

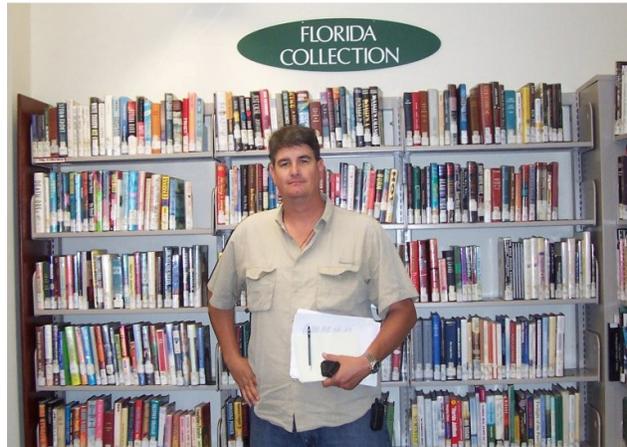
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Terry Howard: Good afternoon. This is Terry Howard. Today is May 4, 2010, and I am at the Fort Pierce Library on Melody Lane, conducting an oral history with Ed Killer, the outdoor editor for the *Fort Pierce Tribune*. The interview is for the Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Foundation's project with Fort Pierce fishermen on the Oculina Bank HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. Welcome, Ed. Please state your name, spell your name, your place of birth, and your date of birth.

Edward Killer: My name is Ed Killer, or Edward Killer. E-d-w-a-r-d K-i-l-l-e-r. I was born here in Fort Pierce, July 26, 1966 in the hospital over on Seventh Street. (laughs)

TH: Okay. So, you were born—are you married?

EK: Yes.

TH: How old were you when you got married?

EK: Well, this is my second marriage. Forty-three, the second time, which is two weeks ago.
(laughs)

TH: Oh, congratulations. Do you have children?

EK: Yes.

TH: How many and how old are they?

EK: I have three boys, ages eleven, seven, and five.

TH: Okay.

EK: The first time I got married, I was twenty-eight.

TH: Okay. How much schooling do you have?

EK: I have a bachelor's degree from University of South Florida, and I took a couple of extra classes on various things, things like environment ecosystems and stuff like that. I also have some training in agricultural research stuff.

TH: Okay. Now, your degree was in what?

EK: It was in psychology.

TH: Okay. What other jobs have you had? Now, you're an editor of the—outdoor editor. You've been an outdoor editor for a long time.

EK: Well, I've been the outdoor editor for the (inaudible) newspapers and *Fort Pierce Tribune* since 2005. So, for five years full-time. I started writing as a freelance outdoors writer for the *Stuart News*; that was back when the three papers were separate. So, the *Stuart News*, *Fort Pierce Tribune*, *Vero [Beach] Press Journal* were all separate, competing companies. Now, they all have combined into one, but at the time—that was 1994. So, I've been covering fishing tournaments and fishing for the newspapers and for magazines since 1994.

TH: Okay. So, have you had any other jobs? I mean, other than being an editor or a writer.

EK: Yeah. When I got the job working as fishing writer, covering fishing tournaments and also covering high school football and stuff like that, I was working as a biologist for the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the Indian River Research and Education Center out here west of town on Rock Road. So, I was doing that full-time from 1993 to ninety-seven [1997], and then I got recruited from there to work as a biological scientist with the United States Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Research Service in their horticultural research lab that they built next door out there on Rock Road. So, I worked there for eight years, full-time, as a federal biologist working with the tomato and pepper growers and strawberry growers and melons and cucumbers and stuff like that. Before that, when I was working for IFAS, I was working with citrus growers.

TH: Okay. Now, Rock Road is in Fort Pierce?

EK: Yes, right.

TH: Okay. And you did what with citrus growers?

EK: I worked for Dr. Bob Bullock. I was a biologist with his research unit, and we worked with citrus insects, insects that are economically important pests to citrus. We focused on those, mostly.

TH: Okay. Have you worked in the fishing industry? I guess as a fishing editor, that would count as working in the fishing industry.

EK: If you say so. (laughs)

TH: Do you currently own a boat?

EK: No.

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

EK: I'm familiar with it from the standpoint of I've been with people [and] we've fished near it, we've fished over it, we've fished recreationally. I've interviewed lots of people and spoken to lots of people who have fished in and around it: mostly recreational fishermen, a few commercial fishermen, or people that have commercial fishing experience near there. But I've written columns on various issues that come up, mostly on the regulatory side, for the HAPC out there when it came up for renewal several years ago and the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council was considering whether to extend the ten-year ban on bottom fishing out there. There was quite a bit of interest from recreational fishermen to not see that continue. And so, after reviewing the information that I had available to me and talking to many of the people that were affected by it, I agreed with a lot of the recreational fishermen who wanted to see it opened up for grouper fishing and snapper fishing. And I wrote some columns stating that for the newspapers, at the time.

TH: Okay. Why do you believe that the Oculina Bank was designated as an area to protect?

EK: Well, from the scientific standpoint, I understand the reasoning. The type of coral that grows there is a very important coral, but because it's a relatively deep water area—it's low in the water column—it grows very slowly. So, it creates really great natural habitat on its own. However, it doesn't do it very quickly, and fishing efforts can damage it really quickly. So, that's one reason why—that's the reason we've been told it needs to be protected. And I can understand it from that standpoint.

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

EK: When they discussed closing it, the biggest point in that was that they wanted to protect the habitat. And they wanted to protect it mainly from any kind of damage from any kind of fishing efforts, whether it be recreational fishing or shrimping. At the time, it was really held up as being a place where it was the only place where this coral was found, mainly because of a combination of water temperatures, the bottom substrate, all that kind of stuff. I can go on and on and on.

TH: The depth.

EK: Depth. A lot of it had to do with many of the types of currents that came by there. But the one thing, the one aspect about it that I think might have been misleading about it is that we've since found *Oculina* coral growing in places that we didn't really understand or know at that time. For instance, there's been an artificial reef at the St. Lucie County artificial reef program, sunk just two years ago, the tugboat called the *Lesley Lee* they sunk out there. It's the reef called the *Lesley Lee*, named after a donor.

TH: How do you spell that?

EK: I think it's L-e-s-l-e-y, and then L-e-e. It's a tugboat. I think it's sixty feet long. They sunk it in about eighty feet of water, maybe seventy to eighty feet of water. It's near the *Amazon* out there, the *Amazon* wreck inshore. That's the other thing. But in its wheelhouse, they've found *Oculina* coral growing in that. And they've also found *Oculina* coral growing in the *Wickstrom* reef, which is the 180 foot ship they sunk about eight or nine years ago, down off of Stuart.

TH: How do you spell that?

EK: Wickstrom, W-i-c-k-s-t-r-o-m, Reef. And it's in 180 feet of water off of—northeast of the St. Lucie inlet. I think they found coral in that, also.

TH: *Oculina*?

EK: *Oculina* coral, specifically that species of coral: the same coral that's on the Bank that they're protecting.

