or groups. We must rely on scientific RIGOR to make sure our facts are really facts, we will have to CHALLENGE ourselves to keep learning and

understanding other perspectives and be prepared to take advantage of OPPORTUNITIES as they present themselves. Finally, we must not lose HOPE. These issues do not resolve easily and will require PATIENCE from all parties.

- All these efforts come as a result of partnerships, and partnerships are hard to come by, yet they most often provide the best answers to community problems and issues.

Robin's talk was followed by a series of questions, comments and advice. Among them:

- Let your voice and your work be heard. Participate in local affairs and opportunities. Some in the audience had participated in various alewife counts and in so doing, had met new people, learned some new skills and felt part of the research and decision-making.
- Several concerns were expressed about our "small river:" Concerns about expansion, about the possibility of small businesses being acquired by larger (and non-local) organizations, about the carrying capacity of the Bagaduce and about introduction of "new" species into the waters generally.
- Robin expressed the opinion that shellfish aquaculture is part of a working waterfront and that we had to accept that.
- Legal, licensing and permitting issues are always part of the process these days and we have to recognize that Augusta (and Washington, DC) are far away. Decisions are best made with local input and it is our local responsibility to do our best to see that local input is provided, logical and made available in a rational and constructive way.
- There was a brief discussion about those who cannot participate in these discussions: the seals, birds, eels, worms and horseshoe crabs, etc. who have long been present in the Bagaduce watershed. We must continue to advocate for them as well.

In the course of her presentation, Robin introduced two people to us:

Paul Anderson, currently of SEANET, will be working with Robin at Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries and will take over as executive director when Robin retires at the end of December, 2017, and

Mike Thalhauser, who works for MCCF and would be our principal contact for matters relating to the Bagaduce watershed.

Incidentally, for those who might be interested in learning more about MCCF, you can visit their website at www.costalfisheries.org.

As always, I welcome your input and suggestions. With summer coming to a close, I send along best wishes for Fall.

Jim Saltonstall