

**Interviewee Name:** Avery Waterman

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**Interviewer(s) Name(s) and affiliations:**

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**Interview Description:**

**Avery Waterman**

North Haven, ME

Commercial Lobsterman

Interviewed by Natalie Springuel with Katie Clark

Avery Waterman, a 20-year-old lobsterman from North Haven, ME, speaks about where he predominantly fishes for lobster while highlighting the changes he has noticed since he began lobster fishing, his current concerns of the impacts of government decisions related to the lobster fishery, and the reality of commercial fishing in North Haven.

**Collection Description:**

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**Transcription by:** Molly Graham, NOAA Voices From the Fisheries

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[0:20:50.06]

NS: Natalie Springuel

GK: Galen Koch

KC: Kaitlyn Clark

[00:00:00.00]

NS: Okay. Great. So, let's start by having you state your name if you don't mind spelling it also.

AW: Okay. My name is Avery Waterman, A-V-E-R-Y-W-A-T-E-R-M-A-N.

NS: Great. Thanks. Thanks for signing the release and all that good stuff and for coming in today. Tell us where you're from and what your fishing background is.

[00:00:35.6]

AW: I'm from the island of North Haven. I've been fishing for lobster since I can remember. Started out with my dad fishing out of his boat and then eventually, we built a little skiff and I started hand-hauling traps. Then, we actually built another skiff and upgraded. Since then, I just have had another outboard. Now I'm in a small full size lobster boat.

NS: Great. How old are you?

AW: I'm twenty.

NS: Twenty. So, you've been fishing since you were a little kid.

AW: Oh, yeah.

NS: Great. Can you show us, in general, the area where you fish?

[00:01:26.6]

AW: Yeah. So, this is the North Haven town. So, we go east. There's a trench that starts off the end of Babbage Island. We fish right about to there. Then, we head up and we can fish up through – this is Sheep and Burnt Island. We can fish up through here, up to about Resolution Island, is where most people go. Then, you cut back down the bay, until we meet up with Rockport and Rockland fishermen over here in the tanker channel. Then, we run traps down off the point, but we don't have much space down here between the mainland and Vinalhaven. Then, up through Southern Harbor and the thoroughfare.

NS: Do you ever go further out from the bay or you pretty much stick to the bay?

AW: We're pretty much all stuck in the bay from North Haven. I've been out fishing offshore with a guy a couple times. We've gone halibut fishing and tuna fishing down this way, but for the lobstering, it's usually just all in Penobscot Bay.

NS: Is lobstering your primary thing?

AW: Yes.

[0:02:50.4]

NS: You halibut occasionally.

AW: Yeah. Well, season's only May and June. We don't ever fill the tags, but you get twenty-five tags. So, it's kind of like a hobby. It's not really very profitable, but it's fun. It's nice to be able to do something different than just lobster fish all year.

NS: Who do you go out with?

AW: I go by myself. I have my commercial. And I've been going with my captain's grandson, (Jeff), who's getting pretty good at it.

NS: So, you're teaching the next generation.

AW: Learning.

NS: Learning.

AW: Learning right now.

NS: Yeah. That's great. You're still learning. Probably good to learn your whole life.

AW: Yeah.

NS: That's great. So, you're young, but you've been fishing a long time already. What are some of the things that you've noticed that have been changing over the years?

[00:03:48.3]

AW: Well, since I was younger, I've noticed – well, 2012, when we had the boom, I've seen the swing, I guess, of how lobstering goes, assuming it's seven to ten-year swing. So, over the past few years, I've noticed there's not quite as many counters. I wouldn't say there's not as many lobsters, especially v-notched females. We throw those over all day. I've seen, when it was really good and we were catching 2700 pounds in the bay. Now, last year, twelve or fourteen hundred's pretty rock solid.

NS: That's a big difference.

[00:04:40.4]

AW: Yeah. Some guys are still getting up there, and it's only for a couple weeks. There's not several pushes that are like that. That's what I've noticed. I've also noticed when the water temperature's warmer – this past year, it didn't get quite as warm as I have seen it on my bottom sounder. So, maybe that could be part of why there's not quite as many around, but I'm not really sure.

NS: Are you concerned for the future?

