

[00:00:00]

Female Interviewer 2: So, Amanda if you want to start.

Female Interviewer 1: So, we're here with John Hand in Everglade city. It's February 15. So, if you can tell us, you know, in the first place a little about your business, since when did you started in this business, when you started fishing in the Everglades area? And then, we're going to talk a little bit about the red tide events and other sort of like destructive events that you've experienced throughout your career. But, just tell us a little bit about yourself and the business.

John Hand: Yes, well like I said I'm fourth generation Ruskin area and then I moved down here to Everglade, been fishing the Everglades for 30 years. Of course we saw more of the red tide in the Tent Bay mostly in the Gulf area than we did than I have down here. Down here, I've been coming down here fishing 30 years and like I said, I haven't seen it pretty much south of Morocco as far as I know. And then, I don't glide in the Gulf, I'm all backwater so I fish the shoreline and the islands, so I don't go, you know, way out into the Gulf. But as far as been on the coast, I've never seen it south of Morocco myself.

Female Interviewer 2: And if in doing charter?

John Hand: Yes, I've been doing charters.

Female Interviewer 2: In to the charter business for like 40 plus years and always in *[indiscernible]*[00:01:25] so what kind of species do you target?

John Hand: Tarpon, snook, red fish, speckled trout, triple tailed, magnum snapper, sharks, pretty much all the species...

Female Interviewer 2: How's the abundance of these species change from the abundant of...

John Hand: Well, it's changed, you know, I mean course has changed with just regular weather. In 2010, we had the snook kill, kill lot of snook, lot of jacks and the freeze, the freeze in 2010.

Female Interviewer 2: You know it was kind of for around...[00:02:00]

Interviewee: Cold water temperature throughout all the way down through the Everglades because it's so shallow. The water temperature dropped and had a massive snook kill, you know, kill some tarpon and the jack reber, quite a few other fish. But snook was the main one that was devastated that we deal with. And then it was a moratorium on snook for a few years. And then snook came back, snook population's great now. But now after Irma -- before Irma, we had a lot of good healthy redfish population. After Irma, it was hard to find redfish. Snook and tarpon were off the charts

right here in front of this house. You could sit here and watch snook popping all the shoreline and tarpon rolling all over the place. I'd sit here and catch jump six or eight tarpon off the dock but no that was after Irma. But now the red -- like I said, the redfish disappeared for some reason I don't know why. I know the Florida Gas Association did a survey with all those gas to find out after Hurricane Irma. Now they're starting to come back. We catch a lot of what we call ret rich, little up to 14-16 inches, we're catching a lot of those but the big reds are still kind of hard to find. They're showing up here and there but not like they were before Irma. Before Irma, we would have -- I got one shoreline at home, see on normal day two dozen good size big redfish. And after Irma, I'd be lucky to see two or three if any, some days. So you know that was all weather factors I guess. I'm sure they calls that. I don't know why they leave or what they did.

Female Interviewer 2: Okay. So how has fishing changed, how does fishing today compared to fishing 30-40 years ago?

Interviewee: Fishing is great since Irma [00:04:00] other than redfish. I mean just looking the tarpon population, it's just been off the charts and there's also snook, you know, the fishing has been just as great as it was 30 years ago.

Female Interviewer 2: Just before we started the interview, you were mentioning that you've never noticed a red tide since you've been fishing like, you've never...

Interviewee: Not down in this area...

Female Interviewer 2: ...impacted in anyway?

Interviewee: Yeah not south of Marco. I know that would comes in at North Marco and Gordon river, Naples, I know they see it there. But you know, as far as down here...

Female Interviewer 2: No, never?

Interviewee: Yeah. Nothing I'm aware of.

Female Interviewer 2: Okay. So I was trying to understand a little bit how has, you know, like what was different 30 years ago when you started fishing from now?

Interviewee: Well not so much as what was different 30 years ago I think, but what's different from the areas, because our water comes -- we've got halfway Creek which were all right here, comes under 41. That's agricultural water we're getting. I mean some of that has to be just like it is over south of *[indiscernible]* [00:05:07] you know, but the difference is, here it flows through -- you get a sheet flow before it gets to us and before it gets to our salt water.

Female Interviewer 2: What do you mean by sheet flow?

Interviewee: A sheet flow in the Everglades is what we call a shooting unit. It's where it gets filtrating, right. All the fungus and mosses and saw grass and all that stuff gets in here and it filters all that stuff out before it gets to us. Because like Lake Trafford out of Immokalee, they drains down this way. So you've got halfway Creek which drains out here. Turner river which is further east on 41, it drains out on the other side of this island. This is 100-acre Island so the other side of the island, that's the Turner river down there. So it's under 41. All that comes through a sheet flow before it comes out here, all the way down, I can take you down. I don't know if it shows up on this map.

