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Oculina Bank Oral History Project
Oral History Program
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[Transcriber's note: This interview occurs in a public setting. Background noise is evident.]

Terry Howard: Good afternoon, my name is Terry Howard. Today is March 30, 2010. I'm at DeBrooks Fishing Corner conducting an oral history with Glenn Middlebrooks for the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation's project with Fort Pierce fishermen on the Oculina Bank HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. Welcome, Glenn. One question I have, Glenn: How come your place is called DeBrooks Tackle Shop and your name is Middlebrooks?

William Middlebrooks: I have a partner named DeBoat, so it's either Middle Boat or DeBrooks.

TH: Very good, thank you. I was just thinking about that on the way over. Please state your name. Spell your name, full name, your place of birth and your date of birth.

WM: Full name is William Glenn Middlebrooks. W-i-l-l-i-a-m G-l-e-n-n M-i-d-d-l-e-b-r-o-o-k-s. Tallahassee, Florida. 1-5-44 [January 5, 1944].

TH: 1-5-44 [January 5, 1944], Tallahassee.

WM: Methodist Memorial Hospital.

TH: Where?

WM: Methodist Memorial Hospital.

TH: All right. What brought you to Fort Pierce, and when did you come?

WM: I came to Fort Pierce in 1972. I was transferred down here by a corporation that I was working for in Orlando.

TH: What was the corporation?

WM: The corporation was J.M. Fields, now out of business.

TH: Are you married?

WM: Yes.

TH: How old were you when you got married? I don't know why this question is in there.

WM: Roughly? (laughs)

TH: This is important. It's gonna be archived, you know, at the University of South Florida.

WM: Let's see, I was about twenty-eight—this time, the second time.

TH: All right. Do you have children? How many and how old are they?

WM: I have two children: one boy and one girl. The girl is forty-five or forty-four, she'll be forty-five this year; and the boy is forty-two.

TH: All right, cool. How much schooling do you have?

WM: College graduate.

TH: From where?

WM: TCU.

TH: Texas Christian?

WM: Mm-hm.

TH: What do you do for a living?

WM: I own DeBrooks, or am a partner in DeBrooks Fishing Corner.

TH: That's here in Fort Pierce?

WM: Correct.

TH: Other jobs you've had over the years?

WM: Ever since I've graduated from college, I've been in retail business. I was in retail with JC Penney's, for J.M. Field's, and this store. That's been it.

TH: Have you worked in the fishing industry, commercial or charter boat?

WM: No.

TH: Do you currently own a boat? What kind?

WM: I do. It's a nineteen-foot Blue Wave, outboard, center console kind of bay boat.

TH: Okay. So I'm gonna talk a little bit about your personal fishing history and how regulations affected your personal fishing history and your business here. We're gonna kind of jump back and forth. Let's start with—how familiar are you with the Oculina Bank?

WM: Very.

TH: Very familiar. What was the Oculina Bank designated or why was it designated as an area to protect? What do you know?

WM: It depends on who you want to talk to. The official reason was is to protect the Oculina coral.

TH: From what?

WM: Well, the official reason was to protect the Oculina coral from anchoring and from trawling, specifically scallop trawling. However—

TH: Shrimp and scallop?

WM: Mainly scallops. The Melbourne guys were coming down here and they were—you could see the big scars in there. The—

(to customer) You'll have to go by and look.

It's a John Webb, John—who would hunt. Who was the doctor from Harbor Branch [Oceanographic Institution] who did all the research? He admitted that anchoring in the Oculina

Bank did a minute amount of damage. But they felt like they could not enforce—I'm getting a little ahead of myself. They could not enforce protection if they allowed some people to anchor and some people to trawl, so they just closed it all off. But he admitted that at one of the South Atlantic Fishery Council meetings.

TH: Grant Gilmore?¹

WM: No, it wasn't Grant. There was a doctor there that did specifically Oculina Bank research.

TH: Okay.

WM: Anyway, that was the reason. It was just [prohibiting] trawling and anchoring to protect the Oculina coral.

TH: Is there anything else that you can tell me about the Oculina Bank? What do you know about the coral?

WM: Never dove on it. I've seen videos, actually, of the peaks; Florida Oceanographic [Society] did videos of the peaks. And it was a great place to fish. (laughs) You caught a lot of fish off there. And there's a lot of damage done by jigging on those peaks.

TH: What do you think about the closure of the Oculina Bank to anchoring and bottom fishing?

WM: I think that the amount of damage—first of all, it's basically too deep to anchor in, for a recreational fisherman to fish.

TH: About 290 feet?

WM: I think the shallowest place you can find is 180 feet, probably. You can go about 300 feet. And for all practical purposes, you cannot anchor up on a spot with any kind of current in that deep a water. By the time you drop an anchor and you're trying to gauge where—you just can't do it. So basically, for fishing in the bottom, it was all drifting.

