

Male Interviewer: Tell me when we are ready.

Female Interviewer: Okay. We're recording, our interview with Bruce Hitchcock.

Male Interviewer: So to start off, can you just tell us a little bit about, you know, how long you have been fishing here and what kind of, you know, different fishing activities you've?

Bruce Hitchcock: Well, I've been diving here for 25 years. But I've been fishing here for over 40, 46 years, 45 years.

Female Interviewer: Can you say for the record before you begin, your name?

Bruce Hitchcock: Bruce Hitchcock.

Female Interviewer: Thank you.

Bruce Hitchcock: I do mostly inshore fishing, backcountry fishing.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: One reason is the fishing on the outside this year has been so bad. I don't know if its Red Tide-related or what it is but it's terrible. But the fishing in the backcountry is good.

Male Interviewer: Okay, and when you say backcountry what area specifically are you referring to?

Bruce Hitchcock: Well, no they are not shores but, you know, back in towards...

Male Interviewer: Up in the – more up in the, up in the Everglades?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes. Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Like, let see, yes I see it'd be ...

Male Interviewer: You know that's okay, it might be up..

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, I mean it would be it would be up in here actually.

Male Interviewer: Okay. Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: And, you know, down this way, like, some of these bays here, you know, I'd be fishing on the backside of those bays.

Male Interviewer: Okay. And is that that's this year just because the fishing has been so bad offshore, or do you normally do most of Backcountry?

Bruce Hitchcock: Well, I kind of split it up. I mean, dependent on the weather and what people want to do. Most of the fishing back there is [00:02:00] tarp and fishing and snook fishing which are trapped in it on and snook around a season. So if people want to catch fish to eat then they would be more out, to go out along the coast.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: Trout fishing pelagic species, whatever. But it's I mean, I fished I think it was last Monday I think I went offshore. Fish some of the rags out in here. It was just nonexistent.

Male Interviewer: Well.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. It should just be loaded at least with trout this time of year, but we didn't catch a single trout up here. I ran all the way down to Shark River barge, which is of Shark River about halfway between here and Flamingo and we did catch some fish down there but not so much apparent.

Male Interviewer: Well. So let's, I'd like to talk more about what's happening now. But first, kind of go back sort of historically and just, you know, you said you would start fishing here 40 years ago. I mean, was that just your own, for your own recreation at that time?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: So you weren't doing any sort of commercial fishing?

Bruce Hitchcock: No, I have been 25 years. I've had my permit here in the park.

Male Interviewer: Okay. And is it always been as a guide or have you ever done commercial type fishing?

Bruce Hitchcock: No.

Male Interviewer: No, just, okay as a guy. And what are the differences that you've noticed? Let's say when you started, you know, fishing 40 years ago in comparison to now.

Bruce Hitchcock: Forty years ago, it wasn't hard to catch fish. I mean, you just go anywhere basically and catch fish. Now it's you have to work at it to catch fish.

Male Interviewer: And what kind of - what species were you targeting back then?

Bruce Hitchcock: The same snook, red fish, trout, tarp and...

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: The tarp fishing lot of things changed too much because tarp are migratory fish. And they come through every year, you know, starting in the spring and [00:04:00] so I don't think it has too much effect on that. The red fishing this year is the worst it's ever been in my life.

Male Interviewer: Well.

Bruce Hitchcock: I was talking to a guy the other day at the gas station and he was thinking that maybe to fish it or migrating down are being killed with the Red Tide. And not making it here which kind of make sense. I mean usually and, you know, from like October through winter, redfish sounds really good but I mean it's pathetic. And the ones you are catching are really small most of them.

Male Interviewer: And do they normally migrate down from the...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: ... from the north? Okay. Well, okay. Now have you in the past ever had any experience with red tides before...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: ... in this area?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: You have?

Bruce Hitchcock: The only time I've actually seen it physically here was the year that Hurricane Sandy came by. Sandy past and couple of weeks before that there was like a Tropical Depression that passed and we had a west wind for about three or four weeks and it pushed it in. And I mean, you could actually, you know, smell it and sense it, you know.

Male Interviewer: That's the first one that you actually, you remember?

Bruce Hitchcock: Even hear at the house. Yes.

Male Interviewer: Wow.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Can we - so one of the things that we're doing with these maps is we're trying to actually just sort of record as best as possible spatially. You know, where if people saw those red tides. That was back Hurricane Sandy?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: So we're talking Sandy was split about eight years ago, right? Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: I'm terrible at judging time I have been here.

Male Interviewer: Sandy was in - because I was in the northeast when Sandy hit.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: That's the same Sandy, right? The one that hit, New Jersey?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes. So that was...

Female Interviewer: In 2008, no.

Male Interviewer: That was six years ago, I think maybe 2000, 2012? [00:06:00] Anyway and so that's...

Female Interviewer: It's 2012.

Male Interviewer: Two thousand twelve, okay.

Female Interviewer: Yes.

Male Interviewer: And that's - so that's the first. So you - that's the first one that you actually saw here, had in before 2012. I mean, had you experienced any red tides or impacts of red tides event...

Bruce Hitchcock: Well, I usually experience impacts of red tides. I mean that's it actually came up in here which is very unusual. The way the currents are on the gulf. The water comes down this way and then it goes out. So we are kind of protected in here but that west wind just kept blowing it in.