Female Interviewer 2: It have some small ones. [00:06:00]

Interviewee: You're looking for well maybe let's see here. You have one further down, what I'm looking for is, I might have to go out and get one of my maps. We're looking for Sweetwater. Sweetwater it just like halfway Creek and Turner Creek. It's further southeast from us. But Sweetwater, you cross the Sweetwater creek drainage on loop road. Are you familiar with that road?

Female Interviewer 2: No.

Interviewee: Okay. The loop road is where Monroe station used to be, there's a dirt road to go south. If you've never traveled it, you need to ride that road. It's a dirt road to go south. It's called the loop road. You turn it south and run around and then you come out just this side on the west end of the Mississippi reservation. But you go down there and you can see all those little -- you cross all those little creeks that they put culverts over, but the main one down there is just what they call Sweetwater. And I fish it from the outside where that water flows in down south of us. And that's always been my contention is that, the sheet flow limits a part of this. It comes up a lot of our...

Female Interviewer 2: So we could shows -- and that was your area of fishing for a long time.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Female Interviewer 2: This have been, always been?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Female Interviewer 2: Good. What about, did you hear from other fisherman you know, stories about red tides in the area, but...

Interviewee: No, never heard of anybody...

Female Interviewer 2: Okay.

Interviewee: It ran into -- it was two years ago, we had a hot summer and we ran into a, I want to say it was like a fungus or a moss born, you know, that rolled up out here and

kind of affected the [00:08:00] oxygen level a little bit. But we really -- it wouldn't affect much really bad.

Female Interviewer 2: No fish kills or anything?

Interviewee: No.

Male Interviewer 1: So what was the -- what happened as a result of that oxygen deficiency in that?

Interviewee: Well, they had some -- I know, they ran into some manatees and some dolphins that year that had some respiratory problems.

Male Interviewer 1: Okay. But it didn't affect...

Interviewee: I didn't see fish kill.

Male Interviewer 1: No against temperature or and you could still fish in those areas...

Interviewee: Yeah. There was limited, the fish kind of moved out of those areas.

Male Interviewer 1: And what area more or less was that?

Interviewee: It was pretty much right outside here on the inside of this, inside of the base where you didn't have much water float. Back in Russell...

Female Interviewer 2: Can you circle those areas?

Interviewee: It's about here Russell bay. That's one of the areas. Some of them where you didn't have a whole lot of water movement. And it was mostly again, that wasn't you know, that was even mostly on the North Side. It was very little down, south of it. There was some back in here, which is often.

Female Interviewer 2: So this was one?

Interviewee: I want to say it was here. It wasn't with the year of Irma. It was the year before that. The year before so it was three summers ago.

Female Interviewer 2: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. Three summers ago in the spring. Since [00:10:00] 2016 yes 15-16 somewhere in there.

Male Interviewer 1: So you mostly fish up in the back in those areas where...

Interviewee: I finished -- well, I go to the job around. I'll go from here all the way back to the -- all the way back, you know, as far as I can go around the hills, there were trench with five inch of water. So I just you know. And that's, of course, that's one of the great things about fishing here is I can fish outside for talking around gold with black fish or snow bass and that's all within three miles.

Male Interviewer 1: So usually if you go outside here, it's for tarpon?

Interviewee: Tarpon, well, its quarterly time a year. You know, you get your snook in the back country right now. But now in the spring, some of the move to the outside.

Female Interviewer 2: About these areas, you said there was problems with the oxygen in the water...

Interviewee: Yeah, it was locked up. And it's a normal phenomenon. It's like the moss that grows pretty much every summer we'll see it and what it is, it'll roll up. And you'll have rolls as long as this table and I don't know the technical term for it, but it's a common thing, but it just got really, really extensive.

Female Interviewer 2: And it's natural?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, it was extensive last year. But, you know, we don't know. I want to say that we had a lot of water in the spring. I think that was the year we had the storm come through and we had 21 inches of the rain in like less than 48 hours. So we had a day we lose your fresh water which went further out the salinity.

Female Interviewer 2: And besides the manatees were affected?

Interviewee: Well, that's what I understand. I didn't see any of that were affected that I saw but I just...

Female Interviewer 2: But you didn't -- and other fish species not involved in that? Okay.

