



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, commercial and recreational fishermen - of what shellfish means to them. With the exception of the last group of people at Chipman Cove in Wellfleet, 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. Two groups of recreational fishermen were interviewed – one group at the Yacht Club in Orleans and another at Chipman Cove in Wellfleet. As a result of the time of the interviews (late fall), all of the people were year-round residents. We tried to capture opinions from seasonal visitors as well but it did not work out.

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. An additional group represented here, but not discussed previously with the Extension staff, was dealers. Recreational fishermen were not prone to long discourse on what shellfish means to them, so we added more individuals instead.

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.

HENRY LIND – Natural Resources Director – Eastham

Henry stated that 90% of his working career has been involved in shellfish management so in answering the question what does shellfish mean to him, the answer was a resounding “a lot”! The job includes enforcing statutes, education of Selectmen (policy makers) and public and it also includes enhancement of both shellfish and habitat. All of that boils down to education – lots of people just don’t get it and the Tragedy of the Commons is the rule of thumb (referring to a classic essay by Garrett Harding published in Science Magazine in the 1960s).

He got into the field as a random act of education. As an undergrad, he took a geology class and the professor said that they had a choice – attend a lab for 2-4 hours or grow their own lab and write a report. Henry had spent summers on the Cape in Eastham and decided to study salt marsh systems. He was especially interested in the transition zone between upland and the marsh – the mud, plants and animals and sedimentation. He stopped in to the Town Hall to ask the Selectmen’s permission and they said he needed to talk to Phil Schwind, the shellfish warden. In what became a classic meeting, he stopped in at 1PM and left at 9PM. He spent the spring break doing lab sieve analyses and then wrote his report.

The following summer he worked with Phil. They were bringing in oysters from Fisher’s Island that were attached to scallop shells in long strings with pieces of garden hose separating the shells. The shells were used to collect the oyster seed and the strings were then sold to the town and others. They kept doing it for 5 years and felt they should have native oysters setting on the shells but they didn’t and wondered why. Why weren’t there any native oysters in the Nauset system when there were clearly shell middens from years ago that were made up of oyster shells? Henry found that in all the years he has worked for the town, they still don’t know why and joked that that provides a semblance of job security. They are close to understanding but have no absolute answer but when they do know, he says he’ll pass in his retirement slip.

From 1971-1975, he had a part-time job as the conservation agent but then got married and needed a full time job. Phil retired and the town created a Natural Resources Department combining conservation with shellfish. The pay was not much but he liked what he was doing and said he couldn't beat the commute. To date, he is the longest employed shellfish officer in the county.

Henry's family built a cottage at Camp Ground Beach where he spent summers since he was 1 year old. He has seen many changes and remembered an early meeting of the county shellfish advisory committee of the then CCPEDC. Everyone was sitting around the table and people were railing against Long Island and what it had become and said if we weren't careful, the same thing could happen here. He feels that with the exception of the Long Island Expressway, we have replicated Long Island in many unfavorable ways. He sees a classic difference of opinion between development and conservation with the county consistently advocating moderation. He sees the amount of organized support for shellfish steadily rising and feels that the county has done a wonderful job in not letting shellfish fall off the radar. He remembered that in 1976 the constables were seeing problems with shellfish abundance and with pollution problems such as the oil spill in Falmouth where the shellfish issues were identified by George Souza (former Shellfish Constable for many years). The county has drawn attention to the needs and put resources they have at the problems. What has not changed is the parochial attitude to keep the county out of local affairs, which is not always a good approach. The town level has seen the effect of county help in the form of the organization of constables – shellfish advisory committee. The days of two guys riding around in a truck waiting to write citations are over – there is a lot more to the job than that.

Shellfish constables used to be elected in the 1920s. Now they are appointed. Sometimes, he said, commercial fishermen make good constables because they are trained to think like a pirate. But there is a concern that there is more to the job than that too and former commercial fishermen are often excellent support staff. There are still

some folks who don't believe that any of this (propagation) is important – they think all they need is someone to do enforcement.

One of the biggest problems in management is managing people. Luckily, most of the naysayers are gone. But others still just don't get it. For commercial fishermen, 99% are good but 1% take 99% of the time – it's the same formula.

Aquaculture is not new – log books going back to the 30s show that it was practiced in Eastham – the Salt Pond, Station Bay and Cape Cod Bay. There were mylar plans. Luther and Red Eldredge's grandfather was involved in it. Phil (Schwind) was a strong advocate and teacher. Another major player was Alice Boyd. In the 1990s there was the Pazolt hearings and those resulted in a plan to develop an area for aquaculture starting at Boat Meadow on Cape Cod Bay side. They then assigned people to plots and 80% worked them. It turned out to be successful and she applied for another grant to provide training. They needed to know the number of active sites and the number of shellfish grants steadily increased doubling and tripling. They were not huge grants -1/2 to 1 acre. Most considered it an adjunct to another fishery or retirees got into it as a part time venture. Most of those with grants were also doing wild harvest too.

The value of the facility at Hemenway Landing is education of people and growing oysters and the value is huge to the town. Even when county funding stopped, the town still said OK. It is not a production facility – there is no way to supply the demand. There is a societal lack of understanding about the natural coastal environment. At times, it is disheartening, as if we were just holding our finger in the dike.

Permits are down and that may be attributable to the red tide. There's been a spike this year because of good sets of clams and mussels. It is humbling not knowing the reasons for abundances or lack. This one could be because of predators, especially the green crabs and their population is probably 10% of what it was primarily because the cold winters of the last two years. There are people interested in collecting the gut contents of

the green crab which are considered a delicacy in some circles. He mused about creating a new market for them. Eastham doesn't have predator control. They decided it was a drop in the bucket and not enough to make a dent in the population.

Water quality is a huge problem facing us. It goes back to education – the developers need to understand what is going on.

He said he couldn't imagine having more fun as a job and feels blessed to have this as a career.