AW: I'm more concerned with what the government or whoever, imposing forces, are going to do to us because my captain's been fishing his entire life and he said back in the day you would haul all day for a hundred and fifty pounds or something and that would be good. He also has had a hundred and twenty strings. So, he's seen it go from all the way down to good and bad and everywhere in between. I'm not that worried about the population, depending on water temperatures in the next decade or so. I think the lobster population looks healthy, as far as I can see. Not as much shell disease as we were seeing four or five years ago. I don't know. I'm optimistic about it.

[00:06:25.3]

NS: Good, good. Do you envision yourself lobstering well into the future?

AW: Yeah, I do.

NS: In the same area?

AW: Yeah. I've contemplated getting an offshore permit and stuff, but that wouldn't be for a few more years. We'll see where regulations and prices of permits goes and if there's anything going out there for. If not, I would do something else in fishing anyway, even if it wasn't right around the island. It would be nice, but I would move to go do some other fishing somewhere.

NS: What do you love about Vinalhaven?

AW: North Haven.

NS: North Haven. You probably hate when people do that.

AW: Yeah. [laughter]

NS: Let me rephrase that. What do you love about North Haven?

[00:07:22.2]

AW: I love that we're, obviously, separated from the mainland. It's a different – living out there is different. Not only are you like – everywhere you look is where you work. I feel like that's special because there's some people that, I don't know, live inland, even on the mainland and travel to the ocean, but everywhere we go, we're just surrounded by our work environment. Even though we don't have very good piers, docks and whatever, town docks – we don't even have a crane, a lift. So, we have to do it all according to the tides in the Maine State Ferry parking lot, is the only place that you can take it –

NS: Which is?

AW: Which is right in between the Fox Island Thoroughfare, probably right here.

[00:08:26.0]

NS: So, you guys are tide-dependent to offload your catch?

AW: Yeah. Then there's actually one more spot up in Pulpit Harbor. There's a beach. Well, there's a bridge there too, but they just rebuilt it and you can get maybe a hundred traps on it. That's one guy. It's called (Izzy's) Beach. At high tide, you can go and ground your boat out and throw traps off either side and then back the boat off the beach. Then, when the tide goes, you can bring the truck and trailer out and back it onto the beach and throw the traps on, take them home.

NS: Wow.

AW: That's probably the most convenient way, besides that it's on the opposite side of the island from downtown. Nobody has a fishing wharf to pile traps on or anything out there. Ninety-eight percent of all the waterfront is owned by summer people. So, it's tricky, but we get it done.

NS: How is the diversity of the people who use the waterfront? How is that relationship in the summertime with the fishermen?

[00:09:48.3]

AW: We get along good, all of us. Other than at boat times, when there's a lot of traffic in the parking lot, we're usually pretty good. We don't really have to deal a lot with other summer people or anything when we're doing traps.

NS: How many of you are fishing out there?

AW: Probably fifty-two-ish with commercial licenses, I bet. Some not quite eight-hundred. I only have six-hundred tags this year, but there's about fifty.

NS: What does the future hold for younger guys, like you or even younger than you for getting into the fishery?

[00:10:40.5]

AW: Depends. So, they just closed zone C last year. So, I guess, students can still get commercial licenses, is how I think it works. Once you're out of school and you haven't got a license, then you're on the waiting list, which is fairly short right now, I believe, but it could be ten, fifteen years before somebody gets one a couple years from now. I'm lucky I got mine when I did because it's a little more uncertain now, I would say. But it's also tricky, especially from the island. When you're seventeen, you either complete all your time and you get a license and you're going to fish or you don't. It's not like you get commercial license out there, then go to college or something. That's not usually how it works out, out there.

[00:11:51.2]

NS: So, you knew from a young age that you wanted to make sure to get a license.

AW: Yeah. I tried to get it right when I was seventeen. I was a little bit late, so it was almost when I was eighteen, but I wanted to get it to make sure that there was no way – because at that time, the zone was still open, but there was talks about them closing it. So, I just wanted to make sure that I was all squared away, it was going to be all set.

NS: What do you love about it?

