

Kenneth Brennan: My name is Ken Brennan. I will be conducting the interview. The subject of the interview is the history of fishing on the East Coast, Florida. I am with Captain Paul Nelson. The date is May 18, 2009. We're located in Daytona, Florida. Good morning, Captain Paul. Can you tell me your age and how long you've been a resident of Florida?

Paul Nelson: I'm sixty-three years old. I've been a resident of Florida since 1946.

KB: In the Daytona area?

PN: Daytona area. Well, I started out in the St. Augustine area and then moved to Sanford, then ended up in Daytona. I moved here when I was probably about two years old, so 1947.

KB: How long have you been a fisherman?

PN: I've been an ocean fisherman since I was twelve years old.

KB: Was your father a fisherman?

PN: No, he was a carpenter.

KB: You just happened to be around the docks? What sparked your interest?

PN: Yes. When I was twelve years old – maybe even before twelve years, I used to go down and scrub the boats, cleaned the boats for the guys that were coming in. I was a bait boy during the summertime when I was going to school. On the weekends, I used to be bait boy. I was about twelve years old, and worked all through high school in the summertime on boats until I got out of high school. I didn't finish high school. I quit high school when I was sixteen to go fishing, and I've been fishing ever since – commercially shrimping, whatever it took to make money back in the day. We usually worked in combination. Sometimes, we'd snapper fish and then shrimp when we're in the shrimping season, and charter fish during the charter season. We did everything back then. They'd take the charter boat equipment off and go shrimping in the fall year. Then after the shrimping season, we'd go commercial fishing, put our electric reels on. Back when I first started, we use handlines. We used to use handlines.

KB: What year was that?

PN: That was back in probably 1961, [19]62, somewhere in there.

KB: What type of boat?

PN: It was wooden boats. They were around thirty-eight to forty feet. They're all wooden boats. Some of them were gas-powered. Some of them were diesel-powered back then.

KB: What type of navigation equipment did you have on them?

PN: When we started out, one or two boats out on the harbor had LORAN-As – still LORAN-

As. They started out with LORAN-As with a lot of boats. Sometimes, we'd work together. When I first started out, they didn't have LORAN. They used flags. We used to take flags out, and during the first part of the season, drop flags on the main part of the reefs, and then we could range off. Then every time a storm would come by, we'd always carry a couple of flags with us. They'd disappear, and we'd find them. We go by depth and running time.

KB: You would use a –

PN: A sounding lead. Well, when I first started, we had power on. Then we had there were my (favorite?) machines. The sounding lead was before I started. Most of us had power on. There was radio on. We used to have radio – our (favorite?) machines, yes.

KB: Were these boats you would consider head boats?

PN: Well, some of them were head boats. They'd carry up to about fifteen to eighteen people on the average head boat back in them days.

KB: I guess they were called party boats back then.

PN: Party boats, right.

KB: From what you heard from some of the old-timers back then, what is the earliest account of head boat fishing in this area?

PN: They've head boat-fished before I started. Matter of fact, the skipper, when I first started running with it, carried up to about fifteen people. It was a forty-two-foot Matthews, gas powered. Back then, they weren't inspecting for carrying over six back then. Then after, I think, about the mid-[19]60s, late [19]60s, they started inspecting over six-pack boats back then in this area.

KB: That separated the party boats from the charter boats?

PN: Party boats from the charter boats, right.

KB: Talking to Captain Bob, he has recollection that some of the head boat fishing was as far back as the 1920s.

PN: Yes. (Mike Epton?), probably during the war and before the war, he used to run out of Daytona Beach up around the Main Street Bridge is what I recall, when people told me. That's where he used to run all the way through about ten miles to the inlet before you got out of the inlet.

KB: That was before World War II?

PN: That was probably right just before and right during World War II, when they could fish, and right after. It was probably right after, I'd imagine. It was probably mostly right after

because they didn't let them go offshore [inaudible].

KB: Yes, with the threats of the subs out.

PN: Right.

KB: Actually, Captain Bob mentioned that they would only let you go out an hour after sunrise, and you had to be back in the inlet an hour before sunset.

PN: Yes, even in Florida. It was probably before my time.

KB: So, you started fishing in the [19]60s?

PN: Let me see. I was a mate when I was twelve years old. So, it would have been 1957 when I started mating on boats, yes.

KB: What was the name of that boat?

