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Neil Logan oral history interview by Robert Cardin, April 18, 2010

Neil Logan (Interviewee)
Robert Cardin (Interviewer)

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Robert Cardin: Hello. Good afternoon. This is Robert Cardin, and today I’m interviewing Neil Logan at his residence. We’re conducting an oral history for the Gulf Fisheries Foundation project for Fort Pierce Oculina Bank HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. Well, Neil, welcome. Will you please state your name and spell your name and place of birth for the record?

Neil Logan: My name’s Neil Logan, N-e-i-l L-o-g-a-n. I was born November 17, 1952.

RC: Neil, when did you first move to Fort Pierce?

RC: Did you—are you married?

NL: Yes.

RC: How old were you when you got married?

NL: Forty-three.

RC: You were forty-three when you got married.

NL: Yes.

RC: Do you have children?

NL: I have two boys, two sons.

RC: How old are they?

NL: One is thirty-six and one is fourteen.

RC: What’s your education, or how much schooling do you have?

NL: High school.

RC: High school graduate, all right. Do you have any other jobs besides fishing?

NL: No.

RC: Have you had any other jobs besides fishing?
RC: Do you currently own a boat?

NL: Yes.

RC: How big is your boat, Neil?

NL: Thirty-one [feet].

RC: Now, I’d like to ask you some questions about the Oculina Bank. How familiar are you with the Oculina Bank?

NL: Well, I moved from West Palm Beach, in 1991, to Fort Pierce because of the Oculina Bank, because of how productive it was and how good of money I could make, meaning that I could work myself, and my family, or my wife, would not have to hold a job.

RC: This isn’t a question, but you just moved up hoping that there was a lot of fish in the Oculina Bank, or did you fish—

NL: No, I used to come up here from West Palm Beach when I lived there and fish up here.

RC: Okay. Thank you.

NL: That’s the reason that we moved here, was because of the Oculina Bank.

RC: Why was Oculina Bank designated as an area to protect? Do you know?

NL: I’m not really—I don’t know exactly all the reasons that they closed it.

RC: Can you, like, just name anything that you’ve—
NL: What I understood was [that] they closed it because of the coral that’s on the bottom and they didn’t want people to anchor up on it and tear up the coral.

RC: All right. Is there anything else you can tell me about the Oculina Bank?

NL: It’s very protective. It’s a very good place to fish. It’s a long ways offshore and a lot of fish [are] on it. Very productive, and you can make a lot money in one day of fishing there. Always go there to catch a lot of fish.

RC: All right. What do you think about the closure of the Oculina Bank to anchoring and bottom fishing?

NL: Well, all I know is that it has hurt me over, probably, 60 percent of my income because of closing it. And the reason, that is because my wife had to go back to work, because we couldn’t afford me having to fish inshore. The reason fishing inshore doesn’t pay off is ’cause you go inshore, and the water is dirty, or so many things are wrong, that you don’t have the conditions like you do out in deeper water. All the time, you have somewhat, some kind of good conditions. It might be a little bit of tide, or it might be a lot of tide, but you could always go out there and catch a lot of fish, regardless of what the tide or the water was. It’s always a good, productive place.

RC: So just a—you’re saying, like, the location of it; there’s more often clean water there or more—

NL: Right. There’s more cleaner water, a better temperature all the time there, than inshore. Inshore, if there’s a ground sea—well, the water, ’cause of it being shallower at ninety feet or sixty feet or seventy feet, will get dirtier quicker. Out there at 190 to 240, the water stays cleaner even though it’s a bigger ground sea. But you can always go out there and catch a lot of groupers or a lot of amberjacks or a lot of snappers or whatever you’re after, regardless of how big the sea is; you could always go out there and make either $1,000 or you can make $5,000.

RC: Interesting. So basically it’s just more fishing opportunity, I guess.

NL: More fishing opportunity, and a lot of area to fish.
RC: Thank you. I guess that you’ve just answered a few of the questions here. If anchoring and bottom fishing in Oculina Bank was not prohibited, would you fish there? I guess you’ve might have answered that. (laughs)

NL: I would probably fish there somewhere around—probably 150 days a year.

RC: All right. How would you fish and what would you fish for?

NL: Well, I would fish for mainly groupers and amberjacks and snappers.

RC: How would you do that, I guess the question would be?

