

NOAA Beaufort Lab Oral Histories
Aleta Hohn Oral History
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Interviewer: JS – Joseph Smith
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Joseph Smith: Joe Smith here. We're doing an interview today, March 7, 2022. We're at the Duke University Marine Lab, in their auditorium. We're interviewing today, Dr. Aleta Hohn. She's recently retired from the Beaufort Lab. She was in charge of the marine mammal group at the lab. Interviewing today will also be two former directors at the lab, Dr. Don Hos, Dr. Bud Cross. Former deputy director, Dr. Jeff Govoni, myself, and Dr. Doug Vaughan. We'll proceed with the interview.

Don Hos: This is Don Hos. I'm glad we finally got – we had to postpone this once due to my mishandling of scheduling. But I'm very glad to get to Aleta because I find her a very interesting person.

[laughter]

Aleta Hohn: Thanks [laughter].

DH: I'll start the questioning. I'd like to know a little bit – or I think we'd all like to know a little bit about your background before you came here, where you went to school, and ending up by saying how you got here [laughter].

AH: Right [laughter].

DH: Which I know was kind of interesting. I remember part of it. So, Aleta, takeoff.

AH: Okay. So, I had been in Maryland. I did my bachelor's degree at the University of Maryland in College Park and then stayed there for a master's degree under Eugenie Clark to work on coral reef fish in the Red Sea. I've never been to the Red Sea.

[laughter]

Still, I had an interest in applied science. So, I went down to the Smithsonian. I already knew some people there. This is when I was starting my masters. I thought I would be interested in marine mammals, and I loved the Marine Mammal collection. I'm a museum person at heart for sure. So, I met with the curator of Marine Mammals Jim Mead, and said, "I just want to volunteer. I just want to see if this is what I'd rather do than work on unapplied work." So, I spent some time in the basement of the Smithsonian where the Marine Mammal collection was, and it was really cool down there, and I decided that's what I would do. So, I talked to Eugenie and I switched my project. But I stayed with Genie, and then Jim Meade became part of my committee. So, as a result of being at the Smithsonian, Jim Mead, one of his dearest friends, ran the Marine Mammal program in La Jolla at the Southwest Center. He is one of the people that was responsible for the Marine Mammal Protection Act because of all the dolphins being killed in the tuna nets. He really was the one who brought it to the world's attention that that was happening. After I finished my master's, because of what I'd been working on, they offered me a job. So, shortly after finishing my master's, I didn't have my PhD. I moved to La Jolla to the start of the Southwest Fishery Science Center. That was in 1980. Ronald Reagan had just been – this is probably more than you need. Ronald Reagan had just been reelected, and the tuna fishery in California was one of the biggest donators to his reelection campaign. So, three

months after arriving in La Jolla, I was rift. The program was essentially gutted. Like twelve people rifted. Don't hold me to that number exactly, but it was something like that. In the end, a lot of those people left because they knew the rift was coming, and in the end, it never came. So, I stayed in La Jolla and I was there for ten years. Then a fabulous way to start my NMFS career it was. I am so appreciative of it. Then I did a detail in the Office of Protected Resources. Well, they asked me if I would, and I agreed. Helping with the permit process because the permitting process was really a mess. So, I agreed and I went for three months. At the end of that three months, let me see, Nancy Foster was the head of the Office of Protected Resources, and Bill Fox was the head of NMFS. They asked me to come permanently to headquarters to help fix their protected species office. So, I did, and I did in part because of a couple things. One is, my whole family's on the East Coast, right? So, I was ready to move back to the East Coast. Number two, I thought it would be a great opportunity because I really thought the world of both Nancy and Bill Fox. Number three, I told them that I would come, but it would only be temporary because I wasn't going to give up research. But I would promise to stay for two years. I needed to still keep my toes in research. So, every Friday, I got to go to the Smithsonian. They gave me my lab back. So, every Friday, until the last year I was at OPR, I went down to Smithsonian. They knew how to reach me there. They could call me there, and they did. But at least I had that research time. Then they had to pay for my travel scientific conferences and pay for page charges because I was still publishing, and they agreed to all of that. So, how could I not agree to come and help them? So, I started in the permit office as a branch chief for scientific research permits. In about second year, I went up to the only chief scientist of the Office of Protective Resources that they've ever had so that I could help with other things. I kept saying to Nancy Foster, "Okay. I've met my obligation of two years. I'll stay another year," and then it took three more years –

