

Corina Gribble: My name is Carna Gribble. I am with College of the Atlantic. I am here with Kaitlyn Clark, also from College of the Atlantic. We are here today at the National Working Waterfront Symposium in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Today is May 15, 2018 at 5:09 p.m. If you could start by stating your name and how to spell it.

Meaghan Gass: My name is Meaghan Gass, M-E-A-G-H-A-N, Gass, G-A-S-S.

CG: What is your occupation and town? Where do you live right now?

MG: I live in Bay City, Michigan. I am an extension educator serving with Michigan Sea Grant. I serve the region of Saginaw Bay, Michigan. I focus on the coastal counties that are adjacent to the Bay. So, if you look at Saginaw Bay, I start at Arenac County, and then I serve all the way to Sanilac County. With that position, I am very new. I started it in February.

CG: Where were you before that?

MG: Prior to moving to the Saginaw Bay region, I lived for three years in Alpena, Michigan, which was my first experience living on a great lake. Prior to that, I was in the Mississippi River Basin in southern Illinois for the majority of my life.

CG: What makes the working waterfront important to you, important to the communities you serve?

MG: The working waterfront to me, it's a critical part of our place. It's connected where I live to the Great Lakes, which is the largest freshwater system in the whole world. So, there's a natural value to that resource. Then beyond that, there are a lot of ways that we can support our societies through the resource, but we also want to make sure that our uses of the resource are in connection with making sure that we can continue to have this resource be valued and used by future generations.

CG: What do you do with the Michigan Sea Grant, education, and university?

MG: With MSU Extension, I work with different communities to help connect them to the Great Lakes to develop resilience. So, one of my projects connects to issues of extreme storms and flooding and how can our communities be better prepared. Beyond that, I am very passionate about stakeholder engagement, in particular working with youth. I think having a better understanding of how we use resources and how those uses might have an impact on it and what are ways that we can be better stewards, are really critical. I'm very passionate about place-based stewardship education, so, finding ways to have youth service partners today, to be empowered to make changes in their community, but also increase understanding. Having youth serve as agents within our community can help broaden messages and reach audiences that we would not be able to reach alone.

CG: What do you feel is unique about the freshwater working waterfronts that you are working with here in the Great Lakes, Michigan area?

MG: Unique compared to other working waterfronts?

CG: Yes. There is a lot more coastline than freshwater coastline, [laughs] looks like. So, what is unique here? Or what do you think is something that takes precedent in the Great Lakes, but might not in an ocean setting?

MG: I guess something that is important to recognize with the Great Lakes, it's a big source of our drinking water. So, our uses of it need to be cognizant of the fact that we'd want to keep this resource and have it be used for us, but then also the amount of biodiversity it supports. There's a lot of life that depends on this, and then we depend on that life, thinking about our fisheries. How do we use that both commercially, but then also recreationally? How does that increase access to the outdoors? All of our bodies of water support life. That's something that's universal. But the fact that this is a large source of drinking water for a huge part of the population is important to think about. Then also, at the same time, within, for instance, the State of Michigan, you have contrast between the industry and manufacturing, which is very and still is an important part of our economy, but it's changing. So, how do you adjust to those changes at the same time of having introductions to your economy, like tourism and recreation, and having people that want to have more increased access? How do you combine all those together? It's not necessarily something that's unique just to the Great Lakes, but it's something that's important to the Great Lakes.

CG: What got you interested in helping with this educational component of the working waterfronts? What brought you to do this work?

MG: I think in terms of education, it's hard for people to make decisions. It's hard for people to act in their community if they don't have some type of baseline of knowledge. We were just in a session talking about the hidden identities of a working waterfront. It's something like, as I'm new to a community, I don't know all of the uses of the working waterfront in the Saginaw Bay region. I'm learning this as I work with different stakeholders and gain from their research. But I think the process I'm going through is something that it's important that we all kind of go through this and have an understanding of our local place. How do we use our different resources around us in order to be better stewards and make sure that we can continue to have this resource to support life, including our own economic activities, but then also having it be a tool to be useful in the future? I think really having an understanding is key. I feel there are a number of issues where people don't fully understand the uses. We discuss that a lot in the last session I attended, where you have industries that are combating against one another or not necessarily working together, but they're all using the same water economy. So, how do you break down those barriers between different industries, have people talking to one another more to support more sustainable development, and then at the same time, tying into how our resources function as systems? So, I think that's something we just don't have as much of an understanding of as a society as a whole, and something I'm in the process of learning more about that every single day. I think it's an ongoing process that you never stop learning. How can we as stewards and just supporters of this working waterfront economy help to bolster and increase understanding of that?

