

**Interview with Parker Poole, marine salvage/towing and commercial fisherman**

**Occupation:** marine salvage/towing and commercial fisherman

**Port Community:** Portland, Maine

**Interviewer:** Sarah Schumann

**Date and year:** March 1, 2019

**Location:** Rockport, Maine

**Project:** The Graying of the Fleet Part II: How and Why Young Fishermen Choose to Fish?

**Transcriber:** Sarah Schumann

[Start of interview]

[00:00]

Sarah Schumann [SS]: I'm Sarah Schumann. Today is March 1, 2019. I'm in Rockport, Maine, and I'm with Parker Poole. Parker, could you please state your occupation?

Parker Poole [PP]: I own a marine towing and salvage company and am a commercial fisherman, amongst other various side jobs.

SS: For commercial fishing, would you call yourself a part-time commercial fisherman or do you call yourself fulltime?

PP: I used to be a fulltime commercial fisherman, and I've gone more to part-time in the past few years, as I've kind of branched off to the towing and salvage business. I don't have a lot of opportunities in this state to go fishing. We have a lot of issues with the way our state manages the fishing industry and the lobster industry. I guess I can start with that.

SS: Can you hold that thought for just one second? I just want to ask you a couple more biographical details, and then loop right back into that. Don't let me delay your train of thought. But first, your homeport?

PP: Falmouth, Maine. I fish out of Portland, Maine now. I'm from Falmouth originally. It's kind of the next town over. It's just that we have better port facilities in Portland.

SS: Is it your boat or do you fish on someone else's boat?

PP: My boat.

SS: What's the name of the vessel?

PP: Determination.

SS: Determination? Alright, and what's your age?

PP: Thirty-one.

SS: Thirty-one. And what's your educational background?

PP: I graduated from high school. I went to a marine trades school for marine systems, graduated from that. Went to Maine Maritime for a little while. I was in a tug and barge program, decided I was going to make more money fishing and that that would be a much better use of my time. In hindsight, not so much. I probably should have stayed in school and done that, but I'm a licensed US Coast Guard captain as well, which I did after that whole time period.

SS: Ok, so you've done a number of different things.

PP: Yes.

SS: Why did you just say that you should have stuck with that rather than going fishing? Is that what you said?

PP: Yeah. I should have stayed in school, and been running a ship or a tug or something like that. My sister does that, and she's got a pretty good, back and forth job. I wouldn't necessarily trade it for what I do, but just as a financial and security, I would have been in a much better position now, had I done that, even if I wanted to still do what I'm doing. Just having that degree would have been a good idea.

SS: Ok. Did you want to go back to that thought you had earlier? Where did you want to start?

PP: Doesn't matter to me.

SS: Where is your brain right now, most naturally for you? Do you want to loop back to that over topic?

PP: Let me start with how I started fishing when I was younger. Is that the easiest?

SS: Start at the beginning. That's the easiest way.

[03:09]

PP: When I grew up, my family's been involved with the waterfront. Not necessarily fishing; we own a large commercial wharf in the port of Portland. Growing up, I grew up around the waterfront. I grew up in Falmouth, right down the street from the town dock. That was where I hung out. Kind of got into the fishing world, wound up working for a guy when I was in high school. I worked for a mooring company when I was in high school that worked for an offshore lobster boat. We'd do summer fishing in state waters and go outside and fish on his federal permit all winter. He kind of took me under his wing, and I worked for him all through high school, nights and weekends and stuff. Did that kind of right through. I had a student license in the state of Maine. Had I had that license one year prior, I probably would

have been given a fulltime commercial lobster license. The way the state of Maine works, you have a student or an apprenticeship license, and your parents decide that they want you to have a lobster license at a young age, they record all your time from the time you're twelve. You have to log, I believe, two hundred days fishing and about two thousand hours. You have to log those hours before you're eighteen, in this state. If you do that—which is essentially if your parents decide that you're going to go fishing—you're handed a lobster license by the state of Maine. If you don't, you go on a waiting list, which at the time was around a decade. The exit ratios are around seven to one. The kids who get their apprentice hours before they're eighteen, that doesn't count in any of the entry-exit ratios. If your parents decide you're going to go fishing, you're good. You're set, in this state. If you don't, you wind up going on this waiting list. And I probably should have just completed the apprenticeship program and been on the waiting list. I would have a license now. I would have just gotten a license now. But tell fifteen, sixteen-year-old me to do that. I didn't really know that this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I just got into it. Looking back, I wish I had done a lot of things differently. There were a couple kids my age that forged all their time, and they were handed a license, and they're doing real well now and loving life. I kind of took the honest approach and didn't lie about it, and tried to follow the rules. Didn't pan out so well on the fishing side of it. In the state of Maine, you have to have a state lobster license to fish for lobsters or crabs inside state waters. Totally reasonable. Every state's like that. It's no big deal. One of the big issues that the state faces is if you possess federal permits to fish in federal waters, like any other state, you can fish in federal waters and you can land in your home state. Maine is essentially controlled by the Maine Lobstermen's Association. They run the department of marine resources. They control the state at every level. They don't want people fishing out in federal waters, federally licensed, abiding by all rules and regulations for the lobster and crab industry. They don't want them landing in the state of Maine. You can't bring lobsters and crabs into the state of Maine from federal waters. You're essentially locked out of the federal fishery. If you don't have that state license, you can have a federal permit, but you can't land in this state. What guys started doing is they would leave from the state of Maine, they would go lobstering, and they would go to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. In New Hampshire, you just have to buy a landings permit and you can land your lobsters. Then they would steam back to Maine. Maine decided they didn't want that anymore, so what they've done is that they've banned—if you have a federal permit, you're not allowed to load bait or anything considered lobster paraphernalia for a lobster trip in the state of Maine, to leave for a trip, and you're not allowed to come back. Essentially, it took all the guys that could go do a trip, go into Portsmouth, unload their lobsters, and then come back to Maine and operate. It was a pain, but it was doable. Once you have to steam to New Hampshire to get your bait to leave for a trip and then go back to New Hampshire it becomes too much.