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

EK: Well, I don't think it's out of the realm of—I don't think it's unreasonable to close it to anchoring. I think that anchoring techniques can do quite a bit of damage, unless it's done by somebody who's extremely skilled and really has a great—not only a great handle on how to anchor, but also how to position a boat in a spot where they won't actually fish. But for drift fishing, for recreational drift fishing for grouper and snapper, I don't think it's necessary to close the area.

TH: Has the closure of the Oculina Bank affected your fishing, and how? And as an editor, has it affected fishermen that you've interviewed, and how? I guess that would be the way to ask this of you.

EK: I'd have to say it really hasn't affected my fishing, mainly because of where I live and because of the type of—the majority of the type of fishing that I engage in. I've had several trips out there where I fished near it and, had it been opened, we would have fished in that area for sure. But I was always invited as a guest, so it was more of a choice by the person who invited me. But certainly, many people that I have spoken to and many of the readers I talk to— especially fellows that specialize in that method of fishing— they would really like to see it opened, and they would really like to be able to fish in that area. And a lot of them are just—they don't agree with the policy to close it.

TH: If anchoring and bottom fishing in the Bank, Oculina Bank, was not prohibited, would you or the people you know fish there?

EK: Yes, they would. Yep.

TH: So, how would you—how do they usually fish, and for what? You mentioned that because of the depth and the currents, most people don't necessarily anchor. So, how do they fish there and, basically, for what? You've mentioned it a little bit.

EK: Well, they mostly will fish for the highly sought-after species like gag grouper. To some degree, red grouper, scamp, speckled hind, rock hind, whatever things like that that we have out here. Warsaw grouper—

TH: Hind, h-i-n-d?

EK: H-i-n-d, right.

TH: Okay.

EK: And “scamp” is s-c-a-m-p. And you have red snapper. Now, one of the problems, though, with this scenario— there's been a development that's occurred just in the last couple of years is [that] South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has recommended— and National Fishery Service has gone along with it with closing seasons for some of these species that are actually targeted, that would be targeted in that area. So, by closing down the ability to harvest these

species, they actually are doubly-protecting that area. You've actually got another protection built in.

So, the grouper season now has been for what they call "shallow water" grouper, which would be the grouper caught from about that point inshore. That's been closed now from April 1 through—I'm sorry, from January 1 through April 30, for those species. This is the first year; 2010 is the first year it's been in effect. And the red snapper—they've closed that temporarily for six months, and it looks like they're gonna extend that. The National Fishery Service decides on whether or not to accept the recommendation of the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council. They'll close it, probably, for another six months. And it could be even longer, once they get the permanent management guidelines in place for the red snapper species—which would protect that area completely from fishing methods that would target red snapper.

TH: Okay. I'm gonna come back to that a little later, on the closures to the grouper and snapper, at the end when we ask about your opinions of the fishery management. Overall, how has fishing changed since you began fishing in the Fort Pierce area?

EK: It's changed a great deal. We've seen lots and lots of limits and restrictions, both from a standpoint of seasons to size limits to catch limits— bag limits, that is. So, those have all— there's been more and more and more of those added, constantly, in my lifetime. When I was a—my earliest memories of fishing; I didn't have to worry. We didn't really worry that much about certain limits for many of the species we targeted because they [the limits] just weren't there. We just thought they were plentiful. But with the population growth in Florida's coastal areas, especially— and with the tourism industry— there's been a lot more attention placed on how many of these fish are being impacted, and by whom and how and when. So, we've seen a lot of that change. Everything from all your inshore species to— I mean, virtually every inshore species, virtually every offshore species that has any kind of value to recreational fishing has been affected one way or another.

TH: By regulations.

EK: By regulations. Yeah.

TH: Have you had any experience—

EK: And by—well—

TH: Overfishing?

EK: Well, overfishing to some degree, but I don't really—I don't know about that. I don't ascribe to that so much, 'cause I can put it to many examples where overfishing has been the cause of why they've created regulation, but the data doesn't back that up. But also by environmental impacts: there's been a lot of habitat loss, especially in the estuaries and along the beaches. There's been a lot of damaging things that have been done that have changed habitat and have created problems for some of these species that depend on a very thin envelope of where they have to live. And a lot of these changes that have occurred have been really devastating.

TH: You're thinking primarily of runoff? Right now, I think—

EK: Well, not so much. I mean, that's a big one, of course. It's one that I see as being a controllable one; that's where I have the biggest beef. I think that we spend so much energy getting our storm water off of our land and off of our property and into the estuaries that we haven't really considered how much damage it does do. Now we're having a little more awareness on that level on what kind of damage it does do. But just from construction, urban growth next to the coastal areas. Fortunately, we've started protecting things like mangroves and sea grasses a lot more.

But even just— what is it, a year and a half ago?— there was actually a bill being pushed to the Florida House [of Representatives] about creating sea grass mitigation banks to allow developers to damage areas of sea grass and they would just pay into a sea grass area somewhere else. You could, for instance, build a—say you wanted to build a marina. In Fort Pierce, you could damage twenty acres of sea grass here. But you could just pay for the preservation of, say, thirty acres of sea grass, but it might be in Escambia County. What kind of sense does that make? (laughs) Fortunately, that bill was shot down, but not until the governor got involved and took care of it.

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

EK: Only from the standpoint of press releases and stories that I've done about violators that have been caught out there by NOAA—you know, federal agents that work with NOAA cases; so, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration cases. So, that's about it.

TH: Okay. Have there been many? (phone rings)

EK: No. It's only been a couple.

TH: Okay.

EK: One of the worst ones that I never really quite understood what happened—'cause they never really did explain it very well— was a situation where a shrimp boat, a rock shrimper called *The Shootist*. I always remember that, 'cause it's a John Wayne movie. (laughs) With *The Shootist*—this was only a couple of years ago, too, maybe 2007—he was caught with 10,000 pounds of rock shrimp onboard. They've fitted radar or tracking devices on all these shrimp boats now, so that they can tell exactly where they are at any given time, and they found him inside of the Bank, the protected area. They found him with 10,000 pounds of rock shrimp, but somehow they determined that they couldn't exactly figure out whether or not he actually collected the shrimp inside the area or not. So, he should have been driving around the outside of it anyway, but he decided not to. And that is not the first time he had done that, so that's the other part of the equation. But to my knowledge, he was never formally charged with any violation from that one incident. Boy, it sure did smell like a bunch of bad rock shrimp to me. (laughs)

TH: Along that line, have you ever heard of the Oculina Bank being referred to as “the peaks”?

EK: Yeah.

TH: Along those lines, is that where the dragging hurt the reefs?

EK: That's what I've—that's my knowledge of it. I've heard of a couple places, one called “the peaks.” I've heard other references called “the steeples.” I'm not sure that “the steeples” aren't seamounts that are further north off of Sebastian, northeast of Sebastian a little bit. But yeah, I've heard those terms used.

TH: Seamounts?

EK: Seamounts. Yeah.

TH: What is that distinction? That's a new one to me.

EK: Large—you know what I'm talking about, right? You've seen that spot, haven't you, these places on charts? It comes up, like, from 440 feet up to, like, 200 feet, but it's in a very small area; it just comes straight [up] like that. Somebody told me they were seamounts.

TH: Okay.

