Michael Jepson: This is Michael Jepson with NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Regional Office. I am here today with Corky Perrett, who is a Gulf council member. We are going to interview Corky as part of the Fishery Management Council Oral History Project at SERO that is in conjunction with the Voices of the Fisheries, NOAA Fisheries website, and collection of oral histories from around the country. Corky, we usually begin this interview just to talk a little bit about your background. So, if you could just state your full name and where you presently reside.

William Perrett: My name is William S. "Corky" Perrett. I reside at 68 Ravine Lane in Poplarville, Mississippi. Let me give you early background. I was very fortunate that my family owned a summer home on Grand Isle, Louisiana. It would probably be called a camp, what it was. I was able to spend most of my summers on the island. There were no doctors on the island, and all of my uncles, dad, and grandfather were medical doctors. So, when the Perretts would get on the island, they treated the locals. Consequently, we got to be friends with a lot of the fishermen: shrimp fishermen, crab fishermen, oyster fishermen. Not so much finfish fishermen in those days. So, I got to go out on fishing boats at an early age. I can recall sitting in an old Biloxi shrimp boat looking at bottles filled with alcohol of these weird-looking animals, fish and so on. I thought, as a little boy, "My gosh, look at these things live out there." So, I think that's what piqued my interest into getting, first, an undergraduate degree in zoology, then a master's in fishery science. Went to work for Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Department in 1966, was stationed at the marine lab for the department, which is located on Grand Tear Island, which is the island just east of Grand Isle, where I'd spent so much of my time during the summer. After training at the lab for X number of months, I was given an area to work, which happened to be, in my opinion, one of the most productive habitat areas in the entire country, and that was the lower delta of the Mississippi River. It was fascinating to see that you had this tremendous volume of fresh water going out of the river. Yet, you were catching marine species on the bottom, and you could catch freshwater species on top. Following approximately one year, I guess I was fortunate – or unfortunate, depending on how you look at it. I was made a bureaucrat and brought into the office and became an administrator at a very early age. Spent thirty years at the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in Louisiana, retired as the position of assistant secretary where I had freshwater as well as marine issues – and can tell you, marine issues probably took eighty percent of my time versus freshwater issues. Retired for a day and became director of marine fisheries for the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. Spent fourteen years there, retired as deputy director of that agency. Cast my first vote on the Gulf council in 1979 or [19]80, and with a very short hiatus, I've been a member of the council ever since.

MJ: Well, let us go back and talk about your education. Where were you educated?

WP: I went to University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, which is now ULL, I guess, University of Louisiana in Lafayette. I got my undergraduate degree and was going to go into fisheries at LSU, but the university brought a new Ph.D. down who had some money for marine work, and they offered me an assistantship. I stayed at UL, USL, ULL, and got a masters there.

MJ: Let us go back to when you were younger also. You said you spent a lot of time on Grand Island, were on shrimp boats. Did you fish yourself? Were you a recreational fisher?

WP: Did you work on any commercial boats at all?

MJ: I never worked on a commercial boat in my life. But I can remember the first fish I caught, and still, every now and then, I think about that and how exciting it was. I have been a recreational fisherman all my life. I have lived on the water all my life, not necessarily on marine water, but on the water. I could fish from my dock. Where I lived for some twenty-five or so years on the Pearl River, Lower Pearl River, in twenty, thirty minutes, I could be catching estuarine fish, primarily spotted seatrout and red drum. I currently live on the Wolf River in Mississippi where I catch freshwater fish. Do not get as much opportunity to saltwater fish as I used to prior to Katrina. Katrina took every boat, fish, and tackle, all that. So, while I have gotten back into it, not near as much as I used to fish.

MJ: What was that first fish you caught?

WP: First fish I caught was a crappie, a freshwater fish. It was huge. It probably weighed ten ounces.

MJ: You are married, right?

WP: I'm married. I have a son and a daughter.

MJ: Does your wife work? Is she into marine science?

WP: No. Well, I don't know if we should mention private companies, but she was with a very large – well, can we mention private…

MJ: Sure.

WP: She was with IBM for a number of years and went out on her own and formed her own business. She's got a consultant business. She works with groups – private, public, non-profits – strategic and long-range planning, works with family businesses, small businesses going through change. After Katrina, every business in the south Mississippi, south Louisiana area was going through change, so she was very much involved with that. She worked for the City of New Orleans at ground zero following Katrina, bringing medical health units back into the city. So, she could really tell you some stories.

MJ: I bet. You say you have two children?

WP: I have a son who is in the catering business in New Orleans, and my daughter is in the retail women's clothes business in New Orleans.

MJ: Did they ever express any interest in following in your footsteps in marine science?

WP: No. My son's degree is in marketing, and my daughter, she went to college. She didn't finish, but she's into merchandising.

MJ: Any brothers and sisters?

WP: Two sisters. One older, one younger. One sister finished in education and taught for a while, and then has been a housewife ever since. Younger sister's probably the only person I know who got a four-year degree in secretarial science and became a legal secretary.

