Herman Summerlin oral history interview by Terry Lee Howard, July 17, 2010

Herman Summerlin (Interviewee)

Terry Lee Howard (Interviewer)

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Terry Howard: Good morning. This is Terry Howard. Today is July 17, 2010. I’m in St. Lucie Village at—what’s the address? … conducting an oral history with Herman Summerlin for the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation’s project with Fort Pierce fishermen on the Oculina Bank HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. Welcome, Herman. Please state your name, spell your name, your place of birth, and your date of birth.

Herman Summerlin: Herman Summerlin, Senior. S-u-m-m-e-r-l-i-n.

TH: Spell your name.

HS: H-e-r-m-a-n S-u-m-m-e-r-l-i-n. Senior.
TH: Okay, and place of birth?

HS: Fort Pierce, Florida.

TH: And date of birth?

HS: 5-4-38 [May 4, 1938].

TH: May 4, 1938.

HS: Yes, sir.

TH: When did you move to Fort Pierce? I guess—

HS: I was born in Fort Pierce.

TH: Born in Fort Pierce. Are you married?

HS: Yes.

TH: How old are you—or, how old were you when you got married?

HS: Seventeen.

TH: Okay. Do you have children, how many, and how old are they?

HS: Yes, I got seven children, and they range in date from—I mean—

TH: Age?
HS: Age, from thirty-two to fifty-two.

TH: Okay. How much schooling do you have?

HS: Ninth grade.

TH: Okay. Do you have another job besides fishing? Have you had other jobs besides fishing?

HS: Yes, sir.

TH: Could you elaborate?

HS: I had a lot of jobs. When I was young, I worked for the fish company. I worked for several fish companies. I worked for Hudgins Fish Company, for Singleton Fish Company, for Kirby Fish Company, and for Garret Fish Company. After that, I went in the retail fish business, and I was in the fish business for thirty years.

TH: Do you currently own a boat?

HS: Yes, sir.

TH: How many? (laughs)

HS: Oh, I think about four.

TH: Okay. What’s your primary boat right now, and could you describe it?

HS: I got a little Stumpknocker—it’s only fifteen feet long—that I fish cast net mullet along shore with.

TH: Okay. What kind of motor?
HS: A Mercury, fifteen horsepower.

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

HS: Not very. I’ve never done much offshore fishing. As a boy, I fished mackerel with some of the old timers. But I never done no bottom fishin’ offshore.

TH: Okay. Let’s go back quickly to—how many fish houses were in Fort Pierce when you say you worked for these various fish companies?

HS: At one point there was eight fish companies—

TH: Okay.

HS: —that I can recall. That was in the early fifties [1950s].

TH: Okay. Can you go back and name, and can you spell the names of the fish companies? I hate to say this, but they need it for the spelling.

HS: I can’t spell the names of them, but I can name them. I don’t have any idea how to spell them.

TH: Okay. We’ll go on. I’d like to—okay, do you know why the Oculina Bank was designated as an area to protect? What do you know about it?

HS: Very little. I know about it and I don’t—I never did figure out exactly why they decided to shut a certain area of the ocean down and not the rest of it.

TH: Okay. Is there anything else you can tell me about the Oculina Bank?

HS: No, sir.
TH: Okay. What do you think about the closure of the Oculina Bank to anchoring and bottom fishing?

HS: I think that the closure of any area is a detriment to the fishin’ industry, sport and commercial. I don’t feel that the government or the powers to be has the right to just say, “Well, we’re not gonna let you fish in this area anymore. You caught too many fish here.”

TH: Okay. Has the closure of the Oculina Bank affected your fishing?

HS: No, sir.

TH: Okay. If anchoring and bottom fishing in the Oculina Bank was permitted, would you fish there?

HS: No, sir.

TH: Okay. Overall, how has fishing changed since you began fishing in Fort Pierce?

HS: Well, about twenty-five or thirty years ago, they tried to organize some fishermen and they couldn’t get them together. The hook and liners and the net fishermen wanted to fight about everything. If the net fishermen caught a kingfish, the hook and line fishermen thought that he was doing wrong, that he shouldn’t be able to catch kingfish because he was fishing with a net. So, as I seen it come, it gradually went downhill. A very smart man told me one time—by the name of Gene Hayes—that when they limit the days that you could fish that there’s no way to win because the Lord limits the days that you can fish. The fishing has gone down so bad that they handle more fish—we used to handle more fish in a month than they handle in a year. Now —

TH: In the fish houses?