EK: But anyway, there's like three or four of those up there off of Sebastian. But they're kinda like on the same line of topography as where the Oculina Bank lies, too. But yeah, there's—I know that Harbor Branch has that camera footage, underwater camera footage from one of their subs that shows an area there of the Oculina Bank where some rock shrimping has occurred, where they just mowed down everything and made a flat, barren wasteland out there.¹

TH: Gotcha. Okay. Now I want to talk about your fishing history, specifically. What was your earliest memory of fishing and how old were you?

EK: Probably my earliest memory—I was probably about five, maybe four, five, six years old. A specific memory I have is going with my dad—and I fished a lot with my dad. But I remember me and my brother—he's two years younger than me—going with my dad. We lived in Jensen right after I was born; I was about six months old. My mom and dad, they were really young. Mom was nineteen, Dad was like twenty, and they bought a house in Jensen Beach and Dad's parents came down. By the way, this is the only time I ever fished with my dad's parents. (laughs)

TH: At six months old?

EK: Well, no, no. I was about five, probably. We went down to what's now Sailfish Point. It used to be called Rand's down there; a guy named [James] Rand owned it. And along the north edge of that property—it was down on the southern tip of south Hutchinson Island; it's right at the St. Lucie Inlet. On the opposite side of that inlet on the north side of the property, there was a long seawall about three quarters of a mile long. And it was in various [stages of] disrepair. Big chunks of it had eroded and collapsed into the river right there. The river's only probably got—I say river; it's the Indian River Lagoon. But it's probably only got about four or five feet of water, tops, right there along that seawall. And those other places were crumbled in. We'd go there with a cane pole and a box of frozen shrimp— you know, those little Oriental boxes that

¹ Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution at Florida Atlantic University conducted scientific research referenced in the Oculina Bank closure. It is a non-profit oceanographic institution dedicated to marine and ocean research and education operated by Florida Atlantic University.

you get Chinese food in. And with a cane pole and boxes of shrimp, you could catch all the mangrove snapper you wanted. Lane snapper, groupers—mostly gag groupers.

TH: Now, this is right on the edge of the inlet?

EK: Well, it's around the corner from the inlet. So, it's probably—if you took a boat, it'd take you about—it's probably almost three-quarters of a mile to the inlet, but the seawall is really long. But the tidal flow would come in and out of there really good, so it would clean it out really good. And right there on that flat—we would go there later on in life. I remember being eleven or twelve years old when we did it on a boat. And we would go to those flats right there, right near that spot, and you'd find clams and fighting conchs and big old horse conchs and queen conchs and all kinds of stuff crawling around out there, even then. But even then, they started telling us not to eat the shellfish. That was in the seventies [1970s].

TH: So, you remember when you were a child; that was your first memory of fishing?

EK: That was one of the first instances I remember, but I remember many, many times going to the Jensen Beach Causeway. That was where we spent many, many, many Saturdays as a child. You know, fishing with a variety of cane poles and light-spinning outfits, and catching everything from, like I said, small mangrove snapper to flounder to real big snook to trout, redfish. Of course, we called 'em “channel bass” back then. I didn't know what a redfish was till I moved Tampa to go to college, (laughs) reading these stories that Frank Sargeant wrote about redfish and I'm like, “I gotta find out about what these redfish are.” I looked at a picture one day and went, “Oh, that's a channel bass.” (laughs)

TH: I first learned of 'em as channel bass myself.

EK: Yeah.

TH: I want to go back to that date, 'cause that has to be—like, if you were imagining one of the coolest ways to fish and to catch fish, you could catch mangrove snapper and lane snapper, all you wanted, with a cane pole and shrimp. I mean, that has to be a classic memory.

EK: (laughs) It's great. Yup, sheepshead, black drum—(beeping noise in background) Catch a sand trout when those things would come in during the wintertime.

TH: Okay. We're gonna try to erase some of this [background noise] here, and then we're gonna keep on going. That's what you fish for. Where'd you fish? You explained that. Can you show me? You've shown. Do you mostly go fishing—now, today, you mostly go fishing with others, other people.

EK: Mm-hm.

TH: And they—recreationally.

EK: Yeah.

TH: Okay. During the months of what [time of] year do you fish for what?

EK: Well—

TH: And how long does a fishing trip last? That's a way out there question, I know.

EK: And for me it's a weird answer, because I fish as part of my job quite a bit, (laughs) probably more than I do on my own now. Now, when I go on my own, I'm taking my sons, of course, with me. And because we don't have a boat, we're fishing from land. So, we're fishing from the beach; we're fishing from piers and docks and some of the public access areas we have around our area. Sometimes, we'll go on a boat. My uncle, he's a commercial and recreational fisherman. So, he fishes inshore in the Pomp City [Pompano City]/Stuart area, for pompano, mostly. My sons actually get to fish with him quite a bit for things like pompano, and a lot of my fishing experiences are with him. It's kind of strange, I haven't had a chance to fish with him for a long time, really.

My fishing trips now, like I said, are mostly work-related. They're mostly in pursuit of story topics and subjects, photos, video, things like that. So, a lot of times, the timeline will be set up based on how much time I have available to be there. That's one thing that factors in a lot of times. Sometimes, I can rearrange my schedule to a point where I can actually just be a participant in however the person's gonna fish that day, anyway. So, if they're gonna do a swordfish trip, or go across to the other side or something like that, I'll have to really jump through some hoops. But a lot of times, like I said, it'll be things like inshore fishing. Do you want me to get into the seasons and stuff now?

TH: Sure.

EK Okay. When it comes to seasons, things are pretty typical for this part of Florida. Springtime, this is the time of year— April, May— when we really see great, great snook biting inshore that goes on, probably one of the best ways. I enjoy catching snook because they're not all stacked up in one spot. This time of year, they're kind of spread out all over the place. So, you can kind of find 'em in some of their spring haunts like up the rivers, up the St. Lucie River in North Fork, South Fork, Sebastian River, back up at Taylor Creek. Some of those places I kinda like fishing as you can do a couple things there: you can troll plugs, you can cast mangroves, you can use live bait, you can use dead bait, whatever you want to do, and you can catch a variety of fish. The big jacks [amberjacks] come in this time of year and sometimes they're fun, to go out on a boat and cast the spawning schools that are in cruising in fifteen, twenty feet of water. That's a lot of fun. I like targeting the big kingfish. Wait, wait. We're talking about seasons?

TH: Yeah, May and April.

EK: I mean, the springtime is just great because, like I said, you got the inshore and offshore. The big trout are starting to get ready to do their thing and starting to spawn. So, early morning— top water plugs, fishing anywhere along shorelines. Indian River Lagoon is one of the best places to find them. Although, I love telling people the two biggest trout I ever caught were trolling plugs. One was in Palm City Bay; which, if you have ever fished there, people would go, "How do you catch a trout here? This is nowhere near where trout live." But that's where these—the big ones will go up there for some reason in March and April. I don't know why.

TH: What's the biggest you've ever caught?

EK: About nine pounds.

TH: That's big.

