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Terry Howard: Good morning. This is Terry Howard. Today is June 10, 2010. I am at the Yates Funeral Home in Fort Pierce, Florida, conducting an oral interview with Billy Yates for the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation's project with the Fort Pierce fishermen on the Oculina Bank HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. Welcome, Mr. Yates. Please state your name, spell your name, your place of birth, and your date of birth.

Joseph Yates: Okay, I'm Joseph William Yates, Jr. Always been known as Bill. I was born in Fort Pierce, Florida, September 27, 1944.

TH: Okay, when did you say—you were just born right here in Fort Pierce?

JY: Always lived here, yes.

TH: Okay, are you married?

JY: Married. Been married forty-two years.

TH: Okay, how old were you when you got married?

JY: Twenty-three.

TH: Okay, do you have children?

JY: I have a daughter, thirty-six years old.

TH: How much schooling do you have?

JY: I have a college degree, associate's degree in mortuary science.

TH: What was your daughter's name?

JY: Elizabeth.

TH: Okay, Elizabeth. What do you do for a living?

JY: I'm a funeral director and retired owner of Yates Funeral Home, semi-retired.

TH: Okay. Other jobs that you've had?

JY: No, I've always been in the funeral business. But a lot like a lot of people my age, I sold fish from a teenager on, had a restricted species license for grouper and snapper when I was in my twenties.

TH: So you fished here mostly all your life?

JY: All my life, yeah.

TH: Did you ever have any jobs on charter boats, or—

JY: I worked for the old charter boat *Valda*.

TH: *Valda*, V-a-l-d-a?

JY: Uh-huh, *Valda*, and that was captained and owned by Art Eargle, and he was the brother of Walter, or “Pug,” Eargle.

TH: Okay. Art Eargle, how do you spell “Eargle?”

JY: E-a-r-g-l-e. And then I—

TH: Art was the brother?

JY: Of Walter, remember; he was port captain.

TH: Art was the brother of Walter Eargle, port captain. You worked on his boat—

JY: His charter boat—

TH: As a mate.

JY: A mate.

TH: How old were you then?

JY: Probably twelve and thirteen, fourteen. I moved on to bein' a freeloader and mate on the *Buccaneer*, Lyle Curnette and Frank Haskell's party boat, head boat.

TH: Okay, now we need to get their names and spell them correctly.

JY: Okay.

TH: The *Buccaneer* was kind of a head boat.

JY: Was a head boat, right, yeah.

TH: Who was the captain?

JY: Lyle, L-y-l-e, Curnette, C-u-r-n-e-t-t-e.

TH: C-u-r—

JY: —n-e-t-t-e.

TH: And?

JY: Frank Haskell, H-a-s-k-e-l-l.

TH: This was—what was your age then? You were out of school?

JY: Fourteen and fifteen. I started fishin' on the *Buccaneer*.

TH: So, you've worked in a fishing industry a little bit, but not as a full-time—

JY: Not as a full-time career; weekend. I was a weekend warrior.

TH: Okay, do you currently own a boat?

JY: I own a twenty-five foot Mako that's twenty-nine years old.

TH: (laughs) That's was when the Makos—but they're still good boats.

JY: All I do is put a new engine on her when she needs it and it still goes.

TH: What kind of engine do you have on this boat?

JY: A 225 horse[power] Mercury. Always had Mercurys.

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

JY: Over the years when the current wasn't runnin' very bad, it was *el primo* place to catch grouper and snapper, all the way from Jeff's Reef to west or east of Vero [Beach].

TH: Jeff's Reef?

JY: That's the—

TH: Can you be more specific?

JY: That's the beginnin' of Oculina Bank, and it's a big rock that lays east of Fort Pierce. The submarine divers have been all over it and they—the man that discovered it some thirty years ago was Jeff, or Jeff Somebody, and they called it Jeff's Reef.

TH: Okay, that's the south end?

JY: That's the very south end, and then there's a gap between Jeff's Reef and where the reef picks up in 165 and 240 feet of water.

TH: Jeff's Reef is in how many feet of water?

JY: Two hundred forty at the deepest part of it, but it comes up sixty foot.

TH: Is that the peaks?

JY: It's the beginnin' of the peaks.