NL: Ninety-nine percent of all times I’m snapper or grouper fishing or whatever, I anchor up. So I do use an anchor. Very seldom [do] I ever motor fish.

RC: And I—so you’re using a vertical bandit fishing gear?

NL: Right, right.

RC: Overall, how has the fishing changed since you began fishing here in the Fort Pierce area?

NL: Well, the fishing has been great; it’s just the areas have been closed, so the fishing has gone down because we’re prohibited down [to] so small of an area now that you can’t go make the money you used to make. Like I said, it’s taken away over 60 percent of my income.

RC: So that’s due to—you’re saying area closures, and I guess just opportunity? Okay. How do you—excuse me, have you had any experiences with law enforcement within or regarding the Oculina Bank?

NL: No.

RC: Now I want to talk about your fishing history. What is your earliest memory of fishing and how old were you? You know, like, with your grandpa at the lake or something.
NL: I was nine years old, and I went fishing with my dad and my grandfather on the Palm Beach Pier in West Palm Beach.

RC: How did you learn to fish, or who taught you?

NL: I don’t know; it’s just something that I was born with.

RC: So did you have to be taught any or you just picked it up?

NL: Well, basically trial and error, going and going and going.

(VHF radio chattering)

RC: All right. How did you decide to become a fisherman? Mr. Logan is turning down the VHF.

NL: Well, for one thing—how I became a fisherman in the position that I’m in is because I enjoyed it so much; and, in return, I was good at it from going so much and trial and error, that I could see that there was a great future in it that I could make, and support my family the way a working man could do. That’s why I’m in the fishing business.

RC: All right. Thank you. This question kind of talks—it would be about the same as when you moved up here. But the question is: When did you start to work as a fisherman in the Fort Pierce area?


RC: I guess you were—how old were you then?

NL: Forty-three.

RC: What did you fish for then?

NL: Snapper, grouper, amberjacks, kingfish.
RC: How did you fish for ’em?

NL: By deep reel with bandits, catching one hook at a time.

RC: Okay. Here’s a different question: Who did you fish with?

NL: Nobody. By myself.

RC: Who owned the boat?

NL: Me.

RC: Where did you go to fish when you began fishing? Can you show me on this map? I guess this [area] that you’re pointing at, that’d be, like, Chapman’s Reef, Jeff’s Reef, down through there?

NL: Yeah.

RC: All right, anywhere else? Mr. Logan is pointing at the northern end of the ECA.

NL: Well, right here where it says Oculina Experimental Closed Area: from there to the north, I’ve fished all that, all the way up past Sebastian.

RC: All right. Thank you. During what months did you—oh, I guess that depth, what would the depths be there?

NL: An average 245 feet.

RC: All right. Okay, next question: During what months of the year did you fish?

NL: Every month.
RC: Okay. How long did your fishing trips last?

NL: An average trip would probably last me around fourteen hours, fifteen hours.

RC: How much was an average trip, your catch from an average trip?

NL: Pounds? Pound-wise, I would probably average somewhere in the area of around 500—probably 550 pounds of grouper was average; a trip, a day. Amberjacks, probably somewhere between 800 and 1,200 pounds of amberjacks. I could have caught a lot more amberjacks if I wanted, but I was actually mainly going for the groupers and the snappers.

RC: All right. So the 500 and the 800 to 1,200; that was on each—each trip could have possibly—

NL: Yeah.

RC: Or are you talking about some—okay, you’re fishing for one and catching the other on the same—

NL: Right, ’cause there’s so many of ’em, so plentiful.

RC: Okay. Thank you. For how many years did you fish for, I guess, groupers and amberjacks?

NL: How many years have I been fishing for ’em? Over my lifetime?

RC: Yeah.

NL: Basically from the last—probably forty-five years, forty-two years, or something.

RC: Okay. The next question is: Why did you stop fishing for groupers and amberjacks? I guess you haven’t started—you haven’t stopped. I don’t understand the question. (laughs)
NL: I stopped fishing on the Oculina Bank because they passed the law that we cannot go out there and fish.

RC: Okay, so what did you do next? Was that the end of your fishing career?

NL: No. Well, then I came inshore and found out that the days that you could fish inshore was so limited that I actually had to start diving more than I was able to fish.

RC: All right. Now, how long have you been doing the inshore fishing and diving?


RC: Okay.

