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Marcia Foosaner oral history interview by Terry Howard, August 10, 2010

Marcia Foosaner (Interviewee)

Terry Lee Howard (Interviewer)

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Terry Howard: Good afternoon, this is Terry Howard. Today is August 10, 2010. I'm at the Hoke Library in Jensen Beach [Florida] conducting an oral interview with Marcia—

Marcia Foosaner: Foosaner.

TH: —Foosaner 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, Marcia. Please state your name, spell your name, your place of birth, and your date of birth.

MF: My name is Marcia Foosaner. M-a-r-c-i-a F as in Frank-double o-s as in Sam-a-n-e-r. I was born on the second of June, 1948, in the city of Hollywood, Florida.

TH: Cool. Are you married?

MF: Yes.

TH: How old were you when you got married?

MF: The first time? (laughs) Probably twenty-four.

TH: Okay. Do you have children?

MF: No, I do not.

TH: Okay. How much schooling do you have?

MF: I was—I graduated high school and I went to two years of art school at the Art Institute in Miami, and then I went to Rollins College for some courses.

TH: Rollins?

MF: Uh-huh.

TH: R-o-l-l-i-n-s?

MF: Yeah, that's in Winter Park, Florida.

TH: Winter Park.

MF: And I took some courses there. In between that time, though, I had gotten married, divorced, and I was remarried. I just had my twenty-second wedding anniversary [with] my second husband.

TH: Okay.

MF: He does not fish.

TH: He does not fish. (MF laughs) His name?

MF: His name is Aaron. A-a-r-o-n.

TH: Foosaner?

MF: Yes.

TH: How do you pronounce Foosaner, again?

MF: *Foos-ner*, just the way you said it.

TH: Foosaner. Okay. What do you do for a living?

MF: I fish. I'm a fishing guide.

TH: Okay. What other jobs have you had?

MF: I've been an artist. I've worked in a fish store, sold aquariums and tropical fish, and things like that. I did that here in Stuart when I moved here. I've been a bartender. (laughs) I was an artist. I did outdoor art shows for about ten years.

TH: Watercolors?

MF: Watercolors. Mm-hm. Yeah, what else? (laughs)

TH: Well, what other jobs have you had?

MF: What else would I do (laughs) but watercolors?

TH: Okay. Have you worked in the fishing industry?

MF: I have. I've had a captain's license for the last thirteen years.

TH: Okay. Would that be a Six-Pack License?

MF: It is, a Six-Pack.

TH: Okay. Do you currently own a boat?

MF: I do.

TH: What kind?

MF: I own an Action Craft, eighteen [feet] two [inches] flat skiff.

TH: Eighteen two Action Craft flat skiff. Okay. How is it powered?

MF: It is powered with a brand-new E-TEC 115.

TH: E-TEC?

MF: Mm-hm. Evinrude.

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

MF: I am familiar with it by reputation only. I never fished it.

TH: Okay. Why was the Oculina Bank designated as an area to protect? Do you know?

MF: It's got to be protected. I mean, there have got to be fish that spawn there, all the snapper or grouper. I'm all for protection.

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

MF: I do know that there was a lot of static about people not wanting to close it off, "We're not gonna have anyplace to fish," and my God, we have to protect areas like this because if we don't—and this, I knew about the trawlers wrecking it, the nets wrecking it. I knew about all that. I read the papers and I look at it and if I see something, anything to do with the environment, I'll look at it twice, sometimes three times.

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

MF: That's fine and dandy. First of all, if you're anchoring it—and trust me, I've been in enough boats offshore that you see when people anchor and their anchor gets hung up on something and they don't care what they do to it to get it off. And if they can't get it off, then they leave it there, and then it's another problem.

TH: Has the closure of the Oculina Bank affected your fishing, and if so, how?

MF: I don't know that it has, and I don't know that it would have time to do so. There are occasions in the lagoon here—I used to see it quite a bit in Sebastian. I'd catch quite a few grouper inshore. My brother and I used to. My parents lived in Sebastian, and when my parents retired from Miami, that's where they moved to. My dad loved the fishing there. So, we would go up there and my brother decided—he had heard from somebody that if we could troll in the channel with something that looked like a bass worm attached to a yellow jig, that we could catch grouper trolling along the edge of the channel, and by God, we could. Now, those grouper have to come from someplace, and I am assuming that a place like the Oculina Bank is probably prime territory for those fish.

Now, I do occasionally, from just south of the Fort Pierce inlet to the power plant, catch grouper with my fly rod—nice grouper, legal grouper—and I catch 'em along the banks in the grass beds around the docks. I catch—I have caught, recently, and probably because there's been some protection on them, goliath grouper. I've caught several of those now, on fly.

TH: Where?

MF: Around docks and in holes under docks. When someone puts their motor down in the water and cranks it up, it leaves a big ditch. You know, that fish wants to be in that ditch. So, I would say that, yes, if that thing is closed long enough, it's probably gonna be even better. I know that a lot of times I catch some mutton snapper that are of legal size in the lagoon just south—I mean, just north of the North Bridge in Fort Pierce. And I've caught them on flies, because that's primarily the way I fish.

TH: If anchoring and bottom fishing in the Oculina Bank was not prohibited—in other words, if you could fish there, would you fish there?

MF: I probably would not, because it just is not the way I fish. I don't think I'd be dropping a fly that deep in the water. It would take the fun out of it.

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

MF: Oh, it's a lot different. It's a lot different and I, personally, think that it's probably—you know, I can't—I've seen the gill net ban come into effect, which I think was a good thing; but I think that there are other factors, namely the runoff that we get and the junk that comes out of those canals. Taylor Creek—thank God it's right in front of the inlet, but all that does is pull it out into the ocean a little bit faster.

