

Name of person interviewed: Mark Phillips [MP]

Facts about this person:

Age: 53

Sex: Male

Occupation: fisherman, boat owner

If a fisherman (if retired, list the ports used when fishing),

Home port: Greenport, NY and New Bedford, MA

Residence (Town where lives): Greenport, NY

Ethnic Background:

Interviewer: Madeleine Hall-Arber

Transcriber: Laura Orleans

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 26, 2010

Abstract:

Mark Phillips is the owner/operator of an 83' dragger F/V ILLUSION. He fishes out of Greenport, Long Island NY and New Bedford. He has been fishing for 35 years. He talks about his operation (what he fishes for, where he fishes, his crew, storms, etc.). He also discusses the impact of regulations including the catch share/sector system; changes in technology (gear and communications); political advocacy; and tension between environmentalists and industry.

Index

Keywords: Greenport; sectors; catch shares; choke species; unusual catches; storms; LADY OF GRACE; technology; Magnuson; NEMAP; Jimmy Ruhle; gentrification;

Tape 1

000-3:00 background; b. 1956; Greenport NY; grandfather was a coastal trader; runs 83' dragger

3:00-6:00 talks about crew and sector/catch share system; choke stocks

6:00-9:00 impact of catch shares on industry

9:00-12:00 conservation; overfishing vs. overfished

12:00-15:00 variety of species; unusual catches; innovative fishing techniques; involvement in fisheries politics

15:00-18:00 storms; LADY OF GRACE; icing up

18:00-21:00 communication at sea between boats; safety training; changes in technology (gear)

21:00-24:00 culture of fishing; share system; owner/operators vs. fleet owner; longevity of crew; scallopers vs. draggers (require different set of skills)

24:00-27:00 mentors; fishing community (socializing on shore); communication with those on shore

27:00-30:00 marine operators to cell phones; using scanners to eavesdrop on each other when cell phones first came in; changes in fishing effort due to regulations; impact of regulations on stability of market

30:00-End problems with interpretation of Magnuson Act

Tape 2

000-3:00 ten year rebuilding timeline an impossibility; issues w/ NOAA/NMFS; relationship between environmental groups and government

3:00-6:00 working with politicians

6:00-9:00 challenges of countering environmental message; fisherman's organizations; NEMAP survey and Jimmy Ruhle

9:00-12:00 meeting with Lubchenco and Schwab; trawlgate; faulty science; NEMAP

12:00-15:00 NEMAP vs. NOAA science

15:00-18:00 size of twine affects towing speed; importance of educating politicians and public on issues

18:00-21:00 local politics in Greenport/advocating for more Bay Constables; impact of regulations on Greenport's fleet

21:00-End concerns re gentrification of waterfront; Hathaway's winch builder and others in fishing industry who got pushed out to make room for Steamship Authority in New Bedford; fishermen as only true conservationists.

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MP Tell me when

MHA You're on

MP Ok. My name's Mark Phillips. I own the fishing vessel ILLUSION

MHA Ok good. And I'm Madeleine Hall-Arber, I'm asking the questions here [laughs] starting the interview. So where are you from originally?

MP Uh, I'm from Greenport Long Island, New York.

MHA And when were you born?

MP 1956. December 7th, 1956.

MHA Ok. So tell me a little bit about growing up. Did you grow up there? Did you live here or

MP No I actually, I still live in Greenport. I grew up there. I started fishing when I was 8 years old.

MHA Uh huh

MP I started out lobstering and didn't really like it and a friend had a dragger so I started on there and then whenever I could skip out of school or weekends, all vacations I went fishin'

MHA So did you come from a fishing family or is this just...

MP Well my father was always involved in the water. My great grandfather he was a trader, a sailing trader up and down the whole East Coast and parts of the middle India, whatever you call it. Is that part of Asia? So the water's always been in my family. But I'm really the only true fisherman.

MHA I see. And do you know what attracted you to it?

MP Uh, the interest that, the different things you get to see. I knew when I was growing up I either wanted to go fishing or I wanted to get into marine biology or oceanography or something like that and I kind of feel like I get the best of both worlds there I see stuff nobody else ever sees so and I'm fascinated by it. I still get excited when something different comes up. I kind of pride myself in, you if an odd species comes up, I'm probably the only one on the boat that knows what it is. And I just, I like seeing different things. And that's still the fun part about it.

MHA So how many crew members to you have?

MP I have three, plus myself.

