Project	**Women in Alaska Fisheries**
Interviewee	Wassiliisa Bennis [WB]
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Transcribed by	Kim Sparks
Notes	(??) indicates the transcriber's best guess for a word or name when not verified by the interviewee. When not provided by the interviewee, spelling and definitions for Yup'ik terms (shown in italics) are sourced from: Jacobson, S. A. (2012). *Yup'ik Eskimo dictionary* (2nd ed.). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Language Center.

KS: I'm Kim Sparks and I'm here with Deedee and we're at BBNA [Bristol Bay Native Association] and Deedee's graciously agreed to an interview with us, and Deedee can you talk about when you first started fishing?

WB: First of all, my name is Wassiliisa and Deedee's a nickname. I'm Yupik and Aleut. Wassiliisa is—I'm named after my grandmother who was Aleut, and she's from the Naknek/Kvichak area, the peninsula. And so my father is half Finn and half Aleut, and Wassiliisa is—he named me after his mother. Deedee, I use that as a nickname and I was given that to me by my grandmother who is Yupik, and she's from this—in the Bethel, YK Kuskokwim region. And she married a Japanese person and it's interesting, it's an interesting story in itself, so that makes me Yupik, Aleut, Finn and Japanese on both my grandfathers. Both of my grandmothers are from this land, and born and raised in Alaska, in region, so I was born and raised here in Dillingham. I grew up in Ekuk, which is a small village down river. We moved here to Dillingham after the earthquake, and moved to Dillingham with all my siblings. I have, had—there was eight children, my mother had eight children. And my father was a commercial fishing, we grew up commercial fishing, we lived and were raised in—during the summertime's after we moved to Dillingham in the village of Ekuk. My father was a full time commercial fishing, and that's how we survived, and that's how we, he worked, he started his fishery in April getting ready. We had a King season in May, and he was fishing until August, so—and that was in the 1960s and 70s—and having lived up here and meeting my spouse, John Bennis, I knew him since elementary. Been here, never lived anywhere else but in the region in Dillingham. And so I have the best of both worlds. I fish in Naknek/ Kvichak for years with my spouse, that's where my children grew up during

the summertimes, and during the wintertimes we'd come back here and work and do the rest of our subsistence.

We're so blessed with large/small game. We do both—birds, caribou, moose, porcupine, beaver—all of that, in addition to the fishery. My children grew up fishing in commercial and set netting, but when I got married I started set netting with my spouse. He worked for the state until he retired, the city and the state and so I took my children over and a lot of families did that, set netting. And then we'd come over and we'd do our—we'd be gone June and July, and that's the beauty of working here at BBNA. I've worked in—I start off by saying I work at BBNA all my life, because I have. I started when I was 18. I had my first child at 19, and started fishing in the fishery full time since then. I'm now, I mean we haven't commercial fished although we still have our permit, set net permit, my family and extended family and my brother and his family still reside and fish in the summertime, commercial, down at Ekuk and set net. And now my son is into the fishery as well. My middle son. My elder son is a tradesman and gone, and of course, he's the one who has all my grandchildren who I'm now passing on my traditional knowledge, as it comes with subsistence fishing from, you know, you name it. We've done it, all our lives.

You know I was reading your—Alaska Native women in fisheries and it indicated, you know what, it's part of who we are, and so when I committed to doing this yesterday, I think it's so important that people hear what we have to say. It's so important for people to know how we live. Why we live it. And we chose to stay here. Its—you know, we thought about, you know, when I'm getting up in retirement age of where we would live—outside of Dillingham, and I can't think of any place else but here because we have so much freedoms at our back door. I can go out and pick greens. I do that today, you know, plants and berries. I'm an avid berry picker, avid subsistence user. Even now I'm waiting to get out, wait for the silvers to come in to go out and get silvers, you know, we freeze. We can. We smoke. We salt. And use all of the fish. I mean, there's no waste. And one of the things I take pride in is that as a user of the resources you never take more than you need. It's a sin otherwise. It's wasteful and we share, you know.