PN: Skipper was the first one. Then there was a couple boats named – one was the Maria Lane would run out the same dock, and then the *South Pole*. They were old wooden boats.

KB: These were head boat party boats?

PN: Party boats. These were party boats – charter boats. These were charter boats. *The Skipper* was a head boat, what you call a head boat. It carried up to about twelve, fifteen people.

KB: The Maria Lane and the South...

PN: *South Pole* was a charter boat. They were six pack boats.

KB: You mated on all of those boats?

PN: All of those boats, yes. Then I mated on the Broadville for Ray Fulgem for a while. He sold his skipper and bought the Broadville. It was a head boat. It was a thirty-six pack boat. It ran out of Fisherman's Wharf, and I worked on it for a while.

KB: Is that Ponce Inlet?

PN: Ponce Inlet, right. Fisherman's Wharf...

KB: So, most of your fishing has been out of Ponce Inlet?

PN: Ponce Inlet, yes. Pretty well all Ponce Inlet.

KB: So, you did it all through high school, and then...

PN: Yes, sometime between high school until I quit school – that's when I was sixteen – and went fishing.

KB: Full-time?

PN: Full-time.

KB: You did it from that point right on the rest of your life?

PN: Right.

KB: So, did you become a captain in...

PN: I became a captain after I got out of service, which was probably 1968.

KB: How long were you in the service?

PN: Two years active, Navy.

KB: So, you got out in [19]68, and then you became...

PN: No, 1967. I got my captain's license in [19]68. But I worked on the *Snow White* as a mate for a year, and then I got my license. Then I ran the *Snow Whites* for probably about three years before I went to the Critters.

KB: The *Snow Whites* were party head boats?

PN: Party boats, yes. The first one I ran was a forty-five-foot boat in Mayport, and it had 2,670 watts in it. It carried up to twenty-eight people. Then we bought it. Then when we went down to Palm Beach, we bought the old boat called *Catch a Lot*. It was a party boat down there. We bought it. It was a *Snow White* too. I ran that for a while, for a year or so, before going to the Critter fleet. I think it was a forty-nine (fishing?) boat.

KB: These were wooden boats?

PN: Wooden boats. All wooden boats. I thought it was a Gilligan boat.

KB: Built in North Carolina?

PN: Right.

KB: So, LORAN-A lasted until, I guess, the late [19]60s or early [19]70s?

PN: Yes. We went to the C in probably – let's see. Maybe we started using the C in about the [19]70s. Probably about [19]76, [19]77, we went to the C. But when I first started running the *Sea Critter*, it was an A. It was an A. So, that was in [19]73, [19]74, [19]75. Probably about

[19]55, we went to the C LORAN.

KB: When you were using A, how reliable were they?

PN: They were pretty reliable. I didn't have a problem with them. It was all in a loop. You get within a hundred feet of your – a lot of times, we left jugs out there back in them days. We'd get a hundred feet with our jugs, because there weren't many boats out there then. So, we could leave a jug overnight and nobody would be on it the next morning, normally. [laughter]

KB: No center console?

PN: No, there wasn't. There were very few small boats back in them days.

KB: What would your typical catch be in a day on a party boat run?

PN: On average day, we used to catch a lot more sea bass back in – sea bass was very popular back then. I think what happened to them, they migrated with cooler water and moved further north. Supposedly, they're catching them off of Georgia and the Carolinas more than we are down here now. But the sea bass used to be plentiful. You could go to just about any rock and catch all the sea bass you wanted – big two to three pounders, two and a half, three pounders. Snapper, we'd get a lot of triggerfish. There would be some nice snapper. Now, we'd get a school of snapper – some rocks you'd hit, and you'd catch is all sea bass, triggerfish, or whatever, and a few groupers. The next, you'd get a chicken rock, and you catch chickens off it. That's snapper, yes.

KB: Red snapper?

PN: Red snapper, right.

KB: Did you catch any lane or mutton?

PN: Very few lanes. Very few muttons. It seemed like when the muttons moved in as the water – when the water got warmer, we started catching more muttons. I didn't really see too many muttons back then, no, and not very many vermilion snappers too back then. It was mostly either sea bass, triggerfish, and grunts. A few vermilion, but not like what we're catching now.

KB: This was the [19]60s?

PN: This was the [19]60s. [19]50s and [19]60s, yes.

KB: How about grouper?

PN: Grouper, we had been really getting a lot of groupers in the [19]60s. We had big catches of grouper inshore certain times of year. On November and December, we used to do real good on the gag groupers.

