



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.

Heinz Proft – Natural Resources Officer/Biologist – Harwich

Heinz said that working for Harwich is a rare experience few can understand or grasp or fully appreciate. By being in the Natural Resources Department you are exposed to people you might not have otherwise been exposed to - people commercial fishing, people in neighboring town shellfish departments, personnel from CZM, DMF and others. It's a position where it's possible to interact with others and share information freely and learn about things in other fields. It is a unique and special position. He's been at it for 10 years and every day is different. It's a privilege to have a job where there are new experiences and difficult challenges that improves the natural resources as well. It allows him the opportunity to try different techniques and experiment. One important aspect is to keep detailed logs. They don't have much time to pause and reflect but when they do they find that they've done a lot and improved the situation. The water quality programs add a piece of the puzzle to the whole program. Many people think that the drinking water is the primary reason for testing the waters but other reasons include shellfish, boating and swimming. It provides support not only for another the shellfish propagation program but is critical to the future wastewater planning concerns for the Town.

He obtained a MS in marine fisheries from the College of William and Mary, also known as VIMS. He got his start with the Caribbean Marine Research Center (CMRC) where he studied spiny lobsters, queen conch, Nassau groupers and coral. That was followed by 2 years working at the Boston University Marine Program in Woods Hole. Although he has spent years in the Caribbean and Chesapeake Bay, he grew up in the land of 10,000 lakes – Minnesota. He has also worked for the National Marine Fisheries Service in Alaska as a fisheries observer aboard a Korean fish processing ship. Although he has worked with many different marine species, he has found that there are similar problems that can be addressed with each species and geographic area. Each step of the way, he has focused on the problems and attempted to improve the situation.

His travels and experiences also prepared him for dealing with people and getting to the point of what's important quickly. Every town is different. In Harwich, the Natural Resources Dept. also takes on Harbormaster duties and so he is also an Assistant Harbormaster, meaning that he is also involved with boating safety, moorings, docks and marina management.

Harwich grows quahaugs and oysters in a small building on the shores of Wychmere Harbor using upwellers. The first year they grew oysters in a significant amount, they put on tremendous growth but took up a lot of space and it was a stretch of resources to care for them. They added quahaugs and the growth of quahaugs determines how much space they need. They start with seed that is 1.5 to 2 mm, 3 and 4.5-5. They buy some of each size when available. But quahaugs are also space intensive and grow slowly so they do a mix of both species.

He manages a summer internship program for high school students to help with the nursery program and it has worked out well. The students get to learn about growing shellfish and what it takes to repopulate the town's resources and the town gets committed people to work. It's a win-win situation and there are always students willing to work for the town. When the season ends, they put oysters in trays and in October, they plant the quahaugs.

They have found that the shellfish lab in Wychmere Harbor provides a good place for growing stock, obtaining the initial stock through the county seed program and purchasing some seed with town funds. The larger ones they purchase with town funds. When they are ready to plant, they mix the sizes and plant in at least seven areas, some of which have been used over many years. Round Cove, closed in the summer, is one of the areas that is seeded every year.

Harwich has participated in an oyster growth project with the County at Round Pond, Wychmere Harbor and Saquatucket joining at least four other towns in the project.

Heinz is active in a group called SHORE – Shellfish Officers Resource and Education. The concept facilitates rapid deployment of gear through the towns that provide the people, the county gets the data, the town offers time and space and everyone gets the reports. It is a brand new program, begun the summer of '07 so the projects that people want to attempt are wide open.

When asked about the difference between the towns, the subject of enforcement came up. Harwich officers don't wear sidearms and Heinz doesn't want it to come to that, joking that he didn't want to put a hole in the boat. But one of the topics that came up in an organizational meeting was sharing enforcement techniques among towns. Heinz tries to be as friendly as possible, preferring education over the hammer approach, trying to get the person's name before he shows the badge or issues a warning or any other method of enforcement.

Heinz operates the lab with the high school students he gets through an aquaculture intern program. Students apply for the program. Some years, there are fewer students than other years but he has managed to get his full complement of workers for all the years he has operated the facility. Some of the students go on to environmental sciences in college and one of the reasons is because of the exposure they received in data collection and the responsibility of taking care of the animals.

