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## Vulnerability and Power: Exploring the Confluence of Politics and Climate Change in Cortez, Florida

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Vulnerability and Power: Exploring the Confluence of Politics and Climate Change  
in Cortez, Florida

by

Justin P. Winn

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Anthropology  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis describes how politics shape vulnerability to climate change at the local level, based on an ethnography in Cortez, Florida. Focusing on a “traditional” commercial fishing village on the Florida Gulf Coast, my research indicates that such vulnerabilities are created at multiple scales of the nexus between governance and commerce. Moreover, a key finding is that, as a community closely linked to the health of local environments, the village in Cortez is largely organized to protect their commercial industry from regional economic overdevelopment; not in recognition of its role in contributing to global climate change, but because such overdevelopment is perceived as unjust and destructive to local environments. Further, through qualitatively examining the environmental values of a “traditional” fishing community located in a large metropolitan coastal area, my thesis confronts the responsibility that broader society may have to reevaluate economic growth in effort to truly foster sustainability and justice. Finally, the thesis describes how communities like Cortez may be repositories for locally developed, ecologically grounded resilience strategies, rendering their voice all the more crucial, beyond conventional stakeholder approaches, in public discussions about regional economic development and marine resource management.

## **Chapter One:**

### **Introduction**

Discussions about the impacts, causes, and solutions associated with climate change among Western leaders, as well as decision-makers at the local level, are dominated by the way that climate scientists frame them. For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is widely considered the international authority in providing for those leaders appropriate proposals in response to the problem, and largely drawing from the collective work of thousands of professional scientists from around the world. And that makes a certain amount of sense in that climate scientists are rightfully credited with having made most of the discoveries about climate change. That frame, however, centers features associated with physical problems of climate change, such as atmospheric greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations, emissions reduction targets, and ocean acidification, such that their conceptually abstract nature, for largely lay publics, provides space for misrepresenting the gravity of the situation and mystifies underlying social causes that have created the global problem. This situation, I believe, has significantly contributed to the inability of industrial societies to take responsibility for having largely created the problem in the first place. For instance, stopping at carbon dioxide emissions in discussing what constitutes the root cause of climate change, as is so often done, entirely elides all the complexity of the social, political, and economic arrangements that constitute those industrialized societies.

For example, at the national level, much of the effort to innovate and implement adaptation policy by the US government is done within a “defense and security” paradigm, by agencies such as Homeland Security and the Pentagon. Such efforts are aimed at building resilience and reducing vulnerability for coastal military bases prone to sea level rise and improving the effectiveness of emergency response efforts to extreme weather events, while altogether avoiding issues of climate mitigation in the form of curtailing carbon emissions. Most Americans, however, do not live their lives within the confines of a military base, but rather do so embedded within the ever-expanding landscape of industrial economic development and consumer culture that scientists point out has given rise to climate change.

This thesis project was designed as a way to understand how climate change, a global phenomenon, is experienced and responded to at the local level in attempt to specifically identify actionable means of reducing climate vulnerability from within an industrialized setting. Using qualitative methods of ethnography, and social theory, like political ecology, this study aims to center the human experience of the predominant social, political, and economic configurations that have resulted in the carbon emissions that climate scientists assert are at the heart of the problem. I believe that a qualitative approach using ethnography to investigate how communities have responded to prevailing trends of economic growth and the inequities that result can provide meaningful insight for understanding how we got here and what we can do about it. Furthermore, I explore how environmental values in a “traditional” Florida fishing village contrast with values within the broader economic landscape of consumerism in which it is embedded.

This anthropology thesis project studies how a 130-year old community organized around a small-scale, local commercial fishing industry (Green 1985) in Cortez, Florida has persisted in

the face of encroaching development and political attacks from economic interests outside their industrial sector. Regional development patterns and powerful corporate interests have essentially functioned to limit the access fishermen in Cortez have to the marine resources their community is built around. Moreover, the way their access to those public resources is limited portends vulnerabilities they may have to climate change.

In light of the fact that the fishing community in Cortez is among the last of its kind in the state, this project will highlight what might characterize its resilience to climate change in a community of historical and cultural significance for Floridians. In an era of increasing political and economic inequality, the resulting social stratification that renders increasingly fewer livelihoods directly reliant on the health of natural environments where they are pursued distances more people from the tangible harms fostered by limitless economic growth. Additionally, I believe that researching what makes a community resilient to changing environments using ethnography could provide insight for other Gulf Coast communities as the impacts of climate change mount.

This project defines resilience after Berkes and Jolly (2001), drawing from the work of the Resilience Alliance ([www.resalliance.org](http://www.resalliance.org)). These authors formulate the meaning of resilience as three-dimensional in the context of social-ecological systems. First, resilience is the amount of change a system can experience without disrupting its underlying organizing principles. Second, resilience is a measure of the ability of a system to self-organize. Third, resilience is the capacity a community has to rebuild, learn, and adapt. As such, qualitative aspects of the community's efforts to organize themselves and how they have experienced changes in their capacity to learn and adapt will be of particular analytical importance to this project.



Climate change is defined as the increase in global temperatures caused by industrial GHG emissions that trap solar energy in the earth's atmosphere, leading to a suite of cascading impacts such as sea level rise, ocean acidification, and extreme weather events (Fiske et al. 2014). Further, in acknowledgement of the final report of the American Anthropological Association's Global Climate Change Task Force (2014), which promotes a conceptualization of climate change as an aspect of "global environmental change," this project seeks to contextualize the phenomenon as one of several interrelated planetary boundaries identified by Rockström et al., 2009, and as discussed in the next chapter.

Coastal communities are regularly identified as among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts. Sea level rise accounts for much of the heightened concern for the future of coastal communities around the globe, yet other factors influenced by the effects of, and contributions to, climate change threaten their way of life as well, such as biodiversity loss and habitat destruction.

The fishing village on the waterfront in Cortez is one such community made vulnerable to climate change impacts. The people of Cortez have historically relied on the health of local marine environments in providing for their commercial fishing-based economy (Green 1985), which increases their vulnerability to climate change relative to other coastal communities in the area (Jacques et al. 2017), which are characterized by tourism and sprawling suburban development.

Neil Adger observes that the concept of vulnerability is used within many academic traditions, including anthropology, to convey "the state of susceptibility to harm from exposure to stresses associated with environmental and social change and from absence of capacity to adapt (Adger 2006, 268)." He further indicates that various academic traditions view

vulnerability to climate change as inextricably linked to “the wider political economy of resource use (Adger 2006, 270),” suggesting that the results of interactions between humans and other natural systems are conditioned by the unequal distributions of power in the social sphere.

In this project I explore how Cortez’s vulnerability to climate change can be problematized in terms of political aspects of relationships between different actors and institutions. Specifically, this project aims to explore how perceptions of climate change, including climate science reception, and regional politics may create vulnerability to climate impacts in Cortez. Ultimately, this project seeks to formulate policy recommendations in collaboration with community members in Cortez for local municipal planning and development agencies, with the aim of reducing their vulnerability to future climate change impacts. This project serves in part as an answer to Rudiak-Gould’s (2011) call for more climate reception studies in anthropology. It will focus attention on the influence that local relations of power have on both the way climate science is received in Cortez, Florida, in effort to assess its vulnerability to climate change.

Vulnerability to the impacts of climate change is created in the context of particular political relationships (Adger et al. 2009; Eriksen et al. 2015; McGovern 2014[1994]). At the local level such relationships mediate both the economy (Scheper-Hughes 2005) and the reception of climate science (Boykoff 2009). The way that climate science is received conditions how climate change risks are assessed and responded to (Ogbo et al. 2013; Boykoff 2009). Economic health can generally predict the degree to which a community is made vulnerable to climate impacts (OXFAM 2015). Emerging economic development programs attempt to synthesize strategies of poverty eradication with those aimed at reducing vulnerability to climate

impacts (Eriksen et al. 2011; Ribot et al. 2010; Hallegatte et al. 2016), but mainly do so in the context of developing countries and without consideration to the reception of climate science.

Cortez is a low- to middle-income working-class community in the south-central Gulf Coast of Florida. The median annual household income (2000 U.S. Census \$36,577) pales in comparison to some of the other nearby oceanfront communities, by nearly an order of magnitude, like Longboat Key (2000 U.S. Census \$290,251), highlighting the extreme inequality in income distributions characteristic of the region. Like many coastal communities in the region, Cortez experiences increasing flooding events due to its low elevation, proximity to the ocean, and the long-predicted effects of climate change such as sea level rise and increasing storm intensity. Commercial real estate developers routinely test local municipal planners' appetite for trading the mangrove and grass flat environments that form the foundation of Cortez's fishing industry for gated residential communities, luxury resorts, and private marinas that promise to inject much needed revenue into the local economy. Long Bar Pointe, a mature mangrove forest that extends into Sarasota Bay, forming the core for multiple habitats that provide Cortez with marine resources, is a remnant of a much larger bay ecosystem that has lost its former area to such development. In short, Cortez is vulnerable to impacts associated with changes in global climate and regional development patterns.

By focusing on a Gulf Coast commercial fishing community in Florida this project intends to address gaps by examining the ways that politics shape vulnerability to climate change highlighting climate justice dynamics between the community and the surrounding region.

Specifically, these are the research questions I intend to address with this project:

1. *How do relationships of regional power contribute to vulnerability to climate change impacts in Cortez, Florida?*

2. *How is climate science perceived in Cortez, Florida? In what ways does translation of climate science (or lack thereof) relate to local vulnerabilities?*
3. *How has the community in Cortez, Florida experienced climate change, particularly commercial fishers who rely on marine resources for their livelihoods? To what extent do community members directly rely on marine resources for their livelihoods and how has this changed over time?*
4. *What policy recommendations could be articulated for local municipal development and planning agencies that could meaningfully reduce vulnerability to climate change impacts in Cortez, Florida?*

Because the people living in Cortez have continued in commercial fishing for so long relative to other small-scale Gulf Coast fishing communities—having weathered many calamitous environmental and social impacts—studying how the community organizes itself based on its environmental values could provide meaningful insight for municipal planners and marine resource managers seeking to achieve sustainability.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Literature Review**

In this chapter I will first review some of the literature that points to why aggressively pursuing and implementing climate mitigation policies is an important aspect of taking responsibility for climate change within industrialized societies, and particularly for Floridians, beyond any attempts to otherwise adapt to its impacts. This includes a review of how, historically, economic development and the inequality it produces in the region characterize the very kind of human activity that has given rise to climate change on a global scale. Additionally, this section will introduce how human values are connected to exacerbating climate change and key to conceptualizing how to mitigate it.

Next, I will outline how anthropology and ethnographic techniques are suited to investigate the connection between climate change and the social processes that have triggered its onset. This section will briefly survey how climate change has been approached in anthropology and the significance of studying a global phenomenon at the community level.

This chapter will then turn to the relationship that capitalism has with climate change, as one of cause and effect. Here I will discuss some of the conceptual complexity with that relationship, as well as how the onset of global capitalism reconfigured economic and political relationships in a way that provided the social context for the later emergence of climate change well before the Industrial Revolution found fossil fuels.

Following that, this chapter will describe how politics has been discussed as it relates to climate vulnerability. Additionally, this section will consider how the concepts of adaptation and resilience have been developed and how they will be used for this study.

Finally, this chapter will review how this study is connected to the anthropology of fishing and how politics shape aspects of the livelihoods of small-scale commercial fishing communities.

### *Climate Change*

Pointing to Florida's relative responsibility in contributing to climate change Jacques et al. identify the state as the 6<sup>th</sup> highest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHGs) among US states and “when ranked globally with all US states and nations [...], [it] was the 27<sup>th</sup> largest global emitter [...], outstripping emissions of entire nations including Turkey, Taiwan, and the Netherlands (2017, 9-10).” Jacques et al. further describe how Florida's development pattern, characterized by “low-density sprawling land use configurations (2017, 11)” promote carbon-intensive modes of transportation and impedes carbon uptake as wetlands and other natural landscapes are transformed into built environments. Moreover, the authors cite that “Florida lost an estimated 84,000 acres of wetlands between 1990-2003, despite the US Clean Water Act requirement for ‘no net loss’ of wetland to development—this represents a clear policy failure, and perhaps even a corruption (2017, 12).” The authors identify how Florida's culture of consumption, largely based on fossil fuel energy, compounds problems associated with climate change, with more than half of its carbon dioxide footprint made by residential neighborhoods.

Connecting how such development patterns have impacted the livelihoods of Floridians, Jacques et al. (2017) observe that the per capita income for middle-class Floridians was the same

in 2012 as it was in 1978. And “since income/poverty is an indicator for vulnerability to hazards [...], the structure of Florida’s economy is partly responsible for this pattern of vulnerability alongside government policies, which have focused on bringing more tourists and retirees, resulting in increased development and subsequent carbon emissions (2017, 3-4).”

In this project, the conceptual framework for my thesis builds on Gardiner’s and Hartzell-Nichols’ (2012) broad outline of salient climate change ethical categories and the observations by Barnes et al. (2013)—that anthropology’s expertise in ethnography, and emphases on history and holism, positions the field to move much needed climate change policy discussions forward.

The work of Rockström et al. (2009) is helpful for the purpose of contextualizing climate change as an analytical component of this thesis. These authors identify climate change as one of nine “tightly coupled (2009, 474)” planetary boundaries associated with the exploitative relationship humans have had with various Earth systems within the biosphere. They describe the boundaries as representing “the safe operating space for humanity with respect to the Earth system and are associated with the planet’s biophysical subsystems or processes (2009, 472),” such that exceeding them indicates grave threats to humanity. Additionally, they observe that climate change is one of three planetary boundaries that have already been exceeded, the other two being biodiversity loss and disruption of the nitrogen cycle (Rockström et al. 2009).

As such, this study recognizes climate change as one of a suite of interrelated anthropogenic processes of global environmental change, which portends adverse impacts at the local level. Such impacts will be experienced in specific ways at the local level. Cortezian’s experiences will illuminate how they conceptualize climate change. For instance, toxic marine algae blooms that result from fertilizer runoff are symptomatic of both climate change and a

disruption of the nitrogen cycle, but the ways that Cortezians discuss experiencing those algae blooms will speak to what they imagine creates such problems and what they may do to respond.

Steffen et al. (2018) argue that, due to self-reinforcing feedbacks associated with climate change, global temperatures and sea levels are likely to rise well above any experienced within the last 1.2 million years and to within ranges characterized by what scientists refer to as a 'Hothouse Earth'. Further, they argue that the effects of such feedbacks on the nonlinear aspects of Earth system trajectories could supersede the effects of atmospheric carbon pollution such that the Hothouse Earth condition could be realized even in the event of humanity somehow curtailing its carbon emissions. Notably, these authors propose remedies that could prevent the planet from attaining a runaway hothouse trajectory through “decarbonization of the global economy, enhancement of biosphere carbon sinks, technological innovations, new governance arrangements, and transformed social values (Steffen et al. 2018: 8252).”

### *Anthropology and/of Climate Change*

Jessica Barnes, et al. (2013), identify three ways that anthropology is well suited to contribute to climate change research, an area of interest traditionally driven by natural sciences. First, they point to the ethnographic tradition as providing a means of “[drawing] attention to the cultural values and political relations that shape climate related knowledge creation and interpretation and that form the basis of responses to continuing environmental changes (Barnes et al. 2013, 541).” The authors expand on this by describing how ethnography is geared to capture the “political relations, power dynamics, social status and cultural values (2013, 542)” that coalesce in forming the ways that climate science and policy are produced. Next, they mention a historical perspective, particularly within environmental anthropology, that informs



how changes in both society and their environments transpire in relation to one another, creating the conditions encountered upon arrival in the field. The third key contribution the authors identify is that anthropology needs to offer climate change researchers a holistic perspective. A holistic view entails consideration of how a community like Cortez is at once shaped by its internal and external social relationships; how those relationships shape climate change and the way that people conceive of and respond to it; and how climate change increasingly affects every aspect of human life, the more their conceptions and responses will change in turn (Barnes et al. 2013). Additionally, provided by anthropology's holistic perspective, the authors offer the insight that the effects of climate change are more apparent at the global rather than local scale (Barnes et al. 2013). This insight speaks to the difficulty that particular communities have, along with the anthropologists who study them, in relating their everyday realities to processes of environmental change on a global scale. Jacques et al. point to cognitive biases, such as the temporal and psychological distance of future impacts, that compound Floridians' vulnerability to climate change, and particularly for sea level rise, "the [state's] largest threat (2017, 7)." Exploring how and to what extent the community in Cortez conceives of the ways their social and environmental realities articulate with climate change on a global scale will comprise a recurring theme as I investigate their reception of climate science and related local politics.

### *Capitalism and Climate Change*

Capitalism is the driving force behind climate change, so it is imperative to explore how the two are connected from local to global (Chakrabarty 2017). Chakrabarty maintains his position that climate change and capitalism are not equivalent phenomena, despite acknowledging they are "profoundly (2017, 29)" related, doubling down against critiques that

emphasize the social implications regarding the skewed distribution of climate impacts, between rich and poor, and among generations. He acknowledges these differentials, but, in thinking through the ‘lifeboat’ metaphor to conclusion—regarding how the rich will continue avoiding the worst climate impacts relative to the poor through leveraging the power their wealth provides to access key resources—he contends that there will come a point when no amount of wealth will confer enough power to avoid catastrophic impacts. Therefore, Chakrabarty asserts that since all of humanity is impacted to some significant degree, then the economic inequities characteristic of capitalism are somehow fundamentally different than observed inequities of exposure to climate impacts. . Among the first observations in his essay he uses to drive his point home is that “the methods by which we define them as problems are, [...] often, substantially different (2017, 25).” Indeed, the theorizing and observational techniques employed to detect climate change have been significantly different than those used to detect social inequities arising from capitalist arrangements.

As a comprehensive meditation on what has become one of the definitive crises of capitalism, David Graeber’s *Debt: the first 5,000 years* (2014) explores how the now predominant global economic system can be conceptualized as a successive series of transformations in local moral networks on a global scale that began at the onset of Western colonial expansion. These transformations, he contends, can be characterized as a process of having changed economies once based on systems of credit to ones based on extractive interest through the enforcement of European-style debt obligations. In this study I apply Graeber’s (2014) concept of how the process of capitalism transforms moral networks in order to analyze how Cortezian’s values might differ from broader social networks in which they are embedded. For example, the exhaustibility of the natural resources that Cortezians access in order to make a

living informs their values about the importance of protecting the environment, values that they extend to their social relationships. In the context of the broader economy, however, those natural resources are little more than commodities that could fuel greater economic growth. The values of capitalism, based on exploitative social arrangements, are extended in the opposite direction toward the natural resources, rendering their exhaustibility moot.

Central to his thesis is the peculiar Western tradition of property law and how it is predicated on Roman slave logic, a notion he credits to Orlando Patterson. What Graeber identifies as its cultural peculiarity, specifically, is the principle of dominium, which arises from a property owner's absolute power to (in short) use, enjoy the fruits of, and destroy that which he owns, and to the complete exclusion of anyone else. *He*, apparently, because it was the father of the house in ancient Rome who was considered the owner of his wife, children, slaves, horses, house, tables, etc. Graeber then traces the development and implications of dominium to the onset of Western colonial expansion, precisely when the Spanish Crown commissioned Hernán Cortés to conquer the Aztec empire in hopes of paying off royal debts they owed to various Northern Italian banks. This first global capitalist venture, Graeber contends, culminated in the 1521 sacking of Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, which he describes as “the greatest act of theft in world history (2014, 318).” This project will use Graeber's model of global capitalism and relevant social implications, particularly regarding justice, at the local level in Cortez, Florida. Together with the model of planetary boundaries put forward by Rockström et al. (2009), I will later use these concepts to coordinate insights pertaining to the global-local nexus for both capitalism and climate change, and the causal relationship the former has with the latter, as they pertain to Cortez, the fishing village.

Wilk (2016) remarks on the ubiquity of modern consumer culture, bringing into question the efficacy of pursuing such development initiatives as ‘sustainability’ from within such a culture whose economy is built on constant growth. Additionally, Wilk (2016) emphasizes the rarity of economic growth ever accompanying even a stabilization of GHG emissions, let alone a decrease, in wealthy nations.

Shapiro (2011) makes the case that poor people are not only disproportionately exposed to climate impacts, but that the inequality built into global capitalism is itself structured in a way that compounds climate change through promoting values of consumption among the swelling class of low wage workers. Shapiro identifies six “elements” that form the mechanism which drives this “inequality-climate change cycle:” low-cost labor (1) that relies on low-cost, carbon-intensive energy sources (2) in transforming natural resources into commodities (3), using carbon-intensive energy sources to transport those commodities to a global market (4) through corporate advertising campaigns that function to “concentrate financial and resource capital to make and sell those goods” (5) in societies whose “materialistic values [...are] enabled by the production of low-wage workers (6) (2011, 21).” He argues that by reimagining the relationships we have among ourselves and with the environment we can make those relationships more equitable and responsible, respectively. Shapiro’s work will be useful to better understand how access to fish is curtailed for fishermen in Cortez to the extent that their livelihoods become increasingly centered around the culture of consumption within the broader regional economy of tourism and retail development, the effect is one of contributing to the process of climate change, beyond simply increasing their vulnerability to its impacts.

### *Vulnerability and Politics*

The people of Cortez have historically relied on the health of local marine environments in providing for their commercial fishing-based economy (Green 1985), which increases their vulnerability to climate change relative to other coastal communities in the area (Jacques et al.2017), characterized by tourism development and luxury homes.

Neil Adger observes that the concept of vulnerability is used within many academic traditions, including anthropology, to convey “the state of susceptibility to harm from exposure to stresses associated with environmental and social change and from absence of capacity to adapt (2006, 268).” He further indicates that various academic traditions view vulnerability to climate change as inextricably linked to “the wider political economy of resource use (2006, 270),” suggesting that the results of interactions between humans and other natural systems are conditioned by the unequal distributions of power in the social sphere.