KB: Did you ever recall getting any amount of black grouper up here in (Cardiff Reef?)

PN: Very few blacks. Mostly gags, and a lot of red groupers. We used to get a lot of nice big red grouper back in them days.

KB: What would be a big red grouper?

PN: Twenty-five pounder. Twenty, twenty-five pounders.

KB: Did you ever target red grouper, or they were just more incidental?

PN: No, they were just incidental. We'd do a lot of drifting down what they call (Christmas in Britain?) down south, and there used to be a lot of red groupers down there. When we were drifting sea bass, we'd catch red grouper along with the drift most of the time.

KB: Did they seem to be less common the farther north you fished?

PN: Yes. It seemed like they were mostly down around south of the mainland, mostly – regularly down in the shallow water, it seemed like. For me it was, anyway.

KB: Was there any particular fish you targeted back then, or were you just generally fishing –

PN: It was mostly red snapper and grouper. That's what everybody liked. Back in them days, they didn't want any sea bass when they were really the best eating fish in the ocean, as far as the black sea bass. Most people didn't want it. They wanted the red snapper and grouper. Even the triggerfish, they didn't want them. They'd leave them on the dock. What they didn't want to leave was only the red snapper and grouper or say, black. I remember the amberjack was plentiful back then inshore. I mean, they were on [inaudible ] pretty well had amberjack now.

KB: Were they a less desirable species?

PN: Yes, they didn't like those either – mostly what you call meat hogs, the one we stick out, the ones we fish for meat. They didn't like the amberjack, but the tourists loved the amberjack. We did a lot of good business for the tourists on the amberjack. So, they were fun to catch. They were good eating. I was the original guy that started eating amberjack. They didn't even really mess with them years ago. They didn't want them. So, I started eating them, taking them out on the boat and frying them, taking them out on the boat, and we'd give them little samples and stuff. Tourists liked amberjack, so we started catching everything, keep them warm.

KB: So, that was the way you would prepare them, would...

PN: We liked to fry them, mostly. I'd take them out to eat myself, and then I'd give them to the party [inaudible]. Then we'd smoke them, bake them in the oven.

KB: I cook them on the grill.

PN: Yes, you can get them grilled.

KB: That is an underrated fish. So, that got you through the [19]60s. I mean, you were captaining at that point, and still captaining into the [19]70s. What boats were you running in the [19]70s?

PN: *Super Critters*. I stayed on the *Super Critter* fleet for thirty-six years.

KB: They are the same?

PN: Same boat.

KB: They were actually named as...

PN: Yes. Well, we started with *Sea Critter* originally, with *Sea Critter*. Then we bought the *Little Critter*, which Bob is still the man. Then we sold the *Little Critter* and got the *Super Critter 1*, which was a ninety-foot Lyman boat. When we got that boat – one was a half day, one was a full day. Then eventually, we sold the *Sea Critter* and got two Lyman boats, because they were less maintenance, faster, had air conditioner on and stuff like that.

KB: What were they capable of carrying? How many people?

PN: Well, we licensed for 130 inshore, twenty miles, a hundred offshore. That's over twenty miles, a hundred people.

KB: Did you have many occasions where you carried that many people?

PN: Yes. When we first got the *Super Critters*, in a lot of days, we'd run pretty well loaded up. We'd run two half days. Business was good. Then we'd run two half days, we'd run seventy-five a day, or more than seventy-five people.

KB: That is more of a seasonal thing, I guess, right?

PN: Right, it was seasonal. Well, the seasons kept getting longer and longer. It used to be the season for party fishing was from June when school let out until Labor Day. Then it would kind of shut off after that. That three months was our main – you know, for party fishing for tourists. They got longer. We have a spring break. We got race weeks where it started picking up for us. We used to do real well on race weeks for a couple of weeks. Then spring break was really good. When college kids used to come town, we used to do real good with them. Then it was right around into your summer then. So, we ended up with about a six-month season then for tourists.

KB: So, that was most of the [19]70s?

PN: Yes, most of the [19]70s and [19]80s until the [19]90s.

KB: When you switched to LORAN-C in the [19]70s, how did that affect your fishing?

PN: It was about the same. With the A, it was just as impactful to me as it was the C. It was just a different machine we had to operate.

KB: Was the signal more dependable with LORAN-C?