But I've seen—I saw a sewage plant explode and just destroy a group of flats that I used to fish south of the Fort Pierce Causeway. It has taken them till now—I don't remember when that sewage spill was; it's got to be ten years ago. I don't know if you remember that or not, but a sewage line burst and that thing is sitting right there on the lagoon. And it just—all of those flats, which were beautiful grass, were covered with this slimy grass, this stuff that only grows when the water's too dirty. And it kind of ruined those places for me to fish, and it is just recently that I've gone back in there and started to fish it a little more steadily. I take clients up there because they—you know, on the incoming tide there, the water is so beautiful, as long as they're not dumping, and they say, "Well, it looks like the Bahamas here." And that's the way the lagoon should look.

TH: It looks that way when, during dry seasons and when they're not—?

MF: When the tide's coming out, and in the winter, if it's dry, we have no rain, it looks absolutely gorgeous.

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

MF: No, no. I just am not—you know, I'm not out there. I hear what goes on and I read what goes on, but personally, no.

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

MF: I was probably about five or six years old and my—I was born and raised in Miami, and my older brother didn't care anything about fishing. But my dad was a fisherman, and my dad would take me out into a little place called Snake Creek Canal with a piece of shrimp while he would throw a bait caster with a plug on it up against the creek, which couldn't have been any wider than this room we're sitting in. (laughs)

TH: Which is about six, eight feet, ten feet wide.

MF: We would sit out in the middle of this circle. We'd come into this little cut and there'd be this little opening, and my dad would throw that plug up against those mangroves for snook. As I got older, I just started—I really grew up fishing in a place called Greynolds Park, which was across the street from where I lived.

TH: In Miami.

MF: In North Miami Beach. Not only did it have bass in it, which I used to fish for with black plastic worms, but it was connected to the Intracoastal Waterway through a place called Dumfoundling Bay. Now, that area is all developed now.

TH: Spell—

MF: Dumfoundling. I think it was D-u-m-b-f-o-u-n-d-l-i-n-g [*sic*].

TH: Founding?

MF: Foundling. Oh, I'm sorry, Dumfoundling, ling, l-i-n-g.

TH: —d-l-in-g. Okay.

MF: Yeah. I'd have to write it out. We'll go over that. (laughs)

TH: Okay.

MF: But it connected to the Intracoastal Waterway and there were drainpipes under the road of the entrance to the park, and through those drainpipes would swim the most wonderful saltwater fish. We had snook. I caught redfish there. There used to be tarpon and I would see them coming through those pipes. And I discovered it quite by accident because I had a long handled dip net one day, had it down in front of one of those pipes to catch a mullet for some man that had stopped, and he said, "If you can catch me a couple mullet, I'll give you thirty-five cents." And I put that net down in front of that thing and this snook came through there and it was a little bit bigger than what my net could hold. So, I had experiences with saltwater fish. And then they built—there was a park called East Greynolds Park that had a dam that connected to a place called Snake Creek Canal.

TH: East Greynolds? Spell it.

MF: East Greynolds, G-r-e-y-n-o-l-d-s. *Grey-nolds* Park. And it was called East Greynolds and it was on US 1, which is really—it was tame then compared to what it's like now. But I would ride my bicycle there to fish for the tarpon and the snook, because there were more of 'em, because it didn't have quite as much freshwater in it and it was really close to where they lived—I mean, it was mangroves—and that's what I wanted to fish for. But I have fished all my life, with probably the exception of about two years where I lived in Atlanta and I would spend my weekends driving up to a farm and fishing in a bass pond. (laughs) But I fish just about every day now.

TH: So, it says: How did you learn to fish and who taught you?

MF: My dad.

TH: Your dad.

MF: Yeah, my dad. But he—you know, my dad was a meat fisherman. I can remember when you were allowed to keep a snook that was sixteen inches or eighteen inches. You know, that was a fish sandwich for him. He's probably just shaking his head at me now when he sees me throw something back like that. You know, why throw it back when you can eat it? So, if he's watching, I know he's just, "Oh, my God, how can she do that?" But I fish in a totally different way, actually, than what he taught me.

TH: Okay.

MF: You know, when I got older and I moved back here from when I was living in Atlanta, I just fished a totally different way. And then, of course, I taught myself to fly fish. Now, I really fish a different way.

TH: When did you start fishing in the Fort Pierce area? Age and year.

MF: That would be—I have lived here for twenty-one years. I am sixty-two this past June, so when I was thirty—you do the math. I'm a terrible mathematician.

TH: Okay. That would be—since it's twenty-one years, this is 2010, 2000—I mean 1990, before 1990? Nineteen eighty-nine? Sound about right?

MF: Yeah. Let's see, we moved up here in eighty-nine [1989] or ninety [1990].

TH: Okay.

MF: If we weren't living here then, we were buying the house.

TH: Okay. What did you fish and how did you fish? Bait, gear?

MF: I have never used bait, live bait, dead bait, ever. I was raised with artificials and I stuck with 'em, and now I fish with flies.

TH: Cool.

MF: I just couldn't get over the idea that someone would spend three hours looking to throw a cast net on a bait when I could already be fishing all that time. So, it seems always kind of like a waste of time to me.

TH: Where did you go to fish when you began fishing?

MF: When I first started fishing here, I knew something about the area because when I was growing up, my dad and my mother, who would go with him on occasion, used to come to [Port] Salerno to snook fish.

TH: From Sebastian or from Miami?

MF: From Miami. I think the only reason they didn't move to Stuart was because Stuart was more crowded than Sebastian when they moved there. (laughs) But he would come up here. So when I moved here, when I said to my husband, "Why don't we look in Stuart?" I kind of knew why I wanted to be here, because I remembered when my dad used to bring me up here and we'd get these tremendous snook and we'd see tarpon rolling around. We'd put the boat in and motor around.

