

Name of person interviewed: Richard McKnight [RM]

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 28, 2013

Interviewer: Markham Starr [MS]

Abstract

Richard McKnight talks about his 20 year career fishing for King Mackerel in South Florida and Louisiana.

Demographic information

Sex: Male

Age:

Ethnicity: White

Occupation: fisherman

Born: Lake Worth, FL

Homeport: Sebastian, FL

Key words

Role

Fisherman, boat owner

General Social and Cultural Characteristics

Social networks (family, friends, neighbors, co-workers)

Social and Cultural Characteristics of Fishing

Swordfish fishery

King Mackerel fishery

Red Snapper fishery

Golden Tile fishery

Regulations, IFQs

Gear and Fishing Technology

Other gear and technology

Boats

MS Could you tell us your name and where you're from?

RM Richard McKnight and I'm from, actually I was from Lake Worth Florida, but now I live in Sebastian Florida.

MS And is your family, was your family in fishing as you came up?

RM No they were not at all.

MS How did you get into it?

RM From the time I was five years old and I put a fishing rod in my hand, that's all I've ever wanted to do. My father was a construction worker. And out of high school I did that for ten years. And worked in the union, carpenters, joiners union. And dreamed about fishing. And then bought my first boat when I was twenty-one. And didn't succeed, bought another boat when I was twenty-eight. And it was a rough start, the first few years. Never deck handed on a boat, never knew anything but a fishing pole from the banks and a few years in Florida. And it was a struggle the first three years, and then started making some decent money in my fifth year, a few blown up motors and back to construction and paying debt loans off and buyin' new boats and more loans and back in the day the government gave us our permits, we qualified by income. Certain permits had more income qualifications than others. Like a snapper/grouper permit in the South Atlantic is a fifty percent income. So you had to make at least fifty percent fishing if you had another job. If you worked in construction, and still had the time. And so I qualified for I guess about eight permits in the first few years I was fishing. They weren't bought and sold back then. You just checked the box on the application, paid your ten dollar annual permit fee and the government issued you a permit. And that was probably '94 is when I really got into it strong. And in '97 they came down on us with moratoriums on issuances of new permits. And they allowed existing permits to be bought and sold. And that really backfired. I had a swordfish permit at the time, they took that because I didn't have any landings 'cause I was in the king mackerel fishery. And then I had a, in the state of Florida, a blue crab and stone crab licenses which they've taken those in the last decade for no landings 'cause I was in the king mackerel fishery. I mean when I was young I was told by the older fishermen to get every stamp, sticker, license, permit I could get 'cause in the future they would not be giving them away anymore. So I had 'em all. And you know as a young man, you want to diversify, you think about in the future you could have maybe a longline boat for swordfish, a couple crab boats, a mackerel boat, you know, but that never happened because starting in '97 they started taking permits away because we had no landings in that fishery. And today, I'm squeezed into the king mackerel fishery. That's what I've been doing for the last, since about '97, '98. And I travel from the east coast of Florida from Daytona Beach to Key West, king mackerel, trolling for king mackerel and then I fish in the Gulf of Mexico between July and October. And then back on the East Coast between November and June, end of June. And that's kind of what's happened to me in the last twenty years. It's just...

MS When you started, what, what, what was the fishery your very first boat was, were you...

