

Interviewee Name: Chris Bartlett

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Interviewer(s) Name(s) and affiliations: Matt Frassica (the Briney Podcast) and Galen Koch (The First Coast), Kaitlyn Clark (College of the Atlantic Intern)

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Interview Description:

Chris Bartlett

Eastport, ME

Marine Extension Associate, University of Maine Sea Grant

Interviewed by Matt Frassica, Galen Koch and Katie Clark

Chris Bartlett, a marine extension associate with the University of Maine Sea Grant from Eastport, ME, whose work has focused on commercial fishing and aquaculture, speaks about the economic and social changes in Eastport during his time there. He describes the old method of locating fishing spots by using multiple landmarks for triangulation, the impact of changing technologies on the fishery, and his work with the Ocean Renewable Power Company to assess the environmental impacts of tidal power and communicate effectively with the local communities.

Collection Description:

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CB: Chris Bartlett (Interviewee)

MF: Matt Frassica (Lead interviewer)

GK: Galen Koch (Interviewer)

KC: Kaitlyn Clark (Student intern)

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(sound of paper rustling)

CB: So whose idea was the Airstream?

MF: That was Galen's idea.

CB: Galen, it's brilliant.

GK: Thanks! Been working on it for a year!

MF: And Galen's sweat going into it to make it what it is today.

CB: So how did you get involved?

MF: Um, I met Galen through a group of radio people and audio editors that meets in Portland our first ever meeting was in this Airstream at a much earlier point and it's - back in the summertime and that's where we met. So it's okay.

(looking for the downeast map)

Katie: Trying to find the Downeast...

CB: So we're getting there with this one if we could go a little further east that would be great but we might not have it.

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GK: We do have it - right... right?

CB: She's like the wizard behind the curtain.

GK: Like the Great and Powerful Oz back here.

MF: Do you want to get a felt tip?

Katie; What color would you like?

CB: So many choices, they don't have scent... at Sea Grant they bought us a whole bunch of markers one time that smell like different things. And the kids just go crazy. Anyway...

MF: So Chris can we start by just getting you to say your name and to spell it.

CB: Sure. Hi, Good Morning, my name is Chris Bartlett that's Chris Bartlett.

MF: And what do you do?

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CB: I work for the University of Maine Sea Grant program. We conduct research and education around our marine resources here in Maine. I live in far Downeast Maine in the town of Eastport - been there for 23 years now for Sea Grant.

MF: And what things concern you about what's going on in your community?

CB: Oh... really good question. So let me back up and say when I moved to Eastport I was 23, fresh out of college. And then I traveled a bit, lived in Southeast Alaska for a little while. And came back to Eastport because I got a call to see if I'd like to work for the University based in eastport again, took that opportunity. So since 1989 things in Maine and the Downeast section that I live in have changed a lot.

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And I think my life has changed as well over that time, I met my wife Connie, we have three daughters now, they're 18, 16, and 13. And since I moved to Eastport in '89 the population then was 2000 people we're down to 1200 and what we've mostly lost are young families. Again, when I moved there there were two textiles mills there were two fish processing plants, the natural resources economy was going strong with forestry as well as fisheries, so those economies have dropped in the amount of money that people can make and we lost the textiles mills and the fish processing plants. So... in terms of concern for the coastal community that I live in, I worry about you know keeping young people in town

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it seems like our youth is our future and so for my own daughters I hope that they go off and find happiness wherever they want - if they'd love to move back, that would also be great. But I don't know what opportunities are going to be there for them. So that's a concern as a community member, as a parent. Within my job things have changed quite a bit as well. So I've - the University hired me, my background is in microbiology and did a lot in college and in the private industry with fish health around salmon farming and when I was stationed in eastport back in '92 um... there were 21 small family farms in aquaculture raising salmon. We've consolidated now, the industry has consolidated to one company in Maine that's a large Canadian company

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a family-owned company with lots of outside investment. They're a global company now. So those small family farms have gone to the wayside. Salmon farming has had its trials and tribulations, it's, I think the large farm is more efficient but the - how to say this - the folks that work there some of them have been in the industry for 30 years now. They really are proud of what they do. And they're excellent at farming salmon but there's far fewer of them than there was with all the small family farms and there's not the, again, the community connection to farming. Because everyone had a family member that was working in aquaculture or fisheries when I first moved there and at one time the labor force in Eastport alone was around 1,000 people working in - this is Cobscook Bay, working in Cobscook Bay on salmon farming. We're down to about 100 people working in that now.

