

Kenneth R. Rasche

Oral History Interview
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Carson G. Prichard
April 23, 2021
Kenneth R. Rasche's house
Rogers City, MI

Project—Human dimensions of the Lake Huron salmon fishery crash: Using oral histories to assess the attitudes, values, and beliefs of anglers and non-angler stakeholders in Great Lakes coastal communities

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PRICHARD: My name's Carson Prichard and I'm here with Ken Rasche at his home in Rogers City. Today is Friday, April 23, 2021 and it's 4:26 p.m. Just before we begin, Ken, can you state on the recording that you do consent in participating in the interview and being recorded?

RASCHE: I do consent on the interview as well as being recorded, and I hope it helps somebody in the future.

PRICHARD: Alright, thanks. Well to begin, can you just tell me a little bit about yourself?

RASCHE: Well, I'm—everybody asked me if I lived in Rogers City all of my life, or was I born here, and I said, "No, but I got here as quick as I could." [I] was born in Detroit, actually grew up in the Hawks area which is about eleven miles from here. Married a local girl, and went to work immediately after graduation from high school. I was going to go to CMU [Central Michigan University] and become a history teacher but it just

never worked out, I don't know why. But I went to work down at Calcite, worked there three years, and then I quit down there and I went to work for my wife's father-in-law who was a Standard Oil distributor. In Mount Pleasant maybe you've seen the signs [for] Coyne Oil Company (Prichard: Mm-hm, yeah.). Okay. I know the Coynes well, and worked with them, actually. Did that for twenty-five years and I retired. [Rasche clarification: Rasche's wife's *father* was a Standard Oil Distributor in Rogers City, and that's for whom and where Rasche worked] Quite a few reasons. We had a good business. I didn't take any vacations. My wife refused to go on—we did take the girls to—I've got two girls, and we did take them to Florida once but my wife said that she would never go again because I spent all my time on the phone to see how the business was going. So, I sold the business and actually went to work for the people I sold it for, but I found I was working just as hard as ever but not making any money. And one day the city manager from the local city here called me and he said, "Hey, would you be interested in running the marina?" And I said, "I don't know anything about running a marina," but he said, "You do know how to run a business." I said, "Well—." So we talked about it, and for a guy that never had a—I never had a paid vacation in my life—I figured this might be a way to work for six months and have six months off, even though I didn't draw unemployment, and the six months I could do what I wanted to do, okay? And that's basically what happened. I worked there for seventeen years. And prior to working there I did have a twenty-four-foot boat and snuck out salmon fishing every chance I had. And the fishing was excellent. It really was. And then when I went to work at the marina, it was—one of the—

PRICHARD: You started in 1990, right? At the marina?

RASCHE: Oh, no. No. No, earlier than that. (Prichard: Oh, okay.) I have to figure it out. Probably in the mid-eighties. (Prichard: Okay.) Nineteen eighties. (Prichard: Okay.) Yeah. So, the marina was very small at that time. We had seventy-nine boat slips. It was a real challenge. A real challenging job, to run it. When you have twice as much demand for something than you can—we constantly promoted to bring more people to Rogers City to go fishing, but we didn't have boat slips for them. And so you make some people angry. And it was a very uncomfortable job at times. Rewarding, at times. And one of the main reasons we rebuilt the marina and increased it in size—we almost doubled it in size—was the fact [that] we had so many fishermen. We had a waiting list of, I think at one time about 120 people. I had no problem—you know, you can't fill every slip with seasonal boaters. You've got to have room for the transients coming off the lake. So the state controlled pretty much what we did down there, and it was a balancing act. Fishermen and cruising boaters really didn't get along well. A guy pulls in with his million-dollar boat, and he pulls in and he probably spends the night drinking onboard, and he's staying up late and plans on getting up at ten o'clock in the morning and taking off and going, but at five o'clock in the morning you've got eighteen fishermen starting up alongside of him. So there's always good and bad with both. So we enlarged the marina—and again, we still had way more boats than we could handle. We've had fishing tournaments down there—the Rogers City Salmon Tournament, at one time, I think the largest I ever saw it was 350 boats. And we actually had a waiting list of people who wanted to get in. And when you have 350 boats, you don't have 350 spots to put them. So you're going to make some people—some people are going to be unhappy. But we ended up having a lottery system—a drawing, okay? If you get drawn you get a boat slip, if you

