

Kelcie Troutman: Can you state your name and your affiliation, what you do?

Carlos Farchette: Okay, my name is Carlos Farchette, retired from DPNR [Department of Planning and Natural Resources] enforcement. And I presently work with the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council as the chairman, which manages federal fisheries in the US Caribbean Federal Waters. And also, I'm a secretary for the St. Croix Fishery Advisory Committee.

KT: Alright, what is your earliest memory of Great Pond?

CF: Wow, that's dating me. [laughter] I would say since I was maybe nine, ten years old. I used to go out there with my father, and then I ended up doing a lot of fishing with a cousin of mine—that unfortunately, he's passed away now but that was my fishing buddy. We'd fish you know, three, four times a week in different places on St. Croix, and Great Pond was one of our big fishing grounds. Used to be a lot of fish inside that pond.

KT: What are some of your fondest or most memorable moments at Great Pond?

CF: I think my fondest moments in Great Pond would be the kind of fish and the amount of fish that we used to catch. A lot of mullet, a lot of shrimp, a lot of blue crabs. I mean, and then that's in the pond. And then when you're talking on the oceanside, it was the same thing including barracudas in the oceanside.

KT: And can you describe the state of Great Pond at the time?

CF: Oh boy, Great Pond. Well, I went to the public hearing that you all held in UVI [University of the Virgin Islands] and, I got to say that the picture from Mr. Schuster—Robert Schuster—from 1974 is what I remember Great Pond to be. At least three feet deep inside, the channel was deep as—I was like twenty, twenty-five years old and the water in the channel to cross it was up to my chest. That's how deep that entrance was. We've had people used to go through there in canoes and kayaks. That was the beauty of Great Pond.

KT: What kind of stories were you told by your elders about Great Pond?

CF: Well, to be honest with you [laughter] most of my elders were not fishers. So, it was just my father. But, you know, I didn't fish as much with him as I did with my cousin. I think my knowledge of my elders' fishing in that area was very limited.

KT: Was there somebody in the community that kind of influenced you to want to fish when you were younger?

CF: My father.

KT: Your father?

CF: Yes, he was always fishing, especially in Altona Lagoon and the shorelines of south shore.

KT: What are some of Great Pond's most important uses for the community over time? What are the things that you found most interesting about Great Pond?

CF: Well for one, the amount of fish that people can take home from there. And next thing was the birdwatchers. There was a lot of birds, migratory birds—there were ducks at one time. You don't see that anymore, or hardly see that anymore compared to what it was years ago. So for birdwatchers and people camping out on Easter time, you know, that was what Great Pond was about.

KT: Did you ever camp at Great Pond?

CF: No, I camped at Coakley Bay, Jack's Bay, Isaac's Bay.

KT: When you think of the pond as it is now, what do you picture? What is its ecological state?

CF: My opinion may differ from a scientist's, where they see the value in something that's going to turn into a salt flat, when I don't. I think it's going to eventually turn into a salt flat if we don't do something. Just like Cotton Grove is now a salt flat. But I think it's in pretty bad shape.

KT: What did the back of Great Pond look like? Not so much towards the mouth but what did the back look like [inaudible]?

CF: In my days of fishing, I think the mangrove was limited to the edge of the shore I would say, of Great Pond. It was not in the middle like it ended up becoming years later. I mean, I guess it was—just before Hugo or whatever it was—a lot of mangrove inside the middle of Great Pond, which was I think impeding the flow.

KT: What are some of the favorite things that you caught in Great Pond? Like what was your favorite fish to fish in there?

CF: My favorite fish to catch in there was the blue crabs.

KT: The blue crab?

CF: Yes, when they ran because they're seasonal. So is the shrimp. Shrimp is January, February. [inaudible] season only when the tide goes out, you can catch them when they're coming out with the flow, the current. Mullet, lots of it. But I don't really like mullet too much.

KT: Do you still see mullet around St. Croix today?

CF: Very rare. I was telling someone that compared to when I was younger—and I'm not talking a little kid, I'm talking teenager and my early twenties—where fish were, mullet were abundant in all the shorelines, especially south shore. I mean, they'd be jumping in—schools of mullet. You don't see that anymore. Same thing with the fry. You know, you hardly see any fry on the shorelines anymore. I mean St. Thomas has a lot, but we used to have quite a bit also. We used to

have the blue runners rush into the shoreline after a fright—you hardly see that anymore. That could be just the environmental change of the area, not necessarily overfishing. [laughter]

KT: I mean I grew up here and I spent a lot of time in the ocean, and I never really knew about mullet being a thing here. When I went to Florida is when I experienced mullet.

CF: Right.

KT: You can smell it on the water. And I never experienced that here.

CF: Right, right. And Yacht Club, lots of mullet there. But Yacht Club's also like a lagoon, if you in there it's muddy, silty bottom.

KT: Alright, what are some of the things that you think have contributed to the change and degradation of Great Pond over time?

CF: Over time, I believe the runoff from the uplands. This has been discussed quite often about the retention ponds that are up in the farmlands up there. I think that over time they backfill with silt, so the water doesn't—it's not retaining any water. Also, it was a major of cattle field, those areas. So, you know, a lot of runoff with the waste of the urine and cattle waste and stuff like that. I think that created a lot of degradation to Great Pond.

KT: What are some things that you think can be done to slow down or stop the degradation of Great Pond?