Vulnerability to the impacts of climate change is created in the context of particular political relationships (Adger et al., 2009; Eriksen et al., 2015; McGovern 2014[1994]). At the local level such relationships mediate both the economy (Scheper-Hughes 2005) and the reception of climate science (Boykoff 2009). According to some authors, the way that climate science is received conditions how climate change risks are assessed and responded to (Ogbo et al., 2013, Boykoff 2009). Economic health can generally predict the degree to which a community is made vulnerable to climate impacts (OXFAM 2015). Emerging economic development programs attempt to synthesize strategies of poverty eradication with those aimed at reducing vulnerability to climate impacts (Eriksen et al., 2011; Ribot et al., 2010; Hallegatte et al., 2016), but mainly do so in the context of non-industrialized countries and without

consideration to the reception of climate science. This project serves in part as an answer to Rudiak-Gould's (2011) call for more climate reception studies in anthropology.

Calling for more climate reception studies in anthropology, Peter Rudiak-Gould (2011) calls his own discipline out for its traditional focus on researching how groups *perceive* climate change, somehow capturing an increasingly scarce and fantastic conception of the phenomenon, as pristine of knowledge produced by Western science. As an anthropologist who studies Marshallese Islanders, Rudiak-Gould observes in his own work, and others', how people in the seemingly most remote areas of the world are increasingly attune to aspects of climate science and incorporate them with their unique cultural and ecological experiences in forming their own locally grounded conceptions of climate change. In this thesis, the politics of climate reception certainly shapes how the community in Cortez understands the emerging realities and risks that human-induced climate change portends.

Reimagining disaster as the underlying political context in which climate impacts are experienced, rather than simply the human suffering that results from flooding, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2005) explicitly analyzes the local, regional, and national fields of power that fostered vulnerability within the Lower Ninth Ward before Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005. Indeed, anthropologists have explained climate-induced social collapse in terms of the influence that politics has had in fostering vulnerability since the mid-1990s when Thomas H. McGovern published his study, *Management for Extinction in Norse Greenland* (1994).

Politics, in fact, influence how communities are made vulnerable to climate impacts beyond resource use alone. For instance, Maxwell T. Boykoff (2009) points to the manifold interests of money and power that deeply influence how climate science is mediated between academia and the broader public, and particularly so in media-saturated, industrialized societies.

The politics of how climate science is mediated—among competing commercial news outlets, Hollywood movies, books, magazines, and the internet—profoundly affects how it is received and ultimately understood.

Adaptation is another basic concept, along with vulnerability, used in climate change and development literature to provide a framework for discussing societal “[responses] to climate change [that are] about adjusting to risks, either in reaction to or in anticipation of changes arising from changing weather and climate (Adger et al. 2013, 112).” The concept of adaptation comes to this literature from the natural sciences, used in the sense of Darwinian evolution where traits are selected for through environmental pressures that confer to organisms the ability to survive and reproduce (Smit and Wandel 2006). Within the social sciences, and political ecology in particular, adaptation has developed into a concept that includes the political dimensions of resource use and risk management, processes deeply shaped by the various value systems imbedded in power relations at the societal level (Smit and Wandel 2006; Adger et al. 2009). In climate change and development scholarship, the concept of adaptation as a strategic focus came to prominence in light of the fact that mitigation strategies alone had been insufficient to protect society from the negative impacts already locked into future changes in climate by virtue of both the sheer volume of carbon pollution already emitted and the unambiguous failure of efforts to curtail those emissions to date (Adger et al. 2009). This project will seek to understand how Cortezian’s have adapted to both social and environmental change by exploring how they perceive their community has organizationally responded to such change over time, and how the impact of that change is experienced.

Efforts at mitigating the underlying causes of anthropogenic climate change, however, have not been abandoned by scholars. Rather, mitigation has been subsumed within the concept

of adaptation, among other long-term strategies formulated for coping with the inevitable effects of a changed and changing climate. Indeed, emerging development scholarship that seeks to wed poverty eradication strategies with those that address climate change impacts involve emphasizing both adaptation and mitigation measures, and recognizes ways that poverty and climate change commonly create vulnerabilities within society, and that climate change effects disproportionately impact the poor (Eriksen et al. 2011; Ribot et al. 2010; Hallegatte et al. 2016). Moreover, scholarship has identified governance as the appropriate target for articulating strategies of climate change adaptation and vulnerability reduction (Eriksen et al., 2011; Adger 2009; Ogbo 2013; Ribot 2010).

Resilience, a kind of corollary concept to vulnerability, has been developed in climate change literature as a way to conceptualize and gauge how quickly and completely a society can restore itself to a previous level of functionality after having been exposed to climate impacts (Füssell 2007; Adger 2006). The final report from the American Anthropological Association's Global Climate Change Task Force, however, recognizes that the concept of resilience has a rather wide focus among researchers who employ it to investigate climate change (Fiske, Crate, et al. 2014). Specifically, their report lumps usage for the concept of resilience into two categories: either focusing on systemic change or stability. These authors conclude, "the cultural side of resilience requires that livelihoods that fulfill material, moral, and spiritual needs in the context of major environmental, social, cultural, economic or political changes be maintained for a sense of continuity of meaning and coherence (Fiske, Crate, et al. 2014, 48)." As such, this project will be concerned with the way Cortezians express having experienced social and environmental harm and their perceptions of the effectiveness of their efforts to recover from it.



Gardiner and Hartzell-Nichols drill into the ethical considerations of climate change with respect to social inequality (2012). They outline three important areas of ethics regarding the challenges confronted by climate change. The first ethical problem deals with the global nature of climate change, that is, how industrial greenhouse gases (GHGs) are emitted locally and benefit relatively few, yet those GHGs become part of the global atmosphere and impact everyone on the planet. For these authors, such a configuration creates what they call “skewed vulnerabilities (2012, 1)” in the sense that the short term, yet substantial financial benefits experienced by high emitters of GHGs make them less vulnerable to climate impacts than those who emit less and have fewer resources to cope with environmental change. Furthermore, such a structure of skewed vulnerabilities at the international scale creates a dynamic ruled by the tragedy of the commons in that any nation that would agree to limit their GHG emissions first would also be the first to commit themselves to a reduction in financial benefits from doing so (Gardiner and Hartzell-Nichols 2012), limiting their available resources to adapt relative to those yet reluctant to change in kind. The second ethical problem they discuss is a temporal one, in that emitted GHGs can linger in the atmosphere for decades or more depending on the particular GHG emitted. This has the effect of forcing the processes of global change long after the emissions take place and impacting young and unborn generations of people who had no agency in creating the increasingly less hospitable environments they will inhabit (Gardiner and Hartzell-Nichols 2012). The third dilemma that climate change presents for these authors involves the degree to which the theoretical tools regarding the ethics of climate change are underdeveloped. Here, the authors observe how issues of social justice, intergenerational ethics, scientific uncertainty, and divining the appropriate relationship between humanity and the rest of nature are all areas of inquiry that require theoretical improvements.

*Historical Materialism: Reconciling the Global with the Local*

In *Europe and the People Without History*, Eric Wolf (1982) calls for anthropologists to acknowledge the important contributions an historical perspective brings to studying the relationships among groups that we make the object of our research. Rather than what was then a conventional, sequentially linear approach to history, however, Wolf lays out his conceptualization of history as one that recognizes the complexity and manifold internal and external connections that characterize the fluid social realities as experienced in particular times and places by those who lived there. Further, Wolf argues that it is in the relationships between people and between the groups they form that the contestations and alignments they produce at different scales of society—political, cultural, economic, and so forth—which are analytically instructive in answering the research questions that anthropologists ask. And that such a principle holds true from first- to third-world contexts. Taking his cue, I have approached this project by directing my attention toward events of historical significance and the community-level and regional relationships experienced in Cortez in order to guide my process of inquiry. I suspect that such an approach will be particularly fruitful in reconciling the global natures of climate change and capitalism with the rather local social realities of the fishing village in Cortez.

Turning to the local level in Cortez, the following sections will review some of the literature concerning the anthropological significance of the community's commercial fishing industry, and how it experiences non-market competition for local resources with industries outside its economic sector.

## *Anthropology of Fisheries*

Working among lobstermen in Maine, James M. Acheson (1981; 1989) explores how fishing communities are unique among other such communities that rely on natural resources, like farmers. Unlike farming, however, commercial fishing, Acheson (1981) points out, is an activity based on access to common property resources, for which the responsibilities of its maintenance falls disproportionately on and with higher stakes for the commercial fisherman than others who would exploit it, like sport fishers. Through investigating issues such as accessing the commons, managing the community's relationship to nature, and organizing those institutions of management, Acheson provides useful insight into the treatment of conducting research in fishing communities, which I make use of as a guide in this project. Nevertheless, he is also clear about what kind of study constitutes the anthropology of fisheries. Acheson observes that "shore-based studies of fishing communities (1981, 276)" are more broadly cultural anthropology projects, rather than anthropology of fisheries proper. In that vein, this ethnographic study is situated more with anthropology of climate change.

Boucquey (2017) investigates how conflicts between sport and commercial fishermen in North Carolina's red drum fishery are predicated on divergent moral economies, how policy decisions in fisheries are influenced by those differences, and how such decision-making has significant political and economic implications based on their ability to differentially allocate access to public resources between these groups. Boucquey highlights how scholars have developed the concept of moral economies in "first world" contexts, a concept hitherto used in studying conflicts arising in the "third world." Boucquey finds that framing conflicts between groups using the concept of moral economies is useful in that it provides a meaningful way to analyze the claims made by those groups in terms of how they value particular resources. She

further identifies political ecology as a useful tool for offering insight into environmental management conflicts in the first world that revolve around negotiating the appropriate use of natural resources. She discusses the resentment commercial fishermen develop for their recreational counterparts over allocation conflicts. She documents how that resentment is developed by a “proprietary attitude” that commercial fishermen perceive sport fishers have. Boucquey points out that the conflict between different fishing groups is contested on the water through arguments about which one appreciates the fish and fishing more, while, in the arena of decision making, proponents for sport fishing rely on arguments based on economic impact to the state. Additionally, Boucquey compellingly asserts that, “examining moral economies highlights issues of well-being at the social-environment nexus, questions that are raised by the coexistence of affluence and poverty and by uneven development. As uneven development stemming from amenity migration and tourism proceeds along many coastlines around the globe, investigating moral economies can illuminate the underlying concerns of user groups and perhaps promote more equitable policy solutions (148).”

### *Fishing in the Coastal U.S. and Net Bans*

Loring (2017) discusses how parametric management of fisheries is a common governance regime and is embedded in traditional fishing systems through regulation of fairness with respect to territoriality and values. Such management is key “to both community resilience and ecosystem sustainability. Through a comparison of the enacted 1994 commercial net ban in Florida and the unsuccessful attempt to ban gill nets in Alaska, the author makes the case that “ethical considerations can be inseparable from the ecological aspects of managing fisheries, and that when communities grapple with the sustainability of fisheries, they are simultaneously

seeking to define the socially acceptable uses of those resources (94).” Proponents of Florida’s net ban launched a media propaganda campaign, Loring (2017) observes, to the tune of millions of dollars, in effort to smear commercial fishermen as environmentally irresponsible and destructive, even though “there was and is little scientific evidence available to support these claims (97). Additionally, he finds that Decision making in fisheries management largely necessitates important political considerations. For example, Loring (2017) cites one Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) representative having remarked after an unsuccessful legal attempt in 2015 to reverse the net ban: ‘[the state and its lawyers] did a fantastic job to ensure that our state remains the Sportfishing Capital of the World,’ “mak[ing] clear,” in Loring’s (2017) words, “the group’s allocative rather than conservation-minded motivations (98).” Loring goes on to document some of the adverse social and ecological effects resulting from the statewide net ban: approximately 25 per cent of fishermen statewide were driven from the fishing industry altogether; before the net ban, household income from fishing comprised 80 percent of total income, dropping down to 55 percent after the ban for those who could remain in the industry at all; with fewer species to target with their gear that remained legal meant depleting those species’ stocks, and particularly so for stone crabs whose fishery was deemed overfished by 2011.

Describing how the process of the Florida net ban was the culmination of a constitutional referendum, Loring (2017) observes that “the ban dramatically re-allocated marine resources from commercial to sport sectors, and in a way that circumvented existing natural resource policy, management agencies, and the best available science (97).” Loring (2017) summarizes best what Smith et al. (2003) report regarding how the State of Florida handled the social justice implications of the net ban: “Social justice issues were not addressed in the case of the Florida

ban. The State of Florida attempted to provide sufficient compensation to disenfranchised fishers, but [...], the financial reparations and job training initiatives fell short because they were implemented from a strictly neoliberal understanding of what values fishers derive from fishing (100).”

Ultimately, Loring (2017) articulates a series of questions for decision makers to ask in effort to address important dimensions of social justice when contemplating parametric changes to fishery management regulations. These questions include deliberating how parametric fishery changes might cause such adverse social changes in fishermen’s lives as restricting their access to public resources, degrading their pedagogical traditions and social ties, and limiting their ability to materially provision their livelihoods. He further indicates that fishery managers should ask how well state services are prepared to ameliorate these adverse social impacts.

Smith et al. (2003) briefly outline the history and some of the circumstances of Florida’s 1994 net ban passed by state constitutional referendum. The study statistically analyzes data collected from commercial fishing families before and after the net ban in effort to determine mental health impacts to the community, specifically emotional stress. The authors find the community has suffered significant impacts of stress and that there are gender differences in the way the community experiences stress related to the net ban. Such impacts were largely anxiety in men and depression in women. The authors conclude the net ban constituted a case of environmental injustice.

The net ban prohibited the use of traditional gill nets greater than 500 square feet. Smith et al. (2003) describe that “the vote on the so-called ‘net ban’ was the culmination of a 2-year, multi-million-dollar media campaign launched by a coalition of recreational fishing groups and conservationists against Florida’s commercial fisheries (39).” The people of Florida, not

generally knowledgeable about commercial fishing gear or its associated environmental effects, were propagandized in various media forms, leading voters to believe that commercial fishermen were responsible for degrading the state's marine environments, including overfishing stocks and killing marine mammals and sea turtles. The authors point out, however, "many scientists disagreed, noting that there were few problems with overfishing and little evidence of a downward trend in stocks of species studied (40)." Having the issue decided with a constitutional referendum was "unprecedented" and in effect circumvented state agencies tasked with managing fisheries through evidence-based evaluation of such matters. The authors note, "through a political process, the net ban amendment permanently altered the allocation of marine fisheries resources among commercial and recreational user groups (40)." Imprecision in the language of the net ban amendment has led to confusion among commercial fishermen and those charged with enforcing regulations, including what parts of their nets comprise the 500 square foot limit. Such vagueness has resulted in fishermen having to spend excessive time and resources attempting to fabricate nets that comply with the new law, and some have even been arrested for failing to adequately do so.

Smith et al. (2003) further describe how, in commercial fishing communities, their trade has been passed down within the family, a tradition four generations old, in some cases, at the time of their publication 15 years ago. Daily life for such communities is entirely constructed around the production of locally caught fresh seafood, and making it available for sale to Floridians and tourists alike who are otherwise either unable to access, or not interested in accessing, the publicly owned marine resources themselves.

Additionally, Smith et al. (2003) note that previous research conducted in North American fishing communities indicate that, for fishermen, "there is much more to fishing than

the money; [and that] fishers derive considerable nonmonetary rewards for their work (41).” This was a theme of particular importance that participants discussed in interviews for this thesis project. Further, as validated in my data collection, the authors observe how frequent changes in industry regulations, and negative public opinion of commercial fishermen largely brought about by the net ban campaign, generally make life more difficult for communities like Cortez. Critically, Smith et al. (2003) describe the process by which communities previously built around commercial fishing in Florida have shifted their orientation from being centered on the local fishing economy to relying more heavily on the surrounding economy through mainly service industry labor based on tourism and recreational fishing.

Robert Fritchey (1994), in *Wetland Riders*, describes the founding of the Gulf Coast Conservation Association (GCCA)—the precursor to what is now the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA)—by a group of powerful Texas executives and representatives of the recreational fishing industry in a Houston sporting goods store in 1977. He details that group’s founding leadership as comprised of “Walter W. Fondren, III, a Houston oil executive and EXXON heir [...] to serve as chairman of GCCA’s executive committee, [...] which] included co-founder Perry R. Bass, a Fort Worth oilman/magnate[;] Houston investor David Cummings [...] as GCCA president, and insurance magnate Clyde Hanks as GCCA vice president[; and] Houston sport fisherman H.A. ‘Dusty’ Rhodes [...] as dollar-a-year executive director (14).” The group’s initial efforts were focused on negotiating catch limits between recreational and commercial fishermen, but news reports about Galveston shrimpers depleting spotted seatrout stocks apparently raised interest among the public to support GCCA’s reallocation attempts in favor of recreational fishermen with respect to both spotted seatrout and red drum. A protracted battle between the two groups of fishermen ensued in the Texas legislature, which culminated in



the designation of the two finfish species as gamefish, altogether reallocating them for recreation alone. That reallocation marked the first time economic impact arguments were used to shut commercial fisheries down. The Texas legislature did so based on the significantly greater impact that recreational interests demonstrated to legislators their industries had on the Texas economy, was reflected in and abetted by the astronomically greater campaign contributions they provided legislators over what commercial interests were able to contribute prior to the vote. The author goes on to document the political and financial momentum that the GCCA gathered as it repeated its Texas success eastward into Louisiana, decimating commercial fishing communities along the way with net bans and the designation of gamefish status of several commercially fished species.

The section of Fritchey's (1994) book that best articulates with the focus of my thesis, however, is his chapter in Part IV, *The Recreational Fishing Industry: Something of Value?* (291-301). In this chapter the author systematically, and poetically, takes apart the economic arguments that the recreational fishing industry has used in Gulf Coast state legislatures to entirely reallocate marine resources from commercial fishing to their own industry. Fritchey points out that official economic impact studies of commercial fisheries presented to decision makers have been comprised entirely of monetary figures representing only the aggregated per pound market value of catches, completely ignoring the expenditures commercial fishing communities make, such as for gear, housing, labor, insurance, healthcare and everything else they contribute to local economies where they operate. Furthermore, Fritchey points out that the sport fishing industry encompasses far more than their customers, the weekend anglers from the public that the CCA appeals to in pseudo-environmentalist corporate advertising in effort to concentrate their financial power, which they in turn use as bribes for legislative support. He

reports that the sport fishing industry's think tank, the Sport Fishing Institute (SFI), "lists over 70 categories of goods and services involved in sport fishing (294)." Moreover, he observes, "that more than one-fifth of the expenditures made by recreational fishermen consists of petroleum products is not lost on oil companies. British Petroleum, for instance, spent more than \$3 million in 1991 to sponsor fishing events and advertise in fishing publications. Other oil companies help finance recreational groups in their efforts to ban commercial fishing (295)." The central role of fossil fuel interests in the recreational fishing industry's lobbying efforts to re-territorialize claims to public marine resources, to the exclusion of commercial fishermen, points to the ubiquity of fossil fuel interests across industrial sectors in a way that is only matched by finance itself, another concept I will return to in my analysis.

### *Summary*

In this chapter I have reviewed literature that contextualizes climate change as one of several interrelated global phenomena of planetary environmental change arising from capitalist relationships at that scale. Further, I have reviewed how the community in Cortez, situated within the developed world, is shaped by political contests with economic interests from larger scales of the broader economy whose need for constant growth adversely impacts fishermen's access to marine resources. These contests do not only limit commercial fishermen's access to marine resources, they reterritorialize them for use by industries that are not as susceptible to the exhaustibility of those resources local to Cortez as are those who fish there for a living.

Studying perceptions of climate change at the local level requires the ethnographer to contextualize its experiential dimensions within the social realities salient to the community. For this project, that process of contextualization has meant understanding how regional economic

development is connected to issues of fisheries management for Cortezians, as well as how they are both enmeshed in and constitute the larger economic and political architecture that drives climate change.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Situating the Researcher and Cortez**

An important objective of this research has been to underline the importance of leveraging ethnography in researching political dimensions of climate change vulnerability at the local scale. Here, I will briefly provide some background of my positionality in carrying out this research project and my relationship to Cortez. My hope is that this background will contextualize the perspective I have brought to this project, and do so while building the first block in the construction of a broader system of key relationships I have identified in conducting this research in order to address its questions. Additionally, beyond those questions, I have designed this project as a climate change vulnerability assessment to evaluate the usefulness of a qualitative approach to that task. My suspicion has been that a qualitative approach that centers the human experience and social dynamics will add important insights to conversations about reducing vulnerability to climate change impacts for their accessibility to other Gulf Coast communities, compared to relatively abstract scientific understandings of climate change.

In the summer of 2013, toward the end of a short career working for the State of Florida, I learned in social media of a petition effort to prevent the destruction of an old-growth mangrove forest situated around a small peninsula, called Long Bar Pointe, along the northeast shore of Sarasota Bay. My decision to support the petition drive by helping collect signatures was compelled by three principal elements. First, my job with the state in an environmental regulatory program had sensitized me to the importance of protecting wetlands. I learned

firsthand how wetlands serve to clean pollutants from the water that flows through them. The old growth mangrove forest on and around Long Bar Pointe was apparently the last of its kind in that particular bay. Second, I grew up in southern Sarasota County, in the small retirement community of Venice on the Gulf Coast. Fishing for food, boating, swimming, and otherwise playing in and around the coastal waters of the area comprised the bulk of my childhood recreation, and I knew from experience the threats that overdevelopment posed—mainly pollution and exclusion of public access—to those very activities I felt were part of my identity as a Floridian. Third, the social media reports where I first learned about the petition included appeals that suggested protecting the mangroves would, in turn, help protect the livelihoods of members of a nearby traditional fishing village in Cortez, who relied on the remaining local mangroves and grass flats to support populations of fish and shellfish from which they harvested seafood to feed their families and sell in local markets. This last point was particularly compelling to me in the sense that I felt if I could help petition Manatee County (the governing body of the very north end of the bay) to deny approval for development on Long Bar Pointe, a process that would begin with the destruction of its mangroves and grass flats, then I could be part of a movement that would preserve something of importance for others that I viewed was taken from me as a child. I felt that if I did what I could to help stop those who pollute the water and further restrict public access to local natural resources that made this area wonderful, then I could alleviate some of the resentment I had developed for developers, and for how I imagined “the system” works.