¹ Richard Grant Gilmore, Jr., PhD, is a fish ecologist and ichthyologist. He worked at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution as research scientist for twenty-seven years (1971-1998). Gilmore has worked on regional aquatic conservation and fishery management programs including Everglades Restoration, Oculina Coral Bank studies and Indian River Lagoon habitat management and reclamation.

TH: Power?

WM: In those days we didn't power fish much. We would just sit down a twenty-ounce bank sinker or however big a bank sinker you needed, and a sardine or a cigar minnow, and just drift over it. When you got too much scope out, you'd reel in and start going someplace else: and that's why we liked the peaks, because you can work up the peak.

TH: So you have fished it yourself?

WM: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah.

TH: A lot. Okay.

WM: But like I said, anchoring, you couldn't do it. What you could—the damage that was done was [from] the trawling.

TH: What do you think about the ban on the anchoring and bottom fishing?

WM: Okay, I think the ban on anchoring and bottom fishing—I think the ban on anchoring is—what's a nice word for stupid? Politically correct; not effective. Anchoring has nothing to do with protecting the coral, because nobody ain't anchoring anyway. Bottom fishing: I don't really have the ability to say how much damage is done bottom fishing 'cause you would have to send a sub down to look at it, and I have not seen those videos. I don't know. I don't know how much damage was done. To me, I would assume—it's such a big area, you probably couldn't do a whole lot of damage to it, but I understand that there's some damage that's obviously gonna be done by bottom fishing. How much? Don't know.

TH: Okay, how about dragging?

WM: Dragging should be outlawed, period.

TH: If anchoring and bottom fishing—has the closure of the Oculina affected your fishing?

WM: Slightly.

TH: Okay, as a recreational fisherman?

WM: As a recreational fisherman, we used to bottom fish there. We don't do it anymore. I would say out of the—more typically, we would fish in ninety feet to 150 feet, twenty-seven fathoms.

TH: That's just inside of the Oculina Bank?

WM: Inside of the Oculina Bank. The Oculina Bank was a little bit more extreme bottom fishing. The guys that did that, and I didn't do a lot of it, was the guys deep jigging it with the twenty-four ounce jigs and the strips and arms that look like Popeye. And it was a great place to bottom fish for that, 'cause that was pretty extreme.

TH: Do you have jigs like you're talking about?

WM: Not anymore. We don't sell them anymore, because there's no place to use them anymore.

TH: All right. Can you describe the jig more specifically?

WM: Bullet-head typically; sixteen-ounce minimum; twenty, and twenty-four ounce—

TH: With the lead right on the hook?

WM: Yes, yes. Red Tail Hawk, but bigger. Two hooks with a swivel in the middle. Seven-aught double-strength hooks. Grouper like to spin on the way coming up. They'll tear the hooks out of their mouths if you'll let 'em spin, so you put a swivel and catch 'em on the back hook and you wouldn't have that problem. And Mike Hogan, by the way, will tell ya a whole lot more about that because he did a lot of it there, and you got him on your list.²

TH: I know Mike; I'm gonna—

² Mike Hogan was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00015.

WM: But he's done a lot of that. He's got arms that look like Popeye. (laughs)

TH: Has the closure affected your business here?

WM: Slightly. More specifically, the closure has allowed, I think, the Feds to expand that perception of closures which affects us more; it's the little step leading to the bigger steps. But it has not been a major factor in our business, though.

TH: Okay, we'll get—at the end of this, we'll get to your opinion on the best way to manage fisheries. We're just working right now, just—has the closure affected your business? Somewhat. Okay. If anchoring and bottom fishing in the Oculina Bank was not prohibited, I mean if you were allowed to fish there, would you fish there?

WM: What, me personally, or what?

TH: Yeah, you personally.

WM: No, not anymore. I'm sixty-six years old, no.

TH: Okay.

WM: Twenty years ago, yes, I still would.

TH: Do you think people, your customers, would fish there?

WM: Oh, yes, absolutely. First, it looks like—let me expand on that a little bit. The technology now, which we did not have in those days, is these jigging rods, braided line, these fast-sinking jigs, which we did not have at all in the old days. And it'll be much easier to fish the Oculina Bank and you'll have a lot more people fishing it because of that.

TH: Interesting. The technology is better for that deep-bottom jigging.

WM: Absolutely. We used to use forty-pound mono to get rid of some—I mean, it was just as thin as we could get by with. Today, you could use fifty-pound, eighty-pound braid, which is half the size of forty-pound mono. So you can use lighter jigs; they sink faster, they sink straighter—the monos, there's no stretch in the braid, much easier than it used to be.

TH: Plus, you have better electronics.

WM: You have better electronics. You got better, faster reels, stronger reels, lighter rods, these deep-jigging rods. It would be—you could catch a lot of fish out there with this way, yeah.

TH: Okay, very interesting.

WM: And that would increase our business, 'cause then we would sell a lot of the jigging rods and a lot of the deep jigs, that kind of thing.

TH: Interesting. For what they fish out there, what's the main target?

WM: Grouper.

TH: Grouper. Snapper?