My husband and I, through the years, do gift baskets and gift our elders, you know, my parents who are no longer here, and his family and my family always got treats. I'll never forget the one time I had cut up some salt heads, which we call *sulunaq*[1], and I put them in a quart bag and the delight that you get when you give it to an elder is just—it be—you can't explain it. And that's part of what we do when we're sharing and I've come to the point where I'm

[1] Salted fish heads

journaling for my daughter, so she can have it from start to finish. And how and what we do, and now I'm bringing my grandchildren out and I'm doing the same, because, you know, we each have jobs. Even when we were commercial fishing and set netting—and subsisting—and you never, you never—the success I think of our fishery and our resource is in passing on the knowledge is, you're respectful to the land. And you're grateful. And you never take more than you need. And you share. And those are key to what we do today, and—back, back—being a tribal member—our tribe does a subsistence camp and they teach our kids how to subsist and put up fish, and the beauty about that is, is—we go and we get the fish and we teach them how to do it—is they get to take some of that product home, and then we have a big event in the Fall, and we give it out. And that—and the joy in that, for those that don't actively participate, but are—have the resource at their hands, we want to—and that's part of the sharing part of what we do—on a cultural basis.

In the early seventies, when commercial fishing was active and I had mentioned my dad was a commercial fishing, and he was one of three captains that got fiberglass boats, and he was always—always a high fisherman. He was always, you know, one to five and he was always from upwards of two to three, being high boat.

I'd gone to a funeral, a dear friend's funeral who—knew my parents and they were good friends and in the obituary—it was said that me and my wife back in the day put up a 120,000 pounds by ourselves, and a lot of our—our fishermen did that with their wives. I think women in the fisheries, I mean, we're steadfast. We're strong. We may not have the physical strength, but we have the mental strength. I've fished on the beach. I know how to mend nets. And I know how to hang nets, and of course passing that on to my children, as my father, who had taught and my uncles who had taught me, and I inherited my father's hanging bench. And my uncle from South Naknek had made me one, and I love my family dearly, so I passed on what my dad gave me to my brother, whose children are still in the fisheries, and my brother is still, and so I still have the one that my uncle made me. In fact we just hung a—subsistence net, cause that's what we do now.

But learning, all of what it takes and being a commercial fisherman, it's a small business. And people forget that. It's a, you know, it's where you make your money. My dad did it for years, and fished really hard, like I said, he was a high boat fishermen and he paid all his bills. And then we moved up here, you know, we operate on grub stakes, we all have grub rooms, and you know commercial fish. I do the same. We get our food and we buy it in bulk, you know, its—and we have freezers. You know, I have a freezer for my fish. I have a freezer for my berries and I have a freezer for my—moose and

caribou. And living out here, although it is really expensive, you learn to buy in bulk and you've gotta have a vacuum packer—and those are the kinds of changes over the years that we've adapted to, you know, when we get new people in and we share—and I'm constantly sharing this information—first thing you need is a freezer. Because you're going to buy in bulk. You're going to buy chicken that goes on sale, and you're going to break it down into meal size, and you're going to do the same with everything, you know, from moose and caribou and your birds, and your fish. I mean, and your plants, you're going to learn. You need to do that, and so that's—every day. It's what we do here. There's no question about, you know, you always learn something different. I was out berry picking several years back and we sat down for a break, and we were eating—snacks and fish and one of my cousins was eating a piece of strip and she took the skin of it, and she buried it. And I said, What are you doing? And she said, Well we have to give back to the land what we take. And so I just did that about three days ago and I said, This is the reason why we do it, you know but, it's those little things that you pass down that you remember to give—it's a respect factor in our lands, as we compete in the fisheries and with sports and commercial and subsistence users there's a really, a fine balance and there's got to be equity in how we do it, and its beyond me. And place ourselves so that we don't use, overuse the resource, you know, with technology the way it is today with phones, you know, instead of radio and CBs and mail.

