Jack Schultheis

Jack Schultheis: My name is Jack Schultheis and I am with Quick Park Fisheries on the lower Yukon River in Monica.

Interviewer 1: Try to keep your eye [on the light 00:13] if you can.

Jack Schultheis: Okay, got it.

Interviewer 2: What are you doing out here Jack?

Jack Schultheis: I'm the General Manager for this company. I've been associated with the lower Yukon commercial fisheries since 1974. It was the first time I came here.

Interviewer 2: Wow. And what's different now from '74, say in 10 fast forward 10 years, fast forward 10 years to current? I mean what's the fisheries look like? The state of affairs look like?

Jack Schultheis: Oh, state of affairs. It's changed immensely from... I mean in the '70s there was actually traditionally a set nut fisheries, wooden skiff fishery, not a very efficient fleet and it gradually turned into a... It went from a set nut fishery long term all summer, regular scheduled openings to now what almost has a derbylike thing. That was a gradual thing when drifting became popular here and they switched over to big horse power motors and fast boats and luminous skiffs. All the fisheries have modernized in Alaska. This was probably one of the last ones too, especially being where it is and [unintelligible 00:01:40.08] and it wasn't a big money fishery, this is a local family fishery that village people do. It's probably the last native fishery left in the state of Alaska. That stayed the same it's still a native fishery, just people that live here participate in this thing. In these villages are 98%, 99% native Alaskans, Yupik Eskimos. That hasn't changed. The fisheries changed because the fleet got more efficient. One thing about that the people here know how to fish, they are very good at it. They're very good hunters, they're very good fishermen. So over the years as gear improved, equipment improved, they just got more efficient and what took 48 hours back in the '70s to harvest they can do that in 6 hours now with the gear they got, the equipment they got. That's the biggest change, plus the fisheries with king run getting into a conservation mode

with it. That changed the economics of this fishery substantially. So that's really affected the village life here, the economies here tremendously.

Interviewer 2: Yeah, so if you're more efficient and the harvest was greater do you see any impact on them? Was that a potential impact on maybe where the current decline is now [unintelligible 00: 03:25] with the kings...?

Jack Schultheis: No, no. I don't think that had anything to do with the decline in fish because they basically... It just took longer to harvest the same amount of fish in the '70s. You know, longer hours fishing, they harvested the same amount of fish in less hours. Spread out over the same calendar period it just took longer hours to do it. Like I said what took 48 hours to catch they could do it in 6 now so I don't think that had much to do with it.

Interviewer 2: Who's managing all this? When did the state start to manage this?

Jack Schultheis: When Alaska became a state they took over control from the feds and the state came in and started managing the fisheries. In the state under the constitution of Alaska, it's an own estate. The residents own the resources and they're to be managed for the economic benefit of the residents. And also it's part of the state constitution that they got to be managed on a sustainability platform. So when the state took over a lot changed from the days of the federal control. It got much better management, more hands on management. When this was under federal control I don't think they had a federal officer stationed here for 20 something years. That was an occasional thing they did every 10 years when the state actually was here doing the fishery.

Interviewer 1: And you...

Interviewer 2: One second. We're just changing back to this wire here.

Jack Schultheis: Oh.

Interviewer 2: Maybe actually take it out and put it like underneath your sweat shirt.

Jack Schultheis: Underneath like this.

Interviewer 2: Yep.

Jack Schultheis: Okay, there you go.

Interviewer 2: Yeah, exactly. Jack can you just look at that real quick? Good.

Interviewer 1: So having worked for the state I consider them to be top notch managers.

Jack Schultheis: Yeah.

Interviewer 1: I am assuming you have the same sentiments. How can they help this fishery?

Jack Schultheis: How can they help this fishery? They're here to, I think... There's two things, you know, number one they got to make sure the run stay is sustainable, that enough fish get on the spotting ground. That's the first criteria in managing. Subsistence comes second after that and then commercial or personal use or sport fishing. There's no sport fishing down here, there's no personal use fishery like you have in Keni or Kappa River. There's good enough fish on the sporting grounds, have enough for subsistence and any surplus is open to commercial fishing. So the state, they maintain that model. Their first priority is to get enough fish on the sporting grounds and weed out commercial fish till they feel comfortable with what they see as far as the running goes. So I think they do a really good job of that. It's a really difficult job because there are a lot of opinions on how that should be done but all things considered I've worked in state fisheries for a long time and very seldom do I think they lack in professionalism. They're good people, they're very involved in the fishery.

