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UNH Helping Portsmouth Fisherman's Cooperative Survive and Evolve

By [Kathleen Schmitt](#)
N.H. Sea Grant
603-749-1565

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DURHAM, N.H. -- A fixture on the New Hampshire waterfront for the past quarter century, the Portsmouth Fisherman's Cooperative has seen good times and bad. Now, with the assistance of the University of New Hampshire, co-op members are taking on a new mission -- research -- while working to secure their future.

Recent changes in federal fishing restrictions contributed to the co-op closing its doors in May. It has since reopened, but continues to struggle as it faces uncertain times.

In June, Troy Hartley, executive director of the Northeast Consortium and assistant director of N.H. Sea Grant, met with several co-op members to discuss strategies to preserve the organization and provide new ways for its members to earn income.

The co-op formed to provide fuel, ice and unloading services to the local, small-scale fishing community. While preserving these primary functions, Hartley wants to help it expand to serve an important role in coordinating fishing vessel participation in marine research projects and increasing the awareness among fishermen about cooperative research opportunities available to them.

The Northeast Consortium, created with the support and leadership of U.S. Senator Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), has committed resources to fund co-op staff who will facilitate partnerships between the co-op and university researchers in the coming year.

A joint program of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the Sea Grant programs at the University of Maine, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of New Hampshire, the Northeast Consortium encourages partnerships between researchers and commercial fishermen to carry out marine research together. It is housed at UNH's Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space.

"The Northeast Consortium has an interest in maintaining strong and productive partnerships with fishing organizations, and it considers the Portsmouth Fisherman's Cooperative a vital partner in ensuring the success of cooperative research projects currently under way here in New Hampshire," Hartley says.

Using its network of university researchers and extension staff, N.H. Sea Grant has offered to help the co-op plan for the future. Important first steps are to promote a broad dialogue among its members about the co-op's needs and future; develop a business plan, possibly with the help of UNH Cooperative Extension specialists; and create a job description for a new manager.

Rob Robertson, UNH professor of resource economics and development, is conducting a survey of members regarding their views of the co-op's future. Rollie Barnaby, an extension educator with Sea Grant and Cooperative Extension, also hopes to involve the co-op with the UNH open ocean aquaculture project that has successfully raised mussels on longlines in the open sea.

Erik Anderson, a member of the Portsmouth Fisherman's Cooperative board of directors, is enthusiastic about the assistance offered to the organization.

"The partnership of the Portsmouth Fisherman's Cooperative, N.H. Sea Grant and the Northeast Consortium is a valued milestone in the continued effort of blending industry with science," Anderson says. "What distinguishes this partnership is that Sea Grant and the consortium take their approach of issues from an even dimension of academia and industry in the attempt to produce the science needed in a very complex issue. The partnership is conceived and

functions in a 'win-win' condition. The co-op looks forward to the successful benefits of such a partnership."

N.H. Sea Grant provides support, leadership and expertise for marine research, education and extension. A component of NOAA's National Sea Grant College Program and based at UNH, it is one of 30 university programs promoting the understanding, development, wise use and conservation of ocean and coastal resources.

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