There's nothing—like getting a card in the mail, a thank you or a note from someone, from an aunt. I just went over to visit my two aunties, ones eighty eight years old and she's still putting up her own fish, you know, and I just hung out with her all day for three days and my other auntie who is—who puts up fish, and who's done it all her life, you know, I think she's seventy three—and those are the last—my auntie in South Naknek is the last sibling on my dad's side, and so I really wanted to spend some quality time with her. I did lose my father in 1977 to a boating accident. The engine—he had three younger brothers—he was taking my two younger brothers out to teach them, to break them in and my other brother was out with another guy, that he was breaking in—and he got asphyxiated with—got poisoned, you know, they were going—they just got done delivering fish to the harbor—to the scow and they passed, both my brother and my dad, which was—awful. Horrible. And my other brother survived, but he's no longer with us either because then shortly after that I lost my grandmother to cancer, and then my mother to an aneurism, and then my brother to suicide. And so—and that was all within five years I lost half of my family, so I value family. And I value [pause for emotion] families that have moms. Because I don't have one, I've lost mine so early. Or parents, you know, I lost my dad—I never got to—as I grew up into my 20s and I just had my son when my dad died, he was only

three months old. [pause for emotion] And it's been several years, my son's forty one years old, and you think you know, it wouldn't hurt, but you never stop loving those, your family. And so—

But that's part of—and I'm so grateful that what was instilled in me was to be respectful. To love your family, and take care of your family because that's all you've got. And so I try to carry on that, and I think I portray that in everything that I do. Because you don't know what you have until you lose it. And because I grew up with my dad being a commercial fishermen, it was—and my mother worked, and then we moved up here and that changed a little bit [??] when we moved up here I was in the third grade, and I still believed in the tooth fairy and Santa Clause, and you know, all the things until I realized, I was told that they don't exist, and it was quite the shock.

But what I had, and what we had year round, and you know, we went to a small village school in the village and there's another community—Clark's Point where my mother's family had family on. And between my husband and me, I could almost say we're related to everybody and their brother here so you have to careful what you say and who you say it to, but you know one of the things is if you never lie you never have to remember what you said. And if you're respectful in all cases then there's nothing to say, we all make mistakes. And I'm just glad to have my health and family and not be tied into the alcoholism and drug addictions that happen here. And not to say that I don't have family members who do it, and so I adamantly try to practice what I preach and it comes along with healthy living and also living in, participating in our subsistence lifestyle.

Fisheries is a biggie for us but there's other things that we do here that makes us unique as a region, you know, we—Bristol Bay and BBNA, we represent 31 communities. You know, from the Aleuts we have three distinctive groups. We have Aleut, Yupik and Asthabascan. And it's pretty cool and we're all shore based communities, you know from the coast to the Chigniks to Ivenoff/Perryville all the way up to Naknek, Kvichak and to the Illiamna region to Togiak to [*maybe Klinik*]. So we have major fishing districts here. We have the Kvichak, which Naknek, which we fish in and we have Nushagak which we fish in. We have Iguigig, we have the Chigniks and we have [Ugashik] and we have Togiak, and all of those are high producing. Except our Chigniks, they had a bum year this year, which is unfortunate. But you always, you know, wish people well in their fisheries so...

[Break in recording]

Fishing! Commercial fishing with my children, they grew up in South Naknek fishing, commercial fishing, set netting, you know, everybody had a chore. Everybody started together and everybody ended together from mending the

net, putting the net out to picking the fish, cleaning the fish, and delivering the fish. I mean, we did it as a family from wood gathering, to hauling water to doing laundry, to cooking. The only thing that they didn't do that we did is cook, but bringing them back in the summertime and doing—putting up fish was part—I think one of the best things my family has ever done and what provides good work ethic, is working one together as a family from start to finish. I mean, I have three children who are very work oriented who have good work ethic. Fishing is a small business. You start and end together and you learn really good work habits and it develops really good work ethic. My children had to work for what they got. They weren't given things. If they didn't earn it, they didn't get it. And that's how it was, that's how JD grew up and that's how I grew up, you know, my father was a fisherman and I can't say he's always had good years. He had poor years and so I had to start working when I was, you know, thirteen. And there was some years I'd make more than my dad, and I'd offer to help pay the bills with it, as young as I was. And he would never take my money, he said, You earned it. It's your money. And, We'll manage. And we did, you know. So using that as a guide, and looking at the good years and the bad years with commercial fishing it's all not hunky dory, because you know there is going to be bad years, and we grew up with that, you know, we never lacked for anything. A lot of people said we were poor, but what's poor? In who's eyes? You know, just because we didn't have a car or we didn't have TV, and those were kind of blessings anyway because we did things, you know, as a family. We were fed. We had a warm place to stay. We had food on the table. And that was good, you know, I didn't know what rich or what poor was because I didn't grow up in that lifestyle.

