

Date: June 11, 2014

Location: Quoddy Head State Park, Lubec, Maine

Interviewee: Julie Keene

Interviewer: Julia Beaty

Associated sound file: JulieKeeneInterview.wav

Julia: How long have you been harvesting elvers for?

Julie: 21 years I have harvested elvers.

Julia: And do you mostly harvest around here in Lubec?

Julie: For seventeen years we only fished elvers in the immediate vicinity, no further than 17, 20 miles away. We did try the St. Croix up in the Calais region. We try every year a little bit. It's a hard place to fish. The first time I set a net up there I went back to check it after the tide had gone and the net had completely turned over and it was still barely hanging there. I was very lucky I didn't lose the net. There's only a few key spots to fish on the St. Croix if you have a fyke net and those spots were pretty much acquired by other people. It takes a long time to learn a river so we pretty much stuck with what we knew until our state legislature gave out licenses to the Native Americans. When 500 Native Americans hit our local rivers you couldn't leave your nets. You couldn't catch anything. There was a lot of things going on that made it...I don't even know what the words are. I'm trying to be very respectful. It made it very difficult to fish. There was a lot of cutting of nets, a lot of stealing of eels, a lot of nets being stolen, or if you didn't sit right on top of your net they were either taking your eels or they were taking a dip net and getting your eels out of the front of it. It was very difficult. So we left. The first year that they acquired licenses I was actually threatened on Pennamaquan River in Pembroke by some Native Americans. I called the warden. After the warden left they held a hangman's noose up in my face. I went from there to Whiting. I got fourteen elvers that night and heard that they had caught a lot of eels in Ellsworth so we left. I went. I said, I don't care. People are very territorial and we always heard the story you can't go to Bangor, you can't go to Ellsworth because they'll cut your nets, they'll cut your tires, they'll put a gun in your face. But I decided that my license is a state license and I had every right so I told everybody I'm leaving and they all followed me. So I went to Ellsworth and fished and from there we went and fished Bangor. Now that's traditionally what we do, try to do. There are other rivers around the state. We've had to go away and start learning other rivers because we can't fish here any longer. I tried to fish here this year. We had a very cold spring. I was on the East Machias River, which is a river I fished for 18 years. I went over there but there was 80 Native Americans dipping down the riverbank. One eel a piece. Every dip is 80 elvers that they're taking and couldn't catch anything. So we left again. We fished all over the place this year.

Julia: So is that just in recent years that that's become a problem, so many people in it? Since a few years ago when the price went up?

Julie: Oh yeah. There were roughly about 407 people three years ago that had an elver license. And then the price went through the roof and the Native Americans decided that they wanted to be involved in the fishery so they put various bills in at the legislature at the state level. The Passamaquoddy bill actually said eight licenses and we drove down to support the eight licenses. The commissioner was out in the hallway with them and when he came in he said 200 licenses and we almost fell on the floor because nobody can get a license. Everybody obtained their license either by having been in the fishery for years and years or through the lottery. The state held two or three lotteries. To give out 200 licenses all of a sudden was shocking. So the legislature said, yeah, done deal. And that was that. But they did not follow procedure or guidelines set by the state and they actually decided that they were going to issue whatever they wanted. I heard 575 licenses. I can't believe that the Tribe would issue those licenses. The first Passamaquoddies that I met that acquired some of those licenses, the first thing they said to me is, I don't know the laws. I just couldn't believe it. Because elver fishing is – you've got to know every single aspect of what you're doing. You've got to know how to keep them alive. You've got to know what nights you can't fish and what to do with your gear when you're not fishing, how you respect the resource, how much you've got to respect other fishermen that have been fishing in a certain spot for years, and years, and years. It was quite an experience.

Julia: And you have two pieces of gear, you said?

Julie: I have two fyke nets because I have been fishing for so long it's grandfathered. My other half has two fyke nets. My daughter has one piece of gear. She got it through the lottery. My brother has two nets. Most everybody had one piece of gear except for Adam, my other half, my brother, and myself. The rest of them are all only one piece of gear.

Julia: Were you allowed to choose between a fyke net and a dip net?

Julie: We can actually. Every year when our license application comes from the state you can choose. You can have two pieces of gear. I could actually give up one of my fyke nets for a dip license. Sometimes if you call the state they'll tell you, yeah, it's no problem you can switch back to a fyke net. I've heard that so many times but it's not true. Once you give up a fyke net you can only stay with your dipping. That's it. You can't get the dip back.