MHA And uh, what kind of, you're trawling right?

MP I'm a trawler. I fish from Cape Hatteras to the Canadian border.

MHA Oh.

MP So the majority of my fishing is on George's Banks. But I do fish, do other species and fish other places.

MHA How big is the boat?

MP 83 foot.

MHA And what kind of species do you mostly go in for?

MP Right now with the regulations, everybody's targeting haddock,

3:00

but cod, yellowtail flounder, winter flounder, grey sole, sea dabs, monks, and we do a little bit of squiddin', a little bit of fluking, chase a few scup around, just about everything. Whatever it takes to make a living.

MHA Are you in a sector?

MP Yeah. Yes.

MHA Which?

MP Sector 13. It's a pretty good group of guys. It started out with four individuals, five individuals and we kind of made a pact there that we would, we would keep it together and we would stick together as that little group there and so far that part of the sector fishing has been ok because of the, we've tried you know, we can work together. But

MHA Did you know each other before?

MP Yeah we fished around each other for some of us for 25 years. And that's the, you have to be able to, because you gotta be able to trust the guys that you're fishin' with. You know you're responsible for what everybody else does in your own sector. That's the scary part of the sector fishing is, one guy can put the whole sector out of business for the year. One guy, one species and you're done. It's not a, it should have been done a lot different.

MHA How do you think that it should have been done? What would have been better?

MP Well this, the way they, sectors are basically an ITQ, Individual Transferable Quota. And it's just disguised to skirt National Marine Fisheries Service Regulations. They says, well if you have sectors it's a group of people, it's not an individual transferable quota, but it is your quota. If you leave the sector it goes with you, so I don't know, it's just, they played with words to get around the regulations. They would have had to go to a referendum with all the fishermen if they'd a called it ITQs so to get around having a referendum, we called it catch shares and a sector and...but this is the only catch share ITQ system that involves 19 species and one species can stop you from fishing and catching your quota on every other species which is a little hard because most guys didn't target multiple species, they were, they targeted, they had their primary species so you wind up with some species in the ground, in your sectors that you have very little quota of and that is, we call those choke stocks and they become, I mean I know guys that, they got less than one pound of a certain species.

6:00

That's not even a whole fish! So technically, they can't go fishin', they have to go find somebody else that has that species. So there's a lot of issues that should have been addressed differently.

MHA So the folks in your sector are, do they have a pretty good range of species. Were you able to...

MP Well we, in order to keep my boat going, three of us got together and we bought one guy's whole quota. He tied the boat up for the year, we bought his quota and we moved those, we've made it work to say that it's successful, I don't know.

MHA Yeah

MP You know, over 50 percent of the fleet of the fishing fleet in New Bedford is tied up because of this. So it's, I mean it's scary. I know I have friends in the gear business and their down 50 percent or more for the year. So...it's a scary thing.

MHA Are you here, tied up in New Bedford?

MP Yeah I'm hauled out at Fairhaven Shipyard right now.

MHA I see

MP There's a really lot of nice people you know, you get to know the different people involved in the infrastructure and there's really a lot of good people in there. I mean there's always bad apples, but that's gonna be in any industry. But there's really a lot of good people that really care about the industry.

MHA Now how about your sector manager. Are you happy with...

MP I've been very happy with him. We got, we were very lucky. I know so many guys are not happy with their sector managers and we've had, we've actually had a few boats leave other sectors to come to our sector cause he is, he's doin' an excellent job.

MHA How do you keep track day to day? Do you have...

MP That's the sector managers job.

MHA Yeah

MP So

MHA So you just report to him whatever your landing and...

MP Well yeah that's part of it, there's a lot more paperwork involved with sectors than there used to be there's always been a lot of paperwork, but there's a lot more now.

MHA Tell me a little bit about when you first started, maybe just how things were then and what you did and what you liked about fishing.

MP The best things seeing was a lot of different species, uh, we've come a long ways from 40 years ago, uh we're the most conservative country in the world when it comes to the fish we catch, the mesh size that we use.

