

Amanda Stoltz: Okay. So, it is June 7th and we are in Sarasota with Ed Hurst – Captain Ed – and my name is Amanda, and —

Karla Gore: And my name is Karla.

AS: Yeah, Captain Ed, I do want to ask first if you could describe your business, how often you fish inshore versus offshore, and how long you have been in this Sarasota area.

Ed Hurst: Okay. I've lived in Sarasota since I was nine years old – 1956. I fished offshore from about 1970, and then commercially from about 1976 to about 1995.

AS: You fished commercially offshore?

EH: Well not commercially but guided.

AS: Okay.

EH: Charter fish.

AS: And then after that? After offshore in 19—

EH: In 1990 I started fishing inshore, guiding inshore. I fished here all my life. I mean not all my life and not yet anyway. What was the next question?

AS: So you've been charting since 1976?

EH: [Yes].

AS: Okay. So I want to talk about red tide historically, starting with the first one that you remember in this area and then I want to ask a bunch of questions about that first red tide and then move forward in time to the next one, and then finally talk about the one last year.

EH: Probably, I don't know, the first one I can — that I vividly remember is probably in the 80s. But it was here before that. I used to do around dive charters then too. And I could remember diving in sixty feet of water in winter time when everything was dead on the bottom.

KG: Were you seeing red tide on the surface or, it was just dead fish.

EH: Yes, dead fish, yes.

AS: So that was even before the 80s?

EH: Yes.

AS: Where you would go on diving charters?

EH: Well in the 80s I started doing dive charters too.

AS: Yeah.

EH: So that's — I bought that house in 1970. In 1975 or '76 and we had red tide down in — dead fish underneath the dock; it would be a foot deep when Midnight Pass used to be open. Used to be right down just at end of this key, separated Casey Key and Siesta Key, you know that?

AS: [Yes].

EH: And then the fish would take stickers up and push the fish waiting on the dock on the outgoing tide.

KG: Okay.

EH: And the incoming tide they come right back. But I don't — you know, we just had a lot of dead fish. I don't remember, if you went to the beach you'd call.

AS: Yeah.

EH: I had times when I use to put the boat in here a lot. In the morning I went out to the east, in the afternoon it would be out the west and you couldn't — a couple of times I could remember I was — we had to figure, do we put the boat back on the trailer or not, I was coughing so bad from the red tide.

KG: And that was in the 70s.

EH: Yes.

KG: Okay.

AS: So, in the 70s how did red tide affect the business?

EH: Well, I didn't have the business in the 70s.

AS: Okay.

EH: I just fish, did regular fishing then.

AS: Just recreationally?

EH: Yes.

AS: And were there — how long did the events last when there was red tide here?

EH: I don't remember them lasting that long. I mean, I never wrote any of that stuff down I should've I guess, but I don't remember them lasting... Maybe, I don't know, a few weeks or a month maybe, or something like that? Maybe, then it would go away.

AS: And it would be, the health impacts would be bad enough that sometimes you take your boat out completely and not go fishing?

EH: Well, you could go offshore far enough and get away from it.

AS: Yeah?

EH: When the pass was open, the red tide would get in this bay here but in this last event we had the red tide, well it didn't get near enough to kill a fish anyway between the Stickney Point Bridge and the Blackburn Point Bridge because the water just kind of just, and it does move but it just kind of goes in and out.

AS: Right.

EH: So the red tide — I didn't see any dead fish in this part of bay at all.

AS: When you say dead fish what kind of species did you see?

EH: Everything.

AS: Everything?

EH: Everything you could name is in there: crabs, eels, sheepshead, snook, trout, Red fish, Jacks. Everything.

AS: Are there any species or larger species or smaller — anything that's not affected?

EH: No.

AS: By the red tide?

EH: No. Gets them all. It's a neurotoxic algae.

AS: What about marine mammals and turtles and —?

EH: Well this — I don't remember before this last event, I don't remember of seeing any dead like manatees or anything like that.

AS: Yeah.

EH: This last summer was extreme, it was like the worst I've ever seen. And I say worst because it just lasted so long. I mean I've seen some really terrible fish kills but this one just lasted so long.

AS: [Yes].

EH: For whatever reason.

AS: Yeah.

EH: I don't remember — there was a few years ago we had a really bad red tide and we had a tremendous amount of rain and at that time — but it brought the phosphate pips over in Bartow. They actually went over and brought tanker trucks, took the water out of those pips, put them in barges and took them 30 miles offshore. So that, I don't think — and I don't know I'm not a scientist but this, my theory is — they bring up that doesn't cause the red tide — but they brought all those nutrients in there and it's just like they put, you know, fertilizer on your lawn out here. So I think that was another — that was another bad red tide too because that was probably maybe ten years ago possibly.

KG: So, like 2009?

EH: In, somewhere in there. You could, I'm sure you could look it up to see when it was.

AS: So with the, you know you can see these really bad fish kills back in the 70s and the 80s from red tide. Did it ever last more than a couple of weeks during that time?

EH: I don't know maybe two or three weeks, maybe four weeks or so, you know. It would usually just, you know, be there and then would go away. I mean at the very least it wouldn't have the fish kills. I don't know if the red tide ever really went away but it wouldn't —

KG: Wasn't floating fish everywhere.

EH: Yeah,

KG: Did you, in 2009, you had your charter business, so did it affect fishing?

EH: Yes, oh yes. It killed every — it killed all kind of fish. I mean, even at that time you could find areas of clean water where the red tide wasn't and catch you know catch fish you just had to keep running. You just run until you got out of the dead fish basically.

KG: Right, yeah.

EH: And I think, god, I just have been here so long, so many things happened. There was one year that the red tide was so bad and the fishing in this part of bay was just phenomenal because I think it pushed all those fish in the bay and end up in this part. Then it eventually got in — at that time I think the pass was open and it eventually got in there and got them too.

AS: So when you say that you can kind of fish through it in these past events in the 70s and 80s that you could still like find places?

EH: Yeah, you could go from, you know, the wind would push it.

AS: Yeah.