Julia: What are the advantages of a fyke net over a dip net?

Julie: Well one of the advantages is – especially for someone – I'm 55 years old. I have a very bad back from being in the fisheries all my life and heavy, heavy work – is that once you set your net you can sit down and wait for the eels to come. You don't have to stand there dipping. If you know where the elvers are going to come, if you study the river enough and know this is a spot they're going to come to, it does all the work for you. It's a lot of work to build a net. I build all our nets. But there's some disadvantages to having fyke nets as well. You are stationary. Once you put that net and that tide comes over it, if the eels are going around it or if the eels only come this far up the river or if the eels have made it past your net and they're this

far up the river, you're done because you can't go down in water over your head and get that net out and drag it out and take it out somewhere up or down. Once the tide comes, that's it.

Julia: But you know from doing it so much, you have a good idea of how the tide is going to come in and where the elvers are going to be?

Julie: The key to being a successful elver fisherman is not taking the net and throwing it on the river and going home and coming back after the tide goes off and check it. You have to spend hundreds of hours on the rivers studying how cold is it. How cold is the water? You put your hands in the water, you know immediately. Are there sand fleas coming up in the river? Are the alewives running yet? Are the smelts running yet? What are the seals doing? Are they coming way up in there? Are they feeding? Watching the seagulls and seeing what they're doing when the tide's out. You can tell a lot. If there are any eels in the river or not. Seeing what the ospreys are doing and the eagles. You have to watch everything around you, what's going on. How much rain have we had? Has there's been a lot of rain? Is the water too rough? If it's too rough do you need to move your net because the currents change? Has there been any different construction going on? Like they bulldozed the East Machias River and it changed everything. There's a lot to it as far as trying to figure out where to put a net. If there's a point they have to go around a point to get up the river. But there's always going to be one side of the river that will fish better than another side of the river.

[Pause because people walking by in the background, reading an interpretive sign.]

Julia: So what time of year do they usually start showing up here?

Julie: That's the million-dollar question. Traditionally, for the first ten years I fished we would go out looking for two weeks before the season started. We would start going out at night with a flashlight checking all kinds of different brooks and rivers and wouldn't see an elver. And then 2012 it was opening day of elver season, it was 87 degrees. I got a sunburn. It was March 22. We were in Whiting River. That year was the most eels anybody had ever seen. They caught over a million dollars worth on the Union River in Ellsworth opening day. That was the day that I only had the 14 elvers in Whiting. It was that Sunday night that I went down there and I set my nets and it took me, because the tides were getting off at that point, it took me a couple of days but I caught 18 pounds, which is the most eels I ever caught in my life up to that point. I caught 18 pounds. But mostly the eels will show up – if it's a really cold, wet spring like we had this year they can be weeks behind. The season ends May 31st. I've talked to people all over the state because I'm the secretary for the Maine Elver Fishermen's Association and I've gotten report after report after report of people telling me, oh my god! They went down and looked and there were elvers everywhere. There were so many elvers that ran all of June. I don't know what's going on in July but I know all of June on the big tides there were people saying that there were just masses of them, that there were blue balls of elvers at the foot of the dams. They said if you went down to the ledges with a little tiny net you could get ten pounds easy. There's just so many of them. But I don't go and look because it upsets me.

Julia: Because it's after the season's over?