WM: Not so much snapper, because snapper was more of a bait fish and it's hard to fish bait in that deep a water. The jigs work good for grouper and a whole bait was—but red snapper for sure. I should back up a second. Red snapper for sure, certain times of the year and I don't even remember the times of the year anymore. But not mangroves, not (inaudible).

TH: And, what's this? Big jacks, what are those? Amberjacks?

WM: Amberjacks. Amberjacks were my catch. The guys—when you were grouper fishing and you caught an amberjack, you were not happy. (both laugh) Sort of like kingfishing, right? (laughs)

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

WM: Boy, that's a long question. That's a big question.

TH: Well, that's—we're gonna come back to that question, too. We're gonna come back to this at the end, and you're really gonna be more detailed at the end.

WM: What's changed mostly, and I wish I had some time to think about this one, the electronics have changed the bottom fishing a lot. I don't know where to go—

TH: Can you elaborate on that for just a minute on that 'cause you mean the electronics; everybody knows certain rocks?

WM: When I started fishing in Fort Pierce, we had a curved line [depth] recorder. We had no LORANs. So, you would go out and you'd kind of line up where the 12-A buoy was and the 12 buoy and you'd go, you'd find a rock—and there were a lot of rocks to find—and you'd find a rock and you'd fish off the bottom. We're talking about bottom fishing now. Moving backward; do we want just bottom fishing or we want (inaudible) trolling as well?

TH: We're gonna get into all of it. I'm gonna get into asking you each kind of fishing.

WM: Okay, but as far as the change, so the electronics have changed where you can pinpoint—I caught fish here on May 13 last year, I'm gonna go May 13, I'm gonna go to the same spot. We could not do that when we first started here. That's one big change. The second big change was not as many people fishing here. The pressure was not on the fish as much. The fishing was better; it was not as good as it was in 1950. In 1950, it was not as good as it was in 1930. But in 1970, it was better. So it was an easier catch fish. What we would do, is we would go catch a limit of kingfish—we'd catch all the kingfish we wanted to catch between the 12 buoy and the 12-A buoy, and then we would go out looking for something else, whether it be bottom fishing, or trolling for king or dolphin or something else.

TH: Okay, I've heard that a lot.

WM: The other big thing—also the big change is we didn't use as much live bait. We never used live bait for trolling, and we did not use as much live bait for bottom fishing that is used today. Or kingfish, either.

TH: All right, we'll elaborate on this a little later. Have you had any experience with law enforcement within or regarding the Oculina Bank?

WM: Personally, no.

TH: Okay, do you know people that have?

WM: Yes.

TH: And what happened?

WM: I know only one person that ever got a ticket for fishing in the Oculina Bank per se. And that was probably fifteen years ago. It is not well enforced, and it's pretty much left up to the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard really kinda feels like they've got other things to do.

TH: Okay. Now, I want to talk about your fishing history, specifically.

WM: All right, cool.

TH: What was the earliest memory of fishing? What was your earliest memory of fishing and how old were you?

WM: The earliest fish that I can remember catching, of memory, was a five pound catfish when I was probably six that nearly pulled me into the Ochlockonee River. I yelled for my father to come help me, and he was asleep and finally came, and I had these tracks going down the mud, in the river. I was not gonna let go. Reel—drag, and I'm just holding on. My father was more of a freshwater fisherman, so we fished for brim mainly; some bass, but mainly brim. Lived in Tallahassee, fished the rivers and lakes in Tallahassee. But I can remember fishing when I was—I mean, with a cork and a cane pole from, you know, early, early memory.

TH: Me, too.

WM: Yeah, yeah.

TH: Cool. How did you learn how to fish? Who taught you? I guess your father?

WM: My father taught me how to freshwater fish. I've always fished, with friends, mainly. You know, you think you know it all when you're young and you find friends that know more than you do so, you learn something, eventually.

TH: When did you start fishing the Fort Pierce area? What age and year?

WM: Nineteen seventy-two [1972], so I would have been twenty-eight, I guess? Or twenty-nine—twenty-eight, or twenty-nine. Yeah, twenty-eight.

TH: I think I remember meeting you back about that time.

WM: Probably. I bought Bob Miller's boat. You remember Bob Miller? He was the dock master at the Pelican Yacht Club. He used have a boat called the *Ice Bucket*, which is a twenty-three foot North American IO, which Anne and I bought, which sat for most of the time at—not St. Lucie Outboard [Marine Center]; it was the old place on the Okeechobee—fishermen—

TH: It was St. Lucie Outboard.

WM: No, it was before that. It was—anyway, it was the (inaudible) dealer and he would fix my motor all the time. (laughs)

TH: I understand. I've had motors like that.

WM: It was the outdrive more than it was the motor.

TH: Okay, it was inboard/outboard?

WM: Yes, sir. Big mistake.

TH: When did you start fishing Fort Pierce? Twenty-eight, 1972. What did you fish for first, when you first started fishing?

WM: Well, offshore, 90 percent trolling.

TH: You went offshore right away.

WM: Yeah, I bought that twenty-three foot North American IO, and by golly, that's what we did.

