

Access:

Unpacking the complexities of the current state of accessing the coast of Maine and wild, intertidal shellfish fisheries

A technical report

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OVERVIEW

This technical report in its full form is intended to assist those working in and with wild intertidal shellfish fisheries (WISFs) as they discuss and work to form solutions to issues of access. This report provides clarity surrounding different meanings of the word *access* as exemplified through descriptions of the various threats to access. These definitions were surmised over the course of two years of discourse attunement and analysis from within and around WISFs in Maine, primarily the wild soft-shelled clam fishery. Two years of engaged, communication research into the body of communication, or discourse, surrounding access has yielded a series of central topics that reemerge repeatedly. Those topics are explored alongside recommendations for how to support a sustainable, equitable, accessible set of wild fisheries. Furthermore, the emergent needs and current strategies are also identified through two years of engagement in and around WISFs in Maine.

This report is intended for those working within and around the co-management system that governs wild shellfish in Maine. While co-management is formally a partnership between the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) and municipalities, many groups and individuals work in and around those central groups to solve large and multifaceted issues that face WISFs. Harvesters, local volunteers, land trusts, researchers, consultants, and university extension offices all play a role in supporting state and local managers and adding capacity to tackle wicked problems. The engaged rhetorical field methods used to gather this information also reflect the diversity of positions that people hold within and around these fisheries. It was through engagement and learning from diverse experts and knowledge holders in and around WISFs in Maine, that I came to have this statewide, broad view of the ways in which access issues are manifesting, being communicated about, and being addressed. The sharing of this collected

knowledge through this report works to uphold a commitment of reciprocity, characterized by sharing knowledge, data, and information gathered by researchers with those who were involved in the gathering of said knowledge, data, and information.

MEANINGS OF *ACCESS*

While the word *access* emerges regularly in the discourse surrounding issues within wild intertidal shellfish fisheries, it doesn't always carry the same meaning. Through two years of discourse analysis, I have come to find that there are three primary categories into which different meanings of the word *access* usually fall. They are described below.

PHYSICAL

Physical access can mean access to: parking, mudflats, walk-in paths, drive-in access, boat ramps, healthy and abundant shellfish stock.

Physical access is currently threatened by the forces of climate change (warming ocean temperatures, ocean acidification, and an increase in predatory species) and by social factors such as coastal displacement, fueled by a boom in coastal real estate. This current wave of displacement from coastal spaces, driven by the colonial ideals of private property, is a perpetuation of the colonial displacement of Wabanaki people from coastal spaces in the Dawnland using militarized tactics. The shift in ownership and therefore power drives the continued privatization of coastal spaces and a turn away from working waterfront that so many long-time locals depend on for their livelihoods (Thompson, 2012).

STRUCTURAL

Structural access can mean access to: decision making spaces, licenses, affordable coastal housing, equitable policies, equitable access to health care.

Structural forms of access center around the governance structures erected around and within wild intertidal fisheries. These governing norms and policies influence who can access wild intertidal fisheries and in what manner they can access them. Structural access can refer to both the ability for people to access the decision-making process and ways in which codified rules and regulations dictate the realities of access. For example, in most fisheries, commercial harvesters must obtain a license to harvest. These licenses have a suite of eligibility requirements which often pose a barrier to obtaining one. With the increasing cost of coastal housing, many harvesters can no longer afford to live in coastal communities, creating issues related to meeting these residency requirements and access to shellfish harvesting as a livelihood.

SOCIAL

Social access can mean access to: necessary means to form relationships with coastal landowners or other brokers of walk-in access, community support, community awareness of issues, generational and experiential knowledge required to learn how to harvest.

The cultural norms within coastal communities often shape social access. Social access refers to the ways in which access manifests in cultural and social spaces. In wild intertidal fisheries in the Dawnland now known as Maine, access in coastal spaces is threatened on a social level as the population of coastal spaces is changing. With an influx of new people ‘from away’, attitudes towards handshake agreements that have previously enabled intertidal users to cross private property and travel to the intertidal are shifting to one that prevents walk-in access.