Julie: Because there's so many elvers! And because the people that are supposed to be in charge that are supposed to be the experts don't have a clue about what's really going on in this fishery, you know? They put us on a personal quota this year and that's because the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission decided that we were catching too many. Based on *what*? Based on what? I lost two thirds of my income. I'm a conservationist at heart. I fight rockweed harvest. I fought to have the periwinkles screened on the beach, the little ones so that they got a chance to grow up. I believe in having a future and having a tomorrow. But when somebody that doesn't know anything about - they've never even been to a river you're fishing on, they have no idea what lives in our lakes, when they are going to regulate something or when they are going to step in and say, 'Okay, you guys took too many. Now you're on a quota system.' And I had my quota pretty - I didn't catch hardly anything the month of April. My report to the state said 0.06. Six one hundredths of a pound! My other half, his report for April was zero. And then to go away and fish and to have almost all of our quota, almost 70 pounds, in one night and have to get off the river knowing that those eels aren't going to go until June. Knowing that behind all the gear, I don't care what river, what brook it is, that the eels go right up the middle of these rivers where the current is shut down when the tide comes in, all that water blowing down river, it stops it and it becomes very still. And if the water tables are low, if there's not much rain, they follow the current. They're not going to come to the shore. They go right up the middle of those rivers. Who is up next to these dams checking? Who is monitoring this? Nobody. How can you tell me how many big eels there are up in those lakes? They don't have the data. So they are managing with no scientific information whatsoever, very little. And they're saying, 'Oh god, you guys caught so many in 2012 because the price was through the roof.' I've got two nets. I can't fish them any harder than what I did. I'm a very poor individual. Not any more because of elver fishing. But digging clams and picking wrinkles all winter when it's 20, 30 below here. Going out when the tide's out at six o'clock in the morning, going back that evening with a head light when it's out. Doing it at midnight. You're darn right I fished elvers just as hard as I could! Even when they were only \$200 a pound I fished as hard as I could because it got us off the beaches. Don't tell me I fished harder because the price was up! The eels were there! You can't catch them if they're not there. Just like in April it was cold. I fished just as hard as I could. I put 3,000 miles on my truck looking for elvers and it was just too cold. They did very well in midcoast Maine and southern Maine this spring. But I'm of a mind, I respect people's territory. People have been fishing these same spots for 25 years. You don't pull in, I don't want them coming in on me and saying, 'Move the hell over, these are my elvers or I'm taking your spot away.' We've had confrontations with people over the years. It's almost like having a garden and you plant it and you go back and you harvest. You spend years figuring a river out and then somebody comes down and shines a light in your net to see how many you're catching and then sets a net right in front of you or comes down with a dip net and starts taking them all. They're stealing all those hours of knowledge that you put into it. So as far as when do they show up, it depends on how much runoff we have, how cold a winter we've had, is the ice out of the lakes up above us, how cold is the water temperature? That's why people fish the brooks first because the brooks warm up quicker. You've also got to go back, if you have a year where there isn't any elvers, you have to go back to 18 months before that and look

at the weather. What happened in that month of October, August, September, October, when the silver eels will go to sea? The weather conditions have to be perfect. It has to be a dark of the night. It has to be a rainy night. It has to be perfect. And if it isn't, they won't go. So if you don't have a good fall run of silver eels to the Sargasso Sea, 18 months later you're not going to have that good spring run. And they can say, 'Oh my god, they're all in trouble.' No. Go back and look and see what was going on back then. And then when the conditions are perfect and they all go, you have a good season. But just because they didn't go doesn't mean they're not there. It means that the conditions weren't right for them to go.

Julia: And that changes every year and you only have a short window of ten weeks –

Julie: That's correct. This year we were delayed two weeks by the legislative bill that was increasing the fines and penalties and putting a swipe card system into place. I agree with all of that. But they wouldn't give us the other two weeks on the other end. You can take it away but you can't give it back to us. It wouldn't have mattered that we were on a personal quota.

[Pause because a group of people walked by talking. Tape restarts.]

Julia: So you were saying that it depends on temperature and what the winter's been like.

Julie: What is so frustrating to the fishermen who understand that elvers don't – you can't start fishing just because it's March 22. They set a date. And then it ends May 31st. If you have a brutal winter, you're not going to get those elvers. You better hope and pray. I never was so scared in my life. This is the first time we've ever been on a personal quota. And not to catch those eels and to know that you've got a deadline coming. It's no different than some of the fisheries that we have here. Scallops and urchins, where they give you, you can go fishing Monday or you can go fishing Wednesday and if it blows 50 miles an hour that day, those people know that they've only got X amount of days and they literally risk their lives to go out and fish. Even though we've had these conversations - if there's a really bad storm, could you please take that day away and put it somewhere else? No. Because word won't get out to all the fishermen and there's always going to be someone go and they're going to look at you and they're going to say, well I thought it was open because that's what it says on the calendar. So it's very difficult to manage. Years ago we had a storm called the Patriots' Day storm in the state of Maine. We got eight inches of rain in that storm. There was no elver fishing for almost two weeks because the waters were just raging rivers and it drove everything back out or they just lay down and they wouldn't move. We begged the state to do something, to please give us some more days, but they wouldn't do it. It can be very difficult to know you have March 22 to May 31st in the state of Maine. During that time it might come out to, I actually have all these numbers in the house, but you have so many days to fish. Friday noon to Sunday noon is closed to conservation. However, we have so many tides that are daylight tides when you can't catch any elvers, such as if the tide is high at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and 4 o'clock in the morning, the elvers don't run. Then it's 5 o'clock and 5 o'clock. Then it's 6 o'clock and 6 o'clock. Then 7 o'clock and 7 o'clock. And 8 o'clock and 8 o'clock. That happens twice a month. So you actually lose all those tides in April, all those tides in May. Most of the time you lose four or five days at