TH: What did you fish for and how'd you fish for it?

WM: We always trolled.

TH: Gear and bait.

WM: Gear and bait. Well, in those days, it was probably a four-ought Senator reel, probably a green true temper rod, ballyhoo—skipping ballyhoo, because we didn't know how to rig it any other way—and a bee chain hook.

TH: Skipping ballyhoo.

WM: Rather than swimming; just be on top of the water, beating itself to death.

TH: All right.

WM: Then we learned how to use a strip. That was a big improvement.

TH: Mullet strip?

WM: Mullet strips, 'cause we could buy 'em. Then we learned to make bonita strips, 'cause they're always plentiful.

TH: Catch a bonita; you can make a few baits.

WM: That's right, yep.

TH: Done that when I've run out of bait.

WM: Absolutely. That's when you salt 'em down, put them between newspapers and freeze 'em.

TH: Okay and you trolled for basically dolphin, kingfish?

WM: We would basically—typically, we would go out to the 12 buoy, put a bait there and start trolling towards 12-A and catch kingfish. You'd catch enough kingfish for either a meal or two or ten people that you're gonna feed, or however many you wanted to catch. We quit doing that, then we would go look for dolphin—or maybe, if we got lucky, a sailfish with our number seven wire and a number eight wire.

TH: Did you catch many sailfish?

WM: No. (laughs) So, it was a real treat when we got one.

TH: Where do you go—okay, let's see, where do you go to fish when you began fishing? Can you show me on this map? Just—you can tell me where you fish.

WM: Between 12 and 12-A, 'cause we didn't want to get out of sight of land and 12 was still in sight of land. 12-A buoy was still there.

TH: Okay, and did you mostly go fishing in your own boat or the boats of others?

WM: Mostly my own boat.

TH: Who did you fish with?

WM: Friends; people I worked with; my wife, occasionally.

TH: Does she like to go fish much?

WM: She likes to go fishing. She doesn't really like fishing, but she likes to go fishing.

TH: Boat rides?

WM: She likes to catch—I mean, she's just—you know, she likes to be out; she likes to be with me. (laughs)

TH: Well, that's good.

WM: Sort of like a dog. (laughs)

TH: Well, you know that's gonna be on tape, right?

WM: (laughs) We've been married a long time. There's nothing I can say that offends. (laughs)

TH: During what months of the year did you fish for what fish? Is there a season?

WM: Well, we would—no, if the weather was good, and we had enough money to pay for the gas, we would go fishing.

TH: Okay.

WM: And we were happy catching kingfish and giving them away, 'cause we didn't like to eat 'em.

TH: How long did a fishing trip last?

WM: Mm, probably early morning until the middle of the afternoon.

TH: Okay, and how much would you catch on an average trip?

WM: Pounds or head? Don't know?

TH: It's an ambiguous question.

WM: I know. I would say, you know, a good day would be ten fish—of keepable fish, not counting bonitas or barracudas. And a bad day would be three or four keepable fish, not counting bonitas or barracudas.

TH: So fishing was pretty good back then.

WM: Oh, yeah. Even I could do it with basic tackle and, like I say, with very rudimentary tackle and rudimentary rigs.

TH: Okay.

WM: Read your book. You'll find out how good it was. (both laugh)

TH: Thank you; a little plugging. And do you still fish? You say you've pretty much given it up.

WM: No, I've given up trolling. I've got bad knees, so I've sold my twenty-seven foot twin outboard boat that I sold about three years ago and have not been offshore since.

TH: Okay, and where else did you go? Do you go fishing in Fort Pierce area? You fish the river at all?

WM: Oh, yeah, we fished the river. I have friends that have small boats. Knew Jerry Metz back in those days, Jerry and I would go fishing a lot. We would wade, I had a canoe; fished the river, fished the beach.

TH: Did you ever catch any big fish while you were in your canoe?

WM: No, never did. But Jerry Ergle has got a picture in his kayak of showering mullet, and you can see the 12 buoy in the background.

TH: I saw that. Fox Watkins has it.³

WM: Well, it was Jerry's picture.

TH: I know. He gave one to Jerry. Yeah, I saw that picture.

WM: That's a cool picture.

TH: Incredible picture. Ah, man, he's out there in the kayak.

WM: Yes. (laughs) We'll never get this done, will we?

TH: Fish for snook?

WM: I was—I did. I fished for a snook and Bob—oh, Lord, I want to say Beusiana, and that's not the right last name. He taught, his dad taught; I think he was a science teacher. He and Bobby Hite were good friends, and he moved out of town.

TH: It's not Beusiana.

WM: No, I know.

TH: I know who you're talking about; he's a good friend of mine, too.

WM: But he's started, we started fishing—

TH: Bankitas.

WM: Bankitas, George Bankitas.

³ Maltby "Fox" Foxworthy Watkins was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O06-00004.

TH: George Bankitas, yes.

WM: Fished with him off the North Bridge for snook.

TH: He was good. He could catch some snook.