Male Interviewer: So can you...

Bruce Hitchcock: But I do penalized, you know, I...

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: ...I see dead fish, birds have red tide poisoning. You see that's from time to time. But actually smelling it and, you know, it's affecting your sinuses. That was the only real incident...

Male Interviewer: That was the only. Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Do you remember any times in the past where you saw the, you know, saw the dead fish and the sort of the consequences of red tide in a particularly I don't know, significant way that you sort of remember?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. I mean last summer - summer before last.

And where we are here.

Male Interviewer: So that's, yes, that's one of the reason for this. Is this the one that we've been, that we've been using?

Female Interviewer: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, so we are looking, you know, probably in this area, right in, [00:08:00] where this drop off is right.

Male Interviewer: Can you draw sort of just on the map more or less the area that...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. This was...

Male Interviewer: Where you wrote the same things.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, it's actually off this, but here it would be, you know, in this area...

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: ... probably down this way kind of in here. There's a couple of barges out here I don't know if they're in. Yes I think these two right here. But I mean just thousands and thousands...

Male Interviewer: So basically just in this area?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes and this.

Female Interviewer: That's 2012 after the Hurricane Sandy?

Male Interviewer: No, no this was two years ago.

Bruce Hitchcock: No, that was, yes.

Female Interviewer: Two years ago.

Bruce Hitchcock: That was like 17.

Male Interviewer: So, so 20. How you guy have been marking this map.

Female Interviewer: Yeah I know just began through.

Male Interviewer: And this was, what kind of things that you see they're like, you know...

Bruce Hitchcock: Just massive amount of dead fish.

Male Interviewer: And what kind of fish were you?

Bruce Hitchcock: Mostly small fish like bait fish.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: You know, it's a little bit bigger like grunts and snappers and things like that. No real big fish like snook or tarp or anything like that.

Male Interviewer: Okay. And so that was 2017, right?

Female Interviewer: Yes.

Male Interviewer: And then can you show us where you saw the red tide in after Sandy in 2012? What area you kind...

Bruce Hitchcock: Well...

Male Interviewer: What area you [overlapping conversation]

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, I mean, yes I would just...

Male Interviewer: Yeah you can use the different well.

Bruce Hitchcock: From - just from, you know, where I was fishing and located just kind of in this area right in here.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: But it was, you know, here at the dock it actually bothered me.

Male Interviewer: Well.

Bruce Hitchcock: I was up but homeless is not homeless [00:10:00] Inglewood couple of months ago, walking the beach and man it was so brutal up there. I mean, you could barely breathe.

Male Interviewer: Couple of months ago?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: And where is Inglewood?

Bruce Hitchcock: It's up South of Tampa.

Male Interviewer: Okay. That was just on the beach where you...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, it was just there, there are sharks' teeth on the beach up there we were just walking the beach looking for sharks' teeth. But it was, I mean it's terrible.

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: And that's very unusual to have red tide that late in the year.

Male Interviewer: Yes, yes. Well no, yes, that's why we're...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: ... so concerned about it. So this, how long did the red tide stay around in this incident 2012?

Bruce Hitchcock: Maybe a week or two. Once the winds, you know, switch back out of the East it was back out.

Male Interviewer: Okay and...

Female Interviewer: And was it dead fish that you notice in...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Female Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: ... and birds.

Female Interviewer: And birds?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. You see a lot of East, you know, the fish come and go, you know, they flip up to the surface and maybe in two days they sink back to the bottom. But the birds you see them on the beach and they're like, you know they're drunk and kind of walk around and fall over because it affects your nervous system.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: And dead birds. I saw dead birds last week, Monday when I was out here. I saw two, I don't know if they were like boobies or some big sea bird. You know, it looks like a giant seagull.

Male Interviewer: Well.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. Just and floating in the open ocean.

Male Interviewer: And so this, in 2017, how long did you continue to see the dead fish and birds out in that area?

Bruce Hitchcock: Just - I was just out there, you know, like two days and I saw them, there wasn't any fish out there to catch anyway so I went somewhere else.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: I go out there and the fish aren't biting. I'm not going to get back out there. [00:12:00]

Male Interviewer: Right. So before this recent incident was there anything else that you would - that you would see, in terms of red tides you know before like 2012 that you remember?

Bruce Hitchcock: No, not that I can, you know, honestly say that it was red tide. I mean sometimes you'll see small fish kills here and there. I mean we had a whale. Did you hear about the whale that came in here a couple weeks ago?

Female Interviewer: No.

Male Interviewer: A couple weeks ago?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, Brutus Whale.



Male Interviewer: Oh, I did hear about that, yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: And I also read that there were eight dolphins in the same area that whale was in, which is a, it's quite a ways further south in this. And they found 40 other dolphins dead in the park in November, they said.

Male Interviewer: And what do they think was?

Bruce Hitchcock: They inconclusive that it was leaning towards red tide.

Male Interviewer: The red tide?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: So in, you know, the more recent after 2017. I mean, have you what are the sort of the impacts of the red tide that you've seen down here? Because, we've had that big red tide, you know, North...