TH: So, you—

MF: I went—the first place, the first thing I started to do was walk around the shoreline because even twenty-one years ago, there wasn't nearly here what there is now. And there were so many places where you could easily access the lagoon. Now, since the storms, they've paved things and stuff so you can't pull off the road, or they've put a seawall there, or they've put a bumper there and put the road right up next to the curb. So, you can't park on the side of the road anymore. But I would go to all the little places that I could get into the water. I met a guy named Robin Smillie, S-m-i-l-l-i-e. And Robin was an insurance salesman that lived here that loved to fish. And I met Robin and he was standing in the water one morning. So I thought, my God, if he can do that—

TH: You can stand in the water, too. (laughs)

MF: —so can I.

TH: (laughs) Where was this?

MF: It was on the Stuart Causeway.

TH: Okay.

MF: And then I started walking the beaches. At the time I was throwing spinning rods, so I would be using soft plastics or top waters. I have an affection for top water lures. I like the strike. So, I would throw top waters and soft plastics, which are just all the rage. Then I decided that, God, I had to get a boat. So, I was out so much, when I went and talked to my husband and I said, "You know, honey, I've got to get a boat." And he says, "What do you need a boat for?" And I said, "I got to get to these places that I can see. I can't get to 'em. I can't walk there." And he says, "You don't need a boat." Well, unbeknownst to my husband, I went out and bought a little Gheenoe, and I had a friend that lived on the lagoon in Sewall's Point and I kept my little Gheenoe in their back yard.

TH: Gheenoe?

MF: Gheenoe. G-h-e-e-n-o-e. It's built by John Gheen. They are a fiberglass square stern canoe, and they are built in Titusville, and he calls them Gheenoes.

TH: You had a motor?

MF: G-h-e-e-n.

TH: Put a motor on it?

MF: I had to get a motor and my husband got me the motor, because one day I got out in it with my paddle and the wind started blowing so hard that I couldn't get back, and he was ready to call the marine patrol to find out where I was. He didn't know I was in a boat. He didn't know I had the boat. And he asked me, "Where the hell were you?" (laughs) And I said, "I got stuck." He said, "Stuck where?" I said, "In my boat." He goes, "What boat?" (laughs)

TH: Oh, he didn't know you had a boat. (laughs)

MF: No. So, he said, "Well, I suppose I have to put a motor on it, then, if you're gonna get back on time in the morning." And I got a little three horse kicker for it.

TH: Cool.

MF: And then I got another boat called a Fin and Feather that was originally made as a freshwater boat that I bought over from some guy in Bartow. He was making 'em one at a time and I got one of those.

TH: Fin and Feather?

MS: Fin and Feather. It had decks on it and a little center console and a little twenty-five on the back. That was a great little boat to get. And then one of the guides here in Stuart that I had met—and I had met just about everybody because anybody that ever saw me fishing, they saw a woman standing out in the water, they just had to know who that was (TH laughs) because there weren't any other ones standing out there. A guy named Gregg Gentile—

TH: Spell it.

MS: G-e-n-t-i-l-e, and I think he spells it with two G's, Gregg. He was a guide here. He guided, primarily, in the north fork of the St. Lucie River. And he said one day in the presence of my husband, "You know, Marcia, you ought to get a captain's license and be a guide." And I said, "Oh, Gregg, I can't do that. I love fishing too much," and I said, "And then I'd have to get a bigger boat." Well, my husband liked that idea because he said, "Well, if she can earn here her keep and get a nice boat and she can make money doing it, then why shouldn't she have one?" So, the next thing I know, he's going to the boat show in Miami with me to buy a new boat. So, I bought my first boat and I got a captain's license.

TH: What was that boat?

MF: It was an Action Craft, also, but a smaller one, seventeen foot. And I had to get a bigger one, because if you know anything about fly fishermen, they bring every fly they ever tied, every reel that they own, and a couple of rods, and they're usually in cases and packs and gear bags. And I needed more room, so I bought a boat with more storage just to accommodate my anglers. (laughs)

TH: So, who did you fish with? I guess you started off with your father, and then mostly by yourself as you got older?

MF: I enjoy fishing by myself. My younger brother fishes; my older brother has never cared anything about it. But my younger brother fished, and his name is Pete. Pete and I would fish.

TH: What's your—

MF: Laphan. L-a-p-h-a-m.

TH: L-a-p—

MF: —h-a-m.

TH: Is that a Finnish name, Laphan?

MF: Welsh.

TH: Welsh? Interesting. Okay. So, during what months of the year do you fish for what fish? Let's just start here in the Fort Pierce area. During what months of the year do you fish for what fish?

MF: Well, you just learn how to do that when you're here, and the neat thing about this area and in Fort Pierce, in general, is that you can fish here. It's Florida; you can fish all year round. You learn when everything is gonna show up, and I really don't have a preference for what I fish for as long as it bends the rod. I am just as happy getting a ten-pound snook as I am a twelve-pound trout. I fish for pompano religiously in the winter. They're a blast. They're a lot of fun. So, you start to learn what's gonna happen with seasons. And then, of course, your customers call you and they want to know, "What are you fishing for now? What can you fish for?" I really don't have a preference for any fish, but if I have to hook one and watch it, it's a tarpon.

TH: That's your favorite?

MF: Got to be.

TH: On a fly rod?

MF: Got to be. Yeah. And if I go out off the beach to cast for them in the spring and the early summer when they start migrating on the beach, I fish with a fifteen, twenty-pound leader because I don't want to fish like that anymore. (laughs) I just want to watch it jump. I've gotten exactly what I came for, and if it jumps and breaks off or throws the hook, I'm a happy camper. But visually, that's what I want to see.

TH: Okay. So, you fish for anything all year long, whatever's available?

MF: Whatever's available.

TH: An average fishing trip, how long does it last? This is kind of a tough question, but I mean —

MF: Well, according to my husband's phone calls, it should be over in about three hours, but nobody goes fishing for three hours.