MJ: There is a degree in secretarial science? [laughter]

WP: Yes, a degree in secretarial…

MJ: That is funny. Oh, I forgot to mention also that Ava Lasseter, Gulf council staff, is here with us also. Ava, certainly, if you would like to ask a question, feel free to do so.

Ava Lasseter: Thank you.

MJ: You were the director of Louisiana Fish and Wildlife, and then you went to Mississippi. Can you talk a little bit about your tenure in both of those positions and what they were like?

WP: Well, as a young person, you go to school, and then you get your undergraduate degree. Then in the field I'm in, you're in, Ava's in, you want to specialize. You go on to do the field that you think you really like. In my case, it's been great. I've really enjoyed my career. So, I came out of school and was involved with biological monitoring of finfish, shrimp, crabs, and so on and so forth. We would utilize that data. Back in those days, the big fishery was – and still is, as far as from a commercial aspect – shrimp fishery. The Louisiana shrimp fishery, Louisiana produced more shrimp than the rest of the country and all that kind of stuff. So, we young scientists – and we're all a bunch of young people that had basically gotten out of school within four, five, six years of each other. We do our thing, collect our data, and provide our information to our boss who would then provide that information to the commission. The commission would then set the season based on that biological input. Well, I think one of the hardest things for me to learn as a biological scientist was there were a lot more factors involved in setting that shrimp season than just biology. There was definitely the economics of it. If you set it early, the shrimp was smaller, they're not worth as much money. If you set it later, the shrimp are larger, they're worth more money. But there are also other factors. You got a lot more small boat fishermen who want to fish early because they can't fish offshore when the shrimp get larger and go offshore. So, it was a little difficult to understand why the biology showed one particular thing, and yet, the commission didn't go always with the biology. They went with other factors, social, economic, and so on. Well, I could go into some specific details. When I was working in the field early on, I was working in Plaquemine and St. Bernard parishes, which is below New Orleans. Plaquemine Parish was ruled with an iron thumb by Judge Leander Perez. Anything that got done in Plaquemine Parish, you better make sure the judge and his people were advised of what was going on, and that was very surprising to me. But you had influences coming in from various directions, and Judge Perez was where it all ended up. Judge Perez either agreed or didn't agree with you. If he didn't agree with you, you probably had to do some modifications.

MJ: Has that changed, do you think, in terms of the management in the states and things like that?

WP: The biggest change I have seen in my career in the management process not the science, not the biological sound, but the management process. Historically, you had various aspects of the commercial industry that wanted things one way or the other way: big shrimp versus little shrimp, for example, private oyster leaseholders versus public ground oyster fishermen. So, you had the commercial fishermen, then some – I guess it started in the [19]70s, the recreational fishing movement. Historically, none of the Gulf states had a marine angling license. When I started my career in the [19]60s, management was very basic. You managed oyster seasons and shrimp seasons, and that was it. To this day, I think there's still no season on blue crabs, for example. Year round, it's open. So, you had shrimp seasons you opened and closed based on your biological and other data. You had oyster seasons that opened and closed on that type of information. Finfish was wide open. There was no limits for anybody. Well, in the [19]60s, the only thing required to be a commercial fisherman was a license, which was very inexpensive. For the most part, compliance in those days was not near as good as it is now. I think people have – because of what's happened in the terrestrial environment, they understand the importance of habitat. Because of that, I think the users of the resource today are a lot more environmentally conscious to habitat and the need for good habitat if we're going to have fish production. But back to the one big change that followed the recreational input in fisheries, is the environmental group. Years ago, we never heard from the environmental group. Today, they are a very strong and legitimate voice. Best example I can give you of a project that happened in Louisiana, that was terribly detrimental to Southeast Louisiana, was the dredging of the Mississippi River Gulf outlet. A channel in Southeast Louisiana out to the Gulf that was going to shorten the trip up for the port of New Orleans. The benefits were going to be great because there were going to be X number of ships that were going to use the channel and so on and so forth. Well, for whatever reason, the number of ships using that channel was one-tenth of the number they estimated. But that channel, which was dredged to a certain width and depth at one time, eroded so much, maintenance dredging, the cost was just sky-high, extremely expensive to keep the channel open, even though very few ships were using it. The channel continued to erode, the banks, as well as brought saltwater intrusion in that has killed cypress trees in the northern end of the basin. Well, some claim that one of the reasons Katrina was so devastating to the New Orleans area was it came right up in the Mississippi River-Gulf outlet. Whether that's true or not, I'm sure it contributed to some of the problems. Because of the environmental damage, lack of use by the shipping industry, hurricane protection, and other things, the Corps of Engineers was authorized by Congress to discontinue the utilization of MRGO. They put a low-level seal to block off some of that saltwater intrusion, and it's no longer used as a ship channel by the larger ships. That one channel probably did as much damage to southeast Louisiana as any project I can think of. So, while in management decisions you've got another group that are providing their input, I think it's very good to have them in the process. You may not always agree with what they have to say, just like I don't always agree with what any one group has to say. But at least you're getting input from a variety of people.

MJ: So, you are saying that stakeholder groups have become more part of the process?