don't, I'm sorry, you've got to use the trailer. And there were days during that tournament, Carson, there were days more than just during those times—if you know where the red light used to be in downtown Rogers City; it's now a four-way, okay—at four o'clock in the morning, the line of cars went from the launch ramp back to the red light, okay? I mean it was a zoo. It was absolute—it was wild. And I guess I understand it. You have a guy that, he's got a huge investment in a boat. He's got, you know, thirty-five-forty thousand dollars. He probably works in a factory in Bay City, Saginaw, or Detroit, and he's looking forward to that seven days or fourteen days he's going to be up in Rogers City just socking them salmon like crazy, but he can't get his boat in the water. (both laugh) And again, we had some very unhappy people—we had a lot of happy people. But it was a challenge. It was a challenge. It really was. When the pressure, when the salmon fishing started to go away, as much as you didn't really want to see it go away, it made my job much easier. *Much* easier. So, I always referred to it as we tried to put ten pounds of manure in a five-pound bag down there. (Prichard laughs) In the heart of salmon season, we'd have a festival in town, which is the city's festival, we took up three quarters of the parking lot. Now what do you do with the fishermen, you know? You talk about a challenge. It was a challenge. And we did see—I can't tell you exactly, Carson, I can't tell you when we first noticed it. There was—even after the alewives—you knew something was happening, okay, because for a while you had a fish that was thirty inches long, thirty-five inches long, it was close to forty pounds. In three or four years that fish that was the same length was seventeen pounds. The thing that I noticed the most was the color of the flesh. When the alewives were out there—and alewives are a very fatty food—and so our salmon here were nowhere near like the salmon are in

Alaska, as far as the coloration of the meat. Our salmon was yellow. I don't like it, to be honest with you. I like Alaskan salmon, but I don't like ours. Ours has changed from yellow to more like Alaskan salmon simply because [of] what they're eating out here. They're not eating alewives. You could see this happening, and again, back at the time, Carson, we didn't, I don't think any of us knew—maybe Jim Johnson and the people from Alpena, from the [Alpena] Fisheries [Research Station], maybe they knew what was happening, because of course you've always got the creel census, down there, taker, you know, maybe they saw it—but as novices we didn't see it. We just knew something was changing, but what it was we didn't know. And as far as the revenue's concerned down there, the revenue's dropped dramatically. I mean, dramatically. And I think every business in Rogers City felt that same effect. And there's really, I think this fishing out there now—I don't go fishing much anymore; usually my grandson or somebody takes me out—but the fishing out there now is still pretty darn good, but it's not for salmon. The lake trout seems to be doing extremely well, but a lot of people don't like to catch lake trout compared to salmon because, it's like a Volkswagen or a Cadillac, the difference. So, it's too bad. It really helped, well, like the motels, the restaurants, stuff like that, it helped dramatically. Growing up where I did, Rogers City was—when Barb and I got married which was fifty-six years ago tomorrow, okay—

PRICHARD: Oh. Congrats. (laughs)

RASCHE: —it was about 4,200 people. When I started working down at Calcite—I started two days after graduation—there was about six hundred people working there, okay? Now there's about a hundred. I don't know if the salmon industry would have—or, the salmon would have stayed in Lake Huron, would that have made the business in

Rogers City better? I think we're now down to like 2,800 people. There's no more big families. It's changing dramatically. And this is probably off the subject, but one of the things in the last year that has helped us in Rogers City, Carson, believe it or not, is this virus. Where did you drive here from? Okay. Last year at this time between here and Rogers City—these are ten-acre pieces of land—there was like six of them for sale. Now there's none for sale, and there's home sites on five of them from people who are moving up from down below, working from home. So, this Covid thing has benefitted Rogers City, in my opinion. You don't see real estate signs in Rogers City. The real estate people have a—and I know this is getting off the subject—but they've got a waiting list. They don't put signs up. They've got so many people waiting to buy up here. It's crazy. It's one of the places that's still affordable.

Getting back to the salmon, is there anything specifically that you want to ask me about it?

PRICHARD: I think so, but I was kind of just letting you talk about—

RASCHE: Ramble on.

PRICHARD: —no, what you think is important. (Rasche laughs) I accidentally, I think I accidentally cut you off earlier when I asked when you started and you were starting to talk about how before you were harbormaster you had a boat and fished, (Rasche: Yeah. Yeah.) and so I don't know if you wanted to (laughs) go back to that.

RASCHE: Well, I did. You know, I had a boat. Matter of fact, I had two of them. I had an eighteen-foot—I started out in an eighteen-footer and my daughter and I damn near

