

Date: July 11, 2014

Location: Bushey Enterprises, Steuben, Maine

Interviewee: Randy Bushey

Interviewer: Julia Beaty

Associated sound file: RandyBusheyInterview.wav

Julia: I guess to start out with do you want to say how long you've been in the business, how long you've been a buyer for and how long you've been fishing for them? Just to have context.

Randy: I started fishing in '93, before we had an elver license. I started buying in '94. I was asked to sit on the eel/elver management committee with the Department of Marine Resources in '94. We have implemented major laws and rules and regulations here in the state of Maine. I've seen the bad times and I've seen the best so far. And it's a very competitive field right now to be in. And what was your question?

Julia: My question was just how long have you been doing it for?

Randy: Okay.

Julia: So have you been fishing for them consistently since '94?

Randy: Since '94 there was one or two years that I didn't fish because the price was so low. There were numerous fishermen that didn't do that. But I still ended up buying every year because the guys need something this time of year to actually fill in because there's nothing to do in March in Maine, not on the coast here. The clamming flats are froze up. There just isn't no money anywhere. I was asked to buy even though we were only paying eight and ten dollars a pound that year. And it was a very good year for eels. I don't know why, but it was. There was a major amount of eels caught that year. Now, if those eels weren't caught at that time at the low price, well, it would be 20 years ago, and all of those females would have already gone back. I assume the ones that got by have. But by being in it so long and helping the state of Maine set up the laws and the season – see when we first started I was fishing 38 nets. We were doing Washington and Hancock County. When the state put on the elver dealer's license, we were cut back to five pieces of gear. At that time we paid \$200 for each net that we fished. We fished five pieces of gear. Over the course of three or four years we were at those prices on our licenses, two to three million dollars went to the University of Maine for a study of the eels with Dr. Jim McCleave. He did a major study on the female egg ratio. He counted eels on the fall migration. In the study there were seven-year-old eels right up to twenty-year-old eels. It was very interesting that seven-year-old females had just over a million eggs in them. And the twenty-year-olds had twenty million eggs. He had four or five with twenty two million. It was astronomical to realize but that one study opened up more questions. Why do some go to spawn at seven years and why do some go to spawn at twenty years? Why do they wait? Nobody can answer that question. Nobody can answer the questions of the ratio of mortality throughout the spawning cycle. Everything in this industry, or most of it, is a theory. The theory is that the females spawn and die. They've never caught them. They've never witnessed it. It's a

theory. Nobody checks the rivers on the upward migration if they come back. It's possible that they do because the *Anguilla japonica* that run in Alaska, they have a fall run up and under the ice and that's where the eskimos get their eels to feed their dogs for the winter.

Julia: I didn't know that.

Randy: Yeah. There's a lot that people don't know. And the more that they know the more they want to try to control it. But this is a species that nobody knows enough about and they never will. It is such a massive range. The American eel ranges from Wisconsin, to Montana, all the way down the Mississippi valley, from the Ohio valley, which drains into the Mississippi. There's 31 states out there. I think it was 1.8 million miles of watershed. There's no studies being done on that watershed. Yeah, they go to a dam to see if they can see eels. They see eels. But the actual study that the US Fish and Wildlife did in '05 and '06 and determined in '07 that these are not endangered or threatened, I totally agree with them because they were actually out there looking. If we can do a study, a year-round study – this watershed right out the back of my shop flows into this pond. It's probably a ten-acre pond. For twenty years, since I've been buying, if I wasn't buying the young of the year, the small pigmented eels, I would save them up and at the end of the day I would go put them in the brook. This pond, I know nobody fishes all the way down through. In the spring, in the fall, nothing. So this little watershed right here, I know is full of eels because I've been putting them there. To do a study on this thing wouldn't take nothing. You've got a six-foot culvert right down the road here where it runs under Route 1 that could be totally shut off before the dam. I've been down to this dam in September and seen literally hundreds of eels coming over the top of it going out to spawn. And they're nice eels. And nobody touches them.

Julia: And they get over the dam okay?

Randy: Oh, it's only a three-foot dam.

Julia: It doesn't have any turbines or anything like that?

Randy: No. Nothing. Nothing to chop them up. Being on the management committee with the Department of Marine Resources, we were able to stop and enforce some of the hydro dams to put upstream and downstream passages in before we give them another license. This went over fine for a few years and then I don't know what happened. Things started to change because it all came to a halt. I spoke with Gail Wipplehauser the other day and she said, 'Oh no, they're not doing that anymore.' So somebody in the industry paid somebody off and they just let it go away, give them a license. I don't understand this. If you've got laws in effect to make them do something, make them do it. If someone can take a stand and make all hydro dams throughout the United States do it, it would work. But somebody has got to be in charge and take a step. I can take NOAA to the Champlain Valley up in Vermont and New York and go down through the sets of locks on the Champlain Canal and on the fall run you wouldn't believe the eels that come out of that lake. And now the state of New York has shut down that entire watershed for adult eels. You can't fish them. They can't hydro-shock them, nothing, because

they're full of mercury. Now it's ground-based mercury so whatever they eat...Somebody's got to take a step in this industry and I don't believe it's the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Council. I think it's the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and NOAA together. I think NOAA can overstep their bounds a little bit and include the Caribbean. I'd love to take you guys down to Jamaica and catch some eels. But the whole thing, nobody has control over these other countries to get data on it.