Additionally, the aging population of wild harvesters and their retirement from the profession (either by choice or due to bodily injury) is leaving a gap that is difficult to fill by those from away or those without the institutional knowledge often needed to enter the fishery.

TOPICS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through a process of engaged, community-informed, qualitative research, several recurring themes or topics emerged regularly within conversations surrounding access. While there are many recurring themes, equitable access, crisis framing, and resilience were amongst the most common. Understanding the themes that emerge time and time again in verbal and written communication is one way to understand the key features of an issue, providing more clear paths for forming solutions. Furthermore, an understanding of what themes emerge in communication around a specific issue can point to issues within a larger system, in this case, the social and governance structures around wild intertidal shellfish fisheries in Maine. For this reason, each recurring theme is tied to a set of recommendations that could serve to protect, preserve, and expand equitable and sustainable access, but also to create more equitable and sustainable fisheries.

EQUITABLE ACCESS

As are present in any and all fisheries and governance structures, power and power dynamics influence the structures and systems that shape access in wild intertidal shellfish fisheries. Power dynamics can contribute to increasing equity, making the fisheries and coasts more accessible for all, or to reinforcing and creating inequities. This section will explore the ways in which existing systems, structures, and relationships do or have the potential to contribute to

create tensions and reinforce inequities, while also providing recommendations for how to support more equitable fisheries into the future.

Co-management of wild shellfish fisheries in Maine presents both benefits and potential power imbalances. The partnership between the Department of Marine Resources and municipalities has the potential to make the sharing of resources and knowledge more frequent and streamlined. However, one of the drawbacks of shared power and responsibility is that the terms of shared power and responsibility must be well defined so that both parties understand their roles. Unclear delineations of power and responsibility allocations can lead to stagnation in the face of challenges or problems. For example, coastal and fisheries access is both a local and state problem. Lack of clarity around who's responsibility it is or who has power to protect, preserve, and expand access can result in inaction. Clear definitions of roles can lead to more successful collaborative problem solving and action.

Governance systems in which multiple groups are involved in decision making, such as co-management often benefit from a diversity of knowledge and knowledge holders. While biophysical, scientific knowledge produced through quantitative research is highly valuable in fisheries management, experiential knowledge from those who have regular and direct experience in an ecosystem or community is also highly valuable. A combination of scientific and experiential knowledge can often paint a richer picture than either alone. This is the case when it comes to access. Harvesters have the most direct experience and therefore knowledge regarding the ways in which access is changing along the coast. While quantitative surveys can serve as a meaningful, supplementary dataset, harvester knowledge must be considered as well. This kind of equitable valuation of knowledge forms, creates greater equity in the decision-making process surrounding wild shellfish fisheries.

Diversity amongst decision makers and ways of knowing are important for creating more inclusive and equitable fisheries and coastal spaces. Simultaneously, it is crucial to examine the internal forces of exclusion and oppression that are baked into existing systems and structures. The governance system and structures in and around wild shellfish fisheries that we know today are built upon and around colonial ideas. Wabanaki people have been harvesting wild shellfish in the place now known as Maine for time immemorial. European settler colonists acted upon colonial ideas of claiming land and resources, disrupting Wabanaki life ways and food systems, and establishing colonial governance of resources (Sutton, 2020; Wabanaki Program, 2002). Colonialism remains present in the fisheries and is enacted through exclusion of Wabanaki and non-Wabanaki people from accessing the coast and marine derived food and livelihoods and the privatization of property, amongst others.

An equitable fishery is one that examines and challenges the ways in which established norms reinforce inequities. Thus, when addressing issues of access in wild shellfish fisheries, it is important to ask: access for whom? Furthermore, the tools and strategies used to address issues of losses of access should be examined to ensure that they are not reinforcing harmful power structures like colonialism. Doing things the way they have always been done without asking why those norms were established in the first place can be harmful.