TH: The beginning of the peaks, okay; they call them "towers" off of Jacksonville.

JY: Mm-hm, and they catch mules out there; you know what a mule is? That's a sow snapper. A big red snapper is called a mule when you get up above Daytona.

TH: Excellent. (phone rings) Why was—how familiar are you—you're very familiar with the Oculina Bank?

JY: Yeah.

TH: Why was the Oculina Bank designated as an area to protect?

JY: Probably the last holdout for good fishin': when 80 foot reef, 95 foot reef, 105 foot reef was slow fishin', you could always go to the Oculina Bank. You could always go there; you couldn't always fish it out of a small boat. You needed a lot of anchor line, you know, and heavy reels, so you picked your days to fish the Oculina Bank. And it's also good troll fishin'. The pelagic fish, the wahoos, sailfish seem to congregate around the peaks and over the reefs and deep water, also.

TH: Is there anything else you can tell me about the Oculina Bank that you know about it? You're tellin' me a lot already.

JY: Yeah. It's been commercial fished since I was a little boy. There was a rock called the Indiana Rock, which is part of the Oculina Bank and it was, you know, kept secret for a long time. And you've heard of it, Terry.

TH: Was that found by three fishermen from Indiana?

JY: Supposedly. You never know. And, of course, that's where the story about Kittie Mitchel groupers came from. Do you know why they're named Kittie Mitchels?

TH: No.

JY: There was a house of ill repute in St. Augustine and the madam was Kittie Mitchel. And the commercial fishermen would save a grouper out, save that little for Kittie Mitchel and that's where the term "Kittie Mitchel" grouper came from. Some people think it's just a small warsaw or a small yellowfin, yellowedge grouper, but it's subspecies of them, and they're called Kittie Mitchels.

TH: (laughs) That is interesting.

JY: On the west coast, they can get fifty pounds. I never caught one bigger than seven or eight pounds on the east coast.

TH: Okay, the Kittie Mitchel. How do you spell that?

JY: K-i-t-t-i-e, Kittie, Mitchel, M-i-t-c-h-e-l. Maybe two 'L's?

TH: Fascinating.

JY: Yeah.

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

JY: Ignore my cell phone. I don't think it's hurt the recreational fishermen because of the difficulty of day fishin' it and current runnin' all the problems you have fishin' deep water hook and line, but some of the commercial fishing boats have been hurt. They're not able to catch grouper and snapper hook and line in some of their better places. But for the recreational fisherman, I think it has a small impact.

TH: On them?

JY: On them, yeah.

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

JY: In a small way, yes, but not—the older I got, the shallower I fish. Eighty foot to a hundred foot is my target area.

TH: If you were younger, would you fish there more? (phone rings)

JY: Yeah, if I was younger and stronger and, you know, I would fish Oculina Bank, you're right.

TH: Can we turn the—

JY: Yeah, yeah. I know it's my doctor callin' to say I've got an appointment tomorrow. I'll turn it off, go ahead.

TH: Has the closure of the Oculina Bank affected your fishing? You say somewhat; when you were younger you fished there a lot more.

JY: Yeah.

TH: If anchoring and bottom fishing on the Oculina Bank was not prohibited, if you could anchor and bottom fish there, would you fish there?

JY: Yes.

TH: Okay. How and for what?

JY: Grouper and snapper.

TH: Okay, and how?

JY: Hook and line, rod and reel.

TH: Rod and reel, can you be more—what do you use for bait?

JY: Live bait if I can get it. Greenies or bunkers in the wintertime. Winkies—that's a mullet. Whatever. Whatever's available.

TH: Now, would you anchor there, or would you drift fish?

JY: I would anchor.

TH: You would anchor?

JY: Yeah, and with the advent of the new—you know, new lines, the new braided lines—you can get down with less weight now.

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

JY: Peaks and valleys. [I've] seen cycles where fishing was better for a year or two or three and not as good for two or three years; and, of course, there's cycles with the upwelling of the cold water in May and June every year, and weather bein' bad in the wintertime; but the fishin' being better, you know—it's cyclic.

TH: So you think it's cyclical?

JY: Yes, by all—you never know.

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

JY: No, I've never seen any law enforcement near the Oculina Bank, but of course, you're not there to see if the Coast Guard or Marine Patrol is there. So, I've had no experience.