When we moved up here, my dad got a job and so did my mom, but then he did commercial fish. You know, his season started in April and ended in August and then he came here. You know, he worked down at the canneries and all the fisheries here, and so I tell you this because its part of who I am and what I've seen and what I grew up with and how I trained. And when I got married and how I worked with my Spouse, and knowing, and teaching my children to you know, being able to hang nets, to mend nets. I said, the value you bring, that you will bring to the fishery, your work, is going to carry you through.

Everybody had a job, you know, from six years old on up. Whether it be a string holder or a fish carrier, or in the fishery, you know, from start to finish. Like I said, there's all these different functions from set net, and families that—and a lot of families on the beach on South Naknek brought, were women with their kids. And the men were out fishing in a commercial boat and I tell you, being a fisherwoman on the beach was hard work. But it was

well worth it. I mean one of the things I liked about fish camp is we didn't have TV. We had the radio so we could listen to the announcements. I mean, I was a reader so we'd always pick books and read. But, you know, we didn't have electricity. We had an outhouse. We picked our wood for bathing, for steaming, and we hauled our own water and we washed clothes. I think seventeen, eighteen and I had gone over to JD's fish camp and it was like walking back in the stone age cause they still had [?? oil] lamps, and they were washing their clothes on a washing board and of course I was just so eager to help because it was his a dad and mom over there—and learned that there's a certain way that you wash clothes because when I first did it I had no clue. I just was working really hard and I had blisters all over on my knuckles until I learned the proper way to do that. And since then I've been bringing my children over to fish camp with me, over in South Naknek and working at BBNA for the last forty plus years, one of the beauties about working at the non-profit is that we were given that ability to take off during the summer months to do our commercial fishing. Whether it'd be set netting commercial, or subsistence, I tell you—even today when the fish hit the beach everybody's gone. Because you only have that small window opportunity to process when the salmon hit the beaches.

But getting back to my children—that's what they grew up with, you know, outhouses. No electricity. No running water. Bathing in the stream bath and cooking over a Coleman stove, or a wood stove. And of course, things have gotten easier. Now we have generators and running water and electricity with generators and even—I was just over at South Naknek and I visited a fish camp that we haven't fished over there for the last few years, and they have even a washer down there running from a generator. It's like holy, we used to use the—not the wash boards but the (pause) And my mom did that cause she washed all the diapers and the kids in Ekuk would just be hanging diapers everywhere! You know, in the wintertime they'd be stiff and we'd bring them in and put them over the wood stove or the oil stove and then in the summer they'd be flapping, you know, diapers, diapers, diapers. I mean, eight kids back to back to back, I know all of my siblings ages based on—how old I am, you know, so I can go down the line to know all their ages.

But bringing my kids back here and working and putting up fish after the seasons over and doing the subsistence fishing and them growing up with it year after year after year—it really helped develop their character and who they are and what they—and they've been taught, as I've been taught, you be respectful. Not just to your adults but you be respectful to the land as well, you don't take more than you need and if you do have it and you're more fortunate than others, you share. And they grew up hearing that, and we practice it today and now my grandchildren (pause)

My son had to move to Wasilla, they moved out of region. He has six kids, seven kids. And so we bring them out, and—as my children, they each have their own chores from mixing the salt and making the potato float to making strings to trying—Grandma, grandma! Could I cut the head off? Well of course, cut the head off, cut their fingers off because you've got a sharp knife, so (laughs) they each have their own chores, you know, and they work as get older they can learn how to process. From catching and putting the net out, from catching and picking the fish and cleaning the fish. So I'm teaching my grandchildren this and going out and—from berry picking to making jam to processing the fish. In fact, I just had the two grandkids out, and damn if they didn't miss the kings by a day! But they to help with the wood, and help start the smokehouse, you know, when we did the strips and they helped cut up all the fish for canning and the salting, and then we did, after the strips with the kings and we have the reds with the dried fish and they got to help with that, and checking the smokehouse and all of that. So, they know.

