

Michael Jepson: So, this is Michael Jepson with the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office. I am here today with Roy Williams, a Gulf Council member, and we are interviewing Roy as part of the Fishery Management Council Oral History Project at SERO in conjunction with the NOAA Voices from the Fisheries project. So, Roy, we usually start the interview just have you talk a little bit about your background. So, could you first state your full name and where you presently reside?

Roy Williams: My name is Roy Williams, Roy O. Williams. I reside in Tallahassee, Florida.

MJ: When were you born? What year?

RW: 1945.

MJ: Where were you born?

RW: Ames, Iowa.

MJ: Are you married?

RW: I am. Wife and two children, two adult children.

MJ: What is your wife's name?

RW: Deborah. Debbie.

MJ: How long have you been married?

RW: 1971. That makes it over forty years.

MJ: What is your father and mother's names?

RW: Well, my real father died in World War II. His name was Roy (Orin-Jost?). I was born Roy (Orin-Jost?). My mother remarried to John Williams, and their names were John Williams and Helen Williams.

MJ: Did they have occupations similar to yours?

RW: He was an engineer, but mainly a contractor by profession, an earth-moving business.

MJ: Did your mother work at all?

RW: Just a little, not much.

MJ: You said you had children?

RW: Two children. Two adult sons, age thirty-two. Andy's thirty-two, and Brian's thirty.

MJ: Are they involved in marine science at all?

RW: Well, not really. The younger son, to some degree. He's in the U.S. Coast Guard in Ketchikan, Alaska. He's an ensign for the Coast Guard on the 110, the *Chandeleur*. You couldn't really say he was involved in biology, though. He worked for two summers for the state of Wyoming, managing projects. They have a problem – well, they don't have a problem yet, but zebra mussels are a problem in a lot of states. They're not in a problem with Wyoming yet, but he worked two summer projects managing a team of guys who were intercepting boats, inspecting them for zebra mussels. If the boat had been coming out of someplace like Arizona that has a real problem with zebra mussels, they had some – I think it was a steam machine of some sort that they would wash it down with, clean the bilge somehow. So, that's his only real involvement.

MJ: So, briefly with some invasive species work and things like that?

RW: Invasive species, yes.

MJ: Any brothers and sisters that work in fisheries management or fisheries?

RW: Well, not anymore. My younger brother, John, was I would call the executive director of the limited entry commission in Alaska back thirty years ago, I guess. They didn't call it executive director. They called it something else. But he ran their limited entry commission. He did that for, I don't know, three, four, five years, and then got into the real estate business in Juneau, Alaska. That's what he does now. My sister's married to an engineer and lives in Colorado. I have another brother who's in the manufacturing business in Colorado.

MJ: So, tell me a little bit about your educational background. Where would you go to high school and college?

RW: Well, I came from Southwestern Nebraska originally, a small town called Benkelman, Nebraska.

MJ: Benkelman?

RW: Population, fifteen hundred. I went to school at the University of Nebraska, graduated in 1968. I had a friend at the University of Florida. I'd been offered to go to graduate school in genetics. I went down to see him, and just while he was in Gainesville. While I was there, I thought, "Oh, what the heck," and I applied for a job at the marine laboratory in St. Petersburg. Within a month, I got a notice that they wanted to hire me, and I took the job and really never left, I worked. I went to work in 1968 for the then Florida Board of Conservation. They, within a couple years, became the Department of Natural Resources. I worked for the Department of Natural Resources until 1987 when I went to work for the Marine Fisheries Commission. That eventually became the Fish and Wildlife when the Marine Fisheries Commission merged with the Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, became the Fish and Wildlife Commission. That's where I retired from in 2007.

MJ: What was it like in those early years when you were working for the Board of Conservation? It must have been a pretty small lab. Was it big at that time?

RW: Well, it was the marine laboratory in St. Petersburg. No, they had a pretty good staff. Small by today's comparisons, but they must have had sixty biologists or so. But Florida's a huge state, too. I was in a field laboratory in Sanford, Florida, working on American shad and blueback herring in the St. John's River. But they had field labs in Sanford, Crystal River, Pensacola, down in the Keys. They would open and close them as they needed to for projects that they had. If they had a federal contract or a contract from a power agency, a power company, to work on a – back then, there were a number of projects that were looking at entrainment and impingement of fishes in the cooling water apparatuses of a lot of power plants that were being built, Hutchinson Island, Florida, Crystal River, Florida. So, the agency opened and closed field laboratories as they needed. I was in the Sanford field lab.

MJ: So, a lot of the work that you were doing was supporting state projects and states –

RW: It was all state.

MJ: It was all state?

RW: All state projects, yes.

MJ: Then did you live in St. Pete? You said you got to move around.

RW: I lived in Sanford from [19]68 to [19]74. In the summer of [19]74, I moved to St. Petersburg and started working on king mackerel and doing a tagging project on king mackerel.