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So there's not that connectedness to the communities that there once was. Fishing has certainly changed over time - when you say concerns, I think it is somewhat concerning that we've had this great boom in lobsters which economically is wonderful in terms of providing employment for people including many young people who can still get into the industry. But it's created a mono-fishery, it used to be that folks, I should say we still have more of a diverse fishery in the Downeast area than say here in the Midcoast. Many fishers are still targeting scallops and sea urchins and lobsters and they'll go for Halibut in the spring, though that's not a big economic boom but it's still part of their livelihood. But the importance of those other fisheries has diminished over time as the landings have dropped so now you have this lowly crustacean being the

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apex species, if you will, for the Gulf of Maine and that's somewhat concerning to think about that we've lost I thought that the Downeast area was pretty special when I started working for Sea Grant I got to know a lot of the old time handliners who would make their living just going out and catching a couple hundred, 300 lbs, of cod a day. And they showed me all their old fishing marks and it was just wonderful we did a cod tagging study that was in part with then the Gulf of Maine Aquarium, Gulf of Maine Research Institute now, where we were tagging cod in small boats, it was the only part of the project where we were actually out in little open boats with these men that were in their 60s, 70s, a couple in their 80s, tagging cod. We were tagging up to 75 a day. This was in early 2000s and some of those fish were going as far as Rhode Island and being recovered, so that was neat. By 2005 those cod were gone, so it wasn't so much that it was a special place

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we were just behind the curve, we lost groundfish like everywhere else.

MF: Do you remember where that was, can you point to that on the map?

CB: Yeah absolutely, so let me give you a little walk around my backyard. So I live right here at Prince's Cove in Eastport and this is downtown Eastport where we call the Breakwater, this is where boats from - so this is Cobscook Bay and the fishing fleet primarily devices from about here so all the communities around here tie up their boats in Eastport and all the communities over here tie up their boats in Lubec. So, those are the two primary fishing ports. And when we were fishing for cod fish we had marks that I should mention, this is Canada so this is

Campobello Island and Deer Island, and New Brunswick and this pink line is the international boundary

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goes right up the St. Croix River like this and right out the Lubec narrows so at one time communities in new Brunswick and in Maine were very much tied by family and by employment, there were 20 sardine packing plants here up through the 1950s and another 19 over in Lubec and families from Campobello and Deer Island were taking boats across for employment and there was lots of generational family connections across... after WWII and then with the Magnuson-Stevens act of not allowing Canadians or Americans to fish in each other's waters it started breaking down those ties, so there's still quite a few ties, especially to Campobello which is connected to Maine by a bridge, so folks who want to come over

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you know for grocery shopping or the hospital there's still a connection there but it's not as - it's not as dynamic as it used to be. So when we are talking about the handlining study, we have to stay primarily on the Maine side of the border and at best cod fishing was from here in Friar Roads, you can see on the chart, straight up through into Western Passage just before you got to Sabayak which is the Passamaquoddy reservation right here. So from here down tot here and the gentlemen that taught me how to hand line, they would triangulate their marks by looking at landmarks on the mainland, so you know they called them drifts because we have a big tidal exchange (mic hit here) - excuse me - rise and fall of the tide is about 19 feet, right? So down here it's about 10 feet. We're in the southwest corner of the Bay of Fundy, here.

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So they take their small boats out and they would drift along the tide and they would find these, these areas to fish that were productive and they would give them names like "Coffin's Ledge" or "The Henney Ground" or "Graveyard Point" and that might be best fished on the ebbtide or it might be best fished on the flood tide. And to start the drift they would triangulate where they started the drift by okay, we're going by the church steeple there and the elm tree on Burton Blanch's yard, you know how... to where I am. And so that was the triangulation. That was great except when it was foggy, right? So I come along as a young whippersnapper and I have one of the early GPS's and I'm out with Reedy Wilson and I mark all of his hotspots and so tagging study came along and said "Reedy, let's go out fishing, let's go out to the Henney Ground, we did well there the other day."

