

Date: Thursday May 29, 2014.

Location: Passamaquoddy Tribal Office, Pleasant Point, Maine.

Interviewer: Julia Beaty

Interviewee: Hugh Akagi

Associated sound files: HughAkagi.wav

Julia: Can you say your name for the camera?

Hugh: My name is Hugh Michael Akagi.

Julia: And what's your role here?

Hugh: I'm chief of the Passamaquoddy on the Canadian side of the border. I'm a Tribal member. All of my family and all of my relatives are right behind me on this reserve. So, that's my role.

Julia: So you live here or you live on the Canadian side?

Hugh: I live in Canada.

Julia: What's the name of the – is it a reservation over there too?

Hugh: No, it's not. It's a community. They call it St. Andrews, New Brunswick. Traditionally it was known as Qonasqamkuk. Our people were living at Qonasqamkuk when we were "discovered". And through a series of, basically, encroachment, displacement, whatever, we ended up being shoved out of St. Andrews, Qonasqamkuk, and eventually living on an island next door, called Indian Island, of all things. And that wasn't going to work because a large population of Indians on a small Island...and by then all the other territory was pretty much compromised. Well, the Americans took a look at this Tribe and said, 'They are going to disappear. You'd better come ashore.' And they created a reserve called Sipayik, Pleasant Point. That's how this place came to be. Eventually there was a split that moved part of the Tribe up the river [to Indian] Township. But the beginning is where I live to this day, St. Andrews, New Brunswick.

Julia: What year was it that Pleasant Point was established?

Hugh: This goes back hundreds of years. It goes back to 17-somethings. I'm sorry. I'm not very good with dates. I may as well be up front with you on that. I'm terrible with dates. But the real crunch came after the American Revolution when the loyalists were displaced from their communities here and shoved into Canada. They proceeded to shove the Passamaquoddy right out of Canada and back into the states. That's how the majority of the population ended up here. Although, many of the Passamaquoddy intermarried, remained in the area, including my great grandfather, made a living and maintained themselves as traditional people, and survived, but not on a reservation. We had reserves set aside for us, but, again, through some very magical legislation using governments and government techniques, the people disappeared.

There aren't any Indians, there can't be any reserves, the reserves must be turned over to the province, the province owns all the land, etc., etc. So we're having that discussion now in Canada, with the Canadian government. Sorry, I'm well off your alewife issue. You'll have to keep bringing me back.

Julia: Okay. This stuff is all interesting too. And part of this is the history of fishing in this area and the role that these fisheries played historically in this area. So that's all relevant and interesting.

Hugh: And the other factor I would toss in is that the border isn't ours. And the fish don't realize that there's an invisible line and he's supposed to behave one way on one side of the border and another way on the other. So when it comes to talking about the natives, us, the Passamaquoddy, the fish, we really can't discuss the border as our problem. It is a problem but it's just that we don't see it as our problem.

Julia: So I'm not terribly familiar with – I've been trying to figure this out lately, the relationship between state management of fisheries, and federal management, and Tribal management. And it seems like here in the United States Tribal management is tied to ownership of land. Is that different on the other side of the border?

Hugh: It can be, because you have to throw in treaty rights. You have to look at management of what they call "resources". And that's a term I hate because instead of talking about the fish and the environment they talk about resources and that means that somebody's trying to make money off of it and that becomes the issue. Well, if you want to really look at a problem, when you look at our river, it's totally different in the way that it's treated on both sides of the border. You can go up and down Maine and you'll find that there's no problem dealing with species at risk, which is what we are here to discuss. There's no problem dealing with management of alewife. There's no problem dealing with management of fisheries. You go to Canada and DFO are in charge of these things, or the Inland Waters. You'll have to deal with the province. But on the St. Croix River, think of what you've got. You have the Province of New Brunswick, you have the State of Maine, you have the Canadian government, you have the United States government, you have the Passamaquoddy Tribe, at the top of the river you have the Penobscot Tribe, on both sides of the border you have the Maliseet Tribe, you toss into that the International Joint Commission, and this is what you've got to deal with when you talk about our river.