Interviewer 2: So can you expound on how....

Interviewer 1: I was going to.... Jack can you reach out and turn off that light over there?

Jack Schultheis: This light?

Interviewer 1: Yes please. Thanks.

Interviewer 2: Just how

Interviewer 3: Is there going to be a problem cutting back and forth?

Interviewer 2: We're not that far into the interview and it's going to look better if we have it turned off, I think. Or we can turn it back on it's not a huge difference.

Interviewer 3: Or we'll be essentially throwing out what we just covered.

Interviewer 2: Do you think we're going to cut [unintelligible 00:08:15]?

Interviewer 1: Anything is possible but it's fine.

Interviewer 3: How complex.....

Interviewer 2: Then let's just turn it back on.

Interviewer 3: Explain how complex managing this fishery is within three miles and the technology that is needed to see something that you obviously can't see. It's got to be very difficult.

Jack Schultheis: Yeah. It is very difficult. It's a very long water shed. It involves two countries, the fish ponds both in the United States and in Canada. I think under the international agreement whatever country the fish spawn in has a say in the harvest of those fish. So there's a treaty between the US and Canada 'Yukon River Treaty' on how the fishery is managed so that adds problems or issues - there's another party to deal with it's not just the state of Alaska. So the Canadians have a big say in it, as they should, half the King Spawns spawn in Canada probably have the full [unintelligible 00:09:37] in Canada. So they should have a say in it. At the same time all along the river, the 1200 mile of river is in the United States all the villages along it I think there's 20 some' villages, 25,000 people which isn't a lot of people I realize that but it's a lot of people for Alaska. They depend on this river for their subsistence fish in a lot of different...... you know.

The word subsistence means a lot of things in Alaska. Down here at the mouth it means food for people. So the people down here depend on it.

This is a very, very important part of living here. The people here have to have subsistence food. You can't afford to live here unless you go gather your own food. So it's a very big issue more so on the lower river than anywhere else. Most of the population is on the lower river. So that's part of the complexity of managing it. You got to make sure there's enough fish for people to eat and feed themselves, and at the same time also the loss of the river, the lower the Yukon is

the commercial fishery which there has been the commercial fishery here for a hundred years, I mean a documented commercial fishery.

Prior to that they always traded these fish in one form or another but companies from Seattle came here in 1915 and established the first canneries. Carla Packing Company, were the first ones. They called them foreign companies at the time but there was an actual commercial operation here under federal management which was nonexistent. It's a big river, it's a huge river. I mean down at the mouth it's seven miles wide and there's three miles you have fish can come in at any one. The closest they can actually take measurements is 120 miles upriver, there's a sonar that kind of provides an educated guess at best of what's going on. Other than test fisheries it's really difficult to count how many fish come in this river. And there's a lot of fish that come in this river, mixture of salmon and white fish, trout, everything. So it is difficult to manage accurately, I think. In my opinion they manage to the point of no error on the side of conservation and I think that's a good thing, I do. I think that's why we still have good strong salmon rounds on the Yukon.

Interviewer 2: You think that error in conservation occurred with the King? What's the theories of why it's been declining since the last 10, 15 years?

Jack Schultheis: First it was the high seas police boats caused it, and I don't agree with that because there was always high seas interception. It's just for the first time ever it was actually documented. I mean, in the '80s they caught high seas boats after they had 400,000 Kings caught in the Bering Sea. So what the police boats did was a fraction of that. Then there was climate change and something disrupted the food chain. I think it's a combination of things, I don't think it's any one thing. In the other part of the story is they really don't know. There's a lot of proof that it was this and it was that, at the same time Kings all over the world [unintelligible 00:14:04] everywhere were in decline. I don't think that was anything, It wasn't one set thing in my opinion.