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

JY: Probably eight or nine years old, fishin' in canals and ditches. I remember catching my first bass alone, a two and a half pound bass on a red wiggler worm, fishin' for brim and trying to fillet it, and cuttin' my finger, and winding up with two ounces of meat off of a two pound bass.

TH: Where was this?

JY: In a canal west of Fort Pierce. My dad had an orange grove and I was fishin' in the canal near the orange grove. But I started saltwater fishing about the same time, and I would ride my bicycle to Art Eargle's boat or to the *Buccaneer* to go out.

TH: They were at the city marina?

JY: South bridge; both of them were on the south bridge over on Bill Parker's side, which is the —Bill Parker was on the north side and Frank Parker was south side. Both of them had docks on the east end of the south bridge, and Art Eargle—

TH: On the east end of the south bridge?

JY: Mm-hm.

TH: Where the museum is?

JY: Mm-hm. Yup. But I fished on the boats that would come in the wintertime, the Davis Boats: the *Queen of Queens*, *New Dixie Queen*, *Ocean Queen*, *Star Queen*, all of them. They came from Panama City and would bring a boat or two or three here in the wintertime.

TH: What kinds of fishing boats were these?

JY: Those were head boats; grouper and snapper boats.

TH: Head boats. And people would come to Fort Pierce to—

JY: It was an event when the head boat came to the dock. Of course, it was an event when they came through the inlet because they would hang their fish up, and when they had a good catch, people would blow their horns and flash their lights to see all the grouper and snapper.

TH: Huh. So, how old were you when you worked on these boats, again?

JY: Startin' about age twelve to probably sixteen or seventeen.

TH: How did you learn to fish? Who taught you? (siren blaring)

JY: Self taught, more than anything else; trial and error, and then watchin' other people—

TH: So, your father?

JY: My dad—my granddad came to Fort Pierce in the early 1900s, like 1901 or 1902, and he and his oldest son, Gettis Yates, had a mackerel house on Taylor Creek, and it was only open November through February. But in those days, they had barrels—they weren't real barrels; they were kegs, pony kegs—and they salted mackerel: layer of salt, layer of mackerel, mixed squares, and they would go on the train and be shipped to Kansas and some farm (phone rings) woman would—wife could buy a square mackerel for a dime. Instead of havin' pork or beef, she'd do fish every once in a while. Now, that's my granddad had the commercial mackerel house on—

TH: Taylor Creek.

JY: Yeah, and Moores Creek. He had a fish house on both places at one time; different times, though.

TH: Okay, Taylor Creek is north of Fort Pierce, and Moores Creek is right in where the city marina is today.

JY: Mm-hm, yup.

TH: When did you start fishing in the Fort Pierce area? I guess that was right where you grew up. What did you fish for first? Let's see, you said bass.

JY: Yeah, freshwater. We were livin' on the grove, so the canals and the ditches were the first place I fished.

TH: Used red worms, you said?

JY: Wigglers: you dig them, you know? Go to—I went to my mother's flower garden and dig around and catch a worm.

TH: Was it cane poles?

JY: Cane poles. Yeah, cane poles.

TH: You catch brim?

JY: Brim and bass.

TH: And bass. Brim: is that a bluegill?

JY: Yeah, bluegill.

TH: Where did you go to fish when you began fishing? Then you would ride your bicycle from the grove all the way—

JY: We had moved into town when I was eleven, and lived on Indian River Drive. And so I fished in front of the house. Part of my job with Art Eargle, he gave me a six-foot nylon cast net and I was to catch as many mullet before I showed up at the charter boat.

TH: As you could.

JY: As I could. Sometimes it was six or eight and sometimes it would be sixty, but no one used ballyhoo in those days. We didn't know what a ballyhoo was. It was all trolled mullet.

TH: Trolled mullet, okay, and with mullet strips?

JY: Strips and whole.

TH: Did you use sea witches?

JY: Mostly they were bare. Sea witches were not popular in those days, you know.

TH: Just two bare hooks—

JY: A single big hook, or sometimes if there was a lot of kingfish around, you used two hooks. Single hooks ran better, would troll better.

TH: A single hook and a strip.

JY: And a whole mullet.

TH: On a whole mullet?

JY: Mm-hm.