EK: I caught a nine-pound, and I caught about a six-and-a-half-pounder way up the North Fork by Club Med. There's a place called Kitching Cove; it's kinda a corner, and it was about an hour after dark. And me and a friend were up there trolling plugs and we caught a real nice snook, and then, right after that, we caught a real nice trout.

TH: Twelve-pounder?

EK: No, no. He was about six-and-a-half-pound. Twelve-pound snook, but about six-and-a-half-pound trout in there.

TH: You know where Shortys Slough is?

EK: Shortys Slough?

TH: Yeah, going out the Fort Pierce inlet.

EK: No.

TH: There's a cut that goes a little—

EK: On the north side? Yeah, okay. Yeah.

TH: When I first came here in 1972, I caught a thirteen-pound trout there.

EK: Yeah?

TH: I didn't know what it was. I put my thumb in its mouth to try and land it, like you do a bass, and I got a big hole in my thumb. My grandfather, when he saw it, he got real excited. We took it over to Parker's [Fish Camp] and he weighed it, and it was thirteen pounds.

EK: That's awesome.

TH: Anyway, I didn't know what it was.

EK: But that's—the variety of fishing that we have is fantastic, and really, year-round, it's great. But this time of year is probably one of the best times to fish, because you have such a variety to fish for and everything is all going crazy. The redfish are schooling up in the flats and the shallow water, you know—Round Island, Bear Point, places like that. The dolphin run is starting. So, if you go offshore, you find those current edges, and you can get lots of schoolies or

you can get some big ones every once in a while, and you can get those big, old forty, fifty-pounders. We get those big, old square-heads and then—

TH: You're talking about dolphin?

EK: Yeah.

TH: Mahi-mahi?

EK: Yeah. But the grouper fishing is great. The snapper fishing is great right now. We got—I mean, when did the mutton bite start in Fort Pierce? I mean, it was a couple of years ago, wasn't it, that phenomenon. But, I mean, the mutton bite has been great around here and definitely off Stuart.

TH: You say it, and almost everybody I interviewed has said that the mutton snapper is about as good as—I mean the snapper fishing is about as good as it's ever been.

EK: It's been incredible. Most of what I get—you can say it's anecdotal, but that's what a fishing report is. But one of the beautiful things about the job I have, and about the way we set it up, is we have a daily fishing report. So, that keeps you in the flow of information. When we used to get criticized for doing one or two days a week—you get criticized because when you call a tackle shop, you might be getting information [that] might be ten days old. Because if a customer comes in a tackle shop and buys their bait, they go out and go fishing, they might not come back to the tackle shop again for seven days. They come in and the guy says, "Well, how did you do?" [The customer says] "Well, I caught a couple of snook, a couple trout." So—

TH: And that'd be a week ago.

EK: Yeah. When you call on Monday, the guy says, "Oh, we're catching trout and snook." And you think, "Oh, that's great." But realistically, the guys have been out there the day before, they may not have had very great success. And so, you got old information. With the technology we have today, with people sending in photos with their iPhone from right as soon as they catch the fish, to the captains that will call me on their cell phones as they come in the inlet—a lot of times that information we turn around on a Tuesday was information that was coming from Monday. So, the fishing information is as fresh as possible. It helps us to really stay on top of the type of bite that's going on.

And that's one thing I really noticed in the last four or five years, is the improvement in the snapper fishing that we've had in this area. It's just really been tremendous, and the variety of fish that they're catching off of Fort Pierce now has been just really, really incredible. The yellowtail snapper—which is always something that you thought of as being something in Palm Beach County—the yellowtail snapper fishing is fantastic. The mutton snapper fishing is fantastic. They're getting a lot of great red snapper fishing, although we have to throw 'em back. And they're getting good red snapper fishing. The crossover has occurred where they're getting great red snapper fishing off of Stuart to the point where you can actually target it, which was never something you could do. Five, six, seven years ago, you couldn't tell someone out of Stuart, "Let's go catch some red snapper," and go to it. Nowadays, you can set up a whole trip just to do that.

TH: What do you attribute that to?

EK: I've talked to a lot of people about it, the debate among scientists and people that have a lot more fishing experience than I do. One side of the debate is that, obviously, it speaks to the health of the fishery. If we have more fish in more places, it means that we're doing better. Other people say no; actually, what they're seeing is they're seeing a shift. They're seeing fish that may have been caught in South Carolina that aren't being caught now—are now being caught in parts farther south that weren't caught [there] before. And then, every once in a while, you get a guy who really is a glass-half-empty kinda guy and he says, "Well, they used to catch 'em off of Jupiter. They used to catch red snapper off Jupiter all the time, but they haven't been able to do that in fifty years." So, I don't know what to think, sometimes. It depends on who you talk to, you know? (laughs)

TH: Has anybody mentioned that we've had drought conditions for the last few years? And the drought condition creates less runoff, which is another—I don't know.

EK: You know, there is somebody who's mentioned—who's talked about that, and—

TH: I know the clarity in the river has been better, right here.

EK: One of the guys that speaks to that is Grant Gilmore, who's a scientist who's been working with the lagoon now, since he showed up here in 1971, or something.² And he has never left. He's been working with it. And he has this great story he tells: His first day on the job, he goes down to the big flats, big, grass flat south of Stuart Causeway right there, just inshore of the

² 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, from 1971 to 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.

House of Refuge.³ And right there in that flat—I don't know if you've ever been there, Terry, but the flat, at different times, can be really big. But at times, it can be three or four hundred acres of just this nice big thick shoal grass that comes up about two and a half, three feet deep when it's really been growing good. The hurricanes in aught-four [2004] wiped it all out, but before that, that June of that year, it was really tremendous. Wading in there was like wading in a marsh. That's how thick the grass was. You couldn't actually get through it, hardly.

But he set a net there, and his story goes something like: in a fifty-foot net set, he caught something like fifty-four species in one set. To talk about diversity of an estuary, you can't speak to it any better than that. That's one reason why, on a federal level, they've identified the Indian River Lagoon as being the most important estuary we have in the United States. And part of those species that he caught in there were juvenile, numbers and numbers of juvenile species of fish that will spend most of their adult lives offshore. They use our lagoon as its nursery ground. So, that's one reason why it's so important for us to protect these areas. But that's the one thing about it that is really tremendous.

TH: Okay. Where else do you go fishing in the Fort Pierce area?

EK: Well, I love fishing along the west bank here of the Indian River Lagoon, all the way along it, all the way from the St. Lucie-Martin County line all the way up to past the St. Lucie-Indian River County line. I feel like fishing that whole area through St. Lucie Village. I like fishing this area right here by the marina, just south of here. There's some really good, new, lush fishing grounds right here. I like fishing the east side of the river here.

I swear I saw a twenty-pound trout, the next world record trout. (TH laughs) I swear I saw it straight across the river here over near that flat at Jaycee Park there one day. I was out there with Ed Zyak; we were messing around with something, and all of a sudden, there's this huge boil right behind the boat. When it turned, you could tell it was a square tail, but there were just too many spots for it to be a redbfish. I didn't think it was—there's just something about the image you get out of the corner of your eye; you just know it wasn't a redbfish. It didn't have that blue edge on the tail; it just had a square tail. I didn't think it was a drum—something about the spots right there towards the last fin. If that was a trout, the tail was that thick. (TH laughs) It had to be a twenty-pounder, you know.