WM: Yes, he was very good. That's how I learned to snook fish, with him. I did not really care for that kind of fishing that much. It was just—I'd rather be in a boat, I'd rather be casting. That was not my style, but [I] caught a lot of snook that way.

TH: What else did you catch in the river?

WM: Well, we would fish—the two fish we would fish for most were the snook and trouts.

TH: Okay, did you ever catch a lot of mangroves in the river?

WM: We did, but they were usually small and it was not, it was—

TH: Before the size limits?

WM: It wasn't even much that. It was—I don't know, I was never really a great bottom fisherman, and I'd still rather catch a fish on top water than anything. Trout would be—it's the easiest fish to catch on top water. Even snook are not good to catch on top water.

TH: What did you use for bait for trout? Trout touts?

WM: I remember when it came out. The theory was, in those days, if you wanted to catch big fish, you'd use, like, top water lures, big lures, plugs like Zara Spooks, like creek chub, those kinds of lures. If you wanted to catch lots of fish, then you'd use plastic grubs, like a trout tout.

TH: Okay, and I guess you cast?

WM: Yeah, yeah.

TH: And bait for snook? Shrimp?

WM: Uh, didn't use much shrimp. We would normally cast out things, you know, like pogies or bunkers, you know, something. We weren't real big on going out and spending a half a day catching croakers, but we just—whatever live bait we could get, go to the North Bridge or the South Bridge, fish the fenders, go to the old sewer plant, fish around there, around the lights. Just chucking up whatever kind of live bait you had, sit back and talk about how great a fisherman you were (TH laughs) and watching the ribbon fish eat your bait. (laughs)

TH: Did you usually go on your own boat or others?

WM: Both, yeah.

TH: You fish with different friends?

WM: Oh, yeah, lots of people, yeah.

TH: During what months of the year did you fish there? Let's see, how much did you catch in an average trip? Okay, so all your life you fished for all these different kinds of fish.

WM: Yeah.

TH: Okay, that brings us to—now, how often do you go offshore fishing?

WM: No more, anymore.

TH: But you did like to go a lot (inaudible).

WM: Oh, I loved it. I'd rather do that more than anything. Yes, sir.

TH: How many—in your heyday of fishing, how many times a week did you go?

WM: Never more than once a week. I mean, I was working, you know, and to go twice a week was just—too many other things to do. But once a week—

TH: Probably four times a month, maybe?

WM: Yeah, and then vacations, though; we would go to the Bahamas and spend every day fishing.

TH: Take your boat over?

WM: Well, some boats. Not that boat, but I—oh, yeah, the first time I went to the Bahamas, I remember Anne and I went in my seventeen Whaler.

TH: You're kidding me.

WM: From Palm Beach to West End [Bahamas]. I ain't kidding you. No, sir, I'm not kidding you. (laughs)

TH: Cool. I like that.

WM: Young and dumb.

TH: You can't sink a Whaler, huh?

WM: Yeah, but you know, you could run out of gas, though. (laughs) I even had a radio then, and a compass. (laughs)

TH: Cool. That must have been quite a trip. Where did you stay when you got over there?

WM: On the boat.

TH: Did you stay on your seventeen-foot Whaler?

WM: We had—do you remember Ev Priest?

TH: The name sounds familiar.

WM: He taught at Westwood [High School]. He also taught marine science. They own an All American Sub Shop, Ev and Betty Priest.

TH: Okay.

WM: Ev happened to have a seventeen [foot] Whaler that had a casting platform that I bought from him. It had a eighty-five [horsepower] Johnson [motor] on it, seventy Merc[ury motor]—yeah, seventy Merc. But they had built a casting platform, lattice type, so the front deck was flat. So Anne and I took two sleeping bags and two air mattresses, and we were gonna sleep on the front deck. The other people we were with—we had an eighteen-foot Wellcraft—took a tent. Little did we know how bad the bugs were at West End, so they slept in the bugs; we slept offshore. Air mattresses of course, just hold air, so we're sleeping on, you know, the bare wood.

The other thing—I gotta tell you this. Nobody's gonna hear this, right? We've been over there for three days and there's a twenty-eight (inaudible) over there and I look over there and I say, "John, those girls are naked!" And I say, "Anne!" She said, "They've been like that for three days." (both laugh) I said, "Well, you didn't tell me!" She said, "Well, why would I tell you?" (laughs) Okay, I'll get serious again, get serious.

TH: All right. That's good, though. I like that. I'd like to get into—if we get done, I'd like to ask for big storm stories and stuff, but we gotta get through this first. Okay, so now, your fishing: how's your fishing changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank? Since 1984, several changes have been made in the regulations of the Oculina Bank. I'd like to know if any of these regulations affected your fishing and if so, how? Did you fish there prior to 1984?

WM: Yes.

TH: Yes.

WM: Rarely, though. Bottom fishing; this is about bottom fishing now?

TH: Yeah, bottom fishing.

WM: Rarely bottom fished off the Oculina Banks.

TH: You ever troll over it?

WM: Always. Oh, absolutely. Wahoos, mainly.