Julia: That's a lot of people to try to get along and work together on something.

Hugh: That's a disaster. And they're wondering why they can't get together and help this fish! They can't get together on anything. There has to be some sort of leadership. There has to be something that says we're going to be concerned with this fish. If we're going to talk species at risk, we're going to talk about the fish. We shouldn't be talking politics. We shouldn't be talking about resources and who's going to make money off of this or that. We shouldn't be talking about land management. We should be talking about what we need to do to help this fish do

what it's been doing for thousands of years so that everything around it can return. Because things have disappeared in this river. You want to talk about species at risk? Talk about the salmon. You wonder why the salmon are missing from here? You want to know why the cod are missing from here? You want to know why it's tough for the osprey and the eagles to come back? You take away their food source. And then you wonder why the Indian disappears. You destroy his culture when you destroy these things. He's part of that environment. We're all in it together. The native has never been able to separate himself from the very things we're talking about. So we have to maintain all of that in the picture if we really want to have that discussion. And that's why it's difficult for governments and stakeholders. And we're not stakeholders. I believe Brian said that quite clearly. If they're going to have that discussion, then they have to look at not just the individual species but every creature in that system, including us, and themselves. I've often accused this society, today's society if you will, of dissecting things. They love to look at things by dissecting things and they really think that once they've figured out what every little piece means and what it does then they'll understand it. But the problem with dissecting something, especially if it's something like a human, is you can never put the life back in that human. And that's what happens with this system. We look at this system as a life. The wonderful lady that just left reminded me that the name Wolicon (*spelling?*) for part of our river is "backbone". We talk about the Passamaquody Bay as being the heart of our people because it's a living organism. If we're going to maintain that and if we're going to understand it, then this is what others need to understand. I hope your videos help you when it comes time to discuss this with the resource-based users you talked about, the people that I think you called them fishermen. I'd like them to understand that relationship. They're getting there, by the way. You've got to remember that their footprint here is only a few hundred years old. Our footprint, according to the archaeological record over there is 13,000 years, the latest site, 13,000 years. We say 15,000. They've got some catching up to do. And when they do, they'll start to feel how important these things are and what they mean and they'll start to understand. Like I said, they're getting there. But after just a few hundred years, they've still got a long way to go. Sorry, I think I'm off track.

Julia: No. That's very interesting. There's this push in United States federal fisheries management to do ecosystem-based management, so doing everything together instead of all the little parts. But nobody knows how to do it. And it seems like the federal government has been pushing it for a while but we still can't figure out how to do it because we're not used to thinking that way and we've invested so much effort into designing ways to manage fish one by one. We have to kind of start all over again, and it's hard.

Hugh: We've had the ecosystem concept for a long time. We call it the Mother Earth concept. So you have a Mother Earth that looks after you and nurtures you and makes sure that you have plenty to sustain yourself. And here we go, terms like sustainability, we know what sustainability is all about. So when they are trying to use the terms - and this is fun because, if you really want to have fun, play with your dictionary, because the terminology is actually changing and adapting to fit resource management. If you go back to the original meaning of real words, then sustainability doesn't have a dollar sign in it. Economic resource management - economy? They're putting the dollar sign in it. So when you look at ecosystem, that's a