CRISIS FRAMING

In many ways, losses of access to the coast are a crisis. Harvesters are experiencing walk-in paths disappear as land changes hands or is developed. Harvesters are experiencing changes in clam populations that impact their ability to access harvesting as a livelihood. It doesn't take many conversations with harvesters for stories that validate those statements to emerge. When people

talk about the ways in which they are losing access or seeing access be lost, it is with a sense of urgency and fear that accompanies any deeply felt crisis. Harvesters are not the only ones to discuss the loss of access as a crisis, as more and more those working in and around the system of co-management work to both understand the issue at hand and respond.

The prevailing narratives of crisis and tragedy surrounding the loss of access in Maine's wild intertidal shellfish fisheries have taken root within the public discourse and media reporting. These narratives often oversimplify the complexities of access-related issues, consequently leading to solutions that lack depth and fail to address the multifaceted nature of the problem. In this section, we will explore the implications of crisis-oriented narratives in shaping perceptions and responses to access challenges, emphasizing the significance of local stewardship efforts in addressing these challenges.

Communicating about any aspect of the environment in an age of a changing climate, it is inevitable that issues will be framed as crises. Furthermore, communication plays a pivotal role in shaping society's response to crises, contributing to the construction of the way each of us experiences reality. However, such crisis frames can overlook the bigger picture and gloss over inequitable systems and structures (Whyte, 2021). Urgency can lead to an oversimplification that can result in an incomplete understanding of the issue and unsustainable and inequitable solutions that were born out of an incomplete picture. In the discourse surrounding access, this crisis frame can lead to hasty attribution of blame, diverting attention from systematic factors that further fuel the issues at hand.

The urgency that accompanies a crisis can also cause an overlooking of ongoing, local solutions forming. In the case of access, communities, led by harvesters, have been actively addressing access losses through pragmatic and inventive initiatives. For instance, green crab traps

have been deployed to safeguard juvenile clams in Lubec to protect access to plentiful and healthy stock, while Lamoine's municipal officials have sought to protect walk-in access through existing ordinances. Landowner appreciation events in Harpswell have built relationships between coastal landowners and harvesters and have led to new access points for harvesters. There is so much to learn from these successful local solutions. Not only could they be applicable in other communities, but there is much to learn from the processes by which these solutions were formed. When responding with the urgency that accompanies crisis framing, it is possible for these local solutions and processes to be overlooked. It is important to understand what is already ongoing before forming new initiatives.

Thus, it is important to recognize the ways in which framing an issue as a crisis works to increase the urgency of responding to an issue, it can also lead to oversimplifying complex issues and overlooking ongoing efforts. While some issues do demand urgency, in the case of addressing losses of coastal and fisheries access, it is crucial to have a full understanding of the complexities and nuances of the social, environmental, and economic changes at play to create sustainable solutions. Furthermore, understanding the existing and ongoing efforts to protect and preserve access provides an opportunity to examine existing needs. Funding and capacity can then be directed towards meeting those needs and avoiding redundancy.

RESILIENCE

In the past, ecologists deemed an ecological community resilient if it could withstand disturbances and revert to an idealized state called a 'climax community'. This notion implied that resilience entailed bouncing back to the same state after a change. This form of resilience revolves around a system's ability to "absorb a disturbance and retain essentially the same function,

structure, identity, and feedbacks” (Walker et al., 2004, p.488). While ecologists have moved away from this concept, echoes of it persist in adjacent disciplines.

This way of approaching resilience in this way, manifests in the discourse around access and wild shellfish fisheries. Often this emerges as a general resistance to all forms of change within and around the fisheries. This resistance to change is often voiced by harvesters and managers alike who find themselves grappling with coastal transformations. It carries an undertone of resistance against the forces driving change, coupled with a yearning to preserve aspects of the current reality in the face of transformations. Framing resilience as a long-term resistance to change aligns with the outdated climate community thinking.

