



New Trust Fund Aims To Keep Small-scale Fishing On Cape Cod

by [Alan Pollock](#)

CHATHAM — The Cape Cod Fisheries Trust, a new offshoot of the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen’s Association, is in the midst of a \$10 million fundraising campaign to help it buy up fishing permits. The goal, organizers say, is to preserve the viability of the Cape’s small, family-based fisheries.

The trust will be led by Paul Parker, who is stepping down as executive director of the hook fishermen’s association, a position he has held for the past decade. The association has already retained a Boston-based executive search firm to help find a new leader.



“We want to keep small-scale fishing on Cape Cod,” hook fishermen’s association board President Peter Taylor said. ALAN POLLOCK PHOTO

The Cape Cod Fisheries Trust aims to purchase fishing permits, leasing or loaning them out to local fishermen who agree to fish in a sustainable manner. Through grants and loans, the trust has already raised \$1.3 million, and expects to secure another \$1 million shortly, Parker said.

In 2010, regulators will change the way fisheries are managed, dividing the resource into sectors and allocating a portion of the total allowable catch to each sector. Fishermen will likely obtain a share of the catch based in part on their history of landings in the past. The use of quotas to manage fisheries has caused permits to dramatically increase in value, with permits routinely trading for hundreds of thousands of dollars. While this can be a boon to current permit holders, Parker said, it is a net loss for the community when permits are lost to outside fishing conglomerates, or when young fishermen can’t afford to enter the industry.

Longtime Chatham fisherman Chris Davis said the permit held by his boat, the Coming Home, is likely to jump in value tenfold.

“And that sounds good if you own the permit and you want to retire,” he said. But instead of selling the permit to a New Bedford sea scalloper whose 100-foot boat might hold 10 permits, Davis said he’s more interested

in selling “to the captain who’s running the boat now, who’s a young man who can’t afford a quarter of a million dollars.” So Davis is selling his scallop permit to the trust, which will then lease it out to the current skipper, Josh Neal of Chatham, who has two children and a third on the way. When Davis was sidelined with an injury, Neal offered to run the boat for him; the two are now business partners. “He wants to make a go of being a fisherman,” Davis said. But there’s no way he could afford the market price for a decent permit.

Once fully operational, the trust fund will hold the quota authorizations and lease or finance their sale to qualified fishermen. The program aims to protect around 150 viable fishing jobs on Cape Cod, in the scallop, groundfish and lobster fisheries, and in shoreside businesses. A portion of the permits will be reserved for new fishermen, Parker said. Participants agree to use scallop dredges that are less destructive to the ocean bottom, or to switch from big trawlers to gillnets or longlines, which are less efficient but don’t harm essential fish habitat.

The trust’s goal isn’t to buy up all of the available permits, Parker stressed. The organization will hold only enough to provide a buffer for the local fishing fleet, allowing them to switch gear types in response to market demands, as they always have.

Peter Taylor, president of the hook fishermen’s board of directors, said it’s hard to buy a permit for less than \$200,000.

“It costs a couple hundred thousand dollars for a boat, a couple hundred thousand dollars for a permit,” he said. “And if you want to live in Chatham, well, you know how expensive that is,” Taylor said. If steps aren’t taken to keep the small-scale fishery alive here, the permits will migrate to Gloucester and New Bedford, and Chatham will become a port for recreational boaters only.

“That’d make a nice restaurant,” he quipped, peering over his shoulder at the fish pier’s packing house.

Since the hook fishermen’s board includes commercial fishermen, the administration of the trust needs to be separate and transparent, Parker said. To that end, the trust has a partnership with the Lower Cape Community Development Corporation (LCCDC), which will oversee the leasing process. Parker likened the system to an affordable housing project, in which the trust plays the part of the building owner, and the CDC acts as property manager. The CDC already has experience helping local fishermen through its micro-loan program, he noted.

Like any commercial fishing initiative, the trust is not without its critics. Some fishermen feel that it’s unfair for a trust fund to sell or lease fishing rights below their market value. There are other members of the fleet who are more inclined to work independently than to take part in this kind of coalition. But Parker said fishing communities that have already struggled

under quotas—like ones in Alaska—and have undergone severe financial and ecological hardships, and that’s a warning that places like Chatham cannot afford to ignore.

With the change to a sector allocation system of fisheries management, fisheries trusts are taking hold around the nation. The closest is the Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund, which is purchasing groundfish permits, Parker said.

As Parker prepares to give up day-to-day management of the hook fishermen’s association, the group is putting out the call for a new executive director. A job description is posted at the association’s website, www.ccchfa.org.

7/31/08

0 0 0 1 9 6



CLICK ON THE MENU ON THE LEFT FOR MORE OF THIS WEEK'S STORIES

*For more stories about Chatham, Harwich and the lower Cape, see the print edition of **The Cape Cod Chronicle**, on news stands every Thursday. [Click here](#) for a list of news dealers who carry the paper, or contact us to [subscribe](#). Contents copyright 2008, The Cape Cod Chronicle.*