The fishing along here is great. I love the flats fishing there. I love fishing on the beaches there. I mean, probably the biggest jack crevalle that I've ever caught was basically straight due east of us here. But you go to the other side of the beach; you go out about a half mile off the beach here. I swore it was a fifty-pound kingfish, but it turned out to be a about a forty-five pound jack. (laughs)

³ The House of Refuge at Gilbert's Bar, also known as the House of Refuge, is the last remaining shipwreck life-saving station on Florida's Atlantic Coast, and is the oldest surviving building in Marion County, Florida.

TH: That would be near the sewer treatment plant.

EK: On the ocean side, though.

TH: Oh, okay.

EK: Yeah. So, I'm saying we caught that on the ocean.

TH: All right.

EK: Yeah. Around the sewage plant, though, that's always been a great place to catch grouper and snapper. Lobster divers go there every summer. (laughs)

TH: We had a good season of catching jacks there.

EK: Yeah, yeah.

TH: Commercially. Okay. During what—you were finishing, you finished the summer. Let's go to the fall.

EK: Okay.

TH: Let's start midsummer.

EK: Midsummer. The early summer, you got the tarpon come through, and that's always a spectacle to behold. I always think of it in terms like this: March, you get the kingfish; April, you get the dolphin; May, you get the tarpon, into June; let's say May and June. You really think of June really as being tarpon as more than anything. But we still get those 200-pounders that come up the beach. We'll still get 'em sometimes; usually in the fall though, on the way back. But they'll come way up the rivers. They'll go way up the St. Lucie, sometimes. Sometimes in spring, they'll be up there, too. There'll be, like, an eel hatch about every four or five years and they'll go and just gorge themselves on these weird, dog-faced eels that are strange-looking

things. You'll see 'em. You'll catch 'em and they'll be, like, just barfing 'em up, you know, these big, old eels. (laughs)

TH: That's nuts. Where do they get those eels?

EK: Up in the North Fork of the St. Lucie River. They hatch up there somewhere. I don't where, but they start coming down. It's a cyclical thing. Every several years, you'll get 'em and all of a sudden, the river will be full of 'em for about a week.

TH: The eels or the—

EK: The eels. But everything goes up there, especially the tarpon; they love 'em. But anyway, you move away from that and you get into—

TH: What's the biggest tarpon you ever caught?

EK: Probably about 120 [pounds].

TH: You got him up the side of the boat?

EK: Yeah. He was a pretty good size. That was a crazy day, that whole day of fishing. But I was with my uncle and my brother and my cousin. And we were on a little—my uncle has an eighteen foot Renegade, and we went out there with some live greenies. It was in July, end of July, one of those Julys where we had just flat-calm ocean. It was like “Lake Atlantic” for like three weeks. And the greenies were as thick as you've ever seen 'em around here, and they just pretty much were on the beach.

TH: What's the name? It's “greenies”?

EK: Threadfin herring.

TH: Thank you.

EK: So, they're in there, real thick. I mean, literally, in ten feet of water, you'd have threadfin herring from top to bottom in the water column. And then, you would have—the schools of tarpon will break off into these schools of about thirty fish in each school. And they would corral the threadfin herring against the beach. So, they'd use the beach as one border, and then they would form like a semicircle, and just swim around on the outside of 'em to keep 'em hemmed in. The recreational anglers loved 'em. They'd go in there and all you do is cast nets and greenies, throw in your live bait well, stick 'em on your hook, and throw it out right out right in the middle. You could pretty much sight cast which tarpon you wanted, throw it right in front of 'em. We had a quadruple-header of 100-pound tarpon all at the same time for about five minutes, until we started breaking 'em off. (laughs)

TH: That's five minutes of your life you'll remember.

EK: It was a lot of fun, yeah. Yeah.

TH: That's cool. Okay, then you got the tarpon, so you'd—

EK: Tarpon. Then, you go into the—a lot of times summertime is a great time to go offshore, too. You get all kinds of things.

TH: Dolphin and sailfish.

EK: Some sailfish; there's always sailfish all year around here. One thing that's nice is you can go out there on a flats boat or a shallow-draft boat. So, you don't have to have real big, heavy gear and hold on with one hand. You just go out there and—

TH: In the summertime?

EK: Yeah, in the summertime, and catch 'em. Yeah, for things all things like barracudas and bonitos and stuff like that—which are great fish to bend rods on for kids and stuff. I grew up—probably one of the first offshore trips I remember, I was probably about seven or eight, you know, out there with my uncle. He had his eighteen foot MAKO with an eighty-five horsepower Mercury on it. (laughs) It was a little overpowered, but he used to take it back and forth to the Bahamas all time with the Stuart Sailfish Club.

But yeah, then we go into the fall; and of course, fall, you can't think of fall without thinking of the fall mullet run.

TH: Let me go back before you leave the summer. Did you have to worry about something in the afternoons in the summer?

EK: Well, lightning, thunderstorms. Yeah, absolutely.

TH: Summer squalls?

EK: Yeah, so you want to make sure that you did your thing early, that's for sure.

TH: You spoke of the small boats and I know it can be flat-calm in the summer, especially early summer, June and July. It's when—

EK: Yeah, you want to be off the water by three [PM], there's no doubt about that. So, you always try to plan accordingly for that. Usually by then, it's so hot anyway, you've pretty much burned yourself out by that point. (laughs)

TH: Right. All right. Now, go on the to fall end of your—

EK: Well, the fall mullet run, which is—again, it's just one of those things, those migrations of Mother Nature that just is incredible to see in our area right through this part of Florida—coastal Florida for that matter. You just get this huge run of bait. I understand it's like the second or third year; for me, it's the first year. It's the first-year mullet hatch, and what they'll do is they leave their estuaries and they all gather up. And they come down the beaches and in and out of the lagoons, the Indian River Lagoon; they come from north-south, it seems. And as they push south, everything that eats a mullet is on top of it, and it's just really incredible. Sometimes, you catch yourself not fishing but just staring and watching in awe, 'cause it's just incredible. I mean, everything from the snook and the bluefish and the sharks and the tarpon and the redfish. You get these big bull reds that follow 'em up in the Sebastian area. We got forty, fifty pounders; you'll see them crashing through there.

TH: Through the mullet; that's the fall.

EK: They love the mullet—

TH: Now, is that the row mullet or the silver?

EK: Those are the silver mullet.

TH: Okay.

EK: And they'll be coming down and it's, you know, finger mullet. Mullet's not very big. They're only about eight to ten inches long, maybe. So, you'll be watching those, and that's really incredible to fish in all that. Some guys I know, they get frustrated with it. They call it lottery fishing because it's like you can take your—you almost have to use a live mullet to fish in a school of live mullet. You throw it out in the middle there and you just kind of hope that you're the one in a billion that gets hit this minute. But I've done really well fishing with artificial shrimp in the middle of a mullet run. One guy described it to me, he said, "Shrimp are like candy to a fish—most types of fish, anyway. So, they're not gonna be able to pass one up, if they see one." And a lot of times, if they're feeding on one species for a long time, they kind of like the change of pace if you throw it in the middle. At least, that's the rationale.