Interviewee: But [00:12:00] I know some days you'd go there, when it got real bad you'd go there and some of those areas where there was no water flow, it'd be kind of -- it wouldn't be dead as far as dead fish go, but it would be dead because there was no bait there so there was no fish there. So that, you know, there would be no fish in that area then I'll leave the area. It was an deal condition for them because if the baits not there, they're not going to be there.

Female Interviewer 2: They're not going to go.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Female Interviewer 2: So if you think about this time last year, how does the business compare, the same?

Interviewee: This time last year?

Female Interviewer 2: The same, it's better?

Interviewee: Our business is really good right now. I don't know I should say this or not but I will anyway. What's hurt our business is when they put it on the news that the whole current state of Florida is covered with a red tide we lose charters, because it's not down here but they think it is. That's what really hurts us. It's just the media puts it out there as if the whole state is covered. So I mean, it's not just us, not just guys, it's the restaurants and the hotels and the, you know, the whole dependency system.

Female Interviewer 2: So when did you start seeing, noticing those or like the number of clients decline if you've noticed that?

Interviewee: Yeah, it was less when we're going into the summer, yes. And really the last two years were pretty slim. Now we picked up pretty good. I'm booked pretty good this year.

Female Interviewer 2: Okay.

Interviewee: But the people who contacted me are learning that it's not, and some of them asked me but it's not -- plus it's, the red tide, nobody disappears in the wintertime. You know, we get cool weather. It normally goes away but, you know, it's like this year, we had -- I'm not usually here in August but I was here in August this year. And [00:14:00] because they shut down the snook and redfish fishery from Naples to above Tampa Bay. We had boat trailers on the side of the road to Chokoloskee boat ramp when we don't normally have boat drivers on the side because all those guys from Lehigh acres and you know all the guests from North Naples, they would come down here because down here they can fish, they could keep snook and redfish that affected our...

Male Interviewer 1: What was that closure from?

Interviewee: That was Florida Fishing Game closed down.

Male Interviewer 1: Florida Fishing Closed down?

Interviewee: Yeah. They put a moratorium on it for so many months. But I think that maybe getting off track for what you're looking for here.

Female Interviewer 2: No we're trying to understand sort of like what are the things that changed the way you conduct your business.

Interviewee: I just think, you know, I'm an old Florida native and I think that our main thing that's going to help us the most, you can't do it you know, you can't do it in Pine Island. You can't do it in Port St. Lucie because there's no fleet sheet flow, you know, but if we can divert the water to where it goes through the sheet flow from here to Flamingo, that spreads a lot of water out. Now all that grasses all that sheet flow is going to filter a heck of a lot of water, a heck of a lot more. And I just don't know you know, we get frustrated with the hold up on the reservoir south of a Lake Okeechobee that was supposed to be built for everything to go and you know, the main stuff drops out itself to the bottom and the rest of it goes on the sheet flow South because I mean that's why Flamingo didn't have any -- we don't have seagrass here. We have a minimum mount seagrass on this side. But that's just the nature of the beach, that's just the way this area is. But now Flamingo, you know, their seagrasses died because of the lack of the induction of the fresh [00:16:00] water they're supposed to be getting and so they don't ever get it. It just affected the whole system.

Male Interviewer 1: But in this area, you never -- I mean, not having seagrasses in this area so that's just the way the area is?

Interviewee: Yeah, that's the way the area is. Just a minimal areas that you see seagrasses down here. But over here mostly on wood lock.

Male Interviewer 1: Okay.

Female Interviewer 2: And it's always been like that?

Interviewee: It's always been like that. Yeah. It's just muddy and it's not conducive to the growth of seagrass.

Female Interviewer 2: Tell us a little bit about the hurricane Irma and how it impacted you.

Interviewee: Well, luckily, we weren't hurt. You know, we got minimal, I lost a little bit of siding and that was pretty much it. So we were very, very fortunate.

Female Interviewer 2: What about the fishing business?

Interviewee: The fishing was great after Irma. I'd say fishing was efficient right after Irma. And I'd say at September 11, you know. October was off the charts as far as everything but everything but redfish.

Female Interviewer 2: And you have buy-ins?

Interviewee: Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yeah.

Female Interviewer 2: Because Everglade City had some...

Interviewee: That was a struggle. Now, I had clients that couldn't come because they couldn't -- they didn't have any lodging, you know, they're first. But as soon as they could get lodging or some of them would stay DC, even going to Naples, there was a lot of motels in Naples that were booked up, covered up by people that their homes were destroyed. So, you know, we had a lot of those who are unfortunate even available there at Naples. But as soon as these places started opening up, you know, we started -- my class started coming on back down.