Bruce Hitchcock: Well, it's affected the fishing. There's very little bait. You know, we have - most of the base species are migratory. They migrate from the north, down and down, I mean, if you've seen pictures of them up around Naples, Marco, Tampa are just billions of them dead.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: So they're not here. So the fish aren't here because there's nothing for them to eat.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: And did you see, you didn't see any red tide though actually in the water this far south in the areas that you fish?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: And did you see any of these events in the water where you saw a dead fish in?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, I mean offshore. From time to time, you'll see, you know, a few hands full of [00:14:00] floating fish. But they're probably fish that, you know, floated down from further north. I mean, I can't say for sure but that my fear.

Male Interviewer: No, a specific area where you remember seeing, you know, huge areas of dead fish or anything like that?

Bruce Hitchcock: No.

Male Interviewer: Okay. How does - how has this like, for example, in this 2012 red tide. I mean, did this affect your business at all?

Bruce Hitchcock: Not as much as this is affecting. This time is affecting the business. I mean, every single person that calls me ask repeatedly what the red tide situation is. And I'm sure it's driven or I didn't know for a fact and it's driven a lot of business away. And I've got some guys that fish with me that have winter homes in Boca Grande, which is up in here, some well, I have been here somewhere. And they didn't fish with me this year because they didn't go to Boca Grande because Boca Grande has such bad red tide.

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: And I mean literally every single person that calls from around the country is it worth coming down, you know, what the red tide, I'm like well, we don't really have it here. But you know...

Male Interviewer: The fishing, that's good.

Bruce Hitchcock: Well, the backcountry ...

Male Interviewer: Backcountry is good.

Bruce Hitchcock: ... have been fantastic. I guess the fish have just moved back there because that's where their food supply is. It definitely has affected.

Male Interviewer: So you think actually the fishing has been better backcountry just because the fish have been following the food backup in that?

Bruce Hitchcock: I can't say its better.

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: But it's good, yeah.

Male Interviewer: It's good, okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. We had an event in Hurricane Irma. There's an area it's not on here but it's down in this area. It's a backcountry area but it - hurricane killed all the fish that were in that area. I mean, tens of thousands of snook in there. [00:16:00]

Male Interviewer: Well.

Bruce Hitchcock: Unrelated, you know, the pollution. I think it's just it's a real shallow area and there's very little current. So there's a lot of sediment on the bottom. And the hurricane disturbed sediment and suffocated it. That really could have hurt them, because that's where I usually fish in the winter.

Male Interviewer: Oh.

Bruce Hitchcock: And the fish, the small snook have moved back in there, you know, but they're all about that big and people don't come down here to catch fish that big.

Male Interviewer: Well.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: So and what area was that and you said it's off of this map.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, it's called Topher Creek.

Male Interviewer: Topher Creek

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Female Interviewer: [indiscernible] [00:16:39].

Male Interviewer: So it's a big one right?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. It's probably not.

It's not even on this but it's between these two rivers right here. It's up in this area.

Female Interviewer: Okay. Oh, sorry, can you show me on this.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, it's between that's Chatham river it's right in the middle of these two rivers. There's a creek that goes up and there's some big bays back in here. It's called Topher Creek, T-O-P-H-E-R.

Male Interviewer: Oh, that's Irma, Irma-related for snook?

Bruce Hitchcock: That's kind of a common occurrence here when you have a hurricane. And you know that direct area, it kills the fish in there. In freeze, we had a freeze seven years ago killed all the fish down here.

Male Interviewer: A freeze. [00:18:00]

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: How long did it take - does it usually take for those areas to sort of come back, you said, the small ones are coming back in?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, the small ones are coming back in. You know, it'll probably take those fish four or five years to, you know, reaching a decent size. There used to be a lot of red fish in there. Probably about three years ago, we had an event that killed all of them. And they haven't come back.

Male Interviewer: What kind of event was it?

Bruce Hitchcock: I think it was an oxygen problem. We had like, four or five days of real cloudy weather. And it's like I said, it's real shallow. And there's a lot of algae in there. And I think the algae, just ate all the oxygen and wasn't photosynthesizing and so it didn't replenish it. And it was funny because there were snook in there and red fish. But the snook left and the red fish stayed and they died. And then a couple days after they died, the snook came back in there again. It's like they knew. And typically red fish are much harder to fish than a snook is. You know, they can live in your bait well for a couple days.

Male Interviewer: So is algae - has other kinds of algae come across from around here. It's just in a natural normal.

Bruce Hitchcock: No, it's not. Primarily that's normal but it's not - it's natural, but it's not normal. There's hardly any seagrass left here. And that's from algae that grows on the grass and, you know, clocks the sun out and it kills it. That's been going on for years.

Male Interviewer: That's the Everglades that whole Everglades contamination issue, yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: I mean, that's affected this place more than anything. Birds, I mean, the whole food chain is affected by it. Because the grass is the basis of the food chain and here that's where all the little swamp and little minute live [00:20:00] things like that and you take those out of the equation.

You know the next size fish up aren't there. Like pen fish, you don't catch pen fishing anymore. You used to catch him by the hundreds if you want it for bait. The trout typically live in the grass, that's their preferred environment. But now you don't catch them. I mean there's not any grass up in here.

Once you get down towards Lostmans River, which is from here on down, the grass is pretty good down there. So the trout fishing is a lot better down there and, you know...

Female Interviewer: Where on then...