RM I was twenty one years old, I bought an albacore boat, center consul, and, down in South Florida we had snappers, we have reefs down there, lots of yellow tail snapper, mangroves, mutton snappers, and a lot of that was hand line, for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper, fishing at night. And then that was what I knew how to do, kind of, fishing off the piers and the banks. We had snappers. We rod and reel fished and then I started trolling king mackerel in like '95 and that was a whole, a whole different ball game. It was goin' from making a certain am., hundred dollars a day, to up to a thousand dollars a day and that kind of, that's what, once I got doin' that, there was no turning back. And I bought, I was actually trolling in an outboard, which is kind of odd, because most trolling boats are diesel inboards, and then I got my first diesel inboard in 2000 and that meant I went up to a large vessel in '04 and that's when I started going to the Gulf of Mexico and king mackerel fishing there. [With a] bigger boat I could travel farther, live on the boat. I'm gone away from home about five months out of the year these days, six months, come home to visit maybe every six weeks and go back to the boat. We gotta do a lot of travellin', follow the stocks, follow the quota openings, 'cause we have different quotas for the East Coast and the Gulf and we have opening dates and we have a certain amount of pounds for the Gulf as well as the East Coast and once the quota's met, we move on to the next quota, the next opening. So that's why I ended up in the Gulf. Their quota starts July first from Alabama to Texas, it's a million pounds. We just got done catchin' that. We caught that this year in like ten weeks. Last year we caught it in seven weeks. In the year's past we've been there for four months because what's happened in the last four years, the fisheries, National Marine Fisheries has taken away the Red Snapper on the whole Atlantic Seaboard in the last five years, no harvesting of Red Snapper for recreational or commercial on the whole Atlantic seaboard. So the Red Snapper fishermen moved into the King Mackerel fishery. The Golden Tile fish quota's been cut from over a million down to three hundred and fifty thousand or four hundred thousand so the Tile fishermen have moved into the King Mackerel fishery. And the sharks, the long line sharks and gill net sharks have been pretty much shut down so those people have moved into the King Mackerel fishery. That's pretty much the only fishery left that's open access where you can buy a permit for five grand and buy a vessel and go King Mackerel fishing. So that way, so then us few that have done it for twenty years, we have now instead of a fifty boat fleet on the East Coast, it's a hundred and twenty boats. All these fishermen that did all these other things that they got squeezed out of, they've come into our, the King Mackerel fishery. So there's only so much fish to catch per year on the quota system, so that's less for everybody. So the income's been dropped in half in the last five years. And they were pushin' IFQs on it, and we fought it because we've seen what IFQ's have done in the Red Snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico, there's about twenty men that own the whole Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper fishery. And if you wanna fish Red Snapper you have to have a re-fish permit in the Gulf and lease 'em from them. And I've tried that and I lease 'em from the owner for three twenty five a pound and I get maybe four and a quarter at the dock so I'm workin' on a dollar a pound and then I gotta pay a deck hand and bait and ice and fuel and that takes about sixty cents so I'm workin' on forty cents a pound to go catch a Red Snapper. And the Gulf of Mexico Tile Fishery's

IFQ all Grouper's IFQ. It's just tough. There's no where to go anymore. There's no other fisheries to get into. To buy into the Red Snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico is forty dollars a pound for one share of allocation. So you have to be very wealthy to buy into that fishery which the people that have it are doing good. They're happy. Some of them have 50,000 pounds, some have a hundred thousand pounds. They can sit at the dock all year and lease 'em out for three and a quarter, never leave the dock. It's more profitable to lease 'em. By the time they pay, by the time they get five dollars at the dock for their fish and they pay their deck hand and fuel and ice and all of that in expenses, they can lease 'em for three and a quarter and make the same amount of money and never leave the dock. So that's been kind of a struggle. And on the East Coast, this Red Snapper fishery being shut down, I think that's just like, they talk about thirty years, National Marine Fisheries. And in the last seven years, we've seen a major, major comeback. You can't when you try to fish King Mackerel off Daytona Beach in Cape Canaveral, you have to leave areas where the Red Snappers are so thick they're biting trolling gear which you're trolling twenty feet below the surface and the Red Snappers are mid-water to bottom fish and they're so many of them that you're catching 'em trolling. And you're shakin' 'em off the hook. And just to think that that could be shut down for thirty years just is, is crazy. I mean they should have at least, this year they had a little opening. I don't know what the quota was, it was some ridiculous, it was 16,000 pounds or something for the commercial sector. And they had little five day, three day openings or something like that where we could catch fifty pounds a trip as by-catch. But if they're gonna use statistics on that, as far as us catching that 16,000 in three days, well the wind blew the whole three days that it was open so we didn't catch any of it so they consider we didn't catch any therefore they're not there, is, that's basically how fisheries is based anymore is on numbers and averages. It's not really done by science and, you know. It's all done by numbers and averages. We get shut down in the Gulf every year. We just got shut down, what's today, Sunday, we got done, shut down, not this Friday, but last Friday. And they shut us down, on numbers again, you know. We got shut down last year, there was probably sixty or seventy thousand left on the quota of a million pounds. This year we project, us fishermen, there's probably at least sixty or seventy thousand left on the quota and they shut us down by sayin' the weeks prior we caught so many fish in so many days, the weather was good, so they say, ok, there's this much fish left, they caught this much fish in seven days, so they're gonna catch that much fish again in seven days, well the wind blew for two weeks, twenty one days, almost twenty one days straight, we never left the dock. When we quit fishing there was supposedly 70% left. Three weeks later we never left the dock. They shut it down, said we hit our quota. We don't know exactly how much is left. But they don't open it back up. The counting of fish for quotas like that is just, it's just ballpark, it's so rough, it takes so much time. It's like pencil and paper, it's not a computer age. It's pretty bad.