Female Interviewer 2: And it's been like that since?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Male Interviewer 1: Now, do you have steady clients that will come year after year regularly. [00:18:00] Is that your primary?

Interviewee: No. I mean most of them -- I got a lot of people that are just, you know, they call and they're going to be here next week -- and I get this call yesterday. He's going to be here from Canada next week. And then he wants his son to come down and go fishing. So, you know, it's, you know, so but I'd say probably 40% of my business is repeat clients.

Male Interviewer 1: Okay.

Interviewee: And then probably another 30% is the people that call me now start booking tarpon season, you know, they'll book months ahead, you know, and then the other percentages, my last-minute people. They come to town and you know, guy comes to town with his wife and family and visit kin folk or something and all of a sudden he gets a day where he can go fishing. He was calling see if he can go, you know, that kind of stuff.

Male Interviewer 1: Right, right. Okay.

Female Interviewer 2: So how do you see the future fishing in this area in Everglades? The Everglades area, like charter fishing is to be like?

Interviewee: I think it's going to maintain to be great as long as they don't get crazy with development, which we're pretty much, you know, we're protected from that lot. With all of the -- well the park in the Big Cypress being north of us, you know, all that the sheet flow I'm talking about is pretty much protected. So I don't see them destroying that. So, I mean, this area is, I don't see anything coming that would change it in the near future.

Female Interviewer 2: Do you do you have [00:20:00] family who's going to be involved in the business or is there no one in the business or you're just there?

Interviewee: No.

Female Interviewer 2: Okay.

Male Interviewer 1: You've always been a charter?

Interviewee: No. I was a -- I make my living as a -- to make a sale.

Male Interviewer 1: Okay.

Interviewee: I know you've heard of Ruskin Bay, well that's what. You know, I grew up and then to make it this.

Male Interviewer 1: Okay.

Interviewee: And then would do sales and then charter the rest of the year and kind of started kind of working on together.

Male Interviewer 1: Okay. So if I was just, in terms of fishing, it was always charter business. You never did commercial?

Interviewee: I never did commercial. Now, my ancestor did, all my ancestors were you know, the Ruskin area was settled by commercial fishermen and farmers. That's what it was settled by. I have my great grandfather had a trading post at the mouth of a little manatee river. So you know, and the mail came in by boat from Tampa back then and everything. So it's kind of, you know.

Male Interviewer 1: Yeah, you have an interesting family and you guys live here Florida...

Interviewee: Yeah, because both my grandmother's -- my mother's mother, she lived to be 101 and my dad's mom live, she was 92 or 93. So they had some -- and my mom, my grandmother on my dad's side was the one that had a trading post. But they were old and of course they travel. A lot of them travel by boat back then on the little manatee river to get around in Tampa bay and so that's one just like small woods down here somewhere set up.

Male Interviewer 1: Right, right. And did you fish when you lived up there also?

Interviewee: Yeah. I fished up there.

Male Interviewer 1: Yeah. On the charter and for private and just for private, okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Male Interviewer 1: And what made you decide to come down here to set up a business down here?

Interviewee: The development in Tampa. I had bed and breakfast on the little manatee river which [00:22:00] was great. I mean, we did great but then just too many people moving in up there and just you know. And on the water in Tampa Bay is just so crowded and the ethics of the watermen are less than it is down here. You know down here I have clients that own boats they don't -- they hire me when they come down here because they don't want to take them in the Everglades. So we're protected from you know being overran pretty much, just like here we go north towards Marco, we're going to see a lot more people than if we go south or we go back country. You know when people come in put here, most people aren't familiar with the area, they can go straight to the outside and fish outer islands where they can get around these, you can see. You know very few of them run to the backcountry or run to the water. Like I said my boat runs in five-six inches of water so it's, you know, they're not *[overlapping conversation]* [00:22:54] So for that reason, we call this the quiet side the Everglades because like a Flamingo, so they got from -- the people from Miami homestead, they drive down to Flamingo by then. Also you have all the guys from the Keys. You get guys from Key Largo, Marathon, Alomar, all those guys run over in their boats and fish Flamingo. So they get a lot more boat traffic. They got traffic, fishing traffic than we get over here.

Male Interviewer 1: Right. Yeah, this is nice.

Interviewee: Yeah, it is.

Male Interviewer 1: But you say you've been here for 30 years.

Interviewee: I've been fishing here for 30.

Male Interviewer 1: Fishing here for 30, I'm sorry.

Interviewee: Yeah. I've lived here for five years.

Male Interviewer 1: Oh, you've lived here for five years. But you had a business, a fishing business here before?