I bring, you know, my son and daughter live here in Dillingham, and my son has a baby. She just turned one years old. And my daughter is hopefully going to start a family soon, but what she had asked me to do, and what I did, is I started journaling everything from start to finish so she could have that skill to pass onto to her children as I've taught to her and as I was taught by my grandmother and my mother on JD's side. And on my side. But from fish, they go out and get it sometimes and they bring it in, you know, and everything that I do, somebody—they all contribute on one level. Whether it's going out and getting the moose, then we bring it home, we hang it, we clean it and we cut it up and we process it and then it gets divided out. And that includes my family and my son and his family in Wasilla because my kids, our grandkids, are going to know what Native foods are. They're going to know how to make *akutaq*[2]. They're going to know how to eat *gumchak*[3]. They're going to know how to eat salt fish. They're going to know how to eat pickled fish. From herring eggs—they're going to know—and it is an acquired taste. If you're not used to eating it, then you get—this day and age they eat nothing but processed food. Who the hell eats processed food?! We don't, you know. You grow your own potatoes, your carrots, you know, everything you eat we cook. It doesn't come from a box, although sometimes you get rice pilaf you get from a box and macaroni and cheese, I mean, we don't even make macaroni and cheese from the box—everything is homemade. I mean, I made it one time as my mom made it—boil the macaroni and get the cheese and get the bacon and get the milk, and you make it. But my grandkids, they come

[2] Ice cream
[3] Three day-old smoked salmon

and they'd rather have a boxed macaroni and cheese. And I said, Are you kidding me? (laughs)

So everything is done from scratch, you know, from bread baking to all of that, and the food we eat, you know, when you look at—when I look at beef, you know, you look at a beef steak and you look at all that fat, it's just riddled with fat! And then you have a moose steak and it's just so lean and tasty and good and hamburger—and then when you, you know, we'd make our own hamburger from our moose and then you buy hamburger from the store your down in all that grease in the pan, gross! So you make homemade hamburger and it's just firm and it's a taste, and the acquired taste that you have. So I want to keep that tradition alive by not just having them help and getting used to eating the food that we eat. And how we eat it and how it's prepared, but it's kind of hard to compete with McDonalds and Burger King and all those places. You know, I made a smoothie for us the other day and I used frozen berries, you know, and water. Ice chunks, you know, and they were just as excited to have that over buying a milkshake, but who can buy a milkshake for whatever it costs downtown, you know? But those are the little things that you have that I'm very aware of the cultural change that's happening even now in what we do, so it's important that we document how we process our wild game, our fish.

I mean, I remember back when JD and I first got married and we were doing our grubstake. We got paid and we came home and we were doing our grubstakes [*??*] AK and I made $3,000. Holy smokes, that's a lot of money. Let's get our food and we're set, you know. And I was ordering a case of tuna, and I said, Why? We've got all this fish out here. Why can't we make our own? You know, if you like tuna so much—I went and got a can and read up on how to do it, and started canning ever since and that was forty years ago. Now I do eight to twelve cases and everybody gets two to three cases of jarred salmon. And that's what you eat, you know, you make fish pie. You make salmon salad, you make burgers from it. There's all different kinds of things you can do with salmon, especially jarred salmon. So everybody gets salmon. And make that part of their eating habits. It doesn't make sense—you know, I can't remember the cost was and we were on a budget, and I was thinking, There's no way I'm going to order a case of tuna when we have, when I could get salmon and do my own here, so that's what started all of that. And so it was more efficient to use what our resource is here, and so we still do it today. And my children still do it.

And now we're canning and jarring moose for soups and stuff so—as we evolve and as we get used to—what we have, what we've done, even twenty years ago, and what we do today is changed tremendously. And it is a lot of work to subsist. And a lot of time and effort, you know, that you have to put—

my husband, poor husband (laughs), Oh Deedee, you put up the best fish! And I'll say, Oh, yeah thank you very much, and poor guy. Goes out pounds the pipes, and puts out the lines, and puts the net out, and check it, and bleed the fish. And I help but maybe not as much, because I'm doing other things to prep to put the net out, but I get all the acknowledgement. Or all the glory and it's a family thing, so I have to recognize and I always say it's a family thing because we all do it together. I could never do it just by myself. But when I think back to how my children grew up and the work we done and how it carried over to who they are today, and what it provided, and how they're feeding their families in the world of work in the cash economy—it's carried over. You know, as it carried over to me, and to my parents and my grandparents.