TH: There are, you know they—wahoo and (inaudible).

WM: So that hasn't changed. I mean that, you know—

TH: You can still troll it.

WM: You can still troll it; so that's not an issue.

TH: It was initially closed to trawling, dredging and bottom longlining in 1984. Did this affect your fishing or your business? It was originally—

WM: I thought they closed it all at the same time?

TH: It was originally closed in 1984 for trawling, dredging and bottom longlining.

WM: Well, that would not affect—

TH: Did this affect your business or your fishing?

WM: No.

TH: Okay. Then, in 1994, the Oculina Bank was designated an experimental closed area for fishing, for retention of snapper/grouper species, was prohibited. Snapper/grouper fishing boats were also prohibited from anchoring. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation?

WM: Yes.

TH: Okay, that's 1994, and that affected your business here to some degree?

WM: Yes.

TH: Okay. Then, in 1986, all anchoring was prohibited within the Oculina Bank. Did this impact your fishing? If so, how?

WM: That regulation did not.

TH: 'Cause it had already been affected by—

WM: Actually, recreational fisherman basically did not anchor up on the Oculina Bank.

TH: Okay. In 1996, trawling for rock shrimp was prohibited in the area to the east and north of the Oculina Bank, and there's a map in here that shows it all. This area was incorporated into the Oculina Bank HAPC. Fishing with bottom longline, trawl, and dredge was prohibited in the expanded area, as was anchoring of any vessel. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation?

WM: No, not really. But at that meeting—that was the meeting I was talking about, when they were getting ready to implement that. The guy from Harbor Branch said that anchoring in the Oculina Bank by recreational fisherman was of little impact, and that expanding it for recreational fishing anchoring was really sort of useless and just an exercise in trying to police the area, because it was just not of any value to their studies).

TH: Okay. And then, really, they had no proof of your saying that there was no overt proof of damage done to the Oculina Bank by anchoring or bottom fishing?

WM: By anchoring.

TH: By anchoring.

WM: By anchoring by recreational boats.

TH: Okay, and bottom fishing, you don't?

WM: Bottom fishing, there was definitely some damage. We are not privy to know how much damage. You know, I mean, just—

TH: What do you mean we're not privy to know?

WM: Well, is it 1 percent, 5 percent, a ½ percent damage to the *Oculina* coral by bottom fishing? Who knows? I don't know. And maybe somebody does, though, so we're not privy to that information. If they don't know, we're still not privy to the information because there is no information to be privy to.

TH: That's what I'm wondering.

WM: You know, it's like how many wrecks are there? How many tickets are given by the Marine Patrol? I don't know, and I'm not privy to that information.

TH: I would be curious as to why they said bottom fishing was not allowed, other than—I don't know.

WM: We were told—we were under the impression there was two reasons. There was damage to the *Oculina* coral—

TH: From bottom fishing, from jigging.

WM: From bottom fishing, from hitting the bottom with either jigs or lead with bait. And I don't think you cannot—there is no argument that's true. How much damage there is to that? That, we don't know. The other argument that they used—and they did not want to make this too obvious, but it was obvious enough—is the enforcement would be too difficult if you allowed them to bottom fish, but not to anchor. So the easiest thing to do was just say, “No possession of

bottom fish in the Oculina Banks.” And that way, it covers everything and it’s sort of, “Well, I wasn’t bottom fishing, you know, my battery died and I had blah, blah, blah.” If you have possession of, you’re in trouble.

TH: Okay, this next question’s probably the finale and probably the most important and you’re gonna—now’s when you can spend a little time elaborating. The designation of marine areas that are closed to fishing is being used more—are being used more frequently, wait a minute. The designation of marine areas that are closed to fishing is being used more frequently as a fishery management tool. What do you think about the use of closed areas to fishing compared to other types of management regulations like quotas, closed seasons, et cetera?

WM: I think, of all the ways that you can manage fisheries, closing areas off is the worst way of managing. Not to say it’s not the most effective, but it’s the worst. (laughs)

TH: Can you say why?

WM: Okay. What do we have fisheries for? We have it for people to use. We allow you to use the woods. You may not harvest a bald eagle in the woods, but you can use the woods. We don’t say, “This national park is off limits to people because you may disturb the bears.” Why does that logic not apply to saltwater, to the fisheries? You can use the resource; you cannot disturb the bears, you cannot disturb the grouper, you cannot do certain things. But there are other things that you can do. If you want to fish for yellow-tailed snapper in eighty feet of water with a 20 hook and live shrimp, you’re not disturbing grouper. So why not allow that? You still can’t shoot the bald eagle, you know, but you can still go out in the woods. So I think that the idea of closing it totally off for any use is a very poor management idea.

TH: Okay, what do you prefer?

WM: Well, I think you have to go fish by fish by fish; and I think there is the possibility that nothing will work.

TH: Can you elaborate on that?