EH: And there would be fishing — it's one spot one day and you go there the next day and they're all dead. So you just have to keep moving around, but you know, it wasn't like this last time where the whole bay was just dead.

AS: Yeah. And you said that, you know, for the one ten years ago it was caused by maybe increased nutrients?

EH: Well, I'm just saying it just happened to be the correlation that they dumped all the stuff. They took it — they put it in barges and took it 30 miles offshore. This is out of Tampa — and pumped it out into the gulf out there and that year we had a really, really bad red tide.

AS: Yeah.

EH: So, now they're blaming it on Lake Okeechobee, they're blaming it on the lake. Well it's not the fresh water that's doing it. It's the nutrients that they're putting in there, but you know they've been, it's been doing that for a long time so it's not, they didn't just start that last week.

KG: Right. They just started the dumping last week?

AS: No they didn't start. They've been doing that for such a long time.

KG: Got it.

EH: No, I'm saying — that water has been — the water has been around the Caloosahatchee River out [of] Lake Okeechobee and then of St. Lucie River from day one.

AS: Are there any other causes? Like what do you think causes red tide?

EH: It's just a natural occurrence. Algae has been there for hundreds, thousands of years. I guess you read the old books, you know starting and then like when the Spanish come here in the 1500s they had red tide and fish kills. They don't talk about the [inaudible]; and that's something they actually wrote down and, you know, it wasn't like somebody were just telling somebody they had, they were like dairies, or whatever they had.

AS: So red tide in this area in the 80s — were there any specific years that stood out to you as being kind of like a major event?

EH: Well that one, when — well, the one in 80s I think it was when, like I say I was diving and with the wetsuit on and I came up took my mask off and I thought I was going to vomit, that thing was so, it stunk so bad, it was terrible. Like I say, you see it all along like the clams and [inaudible] crabs, and the fish they would be lying on the bottom and the fish would float but the clams and things that actually live in the sand or underneath the sand they were all up on top of the sand dead, rotten. It was horrible.

KG: And I guess the visibility was probably bad?

EH: Oh visibility was fine.

KG: Oh, really?

EH: Yeah. Visibility was fine.

AS: Yeah. And then, how long did it take the area to recover after that? After seeing that event?

EH: I don't know back in 80s because I fished offshore, so I would go past it.

KG: Do you remember how far out it was?

EH: It was sixty feet of water which was about ten to twelve miles I'd say.

KG: Do you want to map it?

AS: Is there, if — would it make sense to kind of draw the area where you saw it on this map?

EH: Let's see where we're at here. It's a big pass, I used to go out of Venice here — where's that, Venice Inlet right here? That's Venice Inlet?

AS: Yeah, that's Venice Inlet.

EH: So we would go out here in sixty feet of water or something, probably. We can get out easy about sixty, fifty, sixty feet somewhere.

AS: Yes, that's fifty, here's sixty, or fifty-six

EH: Fifty? Yeah.

AS: Yeah.

EH: It's just past [inaudible]

AS: Sixty-four, sixty-two.

EH: Yes somewhere in there, you know, we go out of there in that area. We went out, a lot of different places out there but basically that far out.

AS: Do you want to draw kind of a circle about, around the area that you would have seen it?

EH: I mean we were [inaudible] or stuff I don't know. Like I say, sixty foot of water so —

AS: Yes.

EH: Wherever it is, it don't make [inaudible]. Two-forty out of there so then we kind of like this — probably out in this, more out in this area right here. What does that say that is?

AS: That is —

EH: Artificial reef?

AS: Fish Haven?

EH: Yes, they put that out there since then, since I was after that – went after then.

AS: Yes.

EH: I would say probably somewhere in this area, if that's sixty feet about.

KG: Are these feet or fathoms?

AS: These are feet.

KG: Okay, so it's like sixty-eight feet.

AS: And then do you remember if this was early 80s or late 80s or-? Sometimes it can help if you can think about like other things that happened in your life around the same time that you might have seen that big.

EH: Oh, we were diving, we used to go on dive trips all the time back then.

AS: Yeah. Is there a difference, do you think, between red tides that you see on the surface versus along that you're describing here where it was in the whole water column down to the bottom?

EH: I don't — I can never, I never kept — they say they see red tide. When you see the — you'd usually do see the water color and a lot of it is a fresh water changes the water. Everybody says well the water, you know you look over here and it goes red tide but it's not red tide. Because with red tide you could, you'd be — you'll be coughing and you're head off. Any time that red tide you cannot — you could — like I said I almost couldn't get a boat on there just I mean just coughing like crazy. So people go there, you see it, and then they're not seeing a red tide. If you see a red tide I mean you'll be coughing way before you ever figured it out.

KG: Right.

AS: Yeah.

EH: I guess if it's just concentrated enough it — you could probably see it maybe in the water. I don't remember ever actually like looking in the water and saying “well there's red tide.”

KG: Yeah.

EH: And you be like coughing like crazy.

AS: Yeah.

EH: And what happens, I guess the wind, when it's rough, the wind picks it up and breaks the cells open and that admits the toxin or whatever you want to call.

KG: Right near the shoreline where the – it's getting kicked up? Well, what about when you're going offshore you don't notice a water change?

EH: No. Well yeah, well no, I really — like lot of times it'll be more, you know, not as clear and closer. In fact if it's – if the water's rough it'll stir it up.

KG: Right.

EH: Soon as you get offshore, clears up.

KG: Okay.

EH: So that doesn't mean that the red tide's not there and the fish kills.

KG: Right.

AS: So you were doing —

EH: So don't know – I don't know how far the red tide actually goes down or how that, I don't know if the stuff sinks to the bottom or what had happens to it when it bursts, disperses.

AS: So in the 80's it was offshore charters for diving, let's say, and then, was diving, was there fishing involved at all or just —?

EH: We used to spear fish out there.

AS: Yes.

EH: Well, at that time I was running fishing trips too, offshore.

AS: Yeah. So did that affect the fishing trips?

EH: No because we ran up by it, bypassed it.

AS: Yeah.