SS: And you had to drive all your traps to meet your boat in Portsmouth so you could load your traps on the boat?

PP: Yeah, it's totally insane. There's no way that you can work. They've done well with that. They've shut out a lot of people. There are a capped amount of Area 1 federal permits. Every other fishery that I've ever heard of in the United States, I don't know of any other state that has a system set up like this, that bars you from landing federally permitted species in the state of Maine because you don't possess a state waters license. Now, black sea bass is an emerging fishery here that's probably going to be our next fishery. They've also changed the

laws, so that if you fish any fixed gear that's capable of catching a lobster, you're not allowed to have that gear unless you have a state lobster and crab permit, which is really unfortunate, because that would be a great opportunity for myself, being able to get into that fishery, since I'm essentially locked out of the lobster and crab fishery. That's kind of the next up and coming thing. But unfortunately, the state is trying to make it so that you have to have a lobster and crab license in order to operate out of the state. It's very difficult. It's just totally unsustainable. It prevents a lot of diversity. It prevents people from leaving the fishery. My personal opinion, whether it's worth anything or not, is that licenses should be transferable in the state. If you want to keep the apprenticeship program, and make people go log their time, I totally understand that. I totally support that. I think it creates an educated group of people that's educated going into it. Not just, "Hey, I bought a license. Let's go!" But allowing the license to be transferable, you solve a lot of problems. You'd give some of the people in the business a retirement. If they could cash out with a hundred thousand, a quarter million, whatever licenses go up to, they would be in a lot better position to retire. Right now, you have to sell your boat, your gear. I think right now, Massachusetts does it that if you are a first-time license buyer, you have to buy the boat, the gear, and the license all in one, so it kind of forces you to buy somebody who wants to retire. There are a lot of ways to look at it. It would eliminate a lot of the drug addicts that we have in this state, because in the winter when it's slow, they would sell their license to pay for drugs. I don't agree with that part of it, but it would weed out a lot of the people who aren't business people and couldn't run a business on their own. If they had a license going into it, they would probably get out. Unfortunately, what I see right now in the lobster industry is generations of people who don't have any skills outside of lobstering. It's kind of scary if the lobster industry does collapse. This state has created a huge issue. They've done everything they can to drive the groundfishery out. It's kind of lobstering versus groundfishing. Those were the two big things in the state. They've pushed really hard to shut the groundfish guys out. Groundfish permits in the sector, they're allowed to land five hundred pieces of lobsters, legally, in federal waters, on a trip. It's by pieces, not by pounds, so they end up keeping two- to three-pound jumbo lobsters that bring a higher price. You're looking at fifteen hundred to two thousand pounds of lobster a trip, that if they want to come land their groundfish in the state of Maine, they have to throw that overboard. They can't come in with it. Unfortunately, the way the value of lobster has gone, you go from anywhere from five to ten bucks a pound for that offshore stuff. Depending on the time of year, that's anywhere from eight to twenty thousand dollars that they would have to just shovel over the side to come into our great state, which is all their fuel money. That's their operating costs for the entire trip. So no groundfish are landed in this state. There's a handful of gillnetters. A dragger will come in occasionally, if they had a reason to. If they have a mechanical breakdown, they'll have to pull into port, with no lobsters. Not being able to land dragged lobsters in this state is essentially what drove the groundfish industry out of the state. License consolidation is a huge issue that we have in the state. Our largest groundfish quota owner in the state is North Atlantic Trawlers. They just sold the whole company. They had five boats and were just sold them to a larger company in New Bedford. It was the time to cash out. I think he was the number two quota owner in the Northeast at the time, below Carlos Rafael. Those boats were landing their catch in Massachusetts, in Gloucester or Boston, but then they would transit home and he would do all the fleet maintenance and everything, ice up, and leave for a trip out of Maine. That keeps our fuel and ice company in Portland. We're the last place in the state, really, with an ice plant. That keeps our ice plant going. That's our fuel money. That's our ice money. It keeps the port going. When those folks

leave, unfortunately, I think Portland's going to lose a lot of the support that we had. We're not going to have the fuel dock open six days a week like it was. It'll be open a couple days during the winter. The ice plant, they'll either shut it down or run it on a limited schedule, or the price will go up through the roof—somewhere in that mix. What we originally started talking about was that essentially, I'm locked out of the lobster industry. I have a federal hand gear groundfish permit, which I'm hoping to start using more. I tried it a couple times. I could never find a way to make it work. Without other income streams from fishing, I have a hard time. I can't go borrow the money to go try an experimental fishery. Everybody in this state has the lobster industry, like, "Well, ok, I've got money coming in from lobstering. I can go throw ten, fifteen grand into trying this or trying that."

SS: The lobster is their foundation.

[16:43]

PP: Yeah. It's your base, and everything else, you can kind of sprout off from there.

SS: What would you be doing with that license if you were using it?

PP: Lobster?

SS: No, the hand gear license.

PP: I'd be catching groundfish.

SS: Is it rod and reel?

PP: It's primarily rod and reel. It's a hand gear permit. I've researched a lot into the auto-jigging machines that they use a lot on the West Coast. They're used actually all over the country and the world, like in Europe. The efficiency that those operate at is pretty unbelievable. It's pretty much the future of the groundfish fishery, I think.