Cortez, often introduced as “a traditional fishing village” (Green 1985), is located just north of Long Bar Point, at the northeast corner of Sarasota Bay. The western boundary of the bay is flanked by a series of barrier islands whose picturesque, powdery white-sand beaches

attract tourists and future residents from all over the world. And it was on the beaches of Anna Maria Island, due west of Cortez, that I could collect the most signatures for the petition, I was told, because that is where a lot of Cortezians can be found on weekends. Indeed, support for getting the county to turn down the application to develop Long Bar Pointe was in great supply. The only real impediment I encountered in collecting a truly significant number of signatures was the time it took being drawn into passionate conversations with signatories about how important it was to protect remaining mangroves in the bay.

There was, tellingly, only one middle-aged couple that declined to sign the petition. The gentleman explained that he *was* a developer, in fact, and seemed not only polite in declining, but genuinely interested in discussing the issues surrounding social and ecological pressures that development, in general, places on people and local environments, yet declined nonetheless. His wife, less congenial, was palpably put out by having to explain the obvious need for development: “That’s progress!” she snapped with her German accent, and a full-body gesticulation from her plastic beach lounge that culminated in throwing a pointed finger toward the sky, as if indicating from where the authority of her logic emanated.

I quit my job a year later partly because Rick Scott’s administration in Tallahassee had, by then, successfully suffocated state environmental regulatory programs like mine into virtual obsolescence, and partly because I needed to learn more about how “the system” worked in order to participate in more meaningful ways than begging local governments with petitions to plan development more responsibly.

That particular petition, it turns out, was only one among several actions like it that people in the area organized to prevent the destruction of mangroves and grass flats in and around Long Bar Pointe. We were successful that time, but Carlos Beruff, the property

owner, found other avenues to pursue getting his development approved. Interestingly, one subsequent iteration involved submitting his plans to the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and the State of Florida as an environmental easement project. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FLDEP) was strong-armed by Rick Scott into approving the plans, and not surprisingly due to the history of Beruff's financial support of Scott's political campaigns. The ACOE, however, recognized that destroying mangroves was the opposite of environmental easement and rejected the application as such.

Over the course of conducting my fieldwork for this thesis, however, the Manatee County Board of Commissioners (MCBC) finally approved Beruff's development, dubbed Aqua by the Bay, on the basis that its plans had been sufficiently retooled to comply with county building and zoning codes, and that the county would have access to inspect the building process as it progressed in order to ensure compliance. The MCBC seemed to approve the application after a years-long process of convening public hearings that served to give the appearance of providing Manatee County residents a voice in that process, regardless of the fact that many who opposed Beruff's plans pointed to clear inconsistencies between county building codes and his development plans that they approved. Some of the hearings were so widely attended that they had to be moved from the courthouse to the Bradenton Area Convention Center. Two of the public hearings I attended at the courthouse required overflow rooms to be opened where spectators could only watch the proceedings without contributing their input. I never once met anyone in my time collecting data for this project who thought that building Aqua by the Bay was a good idea, and for myriad reasons.

Furthermore, Aqua by the Bay turned out to be only one of several other development and infrastructure projects approved by various levels of government, and adjacent to Cortez,

over the course of my time collecting data for which no one with whom I spoke, with one slight exception, thought was a good idea. The one exception involved a commercial fisherman who suggested that the project to upgrade a Manatee Avenue bridge, which connects Cortez to Anna Maria Island, might funnel so many more visitors through the area as to shut down already choked vehicular traffic altogether, a sentiment he seemed to relish expressing even as he demonstrated awareness of its dire consequences for Cortezians and their local businesses.

General attitudes toward conventional urban planning processes among those in Cortez from whom I collected data aligned greatly with my own personal anecdotal sense of disempowerment and marginalization. The most notable difference I found, however, between my own experience and how Cortezians expressed theirs—specifically, of the unsustainable urban and suburban sprawl that characterizes so much of Florida’s coastal communities (Hafen 2016)—was the degree to which they seemed to take it quite personally. Overdevelopment or sprawl is not only at odds with their recreation, as I’ve felt, but an attack on the part of particular people and institutions that existentially threaten their personal and collective way of life. This important distinction was made evident through discussions I had with them about the way they provision their lives so directly from the natural resources harvested from local waterways, and because they have done so in concert with one another over multiple generations.

Cortezians regularly discuss such things as “our way of life,” “our heritage,” and “our commercial fishing culture.” And it occurred to me that their ability to articulate that shared experience as a community in this way points directly to what sets them apart as a “traditional Florida fishing village.” Floridians like me who visit towns like Cortez are drawn to them for their historical significance as a kind of window into Florida’s past that allows us to glimpse something of what life was like before everything else was absorbed into the broader economic



landscape of consumerism, tourism, and sprawling development, the very kinds of collective activities science suggests brought about climate change. Yet, whereas Cortez certainly stands out as having largely avoided being subsumed by the prevailing consumer culture of much of the rest of the state, another aspect of its determination to hold on to its commercial fishing culture is of perhaps greater importance for the future.

Cortez has not persisted out of accident, but for their ability to actively organize themselves in confronting the power that the broader political economy has historically brought to bear in transforming so many other communities like it (like Venice) into just another cash cow for developers, retailers, and rent-seekers. Such organization necessitates a modicum of political agency, resolve, and vision—qualities conspicuously missing among more typical neighborhoods that constitute the contiguous sprawl from urban to rural landscapes in Florida. Despite the way economic development patterns predicated on the myth of endless growth, or the climate change impacts they precipitate, might produce vulnerabilities experienced in Cortez, researching those vulnerabilities has revealed kinds of social resilience that I believe could benefit all Floridians in their attempts to mitigate and adapt to a changing climate.

My relationship to Cortez began in a mutual effort to steer development in a more responsible direction, one that would acknowledge how people and the environments where they live are codependent. Such an approach would recognize that the fate of the environment would also be the fate of the communities that lived there, and vice versa.

In order to better comprehend what it would take to change the direction of conventional development practices, of course, requires a broader network of relationships to be systematically studied beyond those among municipal decision makers, developers, local ecosystems, a local fishing village, and me. This thesis project is essentially my attempt to

identify the salient relationships that exist at different social scales that have impacted Cortez in important ways, and whose qualities directly address aspects of the research questions. The total number of relationships involved, at (and within) different social scales, among various actors and institutions that result in the fishing community in Cortez, existing the way it does, constitutes an overwhelming dynamic complexity well beyond the scope of a thesis project. As such, the ethnographic process for this study has been iterative in nature, focusing on emergent themes of importance for Cortezians. For instance, after observing that the 1994 net ban spontaneously became a part of every conversation I was having with residents, it became clear that I would have to learn how Cortezians were conceptually connecting that to conversations I would open about climate change or development. Themes like the net ban that participants would spontaneously bring up during separate interviews and in similar narrative contexts were used in this study to guide the process of familiarizing myself with how Cortezians were conceptualizing issues about development and climate change. These themes are discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow in the thesis. Cortezians iteratively contributed to this project so that I included problems with marine pollution and emerging social divisions within the community. In many of my discussions with people living in Cortez, particularly fishers, there was a focus on ethical climate change considerations of responsibility, stewardship, and justice. In my view, focusing on the strengths that historically- and holistically-informed ethnography brings to bear on formulating climate change solutions has guided my project toward culturally appropriate and locally meaningful policy recommendations.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Research Methods**

#### *Overview*

Experiences of both local politics and climate science are deeply discursive social features that lend themselves to observation through participant observation and interviews. As such, exploratory informal interviews, semi-structured follow-up interviews, and participant observation were used to collect qualitative data in effort to explore these topics.

I approached this applied project as a community-based collaboration (Schensul et al. 2015) in which the residents of Cortez, as experts of their own community, contributed to the research process, and the formulation of policy recommendations in particular. I initially engaged the community with the help of author Ben Green (year) and another anthropologist who works in the area, both of whom introduced me to a couple of community members that led to interviews with them. Those discussions led to being invited to address a regularly scheduled community gathering where I introduced myself, explained my research agenda, and successfully solicited enough participation from the gathering to sustain the process of recruiting others from among the community. As I did not take up residence within the community while conducting fieldwork due to the relatively short commute to Cortez from where I live in nearby Tampa, my approach to participant observation was one that subsumes all of my activity within the community, taking every opportunity to observe and collect relevant data for interpretation and analysis.

Informal interviews were conducted with 10 community members, one biologist who works with the community in a strategic planning capacity, and one anthropologist who has conducted fieldwork in Cortez related to the net ban. I conducted the first interview over the phone with one Cortezian in November, 2017, which led to a meeting at their home. I met with another resident at their office in a Cortezian fishhouse to conduct an interview in late November, 2017. As the height of mullet season occurs between December and January, the community was too busy conducting their seasonal harvest to accommodate interviews at that time. By February, 2018, however, after introducing my research that month to the local organization, Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage, Cortez's main organizing committee, I was able to schedule enough interviews and meetings to support visiting Cortez two to three times a week, for about two to three hours at a time (sometimes more or less), until the beginning of May, 2018 when I began the process of analyzing the data.

### *Informal Interviews*

Initially, I proposed to conduct a first round of semi-structured interviews, of about an hour for each, with a dozen residents, and a follow up interview with each participant. I found that getting Cortez residents, and particularly fishermen, to commit to such interviews, however, was difficult. Cortez fishermen, it turns out, work according to highly variable schedules depending on various factors like the weather, tides, and phases of the moon. And even when such factors align to present favorable or somewhat predictable fishing conditions, often someone's boat or equipment breaks down and requires repairing. Or sometimes a friend's boat or equipment requires emergency repairs for which fishermen pool their labor cooperatively and,

ultimately quite unpredictably in order to keep the community's harvest at peak levels depending on the season.

In effort to keep the focus of this project on the livelihoods of fishermen, through collecting data from them directly, I had to settle for more spontaneous conversations that were planned one or two days ahead of time. Many meetings I scheduled had to be cancelled due to reasons mentioned above. Eventually, I discovered that offering to meet at the local café provided the most consistent way to reliably get a fisherman to commit to and show up for a meeting. Additionally, the Cortez Cafe proved popular enough that participants were able to introduce me to others in the community during our meetings, which led to some group discussions.

In all, there were four fishermen with whom I was able to speak one-on-one and in person. There were two additional fishermen with whom I was able to speak over the phone, and at length, over the course of several communications. So, I was able to speak with a total of six fishermen such that I felt our conversations had sufficiently covered the gist of what I intended to address in the interview schedules I had originally designed for semi-structured interviews.

Other Cortezians who participated in my project had more traditional employment, such as an office job or other wage labor. The catch with trying to pin them down for an interview, however, was that they either did not have time at work to chat, or they were all otherwise busy with family or community commitments in their off time. All but one person I spoke with who did not currently harvest fish in their working life were directly employed in some aspect of the community's commercial seafood production. I interviewed three women who fit into this category: a business owner, a secretary, and a retiree—an elderly woman often referred to as a village matriarch by others in the community.

One of the conversations I had was with a board member of the Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage (FISH). FISH serves as the governing organization for the community, which holds monthly meetings taking input from residents, planning fundraisers, and deciding how to spend the funds they raise. Established in 1991, FISH has made a point to include at least one scientist on its board, and it was one of those scientists, a non-resident, with whom I met at length.

Another meeting I had was with an anthropologist who has conducted field work in the community and was able to provide important insights into accessing community members, how the community frames discussions of topics related to my research, and some historical context of significant events in Cortez that address my research agenda generally. Additionally, that anthropologist discussed how there have been many researchers and journalists who have worked in Cortez, and that history of outsiders asking questions has shaped the community's perceptibly ambivalent attitude towards outsiders like me. For example, given the chance to describe what I was doing in the neighborhood, I generally felt warmly welcomed and that people would generously avail themselves to questions about their beliefs and experiences regarding climate change and politics. In fact, FISH articulates on its website ([www.cortez-fish.org](http://www.cortez-fish.org)) that its mission is "dedicated to the promotion, education and preservation of Cortez and Florida's commercial fishing and other traditional maritime cultures including the environment upon which these communities depend." However, Cortezians feel that some of the things published by people who come around asking questions are inaccurate, or even at odds with their community's interests. So, despite being generally open and welcoming to outsiders, Cortezians, in their politeness, display a healthy skepticism toward outsiders asking questions

about them, an ambivalence I learned was best mediated by being as open and direct as I could in explaining my research agenda.

One of the reasons I believe the number of informants who participated in interviews for this study is representative of the community as a whole is because I was careful to ask them, during interviews, about how they thought others in the community felt about the issues I asked them, and about how they felt others might differ from their perceptions. I believe the tendency for Cortezians to speak frankly and without posturing, combined with also having checked the veracity of participants' perceptions by asking what others thought about those perceptions, as well as simply asking how they felt others in the community might differ in their perceptions, enabled an accurate depiction of the range of perceptions that exist within the community. One basis for my assertion about participants' frankness is the fact that when asked about whether they would comment on or discuss another specific community member's perceptions participants would promptly and forthrightly answer yes or no, seemingly confident either way, such that they never seemed to calculate or waiver in how they understood the dynamics of their interpersonal relationships. Indeed, it always felt like everyone I met knew everyone else very well, and that they were all confident about knowing each others' boundaries.

### *Participant Observation*

Cortezians are often busy, either working for income in the commercial fishing industry, or organizing and working for their right to do so in a culturally palatable way. As such, finding activities in which I could engage Cortezians and participate in community events was challenging. Most community members had little, if any, time to contribute to my research, even though I was nearly always greeted warmly and most Cortezians I approached clearly expressed

a mix of pride and excitement about a university student showing interest in their culture and livelihoods. Because Cortez is relatively small and the operation of its fishing industry requires most people in the community to attend to it, Cortezians I met had at least one job and other various duties of community responsibility. For instance, one man with whom I spoke was a self-employed fisherman, had recently begun keeping bees for supplementary income, and also served on the board of FISH. The combination of busy schedules, the relatively small scale of their village's tightly knit commercial fishing enterprise, and non-working time spent protecting their community from being further absorbed into the broader regional economy based on real estate and tourism makes the novice anthropologist's job to find space for conducting participant observation tricky.

As in other typically rural, traditional Florida communities, meeting locals in Cortez is a generally affable affair, mostly straight-talk sparingly laced with pleasantries and lacking the social posturing more common in encounters with folks from larger towns and cities. Yet, while strolling through the village has the look and feel of rural Florida, Cortez is located between two of the nation's fastest growing metropolitan areas: North Port-Sarasota-Bradenton to the west and south, and Tampa-St.Petersburg-Clearwater to the north (US Census 2015, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-56.html>). The history of that mushrooming development pattern around Cortez has been a catalyst for the community in forming organizations such as FISH, which essentially functions to protect local environments from encroaching development. Such development, Cortezians contend, is the source of all the "pollution" in Sarasota Bay that poses the greatest threat to their commercial fishing culture. This creates a dynamic where the small town affability one finds in meeting Cortezians is colored by an ambivalence toward "outsiders" exhibited by the community's efforts to maintain



their fishing livelihoods while increasingly besieged by urban development. I found this particularly so as a student researcher asking around about political aspects of relationships within the community and, likewise, those the community has with others. I began thinking of this ambivalence over the course of my data collection as “keeping an arm’s distance,” and an interesting and subtle contradiction to the community’s otherwise palpably charming demeanor.

For instance, it was nearly ubiquitous that individuals suggested I visit either the Florida Maritime Museum (<https://www.floridamaritimemuseum.org>) or the Cortez Cultural Center (<https://www.cortezvillagehistoricalsociety.org>) in lieu of their accommodating time and space for me to conduct participant observation. The museum and cultural center are located on the outskirts of the core village, away from the businesses that line Cortez Rd., away from the waterfront restaurants and fishing docks, and away from the blocks of residents’ historic white tin-roofed cottages. They are funded by FISH and primarily serve as outreach programs to educate the public about Cortez and its commercial fishing tradition. Some people were certainly too busy or could not accommodate my requests for other reasons. But, sometimes people would direct me there expressly because they were not clear if my research agenda was something they could support. I learned over the course of collecting data that an ancillary function of the cultural center and museum was, ironically, to keep outsiders at arm’s length, despite doing so in a way that was intended to draw them in. Many Cortezians I spoke with expressed anxiety about how they perceived increasing numbers of tourists in their community to have negatively impacted their quality of life, mainly citing increased traffic and loitering, and notwithstanding their expressed acknowledgement of the significant degree to which Cortez’s economy has increasingly become reliant on tourists’ expenditures. In any event, even though the cultural center and museum contain a wealth of resources for learning about the history of Cortez and its

commercial fishing industry, they had little, if any, material that spoke directly to my research questions concerning climate change and politics.

Often, conducting participant observation (Musante 2015) in Cortez, for this project, became an extension of the time I spent recruiting community members for interviews, and lingering before and after where we spoke, mostly at the Cortez Cafe.

Another context that proved useful was taking advantage of the time Cortezians offered to speak with me while working at one of the two remaining “fish houses,” as they are referred to, at opposite ends of the waterfront. Cortezians would lament how there were once five such operations on the waterfront as little as a generation ago. The fish houses are the main hubs of commerce in the village in that they physically bring together the largest pieces of what constitutes Cortez’s commercial fishing industry. The “houses” are basically two-story warehouses comprised largely of industrial refrigeration machinery, ice makers, and room to store processed fish harvests; also, factory processing floors where workers clean and package harvests; and office space where administrative activities of the business are conducted. On their waterfront side, the fish houses are flanked by docks that provide fishermen access to unload and weigh catches, as well as room for boaters to moor for lunch or dinner at one of the adjacent restaurants. The waterfront docks also provide spectacular views of Sarasota Bay, with Anna Maria Island in the distance and what’s referred to by Cortezians as “the kitchen” directly offshore. The kitchen is a traditional name for the shallow oyster bed- and mangrove-dotted water from which they catch food to eat, rather than sell at market. On the other side are parking lots, vehicular transport loading docks, and an array of stored fishing gear such as crab traps and boats. The northerly fish house has one restaurant and a walk-in seafood market. The other has two restaurants and recently moved its seafood market to Cortez Rd., next to the café, where

there is more room to expand that part of their operation. From the fish houses, their docks, or restaurants, one can observe the activities among customers, fishermen, and business owners and operators that have shaped Cortez for nearly a century and a half.

Another opportunity I found for participant observation was aboard a sightseeing charter that launches from the docks at one of the fish houses. The captain, a former fisherman herself—firmly insisted on being referred to as a fisherman upon asking her preference—was as active in keeping up with local development and environmental issues as she was colloquially colorful in guiding her tour. I combined interviewing the captain with participant observation over the course of the two-hour tour, which circled around the kitchen and then headed north into Palma Sola Bay. I was able to show up early and stay late, which gave us nearly three hours to talk, plenty of time to cover the gist of my interview. The paying customers who accompanied us were a young family: mom, dad, four year-old daughter, and grandma. In effect I was participating as one of the tourists, albeit the one asking most of the questions. The captain was comfortable allowing me to direct her spiel with questions about local development projects, the environment, and politics, topics that seemed to complement much of what she was apparently already prepared to discuss. What really set this apart from other interviews I conducted, as an opportunity to simultaneously engage in participant observation, was that there were others involved, and she was able to do her job while we spoke. Furthermore, it was the only time during data collection I was able to tour local marine environments around the village with one of its members, an experience that stands out in my time collecting data as one that provided unusually rich qualitative information beyond our verbal exchange compared to other interviews I conducted, which typically took place in a local café, at the docks, or on the phone.

I also attended one of the meetings that the FISH board convenes on a monthly basis. Upon an email request, the president gave me permission to address the board. I took the opportunity to introduce myself and describe what I was trying to do with my research. Apart from getting to observe how an important segment of local leadership organizes for the benefit of their community, my efforts that night to engage the community were rewarded with several people who approached me expressing interest in participating in my research. My remarks before the board can be found in the appendices.

The annual Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival also provided an opportunity for participant observation. The yearly event is the community's largest, drawing tens of thousands of tourists. The festival is planned over the course of the year and the revenue generated comprises the bulk of cash the FISH board has on hand to maintain its operations. The fish houses are opened to the public for the event, and booths of local crafts and seafood for sale line several blocks of the village. In the same way that the museum and cultural center are reserved as a space for both outreach and keeping outsiders at arm's length, the annual Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival serves those same functions by reserving time for outsiders to have a more intimate experience with the village, but for once a year.

### *Data Analysis*

This project originally proposed to incorporate the use of an audio recording device for semi-structured interviews for the purpose of analyzing the text of their transcriptions. In the community, however, participants (and, importantly, prospective participants) exhibited great reservation about being recorded, even after discussing the measures I intended to take to protect their confidentiality. Most Cortezians who expressly wanted to participate in this study were also

frank about not wanting to be recorded. Initially, the few Cortezians who verbally agreed to be recorded suddenly became unavailable by phone or email for unknown reasons. Over the course of having failed several times to find participants who would agree to be recorded, however, I found that without a recording device and keeping our meetings as informal as possible, Cortezians would generally be happy to discuss just about any topic I wanted to bring up. In the end, it seemed as though were I to spend more time in the community I could have established the rapport and trust necessary for Cortezians to agree to be recorded, but I also had to find a way around the fact that I had not reached that level of mutual comfort with them in the time I had to collect data in the field.

As a side note, there was one exception where a participant clearly agreed to be recorded and continued to keep in touch with me. However, their inability to converse in a way that would allow me to control the direction of the conversation made it exceedingly difficult to imagine how even a semi-structured interview could be accomplished, despite the fact that that participant's perspective as a community elder was of particular interest to this project.

Due to that difficulty, I began taking handwritten notes on the conversations I was able to have in a single notebook. I began organizing my notebook into sections including brief encounters, notes and quotes from interviews with participants that logged when and where we met, and a section I used to conceptually process data I was collecting during the course of my time in the field. The process of writing down salient features of conversations, identifying and connecting themes among participants, and using that to formulate questions for the next participant based on what I could glean about their positionality within the community evolved into a grounded theory approach (Wutich et al. 2015).

For example, after prompting several conversations in the community about problems with climate change and regional overdevelopment, participants reliably responded in part by discussing the injustice they experienced over the process of having their traditional fishing gear outlawed in what has come to be known as the 1994 net ban (also referred to in some literature as the 1995 net ban, as it was voted into effect in 1994, but not officially implemented until 1995). Hence, where such patterns emerged in our discussions, I would note how and at what point participants were compelled to interject such issues and attempt to draw out the significance of those conceptual connections in subsequent conversations. My data analysis is a product of this iterative approach.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Fishing, Tourism and Development in Cortez**

#### *Developments*

As discussed earlier, Cortez is sandwiched between two of the nation's fastest growing metro areas. And the volume of new construction and infrastructure improvement projects in and around Cortez to accommodate the steady influx of people is a snapshot of the growth occurring throughout this region of Florida. Researching what effects this has had on the community in Cortez and their commercial fishing industry revealed a sense of increasing precariousness for virtually everyone in the community with whom I spoke.

