



# BEYOND the BOW

A Fisheries Needs Assessment of Harpswell 2017



**Harpswell's** connection to the coast defines and shapes its past, its present, and its future. You see it in the weathered faces of those who harvest its marine resources, on the street signs with the names of fishing families, and in the development and growth spurred by those who idealize Maine coastal life. We exist at a juncture where the decisions today will impact what type of relationship Harpswell will continue to have with its coast and we developed the Fisheries Needs Assessment to help shape the conversation around these decisions.

Maine's fishing industry is facing new challenges as increased regulations, coastal development, climate change, and shifting marine resources are making it even more difficult to maintain or grow a marine business. Through this effort, funded by the Holbrook Community Foundation and undertaken by the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, we hope to get to the core of what Harpswell needs to ensure community-based fishermen are successful.

To that end, the Fishermen's Association wanted to go directly to the fishermen, those who work with them, and those that surround them in the community, to truly understand their needs as they define them. This needs assessment aims to ensure the fishing community's perceived needs are heard loud and clear and to start a dialogue is between the town, the community, and the fishermen about how to preserve this iconic way of life.

Hundreds of hours of interviews and research were done to complete this needs assessment, but it is only a drop in the ocean compared to what should be done to build relationships, knowledge, and understanding within the community. Everyone who was involved in this process is dedicated to ensuring that fishing is a part of the economic and cultural fabric of Harpswell, now we must take the time to chart a course to the future we are all striving to achieve.

We hope you find this overview, and the full report, as interesting and informative as we did.

Ben Martens



Executive Director, MCFA

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The Fishermen's Association began the Harpswell Needs Assessment in early 2017 as an in-depth and encompassing look at the needs, gaps, and strengths of the diverse fishing community within Harpswell. Over the course of a year, information was gathered through one-on-one and group interviews, public town meetings, and two public community forums. Hours of interviews and data were processed to identify common recurring needs or gaps fishing community members felt existed in the Town of Harpswell and within the greater fishing industry. Interviewees included fishermen, harvesters, wharf owners, buyers, dealers, land owners, town support staff, fishing families, town government, Maine DMR, and industry-based nonprofit personnel.

*To learn more and view the complete 2017 Harpswell Needs Assessment final report, visit:*

**MaineCoastFishermen.org/BeyondTheBow**

## BEYOND the BOW

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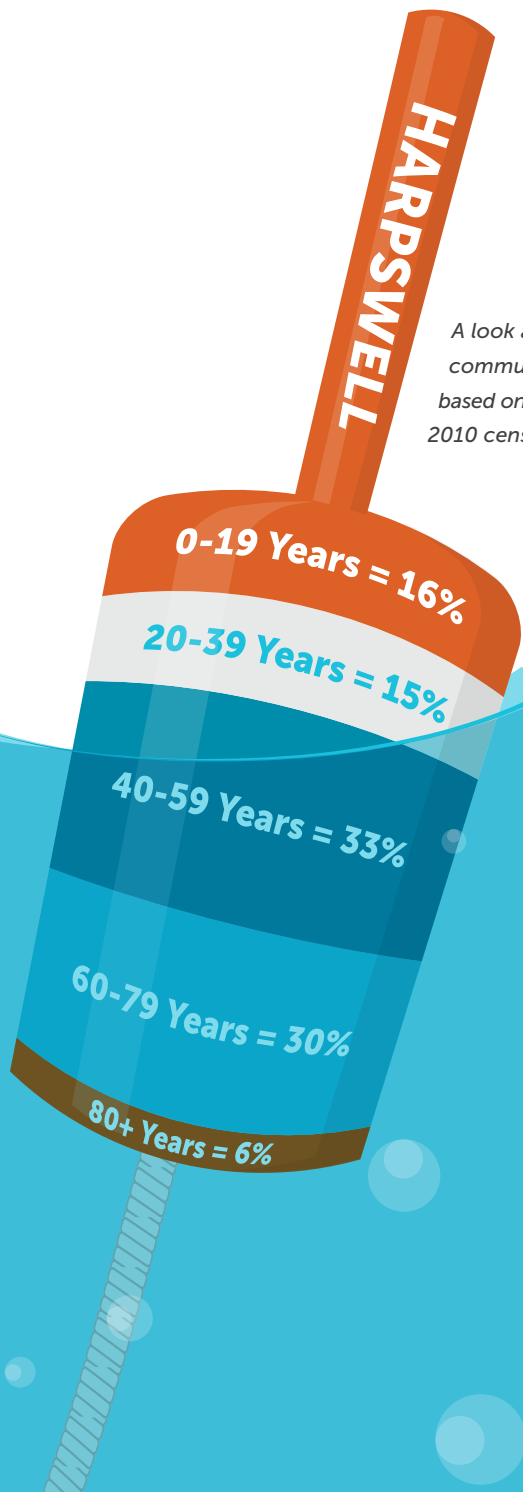
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Information on the diversity, effort, and economic impact of the Harpswell Fishing Community based on information provided by the Maine Department of Marine Resources and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