WM: All right. No matter what we’ve done to protect the tuna, they’re under such stress that maybe nothing—maybe there’s just too much financial reward to protect them completely. No matter what we’ve done for the gopher tortoise, you know—I don’t want to go that way. No matter what we do for—all right, let me give you a better example. When I moved to Fort Pierce during the wintertime, we would have shrimp runs and we would go net shrimp in the river,

okay? We don't have those runs anymore. It was not because we over-fished the shrimp; it was not because we had commercial guys wing netting the shrimp before they got to the inlet. We don't really know what was the reason for it. But the fact is, something has changed enough to make it where there's not enough shrimp to make it worthwhile to go get your dip net and dip 'em up in the little cup. Not because of regulations or any lack of regulations, 'cause we—there was no regulations; that's not the issue. So there may be fish and fisheries that no regulation will protect. I can't tell you what that is, 'cause I'm not a marine biologist. You know, maybe Grant Gilmore can tell you, I don't know.

TH: I'm curious about tuna. That's interesting. They've been recently targeted, I noticed. I know that a lot of sport boats are going across the Gulf Stream.

WM: They've done that for years.

TH: But they've started doing that more.

WM: They got—well, the technology has allowed 'em to do it. You got faster, bigger boats, better electronics, the radar; everybody's got radar now, look at the birds, sure.

TH: Is there a limit on tuna?

WM: Yes.

TH: How many per person?

WM: Depends on what species, but there's limits on tuna. But how are you gonna regulate the tuna that are on the other side of the Bahama Bank? How are you gonna rid of the Japanese or the Koreans or the Vietnamese or the Australians, or whoever it may be, from catching your dolphin in the Atlantic? The world we live in is just so very difficult to do this with.

TH: Because, as you said, very first thing—

WM: Lots of people. Population.

TH: Population is now—

WM: Is what, four billion people now?

TH: Yeah, we're getting up close to four billion.

WM: And we're still—I think we're still at less than 40 percent commercially raised fish. Sixty percent are still wild harvested.

TH: Let's go back. If you were managing the fisheries—

WM: Which fisheries?

TH: Let's go through 'em. Let's start with kingfish. I can talk about kingfish.

WM: Well, I'm not the expert on kingfish, so don't misunderstand me from here. Kingfish, I think, can very easily be managed by gear limits or size restrictions. They're fast growing, they're school fish, they're easily recognized where they are and how many there are. They're easily—

TH: By catch limits?

WM: Yeah. No, I'm saying they're easily recognized, where you know that in November, they're gonna be here, the big schools—we'll say Jupiter—and then in October, they're gonna be in Pelican Flats or wherever, you know? All the kingfishermen know this. You know how to target these fish. It's easy for the managers to watch what the commercial guys are doing and say, "Okay, they're all coming from here, we can count these fish. We know how many go in the fish house; we can see if you're catching more than you should or less than you should, whatever." It's a very easy thing to target. Most kingfish are caught by commercial fishermen. Most grouper are caught by recreational fishermen, hook and line. Okay, how are you gonna decide how many grouper, who are very slow growing—as compared to kingfish, who are very fast growing—how are you gonna decide how many grouper you need to maintain the biomass that maintain the stock? It's not an easy decision. And then, on top of that, the government does not have the ability or the money to hire people to do the surveys to find out how many fish are really being caught. It's a totally different—

TH: It's just that each fishery is different.

WM: Each fishery is different.

TH: What do you think about closed seasons, total closed seasons, and has that hurt your business?

WM: Oh, it certainly hurts the business. And the thing that hurts the business the most is that we end up, in some cases, closing and overlapping closed seasons to where the month of January, there's nothing you can catch; and the month of December, you can catch everything. So, I mean, it really affects our customers and me very strongly.

TH: What if you were—instead of a total closure, what if they could have, you know, pure fish?

WM: I mean, how many one fish per boats can you have? (laughs) Could you have a half a fish a boat? I think in twenty years, or thirty years, you will see this. I don't know, and this is my opinion and this is not some revelation. I think you will see, as a recreational fisherman, you'll be able to buy something. I don't know what it may be called: a permit, or it may be called a license or whatever. And you'll be allowed to catch 100 pounds of fish or 200 pounds of fish in a season, in a year, or whatever. And when you reach that—and you can catch one 250 pound snook, or you can catch twenty two-pound snook; you can catch so many pounds, or head. I don't know how it's gonna work. Just like deer hunting: you can shoot so many deer, you can shoot so many in a year. You get tags, that's it. And you will have these tags with these permits, or whatever, and when you—so you can decide if you want to go catch a bunch of pompano, or if you want to go catch one big blue marlin, and you will be able to take out that much biomass out of the ocean.

TH: Interesting.

WM: And it'll be regulated very much like land animals are regulated.

TH: Okay.

WM: It'll be something of that sort. I'm not proposing that that's the way to do it, but I think it'll be something like that because I don't think with gear restrictions, with limits, it'll work—because it hasn't for some fish. For some fish, it has worked. For kingfish, it has worked.

TH: Mm-hm. Mackerel.