CG: What has been your personal experience with working waterfront here, where you lived

before? Have you had any experience? If so, what?

MG: Growing up in the Mississippi River Basin, I remember seeing barges just always going down the river. It was fun and relaxing to go hang out by the river and to watch it. I remember hearing different discussions of people, how they wanted green spaces along the river and trying to shift away from this industry. But how does that industry connect to our place and the reason why we're here in this area in the first place? Moving to Michigan, it changed from seeing those barges to seeing more of the freighters moving through the Great Lakes. I guess thinking about shipping, the most telling experience I've had personally, when I was living in Alpena, I was part of a rowing team. We were out rowing near Alpena in Thunder Bay. We saw the freighter *Alpena*, or the *City of Alpena*, I think was the name of it. That night, I went up with a friend. We were going to a dark sky tour up by the Mackinac Bridge. We saw that same freighter up. So, seeing that move through the place and just how that ties into so many other economies throughout the Great Lakes and how these systems are connected, it was interesting for me to be able to see that. See, I moved from two different places, but that freighter was still – it was in the same place as me. So, just thinking about that and how places move or how freighters move, but then how they connect to all these different communities that are all part of this one system.

CG: You have touched on some of the challenges that you are currently educating about and working towards. Have there been any successes that you have seen?

MG: Yes, there definitely have been successes. I'm trying to figure – I'm trying to determine which one would be the most telling. With my past position serving as the education coordinator for the Northeast Michigan Great Lake Stewardship Initiative, we worked to connect schools, including students and teachers, to different community partners for them to explore Great Lakes issues, and then also serve as leaders in their community by completing different stewardship efforts. With those connections and those projects, it was very compelling for me to hear students just be so excited to meet people that are having careers connected to the Great Lakes in their community and knowing that those jobs exist. I think making those connections with youth are really important, to have them have an understanding of what are potential jobs that they could have in the future within their own community and how they could still have a connection to the Great Lakes. So, I think seeing that firsthand and just how excited youth were from the opportunity of having this career as an option where they live locally.

CG: What kind of stakeholders – you mentioned that you have been working with different stakeholders of the working waterfront. Can you elaborate on the particular types of stakeholders you have come across?

MG: With my position thus far, I have connected with – I'm still doing a lot of the network-building with my current position. So, I can't fully answer this question. But I would say that within the context of the working waterfront, a lot of the relationships that I've developed thus far have been really more of the community partners that are connected to conservation and resource management. With that, trying to think about how our uses of land impact the working waterfront. So, it's less tied to a specific industry. I would say I have had the opportunity to join a number of fisheries workshops. The target audience was anyone from the commercial fishing industry to sport fishing or anyone that's just interested in the overall Lake Huron fishery, where

they had different resource professionals sharing information with attendees about the status of the fishery. It's an important process to increase understanding. But at the same time, most of those stakeholders were not from the commercial fishing industry. But they did highlight the commercial fishing industry status in terms of licenses in the area and how that could connect back. I do believe, in past years, there are attendees that come from – and different workshops around the state – there are attendees that come from the more of the working waterfront aspect. But as far as I know, with the workshop that I was attending, it seemed like there were a lot more in terms of the sport fishing, which I guess would tie into potentially tourism – that would tie into tourism and recreation. But I don't think that's a number that is easily calculated in terms of a contributor to our economy. It's part of it, but it's not something that – I'm not a 100 percent sure, but are those numbers counted in the working waterfront economy.

CG: Are you asking?

MG: You can answer if you know. It's just more of I'm not sure if that that would be included.