MJ: Can you talk a little bit about that move when you became a supervisor of the vertebrate fisheries section at the marine –

RW: I don't really remember what year I became the supervisor of vertebrate fisheries section. I was just another biologist when I went over there in [19]74. By [19]77 or [19]78, Charlie Futch, who had been the vertebrate fisheries section supervisor, had left and moved to Tallahassee, and I took over the job. I had twelve or thirteen people working for me. We were working on king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, red drum, sea trout, snook. We had several guys identifying larval fishes. We had really an assortment of projects.

MJ: Were there any notable people or people that you remember working with back in those early days that...

RW: Well, yes, there were. Well, of course, (Bob Engel?) had started the marine laboratory – oh, jeez, I guess the late – probably the late [19]50s or early 1960s. I guess his background was oyster biology and shrimp biology. He had started the laboratory with a biologist or two. By the time I arrived, they had fifty or sixty staff members. (Bill Lyons?) ran the invertebrate section. He was an interesting guy, because Bill had been accepted into the Naval Academy and had left

before he finished. I think he, for whatever reason, didn't fit in, and had left the Naval Academy. At the time, when I got there, he was running the invertebrate fishery section. Even though he hadn't actually graduated from college yet, he was supervising people at least with master's degrees. But he was the right guy. Bill was bright and I wouldn't want to have to supervise him, honestly. He's the kind of guy that needed to be a supervisee rather than the supervised. I mean, he needed to supervise people. He'd been a hard guy to supervise. I wouldn't want him working for me, yes, only because he has a strong personality. (Karen Steininger?), when I first went there, was the – and I don't know if you know Karen, but she was the red tide biologist. She took over running the marine laboratory in probably about [19]78, [19]79, somewhere in there. She was really good, extremely organized, and worked all the time. It was her whole life. She was unmarried, no kids. That was her entire life. She worked all the time.

MJ: Devoting herself to her job?

RW: She worked all the time. Yes, she worked all the time in the job. We had good biologists that worked. I hired Mike Murphy (Stilo?), one of their technical biologists there that is in charge of their statistics section, fishery analysis. I hired him years ago. I hired Bob McMichael who runs the invertebrate fishery section there. I hired Behzad Mahmoudi as a mullet biologist, but he has stayed around as – I don't know what Behzad works on anymore. But I had hired all those guys.

MJ: Well, I wanted to ask you, because you did come from the Midwest. Was that kind of an odd transition to the marine –

RW: It probably was, but I started life in freshwater. I was working on American shad in St. John's River. So, I worked on freshwater projects from [19]68 to [19]74. They moved me to St. Petersburg and they closed the Sanford laboratory down in 1974 and moved me over there. I knew the state of Florida by then. You just have to become skilled or not skilled, but you have to become informed on whatever it is you're working on, read the literature, and get to know the people that are involved in it. So, it wasn't a real tough transition to work on king mackerel, no.

MJ: What was it like, that transition, then, from working at the lab and then going to the Marine Fisheries Commission?

RW: Well, that was a real change. But it was a change I really wanted to make too. I've always been interested in management and conservation. Even as a kid, I was interested in those kinds of things. I had gotten to know the people on the Marine Fisheries Commission because they had asked the marine laboratory to do an assessment on Spanish mackerel. King mackerel were being managed by the federal government. They had started assessments and were working on them, and they hadn't done anything with Spanish mackerel.

MJ: What year? What time was this?

RW: This was about [19]85, I would say. In the fall of [19]85, myself, Mike Murphy, and Bob Muller prepared a paper for the Marine Fisheries Commission on what we thought the status of Spanish mackerel was. There hadn't been any kind of assessment at the federal level by then.

We concluded that Spanish mackerel were almost certainly overfished. During that, I had been asked to start going to the Marine Fisheries Commission public hearings. This was really a big deal back in 1985, because the state really hadn't done much real management. Prior to the creation of the Marine Fisheries Commission, the legislature did all the management. When they created the Marine Fisheries Commission, in – I'm going to say about [19]83 or [19]85, I don't remember exactly – that was the first time there was any real management body in the state. Prior to that, it was done by the legislature. They had a few weeks every year to listen to a little bit of testimony, and they weren't very good at it. I mean, it takes a lot of specialized knowledge to manage fisheries, and they didn't have it. Of course, at that end, it's pretty political too when the legislature's dealing with it. So, I had gotten to know the Marine Fisheries Commission staff, and I'd gotten to know the commissioners. A position came open for the assistant executive director in sometime around summer, fall of [19]86. I applied for it and got hired. They knew me by then, and I knew them. I liked what they were doing. We got that Spanish mackerel – Spanish mackerel were overfished. We conducted hearings all over the state. Me, as a biologist, I still wasn't working for the Marine Fisheries Commission, but I listened to people's testimony. I helped the commission implement a rule to regulate harvest of Spanish mackerel. We got it. We took it to the governor and cabinet. I remember Charles Lee, who was the executive director of the Florida Audubon Society, came to testify. He said that this was the first real test of the Marine Fisheries Commission. Back then, the governor and cabinet had to approve all of our rules. It was a seven-member elected governor and cabinet in Florida, and they had to approve all of our rules. Lee said this was the first real test of this Marine Fisheries Commission. He basically was telling them that if they didn't approve this rule, we may not be much, and maybe we should just go away. I always remember that Governor Graham was really helpful, because after this very emotional testimony about how harmful a rule was going to be to some fishermen and so on, Governor Graham looked around and said, "Is there anybody that wants to vote against this rule?" One person did. But he was really helpful in the way that he put it out there.

