

Flu prevention is in your hands.
 Get more tips to fight flu at: www.maine flu.gov



Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
 An Office of the Department of Health and Human Services
 John E. Baldozzi, Governor | Brenda M. Haney, Commissioner

Portland Press Herald EST. 1862 Maine Sunday Telegram

Veteran fisherman charts a new course

New limits and the stock's depletion are making it harder to earn a living at sea, Craig Pendleton says.

By JOHN RICHARDSON, Staff Writer

February 1, 2009

SHARE

[Printer-friendly version](#)
[Reader Comments](#)

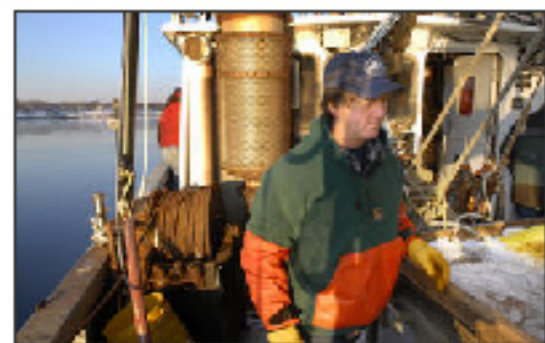
story tools sponsored by



[enlarge](#)

1994 file photo by John Ewing/Staff Photographer

Craig Pendleton bought the 54-foot Susan & Caitlyn, above, in 1989. In the 1990s, landings fell and limits were put in place to save the groundfishery. He traded the Susan & Caitlyn for a smaller boat and made other efforts to cut costs, but it's no longer worth his while to fish for a living, says Pendleton.



[enlarge](#)

Doug Jones/Staff Photographer
 Craig Pendleton helps the crew on his dragger prepare for a day of fishing without him Friday. A fisherman for decades, he's giving it up to pursue a business degree.

Craig Pendleton started fishing on his uncle's boat when he was 9.

And in the nearly four decades since, he's survived stormy seas, suffered lazy deckhands and once was airlifted off a sinking boat. As a young captain, he hauled back heavy nets when the fish and the money came easy. Later, he fought to save the industry as both became elusive.

Now, his fishing days are nearly done.

Pendleton, 48, is trying to sell his boat, and last month started taking classes toward a business degree at Husson University in South Portland. For the third-generation fisherman, it is more than a career change. It's the end of a way of life and a family heritage.

"I'm the last Pendleton to fish out of Camp Ellis," he said. "I held out for as long as I could."

The Mainers who still drag nets for cod, haddock, flounder and other groundfish are the survivors, the most resilient of a hardy breed. But, like Pendleton, many of them are re-evaluating their futures and contemplating new careers, even in the midst of a historic recession.

The fishing industry will survive in some form, Pendleton said. But with some fish populations still depleted after more than 15 years of tightening rules, and facing new limits that could leave the typical Maine fisherman with just 20 fishing days a year, he has no doubt he's doing the right thing.

Proctor Wells, a longtime friend who fishes out of Phippsburg on his 46-foot dragger, Tenacious, said he's never had any job besides fishing, but he is wondering about his future, too.

"It's kind of heartbreaking, but certainly understandable. If you can't do it, you can't do it," Wells said of his friend's decision. "I think anybody in the industry is looking at the business right now and saying, 'Can I continue?'"

Many fishing families have already concluded they can't. In Wells' home harbor, there were once 60 groundfish boats, he said. "Now there's two."

And, like family farms, he said, "Once they're gone, they're gone."

NUMBER OF BOATS PLUMMETS

The number of boats landing groundfish in Maine has dropped from 350 to about 70 in the past 15 years, according to state figures and the Portland Fish Exchange, a seafood auction house and the hub of the state's fleet.

Some, especially the smaller owner-operated boats, have gone out of business. Others, including many of the larger draggers, have survived by moving to Gloucester, Mass., a port that is both closer to the fish and in a state where they can land and sell lobsters legally. In Maine, dragger operators who pick up any lobsters in their nets have to throw them back.

"We want the jobs, and we want to keep the history and culture. We're working hard to keep them in business," said Terry Stockwell, a deputy commissioner of the Department of Marine Resources and himself a former groundfish captain. "We're up against it right now."

Pendleton started hauling lobsters with his uncle in the 1960s, and got hooked fast.

"When I was 12, I made more money than my mother," he said. His mother worked full time as a clerk in a pharmacy at the time.

He earned a degree in commercial fishing and marine technology from the University of Rhode Island in 1980 and, at 21, was hired to skipper a large offshore dragger catching cod, haddock, flounder and other groundfish. "There was a lot of fish," he said. The job paid \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year, he said.


He was fishing in rough and windy weather 60 miles offshore in March 1985 when his boat started to flood with seawater. He made a mayday call that was heard on the VHF radio in the general store back in Camp Ellis. His father made sure the news didn't get to Pendleton's wife, who was nine months pregnant at the time.

Pendleton was plucked off the boat by a rescue helicopter 20 minutes before it sank, he said.

He also endured crew problems over the years. Once, he...

WHO SHOULD GET THE H1N1 SHOT FIRST?

Find out at www.maine flu.gov



Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
 An Office of the Department of Health and Human Services
 John E. Baldozzi, Governor | Brenda M. Haney, Commissioner

Should Second Graders be Taught About Homosexual Marriage?

TAKE ACTION NOW

Paid for by Stand For Marriage Maine