SS: Hmm, but there's an investment involved?

PP: Well, it's not even the investment. If I want to fish with a jigging machine, which is essentially an over-glorified rod and reel with an electric motor, I have to buy a full sector permit and join a sector. I can't fish in the common pool. I can't fish the hand gear permit. It has to be mechanically operated. The jigging machines are essentially a hand gear hook fishery, very low environmental impact type of fishery, but we can't use them. We're locked out of using those. To buy a sector permit, then I got to go lease my quota, which unfortunately takes the feasibility out. I'm hoping that at some point, the hand gear permits will be expanded to include jigging machines.

SS: They're not right now? You can't use a jigging machine with a hand gear permit?

PP: They're not right now. They're excluded because they have electric motors.

SS: So you're restricted to just manually operated gear?

PP: Yeah.

SS: With the hand gear permit, if you were just using rod and reel to fish groundfish, would that still come under sector rules, or could you be in the common pool for that?

PP: Yeah. I'm in the common pool for that. I can buy another permit, which I will buy once I figure out whether it's worth it or not, and you can do either. You can either operate in the common pool when that's open, or you can opt to join a sector and you can lease quota in a sector. Unfortunately, all of the quota has just been so consolidated. Everybody's buying it up. Younger people, unless you have a trust fund, you're not buying in. Unless somebody set you up and did it, there is nothing for access to fisheries. Like the scallop industry, I was just talking to an insurance broker that I deal with. He's suffering with consolidation, because what happens is all these scallop boats that he's insured for years and years, he's like, "When a boat and a permit goes for sale for seven point five million," he's like, "Somebody new isn't buying that boat. Somebody who's coming into that fishery isn't buying that boat, because nobody has seven point five million dollars to jump into a fishery to go." So he says what happens is that all these boats get bought up. They get bought up by another larger company. The consolidation has started to hurt his business, because now we go from all these mom and pop boats that we had, that we insured. Those are all gone. He's like, "Now it's with a bigger company. They're a fleet. They got twenty boats. It's kind of a totally different animal for insurance. They're operating with a much larger firm. They're in a different world. A Walmart type of principal."

[20:43]

SS: Does crab work the same as lobster? Is it part of the same license, or is that an option?

PP: Yup. They grabbed that. Lobster and crab is all the same license. Crab is an unregulated federal fishery. Rhode Island, you're familiar with what's going on down there with the crab industry. As the lobster industry kind of dried up, the crab just exploded. There are guys doing twenty or twenty-five thousand pounds a day out of crab traps at ninety cents a pound. It doesn't take too much math to figure out that they're making money with it.

SS: It's a lot more work than lobstering, though.

PP: Yeah, totally, but you can make a paycheck. Unfortunately, in this state, there is just no—. I can move to New Hampshire. I can run a boat out of New Hampshire. But I should be able to come back to where I grew up, and not fish out of another state. Unless I made that decision when I was fourteen or fifteen, so I can log my apprentice hours before I turned eighteen.

SS: Can you come back to that a little? I'm not quite clear. You didn't log your apprentice hours when you were fishing?

PP: I didn't log them, because I wasn't going to make it by the time I was eighteen.

SS: There was no incentive, because if you don't log them all by the time you're eighteen, you—

PP: You go on a waiting list. Try telling an eighteen-year-old kid to wait a decade to go do what you're doing now.

SS: But even if you get on that list, you still have to work the same number of hours?

PP: Yeah, totally.

SS: So the process is the same, it's just that how soon you get a license is determined by when you finish the hours by.

PP: Yes.

SS: If you finish those hours by eighteen, you get one. If you finish them after eighteen, you go on a waiting list, and eventually, you might get one.

PP: You might get a license. But you're going to start your career at thirty? When everyone else got to walk into it at seventeen or eighteen?

SS: Right, so you'd have to go do something else in the meantime. You're probably not going to plan your life around the eventual hope of someday—

PP: Yeah. You saw that article I sent you in the Portland Press Herald. It's essentially a lost generation of people. I'm not sure, but I saw somewhere that they may have raised that apprenticeship age, if you complete your hours, to twenty or twenty-one. Had I had that as an option, when I was a kid, that would have been doable.

SS: That would have been doable? How many hours did you have at eighteen?

[23:05]

PP: Actual hours or logged hours?

SS: Logged hours.

PP: I don't know. I probably had most of the hours, but not the days.

SS: But you were close?

PP: Yeah, but there was no way to do it. I couldn't fit the days by the time I was eighteen. I started differently. You have to have it signed off by the marine patrol every twenty-five days, so there's no way you can just go and produce, "Hey, I landed this, this, and this." Looking at it now, sure, it's easy to navigate that. But tell a sixteen-year-old kid, "You got to navigate this bureaucratic [process], you got to get the wardens to sign off every twenty-five days, and you got to know that you want to do this for the rest of your life." I really wish I had done it. But my parents didn't let me take a boat out fishing until I was fourteen. My parents didn't fish. It's essentially geared so that people whose parents or whose family fish, they were just handed a license.

SS: Hmm, sounds like it.

PP: Sorry if I'm doing a circular conversation.

SS: I want to make sure I'm getting what you have done and what you're in a position to do, not just the would-be and should-have, but the actual.

[24:33]

PP: Yeah. Right now, I do a little bit of commercial rod and reel tuna fishing in the summertime. I've been trying to make the groundfish thing work, but the problem is I have too small of a boat to make it work safely in the winter. I'm in the marine salvage and towing business now, so I'm used to dealing with accidents and people doing stupid things on boats. I'm a pretty safety-oriented person and try to stay within the limitations of the vessel I am using.

SS: You know what can go wrong.

