

Ty Alexa Watt: This is Alexa Wutt from Michigan Sea Grant at the National Working Waterfront Symposium in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Today is May 16th, 2018. So, Brandon I will ask if you can please state and spell your name, share your occupation and town, and today's date.

Brandon Schroeder: So, I'm Brandon Schroeder. I work with the Michigan Sea Grant college program. I need to spell my name. So, that's B-R-A-N-D-O-N, S-C-H-R-O-E-D-E-R. I work with the Michigan Sea Grant Program. I'm an Extension Educator employed through Michigan State University Extension, the other half of Michigan Sea Grant. I live and work in northeast Michigan, Lincoln, Michigan, Alcona County. In my senior role, I serve northeast Michigan, northern coastal communities of northern Lake Huron. Does that –

TAW: That was everything?

BS: What's the date? It's May 16th.

TAW: Perfect. So, we will start with a broad question. What is your working waterfront story?

BS: So, I mean, I have a couple. So, my personal story, I grew up on Lake Huron, and I became very excited about the Great Lakes and particularly fisheries. So, I went to college to study fishery science. The fun part of my story is I was told, "You'd have to leave the state to get a job." But over the course of years, I came into the job with Michigan Sea Grant. So, I not only live in Michigan, but I live and work on the same lake, serving some of the same coastal communities that I grew up with. So, personally, I'm very connected to Lake Huron because I grew up a mile from Lake Huron, and it kind of inspired my career path. Now my career path is serving those communities on Lake Huron. In my Sea Grant extension role, I think of my working waterfront role has three perspectives. One is fisheries, working with the fisheries industries, commercial fishermen, charter boat fishermen, recreational community-based fisheries, whether it be access or fishing tournaments. But I worked largely on the coastline of Lake Huron. So, I live and work in northeast Michigan, but my fisheries work takes me up and down the Lake Huron coastline. In northeast Michigan, I'm very involved in the sustainable coastal tourism conversations saying, "How do we look at the Lake Huron?" Northeast Michigan is a very rural community, very economically depressed, and very interested in sustainably capitalizing on a lot of the undeveloped, publicly owned Lake Huron coastline. So, in the three-county area, Presque, Alpena, Alcona County, there's 22 miles of state and federally owned Huron coastline. That's unique in the state. You're not going to find anywhere else in the state with that much publicly owned coastline largely undeveloped. They're not campgrounds. It's just protected coastline for the purpose largely of some of the rare and unique habitats and some of the threatened endangered species in those. So, the community's saying, "Well, we recognize the value of protecting them. But we also want to think about ecotourism or sustainable coastal tourism opportunities that can generate some revenue out of these places that are special to us." So, coastal tourism, fisheries, and then the third working waterfront topic that I would say that brings me here is the fisheries heritage trail. That's a statewide Great Lakes fisheries heritage trail conversation, actually, a multi-state conversation, but just a really neat partnership between the fisheries world I live and work in and the history heritage communities. A lot of the maritime museums or folks that are interested in boats and boat building or

collecting maritime history archives. I think what we presented that day was really this idea of trying to better define a role or opportunity of fisheries heritage in the context of a broader maritime heritage landscape. One of the things I said over and over, but with say maritime heritage, and we think of shipwrecks and lighthouses. This partnership is really trying to say, "How do we better weave fisheries heritage into that conversation?" Not just fisheries history, but the cultures and traditions of fisheries today and then looking forward into the future. So, that was a long-winded answer, but fisheries, coastal tourism, and fisheries heritage.

TAW: So, as you said, you kind of straddle the worlds of fisheries and tourism and in a lot of ways those intersect. What do you find are some challenges in each of those arenas currently?