PN: Yes, it was. During squalls and stuff like that, it was more dependable. Sometimes, you'd get in a thunderstorm or something, and they would go fluctuating on. You'd have to reset it and reset it to get it back up.

KB: But it was not a huge leap as far as getting back on places?

PN: No.

KB: That is interesting. I came in with LORAN-C, and that repeatability was pretty amazing that you could get back on spots.

PN: Yes. We had no problem with the A, really. It didn't seem to have.

KB: They were not affordable to everybody at first.

PN: C, right?

KB: C.

PN: C, yes.

KB: I think they were about \$800 or so. So, did your composition of your catch or the type of fish you fished for in the [19]70s change?

PN: Not really.

KB: Did you make any shifts?

PN: I've seen a decline in the snapper probably in the [19]80s – a decline in the red snapper. Mango snapper got big then. Mango snappers started doing real well. We used to do real well on those. Now, in the last couple of years, the red snapper's come back, and the mangoes have disappeared for some reason. They say a red snapper dominates the reef when they come in. I don't know whether the mango snappers migrated to different areas or what, but I haven't seen the mango snapper like we did for a few years. The snapper's coming back real thick, but we don't see the mangoes like we used to. I don't.

KB: They seem like they would be in direct competition with each other.

PN: Yes.



KB: I think the red snapper probably outsizes, and like you said, a more aggressive fish than the mango. I do not know that I have ever heard anybody study that. So, you fished for basically the same species in the [19]70s and the [19]80s, and you saw the declines. The declines are well documented in the [19]80s. What do you attribute those declines in the [19]80s to?

PN: I really don't know. I think fish migrate a lot. They do a lot of migrating. The red snapper, since we went to the twenty-inch limit and two per person, in the last four or five, six years, they've really come back surprisingly well. We was out there the other day doing some commercial fishing, and we get our anchor out, and we moved inshore in about a hundred feet of water. We'd anchor up on one spot, and our anchor dragged back. Then fish would follow us seventy-five, eighty yards. We started drifting. We pulled anchor and started drifting, and the spots we were fishing were probably two, three hundred yards apart. You'd catch snaps all in between the spots. They would be showing too. You'd run back up the reef, and the main body would be still over the top of the reef. But there'd be so many snappers, they would just keep falling out. A lot of them were nineteen inches. We had to release a lot of them.

KB: Are you seeing many of the fish, say, under sixteen inches?

PN: Not many under sixteen. They're all running about eighteen and nineteen. Not very many under sixteen unless the water gets cold. When the water gets cold, it seems like the bigger fish shut down. The larger snapper shut down. If you do catch snapper – I was out the other day, and we only caught maybe a half a dozen snapper with [19]68 people. The water was cold on the bottom and dirty on the bottom. They were all about ten or twelve, fifteen inches. You go back, the fish were showing a little bit. They don't show as much if the water's cold down at the bottom. There was a couple of spots that were showing pretty good, and we still didn't catch any. But I know the snapper were there. They just don't bite when the water gets milky or whatever it is on the bottom. I don't dive that much, but they say a thermocline makes it kind of blurry down there when you go down. I'm thinking the fish shut down just like that. They don't see –

KB: Just to conserve their energy.

PN: Yes.

KB: I have been told that the fish school according to size. Do you think those smaller fish are just maybe run off by the bigger fish, and until the bigger fish move out, the smaller fish do not have an opportunity to be caught? Why do you think you were not seeing as many?

PN: As many bigger fish?

KB: Smaller.

PN: Smaller fish?

KB: Yes, under eighteen inches.

PN: Like I say, we don't see many under eighteen unless the water gets cold. Most of them are

around eighteen, nineteen and a half inches, nineteen and three quarters. I mean, a lot of them are so close, you hate to throw them back, but you got to. We found out here lately that it seemed like the bigger snapper's way above the smaller snapper. If you fish the bottom, you start catching a lot of eighteen, nineteen inches. You can go to a drift line, and you'll catch a lot of the twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four-inch snapper above the smaller snapper. So, they would seem like they're up in the water more than they are near the bottom. They show up in the water too. You see a school of snapper on the bottom, and then you could see a bunch of little snapper – what we call chicken scratches – that snap up in the water. We went and started using drift line and see if at least the fish would bite. The bigger fish are above the middle fish.

KB: Now, when you were catching some of those fish that are under twenty inches, say, out of ten fish, how many float back?

