

Voices of the Gulf Panel

Coastal Zone Canada Conference

June 16, 2014

A discussion about future priorities and actions for the Gulf of Maine

Background

The Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment (GOMC) organized a three-part session at the 2014 Coastal Zone Canada to celebrate its 25th year of commitment to the health and sustainability of the Gulf of Maine. A multi-media presentation, invited speakers and this panel allowed participants to better understand this unique cross-border area, its social and economic value, the collaboration needed to protect and sustain its natural heritage, its use by communities and industries, and its ecosystem services.

Structure

Panelists: Reflecting on their sectorial interests and personal experience:

Alexandra Duchemin, Tantramar Regional High School (Youth)

Richard Getchell, Aroostook Band of Micmacs (Aboriginal)

Marianne Janowicz, Bay of Fundy Partnership (Collaborative research)

Rob Snyder, Island Institute (Non-governmental organization)

Peter Sykes, Aquaculture Association of Nova Scotia (Industry)

Moderator: Lee Sochasky, Gulf of Maine Council member

Attendees/participants: Approximately 40 people. Origin: 60% Canadian, 40% American.

Primary affiliation: 40% government, 20% non-governmental organization, 12% research, 12% retired, 1% academic.

Duration: 90 minutes.

Preparation: Panelists received the panel questions and a draft of *Facing Change* (the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment's Twenty-Five Year report) a week before the session. *Facing Change* can be viewed on the Council website at:

<http://www.gulfofmaine.org/2/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/GOMC-25thAnniversary-Booklet-WEBVERSION.pdf>

Format: The panel addressed four questions (below). For each, the panelists gave individual responses, had a brief discussion and then invited audience participation. Attendees were given cards to submit additional input; 16 did so and their ideas were incorporated into the summary.

Moderator's brief synopsis: This lively and thoughtful session offered key insights from youth, surprising synergies between different sectors and a clear message that all Gulf of Maine interests want to work to maintain this shared resource if given focused and coordinated means to do so. The challenge to the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment and all levels of government is to provide this essential blueprint. The session suggested initial ways to do so.

Question 1: Core Values

What are two things about the Gulf of Maine that mean the most to you, personally or professionally?

Key panel responses:

Fresh seafood: a first-level indicator of a healthy environment, economy and culture.

Swimming: clean water; direct contact with the ocean.

Coastal landscapes

Social and economic reliance: the Gulf is essential to coastal communities, jobs and lifestyle.

Personal connections: Gulf sights, sounds and experiences inspire residents and visitors, often with lifelong influence.

Long history: over 6,000 years of reliance on Gulf resources. A sacred tribal heritage.

Living heritage: coastal traditions, heritage sites and fishing communities continue our regional identity and sense of place.

Cycles: the ebb and flow of natural and human interactions. Nature does its part to keep its balance; we have to acknowledge and set a stable course for ours.

Together: we all rely on the Gulf for different reasons; we need shared ways to preserve it.

Key audience additions:

Dynamic ecosystem supporting world species: an incredible, resilient 'biological engine' in constant flux.

Quality of life: We enjoy a more natural and balanced lifestyle, on a smaller scale, along the coast.

Global attraction: Researchers and visitors are drawn from around the world to explore it.

Economic driver: Delivering key marine resources to world; *critical* to the economy here.

Ever-changing beauty: inspiring; never the same twice due to tide and other factors.

Question 2: Many Roles

You bring a certain perspective to this discussion. What are 1-2 key roles that your sector can play, on both sides of the border, to maintain a healthy and productive Gulf? [Who might lead it?]

Key panel responses:

Develop shared Gulf-wide public policies: current government "silos" don't work – there is a need to advocate for inter-agency and inter-governmental policies that will. [All sectors].

Educate the public: People of all ages need to know more about the Gulf in order to be good stewards, make informed decisions and support future action. Scientists and managers need to get their messages out. [Agencies, BoFEP, GOMC, NGOs, schools].

Empower communities: Much can be done cost-effectively to monitor, study and preserve Gulf resources at the local level if communities and organizations are given the right training and tools. [Agencies, NGOs, community leaders].

Expand dialog and collaboration between sectors: Bring together tribal knowledge, traditional fishermen's knowledge, current research, and socioeconomic and cultural interests to plan future policy and action. All are needed.