HS: Of all species, yes.

TH: Have you had any experience with law enforcement within or regarding the Oculina Bank?

HS: No, sir.
TH: Now, your fishing history, specifically. What is your earliest of fishing and how old were you?

HS: Well, my daddy was a commercial fisherman. So, my fishin’—my history of fishin’ comes from right after World War II, about 1946. We had to go with him. And he was also a mullet fisherman. He didn’t do much ocean fishin’. In those days, mullet, right after the war, were worth more than or as much as they are today. We got as much as twenty cents a pound for mullet in 1946. They were a primary fish that went up to North Florida and Georgia. But there was a big demand for ’em, because they were inexpensive and had a good shelf life.

TH: What’s your earliest memory of fishing? How old were you?

HS: Eight years old.

TH: Now, were you born in this house—

HS: Yes, sir.

TH: —that we’re in now. What was the address again?

HS: 2801.

TH: 2801. So, did you follow your father?

HS: I followed my father till I seen that that was a going-downhill situation. So, I ended up working at the fish house, ’cause it was steady money instead of you get money every now and then when you fish. That’s how I got most of my experience in the fishin’ industry, was actually working and running the fish houses.

TH: Okay. You started off just working there and you began running the place in short order?

HS: Right. Yes.
TH: How did you learn how to fish? This is who taught you. I mean, to throw a cast net, to use a rod and reel.

HS: My daddy taught me how to throw a cast net, and an old kingfisherman by the name of Sherman Merritt taught me how to kingfish.

TH: Oh, yeah?

HS: And I learned crawfishin’ from Sherman Merritt. I crawfished with him for a couple of years.

TH: You ran traps?

HS: Yes, I ran traps with Sherman. Then, in later years, I fished with my cousin Bill Summerlin, mainly cast net fishin’ and some trap fishin’.

TH: Trap. Fish traps?

HS: No, crawfish traps.

TH: Okay.

HS: I was about twenty years old. I got a boat from Hudgins Fish Company, what they called a company boat. At that time, Hudgins had about fifty vessels that they owned and you fished them for them at 12 ½ percent. I fished that boat for a couple of years.

TH: You get 12 ½ percent of the total fish?

HS: They took—Hudgins took 12 ½ percent of the total fish for the boat, for the use of the boat.

TH: You got 88 percent to you.
HS: Right, yes. But you had to furnish your own gear. They just furnished the boat and they maintained [sic] it, though. They maintained the boat and they had a fleet of boats at that time. A lot of people had what they call company boats, or—is what they called the boats.

TH: Where was Hudgins located at that time? This was the—

HS: Taylor Creek.

TH: Now, what period was this?

HS: This was in the fifties [1950s].

TH: Nineteen fifties, okay. How did you decide to become a fisherman? Is that all you knew?

HS: Well, yeah. I was kind of roped into it, with no education to speak of. In those days, that was—you kind of followed in your family’s footsteps. And all of my—Daddy and his brothers and my cousins and uncles fished, mostly, is what they did.

TH: Okay. So, primarily—okay, I want to talk about the mullet for a minute, and then I’d like to talk about the kingfish and maybe the crawfish, too. How did you fish for the mullet? What gear and bait? What did you use?

HS: We used gill nets. Each boat—we journey fished with two boats, and each boat had 300 to 400 yards of net. We would find a school of mullet and one boat would go one way and one the other, and [we would] pin them up and then drum—what they call drum it out, by banging on the side of the boat or beating on the bottom to run the fish into the net. Did do some seining, beach seining, and then some pursing [purse seining] in the river.

TH: For mullet?

HS: For, mainly, mullet. But we caught—no, on the beach we caught whiting and pompano in spots.

TH: In spots.
HS: Yeah.

TH: All right. Who did you fish with? And this is when you had the company boat.

HS: Yes.

TH: Okay.

HS: I fished with a lot of different people, but when I had the company boat, I fished with a fellow by the name of Cody Williams and his brother Carol Williams. They had the gear, but didn’t have a boat. So, when they crawfish season ended that year, we went—me and Carol and Cody went beach seining. We fished the summer doing that, and I went back crawfishing.