[laughter]

– before they would let me go. But the year before that – so, I was like in year four – people knew I was getting ready to go. That this was going to be the end so I could get back to research. Brad Brown was at a – we were at a workshop up in Woods Hole. I was helping to run some session. He came up to me after the session and he said, "I heard you're trying to get back to the field." I said, "I am." He said, "I'd like you to come to the Southeast Fishery Science Center." I said, "Okay." He said, "Could you go to Charleston? We want you to go to Charleston." I said, "No." Because there were some issues in Charleston, [inaudible], and I knew that already. I said, "I want to go to Beaufort."

[laughter]

He said, "No. We need you to go to Charleston." I said, "No. I'm not going to Charleston."

[laughter]

So, he finally gave in. Took a few months.

[laughter]

DH: That's interesting.

[laughter]

AH: If there was no Marine Mammal program here, but Vicki was here, and I knew Vicki from La Jolla. There'd been so many things; the die offs and the fishery interactions. I just knew it was a place where there would be a career growth ahead.

DH: Well, I know you came to Beaufort to do research, and you did. But I also know that you ended up with [laughter] more administrative stuff than you wanted. That worked out all right. It certainly worked out good for the Beaufort Lab. But I know you had some pauses [laughter] and thinking about that.

AH: Yes, for sure. Because I was ready to be just both feedback full time into research. But one thing leads to another, right? Then we had a growing staff because we were bringing in a lot of money because of the issues that were here. I mean, I think one year, we brought in \$600,000. It was just, the need was so great because of the issues in this area. So, when the program grew, then my administrative load grew. Then we merged the turtles and mammals, right? Then for some reason, I took this director job. Well, I took it because Nancy Thompson, who was then the center director, asked me to do it for a variety of reasons. But I did. So, I'm not sure if that [laughter] was the best thing I've ever done. But, yes, it's okay.

DH: Okay. Somebody else want to –

Jeff Govoni: I have one question. That was Director of Fisheries Operations. Was that the title?

AH: It was a director of the NMFS programs at the NOAA Beaufort Lab.

JG: Okay. This was Jeff Govoni asking the question.

Bud Cross: This is Bud Cross. When you got here, what were some of the major issues with both marine mammals and sea turtles that was obvious where the resources had to go to solve issues with those resources?

AH: Well, the same impacts on both of them through – there are small scale fisheries here in North Carolina. All the gillnets, that was the number one thing.

BC: The what?

AH: Gillnets. Because we have so many gillnets out there and fishing right in the area where the turtles and mammals generally are. So, the fishery interactions in Beaufort in North Carolina far exceeded anywhere else in the United States, except potentially, the shrimp fishery in the Gulf of Mexico taking turtles. So, really, fishery interactions were driving everything. Because of that, the Take Reduction Team was established to reduce the mortality and serious injury of the bottlenose dolphins. Which was the primary issue with regard to fishery interactions for the marine mammals. Then the Take Reduction Team, once that formed, it had requirements for

information to get in order to reduce the take and come up with – know as much as we can about the populations. Then use that information to figure out ways to reduce the bycatch. The Take Reduction Team was managers and scientists – independent from here and other places – NGOs and fishermen, were all on the Take Reduction Team. So, our job then was to get a better understanding of population size and where the animals generally are, all the basic biology. So, we could use that information to help reduce the by-catch. That's what brought in the money because they had to have those answers. Then we were here to help answer those questions.

BC: One of the biggest issues that seemed to resonate from the sea turtle research was the requirement of ensure TEDS in North Carolina, which was the really a product of this lab's research that led to that. Were you here when any of that occurred? You weren't here when we were accosted by about thirty fishermen out in the driveway out here from cold morning?

AH: No. I heard the stories, but that was prior to my arrival. So, that aspect of TEDs was already history when I arrived. After that, though, the next biggest issue became gillnets flounder. A lot of them flounder gillnets in the fall, but other gillnets as well. Primarily, the flounder gillnets inside.

