

Katy Clark: This is Katy Clark from College of the Atlantic at the National Working Waterfront Symposium in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Today is May 15th. Could you please state and spell your name and give your occupation in town?

Adam Mistler: Adam Mistler. Adam, A-D-A-M. Mistler, M-I-S-T-L-E-R. Occupation in town, I am a National Outreach Manager. I got a new title fairly recently for Ocean Conservancy in Washington, D.C.

KC: Great. Thank you. So, starting off, what makes your working waterfront important in your community?

AM: Well, the problem is that D.C. doesn't really have a working waterfront. I am trying to engage with people nationally to have all of these local concerns become a national chorus. Although D.C. has a street named after every state and territory and the Maine Avenue fish market in D.C. on the water is delicious.

KC: [laughter] Okay, nice. So, I guess. What is your job kind of look like? Like that kind of pulling together this and trying to build this course.

AM: It's connecting people and also getting a sense of who my organization knows and doesn't know. We have a lot of programs that work in a number of areas. Ocean acidification, marine debris, so on and so forth. Sustainable fisheries. We know each program knows a lot of people, but they work with those people and they don't look elsewhere within the organization. So, even when it might be incredibly useful for us to be able to reach out to everyone we know who is active on an issue in Maine, I'll keep going back to Maine. We wouldn't have teams that knew, like our OA team knows a lot of people who work on ocean acidification in Maine, but our marine debris team wouldn't know those people. Just last week, the Marine debris team was out on a boat collecting ghost gear with Hattie and Steve Train. I looked at Hattie's Instagram and was like, "Oh, this is why I'm doing this, because I had no idea they were doing that. I had Hattie down to D.C. six weeks ago." But then it's also identifying gaps and we aren't strong in the Great Lakes and a few other states. So, I am working waterfronts are not just a great issue and an important one and a divisive one, but the location in Grand Rapids was great for meeting Michigan Sea Grant - Illinois Sea Grant. So, so many sea grants and other stakeholders here whose voices are vitally important.

KC: I guess in your work in these kind of these different groups across the country, are you seeing particular trends with working waterfronts, directions that they are going?

AM: I had never really thought about the various sizes until being here. I guess I just hadn't really thought about the size at all. I was familiar with Long Island and up in some of the communities like Vinyl Haven, having a working waterfront and then Rockport not having much of one. I never really thought about the sizes and the vast differences. I just thought about the issue. I think the issue that unites all of them is just access, plain, and simple. Like, it's like Steve was talking about. I think the flavor changes depending on where you are. In Maine it's gentrification. In Florida, I've talked with fishermen who are just worried that when a hurricane inevitably blows out their pier, who's going to pay for the replacement?

KC: So, kind of this broader, this worry about access but then more localized issues with Steve. Then in your show, you talked a lot about or you talked about identifying gaps and identifying the people who knows who and where can we make kind of overlaps. What does that translate into, like supporting kind of local on the ground organizations?

AM: I think we, at Ocean Conservancy, I don't think of this as a huge organization. But we're pretty big and we have a pretty powerful voice. We can use that voice to support and connect to people. I think actually, I was looking at email in that session, which I shouldn't have been doing. It's rude. But I got an email from a co-worker about how one woman that we brought down for the fly in that Hattie was a part of – is with the Rockaway Waterfront Alliance in New York City. She had never met this guy Paul, who runs a whale watching company also out of New York City. So, now they are two great voices who they're very cogent and tell a great story. They had never known each other. Now they know each other and they're planning events they can do together to better utilize their voices and engage people.

KC: How did you get involved in this kind of work in the first place?

AM: I was a political science major at Boston College. Go Eagles. I moved to D.C. just to do politics. I was on the Hill for a couple of years. I was an intern for Senator Bill Nelson of Florida, and I heard about things I had never realized were important. The first time I saw red snapper as an issue, I laughed. That is a big thing in the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic. But I just did politics stuff for a couple of years, I guess. I think, it was just that being from Boston, I have always considered myself an urban boy. I love living in a city, but I felt sort of, I never thought about it in Boston. But I realized after a couple of years here that I just felt sort of bereft without the ocean nearby. Like I couldn't just walk a few streets over and see the ocean. I couldn't drive up to Acadia. I mean, there's the mountain ocean divide. I'm an ocean person, but even if I was a mountain person, Maryland doesn't have great mountains. I wanted to do something that would allow me to reconnect in a way with the ocean.

KC: Going forward in the work that you do, are there ways that the working waterfront network can better support or offer different tools going forward to support you in the work that you do?

AM: I don't know. I think just having events like this and me getting to meet everybody is really been fantastic. I just had a networking lunch where myself and David, the videographer, and a woman from Michigan Sea grant extension, just went and grabbed hot dogs and talked about activating in the Great Lakes, the local inland sea issues, working waterfront issues. The conversations are great and I appreciate being able to have them. So, I guess I would just say if the more that I could have these conversations when not at the conference would also be great.

KC: Is there a particular forum that you think would kind of – way of communicating that would support that or would work in that way.

AM: I think it works best, especially when working on working waterfronts and with fishermen. It works best to do it, if not face to face, but voice to voice. I think what we've heard a lot about is how fishermen have their own way of talking and that it can be hard that they fear being

misunderstood. It's easier for me, and also Richard who – yes, Richard is amazing. Richard, like he said, about needing to build trust, it's easier for me to develop that level, for them to develop that level of trust with me and talk to me and make sure that I understand what they're saying. If I can be there with them and once in a while actually be like, I don't get it. What do you mean?

KC: So, things like having things kind of like the symposium and the forum and like more events like that where you're face to face with people.

AM: Yes.

KC: Is there are there any other bits of information or things that you want to add that we have not touched on?

AM: No, I would love to turn the tables and be like, "So, what do you think the definition of a working waterfront is since it's so amorphous?" But I'm here to answer your questions, so I think I'm good. [laughter]

KC: Well, thank you so much for sharing your information.

AM: Yes. Thank you.

[end of transcript]