WP: Absolutely.

MJ: Other stakeholder groups, recreational, and environmental groups, and you think it is better

for the management to have them –

WP: Absolutely. That's why the Congress and their infinite wisdom and knowledge set up this process with commercial, recreational, for-hire people on the council. I think we probably should have more members of the environmental community on the council. We had Ms. Morris from Florida for a number of years who did a tremendous job, was a very fine council member, as we have excellent council members now.

MJ: When did you first get on the council? How did you get on the council?

WP: The department assistant secretary of Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries, Dr. (Sanibal?), was the representative to the Gulf council. Dr. Sanibal became ill in 1979, I think it was, and my instructions were, "Go to that meeting." Now, I had the benefit of being at the first ever Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council meeting. We were in the formative stage back then. NMFS had Buck Byrd going around. He was the guy representing NMFS to get the council process started, explaining what it was all about and so on and so forth. But Dr. Sanibal was the department representing for Wildlife and Fisheries. He got ill, "Go to this council meeting." I went to the council meeting, I listened to a debate for about two hours. I voted a certain way for a change, and then got chewed out by another member from Louisiana because I voted that way. [laughter] That was my first ever vote. It didn't agree with one of the other members from Louisiana, and I heard about it.

MJ: How did you get to go to the first Gulf council meeting? What was your role there?

WP: I went along with Dr. Sanibal. The three council members from the state of Louisiana, Dr. Sanibal for the department, Dr. Ford who was at LSU Sea Grant, had worked for Wildlife and Fisheries, and then Mr. Ed Swindell was an industry man. Dr. Sanibal brought me around to some of those meetings.

MJ: So, what was it like in those early days of the council?

WP: You had a group of individuals that, from the industry standpoint, I don't think knew each other very well. The state directors, I'm thinking back, Dr. Sanibal, Mr. Lyles from Mississippi – I don't remember who the Alabama department head was or the Florida head – and it was Bob Kemp from Texas. I had met them, so I knew some of the directors. So far as the industry people, because I had been going for ten or twelve years, I guess, to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, I knew some of the industry members, because they were part of the Gulf States Commission. Some, I did not know at all. There was a Mr. Greene from Vidor, Texas. Mr. Greene had served or maybe was still serving on the Texas Parks and Wildlife, and Mr. Greene was a recreational representative early on, on the council. There weren't many recreational members because the background of the whole Magnuson process was, "Get the foreign fishermen out and let's regulate and do our thing for our domestic fishermen." Mr. Greene was one of the first recreational early on on the council.

MJ: Were there any obvious divisions in the early days between any members?

WP: Not near as much. The divisions were more so East Gulf, West Gulf, Central Gulf type thing. Everybody wanted the same thing, and we weren't in the allocation picture then. The requirement back then was OY, maximum sustainable yield as modified by relevant social and economic factors. Then after the first reauthorization, I guess ecological got put in there. So, that was the thing. It said MSY, it said OY, and so on. But there were no allocation issues. The biggest issue early on was – I say a Florida issue. It was an issue in the Eastern Gulf between shrimpers and stone crabbers, and it was a shrimp-stone crab line. We had an emergency meeting in Florida. I remember I had to go to my boss, the secretary of the agency, for out-of-state travel approval to go to a meeting Christmas week. This head of the agency, quote-unquote, I remember he says, "That's like a bunch of scientists having a meeting the week of Christmas." But anyway, I went to that meeting, and the chairman of the committee – he must have been in the stone crab committee. He was a Florida department representative – handled the meeting, Mr. (O.B. Lee?), who's deceased now. They had a shooting. So, we did this call to meet under emergency measures. There's some provision in Magnuson for that. We heard from this group, the stone crabbers, and we heard from this group, the shrimpers. Both groups were willing to go just so far, but for some reason, that one area where that line is was the most important stone crab area and the most important shrimp area. We drew a line, we voted, and I don't think there have been any shooting since. But that was one of the most controversial issues that I recall early on, was that stone crab-shrimp line designation.

MJ: I want to bring up another controversial issue, because you have been involved with the shrimp fisheries for some, and you were there when TEDs were implemented. Can you talk a little bit about the implementation of TEDs?

WP: Yes, that was extremely controversial. I was the side against the use of TEDs, mandatory use of TEDs. I was with the state agency, and I testified in Washington at hearings. We had various hearings in the state of Louisiana as well as other areas. Going back – and my numbers are inaccurate, but I think you'll get the picture – the coast of Louisiana, for estuarine monitoring and marine monitoring purposes, were divided into seven study areas. Each study area has got a biologist, a scientist, and support staff. Those areas and those personnel monitor estuarine and marine conditions year-round, weekly. At the time, we had taken fifty, sixty-thousand trawl samples in estuarine and offshore waters. We had never caught a marine sea turtle in any of those tests. So, that was some of the background information I used, and I was a department representative then on all that. However, implementation did come about in probably the largest meeting I've ever attended, where a group of fishermen was in Thibodaux, Louisiana, at that auditorium put on by Concerned Shrimpers of America, Tee John Mialjevich. There was probably a thousand or so people in that one auditorium. Andy Kimmer wanted police protection – he was the regional administrator – and we provided it. The government was forcing them to use a device that they did not think was necessary. One of the big arguments was it's unsafe, that metal thing swinging in the net, and so on and so forth. I think they had a point there from a safety standpoint. We heard about loss of catch, and they're going to lose money and all this sort of thing. Well, fortunately, the government working with industry, the shrimp industry has come about and developed more efficient, safer TEDs. Birds were next – birds and so on. Now, I think other than minor compliance issues, angles in the net and so on and so forth, I think compliance is very good now. But it was not an overnight thing.