What this form of resilience fails to consider are the ways in which the fisheries and surrounding governance structures are already a major transformation for Maine’s first people, the Wabanaki people, while simultaneously failing to recognize inequitable elements need to be shed moving forward. The changes affecting coastal communities echo historical patterns, rooted in colonial frameworks of exclusion and privatization, disadvantaging both Wabanaki and non-Wabanaki communities. Thus, impending changes present an opportunity to transform, and in the process make the fisheries and surrounding governance systems more equitable.

Change is inevitable. It is being felt by all those who work in and around wild shellfish fisheries in Maine, especially when it comes to access. However, it is important to consider what long held traditions or norms may not be equitable in nature or even serve to perpetuate harmful policies. Equitable resilience must ask: resilient for whom and from what? It is also important to ask not only how we can make fisheries and physical spaces more resilient, but how can people and communities themselves become more resilient? Breaking and change are necessary to build a transformative state in which wild intertidal shellfish fisheries and coastal spaces can be

equitably accessible for all those who wish to access them. Acknowledging what needs to break within a system means accepting that vulnerabilities are an inherent part of transformation and the building of a more equitable and just form of resilience.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

An analysis of the ways in which equity, crisis frames, and resilience emerge in the discourse surrounding access can serve as a helpful tool with which to respond to losses of access while asking critical questions necessary to build more equitable and sustainable fisheries. Throughout these topics, a common set of recommendations emerge for the processes through which to respond to issues of access and other emergent issues within the fisheries. While slowing the pace of a response to an issue may seem counterintuitive, it also creates room to ensure that fisheries managers have a wholistic picture of the issue at hand. This wholistic picture includes a diversity of knowledge sources and types, an understanding of ongoing and existent efforts so as to avoid redundancy, and an opportunity to examine what norms may be reinforcing harmful power dynamics. Critical questions can help in identifying a path forward. When discussing how to protect, preserve, and expand access one must ask: access for whom and to what? Once a wholistic picture is ascertained, decision makers can feel more equipped to make necessary changes and transformations to respond to the fisheries most pressing issues, such as losses of coastal and fisheries access.

IDENTIFIED NEEDS AND EMERGENT STRATEGIES

These needs and strategies come from several different sources. First are conversations and unstructured interviews conducted through my graduate thesis research. Secondly, through the series of five regional co-management workshops hosted by ShAC and DMR in the spring of 2022. Thirdly, from many meetings of the organizations and groups listed above. Some of these needs are being actively addressed while others are going unanswered. This list is not comprehensive as many of the needs and strategies are not new. Instead, the needs and strategies below represent relatively new and emergent ideas that I have identified within the past one to two years.

POLICY

Increased funding for intertidal and wild shellfish access support: The state of Maine currently offers several funding opportunities that support the protection and preservation of working waterfronts. These include but are not limited to the Working Waterfront Access Protection Program run through the Maine Coastal program. Groups working to protect working waterfronts in Maine are rapidly increasing in number and momentum throughout the state. However, the definition of and metrics used to evaluate a working waterfront often do not include mudflats and intertidal areas in which many key species, including the second most lucrative fishery in the state (soft-shelled clams) are harvested. Therefore, many of the programs and funding support structures do not apply to the protection of access to mudflats. This needs to change. Many municipalities across the coast are hoping to engage in intertidal access protection work, but the funds are not there to support them. This means that municipalities often take more inefficient paths to protect their access points, further straining their capacity and existing funds,

or they decide not to do anything at all. More funding needs to be made available through regional planning organizations, the state, or federal institutions to support municipal-level intertidal access protection.