NL: Beginning of ninety-five [1995], I started diving and doing less fishing.

RC: Who did you fish with?

NL: You mean since ninety-four [1994]? My dive partner.

RC: How are you related to this person?

NL: He’s a partner.

RC: Okay. What kind of boat?

NL: In my boat, my thirty-one footer.

RC: Where did you go to fish for this stuff?
NL: Inshore.

RC: Mr. Logan is pointing inshore of Oculina Bank. What does that look like, ninety feet?

NL: Yeah, basically eighty-five, ninety feet.

RC: All right.

NL: Offshore bar at Fort Pierce.

RC: All right. Thank you. During what months of the year do you do your inshore fishing?

NL: Well, now since we’re shut down for four months on groupers, and we’re shut down basically two months on amberjacks, basically, I’m only able to go about eight months out of the year.

RC: By shut down, you mean—

NL: Closed.

RC: With the Oculina Bank shut down, there’s less fishing opportunities inshore, or do you mean regulatory?

NL: Yes. There’s less fish in—well, both probably, you know, but there’s just less fishing time now because we’re not allowed to go, ’cause of the closures.

RC: All right. How long do these fishing months—or how long do these fishing trips last?

NL: Basically the same amount of time. Basically, the summer will run twelve hours.

RC: How much is an average catch on these trips?
NL: Probably 300 [pounds]; but that’s divided in half now, ’cause my partner gets half and I get half.

RC: Okay. Where do you sell your catch?

NL: I sell my catch locally, at three different places: here, Fort Pierce, [and] Stuart.

RC: All right. So that brings us up to present on your fishing activities. Let me turn the page here. Finally, I would like to talk about how your fishing has changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank. Since 1984, several changes have been made in regulations to the Oculina Bank. I’d like to know if any of these regulations affected you, and if so, how? See, I guess I point to there on each map. All right. In eighty-four [1984], this area was closed to trawling, dredging, and bottom longlining, in eighty-four [1984]. Did this affect you?

NL: No.

RC: Okay. All right, so you were fishing prior to ninety-four [1994]. In ninety-four [1994], this area was designated as an experimental closed area, where fishing and retention of snapper/grouper was prohibited. Did this fishing [regulation] impact you?

NL: Yes.

RC: How?

NL: ’Cause it shut us down. It shut me down totally. It took away at least 60 percent of my income—that I was making 100 percent of.

RC: Well, in 1996, this whole area of this experimental area here—and this whole Habitat Area of Particular Concern, I guess up here almost to the Cape [Canaveral]—was shut down to anchoring. Does that affect you, not being allowed to anchor?

NL: Yes. Oh, yes.

RC: Could you explain why?
NL: Well, because it takes—that takes 100 percent of your bottom fishing away from you. You can’t stay located on the spot that you want to be stayed on.

RC: You can’t—okay. So “on the spot,” you mean fish or you mean—

NL: The fish; the school of fish.

RC: Oh, okay, interesting. Okay. Let’s see. In ninety-six [1996], trawling for rock shrimp—then, in ninety-six [1996], they expanded the no trawling and bottom longline gear, and I guess—did this affect you?

NL: No.

RC: The designation of marine protected areas is being used more frequently as a management tool. What do you think about the use of closed areas to fishing compared to other types of management regulations: quotas, closed seasons, IFQs [individual fishing quotas], et cetera?

NL: I don’t think that we need ’em.

RC: All right. Thinking ahead to the future, what do you think the fishing in Fort Pierce will be like in ten years?

NL: Well, if they keep passing more laws against us, we’ll be totally out of business; which right now, only the strongest survive, which is a very few.

RC: All right. Could you talk about the strongest survival a bit? That’s interesting.

NL: Well, when I first moved here, there was—I don’t know how many boats were here, but there was—let’s just say if there was a hundred boats here then, there might be fifteen or twenty boats here now. It’s gone down 80 percent, let’s just say, volume of boats.

RC: Okay. I didn’t mean—
NL: And it isn’t because they moved away; it’s because they actually sold their boats and went out of business.

RC: Okay. Excuse me; I got off track there with that question. Thank you. Well, that’ll conclude the interview with Mr. Neil Logan. Thank you for your time, sir.

*Pause in recording*

RC: Interview for 4-18-2010 [April 18, 2010].

*End of interview*