different meaning. Instead of the green of the dollar bill you're looking at the green of the forest, green management. They're totally different and yet they've managed to morph words like ecosystem into economy. And that is a killer when it comes to protecting something. How do you protect something when its value can't be measured in gold? The experience with this society is no matter what it is if it's precious it's going to disappear. Somebody will take it. They took the gold from the Mexicos and the southern states. They've taken all of our trees because that was the gold of its day. They took land, that's very valuable. I don't need to keep calling it gold. The minerals, they've taken those. The fish, they've taken those. So once it's seen as a valuable resource, it becomes a target. It's very sad that we put dollar signs on things. That just attracts the attention that leads to depletion. And depletion is a horrible word. We use words like "harvest". We use words like "manage". The real word is depletion. We've destroyed, depleted. We've done so many things wrong with that management. And you're right, they know that there's something – I told you that they're getting there – they know that there's something to ecosystem management. But it breaks down when you leave man out of it, when you can't put yourself in the equation. They can't put themselves in the equation. They're still blaming the seals for destroying the fish. They claim that the reason the cod disappeared is because of the seals. There's a tagging program. One of the tagging experts at Dalhousie University, he tagged seals. He tagged cod. They come from a place in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and they know that it's a very dynamic hole in the middle of the St. Lawrence where all the fish are together. And they've known this. But when they do this, what happens? Well, interestingly enough, the cod go to that hole, like they're supposed to. The seal hasn't even moved. They tagged them both. The seal is still saying on the coast. Why isn't he going to eat the cod if all the cod are there? It should be a feeding frenzy. Watching the monitor, the cod go out, the seals aren't chasing the cod. They go to the hole. And you know what was in that hole? Yeah, alewives. The cod were there to feed on alewives. The seal was there to feed on alewives. The myth of the cod disappearing because of the seal? No. So that brings us back to, why did the cod disappear? You have to point to men. It wasn't the seal fishing off the Grand Banks in large ships. It wasn't the seal harvesting all the cod in Passamaquoddy Bay and the Bay of Fundy. That's not why the cod disappeared. So back again, long story, to the scenario. The scenario is that if you take man out of that and just look at that ecosystem, it's not an ecosystem. You have to put the other animal in there, the one with the greatest impact. It doesn't matter that he's not an animal. It doesn't matter that he's not considered a resource. It doesn't matter. What matters is he has more impact on that system than anything else. You have to put him in that system. You have to look at yourself. You have to find yourself guilty when you've done something wrong. And then you can fix the system. But that's not what they're doing with their ecosystem management and that's why it's failing. I'm sorry for making such a long explanation.

Julia: That's great. What do you think is the most important thing that we can do restore river fisheries and river ecosystems?

Hugh: Oh, I could say some nasty things here. We should get government out of the equation. I think I mentioned that already. We need to somehow find a way to empower the right people. I believe that people that have the special interest in something, whether it's – and they claim ownership – another word that's very difficult in the native tongue. But they want ownership of

resources. They want to be able to say, these are our waters. This is our fishery. You see, instead of talking about the fish, they talk about the fishery.

Julia: Like I just did.

Hugh: That's because you're trained in this system.

Julia: Yup.

Hugh: We all are. I went through the very same education system. So I had to look back. And that's the advantage I have. I'm nearly 70. I can look back on the spectrum. You're at the other end of the spectrum. You're looking forward. My hope is that somewhere in there I can save you some time. What was the question we were talking about?

Julia: How to fix the problem. How to make it better.

Hugh: Okay. I'm really quite a simple person. Remove the dams. Stop pretending that it's an international issue. Stop playing the games of looking after individual interests, whether it's a sports fishery or any other fishery. Bring it back to doing the right thing. If you have a system that's sick – Brian pointed it out the same way, I think – if you have a system that's sick, you need to cure it, fix the ailment, if you will. And when you've got a system that's missing so many things, we talked about the salmon, I talked about the salmon and the different birds that are disappearing, the cod missing from the mouth of the river, the salt water area, the sturgeon. It's nice to have the sturgeon back. And I'll tell you, sturgeon were here long ago because our name for St. George was the place where you fish sturgeon. We name places after what happened there. So this was a very productive area. Guess what the name of the people is? The people of the pollock. We are people of the pollock. You've heard the expression you could walk across the backs of cod. Well, I've heard the same expression here about pollock. So, where are they? I grew up here. I've been fishing pollock here. So where have they gone? And by that I mean I used to fish on the wharves, sort of like a wharf rat. You run down with your fishing rod. You could grab a meal. We fished flounder, we fished pollock. Anything we would catch we could take home and eat. That was quite a meal. So, where have they gone? Guess what they eat?

Julia: Alewives.

Hugh: Very good! You're a quick study. As well as herring. Again, the diversity of fishing in the area, that was important. The population was important. You asked the question about the herring in the area, the largest herring plant in the world is here in Black's Harbor. It was dependent upon that river fishery. You had, the story I heard is I think twenty-something plants that were processing herring just in Eastport. You had plants all over the island, Campobello, Grand Manan. And you know how many are left, right?