# INSIDE HARPSWELL

The community of Harpswell is home to men and women in over a dozen fisheries as well as bait, boatbuilding, wholesale and retail businesses. As both the population and state of the fisheries change, Harpswell's fishermen and fishing industry remain resilient. The following demographics display this quality and provide a foundation for the following needs assessment.



A look at the Harpswell community as a whole based on the most recent 2010 census data.

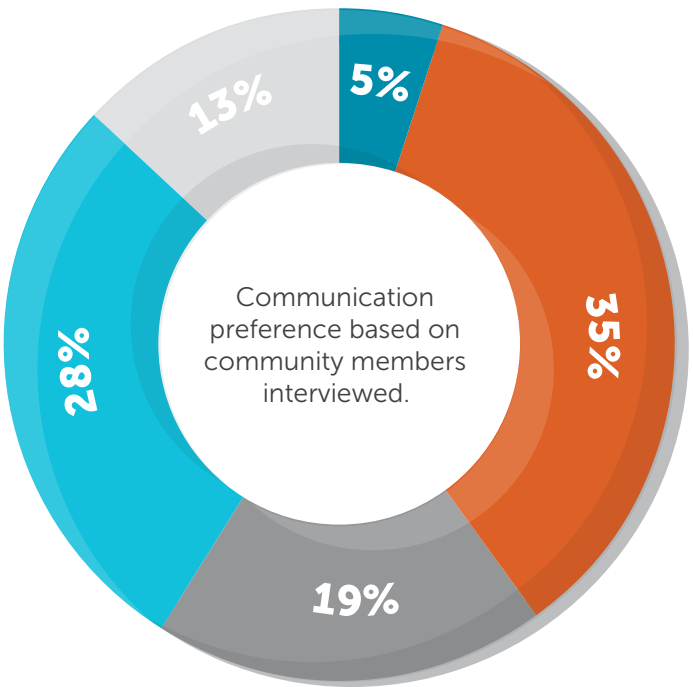
## Harpswell Census Comparison

Ranking 67<sup>th</sup> in population size of 437 towns and cities in Maine, a majority of the 4,070 residents of Harpswell are well into adulthood. This difference is clear when comparing the median age of 53 for Harpswell residents to that of Maine residents with the median age of 44. Making Harpswell almost a decade older.

[MaineCoastFishermen.org/BeyondTheBow](http://MaineCoastFishermen.org/BeyondTheBow)

## How Do You Find Information?

Community Board Postings **28%**  
Websites/social media **13%**  
Newspaper/radio **5%**  
Paper Mailings **35%**  
Email **19%**