MS When you started with your first boat, you were fishing by yourself?

RM Yeah.

MS And could you describe what the day was doing that? What was your typical day and how did you actually do the fishing?

RM Well at, at first I was snapper fishing. That was at night. We would fish from just before dark till five, four, five six o'clock in the morning. We'd come in around six, daylight. And we'd sell our fish and we'd be back in bed by eleven in the morning, sleep till four in the afternoon or so, five, get up and fish again [laughs]. Fish again from dark to daylight that was back then when I snapper fished. They bite more at night. And then King Mackerel fishing is up at 3 and get your bait, you've got your ice and fuel on the afternoon before, get up at three catch bait, leave the dock at four. Three hours run to the fishing grounds, start fishing at daylight, you've gotta be fishin' at daylight, this is no eight o'clock, nine o'clock stuff 'cause sometimes they bite for a couple hours in the morning and then not bite again until late in the afternoon. So, in Louisiana its a different ball game, you fish all day. Sometimes fish bite all day, sometimes it's a few hours in the morning and a few in the afternoon. The days over there are summertime, so it doesn't get dark till nine. Your day starts at six, you're up at four or five. By the time you get done guttin' and packin' at the end of the night when you anchor after dark, it's gut, pack, scrub the boat, cook dinner and a shower and you're in bed by midnight and you're up at five and that's the summertime in Louisiana and then the winter in Florida, it's up at three, in Florida it's a fifty fish per day quota so it's day fishing, it's not trip fishing like in Louisiana where we make three day trips. Florida's up at three, try to be fishin' by seven. A good day's have your fifty by 9:30 or 10, three hour run back to the dock, back at one, unloaded by 2 and you got the afternoon off, it gets dark at five, it's wintertime. Usually, that's a little bit better, but that's a good day. A bad day you could be fishin' until dark for that fifty or three in the afternoon where you're not gettin' in 'till after dark at six o'clock at night. So it just depends. You really have to be up early and try to get those fish quick and early while they're still bitin'.

MS And all these are single hook on a single pole?

RM Yeah, the King Mackerel's trolling, we're trolling at five knots, six knots, four to six knots. And we have four lines and it's all hand line. And it's done with paraveins or planers. We have outriggers that go down and then we have cables that go to those planers and we have different length cables, one line might be at twenty feet, thirty feet and another at forty. And we'll run a port side outrigger at twenty foot of cable and planer and a leader behind the cable to the lure. And then a middle line off the stern, same thing, thirty foot of cable and a planer and a leader and then an inside rigger with another cable and planer and then we have an electric reel we call a bug reel which is basically a starter motor with a spool and some belts and pulleys and it's on a switch we'll fish a bug on that which is just like a big fly, with like a tenno hook and straight wire, piano wire, about a hundred and eighty feet of piano wire number eight or number nine and we'll jerk that bug, it's called a jerk bug for King Mackerel. And as we're trollin' and our planers are in the water, those have sea witches with pogy strips on 'em or mullet strips or spoons or umbrella rigs we use and then that jerk bug line, if those planer lines aren't comin' up in the, sometimes the fish are picky, they want that bug line, so at the end of that wire, there's some mono, some three hundred mono and you wrap that around your hand, a couple wraps with a, you know they have gloves on, and you jerk on that bug and the King Fish, that's one thing they can't, they'll hit, they'll bite that mostly all the time, or

they won't hit the spoons and the sea witches and stuff like that sometimes. So that's kind of, most people fish that bug pretty persistently, but me I'm more of an outrigger fisherman and I kind of leave that bug to the side until I need it because I'm, my shoulder's gettin' worn out from jerkin' on that bug line for all these years so that's kind of the last resort for myself. The best way to catch King Mackerels is with spoons, drum spoons, no cuttin' bait, no, you know, just draggin' spoons around and catchin' 'em, and hand line 'em in. So we got thirty feet of cable and maybe fifty, sixty feet of three-hundred mono to the fish and we have, we have de-hookin' boxes with fifty hookers, we don't handle the fish, we don't take 'em off by hand or nothing, it's all done with de-hookers, which is

MS How does a de-hooker work?