Julia: Zero?

[Hugh holds up a finger.]

Julia: One?

Hugh: The Black's Harbor plant is still running.

Julia: Oh, it is?

Hugh: And it's not necessarily surviving the way it used to because the weir fishery is not what it used to be. As a matter of fact I think last year was the first year that they never put any twine in their weirs on Grand Manan. This is unheard of! What is it that you don't have enough fish that it's not worth putting twine in a weir? Brian's right again. They have offshore trawling. They can chase them down before they get to shore. This shouldn't be rocket science. Why aren't there fish in a weir? Let me see...oh, somebody's cleaning them out out there. That might have something to do with it. Well, it's happening all over the place. Technology is not in favor of restoration of the fish. So, all of these things happening, it's destroying it. And I've taken it away from just the restoration of the alewife, but it's restoring the river system, restoring the species. That are, I guess the word is extirpated, or at risk, threatened, and species that we rely on heavily. I don't know if anyone's talked much about the porpoise, but the porpoise eats these fish. And these fish that we're talking about, by the way - I sat with an incredible cetacean biologist, whale biologist, who said these fish have the highest nutrient content per unit effort for the whales to survive, build up their capacity to travel south. Now what that means is they need less effort to catch an alewife and the other two high-energy fish are mackerel and herring. And the herring, I just told you what's happening. Even if we can start the restoration of alewife, not just saying, okay, we've got alewife, blueback herring, whatever back in the river. If we can take some of the pressure off the herring, wouldn't that be nice? Because we're trying to help him too. So the restoration of a species like the alewife actually works towards helping the restoration of other species. This is very important. It's critical. If we're really serious about restoring this river system, it has to start with that fish.

Julia: So it sounds like the Passamaquoddy culturally relied on several species including the alewives and pollock and porpoise and they're all part of this food web and alewives are at the bottom of it.

Hugh: Yeah. What was the question?

Julia: Oh. It wasn't really a question.

Hugh: Like I said, I'm glad you're contributing to your interview.

Julia: Okay. Cool. Can you tell me more about how eels were used culturally and how they're doing?

Hugh: Well, I'm a person that can't pretend that he knows something about something that he knows nothing about. And I know very little about the eel. Having said that, the little I do know is that I have worked with the Species at Risk people on the Canadian side. I have a background in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans simply because I worked at the biological station at St. Andrews on fisheries research. So being able to put that together with my cultural background I've been able to participate in Species at Risk talks, the aboriginal advisory committees. One of the things that they want to put on that list, and I think it's at least being studied by I think COSEWIC, is the American eel. Now, it seems to me that if you've got a species that needs to be studied, that's approaching endangered status, we shouldn't be harvesting anything. I just think again, maybe I'm too simple, but to me if there's any danger, you have to err on the side of caution. We made that mistake when we thought that we had numbers on the cod. This fish is not coming back. It's not coming back on the Grand Banks, it's not coming back in the Bay of Fundy, it's not coming back in Passamaquoddy Bay. We thought that we had a handle on those numbers. We thought we understood. That arrogance has cost us badly. We need to learn from those mistakes. But this eel, as far as I'm concerned, if they're even talking about it going on something like the endangered species, nobody should touch it. There's no way you can justify a native food fishery. It's not as if we're starving. I absolutely believe we need to maintain cultural practices, but we're not here to risk any other creature on this planet. That shouldn't be a question. So if it needs to be studied, we need to stop talking about it, we need to stop holding meetings, we need to stop having interviews and say this creature is being considered for species at risk. We need to say put it in the hands of the people that can do the work. We have wonderful expertise in this area, in the Tribe, everywhere. All we've got to do is access that and find out and if there is, we do something, and what do we do? We protect the fish. Pretty simple. That's my solution. Removing dams, Brian's right. And he should have pointed out that the Penobscot are doing this. It's not like it's something that we can't do. We have examples of how we do it.

*[0:26:40 – 0:27:09 Interrupted by another person to talk about the schedule for the rest of the day.]*

Julia: (Laughing.) There's another film crew?