TH: Okay. Crawfishing, how many traps did you run? Let’s talk about crawfishing.

HS: Fifty traps.

TH: Okay, right out here?

HS: Yeah, right in front. Right out from Vero [Beach] to Fort Pierce.

TH: And you would bait ’em with?

HS Bunkers or mullet or—

TH: How long would you soak ’em?

HS: We’d let ’em soak about two hours and then we pulled ’em and if they catching, we would put ’em right back. We fished only at night, night fish. They were open top traps. They were not really a trap. We called them pots, is what they were called, crawfish pots. There was—

TH: They were open at the top?
HS: Open at the top, yeah. That’s the reason we pulled ’em every two hours. The crawfish would get in there and start eating, and then you’d pull it. And we caught—you know, a good night, you could catch 500 pounds. On a bad night, you’d catch 150 or 200.

TH: That’s a lot of pounds.

HS: A lot of pounds, yeah. But they weren’t worth a whole lot. The little fish were worth—in those days, I’m wanting to say we got fifty cents for the small ones. That was anything less than two pounds, which we don’t get a lot of in this area. Most of the crawfish here are big crawfish. Anything over two pounds, we only got twenty-five cents a pound for.

TH: Okay. You fished with Sherman Merritt, later?

HS: Yes, I fished with Sherman. I wintertime fished with Sherman, kingfishing. I fished with him a few times, crawfishing. But he normally fished by himself.

TH: Okay.

HS: He was kind of a loner. But he did take me under his wing and taught me how to kingfish. So, I kingfished that same boat, that Hudgins boat, for a couple of years, a couple of winters.

TH: Okay. Were kingfish in closer to shore back then, or did you have to go way offshore?

HS: Yes, a lot closer to shore. We never—I don’t think I ever went no more than five miles offshore.

TH: Okay. Where did you go to fish when you began fishing? You know, this is a tough question. You went different places for whatever fish you were targeting, I assume.

HS: That’s right, yeah.

TH: During what months of the year did you fish for mullet? Let’s go back to the—
HS: Generally we started fishing mullet the first of June and fished mullet all the way through till January, all the way to the roe season. In those days, the season was—there was a closed season on mullet from December—I’m wanting to say from November 15 till January 15. We were not allowed to catch mullet because they were in the roe season.

TH: From November 15?

HS: Right.

TH: So then, you fished from June till November?

HS: Right.

TH: Until they closed the season.

HS: Right.

TH: Okay. So, when did you fish for kingfish?

HS: In the same period there, around Christmas time, is when they got the thickest. When the mullet—when we weren’t fishing mullet, we went offshore kingfishing when the weather was good.

TH: Okay. What was the season for the crawfish?

HS: Crawfishin’ was early. We fished crawfish all the way into—I’m wantin’ to say the season opened in August. We fished crawfish August, September, October, on into November.

TH: Okay. So, it’s hard to say, but an average fishing trip would last how long?

HS: One day.
TH: But, ten hour day?

HS: Oh, no. Days were twelve and fourteen. There wasn’t no ten hour day.

TH: Okay. An average trip’s catch of mullet?

HS: When we were gill net fishing, a thousand pounds for two boats.

TH: That'd be an average?

HS: That was an average day.

TH: An average kingfishing day?

HS: Four hundred.

TH: Four hundred pounds would be an average kingfishing day.

HS: Yes, sir.

TH: Average. And average crawfish, you already said, I think, were somewhere between a hundred and—

HS: A hundred and 500.

TH: To 500, okay. For how many years did you fish for—well, I guess mullet you’re still fishing for. Let’s go back. About how many years did you fish for crawfish?

HS: From the mid-fifties [1950s] till the mid-sixties [1960s]. Ten years.

TH: Okay. How many years did you fish for kingfish?
HS: Only a couple of years.

TH: Then mullet, you’re still fishing for mullet?

HS: Yes, still trying to catch a mullet.

TH: (laughs) Okay. I think we covered a lot of this. So, you’ve fished a lot of boats. You talked about fishing the company boats at Hudgins. Do you remember your first boat that you owned yourself?

HS: Yeah. It was a little McGauran boat. It was built by Denny McGauran.

TH: Denny McGauran?

HS: Yeah.

TH: How do you spell his name?

HS: Don’t know that. (laughs)

TH: Okay. We’ll have to get—I’ll get that.