BC: Okay. One other question, were you involved at all with the massive dolphin die-off that occurred on this coast? I don't think you were here at the time, but you were involved in Washington. I think a lot of people have forgotten how massive that was or what impact it was. It hasn't reoccurred since so far.

AH: Yes. That was in [19]87, [19]88.

BC: Oh, okay.

AH: It was a long time ago. Yes. [19]87, [19]88 is what I recall. They estimated that almost half of the dolphin population died. Of the coastal dolphins, not the estuarine dolphins. It appears that it didn't affect the estuarine resident dolphins.

Douglas Vaughan: Yes. This is Doug Vaughan. I think that was with respect to the red tide there in late [19]87, that dolphin die-off.

AH: It was coincident with that –

DV: Coincident, yes.

AH: – and what they determined is it wasn't morbillivirus. But the red tide probably made the animals' immune systems weaker. Then we recently had a die-off just a couple years ago. It's also morbillivirus. So, it may be something that just happens every few generations with dolphins. We don't know. But the –

DV: Yes, I remember – and Joe may remember as well – that there was some accusation that the menhaden were somehow related to that.

JS: Yes. This is Joe. We sent menhaden samples to Washington. I think there was a (Jurassic?) report, and they found in one dead dolphin, some brevetoxin. So, there was some suspicion that somehow, menhaden were bio accumulating this brevetoxin. Menhaden was a favorite food item of bottlenose dolphin, I think. But it was in equals very low numbers, I think, in that Jurassic report.

AH: So, that was an involving process, really. Because there was the obvious issue, which was the red tide. I think Pat Tester was involved with that. Then further following on from that were all the pathology reports and things, and the histopath that came through. It's attributable to morbillivirus with other circumstances probably making the dolphins more susceptible. Interestingly, in North Carolina, bottlenose dolphins don't eat very many menhaden.

JG: This is Jeff Govoni asking. I'm looking down through this list that Don developed for potential questions.

DH: Bud did that.

JG: I think that the fourth question, what management strategies have been developed from your work? I think you've answered that in the last ten minutes. You've gone through that litany. My question is, do you care to comment on all the work that you did to develop relationship with North Carolina State University and Craig Harms for the pathology? I mean, because in my mind, and my recollection, you were responsible for developing that interaction, for lack of a better term. Can you comment on that?

AH: I can. We are just so lucky that they're essentially in our backyard and even more so when Craig Harms moved to CMAST. So, that relationship started when we were doing our dolphin captures and before Craig had moved down. Before CMAST, I think, opened. Vicky actually, initially, had interacted with them to provide samples or even carcasses for the veterinary training. So, we expanded that and started inviting them to come for our dolphin captures. A, we needed a vet. Well, we have one in Florida we use. B, it's a great training opportunity, not just for the veterinarians and the faculty, but the students would all be able to come. Then that led to more – once Craig Harms moved to the coast – I don't remember exactly what year. But he then started working on all the necropsies with us. Again, out of his own interest, and he would get samples and get publications out of it. Then of course, they started helping with some fish stuff. Do you remember the snowy – was it snowy grouper? No. There was some disease on a fish species off of Florida, and the samples were coming up here. Craig was helping us try to figure out what was going on with these fish. Not a snowy grouper. I don't remember. But anyway, that expanded. So, right then it became helping with the aquaculture program. So, I don't know if I answered your question, but it was a –

JG: Well, you did. In my mind, you were responsible for developing that interaction with NC State, which included Craig Harms. I remember him doing a lot of the necropsies and dealing with trying to determine what was the cause of death. But I also remember him letting air out of sea turtles [laughter] out in the back. Again, in my mind, you are responsible for –

[laughter]

AH: For better or for worse.

JG: For that interaction.

AH: Yes. It's not like we were doing them a favor, right? It was a mutually beneficial arrangement. That's why, I think, it expanded. I think one of the other benefits that's less tangible is that, well, not only did we learn a lot – because we are not veterinarians and we don't do the same level of looking at tissue for pathologies. But the other side of that coin is they have gained a better understanding of what's needed from a population biology perspective, right? So, it was mutually beneficial information passing in both directions. Actually, they used to invite me over to give a lecture in their veterinary classes that they held down here at CMAST. So, I could tell them some of the other things we were doing, like stable isotope work and population differentiation and – so, again, it was, I think, really beneficial. But, yes, thank you for asking about that and recognizing that.