AW: The freedom, which is also slightly in jeopardy, I would say, with regulations being talked about, but the freedom and being on the water every day. It's a different lifestyle than commuting to work in a car or working for somebody else. Being your own employer is nice. Also, there's not too much stuff to do on the island. So, that's one of the best jobs you can have out there.

[00:12:58.4]

NS: Is that what most people do?

AW: No, not really. There's three hundred and fifty or eighty year round people. Only fifty are fishermen. There's a lot of construction companies and some gardening. A lot of hands on stuff. There's a few people that commute to the mainland. I don't know. There's some people out there that make their way through. I'm not really quite sure how. They just move out there and scrap up any jobs you can find. Usually, you get an all right paying job out there because you can't work for free out there.

NS: Do you have any thoughts or concerns about the future of the community out there?

[00:14:06.0]

AW: Yeah. I do actually, because unlike other coastal towns that are really involved in – not respect, but encourage fishing and understand how big a part it is to the economy and stuff, North Haven's – I don't want say doesn't support it, but aren't enthusiastic about it really. Never

have the town bending their back that much to help us get a decent pier or a crane or basically anything. We're basically on our own out there, as far as that goes. The school right now, I believe, is going to change principals and stuff. We had a principal for the last few years when I was in high school that not a lot of people liked. So, it's just been a whirlwind of not very good things, I guess. Just a lot of people being unhappy. Back in, I don't know, probably ten years ago, they had a better hands-on – understand a lot of these kids are probably going to eventually either come back here or stay here, so you can teach them more hands-on things – taxes, business related things, but for the past – ever since I was in school, we never really got any of that.

[00:16:00.7]

NS: So, you have to learn by doing it.

AW: Yeah. Trial and error.

NS: Yeah. The business side of being a lobsterman, what's that like?

AW: It's all right. I don't mind it that much. It's not real fun, but it's sometimes fun to manage your own money, as long as you're doing good, I guess. You get to make your own decisions, which is nice. Yeah. Just a lot of thinking about what the boat needs or thinking of different ways to extend your money or make your money more profitable. It's fun.

NS: Yeah. Do you guys have any questions?

GK: I have one about access. When you're using the ferry pier, is that a relationship that you built? Is it a public access dock? How does that work? Do you know?

[00:17:12.9]

AW: I think it's an agreement basically, I think, with the Maine State Ferry Service, I guess. It's one tiny little corner of the parking lot. I'm not sure if it's been around since they built the parking lot, or if that was something added on later, but there's six poles with a couple things of chain across that you can unclip when you're stacking or loading traps. Then, you just hang it back up and that's it. I would say it's an agreement. There's no signs or anything for it. It's just our little corner.

[00:18:06.3]

GK: I'm surprised I didn't know that about North Haven, that you don't have pier access out there. That seems like it would present a challenge.

AW: I think the town got – or actually, Brown's Boatyard got a grant, I think, from the Island Institute to rebuild their pier, which is a three hundred thousand dollar grant. Now it's just filled with Brown's equipment again. There was supposed to be a crane or a lift and there never was. There was supposed to resituate the docks to make it easier. That never happened. It's still the

same old, same old. I guess that's one of the bittersweet problems of the island, is it's hard to get things changed.

[00:19:09.4]

KC: You said you would be willing to move to follow the fishery. Is your plan to lobster well into your life? Are there other fisheries you're thinking about?

AW: At this point, I'm just going to be lobstering and dip into any fishery I can get into. Obviously, everything is closed and you can't make any money in it. Just playing it by ear. If an opportunity comes up, then just jump on it. If I'm broke as hell and can't make a dollar lobstering here, then move somewhere. But as far as that goes, it could be Downeast or down south or whatever. Take a chance. I'm confident. I'm not expecting to have to do that. Maybe, in the future, even if fishing is good, take a chance and dip into another fishery somewhere else if it's reasonable.

[00:20:33.6]

NS: Great. Cool. Thanks, Avery.

GK: I'm glad I got to catch some of it.

NS: Yeah.

GK: Sorry that I interrupted you guys.

NS: No problem.

GK: I just wanted to [inaudible]

NS: Thank you so much, Avery. Before you vanish, we'd love to take a picture of you.

AW: Okay.

NS: Yeah. That was fabulous.

[0:20:50.6]

END OF TAPE