MJ: Who was the director of the Marine?

RW: At that time, it was a fellow by the name of (Connor Davis?). He had been a staff member of the Gulf Council, and he had left the Gulf Council when the Marine Fisheries Commission was formed. I think it was 1983. He left and was their first executive director. He did that job until probably either late [19]87 or sometime on into 1988. The commission was having a lot of difficulty. I'm being frank here. The commission was having a lot of difficulty down before the governor and cabinet. Ultimately, they decided to let Connor go. I think they just felt that he had trouble communicating. You really had to work through the staff aides. You didn't go in and talk to the governor and cabinet. You had to work with their aides. He didn't seem to be well liked by them. I don't know why. They didn't like to see us come, and honestly, because our issues were difficult. They were difficult. They were hard to understand. They crossed political boundaries. You couldn't predict how somebody was going to vote based on whether he or she was a Democrat or a Republican. They were really independent of the political party. I think the cabinet didn't like to see us come, and they didn't like all those people showing up to complain.

MJ: On that early Spanish mackerel rule, was that primarily commercial?

RW: Well, it regulated everybody, but the commercial fishery had been the problem. It was the development of the deep-water gillnet fishery that we think caused the decline of Spanish mackerel. But it had been declining anyway. I mean, if you looked on the east coast of Florida, we looked at it. If you go back into the [19]50s, there was a shallow water fishery that existed from probably about Cape Canaveral, Daytona Beach area, somewhere clear down into Dade County, there was a shallow water gillnet fishery for them. As you look through the decades, you can see the fishery declining at the ends of the range. Eventually, there aren't any landings up in the Cape Canaveral area anymore. There aren't any landings down in Dade County, in Palm Beach County, which used to have commercial landings. You can see the fishery just pulling into the area from about Sebastian to Fort Pierce or Port Salerno, and then down into just the Fort Pierce-Salerno area. The deep-water gillnet first came into the fishery about [19]75, I would guess [19]75, maybe [19]76. Seventy-five or [19]76. They were fishing out in deeper water, catching Spanish mackerel that really hadn't been harvested before that. These were boats that came up from the Florida Keys, came up into the Fort Pierce, Salerno, even Sebastian area. They had heard about these schools of big Spanish mackerel, but no one had ever fished them before. Prior to then, the fishery was a shallow water fishery that fished just behind the surf line with a relatively shallow, short Spanish mackerel net. These deep-water gillnets fished out in fifty and sixty feet of water with a much larger net, very, very heavy. I can remember when they started that fishery, [19]75 or [19]76, those fishermen and all these guys were coming out of the Keys were just astounded at the size of the Spanish mackerel, because they were catching Spanish mackerel over seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven pounds, and they didn't see those in the Keys. I think they probably didn't see them because the Spanish mackerel population in the Keys had been heavily exploited for a long time. Eventually, they fished that population of Spanish mackerel down. The fish physically became smaller. By the time we did our assessment in, I think, [19]85, the fish had become very small. People had been complaining for several years about the decline of Spanish mackerel. We then, the commission – I was still a biologist for the Department of Natural Resources, but the commission implemented a rule that I think, as I recall, that we decreased harvest by forty-five percent. Everybody had to be cut back. The recreational fisherman was cut back to a four-fish bag limit. The commercial fishery on the east coast and west coast were both – quotas were implemented. There were some other regulations as well, but primarily, what was controlling were these quotas. As I recall, they were – I think it was a forty-five or forty-six percent cut back in fishing mortality. One thing I didn't say earlier was that implementing that first rule was really difficult because when the commission implemented the rule to implement these quotas and bag limits, the commercial industry did challenge it in court or through an administrative hearing process, a legal process. I was a witness for the state. I was the biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. We had to justify our rule to a hearing officer, and we did that. Then we went to the governor and cabinet. That's really when I had got to know the commission staff. Just a little bit about maybe some of the commissioners back then too because we really had some outstanding commissioners. Governor Graham had appointed the first fish and wildlife Marine Fisheries Commission. There were some really good, tough guys on that. One of them was Bill Fox, who later became the head of the National Fisheries Service. At the time, he was a staff member at the University of Miami. He, of course, was really well informed on fisheries population dynamics and fisheries biology. He was really a good Marine Fisheries Commission member. We also had a character by the name of George Barley, who was a tough nut. George was somehow related to the commercial fishermen in Jacksonville, but he was a developer from

Orlando. He was an avid fisherman and had fished in the Keys with – it was a professional football player from Auburn whose name is escaping me right now. But they used this guy's \$100,000 advancement check to buy a big property in Orlando and develop it. George became fairly wealthy from developing this property. But he was an avid fisherman, and he really was opposed to most coastal development because of the environmental aspects of it. He was very bright, very stubborn, very full of himself, very self-confident. He knew what he wanted, and he wanted fishery regulation. He felt that we had to regulate fisheries. Most of the fisheries back then were overfished. His stubbornness was both an obstacle and helpful in fishery regulation. He angered people, and there were people that just despised him. I personally liked him.