PP: I know I can take my thirty-one foot boat with a mast and boom that will collect all sorts of ice when it gets rough and windy. I know I can take it fifty miles offshore, which is where you have to go to get into groundfish during the winter. But it's not the boat to be doing that. It's doable if you pick your days. If it was ten or twelve miles offshore, that's a different thing. I know I can get to the beach and get a lee if it starts getting bad. We get a lot of northwest wind here, and when it comes on, it just screams sometimes. If the forecast is wrong and you miss it, I've been on plenty of death rides home where it's like, "We probably shouldn't be here. Why didn't we go home a few hours earlier?" That was on forty- or forty-five-foot boats. In a thirty-one, you're kind of pushing it.

SS: Asking for trouble. So you do some tuna fishing?

PP: Yes.

SS: Is that on your boat?

PP: Yes.

[25:52]

SS: Do you have a permit especially for that? Like a highly migratory species permit or something?

PP: Yeah, I have a general category HMS permit. I do that. It's a good little fishery.

SS: Is that seasonal?

PP: Yeah, it's very seasonal. The past few years, I haven't been able to go as much, because I've been busy with my other business.

SS: You're just fitting it around?

PP: Yeah, unfortunately, I have to.



SS: The salvage business is kind of your base right now?

PP: That turned into my base, and the fishing accelerates that.

SS: Do you use the same boat for both?

PP: Yup. I've got it set up great for doing a couple things, but the fishing, kind of everything you keep adding something to it, you lose space. There's no perfect boat in that size. I'm a bit maxed out with what I'm doing with it.

SS: And the lobstering, you did in high school?

PP: Yup. I lobstered in high school.

SS: Was it just then, or—?

PP: No, I worked on the stern of lobster boats. I was always part-time through high school, summer job, did that, and then after I dropped out of Maine Maritime—that would have been the end of '06—I went lobstering fulltime and did that until probably 2010. I loved it. I love lobstering. I grew up doing it.

SS: What do you love about it?

[27:46]

PP: Every day's different. Nothing's the same. You can make a lot of money at it. I always worked on the clean, straight edge boats. There were boats that had messed-up crews and stuff, but I always tried to work with people that were intelligent, liked to work hard. We worked a lot, but it wasn't a slave ship with a bunch of junkies. That's why I didn't go groundfishing on a dragger, like in high school. There was a huge drug scene with that crowd. I just didn't want to be around it. Did that all through my twenties. I'll still go now and then with a friend, if they need somebody for a fill-in guy for a day, just because I like doing it, more than anything. I did a trip as an assistant engineer on a factory longliner over in Alaska, out of Dutch Harbor. That was a pretty cool experience to see how different fisheries are run over there. Everything's a corporate mentality, but every time the boat pulled into the dock, a third of the crew was drug tested. If we had that here, I think we'd have a lot different fishery, a lot safer fishery. I don't know if that's even on topic at this point. The stuff that we have happen here is, we're starting to see even more and more of a drug issue, opiates in particular. There's been some news on it. I don't want to go into details. A boat flipped over a few years ago. The guy was using oxies and flipped the boat over. Two people died. I have a Coast Guard license, so I'm in a random drug testing pool, and I've got no use for that on a boat. Just in general, it's not safe. It's not necessary. That's a big issue that we face in this state. I have friends who own gillnetters and draggers, who used to own a lot of fishing boats. They were down to one. They've kind of been whittled away. He was down to a gillnetter, successful boat, decked out, really good offshore setup, and he had a guy OD at the dock, and he's like, "Ok, I'm just leasing out my quota. I'm done. I'm not running a babysitting service. I don't want to deal with this. I'm not doing it anymore. I can lease my quota out and I can make more money than I can fishing the boat." That kind of brings me to the next point. This leased quota, everybody ends up owning quota now. It's

been consolidated so badly that nobody can make any money leasing quota to go fishing. For a while, it was pretty profitable, but the price of quota has gone up so much, especially on choke species like cod. There are more cod in the Gulf of Maine now than ever since I started fishing. You can't get away from them. They're everywhere. Supposedly, there's not one left in the ocean, but there's no way that somebody could go out fishing for a day and tell me that there's no cod left. The biomass is insane. They're everywhere. You can't get away from them. They're everywhere. Any piece of bottom within seventy miles of here, you're just going to load the boat up on cod. I could have twenty-five pounds of cod a day. That's maybe one and a half or two fish. That's a choke species. That's driven the leasing price for quota up so much, that essentially, most of the guys, unless you had fished through the eighties and nineties and own the permits and bought the permits at the right time and know how to operate in this—it's a very bureaucratic system—you know, you've got to join a sector, you've got to be a member of a sector, the sectors are essentially self-regulation and self-government for these fishing groups. You got to join a sector and lease your quota. You're essentially operating as a sharecropper for whoever owns the quota. It's not sustainable. It might work now, but it's not going to work.

[33:18]

SS: What do you think things are going to look like in ten or fifteen years?

PP: In Maine?

SS: Yeah, in Maine fisheries in general—groundfish, lobster, all of it.