Hugh: It comes with the territory. It's something that I don't say no to. It's not that I need to get my face in front of a camera, that's the last thing I need. Avoid cameras. But it's a matter of if you're really interested, you don't say no. If somebody says will you speak for something or on something, the answer is yes. That may not mean that I have much to contribute. It may not mean that I have all the knowledge. I need to admit that. You have to tell the truth and be honest. If we were honest with each other, we wouldn't be here, if we stopped lying about this fish being the problem. We've got people saying that this fish doesn't belong in the river. We've got an indigenous fish here and when they flip it over and say that this fish is an invasive species – you want to talk about invasive species? Don't get me going on that one! Because I usually turn it around to the Indian situation again. And that's where man likes to leave himself out of it. We probably shouldn't go there. Just looking at all of these things that we've done wrong. A friend of mine, a good friend of mine from Germany is restoring the Danube. He said, Hughie,

one of the first things we did is we went to the engineers. I looked at him funny because I know what engineers have done. He said, what we said to the engineers was, 'You caused the problem.' The engineer has to look at you and say, 'Yes we did'. He said, 'Then you can fix it.' And they said, 'Yes, we will.' And guess what? The engineers have made some incredible designs to help overcome the things that Brian was talking about. The culverts, they study the culverts. They know that a drop of a couple of inches could destroy the use of the species. It's struggling for survival. You put an inch or two and something like that – an elver, how's it going to make that climb? They knew that the bed of rivers, the bed of culverts is strange territory to an incoming species. Species rely on sensors. They get information from the water, from the water that flows by them. They're picking up information. I keep telling people we're not the original scientists. These fish know where the right conditions are. They don't have to have a meter to measure salinity and temperature. They know. There's a reason why the fish come back at a certain time of year. There's a reason why it's late this year. The conditions are not right. They don't go by the Julian calendar. These creatures have their own calendar, or clock, whatever you want to call it. And so they know when things are right. The engineers had to study this and they had to turn their thinking over. These are incredible people. And so you see, the expertise again, it's there. All we need is the will. We need to have the will, the desire to do what's right. I keep saying that and I'm sorry for repeating it. But to me that's the simple solution of fixing everything. We know what we've done wrong. If we admit it, then we can fix it. I've compared it to an alcoholic. You go to a meeting for alcoholics, the first thing you have to do is say, 'I'm an alcoholic.' If people don't say, 'We destroyed this', and then they say, 'How are we going to fix something?' And then they start laying blame on everything else. You haven't looked at the problem. Sorry, I think I rambled on that one. I'm really not trying to fill your last six minutes with rhetoric.

Julia: So do you think it's encouraging with the St. Croix and the progress that's been made there? That it's open for alewives now? Is that encouraging to you?

Hugh: Absolutely. There are other things that are encouraging too. The awareness of people who are willing to go the extra mile to record stories and to get the messages out there. The involvement of people from government. The involvement of people from all those divisive areas that we talked about. I didn't even throw in the fact that you have fisheries management that have different areas, like DFO over here and maybe NOAA or the Wildlife Service or something. But they've started to work together. There's been so much division in the ranks and a lack of shared knowledge. And one of the first things that you'll have to do is get rid of that bloody border. You've got expertise here and expertise here. What is this? You do this and before you know it you've cut your work in half. And the knowledge flows. You get two or three science people in a room, the knowledge just flows. So don't allow them to rip it apart and separate it. We must find a way to make sure that this doesn't happen again. That's part of this discussion we had in our little group of river keepers. How do we make sure that we don't repeat the last 25 years? If it takes that long to get something fixed, we shouldn't let it get broken again. It's pretty simple. It's not a complicated problem. It's, again, the right people doing the right thing. I don't think we should let it get complicated. I think that's one of the things we do to get things off balance. And yet they're doing that. All you've got to do is look at



them and say, what is your issue? What is your agenda? You're up to something. And it usually involves the dollar sign. So if there's something that I would get rid of, besides the dams, it would probably be money. There's not way there should be a price on that, any creature, including the fish.