Julia: Yeah. And it's all the same population of eels.

Randy: Right. When I can put a net in Jamaica where I've never fished before in my life and in three nights catch 40 pounds of eels, there's not a problem with the population. I was on numerous rivers. We were studying, we still are, the rivers of Jamaica. The water is pristine. The pH level is fine. And there's eels living throughout the whole water system there. But they claim there's as many underwater rivers in Jamaica as there is that run on top. We've been in caves down there and the eels run real in the caves. I don't know why but they like it in there. There are cave in Westmoreland, it's just like a waterslide right down through it. Gorgeous. You can go in there and live if you wanted to. And the people that show the tourists this location, they actually catch and eat the eels out of those caves.

Julia: They're in the elver stage?

Randy: No. The big eels.

Julia: Cool.

Randy: Yeah, it is cool.

Julia: That's another example of how they are adaptable and can live in a wide range of habitats if they can live in caves.

Randy: Yeah. I've done water studies on - there must have been 70 or 80 rivers that we were doing water temperature and at the head of the tide we would check the salinity and check it right at the mouth of the river. Just to actually see where the eels were. Most of them stayed right in the fresh water and then go up to a big hole just below the dam or something and stay there. It was pretty unique fishing down there and attempting to catch these things when you have no tide to push the glass eels in. We're used to fishing anywhere from 12 to 16 foot tides from here up in into Bangor. Down there it was 1.2, 1.7. I think 2.1 was the biggest tide I ever fished down there in Jamaica. And it wasn't until we had a massive flash flood in that river that we caught any eels. The flood receded and that's when the eels came in and they came in heavy.

Julia: So do you think it was the change in salinity that caused them to rush in? Like maybe they were holding off while the freshwater was coming in and once that –

Randy: Well, I think the salinity down there is like ten points higher than ours so therefore more water has to flow out into it to dilute it. And when they had that flash flood the water was diluted enough they got a taste of the fresh water and in the river they came.

Julia: Okay.

Randy: It's unimaginable. If you stop and you look at the way we fish here in the state of Maine and down in Jamaica we were trying to implement the same techniques. It just wouldn't work. If they don't get the rains there those eels keep on going until they find it.

Julia: So you were saying that you're going to work with people in Jamaica for three years to try to figure out if a fishery is feasible and then maybe they'll start harvesting?

Randy: Well, they're looking into it because their doors are being pounded from the Chinese and the South Koreans to actually come in and set up an industry there. I don't know why they held off until we get a three-year study done on the river systems. When they found out I had 20 years experience in fishing, 20 years in management, 20 years in packing and shipping these things, I was invited to come down to Jamaica. I spent four months down there last year. In 2011 I was in Haiti. I went to the Dominican in 2012. So I've been circling these eels. I'll be going back to Haiti and the Dominican and Jamaica this year. It's helping their economy out as much as it helped out Washington County. It really does a number. When we get done in Jamaica we can probably put 500 guys to work for a short period of time. But to them the amount of revenue they'll be bringing in will be a heck of a lot more than they're used to. These guys can virtually live on nothing down there. A lot of them have jobs but they will still go out at night and fish with us to learn because they know the people. There's places down there this white boy can't work, can't walk, can't go anywhere. But if you have a rasta man with you, you can go anywhere. It's a very unique culture down there to get used to. So do you want to go?

Julia: Sure! Why not? Can you repeat what you said before the camera was rolling, your story about shipping them in the different temperatures?

Randy: Oh, in Jamaica?

Julia: Was it from Jamaica that you shipped them to New York?

Randy: Yeah.

Julia: If you want to say that for the camera. But I thought it was interesting.

Randy: We were catching the eels in Jamaica. Some of the rivers were 75 degrees was about the coldest water temperature that we ran into in January and February. 78 to 79 degrees most of the rivers were running. We caught the eels and cooled them down and held them in 60 degree water and before we shipped we cooled them down some more. With ice we got them down to 55 degree water. At 55 degrees they were nice and lively and everything. By putting

two gel packs in them, driving them two hours to the airport. It was 95 degrees the day we shipped in Montego Bay. And customs made us open up all the boxes. They went through to make sure we weren't shipping drugs and all that stuff because we were a first time shipper out of Jamaica. Customs tore everything all apart. We had to put it all back together right there in a 95 degree warehouse. Once we did that everything went on to the plane. When they arrived in New York at 11 o'clock at night they were put into dry storage at 22 degrees. When we picked them up at 8 o'clock in the morning when customs opened, the eels were at 34 degrees and all alive. And I really thought that was pretty amazing, a 24-hour temperature span of 78 up to 95 and then back down to 34. It's pretty amazing. These things are hard to kill. They really are. But then again, you can turn around another day, if you don't change the water the ammonia goes up and it will kill them. If you don't give them the right amount of air it will kill them. They're temperamental. If you know what you're doing, you can do it.