PP: I see the bottom of the lobster industry falling out. The problem is the state has no diversity in their fisheries. It's just lobster. That's really all that's supporting it. You need diversity. This state needs some diversity. It needs boats that are doing something other than just lobstering. If you look back at the first Bering Sea crab fishery in the 1950s, that whole fishery was wiped off the map in one year because of a disease. They went from the biggest years they've ever had, which is what we're having here, to overnight, the fishery got totally wiped out. The whole biomass was totally eradicated, from one disease that killed off the entire stock. The Bering Sea stock is a huge biomass compared to here. We're small peanuts, compared to the amount of space and bottom there is out there, and the amount of pounds there is on the bottom of crab in that case and lobster here. That whole thing was just wiped totally out overnight. Unfortunately, if that happens in this state, the whole industry will be totally defunct. We don't have multi-fishery operators. Scallop's closed. Well, they have a lottery system now, that you can pay—I don't know if you have to pay or you just put your name in. They did an elver one where you had to pay every time you enter it, and they give out a handful of licenses. This year, they gave out four scallop licenses. Not one of them came to this side of Penobscot Bay, this half of the state. They were all Downeast, which I don't agree with. Doing a lottery system really isn't a fair way to do this. Anybody can go online and put their name in a hat. "Oh, cool, I won the lottery," not putting the effort in. The guys who have been in the fishery have worked their ass off and they just want a chance to do something, and they can't.

SS: What would be a fairer way of doing it?

[36:00]

PP: I don't know the answer to that. Some sort of transferability. Maintaining the owner-operator arrangement that we have now in the lobster fishery, in which you have to be the one running the boat. Keep owner operator status quo in any fishery, make some sort of apprenticeship program if you want, but don't just reward the young kids that their parents said, "Oh, you can go do this. We'll sign off on your logbook when you're fourteen so you can log all the hours." If you're trying to go to school, there's no way you can log all the hours, if you can't go fishing until you're fifteen or sixteen. It's not like you start off with a hundred and fifty traps, which is what you're allowed with a student license. You start off with ten, twenty, and work your way up. If you don't have a parent showing you how to do it, you're pretty much set up for failure going in. Does that make sense?

SS: That makes sense.

PP: I'm also involved in the working waterfront. My family owns a large commercial wharf in Portland. Right now, we have a group of lobstermen who decided that they feel they're getting pushed out of the port, because there's a lot of development. It's become the new San Francisco. It's become the new, trendy, foodie city. It's exploded. We have a lot of building development going on. The commercial berthing is all protected under the current zoning. Ninety percent of the berthing in the port of Portland is zoned to be commercial. The only two exemptions are one marina at the east end of the harbor that's pretty exposed. That's allowed to be recreational berthing and has been for a while, DiMillo's marina in the center of the harbor. They're really in the cool spot. They're three wharves over from us. They are a recreational vessel marina. They've been such since the 1970s, when waterfront wasn't super desirable like it is now. We have two piers that had condos put up in the eighties. One of those condos is allowed to be recreational vessels at their berths. So two wharves are allowed to have recreational vessels. The rest are allowed fifty feet of recreational vessels on a wharf, since 2010, when they changed that rule a little bit. I think it was like twenty-five feet and they made it fifty, just so we could rent out some of our shallower berths, since we can't dredge right now. Since then we've actually gone to zero pleasure boats. They're all commercial vessels. We need to be in a wharf that we essentially subsidize the fishing fleet that ties up at our wharf. Most of the boats pay between three hundred and fifty and five hundred dollars a month. They're supposed to have one parking spot, but they wind up taking two, usually. They'll have trap storage up on top of the pier for a hundred or two hundred traps. They can't leave their whole gang there, but they have a good amount of workspace to shuffle stuff through that they need to repair or work on. Our wharf is a very well maintained wharf. They pay between three hundred and fifty and five hundred bucks to tie up there, myself included in this. I'm directly subsidized by the office space that we've allowed on our wharf. Tell me if I'm getting too far off track.

SS: It sounds like it's going to be relevant.

[40:34]

PP: Everybody's directly subsidized by diversity. On our wharf, there's a fish processing company, lobster buying station, another lobster buying station, and bait company. We have a large oil spill response company. They run a 208-foot oil spill response vessel at our wharf. They have a large, probably like a ten thousand square foot warehouse, on our wharf, in a different section of it. We have pilot boats, probably twelve or eighteen lobster boats, I don't know exactly. The oil spill company has a couple smaller boats. My company's boat and

small skiff are berthed there. My boat's used for fishing and for the towing and salvage business. We're a very diverse property, and we've maintained that diversity. That diversity is what's saved us in a few instances, over the years. If the fisheries collapse, we can still keep going. We're not losing on our business. That's a kind of a model—tying back into the fisheries stuff—that this state could really use some diversity, so it's not heavy on one thing.

SS: Are there opportunities out there that are just not being tapped into? Are there resources available in this area that people could be focusing on, that they're not, because they're not incentivized or supported?

PP: Like fisheries stocks, is that what you're talking about?

SS: Yeah. What could people diversify to?

[42:38]

PP: You know, everybody used to go shrimping. We haven't had a shrimp fishery for eight years now.

SS: But isn't that because there isn't as much shrimp?

PP: The stock collapsed. Yeah. There's some interesting science going on there. We have one guy, he's kind of a god for finding shrimp. He was running all the research trips for the shrimp study for the State of Maine and proving that all the shrimp are coming back. They're seeing them. They're starting to come back. I don't know if it was NOAA or the state or what group was responsible for that data. They decided that they didn't want him on the boat anymore, because it was looking too promising, so he was actually banned from running the boat anymore, which really makes no sense to me, if you have somebody who's consistent and can find the stock. I think this is a much broader problem that's relevant in a lot of fisheries studies. I understand the science. I'm educated enough. I enjoy learning about science. I may not know all the technical details on the fisheries science side of stuff, but I understand data. I understand how data is generated and turned into a scientific finding. I see a lot of fuzzy math with stuff that just totally contradicts what's going on. With codfish, for example, they keep saying the biomass is not there, it's not there. Ten years ago, we used to rarely see a codfish around. Now, you cannot get away from the things. They're everywhere. I don't understand why that's being so brushed under the rug. "Nope, there's still no cod. Nope. Nope, there's still no cod. Nobody can go fishing yet." That's a resource that's going to be available. It's going to be open, someday. Whether it becomes fully privatized or not, I don't know. I think in the dragging side of it, I believe it probably will be privatized. I don't think it can come back from there, at this point. But I think that the small boat fisheries, the hook and line fishery, I think that's the future. I think going jigging is the future. If the stock's here and people will pay a premium for day-boat, line-caught fish. It's a superior product, a hundred percent. You can't get any fresher than that. That's the future. Unfortunately, they've made it impossible for guys who just want to run a small boat. I can set up jigging machines. They'd work on my boat. The boat would be ideally suited for it. I can't use those jigging machines, unless I go buy a hundred thousand dollar permit and I lease all my quota. That doesn't make it work, to go catch buck-a-pound haddock or cod. There are a couple guys that are operating under scientific permits. They're allowed to go under an experimental fishery permit. You can get that, but that's not what this is supposed