WM: Mackerel. Absolutely. Pompano has worked. Redfish, it worked, because here again, they come together, they can take a look at 'em, they spawn, they go back. Trout don't do that. Grouper don't do that, here. Snapper don't do that, here. So—

TH: Bluefish will come back soon.

WM: Bluefish and the reds, exactly, because up north, they regulate 'em up there, not because we've regulated. They don't net bluefish like they used to up on the beaches off Hatteras [North Carolina]. So, like I say, there is some fish; but the fish that you named that have all come back are all pelagics, and they are all school fish. Name me—

TH: Yup, and they're also hit pretty hard, and I don't think they're back to where they were when you said you first started fishing.

WM: Nope, they will never be. But all the fish that are pretty much—pretty much all the fish that are really successful coming back have been pelagics. Name me a non-pelagic fish that has really come back. Pompano is about the only one.

TH: I've heard more people this year say snapper will come back.

WM: What kind of snapper; in a river or offshore?

TH: Offshore red snapper.

WM: I have not heard that.

TH: I've heard that from the charter captains.

WM: Have ya?

TH: It's been one of the best—and again, I'm not familiar with the various kinds of snapper.

WM: That may be. It very well could be. And we certainly have cycles and we have all sorts of things; but generally speaking, I think we would agree that fish that have done well under closures and—I mean, under gear restrictions and other size limits and all that—have been pelagics.

TH: That's interesting, that's very interesting. So, you've answered my last question. I want you to—thinking ahead to the future, what do you think fishing in Fort Pierce will be like in ten years?

WM: I think there'll be more catch and release, I think it will be—you will see more freshwater fishermen saltwater fishing, and more saltwater fishermen freshwater fishing.

TH: That's interesting.

WM: And here's the reason why. You don't bass fish, right?

TH: I do over at my lake house. I have a cottage at Lake Istokpoga.

WM: Okay. Well, that may not be a good example.

TH: But I used to never, before I bought that cottage.

WM: Before you bought that cottage, if you caught three or four bass in a day, would you have been happy?

TH: Oh. yeah.

WM: Okay. When I was a kid fishing Lake Okeechobee, if we would have caught three or four bass, it'd have been a bad day. So, as fishing got worse over there in freshwater, and our expectations kept coming down, and we could only catch two or three fish when we felt like we should catch ten or fifteen—if we go saltwater fishing, and we catch one snook, we're happy as we can be. The snook fisherman who used to catch ten snook a day, who is now only catching one or two, who's—his expectation's going, or the kingfisherman goes over and freshwater fishes and catches two or three bass, and he's happy as he can be. And that's my point.

TH: One thing you haven't touched on—and I want to, I think it's important. I'm quite sure you probably have an opinion—

WM: (laughs) Okay, thanks.

TH: —is runoff.

WM: It goes right in with that same population problem. Look at the trout fishing at Lake Worth: it does not exist. Pollution is a big problem. Unfortunately, it's not a problem that any one agency addresses. It's a huge problem, it's a huge problem. I was just in Spain, okay, and we went to Morocco. In Morocco, you can see the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean meet. And you can see it: it looks just like a current line here. You can see the pretty Mediterranean water, that day we were there, and the ugly Atlantic water. The Mediterranean water is saltier than the Atlantic and it's warmer—where we were, that day. And you can see it, and it's not just pollution, it's just differences of [the waters]. Anyway, that's all.

TH: But here in Fort Pierce, it's—

WM: No, here in Fort Pierce, we have pollution problems, we have runoff problems, we have concrete, and we have asphalt, which does not allow for any percolation. And the more we grow, the more we're gonna have. And it's not the groves and it's not the fertilizers and it's not the whatever, it's the concrete.

TH: Concrete?

WM: The water hits the concrete. (makes sound effect) Whatever's on the concrete goes there.

TH: But that's—when they drained off Lake Okeechobee and they come through the canals of Taylor Creek and—

WM: No, no. No, no, no. Taylor Creek does not access Lake Okeechobee.

TH: It doesn't?

WM: No, sir. No, sir.

TH: Does it access Kissimmee River?

WM: No, sir.

TH: At all?

WM: No, sir. All that goes through Stuart; it does not come out of Fort Pierce at all.

TH: What's Taylor Creek's source?

WM: The canals. The (inaudible) canal. You get your map; the best way now is Google; Google Earth because you can—it's real easy to look at Google Earth. Follow Taylor Creek. You think of Taylor Creek and Okeechobee, right? Not the same Taylor Creek. You follow Taylor Creek—

TH: It makes sense—yeah, makes perfectly good sense, 'cause that other Taylor Creek is going a different direction.

WM: It goes from the cemetery down to Lake Okeechobee. This Taylor Creek goes that way and stops, dead stop, 'cause all the drainage comes off the groves—

TH: Western St. Lucie County's been draining Taylor Creek and Morris Creek, I guess.

WM: Right, right. So, yes, we do get—Stuart, St. Lucie Inlet, gets the Lake Okeechobee runoff, no question; we don't, neither does Vero [Beach].

TH: All right, Glenn, we're done.

End of interview