Carlos Beruff's 529 acre Aqua by the Bay development project, mentioned in the introductory chapters, is noteworthy for threatening the mangrove forest on Long Bar Pointe and the grass flats that surround it, but is by no means the only source of anxiety from such development among Cortezians. Another developer, Whiting Preston, is building a 1,300-acre mixed use development, dubbed Lake Flores, adjacent to Aqua by the Bay—19 acres of which will be the man-made lake—and an 18.7 acre Hunters Point Resort & Marina directly across Cortez Rd. from the village, on the western tip of the Cortez peninsula. The Lake Flores development is remarkable for its size, and the Hunters Point development is noteworthy for its eco-friendly marketing campaign touting the 'Florida cracker'-style of its 'tiny houses', which will come furnished with Tesla vehicles, solar panels, and an electric-powered ferry to Anna Maria Island.

Additionally, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has approved an upgrade for the aging Cortez Rd. drawbridge, which connects Cortez with Anna Maria Island. Asking Cortezians about the bridge upgrade, which the FDOT has determined will be a 65-foot vertical-clearance “mega bridge,” surprisingly revealed as much consternation and anger as the recently approved Aqua by the Bay.

The two most common answers Cortezians cited upon having asked what they perceived presented the greatest threat to their community were (1) the prevalence of development projects and pollution in the bay, which they perceived was a direct result of such overdevelopment, and (2) government regulations on the commercial fishing industry. Traffic congestion and a decrease in the younger generation’s opportunity (and willingness) to work as local fishermen were significant, but of relatively second order concern. Which is why, when I asked one experienced fisherman (the one who recently became a beekeeper on the side) about what he perceived as presenting the single greatest threat to Cortez, I was a bit stunned to hear his swift answer: “The traffic.” Prompting clarity on his choice, he described how impenetrable the congestion routinely was, how it made living in Cortez difficult for everyone. At one point he expressed bewilderment imagining how time-consuming negotiating traffic must be for “delivery drivers” and “those landscape guys that cut people’s yard once a week. I don’t even know how they stay in business around here.” “Going to the bank” was also cited, interestingly, as a common hardship bemoaned by several people. A secretary at one of the fish houses I spoke with became visibly tense and angry as she described what it was like attempting to frantically run to the bank and back over her hour-long lunch break, which she described was, “literally just blocks away.”



Cortez Rd. is the only vehicular route in and out of town, to Bradenton adjacent on the east, and to Anna Maria Island on the west, and narrows to two lanes at Cortez's fishing village and over the bridge, a bottleneck that I experienced can lock up traffic for a few grueling miles without any alternative routes. The community members I spoke with, to a person, were well versed in the intricacies of technical aspects of the proposed bridge upgrade, and particularly with how, on the Cortez side, left hand turns from the village toward Anna Maria will be blocked with curbs, complicating already congested traffic patterns. The blocking of left turns with curbs was discussed by participants as hemming Cortez in. They articulated a strong sense of injustice for having their physical movement curtailed by the FDOT, a demoralizing sentiment for a community that prides itself on freedom through self-sufficiency.

Moreover, the height of the bridge emerged as a significant point of contention as well, much like the height of proposed condominiums for Aqua by the Bay, for being what the beekeeper described as "an eyesore." Imagining having so much construction rise above the trees is antithetical to the way Cortezians see the natural beauty in their part of the bay. The retired teacher I interviewed (the elder "matriarch of the community") and the charter captain both expressed dismay and anxiety at the prospect of Cortez turning into another Anna Maria over the course of their living memory. The matriarch coyly admitted she did not even know what a "condo" was when she first heard they were being built on the beach across the bay.

The charter captain also mentioned how the marinas to be built in the new developments are designed to accommodate larger vessels, as will the width of the new bridge, further eroding and damaging the grass flats caused by dredging and larger boat wakes. She discussed at length how so much boat traffic, especially from increased numbers of tourist rentals, has already caused significant damage to the grass flats in the area. In Palma Sola Bay, she pointed out an

enormous crater in one grass flat caused, she reported, by a rented cabin cruiser that ran aground, apparently due to their lack of familiarity with the bay. Increases in the number, size, and power of boats in the area, were all negative trends the charter captain explicitly associated with the overdevelopment of the area, and which, for her, presented a direct threat to her community. She took every opportunity to get the attention of other nearby boaters she felt were operating their crafts irresponsibly, or illegally—pointing to the “No Wake” signs for those going too fast and imploring tailgaters to keep their distance.

It became clear that there were three main ways that nearby development and infrastructure projects created anxiety in the community. First, the deterioration of their traditional aesthetic sense of what the area around Cortez looked and felt like. Second, their anxiety also stemmed from a sense that their ability to move around freely in the streets around town was becoming increasingly restricted. And, third, the pressures that more people, boats, and cars placed on the local marine environment, in the form of direct physical disturbance and by the increasing amount of pollution they perceived was negatively impacting local populations of fish and shellfish they harvested in the area.

### *Pollution*

The prevalence of chemical and biological contaminants in local waterways was often cited by Cortezians as a growing problem of enormous significance. Lawn fertilizers and pesticides in stormwater runoff that empties into local waterways during storms was widely blamed for harmfully impacting marine ecosystems. Similarly, the increasing prevalence of vehicular and boat traffic was blamed for rising oil and fuel pollution. Three fishermen were worried about raw sewage spills into the bay that have become more common as storm drains

have backed up municipal water treatment plants during severe rain events, overflowing into local waterways. Increasing incidents of red tide were cited as destructive as well. Red tides are blooms of toxic algae that kill fish and make breathing near the water difficult, and were viewed by Cortezians who discussed it as a direct result of lawn fertilizer runoff. Some fishermen complained in anger about the effects of other green and brown algal blooms of less toxic varieties they reported as increasingly problematic due to their blocking sunlight from reaching sea grasses and killing whole meadows. As with the mangroves, fishermen recognized the important role that grass flats play in providing habitats for larval and juvenile stages of marine organisms they depend on for harvesting as adults. Participants also expressed palpable disgust while reporting the slimy consistency such algal blooms would render the water, and would angrily lament how clear it used to be.

At one point on our tour through Sarasota Bay the charter captain navigated past a two-acre patch of sailboats anchored offshore Anna Maria Island, just south of the Cortez Road bridge, which she dubbed “Hobo Harbor.” Groups of such anchored vessels are a common sight in the Intracoastal Waterway, in protected coves that shelter boats from adverse weather conditions, and also shelter boat owners from paying marinas rent to moor in their slips or dry dock storage. The charter captain discussed how coves like the one we passed were formerly ecologically productive grass flats and oyster beds, and safely located away from the marked boating channels. After mentioning that she does not begrudge anyone for wanting to anchor where they want in the bay, she rhetorically asked in earnest, “But, where’s their poop?” Her concerns were two-fold. First, that the concentration of boats killed the sea grasses below them, and second, that their biological waste was being emptied directly into the bay. Further, several of the vessels appeared abandoned, or at least in some advanced stage of terminal neglect, and

the charter captain worried about the eventual spills of onboard chemicals that would certainly, in her mind, result from their impending capsizing or sinking.

The matriarch discussed how, as a girl before the middle of the last century, it was common to harvest scallops for lunch at low tide in the bay's mud. She appeared to cherish the memory of hiking up her pants with friends before wading out into the bay with their metal buckets in the morning, and described in detail the scallop's abundance, delightfulness, and ease of harvesting. She then continued by describing how they became scarce, their flavor off, and altogether disappeared from some places as more people had moved to or vacationed in the area over the years. Watching from the docks over the course of collecting data I observed only one boat that unloaded a harvest of scallops at one of the fish houses. The two middle-aged women had several large gray fabric sacks filled with scallops. But, I never once witnessed groups of kids wading out to the kitchen at low tide collecting them for lunch. The matriarch was the first person I interviewed at length, and I made it a point to ask subsequent informants about their experience with scalloping. Everyone I asked, to a person, about what has become of the scallops in the bay blamed the rise in pollution on their disappearance.

The rookie, a recently married fisherman in his twenties, was happy to discuss the skills he has acquired in becoming a commercial fisherman. He was particularly proud of his mindfulness about professionalism in the commercial fishing industry and his prowess in pursuing a harvest, which he attributed to his ecological sensitivity of the species he targeted. He made a point of mentioning how some of the other less experienced fishermen would haul in a whole shoal of mullet or anchovies, "just so they could throw down some weight on the docks," suggesting that they only valued the fish in terms of the amount of money they make in a single catch. Such behavior was shortsighted and garish for the rookie, who explained the importance

of leaving some of the shoal in the water so they could survive and reproduce, promoting the success of future harvests. Leaving some of the fish that could have been caught behind was a kind of courtesy for other local fishermen, as well. And he also mentioned the adverse effects on the price fishermen could fetch for their hauls when they began bringing too much of a particular species to market, likewise adversely affecting fellow fishermen.

The rookie argued at one point that he could tell where construction projects on land had begun, even if he could not see them from the water, based on the relative decline in productivity of a particular fishing hole. He explained that if a previously productive cove began exhibiting a pattern of diminishing harvests, he would later drive to where the storm water runoff that emptied into that cove came from. He claimed that he would invariably find some kind of construction project going on. He identified the hydraulic oil used by heavy construction equipment as a culprit in contaminating local waterways and suggested that fish, along with most other wildlife, were sensitive to such contaminants and would simply leave those coves. The rookie proposed that absorbents or booms could be placed in the water to restrict the spread of oil spills, but that they were not required if the construction was more than a certain length away from the water. He expressed bewilderment at the idea of not using booms if runoff from a construction site reached the water, regardless of how far away from the water the construction site was.

The activist, an experienced middle-aged fisherman, took to working for Manatee County after the net ban in 1995. Like the beekeeper and the charter captain who also diversified their income beyond commercial fishing after the net ban, the activist found employment with the county as a licensed water quality technician as a meaningful way to earn extra money. The activist has essentially spent whatever free time he has had since the net ban went into effect

attempting to organize a repeal of that ban. What struck me about his story, regarding the widely perceived problems with pollution in the bay among Cortezians, is that his choice of moonlighting was to become a water quality specialist for the county. Despite having little, if anything, good to say about how the county operates to protect the environment, he has been determined to contribute to local efforts aimed at monitoring and curbing the problem of pollution that accompanies local development.

### *Summary*

For most Cortezians with whom I spoke, regional patterns of redundant and sprawling development has increasingly led to reductions in stocks of marine resources, making it more difficult to find fish. The constant loss of habitat to development and the increasing pollution that results are perceived as some of the biggest threats to their community for adversely impacting local marine ecosystems, essentially making it harder to find fish. Other factors that impact their access to local resources include increased traffic on the roads and waterways from the influx of people, which Cortezians feel restricts their ability to move around, and from the loss of marine habitats, like grassflats, which Cortezians perceive to erode away due to the swelling armada of relatively inexperienced recreational boaters. Cortezians who participated in the study seem to feel obligated to find ways of protecting local environments and resent the indifference with which they perceive developers to regard those same environments. They feel that developers take too much from the environment and do so forcefully, and that it is because developers are greedy that they build what and where they do.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **The Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage (FISH)**

Most of the non-locals who visit Cortez likely go to one of their seafood restaurants at the fish houses, the commercial engines of their village, which FISH is intended to protect. As mentioned, the stated purpose of FISH is to protect Cortez's fishing culture through educating the public about its commercial fishing history and heritage. The cultural center and history museum mentioned previously are the most prominent institutions they operate toward that end, in that, after having eaten at one of the restaurants, tourists are encouraged to direct their attention there, and away from the docks and residential cottages, in order to learn more about the village. The other, less publicly prominent endeavors FISH operates are the Boatworks and the Preserve, a community-sponsored environmental restoration project discussed in more detail in this chapter.

#### *The Boatworks*

The Boatworks is a building in the village where FISH maintains a space to keep the local tradition of commercial boatbuilding alive. The ability of Cortez fishermen to build, modify, and/or maintain their own boats is considered by locals to be every bit as integral and important to the commercial fishing enterprise as are their abilities to mend nets and cast them the right way. Likewise, boating skills on the water are taken as signals of fishermen's worth,

and a source of respect among their colleagues. The charter captain would proudly accompany any sighting of a Cortez fishing boat with a brief description of the hull, who built it, and if (maybe even why) there were any significant modifications made to the ship's design. Speaking with the rookie at a dock reserved for the public about his history learning the fishing trade, he was able to point to a small vessel behind me in which he made his first catch, and recount who made the boat and how its design had been modified since then, and for what purpose it was modified.

The monthly FISH board meeting in February was conducted in a distinctly disciplined municipal style, with minutes recorded, votes taken, and members' ranks observed. The deliberations were serious and reflected the organization's expressed responsibility to protect their community. The secretary I spoke with at one of the fish houses told me she speaks about the community as, "The mighty people of Cortez," and "The little village that can," in describing, to her mind, what sets Cortez apart from other Gulf Coast communities. That fighting spirit was on full display at the February FISH meeting, providing an energy that tangibly powered the gathering.

That night's agenda for the meeting included issues regularly discussed, like financial reporting and progress made on donation projects that supplement FISH's main revenue stream, which consists of proceeds raised at the Cortez Annual Commercial Fishing Festival, the marquis annual event for the community that was staged two weeks later. There was the routine commercial fishing report, which indicated harvests were down for a number of species, and particularly for mullet, the fish that locals describe as having built Cortez. They discussed the status of the Preserve. And aside from the time they allowed me to introduce myself and briefly



describe my thesis project, the remainder of the evening was spent considering projects and interests related to the Boatworks.

Two retired men from Central Florida wanted to offer their spare time and expertise to open the Boatworks for a couple of days a week so they could help the community while pursuing their personal interests of shipbuilding. And two others, Cortez residents, addressed the board to request their permission to store and repair their boats at the Boatworks. Despite the men having lived in Cortez for decades, I would later learn from interviewing one of them that they were very much considered “outsiders,”—a term used often in Cortez by long-term residents—because they had only “recently” moved there. Even the beekeeper, who was among the founders of FISH in the early 1990s, and a current board member, conceded that he is considered an outsider due to the fact that he is not directly connected to one of Cortez’s founding families. As outsiders these two residents who approached the board were subjected to rigorous questioning about their intentions, and their plans for how long and where on the Boatworks property they would store their boats. What emerged as perhaps the most important issue for the board, however, was that they had to make sure their boats were commercial fishing vessels. They were apparently prepared to decline one of the requests outright, because it became known that his was not in fact a commercial fishing vessel, precipitating a protracted back-and-forth about how the owner might be able to store his vessel on the property, but out of sight for passersby.

It was explained to me after the meeting in a discussion I had with one of the facility’s operators that the whole purpose of the Boatworks is to project the community’s commercial fishing identity, and that recreational vessels, or vessels of any other kind, did not fit with the mission of having the Boatworks in the first place. Like the Cortez Cultural Center and the

Florida Maritime Museum, the Boatworks is maintained as a kind of museum, although one that is more of a hands-on variety, where local master shipbuilders teach enthusiasts and provide locals a space to repair their boats. The FISH board seemed eager to accommodate outsiders who wanted to donate time to keep the Boatworks open, but reluctant to sully its commercial fishing image by approving residents' requests to store or repair their boats there, depending on how their doing so would impact the carefully crafted image of the facility.

The effort and resources FISH expends to maintain the Boatworks directly points to how critically important it is for Cortezians to maintain their own sense of identity as a commercial fishing community. This is true particularly because the Boatworks draws so few visitors, relative to their restaurants, markets, and other museums. It is important to recall that FISH expresses their mission as protecting the community through educating the public about what kind of a community they are. For a community whose acting central governing authority operates three museums, the Preserve, and organizes the largest yearly commercial fishing festival in the state, with an annual budget on the order of tens of thousands of dollars, the Boatworks only comes into focus through a lens that measures value with something other than money.

### *The Preserve*

The Preserve is located immediately adjacent to Cortez's village, the traditional center of town where its founders' descendants still reside. The vast majority of the Preserve's roughly 100-acres consists of undeveloped mangrove forest and salt marshes. The Cortez Cultural Center, a small white wooden cottage typical of the village, is the only construction noticeable on the property while driving by on Cortez Road. The largely undeveloped wetlands that make it

up are locally revered for providing habitat to the fish and shellfish villagers have harvested from the kitchen since the 1880s. After years of having become a convenient dumpsite for construction debris, FISH purchased the land and made it the focus of intensive habitat restoration projects. And aside from the few stands of Australian pines, the Preserve now appears as one imagines it did when the village's founding settlers from North Carolina decided to make Cortez their new home.

It was made apparent during the deliberations of their February board meeting that there were one or two small parcels left, in the middle of the Preserve, that are still in the process of being acquired by FISH. Board members expressed anxiety about their organization's financial situation, between member dues and donations, as to when they could expect to finalize the transactions that would make the Preserve wholly owned by FISH. Board members also expressed anxiety about the ongoing responsibility to cover county property taxes now that it was largely paid off, but also voiced appreciation for the progress they have so far made in purchasing and restoring the acquisition.

Due to the organization's mission to educate the public, they also deliberated recent plans to construct boardwalks through the Preserve, allowing visitors a chance to experience the natural beauty of the area. It was spontaneously discussed as the "Cortez Heritage Trail," although part of the deliberation was over whether it should be called the "Cortez Environmental Trail," because advocates for the latter predicted such a name would generate more public interest in donating to the construction costs. A regionally renowned botanical garden was mentioned as a potential target for soliciting donations, as was Mosaic, a globally operated strip mining fertilizer company that makes such donations in return for prominent displays of their corporate logo in parks, presumably in effort to offset negative publicity in news stories about

the scale of their environmental destruction in the region (for instance, [http://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/Two-years-after-it-swallowed-215M-gallons-of-polluted-water-Mosaic-sinkhole-finally-corked\\_168291867](http://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/Two-years-after-it-swallowed-215M-gallons-of-polluted-water-Mosaic-sinkhole-finally-corked_168291867)).

I was surprised at the board's president for displaying excited interest at the prospect of courting Mosaic, somewhat due to their perennial involvement in environmental controversies, but mostly because they mine phosphate for the production of commercial fertilizers, which the community seems to blame for the problem of destructive marine algae blooms. At one point, referring to the relatively large amounts of money with which Mosaic is known to gift local parks, one ranking board member emphasized her understatement with wide eyes and a hand to her mouth, "We'll take their money." She said, "The Preserve is our jewel," rationalizing the moral contradiction in a metaphor of material value. My impression was that discussants understood that courting Mosaic would represent a moral compromise on some level, without saying it outright, but that they were also keenly aware of the importance of protecting what they felt was in their purview, or power, to do so. Either way, there was no specific offer of financial support from Mosaic to deliberate, let alone a final decision to accept or decline one that night, just musings about the prospect.

When the Preserve came up in one-on-one interviews and other discussions I had with participants, it was generally spoken of as a critically important accomplishment of FISH to have secured the protection of that land in its "natural" state. In fact, aside from assuming the principal responsibilities for organizing the Annual Commercial Fishing Festival, Cortezians I spoke with felt that the work FISH does to protect the Preserve is its most important function. One highly prominent local business owner and entrepreneur whom I interviewed—and will refer to as 'the entrepreneur'—stated she thought that FISH should focus entirely on its efforts to protect the

Preserve. She felt that board members were easily sidetracked and bogged down by arguments over less important issues. To a person, everyone I spoke with at least appreciated the Preserve as an important part of the local ecology. Some participants also clearly expressed pride in the Preserve for how it represented a victory of community efforts to maintain what remains of importance to them. For them, that protected land does not just preserve a piece of local natural environments, but also preserves their community in turn. Finally, situated adjacent to the village, on its east side, the Preserve acts as a boundary between the heart of Cortez and urban sprawl emanating from Bradenton on the other side, acting as both a physical and psychological boundary that insulates the community from the encroaching development they feel threatens their way of life.

## **Chapter Seven:**

### **Government Regulations**

#### *Emerging Divisions*

Although the Preserve itself was uniformly appreciated among Cortezians who discussed it, some participants voiced concern about how effectively FISH looks after the community's interests as a whole. Whereas some such concerns might be expected about an organization that functions to mediate interests and make impactful decisions for an entire community, other concerns appeared to point to salient fractures within the community's ideological spectrum. In particular, older Cortezians appeared to view FISH more favorably than younger members of the community.

For example, FISH's board is comprised of many of the older community members. The organization's dues-paying members democratically elect candidates for positions on the board. Although no formal survey was taken, none among the 12-member board could have been in their 20s (late 30s at best); half might be considered middle-aged and the other half, elderly. A clear majority were also women. As Ben Green explains in his book about the village, *Finest Kind: A Celebration of a Florida Fishing Village* (1985), women have traditionally assumed administrative roles both within the family and for the community, due to the fact that men have historically been away on the water, more often fulfilling their expected roles as fishers. Indeed, the matriarch with whom I spoke at length discussed her work in having Cortez added to the US

Department of the Interior's National Register of Historic Places. That historic designation helps provide public funds to maintain and protect some 97 structures, according to the Cortez Cultural Center, most of which are still in use. In any event, the elderly nature of the board is not a new trend, but works in tandem with other trends beyond the community, to split how younger and older Cortezians generally envision their future.

The beekeeper, speaking of one such trend, discussed how one of the effects of the 1994 net ban involved some families having to give up commercial fishing altogether, thus forcing a younger generation of Cortezians to rely more heavily on the broader regional economy, based on tourism, to find work. That, combined with the fact that younger Cortezians who have taken up commercial fishing experienced fewer hardships retooling their trade with new kinds of fishing gear, relative to the previous generation who were accustomed to fishing with now-banned gear for many decades, means that younger Cortezians are not as resentful and defensive as their parents' generation is about the net ban. Additionally, younger community members who have found work outside the community also find that their incomes can be just as good, or sometimes better, than the incomes of their peers who decide to remain in the commercial fishing industry. In effect, older Cortezians sense that the younger generation does not feel as compelled to organize through groups like FISH due to their respective differences regarding how they envision what it takes to make a living.