to be about. You're not supposed to have to write grants in order to go fishing. If you found a sustainable way to fish and you can do it, there's not much cleaner of a fishery, as far as bycatch, as far as impact on the environment. Mobile gear is great. It doesn't mess the bottom up. It doesn't affect anything. But I think by the time we actually get to do it, I think I'll be an old man, if that.

SS: Just that one change of moving the jigging over, from something that you have to be a member of a sector in order to do, to where you can use a jigging machine under the hand gear permit that you already have, would make a huge difference for somebody like you?

[47:30]

PP: It would change the game. It would make it so I could actually go.

SS: Fulltime?

PP: Yeah, fulltime.

SS: If they changed that policy tomorrow, is that what you would do? Is that what you want to be doing with your life?

PP: Oh, yeah. I'd much rather be fishing. I just love fishing. I like it. I think I'd still have some sort of side business, whether the towing and salvage business, whether I just hired people to run that, and then I could just go fishing. The fishing is what I want to be doing.

SS: Why is that? Why is the fishing so important to you?

PP: I just like it.

SS: Can you go into more detail about that?

[48:05]

PP: Ok.

SS: What's your favorite part of it?

PP: Sunrises in the morning. There's something about it. It's hard to quantify that. Leaving early. For the groundfishing, if I was to do that around here, it would be a leave-at-midnight kind of fishery. You got to run fifty miles offshore, leave at midnight, depending on how fast of a boat. If I could use a jigging machine, I could build a much more efficient boat, a much faster boat, and actually be able to justify the expense of a new construction—a more efficient boat that's much more fuel efficient, much safer. There's a lot of things that could be gained by having access to that type of fishery. Just kind of being able to leave at midnight, get back early afternoon to unload. Being offshore at four or five AM when it just starts cracking daylight. You fish. You understand it. There's something rewarding about that. It makes you feel like you're doing something. It's just kind of rewarding. Sunsets—same thing. That's a big part of it. I enjoy it. I like being offshore. I like being away from people. I'm out there. It's me. I'm just fishing. That's what I want to do.

SS: When you do the tuna and the groundfishing, are you on your own or do you have crew?

[40:47]

PP: I almost never fish solo. For safety reasons, I usually don't. If I can get the jigging machine going, I think it will be a two to three people on the boat kind of thing. I can fish solo tuna fishing out front. It's just if something happens, having somebody else there is pretty huge. I try to fish safely. If I have to fish by myself, I'll do it.

SS: Do you get involved in policy and management conversations?

PP: With fisheries?

SS: Yeah. Like with this jigging thing, have you tried to advocate for that at all? Or anything else? Do you go to meeting and stuff?

PP: I haven't honestly. I'm involved in lot of the harbor management, on the wharf side, kind of that aspect of it as a property owner. But no, the fisheries, I don't think I'd know the first place to turn to try to effect change. Like there's Penobscot East Resource Center, which is a great program, really cool. Until you buy a sector permit, they don't really have anything to help you with. I'm not east of Penobscot Bay. They really only work with a lot of the smaller licenses with the hand gear A and B permits. They only work with those guys Downeast. Halibut's becoming a bigger fishery around here. I have a state halibut license, federal halibut license.

SS: You have that?

PP: Well, it's included on that federal hand gear permit. I also have a State of Maine halibut license.

SS: Do you fish for halibut?

PP: I've gone a few times, never really did it successfully. I'm always scattered out into three different boat projects. This year, I'll hopefully make a go of it and try to make it work, as soon as we get out of ice season. That's my biggest issue. My boat, you can push the limits with it. I'm comfortable with it. You really have to pay attention and drive it when it's rough, to keep it upright—not upright, but it's not as hands-off as some other boats that I've owned. This time of year, I can't be running around when it's five degrees and blowing spray all over my rigging. I would make ice too quick and once I start making ice, you got to deal with that in half an hour. You're five hours from town, so how do you deal with it? I don't know what else I would say on that, like in terms of having resources to try to effect change, if there was a way that people could get involved a little easier, and kind of be a part of a conversation, I would love to be part of a conversation.

[53:15]

SS: People like you, you mean? As opposed to the MLA? People like you to plug in? You said if you have a hand gear permit and you're involved in Penobscot East, or if you're a

lobsterman involved in the MLA, there's access to decision making. But people like you are left out of the pathways to get involved?

PP: Yeah, if you're not a lobsterman. We're kind of in a gray zone. That's lacking. But you can do a lot now with the Internet.

SS: Tell me about that.

PP: It's changed the speed of dialogue. Let's see, how many emails did I have from NOAA today? One from NOAA. One from Northeast Fisheries Science Center. I didn't get too many today. Yesterday, I had one, two, three, four, five, six emails from NOAA about permits that I have. One's aquaculture funding opportunities—not really applicable to me. That's another thing to get into.