MJ: How do you think the shrimp industry is faring today, given having gone through TEDs? But there are a lot of other issues that affected it.

WP: My biggest issue of all, if we want quality fisheries, if we want sustainable fisheries, habitat is the key. Louisiana is losing a football field an hour or whatever the – I don't know the exact figures, but through natural as well as man-made processes. When man leveed the Mississippi River, that was the beginning of the end for coastal Louisiana. You no longer get the annual overflow, sand, silt, clay. Sand's the heaviest, it falls out first, the silts, and the clays. So, that freshwater, every spring, flooded the natural levees, deposited that material in the estuaries, the nutrients in the water, and so on and so forth. We're not getting that now. Consequently, we're losing and have lost thousands and thousands of acres of vegetated wetlands. Now, how much more can we lose before that balance is tipped? I don't know. But some of the NMFS scientists at the Galveston facility some twenty-five or so years ago did some research, and we were getting close to that fifty-fifty mix. Well, now we're over. We got less vegetated wetlands, and we have more water. I've had people say, "Well, isn't that good? More water, more fish." Well, not necessarily. If you don't have all the nutrients, if you don't have the vegetation where the juveniles and larvae have places to get away from the predators and all sorts of things, I don't think it's good for the fish. We in the Gulf have the productivity we have because of the habitat we have, and we've been losing that habitat. We're losing it naturally as well as man-made. We had one president years ago that said, "No net loss of wetlands." I used to fly a lot in small airplanes, and especially when I fly into our easternmost Gulf state, I still see dredging going on for development. Well, I don't know whatever happened to that no net loss of wetlands. I am continued to be amazed at how productive our estuarine system continues to be in spite of what we've done to it. We've dredged. We've filled. We've bulkheaded. We've polluted. We've littered. It's still very, very productive.

MJ: It is quite amazing in many ways. What do you see the difference between when you were first on the council and how the council is managing now? What would you say is the biggest difference?

WP: Again, the biggest difference is the allocation issue. We didn't have that issue back then. It was fish for Americans, fish for our people in the Gulf areas jurisdiction. We had difference of opinion with South Atlantic on joint management plans, but that's only natural. Your geography is totally different. You're dealing with seventeen voting members in the Gulf, and you add another twelve, I think, in South Atlantic. So, instead of seventeen opinions, you got twenty-nine opinions. Now, way back then, we also had the billfish plan, which was New England, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, and Gulf. When you got that many people involved, it's that much more difficult. But I think the big issues are the allocation issues.

MJ: When you say the allocation issues, you are talking about what was reauthorized in the last Magnuson Act setting ACLs and accountability measures?

WP: Yes. Again, what's the background of that? The environmental movement had influence on the Congress and got some of the things in that we didn't have in there before.

MJ: Has it made management more difficult?

WP: It's made management more challenging. Let's say that way. I suspect we're going through reauthorization now. I don't think anything's going to happen for a couple of years on it, but the process has started. There are some things that I'd like to see tweaked, me personally; flexibility, for example, and some of that kind of stuff. I've testified probably a half a dozen, maybe more times on when Magnuson has come up for reauthorization. I wish I would have been more persuasive or more successful in getting some of the things I wanted. Of course, my wants were more in line with what I thought we needed in the Gulf, whereas others from other parts of the country, they either did or did not agree. For the most part, some of the things they didn't agree, the Congress didn't agree, because I didn't get some of the stuff I wanted.

MJ: I want to go back again to another issue that you were probably involved in. It is often referred to between the South Atlantic and Gulf councils, but it was called the Mackerel Wars. Can you talk a little bit about that?

WP: Well, a couple of things. The Fort Pierce option was one – had to do with hook and line and the gillnet fishery or the run-around – maybe it was a purse seine. I think it was a gillnet issue. Yet again, it was different type of fishermen after the same resource in the same general area. The Mackerel Wars – well, that was one. The other Mackerel Wars, to me, was between the two councils on the zone mixing. Naturally, hey, the Gulf wants its share of fish and felt that the Gulf fish contributed more, and then these guys felt a little bit different on that. So, anytime you've got that type of situation, you're going to have disagreement. That's just a normal, logical thing. Naturally, the guys on one side of the line is going to be in favor of what they see and need for their side, and the guys on the other side of the line are going to have the same opinion on theirs.

MJ: Well, coastal migratory pelagics has to be one of the more complex plans that has ever been developed.