JG: Well, thank you for answering.

[laughter]

DH: Do you want to go?

BC: Go ahead if you've got something.

DH: This is Don Hos again. This is kind of a peculiar question –

AH: [laughter]

DH: –but it's one I've thought about a long time. Marine mammals and turtles actually have a sort of special thing with the public and –

JG: [laughter] Charisma.

DH: Do you care to comment on – things have to die. So, they run aground and they eventually die. But it can cause a great diversion of funding. I remember two whales in Alaska or something that had to cost more than our budget.

AH: Incredible.

DH: Do you have any comment on how to handle – I mean, I'm a very tree hugger person and feel sorry for them. But when you're scraping funds for long-term projects and they shoot off for a special, I call them newspaper-type science. Is there any way to do that better? Or do you have a feeling on that?

AH: Well, there's been a huge amount of discussion about that because it's right. I mean, three gray whales trapped in ice up in Alaska cost NOAA a fortune. The problem is that they can't

ignore it, right? That's the whole thing, is that these animals are too visible and once the word gets out, it's very hard for this agency to not respond. So, having spent those years in Silver Spring, I have a better appreciation of that. Because lawsuits come in and pressure is put on Congress to – and the Congress puts the pressure on the agency. So, I don't have a good answer for you on that because the agency has struggled with it. We know it was a waste of money, probably, except for goodwill, to spend all that money on three gray whales, which are going to die sometime. So, it's a tough problem. On the other hand, the public interest has also resulted in more funds coming into marine mammal and sea turtle work. That's been a bonus. This whole issue of animals dying, coming on the beach, for example, has really increased our ability – the public knowing, the public interest, and reporting of stranded animals helps us. Because that's how we get our data and samples, since there are very few ways for us to get that information. So, it's a double-sided sword, really. It helps get us money. It has helped, over time, get money. Having the public alerted to things like strandings is good for us in many ways. But there are circumstances in which we just have to respond. We have to put money into some kind of response because the public is watching and pressuring. So, I didn't really answer your question, but –

DH: Well, that's as good as it can be done, I think [laughter]. I don't think there is a great answer.

AH: Yes.

BC: You've talked about coming to the lab and your background. But now that you're here at the lab, you've recently retired, what's the status of that and what are your future plans for research and for future relationships with the laboratory?

AH: Yes. So, formally, I retired in August – last August. But the prior August, I went to halftime. It's called phased retirement. So, you're working halftime, but then half your income comes from your retirement. So, you're not really having a decrease in funds that much. The whole goal of that was for me to spend the time in the laboratory catching up on samples. I have narwhals to work on from Greenland. I have beaked whales from the Antarctic, and I have harbor porpoise from the Pacific Northwest. I have tons of Tursiops from this area. I mean, I have a long list of samples that are in my possession that I've made a commitment to people to help with. So, that was the – I'm very appreciative of the Southeast Center for giving me that opportunity. So, essentially, saying, "We'll keep you employed. You have the access to the lab, and you can catch up on your lab work." I mean, that, to me, was a huge benefit. I know I really felt it was like a pat on the back for everything else I had done. So, I was so appreciative. I'm diverting a little bit, but the goal of that phased retirement was to work in the lab and get caught up in my lab work. Then that didn't happen because of the pandemic. I didn't step in the lab one minute for working and doing lab work for that whole time. So, then after one year, I could have extended phased retirement for another year, but they still have to pay me half time when – I was expensive and funding's going down. So, instead, we have an agreement where I'm on a contract through CIMAS, which is the Cooperative Institute at the University of Miami. Quite a few Southeast Center staff are employees of CIMAS and work at the lab and at OAR, which is next door to the Southeast Center in Miami. So, I'm still on that contract. It cost – I don't know if I should tell you this, but it's \$12,000 for a year. So, it's not about the money. It just means that if