RM It's basically a goal post shaped, two stainless bars vertical and a horizontal bar and you just take the fish and put 'em in the box and then you bring the hook up on that bar and you bring the hook to where it's like this, straight up and down to where the weight of the fish falls off in the box and then we have to handle the fish after we catch 'em, we have, once our kill box we call, our chill box, 'cause we have ice and salt water in there so the fish go live off the hook into a chill, ice and salt water. And they die in that chill so they're premium fish, very good quality. And then once the box is full, we have to stop fishing, like in Louisiana, we're on a three-thousand pound trip limit. And we have to gut 'em all, and then we have to pack 'em in another box and we have to move out of that kill box that you're catching them in, the chill box and pack 'em, layer 'em in ice and then go back to fishing and fill out the back box again, which is our chill box that we kill 'em into. And same thing, gut 'em and pack 'em and move 'em again to the forward boxes and in Florida it's fifty heads, it's like nothing usually. I mean like, so there's a lot of days you fish all day to catch 'em, and most days you catch 'em pretty fast. The fish come to Florida in the wintertime and they summer in the Carolinas and they migrate south in the winter to the Keys and a lot of them stay off Daytona, Cape Canaveral and Sebastian which is where I live now, Sebastian Florida. And so they're pretty plentiful there in the wintertime between Thanksgiving and April. So fifty heads, our box holds a thousand that we chill 'em in. Fifty heads, five-hundred pounds on average, so we just catch our fifty and they chill and on our three hour boat ride back to the dock we'll gut the fifty and pretty much just throw 'em back in the chill and come in and unload 'em. There's no really movin' 'em into other boxes, it's not really necessary. We keep icing the other two boxes in front and use 'em to ice the fish in the back after we gut 'em.

MS And how big is the average fish?

RM Ten pound, twelve pound. They go to seventy. On average we catch fish in the seven to twelve pound range. A ten pound fish is a good market fish, better price for smaller fish than large ones. We don't catch too many large fish in the thirty to sixty pound range, they're just a smarter fish, they got old, you know and they're very, I mean sometimes they'll let loose and bite for a little while, but they'll stop and then the little ones will take over. A big fish for us is in the thirty pound range, forty pound range. Those are large fish for us, kind of hard to handle. We'd rather catch 10-12 pounders.

There's a, which is good, the bigger fish are spawning fish you know, and they have more roe and everything. The smaller fish spawn as well. I've caught plenty of fish in the seven pound range that spawn. I think the King Fish spawn about four times a year, any of the months of June through July and August and September. I mean I've seen roe in fish in the winter as well, but I'm not sure how much that, how much spawn that, that I'm not sure.

MS Do you do, so say you catch your fifty right away, do you ever fish for other things out there?

RM We're regulated out of everything. I mean

MS Nothing else you can...

RM No there's not. There's really not I mean, I used to catch Golden Tile fish and I used to catch um, Snappers like I said. And there's just, we can't, they don't let us fish for none of that anymore. The Golden Tile fishery, the quota's way down on the East Coast of Florida, down to four hundred thousand pounds a year which is, which is nothing. I mean long liners get 75% of that, the hook and liners get you know the banded fishermen or electric reel fishermen we call it, they call it banded reels or deck reels, that's a 25% of that quota, that fishery. And the long liners went over this year so they didn't allow the banded fishery to open. So that kind of shut it down for that. I mean we need more fish in all these fisheries. In the Gulf of Mexico, the King Mackerel's a million pounds. That's from Alabama to Texas. That's a wide area for a million pounds of fish. Just to give you an idea, one shrimp shed in Louisiana can unload 12 to 14 million pounds of shrimp in a year. One shrimp shed. The production of crawfish in Louisiana, is somewhere around a hundred and fifty million pounds. The Red Snapper quota in the Gulf I believe is close to six million pounds. We have a one million pound quota of King Mackerel. The scientists say we're fishing on 20% of the TAC which they call, the total allowable catch. If we're fishing on 20% of the total allowable catch, by these numbers, why can't they bump us up to forty or fifty percent? We're still half of what they say we can catch, the total allowable catch, and still be sustainable. I mean we're fishing on 20, we could fish on a, in other words, what they're saying is total allowable catch is what you can, you can catch and still be sustainable. We're catching 20% of that, of what they say we can catch and still be sustainable. So us as a King Mackerel fishery, there's a lot of us. There's a hundred of us at least. There's sixty full timers. Then you have other people that are in the Keys, you have lobster fishermen that'll go King Mackerel fishermen when they're there. You have stone crabbers on the West Coast of Florida that will go King Mackerel fishing when the King Mackerel are there, 'cause they migrate. So really there's sixty boats in from where I live in Central Florida that full time King Mackerel fish, that don't do anything else 'cause we can't do anything else and travel around. We're all out against each other in this thing. You know everybody wants this and that and this. 'Cause we go to these meetings and everybody wants this and I just keep tellin' everybody in the last couple years is, we need more fish. But some people don't agree, more fish, more fishermen. More fishermen, more fish, less price. You know nobody can agree. But if you were catching a certain amount of fish six years ago, at a million pound quota, and