MJ: Maybe possibly difficult.

RW: Yes, he was a difficult guy. He was difficult with staff. I mean, some of the staff really didn't like him either. He and I got along pretty well, I think. Other interesting commissioners we had back then, Gene Raffield, who owned a fish house in Port St. Joe and became well known because he was arrested, I think by the Fish and Wildlife Service. I can't remember for sure who it was, but for purse-seining red drum off of Northwest Florida. Maybe it was the state. Maybe it was the state that arrested him. Florida had a law, this was a legislated law, not a law of the Marine Fisheries Commission. This was part of the statutes of Florida that said you could not use a purse seine on a food fish. They specialized up there in that Port St. Joe fishery, harvesting mostly minor things that other people were not particularly interested in. They had found these redfish offshore and started purse-seining them. There was a Paul Prudhomme, K-Paul's fishery in New Orleans had developed the blackening process, and they needed that. He was the inventor of that, as I recall. But they really needed a relatively inexpensive fish to make a profit on it, I guess. Redfish filled the bill. There were a lot of people purse-seining them in the Northern Gulf.

MJ: Was he a commissioner when he got arrested?

RW: He was a commissioner. He was a commissioner when he was arrested, yes. He eventually resigned just because it was an embarrassment for the governor at the time, I think. I don't really remember the legal outcome of the case, whether he pled out or what. George Barley and Bill Fox were two of the most interesting of the original commissioners we had. We had some other good ones, though. I mean, Dan Kipnis, who had a headboat out of Miami. He's kind of a hippie kind of guy. I don't know what his relationship with the governor was to have gotten appointed to the Marine Fisheries Commission, but he did. He was a guy who would vote against his own self-interest if he thought it was really necessary, to preserve the fish. He was a fun guy because he was real emotional. He would get real emotional about issues. Another good commissioner we had was Tom Frazer, who was from Northern Charlotte Harbor somewhere. He was a biological consultant, but he was an avid fisherman, and he knew a lot about fisheries. He was really helpful, especially after Bill Fox left, in keeping the commission focused on regulating the vertebrate fisheries. He was really knowledgeable. He was so knowledgeable, and he really had a passion for it as well. So, he was another good commissioner. In all honesty, I would give a lot of credit to Russell Nelson, too.

MJ: Can you tell us who Russell was?

RW: Well, after Connor Davis left as executive director of the Marine Fisheries Commission, they hired Russell Nelson, who was a staff biologist at the time. But he was also a few months away from getting his Ph.D. degree, I think, from North Carolina State, as I recall. I know it was North Carolina. I think it was North Carolina State. He was really knowledgeable too. He'd been hired as a statistician for the agency, a fisheries analyst. They then hired him. Bill Fox had known him a long time, and George Barley knew him as well. They hired him when Connor left as the executive director. Russ was extremely bright. He had, I've said in the past, pathways through his brain that most of the rest of us didn't have. He had the ability to take a set of facts, set of circumstances, and figure out how they were going to play out over time. He was a good – really a good strategist. In all fairness, Russ was really pro-recreational. I think he tried to be fair, but he had grown up as an avid recreational fisherman. He was from the Chicago or Chicago area, but the family had an old family home in Wisconsin. He and his brother, Randy, spent summers there. They were avid fishermen. Both of them were avid fishermen. Russ felt, I mean, deep down that the real value, long-term, in fishing was in recreational fisheries as opposed to commercial fisheries. But he still got along with an awful lot of the commercial fishermen. Some of them detested him, but some of them really liked him too. Russ was a guy who had an opinion and usually wasn't afraid to share it. So, you make enemies doing that at times.

MJ: So, you were there with the Marine Fisheries Commission during a very difficult time. I guess it was difficult, but it was during the Florida net ban. Could you talk a little bit about that?