drowned in it. So I said we're going to get a bigger one. And so we did—I got a twenty-four-footer and it was very nice. But, with the business we had, it was extremely hard to get to use it. And that was one of my—probably one of the reasons that I said, well, when they offered me the job, that's one of the reasons I said I'll get a chance to use the boat. That was wrong (Prichard laughs) because I never had a chance to use it. I was too busy down there, I worked seven days a week. It was very intense for six months. But the salmon fishing was great. I can remember out there—and I'm sure Bruce Grant and these other guys can tell it—Frank Krist—you could go out there, and when you had the electronics like we all had, you would go through these schools of alewives, I mean, it was unbelievable. It was—they'd fill the screen up with alewives. I don't remember having die-offs here like we had on Lake Michigan. There may have been. We didn't live here at the time. We lived in town, not close to the lake. But what we also saw back then, before the salmon came, I always looked forward to go out smelt fishing. But when the salmon came there was no more smelt fishing. It pretty much disappeared. I guess there's certain places on the lake that you can still catch a few. But, I can remember—if you do go back and do a little bit of research, Carson, you're going to find there was a guy in Rogers City who worked out at the Hammond Bay Biological Station. His name was Dr. Vernon Applegate. Dr. Applegate was a guy that developed TFM [the sea lamprey larvicide 3-trifluoromethyl-4-nitrophenol]. We delivered fuel to his house. He was a man of few words, but when he decided to talk to you you'd better decide you're going to sit there and listen for quite some time. Well he gave me a lecture on salmon. And his philosophy was you would never ever introduce an exotic species to control an exotic species. He said, “We will regret the day we planted salmon in the Great Lakes.” I'm not

sure he was right. Okay? But they definitely were—they ate themselves out of house and home. And also with the alewives—not the alewives, but the mussels, the zebra mussels, quagga mussels. That all had a big effect on the—if they never came in, would the alewives have remained a food source for the salmon? I don't know. I guess, nobody knows for sure. (Prichard: Right.) Yeah, so, I don't know. But I did enjoy it, you know, fished. We had friends from down below, we had friends from out west, we had—everybody came to Rogers City. And it was probably the hotspot on the Great Lakes for ten years. (Prichard: Yeah.) It was.

PRICHARD: So much so that that was a big driver in the marina upgrade and—? Yeah.

RASCHE: Definitely. Definitely. And it was very financially beneficial to the marina, okay? Yes, you don't sell as much gasoline to a fishing boat quite simply because they fill it up on their trailer on their way in. They fill it up at a gas station because it's cheaper. I understand that. But, you still get the dockage. The town gets a spinoff. They go up the street, they buy alcohol, they buy food, restaurants, things like that. And so, everybody benefitted from it. They really did. So it was a big plus. You know, like Bruce Grant. He's got that resort out there. I don't know if he rents stuff anymore. Is it closed, or what?

PRICHARD: Not anymore.

RASCHE: But, I mean, I think that he had a waiting list for people trying to rent there to go—and Bruce, himself, chartered, okay? So, I think at one time we had probably four or five charters in the harbor, and a couple that went off their trailers. But they were having, as this thing, the salmon fishing was going down, they were having a rough time making

a living, too. But again, when we redesigned the harbor, we tried to—you don't want to use the word "segregate"—but we tried to build it so we could keep cruising boaters away from fishing boaters as much as possible, because quite simply the two are just not compatible, okay? And I think we did a pretty good job of it. That made it—that was a couple of difficult years when we were trying to keep the marina going, trying to keep the fish cleaning station going, and try to remodel the harbor all at the same time. You've got to do that type of work in the summer. And it was difficult. But, I think we ended up with a fairly good product.

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PRICHARD: What was the typical day for you, when—?

RASCHE: For me? (Prichard: Yeah.) It was seven days. It was seven days a week. I would usually get down there—depending on the time of the year, I inevitably was down there by six o'clock in the morning, I never went home for lunch, I would usually leave there any time between five and six at night, and I would usually go back down after, okay? But, weekends I would usually try to be down there by four o'clock to do nothing more than try to direct traffic down at the launch ramp. Okay? And it was difficult. It was difficult. When you tell people, "Hey, you've got to move. Come on, man. You've got to keep moving, keep moving," pretty soon you get a reputation of being a horse's ass, but you make one guy mad, you keep four people happy, so it's a balancing act. So, it was a long day. It was a long day.

Fish cleaning station was just a—it was terrible. Absolutely terrible. We were fortunate, we've had two different guys, and if there is such a thing as a professional fish cleaner,

we had two different guys that came in and they lived right on site. And, because if you didn't—first of all, we had a four-place fish cleaning station with a grinder. You take—a guy comes in with five fish, it's going to take him—some guys'll do it in fifteen minutes, sometimes some guys are going to do it in an hour and a half. (Prichard: Geez.) So you've got a line halfway down the parking lot of guys with coolers, and this is eleven thirty at night. So we got the guys—and we didn't force people to use the fish cleaners, but a lot of people did, and those fish cleaners could clean fish faster—they could clean five fish faster than the fastest fisherman could clean one, okay? And they were a big asset. But then it got to the point—what do we do with the entrails? Well, wastewater treatment plant couldn't handle them anymore. It was overloaded, okay? So we ended up going down to the US Steel plant—which it was then—we made a deal with them that we would haul them down to their location—we went down with city equipment in the spring of the year and we would dig trenches, in the middle of the quarry up on some hills where they had hauled all this overburden, the junk rock. And then we would haul, in dumpsters, all the fish waste down there. Well, it all takes manpower. And it takes machinery. And it costs money to do it. And it's all coming out of the marina revenue. Well then we decided—and it was kind of interesting, if you look at the lay of the land here—and it's hard to understand until you look at a map real close—we get a lot of northwest wind. When we get a northwest wind, this area is not real fishable, okay? But if you go down beyond Calcite, beyond Adams Point, beyond Presque Isle, Michigan turns south and that's pretty decent fishing (Prichard: Okay.) with a northwest wind. Well, we're looking at our parking lot one day and we don't have any really—there's not enough fishermen to worry about having to haul fish waste. And pretty soon this guy