WP: Absolutely. Think about billfish, for example. That's really highly migratory. In the United States, supposedly, we try to lead the conservation effort, but we're only a very, very small part of that entire range of those species.

MJ: Has there been any improvement in management since you began? What would you say was the biggest improvement?

WP: The biggest improvement in management, I think we've done a hell of a lot better job at the state level than we have at the federal level. That's number one. At the state level, because of the makeup of the system, you're able to act or react in a lot quicker fashion. The federal system is not as flexible. I think that's one of the most difficult things for us to deal with. My background coming out as a state fishery director, people came to me, or my staff came to me. "Hey, we've got a problem. This is what we need to do. Commission meets once a month. You can do it if we've got an emergency rule. If you got to do it that quickly, you've got emergency rule. There's protection of life, property, and resource, all that kind of stuff. With the federal system, it's not that flexible. We can't act that quickly. The one time I recall us acting quickly was on that shrimp-stone crab line with the emergency rule, because there was threat to human

life. It used to be frustrating to me, but I've been around long enough that it's the system, and we've got to learn to work the system as best as we can.

MJ: If there is something that you could change about the way we currently manage, what would that be?

WP: If I could change the way we currently manage, I would like to see us – and we're trying to do that. We did something today, if I'm not mistaken, on the king mackerel – is set some numbers for a certain period of time and regulations. Let's live with them. Let's not bounce back and forth because another group came in and said, "Hey, wait a minute. You guys really did this to us." The Gulf is a big area, and we've got to accommodate everybody involved. Some of this zone management, this regional management, and so on and so forth may be the way to go. But until we can decide who gets what and what zone, we're not there yet. Yes, I certainly recognize the differences between fisheries in different parts of the Gulf, but we can't seem to reach an agreement on who gets what part of the pie. It's the same thing. It's an allocation.

MJ: So, you think stability is important in managing?

WP: Stability is very important. I think, with a few exceptions, we've been pretty darn stable. Look at the fisheries and look at the plans we have, and look what dominates our time, reef fish. If we put reef fish aside for a minute, think about all the other species we're evolved with. The council and the system has worked pretty darn well. We had mackerel that were overfished. They're no longer overfished. In fact, we're looking at possibly an allocation shift because one group's not meeting their allocation and that sort of thing. But reef fish aside, I think we've done a pretty darn good job.

MJ: Why is red snapper such an iconic issue in the Gulf?

WP: That's a good question. I wish I could answer that. I'd compare it to the red drum issue that hit in the [19]80s. Red drum was the poster fish for a large recreational conservation organization. A commercial fishery had developed that had taken or was taking a lot of fish. That one group felt that that was hurting the resource. All sorts of stringent regulations have came about. The federal waters have been closed since 1988 or [19]89. I think red snapper is a similar situation. It's the icon of the Gulf recreational fisheries. I think, because of the regulations and the shorter and shorter and shorter and shorter seasons, we've made people, recreational anglers, want to go catch a red snapper. I think we've created part of the problem because of the system we're working in. As an example, back to my early days on Grand Isle, Louisiana, I got to fish offshore a lot. I got to fish offshore when there weren't any oil rigs out there. Again, I guess I was more fortunate than most, was that my family had the ability that I was able to go fishing offshore. The camp next to us was owned by the man who owned a charter boat. (Cruza é Toco?) was the name of the boat. I'll never forget it. We'd go out and catch snapper, but that wasn't the fish that most people were interested in back then. But the system now, for some reason, that big, beautiful red snapper seems to be the icon that so many people want today, that years ago, was not – I don't know, on the forefront as much as it is now.

MJ: Are there any memorable moments or periods of time in your tenure on the council that you

remember most?

WP: Memorable moments. The memorable people I've really enjoyed…

MJ: Sure. What are some of those people? Who are some of those people?

WP: Well, a number of people I was able to work with on the Gulf council, of course, my former boss, Doc Sanibal, who had a tremendous impact on my life and my career, my philosophy of fish. But Mr. John Greene, the recreational fisherman from Vidor, Beaumont, Texas, what a champion he was for the recreational fishing community early on, before the real movement in offshore marine fisheries. We had the recreational guys – spotted seatrout and red drum wasn't too big. Another really memorable individual was Albert King from Alabama. Albert was one of, I think, eleven children. Grew up dirt poor. His father moved to Louisiana to fish shrimp from Morgan City. Albert got into the shrimping business probably after he finished high school, and was very successful as a fisherman processor. He was involved in processing the shrimp down in Brownsville, Texas. Just sitting with he and some of the other older fishmen, listening to the stories and how it was way back then, Albert's boat and two other boats, left the Gulf Shores, Alabama area, and went straight south and fished South America years ago. All they had was a magnetic compass. The stories he told us about fishing down there and fishing in Mexican waters and things of that sort, it's tragic that we have not been able to record that kind of stuff. I asked Albert, I told him numerous times, "You need to write a book about your experiences." Some of the other things, he also fished snapper back then. They used a window weight that was lead, and they had a line that every fathom or so, had a colored mark. They'd put soap on the bottom of that window weight, that concave area. They didn't know where the reefs were. So, the guy on the bow of the boat would throw that line out, and that weight would go down. If that soap picked up grit, they said, "Hey, this is a shelly or a rocky area," and they tried to fish snapper there. I mean, stories like that, they're just gone. Now, Albert sort of embellished telling stories. So, how much of all that was true or not, I don't know.