EH: We go, you know, we go like sixty feet. We go to eighty or ninety or one-hundred feet, whatever in fishing and it actually, the fish were smart enough to get out though; we didn't push the fish out.

AS: And then how soon after, you know, if you went to this area one day and you saw serious red tide all the way to the bottom and it was really bad, how long after..?

EH: They — that there didn't come back pretty quick because the fish had moved in from offshore.

AS: Yeah. So —?

EH: I'd say maybe a month or so, you know.

AS: Yeah.

EH: As far as, I mean how long it took the clams or the shell fish or whatever that what kind of animals they were down there. They come back. I'm not sure about that.

AS: So, after the 80s were there any significant events in the 90s? Like specific years?

EH: Seem like, again I don't remember exactly the dates, but it seem like back then it would come ever six or seven years. But a lot of times it wouldn't be as bad, you know, you don't get... You see some fish kills here, there. It wasn't horrible.

AS: And in the 90's you were guiding inshore too?

EH: Inshore and offshore.

AS: Yeah. Were there areas specifically that would be affected by red tide more often or areas that were usually clean?

EH: Yeah, around the passes.

AS: Yeah?

EH: Like Big Pass where the water would flow in. And you know, we have Big Pass, we have New Pass and have a Longboat Pass, Venice Inlet. We get near the inlets there would be a lot of dead fish floating in and out there. That's all I mean, is all from the red tide. But a lot of times you see, even you see the fish kills and it would smell but you wouldn't be coughing.

AS: Right.

EH: And some — you cough a little bit sometimes. But even, if you get anywhere around whatever red tide is actually is, you'll be coughing long before you ever smell it or anything else. Or see it.

AS: Yeah. So these events in the 80s and 90s that you said would come every six, seven years how long would they last?

EH: There were no, they don't have a time clock, and I don't know — these people say it was the cold water, you know when it gets cool or hot I don't think that's really the determinant factor on the red tide. You know maybe you get more in the summer time because you get more rain and it brings more nutrients in the water, but —

KG: So you were —

EH: I don't — there's no — there's no set pattern for it, you know, we could not have another one for 10 years. I think I read, I can't remember when it was, in the 1900's I think they said it was, this is the worst one since the 1900s that people that knew about it I think or something like that.

AS: So up until this last one there's no other major years? Were there —?

EH: Well that is about may be like I say maybe about 10 years ago when we had tremendous amount of rain.

AS: Yeah. So that one 10 years ago, and let's say like about 2009, which areas did you see that in? Like where was that, and if you could actually just circle areas that —?

EH: I mean it was all in the Sarasota Bay; it was in this whole thing really. This whole bay and it would go down — again it — see the pass would have been closed then.

KG: Yeah, when did the pass close?

EH: I had a service station right there next to CB's and I got out there 1990. And it closed; I went quite a while before that. I'd say it's probably closed in probably 1980, 80-something like that. Actually the county closed it. They want to tell you that it closed naturally.

KG: Yeah, it thought it was a hurricane, no?

AS: Oh, okay.

EH: No they took a big — I read an editorial, somebody wrote in. They took a bulldozer and closed it. The county commissioner wrote in, he goes "no they did not, that's absolutely not true." It's not true; they took a front-end loader and closed it. And then they, Syd Solomon that there he use to come into the state, and he was an artist. You know the house right there just almost towards where the pass is and a guy named [Pasco] Carter had the house next to that. In the past it was actually was migrating north and when they actually closed it you could — it probably wasn't much wider than this, but it was deep.

KG: Yeah.

EH: It would just cut the sand so it was actually going up underneath his swimming pool. It was going to take his house out. So he got a permit to close it.

KG: So he got the permit to close it?

EH: Yes, him [Carter] and Syd Solomon.

KG: Okay.

EH: So they got the permit to close it with the stipulation that they would go back on the shoreline, like the shoreline run like this and the Pass used to go straight out to shoreline. They got the permit to close it with the stipulation that they would reopen it.

KG: Oh.

EH: So they went in over to the dragline and cut that ditch through there and as fast as they dig it out it'll go back in naturally.

KG: Yeah.

EH: It would – like it was physically closed.

KG: Yeah.

AS: Did that change the –?

EH: It changed the whole dynamics to this bay, you know. We use to – used to go around the mudflats and pick up all the clams you wanted. And we use to go in the pass and they put twenty pounds of shrimp a night in the summertime as well. And that's all done. And there used be red fish and everything in there, and somebody said "yeah, well this is much marine life as there ever was." Yeah, if you want to count worms and stuff like that, that's marine life. That's it. So there's not much to fish; the fishing stuff is not there like it used to be.

AS: Yeah. Where was that pass?

EH: Okay, this is Venice Inlet. That's Casey Key. I can't see what that says: South Creek, okay, it's north of South Creek, Osprey, Siesta Key. This is where we are right now, right? This Turtle; what is that White Beach? I never heard of that. You see Turtle Beach anywhere?

KG: Yeah, Turtle Beach will be there up here by the Lagoon, right? Isn't this the pass right here?

EH: No, Turtle Beach is down here somewhere.

KG: Okay.

EH: It says White Beach, right there.

AS: Yeah.

EH: Well, here's Lagoon right here.

AS: Okay.

EH: I would say that's the Lagoon. So, Midnight Pass used to be; it would be right in here somewhere. Here's these islands – that's an island. So, Midnight Pass would've been right in there.

AS: Yeah. And that was closed?

EH: Because I used to live just — let's see here. So this is just should be where we are here, right here. This is where the Turtle, this is — I see yeah, it would be south of there. So this is where we are right now, I think. So you have to go out of here and go out to the intercoastal past these islands. Where we at, up here somewhere, I can't see. Right there, up the intercoastal there.

AS: Yeah.

KG: Right down that way little bit –

AS: So, going back to — oh we think — yeah, so, the area affected by the 2009 —

EH: And then I don't really fish up that way much. I've been up there but I don't really fish up there but I fish a lot from here down to Venice Inlet.

AS: Yeah.

EH: So, I fish up, I mean I fish a lot in here.

AS: And that whole area was affected?