## 2015 Landings In Pounds

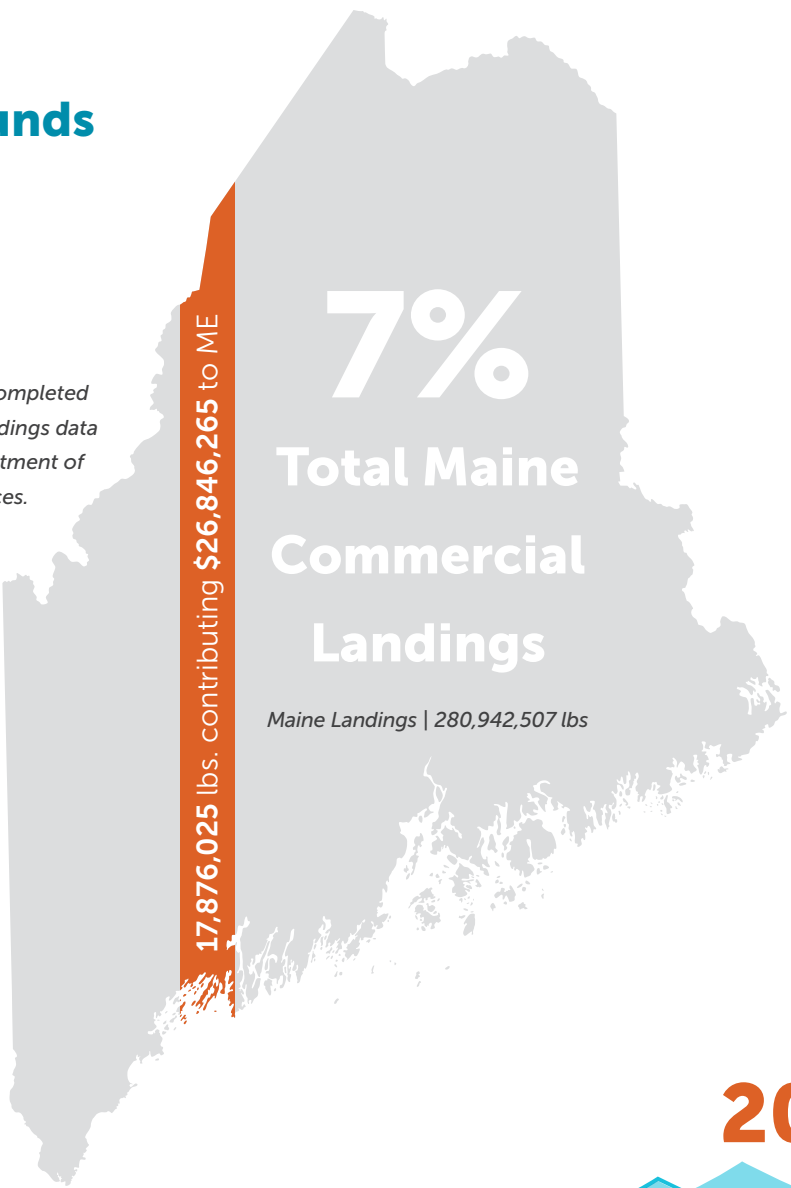
HARPSWELL v. MAINE

Based on the completed 2015 Maine landings data from the Department of Marine Resources.



## Commercial Fishing Licenses

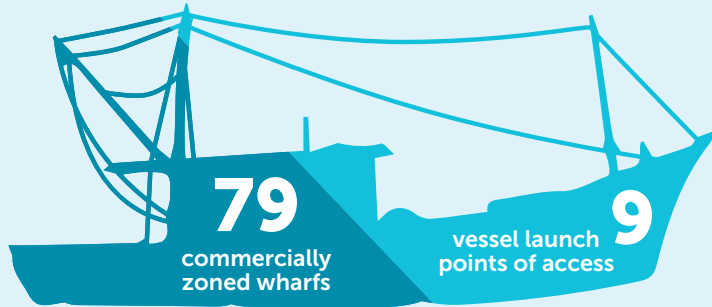
Since the completion of the 1999 Harpswell Fishing Industry Profile, the total number of commercial fishing licenses among the residents of Harpswell has declined by 301, a reduction of almost 40%. Of the 462 commercial licenses in Harpswell, 75 are municipal shellfish, 270 are state lobster, 5 are federal scallop, and 52 are federal groundfish.