CG: There are lots of stakeholders in the working waterfront. Just wanted to hear which ones you have come across and worked with. I know you have only been where you are currently for a short time, you said since this past February 2018. Since that time, in the short amount of time you have been able to see, what have been the top issues or emerging issues that you have seen with the waterfront?

MG: Water quality is a really big issue in the Saginaw Bay region. It's an area of concern. There are a number of benefit-use impairments that impact the area. So, I think addressing those issues is really key. It's been an ongoing process for many years before I joined the team, and it'll continue to be. So, I think having a greater understanding of how we can help address these issues and think about how that status is impacting our region as a whole, but what are some ways that we can help to address them? I think that's one of the biggest issues facing the Saginaw Bay region is tying back to the fact that it's an area of concern. Another big part of Saginaw Bay, I touched on the fishery. A project I will be helping support is a restoration of two reefs in the Bay to help better support our fishery in the future. Then they're also working – there've been a shift within the Lake Huron fishery, so, working to restore and manage the fishery better. I've been able to be part of conversations where Michigan DNR specifically has shared information about their plans for the future with the fishery. So, I think that's another. It connects back to the area of concern because you have to kind of have to address both issues at the same time. It's not like you do one approach. But I think those are big parts of our waterfront economy. Then also, another big issue in the Saginaw Bay region is invasive species. Phragmites is very present, and it limits access. So, that connects back to tourism and recreation, and how you can access the Bay, but then also try and increase understanding of how these invasive species spread. What can we do to stop them as much as we can? With phragmites, it seems like it's a losing battle there just because the stands of phragmites, they've just really taken over the bay. But there are some emerging invasive species. So, what are some ways that we can address those now to help limit the impacts on our biodiversity in the Saginaw Bay region?

CG: You said, was it DNR?

MG: Michigan Department of Natural Resources. They manage the fisheries all across our waters in Michigan. Through their fishing licenses, they do a lot of managing of the fishery. One of the strategies they're taking now is to – it's probably too much information – but they're starting to release cisco. From what I've seen thus far with different stakeholder meetings, it's been an issue where people don't understand why. But then when they explain that with the drop in alewife, which is an invasive species in the Great Lakes, that really shifted the fishery. But with their decline, that also led to the decline of other kinds of sport fishing like salmon in the Great Lakes, which were introduced to control the alewives. But now they're trying to figure out if cisco could potentially be a source for helping to support the salmon and other kinds of sport fishing, like yellow perch, which is very important in the Saginaw Bay Fishery especially. It's interesting to see how, through them sharing that information at those workshops, how it changed people's responses to that. Understanding the why they're doing that I think is a really important part of any type of management strategy.

CG: Have you done work with the National Working Waterfront Network before, or is this your first time?

MG: This is my first time at any type of national working waterfronts and waterways symposium, but then also working with the network. I know that within our team of Michigan Sea Grant, there are definitely partners or other extension educators that are highly involved. So, I know this is a priority of our overall team, but it's not something that I have previously partnered with in my past role. I'm really excited and happy to have been able to learn. I'm learning a lot this [laughter] week. So, I have a lot of research and reading to do whenever I get back to my area in the Saginaw Bay region.

CG: Do you feel there are any tools or information that the network could provide you or your organization with, to help better the working waterfront challenges?

MG: I really enjoyed the session I just attended about hidden identities. I think that will be a useful tool, moving forward. I enjoyed the facilitative dialogue that was at that session. I think having a guide on how to implement that in your local community would be helpful. Because I think trying to figure out ways to break down the barriers between different industries and having people talk together increases understanding of our local place and our assets, but then it also makes people have a better understanding of, "Well, why is it this way? Why are we prioritizing these businesses?" Helping to increase an understanding of the why. So, I have the questions that were outlined, but I think having a guide on how to implement something similar to that last session on hidden identities in the working waterfronts would be really helpful for different – from working with Sea Grant, but also other agencies. It seemed like, as we had the discussions within our own groups, it led to a lot of really great conversation and made people think about the questions in different ways than when you first approached it. You also were at the session. So, you can highlight that as well. [laughter]

CG: Did you have any questions? Sorry. Did you have anything else you would like to add?

MG: No, I think that covers it all. Yes. Thank you.

CG: Thank you.

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