



WHAT DOES SHELLFISHING MEAN TO YOU?

**A COMPILATION OF INTERVIEWS WITH CAPE COD PEOPLE INVOLVED
IN SHELLFISHING**

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INTRODUCTION

The Barnstable County Cooperative Extension contracted with Coastal Resource Specialists to interview people on the Cape involved with shellfish in some capacity. The objective was to get a sense from the people being interviewed – shellfish officers, growers, and commercial fishermen - of what shellfish means to them. All were asked the same question at the start of the interview: “What does shellfishing, the act of shellfishing or the ability to harvest shellfish mean to you?” From that starting point, questions centered on how the individual got into shellfishing and then what they thought the future of shellfishing might be.

While not written in quotes, the material came directly from the interviewees.

The interviews represent geographic, age, gender, and experience diversity as well as shellfish species diversity. One group not contacted directly but an important component of the Cape community was the Wampanoags. We would like to add one or two interviews from to this group to complete the user groups.

Some major themes emerged from this work but one theme that came through loudly is that shellfishing remains an important component of the Cape economy and culture and those who are involved are concerned about its continued presence on the Cape.

Tony Jackett – Shellfish Constable – Provincetown/Truro

Tony Jackett, a third generation Portuguese fisherman from Provincetown could see the handwriting on the wall: his dream of owning his own boat and fishing was coming to an end and he needed to find an alternative life. He was fortunate to own a boat at a young age and he fished with big crews and alone. He was one of the P-town draggers. Fishing was in his blood though farming was as well – his mother’s family was one of the original families. They ran a dairy and raised horses. But the fishing community was losing autonomy with the Federal regulations and it became evident to Tony that what they had taken for granted for generations, that there was an infinite amount of fish, was not the case and rules and regulations limiting what an individual fisherman could do were becoming the order of the day. Tony recognized his chosen profession as a dead-end job and that the government was taking away the lure of an autonomous independent lifestyle and the right to make a living at fishing. He was losing days at sea. He thought that there would be an opportunity to rebuild stocks after the plunder that took place with the foreign fleet but that didn’t happen. The fish stocks continued to decline.

He was in his mid 40’s when the J-tech program began and he was able to try something different. That program led to his job as shellfish officer for Provincetown and Truro and part-time harbormaster for Truro. He never thought that he’d end up in the law-enforcement side of the equation but he had skills that could be useful: a captain’s license, class II license, boat operation knowledge, and business acumen.

The opportunity knocked for him to work for the town as a public servant. He helped resolve problems, working to restore Hatch’s Harbor and lately East Harbor (also known as Pilgrim Lake).

Provincetown has a recreational shellfishery only and it is closed during the summer. Individual grant owners contribute to aquaculture in town. The area is one of the few known for surf clams, which is now a regulated fishery but it is under state jurisdiction

rather than municipal management like the other shellfish species of commercial importance. Boats can harvest 200 bushels/day. A lot of the harvest takes place off Herring Cove Beach and when they are depleted there, they will move on to another area. With the hydraulic gear, it is an efficient method to fish out a place. The larger boats come from outside the local area – if it were a local fishery, there would be smaller boats and more people involved. Tony favors a regional plan to let the towns manage the resource rather than the state but he doesn't hold out much hope of that happening. Tony is working closely with Scott Lindell of MBL in Woods Hole on a project to repopulate area that were once very productive. They are hoping to use that project to persuade the state that the towns could manage the fishery better. Local people have very strong feelings about boats coming in and cleaning out the surf clams.

Tony has a soft spot for the commercial guys operating the big boats, though, too. If Provincetown gets shut down, they will move to Duxbury or some other area and licensing in each town would be difficult. But town enforcement would also be difficult. Tony, as a former commercial fisherman himself, is sensitive to the plight of the fisherman and the ability to sustain any fisheries. He feels that anyone in the business needs to be realistic and willing to adapt to the way things are with an eye to the future. They need to ask themselves if they can make changes and still be able to make a decent living or are they being compromised. They have to do the math when areas are closed or look at potential closings and make their decisions from there. Anyone getting into the business should know what they're getting into.

Because he manages a recreational fishery, Tony does not have the problems in other towns that have commercial as well as recreational fisheries. He reports that people are generally happy with the regulations such as number of days that are open. His is mostly a winter fishery which also means he has little interaction or conflict with tourists and shellfish in the summer.

Tony is trying to increase brood stock. He has used a combination of relays and seeding working together for propagation as well as for water purification. He has noted sets of steamer clams as well in some areas. He has used remote setting oysters in Pamet.

Tony believes that shellfish and the ability to harvest shellfish is in keeping with preserving the culture and landscape of the region. Shellfishing goes back to earliest times and one of the early laws in MA was preserving part of the shoreline for access to fish, game and fowl. He wants to hand that tradition down to the generations.

Tony has found that those who stay on the Cape in the winter, trying to keep the economy going, go shellfishing. New people he has talked to think it is the most wonderful experience.

In a place like Pamet, people don't want to see too many changes and he finds he has to walk a fine line in keeping the economic engine running and preserving the landscape.

Asked if he enjoys what he is doing, he replied that he felt fortunate to make the transition from an independent fisherman to shellfish officer. He had pride in being a captain but had to start over again. He had a family to support and did not have the luxury of jumping around from job to job and feels very fortunate to have been provided the opportunity to serve the towns. It was an opportunity to become educated in a new field that was constantly evolving. Because of his unique status working for both Provincetown and Truro, he was not tied to an 8-5 job because he needs to adapt to the tides and this suits him well.

There was a learning curve from fish to shellfish and it has been intriguing to him to be around educated people willing to share and pass around their knowledge. He feels that the title of shellfish warden is antiquated because there is much more to the job than just shellfish. He feels a more appropriate title would be coastal resources officer and that a change in title would be appropriate to the times. The only part of the job he is uncomfortable with is public speaking and the fact that sometimes he is put on the spot

but recognizes that it goes with the territory. After ten years on the job, he tries to keep things low-key and under the radar – just doing his job the best way he can.

