

Interviewee Name: Herbert Carter

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Interviewer(s) Name(s) and Affiliation: Galen Koch (The First Coast)

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Interview Description:

Herbert Carter Jr., a commercial shellfish harvester from Deer Isle, ME, speaks about the impacts of high levels of silt in the water around Deer Isle caused by mussel dragging. Carter describes his observations during the 64 years he has lived and worked on this coast and his current work to reintroduce mussel beds.

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Transcribed By: Ela Keegan

Start of HERBERT_CARTER_VMFF2019

[0:25:51.7]

GK: Galen Koch
HC: Herbert Carter

[0:00:00.0]

GK: Just tell me your your first and last name first before you do anything.

HC: My name is Herbert Carter Junior. I'm from Deer Island, born and brought up in Deer Isle and um I'm a commercial shellfish harvester. I do um that and now I've doing demolition in my book, but conservation in Deer Isle.

GK: Let me get you that map so we can look at it. 13302, cause they've got this cool thing...

GK: I've got to pause this for a sec.

[Break in audio.]

GK: You don't have to use it if you don't want.

[0:00:58.9]

HC: Well I'm just trying to find.

GK: But what's this one, isn't that where you are.

HC: Uh this is uh this is Deer Isle right here.

GK: Yeah this is the causeway or that's the little one and that's Deer isle village, this is...

HC: This is uh South East bridge right? Right here on this side?

GK: This one is.

HC: That's south east bridge?

GK: Yep.

HC: Alright so this is all of South East Basin right here. Would this be?

GK: No, this is Long cove.

HC: Oh alright.

GK: So that's East Bridge.

HC: Right, this is where we need. Here here is is uh South Deer Isle and all up through long Cove. All these places they they. Are you warm?

GK: Mmhm.

HC: UH these places they all dragged mussels in 1976. Was one of the places they done major dragging I mean this and this Basin in South East was one of the number one scallop bottom in the state that I ever saw, and I've been scalloping for over fifty years. It was the best there was.

[0:02:00.8]

HC: There was men in 1950s coming out of there going, one man to put the boat, with a two and a half foot drag, hand drag, rope gear, no wench and they was coming up with 60 gallons per man. Alone on the boat and today in South East since the state opened up a a bylaw into my law that said that commercial shellfish license. They put a bylaw into the law, opened up where my license is 0 hydraulics. 1976 the state put a bylaw into the law that mussel dragging was allowed on the intertidal zone. In my life the constitutions what I have to live with and by the laws was given to me. And how you do a bylaw into a law is beyond me, that's like telling ye, you can drive drunk and I can't. That's not how it goes.

[0:03:03.0]

HC: So since 1976 we had clams, we had fish, we had everything in 1976.

GK: Yeah you can draw on that

HC: Okay.

GK: and just mark the places.

HC: Okay, in South Deer Isle I'm marking out South East Cove going down to be down to Eatons Point and on Oceanville side would come all the way up through South East on Oceanville side into Deer Isle village up into uh French Camp. By the French Camp over through [Sparfords Cove?] in South Deer Isle, before down to South Deer Isle bridge they was on the, uh in 5 feet. My father used to tell me that some days I'd go clamming and he'd give me an onion sack and he'd say fill this.

[0:03:56.3]

HC: What that was to be filled with was scallops and so I'd go out, 12 years old with my sneakers on and doing my clamming and take this bag and put it on my mud sled and tow it out. Walk with my just no snorkel no nothing and walk out and pick up a bag of scallops and bring them in and my dad was the only time he's come get my clams if I had a bag of scallops. He'd come down and like help me put my clams on the truck and there lugged them up South Deer Isle. But the scallops in there, the fishermen would go out, single man, everyday in South East there was 35 fishermen in that cove in the whole of of South Deer Isle. They all towed together, they never bothered anybody and they would tow and the scallops were like the bottom size of a coca cola bottom. Everyone, they didn't take small ones. They didn't touch them, they didn't need to, they couldn't shell em. They had to do the

biggest ones. and theys, they would push over out of a 2 foot hand drag, they'd push over over a bushel of clear scallops and it was sand.

[0:05:06.3]

HC: Today, in South Deer Isle I would love to have them the the College of the Atlantic um um University of Maine, come down in South Deer Isle, one of the finest places for them to do their testing on what is happened to the fisheries. It can prove all stories right there. Cause right now on the ocean floor what I found snorkeling, diving down in 10 feet of water and inside of this is where I used to pick the scallops up. It was sand, it was red sand. Today, there is zero sand in South Deer Isle anywhere. The scallops have gone from the best to zero. There is zero scallops in South Deer Isle. Now, so to straighten out what the state has done, come do that survey in South Deer Isle, you don't have to go nowhere else in the world.