Interviewee: I would come down here and fish, yeah.

Male Interviewer 1: And you would just come down and -- okay. Interesting. Do you know of others...

Interviewee: It's like when I was in the tomato business, I live in Macula (*phonetics*) for a while. So that's when you know, when I would come down here to fish and take...

Male Interviewer 1: Okay. [00:24:00] Do you, other than Irma and the events that we had talked about, do you remember -- I mean, did you experience any other events that you remember that affected fishing or your business or the fish stocks over the 30 years you've been fishing here?

Interviewee: Not that I can think of. Well, yeah, but I mean, and this might be getting off the ball game, but it was the same thing happened with the red tide is happening now with the media presentation as it did with all the oil, the oil spill.

Male Interviewer 1: Okay.

Interviewee: You remember the oil spill?

Male Interviewer 1: Right.

Interviewee: Well, you went on, you watched on TV, and they showed well, the oil spill is going to go all the way down the coast of Florida and around the tip. So we lost -- we had charters that -- I was in Tampa at that time, we had charters that were booked for a week. I had a bed and breakfast. And they canceled because they thought we were going to be affected by the oil spill. But that was just...

Male Interviewer 1: They're worried about...

Interviewee: That was human media error, that wasn't...

Male Interviewer 1: Right, right. Let's hear it interesting over for the oil...

Interviewee: But we were never affected by it. It never affected our area at all.

Male Interviewer 1: But were people worried about -- they thought the fish were contaminated with the...

Interviewee: No, they just thought the oil spill would come -- that all would come down and the fishing would be nonexistent, that's what they expected.

Male Interviewer 1: Right, right.

Interviewee: Plus, it'll hurt people on the beach because they, you know, a lot of beach people cancel their charters because they thought they'd be all on the beach which there never was.

Male Interviewer 1: Right, right. So it's an interesting impact of the red ties. It's just the media...

Interviewee: The media presentation.

Male Interviewer 1: And so people don't know how to distinguish the areas and all that.

Interviewee: They're like all the stuff.

Male Interviewer 1: Yeah. Interesting.

Female Interviewer 2: So what you said really had the same number of clients. It hasn't really affected your personal business?

Interviewee: Mine's really has increased [00:26:00] in the last five years I've been down here.

Female Interviewer 2: And that was -- what happened after the oil spill...

Interviewee: Well, that affected me when I was in Tampa. But the clientele was because I mean, they just canceled that one trip. You know, once the whole thing was blown...

Female Interviewer 2: But then anyone not fishing here to like...

Interviewee: No, I was fishing at Tampa at that time. But I would come down here on trips. Yes, yes. But not trips down here weren't. Those people didn't cancel but those up there around Tampa Bay and those in that area did a lot.

Female Interviewer 2: So why do you think like despite of this media, PR activity, why do you think your clientele is doing that? Maybe you actually said your clientele base increase the last five years in spite...

Interviewee: Yeah. It was increased now last summer, the last I would say spring and summer. Now as far as people come in has slowed down. And then it picked back up in the fall and increase. And I've got, you know, I've got more charters and you know, as many as I need right now. And that was because it did slow down because of the media presentation of the red tide.

Female Interviewer 2: Of the red tide. Do people come to fish -- do they talk, they ask you about the red tide?

Interviewee: Yes, they do. And most of them asked before they come.

Female Interviewer 2: They ask you for what?

Interviewee: Before they come when they book the trip.

Male Interviewer 1: They're still asking right now?

Interviewee: Yeah, they want to know is it affected our area? People that don't know me, that aren't our regular client. They want to know, has the red tide affected our fishery.

Male Interviewer 1: And there's some people that could be from not just from Florida, but from Canada and other the international...

Interviewee: Canada, northern states. It's mostly Northerners just down here come right down. Like I said, a few Canadians.

Female Interviewer 2: When they [00:28:00] asked me about that, are they worried about the health impacts or that they're not -- there's not going to be any fish to fish.

Interviewee: Yeah. That's right. They're worried they're going to come down not catch any fish.

Female Interviewer 2: I see.

Interviewee: And they won't pay me \$650 a day not to catch a fish.

Male Interviewer 1: Yeah.

Interviewee: Which is understanding.

Male Interviewer 1: So when Irma hit, you said it didn't have any impact here because the houses are up high. Does it have to do anything special to prepare or...

Interviewee: No. No, because we would go in the summer. I'll go to Tennessee and do small tomato sales deal. So we've prepared our house before we left every summer because I'm a native. So every spring when we left, this house were prepared for hurricane.