So, I wouldn't trade it for the world. I wouldn't live anyplace else but here. I don't know nothing else but here. And you know, I've traveled, you know to DC and I've traveled back to, when I was sixteen, to Spain as an exchange student. And my family lives in Anchorage, and every opportunity I go and visit them. I don't think I could live anywhere else. I don't think, I don't know where we have the freedom that we have here outside of our door to what we have today. And what we do. We just have to take advantage of it. And we do. And we have to share it and we have to talk about it. And teach. Teach it. You know, and I am teaching it to my—my kids they already know, its now my grandkids. And I've got to teach them to get used to eating *akutaq*. I teach them how to make it and they go downtown in their cars and they'll buy blueberries and strawberries, and store bought berries, you know? Why? You could pick it. You know, go there and hurry up and pick the high bush cranberries and I make jam for them, you know, jelly. Said you got it here, you got to do it. And so that's the first thing we do, is we—even they're out there they could do the same thing. They don't have the freedoms that we have here. I can't say that enough. I can't say how lucky we are to be here and take advantage of it. But it is work. And its time. It's easy to go and open up a can of macaroni, I mean a box of macaroni and cheese—but it has all that—I don't want to say fake food but false foods that you put in and everything we do and cook, you know, is from our freezer that we processed. And I wouldn't have it any other way. And even as I get older, and of course in our eating habits change and processing and so now I'm going to have to start depending on my children. Even though I'm not that old, but I'm going to have to not process to the magnitude that we process, you know. Seventy kings, one hundred and twenty reds, but then all of that is shared. I told JD, We're running out of elders! He says, well we can adopt elders. And I said, Yeah, let's do that! So we're looking at who we can adopt as elders to give because the joy of sharing what you have is just immensely rewarding to you. To me. And that's what I want to pass on to my daughter and son. And that's

what needs to be passed on to our children. My grandchildren. So I'm excited for that to happen.

[Break in recording. Recording cuts off part of the interviewers question]

KS: Environmental changes that you've seen or witnessed that you'd want to talk about?

WB: Environmental changes over the years—through climate change and through weather patterns—and threats are real. The last few years we've been looking at Northern Dynasty and Pebble mine. I'd mentioned—I was sitting there one day when they first started talking or looking at the research and the paperwork that was being submitted across the state and the region about what it would take and the reality is—the reality is we use a lot of the metals and copper that they're looking at to develop copper mine, Pebble. If we lose our natural resource, and it is a natural resource, and a reoccurring year, generations—I was sitting there one day thinking about it and I just literally had tears running down my eyes and I was thinking, What is wrong with you? Why are you getting so emotional? And you know, of course it brings me back to my family and to my grandparents, and my parents and my children, and then I started thinking about my grandchildren. I said, You can't talk about how you do things. You can't teach how you do things. It's a resource where you have to do it. You have to—show how to cut the fish. How to fillet the fish. How to strip the fish. How to salt the fish. How to hang the fish. How to smoke the fish. How do you process it from start to end. You can't teach that, you have to do that, and that would be lost—if we—if Pebble happens based on what their current development plan is—would be—the risk and the threat would be immensely impactful to the people who live here and who are going to die here. I was born and raised here. My parents were born and raised here, and my grandparents. Third generation, fourth generation, fifth generation.

All what I've talked about and what we do with our lands and our resources will be highly impacted and they're being threatened. You can't teach it, you have to do it. I'm thinking about not just my grandchildren, I'm thinking of their children and their children. We have ties to the land, we will forever have ties to the land, and it's not just our fishery and our fishes. There's small game, large game, birds, plants, everything, our whole ecosystem will be impacted by how we live out here. I live in an urban area in Dillingham. We're not tied to the road system but we have all the convenience of day to day living. Our communities and our villages don't have some of the resources readily available, cash economy readily available, but what we do have is our lands. We have our berries. We have our fish. We have our meat. And our birds. That's all going to be impacted if we lose it to that, where

they're proposing Pebble. I really, truly believe it. We can't replace what comes back year after year and if we lose it. I recognize that there is jobs that need to be sought. I recognize that we live in a cash economy, but what we're going to lose is our culture. And our teachings and our practices. Not for my generation but my children and their children, my grandchildren and the other grandchildren. That can't never ever be replaced, and that's what's heartbreaking.