Working Waterfront tax incentives: The current Working Waterfront Tax Law provides tax incentives for waterfront parcels that are used predominantly (90% of the parcel or more) or primarily (50% of the parcel or more) for working waterfront or fishing purposes. While this is a wonderful incentive for those with parcels on which a large portion of the land is being used for working waterfront purposes, it does not provide incentive for landowners who may want to provide a walking path across their property to access the intertidal. A walking path on most parcels would likely fall under the 50% threshold to receive tax relief. As such, a policy change should be implemented that reduces the percentage of property that must be entered into the program to receive tax predictions. This would provide incentives for providing access to the intertidal.

Tribal shellfish ordinances: In Maine, tribal nations are often treated, policy-wise, like municipalities by the state. Municipalities with shellfish ordinances have the power to manage wild shellfish stock that lie within their political borders, enforce their ordinances policies, and to be able to issue licenses to harvesters. Currently, no tribal nation in Maine has a shellfish ordinance or the equivalent thereof because of colonial displacement of the coast hundreds of years prior. The Passamaquoddy at Sipayik retain the only saltwater access and are working to change that. They are currently working with the MSLN and DMR area biologist to develop an ordinance-like policy where authority comes from tribal government, to manage their wild

shellfish stock, engage in conservation efforts like their clam garden, and issue licenses to tribal members to harvest. This policy may serve as a template for other tribal nations in Maine and set a new precedent for the ways in which the state works with tribal nations in Maine to manage coastal fisheries and ensure indigenous access to them.

License allocation: The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) works with municipalities to establish the number of licenses available in each municipality each year based on surveys of wild shellfish populations. Harvesting licenses are administered by municipalities. There are many different classifications of licenses including commercial and recreational. Further distinction is made between residential and non-residential commercial and recreational licenses. The DMR requires that municipalities offer 10% of residential licenses as non-residential licenses.

Each municipality is responsible for establishing the threshold at which a person meets the residency requirement necessary to obtain a residential license in their municipal shellfish ordinance. Residency thresholds vary widely across the state with some municipalities requiring 3 months and others 12 or more months of residing in a municipality to be eligible for a residential license. With increasing housing costs along the coast, residency in a coastal community is quickly becoming increasingly expensive to obtain, creating a barrier for some harvesters to meet the eligibility requirements for a residential license. While non-resident licenses are available in all municipalities, they are very difficult to obtain as they are so few.

Furthermore, the state of Maine offers no protection for Indigenous people in Maine to harvest wild shellfish in their homelands. This is very different from nearby states like Vermont in which Tribal Members have access to free hunting and fishing licenses (An act relating to

Abenaki hunting and fishing licenses, 2020) and Massachusetts in which no licenses are required for Tribal Members to harvest wild shellfish (*Commonwealth v. Hendricks*, 2008; *Commonwealth v. David Greene*, 1985; *Commonwealth v. Michael J Maxim*, 1997). The governmental relationship between the Wabanaki Confederacy and State of Maine is complex and strained by a history of failures on behalf of the State of Maine. Equitable allocation of shellfish harvesting licenses in Maine would include free, accessible licenses for Wabanaki tribal members.

Exactions: Exactions are a legal mechanism that municipalities can use to require land developers to offset potential negative impacts to the public by providing some kind of public benefit. For example, if a new coastal development will destroy a publicly accessible walk-in path to the intertidal, the municipality could require the developer to create an access path elsewhere in the new development. While this mechanism could work as a powerful tool with which to require new coastal development to include features like walk-in paths and public parking, the details of how the mechanism functions will vary from municipality to municipality and from project to project. Exactions can often work in tandem with existing land use and planning ordinances to give municipal decision makers some options through which to protect physical access to the intertidal.

COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS

Communicating landowner expectations: While the intertidal (the area between mean high and low tide) is most often privately owned by upland landowners, the public has the right to

fish, fowl, and navigate in the intertidal. This means that the public is allowed on private property. This makes some private property owners uneasy and can lead to tensions and altercations between intertidal users and private landowners. Historically, many shellfish harvesters had informal handshake agreements with landowners that allowed harvesters to cross private land to access mudflats. Coastal landowner turnover has seen many of these handshake agreements disappear as new landowners aren't aware of the working waterfront their property abuts. Additionally, some landowners feel uncomfortable with strangers crossing their property and fear liability.

