

Young Professional Spotlight

Young Professional members of AIFRB represent the next generation of leaders in fisheries science and management. Through *Briefs* and our social media platforms we will be highlighting our Young Professionals as a way to introduce them to the full membership and create opportunities for collaborations. AIFRB's Young Professional Representative, Connor Capizzano (connor.capizzano001@umb.edu), will be showcasing a new Young Professional each month through a series of biographical interviews. This month's Young Professional Spotlight features **Dr. Robert Boenish, New England District and Postdoctoral Fellow at the Environmental Defense Fund.**

Dr. Robert Boenish – New England District



What is your current position, with what company/organization, and what do you do?

In June, 2018, I began as a High Meadows Postdoctoral Fellow at the Environmental Defense Fund, co-appointed at the Atkinson Center for Sustainability Solutions at Cornell University. My projects are looking at trends and solutions in International fisheries, stock assessment, and survey design, with a particular focus on Chinese fisheries.

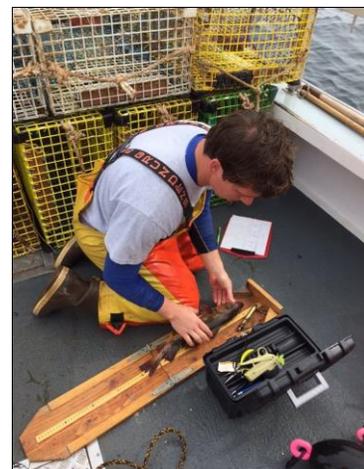
Where did you go to school, and what helped pave your way to your current position?

I completed a B.S in Biology–Marine Emphasis with a minor in Mathematics at Western Washington University, and in 2018, I received a Ph.D. in Marine Biology at the University of Maine, Orono. For me, the people I've been around, including fishermen, friends, advisors, and mentors have been the real all-stars who have paved the way for me to get to where I am.

What is the focus of your research and/or work?

My not-so-distant in the past work at the University of Maine was focused on developing models to understand how American lobster fishery dynamics (including bycatch of Atlantic cod) change through space and time. Ultimately the work led to developing estimates of Atlantic cod discards and simulating incorporation of those estimates into stock assessment scenarios.

My current work is focused on studying the commercial fishing and ecological dynamics of China. Over the last few years, China has steered policy towards becoming an 'ecological civilization', and considering they are by far the biggest global player in wild capture fisheries and aquaculture, there are unprecedented opportunities for breaking new ground in terms of conservation, monitoring, and assessment. I've been traveling back and forth to different Chinese provinces to collaborate with government scientists and academics on projects including designing fishery-independent surveys, developing stock assessments, and studying larval fish dynamics. In addition to all the fun work and meeting awesome folks, it has been especially exciting to learn about a bunch of completely new species!



How does your research apply to fishery management—local, state or federal?

My Ph.D. work applied directly to the estimation of Atlantic cod bycatch, which may be used to improve future stock assessments. The work involved working with local fishermen, and alongside state and federal scientists. For me, getting to see different perspectives has been particularly valuable.

My current work in China involves partnerships with Chinese scientists and officials with a common goal improving the state and understanding of fisheries science for China's domestic fleets. Most recently I've been working on data-limited approaches to characterize multispecies fisheries. Unlike in the U.S, there are no discards in China; everything is used. You end up with a lot of small fish that have not traditionally been recorded. Fortunately, people are now working hard to sample the catches, but the scale is so large that interpretation of those data is tricky. Further, the policy world of China is very different from what I've worked with in the U.S or Europe, so it is a constant learning process.

What got you started studying fisheries?

Well, I grew up on Whidbey Island in Washington State and to the chagrin of my parents, I'd go fishing at the local ferry pier everyday as a kid. Soon I had a small boat, and I never looked back. Next, I spent nine summers as a commercial salmon fishermen in Bristol Bay, Alaska to help pay for college. It was there that I put together two of my favorite skills: fishing and math. I found I was good at interpreting stock assessment and management reports to fishermen. From about the age of 17, captains, crew, and employees at the processor would base decisions on my interpretations of the daily run summary reports. Somehow, a few years later I ended up on an ICES Atlantic Salmon working group, and soon after, I was studying cod lobster in Maine and reef fish in the Caribbean. Studying fisheries science lets me work on problems that affect the oceans and coastal communities around the world and for me, it is the best job.



What do you enjoy most about being a fishery scientist?

More than anything I love the ocean, and being a fishery scientist gives me a unique opportunity to help sustain the ocean as well as the livelihoods of people who depend on it. As a scientist I find myself always asking questions, and when your job involves studying the organisms that reside in 71% planet's surface area, there are copious opportunities to study the natural world and discover new things!

What drew you to AIFRB, and what does AIFRB do for you?

I first heard about AIFRB while wondering around the AFS conference in Portland, OR in 2015. Since, I've been drawn to the AIFRB-sponsored sessions at AFS meetings, educational workshops, professional networking, and the conversation/ comradery involved. All of the above makes AIFRB an amazing organization, and one I'm proud to be a part of.

Please contact Robert (rboenish@edf.org) to continue the conversation!