EH: Yes, this whole area I fish. And actually right now we're fishing tarpon. Let's see actually, I'm fishing tarpon off of — yeah this is Venice Inlet, so that be Casey Key over here. I'm going to write that down as Casey Key. We're fishing tarpon out there right now. There's Casey Key there, so –

AS: Yes, okay. So, in 2009 was a red tide all this whole area?

EH: Yes.

AS: Okay. And were there any areas where you could fish? Any areas that weren't impacted?

EH: Well like I said, I mean this bay is pretty big and the wind would blow the red tide around and move the fish around. But you know, you might find a school of red fish up here today, and you go there tomorrow look for them and they're all dead.

AS: Yeah. So, would you describe that as being like patchy? Like it would move around?

EH: At that time it was very patchy, yeah.

AS: Okay.

EH: At that red tide it was patchy.

AS: And then how long did it last?

EH: I don't know maybe a month – again maybe a month or so. It didn't last as long as this one. This last one I mean it killed fish, I don't know how far north it did, but this whole bay you go up there and you wouldn't get a bite, I mean, not a bite.

AS: Yes.

EH: Nothing. Pinfish, you know, there was not fish swimming around, nothing.

AS: In 2009, though, you were able to continue chartering?

EH: Yeah, you could go from one side to the other maybe around. I guess the fish would, some of them smart enough or whatever would get around it move in and out of it.

AS: Did you lose any trips or were people still happy to go out chartering even though they knew it would be moving around?

EH: I would say 95% of people still go.

AS: Yeah.

EH: I'll tell them, you know, the fishing's terrible, you know. And they go "well that's okay we just want to go."

KG: Are these mostly like tourists, or –?

EH: Yeah.

KG: Okay. So, they want to just be out of the water.

EH: Yeah, just like now tarpon fishing is terrible but that's not because of red tide, I don't think. They just won't bite. There's plenty of fish out there but I tell them "fish won't [bite]." "Oh maybe they'll bite tomorrow" and I go "okay, good luck."

KG: I guess that's good right? They still want to go.

EH: Yeah.

AS: So, you say that even though this area is where the red tide was, it is patchy enough that you didn't have to go farther north or farther south?

EH: No, I don't go that far. It's far for me to go. But you know, I mean years past, I don't go down in this Lemon Bay much but even in Boca Grande up in Charlotte Harbor the red tide was up in there.

AS: Yeah?

EH: I guess it was up in there this year – this year it was up in Charlotte Harbor everywhere around there.

AS: Do you think that red tide affects fish distributions at all?

EH: Fish distribution?

AS: Yeah, like where the fish are or spawning aggregations or –?

EH: I think the ones that it doesn't kill, you know they move.

AS: Yeah.

EH: They go away from it. They can't get, if they can get away from it, I think it would be kind of like you walking into a house on fire. If you're smart enough to turn around –

AS: Yeah.

EH: Before you went ten feet in. If you went ten foot in you'd be done so –

AS: What are the smart fish? Which ones get away?

EH: There are no smart fish. They're not pretty smart I guess. Well, he hold me one time, he said "fish don't even have brains," which they do. I go "thank god, if they did we'd never catch them" [laughter].

KG: Yeah.

EH: But I guess they're just – you know, nature tells them or whatever you know they start feeling funny and go someplace else.

AS: What species?

EH: All of them I guess, I don't know any big difference. I mean I saw, like I say, last well, end of June, in the first of July well, Casey Key Beach there were every kind of fish you could think of laying up there – tarpon, snook, red fish, trout.

KG: This is July 2018?

EH: Yeah, 2018. Yeah. So it doesn't discriminate.

AS: Yeah.

EH: It kills everything. If they get in, stay in it. Maybe, I don't know how long it has to stay to kill them. I guess, was it paralyzes their gills is the way I understand it. They just can't breathe.

AS: Yeah. So, in 2009 you know you said it affected this whole area and there were a lot of fish kills. How long did it take before this was recovered?

EH: It didn't take long for that to come back.

AS: How long do you think?

EH: Probably a month, six weeks or so. But then I think, again, the reason for that is it was bad but it wasn't – it didn't just totally encompass the whole area, everywhere. There were patches. There, you know, there were patches where they have clean water.

AS: Yeah.

EH: And then I think if the fish would go out into the gulf they get in clean water out there too. Eventually, maybe move offshore down away from it.

AS: So, how did this one compare? Was this kind of the, until 2009 was this the most, until this past year, was this the most major event?

EH: This one in 2009, probably.

AS: Yes.

EH: That was – it was a bad one.

AS: Is this the worst one that you experienced up until this last year?

EH: Yeah, I would say so, yes.

AS: If you had to put it on like a scale of one to ten.

EH: I would say that 2009 was probably a seven or an eight.

AS: Yeah.

EH: But like I say, I think there were just patches of areas where it didn't have the fish kill and that's why the fish were able to come back I guess, quicker.

AS: And then the red tides that you experienced in the 70s and 80s where would they fall in that same scale?

EH: You know I didn't – in the 70s, 80s I didn't fish inshore, it was always offshore.

AS: Yeah, so, it wasn't as bad?

EH: So, the red tide didn't affect me because I wasn't a fisherman yet.

AS: Yeah.

EH: But I lived there. So, I know it killed a lot of fish, a lot of fish.

AS: With these, with the one in 2009 do you think you saw that same thing where was killing stuff on the bottom too?

EH: I don't think I was...2009. I don't think, at that time in like 2009 I was, I think I had quit the, I know I quit the dive trips because I thought I had I killed – well, I didn't kill them, although they killed themselves, couple of guys, out there. We dove a wreck called the Bayronto [editor's note: the Bayronto was a British freighter that sank in 1919 off Tampa].

KG: Yeah?

EH: And you could see down 70 feet – you could see the keel of this ship, and below that you couldn't see one thing. So these guys were cave divers. I told them “do not go in this wreck.”

KG: Yeah.

EH: And so, the guy comes up his eyes are this big and round. I said “what's the problem?” He goes “I got caught in the wreck. I had 300 pounds of air left when I got out.”

AS: Wow.