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And he said, "Yeah, like hell it's so thick of fog we won't even find our way there." I said, "Oh no, just trust me." So we went up and I'm looking at my little GPS and I said, "Okay, we're here let's put out lines down." And he's just laughing. And uh I'm following the GPS and I said, "Okay, they're gonna hit right now." We loaded up our lines right then and he just thought it was magic. He thought, he said, "that little box is a cheater." He said, "If i had one of those, I would have made so much money!" So it was really cool how that technology came along but that's also in part it's that kind of technology that fished down the ground fish. Not out of little open boats but you know from the folks that were dragging with their trawl nets being able to target those spots specifically and going back and just like on a farm tractor going back and forth time after time until those little spawning aggregations of groundfish were all cleaned up in the winter.

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And so that's what was happening, it's likely that our spawning aggregations were in New Brunswick, not in Maine. So our chart doesn't go much into New Brunswick here but these are the Wolves which used to have all sorts of fishing camps on them from folks in New Brunswick for herring in the summer months. And between The Wolves and there's an island over here called (Wayhorse?) when - before, during our tagging studies in the winter the Canadians were still dragging for cod and haddock back and forth here in the winters, before the fish would aggregate to spawn and those kind of spawning aggregations were already cleaned up in Maine all the way up to West Quoddy Head. So if you talk to someone like Ted Ames, who I hope you get the chance to, Ted was a fish dragger and he'd fish all the way up to West Quoddy in his boat out of Stonington. Hitting those little aggregations of cod and pollock and haddock and so the Canadians were just slower at getting around to cleaning up the last of them than the Mariners were, unfortunately.

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So yeah, that's where we were doing those handline studies.

MF: And so what do you, what appealed to you about Downeast Maine when you first moved and why do you stay, what is it about that community that keeps you there?

CB: Yeah so I guess like any community it's your relationships, right? I should say that other than my time traveling as a young man, I was born in Maine, my parents are still here I'm spending nights with my parents now in Damariscotta. So I grew up on the coast of Maine and so that's where I feel most comfortable. I lived in Southeast Alaska, that was also a wonderful coast out there. So there's a sense of connectedness within your community as - eastport is a small town you know everybody helps each other out to get by

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and it's that feeling of friendship that I think has caused me to want to stay, it's where I met my wife, it's where I'm raising my children. It has its challenges for sure but it also has it's opportunities. My kids I don't know if you've heard of Chewonki, Chewonki is an educational organization out of Wiscasset and all three of my daughters have been fortunate to go to Girls Camp and Semester School at Chewonki and get to meet young women from all over the globe. And so it broadens their horizons but it also has shown them how fortunate they are to grow up in a small community with the community ties and with their own experience and enjoyment of the outdoors. So they've grown up

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you know floating amongst whales and seals in the summer months and going and hiking the woods and the mountains as a family, canoeing down our rivers, it's stuff that - that's what Chewonki wants to get young people back outdoors to enjoy that kind of stuff and my kids are already there. So that's pretty cool so that's I think some of the value of living in rural coastal Maine.

MF: Can you talk about your work with Sea Grant a little bit and the kinds of projects that you're involved in - what maybe some of them mean for the future of communities like that?

CB: Excuse me for a second.... so as I mentioned I started out being a specialist for salmon farming and as that industry consolidated I used my own interests and knowledge to expand to start working on commercial fisheries projects as well so much of my career with Sea Grant focused on those two industry sectors - commercial fishing and commercial aquaculture.

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I also just did a whole bunch of projects whether it's coastal access, or working waterfronts, or there's a few tidal power development companies that come through we're working closely with one right now, they're putting tidal turbines into the bay they've got test locations, these four buoys are one of their test locations and over here is where we're studying right now - this is Ocean Renewable Power Company and

MF: They're turbines driven by the tides?