Bruce Hitchcock: From Lostmans River south to like Shark River. The grass is a lot better down there. I think because the rivers down there don't have the influx of pollutants that the rivers up here get because they go up until like just the Everglades. These rivers up here are tied into the water that comes down 41 and the drainage canals. And, you know, there's other drainage canals that come in down here that dump into these river.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: So the pollutants or nutrients are coming in more I think at here then they are way down there. I think that's probably why the grass is better down there.

Male Interviewer: And how long ago did you start to notice the effects of?

Bruce Hitchcock: That's 20 years.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Female Interviewer: That's when they start to be more dramatic.

Male Interviewer: Going back into the 90s, right?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: That's when they really started it.

Bruce Hitchcock: I mean used to be you could just run straight out here. Stop between any Island. Look down the bottoms covered with turtle grass and the water is clear. And throw a rod out catch a fish like that. Now, you go out there, its mud. And if you get any wind whatsoever there is a mud at, because there's nothing hold the mud down.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: So the water's [00:22:00] way dirtier, you know, clarity wise in it, than it was 20 years ago which also has an effect on the grass that's there because it's blocking the sunlight from it.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: And in the snowball effect on it.

Male Interviewer: Have you ever gone through a period like you're experiencing now where there just aren't fish coming down from the, apparently from the north, you know, maybe as a red tie, or just there aren't fish out enough? You know, offshore.

Bruce Hitchcock: Not really, not like it was this year. I mean, it's definitely a lot worse than it's ever been. In some year it's cyclical, you know, some years are better efficient and others out there. But this year is just like. And I think the same with the stone crabbers, I have been hearing a lot of reports.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: From them that they're not catching, really catching crabs, you know, and the numbers I should be catching.

Male Interviewer: Right, right.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: And is that further north or is that all the way down here...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, that are all through the area.

Male Interviewer: All through the area.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Because they fish, from most of these guys here, fish over here south, you know, all the way down towards the keys.

Male Interviewer: And it's still been affecting their catch as well in the south?

Bruce Hitchcock: We better talk to, yes.

Male Interviewer: Well, it's interesting.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. I don't know. We need to get it under control or we're all going to be in trouble, I think.

Male Interviewer: Yes. So what are the some of the major ways that your business has changed, you know, since you started, you know, 25 years ago?

Bruce Hitchcock: I mean, you have ups and downs, the economy, you know, when the economy was bad business was not good. I actually started doing photography tours, the company, you know, to make up for the fishing business because...

Male Interviewer: Yes, well.

Bruce Hitchcock: The fishing business really took a hit. It's kind of a luxury item. And, you know, you tell your wife, you're going to go spend 600 bucks to go fishing when you don't have a lot of money.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: She says no. [00:24:00] but the photography people are like retirees that have a lot of extra money. So that really filled in.

Male Interviewer: So there's a whole group that prefer to do photography then...

Bruce Hitchcock: Oh yes.

Male Interviewer: ... they actually go fishing?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. And they don't and some of them overlap, but a lot of them don't.

Male Interviewer: Interesting.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. And then, you know, once the economy got going again, I kind of got away from that because it's boring. Sitting here watching other people take pictures.

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: And, you know, the hurricane Irma really affected business.

Male Interviewer: Yes, let's what was the impact of Irma? We actually came through here, like a couple weeks.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: You know, after Irma, and it was...

Bruce Hitchcock: Sandy.

Male Interviewer: Yes. This - was it essentially the influence of the water coming in again?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. I mean, the winds were just...

Male Interviewer: The surge.

Bruce Hitchcock: ... unbelievable. But the winds didn't do all that much damage. I mean trees and some of the older places here the roofs flew off things like that and it tipped over. There was a bunch of trailers over there gloom over a bit. And when that water comes in and that's what really does the damage.

Male Interviewer: How high was the surge here?

Bruce Hitchcock: That was up to dead bone on this door.

Male Interviewer: Wow.

Bruce Hitchcock: I stayed here through Wilma and Irma. And Irma was significantly worse.

Male Interviewer: Wow.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, it was scary. I don't - I don't know if I'll do it next time.

Male Interviewer: What was...

Female Interviewer: Are you right here in this house?

Bruce Hitchcock: I stayed. There's a little motel.

Female Interviewer: Oh, you did, oh I see.

Bruce Hitchcock: Motel, yes. Here's a picture from that house over there. That's my house. It's in the middle of the water down there.

Male Interviewer: Oh my gosh. What did you do with your boat [00:26:00] during that?

Bruce Hitchcock: My boats were under that house right there, underneath the porch of it. Those are very strong structures. So, you know, it was protected from debris.

Male Interviewer: Okay. And in the eye of the storm I came down and the water was about where it is right now. And within about 15 minutes it was over the dock. So I hooked my truck up to my big boat, moved it up by the motel, came back. By the time I came back and got this boat out from under there was already about six inches of water under the house. And then with that another 20, 30 minutes there was three feet of water.

Male Interviewer: Oh my gosh and you're moving it around when the storm...



Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: ... would actually coming in?

Bruce Hitchcock: And the wind blew my glasses off. And I couldn't see, it was freaking nightmare.

Male Interviewer: The house, yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: It's an experience. I don't know if you've ever been to one but I mean the power is unbelievable.