MJ: It is a pretty ingenious method.

WP: Well, that's what they had back then.

MJ: What have you enjoyed the most about being involved in fisheries management?

WP: Being involved with the council?

MJ: Yes.

WP: The different people from different walks of life, different philosophies, and learning from all of them. My background was science. I still think biology is most important, but we've got the economists, we've got sociologists, and so on and so forth that also have a very important part in the scheme of things.

MJ: What would you say you enjoyed the least about it?

WP: The controversy. I mean, it's no fun to disagree with people. It's a lot easier to get along with people. What I dislike the most or is most displeased, anytime we have to put a regulation on, it's affecting people. Unfortunately, I've had a lot of experience in doing that at the state level as well as with the council level. Nobody wants to curtail other people's activity. At least I don't want to curtail anybody's activity. But it has to be done. I don't like driving fifty-five miles an hour – but, hey, at one time that was the speed limit – and those sort of things. It's one thing to suggest to someone that, "Hey, this may be a better way to do it." But when the government says you have to do it, immediate reaction.

MJ: Is there anything that you are particularly proud about at your accomplishments?

WP: That I've survived this long. [laughter] That's important, that I'm still here. So many of my close friends have passed away recently, and that's really hit hard – Larry Simpson, (Tom McElwain?), Rick Laird, (Mike Wyzant?), who was a very prominent oyster fisherman that I worked with for years. There's just a number of people that – some younger than I am. I've had bypass surgery. I'm just happy to be here. The doctors tell me I'm doing fine. If I don't get my blood pressure up at some of these council meetings, hopefully, I'll be around a little bit longer.

MJ: Do you have any advice for a young person who might want to get involved in fisheries management?

WP: Be persistent. The good Lord gave you two ears and one mouth. Listen and learn. Listen and learn no matter what your discipline is. Mine was biology. That's most important, but other disciplines are just as important to those other people. Listen and learn for them, and try and mesh all that together to come out with the best product you can.

MJ: Is there anything that you would like to ask?

AL: I would love to hear Corky's…

WP: I can't hear you.

MJ: [laughter]

AL: I would to love to hear Corky's favorite fishing story – your favorite big fish story, your favorite fish that got away story.

WP: I've fished so damn many times.

AL: Just tell us one.

MJ: [laughter]

WP: I'll tell you what, you can't imagine the productivity of the Delta area of the Mississippi River. I experienced it. I was there. When I tell you about catching fish, you tell me I'm lying. We sit in one place. You catch red fish, speckled trout, freshwater bass, I mean, flounders. But

probably, my best story was the first big fish I caught as a little boy. I was probably twelve years old. I still got a picture of that somewhere. Katrina took damn near everything I had, so the picture may be gone. My father, my uncle, and there were others in the family – but I brought one of my close friends. I grew up in Central Louisiana. As a kid, growing up in Central Louisiana, the other kids didn't even know we had salt water down there. I got to live it. I mean, I'd spend the summer there. I took one of my friends one time down there, and we went out on a charter boat. He and I each caught a cobia that weighed – Christ, I thought, "So, I'm going to weigh it five-hundred pounds." Look, I'm skin and bones when I was a kid. They weighed twenty-five, thirty pounds. Catching that, that was a big, big fish for me to catch, a big fish. But that first fish I ever caught, a little crappie about that long, I still remember it. I've been very fortunate. I've caught a lot of fish in life. I've never caught any humongous, big fish. Listen, the tuna, one, and I've had it. I don't want to catch any more. That's work. Amberjack fight like hell. Again, I don't fish as much as I used to, but the amberjack we'd catch, I mean – it's just the habitat was there. That was it, habitat.

MJ: What do you think is the future of fisheries management?

WP: As long as we have a healthy environment, we're going to have fisheries. We're going to have more conflict over user space and things of that sort. I still snow ski. I love to snow ski. In California fifteen, twenty years ago, I'm going to go skiing. Big something, I don't remember the name. I get to the mountain. Can't go. What do you mean? "Limited entry, man." They only sell so many damn lift tickets that day, and you can understand. In Los Angeles, it's X million people. It really hit me, I mean, I couldn't even go skiing. I fished out of Westport, Washington in about 1986 or [19]87 on a head boat. A friend of mine that I'd gone to China with – he was a professor– ran a charter boat, a headboat, during the summers. Typical buy license on it. Limit was two silvers per day. You caught a fish, they marked it some kind of way or tagged it. On the way in, or when he got to the dock, he had to report what was caught. Now, that was in the [19]80s. Here we are in 2014. We need to catch up with other parts of the country. I've flown into lakes in Alaska. I mean, after you fly over, you say, "Oh, my God. This is the most beautiful place in the world. I've got it to myself." Land the damn airplane, getting a little old boat and go around it, there's a hundred people there. We got more and more people. We've got the system in place for the commercial guys. We got more of the charter boat guys, and they want more stuff. We got unlimited recreational now. Congress is very smart. Food production and recreation – man, the easiest thing in the world is give me one or the other. One or the other, I don't care. I'm sorry. Take a pick. But trying to make all that mesh together, we're going to have to put more regulations. Here's the pie. Here's the rec guys getting that much of the pie, and the slits are getting smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller. It just can't go on. They want days, they don't want fish. The guy I fished with so much over the years, he calls me and you bunch of idiots. He says, "What am I going to have to do next? Throw half an amberjack out the freezer so I can go catch a half of one?" That kind of stuff. Unfortunately, it's regulations.