PN: Float, probably one out of ten. They either got hooked or damaged too much. Probably one out of ten. Most of them go down. If you deflate them right with a deflator, most of them go down.

KB: Do you see barracudas taking them?

PN: Sometimes we do, inshore. When the barracudas are jelly, they get weak and don't go down very fast. The barracudas would end up getting them.

KB: But it is not prevalent? I mean, you do not see it on every trip?

PN: Not every trip, no. A lot of them make it to the bottom.

KB: Do you do any venting on your boat?

PN: Yes.

KB: You do? You vent?

PN: Yes. We vent them all.

KB: I mean, that is a good practice.

PN: Oh, yes.

KB: There needs to continue to be education on it with the recreational guys and everybody.

PN: Yes. Well, no, even an average fisherman, either recreational or true fisherman, he wants to preserve. You don't want to throw something over that's going to die. We want to try to make it right. That's our livelihood. So, we don't want to destroy it unnecessarily.

KB: So, in the [19]90s, regulations came into effect. How did that affect your business? Did

you see a decline in customers?

PN: Some of them complained. A few customers complained, but the average, they really didn't complain. They knew what was going on. A lot of people understand. They're like everybody else. They don't want to destroy. If they can save a species – they don't want to destroy it. Very few complaints. You're going to get one guy once in a while that would complain. He said it was nineteen and a half. Let's get the snapper onboard. [laughter]

KB: Then he would watch it maybe float off and not make it. I mean, that is the nature of it.

PN: I wish they'd start a tagging program. I'm retired now, but I'd be glad to go to every head boat owner – I wouldn't tag them. They'd just provide me with the tags, and I'd buy the tags. I think we need to know how they do survive when we drop them overboard. Sixty percent, I think, in deep waters too are not surviving, and forty percent or something – they had it on sheet notes. I was reading it. I think it was forty percent in the deep water don't survive, and sixty percent of them – but I'd like to see what the true survival rate is. I don't know why they just can't provide us with tags. I'd be glad to tag them.

PN: I think it's been brought to a lot of people's attention, and I think that's going to happen. I mean, it's definitely been used on a lot of other species to determine survivability after they've been released.

KB: Back in [19]64, when I worked for Bobby Stone, the Schlitz beer company put on a fishing contest with tagging fish. They would have guys assigned to us, whoever was going out and tagging these fish and putting them back overboard. A lot of times, we went out there a week later, and we would catch the same fish over again. So, they were surviving. I guess they were venting them with the tags. They knew how to vent them – because we used to keep everything back then. We would go back there a couple of days later and catch sea bass with a tag, and sometimes snapper with a tag a couple of days before that. So, I think a lot of them are surviving. People see two or three of them floating on the surface, and I think they really say, "Well, none of them are surviving." That is not true. I think a lot of them do survive. Fish are pretty tough. I have seen where their jaws out, tore out, and even spear wounds in them where people speared them. We have caught them, and they survived. They heal quickly as long as you do not hit nothing internally. I think our gut-hooked fish might not survive. But I think a lip-hooked fish – and since we have started these circle hooks, most of them are in the lips, unless you get it on a school. Fish has just been gulping the baits completely.

KB: Do you see circle hooks as a solution?

PN: Oh, yes. You catch a lot more fish. You catch a lot more fish with circle hooks than with J hooks.

KB: So, you use them on your boats now?

PN: Yes.

KB: What size?

PN: I think we're on the 6/0 circle hooks.

KB: For every customer, or do they have a choice?

PN: I will say that's for every customer. We don't really take the J hooks on the boat usually now, on the *Super Critter*.

KB: That was on the Critter?

PN: Well, we carry a few. Some of the guys, they'll take their own tackle. They carry J hooks sometimes, got their own hooks. When you get used to J hook, you got to get used not to jerk on the hook. A lot of those old-timers, they want to jerk on hooks. So, they miss a lot of fish that way. But for the average tourist, a J hook really works well.

KB: Yes, the fish does the work for them.

PN: Yes, it does. Even triggerfish, they're really a hard fish to kind of get into a hook. They hook a lot of them on J hooks pretty well.

KB: Yes, they are effective. Like light lining, I guess they use J hooks.

PN: Yes, drift line. Even drift line. You can use both, either one. Sometimes, we use J hooks. Sometimes, we use the circle hooks. But I think J hooks have becoming a thing now. There's probably going to be a law, is you have to use them in fishing, I'd imagine.