For instance, the matriarch, like other older Cortezians, discussed the net ban in dire, existential terms, while younger ones, like the rookie, seemed perplexed by how much effort their mentors have spent attempting to repeal the ban in vain. The matriarch recounted a story she read about farmers in Bangladesh who were forced by their government to take up fishing in order to survive, emphasizing the injustice of being stripped of one's livelihood and culture.

“The opposite happened here,” she explained, recounting how many local fishermen were forced to find other work due to the net ban rendering the traditional tools of their trade illegal. Moreover, she emphasized the toll that loss had taken on their heritage and sense of community by pointing out how people have fished in the area for thousands of years and traded their catches with farmers, referring to Native Americans who lived there similarly before them. Her sense of loss and injustice that the community has endured as a result of the net ban is difficult to understate, and was echoed in discussions with others.

Conversely, although the rookie acknowledged the injustice of the net ban, he communicated much less sense of loss. The rookie discussed how he has been able to find ways to make due with the gear restrictions that the net ban enacted, that it has not been easy, but a workable situation for him. Additionally, he felt that efforts to repeal the net ban at this point are, “a waist of time,” mainly because, “a lot has changed,” since the ban took effect. The changes he referred to are how so many commercial fishermen now have other full-time employment, fishing seasonally at peak times for stone crabs or mullet, and a lot of fishermen from the east coast come and fish here at those times as well. The rookie felt that this situation would have serious negative impacts on particular species that would make life difficult for those, like him, who fish year-round were the net ban repealed.

Tellingly, perhaps the greatest point of divergence between the rookie and other older Cortezians was his expressed optimism about the future of commercial fishing in Cortez. All the older residents who spoke about their perception of the future expressed at least serious concern about the difficulty their industry faces going forward. Some even bluntly predicted the end of the local commercial fishing tradition altogether, and on the order of decades. The rookie, on the other hand, conveyed demonstrable confidence in describing his perceptions about the future of



fishing in Cortez. Although some of his confidence could casually be explained by his relative lack of experience, just as anyone could equate confidence with naïveté regarding the general condition of young men. Indeed, the twenty-something fisherman, comfortably clad in muscle tee, deeply curved worn ball cap, and aviator sunglasses on a well-shaded dock in the morning, exuded youthful confidence. Despite that, however, he discussed his industry and personal experience in it rather maturely. The rookie was quite talkative, charismatic, and had some insightful observations about commercial fishing in Cortez.

For example, the rookie was the only fisherman I spoke with who directly addressed the importance of “professionalism” in the commercial fishing industry, a theme he spontaneously broached and lucidly discussed in thoughtful specifics. In addition to the discussion about environmental sensitivity above, he mentioned that since the net ban was approved by voters through the use of deceptive advertising campaigns—by portraying the commercial fishing industry as environmentally destructive (a sentiment shared by virtually everyone I spoke with in Cortez). Now, the public often views local commercial fishermen as bad, which precipitates difficult interactions on the water. His perception was that more experienced commercial fishermen tend to come across as quiet, and particularly so regarding how they communicate aspects of their work to the public. The rookie went on to recount a story of one outing on the water, targeting “anchovies,” when an interaction with a concerned homeowner led him to the insight that simply talking to people can make a difference in public relations. He was fishing close to shore due to the significantly reduced size of nets allowed by law; such that a school of fish could only be corralled into a tiny net in shallow water. So close to shore, in fact, that the property owner onshore exited his house to brazenly ask about what he was doing and if it was even legal. The rookie described how he was able to discuss his fishing techniques with the

homeowner, how and why he does not harvest whole shoals, and thanked him for not having a seawall on his property, because of their adverse impacts of erosion and curtailing the filtration effects of storm water runoff before emptying into the bay. He surmised that if more fishermen were willing to engage critical onlookers in a productive way, that effort would counter some of the negative stereotypes of the polluting or irresponsible commercial fisherman cartooned in deceptive ads.

Another point of contention that emerged in my conversations with villagers between younger and older generations of fishermen involved how knowledge and information about specific, locally developed trade secrets are shared. As in other traditional fishing communities there are no published “how-to” manuals of commercial fishing in Cortez. Since the 1880s their trade has been learned on the job, through younger fishermen going to sea with more experienced fishermen. Apart from strengthening intergenerational social bonds and building trust with those who eventually strike out on their own, keeping their knowledge within the community in this way also serves as a check against competition from commercial fishermen coming from other regions of the state at seasonally peak harvesting times. The activist complained how, having come of age during a time when social media has taken a central role in people’s lives, younger fishermen are prone to carelessly make public posts about such things as the best way to mend nets, or where the mullet are running. For the activist such behavior both betrays intergenerational trust and compromises the community’s ability to check outsiders from accessing resources he feels rightfully belong to Cortez. Referring to their locally developed knowledge base, about which young fisherman share information on the internet, the activist bemoaned that, “They don’t know, but that’s their ace in the hole! And they just give it away.”

Another conversation I had with the fishmonger, an older man working the register at one of the retail seafood markets, underscored how the emergent generational divide strains the community's cohesiveness, for which older Cortezians seemed perplexed and expressed a sense of helplessness in confronting it, for their belief that those growing divisions are driven from forces outside the community. The fishmonger discussed coming to terms with knowing that the younger generation has to rely more on finding work outside Cortez, and that such work can, at times, be transient and unprofitable. Being careful to express his understanding, however, he continued with a story about the parking situation at his seafood market that he felt spoke to how attitudes have begun to change in the village. He described how young people will just leave their broken down cars in parking spaces, taking up premium spots in their small village that paying customers could otherwise use, adversely impacting local business in turn. He expressed understanding that cars young people are able to afford can be unreliable, and that it is sometimes difficult to make payments on their repair, but that just leaving them in places that impact business is inconsiderate to degree he felt was new for Cortez. He adeptly mustered a curmudgeonly tone in admitting he once considered alerting authorities to one such disabled vehicle, due to the registration having lapsed as indicated on its license plate sticker, but recounted that he did not ultimately follow through with that, in effort to demonstrate, rather charmingly, his restraint and compassion.

The rookie was, unfortunately, the only younger fisherman I spoke with at length, although he was the youngest, and I did have less comprehensive discussions with others of his general cohort (less than 40 years old). Taken as a whole, and having solicited the analysis of older Cortezians, these discussions pointed to newly emergent divisions since the net ban took effect—(1) within the community: (a) generationally, and (b) between part-time and full-time

fishermen; and (2) between Cortez and other groups of Floridians: (a) commercial fishermen from other regions of the state, and (b) the general public (and especially recreational fishermen, written about extensively elsewhere).

### *The Net Ban*

It became clear that the net ban was of enormous social importance for the community in Cortez early on in my conversations with participants, well before it was clear what connections that event had to my initial focus on development projects. Some facet of the net ban was spontaneously woven into virtually every discussion I was having with Cortezians from the start of this project, although with the one glaring exception of the discussion I had with the rookie in which I eventually, and reluctantly, broached the subject in order to get his take. Further, participants would invariably bring it up within a few minutes of beginning a conversation.

From an academic perspective, the net ban is considered under the purview of fisheries management and regulations, which seemed rather far afield from the development issues I was interested in investigating. But finally, there came a point when I realized that, for Cortezians, the transition between the two seemingly disparate topics was made seamless due to their recognition of the government's role in each case, and specifically how they were both viewed as a kind of betrayal by government institutions and the political process generally. Both patterns of regional overdevelopment and unfair commercial fisheries regulation (relative to recreational fisheries regulation) represented government capitulation to powerful corporate interests at the expense of their small scale fishing industry. Participants simply expressed a sense of having increasingly become squeezed by larger scale economic forces arising from relationships that

corporate developers and the CCA have with government institutions that regulate regional development and fisheries management, respectively.

Interestingly, when asked about whether, or which, government agencies at the county, state, or federal levels were either helpful to Cortez or not, most participants responded unequivocally that Manatee County was most responsible for letting the community down, the State of Florida came in second in that category, and that the federal government was perceived as somewhat helpful. In that light it is noteworthy that the county approves most of the development projects, while the State of Florida (its agencies and political procedures) was largely responsible for the process that led to the 1994 net ban, although there exists some overlap with the federal government in that the CCA's 501I(3) status is designated by the federal tax code. And it was through coming to understand the net ban as a political process, fueled and won by the overwhelming power of capital that the CCA brought to bear in the fight it picked with the small scale commercial fishermen in Florida, that its connection to injustice resulting from overdevelopment came into focus.

Participants, particularly the entrepreneur and the matriarch, aired grievances about how the CCA's campaign to ban traditional gill nets was waged in media, such as popular sporting magazines and especially television ads. This meant that, in contrast to local development issues that arose, there were no county commission meetings they could attend with expectations of being heard by those who would make the decision. Having been ultimately enacted through a statewide public referendum, the net ban would be decided on by the voters of Florida, a yes or no decision that rendered the whole process deeply unjust in two ways for the Cortezians I spoke with. First, community members described the feeling of not being able to blanket statewide commercial media with their side of the story, in anything like the same way the CCA did, as

being “outgunned,” a metaphor of unfairness on an existential level. That unfairness essentially represented the tiny amount of money the community had to advocate their side, relative to how much the CCA was prepared to pay. The entrepreneur described having published opinions in local newspapers and airing a few ads in local broadcast television networks, but she was fully aware that effort was dwarfed by what the CCA accomplished throughout the state. Second, virtually everyone I spoke with felt that what the CCA was communicating to the public about gill nets and the commercial fishing industry were lies, that they severely misrepresented who Cortezians were as a community and deeply offended the pride they had for what they considered as the historical and cultural significance of their commercial fishing heritage. They spoke of the deceptiveness of the CCA’s messaging in corporate media about the net ban in terms of having endured humiliation.

One of the more striking aspects of listening to participants’ stories about the process of passing the gill net ban was how, on the one hand, they experienced its passage as a direct, existential attack on their community and personal livelihoods, yet, on the other hand, they entirely blamed the CCA for their efforts in deceiving the public. Asking Cortezians specifically how they felt about what has changed regarding their relationship to fellow Floridians who passed the net ban, after having endured so much loss to their traditional ways of living, through adverse community and personal impacts, participants answered in terms of having developed a sense of compassion and understanding for those who were influenced by the deception. It was as if their sense of injustice extended to Floridians who voted for the net ban for having been deceived by the CCA, like those who voted for the ban were treated unfairly as well. They expressed knowing that many more people from the public now view commercial fishing as

environmentally destructive as a result of what the CCA did, but were very careful not to lay any blame at the feet of their fellow Floridians.

Participants communicated a particularly galling sense of injustice for having communities like theirs in any way associated with irresponsible stewardship of public marine resources, or of the environment generally, as was achieved in commercial media through corporate messaging sponsored by the CCA's net ban campaign. One television ad that came up in several discussions apparently depicted dead "spinner dolphins," caught in miles-long deep-sea commercial fishing nets. The message, participants related, was that commercial fishermen were greedy and irresponsible in their pursuit of catches to the degree that they would risk killing dolphins and presumably destroy the environment for a buck, spoiling the natural splendor of the Gulf Coast region for everyone. The charter captain, the entrepreneur, and the matriarch pointed out, however, that spinner dolphins exclusively live in the Pacific Ocean, that such large-scale netting has never been used by Cortez fishermen, and that, above all, Cortez fishermen are neither greedy, nor irresponsible with the marine environments and resources on which they depend to make their living. Participants described the experience of watching television during the run up to the 1994 referendum when one of those ads came on in ignominious terms, such that some were unable to watch television altogether. They described how the characteristics that the CCA's corporate messaging attempted attributing to commercial fishermen in Florida were, in fact, applicable to those who crafted the message.

"They want it all for themselves," is how the entrepreneur put it, referring to the greed of recreational fishing retail industries that comprise the CCA's leadership and financial backing. Participants also deftly demonstrated an understanding about how the increase in recreational fishermen has adversely affected the environment, and did so casting blame at the CCA for the

damage, again deflecting responsibility from fellow Floridians, and even tourists. The charter captain netted several pieces of plastic recreational fishing gear in various stages of decay on our tour of the surrounding bays, being careful to point out each time to her crew of tourists how harmful such litter is to the environment, and how it has gotten worse as so many more people have moved to the area. The beekeeper, the rookie, and the activist discussed how recreational fishermen kill many more fish statewide through discarding unwanted species than commercial fishermen do in their bycatch, they believed, due to the precipitous increase in numbers of recreational fishermen. Further, the activist offered the observation that even recreational fishermen who use catch-and-release techniques, for species they do target, will often handle the fish with bare hands instead of using a rag, which, he thought, will also often result in killing the fish, even if unknowingly.

Additionally, the beekeeper expressed deep frustration and bewilderment at the thought of what effects the net ban would have for Floridians who do not fish, but depend on communities like his to provide them with fresh local seafood. Specifically mentioning elderly and handicapped Floridians, the beekeeper suggested that curtailing commercial fisher's access to public marine resources through the net ban has likely adversely impacted their ability to buy seafood at their markets, and that due to their age or handicap are altogether cut off from such public resources for not being able to otherwise recreationally fish for them. This sentiment was echoed in all the interviews I had with other participants except for the secretary.

The activist, one of the more abrasive, if passionate, personalities among participants in this project, further illustrated the community's sensitivity in their care for attributing blame, not to ordinary Floridians, but to the CCA for enacting the net ban. At one point, after having interviewed the rookie and wanting to check the veracity of what appeared to be generational



differences in attitudes about the net ban, I called the activist. Being much older than the rookie, and having spent more time and effort attempting to organize a repeal of the ban than any other Cortezian I spoke with, I felt his perspective would help.

I asked him to address whether he noticed any differences in such attitudes about the net ban and what he attributed them to, which led to a conversation about the nature of the ongoing conflict between recreational and commercial fishermen. I told him about how I learned to fish recreationally when I was a child, and that I enjoy teaching my young boys how to do it, too. I described to him how I was never aware of the rivalry between “recreationals” and “commercials”, as they’re apparently referred to, and asked about how the process of the net ban affected that rivalry. He told me the rivalry was very real, that it was always there, but that the net ban exacerbated it. He described how the rivalry was more of a fraternal competition on the water before the net ban, when recreationals would exhibit some semblance of respect for commercial fishermen. He perceived that as specifically having changed over the course of the CCA’s campaign, such that it is now common for recreationals to be disrespectful in interactions on the water. And despite all that, he also expressed his appreciation for people wanting to recreationally angle for fish and teach their kids how to do it, just as he has done with his.

It emerged in conversations I was having with participants that a significant contributor to their sense of injustice surrounding the net ban, apart from having had their traditional gear banned outright through public referendum, was their perception that government fisheries regulations, and those who enforce them, are generally much more stringent for commercial fishers than they are for their recreational counterparts. For instance, because of the way local seafood markets have historically been organized, commercial catches are weighed and recorded to within fractions of a pound, an activity that forms the basis for setting wholesale and retail

prices of any seafood product. This also means, however, that government regulatory agencies, like the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC), have access to very precise records of annual commercial catches of every marketed species, relative to how it tracks recreational takes, a statistical endeavor involving limited surveys of (only licensed) recreational fishers from which a statewide approximation is mathematically extrapolated. Participants exhibited serious doubt over whether such approximations could be accurate, and particularly so due to their perception that the government almost certainly favors recreational fishermen over their commercial counterparts. Indeed, many Floridians who staff agencies such as the FWC would presumably have closer personal ties to, or experience with, recreational fishing than to the small scale, dwindling commercial operations like the one in Cortez. The activist even mentioned having visited the regional FWC office where he found a CCA membership plaque prominently displayed on the director's office wall, behind the desk. He was careful to describe exactly where he found the plaque, where one would typically display personal credentials, and did so as if confirming whose side the Florida FWC was on. Again, however, on any given day walking by the docks along the waterfront in Cortez, one can find among the rusted pickup trucks a sharply worded anti-CCA bumper sticker, and to the exclusion of any such messages against recreational fishing, or any other group of Floridians.

### *Summary*

Apart from the remarkable pace of growth in regional development, Cortezians cite "government regulations" as among their chief concerns when asked about what they feel poses the most difficult challenges to their community. The community's deep concern for the way their industry is regulated, as expressed in nearly every conversation I had, required that this

narrative become a critical theme of importance for the project. It took some time to intuit how the community was conceptually associating the net ban with everyday problems they face from development.

Most of the Cortezians who brought it up could cite government regulations in great detail and discuss, in seemingly endless technical nuance, their utter absurdity. Above and beyond any other regulatory artifact they mentioned, the 1994 net ban is, for them, the definitive example of the government's inability to justly or responsibly regulate a marine fishery. After spending some time focusing on discussions about the net ban, participants provided insights that led to clues about the connections between the way they experience encroaching development and how their industry is regulated. Both processes are largely mediated through government, albeit at different scales. Both processes involve powerful corporate interests that, in effect, work to limit commercial fishermen's access to marine resources, which are viewed by those corporations as their rightful property (Fritchey 1994). Developers and the recreational fishing industry have forced Cortez fishermen to make do with less and have done so through formal political processes.

As such, the community is not only made vulnerable to climate change impacts through political processes that restrict its access to marine resources, and at different scales of the nexus between governance and commerce. The community is also made vulnerable to climate change by virtue of how those natural resources are then used by the very corporations that have pushed Cortez aside in pursuit of growth. Developers deplete the carbon-capturing-, flood-absorbing-, pollution-filtering wetlands to make room for expansion of the very kind of sprawling consumerist development that contributes to climate change. While retail sport fishing interests, in large part organized and captained by the fossil fuel industry (Fritchey 1994), provides

consumer demand for growth in further developing the Gulf Coast region, a theme further explored in the analysis chapter below.

## **Chapter Eight:**

### **Cortez's Relationship to the Environment**

#### *Connecting Development and Fisheries Management*

After spending some time away from development issues in Cortez, discussing concerns about fishing regulations with participants, the gap between the two topics began filling itself in. For example, as participants were describing how their community has changed, internally and in relation to the rest of the state, as a result of the process that led to a state level ban on their traditional fishing gear, development projects approved at the local level continued apace, bringing the associated influx of people: new residents, tourists, and recreational fishers. Pollution increased as more natural landscapes and the ecosystems they supported were converted into condominiums, residential housing, and retail strip malls. For-profit corporate advertising campaigns—for fishing, boating, and living the dream in paradise—have provided the booming residential real estate market the necessary demand it requires for attracting consumers, fueling a feedback loop of growing consumption that squeezes out natural environments and, in turn, the communities that have traditionally relied on them.

The secretary described her community's struggle with Manatee County to limit nearby waterfront development as a fight, but that, "The developers always win." I got the impression that since internal divisions discussed earlier had emerged within the community, precipitated by the net ban, their efforts at organizing in opposition to development projects have, in turn, been

diluted, especially as more Cortezians have increasingly begun to rely on the encroaching consumer economy that revolves around having built those new developments. This cycle of community members coping with having lost their ability to continue fishing commercially by filling in financial gaps through working in jobs provided by the encroaching consumer economy presents itself in the pessimism older Cortezians express about the future of commercial fishing in Cortez.

For instance, the charter captain, who once commercially fished full-time, and whose husband continues to do so, docks her tour boat at one of the fish houses, as other charter captains, whose families likewise once commercially fished, do as well. She has a twenty-something daughter who has also taken up chartering tours of the bay, launching her boat from the same fish house dock. Their family still makes their living exclusively through activities on the water, launching their boats from Cortez and reproducing their maritime heritage in a way. Although the fact that the daughter now provides tourists tours, rather than fish and like her mother, reveals in one family how the community as whole straddles the reproduction of their shared heritage: torn between commercial fishing and engaging the broader consumer economy based on tourism and residential development.

Importantly, what the charter captain's family has maintained of their maritime heritage includes their reliance on the health of local ecosystems to make living. Rather than having had to take a job with the county, like the activist, or going off to college and getting a job altogether unrelated to commercial fishing, a pattern participants described as increasingly happening, the charter captain's family remains directly reliant on the health of local environments, whether as commercial fishers or tour guides. In any final analysis, the community's ability to reproduce itself in such a way that they feel meaningfully connected to their heritage will pivot on the

future well being of the rich ecosystems that surround Cortez. The community and its heritage are tightly linked to the environment, and this is somewhat different from neighboring coastal towns in Florida, where the connection may not be as strong for residents. I explore this further in the next section.

### *Expressions of Environmental Values*

Cortezians discuss the environment, generally, and the opportunity they have to make a living from it, as a “gift from God.” They view the environment as something to cherish, study, learn from, and protect. Because Cortezians recognize their relationship to the environment as the source of their material well-being, they organize their community around that relationship. In effect, the way Cortezians express their values about the environment is insightful for understanding why so much of their efforts at organizing have been directed toward thwarting new development. Moreover, examining how Cortezians discuss their environmental values reveals an important point of divergence with the way they see developers and the recreational fishing industry to value the environment, namely regarding the role of economic growth.

Toward the beginning of our tour, gently idling past a dot of isolated mangroves in the kitchen, the charter captain directed our attention to the oyster bed peeking above the water, off the bow, on which it appeared we were about to run aground. And, rather than the speed of her approach hinting toward a collision, it was that her attention was fixed through the telephoto lens of a digital camera pointed skyward. With one hand gripping her camera, and the other alternating between the vessel’s wheel and throttle, she calmly described various sorts of birds, fish, and crustaceans that feed in and around the mangroves and oyster beds we might glimpse as she expertly missed the oysters with her boat, navigating by what appeared to be all her other

senses besides sight. It became apparent her camera was tracking the back and forth movements of a distant helicopter to the east, over the Preserve, diving toward the tops of trees as it turned around. I asked her about her interest in helicopter photography as my nervousness over hitting the oysters gave way to a mesmerizing sense of awe for her boating skills.

