



TRANSCRIPT

Episode 2: Maine Won't Wait – A four-year Climate Action Plan

Narrator: 0:00

You're listening to The Sounding Line from the Gulf of Maine Research Institute.

Dave Reidmiller: 0:17

I'm Dave Reidmiller, Director of the Climate Center here at GMRI. Thanks for joining us. Climate change poses an existential threat to coastal communities as we know them. GMRI's Climate Center works to ensure coastal communities continue to thrive in a warmer world. We work with public and private sector partners to deliver world class climate science to help them address climate related risks and capitalize on new opportunities that may emerge. Our focus on providing customized solutions ensures our work has a lasting impact. Maine Climate Council was established in law back in 2019, to bring diverse perspectives from every aspect of Maine life into a process that would create a roadmap for ambitious climate action across the state. Maine Won't Wait, the state's four-year Climate Action Plan was released by the council in December of 2020, charting a path for all Mainers to build adaptation to climate change, and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that drive it. In today's conversation, we're going to hear from two Mainers about their work on the state's climate Council. Our guests are Kate Dempsey, State Director of The Nature Conservancy in Maine, and Dan Kleban, co-founder and owner of Maine Beer Company. They told us about their roles on the Climate Council.

Kate Dempsey: 1:32

Well, let's see, let me start with some of the basics. Dan and I are each appointed by the governor, by Governor Mills, we are on Dan correct me, I believe it's a three-year term. And, you know, each of us were put in place in our position to represent a particular perspective or bring some particular knowledge to the conversation, much like Dan was articulating. And then there are also working groups that really dug in deeply to specific areas say transportation, community resilience, working lands, and so energy efficiency in



The Sounding Line



buildings. So, Dan and I both played different roles. But at The Nature Conservancy, I was one serving, I am the one serving on the council, and then a number of the team are on some of the working groups, which has been really wonderful.

Dan Kleban: 2:28

Yeah, and I think as Kate alluded to, I think one of one of the things that I initially, you know, made me a bit of a skeptic about the work we were embarking on but has what has actually proven to be an asset, due in large part to you know, Director Pingree and her staff, is the written in the statute was a litany of members that were required to participate on this climate Council and the specific number, I forget, but it was 30 Plus or 40, some odd members that were required by statute to be on this council. And so, when I saw that I'm like, representing, I mean, any any and all industry, NGO, legislative interest you can imagine, which is you can, as any of us who have participated in large group committees can appreciate the bigger they are, the more cumbersome they are, and the more apt they are to kind of crumble under their own weight. But it is actually proven to be quite quite a, I think, a strength in that we were able to vet differences in the committee work in this subcommittee work and really come to a consensus so that the end product really has buy in from a divergent set of interests in the state. So it wasn't a report that the or the plan that we submitted, really has been kind of fully, not fully baked, but you know, has really kind of gone through the wringer already. So it leaves it less vulnerable to, you know, political or, or private interest attack. So I think that that is something that, like I said, I was I was a bit skeptical to begin with, but it's actually proven to be an asset. But there's no doubt been a ton of hard work done by not only the members of the council, but all the staff that has really worked to to wrangle us as cats.

Dave Reidmiller: 4:18

You know, I'm struck by the fact of the the timeline over which all this occurred, right. I believe the the legislation was signed maybe in December of 2019. And, you know, the council presumably, you know, was was set up soon thereafter. And, of course, almost simultaneous to that, you know, the COVID 19 pandemic, you know, gripped the entire country and clearly affected the way you all operated and how you're able to conduct the work. And I'm curious if you can speak to sort of some of the challenges that emerged as a result of that and also some of maybe the new ways of working together that that you think may have together as a result.



The Sounding Line

Kate Dempsey: 5:01

Alright, I'll start Dan. You know, when I reflect back, it's your right Dave, Dan and I and probably, I don't know, 250 people I don't we're sandwiched into a room in Hallowell, and the governor was there and some other public officials. And it was, you know, it was like a rally it was it was super inspiring. And I believe that was in late January, early February. And, obviously, we all know what the last year and a half, two years have been like. And so COVID hit, we all went to our offices at home, and began learning this new world. I think what remained two things I just want to point out that are really critical. Building what Dan talked about reaching consensus, we collectively all put a real emphasis that on the stakeholder process and outreach needed to go forward. In some way we had to learn how to do that. But to Dan's point, if we were going to get to the end of the year and be successful, we had to reach out and hear from a huge number of people. So we can talk about how the climate council did that. Yeah, and the other thing, I mean, no one needs to tell anyone how the the evil and the good of zoom. But what I think, I mean, the great outcome, I think we've all learned is we don't need to drive or fly to every single meeting. And if we did our little part, as the council not contributing to carbon emissions through driving from all over the state, maybe that was a good outcome. You know, Zoom is hampering no matter what we do in terms of building relationships, getting to know people, and that's really how great collaboration works.