comes over who I had never met before, and he says, “Hey. You’re dumpster is full.” I said, “What do you mean it’s full?” “Yeah, it’s full.” Everybody that was fishing out of Presque Isle Harbor is bringing their fish up to Rogers City. The DNR’s [Department of Natural Resources] smart enough, they won’t put a cleaning station in at Presque Isle because those people are coming up here and cleaning their fish, and they’re not benefitting our marina one penny. (Prichard: Right.) But it is costing us a ton of money to get rid of their waste. So you go to the city and say, “Now look, this is what’s happening. What do you want to do?” “Well, we don’t know.” And I said, “Well how about this? We charge people—,” I think back then it was like, “—four dollars to launch a boat. Put up a sign that says, ‘If you did not fish in Rogers City, go down and buy a four-dollar launch fee. Come and clean your fish. If you don’t want to buy that then take your fish someplace else.’” Well, you know what, you would have thought that I was the nastiest person in the world. I mean, even our city fathers, You can’t do that. Now all of a sudden the marina is broke, and they wonder why. One of the things for years that bothered me, Carson, being in business for myself—I’ve got to be careful how I say this—we made a lot of money for the city. A lot of money. The city borrowed, it was a matching grant, to rebuild the marina, and the bond payments were structured in such a manner that when we started off repaying the bonds we made very small payments. But as you got into the bond payments more long-term, your bond payments went up. Well that was good because we had tons of money after we made our yearly bond payment. And this is where the problem comes in. What our city had decided to do in their—and John Bruning was part of it—they balanced their budget for the city on money that the marina made. And I kept telling them, “Guys, there’s going to come a time, you’re going to need that money

in reserve to pay these—.” That’s one of the reasons I got out, because the marina was supposed to be self-sustaining. Okay? For the last ten years our streets in Rogers City have gone to hell because the city is subsidizing the marina, which should have never happened. If—(laughs) I probably shouldn’t say too much more—but this is what happened. Oh, hey, the marina’s got money. We need that. We need that. We—. Like I say, that’s one of the reasons I got out, okay. (Prichard: Okay.) Yeah. It’s just—you could see, it didn’t matter how much money you made, they could spend it faster than you could make it. And then with the downturn with the fishing, I could see awful dark days coming. I always said, my mother raised short kids, not stupid kids. But anyway, it was interesting. I enjoyed it. Especially working with the young kids. We had twelve people down there, easily, every year. I had some fantastic workers. Fantastic. And we’re pretty close to a lot of them right to this day. And a lot of them have been very successful. Matter of fact, one of the kids that worked for me my first year down there, he’s my doctor right now.

PRICHARD: (laughs) Oh, really?

RASCHE: (laughs) So I get darn good care.

[00:28:23]

Wind blows through the screened-in back porch where the interview is taking place and blows some pieces of paper around. Prichard and Rasche take a few seconds to collect them.

PRICHARD: So when the marina expanded in '96 did that make your job easier or harder, having to deal with more—?

RASCHE: It was more responsibility, but it was easier because you could keep more people happy. You really could. We've had—I think there's 129 boat slips down there right now. We had, Carson, at one time, we had the Great Lakes Cruising Club come through. And these are big pleasure boats. We had 179 boats in there. Every one of them had power and water. They were drawing so much power that we had to run a garden hose on the transformer to keep it from blowing up. (Prichard: Really?) That's how hot it was. But we could put a lot of boats in there. We really could. And it turned out to be a great marina. I think it's one of the nicer ones on the lake. I really do. So I'm damn proud of it. (Prichard: Yeah.) Lot of sweat equity went into that one. (Prichard laughs)

What else?

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PRICHARD: Was the change in the fishery really reflected in participation, like, at the marina? Boats coming in from out of town. Or was there a lag? What were you seeing, kind of, that might have had you concerned or thinking about what's going on with the fishery when it was going—when it was changing?