Julia: Okay. So temperature - they can handle temperature fluctuations but not –

Randy: No, no, no, no, no. They can't. If you take a glass eel out of 50, 60 degree water, put ice in a glass and bring that right down to 32 degrees and take that eel like that and drop him in it, eight degrees, he'll go into shock, go right to the bottom, shake, and act like he's dead. He goes right into a coma. You set that glass of water right there and let it warm up and that eel will come back to life. It's amazing what that thing will do. If you did it at a ten-degree temperature change, it will kill him. Eight degrees he will go into spasms but he will come out of it. Now that's personal research. Try it. Because it is really fun how close you can scientifically do this without having that PhD behind your name. Now, I would really like to get involved with NOAA to get you guys out into the field and show you where to go. Because you come into Washington County and run into a herd of people on the river, you better know what you're doing because I wouldn't want to see you out there at night by yourself trying to fish or trying to even get stats off the fishermen. You need to take a local with you and make sure the local is well-known. Every drug addict that has been in this business knows me and knows that I carry a gun. I don't hesitate one bit. Everybody knows that I do. I'm friends with all the state cops, I'm friends with all the sheriffs. I don't get bothered.

Julia: I guess you kind of have to do something if you're the dealer with all the money.

Randy: You're right. I'm 100% grateful that the state went to all checks. Legally I don't think they can do it but until they take that thing up, I'm glad they did it. And they managed it. There haven't been any lawsuits against it. I'm glad they did. I did not like running around with a million dollars of cash on me.

Julia: Yeah. I'm sure.

Randy: It gets a little bit scary some nights.

Julia: So from what geographic area do people come from to sell you their elvers?

Randy: Everywhere from the Canadian border – here at this location I'm at Steuben but I can actually see the Millbridge line up the road here. From here usually into Ellsworth. But I'll put a truck on the road. I'll buy all day and then at night I'll go into Ellsworth. I buy off the river in Ellsworth and those guys come from Surry and Blue Hill and that whole area and the Ellsworth area. When Bangor changes – see it's kind of unique. I'll go into Ellsworth and buy until almost low water. I'll come back here and tend my own nets and then come over here because most of my local guys are set up with tanks and pumps and they hold their eels. Sometimes they'll hold them all week before they sell. That's fine if they know what they're doing. There hasn't been many guys complaining that they've lost a lot of eels so they're doing a decent job at it. Once I get done over here in the Steuben River, Tunk Stream, that's when I head for Bangor. We'll go up and spend three or four days and probably not catch anything in Bangor. But we're running the river all night long trying to find them. When we find them we put our nets in and keep trying to jump ahead of them. But you can't catch them all. There is no way. When the state put the laws in that we can't fish the middle third, that wasn't bad at low water, but now it's at any tide. So if a warden walks down and shines his laser, his range finder, on the tip of the wing of your net and you're in the center third, he can give you a ticket.

Julia: Oh, I see. Because depending on the stage of the tide the length of the middle third is going to change.

Ricky: See if the river runs here and the tide floods over here, you're safe. But if the tide floods big both ways, you're in the middle third. You've got to be very cautious about how you set your nets. We've managed to work with the wardens enough where they'll come right up before you set a net up. What is your theory on this? And if you work with them guys, they'll work with you. I've got two different spots, one on each side of the river here on Tunk. In the spring of the year I set my net in a dry hole. But after we get three or four inches of rain that's considered a waterway even though it was high and dry when I set my net. Is that legal or illegal?

Julia: I don't know. You tell me!

Randy: That's a fine line. It really is a fine line because the course of the waterway changes with the height of the river. You really need to stay up on what's coming for rain and everything.

Julia: I didn't realize that.

Randy: Oh yeah. And three tickets and you're out of this business. Thank the good lord I haven't had one yet. 20 years, no violations. But I work with the wardens. There isn't a warden probably from here to Portland that doesn't know my name, or know of me, or heard of me.

*Segment from 0:26:53 through 0:27:16 deleted.*

Julia: Have you noticed if the abundance changes year-to-year? Like the abundance of elvers that are coming in to the river?