the end of March too. And then they have it set up Friday noon to Sunday noon. Well, the eelers will take off and run on the big tides because it seems like they can go farther up river because the tide goes farther up river and helps carry them. If that falls on a Friday or a Saturday, you don't fish. They can make the argument for the Native Americans to give out 500 and some odd licenses and all this gear by saying we're now on an output control. So if you're on an output control and they had 1,650 pounds – do you understand what I'm saying?

Julia: I think so.

Julie: Well why would you not care when we caught the eels? Why does there need to be a season? Why couldn't you just fish until you got your quota and that's it?

Julia: Yeah. That hasn't been an option?

Julie: Well they make the argument about enforcement, that they've got clamming to take care of. They've only got so many officers. They've got lobster fishing coming up. They've got mussel dragging. They've got other duties to perform and so that's it, regardless.

Julia: So it's a funding issue, that they can't afford to put extra Marine Patrol offices out there to keep their eye on it?

Julie: But you can't make the argument it's an output control and let all these people into the fishery and give them X amount of pounds. Why can't you make the same argument that it's an output control if we're going to be on a personal quota, not to be under that kind of pressure that you've got to catch these eels? And if it's a bad winter you don't stand a chance until later in the season. I thought it worked really well. Thank god most of us that did know how to fish, we got our quotas.

Julia: It was the first year of it so hopefully it will continue to evolve and work out some problems.

Julie: Well, if they put us down to 3,000 pounds – 3,000 pounds! 900 people in the fishery now. We're outnumbered by the Native Americans. There's 427 non-tribal and I think there's well over, I don't know, 600, tribal.

Julia: And the cap overall for everybody was 11,000 this year?

Julie: 11,780. The state was originally going to keep back 1,000 pounds for conservation in case people went over what their swipe card was intended to stop. So in other words I had 51.5 pounds for a quota. If I had gone over my quota and got 60 pounds that ten pounds would be part of that buffer that they didn't want to go over because of the Atlantic States mandates. But that never happened. They convinced them to hold back only 500 pounds and I don't think they needed anywhere near that much. That combined with some people did not get their quota is why the newspapers are reporting, well they were on a quota and they only had 41%

of what they were allowed to catch. They say 35 but it's a hell of a lot more than that. I lost two thirds. And we still didn't get our quota, that's what they're saying. That's not true. When this originally came out about putting everybody on a quota there was a lot of talk amongst people who believe in redistribution of wealth, let's put it that way. And they wanted everyone to have the same. Everyone has the same. You've got an elver license, your license is just as valid as this person. Everybody gets the same piece of gear. Everybody gets the same amount of elvers, no matter how many years you've been in it. And I told the state, I said, you can't do that. You're basing it on 18,000 pounds of catch. Those landings come from people that know how to elver fish. You can't take and divide that evenly amongst everybody. I told them, I know people that don't catch eels. If you do it that way we're never going to make our quota and it's going to be reported as oh my god, the eels are in trouble! And look what happened! The newspaper came out and said that, even though we did very well on the quota. They didn't say the state held back 500 pounds. For example I know somebody that had a seven-pound quota and they never filled it. I said you have to base it on previous landings that way the people that caught those eels - that's where the 18,000 pounds comes from - you have a much greater chance of making your quota and proving that we're not in trouble. And they went that way. I think they heard it from a lot of people. Thank god they did it that way because otherwise you're going to give these people that couldn't catch an elver if they had to - As secretary, for example I got calls from people who said, I'm really worried about my quota. I said, well what are you worried about? Well, I've got an elver license but I didn't fish for the last three years and I don't have any landings. I said, well, I've heard that the state's going to give everybody four pounds. So they didn't fish. How many people didn't fish that had a license and they gave them four pounds? They took the four pounds away from those of us that did.

Julia: Oh. So everybody else was it an average of the best two out of three years?