One way for landowners to get to know the harvesters who may be crossing their property and to communicate their expectations for granting access to harvesters is to post a sign on their property that allows access with expressed permission of the landowner. On these signs, landowners can list their phone number so that those wishing to cross their property can contact them. The two parties can then discuss expectations and agreements of use, or they can create an access contract that both parties would sign. This contract is shared between harvesters (or those who would be accessing their private property) and the upland landowners.

Homeowner appreciation events: Homeowner appreciation events work to bring together private coastal landowners and intertidal users. Homeowner appreciation events give the two groups an opportunity to build relationships with each other. These events can also be a great way for harvesters to feature their product. In the past, these events have been known to open new walk-in paths to the intertidal for harvesters, as coastal landowners offer paths across their upland land.

While these events are often effective, they can require much coordination and some funds to pull off. As is the case, it could be helpful for an organization to offer support. This could manifest as a guide to hosting an event, template invitations or invitation language, or more hands-on support in the form of event coordination and municipal staff support. The relationship between coastal homeowners and intertidal users is strained in many localities across the coast and many communities are looking to improve these relationships in some way. Events such as this can offer one such avenue. There are also co-benefits for other fisheries that may use intertidal or subtidal areas such as shellfish aquaculture.

New coastal landowner communication materials: Many coastal communities in Maine are seeing an influx of new residents from different areas of the country. Many of these residents move to coastal Maine based on the quaint, picturesque ideals portrayed in popular media. However, many do not understand what it means to live in a working waterfront community. Maine Coast Fishermen's Association has worked to create a booklet introducing new homeowners to the sights, smells, and sounds of a working waterfront community. This booklet, called "The Scuttlebutt" was published specifically for the Harpswell community, and introduces new homeowners to the fisheries that support the community while also giving tips and tricks for how to keep your cereal from going soggy in the humid coastal air. Harpswell has been working to get this booklet in the hands of new coastal homeowners.

Many communities across the coast are interested in producing similar materials, but again do not have the staff, capacity, expertise, and/or funds to do so. Thus, there is a need for either a supporting organization or group to assist with these materials or for the creation of a template that would require minimal time, effort, and funds for municipalities to tailor for their

own communities. These materials could also be displayed at the municipal offices and provided to new coastal homeowners when they come in to do any paperwork associated with owning a new home in the municipality.

Changing media narratives away from crisis: Overwhelmingly the narrative in media surrounding the wild soft-shelled clam in Maine is negative. Headlines use words like “dead”, “dying”, and/or “in decline”. While the fishery is facing challenges and economic and environmental challenges as a result of climate change, the fishery is not dead. It still supports many livelihoods and provides high quality products to Maine and elsewhere. This narrative can have very real impacts on the fishery and the people working in it. The idea that wild clams are dead further fuels a shift towards aquaculture and can pit the two industries as adversaries. In addition, an idea that the fishery is dead can also lead to a lack of care and awareness on behalf of the public. If private coastal landowners believe that the fishery is dead, they may be even further confused by the people digging in the mud behind their home. There is a need to show the fishery for what it is, using narratives from those who are on the mud every day. Uplifting these narratives can show that while the fishery faces challenges, there is a thriving and active community of harvesters and managers who are working to protect, preserve, care for, and steward the fishery into the future.

Providing tools to real estate agents to communicate working waterfront and access attributes of a property: As stated above, coastal landowners who are not familiar with working waterfront communities can pose a barrier to access to the intertidal. Real estate agents are one of the first points of contact for new coastal homeowners and therefore have a unique

opportunity to talk with new homeowners. One of the barriers here is that many real estate agents are not aware of the working waterfront features of a town or existing access points that may run across or adjacent to the property being sold. There is an opportunity for real estate agents to learn about what to look for and how to communicate working waterfront attributes. Additionally, real estate agents could work with municipal staff who may have been working to inventory access points, such as Gouldsboro.