EH: I said “where's the guy you're diving with?” He goes “I don't know.”

AS: [gasps]

KG: Oh my gosh.

AS: Oh no, that's terrible.

EH: So, they all eventually come up and I took them into 50 feet, did a second dive with them. I went back and I told them to get into their dive mask. I said “don't come back, this is my last dive.” He said,

AS: Yeah?

EH: He said “oh I won't bring them guys again.” I go “no, this is my last dive trip.”

KG: That was the last one you led –?

EH: Commercial. I mean, I went diving myself out there.

AS: Yeah.

EH: But I go, “that's close enough for me” because when it's all over and done, else it would've been all my fault.

AS: Yeah.

KG: Yeah, that's scary.

EH: And then I just quit, I quit the dive trips so, by then so. Mainly then I just was fishing, I would say 2009? Yeah, I was fishing, 2009 – that would be in 2006 – because this is '19, '18? Yes, 2009 pretty much I would have been fishing pretty much all inshore at that time. Well, inshore with the tarpon fish out there.

KG: Okay.

AS: In the gulf?

EH: [Yes]. But even, you know, actually the guys this morning, when we had a red tide in close because the tarpon would be out three or four miles and this one killer day out there, and the tarpon would be offshore. And, I mean, they're hard to find out there if you look into them.

KG: Right.

EH: But the inshore along the beach there were no fish like, there's no snook on the beach. I told you can walk, normally walk to the beach and site cast the snook. Of the last, actually last two years, I haven't caught one snook on the beach. It would be the third year and I'm sure they won't be there this year either.

AS: [Yes].

EH: And the year before that, I don't have my [inaudible] I mean, probably fifty or sixty.

KG: Do you think that's red tide-related or something else?

EH: Well, this is going to be red tide, was last year, because red tide started about first, sometime around the first of May last year or early May of last year. And it was basically, lasted through December, first part of January. And there were still reports of it, you know just light here and there, you know. Then the mode I guess I did the concentration that was – I guess it was always a little bit of it.

KG: Yeah.

AS: So, that's then — let's draw the area that was impacted by the 2018 red tide.

EH: Well, I would place that one in all this area [referring to map]. I think up in Tampa Bay everywhere all the way down to Charlotte Harbor. I mean, as far as — I mean my personal knowledge of it, I would say this whole area between the passes, but again this little area, say I don't know exactly where it would be between the two bridges. The red tide never got to see one dead fish in that whole area. Even the tide didn't bring any dead fish in there.

KG: So between the two like the South Siesta Bridge and the –

EH: No, the Stickney Point Bridge?

KG: Yeah.

AS: Where's that on here?

EH: Let's see, where would the North Siesta [Key] – where would the Stickney Point Bridge would be here?

KG: Would be like – like where is Turtle Beach and then it would be – I guess it's that one right?

EH: There's Point of Rocks, so the bridge is – that must be the bridge right there?

KG: Yeah.

EH: Road? So it's Stickney Point Road. So it must be — yes, [inaudible] there it is. That's the Stickney Point Bridge, then the Blackburn Point Bridge would be — that's the Blackburn Bay. Along the bay up north of that. Osprey, South Osprey, Stickney Point, Midnight Bay. There should be a road going over there somewhere.

KG: Is it even further up than right down here?

EH: That's Osprey.

KG: Right where — this is Blackburn Bay.

EH: That's Blackburn Bay.

KG: This is maybe the bridge right here.

EH: Dryman Bay. That's north of that. It must be right here, because that's where [indiscernible] is right there, it must be where the bridge is; I would say the bridge is right there somewhere. So, that'd be; if you want to write it, my writing is terrible; I say that's Stickney Point Bridge.

AS: [Yes].

KG: So, you're saying between that area, there were no evidence of fish –

EH: I didn't see any fish kill. I mean, because that's the only place you'd catch fish at all.

KG: Okay.

AS: This past, in 2018?

EH: Yeah.

KG: Were there more fish in there? Or like maybe the fish moved to that area or —?

EH: The fishing weren't really that good.

KG: Okay, it wasn't great, but there were fish.

EH: But at least you catch something.

KG: Okay.

EH: And this should be the Blackburn Point Bridge, right there.

AS: So, that's the area that you could still fish?

EH: Yeah.

AS: And you could fish there throughout all of 2018?

EH: [Yes].

AS: Throughout the whole red tide?

EH: [Yes].

AS: And then the rest of this area: did it extend the whole bay?

EH: This bay up here, you would not get a bite.

AS: Yeah.

EH: I mean nothing you couldn't catch a pinfish, there was nothing.

AS: So then let's circle that whole all of Sarasota Bay.

EH: Yeah. And then all this area, you know, I didn't go up, you know, I'd fish along here, but I would say all this area, and this widest part of the bay here, just south of that should be Big [Sarasota] Pass there I guess. Yeah, that's New Pass, that's Big Pass. This area in here, this bigger area, you know, there was no fish in there either.

AS: Yeah. So do you want to circle the whole — everywhere there was no fish, everywhere that was hit by the red tide?

EH: I would say, even north of Long Bar, up there. That's Cortez there. So basically this whole area.

KG: And did you go offshore at all during that time?

EH: No.

KG: No? So you're always inshore.

EH: Well, at that time when – in May and June we were still fishing tarpon.

KG: Okay.

EH: But off the beach I heard they were just like thousands of pinfish dead.

KG: Okay, yeah.

EH: And the tarpons were offshore.

KG: Yeah.

EH: That's the one thing you could catch a tarpon on, it was a pinfish. Put it on the float, it would bite nothing else. I guess they were eating dead fish, I don't know. Maybe that's what, I don't know if had killed the tarpon or not. And that was off of Point of Rocks here. Wherever that is, there's Point of Rocks so, we're out here maybe twenty, twenty-five foot of water that's where the tarpon — they all, it was a big school of them out there.

AS: There was a school of...

EH: Tarpon.

AS: Of fish kill?

EH: Last year, yes, that's where you could catch fish out there.

AS: Right here?

EH: Yeah.

AS: Oh. So, you could catch tarpon here?