9:00

We have the largest mesh size in the world, uh, our, for most of our stocks, overfishing is not occurring. There's a, National Marine Fisheries Service and environmental groups will use the term "overfishing" and "overfished" and they sound the same, but they're completely different. Overfishing means that you're harvesting faster than a stock can replenish itself. Overfished means that a stock has not rebuilt its target level. And almost all species, I might be incorrect in saying all species on the east coast, overfishing is not occurring. If there are any, it's only one or two. But the majority of species are not, overfishing is not occurring. That doesn't mean that there not fully recovered yet. But there's a lot of stuff that goes on. A stock will reach a recovery point and then somebody will change the level, they'll up the level to where they want it to, so then that stock where it was overfishing was not occurring and the stock wasn't overfished, then the stock will be overfished again because we just set the goal post another thousand metric tons or 5000 metric tons higher than previously so there's a lot of games that are played with numbers and there's a lot of games that are played with terminology

MHA Right. Now how about when you first started out, what, what were the species that were most plentiful? And what were some of the interesting things that you picked up?

MP Well I started fishing on scup or porgies, uh, and it was at the time back in the 60s there, the stock had actually, it was just recovering from being overfished or it was on it's

down cycle and now it was starting to go on its up cycle and then it went down on its down cycle and the caught fluke and then we caught winter flounders and some yellowtails. I didn't fish on George's when I started. I fished in southern New England prior to that and it wasn't till I got my own boats that I started fishing on Georges. So...it's the biggest thing is just seeing the different species, the different, you know, you never know what you're gonna catch.

12:00

You know, I've caught paper nautilus, live paper nautilus, which is similar to the nautilus that you see in the aquariums. I've caught bopahs which is a sacred fish in Hawaii, but it's a world wide fish. I've caught a species called a blue bar. I'm trying to think of, they're some of the unusual fish I've caught. I know there's many others. I've caught torpedos, I've caught depth charges; I've caught military shells. You just, you never know what you're gonna catch. The Wolf Fish, that's a pretty interesting one, you don't catch a lot of them but they're, they've got huge teeth and they bite like heck if you

MHA Get to close

MP Yeah. I pioneered a lot of, some mid-water trawling for bluefish which was a lot of fun.

MHA That's another one you have to stay out of the teeth

MP Yeah and there was some tricks to doing that. I've uh, I was one of the first boats, there was a group of us there that figured out that if we started pulling larger cod ends we would catch more marketable fish and we did that with scup and I've been involved in some of the politics trying to you know, change regulations so that they help the stock and in turn help the fishermen.

MHA Right

MP But it's a hard battle, 'cause fishermen are not, we don't have degrees so people don't think we're very smart, but in most cases, the fishermen are a lot smarter than the scientists, you know. We've been going, if we tell the scientists there are stocks in trouble they tell us we don't know what we're talking about. If we tell the scientists that the stocks have recovered or are recovering, they tell us we don't know what we're talking about. But in almost every case the fisherman has been proven right. Once industry gets its own science together, and it's matched up against the government science, industry's been proven right which is, there isn't a single species that we haven't gone, that the industry hasn't been proven correct. The trouble is, is we haven't done enough of the species.

MHA So what has your, when you take, I assume you take trips, you're not a day boat, right

15:00

MP No I'm a trip boat.

MHA And so how long are your trips and has that changed over time?

MP Uh three days to a week. Not really. Once I got my own, when I started I was on a day boat. But pretty much after I got my own boat its, very seldom do I make a day trip.

MHA Do you ever hit any weather out there?

MP All the time. All the time. I escorted a boat in the beginnings of the "perfect storm" before it made it to the Grand Banks

MHA Really

MP We stayed, there was a whole group of us, we all stayed, we fished right up until the last second, until it was too rough to go. There was a guy on a 40 foot sports fisherman and we escorted him all the way to Montauk and then we came to New Bedford and we got the crap beat out of us, I mean, and I guarantee you people on that boat probably never went on the water again because it was horrendous. I've been through a couple hurricanes, been through when the LADY OF GRACE sank, four guys lost there lives, I mean that was, that was a bad, bad night. They had most of us just jogged, but because of the regulations he tried to come home and that was his mistake. It was just

MHA He iced up I think?

MP Yeah he iced up. The problem with icing is that the worst thing you can do is run to the beach. The closer you get to the beach, the colder it is, the colder the air is and the colder the water is. So you, the closer you get, the more ice you make. The best thing you can do is, is, is actually run farther off shore to get to warmer water and hopefully warmer air or at least just jog nice and easy and be aware of what's going on. It's not, I mean I know

MHA Do you have to bang the ice off?