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes, I've been through a couple of it.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes. Irma wasn't bad for us, you know.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: We live in South Florida this time. But, yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: I don't know, we're at the motel up there. The front of the motel faces, kind of Northwest. So the first half of the storm, the wind was blowing over top of the building, so we were out on the porch watching it. And it's, big trees like this bigger just snapping off at the ground.

Male Interviewer: Wow.

Bruce Hitchcock: And just, you're thinking wow, and then a roof from that like, flew over and hit the side of the building and it folded across the top of the roof and started banging. And I thought the roof was coming off from the hotel. So that was kind of freaky.

Male Interviewer: Oh my gosh.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: So how did that compare to Wilma?

Bruce Hitchcock: Wilma was pretty bad. We didn't have as much water here as we did in Irma. And I don't think the winds were as high. We didn't have the tree damage

[00:28:00] that we had. But it came through at night. So it's hard to, you know, to really see the significance of it. But it didn't, I mean, it snapped all the power poles off on the Island, they were just broke off the ground. And it didn't do that in Irma. I lost my house in Wilma. My house was on the ground.

Male Interviewer: Oh my gosh. So how long did it take to sort of recover from, you know, from Wilma, let say?

Bruce Hitchcock: Wilma took me, you know, a couple of years to really get back to normal. Because I had a place here and I after the storm, I remodel that trailer that was on this lot, where I put on this lot. And then one of the other owners down there, put a house on stilts like this. I didn't know it was possible to do it, you know, legally. And once I saw him do that, I said, well, that's the way to go. So I sold the trailer to someone else and then built this place.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Wilma, I mean it probably took me two years and when I get back to normal. Irma took me probably I don't know, three months, three or four months. I mean it wiped all the everything down here the screen cage. I just finished remodel on that ramp. it had three or four feet of water and a mud and it tear all the drywall start over again.

Male Interviewer: Oh yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: And, you know, just getting all your stuff back together again. And the boat was, were all underwater so and that take those all apart and redoing.

Male Interviewer: Well, what about in terms of fishing? I mean, how do the storm affect the, you know, the fish and...

Bruce Hitchcock: Well, like I said it killed those fish down there in Tropher Creek.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: But all in all, the fishing after the storm is unbelievable. I had quite a week after the storm one of my clients called and, I want to come down and get fishing but then and there is things are really massed [00:30:00] down here because you need to get out away from the, you know, the disaster. All right so we went out fish couple days it was unbelievable.

Male Interviewer: Wow.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Why do you think that the fishing was really good?

Bruce Hitchcock: No idea.

Female Interviewer: Did you experienced that after Wilma too?

Bruce Hitchcock: Not that I recall now. I probably didn't fish that much right after Wilma. It was just because I was homeless basically. So, you know, I was - I had more important things on my mind that at that time but we went out and just on one of the islands we cut 25 snooks that were, I mean every one of them was over slot [indiscernible] [00:30:42] and just tarp and I mean just hundreds of tarp in around.

Male Interviewer: Oh my god.

Bruce Hitchcock: That's totally good. And then I mean, there's a lot of red fish around then, and then the red fishing just went to pot. I don't know.

Male Interviewer: How long after Irma, did you notice that the, you know, the red fishing start...

Bruce Hitchcock: I would say probably about a - probably about a month after.

Male Interviewer: Oh, really?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: So the fishing was really, really good at the beginning and then it was...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. I mean, there was still...

Male Interviewer: ... red fish in particular. [Overlapping conversation] [00:31:14].

Bruce Hitchcock: I mean, the trout fishing last year was phenomenal in the winter. It's like the best I've ever seen.

Male Interviewer: Wow.

Bruce Hitchcock: And the snook, you know, the snook fishing, which is backcountry. So it's kind of unrelated, you know, to the outside. It was really good.

Male Interviewer: And how long has it been since you started to notice this sort of complete decline in fishing that you say is sort of happened this year?

Bruce Hitchcock: I would say the last - I'm a terrible judge of time. But I would say probably the last three months that, you know, the fishing on the outside is really

declined. [00:32:00] Kind of coincides with when they had this really bad out or the red tide blend...

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: ... to the north of it. So yes, a lot of that is probably due to migration because that period of time, you know, like October/November is when things really start to migrate down, you know, the bait fish and the redfish and not so much the trout. But I think the lack of bait is what's driving the trout fishing. Because there's nothing for them to eat, they're not going to be there.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: And starve to death.

Male Interviewer: So that that migration of the bait fish was affected and so the larger fish...

Bruce Hitchcock: I think that's really the biggest factor.

Male Interviewer: But you never seen that happen before. This is the first time basically, to that?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, I mean, sometimes you'll see, you know, pictures from like Naples and Marco and up that way of bait fish death. But it's not on the scale that it was this year. I mean, you get - they come down by the billions. And they can be anywhere from the shoreline out to, you know, 20 miles, maybe more. And, you know, sometimes if you have an event, you know, closer to the shore, it'll kill in a small pods of them. But the ones that are out further, you know, they make it down. And you probably wouldn't notice the difference in the amount of bait fish. But this year, you do.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: I mean, the bait fish has been in decline for 20 years because of the grass situation. Because they don't like to be above sand or mud because it doesn't give them any cover. You know, from birds or what have you.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: So they like to be over grass. And it just - it gives them a place to live. I mean, if a bait fish is sitting over mud, if some swims by, there's no, for it too high, it's just going to get eaten.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: So they tend to just go somewhere else.