HS: Yeah. You’ll get that. I had a little boat that he had built that I bought from him for $200. It was a plywood boat, had a little Goodyear motor on it. It was—

TH: A Goodyear?

HS: Yeah. It was made by Johnson Evinrude, but it was called a Sea King, motor on it. I think it was a five horse[power]. And I fished it around the river, trout fishin’. I never was good at trout fishing ’cause I couldn’t sit still long enough. A trout fisherman has got to have great patience and I’m not a real patient person. So, that does not work with the trout fishing and me too long. I tried it a couple summers, and ended up selling bait to the real trout fishermen and making more money selling bait than I was catching trout.
TH: You’re selling—

HS: Pigfish.

TH: Pigfish, to the trout fishermen.

HS: Yeah.

TH: Okay. Now, you said this was—what kind of boat did you say this was?

HS: A McGauran boat.

TH: McGauran.

HS: Yeah.

TH: M—

HS: He built a bunch of ’em. He built ’em from like twelve foot long to twenty foot long. And they all looked alike.

TH: Now, this is Denny McGauran?

HS: Denny and Donny.

TH: And you call them “McGauran.”

HS: That’s what I always called them, “McGauran.”
TH: I must find out the spelling. I will check that. Okay, that was your first boat and you’ve owned many, many boats. Would it be possible to run through the main boats you’ve had, just a quick (HS laughs)—or would this be too many?

HS: Oh, Lord, trying to think.

TH: You owned a fish house at one time. Is this correct?

HS: Yeah.

TH: So, did you have boats then?

HS: I had boats then, yeah. I had—

TH: When did you own the fish house?

HS: I went—in fifty-eight [1958], I opened a retail market on Seventh Street and went into the wholesale fish business, and then I bought Baywood Fisheries from Captain Fagen, who had originally started it. It was a smoke fish business, and I moved my retail business over there on the causeway.

TH: South Beach Causeway?

HS: South Beach Causeway.

TH: Captain Fagen, now who was he?

HS: He was an old retired sea captain. He was born and raised in St. Augustine and when he came back to Florida, he settled here. And him and my uncle opened a smoke fish business, and it was a pretty lucrative business. I want to say in the early sixties [1960s] that I bought that business from him and changed the name of it to Summerlin’s Baywood Fisheries. My fish house was called Summerlin’s, and then I changed it because I wanted to keep the name Baywood. So, I changed it over. That was in the early sixties [1960s]. I owned that business for about fifteen years; ended up selling it to my brother, Astor Summerlin, who later gave it to his son. But after I sold out there, I opened Pelican Seafoods.
TH: 7Cs?

HS: Yeah, on U.S. 1. I bought that when I sold out on the beach. I moved over to U.S. 1, still in the fish business, and bought—Luther and Lindy Peterson had a little place they called 7Cs Seafood, and I bought it out. From there, I went down to Taylor Creek and Bernard Egan built a building for me there, and I stayed there about three years.

TH: That where you were wholesale. You bought fish from fishermen.

HS: Right.

TH: Right there on Taylor Creek.

HS: Right on Taylor Creek, yeah. Back where I was at is right where Hudgins was twenty-five years before. (laughs)

TH: Was that on the north or south side of Taylor Creek?

HS: North side.

TH: North side of Taylor Creek, okay. I’d be right there where Harbortown Marina is today.

HS: Right where Harbortown is now, yeah.

TH: All right.

HS: And then from there, I bought the Co-op Fish Company when it went out of business. I bought it from the government. SBA—Small Business Administration—put it on the market after it folded, and I bought it and moved it up to what we call Mall Channel, which is now Riverside Marina.

TH: Okay, so you bought the Co-op.
HS: I bought the Co-op from SBA.

TH: But it was located down south of here.

HS: It was north of here.

TH: I mean, north of here.

HS: It was landlocked.

TH: Okay.

HS: But I bought it and moved it down there to—

TH: Where Riverside Marina is today.

HS: Where Riverside Marina is today.

TH: So, that was Herman’s—what did you call the place?

HS: 7Cs.

TH: 7Cs, that was right across the little canal from Hudgins.

HS: That’s right.

TH: At that time, that was—okay.

HS: Hudgins was still downtown at the time when I bought that. Hudgins was leasing a place from Joe Tourney—
TH: On Seaway Drive.