Male Interviewer 1: Okay. So you weren't here?

Interviewee: I wasn't here. No, I didn't come back until first week of October.

Male Interviewer 1: Is that right?

Interviewee: Because there was no need for me to come back. You know I mean. They had no infrastructure here.

Male Interviewer 1: Right, right.

Interviewee: And the power was out. I had friends of mine to take care of the house, they're going to go and they came in...

Male Interviewer 1: Checked it out.

Interviewee: Of course they were tickled to death because they cleaned out my pantry of two refrigerators and a big pantry. They came in and cleaned out. But they couldn't get in there before four days because the Plantation Park was flooded. But when they got in here, everything was still, you know, they were closed up. So everything in the freezer was still frozen. They took it and just fed people in town that needed food.

Male Interviewer 1: And no water got up here. How high up are we here?

Interviewee: We're a nine foot elevation.

Male Interviewer 1: Nine foot elevation, wow.

Interviewee: Yeah. So I'm basically I'm about five foot off the ground. But now what these other trailers over here, you know, what happened to them, the older model trailers used to have, you know, they had the ductwork under the trailer. Well, [00:30:00] that's what happened even though the water didn't go inside of your trailer, it came under and knocked the ductwork off for the air conditioning. So my neighbors, two houses over, they didn't get their air conditioner back online until 10th or 11th of November. So they were dealing with -- was trying to eliminate, you know, keep the mold out and all that stuff.

Male Interviewer 1: Right. And what about your boat, did you do something special?

Interviewee: Yeah, I put it -- when I'm going up, as a matter of fact, I take it up and put it into concrete storage building in LaBelle.

Male Interviewer 1: Okay. So everything was...

Interviewee: It's like I said, I'm a llama native and every generation we teach, first thing you do is fill everything you've got, if you're there you feel every container you have with water, because you're ready to cook with it, or you got to use it to flush a toilet. You have canned goods, and you want enough food to where you can cook for at least five days to a week, and some way to prepare it without power. You know, so you want to get a grill or gas grill or something that you can cook on. But the main thing is after that is, if it's going to hit, you go visit people at North. You leave.

Male Interviewer 1: Right, right, right.

Interviewee: And go set it out so.

Male Interviewer 1: Yes.

Female Interviewer 2: Well I don't know. I don't have any other questions. I don't know if you guys...

Interviewee: Go ahead.

Female Interviewer 1: Were you going to say something?

Interviewee: No. Go ahead.

Female Interviewer 1: So you said one of the reasons to moved here because you like it, because there's like, not a ton of development and it's quiet. Do you think that's like one of the main reasons why like a lot of people who live here like, just come here and stay here?

Interviewee: Yeah, because it's a unique person that stays here to live. You know, it's even a unique person that visits really. I've got buddies of mine that are guys that love to come down. They'd go for [00:32:00] tarpon and poker grand and clear water and they come down and fish with me, and they loved it down here as far as fishery but they said, well, they can't even get a girlfriend or their wife to come down here and visit much less move here. And my wife loves it at here as much as I do. She's the reason I build this. She designed it. We build this with the sliding glass door so she can sit in her chair and watch the tarpon roll, watch the hallway across the creek.

Female Interviewer 2: So, do you find out like there's like a kind of a community understanding that you want to avoid development? And like, for example, I don't know if there's any plans or like build hotels or like other things that is a community effort to say no, we don't want this or anything like that?

John Hand: Yes, I don't know you have anything. You know, we got house, we got the condos because you get captain's table and then you get river wilderness and you get the Rod and Gun Club, you know, and then you get Everglade City motel which we all support them with our, you know, as far as lodging goes because I don't do any lodging here. And therefore, they support us with people coming to live in town, they contact one of those guys, you know, so we can support but yes, we tried to -- I think most of us try to, I guess inhibit any major development

Female Interviewer 2: Are there any like specific ways...

John Hand: It was like right now. You're in plantation, the code right now is you can only -- you put it on a mobile home or a manufactured home. That's the only thing you can put back here. This concrete house next to us was done before that was ever -- that's one of the first structures built here on this. And I have aerial overlays when those was first dug out in the late 60's, when there's nothing on here but the sand and the cannals. [00:34:00] But [00:34:00] now, they come up with a proposition since hurricane Irma, there's a few of the people back here, they're locals.