TH: (laughs) So, how long does a trip last?

MF: If I have clients in the boat—I fish with some pretty hard-core guys and we can start at six o'clock in the morning and get back in three o'clock in the afternoon.

TH: Okay.

MF: And that's out pretty much beating the water all day, jumping from flat to flat. I usually get out and wade. The boat's really more of a transportation mode than it is anything else. I very rarely fish from the boat.

TH: Okay. How much would you catch on an average trip? Now, you release everything, though?

MF: I let everything go. If you think about this, you don't realize the type of fishery that you're in until one of your clients says to you, "My God, we caught seven or eight different kinds of fish today." But that is the fabulous thing about this area. I mean, these guys have caught everything. Most of 'em have been fishing with me since I started guiding, and I've never advertised or anything like that. It's been word of mouth. I don't have a Web site; they just call.

And most of 'em have fished with me since day one. And if I tried to give 'em to somebody else because I can't take 'em, they rearrange their schedules so that we can fish. But when they tell you, "We caught seven different kinds of fish today," and you start naming 'em off that you caught a pompano, a snook, a trout, a jack [amberjack], a ladyfish, a croaker, a grouper, a jewfish, you catch all these different fish, and what a spectacular place. And I am sure—if everyone's concerned about that Oculina Bank, I'm sure that most of those fish, at some time or another, visit that place.

TH: Okay. So, you catch everything pretty much all year, but there's certain times of the year you target specific fish; for example, pompano in the winter?

MF: Correct. I love fishing for pompano in the winter. That's a great fishery, and sometimes I see my first one as early as October.

TH: Well, tell me exactly what kind of bait you use, what kind of lures, where you fish for pompano and how you fish for pompano.

MF: I use flies. In the past, when I would have a spin fisherman in the boat or when I spin fish, I would use very small jigs. And I fish a lot of these little flats and cuts that are up here south of the Fort Pierce Inlet. A lot of times, I'll see 'em up on the flats north of the North Causeway. I fish for 'em down in Stuart—sailfish flats. I fish for 'em in the inlet. I don't ever fish for them off the beach.

TH: That's no longer (inaudible).

MF: That's so much fun, in the inlet.

TH: Do you watch for them to skip in the stern of your boat? Can you explain that?

MF: Yeah. I see 'em skip, and what I have found out is that if they're skipping around my boat, I immediately shut my boat off and if I can, I get out, because I'm gonna catch more fish if I don't spook 'em. I actually sight fish for them in some places. If I have an area with lots of flats, like you have north of the North Causeway there on the east side where all those nice grass flats are. Those become a little bit more barren in the winter because of the sunlight, and those flats kind of thin out from the grass, and they're very sandy.

TH: You're talking about north of the North Bridge in Fort Pierce on the east—

MF: North of the North Bridge in Fort Pierce, and in the channel: anyplace where there's a good amount of sand and if it's got a little grass edge, because I think that those fish just are looking for stuff to go right off the edge of those flats on certain tides. The old channel that accesses the Fort Pierce Inlet is a good place to fish. If you're coming from the north and you come underneath the North Causeway Bridge, there's that little thing off to the side and there's a big flat there in the corner.

TH: Large flats.

MF: And there's—I fish off the edge of that channel there. So, yeah, I'll target those until I see 'em start to leave. You know, I fish for something and then I know that, well, it's almost time for it to leave. It's April, and from what I know about those fish, I think they go offshore to spawn. I think they said they see them in eighty feet of water, a hundred feet of water, and that they spawn out there. So, there's another wonderful point for your Oculina Bank. Those fish might be out there doing their thing. And at that point in time, I say, "Okay. Well, I've had enough of the pompano and I know that I'm gonna start seeing some real big trout come in." So, then I start to target trout, and I know that if I'm gonna catch a gator trout, that that's really a great time to catch 'em.

TH: What time is it?

MF: Usually, I would say the first part of May, up until the water starts to get too hot, and sometimes it's not necessarily a month. It's a water temperature that tells me that maybe it's too hot for 'em. Now, I don't know, but I got a thirty-three inch one off of these flats in Fort Pierce the other day. It was thirty-three and a half inches long. I'm guessing that it weighed about eleven or twelve pounds. And I got—I have had three such fish this year, two taken on fly and one taken on a top water.

TH: Wow.

MF: Now, the water's hot. This fish actually knocked a smaller one off the plug to get it. It looked like a shark attack.

TH: Plug fishing with a spinning rod?

MF: It looked like a shark attack. It beat that other fish up until it knocked that thing loose and got a hold of it, and I couldn't believe what I was seeing—if I hadn't seen it before!

TH: You've seen this happen before?

MF: I saw it happen once before.

TH: That's a hungry trout.

MF: Yeah, it was, and a big one, too. (laughs)

TH: Wow.

MF: Two days later, I got another one on a fly, same size.

TH: Wow, in the same area?

MF: No. I was fishing south that day.

TH: Okay. Now, when did you start working as a charter boat captain in the Fort Pierce area?

MF: I have been guiding for about thirteen years now.

TH: Okay. Let's see, if we count back, about 1995, ninety-six [1996]?

MF: Yeah. It wasn't too long after the—when did I get my charter license? Let's see. I guess I got it in—if this is 2010, I got it in 1998?

TH: Okay. So, it's been about twelve years.

MF: Yeah, yeah, 1998, I would guess. Ninety-seven [1997] or ninety-eight [1998].

TH: So, what did you fish for, and how, when you first started charter fishing?

MF: Well, I had a reputation for catching big trout. I mean, anybody that's ever written an article about me in a fishing magazine or any—I'd get all these calls from people that would say, "Is this Marcia?" And I'd say, "Yeah." And they'd say, "I understand you catch big trout." And you know, I was always worried because I was afraid somebody wanted to kill 'em. (laughs) So, if they came here and they didn't catch one, I was just as happy. (laughs)

TH: Because they wanted to eat it.