SS: Have you thought about that?

PP: I've thought about it. I'd like to. The problem is it does take capital to do. I kind of have all the marine side of the equipment. I've been between boat projects. I used to build and repair boats. I'm trying to get out of that, because what happens is I start a project, and it morphs—it always does—and then you miss a season doing something because I'm trying to rebuild somebody's boat so that they can go fishing. Ultimately, I keep winding up being the guy not going fishing, because I'm stuck in the engine room trying to rebuild something or re-glass something, before their season. I'm trying to wean my way off of that. It's just possession limits. That's most of my emails from them. But that's totally changed the game on information. You can look up stuff. I believe that NOAA and everybody in our state is trying to get more on board with trying to make communication work. Before, what was an archaic program, now you can just go online and use an app. I've expressed my frustration with this. The last season that the shrimp season was open, I was going to go shrimp trapping. Everybody has to call in data every day if you go, if you don't go, this, that. It was kind of insane. "Why can't we just do this on email?" "Oh, we can't change a policy like that." It's like, "Well, we need to know what's going on, what's being landed and what people are seeing." "Ok. You guys need this information. But if I'm on my boat, I can just go on my email, shoot you an email in two seconds. I can't hear you over the engine on my boat. You want me to call you at two in the morning or at seven o'clock at night? What do you want me to do?" There's so much bureaucracy with that. "No, we can't." It's like, "Literally, just go to Gmail and just make an email account. This isn't that hard. We have a solvable problem here. How can you guys not regulate this?" The shrimp fishery was overfished the last two years it was open. There was no accountability for reporting. Processors weren't sending their reports in for months after. There was no punishment for it. So, what are they going to do? Close the fishery down or keep making money? They kept hammering on the stock. I don't think that's the whole reason the stock went. I think the environmental factors are a huge thing in the Gulf of Maine right now, and shrimp is a cyclical fishery—up, down, up, down, boom and bust. That's the way it's been since the beginning of time. It's up and down and all over the place. That was a good fishery that people could go do in the winter. Hopefully it's open again someday and I can go do it, but you're losing a whole generation of people that just don't know how to drag. Another issue we have is that as soon as shrimp opens back up—when I was a kid, as soon as shrimp season started, you had to hide your lobster gear. You had to hide on the edges. You couldn't stay out in the tows. It'll be a decade before the shrimp fishery opens again from

when it closed. You'll have a whole generation of fishermen that have never fished around a dragger. You had about three or four hundred traps down around the edges and everybody stayed away. Nobody knows how to do that. As soon as they open that fishery back up, it's going to be an interesting show to sit back with some popcorn to watch. That's kind of beside the point. It's a little off topic. I guess if you could maybe steer me back?

[58:55]

SS: Any other topics we haven't covered yet, that you think are important to understanding your experience as a young fisherman?

PP: Yeah. It's a hard go of it. There's not a whole lot of future in it. I want to do something. I love going fishing. Unfortunately, unless I hit the lottery, there's really not much hope for making a system that would work for me, without easy access for small boats. I understand that they had to regulate it, and it's a lot easier to control companies and large corporations. I totally get the consolidation side from the regulation side—way easier, when you're dealing with ten people instead of two hundred. But if they could just open up some small fisheries and make it so that people could go fishing. I don't want to take an observer every time I go on a thirty-one foot boat. It's not safe. I just want to get on the boat and be able to go fishing. I don't want to have to plan two days in advance to get an observer, when if I was in a sector, when NOAA forecasts aren't good eighteen hours out, how do I plan this? If they could just make this easier for small-scale fisheries that are proven clean fisheries to go and fish, that would be huge for everybody who's in my generation and younger and up and coming people. My generation, I think, is a little bit of a lost cause.

SS: You've said that twice: "lost cause," "lost generation." What do you think that it will be like for the generation after you?

[60:47]

PP: They're eating Tide pods [laughter]. I don't have a whole lot of faith.

SS: Do you think fishing is just sort of skipping a generation, and that the next generation will have a different landscape to navigate, and perhaps a better one?

PP: Hopefully.

SS: Or is it just over for good?

PP: No, I don't think it's over for good. Nothing's over for good. I think it could be changed. I grew up before consolidation, but I was right at the beginning of it. You might be able to navigate it differently, coming into a known thing. Up until now, when the permits have finally started going back up—I don't know about the West Coast. Does the West Coast quota all percentage of a TAC or do you own pounds?

SS: I'm not sure.

PP: I think you can go to the bank, like with the salmon fishery, you can go to the bank and buy your quota, because it's a known variable. They know you're going to get this. They