KB: I bet there is definitely movement in that direction.

PN: Yes.

KB: 2008 was sort of a rough year, from all accounts. Fuel went up. What effects did you notice from your perspective?

PN: You mean for the passengers, passenger-wise?

KB: Yes, passengers.

PN: Well, it hurts. When it first went up, then we were up on price. But we came down on price to give people a break, because the economy was going upside down, too. We've done quite a few people now.

KB: Did you run shorter distances to conserve...

PN: Yes, mostly inshore. We didn't fish offshore. We used to go thirty-five, forty, miles offshore. Now, we're running around twenty-five miles on the average – or try to, anyway. Once

in a while, we'd run offshore, but not too often.

KB: Was there a minimum number of passengers you would take in order to make a trip...

PN: Yes. We used to run with fifteen, then we went up to twenty people we'd have to have before we left the dock.

KB: To make that difference on...

PN: Yes.

KB: The species you were targeting, how do you think those prices and those changes last year affected that, do you think? You stayed inshore, you caught smaller fish, or...

PN: Yes, we caught some fish. There's a lot of red snappers inshore. We was doing good even on our half days on those culverts inshore or any of the artificial reefs. There's a lot of good snapper fishing right there. We used to fish those on our half days. On our full days, we try to stay away from them, try to be offshore.

KB: Just saving for the...

PN: Yes, save for later.

KB: When you needed them.

PN: Yes.

KB: I mean, most of the head boat captains I talk with try not to stay on the same spot. They rotate places and sort of farm them and not wear one place out, because they know they will need it for another day. So, yes, it is a great strategy to use, and works for everybody and the fish.

PN: Yes.

KB: Do you see some of the changes that have taken place to be positive changes as far as management?

PN: The size limits, you mean? On the size limit?

KB: Yes.

PN: Yes, it's definitely working. Definitely working real well. We're catching a lot more twenty inchers now than we did four or five years ago – yes, amberjack. It seems like even when they did, they'd put the – I think the sizes then were just twelve or so. When they'd go to twelve, it was hard. But we kept (lucky?). Then when they got around seventeen, eighteen inches, it was hard to keep them. But between eighteen and a twenty-inch – or a seventeen and twenty-inch, whatever it was – I've seen an improvement then, because it would seem like for the first year,

you'd have quite a few of them back. But then as the year progressed, you'd catch a few more legal ones. Every year, now, we're catching quite a few legal ones compared to it was when they were eighteen inches. It seemed like every year, it would take a year for it to catch up, but then you start catching some more legal ones, more legal ones. Now, twenty inches, we're catching quite a few legal ones. It's doing better and better all the time, a lot of bigger fish.

KB: Do you have to go deeper to catch the larger ones?

PN: No. There's quite a few large snappers inshore. Well, I mean, now, twenty, twenty-five, thirty inches. But most of your bonanzas, all those fish years ago back in the [19]50s and the [19]60s, like the pictures we showed you, those things moved inshore. Then once they spawn, they'd split up, and they go offshore after they're done laying their eggs and stuff. I don't dive, but they say divers went down there on a wreck, where there's a wreck, and they're like salmon or something. They'd get down there in abandoned holes all around, and that's where they'd lay their eggs, is what they what I was told. But I've never done that much diving. But you get around a wreck like that, you'll see a bunch of little potholes for them snapper to get under while they're spawning. I'm like, "Yes, that's interesting."

KB: I have dived on mutton aggregations, and they get right and tight to the bottom too.

PN: What's that? Do you mean the big snappers or what?

KB: Mutton snapper, yes.

PN: Oh, mutton snappers. Yes.

KB: They go up into a sort of tornado, and that is when they mix the eggs and the sperm in that population.

PN: Well, some divers I've talked to like Al Keith, who passed away two or three years ago or so, he dove a lot of the wrecks. He used to tell me that they would get down there and they found little potholes all around them. I presume that's where they were laying their eggs, I guess. But most of the bonanzas like that, those fish really weren't hungry. Those fish weren't hungry. Those big catches, they weren't hungry. They're territorial. So, when they were laying their eggs, they were eating – they were trying to defend their territories, more or less. But actually, the snapper wasn't that hungry.

KB: It is sort of like a bass protecting an area?