All of these require communication with the real estate community in Maine and better understanding of their mechanisms and procedures. Real estate agents in Maine are not required to disclose working waterfront attributes or access points to potential buyers and are not likely to do so if it may impact the sale of the property. Therefore, those working to protect and preserve working waterfront and intertidal access need to use a listening-first approach to better understand the role that real estate agents play and build strategies with that understanding in mind.

Statewide access-oriented conference: Many organizations, agencies, municipalities, volunteers, harvesters, institutions, and informal groups have been working to protect, preserve, and expand access over the past two years. Due to the geographic diversity of the coast in conjunction with inconsistent communication needs of the different groups, many of these efforts are disjointed. Many groups are even undertaking the same strategies, not knowing the work may be redundant. As has been stated above, managers within municipalities and more broadly within wild intertidal shellfish fisheries have limited capacity. Redundant work is not efficient. Additionally, many groups have specialties that in conjunction with those of other groups can produce a better product.

The access-oriented panel at Shellfish Focus Day this year served as a springboard for collective conversations around intertidal access. The fact that multiple groups have cropped up in the wake of that conversation to continue the dialogue is a testament to the need for a space in which to discuss needs and strategies related to intertidal and intertidal shellfish fishery access across the coast.

Discussions with diverse intertidal shellfish community members in several different venues point to the desire for this convening to take the shape of a full-day, statewide, in-person conference. Those who should be present and have the most prominent voices in the dialogue include harvesters (first and foremost as the keepers of the most accurate and up-to-date experiential knowledge of the fishery), municipal managers, and legal and policy-minded individuals. In the past scientists and state agency staff have taken up the most space in these conversations, however, there is an appetite for that to change as it is becoming clear that those who are doing the primary share of the work to protect, preserve, and expand access are harvesters, municipal staff, and potentially policymakers. The appetite is there for such a convening, but the capacity and funds to organize it are scarce.

INFORMATION GATHERING

Inventory support: In order to better understand current access points, how they are being used, and how they are being threatened, many municipalities are working to create comprehensive inventories. Some municipalities are working with organizations such as Manomet to do this while others are using informal surveys and Google maps. Municipalities that have undergone inventory processes have said that it was incredibly helpful in understanding

what the next steps should be. Due to a lack of municipal capacity and funding, many municipalities are not able to conduct these inventories.

CONCLUSIONS

While access continues to be a pressing issue facing wild intertidal shellfish fisheries in Maine, coastal communities, local managers, harvesters, non-profits, research institutes, universities, researchers, scientists, journalists, state managers, and policy makers alike are actively championing creative solutions. The coast of Maine is diverse, as are the ways access issues are manifesting in each coastal community. One community may have great and supportive relationships between private coastal landowners and harvesters and local managers but be losing walk-in access points to other kinds of coastal development. Another community may host a population that is unaware of the necessity of access for harvesters and a housing market that is pushing harvesters out of town but have permanent easements on walk-in paths. Each community needs a different combination of solutions to meet their unique set of needs.

In addition to a need for flexibility in finding the right solution, and an overall need for increased funding, those engaged in the management of wild intertidal shellfish fisheries in Maine need to be willing to ask critical questions to build a more equitable and just fishery for the future. Rushing into technical solutions and reverting to the ways in which things have always been done can be incredibly harmful and uphold inequities for those who have always been excluded. This is true both within the wild shellfish fisheries and outside of them.

Wild shellfish fisheries in Maine are not dead, but they are changing. The ways in which those engaged in the co-management of these fisheries respond will shape the future of these

fisheries for years to come. Now is the time to slow down, listen, assess, learn, understand, and collaborate.

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