# COMMUNITY VIEWS

## Access: On & Off the Water

Like many coastal communities in Maine, Harpswell has seen an increase in migration to the coast leading to a loss in working waterfront. This can lead to fewer places to launch a boat, store gear, live, work or grow a business. Members of the fishing community are looking for protection from future loss and increased access for today. Identified solutions include more local parking for fishing businesses, dedicated commercial moorings, town-owned storage close to the shore and a focus on the growth and development of new fishing businesses.



52% of interviews sited public commercial points of access as a top barrier to sustaining a fishing business

Constrained parking also ranked high as a barrier with 32% stressing the need for an increase with all suggesting more commercial parking to directly combat this need.

Interview participants from fishing sectors noted a historical decrease in available access. This contrasted with town personnel who felt public access has increased in Harpswell in recent years.

“We had a landowner appreciation day once where we invited all the landowners that gave us access to a clambake. It was our way of saying thank you to them and keep their connection to the flats. I don’t know why we don’t do it anymore, but we should.”  
-David Wilson, Shellfish Harvester Harpswell Neck

## Communication

A disconnect in communication between the fishing community and the community-at-large is apparent. Both the fishing community and town acknowledge the lack of a quick-fix for this issue. Without a remedy miscommunication can and will cause future problems and missed opportunities for collaboration and change. Successful community relations are founded in open, transparent communications with all sides being heard.

72% felt the burden of communication is split between the fishing community and the larger community.

51% cited a need for the town to designate a town employee as a liaison for the fishing community to communicate with.

Only 8% specified the need for a media tool for improved communications (i.e.: social media, newsletter, or webpage).

## Community Fishery Knowledge

Visitors and neighbors impact the fishing community in many unseen ways. The feedback is rather simple: the members of the fishing community want neighbors and visitors to seek an understanding of the fishing industry and the impacts it has their community. Many interviews provided feedback that pertained to the “sights, sounds, and smells” of an active fishing port as well as the hazards of visiting active wharfs in the summer season. For as long as Harpswell is a fishing community, these unique traits of the fishing industry will remain.

83% felt the greater community lacked a working knowledge of the needs and demands of the fishing industry

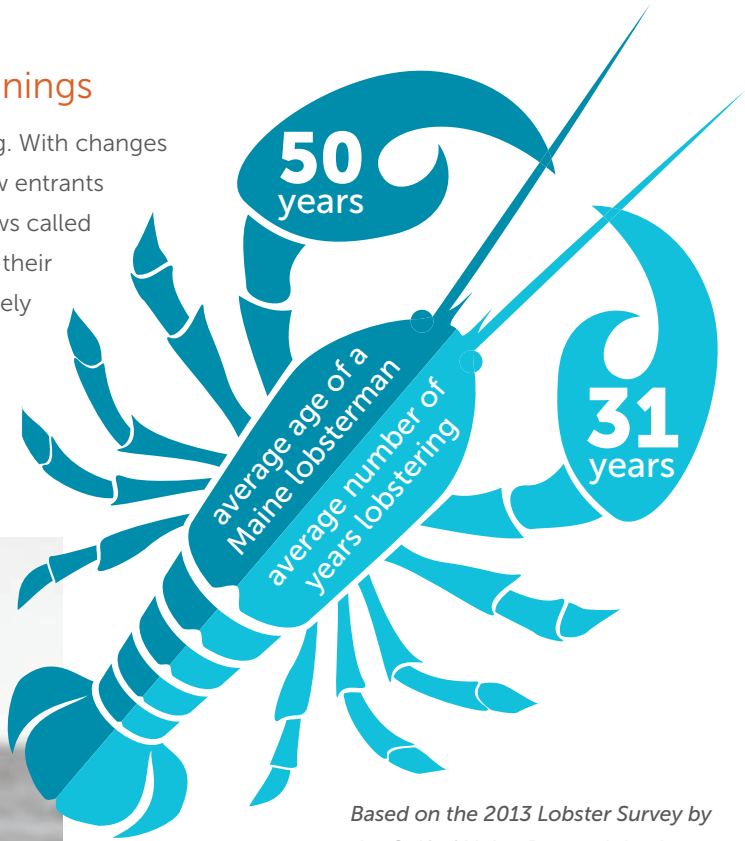
34% called for more members of the fishing community to participate in town government as a way to increase awareness and knowledge.