Julie: Yes. But if they had no landings and had a license they got a minimum of four pounds. Now, I have a problem with this because if you didn't fish for elvers when they were \$2,700 a pound and now you're worried about your quota! They took so much away from us individual fishermen that have been in this fishery for so long and they gave some of the Native Americans who just got in the fishery an increase in how much they can catch away from us. We're the ones that caught the eels! Now we've got to share everything. And I don't have a problem with Native Americans being in the fishery. I think everybody should have an opportunity. But why didn't they acquire a license through the state lottery? They're a resident of the state just like we are, like everybody else. It's been a rough thing when you're so dependent on it to have this happen. And then there is the financial aspect of it, which the Atlantic States don't want to talk about. They don't care, I should say, about the economics. They're all about saving the resource. But you have to take the socio-economics into play. A fishery that brought \$38 million into the state of Maine where there's no jobs. I live in an area that is one of the poorest places in all of Washington County, Maine. I have put up a brand new barn. I have two new trucks. I built a garage. I have acquired angus beef. I put in an apple orchard. It's changed our life. I have money in retirement. And then let's look at how it's contributing to the rest of the state. We paid \$60,000 in taxes last year. That's enough money to support five families on welfare. This year we lost two thirds of our income. The state is

losing. The government is losing. It just doesn't make any sense, the whole thing. If they actually had justification, if they could actually look us in the eye and say, yes, there's a problem with the eels. My other half was trout fishing, he caught a great big giant silver eel. A friend of mine that was up on Indian Lake and a friend of mine up on Hadley's caught one too. I couldn't believe it. It's the first time I've heard about that in years.

Julia: So related to the economics of it, maybe after these people walk by, do you want to describe what you were saying before about how in this area there used to be a lot of other fishing opportunities and now there's not a lot and this is a way for people to make money?

Julie: But there's only a handful of us that elver fish down here.

Julia: So that's more for the individuals? It's not really helping the whole community?

Julie: It's not. We're helping our families. I've done some things for the community that I'm not going to talk about on the camera. It's on the QT. People that are very poor that can't afford things. I can talk in the general sense of growing up in Lubec and being, I don't know, seventh, eighth, ninth generation Lubecer and watching this whole community go through the sardine capital of the world pretty much. Twenty-three sardine factories. My first job. My great grandmother's, my grandmother's, then me, fourth generation sardine packer. My grandfather used to herring fish. I worked on a herring carrier as a kid, well, 20. And watching that whole industry go. And then there was a big urchin fishery and the state didn't regulate that in time. A lot of people say, look what happened to urchins! The state mis-managed that. I used to be an urchin manager in Portland. I had 400 divers in the Portland immediate vicinity. I had buying stations. I bought urchins – I was a receiving manager – from Gloucester all the way to Nova Scotia. I used to schedule all the trucks and stuff that came in. All the urchins that came into the building came into a giant cooler first. We had a conveyor belt. We would take a tote full of urchins over and dump it. It would go up on the conveyor and then they would be dumped onto a big table. But it wasn't a table. It was made out of bars. And the urchins would come down onto the bars and then the bars would shake. So the small urchins would fall through. Back then every single day urchins smaller than that, billions and billions and billions of them. That was called the gurry and we had to have it removed. So the guy that I worked for had a boat hired that could take 300 totes at a time out to sea and they made two runs a day, weather permitting. 600 totes a day. Empty shells from when they were processing the urchins and from the little ones. Back then people used to tow for them, dump the bag on the deck, and shovel them into totes. Well of course the people that are doing piecework, they want big urchins to get the roe out. I watched billions, and billions, and billions of urchins dumped every single day. Because they had to pay a dollar a tote to get rid of them, there was actually someone hired that would jump up and down on the urchins to make more room in the tote.

Julia: Oh no!

Julie: Oh yes.

Julia: So if any of them were left alive –

Julie: No.

Julia: - they were crushed.