[0:06:06.7]

HC: Where mussel dragging happened, the mussels beds they took, 20 inches of of soot that is death. A mussel . . . There's two pieces in the intertidal zone, you have a flat and a bed. A flat is where clams, worms, everything lives. A bed is a mussel bed. A bed has been there for centuries, hundreds of centuries, from the beginning of time, cause I think they're in the dinosaur bracket mussels. Um

GK: And it's like

HC: In South Deer Isle right now there is zero. There was millions of bushels and there was 50 mussel beds that are gone, there is zero. There's soot that comes off of mussel bed and if you had a big boat you could walk through there on a low tide and it run by this bed,

[0:07:00.6]

HC: The mud soot will come off that bed, 50 to 60 feet from each boat and the fish cannot swim in the water from the soot that comes off that bed. Every time a boat goes by. South Deer Isle we don't have fish. There's none. Hasn't been since 1980 oh two or three and then from then on it's been depletion all the time right up through now there is none. There is no scallops, there is no sea urchins, there is no periwinkles. We have um uh snails, we have uh um green crabs.

GK: Do you have bloodworms or anything . . .

HC: Not many worms at all, I mean the the soot that was spread all over this cove of doing this on coming tide. The fact is that we have no smelt, we have no tomcods we have nothing that goes to a brook.

[0:07:57.0]

HC: Towing on a coming tide the mud soot that they dragged up went to the high water mark and it sat. It was so heavy that in the water was black. When they get done dragging the water was black all the way to the high tide mark and a lot of places that eelgrass has been smothered out from soot and can't live in it. We have nothing in South Deer Isle, we have lobsters. Lobsters, green crabs, and snails, the only predators is left in the world have a shell,

they can lay in mud and live. Fish can't do it, periwinkles can't do it, the acid is so high. The eels are almost pink if you can find one and there used to be eel beds in here. And there used to be eel beds in here. I used to dig this in sneakers and they'd be, you'd go down through the clay bed and you'd feel them going around your ankle and mud. The hair on my back and my neck used to stand up quite often cause it scared the hell out of me. I don't mind denying that, that's the truth.

[0:08:58.5]

HC: But we have, it's a shame what's happening that they don't stop and do something, turn this whole can of worms around. You're never going to put that cover on what they've done, that's not going back.

GK: I have a couple of questions. What do you think um, when you say they who do you mean?

HC: I mean the state has to come and go to the real law they had given to 'em and I'm not positive but I think the law come through the commonwealth of Massachusetts. It's 1940 April in 1946 is the law that the intertidal zone is 100% manual. 1 foot mean low water and it well it doesn't claim 1 foot mean low water, but clams which is license and clams live in 1 foot mean low water. I know, I've been doing this for 64 years, I know where they live, I find them (laughs). So if if we can start taking over and taking care of something would be incredible.

[0:10:03.3]

HC: I'd love to see this happen before I die knowing I helped.

GK: And how have you been helping? What do you want . . .

HC: In Deer Isle harbor right now I have probably 4,000 bushels of mussels seeded in over the flats. I moved them out of the mussel bed. I've got to move them again, I've got to pick them up, put more seaweed under em' cause they set in the mud. Ice has pushed them down, the silt on the bottom isn't good anymore and make a bed and hope it they'll seed again. I was hoping Jad was going to be in today I'd like to see him to get my permit. [Inaudible.] I have to do in Deer Isle harbor that I mean Bruce Poliquin gave me and just doing the tests on it and just seeing if I can get and catch the mussel seed to get fishing back.

GK: How do you catch the mussel seed?

HC: Well mussel seeds spread.

[0:10:55.7]

HC: I mean I want to do it on my net, I built a bunch of nets, some 125 feet long, they're all two fathom deep and I'm trying, I want now to get a lease in Deer Isle harbor where I can hang up a bunch of nets. I'd like to have 2 places. I'd like to have one at Sunshine causeway, outside of my house, where I can keep an eye on, where I can put 'em as not something that's going to effect lobstering. It's not like I don't want a hundred acres. I'd like to have an acre

where I could take it and just do 'em buoy it off, so everybody could see what I was doing. It's a test, if we don't do the test I, I mean they catch them on ropes, we had a seining wear it freezes out in the 1960s and at the end of the year the twine when we set it, it would be two inches thick when we got ready to take it out. It was solid mussels from top to bottom.

HK: Wow.

[0:11:51.5]

HC: I know I know they'll catch and I have the mussels in Deer Isle village to seed so if I put the nets outside of them that's my best chance in trying to catch the seed and from that point we want to make mussel beds, we've got to cover them back up so the soot doesn't travel we can get it. so the waters cleaned up cause they are the filter feeder of the ocean. Number 1 there was me and some bushels and we now have none. Dirty water warms quicker than clean. So the minute we clean the water we can change the temperature, we can reverse what's happening if we go to work on it. But if we argue and go in denial for another 20 years, nothing's going to happen. It has to happen, and soon. We don't have time to play and play guilt and non guilt. We got to suck it up. It's done. We got to repair it, so the quicker the better.