PN: Yes. I bet yes. It's same way. They're not hungry. That's the reason why they're not eating and eating everything in sight. I mean, I've seen them go out there, and you'd have one on a hook and the other one would be trying to grab the sinker. I mean, you better grab the sinker when you first get on those snappers, because there'd be so many of them. You'd pull one up, and there'll be four or five following him all the way up, trying to find out where he's going or trying to grab the sinker or whatever other swivels or whatever. They grab everything in sight when you first hit them. Then it slows down as you catch more. They slow down.

KB: Do you think the economics of fishing are heading in the right direction, the cost for head boats to go out on a trip and the amount of tourists you have available to go anymore, or do you see a shift?

PN: No, I think everything's going down to a level. I think we're just like in a big bubble with this economy. I think the price of fishing was a little high because everything else was high. Fuel goes up – everything surrounds the sink, like the fuel. When fuel goes up, we'd go up on price. But I think the price of things are getting down to normal now. We went from \$80 to \$60 a piece. ] But we picked it up on the amount of people we're carrying. A lot of people can't afford when they got families – on head boats, you got mostly families. They can't afford \$80 a piece, but they're dying to go. I was kind of glad to say I don't own the boat, but the owner might be in there for a second. [laughter] But I think everything's going to come down in this economy. The price of houses are way out of range. It's just part of the depleting of the prices of everything. I think the price of fishing is going down to where people can afford it. You have to. I mean, you charge \$80, you might carry twenty people. But you charge sixty and you carry fifty, sixty people, you're still making it out better. You're just using more bait. That's all, really.

KB: Bit more overhead, but...

PN: I think it's good for everybody. I think the price needs to come down a little bit on everything.

KB: Oh, yes, I agree. Need it to equalize from what it was, that is for sure. Do you know, as far as the history of head boat fishing – I will back up here again to the history of head boat fishing. Do you think this is sort of where it was originated on the east coast of Florida, the Daytona area, or do you think it was down near Miami, to your knowledge? I have not talked to any of the captains or people in the Miami area or the Keys. But from your earliest recollection –

KB: Where it originally started, head boat fishing?

PN: Yes.

KB: Well, I do not fish in this area, so I really do not know. I know the drift boats down in the Keys already probably started before we did up here, I can imagine. But I really do not know for sure. I do not. You got to get somebody a lot older than I am, like Bob. He is still around. [laughter]

KB: He got me back to the twenties on...

PN: Yes, he'll know. He's a lot older than me. Not a lot older, but he's older. I used to work for him when I was a kid, so you'll know how old he is. [laughter]

KB: That was news to me, because everything I had heard prior to that was post-World War II. It was very interesting and valuable to hear that it did start, or there was some type of pay-per-person fishing going on in...

PN: In the Keys?

KB: No, he said up here.

PN: Oh, up here? Oh, no doubt, there might have been. I bet. But that's what I can remember. I can imagine there has been, because I think (Port Mann?) was a popular tourist spot. Actually, Port Orange, they had a couple of motels. They got the history on Port Orange. This used to be a kind of a tourist area too, Port Orange was. They had two big motels on the river right across from where I used to work on boats down, on the head boats we used to run out of – it's where that campus is now. It used to be Dave's dock. It wasn't a restaurant then. It was just a dock with fish – you know, rent boats. There was two or three charter boats there. You'd have to probably go back in some kind of history book to get any further back than that around here, that I know of.

KB: Yes, I could. The Stone family album, which Rusty Stone made available, had some newspaper clippings from back then.

PN: In the [19]20s?

KB: Yes.

PN: Oh, really? Well, yes.

KB: So, yes, that is valuable information when you are trying to account for the history. We are resuming the interview with Captain Paul. We took a little break there, and we are talking about red snapper landings, and in particular, charter boat landings of red snapper. You were mentioning that the charter boats catch some of the larger fish. You want to talk about that?

PN: Yes, they catch some of the larger fish because they can target the smaller spots, which your larger snapper are staying mostly on your little smaller spots like wrecks and stuff like that. They're using live bait and long leaders, which that's where your bigger fish bite. They don't bite the short leaders like we use on head boats. I think it would be a good idea to start getting surveys off charter boats too. That would bring up the channel on the bigger snapper, because I think most of the bigger snapper are coming in on charter boats rather than on head boats.

KB: Probably grouper as well.

PN: Probably grouper as well, yes. It happens every day.

KB: Did you see a shift where charter boats did less trolling and did a little mix of both, or did you see that shift occurring in the past few years?