MP If it gets that bad, yeah. I mean you, the best thing to do is just to jog. I mean it was probably 50 of us out there and we just jogged all night that night because it was horrendous. There was a storm a few years ago that was out here, it was a New Year's Eve storm and that was another bad one. We made it to Pollock Rip and got into Nantucket Sound before it got dark and then we laid up under Chatham till the next morning because you couldn't run through Nantucket Sound without you would have iced the boat up. So the best thing to do is get up under the lee.

MHA Do you talk to each other when you're out there? The other boats?

18:00

MP Uh, you talk typically you have a handful of people that your a hundred percent with, then you have a bigger handful of people that you're probably 75 percent with and then the rest you only talk to when there's a problem. One of the good things about fishermen, even if you hate each other you'll help the other guy if he's in trouble. And that's because it might be you next time. You don't rely on anybody else to help you. It's only people out there, I mean you can't you know hopefully the Coast Guard will be there to help you, but the guys you rely on are the guys that are out there that know exactly what you're doing and exactly what they're doing and they know it might be them the next time. So your best friends when you're in trouble are the people that are out there.

MHA Have you taken any of those safety training courses?

MP Yup. We do our drills and we do you know...the biggest thing is really being aware of what's going on. And that's, that's the hardest thing is realizing your limitations or realizing what the weather's gonna do to you.

MHA Do you think it's safer these days than it was when you first started or...?

MP Much. The hydraulics takin', that's probably one of the biggest things, we don't have the mechanical winches, we don't have, we're not using uh, rope tackles anymore, we're using hydraulic winches to lift things aboard, uh things are a lot, it's a lot safer.

MHA Now how about family life? You didn't grow up in a fishing family, but perse anyway, um have are you married?

MP I'm married.

MHA And is your wife from the fishing family?

MP No, but she knew what she was getting into before

MHA Ok

MP I mean she's, the first year I was married I disappeared for three months before she saw me again and I mean its, its not easy. Its not uh, it's hard for family members if you, if you're used to a land job and then you take off and go fishing it usually doesn't work. You kind of have to know what you're getting into before you do it.

MHA Do you have kids?

MP I have one son, he's 24 years old.

MHA Does he have an interest in the fishing industry?

MP No, his mother kind of didn't want him doing it.

21:00

He like the romanticism out of it if you can say that there's any in it, I mean it kinda looks neat, but you know he talked to other fishermen there amongst yourselves what romanticism they said, you know but kids see it as kind of a romantic job I guess, you know. You disappear and then you come home and...The other thing is, is once you're in that, it's also a hard, most fishermen can't adapt back to land life because they're used to being away. They don't like to be cooped up that long. So it's hard for them. They don't work at a 9 to 5 job very well. It's, it's just a different life.

MHA Yeah. What kind of share system do you have on your boat?

MP Uh, I guess it's called a broken 50. The expenses come off the top and the boat takes half and the crew takes half. So and then I usually try to make sure that if things are bad, they make money, so. I don't have that luxury because I'm a owner/operator.

MHA Yeah.

MP You know a fleet owner doesn't, that'll be one of the downfalls. That'll be, that's probably the thing that'll be the worst about these catch share programs is the consolidation that's coming is big corporations don't care about their workers like an owner/operator does.

MHA Have you had the same crew for long?

MP I usually go in spurts. My mate just left me after 17 years. He just, he's wore out. I have one new guy on the boat. I have another guy that's been on the boat for about three years and the other ones been there for five so and then I lost the one that had been with me for 17.

MHA Is it hard to find new people now?

MP Yeah. And it's hard, it's almost impossible to find new young people. I mean, I was the last big age group to get into the fishing industry. I'm 50, almost 54 now, so, I would say most of the guys are 45 plus. It's not a young, I mean, it is a young man's job, but there's no young men in it.

MHA Right.

MP You get young men into the scalloping industry, but you don't into the dragging industry.

MHA And that's because

MP Part of it's money. The other part is knowledge. You have to know a lot more to go dragging than you do to go scalloping. Scalloping you've gotta be a good scalloper

opener. Dragging you need to know how to fix nets, you need to know different species, you need to know a lot of different things. So...

24:00

MHA So are you fishing close to rocks and things and you tear up the nets fairly regularly or...

MP Um we do tear up, uh I've gotten a lot better than when I started. I don't tear up as much as I used to, but we still do it. I mean it used to be I'd come to the dock with everything destroyed when I was done. But now it's uh, I mean we tear up, but it's just, I definitely don't tear up like I used to.

MHA Are there any people in the industry that you look up to, either now or in the past?