RW: Well, yes. The net ban, I'll just tell you straight out, I voted against it. I think probably half of our staff voted for it and half voted against it. I'm one of them that voted against it. The net ban, yes, I'm trying to figure out how to couch this. The problem, I always felt, was not the nets themselves. The nets were actually selective for size of mullet. I mean, what most of the net fishermen were after in the inshore waters of Florida. They also caught sea trout and redfish and quite a few other things inshore, which put them in conflict with the recreational fishermen. I really felt that the problem with nets was the number of them, not the net itself. I still feel that way. If we had had the authority, if the Marine Fisheries Commission had had the authority for limited entry to limit the number of nets, I think the net ban probably would not have ever happened. The thing that really, I think, caused the net ban is when the Marine Fisheries Commission was formed, we went from one species to the next species to the next species, taking the next one that was in the most dire straits. After a few years, we got around to mullet. Everything was overfished because there had never been any real restrictions on fishing in Florida. Mullet were overfished. The commission had an assessment from the Department of Natural Resources – or by then, they were probably Department of Environmental Protection. What we were doing and that we'd actually done – it wouldn't be a SEDAR process, but we had had a review of this assessment. We had brought in outside experts to review the assessment. They concluded that mullet were overfished, and we needed to have some kind of regulation on them. So, we promulgated a regulation, got it through the commission, and it was fairly painful. There was a rule challenge on it. There was a legal challenge on it. We had to get that challenge through the legal process, survive the legal process. The hearing officer endorsed it, took it to the governor and cabinet, and they turned it down. When they turned down that mullet rule, it just infuriated the recreational fishery, and particularly, the CCA. They took that anger, and they

used it for an initiative. They went out and got the signatures through all of their chapters to put that net ban amendment on the ballot, and they did it quickly. They did it with volunteers, not with paid signature gatherers like most of the initiatives in Florida are done. But they did it with their own volunteers, and they did it quickly. Once they got that, I think most of us knew it was going to be for the public who really didn't know very much about it. It was going to be a sort of a free conservation major. It wasn't going to cost them anything.

MJ: I think, at the time, Florida changed the way they modified the constitution so it became a constitutional amendment on the ballot.

RW: Yes, it was a constitutional amendment. They put a constitutional amendment. They gathered these signatures to put this amendment, and it's now – it's in the constitution – an odd sort of place for it, but just the same way that the minimum space for pregnant pigs is now in the constitution because of this initiative. It was a pretty painful time, and it was really hard on the industry. It was really hard. The legislature provided 6 or 7 or \$8 million to try to compensate them for the nets that were going to be wasted and, I guess that was helpful to some degree. But it was really hard on the industry. I guess the fishery has recovered in the sense that they're catching almost as many mullets as they ever did, but they're doing it with cast nets. I would think it's probably mostly a young man's sport nowadays. I don't see how an older guy could – you couldn't do it well into your sixties, I'm sure, throwing those cast nets. But they recovered that fishery with cast nets. The other one that the net ban affected in particular was the Spanish mackerel fishery. That fishery has recovered on the east coast, using a cast net fishery as a modified cast net where they don't use any brails. They cut the center part of the cast net out so that it will sink faster. Some paratrooper or retired ex-paratrooper had suggested to them Spanish mackerel are very fast. So, when you throw out this large mesh net, they're trying to gill the Spanish mackerel. But by the constitution, a handheld cast net is not a gill net. The constitution says that. So, this is not a gill net, even though it gills the Spanish mackerel. But they cut the center of the net out, throw it out there, and it will sink fast because the very center of it is cut out. There aren't any brails in that. It just comes together, the mackerel become gilled in it, and they pull it in and empty it. So, that fishery on the east coast has recovered, but it's recovered because there's a few areas where those mackerel have always formed very large aggregations. They're the same areas that the deepwater gill net used to fish years ago. I don't think they've ever recovered on the west coast. Maybe they can't ever recover on the west coast. I don't know.

MJ: So, you were on the Marine Fisheries Commission, and then in your role, as you became assistant executive...

RW: Assistant executive director, yes.

MJ: – director, you then became involved in federal fisheries management.

RW: I was hired. Yes, I was hired. They paid for that assistant executive director position by the liaison contract from the South Atlantic Council and the Gulf Council. When I was initially hired, I was the designee for the executive director on both councils. The executive director was an official member of the South Atlantic Council and the Gulf Council, and that was Connor

Davis. He didn't actually go to any meetings. I went to the South Atlantic Council and the Gulf Council.

MJ: You were going to both?

RW: I was doing both, which was really difficult at times, because we were in the early stages of regulating Spanish mackerel. We were already regulating king mackerel. We would have these joint council meetings, and I would have to vote as a South Atlantic Council member and then as a Gulf Council. Usually, the council members tended to aggregate together and vote as a unit. This is what the Gulf Council wants. This is what the South Atlantic Council wants. I had to choose which side I was going to make angry.

MJ: Did you ever split your vote between the council?

RW: Well, no, I don't think I ever did. I think I was always consistent. But it was really a difficult position to be in. After Russell Nelson took over as executive director, he was interested. He was really interested in the federal council process. He started doing the Gulf Council for a while, and I did probably both councils for maybe two years. Then he started doing the Gulf Council, and I was doing just the South Atlantic Council. I don't know, we did that for five or six years, probably. Then we switched, and he did the South Atlantic and I did the Gulf. The South Atlantic, I mean there is a difference in the personality of the two councils too, and really always has been. If you go back into when I first went to work for the agency back in [19]87, the South Atlantic Council, which has only thirteen members, were more genteel, by far, than the Gulf Council. The Gulf Council, with its seventeen members, was more divisive and less polite to one another, I would say, than the South Atlantic was. I don't know quite why that is, but (Jack Brunner?), who used to be the regional director for the National Marine Fisheries Service, thought it was related to the number of people on each council. I don't know if it is or if it was simply the issues. The South Atlantic council always tried to be more welcoming to each other's opinion for whatever reason, and the Gulf Council less than so. Now, the Gulf Council also had some really strong personalities on it too, though. That might have been part of it.