They want to build what they call -- they want approval for a stick built hall, which can be concrete block or wood, whatever but they want to build hall. And so now we're going to go to meetings to have, to see if they -- who wants to approved and who doesn't want it approved. The only problem I see with that is there's a lot of cheap homes back here which part of that's been eliminated since Irma because we still have trailers sitting back here that have never been cleaned up since Irma. They're still sitting there. You know, they should be condemned really. But we had a lot of affordable housing back in here. That was more affordable than if you lived in Everglade city or Chokoloskee, you get here someplace. You know, we've got a problem here in our restaurants and motels

with labor already. So that's a, you know, we see that as a problem is affordable housing, which is a problem everywhere. You know?

Female Interviewer 2: Yeah. That's a Florida problem.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Female Interviewer 1: So there's affordable -- there's a labor issue. But then you said, like, when we talk about these two sides of the people that might be supporting the stick boat home versus not supporting it. Are the people who are not supporting it people who are trying to, you know...

Interviewee: Well, there's two things. A few of that are not supporting it are basically like I said, so we don't want to eliminate affordable housing. And we don't want to change your character of the island. This basically was a, you know, these were all fish camps down in here. That's what developed plantation was basically fish camps. And then also, we don't want people coming in here to build a big, you know, McMansion, that's going to -- everybody [00:36:00] taxes are going to be increased. So that's all in the picture. Does that help?

Female Interviewer 2: What's your feeling with everybody commit? Yeah.

Male Interviewer 1: Yeah. Really. Has the affordable housing issue become even more of a problem since Irma?

Interviewee: Oh, definitely. Because there's probably at least 10 structures that are still sitting there that nobody lives in.

Male Interviewer 1: And has that, I mean, has the people left? They've left the community so there is labor problem?

Interviewee: Yeah. They went to Naples. They went to Naples, and when it first happened, they went to Naples and was under FEMA, staying in apartments or motels or whatever. And then they get jobs in Naples and now they're living in Naples.

Male Interviewer 1: Right. So that's created a labor shortage here in this area? And you work by yourself or you?

Interviewee: Yeah I work by myself.

Male Interviewer 1: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah. I'm strictly by myself.

Male Interviewer 1: So you never relied on that?

Interviewee: No, fortunately.

Male Interviewer 1: Yeah. But for the restaurants and hotels and everything, that's a problem...

Interviewee: Right, right. Definitely. You got it. Looks like and then the café. They used open last year, the last couple of years, so then the café would open for dinner in the evenings from, I think it was Thursday, Friday and Saturday. And they don't do it this year because they said they couldn't get you know, they got the employees will come in from breakfast to three or four o'clock. But then they can't get a whole crew that stays for the evening meal. Most of the, you know, a lot of the women that work there, one of them works three days a week is my neighbor over here and she retired. She's a retired lawyer. She didn't need the work. She doesn't like someone live and so she goes down and work during the day, but she's not going to work at night.

Male Interviewer 1: Right, right.

Interviewee: And there's probably at least four or five of those women that work in that restaurant, which is a major part of their employment. They're retirees that -- some of them just come here part of the year. Because in [00:38:00] our restaurants, so you get triad, triads stays open year round, I think. You get Camilla Grill, Havana Café. You know, they close up. You know, they open from -- they're only open during stone crab season. So you're looking at October 15 to May 15. And then they shut down completely.

Female Interviewer 1: What do you think it's going to look like moving forward? Like, what would be your guess? Do you think they're going to start putting some more structures and some affordable housing and stuff like that?

Interviewee: Well, I don't know about affordable housing. That's on everybody's back burner, apparently.

Female Interviewer 1: Yeah. But do you think they'll built anyway?

Interviewee: I think you'll see once they build a few nice homes in here, I think you'll see other people come in here and do it if it's, you know. I don't see it being -- I see it being improved. And the only thing is, you know, then you had at that same meeting, which you get those meetings everybody goes off into a rabbit hole. But at that same meeting, it was brought up that somebody wanted to change your code to where they could allow people to put RVs on their property here and not build a structure at all.

Female Interviewer 1: Yeah. What do you think about that?

Interviewee: So that's, you know, I'd really say that is the big homes built.

Female Interviewer 1: Yeah. I get that.

Interviewee: Because it's at, I don't know, I guess it's that unique person that's going to come down here and put up a travel trailer at this fish camp. You know what I mean?

Male Interviewer 1: Oh, yeah.

Interviewee: As opposed to somebody's going to come down here and build a big mansion.

Female Interviewer 1: Yeah, *[overlapping conversation]* [00:39:54]

Interviewee: Yeah. Let them build big mansions in Everglades city and Chokoloskee. That's [00:40:00] my opinion. Thanks for listening.

Female Interviewer 1: And then I had a couple -- no, I'm interested in it. I had a couple of other just kind of follow up like environmental questions. So I know you were talking about like, the green mats of...