you doubled the boats, so now you're catching half of that, but you doubled the quota, so you're back, so you doubled the boats, but doubled the quota so you're back to catching what you were six years ago, even if you got the same price or a little less, at least you're making the money you were. And it's still sustainable according to their numbers, National Marine Fisheries Service, you know? That, I think that's what we need to do, we need to, we need more fish. On the East Coast of Florida in the winter we have a million pounds of quota. Sometimes we catch that, it starts November 1st. And I've seen it end at the end of January or the end of February. Well the new quota doesn't open, the summer quota doesn't open till April 1st. So we're shut down from the end of February, all of March, for four weeks we're shut down. We don't have a pay check. And then in years past when the fleet was smaller, that quota lasted till April 1st. We never reached it. And because we have a lot of bad weather in the wintertime. We're small boats, we're a day fishery. We go out fish a day, catch fifty, come in. Well if we had bad weather, it's hard to catch that million. We didn't catch it this year. The fleet this year for, the economy had a lot to do with it. In the last few years, the fleet went from sixty boats to a hundred and twenty. Well we had plumbers and we had electricians and we had carpenters in the last few years since '08 the recession, people that were born and raised in Florida knew anything about King Mackerel fishing and they had a boat in their yard, whether it be a contender with three outboards on it or a Carolina skiff with a fifty horse outboard on it, a permit's five thousand dollars to get into this fishery. So if they were plumbers, carpenters, whatever, then in '09, we're all fishing in diesel in board cabin boats, King Mackerel boats that were built in Miami Florida most of them, and in '09, '08 and '09 and '10 were trolling next to sixteen foot Carolina skiffs, thirty miles off shore with PVC for out riggers and a bug reel mounted on the gunwale with three guys in it, three carpenters, that never fished in their lives, but they have an idea from their friends that fish. So that's what we've seen, we've seen the fleet, but then last year the fleet dropped off. It went from over a hundred and twenty boats back down to sixty. And those people that came in those few years, you can't make a living with three men on one boat. We fish by ourselves, fifty fish per day. It's five hundred pound average, at maybe a buck and a half, two bucks. We don't fish everyday; we fish two or three days a week 'cause with the weather, so for them guys to go out in a boat, it didn't work. So either they went, the economy's getting better, they went back to their jobs, so that hurt us as well as full time commercial fishermen, having people come in and catch the quota and reduce the price by flooding the markets on us with you know, instead of 60 boats catching a certain amount of fish per week and the market kind of stayin' stable and the price staying relatively decent, a hundred and twenty boats fishing and you get seven days of good weather, you go from two fifty a pound to a dollar a pound by the end of the week and it's hard to make it with four dollar a gallon fuel.

MS How do you sell your fish when you get back? Is there a central location or are you...