27% recommended more tools and pamphlets for newcomers and visitors to understand the nature of living in a fishing community.

“People need to know when they’re looking to live here that lobster boats start up at 4 AM, harvesters are out late at night, and traps are in the yard drying in the offseason. There are sights, sounds, and smells - it’s all part of the scenery.”  
-Amy Watson Saxton, Harpswell Neck/Cundy’s Harbor

## Lifelong Workforce Learning & Trainings

The fishing fleet in Harpswell, similar to the state of Maine, is aging. With changes in management structures, income stability, and the ability for new entrants to gain a foothold in the industry, feedback from industry interviews called for accessible resources for members of the current fleet to grow their businesses unilaterally across the industry. Many rely mostly or solely on marine resources for their gross income and see potential in expanding their businesses to keep up with increasing costs.



“Never. My body will be the only thing to tell me to stop fishing. As long as it lets me, I’ll be fishing.”

– Herman Coombs

*Orr’s Island fishermen when asked when he thinks he’ll retire from fishing*

The top challenge industry participants identified for the current fleet was new technology with **76%** of industry participants claiming they had technology on their vessel that remains unused.

**35%** showed an interest in acquiring other fishing licenses or investing in aquaculture, but many concluded that they had inadequate knowledge or resources to make the transition.

When reflecting on their own business, **28%** felt there was room to grow their business across the industry and were interested in trainings or tools to increase their revenue.

**84%** supported business and workforce trainings for industry members.

## Next Generation

Many rely on the school district and industry-based organizations to play an active role in the vocational education of the fleet’s next generation. Those interviewed encouraged more robust partnerships with local schools and programs built on the successes of similar industry educational tools.



“It can be hard to get workers in here. If they want to smell like bait, they’ll hop on a lobster boat and can make more money. If I can get people to start in a labor position and learn the business then they have opportunities to move into management and do more, earn more, and get benefits. We [Jennie & her management team] can’t run this place forever.

- Jennie Bichrest, Purse Line Bait

## Business Development & Investment

A major concern for many interviewed was the rising costs of maintaining a career in the fishing industry. They, by no means, blamed Harpswell, but do see this as a constant concern for a vast majority within the industry. From the rising costs of permits and overhead to the continued strains of bait and fuel, feedback from fishermen and the businesses that support them are looking for new and innovative ways to make ends meet. The dependence the fishing community has on an often uncertain industry could greatly change the face of the community of Harpswell if the fishing industry cannot keep up.

A significant majority of interviews highlighted substantial industry costs as cause for declined effort in Maine fisheries.

The top two costs participants noted as industry obstacles were: fuel and bait. Groundfish fishermen specifically noted the high cost of permits and allocation as limitations for access and expanded effort; whereas, lobstermen pinpointed a lengthy waitlist for licenses as a barrier.

**52%** felt the only solution to manage overhead costs was an increase in product price.

**23%** saw a need for fisheries education to be increased or introduced at all levels, while **42%** felt it only necessary at the high school and post-school levels.

**65%** felt a gap lay within business and technology education as opposed to access to fishing techniques and on-boat experience.

Feedback was evenly split between wanting the school system to take a role in developing curriculum or local industry-based organizations leading the way for future generations.

Harpswell’s number one area of focus in the 2013 Economic Development Plan was “fishing, aquaculture, and marine related businesses” demonstrating a town initiative to keep the industry in focus into the future.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

To stimulate big-picture thinking and visionary conversation, we have included a section dedicated to the community-based ideas and solutions garnered from interviews. The foundation of these ideas originates from the central themes as well as direct input from interviews. The overall feasibility and details of these ideas have not been fully researched. It is important to note the data provided should act as only one source of information.

### Town Owned Storage

For some, a stress comes from a lack of storage and location to continue their off-water work. A large unit with spaces that could be leased to those in the fishing industry for trap storage, winter-season workshop needs, and protection for unused gear.