TH: Right up through its lip?

JY: Mm-hm.

TH: Okay. Did you bone the mullet?

JY: You cut a wedge out of the backbone. I didn't see a tubed mullet, you know, where the whole backbone was removed till I was a grown man. I didn't—

TH: You would do what now? You would take—

JY: You would take a wedge out of the top of the back, maybe an inch and a half on either side of the backbone, and cut the backbone and take that little wedge out. And then you bent the tail and wiggled it till it was pliable.

TH: Interesting.

JY: You didn't—you only had one hole in the belly, and that's where the hook came out, the softest spot. You didn't want it to wash out, you know, so you made the hole on the top of the back, take out a little piece of backbone.

TH: Huh, that's the first I've heard this—

JY: I still do it today, and it still works.

TH: I'd like to see it.

JY: Yeah, now tubed—you know how they tube—

TH: You take the whole backbone out.

JY: Yeah, like a piece of golf club, and sharpen the ends of it. Now they make them commercially, and you go in by the gill and work it around to where you encompass the whole backbone and you work it all the way down to the tail and break it off. And when you pull it out, you got a tube of backbone out of almost that long. (demonstrates) Now, that way—yeah, it'll really swim that way. (siren blares)

TH: You started fishing, what did you fish for, how did you fish for—okay, so that's how you fish. You troll for what? Everything. You troll for—

JY: On the charter boats, we were mainly sailfishin'; but of course, that's a wintertime fish and very few in the summer. But you fished for dolphin and kingfish and wahoo, whatever was bitin' that day. If you went more than twelve miles offshore, that was a long ways in those days; very few thirty-mile trips like some of them do today.

TH: Did you fish a lot north of the 12A buoy?

JY: You kept the 12A buoy in sight a lot of times, all day long.

TH: You would catch sailfish right in through here?

JY: That was *el primo* for sailfishin', you know, and sometimes—there're two wrecks right there, World War II wrecks, and sometimes if the conditions were right and you happened to see all the spadefish on top, you'd drop them bait to the bottom. Very few of us had—grouper or big red snapper. Very few of us—nobody had, you know, navigational instruments, LORANs or anything; they just weren't available. And your fish finder, the old Bendix, would mark the bottom but didn't mark fish. Not everybody had a Bendix.

TH: You fished all over. You fish much of the river?

JY: Did a lot of trout fishin' early in the mornin' or late in the evenin'. And snook fishin', yeah.

TH: Do you mostly go fishing in your own boat or the boats of others?

JY: In my own boat more than others.

TH: Who do you fish with?

JY: Albert Ashley, Sam Crutchfield.¹ My son-in-law loves to go, Tom Jefferson. My next door neighbor, “Speedy” Fee, Frank Fee.

TH: Okay, Frank Fee. During what months of the year do you fish for what fish?

JY: My favorite time of the year is the spring, late spring, April, May. Weather's startin' to straighten up a little bit, the bait's more plentiful—not just on the beach, but offshore in eighty foot. There's a lot of bait on the reef. By the time June, July and August comes, your weather may be good, but the fishing's not near as good, September, bein' probably the slowest month for me fishing-wise. Starts pickin' back up in November in the northern reaches, you know, Bethel Shoals starts pickin' up for grouper and snapper, and then it—you're hit and miss on weather until February and March.

TH: How long does—an average fishing trip for you today? Now, you say today you fish a lot in the freshwater. But in the ocean, what's an average fishing trip, how long?

JY: First daylight, leave the dock and be home about four o'clock, four-thirty.

TH: That's a long day.

JY: Yeah, long days.

TH: How much would you catch on an average trip?

JY: In my heyday, when I would sell fish at D&D, I averaged over 200 pounds a day, grouper fishin'.

TH: You averaged over—

JY: Averaged over—you know, a big day was 400 pounds. A slow day was 100 pounds.

TH: Now, when was this? Were you working as a funeral home director?

¹ Albert Ashley and Samuel Crutchfield were also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOIs for their interview are O6-00022 and O6-00032, respectively

JY: This was—yeah, this was in the 1970s and I fished out of a twenty-foot Mako, on days when I shouldn't have been in that ocean in a twenty-foot Mako.

TH: Your own boat?