Interviewee: It wasn't a mat. It's on the bottom. And it's, I forget what they call it. We call it's not (*phonetics*) but it's a moss that's on the bottom, but it's almost like more like a fungus than a moss because it's real fluid. But it'll get to a certain size and then it starts with the movement of the water, it kind of create rolls and it would be kind of like a tumbleweed the length of this table, that kind of stuff.

Female Interviewer 1: Have you noticed any other like, issues with algae like just green algae, where there's been a time where there's been more or less or any changes in water color, anything like that?

Interviewee: I mean just our natural change in water color. You know you get the tannic, you know, it's been windy so you get you know -- this is all mud around here. So you know, we get windy days everything turns -- the water turns muddy. You know, it turns *[indiscernible]* [00:41:19] out there and you can't see the bottom.

Female Interviewer 1: Yeah. And you've never seen any fish kills or like dead fish floating and pockets or anything like that?

Interviewee: Not here.

Female Interviewer 1: Not here, okay and not in the back or anything?

Interviewee: No. Not anywhere down here.

Female Interviewer 2: And I don't have any more questions.

Male Interviewer 1: Are you able to talk to anybody else?

Male Interviewer 2: Yes, we do. I spoke to...

Interviewee: Derek Daffin (*phonetics*) or any of those guys?

Female Interviewer 2: Who?

Interviewee: Derek Daffin?

Female Interviewer 2: We haven't gotten in touch with Derek yet but we spoke to...

Interviewee: He grew up, I mean, he's he grew up here. He's [00:42:00] generational in this area. And he fishes a lot more the outside than I do.

Male Interviewer 1: When you say this area you're talking about the plantation?

Interviewee: Everglade City -- he grew up on the plantations, you know, that's -- if you can talk to him, he's...

Female Interviewer 2: You have his contact?

Female Interviewer 1: I do.

Interviewee: He's got a lot more local history than I do.

Male Interviewer 1: Yeah, that'd be great. That's good, yeah.

Interviewee: I was going to say did you get to see the documentary they did on the oldest swamp on PBS? You ever seen that?

Female Interviewer 2: The swamp? Coral swamp?

Interviewee: Coral swamp.

Female Interviewer 2: Yeah. I've heard of it. I mean...

Interviewee: It's good. It starts with the -- when they drain the swamp, when they started drain in south of Moca Chobe (*phonetics*) and how it went through the history of that. That was pretty good. If you haven't seen it, you need to.

Female Interviewer 1: Yeah. Next time I'm bringing a book on that.

Female Interviewer 2: Gong Wald (*phonetics*), it's based on that book?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think so.

Female Interviewer 2: Gold Wald the journalist?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think so.

Female Interviewer 1: We talked to talk to Bruce Hitchcock. Yeah, we're going to talk to Rockfield later, Rodney Rockfield. We're trying to get hold of his staff but we'll see.

Interviewee: I'm trying to think of somebody else that would be, of course Bob Wills, the realtor because he's old. I mean he knows. Him and his wife, Vicky. See his wife Vicky and her family is from here. Her family owns, you know, her brother owns the air boat deal. Vicky Wills grew up here. And she's in her late 60s I think. Bob's in his 70s.

Male Interviewer 1: Becky? Becky Faulk?

Interviewee: No. Vicky. Vicky Wills, Bob Wills, the realtor out on the highway there.

Female Interviewer 2: Do you have their contact for them? Do you have their phone number or anything?

Interviewee: No.

Male Interviewer 1: And for Derek Daffin?

Female Interviewer 1: I have Derek Daffin. [00:44:00] Yeah. I reached out to him a couple times. I haven't heard back though.

Interviewee: He might not talk to you, I don't know. Like I said, you know, these people down here are unique, different. We don't usually -- it's according to what people are doing...

[overlapping conversation] [00:44:16]

Interviewee: It was something that, you know, my main thing I wanted to get in was the sheet flow and the media deal. If we can get that out there, that's...

Male Interviewer 1: The media, that's really interesting.

Interviewee: What's that?

Female Interviewer 1: You're not the first person.

Interviewee: No, I don't imagine.

Female Interviewer 2: Yeah, I know that's all the for-hire freshmen are, you know *[indiscernible]* [00:44:42] whatever...

Interviewee: Yeah.

Male Interviewer 1: It's really interesting the impact of red tides, you know, that, you know, the red tides in here and still having an impact. It's just really interesting.

Interviewee: That's right. And for no purpose. That's the problem.

Male Interviewer 1: Right.