

Real people who help shape the process: Peg Parker retiring as exec director of CFRF

NORTH KINGSTON, RI – After seven years at the helm, Margaret “Peg” Petruny-Parker is retiring as executive director of the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF), a fishing industry-run, non-profit organization that has led fisheries research in Southern New England for the past eleven years.

“There’s things I’ve been putting off,” said Parker. “This is a good breaking point for me and for the foundation. There are new projects coming in and new initiatives. Change can be a positive thing.”

The foundation was established in 2004 by a group of concerned Rhode Island fishermen who believed that the industry needed to contribute to the science of fishery management in a more direct and meaningful way.

Since then, foundation research projects have informed stock assessments, reduced bycatch and discards, uncovered new natural history information about key commercial species, and pioneered new ways to keep fisheries sustainable.

Parker was a marine policy consultant for the Rhode Island House of Representatives and a fisheries consultant for the Coastal Institute and



Joyce Rowley photo

Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Program at the University of Rhode Island before coming to the foundation.

As its first executive director, Parker oversaw a series of federal grant awards totaling over \$6 million that was used to fund 30 projects, including 22 under its Southern New England Cooperative Research Initiative (SNECRI).

Parker said that while putting together report summaries for NOAA grants and SNECRI projects, she reflected on the many fishermen, students, scientists, and businesses that played a role in developing the projects.

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effect on a lot of people,” Parker said.

“The thing that impressed me most was her approach,” said David Spencer, president of the foundation’s board of directors and owner/operator of an 85’ lobster boat homeported in Newport, RI.

“Taking concerns from industry and bringing in scientists, regulators, and biologists to develop research projects, to me, that was impressive. It wasn’t just an idea that a researcher had for a project; the projects were real concerns of the fishermen. It spoke to our mission as an organization.”

Parker ran the foundation with very little staff, keeping overhead

costs down, Spencer said. “There is a tremendous amount of work administratively. Yet we rarely had more than two people on staff. She left a good administration and format for the next person.”

In fact, Parker was so frugal that some of the SNECRI grant projects had money left over. It was re-invested in projects to extend the timing and continue projects, she said.

“We were very strategic about ideas to be worked on and came up with priorities and soliciting funding rather than waiting for science to come up with ideas,” Parker said.

“Peg’s foresight showed us where to direct our energy,” said Fred Mattera, another founding board member.

“Peg was able to see the bigger picture and steer us down the correct path so we could get there quicker and be more effective.”

Mattera credited Parker with establishing a fisheries advisory panel to review proposals. He said she also set up \$30,000 challenge grants to test a proof-of-concept design to see if it would work before committing large sums of money to a project.

“The first few years were working mostly in building the foundation. We

were building on the run, but we have good procedures in place. It was really challenging," Parker said.

"Then, the latter projects were a little more strategic. What are the priorities of the foundation, of the Southern

New England fishing industry? How do we use science to improve the industry?"

Parker said she hopes the research the foundation has accomplished will help the industry in the future.

"We need a fishing industry here. There is a new role for fishermen beyond catching fish and landing them."

Pointing to ongoing work with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, Parker said fishermen are collaborating with scientists in gathering at-sea information on the changing ocean environment.

Spencer does not anticipate major re-direction of the foundation in the near future. There are several Saltonstall-Kennedy grant proposals pending and others submitted to other funding sources. And the board will likely announce a new director in December.

But Parker will not be far away.

"I'm going to go build a cabin in the woods with my husband," she said, their fourth such endeavor.

In the wilds of Maine? "Oh, no. I'm still a Rhode Islander through and through. The cabin will be here in Narragansett."



CFRF photo

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