RM Yeah there's different fish houses. There's one in Daytona, there's one, a couple in Cape Canaveral. There's a couple in Sebastian, Florida. And then, pretty much from Sebastian to Miami, there's no more fish houses on the water. They're gone to high rise condominiums, restaurants, property's worth so much money. When I was young there was fish, there was a fish house every ten, fifteen miles. And there was some areas, like

in Sebastian, a little two mile strip of land had seven or eight fish houses on it and now there's none. There's an unloading facility to cross a man's dock to go into a truck to go to the fish house from Sebastian to Cape Canaveral or to Dustin, Florida which is where the other buyer comes from in Sebastian. 'Cause they don't own the property anymore. They don't own, they cross the dock. It's in sort of a marina so there's no water, there's no working, like this festival. That's what this is about. And we have those down there. And there's, even the working waterfront south of me, there's some docks, a little small strip of land, there's a couple pavilions set up with shade and the ice is trucked in by vats and the fish is trucked out in vats. There's no more fish house. The fish house that's right a couple blocks down from this area where we unload is an art gallery, so... And it's apartments, it's a coffee shop. And that's what the working waterfront in Florida...it's really bad down there as far as the property values just got so high that the fish house owners...plus the banning of the gill nets put many fish houses out of business overnight in Florida, 1995, overnight. The fish houses went away. These people that were third, fourth generation fishermen and fish buyers, there was no volume of fish to sustain 'em anymore. It was overnight. And the, and now like I said there's just, just little like in Jupiter, Florida, we have one little dock, the piece of property's worth about 8 million dollars. These three buyers have owned it in the last ten years. The people that owned it were there a long time. They sold it. Another guy bought it. He wants to build a restaurant. They won't let him build a restaurant. So the property's still like, it's owned by a third buyer since this buyer a decade ago, but the city, you know they got restaurant here and here, and this guy wants to build him one, but you know, the guys on the side don't want him to build one. So it's just like so much politics. So that piece of land is still there. It's this narrow strip of land with one dock. And it holds about ten boats. And that's where the truck comes from Sebastian. They got a little bit of an ice plant there and a little bit of a packin' facility. And they come from Sebastian with vats of ice to Jupiter, Florida, to this small, little dock, on the waterfront, with restaurants all around. And we unload our fish with hand trucks and garbage cans, and we load our ice by shovel. And you know, it's, it's really bad down there. I mean the property where I'm at in Sebastian, the owner was there for over thirty years and he had an outboard mechanic business. And he had some docks and he leased 'em, rented 'em to the fishermen. And he sold it, I think, well, I don't know, four years ago. He was there for thirty-five years. And we managed to get grant money through the state and through the City of Sebastian to purchase this property, to save it. And it's called "Fishermen's Landing Sebastian". And it's got about ten slips, and we truck our fish with hand trucks to vats in the front of the docks. And we still weigh 'em on a hanging scale pan and we pack 'em ourselves. And the fish house comes down in the truck and they have a fork lift and they fork lift 'em in the truck, take the ice off the truck in back, set it on the ground, and then when we come in the next day to unload, we have ice to pack 'em. So we don't hardly ever see the fish buyer, the worker, or the truck. He comes and goes as we're gone and...but anyways we just got news yesterday that inland navigational district and the City of Sebastian worked together and they got the grant money to build an unloading, like a fish house, an unloading facility. There won't be an ice plant, the ice will still be trucked in. But we're gonna have like a 12,000 square foot area with a cover with scales and vats of ice and now we're just kind of working with, we're just working out in the parking lot really. There's no, there's an old abandoned building, and that's the reason the place got saved is because the building was built, it's

historic, the building that the man did his outboard repair and diesel repair out of, it's in, it got half of it's missing from the hurricanes in 2004. And it's been like that since then. And that's why the man left. He had his home right on the property in front of the business over the water. So he sold it because the hurricanes flooded his house and ruined his business. So he moved out west, more west in Florida. Not far, ten miles. So we still leased from him for those years that he wasn't there. And then the City of Sebastian, we had Charlie Sembler, which is one of our, he was our tax collector a few years and then I believe he was a senator of ours, Charlie Sembler Jr. which his father owned a fish house on the water in Sebastian. And that was sold many years ago and turned into a restaurant. So they, and I think his father as well were fish buyers and fishermen, they're fishermen as well. And Charlie Sembler Jr. got together with the City of Sebastian and got the grant money to initially buy the property. And now the Inland Water District, I think that's what it's called, Inland, Inland Waterway District? Something like that. Inland Navigational District, just, we just got the grant money from them to go ahead and preserve this. It's just, it's the last place that there is in Sebastian and for many miles. There's not another fish house until you hit Daytona Beach which is almost a hundred miles from Sebastian. And then there's really not another fish house from Sebastian probably till you get down to Miami which is over a hundred miles.