JY: Yeah, my own boat; and then in 1981, I got the twenty-five foot Mako.

TH: All right, so you fished hard.

JY: Yeah.

TH: You were averaging 200 pounds. For how many years did you have—okay, so you fished all your life for all these different fish, basically. For how many years did you fish for those fish? What do you still fish for today?

JY: I enjoy pompano fishin' in the inlet in the river. Right now, I enjoy live baitin' the kingfish on the beach. There used to be great old big fifty pounders, now, you know, a twenty-pounder average instead of the big fish. A cobia, if you can get one. When you're allowed to, I will catch a red snapper and a grey grouper.

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

JY: I fish Lake Okeechobee and I also fish up at Fellsmere at Garcia, freshwater fishin'. But we'll fish—Sam and I'll fish for trout from Round Island to the power plant.

TH: You throwing plugs?

JY: Throw plugs and rubber meat.

TH: Okay, that's Sam Crutchfield.

JY: Sam, yeah.

TH: What do you fish for? What gear do you use for bait? You kind of told me that. Do you usually go on your own boat? You already said you do.

JY: Mm-hm.

TH: How often do you go offshore fishing?

JY: This year it's been less than other years, but in the past five years, I usually go twice a month offshore fishin'.

TH: Are there some months you go fishing more frequently?

JY: Yeah, oh, yeah. When the weather's better you fish more often. In wintertime the weather can be bad for a month around here. Some of the diehards can make it out of there, but I don't like to get pounded anymore.

TH: Are there some months you rarely go fishing?

JY: January, February, yeah. Those were the least amount.

TH: On average, how far do you go offshore?

JY: Twelve to fourteen miles.

TH: Okay, do you know ahead of time, like, what you're going to fish for?

JY: Yeah.

TH: Like, you plan to bottom fish, or plan to—

JY: Yeah, I plan, sure.

TH: —to, you know, troll.

JY: Yeah, I plan.

TH: How do you decide?

JY: Sometimes it's short notice, depending on what kind of bait you can get, and you match the hatch, so to speak, if you've got big bunkers or nice pretty greenies or threadfins, you know. And you may plan to go offshore and the kingfishin' be real hot on the beach and [you] never make it offshore or vice versa. You come from offshore and you come in back early and the kingfish are bitin' on the beach, and you stop and catch a big kingfish.

TH: Okay.

JY: You know, I've noticed, in the past few years, some of the Jupiter guys come, and you've seen them. And they're live baiters, and they've skinnied down for up here, and they can catch as many on the beach, thirty-five foot of water, as a poor hook and liner jerk-fisherman can catch all day offshore with four lines out. And these guys—I mean, they're young, they're smart, they've done a good job. Some of us old guys need to watch them.

TH: Yeah, the young live baiters are—if you're going to get into commercial fishing today—

JY: You better have a big livewell.

TH: You better—yeah, I would suggest you—

JY: Yeah, you better have a big livewell.

TH: I think you're correct there. Okay, finally, I would like to talk about how your fishing has changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank. Since 1984, several changes have been made in the regulations of the Oculina Bank. I'd like to know if any of these regulations have affected your fishing, and if so, how? The Oculina Bank was initially closed to trawling, dredging, and bottom longlining in 1984. Did this affect your fishing, and if so, how?

JY: I think it helped. Some of the things I saw in the early eighties [1980s] would be like the rock shrimp people. And they fished—they trawled that Oculina Bank and just inside of it. The longliners who were gonna do shark fishin', or whatever, a bycatch would be a big grouper. And then, some of them started not worrying about how many sharks they had, it was how many big grouper they could catch on those longlines. I didn't see too many draggers other than the rock shrimp fishermen, but when they quit doing that, I think it helped the Oculina Bank's fishing. And I didn't see a lot of abuse by commercial boats and/or charter boats fishin' the Oculina Bank, because I wasn't there after it was banned. And you can't see from the eighty-foot reef, you can't see a boat on—best part out there.

TH: Well, that was 1984 when they banned the trawling, dredging, and bottom longlining. 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?

JY: Somewhat. I could still go to the Oculina Bank—the offshore peaks, you know, the Indiana Rock, all those—because we started havin' better navigational equipment in the eighties [1980s] with the LORANs. It wasn't hit or miss; you could run right back to the same rocks. But there, again, I had to pick my days with the influence of the Gulf Stream, the currents, and did I have enough bait? And it impacted me, but me less than some others, you know.