MF: I figured they wanted to kill it. I killed—I haven't ever—you know, trout, I'm not crazy about eating 'em anyway. I'll take a pompano for dinner and a Spanish mackerel. But I haven't killed a snook in more than ten years.

TH: Cool.

MF: And I've never killed a trout.

TH: So, for trout fishing, do you fish the grass flats? Do you look for the sand spots, the sandy
—

MF: I look for schools of big mullet.

TH: Really? More than the—

MF: Even more than the terrain. I like an area that's grassy, that drops off. But I like to see big mullet in the water.

TH: Okay.

MF: Because every single fish—those fish I caught this year were all underneath schools of big mullet. Sometimes I think if they have a lot of—and when I say big mullet, I'm talking about something that looks like—I've seen trout choking to death on a nine inch mullet floating in the water because they tried to eat a mullet that was too big for 'em. They're aggressive. I mean,

these mullet are like this. And these fish are swimming around underneath 'em, and the only reason that I think that they might be there is the mullet. They're not getting hit, but they just look nervous. They're just kind of flopping around.

TH: Okay.

MF: But the areas that I fish, I notice that when the terrain changes, like from the storms, or if we get a lot of runoff and the grass dies off and the water gets stinky and you know, whatever else might happen, the fish move. They stay in the same area, it seems like, but they'll move to a different spot that had what they had in the place that was there before. If it's gotten shallower, they've moved a notch further, or if there's less grass someplace and there's more down at the other end of a flat. If I have a flat that's two blocks long and I move to the other end of the flat where there's a drop, those fish might be there on that given day and it kind of becomes one of their favorite haunts. So, I look for 'em, though. I fish—if I'm by myself, I am seriously fishing because I love what I learn.

TH: Okay. Who do you work with? Who owns the boat? I guess you own your own boat.

MF: I own my own boat.

TH: Is there anybody that you work with or fish with?

MF: Once in a while I'll do a double charter with somebody. I'll either hire them to help me or they hire me to help them.

TH: Any specific captains?

MF: Nobody in particular.

TH: Okay.

MF: As a general rule, my fly charters, I would give to—if I couldn't take someone, I would recommend somebody that does pretty much—that would like to do strictly fly. They would probably do it because they have mouths to feed at home and stuff like that, so they'll take anybody fishing. But I like to have a fly rod or take a fly fisherman fishing.

TH: Okay.

MF: I don't want to give 'em somebody that slings live bait all day.

TH: So, where do you go to fish for—okay, let's—trout. Trout, you go to the river?

MF: I'm in the river. I fish for snook. I fish for trout and redfish and snook in the same areas.

TH: Okay. And that would be—

MF: Grass flats, usually with drop offs, and if I can find some bait on 'em, I fish shorelines with docks. I don't actually fish the docks, per se, but I will get out and walk around down a shoreline, maybe cast down the side of 'em. But I don't go up to a dock in my boat like you see people do.

TH: Okay. Now, that's trout, redfish and snook. How 'bout tarpon, pompano?

MF: When I fish for pompano, I'm basically fishing for them almost in the same places that I'm fishing for the trout and the redfish and the snook.

TH: So, you have favorite places.

MF: Because I know I can sight fish 'em. Tell somebody that they're gonna catch a little fish that weighs three pounds on their fly rod and it's gonna run their little rear ends ragged, they don't believe you till they hook one. They're great little fish.

TH: That's trout?

MF: Pompano.

TH: Pompano.

MF: But I fish for them the same in the same places, and we catch bluefish out there. We catch tarpon. It's a different animal.

TH: Before we go to tarpon—I want tarpon next—but do permit, are their habits the same as pompano?

MF: Just that they get bigger.

TH: That's (inaudible).

MF: I've caught 'em in the lagoon, and I had, actually, clients [who] caught six bonefish last year in the lagoon.

TH: Wow.

MF: One up in Fort Pierce and the rest of 'em out at Sailfish Flats.

TH: Sailfish Flats is in?

MF: That's just inside the St. Lucie Inlet, just north of the entrance to the St. Lucie Inlet.

TH: Thank you. But when you see a pompano skip, how do you know that's not a permit?

MF: They don't skip.

TH: They don't skip. That's what I was curious about. Okay.

MF: Yeah, they don't skip. At least, if they do, I've never seen one.

TH: Let's go on to tarpon.

MF: Tarpon I fish for in a different way. A lot of times I'll see 'em in the Intracoastal channel. While I was catching that trout the other day in that sailboat channel where (inaudible) and there were some big girls rolling around in there. (laughs) So, I'm fighting this trout and looking out the corner of my eye and I see tarpon rolling—big ones. (laughs)

TH: Big by—

MF: Big: eighty pounds, ninety pounds. Yeah.

TH: Big.

MF: Yeah, yeah. And I fish for 'em on the beach.

TH: From the beach or from the boat?

MF: Sometimes they get close enough to the shore where you can cast 'em from the beach. I'm fishing with such light leader, though, that they're not gonna spool me. They're not gonna run all my fly line off into the ocean. Like I said, if they jump three or four times and they break me off, I'm happy.

TH: Do you fish from your boat in the ocean?

MF: I do fish from my boat in the ocean, and I'll run down the beach looking for fish: cobia, Jack Crevalle, tarpon. I go outside and fish for Spanish mackerel.

TH: That's fly fishing for Spanish mackerel?

MF: That's a blast.

TH: I bet. I bet that is.

MF: The guys have a great time doing that.

TH: And cobia?

MF: Cobia, we see cobia out there.

TH: Do they hit a fly?

MF: In a heartbeat.

TH: Cool.