I work an hour a week even, or report an hour a week, I get to keep my CAC card, my computer, and the software – lots of things that I have access to because I'm an employee. Now, I talked to them just last month and I said, "Here we are two years later. I haven't been in" – is it three years now? No, it's two years, right? "I haven't been in the lab." I said, "So, do you mind if I just keep working off that \$12,000?" Because I think just a small part of it has been claimed. Yes, they're just going to let me keep working. So, I keep my card, keep my computer. I'm still an employee, a contract employee. My goal is to get in the lab and try to get all these projects done and written up. So, I don't feel like I'm stopping. Even when I'm not doing lab work anymore, I still have a lot of writing to do, which is what I've been doing for the past two years.

DV: You still have your email address too?

AH: I still have my email address.

[laughter]

DV: I lost that the day I retired.

AH: I do. Yes. All my files that I have stored on the – I have access to the network.

JG: You still have publishing costs?

AH: Well, they have so far agreed to pay my page charges.

JG: Yes, there you go.

AH: Yes.

DV: Good.

AH: So, we'll see. I have one paper that's going to require that soon. So, see what happens. But anyway, yes. So, in the future after that, I don't know. Well, I am going to move back to Maryland, I'm sure of that. Part, because my family is there. Part, because my mother's ninety-one and she's not going to – she lives on her own still in her house. That's going to change slowly than I think. She needs help. So, that's my goal in the long run. But I think it's still a couple years away in part because I need to come in the lab. I need a year in the lab. So, I'm not going anywhere anytime immediately. Then after that, I don't know what will happen.

BC: We should have given you – this is Bud – a warning about this question so you could think back about it. But after all the years that you've been involved in the federal government and with research, do you have anything that stands out in your memory as something that was always going to stay with you? It could be an unusual event you got involved with, like the dolphin die-off. Or even comical stuff that's happened that probably will never be repeated again unless you can get it on tape. So, if there's anything that you wanted to reflect about your past experience and some things that stand out in your mind, it would be interesting. We're asking this of everybody and we're getting a nice variety of thoughts.

AH: So, positive things and not so positive things?

DH: Yes.

BC: That's a good idea.

AH: I'll probably ramble a bit here. But some things that really stand out for me is the pilot whale mass stranding of near Oregon Inlet. That was maybe ten years ago. I can't remember the exact date. Do you remember that mass stranding. With no notice, we took the whole team up to Oregon Inlet and had thirty-three dead pilot whales. It was a record-cold weekend. It was a holiday weekend in February or January, and it was a record-cold weekend. We reached out all around and we asked for help from everywhere we could get it. Because we wanted to get as much information from these whales as we could. We had people from Duke and from Wilmington and from D.C. I mean, we had people come and help us from all over. So, we had a crowd. The Vet school program with Craig, he rounded up people. I think it was a massive effort and everyone who wanted to, who was involved, got to collect their share of the samples. I think Duke did the stomach contents and Craig got his pathology, and Wilmington something I can't remember. But it was just a massive effort. Drop everything, grab as many sample jars as you can, and hit the road. So, that'll be with me forever. Again, it was such a cold weekend. It was miserable. Anyway, that'll stick with me. But also, one thing that will stick with me for better or worse is, it was tough here at the lab for quite a few years with the NOS director.

DV: With what?

AH: The NOS director whose name I won't mention. But it was very challenging. There were issues over how much NMFS should be paying to be at the lab, what should their contribution be? How did you figure that out, and what was fair considering the money? People had been transferred when the lab was transferred. But this director would go around and say to NMFS staff, "Were going to turn off your lights because you're not paying your bill." That would just be to like a technician, he would be saying that. So, that was very tough. Very tough. In fact, the reason this position was created was to be a primary person to interact with the NOS lab director. That's why my position was created. Now, it's gone right there. I'm the one and only person in that position. So, that was very hard. Yes.

BC: What's the current status of that relationship now? Has there been an improvement?

AH: No, night and day.

BC: Pardon?

AH: Night and day. Night and day. Yes. That started almost immediately after the prior person had retired. So, yes, that was very hard. Jeff knows all too well.

JG: I was about to excuse myself actually.