GK: Can you show me where [Frasers?] Island is, where you had that seine? Is it on this map do you think?

HC: Umm.

GK: It might be over . . .

HC: I think it's over here further.

GK: Cause its out on, it's out near your house.

[0:13:02.3]

HC: Out sunshine yeah, it's on the next map over, but we are and I used to go seine that weir all by myself and do at 30 to 125 bushels a tide.

GK: Wow.

HC: And there's 0 and today there's they have stopped we have we had at one time a 121 sardine factories in the state of Maine. Since 1976 ladies and gentlemen we have none. Something happened since 1976. Anybody got any ideas beside me? I hope.

GK: And you in your in your opinion, a lot of it's supposed to do with that mussel dragging..

HC: Its soot, it's dirty water. Ladies and gentlemen, lobsters had to change their adaption, cause there was no more sand. They towed this for 34 years, Great Eastern Mussel Farm towed it with a dredge.

[0:14:01.8]

HC: It was not cable, it was a hydraulic arm. I have to go get permits to work in the federal waters. You're not allowed to dredge. You're really not allowed to drag, so the minute they stop and come to their common senses and stop the bullshit. Let the water clean, stop dragging in the intertidal zone. We have so much acid spreading now, I don't think we can ever clean it completely, but we can make it cleaner than it is.

GK: Are they still draggin' in those places?

HC: Yes, we've got one cardinal is dragging in Oceanville, I mean Sunshine. He still has a lease right down below me and the shore in the summer, when he goes up and drags his mussels up, you can't even walk up the ledges from the slime that's spread from the soot, so it has to stop. We have a clean water act somewhere in the world, it doesn't seem to be in Maine.

[0:14:59.6]

HC: But, we're supposed to have that too, so this this all is what we need to help us. It's, I come over here to this meeting to talk to these people and they don't want to make 0 common sense with you cause the state has to know it's guilty. If you're in that denial that you don't know that you're guilty for what you're doing and this this I don't know. It's a shame and this whole thing is um crazy.

GK: What's the reaction when you tell people this is what you saw?

HC: I said in this meeting today and I told them just what I told you and it's like I had 3 heads you know and none of them was screwed on right. It is, I know it is, cause I live with it every day, I like it's pretty good. It's pretty too (laughs).

GK: Yeah. [Inaudible.]

[0:15:59.6]

GK: You know when you say that it's striking to me to hear, cause I grew up there and I never saw sandy bottom in my entire life.

HC: No, no there's, I mean we don't have that anymore. I mean Oceanville Bridge. And Oceanville Bridge was a great big sandy beach. And that was a big sand hole all the way down the middle of that was a sand hole. The water hole was twice as, three times as big as it is now. But the soot come down through from towing up in South East. Come down through Oceanville Bridge all the way to [inaudible] smothers out acres of clam flats. I mean it spread over inch of soil and week them towing. You take six, eight boats up in that towing. They're all towing with a nine inch caliber and the soft, they didn't stay in the mussel bed. They came right over to the clam flats and a lot of places it looked like a bulldozer had gone. You stepped down, and the clams would be cut right in half.

[0:17:01.3]

HC: You see where they drag through clam flats, so I mean, dragging it's got to go. It says manual and I think if we get it back to manual we can get it back to manual we can get it

back, cause musseling they never needed to tow mussels. I can do, I could do a hundred bushel all by myself.

GK: How did you do it?

HC: I used to do it every day. I raked 'em.

GK: You raked 'em by hand?

HC: I raked mussels by hand and put 'em in my boat and there was no mud. I didn't want no mud. I wanted clean black mussels and that's the way they were and the boat would be loaded. I would run from Vinalhaven with 50 bushel to Stonington, bag 'em, run back to Vinalhaven, load the boat again and back to Stonington and take that one in to sell it and go get the other one out of the car bring that in to sell [inaudible] do it three times a week. It was fun. And today it couldn't employ 100s of people, 100s.

[0:18:00.7]

HC: Mussels are on the market where I've had people say jeez they're not good, I don't like mussels. I always did, I still do, that's why I want to play with them while I have them. You know keep 'em. It's another species we can't keep losing species. We can't. And right now um they're having problems with shrimp. The soot is still happening, it don't sink. The shrimp, their eggs have to lay on clean bottom, it don't happen. And why not have there, shrimp can't lay on sandy bottom, they need their sand to lay their eggs, just like lobsters they you know they need to lay them eggs, but lobsters are making it. I don't understand what's making that so great. They're the number, it's the cockroach though, that's the truth. I'm sorry green crabs are another one, they all eggs land but evidently they all survive well in this dirty water.