know how many pounds you're going to be able to catch. Here, it's all a percentage of a TAC, and it's so all over the place that you don't know what you're getting. You don't know what you're buying. A few guys kind of gambled on it. Carlos, he built a whole empire on just finding a way around the system—making his own system. It put a lot of people out of business. A lot of smaller, local guys, he bought out their permits and now they're gone. They're not here anymore. Those permits have been moved to New Bedford. So what happens now that he's been busted? The boats are easy to dispose of. One's been sold back into Maine. It was one of two local boats and two local permits that had a fair amount of quota on them. They were sold to Carlos two or three months before he got busted by the feds. One of those boats has been bought back into Maine to replace a vessel that sank last year. The boats are easy to dispose of. Then you have this whole thing of, where does all this quota—which is I believe it was fifty-two percent of the quota for Northeast groundfish. Don't quote me on that. I'm not sure, but it was a very large number that he controlled. He owned everything. He had twenty-five boats. He pretty much ran New Bedford. He had fifty-two percent of the Northeast quota. All that quota is going to New Bedford. New Bedford's built their industry on that. I totally understand the hardships there. But as that legal case gets sorted out, whatever you want to call it, hopefully they can distribute some of that quota back to other states. New Bedford's pushing for all that quota to stay in New Bedford, because it was there. But it was taken from here. Yes, you guys controlled it now, but traditionally, that quota was quota that was the Maine coast. The whole federal system doesn't really work like that, so I don't think there would be any fruition of that, but if they could try to bring some of that quota back here, to distribute it. Their whole thing was, "These sectors are great. We'll have these sectors. They'll regulate themselves. They'll govern themselves. Everybody will be great. Catch shares are the greatest thing going." Well, there's proof positive that, no, it's not, because you give somebody a monopoly. Granted, there are some people who have monopolies who run a really good business. Totally. But if you give someone that has ulterior motives that much of a monopoly and control over it, they're just going to do whatever they want. They're going to build a system to do what they want. Instead of trying to fight all these small guys and push them out of business—yeah, it might be more paperwork and it might be more headache for the government to deal with, but you got a lot safer bet. Plus, you're going to cleaner fisheries. Hopefully, they can distribute some of that quota back into the common pool and the smaller fleet fisheries. That would make sense. I hope that that's the case. I think that groundfish are being rebuilt. For example, the stock of cod and haddock, from what it was when I was a kid, is unbelievably better. The whole gulf is teeming with life. There's whales. There's stuff that we never used to see when we were fishing. There's enough feed that the whales are here all summer, which is a whole other problem for the lobster fishery. But there's a lot of life going on in the Gulf of Maine, and hopefully, creatively, somebody will be able to navigate it. We shouldn't have to have a degree in fisheries science just to be able to go fishing. If you want to play by the rules, make reasonable, attainable rules. When you force fishermen to cheat because that's the only way they can survive, you're just setting them up for failure. And then you're just going to say, "You're lying." "Well, you guys made us lie about this. There was no way. We were out of business. If we didn't lie about this, we were done. If we do lie about it, we're liars." Does that make sense? Just with the overregulation of it. If you have small, clean fisheries, do you need observers to go keep an eye on them? Now they're doing camera systems. Personally, I don't really want a camera system on my boat that's hooked up to Big Brother all the time. My life's not that exciting. If you put the camera system in, you can't shut it off. It's live feed all the time.

SS: Oh, really?

[67:10]

PP: I believe so. I don't think you're allowed to leave the dock with it off. I think you have to be tied to the dock if it's switched off. I do a bunch of different stuff. NOAA doesn't need to regulate my towing and salvage work. I'm sure it would be cool having footage, if I could even get it, for a legal case or something. Just make it so that small guys that aren't hurting anything, that have clean, sustainable fisheries, can go fishing. That would be my hope for the future, whether it will happen or not. They're doing it on the West Coast. I don't know why we're this weird little bubble here where nothing works. I know guys on the West Coast that go fishing. They have jigging machines. They fish them under normal permits. They didn't consolidate all the permits. Everybody has these groundfish permits. They go groundfishing with jigging machines and make a pile of money. They do a bunch of different fisheries, from salmon to groundfish to crab. They're doing a lot of different stuff and can build a small boat fishery. We're really lacking that here. If I could have a multipurpose boat that I could go do a bunch of different small-scale artisanal fisheries, I'd love that. I love going fishing. It's what I want to do. It's what I've always wanted to do. It makes me happy. Does that make sense, in a roundabout kind of way?

SS: Yeah, it does. It makes me feel bad about our region, though [laughter]. Why is it that we have a rough go of it and can't get it together sometimes?

PP: Yeah. It's just hard. They drove all the honest fishermen out, back in 2005 or 2010. I think there was a guy, a head of NOAA—Jones, I think was his last name. He was the regional director for the Northeast. This is when everything was going to IFQs. He got busted. They went to search his office as part of an internal investigation, and he had his office staff shredding every document in the office. Doesn't build a lot of trust with the fishing community. I've seen so many countless arguments between NOAA officers and groundfish guys, because we used to unload at the same dock sometimes, and they're screaming about "All these fish are illegal. Blah, blah, blah." And the guy's like, "Here's the rule book. Here's how you measure the fish. Here's the board." "Nope. I'm writing you for it." They'd write him for it. If you sought legal counsel—this was at the time, I think it's changed since—if you got a fisheries infraction from NOAA, and you sought legal counsel for it, you were slapped with an obstruction of justice charge, which drove all the honest guys out. It was insane. It was absolutely insane what was going on. It was like the Wild West, but here in New England. A lot of honest guys got run out that didn't need to be. They were nice people who were just trying to make an honest living. The guys that were scumbags, they kind of prospered. They found a way to operate in a hostile environment. They're doing fine. That didn't really sound the way I wanted it to come out, if that makes sense. I think you kind of get what I'm saying. If you need any clarification on that, you can ask me.

SS: I'll send you the transcript, and if you want to, you can tweak it to make it come across the way you want it to.

PP: Ok, that's my rant, I guess.

SS: Well, great. Are there any closing thoughts that you want to leave me with?

PP: No. Hopefully, they can try to find a way so that people can go fishing. It's a pretty old profession. It's a pretty noble profession, in my mind. We've got a great resource here. Don't just turn it into a factory production floor. Keep it small. Keep individuals fishing. We're a foodie city. We're a fresh fish and food capital. But we can't go fishing and catch the fish. You have to do it on a factory boat, essentially. Explain to me how this makes sense. There's a market and there's no reason not to have small, sustainable fisheries, in my mind.

SS: Well, great. Thank you very much for sharing your story and your reflections on what you've experienced.

[72:23]

[end of interview]