AH: Let's see other things I remember. I can't say enough about the experience I got in La Jolla for those years. That set a foundation. When I came here to start a program, I was ready to go because I had so much good training and experience in La Jolla. From the sampling, thousands and thousands of dolphins had a sample, get a lot of samples at one time, what you had to do, the protocols put in place, getting cooperation from a lot of people. Working up large samples and learning how to work with huge databases and do database checking. I mean, there's just so many things I learned. I've always been reasonably good quantitatively. I didn't go there with strong quantitative experience, but it was so important there because it's one lawsuit after another. The TUNA Corpus, it was just constant lawsuits. So, everything had to be done knowing that the tuna industry is probably going to take you to court. So, it just set the stage for me. They're just really fantastic people there. I mean, they're fantastic people here too, but what a way to start my career. I can't say enough about it. I love the people here. I think the thing about the Beaufort Lab that's so special is, I felt at home right away. It was really great. That didn't really change for me. Well, a little bit with the NOS issues. But mostly, what will stick with me is how wonderful the people were here. I just, again, can't say enough about that.

DH: This is Don. But who did you actually work with in La Jolla?

AH: Bill Perrin.

DH: Because we had a close association with La Jolla, with Reuben Lasker group, who we modeled our larval fish group at. I think even had a better one at the end. But anyway, Reuben was the one – well, Reuben's people.

AH: Right, and I overlapped with Reuben. So, I didn't know him. But that was the larval fish side.

DH: Yes.

AH: They had that fantastic CalCOFI. They still do have CalCOFI there. I think there were really good people on these long-running programs, like CalCOFI. The collaborations of those all involved, like this close association between the Scripps Institute of Oceanography and the Southwest Center there in La Jolla. Again, that just provided a perspective for me that was really important. But also, again, the Marine Mammal group there was good, but everyone there was good. Also, if you had a question about something, you could go and ask anyone. Even if I had a question about larval fish, Reuben would've opened his door to me going in and just asking the question. So, it was just a great experience for me to start my career in NOAA.

BC: Jeff Mosier was there then too, right?

AH: Jeff Mosier was there then. Did you know Alec McCall?

BC: Yes.

AH: Oh, man. He was fantastic.

BC: Yes, I knew Al.

AH: Oh, my gosh. Yes. I mean, just the people that were there when I was there, I just was very lucky. They also had hired some bunch of new people. Again, this had to do with tuna dolphin. So, I was one of a number of people that had come in. We were all about the same age group. So, it was like, we had this great cohort of people. We played softball on weekends. We had poker games and we did dance parties. It was a really just a great time. I don't know if that [laughter] answer your question exactly.

BC: Yes.

AH: But I just feel very lucky that I've had this career at NOAA. I've been very fortunate.

BC: I know I shared an office at Oregon State with Mike Lars and then he went on down there. He was part of that group, the Tuna Forecast, I think.

AH: Yes. That was at the forefront of that field at the time, I think, right?

BC: Yes.

AH: He was next door to me. His office was next to me, Mike. So, we talked a lot. Yes, nice guy. Then he went out to Hawaii.

DH: Anybody else got any –

JS: Aleta, we worked briefly, I want to say about ten years ago. I forget the exact circumstances. But one of the rivers in North Jersey, in springtime; Shrewsbury maybe or Shark River.

AH: Yes, it was Shrewsbury.

JS: That the bottlenose dolphin, I think would go in and they wouldn't come out. They were chasing menhaden. I think we supplied a bunch of fishery dependent data to your group. I forget all the details, but I imagine they eventually came out of the river.

[laughter]

AH: Well, do you want to hear the Shrewsbury story?

[laughter]

JS: Okay.

AH: There are two Shrewsbury stories. There are two times where it was notable that these bottlenose dolphins, who should have migrated south already, had not migrated south. Then the temperature changed and everything got really cold. But the Shrewsbury River was full of

menhaden. The dolphins were in there eating menhaden and people got very concerned. So, one time when this happened, the dolphins didn't leave. The river froze over and the dolphins were found dead. Of course, they died. So, the next time it happened – and this is when you were involved – there was an uproar. We can't have three more dolphins dead. So, to your point earlier, right? So, yes, with Joe's help, we got information about the menhaden, then we packed up our stuff and Craig Harms, and we went and we rescued the dolphins because we – again, it's a lot of money to put into three dolphins, but it was such a visible situation. Because the dolphins were right around the bridge and the cars could see them, and the people could see them. It was cold out and they didn't want to see –

DH: [laughter]

AH: – any more dolphins get frozen under the ice in the Shrewsbury River.