EH: Yeah. And that was in, that's when the red tide started in May and June out there.

AS: And then, you know, you said this area during 2018 you were able to fish here. Were you able to fish here back in 2009, or you didn't even have to go here?

EH: 2009, we probably fished here in the winter time, but we – I don't – I mean yes, I would probably fish there but I didn't have to go there. And this last one, if you want to catch anything you had to go down there.

AS: Yeah.

EH: I know guys were fishing up there and they'd tell me. But they, you know, they put their boats in way up here so it's real pain to go through all these No Wake zones to get to this area, you know. So, I just put my boat in right there and you know you're here, so.

AS: I know you said that this 2018 red tide was the first time that you saw a manatee that was killed?

EH: [Yes].

AS: What other differences between the last red tide and ones in the past?

EH: I think it just lasted so, so long you know. I think that's the main thing and it was such a broad area. And I guess the manatees are mammals so they're not breathing there in the water but I guess it probably eventually gets it bad enough, gets in their lungs but they could maybe go through it, it'd be like us you know getting coughing like crazy. But if we don't stay in it for two days,

KG: Right, get away.

EH: You know you probably could overcome it, yes.

AS: Why do you think the one last year lasted so long?

EH: I have no idea. You know everybody, again, everybody's blaming it on Lake Okeechobee.

AS: Yeah.

EH: But they had – if you look back years, I think in 1900, they had a horrible red tide then. They didn't have all that stuff going on then, so it's just like when they have wild fires out in California, you know? Have one that's really bad and the next one is not, so –

KG: Not so bad.

AS: Yeah.

EH: It's just the winds and the way the atmosphere is, and the weather and everything controls it, I think. You get a lot of west wind, [it] keeps it blown in, you know keeps it blown inshore. You get a lot of east wind, and blows it offshore. So we don't get in, you know – you got people living in the bay, they don't even know the red tides there, until the east wind.

AS: Right.

EH: It turns out and blows out of the west, slamming their doors real quick.

AS: How is your business impacted?

EH: A lot.

AS: How so? I mean, I know you said you could fish in this area but what were the other impacts?

EH: Well, a lot of — some people didn't come, I mean, like the tourists didn't come, the local people. I'm, out of most of them, I'm a little different than most of these guys; most of my clients are regulars. Been coming for years so I actually I'm on the downhill slide, so I'm not fishing tourists and stuff. So the guys who are fishing tourist, they — people didn't go. And my guys, most of them would go. I don't — very few people didn't go, they go "well, we don't care, let's just go." But you know you walk in there and you're coughing your head off, you're not going. And the news just puts it on, you know twenty-four/seven on the news how bad the red tide was. So people, you know, come and the store is empty up there and people just doing, I mean —

AS: Yeah?

EH: My girlfriend does vacation rental properties, people calling up cancelling left them and calling out, I mean cancelling up through February, March and April you know, this year.

KG: Were they cancelling because they heard it on the news or...?

EH: Yeah.

KG: Okay.

EH: On the news, they play it and they show all of the millions of dead fish on the beach, which there was. But even when it got, when it got, I mean, everybody knows eventually the red tide is going to go away, eventually hopefully, you know.

KG: Yeah.

EH: But the people were thinking "you know it's the red tide" so they go someplace else, you know.

KG: The news did a good job of telling the red tide was here, but didn't say much when it was gone.

EH: Yeah.

KG: Like hey, even better now.

EH: Yeah. No they, I mean it was everywhere, people up north, everybody is calling me up, you know. I'm telling the same thing, you know, I said, "You know, fishing's not great so we can catch a few, you know. You won't catch any trophies." But you go and get out there, you know, so tell them we fish down there and it was like I say, this area wasn't impacted, so. Or it was impacted but it — you know like, you could fish in there and pick up a few fish, have a little action. I don't — very few of my people are fish killers; they don't, we don't keep them, it's all catch and release so that they're not looking to pull up a cooler.

AS: Yeah. For, you know, when it gets to that really bad part where there's nobody at CB's there's nobody in the shop, even like regulars don't want to go out – what are the options? Like what else can you do?

EH: Nothing.

AS: Are there any, you know, you said you know, for you you're kind of slowing down a little bit. What are the – what happens for the other guys that are out on the water, what do they end up doing, some of the other captains?

EH: Well, I don't know, lot of them they got to get jobs.

AS: Yeah.

EH: I know three or four guys that are basically just guiding on the weekends. Had to get a, you know, get a job, pay their bill. Basically, you know, for these guys when everything was going good there, you know, they're out here buying new boats and new trucks and this and that. [Slams hand on table] and stops like that and –

AS: Yeah.

EH: And they're making payments on all this stuff. They're stuck.

KG: It's hard, yeah?

EH: You know like look at this bus, there ain't anybody on this bus. And then in the winter time it would be packed.

KG: Oh, yeah.

AS: Are there any –

EH: But this is this time of year, though, it's not the –

KG: Europeans will be here soon.

EH: Yeah.

AS: Are there any other clues or indicators before a red tide occurs?

EH: No. This is naturally occurring. There's a book if you'd like to read about it, you should read it, it's called The Swamp. It talks about Florida and you know, the –

AS: Yeah, it's all about the Everglades, right?

EH: Yeah, 1500s.

AS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EH: Yeah.

AS: Yeah, I heard about it. I started reading it and I got to pick it back up.

EH: Yes, it's pretty interesting. It's not political or anything, it's just facts.

AS: So, since last year how has this area recovered? Like how, what's come back?

EH: Well, I would say in probably April, we started catching some fish back up in this big bay again.

KG: Do you remember what kind?

EH: We're catching trout, lady fish or [inaudible], thank god, jacks, a few snook; actually the snook fishing, believe it or you know, snook is kind of one of the harder fishes to catch, and while this is going on, or actually when the recovery started, they were one of the first fish to come back. And again, I'm not a scientist but I think the reason for that is these fish can live in fresh water so I'm thinking they went up these rivers, you know up the rivers and stuff to get away from it. And then when it, you know, stopped, they came back in, come back down there. I mean I've seen in Casey Key there were thousands of them laying on the beach dead. So I mean they're not – all of them didn't leave. But they're one of the ones that came back quick and stuff.