I always thought it was the five billion hatchery smould that suddenly showed up in the Bering Sea. I still think that has more to do with it than anything. The carrying capacity of Bering sea has to be limited and when you disrupt that and add 5 billion extra baby salmon and that was a big ocean and everything but it was a very delicate balance and all over a sudden you dump another five billion salmon out there for 20 years straight, something had to give. I think that contributed to it as well. Probably a little bit of everything but it's just kind of odd because it only [00:15:00] affected chunox, the chamrans were healthy throughout western Alaska, the cohorans were healthy, the sokrans, the pinkrans. It just seemed like it affected kings and that's why they have such a hard time wrapping a reason around it.

Interviewer 2: Can you just explain the story about adding 5 million paltry fish? **Jack Schultheis:** Billion.

Interviewer 2: 5 Billion. Can you explain it to like somebody who has no clue at all?

Jack Schultheis: Salmon became valuable. There you go, that's what happened. Suddenly they were needed protein that had value. I think in the late '70 and early '80s Japan started their hatcheries in Hokkaido and they were successful in the sense of, they could have raised salmon in a hatchery and it would return to that hatchery in large commercial value, six million, eight million fish they could return. So other countries especially Alaska, United States and it started mostly in South East Alaska coz south east was having issues with their salmon runs, they were depleted both in kings for one, not so much depleted in kings but kings were very valuable commercial property. Kings and charms were commercial property. So they started raising Kings, hatchery fish and that drifted up into prince volume sound Kodiak has hatcheries. Actually the only place in the state of Alaska that doesn't have commercial hatcheries is Western Alaska. None of the people will tolerate them in western Alaska. So, the thing was that it became economically feasible to build large scale hatcheries to the point where it build up to a point where suddenly there were 5 billion extra salmon out in the Bering sea. This was done not for sport fishing or pleasure fishing or recreation, this was done for commercial purposes. I think right now prince volume sounds 90 some' percent, 96 %, 93%. I know it's 90 something percent on the commercial harvest is hatchery production.

20 years ago hatchery production wasn't 10 percent in Prince William Sound or 30 years ago, or whenever, the '80s. I forget how old I am. So all these hatcheries started dumping enormous amounts of fish in the Bering sea for commercial ventures with state support, state oversight, blessings of the state, whatever you want to call them and I think it's something over five billion smoldering were released in the Bering sea between Japan, Canada, Korea, Russia, who else has hatcheries? Bunch of little countries.

Interviewer 2: You see hatchery returns here?

Jack Schultheis: No, we don't have hatchery fish here.

Interviewer 2: Right. E strays, have you seen anything like black salmons?

Jack Schultheis: No.

Interviewer 2: Nothing has been documented?

Jack Schultheis: No.

Interviewer 2: So when you talk about carrying pass you're talking about

competition?

Jack Schultheis: Yeah, food.

Interviewer 2: Yeah?

Jack Schultheis: Food competition.

Interviewer 1: Let's shift gears because that was great. We were talking earlier and you were touching on... You've been up here for 40 years and so there's probably ... you've been hard pressed to find another outsider non-native with a better perspective and I think an outside perspective of that and just the spirit of the people and the resilience in how they are very ... You talking of how their way of life is so important to them and they want to maintain that even with what some other people might call progress they seeSee if you can talk about that a little bit.

Jack Schultheis: I have been coming here a long time - 40 years is a long time I guess. I've done fisheries from [unintelligible 00:20:12] all the way to Canterview so I've done a lot of different commercial fisheries and something

that always attracted me back to the lower Yukon, I think the thing that wasn't in Bristol base is spectacular salmon fishery but it's a cowboy fishery and this is very different in the bay. This is a family thing, you see, built by the mother and a couple of her kids fishing and grandfathers and grandsons fishing in a 20 foot skiff in the most God-awful shitty weather and they are fishing for enough money to just be able to live out here. 10,000 dollars is big money to the people here. It gives them enough money to buy gas and the equipment they need to go seal hunting and whale hunting and moose hunting and gather firewood for the year.

But the people out here, the thing that always impressed me the most about them is that it's got to be the most harshest places in the word to live and I could never understand why you would pick this place to live. One of the villagers called Nunum Ekwa, translated literally it means end of earth, end of the land and believe me it's true, you got to watch where you step around here because you'll fall off the earth, end of the earth. They picked this place to live in. Somewhere it was documented that people were here for 10,000 years. It was close to the Bering land bridge and the people stayed here thousands of years before Europeans ever came here. I couldn't figure out what would keep people here, the harshest environment in the world, I mean there's 90 days of what they call summer where you're still wearing a coat every day. The old people after about 30 years of coming here they finally accepted me to the point where they would talk in confidence with me.