MP I've been very fortunate to have some really good teachers. Um, I had a guy there that taught me how to go pair trawling, he was incredible, he's still fishing, he's almost 70 now. I had another guy there that took me under his wing when I first started. He's dead now, but yeah there's a lot of guys. I have one guy that I still fish with me when I first started fishing on George's he drove me all over the place and uh yeah there's a lot of guys that I look up to. They probably look up to me to. But I mean we're a close, the guys that you're really, you fish with a lot, you're really close to, I mean

MHA Do you socialize at all away from the water?

MP Uh

MHA With families or anything?

MP Not really. Uh, everything kind of revolves around fishing or the fishing politics, uh most of my in-laws don't understand it, they don't understand why I'm not home for parties. They don't understand why I'm not home on Sundays, why I'm not taking the day off. They don't understand the bills aren't paid, Mark's out fishin'. They don't, it's completely foreign to 'em. My mother still doesn't, she still gets upset with me for not being at home for family functions. She still worries about me.

MHA That's probably the real thing

MP Yeah she worries a lot about me. That's the, probably that's the best thing that's come out of--is we not have satellite telephones, we have the Boatracs which is basically you can send emails back to home on a real time basis. You know when I started fishin' off shore it was uh, you had to wait until you could get a marine operator so you might not talk to somebody on the beach for a week. You relied on if there was a problem it went from boat to boat to boat until it finally got to you. So, now you pretty much you can find out what's going on within a few hours.

27:00

MHA Yeah the marine operators were also always on right? So there was no private conversations.

MP Yeah and when the cell phones first came out we all went out and we bought scanners that were doctored up so we could listen to everybody's cell phone conversations.

MHA [laughter]

MP And now they've been, you know since they went to the digital, there, we can't listen to everybody's social lives anymore.

MHA How about the radio talk, is uh, I know in the old days people used to have code words and they would talk to each other over

MP We, now it's just chit chat to uh pass the time away or to, I mean if sometimes there you'll say something over the radio that maybe it looks good or something, you know. But if you want to keep things secret it's not too hard anymore. It's getting, but then with all the regulations, that's changed too because now, everybody kinda does the same thing all at once. There's, it used to be when I started fishing everybody did something different. Now it's everybody goes from one species to the next species to the next species and you're forced into these boxes and

MHA What's that doing to the market?

MP It's destroyed a lot of markets. I mean look at New Bedford there. I don't know how many Cutters we've, it's one tenth the cutters that there used to be 20 years ago. It's just the summer flounder or fluke fish, that market's been completely destroyed in this country. Scup, the whole market's been destroyed through regulations. Rebuild the stock, maximum sustainable yield, as quick as possible, and no care whatsoever about the fishermen, no care whatsoever about the infrastructure. And then what happens is uh the customer goes on to a different species and most likely that species is imported so we wind up with, we wind up losing a whole segment of people buying the species. And then when it gets opened up, those people don't want to buy that species again, cause its been off the market for so long.

30:00

And they're afraid that uh, you know, it'll happen again. So its, we import almost 85 percent of our seafood now. And that's pretty sad.

MHA What do you think the answer is?

MP I don't know the exact answer. There are things, if you read the Magnuson Act um, there's things in there, it never should have gone the way it has as far as when they make regulations they were supposed to take into account the effects on the infrastructure and

the effects on the communities and somehow, those provisions in Magnuson have been forgotten. In 1996 we reauthorized
End of Tape

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Magnuson and then basically said that all stocks had to be rebuilt to maximum sustainable yield and, in 10 years. Well, it's an impossibility. You can't do it. You cannot have every stock at all-time highs all the time. You can't have deer at an all-time high and coyotes or wolves at an all-time high too. It doesn't work.

MHA Yeah.

MP Uh, so we've put in place things that are technically impossible.

MHA Yup

MP And the environmental groups have really grabbed a hold of it. And um, we've gone from being under regulated to being so overregulated that uh, something has to be done. Personally I think that parts of NOAA and most of NMFS needs a house cleaning and a different...they need to get people that understand the industry 'cause pretty soon we won't have any fisheries and that, that's the scariest part. They need a total house cleaning in NMFS. They need to do something about the environmental groups able to sue NMFS and get paid for suing. Our government pays the environmental groups to sue our government on procedural issues. That's one of the ways that they're funded.

MHA Really?