MJ: Who were some of those strong personalities?

RW: Gary Matlock in Texas, (John Greene?) in Texas – not the Johnny Greene from Alabama, but John Green in Texas – Walter Fondren, who was on the Gulf Council from Texas back then. Those were all fairly strong personalities. Over on the Florida side, they had Alex Jernigan, who was one of the partners in Post, Buckley, Schuh, and Jernigan, and was an avid fisherman. He had a fairly strong personality. I'm leaving some people out. Well, then there were some characters – well, Corky Perret, of course. He has an opinion on stuff, especially when it comes to shrimp. There were some characters too. (T. John Mihajlovic?) from Louisiana was a character. He came on when the turtle excluder devices were being implemented, and he was very anti-TED.

MJ: Well, that was a very controversial technology that was being implemented.

RW: That was a very controversial time period. Technology, the time period, you had all these fishermen standing up in front of both councils saying, "We never catch any turtles. We never catch any turtles." I think what they probably really meant to say was, "We don't catch turtles very often," but I think they did catch a lot of turtles. It was kind of proven that they did catch a lot of turtles. You had some other strong personalities on both councils. That gave each council its own personality. Like I said, the Gulf Council was more contentious. Maybe the issues were more contentious. I don't know. But there was certainly more contention and tension on the Gulf Council than on the South Atlantic. South Atlantic had hard issues too, but they approached them differently, I think.

MJ: Now, you have been off the council for a while.

RW: Yes, I left. My last meeting would have been the fall of 2006, and I retired. The last meeting on the Gulf Council would have been the fall of 2006. I retired from the state of Florida at the end of January of 2007.

MJ: Do you see any differences since you have come back in the way that we are managing?

RW: Yes. Well, I mean, one thing that I saw right away when I came back was this aversion to ITQs. That surprised me. When I left the council, we were pro-ITQ. We did an ITQ on red snapper. We were in the process of doing one on groupers. Hell, we were proud of them back then. Russell Nelson and I went to the Florida Marine Fisheries Commission and convinced them that the ITQ was the way to manage the commercial red snapper fishery. By the time I came back – and I guess it was August of 2013 – red snapper ITQ was fully implemented, and the council itself just hates them. I'll tell you something that is – when you haven't been around it, I was surprised by that. The other thing that I would say has really surprised me is the jealousy and animosity towards the people who have these ITQs. The process has made many of the millionaires. It solved the overfishing problem in the commercial fishery with red snapper. It performed. It solved the problems that we had enumerated with the commercial red snapper fishery. But people are very jealous of these guys. They're very jealous. There's an animosity toward them because of how the process has made them fairly wealthy men. There's a lot of animosity towards the people that don't fish that just rent out their ITQ. There's a lot of animosity toward them. One of the pleasant things I found, coming back to the council is what a good staff they have nowadays. They really have a young, energetic, bright staff. Really, really capable. It's much larger than it was when I left, but they are really a good staff. What other changes have occurred in the council? Corky and I are still there. Well, (Robin Rykers?) was there, I guess, when I left as well. Crabtree, yes, Crabtree. Roy Crabtree was still there. I'll just say a few words about Crabtree as long as we're on here. He is the best regional director that I've ever seen. I mean, I've been through a bunch of regional directors and acting regional directors, and there's no one who's more informed on the fishery issues and can answer questions and understand the biology of the fish than Crabtree. There's so many people who make these cutting comments all the time about him, but he really is good. He's got a stressful job. They never had anybody better, and I'll tell you that.

MJ: What would you say has been the biggest improvement that you have seen since you have come back and the way they have...

RW: Staff.

MJ: Just staff?

RW: The staff is so good. The staff is so well informed. They're fairly young and they're energetic. They're technically very good. Yes, I think I'm really impressed with the staff. I'm not impressed with the fact that the process has become even slower than when...