HS: Yeah, on the corner of Seaway Drive, right.

TH: On the west side of the river, the base of South Bridge.

HS: Yeah, base of the old South Bridge.

TH: All right. So, you’ve had fish houses. You’ve owned too many boats to probably count. (laughs)

HS: Yeah, I have owned a lot of boats.

TH: All right. Let’s go back to the question: How has fishing changed since you began fishing as a kid? What do you think has affected the fishing most in this area?

HS: I think that probably what affected the fishing is that—you gotta remember, coming up as a boy, that if you’d seen five boats in one day other than your own, you’ve seen a lot of boats. Today, I don’t have to leave my dock to see five boats. In the day when I was fishin’, when I was twenty years old, there was probably—all through the fifties [1950s], there was probably a hundred fishermen lived in Fort Pierce. When I say “fishermen,” I mean full-time, gung-ho fishermen. We didn’t have anything [like] what we called [in] later years, we call weekend warriors. Then, I think it just got to a point that the boat traffic—there’s still a lot of fish, but the boat traffic keeps them beat so bad that—I don’t know much about the ocean fishing, but the river fishing, it appears to me that the fish don’t have a chance to rest. There’s just so many people out there.

TH: Targeting.

HS: And I know they—a lot of them do fish and return the fish to the water, but I think—I’ve always believed that half of the fish returned to the water are dead when you return them, no matter whether they’re sailfish, kingfish, mackerel, or bluefish or mullet or whatever. They don’t survive the trauma.
TH: Have you seen runoff? Has that been a factor?

HS: Say again?

TH: Freshwater runoff, has it increased? Has that been a factor in the fishing in the river?

HS: I don’t think it’s increased, but I think they turn it loose all at one time, where it used to be the runoff would last for two or three days after a rain and it was over. But now, they hold it up and dump it in smaller amounts, I suppose. But it seems to affect the river for ten days after a hard rain or something like that.

TH: Okay. So, you think it comes in greater volume, or just the way they’re releasing it is changing?

HS: Just the way they release it.

TH: Okay, they’ve always released the water from Lake Okeechobee?

HS: Oh, yes. Yes, there’s always been.

TH: Since you were—

HS: Since I was a boy.

TH: Nineteen thirty-eight.

HS: Yeah, there was always release. I don’t think it was as great as it is now, but there was always a release. You could depend on it if you were fishing Gilbert’s Bar or Port Salerno, that if you had a hard rain, it was gonna be two or three days before the river got back to its normal self.

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1 The House of Refuge at Gilbert’s Bar, a.k.a. the House of Refuge, is the last remaining shipwreck life-saving station on Florida's Atlantic Coast and is the oldest building in Marion County.
TH: All right. I’d like to talk about your fishing—how your fishing has changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank. Since 1984, several changes have been made in the regulations of the Oculina Bank. I’d like to know if any of these regulations affected your fishing, and if so, how? The Oculina Bank was initially closed to trawling, dredging, and bottom longlining in 1984. Did this affect your fishing?

HS: Only to the point that the production was down in eighty-four [1984].

TH: Now, did you own a fish house at this time?

HS: Yes. Yes, I did.

TH: So, you were not getting as many fish coming in from your longliners, I assume.

HS: Right.

TH: All right. So, that affected your fishing business.

HS: Yeah. Well, they actually—at that time, they stopped the fishing all through the straits. You couldn’t fish more than half the distance from one country to another along that same period of time.

TH: And that was the sword—you were getting a lot of swordfish?

HS: All the small boats that were swordfishing. Nick the Greek had one of my boats he was fishin’. It was only a thirty foot boat and he just fished maybe two nights, and that put him completely out. And then there was several other—

TH: Now, what’s Nick the Greek’s full name?

HS: Korrusis, Nick Korrusis.

TH: Nick Korrusis, okay, Ronnie’s father.
HS: Ronnie’s father.

TH: Okay.

HS: He fished one of my boats, the *Barbara Bee*, he fished—and Jerry Harrison fished one of my boats, one of my swordfish boats. What was that other boy’s name? Jewfish, but I can’t remember what his name was. Martin. Can’t remember his first name, but he fished one of my boats. At that time, I had a half a dozen—in fact, I had seven longline boats. We rigged the first longline boat that ever fished out of Fort Pierce.