Male Interviewer: Now [00:34:00] have you heard of red tide? I mean, farther north up in Naples, Marco Island, all that?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: That's a frequent - that's more frequent up there?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes for sure. Yes. Actually from Cape Romano in north, because Cape Romano is where the current goes offshore. So this from here downs generally protected.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Because the prevailing winds are east. So it's blowing it out this way anyway. And if it comes down here and the current is going out, the winds blowing it out, that's why we rarely get it. But I mean...

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: ... it's constant. Up until a couple weeks ago, they would had red tide in Cape Romano.

Male Interviewer: Oh wow.

Bruce Hitchcock: I mean, you see it on the news every day.

Female Interviewer: That's kind of interesting, where is Cape Romano?

Bruce Hitchcock: In right here.

Female Interviewer: So we made like a, you said, it's a kind of like that?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. So this area...

Female Interviewer: So, it's [overlapping conversation] because of the current?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. And the prevailing wind.

Male Interviewer: This area here has...

Bruce Hitchcock: It's kind of...

Male Interviewer: ... is protected?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Right up above this area.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Female Interviewer: It's been a while yeah.

Male Interviewer: This is the red tide.

Bruce Hitchcock: I mean, I saw, I guess it was last week they had - actually they had a little bit out in this...

Male Interviewer: In that Cape Romano?

Bruce Hitchcock: Out in here. They showed some out in here, you know, up from here, up in here. There's some pretty serious concentrations for this time of year.

Male Interviewer: Where did you see that, sir?

Bruce Hitchcock: Just on the news.

Male Interviewer: On the news, okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: I have some friends that live on the east coast. And, you know, I have friends that live in different places like, I have a buddy that lives in Hudson and he said, he's just going to sell it to the firm consider this sense and go on fishing. But I have friends that live in Fort Lauderdale, which never have any red tide. And they had it this year because they were pumping water down and pumping it out the canals so there's Creek New River. The guy swims every day on the beach and lobster dives off the beach and he said it's the first time [00:36:00] he's ever seen red tide in there, in serious algae lamps.

Male Interviewer: And they think that's because - how is they're pumping water from over here to get it to the Fort Lauderdale?

Bruce Hitchcock: No, they are pumping, instead of pumping water from Lake Okeechobee out the St. Lucie River.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: Throughout the Caloosahatchee River in the St. Lucie River. They're pumping it down like Miami canal and then pumping it out the canals, the drainage canals that run east down to Fort Lauderdale.

Male Interviewer: [indiscernible] [00:36:25] yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. The time it takes some of the pressure off of Caloosahatchee and the St. Lucie areas that are decimated rather sending it south. And they don't really want to set it out.

Female Interviewer: But this has been going on for a while now, right? Using the Miami canal to?

Bruce Hitchcock: I don't think is significantly as it is this year. Because I mean, this guy is really intend to, you know, what the beach conditions are like there. Because like I say he swims almost every day and he said it's just unbelievable.

Male Interviewer: Wow.

Bruce Hitchcock: And it's just this year and within the last couple months that he's really noticed that.

Male Interviewer: The red tide and the algae?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. I mean, the algae comes and goes, but it's never been as bad as it is. And they never had the red tide down in that area.

Male Interviewer: Wow.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: But in this area, you say it's...

Bruce Hitchcock: It's almost constant.

Male Interviewer: ... frequent.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: But I mean, over the years, over time, or just this year, you're talking about?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, the further north you get, the further you get up towards the Caloosahatchee River, the more prevalent it is. I guess is that it right there.

Male Interviewer: So you think the red tide there, these red tides are related in some way to the...

Female Interviewer: Okeechobee.

Male Interviewer: ... Okeechobee?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, well. I don't see any question. I mean, they, they sugarcoat it to make it look like it's not. But I mean it's pretty evident [00:38:00] when you see massive red tide blooms in this area. And it thins out as you go away from it.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: And then they start pumping the water over there and you start seeing it over there. And it starts where the canals dump out, you know, the drainage canals. And it just kind of dissipates as it gets away from them. So it's, I mean it's not all Okeechobee, but a big part of it is.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: I mean, in my mind it is. I've got some of my neighbors are huge farmers, Hillier brothers next door, they're huge stories across the street. They have And tens of thousands of acres. Oh, no, it doesn't have any effect at all the lakes healthy. Yes. Now.

Male Interviewer: The lake's healthy?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, the lakes are dope.

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Female Interviewer: So, but I'm still not clear. So this is like you notice frequent or you heard of it frequently in the past year, it's not only [indiscernible] [00:39:02].

Bruce Hitchcock: No, it's always. I mean, every summer.

Female Interviewer: Always like when?

Bruce Hitchcock: This is most of this is summer. And typically in the winter, it pretty much goes away. This year, there's been more, we've had more rain in this winter than we've had in previous winners. But there's been a lot more red tide present later in the year, you know, in the winter time which is typical it's gone.



Female Interviewer: Uh-huh. So, you have heard of red tide since, you know, 40 years or like 20...

Bruce Hitchcock: Red tides have been here for hundreds of years.

Female Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Female Interviewer: But in this area, this kind of area of concentration.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes

Female Interviewer: When it's like the first time you became aware?

Bruce Hitchcock: It's always been like that.