MP Yeah. Yeah you're paying, you're paying the Conservation Law Foundation right now to sue us, to be, what is it, a friend of the

MHA Yeah.

MP Friend of the court or a friend of something.

MHA You seem very well informed. How do you get your information mostly?

MP Uh, I used to be very involved in the politics. I got out for a while and now I've gotten back in.

MHA Is there any particular newspaper or journal that you follow and keep up with things?

MP I read a lot. I've got a lot of friends that do the same thing. I talk with congressional aides. The biggest thing is I would say is you need to get the congressmen and the senators to realize that you're sincere and that you're knowledgeable and once you reach that point it comes fairly easy as far as you know.

3:00

When they can trust what your saying isn't-- is truth and when you can present the facts so that they don't go and look like an idiot, then it comes, they give you information and there's a back and forth and that's, that's been the hardest thing. You know once you get that established, and until you screw it up, it goes along pretty easy. Industry has been very reluctant to embrace the politicians and they're finally starting to now learn how to, they've been forced into having to learn how to deal with the politicians.

MHA Do you think it's because there are politicians that are more amenable to hearing what the fishermen have to say?

MP I think that we've made inroads into it, that we're being accepted as being knowledgeable. We've been painted as a pretty vile group.

MHA Mmmm

MP And it was probably a correct picture 25, 30, 40 years ago. I mean you know it's a rough industry. It's always been a rough industry. But the guys that are in it now, that are still here, that have managed to survive all these regulations, they're not dumb.

MHA Mmm Hmmm

MP And I think that's, there's a lot of guys that, the once that have survived have learned how to talk to politicians and that's been the whole key you know, it's easy to solve all the world's problems out there on the water talkin' to your friends. But it's a lot harder when you have to talk and explain it to normal people.

MHA Right. Are there any politicians in particular that have been...

MP Barney Frank has been incredible. I don't always agree with the rest of his politics, but he has been incredible for the fishing industry. And uh, I have two people home that uh, Chuck Schumer and Tim Bishop that have been really good and what we had before were incredibly terrible to the fishing industry. I went through a fishery where I lobbied the guy, I lobbied my congressman and my senator to just please write a letter to National Marine Fisheries Service to base their decisions on the facts and not the rumors. I got 'em to write a letter to do that and two weeks later they wrote a second letter saying there was more important issues than just the facts. And I wasn't supposed to find out about it.

6:00

And I mean they didn't stand a chance with the industry after that because I wasn't quiet about it. There wasn't a single boat on the whole east coast that didn't know about it.

MHA Wow.

MP And uh...but that's what we've been up against. I mean they get, you have the environmental groups they're in every day talking to these, the congressmen and the senators there, bombarding them with their agenda. You know and if you tell somebody something enough times, pretty soon it becomes fact.

MHA Right, right.

MP It doesn't mean its fact. It just it becomes fact. I mean...and we shouldn't be there, and some of it's our own fault for not being proactive and explaining things. But you know, we are played out to be the worst people in the world.

MHA So do you belong to any of the fishermen's organizations that do some of that?

MP Yeah, I'm pretty active, there's one in Rhode Island that I'm very active with. I belong to uh, it's AAAFC, I don't even know what everything stands for. But yeah, I support a lot of them I don't even, in that respect I'm bad with names, you know, I know people. I support the stuff that Jimmy Ruhle was doing with the NEAMAP study

MHA Right

MP He's uh, I've known Jimmy for 25 years. My father used to dive for his father, used to take the wheel, the rope he used to get out of the wheel. He's an incredible person that's one of the people I look up to. He hasn't given up with the politics, he's disgusted with it, but he hasn't given up. And he's a better man than I am with, when it comes to that, because I got fed up. But what he's doing with the NEAMAP stuff and proving, that's another case where, you know, industry is proving the government science wrong. I tried to get that across, I talked to Jane Lubchenco a month ago and last week I talked to Eric Schwab, I don't think it went anywhere. When I finished talking to Eric, I felt like I got more out of talking to that wall. I don't really think he said he was listening, but I don't believe it. We'll see.

MHA What were you talking about, what was the subject?