MF: Yeah, in a heartbeat. I fish for tarpon in the north fork of the St. Lucie River, also. I fish for 'em around the power plant, Little Mud Creek, Big Mud Creek. That's not my favorite place because sometimes the water's pretty stinky there, so I don't like to go there. And if I'm gonna get out of the boat, my clients don't really want to walk in that either.

TH: Okay. You're talking about the deep muck?

MF: I'm talking about the muck, and I'm talking about the mosquito ditches running, and just foul water.

TH: Okay.

MF: If they don't run 'em and it looks nice, it's beautiful.

TH: So, let's see. We're kinda rambling a little bit here. What's the farthest you go offshore to fish?

MF: Probably a mile and a half, two miles.

TH: You stay close to the—

MF: Yeah, close to the beach.

TH: How do you decide where you will fish?

MF: That's because I'm on the water almost every single day. So, if I catch fish in one place, one day, I can almost bet that they're gonna be there the next day. I don't know about the third day. (laughs) So, I just kind of make my decisions on my clients, on my customers. I know what they like to do. I've fished with them as long as I've been guiding and I know what they like to do. Sometimes they'll tell me. I had some guys here the other week and they said they wanted to go, they wanted to fish and I said, "Look, would you guys like to try something different, because I can't take you the first day you're here. I'll set you up with somebody. They'll take you off the beach and they'll chum fish up for you, and you can catch some albies [albacore] and bonito and whatever else happens to swim along." And they liked that, but when I asked Joe how they like the [Florida] Keys, 'cause they went to the Keys for two days and they came back and they came back and fished with me again, I said, "How did you like John?" "Fine." "How did you like Steve?" "Fine, but we like fishing with you better."

TH: We have to get the last names.

MF: Meskauskas.

TH: Now, which one? Let's go—John, what's the guy that chartered you?

MF: No, no. His name is *John Meskauskas*. He's a guide here in Stuart.

TH: M—

MF: M-e-s—wait a minute. Let me write it. (laughs) I can write it better than I can spell it for you. M-e-s—

TH: *Meskauskas?*

MF: Yeah. He's a—

TH: He's a guide here. Who's the one who—you said you sent somebody down to fish the Keys?

MF: I sent them down to fish with a guy named Steve Impallomeni.

TH: Impallomeni. Okay. But who was the one you sent?

MF: They're both guys that I fish with. They're brothers. They've been fishing with me for a good ten years, and they call themselves the "Checchio Cartel." (laughs) Checchio.

TH: Please write their names.

MF: This was Joe Checchio and his son-in-law Bill Ingram.

TH: This would be—

MF: These were my clients, and I set them up to fish with these two guides. John is here; Steve is in the Keys.

TH: Thank you. Okay. My transcriber will like that. Now, an average fishing trip, you say from maybe six to three in the afternoon?

MF: No, it can be anywhere from six to eight hours. I don't punch a clock with these guys. Never have. I do this because I love it, and it pays for my hobby. (laughs) And I'm a people person. I mean, I like people. It's fun.

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

MF: See, that's just a real tough question for me to answer, because if I have to think about the fact that if I'm catching fish that would spawn and use that as habitat, you know, if I'm catching their little offspring, if they come in—and I'm sure that they do come into the lagoon. I'm sure that they come into the lagoon, I'm sure that they grow up there. I mean, I catch lots of little snappers, little lane snappers, little mutton snappers, little mangrove snappers. I catch a lot of small grouper. You know, they've got to come from someplace. I'm sure that they're not

spawning in the lagoon, but I think that their offspring are coming there. So, I'm sure that whatever happens out there offshore, that if an area is protected, you know, how can that be bad? (laughs) How can that be bad? How can anybody not want that to be protected? It's all, "Me, me, me, me, me, me," and not what's gonna come later.

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? Same way, I would assume?

MF: Yeah. Really, you know, that—just like I said, unless it's very indirect, then it's not affecting me.

TH: It's affecting you indirectly, you feel?

MF: Yeah. And I don't go into a store and buy snapper and grouper. So, I want to know that I've caught it myself. (laughs)

TH: I'm curious. Do you eat fish?

MF: Yeah, I do. I eat pompano and I eat mackerel, when I get 'em.

TH: Okay.

MF: It's the only thing that allows my husband to let me go out and fish in the wintertime.

TH: So that you can bring something home?

MF: So I can bring home a pompano or a mackerel for him for dinner.

TH: He likes to eat fish?

MF: Yeah, he does. He sure does.

TH: In 1996, all anchoring was prohibited within the Oculina Bank, and I assume this affected you in the same way. But you believe in this because of the anchoring, the damage that anchoring does?

MF: No one should be allowed to do that. I mean, it just—the only problem I have with it is how can they really police something like that? I mean, there's got to be somebody sneaking around out there at night, just like they can't keep all the gill nets out of the water. There's always gonna be somebody that's gonna—you know, rules are made to be broken.

TH: In 1996, trawling for rock shrimp was prohibited in the area east and north of the designated Oculina Bank. In other words, they extended it way to the north. 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. So, they expanded it.

MF: Yes, and I remember when they did that, and all I could think of was, “This is a good thing.” (laughs)

TH: Okay. The designated—okay, here's the essence: The designation of marine areas that are closed to fishing is being 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 regulation such as quotas, trip limits, closed seasons, et cetera?

MF: Rules are made to be broken. I think that if people would abide by the rules that were made, or if there were quotas in place for fish—you know, nobody thought about this. And if there were quotas placed on fish and people followed those quotas, they wouldn't probably have to be dealing with that.

TH: With an HAPC?