RASCHE: Where we saw the change was basically not in the limits of fish being brought in, but first was the size of them. They were good looking, silver fish. But they looked like they were starving. (Prichard: Okay.) It did not affect the cruising boaters whatsoever. We had—some seasonal boaters moved over to Lake Michigan because

there—we had a couple of charter boaters that moved to Lake Michigan. But it wasn't an overnight thing. It was a gradual thing. A lot of them hated to move, but they were fishermen. And it doesn't take them much longer to drive from Detroit to Ludington than it does from Detroit to Rogers City. No, we didn't see—there was no drop-off in cruising boaters. The fishermen were the ones that we saw the dramatic decrease in.

PRICHARD: Okay. So the differences between, I don't know, the mid- to late-nineties and now was driven by fishing, and—

RASCHE: Yeah. (Prichard: Okay.) And I think there might be—I think there's probably a few more cruising boaters—. After we left, we had the, not a depression, but the panic, and the price of the gas went outrageously high. What we saw also there, we saw the fifty-foot diesel boat still running up and down the lake. What we didn't see was the thirty-two foot gasoline-powered boat because that guy probably had payments for thirty years. The guy that had the sixty-footer probably has owned that boat for some time.

PRICHARD: This would have been like 2009-'10? (Rasche: Yep.) Yeah, okay.

RASCHE: Dramatic change. (Prichard: Yeah.) The fuel sales were amazingly—it had switched. We had always sold three times as much gasoline as we did diesel fuel. Now all of a sudden we're selling twice as much diesel as we are gasoline. That comes from the different sizes—the big boats are diesel-powered. So the big boats are still out there. But the smaller ones are the ones that—fishing boats didn't really make much—wasn't a big part of our business as far as gasoline's concerned. They got it up the street. (Prichard: Yeah.) Put it on the trailer and hey, that's fine.

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PRICHARD: What were the major sources of income and expenses for the marina, then?

RASCHE: The major expense for—well, you had wages back then. And we certainly never overpaid them. You know, there's insurances. (Prichard: Okay.) My wages, electricity, water. We had to pay all the same utilities as if you had a private marina. We had to pay that to the city water department. If I had people from [the Department of] Public Works come down and do some burning or welding down at the marina I had to pay them the same hourly rate out of the marina's, you know—. And as far as revenue is concerned, mostly slips, (Prichard: Okay.) boat slips. That was probably the primary revenue maker. For people who didn't use a boat slip, we had a seasonal boat launch pass, or a daily, and that generated some pretty good revenue. And that's pretty much where our revenue came from. (Prichard: Okay.) The thing here, Carson, if you ever own and run a marina, (Prichard laughs) what you want, you want a seasonal, cruising boater. That seasonal boater pays you in March for a boat slip that he's got from the day you open until the day you close, okay? He goes, he comes, he goes, he buys gas. He can't go up to the gas station. So you've got his money. Now it turns out that you have a terrible summer, and the cruising boaters aren't running back and forth up on the lake, you're okay because you've still got those seasonal boaters. They've already paid you. That's your ace in the hole. If you want a marina to be successful, that's what you have to have. Fishermen are a bonus. They're good to have. You make money on them. Sailboaters are a bonus. They don't buy any gas, okay? But your cruising power boaters, if you can get them in in a marina, you can be successful.

PRICHARD: And they've been pretty consistent (Rasche: Yep.) over time? (Rasche: They have.) Yeah.

RASCHE: Yep. They have. And again, during some of the years when the economy had tanked and things were bad, you still saw the fifty- and sixty-footers coming in.

They're—I'm not saying they're recession-proof, but some of these guys I think are. It's amazing, with—and I'll tell you—and it was embarrassing. Usually these boaters, the cruising boaters, they would travel in groups. If you had a Sea Ray you'd travel with other Sea Ray owners, if you had a Silverton you'd travel with them. We had a group of Sea Rays. They stopped at Rogers City on their way up and they went up to Mackinac Island and St. Ignace and stopped at Rogers City on the way back and they gassed up, and they spent a lot of money—overnight dockage and \$400-worth of gas. And they'd give you their credit card. And you stuck it between the machine and, oop, declined. Over the limit. "Sorry Cap," I said, "this one won't go." "Oh," he said. "Alright." He brings out another one. "Try this one." Declined. "Hmm. Hey hun, give me one of your credit cards, would you?" These boats aren't out there anymore. These are the ones that are no longer running up and down the lake. These guys all, I mean—and that happened, Carson, much more often than you can—. First, I was so embarrassed I didn't know what to do. Here's a guy that's got a boat that's worth \$350,000 that can't pay for the gas. (laughs) I mean—(both laugh). I don't know. Interesting. (Prichard: Yeah.) And you run into, you run into so many situations down there at the marina. I should have written a book.

PRICHARD: Yeah, you told me that on the phone one time.