MS Is there much of a fishing community feel between you and the other fishermen in the mackerel fishery there? Do you interact much with the other guys out fishing? Or is it pretty much solo?

RM As far as us fishermen in the mackerel fishery?

MS Yeah so out of your area is there a community fishing feel to it or?

RM Oh yeah. There's a fleet of us. I mean like I said there's fifty or sixty of us full timers that travel together and work together. I mean we all go to Louisiana, you know, a couple dozen of us every year. We pretty much all know each other. I mean we work together on the radio together to locate fish and everybody helps each other. And in the mornings we all have to, we can't catch pogie ourselves anymore too much, used to be able to run a little piece of gill net in the morning at three o'clock and catch pogies for bait every morning, fresh pogies, they only last a day, very delicate fish. We have to cast net 'em now and it could be hours cast netting pogies so we usually buy 'em from a bait man. So he cast net 'em all night and we get up in the morning at three and we meet him at the docks and he's got coolers full of fresh pogies. They have to be chilled immediately. They have to come right out of the nets into ice and salt water for 'em to be quality enough for us to troll at five knots. 'Cause we strip em, make strip baits out 'em. So I mean yeah, it's a pretty tight, tight knit, you what I mean. We have our odds. I mean it's pretty tight fishing off shore. We're trolling around at four or five knots and the school of fish might be only half a mile or a mile in circumference and you're tryin' to fit fifty boats into a half a mile area and the fish move and everybody's circling and we circle on the fish, we get on the fish and catch one or two and we circle. And nowadays we have autopilots that orbit a waypoint for us so we can set these auto pilots up to orbit a waypoint on the plotter and not touch the steering wheel and just sit there and orbit a waypoint. And that

you know, a lot of guys still drivin', a lot of guys don't have auto pilots and, but I mean it's King Mackerel move, you'll catch twenty or thirty of 'em in one circle and then you look up, you're not catchin' anything and you look up and you're sunk in between fifty boats around you and you're tryin' to find a way out and everybody's circling and they don't want you comin' through their circle you know. It's a, everybody, hands up in the air and hollering. Your in my circle, watch out I'm coming around. You know, this is my spot. So you kind of weave in through the fleet and you can't circle because everybody's so tight, outrigger to outrigger and you finally make it in to an open area where you can make a circle. Hopefully you get a bite in that area so you can make a circle and the next thing you know you're on the outside of the fleet lookin' in. You know, it's not a spectator sport as a lot of us say. I mean it's on the outside lookin' in is pretty rough 'cause it's ten or eleven o'clock in the morning and you got twenty head, you want to catch fifty and get out of there and you're lookin' in and everybody's bailing hand over fist, you know and you're on the edges. But that's...so you don't wanna be there. Get there early in the morning and get on the bunch of fish early and catch 'em. Be the one in the middle of the, middle of the pack when you look up when you got your fifty and you weave your way out of there and you go back home. I mean that's the game. So it's very, very competitive. It's, people get into people's circles that don't know what they're doin', those guys that came out with there Contenders with three outboards and three guys and, I mean literally there were three two hundred and fifty horse motors on the back, they're goin to catch fifty King Fish. I mean we just see that comin' at seventy miles an hour, and we're just like, "Oh my God, I hope he ends up on the South end of the fleet, away from me!" Because you know when they get around you, they're gonna get all in your stuff and you just, you can't even holler at 'em because it's not gonna do any good so you just kind of go off and find some fish somewhere else. It's, that's what it, so that's kind of, there's some pretty crazy stuff. Outriggers catchin' 'outriggers, tearing 'em of the sides of the boats. People getting so mad I mean they just chargin' each other, black smoke blowin' out the dry exhaust and somebody's comin', chargin' somebody and you know goin' from four knots to fifteen knots up on a step and you know comin' behind the sterns of the boats and takin' lines out. And I mean, you get back to the dock and it's like, "Ok, where are we goin' to eat?" There's a lot, there's some of that. I took a man's bug line one day, his wire, hundred and eighty turns of that piano wire, I didn't mean to take it. He was pushin' on me, you know. People get circling next to you and they're, you're at your north end of your circle and they're half into your circle, while you're on your north end so your coming back around and they're going back south again and your heading south, but there still half in your circle so you're comin' around the south end of your circle and your taking their line because it's still in your circle, that close, I mean it's tight quarters. And the guy come up to me at the end of the day and kind of says, "You got my bug?" You know 'cause I had his bug on the end of my plainer cables and stuff. I said, "No, I threw it overboard. I don't have your bug." You know, he looks at me real funny, he's like, you know, he was mad, but he, that's all he said, and he walked away. There's been some serious confrontations out there.