Randy: I don't really think it is the abundance. I think it is...the length of season we have is only ten weeks. This year it was cut back. There were two weeks cut out to get the swipe card in and then we went right to daylight tides for a week so we were three weeks off this season. So we were cut back to seven weeks. By cutting us back and not giving it to us in the month of June – it was a slow spring. The eels weren't here anyway. We wouldn't have caught any more eels. If we had had two more weeks in June, we'd be catching eels. We've had years where opening day you're going to catch a massive amount of eels. But none of this goes into the stats of the highs and the lows of the volume caught every year. The volume caught every year is not going to be the same. If you want to go back in your records seeing as you're with NOAA, you go back a year and half study on the rainfall and the areas and match them up with our catches in that particular area. If we have a heavy rain on the dark of the moon a year and a half ago August, September, and October – those three months is when the females run. If you go back – I have a local guy, he's 70 some years old, that writes down the weather every day. He will go back for me and tell me how many days of rain we had in those three-month span on the dark of the moon. That will tell you what you're going to have for a female run on the outbound. It matches up pretty close.

Julia: Do you think that's related to how many elvers come back in the spring?

Randy: Yes. Absolutely related to what comes back. Now, nobody has done that study. This is a good thing for NOAA to do. You've got to take one or two areas, one or two ponds with nobody fishing the incoming and nobody fishing the outgoing, and do a study on a small watershed.

Julia: Seems pretty straightforward.

Randy: It really is. This watershed right out back of my shop here, it's the Millbridge water supply. There's two ponds out here. There's a nice little brook that runs out the overflow from the town water. It's perfectly clean water and it's full of eels. I've been depositing eels into that watershed for 20 years because it runs right through my property down the road right there. If I wasn't buying the young of the year eels I would take them up all day and then go dump them in the brook. Sure enough, it's got to pay off. There's no way around it. There's nobody that can actually tell if these eels are river-specific. I don't think they are. I think it's world-wide. Wherever they hit freshwater first is where they're going. I don't think any scientist can make that judgment call.

Julia: I think that's the theory is that they just go wherever –

Randy: That's the theory. But that's all it is is a theory because – how do you put this? – scientists work off theories. If they have a theory somebody will give them money to figure it out. But the trouble is they've got five more questions after they've figured out their theory.

Julia: That's how it works.

Randy: That's how scientists make their money, right?

Julia: Yeah. But it's good because then you come up with a new question and then you find new answers.

Randy: Okay. Then answer my question. How many millions of eels are in the Mississippi watershed?

Julia: I have no idea.

Randy: 1.8 million square miles! 1.8 million square miles of watershed. Now U.S. Fish and Wildlife did a study but if they had done a massive study out there it would show them that there is more eels out there than they can really imagine. And where do those eels go to spawn? I don't believe they all go to the Sargasso Sea. There are trenches off of Jamaica, off of the Caimans, off of Puerto Rico that are deeper than the Sargasso Sea. If you go on Google Earth and go right into the depths of the water out there – around the Sargasso Sea is about anywhere from 14 to 19 thousand feet deep. There are trenches that are 22, 24, 26 thousand feet around the islands down in the Caribbean. Now do they have another spawning ground down there? Another theory?

Julia: You think they like the deeper water?

Randy: I think they have to have the deep water to spawn. Otherwise why would they go to the Sargasso Sea?

Julia: I don't know. Maybe they like something else about it. Isn't there a current that circles around the Sargasso?

Randy: I don't know. You're with NOAA. You've got the current maps. I don't!

Julia: I think there's a really big gyre that circles around it.

Randy: Well how do they get out of the circle?

Julia: I think there's some currents that spin off of it. So I think they kind of get into a current and spin off and get into the Gulf Stream or something eventually. That's what I've read anyway.

Randy: Now, would you be willing to do a study, a DNA study, on our glass eels here in Washington County?

Julia: Yeah. I think that would be a good way to figure out how mixed up they are –



Randy: Because in my opinion there are two separate glass eels here. I think we're getting the European eels here. When they're going into a depletion, well, they were, and then all of a sudden they had the biggest catches they'd had in 30 years. They came right back. Now, where did they all go? Where did they all come from?

Julia: I don't know.

Randy: You're supposed to know this! You're the scientist.

Julia: I'm not an eel scientist.

Randy: Yes, but if NOAA is going to do a study and help U.S. Fish and Wildlife and help the Atlantic States Marine Fishery Council, this has to be opened up. I don't really want to go Greenland to catch eels, but if I had to I would. But I know they're all over the Caribbean because I've been there. They are shipping out of three countries right now. The Dominican Republic, Haiti, and I've shipped them out of Jamaica. I've been trying to recall which Islands down there have no freshwater. I think Aruba doesn't have any fresh water. I think they have to make their freshwater. Grand Caiman has freshwater and I think there's eels there as well because that's right there by Jamaica.

Julia: So what do you think is the biggest threat to the overall population of eels?