Julie: Or they were left on the dock in the boiling sun if the weather was bad or the boat was broke down or whatever. I watched that whole industry collapse. I was told that California actually had an urchin fishery and they called up the state of Maine and they said, 'You had better do something and regulate it now before it's too late.' And nobody listened. It was a complete gold rush. A lot of the people that got involved in the urchin fishery really quick, once that dried up, they just went over and got a scallop license. The best scallop grounds in the state – probably 21 years ago, before that I was living in Portland and then I moved back home – was Cobscook Bay. And the first year I was home I watched about 200 boats come up in between Lubec and Campobello underneath the bridge and I said to somebody, 'What the hell is going on?' And they said, 'Scallop season's starting.' And they actually opened this bay up, the first in the state. Our scallop season here lasted one day. The next day you couldn't get enough to eat. This was, at the same time it was combined with the Magnuson Stevens Act when they did the 88 days at sea. It used to be, when I was a groundfisherman out of Portland, we fished year-round. Every day you could go you went. And then the Magnuson Stevens Act came into play, 88 days at sea. Everybody that couldn't go groundfishing went out and bought a scallop license. We had boats here from Portland. Big 110-foot boats up in this little bay. People towing this way, this way, this way, this way. Drags entangled local boats, small boats, by 100-foot boats, being dragged backwards, water coming in over the stern. The local people screaming, 'Help, help, stop!' They couldn't hear them on the big boats over the engine and the radios going on the deck. It bent their rigging. It was very, very dangerous. The coast guard – I had a dragger at the time – actually came along beside and said, 'All you little boats need to go home because it's too dangerous for you to be here.' And this is our home. These people came and they took all the scallops. It lasted one day. They would open this bay first and then they would open Mason's Bay, Machias Bay. They would open them one at a time down the coast so they lined up on this end of the state and raped it, took all the money, all the scallops, and left. Year after year. It took four years. We used to have four Coast Guard boats up here and I don't know how many Marine Patrol planes overhead, everything, trying to keep people from getting killed. That's how bad it was. But the state refused to open it all at the same time. It took four years and finally they opened it at the same time. But this is the biggest concentration of boats in the state is up here and we begged them. If the local people could just have the resource. The scallops collapsed across the state. They asked the fishermen up here, 'Would you be willing if we closed down the prime scallop grounds to let it come back, if we were to let you have the first shot at that, would you go along with it?' They said yes and it never happened because there's so much political pressure from down that side of the state. So you have all these boats that got into the urchin fishery and when the urchins collapsed they all started scalloping. The lobster boats went urchining and scalloping. They wiped it out. And now there's a tote limit on urchins. It's too late. It's crazy to me for the state to say, we're going to put you on a personal quota for elver fishing because the Atlantic States feels that they could be in

trouble and at the same time give out five or six hundred more licenses. How is that rewarding someone that's been in this fishery, that breathes that fishery? That makes their own gear, that is dependent on it, that understands it, that respects it? I still have a license because I obey the law. How is that rewarding good faith? No. Move over. You've got to share this. It's no different than what's happened up in the bay. We've got a green crab problem in the state that's taking over clams. We have red tide here right now. This is closed. You have a whole population of people that are left with no sardine factories. It's not urchin season. It's not scallop season. There are no lobsters. My son just went and hauled the other day. They made \$11. They had eleven pounds. I think he made \$26. I'm not sure. They hauled over 100 traps. So they're all on the beach either picking wrinkles or they're digging clams. Most everybody's on welfare. Because of the green crab problem this year – I have a non-resident Lubec license as well as a Trescott license for harvesting clams, softshell clams – this year there were 18 non-residents that showed up that wanted a resident Lubec license from towns – Roques Bluff, Machias. This has never happened before. The locals are like, 'Oh my god!' Combined with the people that have discovered the rockweed here that are taking everything. I said if they could sell the rocks, they would. How does a local community hold on just by their fingernails, you know? When you're given 12 days to scallop, four totes of urchins, red tide, no wrinkles. What do people do? There's so much drugs here. People are drug addicts bad. A lot of alcoholism. There seems to be no hope. There's no future for our children. They lost their identity when we lost our high school. You see Lubec kids wearing Machias high school sports coats and it breaks your heart to know that my grand children will never graduate from my hometown. The whole town is being taken over by people moving in from away. It's just all shifting. It's very, very painful to watch all this unfold. We could make a decent living, not get rich, but we could make a decent living if we could provide the resources to those people that live here. This is where you live, this is where you pay your taxes, this is where you're dependent, totally dependent on this bay. There's hardly any boats that leave here and go fish down the coast. It's mostly just right here. There's a few that do, but not many. They depend on it. That ocean feeds so many of us. We can't share it with the whole state. And it's the same thing on the rivers. If you allow so many people on the rivers, you've got a future on the rivers. But if you – like in East Machias when you line up 80 people fishing and then the nets behind them. How can this be? I've never seen anything like it. There was only four or five people that ever fished over there. I guess the resources do belong to everybody. How do you manage it? I guess that's the million dollar question and nobody can figure it out.

Julia: Do you think it would be better if it were more regional management, like you fish where you live?