### Updated Visitor Information

Currently, there are brochures outlining what it's like to live in a fishing community. This is a unique, forward thinking piece of media that could be updated and redistributed in high-traffic areas as the community sees an increase in tourism and real estate turnover.

### Youth Engagement

A reinvigorated partnership between the Harpswell Coastal Academy and the fishing community and businesses could result in the development of an apprenticeship program for those interested in the industry but lacking a familial connection.

### Commercial Moorings

It is uncertain how many of the 2,187 resident and non-resident tax payer moorings are currently commercial. A simple update to the leasing agreement would better track the number of commercial use moorings in Harpswell. As a town, a next step forward would be a declaration to ensure a certain percentage of moorings must be allotted to the commercial applicants in commercially-zoned areas.

### Economic Impact Report

The value of the fishing industry in Harpswell can be estimated based on the number of active vessels and the health of the industry; however, this fails to fully grasp the intricate impact Harpswell's fishing community has, not only on Harpswell, but on the surrounding communities and the State of Maine's economy. Many coastal fishing communities throughout the country rely on economic impact reports to detail the vitality and far-reaching impact fishing and it's related business enterprises have on a community.



### Fisheries Liaison

A dedicated position within the town to intercept fisheries information, policy, and needs. This person would attend fisheries meetings, support the town's Marine Resources committee, and field questions and concerns brought forth from the fishing community and the residents of Harpswell. Town officials could use this person to update selectmen and town committees on the state of Harpswell's fisheries. This position could be new or an update to an already existing position and could be employed by the town or the position could be an extension of a local industry-based organization.



# WHAT MCFA IS DOING

Below are some ways the Fishermen's Association is working to meet the needs of its members and the coastal communities they reside in. Some are ongoing projects while others are in development.

## Industry Access

### PERMIT BANKING

Recent funding was received to develop the Next Generation of Permit Banking and Fishery Trusts. Permit banks are designed to anchor fishing access within communities and make fishing opportunities accessible to local fishermen. Access to a permit bank allows many to remain fishing and provides an opportunity for new entrants into Maine's groundfish industry. Local Maine organizations have invested over \$3 million in permits to keep Maine's community-based fishermen active into the future.



## Next Generation

### YOUNG FISHERMEN'S LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The Fishermen's Association is in the process of developing a Young Fishermen's Leadership Program that will work to identify individuals entering the industry from throughout the coast who are emerging leaders within their communities. We will target a range of individuals from different towns, fisheries, backgrounds, ages, and interests. Staff will hold regular meetings with our young fishing leaders' cohort which will focus on education, experience sharing, and developing projects to benefit Maine's fishing communities.

## Community

### INFORMATIVE FISHERIES & SEAFOOD EVENTS

Yearly seafood events and community fisheries panel discussions have highlighted the growth and importance of the Maine's fishing industry. Over 400 Mainers joined MCFA and fishermen to talk, learn, and celebrate Maine's fishing culture. Looking ahead, the Fishermen's Association is working with community partners to develop accessible channels for consumers to grow their

knowledge and be better informed when purchasing, preparing, and enjoying locally sourced seafood.

## Communication

### COMMUNITY FISHERIES UPDATES

As an industry-based organization that works deeply within federal and state fisheries policy, the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association is recognizing their responsibility to keep, not only its members but also Maine's coastal communities apprised to changes in fisheries policy and regulations. When news is happening, or support is needed, the staff will work to maintain open lines of communication with fishing communities and provide them with opportunities to engage in the decision-making process.





Fishermen's Association is an industry-based nonprofit that identifies and fosters ways to restore the fisheries of the Gulf of Maine and sustain Maine's fishing communities for future generations.



**Holbrook**  
Community Foundation

The mission of the Foundation is to provide the long-term protection of the coastal heritage of Harpswell by preserving Holbrook's working waterfront, supporting commercial fishing in Harpswell, and providing opportunities for education about our marine environment for the benefit of the local community.

Funded in part by the Holbrook Community Foundation

**MaineCoastFishermen.org/BeyondTheBow**

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