RASCHE: I should have written a book, (Prichard: Yeah.) okay? I could sit and, for hours, (Prichard laughs) but it's not all about—

PRICHARD: The fishery.

RASCHE: —the salmon fishery. (Prichard: Yeah.) Yeah. Yeah. But it's an interesting job. (Prichard laughs) Interesting.

[00:38:46]

PRICHARD: Well I've been able to read about the tournament because a lot was written in the newspapers (Rasche: Sure) at the time, but I'm kind of wondering, how representative of the amount of people fishing here was the tournament versus before or after the tournament, in the season? I mean, the tournament probably lined up pretty well with when the fishing was good. And that brought in 350 boats, 1,100 people. But, what was the typical amount of people going out fishing earlier or later in the season?

RASCHE: I would say it would normally start—our festival is usually the first full weekend in August, okay? About the first of August through Labor Day, during that time period you couldn't hardly tell if there was a tournament or not because the fishing traffic was the same. (Prichard: Okay.) There was more demand during the tournament because when you were in the tournament you all had to be back in at ten o'clock at night or whatever that was. So they knew there were going to be big lines, so that's when they wanted to get into boat slips, okay? But if they were fishing on their own they didn't really have to because they could come in and go as they wanted. There weren't the big crowds. There were the same amount of boats going out. Well, probably not quite as

many. But, there was not much let up during the month of August, during the primetime. It stayed pretty consistent. [Hoeft] State Park was full. Black Lake State Park was full. Motels. I mean, there was a lot of “No Vacancy” signs. (Prichard: Yeah.) The only time you see that now is during our festival. And so it’s changed it pretty dramatically. It made a big difference. Huge difference.

[00:40:56]

PRICHARD: One of the things I’ve thought about, and I don’t know how this has changed over time, but I do know with the ecosystem change in Lake Huron, places like Saginaw Bay have gotten really good for walleye fishing. And I was wondering if you communicated with harbormasters at other ports ever about your experience, because you kind of had an invaluable experience in Rogers City dealing with the number of boaters, and I just wondered if other ports, either at that time, or now in Saginaw Bay, have you communicated with anybody at those places?

RASCHE: Not really, Carson, not really. Back when the salmon tournament, back when that was really going strong, the guy in Harrisville and I kept in close contact, and if I knew that he had a bunch of boats leaving from Rogers City going—but, again, that was by water—I would call him and say, “Jim, you better put some extra people on. You’ve got this many boats coming that I know of.” And then all of a sudden the weather was good and they didn’t pull in and he’s got more people sitting there, but that’s neither here nor there. But he’s about the only one that I ever—and we kind of kept track with the people who ran Presque Isle [Harbor] before the state took it over, you know, as far as fishing and stuff like that was concerned. You were actually too darn busy to be watching

real close what the fishing was doing, (Prichard: Okay.) okay? That was just a small slice of the pie. (Prichard: Okay.) So, yeah, it was a minor part. (Prichard: Okay.) And I could usually tell on how could the fishing was by how many dumpsters full of fish waste (Prichard. Ah.) that we hauled out. You know, best indication there is. (Prichard: Yeah.) People weren't taking them home. So, that's probably about the best I can tell you.

|00:43:12|

PRICHARD: I was curious, because I think it was the 1997 tournament, I read—and it maybe had been other years, too—the headline was literally, “More than 20,000 pounds of salmon (Rasche: Oh.) caught,” and I'm trying to get a picture of, how long does it take to fillet all those fish? And what is that like? (laughs)

RASCHE: The—Carson, the line of people—. We had, at that time we had an IGA store (Prichard: Okay.) that was right down by the four-way stop sign. They had a terrific business with boaters, and they would let boaters take groceries carts—the cruising boater didn't have a car when he came to town, so he had to get groceries back to the marina, so they would take grocery carts and fill them up at the store and take them down to their boat, and leave them there and the grocery store would go and pick them up, take them back to the store. But the fishermen got in between and they loaded these up with salmon (Prichard laughs) to take them over to the fish cleaning station. I mean, there was literally thousands of pounds of salmon. And thousands of pounds of waste. It was crazy. It was nuts. And you had guys arguing and fighting in line, and some guy's too slow, and—it's funny there was no knife fights over there. It was nuts. And then, you take hot weather, a lot of drinking, late at night everybody's tired—it was an interesting place.

(Prichard: Yeah.; both laugh) I stayed away. (Prichard: Yeah.) I tried to stay away as much as I possibly could because—from the fish cleaning end of it. It was my responsibility to keep it clean and policed and get—but while they were cleaning fish, man, no I'm—

PRICHARD: Stay away.

