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NAMA enters new era; begins leader search

SACO, ME – The Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA), founded on the premise that everyone deserves a seat at the table, is about to undergo a revolutionary change.

Craig Pendleton, NAMA's coordinating director for the past decade, will be stepping down Dec. 7, and NAMA's board of trustees has begun the search for a new leader.

"It's hard to imagine NAMA without Craig, but I think it's an exciting opportunity for the right person," said board of trustees member Rollie Barnaby of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Program and New Hampshire Sea Grant.

By mid-October, a NAMA search committee was deliberating the types of skills and strengths it wanted to see in a new coordinating director and was getting ready to advertise the position.

"I think it's going to be a difficult transition for the organization, but NAMA is strong because of its goals and principles," said board member Geoff Smith of The Nature Conservancy. "We're confident we're going to get a good slate of candidates."

NAMA history

The idea for NAMA first emerged in 1995 when a handful of environmentalists, fishermen, and scientists gathered in Portsmouth, NH and listened to Dee Hock, emeritus CEO of Visa International, who passed along "the Visa story."

Hock's recounting of Visa's operational approach – distributing power down to the local level, making all stakeholders feel welcome, respecting everyone's opinions, and working at the grassroots level to solve common problems – captured a core group of Portsmouth audience members.

Pendleton and Barnaby were both in that room, as was Peter Shelley of the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF), and they became three of the seven who worked to found NAMA.

"It was during that same time as Amendment 5 for groundfish and all of us were really frustrated that the environmental community had won another lawsuit," Pendleton recalled. "They were pushing us further and further from the table, and they weren't offering a solution."

Pendleton was intrigued by Dee Hock's inclusive approach to problem solving, so he agreed to be part of the effort that became NAMA.

The core group of NAMA founders spent its early years developing the principles of organization and practice that have guided NAMA ever since.

During that start-up time, CLF administered the effort, but by 1998, NAMA was incorporated as a nonprofit organization with its own full-time coordinating director – Pendleton – and an office in Saco.

Now, NAMA runs on an annual operating budget of roughly



\$250,000 to \$300,000 – with extra funding at times for special projects. The Fleet Visioning Project, for example, which was carried out in 2005, generated its own \$300,000.

What's NAMA about?

Still, to many fishermen, NAMA is nebulous, fuzzy in its mission, hard to put a finger on, and “in bed” with environmentalists.

NAMA supporters argue exactly the opposite. They say NAMA isn't nebulous at all and point to the group's guiding principles, which meticulously define how NAMA operates.

As for being in bed with environmentalists, that part is true. But NAMA supporters say they're in bed with everyone – commercial fishermen, scientists, harbor masters, and members of coastal communities – everyone who has a stake in the health of marine resources and the people and towns that utilize them.

This open-door policy is what makes NAMA NAMA.

Rollie Barnaby said his commitment to the approach took hold in the late 1980s and early 1990s when fishermen, environmentalists, scientists, and others came together to find ways to reduce harbor porpoise entanglements in gillnets.

It was one of the first times in New England that such diverse interest groups sat around the same table and negotiated a solution that was acceptable to everyone.

“The end result of that was amazing, and it just couldn't have happened unless everyone was sitting at the table together,” said Barnaby. “I decided to devote the rest of my career to that principle – that nobody could be shut out, that everyone could sit at the table.”

All stakeholders

Dana Morse, NAMA's current presiding director and an extension associate with the Maine Sea Grant College Program and the University of Maine's Cooperative Extension program, is of the same mindset.

“If you're still all going to be stakeholders at the end of the day, then it's in everybody's interest to work together,” he said. “These stakeholders are not going to go away, so there's this recognition within NAMA that you have to sit down and talk with people you disagree with.”

Overall, said Morse, “It's a different and better way of doing business.”

According to Morse, the people who participate in NAMA are wide ranging and sometimes have very different opinions.

But it works because the people in the room listen to each other.

“It's an unusual mix of respect and admiration for one another,” he said. “It's a breath of fresh air.”

Groundfish relief

Pendleton views NAMA's first “defining moment” as happening back in 1999 when NAMA, at the request of New Hampshire fishermen, organized numerous meetings so stakeholders could get together to develop a plan for how to use \$5 million in groundfish relief money.

In 1994, then-Commerce Secretary Ron Brown declared the Northeast multispecies fishery a “resource disaster,” and the designation was extended into 1999. As a result, Congress appropriated the \$5 million in disaster relief assistance, which Pendleton said US Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) was instrumental in securing.

US Sen. Judd Gregg (R-NH) wanted to ensure that fishermen had a significant say in how the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) disseminated the relief money, so he encouraged his New

Hampshire constituents to develop a workable plan.

That's when fisherman Erik Anderson called on NAMA for organizational help, and interested stakeholders from Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts formed the Tri-state Conference. They spent a year developing a proposal to compensate fishermen who had been displaced by groundfish rolling closures.