9:00

MP Well I had met him and Jane Lubchenco in a meeting in Chinacock about a month ago and she had spouted off some numbers and I questioned 'em before she even finished her sentence because I knew they were false. He called Jimmy Ruhle to get my phone number and he, so he called me and another fisherman and wanted our opinions on things and how we felt about the way things were going and I told him I was scared to death for the sectors. I questioned a lot of the NMFS science. I said if you want credibility, the only way NMFS is gonna get credibility on the science is to do, is to use the stuff that Jimmy Ruhle was doing. The industry believes that you know Jimmy cares about what he's doing. He cares about the shape of the net, he cares about everything. Fishing is geometry. If you mess up the geometry, you're not gonna catch any fish. And that's, you know scientists are good at doing science, they're not good at, you know working with a net.

MHA Right.

MP And that's the biggest trouble. National Marine Fisheries Service had an incident called "trawlgate". They towed the net up to sixteen foot out of whack. Then they did a study and the study said that you may actually catch more haddock if you towed a net cock-eyed and what I told Eric, I says, how stupid do you think we are? I says, I mean we worry about a half an inch and you're tellin' us to tow the net 16 foot out, 18 foot out of square? I said, you, some of this stuff you can't even make up. It's so ridiculous and this is what our government does to us. So how can we believe anything they say?

MHA Since there will be people listening who don't know a lot about fishing, maybe you could talk just a little bit about what NEAMAP is and how Jimmy's work is ...

MP The work that NEAMAP is doing is, it's the new research vessel is too deep to fish inshore so what the NEAMAP study has done taken those inshore stations and taken that over. It's the same net, the same doors, the doors are what spread the net, they basically work like kite to open the net up sideways and the same protocol, the same everything.

12:00

And the NEAMAP, the side by side tows between the (F/V) DARANA R which is Jimmy's boat and the BIGELOW which is the new research boat is Jimmy catches 55 to one compared to the research vessel towing exactly the same gear, exactly the same protocol, everything the same and that's why industry feels comfortable. Jimmy cares about, he looks at the geometry of the net, he looks at the way the doors are working, he makes sure that there's contact all the way around, he makes sure that speed doesn't vary, and the research vessel doesn't care about any of this. If the net goes over, and it fishes cock-eyed, they catch less fish, they have to do less work. So, I mean, it's, you know, Jimmy goes out, if he catches more fish, and they gotta do more work, that looks good for the fish stocks. And so fishermen don't have any faith at all in NMFS' science anymore. They've seen, they've gone on the boats, they've seen the gear go over cock-eyed, they've seen floats tucked under the, under the sweep so that the net can't open. And you know if they say something, they're chastised so industry has zero confidence in NMFS. And until NMFS can prove to get that confidence back, the only thing that industry is gonna believe in is the NEAMAP.

MHA And is Jimmy working with scientists at all for, I mean how is he getting, how is he, how does he know...

MP He works with the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences and um, it's all scientists, it's been peer reviewed, NMFS has not been able to discredit it. So it's accepted and it is. He's showing the age composition is there in the species that NMFS isn't seeing. One of the problems that NMFS has is they can't slow the boats down fast enough. You know everybody thinks that you throw the net overboard, you tow it and you catch everything that you go over. Well you don't. You don't catch much at all. There's a certain speed for almost every species that's correct. There's also uh, one of the problems with research

nets are that they use smaller twine or smaller mesh size than what a normal fisherman uses.

15:00

When you use a smaller twine you have to tow slower because you create a pressure wave in front of the net and the fish won't go through the pressure wave. And I mean when it gets explained maybe like that you might understand it, but most people just think you throw the net overboard and it comes up full. Well it doesn't. You know. If I gave you my boat, threw the nets on deck, told you to go fishing, you probably wouldn't catch anything. If you give me a fishing pole and tell me to go catch a fish, I'll probably starve to death 'cause I know I'm not a very good pole fisherman, but I know how to make a net work. An that's, it just goes back. Fishermen are fishermen, scientists are scientists and that's, there's a lot to it.

MHA Have you been involved in any collaborative research yourself?

MP I've done stuff for Stoneybrook University. Pretty much that's it. But I understand all the concepts. I mean I've been able to go and talk to different senators there and explain it and have them, "oh yeah, that makes sense..."

MHA Yeah.

MP You know and you have to, I used to take uh, I used to take my sixth grade class in Greenport out on a boat every year. It was, the kids came away amazed. I mean they had, it was a great program we had and it was just, 'cause they'd never seen anything like that.

MHA Right. Yeah.

MP I like to teach. You know that's ...or I like to teach people that want to listen anyhow.