She recounted an incident about having once boated past Long Bar Point when she noticed a helicopter strafing a nest of bald eagles; diving toward the treetops, turning around in a back and forth pattern, like the one we had just witnessed, until the adult eagle flew away. She said she did not suspect the one we saw to have been doing the same thing, but that she did not recognize it and tried to take photos any time she noticed similar activity. She reported how there is a Coast Guard station in Cortez that has a helicopter, nearby farms that use them for spraying insecticides, and ones that take tourists over to the beach that occasionally fly by. But, she mentioned that the one over Long Bar Point was purposely trying to stress the eagles in attempt to get them to move their nest elsewhere. Developers, like Carlos Beruff, try to keep them off their properties using helicopters, because, she said, you cannot displace protected birds by law with developments. So, in order to keep their projects “shovel ready,” upon county approval, she assured me that developers go to extraordinary length to make sure their properties do not have nesting birds protected by law. She reported having taken pictures with a smartphone during that incident, which resulted in poor-quality images such that the helicopter could not be identified. Further, she mentioned that incident being the whole reason why she purchased a digital camera with a telephoto lens. She was attempting to get photographic evidence of environmental crimes she was sure that developers engaged in. She was clearly angry recounting the story, and felt that her efforts to photograph developers breaking environmental laws would help prevent them from destroying more mangroves for their projects.



The charter captain's narratives with which she guided her tour of the bays surrounding Cortez were nearly entirely comprised of two main themes: the environment and cultural aspects of the community in Cortez. Further, the thrust of her presentation illustrated the way in which she perceived those themes to relate, so that her perception of the relationship between the community and the environment was one of mutual dependence.

The village in Cortez has the appearance and feel of a blue-collar working class community. Older model vehicles, especially plain work trucks—pickups, vans, and SUVs—can be found in the driveways of the small white cottages that form the compact village. Commercial fishing equipment, like crab traps, boats, and trailers, are often stored in people's yards in such a way that it can be readily trucked to and from the waterfront. In other words, the equipment and gear they use for work is highly visible, unlike, for instance, how the homeowner's associations of more typical coastal neighborhoods would require such possessions to be stored in a garage, out of sight. The industrial trappings of the local fishing industry are everywhere. The general attire of locals observed in the village is strictly casual; often jeans, tee shirts, and sneakers. The closer one gets to the waterfront, the more the same sort of attire is barely hidden under coveralls. There are two Christian churches in the small community, and besides substituting fishing gear for farm equipment, the village and its people quite reminded me of the agricultural communities I would frequent in my previous job, working for the state in Central Florida, accents and all. The uniformity of the rows of white cottages and stereotypically working class dress code might give the superficial impression of a rather conservative community. Yet, the environmental values community members expressed, in discussions and otherwise, reveal attitudes more commonly associated with liberal or activist, communities.

For example, during the Cortez Annual Commercial Fishing Festival, I was walking past rows of booths in the street, and there were four brightly colored, hand-painted wooden signs with simple expressions of environmental values, prominently placed and worded like memes in social media. “Development is a BAD Word,” read one, underlined with three smiling fish. “BE KiND TO OUR PLANET,” suggested another sign in bright orange, pink, and green, peppered with red kisses. “STOP Polluting in the name OF EARF,” was another sign’s brightly colored message, which included a peace symbol. One red sign with sea foam green script warned the reader with, “The Greatest Threat to Our Planet is US,” stark in its two-tone palette and absence of any other symbols. The “US” in that warning worked to indicate both a sense of responsibility, rather than blame, and to indicate a unity. Those signs were only on display for the festival, their bright colors and prominence serving to highlight for visitors community values of importance, and to the exclusion of any other such signage I noticed that day. Indeed, outside the brightly colored restaurants, and when there is no festival, most of the noticeable art was handcrafted, small, wooden, and included a natural motif, typically of fish.

It became evident early on in my visits to the community that their experience of the environment is a critically important aspect of Cortezians’ daily life. The *Preserve*, the *kitchen*, the ongoing struggles to keep development at bay, all pointed to the complex ways in which the community integrated acknowledging, embracing, and protecting the natural environment in every facet of village life. So much so, that one of the questions I frequently asked participants was whether they have had an opportunity to discuss their concerns about development with developers themselves. It seemed as though much of their efforts to engage decision makers in that realm took place through official public meetings with the Manatee Board of County Commissioners, and I wondered what might become of a more personal encounter.

The rookie discussed having invited Whiting Preston (of the approved Lake Flores and Hunters Point Resort & Marina developments) to his home, and recalled his combination of astonishment and respect for the developer having accepted his offer. He told me of the developer's apparent magnanimous reception of his advice about the importance of protecting the mangroves along Palma Sola Bay and creating meandering paths for storm water runoff through the property such that natural wetland infrastructure could filter it before reaching the bay. Both the rookie and the charter captain seemed certain that Preston intended to at least "trim" the mangrove trees, however, the rookie seemed confident that his personal plea to preserve as much of them as possible had some impact. Although, paraphrasing, he hedged that bet with something to the effect of, "We'll see," due to the development, Hunters Point, being suspended somewhere between the end of its planning phase and the beginning of actual building when we spoke.

The charter captain told me about an outing she had on her tour boat alone with Carlos Beruff, owner of the property on Long Bar Pointe. She discussed taking the opportunity to point out important natural infrastructure in the bay, particularly the mangroves, and the services they provide to Cortez and the area generally. She pointed out wanting to have emphasized the natural beauty of the wetlands and the bays, thinking that doing so would make evident the significance of protecting them. Her attempts to communicate the importance of the natural environment to families in Cortez, however, were rebuffed. She told me how Beruff simply did not respond to her, but focused on what had already been built, inquiring something to the effect that, "If so-and-so got to build that over there, then why was it so difficult for him to build on his own property?" "He doesn't even know about the horseshoe crabs that come on his property," she lamented, referring to the way horseshoe crabs' surplus eggs provide seasonal sustenance for

other animals, all of which are connected and affect each other in complex ways. Her perception was that he was only concerned with illustrating the apparent unfairness of his position in having to fight for approval of his coastal developments.

Importantly, during my time collecting data in Cortez, Beruff, in addition to being a recently defeated primary challenger to Marco Rubio's Senate seat and a prominently successful real estate developer, he also became chairman for the State of Florida's current Constitution Revision Commission, appointed by the governor, Rick Scott. The commission is convened every twenty years for the purpose of providing an alternate, if redundant, means of revising the state's constitution. The commission holds meetings in various regions of the state where the public can air grievances and petition for making changes. The commission, comprised largely of individuals in the governor's cabinet, his appointees, and appointees of both the state's legislature and judiciary, are charged with the power to accept or reject proposed revisions.

The activist, taking the opportunity to spearhead reversing the 1994 net ban, told me about making his argument before the commission and presenting the petitions he collected to do so, which were mainly signed by commercial fishermen and their families. The commission's last of five hearings to host petitioners was held at the University of South Florida's Saint Petersburg campus, on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The activist recounted how, upon approaching the podium to speak, Mr. Beruff casually stood up and walked out of the room. The commission did not approve the proposal to reverse the ban, essentially ignoring the activist and his petitions. He told me Mr. Beruff knew who he was. For Beruff, he represented a group of stakeholders who tied up approval for Aqua by the Bay on Long Bar Point, and that he was not expecting any meaningful consideration. He expressed having nonetheless been deeply disappointed with Mr. Beruff's dismissive behavior. The activist perceived the encounter as humiliating, but typical of

his efforts to have a say in how his community is allotted access to public marine resources at the behest of state government.

I asked him to describe what he expects from the state, why he has continued to devote so much of his time over the past 20 plus years pursuing a repeal of the net ban in the face of such casual dismissal. Without skipping a beat the activist emphatically offered, “Acknowledgement!” It was as if he could live with having been, in his view, treated unfairly by the state, but the state’s unwillingness to have even acknowledged the injustice was crossing a line he has not been able to walk away from.

“They would have to admit the whole thing was a farce,” he said. “It was basically to put us [Cortez fishermen] out of business.”

#### *Private Property and Reconciling Values*

The entrepreneur was the second participant I had the opportunity to interview at length, after the matriarch. The matriarch’s apparently significant social prestige among Cortezians seemed to stem from a combination of unique personal traits. These traits included her old age, making her an important living conduit to the community’s history, a concept nearly inseparable from the community itself; her evident encyclopedic knowledge of that history and her skillful ability to communicate it, in astonishing detail, through storytelling; her lifelong work to engage various levels of government, from local to national, in effort to protect the community; and her mesmerizing ability to sustain an utterly electric level of charisma, matched only by the warmth of her kindness, either of which, at 43, I realized I could only hope to possess a fraction of, were I to live so long. So, I was eager to juxtapose my experience of the matriarch with interviewing

the entrepreneur, a middle-aged woman esteemed in Cortez for her own accomplishments and unique character.

It was in my discussions with the entrepreneur that the issue of acknowledging the authority of laws governing private property first came up, a theme eventually brought up by other participants as well. Unlike other emergent themes of mounting significance to this thesis project, however, the relative importance of private property law was mentioned as a sort of side note, rather than like the central significance that the net ban commanded in its seeming relation to nearly everything discussed. Tellingly, there was only one specific topic during which participants would feel compelled to submit their unsolicited views about private property, specifically in approaching discussions about how problems associated with overdevelopment seem as intractable as they do. The predominant view concerned the immutably protected rights that property owners have to develop their land in the way they generally want. Views on this topic ranged from acknowledging that that is the law and how the system works, to full throated agreement that it makes sense for a property owner to do what they legally can with their property.

The secretary at a fish house office reflected the former end of the range in referring to private property laws that seem to benefit developers. “I understand them,” she conceded, but loosely in the sense that she expects to be afforded the same right as developers to do whatever she likes with her possessions, even though there may be some aspect of inequity involved with the disparity of possessions between her and what developers own. The latter end of the range was represented in the entrepreneur’s sentiment, as she confidently disclosed that she, “believe[s] in property rights.” The entrepreneur, having been a ranking board member of FISH, went so far as to mention that, despite being personally against Aqua by the Bay, she felt that it was wrong

for FISH to interfere politically in that process and that FISH should just stick to taking care of the Preserve. These sentiments appeared to be only expressed in passing as a way for participants to reconcile their conflicting values of protecting what remains of the environment, on the one hand, and of adhering to the importance of playing by the rules, as it were, on the other.

The one exception involved my discussion with the fishmonger. After getting to the point in our conversation about outlining the ongoing problems presented by overdevelopment in the area, I asked him what he imagined could be done to address those problems. Referring to Carlos Beruff and his proposed Aqua by the Bay specifically, he suggested that the county could, “take his property by eminent domain,” in recognition of the environmental value of ecosystem services that the wetlands on Long Bar Point represent to the broader public.

I did not have the opportunity to explore the full significance of how the community’s values concerning property rights and how this may have shaped the boundaries of their imaginations about how to confront overdevelopment. For instance, a more thorough examination of why Cortezians apparently prioritize the importance of laws governing private property over those governing eminent domain could more fully elucidate local narratives that frame the environment, especially in terms of the ecosystem services it provides, as comprising extraordinary aspects of the public trust that occasionally require extraordinary interventions to protect. Perhaps there is something more just about the exclusiveness of private property, for Cortezians, than there is about the government’s ability to intervene on the public’s behalf in order to protect the environment; or, perhaps not. Either way, what I found interesting about this emergent issue of private property was its connection to both the net ban and climate change, in that ecosystem services provided by local natural environments, marine species that the local commercial fishing industry targets, and a stable climate conducive to supporting the

community's ability to reproduce itself are all issues deeply connected to the concept of access. The access Cortezians have to those things is certainly constrained by forces from the natural world, but other sources of such constraint are socially imposed as well, both from within their community and from its manifold connections to broader scales of society.

### *The Outsider*

The term "outsider" was used by participants to refer generally to anyone who was not a direct descendant of one of the founding families of the community or otherwise directly related to someone who was. Residents like the beekeeper that have lived and worked in the community for decades and have become integral actors in every day life only referred to themselves as outsiders, however, rather than being labeled as such by others in the community. The use of "outsider" to refer to someone else was strictly reserved for people from out of town, who were also referred to as "tourists," among other terms. In referring to fellow members of the community, participants would use the phrase "one of us." I got the sense that distinctions about the exact kind of outsider status one had depended on a range of social and personal circumstances within the community. For example, the beekeeper, who was a working fisherman, appeared to be held in higher regard by other Cortezians than "the outsider" who is the focus of the next section. As someone not involved in the commercial fishing industry, and by virtue of his use of they/them pronouns in referring to Cortezians, I chose "the outsider" to refer to this participant as an acknowledgement of his marginal status in the community, despite also having lived there for decades.

I first met the outsider at the monthly FISH board meeting in February. He was one of the two residents who attended the meeting for the purpose of asking to store his vessel at the



Boatworks, the one whose vessel was not of a commercial fishing type. At the board meeting it was clear he was regarded as an outsider, or otherwise somehow lacking social prestige relative to other board members and attendees from the community, due to the scrupulousness with which the board questioned him about every aspect of his request. The depth of skepticism displayed by one elderly board member in her grilling of him, who was all but silent for the rest of the meeting, was contagious to the extent that I found myself wondering what his “real” motives might be other than those he respectfully described.

After the meeting he was among the attendees who offered me his contact information. And because fishing for participants was among the primary reasons I attended, besides describing my research and observing how FISH operates in person, I was happy to take his information and contact him for an interview. Although I did so while overcoming a measure of brief paranoia about others at the meeting getting the impression that I was interested in interviewing outsiders for my project about their community.

In our meeting at the café over breakfast, the outsider described having moved to Cortez from up north as a young man in the mid 1970s. He has apparently lived in Cortez off and on since then. He discussed being drawn to living in communities like Cortez in other parts of Florida as well. His perception as he explained it was that most towns and cities in Florida start out as close-knit, small-scale communities like Cortez, but then change due to the economic growth and influx of people that inevitably result, such that every settlement in Florida, from village to city, is in some stage of that evolutionary development. He felt that people are drawn to move to particular places in Florida, like him, depending on which “stage of that evolutionary development” suits them, so that some move to Miami and others to rural parts of the panhandle and so on. Regardless of the accuracy of that perception, and the fact that it might be taken in a

negative way by locals, I felt his perspective was important to include for his admission that there is something about the feel of Cortez that keeps him coming back. He was an outsider, yet one who seemed to sense what made Cortez different from other Florida towns. So I asked him about that, about what he thinks makes Cortez so special.

“They don’t paint their houses!” he emphatically offered. “They have a culture of don’t fix things.”

His answer immediately struck me as absurd. The cottages in the village are perhaps quaint, relative to other cookie-cutter gated communities of McMansions along the coast. But they appeared well kept to me: most of them painted white, their small lawns mowed, and whatever fishing equipment they stored there was done so in a way that appeared to be organized, rather than just strewn about. Further, upon observing anyone in the village, Cortezians seemed to me to be engaged in fixing something, or at least arranging and otherwise moving equipment around. So, I pressed the outsider for his impression.

He refined his impression to explain how Cortezians will let things go. Their houses may be painted, he agreed, but they do not paint them with anything like the regularity of houses in other coastal communities. He felt that in Cortez something would not get tended to until it was absolutely necessary, prioritizing those material tasks that needed attention first. He described this as an aspect of the community’s attitude that, unlike other Florida locales, this community does not seek to constantly upgrade what they have. For him there was a palpable charm in living in a community that was not focused on accumulating more things or whose existence revolved around refurbishing what they already had in effort to conform with the seemingly arbitrary and fleeting trends around which so many other neighborhoods orbited in their ceaseless pursuit of curb appeal and, thus, market value.

The outsider's clarification articulated well with other participants' views when I asked them similar lines of questioning. For example, the way the entrepreneur put it was that, "The people here are real," and that, "they love what they do," rather than being more concerned about profits. There were a couple of fishermen in her office who suddenly felt compelled to back that sentiment up, describing how they just like to fish and be able to work on the water. I had the same experience in the other fish house in a separate interview with the secretary who replied in kind, and was likewise affirmed by another two fishermen sitting in her office. The charter captain and the rookie also expressed how what they perceived was different about their community was the way they pursued making a living by doing what they love, rather than for wanting to make money for its own sake, such as they imagined so many others do elsewhere. Additionally, the charter captain spoke to me about the difference between values in Cortez and those of the developers they fight. She mentioned that it is "greed" that motivates both the developers and the CCA, drawing the word out in uncharacteristically quiet anger, making her disdain clear.

Also interesting about the outsider's perspective was his perception that efforts made by FISH to purchase land for the Preserve was the most important thing the community has done to protect itself from being absorbed into the broader real estate and tourism economy for two reasons. First, he felt that the government respects property rights and would thus not pass or enforce any laws that might harm the community, although it was not made clear precisely what laws or harm he was referring to. And second, that the community, individually and through FISH, largely own the land in the village, on the waterfront and in the Preserve, which, for the outsider, has prevented Cortez from succumbing to "gentrification." Although that may have been the case, he also indicated that most of the fishermen no longer live in the village but just

outside, east of the Preserve, and that some of the village's residents, like him, are not in fact either from community or related to any of its founding families, a trend the beekeeper attested to having increased since the net ban. The beekeeper felt this was due to the fact that the market value of their waterfront properties in the village core had risen to the extent that the associated rise in property taxes priced those who could not continue fishing, at least full-time, out of their homes. Indeed, there were others I spoke with in the village who worked there or were related to one or more of the founding families that discussed having moved further inland, east of the Preserve, for that reason; nor could they afford to buy to a house in the village in the foreseeable future due to the increase in property values.

Thus, it appeared to be the case that the adverse social impacts resulting from the net ban had been working in tandem with a rise in property values, due to the continued development surrounding the village to, in effect, divide the community geographically and socially. Those social divisions were made apparent in three ways. First, I got the sense that those who once lived in the village and subsequently moved east of the Preserve, whether or not they were able to continue fishing full-time, lost something of their social status for simply not residing in the village any longer. Second, many who did leave the village were in fact not able to continue fishing full-time, or at all, which also led to a loss of social ties and associated status within the community. And third, many of the homes those groups once lived in had been sold to those who were neither related to founding families, nor commercial fishermen of any kind—in effect diminishing the social ties within the village itself.

In fact, the entrepreneur, a Cortezian of relatively high social status within the village (rather unlike the outsider), mentioned that she felt gentrification had already become a problem. She discussed how tourists would visit the area, appreciate it as a tourist, and then get the idea

they wanted to live in the village. And when they did make that move, she continued, they would find they did not appreciate living in the village at all. She felt that outsiders who moved to the village often found local ways of living improper; especially like storing one's crab traps or other fishing gear in one's yard. She felt they complained a lot about those things and gave the impression that the community has struggled quite a bit in adjusting to their new neighbors.

## **Chapter Nine:**

### **Climate Change**

Community perceptions regarding difficulties Cortez has endured in adjusting to a changing climate seem somewhat less urgent to my research participants than emerging difficulties resulting from the net ban or regional overdevelopment. For instance, although all participants had at least a passing familiarity with the concept of anthropogenic climate change, their concern for how the community experiences and copes with its perceived impacts appeared far less dire, generally, than their concerns about pollution, overdevelopment, or even traffic congestion. Even for those who described what they imagined as some of the looming existential threats that climate change poses to the community, most of the accompanying sense of alarm or injustice associated with other problems the community faces was all but absent in discussions about climate change. Further, such discussions rarely, if ever, revealed inherent or seamless conceptual connections that climate change had to other processes and trends for participants, such as the way adverse community impacts from the net ban and ongoing urban development projects were seen as resulting from the same injustice arising from some combination of corporate greed and government betrayal. For Cortezians, climate change and the challenges it presents were perceived as rather distant and disconnected from more pressing problems at hand.

### *Perceptions of climate change*

One way I typically opened a conversation about climate change was by asking what experience, if any, participants had of increased sea level, flooding, or storm surge. Being situated on the water with an elevation just above sea level I was counting on the community, and particularly experienced fishermen, to have some familiarity with recognizing such changes in hydrologic patterns, at least long term ones. Yet, no participants, fishermen or otherwise, conceded having experienced such change when I asked them by framing the question in terms of climate change.

Interestingly, however, I noticed that participants would bring up problems they experienced with flooding in observations they made about how the county was ineffective at maintaining adequate storm water and transportation infrastructure in attempts to keep up with the urban sprawl resulting from all the projects it approved, such that, by framing the discussion through development, adverse hydrologic impacts had been perceived as getting worse over the years, although with the exception of anyone having reported experiencing sea level rise specifically.

For example, sitting at the counter of the café one rainy morning, I overheard a conversation between one of the waitresses and a fisherman seated next to me in which they were swapping stories about how much worse the flooding had gotten on their streets, where their homes were, which resulted from rain events. They were comparing how much more of their streets and yards are now covered with water after it rained than they used to be, how much closer that water gets to their houses, and that the flooding is conspicuously worse at high tide. I asked the waitress, who reported having lived in Cortez for 30 years, what she attributes that trend to? “I’m not sure. I know all the development doesn’t help,” was her exasperated response.

She felt the roads and storm drains were inadequately maintained, and that the county was particularly delinquent in upgrading them in the face of so much development.

Complaints about the inadequacy of county infrastructure were common, as were people's associating it with their perception that Manatee County unfairly gives developers what they want while neglecting the infrastructure in older neighborhoods like the village in Cortez. As the secretary put it, "The original infrastructure they let go to hell in a hand basket. The developers always win." Referring to sewage spills in the bays that have become increasingly more common and problematic, and resulting from the overloading of storm water systems during heavy rainfalls, the rookie rhetorically asked, "Why are they [Manatee County] promoting more development?" To which he deliberately answered of the county commissioners in frustration, "They don't really care."

Such observations of hydrologic problems with county infrastructure were never associated with increased storm intensity or frequency. The closest anyone came, in fact, to spontaneously connecting problems with flooding to sea level at all was the waitress' observation of high tides worsening flood impacts experienced in Cortez.

The beekeeper appeared mystified when I asked him if he has had any experience with sea level rise, as if just asking about it did not make sense. He asked me why I would ask him about that, to which I responded with descriptions of news reports documenting "sunny day" flooding in Miami, how that city has spent tens of billions of dollars in upgrading their storm water infrastructure to give them a few more decades to figure something out before the Atlantic consumes what remains of their coastal infrastructure. He discussed not having been familiar with those stories. The beekeeper was generally familiar with the concept of anthropogenic climate change and some of the hazards it presents. His skepticism was not seemingly related to



the concept of climate change itself, rather he felt that the alarm over impacts it portends was unwarranted.