I asked them why did you pick here to live and they said 'food, there was a lot of food here. That's why we always stayed here'. This culture is a communal culture. They stay in groups, they lead by consensus, they don't have chiefs and they stick together as groups. They go hunting as groups. I was here during the winter time and the young men would go out caribou hunting and they would come in with sledge loads of caribou. The first think they did was make sure all the elders got meat then after they took care of the elders then they went to all the households that didn't have husbands that just had women with children, and their families were the last to get anything. And they still do that today, I mean that was just a couple of years ago when I was here in the winter time. That wasn't 40 years ago, that was 2013.

They keep a net out here during the winter and the young men watch it, take care of it and every day they check it and go and distribute fish to every house in the village, and every village does that. Nobody expects it, it just happens. It's just the way they live. If somebody catches a seal they share it, or a whale. One night one of the boats brought a whale up from black river out on the coast and all the old people, the elders came here at 3 o'clock in the morning and they lined up on the barge cutting up the whale. They share with one another and there's nowhere else in the world that does that, especially in this country. But this culture that's how they survive by sticking together in such an awful environment I mean, climate environment and remoteness from anything. Even today the nearest doctors, you know, 150 miles from here. These people learn how to take care of themselves for food and provide for themselves and way before there was governments or authority or anything else here and they survived without white people and I think if you took this fishery away and the electricity and all the modern conveniences they would still stay here. I don't think they would leave. I really believe that.

Interviewer 2: So as the king fishery declines has an effect on their economic wellbeing, they're no longer economically strained and that affects their ability to buy fuel and other subsistence lifestyle so it just doesn't hurt them economically but it hurts their sense of community they better go out there and get things and share and resources are bringing in and I'm wondering what you've seen as things have gotten tougher up here, what you see in the community, how is that straining the community?

Jack Schultheis: I just notice they switch with the economics changing. They changed, they're resilient people and even if they had less money, I didn't see them to where it affected their way of life that much. It was still subsistence based economy, it was really strange they still, you know. I was here during the hay day the fishery a long time this fishery was once worth 20 million dollars and it wasn't much different than it is now as far as lifestyle goes. They still hunt the same way they did then, I think they had more luxury type items. They could afford a four-wheeler or a new motor. Because they don't have the kind of money they had fifteen or twenty years ago they went more back to their old ways where they hunt

more in groups, families got closer because they had to depend more on working together to get food. I think if anything it made them turn back to their old ways more. When they had a lot of money they would buy hamburgers and when they stopped having that kind of money to throw around they put an extra net or they made sure they went caribou hunting. Overall when I think about their lack coz I was here during the big money days and I don't think it changed all that much as far as how they live and how they operate. I really don't.

Interviewer 2: We're lucky to overlap our time here with Dan, and I was wondering if you could from your perspective how what's going on with New England and that stimulation of

Jack Schultheis: Oh, my customer Dan.

Interviewer 2: Yeah.

Jack Schultheis: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer 2: It's a pretty interesting story.

Jack Schultheis: Yeah, it is.

Interviewer 2: [unintelligible 00:28:42.12]

Jack Schultheis: No they don't. They just know it's Salmon, Salmon, and Salmon. And the law of 48. Okay, it's all Salmon. One thing I went to Europe. Actually the first time I ever went there in my life I went to see [unintelligible 00:29:06] and my customer New England sea foods in t lheir verse the Europeans were more sophisticated than Americans when it comes to the environment and food, quality of food - they're much more conscious about things than Americans are. I was very impressed with how, at least in the UK, that's the only place I went, but I went there I was very impressed with how much they took our fishing, the President of that company, the owner came here and he was on the search for a high quality product because that's what they wanted to market. They are very quality conscious and they wanted something that could attract their consumers over there financial year or economically. So they wanted a high quality salmon at the right price, I guess you could say. And he had travelled from South East all the way to Catabeau and wound up here on the

lower Yukon and he thought this was the best charm salmon or kiddy salmon, there's kiddy in Europe. So he came here and we did some tests marketing with him and I think this has gone on probably our seventh or eighth year where we have been supplying them. We are one of their primary suppliers and a key to salmon has been marketed extremely well with their customers in Europe, to the point where we build a foray line. We now do have a foray factory an automated factory which provides another 40 to 50 jobs for these communities here and it's been a very good, extremely good relationship.