MJ: Talk a little bit about that

RW: It's always been a slow process. I mean, it's always been a slow process. But with development, all these control rules and these overfishing criteria, that has just continued to slow the process down and slow it down. I have an anecdote, I guess, I would share in that regard. John Green, who was a member of the Gulf Council from Texas, this would have been about 1987 or [19]88. He was the council liaison to a South Atlantic Council meeting when I was doing the South Atlantic Council stuff. After a meeting, there was something contentious going on on king mackerel. John, after the meeting, said, "Roy," he said, "I'd like to talk to you after the meeting." Now, at the time, I guess I'm probably in my forties, and he's probably mid-sixties by then. He said, "Would you mind coming to my room?" I said, "Sure, sure." So, I come to him and he said, "Roy," he said, "I'm getting old." He said, "This process is a slow process." He said, "I've seen so little progress since I've been here." He said, "I've got to find ways to make it go faster." He said, "I want you to hear my notes here from this meeting that I'm the council liaison at." He starts reading the notes and reading the notes. Then it goes, "Roy Williams and (Dr. Ernie Carl?) in a rooster fight." [laughter] He said, "Roy, you have to find ways to accommodate what they need and get them to accommodate what you need." I really took that to heart. I went out and took a Dale Carnegie course after that.

MJ: Oh, really?

RW: Yes, I went out and took a Dale Carnegie course. John was a neutral observer, and I think he liked me. But he saw me and Ernie – and Ernie was a bright man, but he saw us just butting heads and neither one of us being willing to give. This is probably where council personality comes into play because I had never been to a South Atlantic Council meeting previous to 1987 when I got hired by the Marine Fisheries Commission. But I'd been to a lot of Gulf Council meetings. I think that I actually thought, "It's what you were supposed to do." You were supposed to fight and fight and fight. It took me a while to absorb that John Green was right. you have to find ways to accommodate what the other side needs. One of the things they teach you in the Dale Carnegie course is don't get into arguments with people. People don't, in the middle of an argument – never put their guard down and say, "Jeez, you were right. I've been wrong all this time. You were right." That doesn't happen. So, you meticulously avoid getting in arguments with me. Don't get into a confrontational thing, because you're not going to win – or you might win, but the other side is never going to just quit and say, "Jeez, you were right." That won't happen. The council personality came into play there, and it took me a while to figure that out. But John Green was helpful, and they think –

MJ: You kind of brought it with you when you went to...

RW: I did. Yes, I did, because it was the only way I'd ever seen the council work. I'd seen these people butting heads and insulting one another. I just thought that's the way it was. In the South Atlantic, that didn't work.

MJ: Is there any sort of memorable moments or times or issues that you have worked on as a council member that you would like to talk about? Any successes?

RW: Well, Spanish mackerel was a success. After Florida implemented regulations, we went to both councils, got them to do emergency rules, persuaded them that we'd taken this through the court process. We'd gotten reviews on it. The councils had put together some mackerel committees, I think, or something to review it, convinced both councils that it was the right thing to do, and we got each of them to do emergency rules and that implemented these quota closures that we were doing and these four-fish bag limits. That was really painful for the councils. Not all of the states actually ever did the four-fish bag limits. But I think both councils did it. We were actually extremely lucky with Spanish mackerel, because they're not a real long-lived fish – I don't know, maybe eight, ten years, something like that. The year that we regulated, there was really good recruitment in the fishery. Just one of those phenomenal happenstances, circumstances, that Spanish – small Spanish mackerel were extremely abundant, the ones down around twelve inches or so. So, within just a couple years, those small mackerel had grown into big mackerel. Within a couple years, they were making catches of Spanish mackerel clear up in the Mid-Atlantic area, in the Chesapeake area, New Jersey, clear on up. We were getting reports cleared in New York. That happened within just a few years. It was by the fact that we were able to get the fishery under control down here. We were simply lucky that we had gotten such good recruitment. It really made us look good, actually. We deserved a little bit of applause, but I don't know that we deserved it. We were lucky. We were really lucky.

MJ: Any regrets, anything that you regret in your past in some the councils?

RW: Oh, jeez. Oh, gosh. What do I regret? I've probably suppressed all of those memories. [laughter] So, they're not jumping out at me, the things I regret. There's probably a lot of them. We made a lot of mistakes over the years in king mackerel and Spanish mackerel. But fortunately, you can correct them as you go along.

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

RW: Well, I've liked bringing to restoring populations. I'm really pleased with the Spanish mackerel, king mackerel, red snapper. I mean, they're all in really good condition now. I'm pleased by those successes. I will say that in the case of red snapper, I always used to say there's good problems and bad problems. Red snapper is a good problem now. The fish is extremely abundant, although we haven't figured out yet how to stay within our allocations and quotas and so on. We haven't solved that problem. But it's kind of a good problem. I'm really pleased by the recovery of those. I'm pleased by the recovery at the state level with mullet, redfish. Redfish are a really good success story, and me and my staff were in on that from ground level. I can remember calling George Barley one time when he was the chairman of the Marine Fisheries

Commission at the time. I was just a biologist and the director of the vertebrate fish section at the Marine Laboratory in St. Petersburg. We had heard that they were going to back off the minimum – the commission was going to back off the minimum size limit on red drum. We knew from our studies that they were an extremely fast-growing fish. The commission was proposing an eighteen-inch minimum size limit, and we heard they were going to back it down to fifteen or something like that. I can remember calling him, and he said, "These fish are really fast growing, and there's just no doubt about that. I mean, it's clear that they are. You're only going to have to wait a few months." He said, "There's people talking about that." He said, "We're not going to back off then. " He wasn't going to let them back off. So, it's been good to see the recovery of a lot of those populations of fish.

