



Securing a future for fisheries and fishing communities in eastern Maine and beyond

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Founder Robin Alden to step down as fisheries organization director



Robin Alden will step down as executive director of the Penobscot East Resource Center in Stonington at the end of this year after 14 years at the helm.

KEVIN BENNETT PHOTO

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By Stephen Rappaport on News, Waterfront

STONINGTON — Robin Alden, a one-time commissioner of the Department of Marine Resources under Governor Angus King and longtime editor and publisher of the regional trade publication *Commercial Fisheries News*,

will step down as executive director of the Penobscot East Resource Center at the end of this year.

The organization has begun a national search for her successor.

Alden founded Penobscot East 13 years ago together with her husband, MacArthur Fellow Ted Ames, former Maine Sea Coast Mission pastor and fisheries advocate Ted Hoskins and Kristen and Paul Lewis.

The aim was to expand the reach of the local Stonington Fisheries Alliance and other Downeast community fishing groups, according to PERC's website, "beyond the horizon of their own harbors."

Started with only a few employees and a thin-as-a-shoestring budget in 2003, Penobscot East now has a dozen employees including fisheries scientists and marine policy experts. Under Alden's stewardship, its operating budget has grown to \$1.8 million.

Alden's decision came as no surprise to the organization.

“I made the decision five years ago and told the board and staff,” Alden said on Monday. “I wanted the organization to be as strong as possible when I stepped aside. I didn’t want anything unexpected.”

Following her departure, Alden plans to continue her work on sustaining fisheries and fishing communities, to which she has devoted her professional career.

“The importance of community-scale fishing to the fishery, to science, to the economy requires an advocate,” she said.

Penobscot East operates a wide variety of fisheries-directed educational, scientific and environmental research and advocacy programs.

The organization has been a vocal advocate of the principles of “bottom-up” fisheries management that recognizes the extensive knowledge fishermen have about the ecosystem in which they work and emphasizes the need for fishermen, scientists and fisheries regulators “to learn how to learn and act together.”

The organization has been recognized as a leader in the field of Maine fisheries policy and works both on its own and as a partner with other organizations dedicated to related programs or policy objectives. Among many programs, PERC was instrumental in establishing a federal fisheries permit banking program to ensure that eastern Maine fishermen can continue to catch groundfish such as cod as depleted stocks recover in the Gulf of Maine. PERC also serves as the coordinator for the eight-school consortium that forms the Eastern Maine Skippers Program that helps high school students acquire the academic and practical skills students need to succeed as commercial fishermen in an increasingly complex world.

“I feel very positive about the place we occupy in fisheries,” Alden said. “Right now, things we have worked on for a very long time are starting to come to fruition. We are starting to be very effective.”

Whoever succeeds Alden as executive director will have some big shoes to fill. Last week, she was named a “Hero of the Seas” as the winner of one of the Peter Benchley Ocean Awards. She was recognized for her career working at the grassroots, engaging fishermen’s knowledge and participation to build sustainable, healthy coastal fisheries and fishing communities.

“It’s really just amazing,” Alden said. “I’m dumbfounded. When you focus on one place for a while, paying attention to the details, you don’t expect to have recognition.”

The new executive director will also take over a new, or at least renamed, organization. In March, Penobscot East will change its name to the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries. That name “will better represent the organization’s stature, thought leadership and breadth of impact,” according to its “Executive Director Search Document.”

“I’m happy to leave an institution that will carry forward into the future,” Alden said.

The Hero of the Seas Award is given to “a marine grassroots activist who has made a major and long-term commitment to improving the quality of our seas and the communities that depend on them.”

In addition to her work as a journalist, DMR commissioner and executive director of Penobscot East, Alden was one of the founders of the Maine Fishermen's Forum, which turns 42 this year.

The international Peter Benchley Ocean Awards acknowledge outstanding achievements leading to the protection of the ocean, coasts and the communities that depend on them. They are named in honor of Peter Benchley, author of "Jaws," who spent more than 40 years educating the public and expanding awareness of the importance of protecting sharks and ocean ecosystems.

Correction: An earlier version of this article contained an error. Alden headed the Department of Marine Resources under Governor Angus King.

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