RASCHE: Or else I'm going to look from a distance, I'm telling you. (Prichard laughs) It's no place to be. (Prichard: Yeah.) Yeah, it was amazing. What we needed, what we needed, and we had a few, we had a couple of Filipinos, families, and I don't know what they do with fish guts, but they were down there every day getting fish carcasses. I was hoping we would have had (laughs) quite a few hundred more of them. I mean, they helped us clean up the waste. Crazy. We had guys hauling salmon waste out for bear bait. (Prichard: Oh, yeah.) We had people burying it in their gardens, which, hey I encouraged it. Go for it, man. Get rid of it someday. What bothers me, and the DNR, God bless them, they know what a fish cleaning station is, so they build a marina down at Presque Isle that has probably almost as many fishermen going out of it, catching as many fish as we do. But all these people are bringing their fish to Rogers City to clean. They don't want any part of it. They're smart. (both laugh)

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PRICHARD: Well that makes me wonder, how big of an impact was it when they put the marina down in Presque Isle? Did that have an impact on (Rasche: Oh—) your stuff here?

RASCHE: —dramatically. (Prichard: Yeah.) Dramatically. Yeah. The year they opened that marina up, we probably lost—25 to 30 percent of our business, gas business. If you look at a map, the DNR—the average cruising boater coming up from the metropolitan area, they're headed to Mackinac Island or to Mackinaw City or that area—that's a destination; we are not. So you're coming up the shoreline. They'll come up from out of Lake St. Clair, they'll get to Port Sanilac, they'll slip across—they can make it across Saginaw Bay to Harrisville. And then they head from Harrisville to Rogers City, because Presque Isle wasn't there. During the average summer, we would have three to four boats per week run out of fuel between our marina and Adams Point, which is just down beyond Calcite. If they didn't run out of gas, when they came in they would take 85 to 95 percent of their capacity, of fuel, because Harrisville to Rogers City is too far for the average boat. They could go into Alpena, but by the time they went all the way into Alpena and came all the way back out Thunder Bay, it's closer to go from Harrisville to Rogers City because you've got ten miles in and ten miles out. So, Presque Isle is at that spot, when they leave Harrisville, that is the ideal spot for them to fuel up in Presque Isle, okay, because they've still got a comfortable margin of fuel, and from Presque Isle they can make it to Mackinaw City, Mackinac Island, safely. Also, if you're going to Mackinac, now, Rogers City, you have to want to go there. Because if you plot a course from Presque Isle lighthouse to Mackinac Island, you'll miss Rogers City by fifteen miles. (Prichard: Okay.) So, yes, it hurt. It hurt a lot.

PRICHARD: That had nothing to do with the fishing—

RASCHE: No, not at all.

PRICHARD: —it was all just cruising boats.

RASCHE: Not at all. (Prichard: Okay.) No. But, they did end up getting a lot of fishermen, too. Which was fine because quite simply we couldn't handle any more than we had. We just couldn't.

|00:49:53|

PRICHARD: I was wondering, with respect to the fishery, in your perspective, what was done well, in your eyes, and what do you think could have been done differently or better or wasn't done well?

RASCHE: As far as the salmon fishery's concerned I really don't think there probably could have been anything—maybe Frank Krist would know. The thing that I didn't like to see is the DNR would come in every spring of the year, just about this time of the year, and they would probably dump twenty thousand small steelhead in the harbor, okay? If they dumped them in there by eight o'clock in the morning, by eight o'clock at night half of them were eaten up by seagulls. (Prichard: Oh, okay. Yep.) Had the DNR come down at eight o'clock at night and dumped them in, by eight o'clock the next morning, the majority of those fish would have been out of the marina and no longer in danger of being eaten. Now you've got—and I, you know, you talk to them about it. But no, no, no, we can't work at night. Well, you wouldn't have to work at night. But, they say, "It costs us this much money to raise a fish this long." I understand that, okay? But why not spend a few more dollars to have 90 percent of the fish survive instead of 20 percent. That's what I think they could have done better. Other than that, hey, I think they did a great job. I would hope now that they concentrate more on, like, Atlantic salmon and stuff like that.

And I think they are. Because at least they don't—they understand that they have to go down and eat gobies off the bottom, and they seem to be thriving. Lake trout are thriving. Chinooks, which everybody loves, I mean they're too stupid. They don't (Prichard laughs) go down there where the food is. (Prichard: Yeah.) And maybe—I'm not knocking the DNR, I'm not. But you can't keep everybody happy. But it just seems like, in some of their planning practices, common sense would say get those things in just before dark. Seagulls aren't feeding on them at nighttime. Give them twelve hours to be acclimated, to spread out, get out of the marina, and they would have a lot more fish out there that survive. That's my thought. But the DNR refuses to do it.

|00:52:54|

PRICHARD: How much interaction did you have with people doing the creel survey?

RASCHE: Some. (Prichard: Okay.) Some. Not a whole lot. I stayed away. We had—she lives right back here behind us—I don't know, did you—

PRICHARD: Julie [Shafto]?