TH: You’re talking swordfish?

HS: Right, swordfishing.

TH: Tell me about that.

HS: The mackerel season was over, and we took the *Little Jody*, one of my mackerel fishin’ boats, and put two miles of longline on it. Kenny Cheetham and Roy and Larry Summerlin—Roy and Larry Summerlin and Jimmy Moore talked me into financin’ a—going longlining. And the first catch we had was—we had one fish that weighed 400 pounds, but we ended up with about 1500 pounds of swordfish for the first couple nights.

TH: Fifteen hundred pounds a night?

HS: No, for the two nights.

TH: Two nights.

HS: And we shipped them to New York, and they refused them because they said the mercury content was too high. Later, I found out it was not the mercury content; it was the northern swordfish boats that didn’t want the southern swordfish on the market. So, it took us about a year to find a market for the southern swordfish. Hudgins had fish turned down in New York, and we had ours shipped back down here; we’d just give them away. But that was out first experience, and as far as I know, we had the first boat, the *Little Jody*, the first boat that was ever rigged for swordfishin’.
TH: The *Little Jody* was about how long?

HS: It was a forty-eight foot Marine Management.

TH: Marine Management—

HS: Forty-eight foot.

TH: Where’s that? Is that the title—name of the boat, the Marine Management?

HS: The name of the manufacturer, yeah, Marine Management.

TH: Okay.

HS: Gene Hayes had one of them. Bobby Crain had one. There was a lot of them around. Henry Crain had one. There was a lot of Marine Managements. They were—I don’t know. Gene always called them Clorox bottles. But they were a high sided boat, would carry a big load, and were fairly fast because [in] those days, we fished under the plane, and the fastest boat got the best set. So, with the mackerel fishermen—

TH: So, a plane would spot the mackerel?

HS: Right.

TH: Okay.

HS: So, speed was a factor, and the Marine Management was fast. [In] later years, we bought a couple of the ones that Gus built up there.

TH: T-Craft?
HS: No, they were—

TH: Gus who?

HS: Gus Lenard.

TH: L-e-n-a-r-d? L-e-n-n-a-r-d?

HS: —n-a-r-d. L-e-n-a-r-d. He built—can’t remember the name of his boat, but he built quite a few of them. We bought the first one out of the mold, and then we had another one. We had two of those boats. They were fifty-foot long with—they put double engines in some of them; we had single engines in ours. And we used them for mackerel fishing and swordfishing.

TH: This was in the 1980s?

HS: Yeah.

TH: So, to go back to my question: So, when they did close down the Oculina Bank, you couldn’t run a swordfish line?

HS: Right, you couldn’t run a swordfish line out there unless you were half the distance to the Bahamas, to the Bahama Bank. You had to be—

TH: So, that’s way deep.

HS: Right. And then the Bahamian government pulled a couple of boats over there for fishing in their waters. So, it’d become big contest where we couldn’t fish anywhere in the straits.

TH: Okay.

HS: From Miami to Fort Pierce.

TH: In 1994, the Oculina—now this is probably—1994, you’d probably given up your—
HS: Yeah, I was out of the fish business in ninety-four [1994].

TH: Okay.

HS: I was in marine construction.

TH: In 1994, the Oculina Bank was designated as an experimental closed area where fishing for and retention of snapper grouper species was prohibited. Snapper grouper fishing boats were also prohibited from anchoring. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation? Probably not.

HS: No.

TH: Nineteen ninety-six, all anchoring was prohibited within the Oculina Bank. Did this impact your fishing, and if so, how?

HS: I have no idea.

TH: It probably didn’t. In 1996, trawling for rock shrimp was prohibited in the area to the east and north of the designated Oculina Bank. And in 1998, this area was incorporated into the Oculina Bank HAPC. Fishing for a bottom—fishing with a bottom longline, trawl, or dredge was prohibited in the expanded area, as was anchoring by any vessel, you know, when they expanded the Oculina Bank area in 1998. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation?

HS: No.

TH: By this time, you were in the marine construction business, building docks, water and sea walls.

HS: Right.

TH: The designation of marine areas that are closed to fishing is being used more frequently as a fishery management tool. What do you think about the use of closed areas to fishing compared to other types of management regulations such as quotas, closed seasons, trip limits, et cetera?
What do you think about—I’ll repeat this, this is a mouthful. What do you think about the use of closes areas to fishing compared to other types of management regulations such as quotas, closed seasons, or trip limits?