The greatest amount of alarm expressed by any participant, notably, was the rookie discussing articles he has read in magazines published for commercial fishermen. One article discussed the rise of aquaculture as a response to warming sea surface temperatures. Echoing concerns of other inshore fishermen, described by Robert Fritchey in his book, *Wetland Riders* (1993), the rookie was horrified at the prospect of an increase in pollution and finfish diseases associated with aquaculture. Most alarming for the rookie, however, was one article describing the catastrophic implications for microorganisms that form the base of global marine ecosystems resulting from ocean acidification. He discussed his understanding of that problem in profound tones, knowing that a collapse at the base of marine food chains would reverberate well beyond Cortez and its commercial fishing industry. Again, the rookie was not the only young fisherman, or Cortezian, I spoke with, but the only one I spoke with at length about the topic of climate change. His relative facility with, and emotional engagement in, discussing climate change and its associated issues was palpably different than such discussions I had with older Cortezians. Unlike issues surrounding the efficacy of reversing the net ban, however, I found no meaningful political insight regarding a potential division between younger and older Cortezians in this regard. It was only notable as an example of how climate change issues might inherently resonate more with younger people than it does with older ones, at least among those who seem to understand climate change and the implications of its future impacts.

The entrepreneur expressed a modicum of concern about the future impacts in that she casually suggested that Cortez would probably be underwater in a hundred years, but that she “doesn’t think about climate change much.” She argued that it was entirely conceivable that

human activity could be involved with global warming, but that the earth was likely “resilient” enough that it could withstand human activity. Referring to having witnessed so much of the local natural landscape having transformed into built environments, she attested to having witnessed how much human activity the environment could withstand. Although she appeared surprised at her own conclusion, as if she may have thought differently before the region was all built up. She discussed climate change in terms of “global warming,” using that as a frame in understanding how such planetary parameters are cyclical in nature, and arguing that such factors will always go up and down. Her overall perception indicated that she conceived of humanity as not in control of global processes.

The entrepreneur’s sentiments represented how most participants discussed climate change, that they understood the broad outlines, but essentially had more pressing issues to concern themselves with. And those concerns at the community level largely appeared to be tackling the routine tasks involved with their commercial fishing industry or otherwise fighting developers and government regulations that would threaten their ability to continue fishing in a culturally meaningful way.

My conversation about climate change with the outsider was interesting for the fact that he did not work directly in the local fishing industry, or have any direct ties with it in any capacity, aside from simply living in the village. He expressed sincere interest in discussing climate change and especially asking me about my research and what an anthropology student was doing studying some aspect of the topic. I told him about how I was interested in studying the way issues of development intersect with climate change, how public discussions of that kind are often mired in GHG or infrastructural metrics and do not include enough of the experiential human dimensions of climate change, and that I wanted to change that. I discussed how I

suspected that problems climate change presents to humanity will not be largely solved through technological innovation, but rather through better understanding of political processes that created the social conditions from which climate change had materialized. He appeared somewhat excited to hear that and expounded on why he agreed, particularly with the dubious notion about tech solutions. He talked about a group of people he referred to as “backwoods environmentalists,” whose lifestyles centered around consuming less, developing relationships that encourage trust and self-sufficiency, and making do with what one had would be the key to combatting climate change. In retrospect, the qualities he described of “backwoods environmentalists” seemed to resemble what he had previously discussed appreciating about the people of Cortez, and what had drawn him to move there.

The matriarch was particularly inquisitive about my research agenda, sincerely expressing generous interest in what it was about the connection between climate change and development that I aimed to investigate. She invited me to her home where we discussed Cortez and how she and her community have dealt with problems related to development and the net ban.

She recounted stories from her childhood in the village, how she and her classmates walked to school in bare feet, and how her dad would dry the roe from mullet on their tin roof, which they mixed in their grits for breakfast—while pointing up to that same roof on the house he built where she now lives. “You know,” she grinned, “instead of chicken eggs-n-grits, we had fish eggs-n-grits,” as she conveyed a sense of familiarity while pointing out how she knew growing up in Cortez must have been different than growing up somewhere else. Contrasting her rustic youth with stories she told about earning graduate degrees, her career as an educator, and raising her children who became accomplished cosmopolitan professionals provided a sense of

the tremendous change she has witnessed since her childhood, since before Cortez became beset on all sides with residential developments, high rise condominiums, strip malls and all such trappings of American consumer culture that make it difficult to distinguish one town from the next. The fishing village maintains its own unique working-waterfront feel that exudes “old Florida,” despite all the development. And in all the hours I spent at the matriarch’s waterfront home on Sarasota Bay that her family built so many years ago, as she told me stories and gave me a tour of her property, I never once saw her in shoes.

The matriarch was happy to discuss climate change and, unlike some residents half her age, did so comfortably while expressing deep concern at the prospect of what impacts, like sea level rise, mean for the future of Cortez. She never pretended to have expert scientific knowledge about climate change, instead just approaching the topic as anyone casually would about understanding how evolution works, or any number of other popularly understood scientific discoveries, and seamlessly folded it into the rest of her unique personal perspective from which she derives meaning generally; a perspective, interestingly, which was deeply shaped by a faithful commitment to her Protestant understanding of Christianity.

As comfortable as she was in discussing climate change when I asked her about it, however, I noticed that it took effort on my part to steer the conversation in that direction. Her proclivity to return the discussion back towards Cortez’s history, commercial fishing, or problems with development indicated how climate change was more of a curiosity, or abstraction, than a viscerally significant aspect of her lived experience. The injustices of the net ban, and the pollution and habitat loss that has accompanied overdevelopment presented more tangibly imminent threats to her community. The net ban has unjustly and materially harmed many people in Cortez, including members of her family. Increasing pollution and the

disappearance of natural space that accompanies overdevelopment has adversely and directly impacted the marine resources her community has always depended on, and has done so within relatively short timeframes.

In discussing problems of climate change with Cortezians, it was as if one had to casually look past the more immediate injustices of other social processes, seemingly distantly related to climate change, with which the community was constantly struggling.

I brought up the issue of rising global temperatures with the beekeeper at the café over breakfast on a particularly warm winter morning in mid-February. I described to him having a personal, unscientific sense that winters are now warmer in Florida than when I was growing up, a few decades ago, and asked him if he has noticed anything like that. I felt that such a line of questioning could break through the skepticism he expressed in discussing his lack of experience with flooding or sea level rise. He surprised me by agreeing that he has noticed feeling that winters are warmer than they used to be. He described having noticed that when the temperature does drop in winter, it does not drop down, to freezing for instance, as often or for as long as it did just decades ago. However, again, it felt more like he was describing an arbitrary curiosity than making a conceptual connection to climate change. Even still, I pressed him by asking what adverse impacts he may have experienced due to warmer winters, if any.

He went on to describe how the height of mullet season occurs sometime between December through January, during their spawning. He discussed how fishermen come over from the east coast and other parts of Florida, and how this is the time when those who have had to find other full-time employment due to the net ban will fish for mullet part-time. The beekeeper explained that he mostly fishes for baitfish throughout the year, but that, like him, other fishermen congregate in mullet season specifically because their roe commands significant

market prices, well beyond what the per pound market price of mullet fillets fetch. Harvesting the roe is apparently a financial lifeline for some Cortez fishermen who have had to make due working jobs in the broader gig economy after having had their gill nets outlawed in 1994. The beekeeper further explained how relatively cooler and turbulent bay waters in the winter will drive the mullet to school more tightly together, as some form of protection, he suggested. And also, that he attributes the warmer winter seasons for the historically low mullet harvests for the past four years, consecutively, due to the mullet not bunching up in tighter schools making catching them much more difficult with the now tiny nets they are legally allowed to use. He stated that buyers of mullet roe in Asian markets have paid high prices for the delicacy for decades, but worries about the future of that market and its ability to continue to provide financial lifelines to local fishermen hit hard by government regulations.

Further complicating the seasonal mullet harvest, beyond out-of-town fishermen adding their nets in prime locations in direct competition with local fishers, the beekeeper (as well as the entrepreneur, the matriarch, and others) discussed how fishermen coming from other parts of the state have recklessly wasted mullet's white roe. White roe comes from the males and can be eaten, but does not command the high market value that the females' red roe does. He, and others, complained that out-of-town fishermen have thrown the white roe back in the water, precluding both those fish from successfully mating as well as anyone from eating it. The thoughtlessness of such a practice for Cortezians was deeply offensive and drove home the notion for them that out-of-towners only come to make a short term profit at the expense of the most culturally and materially significant species to Cortezians. Efforts by locals to prevent such waste have resulted in FWC rule changes making the discarding of white roe illegal, such that it

must be sold for market value, but those I spoke to about it were deeply skeptical that the rule change would prevent some from discarding white roe anyway.

It became clear that part-time fishermen's tendency to only fish during mullet season had the effect of other full-time fishermen associating them with their out-of-town competitors, contributing to the social strain between part-time and full-time local Cortez fishermen, and despite the fact that those full-time fishermen, like the beekeeper, expressed empathy for the situation that has led to some of their colleagues' part-time status. Additionally, this pattern of social strain seemed to be reinforced by the way stone crabs are seasonally harvested, by the same three groups of fishermen, and placing significantly greater pressure on evidently declining stone crab populations in doing so. The rub for full-time fishermen regarding out-of-towners harvesting stone crabs, however, was due to fishermen from elsewhere not acknowledging the unofficially recognized right of local fishermen to place their traps in certain choice locations, an infraction that has apparently led to incidents of physical threats and outright violence.

Nonetheless, it was clear that the beekeeper expressed more concern about declining mullet harvests and the social stresses it caused in his community, rather than pondering the possible connections between those things and climate impacts.

### *Climate Reception*

I asked the rookie about the magazines in which he had read articles about climate change, to which he replied there were a few commercial fishing magazines he read. Later, he texted me photographs of their covers. Among the publications were *Pacific Fishing*, a self-described "business magazine for fishermen," *Fishermen's News*, "the advocate for the commercial fisherman," and *National Fisherman*, "informed fishermen-profitable fisheries-

sustainable fish.” I found it interesting that such business-oriented periodicals were publishing articles about important aspects of climate change related to their industry. I often get the sense in popular media news reporting that American “industry” is ideologically monolithic, conservative, and thus generally thwarts policy designed to address climate change. Commercial fishing, as it is represented in the rookie’s sample of magazines, however, appears at least attuned to tracking and communicating climate change research and the technical, rather than social, implications of climate impacts relevant to its industry. After all, the rookie articulated genuine concern for and understanding of the implications climate change has for his work and community generally, and evidently so beyond other participants I spoke with.

Additionally, the rookie mentioned having discussions about climate change with his colleagues. Although he mentioned that climate change was not a particularly common subject of discussion among fishermen, he attested to the topic having occasionally come up among his friends at work. This admission contrasted sharply with the other fishermen I spoke with who described never having conversations about climate change with their colleagues, even though they appeared to command a basic understanding of the scientific principle of anthropogenic climate change and its impacts.

With the exception of the rookie’s trade magazines, all the participants reported that the main way they receive information about climate change was either in local broadcast television news reports, or local newspapers. There were some passing mentions of seeing climate change related content on the internet, or in social media, but, when pressed about those online sources, participants would essentially explain that they were on local news media websites or their postings in social media. I got the distinct impression that local news outlets were not making important connections between climate change and its implications for the local commercial



fishing industry, beyond occasional suggestions that sea level rise may become a problem for those who live near the coast at some point in the distant future.

## **Chapter Ten:**

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

*Research Question #1: How do relationships of regional power contribute to vulnerability to climate change impacts in Cortez, Florida?*

Despite the enormous efforts that Cortezians make in the organization of their community to protect the environment, curb overdevelopment, and decide for themselves how to fish, inequities in the political landscape between Cortez and corporations that compete with it for access to local natural resources results in continued loss of access to those resources by commercial fishermen. According the residents who participated in the study, this trend has weakened social ties within the community and threatens its long-term ability to reproduce itself.

The exhaustibility of the natural resources Cortezians harvest informs their sensibility about the diminishing returns one encounters beyond certain limits of pursuing endless growth. These limits appear to be extended outward from their fishing activities to inform the way they live in the village, and is reflected in the modesty of their homes and businesses relative to other neighboring communities, as well as is in the way they describe for themselves what it means to be “traditional.” Despite these limits, obvious differences in individual socioeconomic circumstances exist, but not on anything like the scale of what one finds in the sprawling urban landscapes across the bays, and which surround the peninsula where their village is located.

Cortezians largely fish in regional and local waterways, and largely market what they produce from within their community. Whereas some of their products, like mullet roe, find customers as far away as Asia, and some of their commercial fishing expeditions take place at sea, the vast majority of their production and marketing activity has historically taken place in and around the village itself. However, recent historical events and trends since about the early 1990s have begun changing this pattern, such that, as Smith et al. (2003) observe, the economic center of gravity for Cortezians has been shifting away from the village toward an increased reliance on service sector jobs related to the predominantly tourism based economy of the broader region. Fishermen in Cortez do not quit fishing and move outside the community because they want to. Rather, such trends have materialized of necessity, as development projects have continued to displace natural landscapes and the sport fishing industry's manipulation of political processes have coordinated to limit fishermen's access to marine resources. The Cortezians I spoke with discussed how their access to those public resources has been curtailed in terms of the starkly different ways they value them compared to those from outside their community whose economic activity has either reallocated the resources for themselves, or otherwise destroyed them altogether.

First, for Cortezians, residential, tourism, and retail development in the area has reached a critical mass such that what does remain of the natural environment has recently been approved for further, extremely redundant, development. Cortezians who I spoke with understand overdevelopment in terms of its adverse effects on the health of fish stocks and the environment generally. They understand overdevelopment as having replaced ecosystems their village industry has depended on for generations with communities of tourists and newcomers that collectively serve as sources of pollution in the bays. Cortezians experience that pollution as

having further depleted stocks of publicly owned marine resources well beyond the effects of having replaced natural landscapes with condominiums and gated communities of vacation homes. And because they value the fish they catch and the environments from which they do so as a central aspect of their ability to maintain and reproduce their community, they find overdevelopment ugly, imposing, and restrictive.

Second, Cortezians find the recreational fishing industry at the quasi-national scale (and, notably, not sport fishermen themselves necessarily) as having profoundly contributed to their loss of access to marine resources. Both through the 1994 net ban and serving as a significant part of developers' marketing schemes to bring more tourists and residents to the area, a win-win scheme that has provided enormous growth for both industries. That the sport fishing industry won their net ban deceptively arguing theirs was somehow more environmentally friendly than the commercial fishing industry is particularly galling for Cortezians in light of the booming impact that has had, in turn, on regional development, and not just because Cortezians feel a deep sense of responsibility in protecting the environment. It is because the sport fishing industry primarily values marine resources as a way to grow their bottom line, contrary to Cortezians primarily valuing them for the mutually beneficial relationship they perceive to have developed, is why participants I spoke with feel the sport fishing industry has made their community existentially more vulnerable than before the net ban.

Further adding to their sense of heightened vulnerability is the fact that their contests with both developers and the sport fishing industry has been mediated through ostensibly democratic institutions of local and state governments, as well as in mass media. Cortezians do not feel, generally, that the Manatee Board of County Commissioners (MBCC) looks out for their interests in any meaningful way. Developments, like Aqua by the Bay, have been approved for

so long, and in direct violation of the county's own building codes, Cortezians feel that the county is much more beholden to the moneyed interests of developers whose projects are used as promissory notes to the county in the form of increasing the tax base from which it operates. Again, by centering the value of financial growth over sustaining Cortez's ability to maintain its community through protecting wetlands from development, participants I spoke with described their relationship to county government in terms of betrayal and casual disregard. These sentiments were also extended to state government for abetting the use of a constitutional referendum in determining the outcome of the net ban, and for the cozy relationship developers like Carlos Beruff have with governors like Rick Scott, whose administration previously approved Aqua by the Bay as an environmental easement project. And it is in mass media these contests publicly take place. For example, despite fairly good reporting in some cases on the environmental concerns of local development projects, regional newspapers, struggling with their own financial circumstances since the rise of social media, have doubled down on courting moneyed sponsors through advertising and in their reporting, resulting in overall messaging that promotes the value of growth. Additionally, bylines of local celebrity reporters were used in sporting magazines (the most widely circulated of which is personally owned by the CCA of Florida's chapter president, Karl Wickstrom) in which those "reporters" promoted the net ban as a way to protect the environment.

Aside from all the metrics regarding the jobs commercial fishermen have lost, the breakup of families that results, and the adverse mental health impacts reported by researchers like Smith et al. (2003), my ethnographic study points to growing vulnerabilities in the form of emerging social divisions within Cortez itself, which have directly resulted from the community's political contests with developers, the CCA, and government institutions whose

values of endless economic growth have squeezed the community in Cortez in deeply unjust ways. The emergent differences in social status between families who have moved out of the village and those who have stayed, between part-time and full-time fishermen, between those who are still able to fish and those who are not, and between those who support the thrust of FISH's work and those who do not (indicating a possible generational rift) demonstrates a weakening of social ties within the community that renders it increasingly more vulnerable to climate impacts.

Additionally, participants I spoke with left me with the impression that they feel their community has been “left out in the cold.” The adversarial nature of relationships they expressed having developed with the county, state, developers, and organizations like the CCA have fostered a sense of disconnection with broader society that indicates a weakening of social ties that extends well beyond the community itself. After all, local developers and the CCA—a consortium of corporate interests who variously operate between subnational and international scales—represent corporate interests that are altogether in a separate industrial sector from commercial fishing, meaning their competition is one that takes place outside the market and within the formal political realm.

The outcomes of such contests are routinely determined in favor of corporate interests over those of local fishermen, because those corporations—developers and the sport fishing industry—have more financial and political capital with which to influence the formal political process through entirely legal means. Cortezians feel that the political process has failed them in their attempts to curb overdevelopment and defend their right to fish in a culturally significant way. The loss of community that results from social divisions created by that economic and political inequity, divisions catalyzed by lost jobs and homes, and adverse health impacts (Smith

et al. 2003), makes the community increasingly vulnerable. The impacts from overdevelopment and the legal corruption of state fisheries management are cumulative, building up over time as economic growth continues apace. Left unchecked, the trajectory of the community, as regretfully predicted by many participants, as well as Ben Green (1985), would be one where the community increasingly relies on service sector jobs, unrelated to commercial fishing, and where more Cortezians move outside the village due to lost income and livelihoods. Such a trajectory would unwind the local fishing industry, unwinding the community itself.

Another indication of increasing vulnerability is the loss of locally developed trade knowledge and skills. Such knowledge includes a wide range of cooperatively organized responsibilities for tasks that are all infused with values aimed at protecting the environment and managing their fisheries sustainably. Moreover, as discussed by some participants, some knowledge has lost its proprietary importance as it is now available on the internet. This results in undue competition from part-time fishermen outside the community, as well as in precluding one of its former roles as cementing intergenerational social ties as it has been historically passed down on the job from older to younger fishermen. Indeed, although no former commercial fishermen were interviewed for this project, participants lamented the loss of skills their community once had resulting from the loss of fishing jobs due to the net ban. Finally, it was also clear in the discussions among board members at the FISH meeting I attended that the community already struggles significantly to keep their boatbuilding traditions afloat.

Cortezians conveyed in their discussions with me that the greed of wealthy business interests and their use of that wealth to overpower the interests of Cortezians within formal political processes have created more vulnerabilities for the community. In much the same way Scheper-Hughes (2005) observed that multi-scalar political dynamics in New Orleans create

social disasters that act to incubate susceptibility to climate impacts, regional and state politics have had disastrous social and economic consequences for Cortezians. Lost jobs and income that Cortezians describe have resulted from the net ban and adverse environmental impacts of development are experienced as injuries that threaten their community's long-term ability to sustain itself, a sobering reality made evident in participants' discussions about their collective future.

Despite those perceived prospects, however, the community persists. Having outlived many other fishing communities like it in the state, their persistence highlights how Cortezians are resilient in the face of environmental and social change. Using the principles for resilience employed by Berkes and Jolly (2001), the community appears to be made most resilient by its ability to organize itself. Whereas most of the political battles Cortezians have engaged in, with developers and the CCA, resulted in loss and harm to the community, their efforts at organizing have at least slowed progress of some environmentally harmful development projects and led to the creation of the Preserve, unanimously seen among participants as an important achievement for protecting Cortez. Such organizational capacity to confront the problem of habitat loss in Sarasota and Palma Sola Bays could provide other working class coastal communities a template for building resilience in enough spaces within the sprawling suburban landscape of the region to change the course of socially destructive, carbon-intensive development patterns. In order to provide that template for other communities, however, Cortez would have to be regionally imagined as more than the historic, traditional fishing village its museums and cultural center portray. To that end, in keeping with the applied aspects of this study, I intend to pursue ways to communicate the importance of how and why the community organizes itself to the public, one model for locally and historically developed, ecologically grounded resilience strategies.



Additionally, using the resilience framework from above, the community demonstrates a great capacity to learn, adapt, and build, as well as maintain control over its internal structure (Berkes and Jolly 2001).

*Research Question #2: How is climate science received in Cortez, Florida? In what ways does translation of climate science (or lack thereof) relate to local vulnerabilities?*

Residents in Cortez generally receive information about climate change from mass media and local news reports, mainly on television, newspapers, and the internet. Although two of the younger fishermen I spoke with shared some nationally circulated commercial fishing trade magazines, in which pieces were published about how specific climate impacts affect particular aspects of fisheries, this kind of information appeared to be isolated to among them and their circle of friends. The younger fishermen described that they occasionally had conversations about climate change with their colleagues, but the older fishermen reported that they virtually never do.

As discussed above, while some aspects of climate change are occasionally reported in local news media, media are generally geared toward increasing consumption and the veneration of economic growth as an important indicator of social health. Although no quantitative data was collected or analyzed comparing the difference between the amount of advertising in support of consumption with the amount of reporting on climate change in local news media for this study, qualitatively that difference appears galactic. And similarly so between the amount of news reporting that covers topics related to the virtues of economic growth and the amount dedicated to communicating climate science or its impacts on economic sectors other than real estate or property insurance. For example, in using the search feature commonly provided on the main

page of a local news outlet's website to find information about climate change in their reporting, one is automatically confronted with a number of different ads promoting the purchase of everything from low-interest financing to psychiatric medications, and similarly so for their printed editions. Comparatively, the results of such a search provide relatively scant reports about climate change. Additionally, local newspaper outlets dedicate entire sections of their reporting to the booming real estate market, reporting that often functions as little more than sponsored advertising for that industrial sector.