Randy: Hydro dams. Now somebody's got to step in and make them guys stop chewing the eels up on the outward migration. We had pictures right here in the state of Maine were guys were loading pickup trucks cleaning the turbines out with female chopped up eels. They were chopped up in perfect one-foot chunks when they were trying to come down through the turbines. That's got to have a stopping to it. When they stopped all the overboard discharge for the processing plants, that was stupid. You're feeding the eel population. I can take you to old-timers right here that used to work at this sardine plant. With everybody having to shut off the overboard discharge, the sardine companies when they were here, they were just dumping their crap back in the ocean. There were old-timers here that any time they wanted supper they could go down to the wharf and just take a dip net with them and get eels, millions of pounds of them. With the overboard discharge stopped the eels have to go somewhere else for food. There aren't many lobster processing plants on the coast but if they could dump their shells back into the ocean it would benefit the ocean with the calcium and food for all kinds of species. But they won't let them do that. They won't let them dump their deads and rocks overboard. They've got to go to a landfill. To me that's stupidity. That should go back into the ocean where it came from. That would help numerous species survive. The processing plant down here in Prospect Harbor, there are days they take eight or nine dumpster-fulls to the dump for compost. There's no reason that stuff can't go on a boat and go out in the ocean and be dumped.

Julia: Are they worried that there's chemicals added to it or something?

Randy: No. I don't know what the reason is. But why would you catch stuff, send it to a processor, and then take it to the dump? Because with the laws here in the state of Maine, we can't process dead lobsters even if they were just caught this morning and died before they got to the processing plant. You can't process them because they're dead. They go to the dump. If you knew how many thousands of pounds of product went to the dump last year right from this processing plant it would scare you. It's a lot of lost money. A lot of lost revenue. I don't understand why when you take this scallop shell and they're not allowed to bring it back into shore. You figure that one out! These have to stay at sea. But the lobsters have to go to compost. Why?

Julia: Something about it being on land for a little while makes it not okay to go back out into the ocean? I didn't know that was a thing.

Randy: See, there are a lot of issues that – if all those lobsters were dumped back on the shoreline, the amount of eels that would be on those lobsters eating them would be unbelievable. Now if you wanted to do a study go down to Pinkham Bay bridge. I've seen it with my own eyes. Somebody picked crabs out at home and they went down to the bridge and they dumped them on the upper side of the bridge. I was walking around down there one day. I looked, a whole bunch of crab shells. There was over a hundred eels right in that area eating what was left of the crab shells and these things have been taken home and cooked. I don't know if the eels were after the butter on the crab or what. But there is a benefit of dumping them back in the ocean versus taking them to a landfill.

Julia: I guess along that same line, another question is what do you think is the – what can we do to help the eel population? What would be the best thing to help the population stay strong or get stronger?

Randy: We've already done it here in the state of Maine. We shut down the young of the year from the pigmented stage to nine inch. All of our adult eel fishery is shut down. We have a very, very small pot fishery. I don't really see why that hasn't been shut down but it's out of the Department of Marine Resources' hands because it goes to Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. See, you're fighting one organization against another. Now if you were to take all the yellow eels that the other states are taking for bait and cut their quota 35% then our quota wouldn't have to be cut. We could go back. We wouldn't need a quota.

Julia: So you think Maine has done enough to help the population?

Randy: Maine has opened up thousands of acres of watershed to the eels again by taking out the Penobscot dams. There's still one left that needs to be taken out but the state of Maine has bent over backwards to save this. And it benefitted the state of Maine because in 2012 the revenue just for the fishermen was a \$40 million revenue. That money stayed right here. It didn't go anywhere. We needed that revenue. If you ask my opinion it should have stayed without no problems. The more money we make the more money the feds make. I ended up paying \$73,000 in taxes when I filed my taxes in 2012. That's a lot more than a lot of people

make but that was my tax base between state and federal. I don't mind paying it if I'm making it. This year was the worst year that I've had in a long time as far of what I make because of the competition with the state letting all the licensed dealers in.

Julia: There were more dealers this year than in the past?

Randy: Thirty more.

Julia: Oh. I didn't know that either.

Randy: There were – don't quote me – it was either 117 or 127 trucks on the road buying eels.

Julia: Did they put a cap on that number? That was just how many people –

Randy: It's a problem. We tried putting a cap on it a long time ago. They ended up saying no. It's commerce. The state of Maine needs to keep the commerce open. We have no right to do that. Well, you have a right to protect your own. Anybody can get on that computer, I don't care where you are in the world, and buy an eel dealer's license here in the state of Maine. It ain't right that anybody can come into this state, not pay a damn penny to the state of Maine, and are allowed to take the work away from the locals.

Julia: Do you have an idea of what percentage of them are from out of state as opposed to in state?

Randy: Between out of state and out of country.