They provide a better market than anywhere else in the world we could get for this fish. I mean, a higher price they take huge volumes of raw fish, they provided personnel to help us learn to process to the standards they needed it. So it's been a good relationship, it's more like a partnership thank a customer, buyer - seller type relationship. We don't have a lot of customers, we really don't. We got about a dozen but all of them have a stake in this fishery with us. All of them have come here at one time or another. We don't do a lot of advertising it's mostly...we have the customers come here and of all the people the customers that come here, they are customers for a lifetime here. It's a really good solid relationship we have in that sense.

Interviewer 2: Which economic development opportunities do you see? Like if you could, like the people we've been talking about, the smoking fish and doing sort of direct consumer type thing? You're a pro at this stuff but do you see other opportunities for economic development that could take root?

Jack Schultheis: Yeah. There's more and more we could do. Value added processing like other products, smoking would be one of them. Big thing now are ready-to-eat meals that you microwave it, there's a lot of things we could do and eventually we will. The problem out here is, it's twice as costly to build something here or three times as costly as in Anchorage. To build a building here is a two-year ordeal because you have a 90- day building season so something you can build somewhere else and be up in six months is two-four seasons out here or two years and to get the funding to do that and build that and the time to do it and then have the right marketing for it. When this company first started all we could do was put

fish in a tow and fly it to Anchorage for processing, to now we do our own processing down to value added boneless forays in a vacuum pack bag and this year we're projected to do a million pounds of those. Overall we made a lot of head way in the time we've done this but I think, give us another ten years and I think we'll develop this company to much more, much bigger commercial venture than it is now and this is the only natural resource in this region. This region of Alaska doesn't have oil or coal or timber, it has fish so it's the one thing we can invest in, and it provides a lot of jobs for the people here and the families here and there isn't anything else. This town has 900 people and when the state came out here and took a poll there's 41 jobs for 950 people. It's a tough place to live financially, a really tough place.

Interviewer 2: That's awesome. We're at 36 minutes. You guys got a last minute follow up?

Interviewer 1: Anything that we didn't ask you about that you want to say, you feel like you want to communicate?

Jack Schultheis: Oh, I could probably talk about five or six hours about this place. No, no, I'm fine.

Interviewer 2: How much fish do you eat in a year?

Jack Schultheis: How much fish do I you eat in a year? You know I grew up in Pittsburg, okay? And we had fish on Fridays because we were Catholics and it was like 'Oh, it's Friday and we're going to have fish again'. But when I came here I started working for a Japanese fish company on the Yukon and it was a very sophisticated thing working with the Japanese people. Their eating habits were very sophisticated which took me a while to get used to. They're two kinds of Japanese, there's Tokyo Japanese and then there's workers from Hokkaido and I kind of blended in with the workers from Hokkaido. Anyhow, long story short, I probably eat fish four times five times a week now. Probably meat a couple of times maybe, depends.

Interviewer 2: Just opposite of how I grew up.

Interviewer 1: I got one little question. One follow up then we'll wrap it. I'd say one of our overarching goals with this thing is to tell the story in a way that shows why people in Talsa, or Miami or New York should care about people up here who are their fellow Americans. It's such an out of sight out of mind society these days. What would you say to the people who, I mean, because you come back up and you get it within five minutes.

Jack Schultheis: Yeah. That's why we tried everything, how to sell our product, how to market ourselves. We did the Boston sea food show, we had marketing people but I noticed when we brought a customer up here he was so enamored with this region and the people. He said 'I can't believe I'm in America' and he was so stricken by the amount of how poverty stricken the region was financially but then when he seen how the people here weren't helped, how tough they were and how hard they worked and how they just thought this was how everybody lived, that's what I mean as far as when people see what it's like here and what these people are like and what they go through I think there's a great amount of admiration for them. It's not a guilt thing like I need to support these people, they need a market. It's not that at all. It's kind of an admiration thing.