[0:19:06.5]

GK: They might be alive even in the event of like an atom bomb.

HC: Well, I mean the ocean the ocean, the nuclear bomb as far as finfish and 70% of out shellfish this happened. It's it's gone. We've got places that're dead zones. And I mean dead. There is zero clams in this zone and there hasn't been for years. And I used, I used to go there, drive down to the beach with my car, park it on the beach and dig two hogs from the car, fill them, go get two more. Start having drink on the second pair and uh and uh dig the tide and load the car with clams, 12-14 bushel. There is zero. We have, I estimate in Deer Isle starting right now we have 13% of the clam flats than we had when I was 15 years old. And that isn't much to pass on to my kids and my grandchildren. So it's sad to tell the kids and I went to Deer Isle high school here five or six years ago, Abby, a girl, a friend of mine, wanted me come up to the class and talk to them about what it was and what it is. Me growing up here was all together difference place, cause today electronics are taking over and I-pads are in and 12 year, eight year old kids got a cellphone and he can call mom and uh and the good old days mom didn't have a car to get there and dad had it at work and you wanted to get home, walk, that was a quick way so things have changed in the day, but we, this our business, we can't change it. It isn't supposed to change, it's supposed to be there, durable.

GK: Why is it important to you to be able to go clamming or be able to do that?

[0:21:00.9]

HC: I love my life. I mean I live the, I've lived the good life. I've lived it pure, I mean I went everyday and made my day's pay and when I got done I was dirty but I'd walk up to the lillypond and wash up and I didn't need too much soap, it wasn't grease, it was clean, and today, walking where I used to walk, I walked with a paddle across green boots and I'd come home and they're black.

(Phone rings.)

GK: Is that you?

HC: Ohh yeah. [Inaudible.]

GK: You want to take it?

HC: No, no . . .

(GK and HC laugh.)

HC: Got rid of him.

GK: He doesn't know how to use a cellphone, but he does know how to . . .

HC: I know I shut him off.

GK: Yeah, so now it's, you were saying it used to be clean.

[0:21:57.8]

HC: I mean everything here was clean before, I mean the water you could swim in it. It was nice, the rocks was all different kinds of colors. We only have one color now, they're all slime, they're dirt. There's not a red, a green, a blue rock anymore. There's not a ledge that's clean, looks like a piece of granite, its slimy and it's not getting any better. I mean you've got different species and the lobster fishermen are talking about these things that are growing. It's a fungus that's growing on the trap, a little sac look likes there's fish inside of it, but they're everywhere now. So we gotta pay attention how diseasing we're doing our water cause it's getting in deeper water. Everything's happening not for the best, not for the best. Uh I don't know all the answers, but you's supposed to have professors and high-grade people's supposed to be able to come up with these answers. They don't seem to be doing it. I listened in here today about the people that was doing the mussel test since 2014.

[0:23:02.6]

HC: A hell of a time to start doing it 2014, were a few years late and they're not going to help, they're not going to find out why. They're depleting, they've figured out since 2014 they're still depleting, but dragging is still happening, Down East heavy. And it's it's a shame I mean they aren't seeing fish either cause they're factory is all closed. And nobody is catching a fish, they're catching mussels and lobsters, that's it. That's a bad, that's a sad figure. You know to pass people we need that protein, it's in the fish, it's not in the clam I mean not

in the mussel and lobster. We need the finfish back and this water has gotta get cleaned up. I I don't know how else to put it, you know, it's just. I I lie awake nights thinking, nothing you can do, but it bugs me.

[0:24:06.1]

GK: Well there is something, I mean you are trying.

HC: I'm trying, but when you go into a meeting like this and you say something to the the high people that are getting paid, is is beyond me to listen to them, they look at you like you have no idea what you're saying. I'm a chemist, I'm a biologist and I've been doing this for 30 years. Well I've been living mine for 64 years, so I know what I see, I don't have to have a test tube to see it. I'm standing looking at it. So if you can't believe what I tell you or I can't, you won't come and and let me show you and you stay away, it's not good, that's not helping. So somehow I guess this year I get I just bought a new movie camera. I get around and take it wear it every day I go to work, do my thing and take my pictures, it's coming in the year and get somebody to straighten it up in order to make a good movie out of it. So, that's my intentions, I spent the money.

[0:25:12.0]

GK: That's great.

HC: So that's what I've got to do. This will be the year that I'm gonna. But I have to watch myself cause my wife says, Herbie, what you're doing doesn't pay and that is the truth, it costs me a bunch. So, I have to do it easily and cheap as I can and um try to help the state of Maine get their straightened out. I'll try if they'll try I can try, but they have to help me. I am not the one to help them, I'll do everything to help them but they have to come help.

GK: Thanks Herb.

HC: Okay baby. It's been good.

GK: Hey.

[0:25:51.7]