AS: Yeah. What about other environmental changes over time in Sarasota Bay and this area?

EH: Well, there's been lot of environment. When I was growing up here the city basically dumped the sewage right straight into the Bay out of Whitaker Bayou. It was supposed to have been treated, you know, well I mean.

AS: When did that start?

EH: Say again?

AS: When did that happen?

EH: When I was a kid here, probably in the 60s, 70s. Whitaker Bayou there's a big sewage treatment plant.

KG: Oh, yeah.

EH: And it's supposed to have been treating the sewage but basically they pump out it all right in the Bay. There's one in the South Bay down there, big development. I don't remember how many years ago, probably twenty or twenty-five years ago, now they found the pipe directly from the sewer plant into the Bay down there, where they were just by-passing the sewage plant, pump it right in the bay. So, all that's stopped. So the Bay itself is actually very clean, it's looks nice but, you know, like I say they closed the path, so you don't get the water flow in there so you don't have to sea grass it used to have, so you don't have the shrimp and stuff like that. I mean, where I used to go at Midnight Pass there, I'm at the gas station I would go there, like twelve o'clock one day and fish for half an hour, catch four snook and go home. Go the next day at 12:30, whatever the tide was, you know, maybe 12:45 or whatever and just put my boat – had a little thirteen-foot boat was down there. I mean not every day but most days.

AS: Yeah.

EH: And that's all done, it's all done.

KG: Because of the pass, mostly?

EH: The pass closed yeah.

KG: Isn't there – aren't they talking about re-opening it? They're always talking about it.

EH: No, that's done.

KG: Okay.

EH: They spent thousands and thousands, if not millions of dollars, on research. Every person that researched it — there was a lady came she did and lived up in North Carolina. And she was really good put on a really nice presentation, not a bunch of smoking mirrors or nothing.

KG: Yeah.

EH: And everybody did that recommend it open. Well they thought they had to permit, so they got a bunch of these guys called, I don't know what they call it — Open Midnight Pass Society or whatever their name was, I can't remember. They chartered a bus to go to Tallahassee to get the permit. They get to Tallahassee, the guy walk out, goes “doesn't meet the criteria.” [Claps hands] Done.

KG: Ah, didn't hide.

EH: Done. After all those years, all that money. Done [claps hands]. I told them since day one, they'll never open it.

KG: Yeah.

EH: Never open.

KG: Interesting.

EH: Because their big — county's biggest deal was who's going to maintain it, you know, if they opened it then you have to maintain it, whose going to maintain it.

KG: Right.

KG: It's hard enough with Big Pass and New Pass, keeping those dredged and —

EH: Well, they should leave Big Pass alone, I think. It's better now and it's been forever.

KG: Yeah.

EH: So, let's go there and dredge it out and make it four feet deep again.

AS: What other management changes, do you think —?

EH: Management?

AS: Yes, that could help with red tide?

EH: I don't think any management change can help red tide. You know they're talking about how many millions of dollars they're going to spend on it. They could control it down in a five gallon bucket or a swimming pool but how you're going to control the gulf, you know? And you can probably help it by stopping the nutrients but you know they're talking about — everybody is on Lake Okeechobee you know. Well, go to Bird Key, go to Longboat Key look at all the bright green lawns everything and everybody is pouring all this stuff on, you know. So eventually that stuff all reaches into the, in there. Gets the same nutrients that's coming out of Lake Okeechobee. So I would say maybe stop the nutrient. But again, you know it's been there, you know, since people have been writing things down so it's not, you know — just like the global warming, you know? There wasn't any SUV's around when all the ice age ended, so [laughter].

AS: So, with the — I think you said that 2009 on a scale of one to ten you put that like a seven. What about the 2018 red tide?

EH: I would say it was a ten.

AS: Yeah.

EH: It was horrible, it really was horrible. Really, really bad. Like I say, you know, I don't remember seeing sea turtles and things like that dead, you know?

AS: Yeah.

EH: Maybe killed that was a whale shark that died. But I mean it wasn't the red tide killed it, I don't know. Twenty-five foot whale shark. Goliath grouper, two, three, four hundred pound Goliath grouper lying up on the beach dead.

AS: Have you ever seen a Goliath grouper killed before?

EH: No, I've never seen it. Not for any red tide, no.

AS: Yeah.

EH: They're pretty hardy. It took a lot to kill them.

AS: Is there any forecasting or monitoring that could help? Anything like that?

AS: The only thing [is] to monitor so the news can put it on a TV, I guess. I don't know. You know, that's not something you can stop. Well —

AS: Yeah.

EH: Well, it's moving down you know. There's a time you can just walk up, and one guy would blame it on [Rick] Scott. They were having elections: "it's all Scott's fault." Like we have the hurricanes it's all his fault too. He should have walked out there and go "stop right there." [Laughter]. So, if you — I'll read up on this stuff, it just happens, you know? And I think, you know, maybe global warming and there's definitely, there's something going on with the weather honestly. That we caused it? I don't know. Is there anything we can do to stop it? I don't know. Like I said, I don't remember what year there was the first billion people was on earth. And it took a one-hundred and twenty-four years for the second billion. Now it's 11.8 or something-like-that-billion. And 11.8 years for another billion.

KG: Another billion.

EH: So, just keep getting.

AS: Yeah.

EH: So, we're not helping the situation.

AS: Really optimistic, here [laughter].

EH: Who wants to be the first to go to help things out, right? I mean it does make sense, I mean really. How much can the Earth sustain, you know?

AS: Yeah, especially here where everyone's moving to the coast all the time.

EH: Well, it's all over the world you know. There is a — you should right his down like I said, it was called Jelly Bean Economics. It's on YouTube. So it's talking about you know, immigration. It said that each Jelly Bean represents a million people. So the guy takes one Jelly Bean out of China puts it in the United States. Nothing, it doesn't help them any. It goes okay, let's put five billion into United States. Doesn't help them any. They might help the five, that particular five billion people, but in general it doesn't help us at all. And you say then well you're bringing the five billion — or five million in, excuse me — five million in, there's thirty more million that haven't been born, so. So, you know you got to help them where they are. You can't bring them here and help them here. Again, help them where they are but, so —

AS: Yeah. I think we covered a lot. Did you have any questions?