They want to be part of it, they want to be aligned with that type of people. It's a neat story, they're not cowboy fishermen they come up for two weeks in between their regular job to fish bristle bay, these people live here all year round. Like I said come here in January and see how this place looks like. I think those people in Torso, Oklahoma or Miami need to understand how the people here, their experience at sharing stuff with them. They think that when they give food away that's the most precious thing they can do is share their food coz food to them means life. That's the name 'Quick Pack' the name of this company to the old people it means big river. That's what the younger generation calls it but the old people said that name said it means that this river gave us life. It provided all our food and I think the people in the states or in London or in Paris. I sent fish from here to Paris successfully by air and they were so impressed with the people here and they wanted to be part of that. They wanted to latch on to how these people took pride in what they did, how they caught these fish. The parents go out

fishing or their brothers and the other brothers and sisters are here processing the fish and packing fish and loading the airplanes and loading refrigerated ships. It's a community effort here and that word community means so much more to me now than it did when I grew up in a community I came from. This is a real community here. Everybody has a stake in this and there's not a competitive thing where they're going to outdo their neighbors. They don't have that attitude here. Very different way of life. That's it.

Interviewer 2: I think you just underscored what we're doing and how we had to go back...

Interviewer 1: Before you cut. Just one last question I think would be good to clarify is how you arrived here and how long you've been here. I just want to make sure that we got that clearly because when you first answered that you were a little bit fast. I just want to make sure that we get that clearly.

Jack Schultheis: Okay. How I arrived here.

Interviewer 1: Like why Alaska while you came from Pittsburg?

Jack Schultheis: Oh, that part.

Interviewer 1: Or even why Monica?

Jack Schultheis: Why Monica?

Interviewer 1: Yeah.

Jack Schultheis: Okay. So what do you want? Why Alaska or why Monica?

Interviewer 1: Why Monica, I think.

Jack Schultheis: Why Monica? I came to Monica because there was a commercial fishery here and I worked for a fishing company, a Japanese fishing company who used to fish off-shore here. This was one of their primary fishing grounds before the 200 mile limit. Actually I flew in a float plane and you could see the lights of the mother ship off the coast here in '72. They could still operate mother ships here. Mother ships are like aircraft carriers, there's 6,000 people on them. They can can, smoke, freeze, they're huge. Anyhow, they knew that was the end of an era so that Japanese company they started grabbing areas of Alaska where they wanted to

operate in and they hired me because of what I was to work on the lower Yukon. That's originally how I came to come to the lower Yukon. I did it for money, I had a job, strictly economics.

Interviewer 1: Why did you stay and at what point did you start the company?

Jack Schultheis: Why did I stay? I was attracted by the people here and the region and it was so different than any other fishery in the state of Alaska, it was unique, it was different. When I was unloading the fishing boat they had spears and I asked them 'what are you doing with the spears?' And they said 'we hunt with them'. And I said 'why don't you use a gun?' And they said 'we always hunted with spears. My father hunted with spears and his father and his father. That's the only way we know how to hunt'.

I sport hunted and stuff but these people are hunting to live, I mean, they need to hunt to eat and they're using spears. There's something inside me that had stirred, that there were people that kept that way of life, they were proud of that, that's how they did it. They could still do it, they didn't need a gun. They used the same spears their ancestors used and that impressed me so no matter where I was and I operated throughout the state of Alaska at one time or another, you know, I worked for six different companies on the lower Yukon including my own I always kept coming back here. Number one I was welcomed by the people here, I always got along well here. I fit in, so to speak. And that's the big thing with these people that you're accepted, earn a certain amount of trust. I respected them and they knew that. They could feel that and so I was always welcome back here no matter who I worked for, what company I was attached to, but I just liked it here. It was different, it was a more personable thing. So I just kept gravitating here and with this company, I started working for this company in 2005 so I've been with this one for ten years now.

Interviewer 1: How long have you been here in total?

Jack Schultheis: '74 to whatever today is...2015. 41 years I think. Something like that.

Interviewer 3: Can I get you're saying that you've been in the mark for 41 years?

Jack Schultheis: I've been in the mark for 41 years, involved in fishery on the lower Yukon for 41 years. How's that?

Interviewer 3: Perfect. Don't cut yet... Good.