HS: I’m against closing any part of the river or its tributaries or the ocean. I think that the quotas and the limited fishing works better than closing an area. I just don’t think that closing an area is a fair and equitable way to manage the fisheries.

TH: You do believe in managing the fisheries?

HS: Yes, I think it has to be managed, yes.

TH: But you—

HS: I don’t think closing an area is the proper way. I don’t think it’s fair to the fishermen or the sport fishermen—you know, the commercial fishermen or the sport fishermen—because fish can’t read signs. I mean, they put signs up that say go slow ’cause there’s manatees. But you gotta remember, those manatees can’t read that sign. So, they don’t know where to travel, and that’s the same way with the fishin’. The fishin’—you might go out there and those kingfish pull in, and they only pull in on Oculina Bank. So, what do you do now? Where do you go? You go back to the dock and hope they’re gonna pull offshore or pull inshore or—

TH: Someplace where you can fish.

HS: —somewhere you can fish.

TH: Okay. Next question is: What do you think the most fair and equitable way to manage all the fisheries is? How do you—if you could manage the fisheries, what do you think the fairest, most equitable way to manage the fisheries [would be] so there would be a plentiful supply of fish and fishermen in the future?

HS: You got me now. I don’t know how the hell you would manage it.

TH: Well, the tools—
HS: I think that the—what I see is that the quota thing—the number of fish that you can catch—is a fair and equitable way. If everybody abides or has to abide by the rules, it makes a better quality of fish. I know that to be a fact. That was always one of the biggest problems with the fishing industry, was having a quality [fish] to sell, not necessarily a quantity. It was the quality of the seafood that made it worth more money and gave people a better taste in their mouth.

TH: So, in the kingfish industry, I guess when they were—the quality slumped when nets—

HS: The quality went to hell when the net fishermen come. In fact, we packed net fish and hook and line fish in two different boxes. We marked right on the box, “hook and line.” And on the net fish, we didn’t mark the box.

TH: So, you’d get more money for the—

HS: Yes, and they did bring more money. As a general rule, they brought a nickel or a dime more by just having “hook and line” on it.

TH: A nickel or a dime’s not that much today.

HS: Well, it ain’t today, but it was a lot then when kingfish were a quarter and sometimes twelve cents. (laughs)

TH: I guess, yeah. Okay. So, you think quotas are probably the fairest way?

HS: The fairest way.

TH: And trip limits, maybe?

HS: Right.

TH: For sport fish?

HS: Yeah.
TH: Do you think they should be policed at the docks, at the boat ramps, or in the water?

HS: At the docks or the boat ramp, not in the water. That’s a dangerous and very bad situation, to try to police somebody in the water.

TH: Okay. Finally, thinking ahead to the future, what do you think fishing in Fort Pierce will be like in ten years?

HS: I don’t think we’re gonna see a lot of change. [There is a] possibility that, if they get something done with that Everglades thing and get that freshwater from flowing, I think it will help our river.

TH: But the river’s where the small fish spawn.

HS: Right, and—

TH: The river grasses, I guess.

HS: Right. I think it’ll help that part of it once they get that water diverted south, if they ever do. They have created a monster with this South Florida Water Management District and now they don’t know what to do with it. Their hands are tied. So, I don’t know what’s gonna become of that, who’s gonna end up having to step up to the plate and put a stop to the stuff we’re going through right now. I see the fishery staying about the same, really. I don’t see it getting any better or any worse. They keep changing the rules. If you want to go fishing now, you almost gotta take your lawyer with you ’cause they’ll change it while you’re out there. (TH laughs) I just got my paper from Tallahassee to tell me the new rules and regulations, and they’ve changed things all around again. So, I had no idea some of the rules and regulations that are now in effect. It wasn’t in effect a year ago.

TH: So, you think in ten years, it won’t change a whole lot?

HS: No, sir.

TH: And you do think that one of the biggest problems right now is the pressure on the fish from the numbers of all kinds of fishermen?
HS: Yes.

TH: Like you said at the beginning, the boats—there’s far, far more boats.

HS: Yeah, the boat traffic, more than fishing, just the boat—

*End of interview*