*[Tape stopped and restarted. Some of what Randy said was cut off.]*

Randy: [Why isn't the] Atlantic States Marine Fishery Council taking the most sophisticated study that U.S. Fish and Wildlife has done on the eels and going with it? They are literally throwing out the 2007 findings. For what reason? It's not right. U.S. Fish and Wildlife spent a lot of money doing that study and now they want to throw it out because they want to change the angle of how to shut down this industry? It certainly isn't because of the lawsuit and the tree huggers adding global warming to it because you can throw that out the window with these eels living in 87 degree water in Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican, and as far down as Columbia. These eels don't have a problem with global warming. They don't have a problem with mercury. They don't have a problem with nothing as long as we don't eat them. If you were to let all the adults go, everybody fish glass eels, open all the states down the eastern seaboard, I'll bet you ten years from now you'll have just as many eels as you have right now. Because if you take Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, all these states that catch the baby eels and let them grow up, we would have more eels then...But as far as the state of Maine shutting down their silver eel fishery, shutting down their young of the year eel fishery up to nine inch and just having a very, very small pot fishery, it's virtually – we've done more than the rest of the states down through. But we've benefitted from it by going to glass eels for the revenue because \$40 million

for the state of Maine is pretty good. It benefits Washington and Hancock County tremendously because really this is where the people came back in '93 and wanted us to find these eels.

Julia: So it started in this part of Maine?

Randy: It started right here in Washington County.

Julia: Are there more glass eels here than in other parts of the state?

Randy: I really don't think so because we were slow at the beginning of the season, very slow. Our ice didn't leave the river until probably the second week of April. Some of the guys had already, the first week, down in the western, had already caught their quota. Some of the rivers down there produced before we did. But our water temperature was extremely cold.

Julia: So what is it about this area that this was the place that it started?

Randy: Less population, I believe. This is a total night industry. Everybody's out at night. Can you imagine ten guys in the middle of Camden in the middle of the night playing around in the rivers? There's a problem in some of the cities where the river runs through. You can't have these fishermen running down through locals' front yards or backyards to get to the river without permission. Down here there are more open rivers where you can stop beside the road and throw a net in and you're not bothering anybody. A lot of it is because of the population. And there are some real beautiful rivers down here in Washington County. There are seven salmon rivers. If there are seven salmon rivers there have got to be good eel rivers, right? There are seven, either six or seven, and one or two experimental rivers. I know Tunk Stream is experimental for Atlantic salmon. They put that one in there just in case they wanted to someday do a study on it I think. But there is Atlantic salmon in that river. Why do they go to that river and they don't go to the Narraguagus now? You're not answering my questions. You're NOAA. You're supposed to know this stuff!

Julia: Haha! I've only been with NOAA for a few months. And I don't really know that much about – I'm the least educated about salmon in the entire NOAA office that I work in.

Randy: Okay.

Julia: They hired me because I have experience doing things like this, doing interviews, talking to fishermen.

Randy: So, what do you want to discuss now, dear?

Julia: Can I ask my question that you didn't like?

Randy: Which one?

Julia: The one with, what would Downeast Maine be like if there were no river fisheries?

Randy: That question scares me. The answer I'm going to give you is: if that question is out there you're going to shut down all fishing in this county. And I don't think it's right. I don't think it is a very decent question to ask a seafood dealer down here when we depend on these rivers and the ocean. When I opened up my business I started with lobsters, scallops, shrimp, and elvers. Out of those four, the scallop season is gone, the shrimp season has been regulated so bad you can't buy or sell any. You can't buy them. Scallops went up to \$11 a pound last year. Now you want to screw the eels up? What's left? Lobsters? That's five months out of the year for me. And then you shut the doors and go bankrupt. I picked those four categories to get me a year-round income. I used to buy and sell shrimp, have it processed for me, and sell it to restaurants. I used to buy the scallops, put them in five-pound bags for the restaurants. I can't afford the inventory now. If you take eels away and you take the smelt away – Now there's a problem with the smelt population. I increased the smelt population 15 years ago because the Department of Marine Resources wanted us to take the nets out of the water on our closed days. You come back in March and we'll prove to you that our fyke nets are saving the smelt. When they go upstream to spawn and those eggs come back downstream they get caught up on our nets and they actually hatch right on our nets. But if we were to take them out every week and lay them on the bank it would kill them all. Now we proved this to the state and we actually had the wardens verifying that we actually increased the population of the smelt down here. And that's the best way to do the smelt population to get them back. But shutting down all the river systems in Washington *and* Hancock County? Why would you want to do that? To turn it over to the Indians? I don't want to hear that. I really don't want to hear it because that's a step where somebody's going to have a hell of a lawsuit on their hands. How can you take two counties in the state of Maine and shut it down to all fisheries? Why would NOAA even want that question on there?

Julia: I think you had an excellent answer to that question because that's exactly what they need to hear. It's a similar thing to what fishermen are saying is that they need the year-round income. You know, lobster are only in the summer and this is a really helpful thing because it helps you get through a time of year when you're not having a lot of income. I never really realized or thought about it being the same thing from a buyer's point of view. So even though it's a scary thing to think about, I think it's a good thing for NOAA to hear that it's important in that way.