MF: With the marine protected areas. Now, I still think that, because it's a reef and it's coral and it's a viable, living entity in the ocean, that it should certainly be protected. But I still think that if—like this grouper and snapper and whatever, the closing on the fisheries, you know, and all these people were complaining. But if people weren't so greedy, I don't think that they'd have to do things like that. You know, I look at people. I think how many more—as far as the snook regulations go, who need more than one? Why take a fish if it's gonna be in a prime spawning point in its life? Why keep that huge fish? Give 'em something smaller. You know, redbfish are probably perfectly sized, I think. Who needs—

TH: You mean the—

MF: The slot.

TH: The slot. Okay.

MF: And snook right now, I would have liked to have seen it be something like twenty-six to thirty-two [inches], instead of thirty-four, because I think thirty-four starts to be a pretty good sized fish. And from what I see, is that a potential spawner, you may be—you know, I think that's the point where you start to say, "Well, yep, this is gonna be a female and this is gonna have eggs in it." But if people would just, I think, abide by rules—I want an area to be protected because of what it has.

I mean, you know, look at the people that dive. Do they want to go down and look at something that's ripped to shreds, or do they even notice? Are they just out there looking at the fish? I have no idea. But I think that we have to have areas like this now. I think it's gonna almost be a necessity now, because I think that we've just demolished everything. We've just destroyed a lot of fisheries, and unless they put some pretty stringent rules on 'em, I don't think that they're gonna come back. There's more people fishing every day, there's more people boating every day, there's more people diving every day, and there's more bad guys out there every day.

TH: If you could manage the fisheries, what do you think the fairest, most equitable way to manage the fisheries here in southeast Florida?

MF: I thank God I don't have to, because you'd probably get your house blown up. (TH laughs) I just think that—

TH: Now, can you elaborate on that?

MF: (laughs) Yeah. I'd be afraid somebody would get mad at me, slash my tires. It was like when they were trying to put the gill net ban into effect. I mean, people were getting their tires slashed and somebody's boat was put on fire. (laughs) You know, I guess we're talking about people's livelihoods. But I think that if something like that isn't done, if there's not some kind of management—and I'm not for—I usually, when they make rules, say to myself, "They should put the more stringent rule in effect." In three years from now if they find out that it's not—you know, it's not necessary; we've done this research, we've done that and everything is working out and spawning ratios are up and everything's happy—then relax 'em a little bit. But I don't

think they should just let everybody go hog wild. But I'm all for stringent rules, but I don't have five little hungry mouths to feed and it's got to be a very tough job, and I would hate to see somebody go hungry or not have a job. I see what they're saying. I know why they don't want it closed. But if somebody would have made some rules—you know, shoulda, woulda—a little while back, things wouldn't be so bad.

TH: Thinking ahead—well, would you like to elaborate any more on how you would manage the fisheries, if you could?

MF: God, if I could—

TH: Don't worry about slashed tires or any—if this is a perfect world, if you could manage the fisheries—

MF: If I could manage the fisheries. That is a real tough question for me, because I'm just—I'm pretty hardcore about it. I don't want to see things destroyed. When I go out in the lagoon, there is nothing, nothing more beautiful [than] when there's no dirty water and there's nobody running it over. And if I could stop some of those things, I know that it would help. I'd put some pretty stringent rules on things. You know, I wouldn't—

A perfect example is right now, I'm looking at the snook fishery and I looked at pictures of thousands of dead fish. And I think—you know, they're talking about, "Well, we're not gonna open it September 1, we're gonna keep it another seventeen days." Well, what are they keeping it another seventeen days for? (laughs) Look at it, assess it. You don't have to do it on September 1. Is it gonna take you seventeen days more days to do it? Well, if that's the case, go ahead and do it. But, hey, give yourself a little time. Wait and see if we don't get blasted again next winter. You know, I'm having reactions from fish—and this is the weird thing. I'm out fishing the other day and I catch a snook. He didn't have a hook in his gills. The water wasn't overly hot for the summer; some cold water had already started to come in. It wasn't a real big fish, probably just under the bottom of the slot.

TH: Which would be twenty-eight inches.

MF: And I released it. It died. It just died. And I thought, "Did this fish have problems this winter? Did it die because it was injured by the cold and it's just not gonna be the same?" It didn't fight very hard. You know, was there something wrong with it? Did these fish need some more time to recover? I don't think that we're gonna see the results of this—I don't think we're gonna see the results of what happened last year until about five years from now. I am not catching the fish that I usually catch that are this big.

TH: You're holding your hands two feet [apart]?

MF: Less than that.

TH: Less than two feet.

MF: You know, something that's eighteen inches, nineteen inches. I'm not catching those little fish. My average fish this year has been probably about eight pounds or bigger. I caught a lot of big ones, but I'm catching 'em in the inlet. They're coming in from the ocean. Divers are telling me they're seeing, on the north jetty of the St. Lucie Inlet and on the jetty at the Fort Pierce Inlet, hundreds and hundreds of snook—big ones, huge fish. They were probably smart enough where they were out on a reef someplace. I'm not seeing a lot of those fish in the lagoon, not as many as I usually see. Are they not coming in because the water quality is poor? Are they not coming in—you know, the water doesn't taste any good to 'em anymore? Are they gonna stay out there? I'm seeing things differently this year than I've seen in the past. So, can I take rules as tough as they go? Yeah, because it might be just because I don't kill 'em anyway. But that—

TH: When we started, you were remarking on the water being as clear as in the Keys or the Bahamas. Could you elaborate?

MF: Drop dead gorgeous.

TH: Can you elaborate a little bit more on that? I stopped you before, and I want you to talk about that and the—

MF: That is so fabulous, and people that have come here and fished with me in the summer and seen this crap that comes out, look at the water in the winter, they go, "Oh, my God, this is so fabulous!" And it is. It's absolutely—

TH: Gulf Stream water?