KG: I guess just the question you know, if red tide hits again this year what would happen to your business?

EH: Oh, if it hits again this year it'll be really devastating because, like I said, what fish are here if it kills them now, if we put — I think this one here is — I'm saying this red tide here will take two or three years to recover from it.

KG: So, it'll impact the ecosystem if it hits again but what about your business? Like would you —?

EH: Personally, probably I don't care much anyway. I'm about ready to quit any day so

KG: Okay.

EH: As far as business, it's killed Florida, or this area, wherever it is, because it's already, I mean, the word's already out there. Despite how many people have gone back north that were here during the red tide and they tell all their friends "god, don't go there," you know.

AS: Yeah.

EH: You see it on the news: "there's a red tide, oh man don't go there." I don't know if you saw it, there was a guy arrested the other day out of [inaudible].

KG: The charter guy?

EH: Yeah.

KG: Yeah, you were talking about it.

EH: I can't tell you how many people from up north have sent me that.

KG: Yeah.

AS: Well, I just saw because you know I'm looking for people to talk to online and the article kept coming up [laughter].

EH: That guy is in a world of trouble here. I'll be surprised if they don't charge him with kidnapping and reckless endangerment; all kind of stuff for —

AS: On federal water and like -

EH: Yes.

AS: Yeah, he's in for it.

KG: Do you know him personally?

EH: I don't know him at all, thank god. You know, I had the offshore boat; I had you know, again, a lot of regular customers and they'd come up and we're coming in, in the afternoon or something. They come up and bring me a beer right there and I go "no, no thanks." He goes "well, we don't care. It's alright, you can have a beer, I - we don't care." I said "I know." I said

KG: The Coast Guard cares.

EH: I said "but if something happens, something goes wrong, something happens?"

KG: Yeah.

EH: "It wouldn't matter if you had a beer or a case."

AS: Yeah.

EH: You're still on the hook, right? I said "now we get to the dock, we get the boat done, we're done..." I'll go sit down, talk to him, and we have a beer but if we're done then, you know?

KG: Right.

EH: Thing's over; charter's over. Until then I never, never, one time never did that. That's stupid.

KG: Yeah.

EH: I guess there's — they may be getting some more of them too. I hear stories a couple of them are staying up all night snorting coke. And getting up in the morning and taking their trips out you know.

AS: Yeah, that's not good.

EH: I don't know, I've done some really stupid stuff, but I never pulled that crap.

KG: Yeah.

EH: I thank God every day of my life.

KG: Yeah.

AS: Is there anything, yeah, we covered a lot but is there anything else that you wanted to add about red tide or the environment?

EH: I wish it would go away.

KG: Yeah.

EH: You know, it's hard, I mean I don't know. But you know you look back, I mean you watch the TV and they go "record high for this day was 102 [degrees] back in 1920" or something, you know.

KG: Yeah, [indiscernible].

EH: But I think, I think as a general rule you know, instead of having a lot of days in the 90s [degrees], 91, 92, 89 and 91 so you get more 90 days.

KG: Right.

EH: So, it's actually warming up with the —

AS: Yeah. Changing times.

EH: Turn the air up.

KG: Yeah, spend a lot of time in the pool.

AS: Yeah.

EH: You know basically here we've had basically no winter for five years, about.

KG: Yeah.

EH: I mean where I live out of east of town I wake up in the morning in the wintertime and the whole pasture behind me is frosted over, white.

KG: Oh, yeah.

EH: Yeah, and stuff like that. But I haven't seen any frost out there for at least five years.

AS: Yeah.

KG: Yeah. There's been some cold days, but not like frost, I've never seen frost.

EH: And then you look at — my friends moved to Minnesota. The worst, coldest winter they've had for eons, you know?

KG: Yeah.

EH: And my sister lives in Paducah, Kentucky, her house got tore down by tornados about two months ago.

KG: Oh, wow.

EH: So, they were — she — they were going to start rebuilding this week, but they can't because all of the rain so down here we aren't getting a drop of rain.

AS: And you said you don't think that red tide is connected to like temperature?

EH: No, I don't, I don't think it is.

AS: Okay.

EH: Because if it was, it would be, you know — right now, I mean, the water is about 90 degrees, I think. Isn't it?

KG: Yes.

EH: You stick your hand in, it's warm. I don't turn, I got a bottom machine with a temperature thing on it and turn it on, so I think it's about 90. So there's no red tide there now. Not that it doesn't help it, you know, make it grow.

AS: Yeah.

EH: I am confident that, I mean, I feel pretty sure that this, all and it does come and I feel it's low here. I guess when I read about it, again I'm not a scientist but I read about it, it actually starts offshore. It doesn't start in the bay, it starts offshore. And then, the wind blows it in, then it gets in where the nutrient are and stuff. And I think as long as it's alive, it's fine. Then it starts dying and the things start popping and little cells starts popping. What is there? Three cells in a red tide cell or something like that? And one of them has toxin in it.

KG: Oh I don't know that.

EH: And if you get a good look at it, you look up — if you go to [indiscernible].

AS: Yeah.

EH: They have a pretty nice, they have pretty good thing in there. Looks like a little, like a little beetle, I mean, it's just, you know, microscopic but it looks like a little beetle with three little backs on it.

KG: Right, right.

EH: And the one of them has toxin on it, and that's the one it pops and that's what causes —

AS: Yeah. Cool. Thank you so much for your time today.

EH: Okay.

KG: Yeah.

AS: I have a release form that I'd like you to sign. So, it's just your name up here and then sign at the bottom.

KG: So nice out right now.

AS: It's really pretty, I wanna go swimming.

KG: Not in the canal. Or not — the ocean's right there. On the other side of the sand dune.

AS: Yeah.

Reviewed by Susana Oliveros 6/7/2022