[laughter]

I forgot about that.

JS: One other comment. One of the personalities you mentioned early on in the interview, Jim Mead, I got a chance to meet him in the mid to late [19]70s when I was a graduate student at VIMS. In the spring, we'd go down to the northern Outer Banks in Corolla, and we'd work with the (Halsin?) crews there. Jim would come down with a couple of technicians from the Smithsonian to work process stranded marine mammals, bottlenose dolphin. I remember him working, in the Ford Dune, working, doing the necropsy right there. But there was a story about Jim the previous year. I think there was a large marine mammal, I want to say maybe a pilot whale. It was pretty ripe, but he decided to carry it back to the Smithsonian. So, they arranged to get it off the beach onto a flatbed. They went up the Eastern Shore, and they had a lead truck, and then the bed truck with the flatbed. But the story was the lead truck got to the toll booth at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and said, "I'm paying the toll for us and there's a large flatbed behind us. I'm paying the toll for them also. You don't want them to stop."

[laughter]

JS: I guess they did the same at the Annapolis Bay Bridge.

AH: Yes. That sounds like them. But if it was the flatbed, it was probably a big whale. It was probably not pilot whale, but a big whale. He would come down because there are so many dead animals on the beach here because of fishery interactions mostly. Of course, in the winter or early spring, there's a lot of fishery interactions with Tursiops. But also, that's when harbor porpoises are down south. Sort of, this is the southern end of their range and it's only in winter. There were a lot of dead ones in park because a lot of them were small because they die a lot of them die at weaning, right? That's just a normal biological thing. So, there would be a lot of harbor porpoise on the beach. Some of them got caught in gear. But mostly, it was a lot of young ones dying at weaning. So, he would come down and stay in the park service trailers. They let him have it. One year, I came down – this reminds me of two stories. One year, I came down with him when I was a graduate student and I spent a week with him at the park service. I

had a new car at the time and I was – let me see. There was a dead porpoise somewhere down here, which was unusual. So, he said, "We have to go get it." But his car wouldn't carry everything. He had a – I can't remember. But anyway, for some reason, I had to drive. So, we drove down here and he said, "We have to take the harbor porpoise back up there because that's where all the gear is." So, in my brand-new car, he put this harbor porpoise in my trunk.

[laughter]

BC: That's classified as the not so funny.

[laughter]

AH: It wasn't funny at the time. But it's a good story and he's quite the character in a good way. Yes.

DH: Okay. Anybody else?

BC: Yes. I just want to mention something to get it on tape. I forgot to mention it at the time. It was before you came, but it dealt with sea turtles. It had to do with the key patterns in shore flounder fishery or nearshore flounder fishery, and the tremendous strandings that were occurring over a short period of time. The state shut down the fishery, which created a lot of problems because these guys could only fish close to shore with their vessels. The Pascagoula Lab tried to develop a TED type that would let them continue to fish for flounder and – I hope I get this right. Fish for flounder and shark with sand – what's the shark fishery close to the shore?

JS: Dogfish.

BC: Dogfish shark. Yes, that's it. Because that was a big problem and the TEDs weren't working. So, the fishermen were allowed to go back and fish. But they had to have tow times on them of one hour and a bunch of other things. We put people on the boat before Christmas that year, and they were all very cooperative until the data came in. It showed that they were vastly exceeding tow times. They were going into Virginia closed waters to trawl for flounder. They all got together when they saw the data. After Christmas, they said, "No more observers will go on our vessel." This is an effort like you talked about with some of the strandings, where a lot of agencies and people get together. So, we then began to require observers on those vessels. They had to call in every time and get those vessels okayed, that there was an observer on them. If they were caught offshore without an observer, the Coast Guard was stopping everybody if you didn't have a guy on there. He had a code that if he was being mistreated, the Coast Guard would code the vessel and the captain would say, "Well, he's all good. There's no problem at all." "Well, put them on the phone. We want to talk to him." I had the dealer say two numbers, and he was off. I did board a guy who was out there without a permit, without an observer, and they made him haul back. He had put a lining inside his tow bag. He finally negotiated it for \$7,500. While in fact, all he had to do was call in and get an observer. He would've been fine, but he wouldn't have got away with fishing illegally. So, when the problem with the sharks finally worked itself out, which was part of the problem, we'd just begun starting to use sea surface temperature. We were able to allow them to fish for flounder in certain areas