Randy: Well they don't understand, or comprehend, or care, one or the other that we need to make a living here. We employ people here. It doesn't matter if it's one person. It doesn't matter if it's ten people, right? I can go from one person in the dead of the winter because there is nothing to do. Lobsters is over. The shrimping has been regulated so bad and shut down that industry. The scallops are \$11 a pound. I just give up buying them because of the price. This year Cobscook Bay, they wanted to open it up with one five-gallon bucket of scallops. I can't afford to drive down to Cobscook Bay. Even if I bought off of ten boats I wouldn't have enough to make a days pay. To me that's driven right out of proportion. If you take the eels away from me now, hell, this place is going to be shut down. And if NOAA wants

to rent it they can come have it because it's one of those things where we're being regulated to death and there's just not enough to go around for everybody. If you don't have the ability to go into other species you're going to get pushed right out because lobsters won't do it for dealers down here. It won't do it anywhere. Sure, if you're retired and you own a caddy shack selling lobster rolls for the tourists, you make your six months money and go to Florida. Be Linda Bean! Let PETA come after you. But the idea of shutting down these rivers is – that question wouldn't be on there unless it's in somebody's head that they're going to try to do it.

Julia: I think it's related to the Endangered Species Act stuff that's coming –

Randy: That's bullshit! They ought to completely do away with the Endangered Species Act. What species have they ever brought back except the American eagle? And that was a chemical problem. FDA says, 'Okay, that pesticide's all right. The DDT's all right. You can use that, boys!' When they screwed up that's when U.S. Fish and Wildlife had to step in and say, 'No, no, no, no. This doesn't work.' Well, it's time the people say, 'No, no, no, government. This doesn't work.' We've got to make a living. There's a reason behind that question. We can't make a living, a year-round living by shutting these rivers down. The guys in Addison River, Narraguagus, they actually go out and smelt fish through the ice. You can still put your net in the ice, sink your net and catch the smelt coming up in the winter. Now this would totally eliminate all smelt fishing. All alewife fishing, all eel fishing, every type of fishing there is. That would probably include the stripers coming in and the bluefish, our summer tourist attraction down here on the Narraguagus. Go out and see if the stripers are running. I know it's coming! I know it's coming because they want to overstep their bounds. It's not right. They are literally going to turn Washington and Hancock County, they may not do it to Hancock, but they're going to turn Washington County into – what do you think? A national park? What's their theory behind it? Why do they want to do it?

Julia: Shut down the river fisheries?

Randy: Yeah. Why do they want to do it?

Julia: I don't think they're going to do it. But I think –

Randy: It's on somebody's mind to try to do it, okay? Now, we catch herring for lobster bait in the spring about the same time we're catching eels. Shutting it down would mean - You've shut the Atlantic salmon down. They can't even sport fish them over here in the river. That place is out of business. They used to have forty, fifty guys every weekend up here fly-fishing.

*[Tape runs out. Restarted on new tape (all on one .wav file).]*

Randy: How in depth do you want to go on that question?

Julia: As far as you want to go.

Randy: Because by you shutting down, or NOAA, or – who's controlling the rivers? You can't shut the rivers down. It's not the federal jurisdiction unless you put everything that runs in the river on the endangered species list, everything, right? And you can't prove it for the Endangered Species list.

Julia: I guess theoretically we could think of this question like what if we just dammed all the rivers and no fish were running in them anymore? I guess there's multiple ways that you could –

Randy: What the hell have they done over the last hundred years? It's time to take all the dams back out!

Julia: I agree.

Randy: That would be very easy to do. All the government has to do is supply us with electricity.

Julia: You can get it in other ways.

Randy: We haven't had a nuclear fallout from our nuclear power plants, have we? How many species of fish have we destroyed by our hydro dams? How many thousands of species that we don't even know about that are in these rivers? You've got the sturgeon on the Endangered Species list still. If you were to go to the locals down there in Penobscot, not to the University of Maine who are going to throw four traps in the river and say, oh, there aren't any. Go to the locals and they will take you to them. There are guys that have seen the two and three-foot sturgeon stacked up just like chord wood right at the edge of the brook down there during our eel season. To me that's not endangered. When you can actually count and know of a species that is down to, what? 5,000? 10,000? Wouldn't you classify it as endangered? The bald eagle raises one maybe two chicks a year, at best two. You compare that, two eggs, to 22 million eggs from one eel. *22 million!* How many of them grow up? You can't answer that question. Why do you want to put it on the Endangered Species list? Because the state of Maine is making too damn much money and the fishermen are making too much money. Hell, when we're making more money than NOAA's guys are, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife guys, or the congressmen in Washington, they get a little bit pissed off because we've found something we can make money with. So let's shut her down because we're making money. Shutting down all these rivers is going to benefit who? Nobody. It's going to devastate how many people in Washington County? How many people in Hancock County? Right now we've got tree huggers as far as Bar Harbor. We don't need them across that Washington County line. Shutting the rivers down isn't going to benefit nobody here in the state of Maine. It's going to devastate it. If you were to – you're out of Gloucester? NOAA's out of Gloucester?