CF: I believe they would need to reestablish the retention ponds up in the farmlands and maybe even add more. And who knows now what's going to happen since they've cleared all that land for the solar farm. I think that's going to cause some more runoff, depends on what they're going to do for grass to retain the soil.

KT: What do you remember about major impacts of hurricanes like Hugo and Marilyn to Great Pond area? I know you mentioned about the mangroves [inaudible]

CF: Yes. My opinion is I believe that the force of the wind you know, (took off all?) the leaves from the mangroves and then that wind pressure for so long maybe even dried up the mangrove—or affected the mangrove somehow, that they couldn't catch themselves. Look at Salt River is a prime example. Hurricane wiped out Salt River's mangroves, and they were still standing but they were dead. And that's what happened with Great Pond. And also the drought. The major droughts cause a lot of death to the mangroves in Great Pond.

KT: If you had to tell a story about Great Pond today, what would you want people to remember about Great Pond?

CF: I would like them to remember the great fishing spot that it was. And I also think that we should try to restore that to what it was back in the '70s. That's what I would like to see.

KT: What does the fishing community that you work so closely with think about this restoration effort?

CF: They're very happy that it's finally taking place. I mean in our Fisheries Advisory Committee—and we meet monthly—for years, I've been in that committee, for forty-one years now. And Great Pond has been a large topic in the last ten years. The need to restore it—and you know, we have fourteen members, most of them are fishermen. Couple charter people, couple of recreational dive sectors like the dive experience and stuff—they're members too. We also have to look out for the tourism industry and the beauty of what they want to see when they come down here. But the fishermen want Great Pond to be used as a nursery. They would like to have all the wetlands on St. Croix restored for nurseries. They don't want to allow no fishing in it for ten or more years, if possible. Or just leave it completely as a nursery, habitat hatchery for juvenile fish. And that's coming from the fisherman.

KT: Is there anything else that you'd like to share with us about Great Pond or anything that we haven't asked here today?

CF: Not really, that I just hope that this becomes a great success for St. Croix. Finally, to have Great Pond restored to at least some of what it was before. I don't expect it to be completely restored like in the '70s, but maybe, you know, at least get it to where we're seeing fish starting to use the pond, starting to reproduce. And that's really important for us because of the fishing shelf in St. Croix is very limited because of our deep, deep waters around here. So, the more nurseries we have aggregating more fish, the better it is for the community.

KT: Is there anybody else that we should ask about history of Great Pond?

CF: I think you need to get to some of the local fishermen that were there. People like (George Ventura?). He camps in Great Pond every year. They've seen the changes; they know about the changes. (The La Desmas?) from right there in Great Pond also Mt. Washington. Those people have a lot of—(the Torrens?) they fished there for a long time. And they're always camping there. Think you need to get to the campers that have the little shacks on the beach.

KT: How do you feel about that?

CF: I think that what they need to do is if you're going to camping—my way of camping was that we take a fishing line, we take our nets, we go catch fish to eat. We don't bring refrigerators and televisions and generators. That's not camping. Whatever they carry there, they need to take it back out and not leave it there. That's what I think.

KT: What do you think about the illegal dumping at Great Pond?

CF: Yes, that is something that has been going on for years. I don't know if it's still happening. But I know that it used to be a tire dump and washing machines. A lot of big appliances used to be dumped there. Somehow, I think educating I guess? But you know, how much time are you going to educate somebody? And I also believe strict enforcement needs to happen.

KT: So in your time as an enforcement officer with DPNR—I did not know that. [laughter] What words of wisdom do you have for young DPNR workers?

CF: I think you need to love the job. If you don't, it's not going to be any fun. If you're not an outdoors person, it's not a job for you. But if you are, you know—I love the job. I think it's the best job in the world. You're your own boss out there, you patrol all the beaches. I mean, this is paradise—what better do you want? And do your job, enforce the laws and educate. I believe in educating before enforcement. Educate the people, and if they still ignore you, then you use enforcement.

KT: [inaudible] do you have any questions?

Unknown speaker: Maybe just one. So, by extension, let's say this project goes forward and we put a fix, and we see improvement. In your experience in terms of hours and time out in the field, what maybe do you think is going to be an important thing to be subsequent to this project to make sure we can then (save?) what we've restored. What's a good effective way to get it out (to?) either education either enforcement or even things like maintenance, dredging, stuff like that. What's a good way not just for Great Pond but things like (Altoona?), other natural resources that are considered, you know, particular concern and should—what's your experience (for these years?) and what's a good way to do that?

CF: Yes, I really strongly believe that they need to maintain the openings of all our wetlands. I think that's what really initially stopped the flow and created the problems to begin with. (Green Key?), Coakley Bay, Sandy Point, all these places that have big wetland areas in there that just clogged up from not being properly maintained. I think once they open Great Pond, however they're going to do it— you're going to do a riprap to try and maintain the berms around it so they don't erode into the water anymore. But I'll always come back every five years or three years or whatever it takes to do a maintenance dredging of the channel all the way in. I think that's very important. The same for Altona Lagoon, that needs to be always maintained. If we lose Altona Lagoon, like what happened with Great Pond, it would be devastating. I've fished in Altona Lagoon all my life. Spent many, many, many years in there—at night, in the daytime, fished in there all the time. And still do. [laughter]

[inaudible]

CF: Alright.

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Reviewed by Cameron Daddis, 06/11/2024