Train tomorrow's leaders today: We need to engage and retain youth in our region through learning and job experiences. One way is to involve youth teaching other youth through hands-on projects. [Schools, Gulf of Maine Institute, NGOs, industry].

Share Gulf-wide research and innovation results: Research results aren't always conveyed between interests or across borders to benefit everyone: they need to be. [BoFEP, industry, GOMC, NGOs, academia, trans-boundary organizations, conference organizers].

Sustainably and smartly diversify our resource uses: The Gulf is changing and we have to change with it to maintain a viable regional economy and society. Put more focus on future (not past) resource uses and on value-added opportunities to generate ongoing jobs and revenue for local businesses. [Industry, agencies, academia].

Key audience additions:

Actively promote the Gulf's national and international importance: We are too quiet in blowing our own horn and pushing our area's significance when others trumpet theirs! [Agencies, industry, communities, tourism associations].

Develop and make widely available more Gulf-wide integrated mapping and databases that help us to work together: Progress has been made on marine spatial mapping and coastal databasing through various sources but there still isn't enough consolidated information and coordination for decision-makers to understand the Gulf's key interactions. [Agencies, GOMC, GOMRI, other trans-boundary organizations].

Expand Gulf-wide predictive modelling and reporting: Progress has been made on Gulf climate change by the GOMC-initiated Climate Network US/Canada quarterly report (<http://www.gulfofmaine.org/2/climate-network-climate-outlook/>). More of this form of collaboration is needed. [Agencies, GOMC, other trans-boundary organizations, academia].

Question 3: Hard Choices

The Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment – with governmental and non-governmental participants – brings together cross-border interests to address Gulf-wide issues. As the Council looks ahead to the next 5-10 years, with very limited resources, what are two programs or activities you think should be its top priorities?

Key panel responses:

Invest in capacity-building and collaboration: See that communities and organizations get more information and tools to be cost-effective partners with government. Encourage governments to move toward these partnerships, given the constraints on internal delivery.

Encourage evidence based decision-making and open source information sharing: This also to involve all sectors in longterm stewardship.

Maintain critical Gulf assessments and reporting; dialog with the public on these. Especially for issues having major human impacts (ex: climate change, economy). Ensure the information reaches the public in understandable terms: everyone wants to know what they need to do in order to continue to live well here.

Adapt to change using new technology: Technological change is altering research and communications at a fast pace and we haven't been keeping up. Actively use social media to shape the attitudes and actions of the current generation (including 'guilt ads'). Expand web-based data portals.

Conserve critical habitats: Past projects have benefited coastal ecosystems and developed local capacities to undertake future Gulf activities. Both are needed.

Reduce land-based sources of pollution: This remains a major issue, having significant longterm impacts on the health of the Gulf: we have to do more to address it.

Key audience additions:

Get school children to the coast for a Gulf experience: Many people in the audience commented on how an early coastal experience had ultimately shaped their views and careers. Deliberate steps to give more young people this experience could have a significant societal impact.

Be more active in shaping Gulf-wide policy: The Council can see the Gulf's 'big picture' and should advise more actively on this.

At the end of this question, the audience voted for their top two issues. These were climate change and habitat conservation.

Question 4: Working Together

The Gulf region's size and political diversity make it difficult to address shared needs. What one initiative do you think could be used to rally all interests – organizations, businesses, schools, governments and more – to work together on something benefiting the Gulf?

Key panel responses:

Gulf of Maine branding: Develop a Gulf marketing program using things like “this product comes from the Gulf of Maine”, the Gulf geo-cache initiative and other ways to make people aware and proud of the Gulf of Maine (many people in the region don't know there is a Gulf of Maine).

Promote the connection between livelihoods and the Gulf: People need to feed their families now and in the future; demonstrate at every opportunity how the Gulf is key to doing this.

Knowledge is power: Have all interests resolve what data is most critical and 'open source' this, to benefit everyone.

Get the word out: Public awareness and engagement activities, Gulf-wide. The key to sustainability is education.

Key audience additions:

Get all nine year olds to the coast at least once!

Create dedicated funding to support ongoing Gulf-wide initiatives: a penny of certain taxes or fees?

Thank you to the panel speakers and participants

The session's findings will contribute to the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment's 25th anniversary re-visioning and strategic planning. Follow the Council's progress at:

www.gulfofmaine.org