MJ: I want to talk about two issues. One that you have mentioned several times, and you experienced it, was Hurricane Katrina. Can you talk a little bit about that experience and what happened to the coast?

WP: Well, Katrina, I had a home in southeast Louisiana, and I had a home in Gulfport, Mississippi. My wife was dealing with a client that she had in Alexandria, Louisiana. She called me that Saturday morning. She was due to come back that Saturday morning before Katrina hit on a Monday or whatever day it hit. I was going to stay. I had been through storms, storms, storms, storms. Well, she didn't convince me. I guess she was upset enough – she had two or three of my friends from different areas call me, "Hey, you need to get out of there." I left in my truck with enough clothes and a small bag, because I figured I'm going to be back in two or three days. Now, I was very fortunate. My two sisters and I still own our family home in Central Louisiana. So, I had a place to go. As the predictions got worse and worse and worse, my sister from New Orleans came up. Son came up. Daughter came up. The guy that I fish with, he and his wife and son came up. The storm hit. Well, we're getting all kinds of reports. We don't know what's happening down there. Finally, the worst thing of all, I guess, was lack of communication. When I was able to get back to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, I couldn't communicate to my employees if they were right outside the – because everything was down. Well, I think the storm hit Sunday night on Monday. By about Wednesday, we're hearing all this stuff. So, I got in a small airplane and I flew down there to see what things looked like. From the air, my house looked all right. There were trees on it and so on. But I didn't know the water had come up six feet. Again, you're flying. So, three or four days later, we drove down there. I had some friends come with me. Picture this hotel room as your home. Every piece of paper, everything was just mud. Nothing worked. You had no power. You had no water. Now, I went back to that in Louisiana. What I went back to in Mississippi was probably worse, but it was easier. The only thing left was a slab. That was easier because you didn't have to try and clean up or pick up. One valuable lesson I learned – now, my office was in Biloxi – keep valuable papers in a safe place. I had valuable papers in Louisiana, in Gulfport, and in Biloxi. Biloxi office was shot. Those papers are gone. Gulfport is gone. Fortunately, those papers were upstairs in the other – you heard stories about people who were bussed to Houston or Atlanta or Birmingham. They had nothing, no ID. That's understandable. Now, as far as the driver's license is, if you have a driver's license, you ought to have it with you. But everything else, passports, all that would have gone to heck. But fortunately, that stuff was upstairs in the place in Louisiana. Then fighting insurance, government – not just the federal government, local government. I fortunately had the resources if I wanted to rebuild. The local officials were changing from day to day. You can do this, you can't – and they had never experienced this. So, after spending a thousand dollars on house plans and all that kind of stuff, I said, "To hell with this. I don't need this." I went and bought a house fifty miles from the coast, where I'm living now. I mean, you just didn't know what you could or couldn't do, and that was extremely frustrating. Again, I recognize these were officials – at the local level, they never had to deal with this kind of thing before.

MJ: You were on a task force for the recovery from Katrina. Can you talk a little bit about that?

WP: Again, Governor Barbour put this group together, represented everything he could think of and the group could think of, from shipping to agriculture to timber to fisheries to – I'm leaving much of it out because I can't think of it. We met, and we met. One of the biggest things that always impacted me after a hurricane – because I used to fly a lot, and I'd always fly after hurricanes to see the damage to the timber. You remember the old game pick-up sticks where you – that's what timber looks like. And you think about it, it took hundreds of years for some of

those trees, and they're down – timber, agriculture, of course, the impact on fisheries, and so on and so forth. Now, on fisheries from a storm, biggest impact is oysters. Oysters can't move. The reefs get silted over. The vegetated wetlands get moved. All that stuff sinks. A lot of it falls out on oyster reefs and so on, smothers the oysters and that sort of thing. But for the mobile species, it's never as bad as a lot of times the press says it is. In fact, after a lot of the storms, some of the fishing activity picks up, because it's a jubilee effect, a thermocline type deal, a turnover, and that sort of thing.

MJ: Has Gulf Coast recovered from Katrina?