TH: Like people.

EK: Yeah, exactly. (TH laughs) That takes you into October, about mid-October, through the nor'easters and stuff.

TH: Well, before we leave that, I want to ask a question. Do you recall reading *Barefoot Mailman*?⁴

EK: Yeah.

TH: And talking about the massive schools of mullet going up and down the coast?

EK: Yeah.

TH: That's exactly what you're describing. So, there's still, to some extent here—

⁴ *The Barefoot Mailman*, written in 1943 by Theodore Pratt, describes the life a mailman in late 19th century Florida who traversed unpaved roads connecting Miami to Palm Beach. The story was adapted to film in 1951.

EK: It's amazing. Of all the interruptions that man has created by building jetties and carving out inlets and—

TH: Net fishing.

EK: Yeah, net fishing, you name it. All kinds of stuff that we've been doing; all the pollution and everything else we've done. It's still incredible at how it just forges on anyway.

TH: It's great.

EK: Yeah.

TH: And you got—now, go into the winter. I keep interrupting you.

EK: Well, end of the winter, right after the mullet run is when we start seeing that first run of bluefish, and it's usually pretty good. Right on the tail end of the mullet is when the bluefish really start moving through here, and they can be spectacular. In fact, the state record bluefish was caught here in the early seventies [1970s] off of Jensen, but it was a twenty-two pounder. It's a pretty good sized bluefish. You say that in New York, they don't even bat an eye. But down here—

TH: Down here, that's huge.

EK: But still, you get those big, four, five, seven-pound bluefish that come through here, and they'll come through by the hundreds. They come through by the billions. So, they're right behind the mullet. And, usually, once the cloud of those things moves through, the Spanish mackerel are kinda tied in with 'em. I remember the old—some of the cast netters in Port Salerno, they always talk about—the last couple of years, they've started asking when the Stuart Air Show is this year, because they know that when the Air Show shows up, that's usually when the Spanish mackerel should be in the kingfish hole; the first wave of it, at least.

TH: Well, the water is—

EK: Which run around Veterans' Day, mid-November every year.

TH: That's when the water temperature changes.

EK: Right.

TH: The bluefish like the cooler water. And as soon as the water gets a little warmer, then—on the backs of the bluefish—then, the mackerel. I had a great commercial season on bluefish and mackerel this year.

EK: Bluefish have been here thick forever. And then, after that, you'll see the pompano come in close to shore, and whiting. There's whiting here year round.

TH: I love whiting.

EK: Yeah. But those, you know, the pompano come though. Usually in December, you're looking at pompano. Then, you get in January and sailfish are here, and they can be real thick. We've had a fantastic season on sailfish here this past year and about every other year for the last seven or eight years. We've had—seems like we've had a really good year of sailfish. So, for recreational guys, [they] like targeting them. Then, let's see, that takes us into the—February is when you clean your tackle. (both laugh) Get ready for March again.

TH: Okay. Sounds like a fishing paradise in this area. Have you ever heard of Fort Pierce—and probably Stuart as well, early on—as being referred to as the “fishing capital of the world”?

EK: You know, I've never come across that yet, but I've called it that, and I've written of that in columns. I remember one time I wrote columns, I got a little ticked off because the “Visit Florida” website—you know, not the website but, at the time, the tourist campaign site. Their big campaign they launched one year was—and this is, like I said, “Visit Florida,” so, it's supposed to be representing the whole state—and they specifically held up Islamorada as the world capital of sport fishing and I started thinking, You know, what does Islamorada have on Fort Pierce, really? You know? (laughs) We got a lot of to be proud of here. You can't go off of Islamorada in any given day and guarantee you're gonna catch a hundred sailfish and kingfish to fifty pounds; and snook to forty pounds; and dolphin to sixty-five, seventy pounds; and grouper to forty pounds. But you can do that here, you know. I guess you can do that there, too, but you can definitely do it here, as well.

TH: Okay. Finally, I'd like to talk about how your fishing has changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank. Since 1984, several changes have been made in the regulations of the Oculina

Bank. I'd like to know if any of these regulations affected your fishing and if so, how. The Oculina Bank was initially closed to trawling, dredging, and bottom long lining in 1984. Did this affect your fishing? If so, how?

EK: No, it did not affect my fishing, personally. No.

TH: In 1994, the Oculina Bank was designated as an experimental closed area where fishing for and retention of snapper grouper species was prohibited. Snapper grouper fishing boats were also prohibited from anchoring. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation, and how? Nineteen ninety-four.

EK: No, it didn't. Again, personally, it didn't really impact my fishing much at all.

TH: But some of your readership—

EK: My readership? It did, definitely, big time. It affected them at a standpoint; like I said, when they were getting ready to do it in ninety-four [1994], they were getting ready to close it down. Well, ninety-four [1994]—did they change it again after that?

TH: Again, to all anchoring within the Oculina Bank, in 1996.

EK: Oh, ninety-six [1996], right. Yeah, in ninety-four [1994], when they closed it—I knew of it at the time. I was just getting into the writing part of things, so I wasn't really in contact with too many fishermen, other than the ones in my family and friends, and stuff like that. A lot of the ones I was friends with and family with did not spend a lot of their energy and time bottom fishing off of our coast here. Most of 'em were either trollers or drift live baiters and guys like that. But later on, when they changed it again—it was ninety-six, right?

TH: Ninety-six [1996], all anchoring was prohibited within Oculina Bank. Did this impact your fishing, and if so, how?

EK: You know, again, I don't think the anchoring really impacted it most. The biggest complaint I heard was that—

TH: Just the snapper/grouper?

EK: Just the snapper and grouper fishing. And most of those guys were gonna drift fish for those fish, and they were really disappointed by that. There were some researchers that said that the eight-ounce, ten-ounce, twelve-ounce weights, lead weights, when you drop 'em down—with a snapper rig, you have to use that much weight to get it down in a current at that depth of water, to get it down to the bottom. That would be like pulverizing the coral reef in small amounts. I think John Reed said that, Harbor Branch.⁵ I think I remember him saying that to me.

TH: Okay. In 1996, trawling for rock shrimp was prohibited in the area to the east and north of the designated Oculina Bank. I showed you on the map; that's that area they.

EK: Yeah.

TH: In 1998, this area was incorporated into the Oculina Bank HAPC. Fishing with bottom long line, trawl, and dredge was prohibited in the expanded area, as was anchoring of any vessel. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation, and how?

EK: No, my fishing was not.

TH: And your constituency?

EK: I couldn't believe it took them that long to do it, though.

TH: Pardon?

EK: I mean I couldn't believe it took 'em that long to close it to that type of activity. I know why they did it, but it was just a no-brainer, if you ask me.

TH: So, basically, before we go on to the next question, the Oculina—help me here. Basically, you have a—you don't have a problem with closing it to anchoring, dredging, long lining—

EK: And trawling.

⁵ John Reed has worked for Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution as a research scientist since 1969. He has over thirty publications relating to the subject of the Oculina Bank.