Of notable exception is a special report series, titled Rising Seas, which is published in the Sarasota Herald Tribune and in collaboration with newspapers from around the state (<http://gatehousenews.com/risingseas/landing/site/heraldtribune.com>). This series reports mainly on climate issues related to adaptation, and particularly regarding infrastructural impacts from sea level rise. However, the series reports little of issues concerning climate mitigation, and in fact will publish whole pieces without using the term "climate change" at all. Although one piece recently published in the series, by reporter Tom McLaughlin, "Political waves over sea level rise," is a rather brave attempt to correct that journalistic disconnect by confronting the politics of climate change and how they affect the way we discuss and understand the overall problem (<http://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20180827/political-waves-over-sea-level-rise>). The piece begins with McLaughlin's assertion: "A deep political divide runs through American politics. It's a gap stretching from a place where talk of sea level rise ends and conversation about climate change begins." This singular piece was the only one I have noticed to date that begins to meaningfully address the significance of how competing values relate to the politics of climate change in news media local to Cortez.

Cortezians experience regional economic development as tourist-trap eyesores that displace the natural resources they depend on with strip malls, luxury resorts, recreational boating and vehicular traffic, and the toxic soup of fertilizers, petroleum products and human biological waste that results. The community is profoundly sensitive to the extent to which those factors have led to fishermen losing their jobs, and such that it is apparently desensitized to attributing those losses to the growing adverse impacts of climate change. Therefore, one way that climate reception makes the community vulnerable is by being mediated through outlets that almost entirely obscure climate science within their overall messaging geared toward promoting the very kind of economic growth that gives rise to climate change. Conceptually insulated from connecting climate change to adverse environmental impacts by local news media, the community—organized around thwarting excessive development and unjust fisheries management—is resigned to adapting in ways that Steffen et al. (2018) suggest could become altogether obsolete within our lifetimes as climate feedbacks eventually render any efforts at curtailing carbon emissions unable to prevent runaway climate breakdown.

In examining how climate reception is related to climate vulnerability, one confronts the issue raised by Chakrabarty (2017) about the analytical pitfalls of equating climate change with capitalism. Specifically, rather than confusing the relationship between capitalism and climate change as one of equivalence, it is important to keep in mind that their relationship is one of cause and effect, respectively. Critically, it is also important to keep in mind that there are other adverse social effects that arise from capitalist arrangements, despite whatever economic gains many observers choose to attribute to such economic arrangements, such that capitalism, politically supported by ideologies based on the virtues of growth-at-any-cost, is what gives rise to both injustice in the social sphere and climate change in the biosphere. And that climate

impacts from the biosphere in turn precipitate further social injustices, for example the way poor people are disproportionately affected, is in effect of a secondary order to the initial injustices experienced in the social sphere by human groups embedded in capitalist arrangements.

Conceiving of the cascading injustices precipitated through capitalist arrangements as primary (direct adverse social impacts of extractive growth-based economics), secondary (longer-term adverse climate impacts feeding back from direct impacts to the biosphere), and so forth, provides an analytical perspective that both prioritizes the significance of social injustice reported in the perceptions of groups anthropologists study.

In this light, climate vulnerability can be thought of as of a secondary order to social vulnerability, in that the groups we study experience the injustices precipitated by unfair political and economic configurations rather directly and primarily, relative to how longer-term climate impacts secondarily precipitate further injustice. And, taken with the way that media generally laud the virtues of economic growth, on the one hand, while abjectly failing to communicate to lay audiences discoveries made by climate scientists and their social implications, on the other, explains why the beekeeper would fail to conceptually connect year-over-year losses in seasonal mullet harvests to climate change, as well as why the waitress would attribute her observations of decadal increases in flooding events to overdevelopment before she would conceptualize any connections they had with climate change.

Therefore, the mechanism that has directly precipitated all the social injustice and its associated vulnerabilities reported by Cortezians in my study, namely growth-at-any-cost capitalism, is the same mechanism that gives rise to secondary climate vulnerabilities, like increasing incidents of flooding.

Within the community of Cortez, endless growth is seen everywhere around them, and they viscerally sense that as precipitating whatever social vulnerabilities they experience. The only reason that the natural resources they access to reproduce their community are considered renewable is because they socially manage them in a way that the fish can replenish their populations, and there is no more room in their management regime for valuing endless growth than there is in the finite environment from which they catch their fish.

*Research Question #3: How has the community in Cortez, Florida experienced climate change, particularly commercial fishers who rely on marine resources for their livelihoods? To what extent do community members directly rely on marine resources for their livelihoods and how has this changed over time?*

As discussed above, whatever climate impacts the community expressed having experienced—decadal increases in flooding, or several consecutive years of declining seasonal mullet harvests—they attribute to overdevelopment. Whereas climate “attribution” studies focus on the proportional contribution climate change has provided to particular extreme weather events within appropriately apportioned statistical variance, Cortezians I spoke with do not perceive such impacts as related to climate change at all. In part, this may be due to the growth-based value systems promoted in local and mass media news reporting outlets. Speaking with participants, however, reveals that they perceive just about any environmental impacts they experience, to their fisheries or to their homes, as resulting from overdevelopment, and to the complete exclusion of climate change. Interestingly, Cortezians view the kind of overdevelopment that has led to significant habitat loss as antagonizing to their fishing heritage and way of life, whereas climate science sees such overdevelopment and its expansion of carbon-

intensive consumer culture as driving global climate change. Recognizing that this disjuncture exists between perceptions that Cortezians and climate scientists have about the problems overdevelopment presents could help researchers that are working to better understand how to communicate climate science to lay publics. But, significantly, in the absence of other explanations like climate science, that Cortezians readily blame so much of their perceived vulnerabilities and harms they absorb on development and government regulations attests to the degree of trauma those variables have inflicted on the community. The stark terms of injustice with which they describe to have been treated by county and state governments, as well as the CCA, reflects having experienced a grave level of aggravation, particularly by a kind of traditional community that has long outlived others like it on the Gulf Coast, and having weathered so much still intact.

In assessing the extent to which the community relies on marine resources using an ethnographic approach enables one to assess how the community in effect defines itself. For example, participants spoke about their industry losing jobs in terms of the social marginalization that out-of-work fishermen and their families' experience. Participants also communicated such loss of personal livelihoods as harmful to the whole community through loss of social ties and fishing knowledge. In the end, Cortez is a commercial fishing community. Those who do not live there, or whose life's work was/is not closely tied to the water in some capacity, for Cortezians, are not members of their community. But even some who do will attest to their consideration as "outsiders," like the beekeeper, even ones who the community holds in high regard. If one has a last name of one of the founding families from North Carolina, or is directly related to someone who does, and they still live in the village, chances are they directly rely on local marine resources and are in fact an integral part of the community. As the entrepreneur put it in so many

words, “some of us may not get along sometimes, but we know how to trust each other, we help each other out,” describing what makes Cortez different from other Gulf Coast communities in terms of social solidarity, and speaking to their underlying values of cooperation, rather than competition. Not only does that hold true for their approach to commercial enterprise, but points to the degree with which they see their community as existing because of their enterprise, in effect blurring the lines between work and play—to the point of defining their lives around commercial fishing. They have the most genuine love for what they do, and they see what they do as maintaining their community. For Cortezians, fishing and their community are one in the same thing.

*Research Question #4: What policy recommendations could be articulated for local municipal development and planning agencies that could meaningfully reduce vulnerability to climate change impacts in Cortez, Florida?*

Local development and planning agencies could most benefit the communities they serve in the region by questioning their approach to and valuations of economic growth. Mark Hafen, a planner and USF faculty member who has studied climate change in the region, makes the point that the extent of overdevelopment in the region is such that it creates its own vulnerabilities, and in the absence of the threats posed by sea level rise (2016, 126). However, since sea level rise is part of our reality, he continues by observing how it “can alter or threaten [...] vital [coastal] ecosystems, which are often already stressed by development and may need special protection to remain viable (Hafen 2016, 135).” In other words, at this point, the viability of ecosystems and communities on the coast of Florida hinges on our ability to protect what remains of those ecosystems. Much of Hafen’s discussion of protecting coastal ecosystems, particularly wetlands

and mangroves, revolves around identifying the services they provide to society, some of which are notoriously difficult to quantify. Such services include filtration of storm water runoff, absorption of floodwater, carbon sequestration, provisioning natural resources in support of commercial enterprise and recreation, and providing habitat to marine life and other plants and animals. The carbon sequestration component is significant in protecting coastal ecosystems for pursuing strategies of climate mitigation in concert with strategies of climate adaptation, a combination that builds resilience (Hafen 2016).

Critically, whenever an application to build on undeveloped coastal property is submitted to county decision-makers, I would propose, at a minimum, that such an application be held until all stakeholders could be identified and contacted for a response that demonstrably represents the community they claim to speak for. Additionally, communities like Cortez, with an official claim of historic or cultural significance, communities that have experience in actually coping with the kind of change coastal overdevelopment would bring should automatically be made part of the decision-making process. Rather than relegating their significance to historical curiosity, the knowledge they have locally developed should be leveraged at every opportunity.

During my interview with the entrepreneur, when she felt comfortable asking me about my research agenda, she asked if I was looking to remake other coastal communities to be like Cortez. I tried to explain that that was not my intention, as, at that time, I had not yet delved into what community members had to say about what made her community so unique, so “traditional.” Over the course of my research, however, it became clear that it is the ways Cortezians value their commercial fishing industry that is unique. I imagine that their thoughts about the environmental and social effects of unchecked economic growth would insert a sense of social responsibility into development conversations that have evidently been missing so far.



Attempting to transform other coastal communities into a Cortez-style commercial fishing village seems as absurd to me now as it did when I began this project. But, if the entrepreneur asked me the same question today, I would tell her that other communities in the area could benefit greatly by critically analyzing what material effects their values and assumptions regarding economic growth have to society and the environment, and that simply understanding why that is important would be nearly a tectonic shift from how decisions are currently made about development.

Hafen (2016) further observes that “there may be political resistance among local elected officials who are reluctant to take action that may be perceived as hurting the local economy or as deterring growth (137).” I would absolutely agree with him, but also point out that the values behind those perceptions are increasingly shared by fewer people as evident in the growing popularity of socialist movements since the financial crash of 2008, especially among millennials. In this light, rethinking my original research question as being directed toward decision-makers alone, I would broaden my efforts to reach out to vulnerable coastal communities directly and find ways of supporting their efforts to be heard by those whose decisions could have adverse social and environmental impacts.

Further broadening my research question, I would propose to regional counties that law enforcement efforts in local waterways to reduce recreational boaters from disregarding no-wake zones be stepped up. Also, counties should take steps to reduce boating traffic over grass flats. Such efforts might reduce the damage to ecosystems that provide habitat to marine species of both recreational and commercial significance. And by using revenue generated from fines in such enforcement efforts could be used for better signage, marking underwater habitats, like grass flats, that are difficult to see, especially by tourists unfamiliar with the area.

Additionally, as a response to the adverse social impacts of the 1994 net ban, I would propose to the state's judiciary that any consideration of changes to commercial fishing regulations that might redistribute access to marine resources from one to another sector of the economy be strictly forbidden to be decided through constitutional referendum. Rather, such decisions should be made in publicly mediated forums, through the regulatory agencies that enforce fisheries rules, where commercial fishermen are provided a meaningful way to negotiate the terms of such a change.

#### *Limitations and Future Research Directions*

Perhaps the greatest limiting factor of this research is the low number of community members who agreed to participate in interviews, and particularly because only one of the younger fishermen participated. Because the most significant source of vulnerability detected had to do with weakening social ties and loss of commercial fishing knowledge related to generational divisions, this project could have been refined with more participation, particularly from younger fishermen. Relatedly, further pursuing conversations with participants specifically addressing the social impacts and nature of their loss of trade knowledge would enhance understanding of their vulnerability and possibly support better developed proposals to increase their resilience. Although, those who spoke about their trade knowledge did so generally, making it clear that divulging specifics of such information required more rapport than I was able to foster in the time I collected data.

One direction this research could benefit from in pursuing a better understanding of the issues would be to explore the perspectives of those involved in both regional development and fisheries management decision making, within municipal and state agencies as well as from

within those respective industries. Such an exploration would reveal more clearly the way the feedback loop operates between developers and the recreational fishing industry that partly drives growth in local development. Toward that end, I found the media kit ([http://2qgjc71eqsc6312s2nj622c59g.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/2017\\_FSF\\_Media\\_Kit.pdf](http://2qgjc71eqsc6312s2nj622c59g.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/2017_FSF_Media_Kit.pdf)) for the magazine, Florida Sport Fishing, to provide tantalizing clues as to how commercial advertising for sport fishing targets potential customers for tourism and boutique luxury residential communities in Florida. Such magazines like this and Karl Wickstrom's, Florida Sportsman, mentioned earlier, bring together in one publication the recreational fishing industry, vacation and real estate advertising, and professional news reporters who use their status to advocate for CCA initiatives.

### *Conclusions*

The community members in Cortez, Florida demonstrate a variability in core values across the broader economic order of the region and beyond. Although the community's commercial fishing industry forms the heart of their economy, the way they value the readily recognizable features of their enterprise appears markedly different from the predominantly growth-based values of enterprise among the broader public. Delving into what locals believe makes their community "traditional," or special to them in a way that they perceive differentiates their community from others, reveals a system of values that centers the integrity of their relationships with one another and to the environment, rather than being centered on growth. Additionally, their value system, as shared with me by my research participants, appears to be marked by prioritizing the maintenance of what they have and revering what they have over attempts to improve or grow what they have without limit.

Interestingly, Cortezians appear to generally align with the logic of dominium as it relates to private property (Graeber 2014). But, that makes a certain sense in light of the fact that they own the means of their production outright: the waterfront, the markets, their houses, boats, fishing gear, labor, and the knowledge locally produced to run it all belongs to them. Moreover, their adherence to the logic of dominium undergirds their strategy of protecting the environment by purchasing land for the Preserve, in effect turning the table on developers by using private property in one case to prevent more loss of habitat.

Their access to local, publicly owned marine resources puts their values and material well-being at odds with growth-based economic systems around them from larger scales of society which opportunistically views those resources as way to grow their own wealth. Although their access to natural resources has been curtailed by patterns of regional overdevelopment and a gear ban enforced by state government, Cortez fishermen continue to find ways of accessing enough of those resources and sustaining many aspects of their way of life. In many ways, the community members' ideas of heritage are being sustained even as their loss of access to resources has adversely impacted their material and psychological well-being (Smith 2003). Their ability to keep their community intact appears due to their tenacious ongoing efforts of political organization through institutions like FISH.

Contestations that the community has had in the form of political struggles over natural resources they depend on to reproduce their community, with powerful economic forces, has compounded their differentiation from the communities that surround them in some ways. Such conflicts have perhaps resulted in weakened social ties within the community and their relationships with neighboring communities. These weakening social ties result in social vulnerability that could affect their resilience to climate impacts, such as flooding and adverse

impacts to marine resources, were their access to marine resources further diminished by overdevelopment or unjust government regulations.

Through a qualitative, holistic approach using ethnography, this thesis project has demonstrated how vulnerability to climate impacts is produced from within the consumer culture that has given rise to climate change, through investigating political aspects of the lived experiences of community members in Cortez. Further, this project has revealed how values of economic growth in the community diverge from that of the broader economic landscape in which it is embedded. Because protecting their community is the most important objective for Cortezians, and because their community fishes and markets its catch for a living, the values they have developed in responding to environmental limits imposed on their fishing enterprise are extended outward to other aspects of their collective lives. This thesis project demonstrates how Cortezians are vulnerable to climate impacts, not for lack of continued and coordinated efforts to resist carbon-intensive overdevelopment (Jacques et al. 2017; Hafen 2016), but because of the adverse social impacts that such development has in the community.

This project's principal contribution to anthropology is toward understanding how climate change is experienced at the local level, and within an industrialized context in a community whose economy is closely tied to the health of local environments. This is accomplished through exploring the perceptions of community members regarding how the social processes that give rise to climate change also create social vulnerabilities to that global phenomenon. The chasm between the way climate change is conceived of among scientists and lay publics at the local level within industrialized society forms an important obstacle in effectively adapting to, and mitigating the underlying causes of, climate change. This thesis

illustrates one way that anthropology, using ethnographic techniques, can provide a bridge between those understandings.

Although this research has identified some possible policy proposals to reduce vulnerability to climate impacts in Cortez, because the broader neoliberal society in which the community is embedded is permeated by values of consumption and growth, focusing on decreasing vulnerability in one community through changes in policy seems of limited value in confronting the global nature of climate change in the absence of a shift away from endless growth within larger scales of society. On the other hand, perhaps efforts to preserve and highlight how a community like Cortez can persist might in some way be instructive to other communities. Moreover, it is possible that values practiced in Cortez could be relevant to other so-called “traditional” communities in industrialized contexts, such as farming/agricultural communities which also rely directly on accessing natural resources (Acheson 1981). Further efforts to investigate how such communities might relate to one another and to the broader political economy centered on growth could identify spaces and opportunities for value transformations that proceed outward, rather than the inward pattern that has impacted Cortez in the form of fishermen who have reluctantly taken jobs in the tourism industry.

The global nature of the existential problems that climate change presents humanity demands that researchers dig deep in their theoretical and methodological toolboxes to find answers that can contribute to changing the current trajectory. As Steffen et al. (2018) have recently pointed out, there may come a time, and possibly in the mid-term future, when efforts to reduce carbon emissions may not be enough to stabilize the climate within internationally agreed upon global temperature targets, due to the cascading effects of feedbacks triggered by carbon already emitted.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

11/1/2017

Justin Winn  
Anthropology  
4202 E Fowler Ave  
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**

IRB#: Pro00031559

Title: Vulnerability and Power: Exploring the confluence of politics and climate change in  
Cortez, Florida

**Study Approval Period: 10/31/2017 to 10/31/2018**

Dear Mr. Winn:

On 10/31/2017, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

**Approved Item(s):**

**Protocol Document(s):**

[Winn IRB Protocol](#)

**Consent/Assent Document(s)\*:**

\*\*\*[Waiver of Signed Informed Consent Script–Interviews](#)

\*\*\*[Waiver of Signed Informed Consent Script–Survey](#)

\*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.\*\*\*Consent forms with waiver are not stamped.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your study qualifies for a waiver of the requirements for the documentation of informed consent as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.117(c) which states that an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either: (1) That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern; or (2) That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context. [For verbal consents]

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,



Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board

## **Appendix B: Presentation to the Board of FISH**

Good evening everyone! I'm Justin Winn, a student at USF, in the anthropology department. I'd like to sincerely thank the board for allowing me this time to discuss my thesis project. It's a project that requires the participation of community members from Cortez in order for it to work, so I hope that with my presentation I'm able to encourage as many of you as possible to help me make a positive impact with what I'm attempting to do.

Before I describe in more detail what my project is about, I'd like to just tell you a bit about who I am and how I decided to make your community the subject of my research.

I was born in NJ, in 1974, and a year later my parents moved our family to Venice where I grew up until I left for a six-year enlistment in the Navy at age 18. But, before I left for boot camp, my life revolved around the beaches and waterways in the southern part of Sarasota County.

Although we never fished commercially, there were many times that my family relied on what we could catch to feed ourselves, supplementing what my mother provided as a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Venice Elementary school.

I was then, and am now, deeply grateful for having had the experience of growing up by the water and learning how to fish, sometimes because we had to, and always for fun. I can remember when the local pier was no more than a donut stand where we could buy shrimp and catch some dinner. I remember when Caspersen and Venice Beach were largely undeveloped, despite being surrounded by mainly retirement communities and tourism developments. When I

go back now, I hardly recognize the beaches and waterways from my youth. The businesses, schools, retirement homes, and condominiums have all changed, in many cases several times over, and to the point where what I remember from childhood will certainly only remain with me as endearing memories.

Now I live in Tampa. I've gotten married, and have two young boys of my own. We live near the Hillsborough River where I enjoy teaching my kids how to fish, which is really fun, because, for me, fishing in freshwater often feels like I'm having to learn from scratch how to catch a fish that's never seen the likes of shrimp or sand fleas. So, I get to learn right along with them.

In the past few years, I've also gone back to school in effort to get trained to work in a career that I find more fulfilling than just holding a job to make ends meet. My research involves understanding how local Gulf Coast communities are coping in an era when the climate itself has begun to change, and, in turn, changes the way that we collectively make a living in Florida.

The development that's taken place in Florida over the years in effort to meet the demands of an economy based on constant growth has important implications for the future of all Floridians. Climate change has, in effect, begun to change the way that development itself progresses. And concepts such as adaptation, resilience, and vulnerability have become cornerstone features of the way that community development is planned. The project I've designed aims to study the ways that communities are coping with so much change, so that, hopefully, planners can better manage the development that inevitably takes place.



What's drawn me to Cortez, like so many others before me, is the apparent consistency and persistence of your fishing heritage and culture. I believe that the ability of this community to continue its way of life, beset as it is by all the development that surrounds it, speaks to important issues of resilience that other Gulf Coast communities can learn from and use to better plan for their future, and particularly so in the face of a changing climate.

I've designed my project as a community collaboration in which it is the members of the community whose knowledge about their own culture, and, crucially, in their own words, will be able to add an important human dimension to the otherwise technically complicated conversations that planners are just beginning to have in tackling the problems such as sea level rise that climate change presents other coastal communities.

With your help and knowledge of Cortez I believe that the heritage and culture of this community can stand as more than some perceived connection that other Floridians have to a revered past, but also, in fact, serve to inform other communities on how to plan for the uncertainty we know that the future brings.

Additionally, in effort to give back to Cortez, this project is designed to collaboratively craft policy initiatives that can improve the resilience of Cortez, which I intend to put forward to municipal planners using my affiliation with the University of South Florida as a platform to be heard by them.

I'd like to ask the board for permission to hand out my contact information so that anyone interested can participate in my project.

Participation will involve two separate formal interviews, each one taking about an hour, with the opportunity to allow for follow up questions and further discussion as time and interest allows.

Again, thank you for having me, and for the opportunity to speak with you tonight.

If the board would allow, I'd like to use the rest of my allotted time to answer any questions that you might have about my project. I'll be around for the remainder of the meeting, so please feel free to approach me if you're interested in participating, or just have any questions.

I very much look forward to hearing from you and learning more about Cortez and the people who make it the wonderful place that it is.