MJ: Well, red drums had rather restrictive management for a long time.

RW: It has. I mean, we did the first regulations on red drum in Florida probably [19]85. The commission did several emergency rules. Probably in 1985 or in – by [19]87, I know we had eighteen-inch minimum size and one-fish bag limits in place and I think a two-month season closure. They've recovered real well. They're abundant now. They're really abundant.

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

RW: Jeez, probably stay away. It's such a slow process. I don't. I think, in a lot of ways, I was probably lucky in a sort of perverse way in that I came in the business when things were overfished. So, I watched the recovery of them. I mean, it really can be done. If you can get people to change their fishing habits and you can convince people that these fish need regulation and that we can make things better, it can be done. I think I was lucky in that regard that in the time I got in and the time I'd left, that we had made so many fisheries so much better. Now, the environmental issues, I can't solve. They're so difficult to solve. I mean, the things like snook and spotted sea trout, the carrying capacity of those fisheries has been greatly reduced by manipulation of freshwater flow, the loss of so much of the seagrass habitats and other marsh habitats in our estuaries. I don't know if we can ever get those back or not.

MJ: Well, you are kind of talking about ecosystem issues.

RW: Yes.

MJ: The council has a hard time dealing with that because they have no purview over a lot of the things that are causing those issues.

RW: Well, and the things that are causing those are, in general, in state waters. So, yes, the council can comment on them, but they really can't control many of them. Things like red snapper, king mackerel, are less estuarine dependent. So, they're less of a problem. That isn't to say a lot of things that they eat don't come out of the estuary. They do. But the fish themselves really spend little to no time in the estuary. So, in that regard, that's not a problem.

MJ: What was I going to say? I do not have many more questions. But is there anything that

you want to say or that we have not talked about that you think is important to comment on? We did talk a little bit about the slowness of management. I guess I did want to ask you about what do you think is going to be the future for fisheries management. Where are we headed, do you think?

RW: One of the things that seems to be slowly occurring is the recreational, the change of fisheries from commercial and consumer to recreational, less consumer usage. I'll tell you this. When I first started to see that, that bothered me, Mike, how often at the state level – and even at the federal level, we had these recreational fishermen coming to the regulatory bodies, trying to get the fish taken away from the commercial fishery and put into the recreational fishery in general, trying to exclude commercial fisheries. There was actually an article that I had the fortune of reading, probably twenty-five, thirty years ago, that was written by a guy by the name of Courtland Smith from Oregon State University. I think he is a cultural anthropologist. He talked about the evolution of fisheries. It really helped me see a bigger picture that had escaped me up to that point. He talked about how fisheries started as commercial or subsistence, and they're driven by population growth. As populations grow, there's more and more recreational fishing. Actually, the recreational fishermen tend, eventually, to drive the commercial fishery out of business. Interestingly, the recreational fisheries, he talks about the ecological succession. Interestingly, the recreational fishery is not the final ecological succession. It's a sort of an aesthetic fishery. He had a term for it, I don't recall what it was, but he talked about how the recreational fishermen are slowly displaced then by people that just want to go look, for example. In the case of Goliath grouper, I think in certain areas of the state where you can go look at these giant goliath groupers, you will never legally kill a giant Goliath grouper again, because they're truly worth more money just to go down and look at the darn things. Divers can sell trip after trip after trip and sell the same fish – to see the same fish. But Courtland Smith's article, when I read that, helped me to see a picture that I hadn't seen up to then. I had just seen these selfish recreational fishermen that were kind of coming in and trying to displace the commercial fishermen, take over the consumer sector, so that only people that had a hook and line or owned a boat could go fishing. It seemed very selfish to me. There is a certain amount of selfishness involved in it, but the Courtland Smith article after I read that actually made my life easier. I saw that it wasn't just these selfish, wealthy people that I saw in Florida. It's a demographic shift and a phenomenon that exists everywhere. It wasn't just unique to my particular area of the world. That was really helpful to me. It really made my life easier after that, that I saw the bigger picture of what was going on.

MJ: Well, I think Florida is kind of at the forefront of a lot of these issues because of these demographic shifts.

RW: Because of the demographic issues, yes.

MJ: You see that conflict between recreational and commercial a lot earlier here than you do in other parts of the country because of all that is going on.

RW: You do that. I saw that one when I was on the South Atlantic Council. It seemed like North Carolina was about five to ten years behind Florida only because of the demographic problem. They were getting the big increases in population on their coastal areas that Florida

had had previous to that. So, they were having to deal with issues that they hadn't had to deal with before. So, it is a demographic problem, a demographic shift that's driving these.

MJ: Anything else you would like to –

RW: No.

MJ: Well, Roy, I appreciate you taking the time to do this. It has been enjoyable listening to you talk about your experience and appreciate it.

RW: Thank you. Thank you, Mike.

[end of transcript]