MHA Well you have a very nice way of explaining things so it is comprehensible. You seem to say just the point that people would normally miss if they're not familiar with it so it's great. Very good. Um can you talk a little bit about the community like either Greenport or New Bedford and whether you have interactions with people that aren't involved with fishing and what people think of it and that kind of thing.

MP Well in New Bedford and Fairhaven I pretty much only interact with fishermen or fishing support people whether it be the auction, Reidars, different other different gear shops, the people at Fairhaven Shipyard. They're all great people. Home, I interact a little more with the village politics, the town politics. I'm very concerned about safety on the water home, very concerned about it.

18:00

I fight with the police department all the time about not having enough bay constables. Not so much for protecting the resources, when you think about, and it applies to every

place, a policeman on land, he has a defined area and there's a lot of policemen on land. But when you think about a bay constable or even the Coast Guard, they have a huge area to look out for and most times when things are going on, their help is needed. Conditions aren't the best so I have, I'm always fighting with my supervisor home about not having enough bay constables and I'm involved, my village home is only one square mile and it's a very contentious village, but you know, I'm always fighting to try to keep people aware of where the village came from. You know. It came from the fishing industry.

MHA Is that how Greenport started?

MP Yup. It was, when I started fishing out of Greenport, there was probably 30 or 40 big boats and there was probably another 30 or 40 little boats. There's two big boats left and there's maybe 10 little boats left. That's what the government regulations have done.

MHA How about any, is there any recreational fishing out of there?

MP Yeah, yeah there's maybe a little bit more, but that hasn't really changed that much, but they've really done a job on ...the marinas, where it used to be all commercial boats is now all recreational. It's changed a lot and I see that happening here, you know. I did a talk on WBSM there a few years ago Kirsten (Bendiksen) asked me to and you know I see the changes coming here and I looked how we got destroyed you know, commercial fishing was year-round employment and now we're a tourist trap. And then when you have a bad economy like we've just gone through the first thing to go is tourism where we really need year-round industry.

MHA That's a really important...

MP And that's what people, and I see that happening here. I mean it'll never collapse like it did in Greenport, but you know, a lot of small villages or towns will see their fishing industry completely disappear. And it's really wrong because it's very important to the local economy.

21:00

You wind up seeing house prices go out of sight in the tourist industry which puts even a bigger burden on it, forces young people out. And it's just uh, it's sad to see that go.

MHA Yeah. Let's see, how about ...is at least in Greenport, are the people aware of the fishing industry?

MP Less and less all the time.

MHA Are they sympathetic at all?

MP Uh, the people that have lived there all their life, yes. The people that have moved out there, no. No, my father used to say that you know the people would move out because, they'd come out and they'd see the nets drying or they'd see people working on

gear and they liked the quaint little village and then pretty soon they moved out and they said “oh we don’t like that smell, so we’re gonna put a regulation in effect that you can’t have that.” Or “We don’t like that noise,” and you know pretty soon their little village wasn’t quaint anymore and you know it just becomes a tourist trap. And then what happens is people, as people get there and it’s this “Oh well I’ve got mine so I don’t want you to have yours I want you to go away” so you get a little bit of elitism. It won’t happen up here like it did home, but it will happen to a certain extent. I’m sure you have, there’s competing uses for the waterfront all the time. Look what happened to Hathaways. That was good for the steamship authority, but it wasn’t too good for the fishermen.

MHA Maybe you can explain what Hathaways

MP Hathaways was one of the oldest winch builders and then because of a lawsuit they basically went out of business and they put an ice plant up there and they were selling ice and they rented space out to other people to use connected with the marine industry and basically the state of Massachusetts came along and said we’d like to buy your property and the dock that all the fishermen used to tie up disappeared and the ice house that the fishermen used to buy ice disappeared and the fishermen got pushed into a smaller corner and tied up more docks. There was definitely some pluses. But there was a lot of minuses.

MHA Is there anything that I haven’t asked you yet that you would, that you think is important for people to know?

MP We’re not the bad guys. That’s the most important thing, is we’re not the bad guys. And we’re probably the only true conservationists. People don’t look at us as conservationists, but if we caught every last fish in the ocean, we’re out of business. Things have changed a lot from what they were 30, 40 years ago. We’ve come a long ways. Most of the people that are in it are pretty good. So that’s probably the best thing I can say.

MHA Ok. Well that’s really helpful. Um it’s been really interesting talking to you. I really appreciate your taking the time. I would like to take a picture, for the record if that’s ok. It’s always hard to know

End of tape 24:58