MS I assume no women out there? Or are any?

RM No, not too much. I mean a lot of guys will bring their wives on the weekends or whatever, you know, daughters, you see daughters sittin' on the back deck. There's a few, I mean I've seen a couple men had their wives fishin' side by side with 'em everyday, travel too, all around the country, more so in the older days. Not too much these days. A lot of the older fishermen that are gone now. They had their wives with 'em. And they had in the heyday. It was wide open. No limits no quotas. It's a good fishery. I mean it's been around a long time. It's probably been around since the '40s. The first bug reels were made with bomb bay door motors. Door motors from the bomb bays on airplanes, you know electric motors. The first bug reels. The bomb, they were this big. And they don't just stop when you turn the electric off, they keep rollin', slowly come to a stop. And they were made from the electric motors from bomb bay doors on bombers. Those were some of the first electric reels. The spools were made from bicycle hubs, Bendex, coaster brake, bicycle hubs. 'Cause when you peddle a bike it has an in gear and then when you stop peddling it coasts. And the spools that were made out of wood and then they have the wood, the round wood block is about three inches, two and a half inches wide with a coaster brake hub mounted inside the wooden spool. And then on the outside of the wooden spool is aluminum plates. The wooden spool's just a wooden circle. But the aluminum plates are two inches higher than the wood so that's your spool now for your wire to lay in. And the inserts is a bicycle hub. And it's made originally with the bomb bay door motors, straight pulley on the end of the shaft, to a, the sprocket where the chain went on a bicycle is drilled in with, on each section of that sprocket and a, and a pulley is mounted onto that sprocket. And then the other side where the old coast brake used to attach to your bicycle, is mounted to the two aluminum frames that come down to hold the spool, aluminum brackets, like L brackets. And the old coaster brake's, still attached to the brackets because it can't spin around. It's just like a bicycle has to be attached. And what they do, is when you hit the motor, it's like peddling and it engages and reels the fish in and then when you just slightly pull on the wire to let the bug line back out because it's just a wire and a like a big fly, there's no weight, no nothing, so when you really just kind of pull and kind of let lose on that bug line, it puts that sprocket into free spool, like you are coastin' on your bicycle. You know what I'm saying? You'd be peddlin' and when you used to peddle on your bicycle, and when you went to coast, you could feel those, feel that kind of disengage on those peddles, you know, when you would stop peddling, and that's the same thing that free spool is on the reel is to just kind of pull it like that and it would disengage. It's a little mechanism inside the coaster brake itself. But originally they, they bugged, we're using a hundred and eighty feet of bug wire, and a nine-o hook with some nylon hair through the eye of the hook folded back with some wire wrapped around it at the head. And then a little bit of super glue right at the eye of the hook, so the hair that goes through the eye of the nylon hair doesn't fluff out on you, cause it's more a drag, it's more pull to jerk, 'cause you're jerkin' fast all day long I mean, just like that. And so they say they used to use like a parachute chord with a sixteen ounce trolling weight which shaped like a cigar, an eye at each end with a piece of piano wire behind that in their bug. And reason being, the piano chord was only like thirty feet and now we can put as much wire as we want out, a hundred and eighty, two-hundred, a hundred fifty, and that regulates the depth of the bug fishing back there at four knots. And the slower you go, the deeper the bug fishes. Well back then they didn't have reels to pull it in so they couldn't put a hundred and eighty feet of wire out and hand line all this wire

on the deck, so they just used a short piece of parachute chord, thirty feet with a sixteen ounce trolling weight and a little piece of fifty foot of wire behind that 'cause they could hand line that, they could deal with that, and the trolling weight got it down, they could let the rope, the parachute chord out to the certain depth they wanted their bug, so now their jerkin' on a sixteen ounce weight all day with a bug at the end of it, but anyway... that was, the guys, I think they were a lot, you know, come from a different breed.

MS Well great. We're out of time. So I was gonna stop, but thank you very much.

RM Alright.