Dan Kleban: 6:54

Yeah, the only thing I would add is that, you know, obviously, after, you know, really March of 2020, when things kind of came to a grinding halt, I think it would have been easy for the council and staff to really lose focus and say, look, we've got other priorities and would have, I think, been right in thinking that and perhaps going down that path, but we didn't, we said that we these two things, with dealing with, you know, the pandemic and addressing the existential threat of climate change, we can do the work in tandem, in fact, we have that we realize you have to do the work. It's kind of foolish to, you know, address one existential threat and ignore, you know, we just have to, you know, to say, you know, we're gonna, we're gonna do double duty here. And, you know, I give all the council members and staff an incredible amount of credit for persevering, it would have been easy to say, let's put this on the back burner, and we'll get to it when we can get to it. But that that did not happen. And there were a lot of members,



The Sounding Line



especially in the committee, in the committee work well, we'll go on unrecognized because it was it was not done. You know, a lot of it was done kind of, not in the dark, but certainly was more behind the scenes. It but there were a tremendous number of folks who put in countless hours putting together I mean, especially, you know, folks on the on the science and technical committee, whose work really guided the rest of the committee's work. I want to say thanks to them, because they did a whole heck of a lot more work probably than I did. Because I'm not the technical or scientific expert. But the work that they come up came up with remotely and on time was I think, really, really incredible. And testament to their dedication.

Dave Reidmiller: 8:46

Yeah, know that. Those are great points. And you both kind of hit on sort of the importance of hearing from a variety of people throughout the process, right, different perspectives. And I'm curious if either from your fellow council members or in the the number of community engagement, you know, listening sessions and workshops you all held, if you were struck by anything, in particular thought about climate change, in a way that you hadn't thought about it before, or you know, how it's impacting communities or what different response options there may be didn't anything strike either view is kind of a new way of thinking about it.

Dan Kleban: 9:26

What struck me was really a level of, of consensus and a level of, and I think, a dearth of opposition, which, you know, is obviously very inspiring, but I think if we would have had that same conversation 10 years ago, this plan would have come out and I think, I think he would have heard voices from all different corners of our community, loud voices and opposition. But, you know, it's not to say that opposition does not exist. Of course it does, but I think there there is an increased I think just awareness and acceptance of reality in facts, which is very, very encouraging. But to be perfectly frank, a lot of the public communication and selling of this plan has yet to happen. Because of our in large part because of COVID. And the the importance of, you know, getting that, you know, getting COVID dealt with and hopefully getting, you know, people's lives that that foundation, you know, set again, before we go out into the community, but I've been actually pretty encouraged by that the lack of really vocal and boisterous opposition, frankly.



The Sounding Line



Kate Dempsey: 10:41

Yeah, the other thing, I mean, it's interesting, because here we are, we're talking about this, the grounding of science, which let's just establish that, that the facts are what matter. And, Dan, you've said something a couple of times, and not to call you on the table. But it's really, for me, really telling of one of the climate community's challenges is we have so technical, technicalized, the solutions that people feel like they're pretty distant from being able to act. And, you know, we need companies to act like dams. And like, much bigger, you know, as you said, a much bigger ones, we need governments to act around the planet. So, I think it's incumbent on all of us now to understand that there's technical experts who will help guide us, and where the passion comes from is understanding how it's going to impact your own community more. And so, you know, we spend a lot of time getting people to talk about how they're seeing climate change in their daily lives. Because as soon as you again, soon as you can make something personal, the conflicts that often do come up in those conversations at your Thanksgiving dinner table. You know, you're talking about the Fourth of July fair parade, and whether you wore shorts, when you were a kid or whether you wore a sweater, you know, and now everyone wears shorts, right. So it's like untechnical ising. It I don't know if that's a term is something I think Dan and I are both really passionate about. And then the other thing, I just want to give a shout out to the huge number of young people who paid a lot of attention to this process. Some of them served on various working groups or on the council. But they organized and really had a tremendous influence on some of the outcomes of the Maine Won't Wait proposal and plan. And, yeah, people like the three of us probably need to make sure that their voices are incorporated even more every day.

Dan Kleban: 12:56

Yeah, amen to that. They bring a passion to this work, I think that is very, very inspiring, and the level of public engagement that you want, I think we've seen in several generations. So, I have been really inspired to see that the amount of youth engagement and this work. And just to dovetail into what Kate was saying about I think that the communication aspect of not just this particular plan, but you know, any, the universal plan to combat climate change, I think that for too long, you know, the language of climate change, and how we solve things, often communicated through climate scientists is, is a future of doom and gloom and set personal sacrifice, that is if we're, if we're



The Sounding Line



going to save the world, we have to give stuff up. That's not a very motivating thing. They don't want to hear that. And that's not going to inspire them to action I think we've seen over the last several decades, it hasn't. And so I hope that, you know, we I think we kind of flip the script a bit and say, in offer a level of optimism that by embracing the the ideas laid out in the climate action plan at the various state levels and the national and hopefully global level, the future can be pretty awesome. You know, a future filled with electric vehicles and radiant heat in homes and, you know, an electrified future can mean healthier, healthier families, healthier communities, just a just a better lifestyle for folks, and we don't have to necessarily give everything up. And I think this is no offense to the climate scientists, but they don't language, the language of the data and if we don't reach a certain goal by a certain time, we're all dead, you know, and that that which is true But as I think a pure communications and by messaging point naught it just, it frightens people and people get it's too depressing.

Dave Reidmiller: 15:18

That was Kate Dempsey, State Director of The Nature Conservancy in Maine, and Dan Kleban, co-founder and owner of Maine Beer Company, talking about their work on the Maine Climate Council. I'm Dave Reidmiller, Director of the Climate Center here at GMRI.

Narrator: 15:36

The Sounding Line is a production of the Gulf of Maine Research Institute. And you can find more episodes and read more about our work at gmri.org. Thanks for listening.