BS: One of the things I've really enjoyed about my Sea Grant role is cross-connecting people that normally wouldn't talk with each other. It might be communities crossing county boundaries, for example. So, we see communities that might be trying to do the same exact thing, but they're geographically separated by a couple county lines. How do we bring them together to help them work through problems that they have mutually in mind? They're all trying to deal with these same issues. Or maybe connecting the fisheries world with the tourism industry. So, a charter boat captain who feels like he's or she is out on an island trying to run a business. Well, they have a really specific role and value to the sustainable coastal tourism development community. So, people that are like, well, we're trying to develop tourism, and fisheries is a valued part of that. So, how do you connect the economic development or tourism development officials with the charter boat or the fishing industries who are also trying to run a business or make a profit out of those fisheries? They have mutual interests, but they don't always connect in ways that I think – and I see that as our Sea Grant role is help putting people together. We have a big youth development initiative. What's the role of youth in a coastal community development conversation? People would often say, "Youth are our future," but we have a place-based education initiative. It's part of a statewide partnership. But using a place-based education strategy, we're really asking the question of what can youth bring into a community conversation today? Can they help our museum develop an interpretive exhibit about our local fisheries heritage story? Can they help create interpretive science through their English language arts class that's going to promote sustainable coastal tourism? If they're raising salmon in a classroom through the Department of Natural Resources, can they use those salmon to help people better understand and value the Lake Huron fishery? So, putting people together in a room or a conversation that normally wouldn't intersect is something I think that's the challenge because that doesn't happen. But it's also a value in what I see our Sea Grant role being.

TAW: What about successes?

BS: So, partnerships I think would be a success. I think some of the most exciting initiatives or projects that I've been involved in reflect collaborative partnerships. I think people say it a lot. I know people say, "Partnerships are valuable." But I don't believe that people always effectively accomplish partnerships in the way that they intend. So, organizationally or individually, every organization has their own brand, their own logo, their own mission, their own need to raise money, their own need to support staff, their own need to show why they individually are relevant. So, sometimes it's hard, and this is also a challenge too. Sometimes it's hard to get

people to put that parochialism aside and say, "How do we better coordinate or connect or collaborate in a really truly authentically partnered way?" So, I think the successes are when that happens, and the initiatives that I would describe as the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Trail network and partnership is a good example of that. There's local, state, federal agencies. They reflect fisheries research science and management interests. They reflect history, heritage, museum library interests. They reflect funders. They reflect tourism interests. There's a lot of unique – well, not unique. There's a lot of different partners that are coming together in that initiative. So, that in turn becomes a really vibrant initiative that has a lot of momentum and is doing some really cool things. I mentioned the youth initiative. The initiative I was referencing is the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative. Using that place-based education strategy, one of the primary underpinnings is bringing schools together with community and in a way that mutually enhances school learning, but also brings the skills and talents of youth into a coastal community conversation. So, students, through their learning, are contributing to environmental stewardship projects that make a difference in their community. So, bringing those partners together, I think there's a lot of awesome opportunities that result. So, I mentioned northeast Michigan being rural and economically challenged. Sometimes the collaboration is as simple as aggregating enough people, enough communities, or enough schools together to generate a critical mass to go ask for funding or resources or whatever is needed to accomplish a really big project. So, an individual organization might be able to ask for \$500. Many organizations collaborating can ask for \$5,000 or \$500,000. So, you can generate more capacity when people are coordinating and collaborating.

TAW: I should note as well, in terms of successes, because I am sure Brandon will not bring this up, but I believe you were named the 2017 Informal Science Educator of the Year by the Michigan Science Teachers Association, correct?

BS: Yes.

TAW: So, kind of, on that personal note, for you, what is a favorite memory associated with the working waterfronts that you work with?

BS: In terms of the Science Education Award?

TAW: Yes. I guess, whatever, if there was something specific with that or in general.

BS: So, I'm going to focus on youth initiative, the Great Lake Stewardship Initiative. As that project was in its infancy, one of the things we felt like we needed was a proof of concept and to show how students can learn and how they can also meaningfully contribute to a Coastal Community Development Initiative. At that time, we were just coming off the Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment, which was a Sea Grant-funded research project in northeast Michigan. The heart of that question was, how do we foster sustainable coastal tourism development? How do we make money without squashing these resources we all value and enjoy in northeast Michigan? One of the really big outcomes of that, with all of the agencies and all local, state, federal, all the people involved in that conversation, one of the biggest findings was, you know what? We really just need some simple way-finding and interpretation. People need to know how to get to Negwegon State Park or Thompson's Harbor State Park. They need