And how do you tell a person that doesn't know and live it? You can't. They don't have that experience, it's not their lifeline to living out here and having that cultural value. You can't replace that. I can't say that enough. And we have to fight for what we got. We have to be able to speak up. We have to learn their culture, their language, because it's a whole new culture. You can't teach what we have, you have to live it. And we do live it here and I speak for all of us that live off our land, off our lands because it's who we are. And who we want to be, and who we want to protect it for our kids. Our children, our grandchildren, and their grandchildren and their grandchildren. We've done it for—forever, and we need it happening forever, you know, we've got a lot of environmental issues happening with climate change and seasons and having super, super hot seasons, sun. We have super, super wet seasons. But what we have is the natural resources that occur year after year after year whether it's storming and raining and hot. You know, we'll have good years and we'll have bad years and we plan accordingly for those and practicing. And if you didn't have it—you hear comments, Well, then move. We don't ask you, and other people, to just move. I've never lived anyplace else. I'll never live anyplace else. This is where I was born, this is where I was raised, and this is where I'm going to die. This is where my family, my parents are. This is where my grandparents where and this is where my family is. You can't ask—the simple comment is well then just move—is stupid. It's beyond belief for someone to even think that.

There's no doubt we do have families that do move out because of jobs. I understand that for those of us that choose to live here, that do live off the land—it's, you know, from getting wood for heat. From picking berries for fruits, from processing fish for nutrients and our animals, I mean—it's who we are. You know, the cultural values and the way we live will be lost if—I truly believe, and it's my opinion—they will be lost if we have—if our fishery is destroyed because it all starts up, you know, from the little plankton and all the things that happen with our waters. I mean, we can't live without water for three days, you know, what's going to happen over ten years? You know, it's short sighted. Twenty years, forty years of having jobs—what about fifty years from now? What are our people going to be? What's going to sustain us, is our land and waters so—yeah, we've got a lot of things

happening in our region and it's up to us as people—it's up to us as leadership to reach out and speak to everybody and tell our stories as it is because it can't be replaced. You can't replace a culture. And our lifestyle and how we do things here. So, you know, I don't know too much, but I do know how I live. I do know the importance of advocating for who we are, and why we are. And I do know we're in competition with the world when we have the last—successful resource and we need to, we need to protect that. And we have the ability to do that and we have some really good people fighting for us, and I am one of them. And I will speak up and I will tell my story at every opportunity because I think it's important, I think it's important for all of us and all of our families to say that, otherwise we're lost.

You know, we've got the scientists—but money talks. Money does and you can't eat money. You know, I've said that before and I'll say it again, you just can't. So that environmental impact is going to be—is big for us. You know, I don't—I can't say enough how important it is for us to keep on, keep on talking about who we are and why we are and what we do for those of us that live out here, you know, we need to stay actively involved politically. We need to use our representatives, our senators and they need to know that. And they do, you know, we advocate for—all the time, but for those of us that live out here—need to be—aware of our threats and we're very aware of what's happening with open mine—open mine here in the region.

If they could do it any other place we're not impacting Naknek/Kvichak is one of the biggest fishery—reasons. Nushagak, Wood-Tikchik, I mean, we're all impacted. We're all downstream from that, and it's just a no brainer to me, but like I said, money talks. And we need to be proactive. We need to stay positive and continue to tell our stories, you know, I'm just one of many that live off the land. I can fairly say I speak for a lot of people that don't have a voice, to have a voice. (pause)

You know, I'm not sure what's going to happen in this project and where we're going to go but I'm just glad we're going, we have the ability to do story telling because we are story tellers too. That's how we pass down our culture and our history, oral—orally. And those of us that can should start documenting everything, and using whatever we can to appeal to those, the powers that may be, to stop any threats to our natural resource.

KS: Well thank you so much for your time and your story.