TH: —and trawling, dragging. Okay. But, you do have a little bit of a problem with bottom fishing, drifting, drift bottom fishing, or power bottom fishing, as they call it: holding a boat in one spot and doing bottom fishing. You don't feel that that really damages the reef. You haven't been convinced.

EK: No. I think—for two reasons: Okay, you can make a case for the type of damage that it causes as making an impact. Fine, I get that. But my problem with it is that the level of the population you're talking about that actually does that kind of fishing is not that large. You're not really closing it off to that many anglers to begin with. Your majority of anglers are gonna be, you know—the farther you get from the coast, the less—

TH: The fewer boats.

EK: Yeah, the fewer boats you see, the fewer type of fishermen. You're talking about a guy who goes out there, a guy who's got specialized gear. It's expensive, he's interested in keeping most of it. He's not gonna be a guy who wants to go out and there and, you know—sure, you gonna find guys that use BreakAway sinkers, but most of 'em aren't. Yeah, you got some guys that get wrapped up on coral and get broken off, but most of 'em are gonna try to avoid that. They're gonna use techniques and gear and things like that that allows 'em to retrieve their stuff. These guys aren't going out there and just dumping several hundred dollars of tackle on the ocean floor for fun. They're going out there to catch a couple fish for dinner, you know, most of 'em, hook and line guys. And okay, great, how do you allow a hook and line recreational guy in there and not a hook and line commercial guy? Well, that's a good point. You probably have to allow that, too. But again, the commercial guy is gonna have—he's gonna be pretty conscientious when it comes to a lot of his techniques that he's using, 'cause he won't be able to get that price back on the other end when he comes back in. He can't just jack his price up because he lost two lead sinkers today. That's not the way that's gonna work on the market.

But it's deep enough where you're not gonna have to worry about divers. It's too deep for that, for diving, for spearing and diving. The only types of damaging fishing techniques you have are those bottom long lines, and definitely the trawling. Bottom long lines are not specific. So, you're gonna be catching a lot of bycatch and stuff like that that you're not gonna be able to release with any kind of success. The trawling is like fishing with a steamroller. So, if you're worried about protecting the habitat, that's the absolute opposite thing [that] you want to allow. So, that's my problem with it. You're not gonna have—in no time, even in the most perfect conditions day, would you ever go out on the Oculina Bank and find a hundred boats out there on a Saturday. Memorial Day weekend? You'd never find a hundred out there. You might find ten, you know, near Fort Pierce, and ten near Sebastian and ten near [Cape] Canaveral. That'd be about it.

TH: Okay, excellent. The designation of marine areas that are closed to fishing is being used more frequently as a fishery management tool. What do you think about the use of closed areas to fishing compared to other types of management regulations, such as quotas, closed seasons, et cetera?

EK: Well, first of all, closing an area to fishing and calling it a tool is a misnomer. It's not a tool. It's an avoidance of addressing the real problem. By closing it off to everybody, all you're doing is trying to make a garden out there, one that's not gonna have any kind of stewardship whatsoever. If there is a problem, then you're not gonna have anybody out there keeping an eye on it. But the main thing is that it's not a tool at all. All it does is prohibit people from being able to do anything. It's punishing the wrong people that didn't have anything to do anything for the wrong reason. I mean, will it work? I don't know. But I do know what it does do. It has an impact. It makes an impact on an economic level. It makes an impact on a lot of levels, especially with all the industries that are attached to it.

TH: Elaborate on that a bit.

EK: Well, the main thing is that the people that do go out and fish in some of these areas—and some of the ones they've created in the last several years are a lot closer to shore and are in areas that are targeted a little more frequently, but still require specialized types of fishing, at least for the ones that they're closing off to bottom fishing. Some of the ones they're talking about creating to protect red snapper fishing are absolutely ridiculous. You're talking about closing off an entire block of the ocean to any kind of bottom fishing whatsoever. All you're doing there is crush the economy for the coastal areas, 'cause it's gonna stop people that want to go out there in their boat on the weekend to go fishing. They're not going to. So, they're gonna start looking at the reason. "Why do we even have a boat to begin with?"

Well, a lot of people have boats. If they don't trailer their boat, they keep it in a marina or they keep it in a rack storage facility. So, you're gonna have an impact there when they remove their boat or sell their boat or get rid of it. You're gonna have that kind of a problem there. That's gonna create a problem. It's gonna create a problem with the tackle shops, of course, because you're not gonna be buying bait, you're not gonna be buying gear, things like that. You're not gonna—you're gonna have a problem. You're not gonna be able to sell more boats. That's another way it's gonna impact it. The convenience store where you stop to get your sandwiches and your drinks and ice, they're not gonna get your money anymore. So, there's gonna be a really high, trickle-down affect felt from the vacuum created by closing off these areas to fishing.

TH: Do people come here from other areas to fish?

EK: Absolutely. That's one of the biggest tourist draws we have in coastal Florida, the whole idea of coming here to catch a fish. And that's actually—they can start measuring that already, not even just for the areas they are closing, but with the seasons that they're closing. I was just talking to Lew Augusta about that with the grouper season having just opened two days ago, you know; I was asking about that.⁶ But that whole thing is, people like—they come here to Florida, they save up their money to come down here, they want to make the most of their experience down here. One of the most fantastic experiences you can have as a family, especially when you're bringing children along, is to catch a fish with 'em, or take 'em somewhere to catch a fish, take 'em on a charter boat or a party boat and allow 'em to catch a fish. And if there isn't any mechanism to do that, that's gonna be one less way to make a memory and one less reason to come down here.

TH: Excellent. So, you're not very much into closing areas. If you were managing all the fisheries in South Florida, what do you think would be the fairest and best way to manage the fisheries? There's quotas, closed seasons, number of fish caught. How would you manage the fisheries? What would be the fairest, most equitable way to manage the fisheries?

EK: Well, closed seasons are less damaging than closed areas.

(phone rings) Excuse me. (answers phone) Hello? I got a lot going on right now. (laughs)

Pause in recording

TH: Okay, we're recording again. You were talking about your—the fairest and best way to manage the fisheries.

EK: Yeah. I think to some degree, some fisheries can be managed pretty effectively with closed seasons. I'm in favor, for instance, of the closed seasons we have for snook, because we know that they're gonna pile in on the inlets during the summertime and line up for the spawn. And they're very easy to target in that situation, and we do have a fair amount of mortality from when you catch and release 'em to begin with. So, you've already got a narrow slot limit—which I think is ridiculous. That makes it hard to catch a fish and then release it safely when you do have a harvest season open. So, I think one or the other is gonna be better, a better tool. Not necessarily using a slot limit so much as using a minimum size and then allowing—especially for your offshore fish—a minimum size is probably the best way to go there, with maybe a closed season for some species.

TH: What species?

⁶ Lew Augusta was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00010.

EK: Well, like I said, I don't know that—like, for instance, the vermilion snapper season closure is, I don't think, warranted. I don't think they need to do that. So, they can just leave that alone. But they have the minimum size at—where they have the minimum size right now is probably a good place to keep it, but they don't need to close the season. Now, grouper might be a little bit different. The only problem I have with that is they close it to all shallow water grouper species. They are just trying to protect gag grouper because they want to—they basically want to eliminate the method of fishing. I think that's a bunch of crap.