Female Interviewer: Always, okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. But it's not on the scale that it is.

Female Interviewer: Right. So red, like, so you've noticed the kind of changing scale, 20 years ago, you mentioned 20 years ago.

Bruce Hitchcock: Well, it's probably been going on longer [00:40:00] than that. But I mean 20, 25 years ago there were drastic changes and, you know, in the sea life, especially the grass situation.

Female Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. It's just too many people in general. I mean, some of this is coming down from Naples. There's a canal that comes down along 41. And there's one that comes down 29 that goes up to like Ave, Maria and all that Western communities up there. And water comes down to those canals. I mean, they pump it through there, you can see it flowing.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: Port of the islands that canal that comes out there, tied into that whole system.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: So, that's – that...

Male Interviewer: And most of that development has been fairly recent, right?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes, you see all that and when you drive north and now it's like.

Bruce Hitchcock: Saying how many houses are building and...

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: ... and fancy, you know, gulf course houses with really nice lawn.

Male Interviewer: Right, right.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: And they are not very upscale type stuff.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. So fertilizer, tons and tons of fertilizer.

Male Interviewer: So you think that's just that - that's been a big part of just building the pressure?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, everything is contributes to it. You know, we are just done too many people.

Male Interviewer: And do you, I mean, so you talked about the grasses have probably been the disappearing of the seagrass has probably been the major influence on those things. And so what are the major, sort of impacts on fish distributions? And I mean, have you seen any impact on any spawning aggregations, other kinds of fish distribution?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, I mean, the snook spawns, you know, 20 years ago, you would go down to certain islands, you know, down the coast where they spawn. And you would see schools of fish. You know, hundreds, several hundred fish spawning. Now, if you see 10 in a spot or 15, maybe that's a big deal.

Male Interviewer: Well, so really, the spawning aggregations have declined

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. [00:42:00] And the further south you go the better it is. I mean, you get down like I say, by Lostmans River, you start getting good grass. And all the way down to shark or probably past shark. I don't fish down that way that often. But there's just a lot more fish down there. And because there's a lot more habitat for them down there.

Male Interviewer: Right. So generally when there's some impact, you know, offshore, you end up fishing in more in that country?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: That's the way you adjust to that?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, because I have to catch fish.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: If I don't catch fish I don't have happy customer.

Male Interviewer: You live exclusively off of your charter business?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Okay. And have you ever had like, major, I mean, you talked about the economic situation that's what the Great Recession...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: ... back in 2007, 2008, that sort of that was one big major lull in your fishing activities. Were there any other ones like that that you remember where you sort of were struggling to keep afloat or whatever?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, I mean, after both the hurricanes, it had serious impact on it. And this year, the red tides had serious impact. The oil spill had serious impact on business. I have a buddy that I grew up with that lives in Fort Lauderdale and he's like, man, how are you doing over there? And I'm like, good. He says what about the oil spill? I'm like dude the oil spill is 500 miles from here. It's just, people just don't know and that guy lives here. Can you imagine what people like in Germany or Italy what they'd think.

Male Interviewer: So people weren't coming here to fish?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Just because they thought because it was in the Gulf?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. I still have people call and asked me, do you think the fish are safe to eat from the oil spill?

Male Interviewer: Huh?

Bruce Hitchcock: Maybe that stuff floats down a little bit but, you know, not in not in any significant amount [00:44:00]. You know, you don't see oil floating around or anything like that.

Male Interviewer: All Right. And how long did it take for business to come back after hurricanes?

Bruce Hitchcock: It gradually. The hurricanes, you know, are probably the least, you know, a couple months.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: It's hurt, it hurt this town, Irma hurt this town a lot. Because it took a lot of the restaurants out. There's not a lot of places for people to eat. It took out some of the motels and that word gets around. I mean, the internet's like the greatest thing in the world for business or the worst thing in the world for business. So people all over the world know that you know, the place is in disarray and I think it's still affecting business.

Male Interviewer: Well. So you've noted a decline in your business since Irma. It hasn't come back yet to sort of...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, I wouldn't really say a decline in it because I'm smart enough to get it from somewhere else or, you know, to draw more business from somewhere some other way. But the business overall has been, you know, affected a lot.

Male Interviewer: But that's by marketing online more in a different way or?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Okay. So you just sort of change your marketing strategy?

Bruce Hitchcock: Well I did the photography thing.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: You just have to kind of adapt to the situation and spend more money on advertising.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: See, I typically don't have to because I've been doing this for 25 years. And I've kind of, let's say, halfway retired. I mean, I have some money saved that. So I don't have to work every day. Like, you know, some people do that have families and try to fish make a living that way. So I don't have to work every single day.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: I mean, I work a lot more than I probably should. But...

Male Interviewer: How often do you go out normally?

Bruce Hitchcock: Almost every day this time of year. I'm off today and I'm back on tomorrow.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: [00:46:00] But just in the overall scheme of things it's hurt business, the Europeans and so we get a lot of Europeans here. Not so much fishing but, you know, ecotourism and just come into city Everglades.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: And that's down for sure. I mean, I've talked to a lot of different people in restaurants and motels and the people in those kayak tour business. They're kind of the same as I am though, you know, they compensate in some other way to get business.

Male Interviewer: Okay. But they feel like I mean, the tourists aren't coming because they still think that there's devastation related to the hurricane here or it just.