where the sea surface temperature was so much – and then when it was cold. When warm water moved in with Gulf Stream [inaudible], it was shut down. That worked very nicely. It was a coordinated effort that resulted in a major fishery interaction problem being solved in less than three years.

AH: That's still true. They're still using that temperature?

BC: Pardon?

AH: They're still doing that. They're still using that temperature. I can't remember if it's fifty degrees. I can't remember the exact temperature. But above a certain temperature, there are different rules, and below a certain temperature, then it should be good because the turtle should be gone. That's in offshore waters or near coastal waters. But what you were telling me reminds me of a couple other things. We really didn't talk about turtles that much. But besides the TEDs – so, that was all before I arrived. But after I arrived, there was a huge number of strandings of sea turtles up around Hatteras and north of Hatteras. I mean, alarmingly high number. So, we were funded to fly a small plane aerial surveys to see what fishing was occurring and where, and how that corresponded to where the turtles were being found. We were able to document a high likelihood of these turtles being caught in these gill nets, given where the turtles were and where the fishing was being done and the wind – all the things. So, that shut down that fishery for a little while. Well, they figured out what to do about it. They, being DMF. Then there was another case of a similar situation down here where – and this is even more recently – a lot of turtles were stranding again. Alarmingly high numbers of turtles were stranding. Once it was documented, they funded us to do an observer program, but using our boats. So, it was not on the fishermen's boats because they weren't going to take us, right? They're small boats because it's inside fishing. So, we went out with our own boats and we were documenting sets and hauls. We had to tell the fishermen, we said, "Here's what we're doing and here's why we're here." We documented even way more turtles being caught in those nets than anyone had anticipated. So, the fishermen stopped letting us be near them. It became unsafe. Then further, our running that observer program got in the way of our getting samples and information from the turtles because the fishermen didn't want to work with us.

BC: They wouldn't do it.

AH: So, that fishery got shut down for a while too, until they came up with some solutions for it.

BC: At that time, there was rumor flying around that there's a run-on hatchets being bought out of hardware stores, particularly down east. That there weren't going to be that many strandings anymore when they would catch them offshore. I didn't really believe it. But it turns out, when I was in a meeting with some fishery owners – owners of fishing fleets, when it was all over, they in fact said, "Yes, our guys have really gotten a lot better now. We don't cut them up anymore." They admitted on TV that they were doing this. So, it could get pretty contentious. You can have the help of the fishery community until it works to their detriment, and then you're on your own.

AH: Yes.

BC: I think one of the common things that happened during that time is that with the TEDs that were coming out and they would come up – the dogfish would be in front of them on that particular problem. Then the dogfish would fall back into the water because they had these things with the rocks and everything would block it. So, a fisherman filmed this – a captain – and he sent the film to us. I think it was Joanne Brown I sent down to get the film run. She came back and said, "Well, yes, we got that film, but it was filmed over a porno film and we got that too."

[laughter]

BC: So, a lot of things do happen. They're funny.

DH: Well, I know Aleta's got something she has to do. Are there anymore – I enjoyed it very much. Thank you, Aleta.

AH: Thank you.

BC: Thank you.

DH: Sorry, it took us three times to get you here [laughter].

AH: I'm sorry about the last one.

DH: But we really did enjoy it. I learned things. I really like this interview thing.

[laughter]

You find out things that I didn't know or forgot. So, thank you again. Appreciate it.

AH: Yes. Thank you very much.

BC: Good interview. Excellent.

[end of transcript]