TH: In 1996, all anchoring was prohibited within the Oculina Bank. Did this impact your fishing, and if so, how?

JY: Very little. I quit fishin' the Oculina Bank in the early nineties [1990s].

TH: In 1996, trawling for rock shrimp was prohibited in the area east and north of the designated Oculina Bank, and in 1998 this area was incorporated into the Oculina Bank HAPC. Fishing with a bottom longline, trawl or dredge was prohibited in this expanded area, as was anchoring by any vessel. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation, and how? That's when they extended it.

JY: Yeah, I thought it went to the west of the Oculina Bank instead of east of the Oculina Bank.

TH: It went north, mostly.

JY: North and maybe to the west a little bit. No, it didn't impact me. It was still—you got a big desert out there between the hundred-foot reef and the Oculina Bank, a big, big desert where troll fishermen fish, but bottom fishermen don't.

TH: Okay, if—let's see—we're winding down here. 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 or closed seasons? (phone rings)

JY: Good. That's a—you know, that's the whole crux of the matter, what works better. And it's gotta be a combination of quotas and minimum sizes and closed areas. It's goin' to take a rocket scientist to figure out what's the best. I know closin' off the area—whatever has happened in the last two to three years, our red snapper have recovered on the east coast. The last two years I've caught bigger, better, nicer, fatter, juicier red snappers than I'd seen in years and years and years. On the other hand, the decline of the gag grouper, gray grouper is tremendous. I mean, the numbers aren't there. I've seen one copper belly on my boat in the whole of last year. Albert should have told you about the guy from North Carolina that was hiring him some eight or ten years ago—a scientist-type guy who was trying to grow grouper in a tank and just couldn't get a big male copper belly grouper to live. And he—

TH: To live in captivity?

JY: Yeah, or to even get the bugger back to shore. Big enough tank, lettin' the air out of his bladder, all those kind of things. They could get females into the tanks up there north. But they came here and I think they—he and Albert caught three copper belly male groupers that did make it to North Carolina. Never heard from the guy how he was doin' raising grouper. But there's no one, you know, good way, whether it's closure or quotas or size limits or closed seasons, you know? I look at, like, snook. And if they didn't close the season, but just allowed everybody to catch one fish no matter what size, soon as you had that fish in the boat, no releases, it had to stay in the boat, I think everybody would be better off.

I belonged at one time to the Organized Fishermen of Florida, who were anti-netters. And I've seen rape and pillage by the purseiners and the netters over the years. On the other hand, I've seen the rape and pillage by the divers. But they all have a place; they all have a place in our fishery. I just wish there wasn't a commercial divin' industry with powerheads. I don't care whether they powerhead or fish, they just shouldn't be able to sell it. That's a personal feelin'. What do you think? Are you allowed to—

TH: I'm the Interviewer. (laughs)

JY: I know, but what do you think, Terry? These guys wait until the grouper under the rock, in cold water, and, you know, they show no mercy, you know? But, anyway, there's a place for everybody, or should be. Chip Shafer, a charter boat captain here, had one of the big meetings we had out in the civics center.² He said when they were talkin' about cane fish, he said you could arm every man, woman and child with a hook and line, jerkline, and not hurt the kingfish population. But these ten or twelve big boats at night with the—

TH: Nets.

JY: —big nets. And he said, “That's gonna hurt,” and it did. And it has, and that's—the kingfish still haven't recovered. But on the other hand, wait till one of these kingfish tournaments are in town, and go to the weigh-in and look at the forty and fifty pound fish that these guys are catchin'. They've skinned down a whole bunch. Bigger baits, different places, and they still catch the forty and fifty pound kingfish. Have you noticed that? Read the tournament results on the SKA [Southern Kingfish Association] Kingfish Tournaments.

TH: You're saying that the weights have gone down?

JY: Weights have gone down for the recreational fishermen. The tournament fishermen, however, are still able to catch those forty and fifty pounders. I can't. I haven't caught a fifty pounder in two years.