Bruce Hitchcock: Somewhat, yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: And the lack of restaurants. I mean, there were, you know, there were couple of restaurants that completely shut down like the oyster house completely shut down because the building was moved and destroyed but unsafe.

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: Havana cafe doesn't serve dinner anymore. So the only restaurant you have for dinner really are Camellia street grill and Island cafe and Island cafe is just like a diner. So it's nothing fancy. Camellia is pretty decent restaurant but people, if you're going on vacation, you want to be able to go out and eat and...

Male Interviewer: Right.

Bruce Hitchcock: ... live the good life. You don't want to suffer. So I think that has an effect.

Male Interviewer: Well. So and after Wilma was there a similar situation? I mean, did business decline for a while. And then sort of take time to build back?

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, Wilma that was that was different. Wilma decimated this island, but Everglades City has almost zero effect on it. Just the way that the I came through and it was a tight storm. So I mean [00:48:00] this place down here in my house was

destroyed. I was living in a tent for a while. But I could drive to Everglades City and go to any of the restaurants, I could go to the Circle K and get gas, what have you. This time Everglades City got hit just as bad as we did, so it's more of a widespread thing.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, Wilma was just concentrated to this island.

Male Interviewer: So, business came back pretty quickly.

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes. But the hotels and restaurants over in Everglades City have also been impacted as a result to Irma. So, when you're talking about the restaurants and hotels, you're talking about Everglades City as well. So, this whole area, sort of the infrastructure for tourism has...

Bruce Hitchcock: See, we're kind of, you know, even though it's two different communities, they're kind of tied together because a lot of people stay in Everglades City, come down here and fish, you know, stay in the motels, go there to eat. But when both of them are gone, then you've got to go to Naples or Marco. And those are both, you know, 45 minutes to an hour away so that just gives people a reason to go somewhere else.

Male Interviewer: Right, right. Okay, I think that's pretty much the questions. You guys have any other anything, I've missed? Yes.

Female Interviewer: Just one question. Her mapping purposes, this area, this 2017 area where you said you saw like a lot of dead fish. How far did it extend like if this was like a shape tide this one where you were able to draw? So, let's...

Bruce Hitchcock: Actually it would extend. Probably, see this is just in my experience.

Female Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: I wasn't, I would say...

Male Interviewer: Well, it's just what you saw or what you experience.

Bruce Hitchcock: I would say the area would be just pavilion key. So, it would be kind of more like, this area down off a pavilion key [00:50:00]. Because these racks that efficient are now here, here and like here.

So I was coming out of here running out and fish in these places. That's when I saw the, you know, the event.

Female Interviewer: What are the Rex named?

Bruce Hitchcock: I think - here's one right here. This is, we called it the six-mile Barge and then a mile north of it, a mile of north of it is another little rack right here. That was the contents of the barge. It tipped over here and they were sure big cover pipes, concrete cover pipes. They fell on the water and then they pull up the barge down here and they finally say and then there's a another barge out here that's 12 miles. And then these two are just one of the private racks. There's not anything significant.

Male Interviewer: Not only you fish off of those. Those different racks is it?

Bruce Hitchcock: If I go offshore.

Male Interviewer: If you offshore. Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Or shark, you know, down toward shark river. But that's completely it's 45 miles.

Male Interviewer: Would a client asked specifically for that or you would do that in response to what they kind of...

Bruce Hitchcock: Usually, when I do it, I do it because I want to do it. Like last Monday when I went down there. It's a cool place. So, there's, I mean, you cut - we cut pumping air down there, which I like a lot. And there's usually cobias down there, this time of year [00:52:00]. There's a lot of permit. I mean, it's kind of so far out of the way that it doesn't get a lot of traffic. I mean, people that have been with me over the years that have been there...

Male Interviewer: You took some clients down there or you just...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes. I take clients. Yes. I mean, when I'm fishing clients, I kind of do what I want to do and what interests me and what, where the best fishing is going to be, I get bored.

Male Interviewer: So, you just take them with, let's try this. This is going to be a good experience and yes, if you're having a good time, they'll probably going to be having...

Bruce Hitchcock: Yes, they're going to - we're having a great time.

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Bruce Hitchcock: If it blows my skirt up, it's really going to be something good. All right, anything else?

Male Interviewer: No, this is great.

Female Interviewer: Yes. Those were all my questions.

Male Interviewer: Okay.

Bruce Hitchcock: Great.

Female Interviewer: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Well, thanks so much.

Bruce Hitchcock: You're welcome.

Male Interviewer: We really appreciate your time. And this is really, really helpful information. I would imagine at some point you're probably going to be seeing, you know, some news and things coming out about the study that we're doing. So, we're trying to, you know, sorting out this red tide issue...

Female Interviewer: I hope we can get it under control.

Male Interviewer: ... draw attention to it and figure out, you know...

Female Interviewer: [indiscernible] [00:53:19] you mentioned at the beginning that we would like to use this interview possibly [Indiscernible] [00:53:24] project, you know, get it online and make it available to the public and researchers for that we would like to get your consent that we can do that.

Bruce Hitchcock: Sign now?

Female Interviewer: Yes.

Male Interviewer: Yes.

Female Interviewer: If you would agree.

Bruce Hitchcock: Here you go.