WP: Oh, no. Well, I mean, we made a lot of steps forward. I mean, you don't replace two-hundred year-old homes and things like that. The infrastructure's come back. There's still a lot of roadwork that needs to be done and things like that. The ports are coming back, but there's work that needs to be done. I have a brother-in-law who's a Yankee from New York. Well, they live in Connecticut now. He came down three years after Katrina and said, "My God, you people have done nothing." Well, they've had Sandy up there, and I think they understand that when you lose everything, and you got to start from scratch, first off, where's the money going to come from? You may have had a community with a tax base five-hundred businesses and ten-thousand people. Well, all of a sudden, you got fifty businesses and two or three-thousand people living in a FEMA trailer. All this has to start from scratch. It has to be funded and so on and so forth. I don't know if you guys were in there when I brought up about the saltwater boat sales going up. Well, in that same section of the paper, it had the five or six communities in Mississippi and the tax revenue that's come in since two thousand or whatever. The largest increase, a tremendous increase, is the Iberville. The Iberville is the community on the north side of Biloxi Bay. It didn't get hit near as hard as Biloxi and Gulfport and Pass Christian. People have moved north, and the businesses have moved with them.

MJ: One other recent disaster was the BP oil spill. Can you talk a little bit about how that affected the…

WP: Well, BP oil spill, as you know, impacted a tremendous geography of the Gulf. Because of that, a very large part of the Gulf was closed to all fishing activity. And rightfully so, for protection of human life as the bottom line. Where the oil came ashore in the greatest quantities, one of my biggest concerns was what that oil was going to do to the vegetation. The only thing holding areas of South Louisiana, South Mississippi, and so on together is the root system of those plants. So, if those root systems go, there goes your land. We've had some of that, unfortunately. So, the loss of vegetated wetlands has been accelerated by the BP plant. It's very, very difficult and expensive to get vegetated wetlands back in place. I'm not saying it can't be done. It can be done, but it's a costly process. Damage to terrestrial life, bird life, and all that along the coast was high. We've had unexplained dolphin and turtle deaths in increased numbers and so on. I don't think we will know the long-term effects of the BP spill for some time. It's just going to take time. Now, saying that, following some of the other storms, we had rigs that were toppled and platforms that were toppled and so on and so forth, and there was tremendous volumes of oil that were released into the Gulf. The big difference is this oil came from one source. The others were more spread out geographically, so the dilution effect was a lot greater. Let me give you a comparison. I'll round things off. BP spill took place for about a hundred

days, three months. One of the big arguments now is how much oil was spilled. I want to say I've heard a hundred million barrels. So, hundred days, hundred million barrels. In the spring of the year, the discharge of the Mississippi River is in excess – on a high river year, discharge of the Mississippi River is in excess of a million CFS – a million cubic feet per second. One of the scientists told me how many gallons were in a cubic foot. And I don't remember it – seven, eight gallons, something like that. Seven million gallons per second. Do the math. Times sixty is a minute. Times sixty is an hour. Times twenty-four is a day. Seven is a week. Thirty is a month. So, what flows out of the Mississippi River in that same ninety, hundred-day period versus that volume of oil? Now, I'm not saying that volume of oil was good for the environment. I'm just saying put things in perspective, because Lord knows we know what's coming down the Mississippi River in some cases. It's not pristine water. But bottom line, I don't think we'll know anytime soon of the impacts that particular spill has had on fisheries. Now, the good news is Dr. Shipp said that meeting in Mobile just recently that the snapper larval count was high, and so on and so forth. So, let's hope all that continues.

MJ: Do you have anything else?

AL: No, that was…

WP: I still can't hear you.

MJ: [laughter]

AL: That was great.

MJ: Well, is there anything else that you would like to say?

WP: Well, let me back up. I grew up in a town of under two-thousand people, a very rural area. Never in my wildest imagination did I ever dream, once I became a biologist with the department the first time, would I ever be so fortunate as to have been promoted to the level I was promoted to. I applied for one job in my life, and that was the one I got. Every promotion I got in the department, they came to me. The first time I was asked by a governor to be head of fisheries, I was a nervous wreck, and went in and recommended someone else. I didn't think I had enough experience. That governor served one term. The next one came in and offered me the job, and I went in there and asked if there was any chance of the current guy staying. It was no. I said, "All right, I'll take the job." So, I was very fortunate there. When I retired from Wildlife and Fisheries, I had three job offers. I was going to take one with your agency. The director in Mississippi came to me, and it was more in line of what I like to do, more direct work with people. That's why I went to Mississippi. It was a small agency. When you got to worry about several hundred employees and budgets and dealing with legislators and all that – and in taking that job in Mississippi, I thought I wasn't going to have a lot of that stuff. I didn't have to worry about the budget like I did before. While I did have to do some of the legislative work, it wasn't near as much as I had done before. So, consequently, I had a lot more time to spend on fishery issues, which is what I wanted to do. Again, to serve on the council this long, I've just been extremely fortunate, and an education for me. Now, off the record – and I've eaten in the best restaurants from Key West through to Brownsville – the council loves to meet in good places

where the food's good. But thank you all. I hope I gave you something to work with.

MJ: Well, we are certainly glad you have hung around, Corky, and glad to have the opportunity to talk to you about that, certainly.

WP: All right.

AL: Thank you.

[end of transcript]