Julie: I sure as hell do. I think that as far as the inshore fisheries go, within three miles, or the inner bays, I think that definitely should be local control. I think there should be a board set up here that should be made up of DMR people, biologists, fish managers, whatever you want to call it, local fishermen, and maybe even some local landowners where you could all come to the table. A clammer can explain what they're seeing. Where you can talk to people that are periwinkle pickers that go down to a place that they've been picking for 40 years and they go down on that ledge that was covered in seaweed that was six feet long is now completely bare

because somebody came in there with a suction pump and they took all the wrinkles, and they took all the seaweed. The seaweed harvesters moved on and this person now has wasted a tide to get to the spot and there's nothing there. What's he supposed to do? You need these conversations where you can say, there's a lot of scallops here, there's a lot of green crabs here, there's no clams here, we need to fix this beach. This person's got a broken sewer pipe over here. We need to get this fixed. The homeowner might come to the table and say, 'Well I was broken into by some clammers down there.'

You try to figure out who did that. You can't manage fisheries from an office far away from where the fishing is being done. You can't run statistics through a computer system. You can't decide how much of any species there is based on a few studies. It's crazy. It's crazy. And how do you look a fisherman in the face when that's their whole life? That's all they know. That's all they've ever done. They don't have a college degree. I do. I have a degree in computers. I went through the federal fisheries retraining program because I wanted to learn how to turn a computer on so I could help the local fishermen, to try to access information, to try to get more involved in how to manage stuff, how to change things, how to change laws, how to be heard. I don't know how you solve any of this because it's gotten so big that it's like government, it's like congress. It's out of control. If you call anybody up and you say we have a problem they say, well you need to talk to so and so. And so you get turned to this person and you leave a voice mail. They call you back and they say, well that's not my department. You need to talk to this person. And you get pushed from this one to that one to this one to that one. People give up. And that's what they want us to do is just give up and go away. I don't know what else to say. It's so sad. We're losing everything. Our way of life, completely. My other half's niece, when she was seven months pregnant went down to a beach to pick periwinkles, a hundred pound sack, dead of winter. She got down on the beach and when she came up off the beach somebody she'd never seen before came out of a house and wanted to know how she got to the beach. It was somebody not from here. She was literally forced to climb through the woods in about four feet of snow, pregnant, dragging this sack of wrinkles because the out-of-stater forced her off of the beach and said you can't access my property. I couldn't believe it. That's the mentality we're dealing with. And all the media attention on this elver thing has been very upsetting because every time they print it you go into the comments and all the comments say, 'Oh my god! They're killing everything!' And this is from people that don't even know what an elver is! There's environmental terrorism going on in the world now. People don't want you to cut the trees but they need the toilet paper. They don't want you to kill a lobster. You've got the people that are, 'Oh my god! You're killing lobsters! You're torturing them.' They turn their nose up at you because you go across their property but the first thing they do is sit down and order clams when they get in a restaurant. It's insanity!

Julia: But from your point of view there are plenty of elvers out there?

Julie: I think there's so many elvers. If we only knew how many elvers! I have seen the elvers quadruple. I can't even say it. I've seen elvers this year that were literally biblical. Something out of a science fiction movie, so help me god. My other half had a net set. In two hours a bag this big solid full. There were so many eels. Fifteen foot wings on that net and it's eight feet deep. There were so many eels in front of it with nowhere to go until the tide got over it and

then they went around it, that they made a vortex. If he could have got to the net and dumped it he probably could have caught 400 pounds. But he's only allowed to have so many.

Julia: Does the abundance change year-to-year? Have you seen low periods and high periods?

Julie: I think, yes. But, actually, I'm not sure what's been going on because we always fished just Downeast. We never caught that many eels. There was a dam on the East Machias River and they took that out. I think it's helping. Fourteen years of conservation in the state. A limit on gear, a limit on licensing, no fishing the middle third. I think we've really helped ourselves. I think it's made a hell of a difference. The season too. I'm quite hopeful for the future. Especially with this report coming out of Canada on this. Cairnes, I think the guy's name is. Quite hopeful. I love it.

Julia: There's one ray of hope in all this bad stuff.