I think what they need to do is, if you want to protect gag grouper, protect gag grouper. So, allow people to fish, but tell 'em, "You can't keep gag grouper for the first four months, but you can keep scamp, or you can keep red grouper. You can keep other species that aren't necessarily—they have done an evaluation and they don't think there's a problem with." Things like snowy grouper and tilefish—that's absolutely ridiculous what they've done with them. And those things, again you should, I think, keep a minimum size, but allow people to catch two or three of 'em, not just one per boat per day. That's absurd, because to get to where they live to begin with, you're not gonna want to make that effort. And that's really their goal to begin with, is to protect the fish from people even going after them to begin with.

So, I just don't think those are good ways to do it. I think catch limits per person is a good way to do things. Limits per vessel is a good way to do things. Restrictive seasons, to a degree, where they make sense; and, like I said, careful management of some of your inshore species would be good. And then, step up enforcement, I think is another part of the thing.

TH: Where?

EK: Well—

TH: Mainly at the boat docks or in the ocean and river?

EK: Both, both. On land and places we know that are targeted heavily by land-based fishermen; on the rivers, all along the beaches, and on the ocean. Those are all really necessary. What was the other part of the question? What—first of all, does that complete that question?

TH: Pretty much, yeah. It's on how you—if you could manage the fisheries.

EK: Well, I'll tell you, I'm not in favor of quotas, okay, of saying, "Well, okay, the recreational sector gets this many pounds and the commercial sector is that many pounds." That part gets a little confusing and dicey, because you're only really gonna have one end of things where you'll be able to keep track of paperwork. And that's gonna be a little tricky to do as far as doing it accurately. So, I don't think that quotas are really the best way to go. But for things like snook or something like that, I don't have a problem with them having a tag for, for instance, charging an angler [for] a tag, and—I remember Glenn Middlebrooks saying this one time; it made total sense to me—treating snook season kind of like you treat deer-hunting season.⁷ You go out, you're gonna get so many, you're allowed to take so many that year. So, go ahead and take your tags, get your tags ahead of time. You get that many tags to keep. That might be one way to handle it. They may not be like a buck apiece, but do it, like—you know, you get to spend five bucks and you can get twenty snook or something like that, to that order. So, that might be a good way to manage some of the species.

One thing I'm really against is the snook slot. A twenty-eight to thirty-two inch slot is absurd. I think that what you should do is have a minimum size limit on those. If you want to reduce the bag limit to one, that's fine. We do know that the large fish are females that spawn. But what you can do is—you know, taking one here and one there isn't really gonna be that big of a deal for that fishery. But go ahead and allow people, say, "Look, I think you can hurt a lot more snook by catching twenty and having to throw nineteen of 'em back than by going out and catching one." So, if you know that you're gonna be fishing there with this big snook, get your one and then go home. So, if you get one above twenty-eight inches, fine. You get to keep it. You know, don't fish any more for 'em. Leave; take your one and go home.

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

EK: If you've asked me that question in November, it'd had been a totally different answer than what I'm gonna give you now. (laughs) We're right on the cusp right now of having about a four month run of some of the most incredibly devastating environmental factors that have gathered in this part of Florida in history. Any one of them is a once in a lifetime type of an event. But to have three of them occur in four months' time, you just have to wonder how any kind of ecosystem can survive and rebound from what we're looking at here. Of course, I'm talking about the worst case scenario with the oil spill. But we don't know what the effects of that are gonna be this coast, but certainly we know what the effects will be on Plaquemines Parish [Louisiana]. I mean, it's gonna be bad and forever-lasting. We're looking at, you know, grandkids there are not gonna know the fishing that their grandfathers knew a week ago. So, in that respect, we're looking at something that's gonna be absolutely ridiculous.

⁷ William Glenn Middlebrooks was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00005.

In this specific area, we've gone through a January where we had the coldest January on record. We had the coldest water for a season that anybody can remember, anecdotally or scientifically, where we saw fishing patterns change dramatically for months at a time. Not just for a few weeks here and there, or everything off by a week or two, or a month; we saw things change for three or four months' period of time. So, it's been very, very odd, very strange, very hard to figure out, very hard to predict what's gonna happen. And then, we follow that up with this ridiculous dumping of Lake Okeechobee water into the St. Lucie River Estuary. I mean, I can't even—as you know, I've been writing about it for weeks now, but I can't even put into words how ridiculous the whole thing is.

TH: How many gallons?

EK: It's just—

TH: Millions?

EK: Well, it's billions. It's millions of gallons a day, just coming into the St. Lucie. Twice that goes to the west coast. There's Fort Myers and the Caloosahatchee River and Port Charlotte area over there. But the whole thing is that we're taking on billions and billions of gallons of storm water runoff that Mother Nature had never intended to come into this estuary. Because of how mankind designed a plumbing system for drainage, we've totally screwed up this whole area over here. If you quit doing it right now, it might have a chance to recover in forty or fifty years. But they have no signs of slowing down. They have no signs of changing any kind of policies. This is gonna continue for the rest of my lifetime, I know, probably to my kid's lifetime, despite how much fighting and screaming and hollering is going on right now—letter-writing and lobbying and campaigning. It doesn't matter. It just seems like it's gonna go on indefinitely.

And then, you come in with this oil spill, which is just so ridiculous. If that has any kind of effect along here, like you were saying earlier, if it comes up the Gulf Stream, comes along Treasure Coast and near Fort Pierce area, if we have like a back eddy, where it spins off, you know—maybe the Gulf Stream's anywhere from fifteen to nineteen miles straight off of Fort Pierce, but if we get a back wind spins in and a southeast wind for three days, and then an incoming tide sucks it into Fort Pierce Inlet, what's that gonna do to this estuary?

TH: And the Indian River Lagoon.

EK: The whole Indian River Lagoon will be wrecked for generations with just that. (phone rings) I mean, right now, they're talking about tar balls. Well, even tar balls could be really damaging for our coastal reefs or anything like that, any kind of shoreline situation we have

along here. So, what's it gonna be like in ten years, to answer the question? I'd like to think that, somehow, we've learned something through this whole process. Somehow, we're gonna be able to figure out how to deal with an oil spill like we're dealing with. And somehow, we're gonna learn how to deal with the—somehow, we're gonna come up with a better solution for the storm water runoff. If we can manage those two issues, then we only have to deal with the once in a hundred-year cold temperatures, and we can live with that. Mother Nature has a way of handling it and healing from its own catastrophes. But it's the ones that are manmade that are the ones that are so damaging.

So, hopefully we'll see some good fishing continue, you know, and continue to get better and better. And we won't do it with terrible management; we'll do it, actually, with smart management. So, that's where I'd like to end it, is that things will—that we'll see good fishing here, ten years from now, for a variety of species, a very diverse estuary, and one that we can all be proud of living in.

TH: If we can stop the oil spill and if we can stop with the runoff of the freshwater.

EK: (laughs) Yep. By the way, that's my Sunday column. (laughs) Just said it right there.

End of interview