PN: Yes. Nowadays, they bottom fish a lot. Ninety percent of the charter boats bottom fish, because the bottom fish are good eating. When the trolling fish are slow, they go bottom fishing. I'm pretty sure they bottom fish probably about three quarters of the season.



KB: These would be the pay-for-a-trip charter boats?

PN: Yes, six-pack boats. Right.

KB: I guess they are trying to conserve fuel too. So, if they can entertain a party with being anchored up that is conserving fuel versus just dragging baits around the ocean all day.

PN: Right, yes.

KB: So, you think it is an effective way of catching some of the larger fish?

PN: Definitely. But majority of the larger fish coming to the dock is caught on charter boats, even red snapper and grouper both.

KB: It stands reason that when a head boat anchors on an area, that all the weights and everything else hitting the bottom would run some of those larger fish off.

PN: Right, yes. All the commotion and the forty, fifty sinkers hitting the bottom at the same time, a lot of your larger fish get away from the reef. They kind of move away along with it. But the smaller fish, they stay there and eat, because they're not educated like the bigger fish. They haven't seen that. Most of the guys that tie off on the back of the boat – and these are why they're using pork on the leaders catch the majority of the bigger fish on our boat, on a head boat. Compared to the short leaders, what the average passenger has on – there's not [inaudible] leaders, but smaller hooks and everything, they don't catch the bigger fish. So, just a small percentage of people catch the bigger fish on the head boats compared to the charter boats.

KB: Yes, it is a less intrusive approach to fishing on a reef, the charter boat. Did the charter boats drift fish?

PN: They drift and anchor both, yes. Years ago, when charter boats showed [inaudible] and had anchor aboard except for emergency, and they trolled most of the time. They trolled ninety percent of the time and did ten percent bottom fishing. Now, it's vice versa. Unless the dolphin ran or when the dolphin would come in, then the troll boats start trolling more.

KB: So, you have definitely seen that change in the strategy for charter boats?

PN: Right.

KB: How have you seen things change with the amount of small boats out there? Has the effort really increased as far as center consoles on that size boat?

PN: A lot of boats. Back in the [19]60s, and even the [19]70s, you might see a dozen boats out there even on a weekend. Now, usually, you'll see forty or fifty in one area everywhere you go. I went down south three or four weeks ago, down in what they call the (Crest Fencing Ground?) with shallow water. Every rock down there had a boat on it. So, I had a hard time getting to

catch a fish, but I ended up squeezing in the middle and catching a few. But it seemed like every rock had a boat on it then.

KB: They are mostly bottom fishing?

PN: Bottom fishing, yes.

KB: Do a little bit of trolling and then switch the bottom fishing, get that morning bite or whatever?

PN: Correct, yes.

KB: Then switch to the bottom fishing?

PN: Yes.

KB: So, I guess with the advent of the GPS, it has made it –

PN: Right, it makes everybody professional. [laughter] No problem getting on the fish nowadays.

KB: For \$200, you could get a Garmin, and you are good to go. Put it on your console and...

PN: No secrets anymore. We catch GPSs on the boat all the time that take away from people that come out. I've had boats go around just following me for all day long and never drop a line, just get the numbers, they float alongside and get the numbers. You can see him out there with his old pad, writing his numbers. [laughter]

KB: That is frustrating.

PN: I know it is.

KB: I am sure.

PN: But it's a free world. What are you going to do? It's a free world. What are you going to do?

KB: Yes. Well, is there anything else you would like to talk about, Captain Paul?

PN: No. I just want to say that the twenty-inch limit now is working very well. I'm starting to do a little commercial fishing with my son, too. We run into a lot of snapper, a lot of nineteen and a half inches. But we've been doing a lot better on the keepers, too. Most days, we have quite a few keepers that we keep. I think the limit they have right now is really working. Other than that, I think we should start monitoring charter boats too, and private boats along to maintain a record on the bigger fish, because I think they catch a lot more bigger fish than we do on a head boat. That's about it.

KB: Well, I want to thank you for taking the time to give this interview. It is valuable, and we appreciate you participating in it. We will definitely stay in touch and give you a copy of the interview for your keepsake.

PN: I appreciate I could do it. We all want to stay in business. We all want to do what's right. I think that whatever we're doing right now, as far as the limits and everything else, I think this really improved the fishing off here, off of the coast of Florida.

KB: Well, thanks again, Captain Paul. We are going to conclude the interview.

PN: All right. Thank you.

[end of transcript]