In the end, vessel owners who could prove they had been displaced by the closures were compensated \$1,500 per lost day – or \$900 per day if the vessel owner didn't compensate crewmembers. In return, the boat owed the government a day of cooperative research.

"The plan came from the people who were ultimately impacted," said Pendleton. "It was the first public display of NAMA. It was the first time our organization had to think strategically."

Settlement agreement

Another pivotal period for NAMA came during the groundfish Framework 33 lawsuit filed by environmental organizations in 2000 that ultimately led to a negotiated settlement agreement in May 2002.

US District Judge Gladys Kessler handed down a decision on Dec. 28, 2001 – a date engrained in the minds of many who lived through that emotional and difficult period – that went against NMFS.

In short, Kessler ruled that more needed to be done for groundfish.

What happened next is itself a long story, but in the end, Kessler accepted a package of new restrictions negotiated by the stakeholders themselves, which included NMFS, state directors, fishermen, and environmentalists.

What made this period particularly hard for NAMA was that NAMA, along with the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association, chose to intervene in the suit on the side of the plaintiffs – the environmental groups – while other commercial fishing associations intervened on the side of NMFS, the defendants.

This approach generated some hostile feelings that in some cases have yet to go away.

Reason for intervening

Pendleton said NAMA intervened because it wanted fishermen to be part of the solution, and it did so on the side of the plaintiffs because it believed "groundfish management was broken" and stocks needed more rebuilding.

"Our goal was to bring coastal communities into the lawsuit," he said. "We did our best to really represent people who didn't have a voice. We asked the judge to not send the remedy back to NMFS or the New England council. We wanted it to go to mediation."

Pendleton believes NAMA and others helped shape the final settlement agreement in one particularly critical way.

"We got C-days," he said. "We asked for 25 and got 10, which with a 20% reduction turned out to be eight. Still, this might be some people's only way back into the fishery in the future."

Pendleton admits NAMA paid a heavy price for intervening on the plaintiffs' side.

"It created adversaries for us," he said. But he didn't regret the decision.

During that same time, NAMA was working back home with roughly 75 people from four states to develop the Gulf of Maine Inshore Fisheries Conservation and Stewardship Plan that it hoped would be accepted as the new way to manage groundfish in Amendment 13.

The New England council did not adopt the plan, but Pendleton still

says, "It was probably the best work we ever did."

Resource important

Geoff Smith said NAMA's willingness to advance biological goals is what attracted him to the organization in the first place.

"NAMA seemed to recognize that the future of our coastal communities was dependent on a healthy marine ecosystem, and they found it very important to put meeting biological objectives right up front in their plans," he said.

But Smith also was attracted to NAMA's way of doing business.

"I think NAMA has been very successful at being an inclusive organization," he said. "They really do have a very open-door policy, and they really are open to a variety of different stakeholders."

Pendleton said NAMA never wanted to lock itself into a particular role.

"We said, 'We don't want to be just a facilitation or convening group. We don't want to be just a groundfish group,'" he recalled.

Rather, its heavy focus on groundfish happened by default.

"It just became so apparent that inshore, small-boat groundfish fishermen were being painted into a box, so we tried to show them how our principles within NAMA could help them maintain their livelihoods," Pendleton said.

Relief efforts

NAMA has worked on other fronts as well. In 2005, through the generous donations of numerous industry members and organizations, it raised \$25,000 that was distributed to fishermen in Gulfport, MS who had been devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Also thanks to numerous donations, NAMA raised over \$150,000 for Sri Lanka victims of the Dec. 26, 2004 tsunami.

Of both projects, Dana Morse said, "They showed how NAMA could use its place to connect people in waterfront communities. Those were bona fide successes."

Besides these concrete examples of how NAMA has helped others, Pendleton is convinced that NAMA helped change the way people hold meetings. He thinks inviting all stakeholders to the table is more the norm now.

"A lot of people who came to our meetings left the room saying they had felt very comfortable," said Pendleton. "I think we did a really good job of not judging anyone's thoughts and letting everyone have their opinions so people could judge on their own."

Future

NAMA's board members collectively think their search for a new coordinating director will produce a solid slate of candidates. They also emphasize that NAMA is itself strong.

Geoff Smith said, "I believe the goals and principles of NAMA are the strength of the organization. They're bigger than any individual. I hold great faith in them and I have optimism that we'll be able to do great things in the future."

Pendleton's announcement this fall that he was stepping down from his post initially came as a shock to the board.

Rollie Barnaby said, "Craig put his heart and soul into this. It made everybody take a step back because we've been dependent on Craig for so long."

However, said Barnaby, the organization certainly intends to carry on its mission.

"My feeling is we'll have a new NAMA," he said.

Dana Morse agreed, feeling sure that the next coordinating director will bring new ideas, new perspectives, and different skills, all of which will lead to new and different strategic thinking.

Once that person is solidly onboard and settled, he said, "Then we'll take a breath and say, 'What's our next big thing to tackle?'"
Janice M. Plante

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