TH: It's been way longer than that. Two years is not bad. (JY laughs) It's been many years since I caught a fifty pounder. Okay, a follow up questions to this—and you kinda put me on the spot, but I'm going to turn it back to you—is what do you think the fairest—if you could manage the fisheries yourself, the fairest most equitable way to manage the fisheries—and you know, you mentioned that with snook, if everybody could just have one snook. Quotas, closed seasons? What do you think?

JY: It's gotta be a combination, and it's goin' to take a rocket scientist to figure out. I have no problem with the Oculina Bank being closed to grouper and snapper fishin'. However, the fish, grouper and snapper, come into shallower water to spawn. The red snapper can spawn anywhere from April to May to September. You go to Key West and they spawn in September down off towards [the Dry] Tortugas. But up here, they're gonna have roe, mature roe, in May, April or May and even June—but they've come from deeper water out of the Oculina Bank up into eighty foot of water to spawn, and those are the ones you don't want to catch. God, they've gotta spawn; they got to have little babies, you know?

² Irving “Chip” Shafer was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00002.

What really concerns me right now is the oil [spill] in the Gulf and how many little baby grouper and snapper it's killin'. It will be in the next lifetime before that fishery recovers over there. I mean, the water that is emulsified with the oil is killin' countless zillions of baby grouper and snapper right now—right now, as we speak. And it's comin'. It gets caught up in the beginning of the Gulf Stream. That's where it starts, and it's gonna come, and it's gonna be on our beaches, and it's gonna foul us on the east coast. It's just weeks or months away.

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

JY: I probably said in the 1970s, "We've seen the heyday." And I saw the fishery of the grouper and snapper recovery in the middle eighties [1980s] and I said, "This is almost as good as the early seventies [1970s]." I didn't see it in the nineties [1990s], but I saw nice catches of fish in the middle nineties [1990s]. I was so amazed last year, and the year before last, that a number of red snapper and big fish. I used to think, and was always told, it takes eight years to make a one pound red snapper be eight pounds. On TV, on one of those fishin' shows, some ichthyologist said that it only takes three years now. Why the change, they don't know. If we protect the breedin' grounds and the closures for the breedin' times, then we'll have fish for a long time. So, it's gotta be managed; it can't be left to rape and pillage. Gotta have management.

TH: You say it's been two years since you caught a fifty pound king mackerel.

JY: Mm-hm.

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

JY: I caught sixty-one [pound], gutted. I probably had a bigger one on—the biggest one I've ever seen, you known, down by the power plant, but—

TH: How big was he?

JY: I don't—seventy, seventy-five [pounds]. On Super Bowl Sunday in the seventies [1970s]—now, that's March, February. Super Bowl Sunday, a real foggy, calm mornin', I turned in the north jetty. No bait. Put out two plugs. Had four bites, caught four fish, and the fog lifted and so I came home. Didn't have another bite, but I had four fish that weighed 204. They were all

fifty pound fish all along the wall, right there before you get to Pepper Park, on the—where it goes from—

TH: Fifteen to thirty [feet deep].

JY: Yeah, right there. I just crisscrossed it up and down for—all of that in one hour.

TH: Four 50 pound plus—

JY: Four fish weighed 204 gutted at D&D fish house. I've caught some big kingfish, you know, off Jupiter, here, when you're fishin' down there. The biggest one, sixty-one pounds, I caught in the cove—

TH: The cove would be in Vero Beach?

JY: Vero Beach Cove.

TH: On live bait?

JY: All on live bait, yeah. All on live bait. I caught a fifty-nine pounder on Matanilla Shoals one night.

TH: Where is Matanilla Shoals?

JY: Bahamas.

TH: Okay. Wow. And your biggest grouper?

JY: Gag grouper, or gray grouper, as we call them here. I've caught high forties: forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight. Biggest red snapper, thirty-five pounds. But it's been years since I caught a thirty pounder. But we used to—I mean, it was not unusual to catch a thirty pound grouper—a thirty pound red snapper in eighty foot of water. They were not unheard of. And even on the *Buccaneer*, on the head boats, we used to go to fifty foot, and everybody would catch red

grouper and then they'd moan and groan, "Let's go to deep water and catch red snapper," deep water bein' eighty foot.

TH: (laughs) Okay. Thank you very much for sharing your fishing history with us, and with that, thank you very much.

JY: Okay, thank you.

End of interview