Julia: The Greater Atlantic Regional Office is in Gloucester. There is an Orono Field Station that is kind of underneath that. So, yes. The NOAA headquarters for the whole country is near D.C.

Randy: Okay. Let's take all the vehicles away from NOAA. Every vehicle that NOAA owns, take them away from them and let them walk to their destination. We'll see how much length and control they have. That's like taking our rivers away from us because we depend on the rivers, we depend on the ocean down here and it's all we're hearing is shut it down. Do you know how much money the fishermen down here, because of regulations, spend just on damn sinking rope?

Julia: A lot.

Randy: A lot. Now it's you've got to have two traps on every buoy. So they just eliminated 50% of the tail lines in the state of Maine, in Maine waters. That's not going to be enough because there's more regulations coming because any time you give the feds something, if you give them one thing, they're going to come back and get it again. Now, there's a reason this question is on there. And it's more devastating to the people that live here than it is to some bureaucrat in Washington that says, 'We want a national park, let's take Washington County.' Well, if the Obama administration wants a national park, they can go right up to Chicago and have one because they ain't going to get it up here. Hell, they couldn't even get it when the girl was going to give them the land! Who was that, the bee girl?

Julia: I don't remember her name. Doesn't it start with a Q? The Burt's Bees lady?

Randy: Quimby. She was going to give them the land to make a national park in her name. They don't need to do nothing with the rivers down here because they're going to devastate the livelihoods of everyone here, whether it's your grandmother that lives here and loves smelt and wants someone to get her a pound of smelt, or two quarts of smelt that used to be legal to get. I think we're down to one quart now but I'm not positive because new regulations just came in. We need these rivers. We need them for food. We need them for income. We need them for the tourists to be here. What are you going to do when the tourists come and the kids go down to the brook and start picking up cray fish? Is that going to be against the law? Nobody can fish in any of the waterways or anything? Because if the river's closed, every bit of water up above it in all the lakes and ponds and stuff are shut off, right? Is that where this is going? So therefore you've got an un-usable national park that tree huggers can come and say, 'Oh, ain't this cute!' But you can't go fishing? No. This is bullshit. It really is bullshit. And I don't care who wants to say that it's not. It's devastating to this area. And hell, I'm not even from this area! I'm a Vermonter! And if you want to go back there and see what the tree huggers did to that state with Act 250? It ain't good. And this is going to be the same way. We can move onto the next question now.

Julia: Okay. I think you've thoroughly answered that one. I think you've answered some of the other ones too without me asking them. Is there anything else that we didn't talk about that you think is important to know?

Randy: I think it's very important that you realize that just because the state has cut us back to a ten-week season, these eels are still running. Their stats run ten weeks. This year we had such



a devastating cold spring and a massive snowfall, our water never warmed up during the season. The last week of the season the eels in Washington County had just really showed up and the season was over. There was a guy in Bangor fishing and he needed I think four pounds to fill his quota and he couldn't catch anything in Bangor where he was located so he went back to East Machias. The first night he was in East Machias he caught over 40 pounds. This was the last three or four days of the season. So that tells me that our season was just starting down here because I've bought off the East Machias for many years. Those guys are good fishermen. So if we could get somebody to do a program that would do a study over a long term to actually look at the fall migration, the fall rains along with eighteen months later, what the catches are, what that year's winter is, and how it relates to the species. Because if there's no snow on the ground March 1<sup>st</sup>, the season opens March 22<sup>nd</sup>, there's eels. Well, if I put my nets in March 1<sup>st</sup>, I'm going to catch eels. I know I can catch eels. I know I can go catch eels right now. What is it, the middle of July? I know the eels are crawling in Columbia. So trying to regulate this species in a short ten-week season, it doesn't work. Trying to get your stats in a ten-week season doesn't work.

Julia: Yeah.

Randy: Yeah.

Julia: I'll try to convey that message.

Randy: There are numerous areas that you could study in this industry. Part of it is when we have a cold spring like this you never see dead eels along the banks, ever. So we're not killing them. We never know when the run really comes because it comes after our season. And even Gail Wipplehauser refused to keep her net in any longer on her studies. Season's over, that's it. Study's over. It's not right because it throws all the data off for the entire next, what, hundred years? It's stupid that you're using data from a hundred years ago because you've taken away all of the overboard discharge, you've taken away – how many dams have been put in in the last hundred years? All of these things contribute to a downfall of the eel. But we're opening up the dams all over again. We're taking them the hell out. The studies that really need to be done are year-round studies. The only way to do that is get somebody with a lot of money and shut something totally off. If you're going to do one species, do it. Because we need to put in numerous nets to see what's coming up the river as well as what's coming out of the river. If you want to do a fall study right now on this watershed out back here, make it quick because it's going to be, this is July, I think August and September and October we'll have eels going out of this shed. Anything else, dear?

Julia: No. That's it.