CB: Correct and so as I mentioned we have - being in the southwest corner of the Bay of Fundy we have a larger tidal exchange than many areas and these geographic constrictions, if you will, cause the tide to go faster. And right here is very dynamic

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the Old Sow whirlpool is right here between Maine and New Brunswick. it's the largest whirlpool in the Western Hemisphere. It's really that big as big as that box and so that just gives you a sense of how fast the tide can move. So happy to talk the ORPC Project the Ocean Renewable Power Company Project so the work that we're doing there is two fold - one is to assess any potential environmental impacts of these devices so we're looking at potential impacts on marine mammals, on finfish, on seabirds. These areas, because we have such strong tidal currents, we get lots of tidal upwelling. And by that I mean the tide isn't just lateral, isn't horizontal, it's pushing up and down because of the bathymetry and that's what causes the Old Sow whirlpool because of that you know the rise and the bathymetry on the bottom

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it's currents coming in from two different areas and trying to get up here and trying to get over here. All to say, it's really dynamic in terms of an ecosystem because you get whales and seabirds and all these finfish coming in to feed because the prey species - there's nutrient rich waters from the depths, get pushed to the surface, hit sunlight so you get great plankton blooms and then you get all sorts of zooplankton and small fish that get forced to the surface where the birds can get at them and the seals don't have to dive too deep. We get minke whales and fin whales right through here, you can sit on the pier in Eastport and watch whales go by, which is pretty cool in Maine. you know if you're in Bar Harbor you gotta go 20 miles off which is still pretty cool. You know. Zach Cliver who grew up in Eastport you know he's one of the head naturalists down at Bar Harbor Whale Watch Company but he grew up watching whales from his hometown

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So all that to say it's a pretty dynamic area, it's all from an energy perspective it's a place that Ocean Renewable Power Company wants to atleast test their designs, not sure if... it seems like it's pretty expensive to produce their technology. So they'll probably look for areas in the globe that either can't get power or power is so expensive that they can compete. So it's, I think it's less likely that we're gonna see a field of 20 or 30 of their turbines here in the WEstern passage

but it's a great place to taste their technology. Um so we want to look at potential impacts before they put their devices in. And then we want to look at the impacts when the device is in. They only put in one device at a time so we can only look at the potential impacts of one device. The greater potential impact would be if they put 20 or 30 in - what does that do to the ecosystem? That's harvesting in the energy so actually the tidal current coming out the backside during the... this is flood tide, tide's gonna come in here and go up here, the energy going in is going to be far greater than the energy coming out

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if you have all these devices harnessing the tide. So is that going to change the ecology? Is there going to be less productivity because the tides aren't bring in g up that nutrient rich water? It's not bringing up the pray species for the gulls and terns and razor bills to feed on... we don't know! So that's why we're studying that. The second part of our work on that project is community outreach and so the research team from the University who is looking at the potential impacts really wants community involvement so I set up meetings with three users of the bay, fishers, and community members, ship pilots, nav- recreational commercial boat users, and just say "This is going in, what knowledge do you have that can inform our studies?" We're looking for marine mammals and finfish and birds, what do you have for community knowledge that can help us? So that we can focus the research to get the best answers. So we've been doing that type of outreach and then we set up meetings to go back

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to the community and say "This is what we're finding so far" so that they understand what the research is, what the results are. So it's an ongoing process so for me that's how I think research should be conducted. When I first started working at the University we had - this area being such a unique ecosystem we had researchers from all over come to study it, the only way to find out what they found out was to do a literature search on you know a university library site. Most folks in the community aren't going to know and it's written as a scientific paper, it's in my mind it's much more robust and

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useful for the researchers to come back into the community and have that two way dialogue with folks from the area. To try to find solutions together.

MF: We are close to time but is there anything else - any other issue you think is important or something from your life, some personal anecdote that you'd like to get down?

CB: I guess I think the key for me with coastal communities like Eastport is learning how to be resilient. Is being able to change with the times. We can see things such as global warming a challenge or a threat, it might also be an opportunity. I mean I think we should do everything we can to understand it completely. But also I think that the key for me is being able to stay resilient and being able to continue to grow, not with population so much it to grow with learning. So I'm hopeful that we can continue to do that and I'm hopeful that my kids and others can carry the torch.

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After we're gone. Thanks so much for this opportunity to talk to you!

(End of interview)