Julie: It's going to be pretty hard to prove that they're not there. They keep saying, oh my god! It's not the elvers we're worried about it's the big eels. Well, where are all these elvers coming from? I mean, come on! They didn't fall out of the sky! You know what the most frustrating thing is? Is seeing stuff like that, seeing so many elvers that you just – all you can do is stand there and say, oh my god. Because who the hell would believe it? From here as far as the water, you can shine, just the whole river going. Billions of them! You've got to tell somebody. You want somebody to see this. There isn't anybody to tell! Each other, the other fishermen, the buyers. But there's nobody from the top that's going to make these dam rules. There should be an 800 number. There should be strategically located observers that you can call up and say, 'My god, you've got to come and see this! Bring a night vision camera. Get in the water underneath and film this. Nobody's going to believe this! You've got to film this. This is insane.' There's a video online, the Severn in England, it had a run this year 50 miles long. The whole river was eels. But yet, Atlantic States comes out and says, the European Consultancy says they're all in trouble. Oh, they are? Where did these come from? How can you get a run of elvers the whole river solid – they said the whole river turned white. It's online. 50 miles long! Where did they come from? You've got to have big eels. We must have some very healthy ecosystems and very productive waterways. I think it's all politics. I think it's the EPA listing and all that is coming out of the California environmental terrorist group and we're going to pay for it. I don't know. I'd hate to lose this fishery. If I lose this fishery eventually I'll end up on social security or something because I'm physically in a very bad way. I have a very bad back. I tried to go clamming the other day and I ended up with a package of frozen deer meat on my back every 15 minutes just trying to get the spasms to stop. I don't know. I feel so bad right now for the people that are trying to come up with enough money for school clothes for their kids here. We have red tide. They can't dig. There's no other work. Nothing. Nothing.

Julia: I don't know what to say.

Julie: Me either.

Julia: This tape has eight minutes left on it. I have more if you want to keep talking. But I think you answered a lot of my questions without me asking them. I think there's only one question that you maybe didn't address, which is, what do you think is the biggest threat to the eels in your local area?

Julie: Dams. And there's a proposed dam right now for the Pennamaquan River in Pembroke.

Julia: A new one?

Julie: A tidal dam. They're out of the midwest somewhere. Even though I'm an elver fisherman I care so much about everything else that lives in that river. It's literally amazing, some of the things that I've seen. Eagles fishing. Ospreys fishing. Alewives so many you could walk on them, trying to get up river and being blocked by a dam. Trout running in the spring. The eels are amazing creatures, the little elvers. They're so smart. I've seen them do crazy things. I watched one one year in Pembroke - I could cry because it's so sad to think that they want to destroy it all for money. It's crazy! There was a big culvert over there and a little tiny brook that's kind of tidal. I went up there to see if there were any eels going up this little tiny brook and there was. The tide was about *that* far from the culvert. I could see all these little eels mulling around this brook that went nowhere. They go everywhere, these eels. The tide got about *that* far from a culvert and I watched this eel come up out of the water. He got his head just on the very edge of that culvert and he pulled himself in. Then he went up - there wasn't a lot of water running out, just enough. This kind of green slime inside. He stayed right on the edge of it and made it. I've watched them climb straight up over a dam at Somesville. There was a giant fish this big laying on the other side of the dam. It was only about that deep. As soon as he made it, *chomp!* I thought, my god! All that effort for that! And that is the truth if we don't open up these waterways or provide passage. Why can't we provide passage for these eels? Everything is trying to get in our rivers. How many millions of dollars are we spending on salmon restoration? Holy crap! You've got the purists. We've got to have the native salmon. Well, we've got all these salmon pens out in the bay. We have escapees all the time. So what do they do? They put nets across the goddamn rivers so none of them can get up there to spawn including the native fish. Millions and millions of dollars.

Julia: That's messed up.

Julie: Yeah. It is.

Julia: So do you think that the best way to address the threats to the eels, would it be just to give them - *[Problem with the tape. The last few words were cut off. They were probably something along the lines of "better passage at the dams".]*

Julie: Absolutely. But if you've got huge, huge dams that maybe they're too high and they can't make it up there, why couldn't you do it in stages like you would stairs? You go up so high and then you go this way and then you go this way. You make it so that they could access. I think a restocking program. But they have to be old enough to go up. You can't just take a glass eel and

throw it in. It won't ever make it. It's not acclimated. Restocking. I think we should count the silver eel migration in the fall and then you'll know if you're going to have a good elver season or not by what's coming out of those lakes. I think they have no idea what we've got going. I read a lot. There's eels in North Dakota, there's Arkansas. They go everywhere! All over South America, Canada. If we don't keep our fishery they're just going to develop another one somewhere else, which they're working on. Bushey can tell you about that.

Julia: Yup. He was telling me about that a little bit.

Julie: Is that it?

Julia: Yeah. Unless you want to talk about anything else. We've got three minutes left. We covered a lot of ground.

Julie: Okay. That's good.