to better understand why that place is special. Why is it undeveloped? It's because of all the threatened and endangered species and the really unique, rare habitats that are home to those rare species. So, there's a reason it's undeveloped, but you wouldn't know that if you walked in as a visitor. You'd just see it's a beach with a wetland. You wouldn't know that there's a dozen different threatened and endangered species in that beach you just walked on. So, it was a big finding but then all the adults, all the agencies, the DNR who manages, let's say, Negwegon State Park, all looked at each other and said, "Well, that's great, but we don't have time or money or people to do that." So, the memory is, we approached Alcona Community Schools. They had environmental agriscience class at the time, and they still do. They had a collection of teachers, an art teacher, an English language art teacher, and a science teacher. We just said, "Could your students develop – I think we started with brochures – develop some interpretive materials for Negwegon State Park that would accomplish way-finding and interpretation?" The students were like, "Well, we want to do signs. We want do big signs." At first, we discouraged the students because signs cost money, and they take time. What the students did is they set up a three-year project where they passed – they did that project. They developed signs. They did it in three phases. So, the third cohort of students actually finished the signs that the students three years earlier had started. There were all kinds of experts that were interviewed and brought in the conversation. The English language arts component was woven in, where the students had to write and edit and do the science writing piece of that. The art students developed illustrations for the signs. The science kids did all the science research and interpreted the habitats. Then at some point, the DNR who manages the property just said, "Well, heck, if the students are making these signs, we need to finish this." So, the money was found, and the signs were produced, and the students put the signs up. So, for me, it was a really powerful – it helped to spawn this great Lake Stewardship Initiative place-based education partnership. But for me, it was a really powerful statement that students, they can be an asset in a community when resources or people or time is limited. So, I use that story a lot because I think if you look at pictures of that project, the kids installing, you can see in their faces, they're just super proud of that. I'm rambling now. One of the funniest parts of that is one of the kids, early on, when they were debating whether they were going to do brochures or signs or websites, one of the students was like, "Well, somebody's just going to go cut those signs down." Because that happens a lot. There's a lot of vandalism in those undeveloped, remote parks. The teacher looked at the kid and said, "Joe Kid," it wasn't his real name, but "Joe Kid, your dad is probably the one that cuts those signs down." He's like, "Yes, you're probably right." So, the kids did these signs. Three years later, they installed them. Those signs still stand today. This is more than ten years ago. So, not only do the students contribute, but they take pride in their project, and the project has been impactful to the community. So, that was a long memory. Sorry.

TAW: No, it was good. I think some of the tangents a lot of times are where the jobs come from. So, how can the National Working Waterfront Network support you in your work going forward in these working waterfront communities?

BS: So, one of the values of this conference has just been cross-connecting with other states that are doing similar things, or other parts of the country. So, the Great Lakes have a lot in common with the ocean coast minus the sharks and the salt. But today, with our fisheries heritage conversation, it was really cool to have people working on the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Trail in the same room with the folks – Natalie Springuel is working on the main Downeast

Fisheries Heritage Trail. It's really cool to see the parallels in the conversations that are being held in both states. The opportunities, the challenge is the directions some of those initiatives are taking to serve the various audiences that benefit from these conversations. I mean, it really just feels like comparing notes and trading ideas. I can't wait to sit on a bus with Natalie and say, "What about this, or how did you do that?" I'm hoping she maybe has some of those questions for us.

TAW: Awesome. I think that was all the questions I had. Anything else you wanted to add?

BS: No.

TAW: Awesome.

BS: No. So, I have to add something because – the only thing I think I would add is just from a working waterfront standpoint is I think one of the fun things with Sea Grant, and I would say this anytime I introduce what Sea Grant does, is I would say that we promote Great Lakes or ocean science with the purpose of thinking about how do we use science to take care of these invaluable coastal resources because they're valuable to us. So, all of the benefits of having access to water or access to fishing or coastal trails to walk, or places where you can launch your boat or places where water-dependent industries can locate and thrive. I think part of the opportunity of using science to protect those is because we know how valuable they are. So, I just think that's one of the important, obviously, underpinnings of this conference are people just saying, "How do we—" I grew up in agriculture, and this is a lot like the farmland preservation conversation is we know food is important. So, if we want to grow food, we have to protect farmland. So, in this case, we know our Great Lakes and our ocean coastlines are very important and invaluable assets. So, how do we think about taking care of them so we can continue to benefit from them looking forward?

TAW: Awesome.

BS: Cool.

TAW: Thank you so much.

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