MF: It's absolutely beautiful. There is no place prettier. And if they—you know, that probably has plenty to do with the fishery, inshore and offshore. We had talked about that. That water goes out into the ocean. I've seen it. I've been out trolling or something with friends and seen it on the—you know, out for the boat ride on a friend's boat. They're trolling, I'm sitting there

with my fly rod waiting for something to swim by, and the water's dirty. (laughs) Who are they kidding that that doesn't hurt? And if that water is getting on a place like the Oculina Bank, that somebody's gonna try to protect, isn't it, of course, gonna kill it? Are any of the rules and regulations that you make to protect that gonna do a damn bit of good anyway, because the water's so bad that it's gonna kill anything that's there anyway?

TH: Interesting.

MF: You know, on my computer I have five hundred pages of written material, and there's a point in there where I talk about the fact that I have this vision of the lagoon twenty from now, thirty years from now: at a time when I won't see it, maybe. And I say, "Is this gonna be—are we gonna be looking at two big mud puddles, one that runs west and one that runs east? And are we gonna be looking at one big mud puddle in the lagoon because a tide change really doesn't bring enough water in, because they've dumped so much muck into it that it's gonna be just covered over with muck. And there's gonna be no grass, and there's gonna be no forage, so there's gonna be no fish, and there's gonna be no birds because the birds won't have anything to feed on because nothing's left. And could it get that bad? Could it be that bad?" I am watching, every year, the water quality go down, down, down, and then I look and we have a drought and I see something fantastic.

TH: You kind of answered my last question. Thinking ahead to the future, what do you think fishing in Fort Pierce will be like in ten years?

MF: I hope it's good, because hopefully I'll still be fishing then. (laughs) And I would not like to—I don't like that vision that I have of something that's liable to take place. But could something like that happen? I mean, if you think about—there's places up there in Vero [Beach] that you can't get in the water and walk around because you sink in up to your ankles. Where did all that stuff come from? It's not just the mangroves rotting; it's Taylor Creek, (laughs) it's the Sebastian River. My tarpon haven't come to the north fork this year in the St. Lucie River. I'm tagging 'em this year, scratching them for DNA, and I've only done seven of 'em. I ought to have thirty of 'em by now. (laughs)

TH: You attribute that, primarily, to the runoff from Lake Okeechobee?

MF: I don't know what it is. I'd like to say that was the only excuse. And then I thought, "Well, maybe, you know, the population's growing here in between the St. Lucie Inlet and the north fork of the St. Lucie River." I now have two large new marinas and I thought, "Those fish aren't coming up here because they're stopping on those dock lights every morning." They're not. (laughs) They're not there. I'm not seeing as many. Where are all those fish? And one of the reasons I wanted—

TH: You say it could be the dock lights?

MF: I thought maybe. But, I'm not seeing 'em there, either. I go there and I look and I don't see 'em. I'm just not seeing what I've seen. You know, last year was a little less and this year's a little less. One of the reasons I wanted to tag those fish was because they're pretty much the fish I like to catch—anywhere from about ten to forty pounds. Do those fish live there all the time? Do I just not see 'em in the winter? I see a few fish out there in the winter.

TH: You're talking tarpon here?

MF: Yeah. But I mean hundreds of 'em rolling. You don't know which one to cast at first. Not this year. I'm not seeing that, and it was kind of less last year, too. Is the water quality becoming so poor that they're just not gonna do it, they're not gonna come? They're gonna stay out in the ocean or go wherever they go. Did those fish all freeze to death? I don't think so. And I can tell if they live there kind of by looking at 'em. I mean, you look at 'em and they're shiny and silver if they're fish that just came in from the ocean. And if they live in the north fork, they've got things hanging off their gills, algae hanging off their gills, and they're black and they smell bad. (laughs) So, I hope it's good.

TH: Thinking ahead, you have high hopes, but you have doubts?

MF: Reservations. Yeah. Sure, because I do see changes. I mean, we got half the grass that we had, and I don't see as many little shrimp as I used to see, and it's probably lack of grass. I don't see that. You know, I go out there in the dark and I look for things. If I'm out there, I take a flashlight out, and I look in the water to see if I see those little orange eyes looking at me. I walk around in the beginning of the year or after the hurricanes and I look and I dig, like this, down in the sand to see if there's any grass shoots coming. I look at stuff like that. And I don't know if anybody else that does what I do does that. I mean, they don't talk about it, but I talk about it.

TH: With that, thank you very much for sharing your fishing history.

MF: Thank you, sir.

Pause in recording

MF: And we'd go (inaudible), go out in the ocean, and you know there, you go out a mile, two miles, and you're in the [Gulf] Stream.

TH: You didn't go out that far, did you?

MF: And it's beautiful. I don't do it now.

TH: But back then?

MF: But this was back in Miami, you know, and we'd go out. My brother and I would go out and we'd troll for dolphin. You know, we'd get a couple of 'em and we'd come back in. If we got a few for the box, we'd put 'em in the box and we might go try to catch for something else. We'd get back to the ramp, and I can remember this as clear as day. Even as a kid with my dad, we'd go out and fish in the Intracoastal down there and fish in this Dumfoundling Bay area, and it was desolate then. And we'd come back to the ramp and there would be people that had been offshore with coolers the size of this table.

TH: Huge coolers: six feet, six by four, six by three.

MF: Full of dolphin. Some of 'em this big, and they'd clean about a dozen of 'em and then they'd look to start giving 'em away. And whatever they didn't want, they'd just dump it.

TH: Quite sad.

MF: So pathetic. And everybody wonders now, you know? We should have dolphin here coming out our ears and we don't. I mean, they grow fast. All they do is eat and swim. I think they said their full growth potential is reached in like five or six years. You catch one that's sixty pounds or seventy pounds, that's how old it is. And you take a fish like that—I couldn't eat a fish that big. My brother got one, one time. It had all this gelatinous material and it tasted terrible. But you know, you look at stuff like that; you see it and you just—

End of interview