RASCHE: —Julie?

PRICHARD: I've tried to reach out to her. I don't know—I think she's got other things she's dealing with right now. But I would like—I would love to speak with her. Yeah.

RASCHE: Okay. Well, I would just as soon if I never talked to her again. She's—I guess she does a good job with what she does, but she caused me so many problems down at the marina that just—I really don't even want to discuss it. (Prichard: Oh, okay.) She

would be stopping people, checking them in line when there's traffic backing up behind them. When we promoted this, okay, go down and buy a launch ramp to clean your fish, you know, a ticket to—and she's down there saying, “Hey, you don't have to do that. You don't have to pay Rogers City to clean your fish here.” I mean, this is a state—I called Jim Johnson. I said, “Look, Jim. This has got to end, okay?” She's—good friends—she loves to fish—good friends of ours, I've know them for years; the guys come up here and they're—she's always hanging around the marina trying to catch rides fishing with somebody, okay? So these guys, they say, “Okay, Julie, come on. We'll take you fishing.” So they did, I think probably twice. Well then the guys' wives come up. Julie's not smart enough to stay away, okay? So all of a sudden the wives are in, chewing my ass, “Now what's this lady doing hanging around their boat? Are my—these husbands going out—?” And I'm saying, “Look—no. That's not happening.” This girl just doesn't know enough to stay away, okay? She's not the sharpest knife in the drawer. She might know how to do creel censuses, but—. She'd be [an] interesting one to talk to, she really would. She probably feels about me the way I feel about her. That's okay. Doesn't matter.

[00:55:34]

PRICHARD: We can change subjects. (both laugh) So we've talked about your perspective on the impact of the salmon fishery on the economics and some of the businesses in Rogers City, but how much of an impact—especially on maybe non-anglers or people that weren't really personally invested in the fishery—how much of an impact did the fishery and the tourism that it generate[d] have on the culture of Rogers City, would you say?

RASCHE: I don't think it—I don't think the fishery—I think the fishery was pretty well accepted by the non-fishing public. I know when people got company coming to their homes the first place they would bring them is down to the marina, (Prichard: Okay.) and show them the fish and show them the lineups and stuff like that. There probably was the usual problem in a bar with a couple guys drunk or stuff like that. That's possible. I know one year there was a problem—the city didn't allow camping in town, okay? And there were some guys that did and I know the city moved them and the guys were not happy with the city. But, I didn't move them. But you can't let people camp all over in a city, for crying out loud. When I started at the marina, we let people camp overnight in the parking lot. That was fine. But when they started emptying their holding tanks out in the parking lot, then it had to stop, you know? And believe it or not they did. So, a few ruin it for everybody. I think—a lot of people like—Carson, in the evenings, the launch ramp was probably the busiest place in Rogers City. (Prichard: Really?) There was, literally, almost every night there was probably fifty-sixty people down there just watching these boats come in because, it was funny, there was a lot of them that were good boat-handling people. (Prichard laughs) But some of them, I mean, it was like kamikazes coming in. And there's people falling off the docks. I mean, it was just—we had people back their boat in, and I've seen this happen more than once, mother gets on the tailgate of a truck, and she's supposed to unhook the hook, and he's backing down and he hits the brake and mother—. (Prichard laughs) And we've fished boats out of the launch ramp. I mean, it was absolutely insane. Crazy. We've had people fallen in. I dove in twice, to get kids that fell off the dock. (Prichard: Oh, okay.) And their parents were standing there. But, hey, I was closer, I guess.

|00:58:46|

PRICHARD: Was there a lot of fishing that happened on the breakwall and in the marina itself?

RASCHE: No—

PRICHARD: No? Okay—

RASCHE: —we didn't allow—.

PRICHARD: —okay.

RASCHE: —inside the marina there was certain places we allowed you to fish. And the reason being, Carson, the reason being—well, there was a multitude of reasons. First of all, Carson has got a nice brand new twenty-six-footer, and he brings it up to Rogers City and puts it in a slip, and he fishes with it and he has fun and then he's going back to work in Mount Pleasant, so he puts this nice canvas cover over it. And when he gets up the following weekend there's hooks in the cover, there's hooks in his seats, there's stuff missing. So you've pretty much got to stop it. Also, I don't know if—have you walked around the marina?

PRICHARD: I've just walked the—I guess it'd be the north breakwall, or—yeah.

RASCHE: Okay. The floating docks out in the middle. Under, around the perimeter of the floating docks there is a copper tubing system that we have air compressors that blow air into these tubes and it goes up and it—they're deicing. (Prichard: Oh, okay.) So you get a twenty-five-pound salmon in there, and you hook it on your line, and the salmon

goes out and around and over one of these pipes and bends the shit out of the pipe, and pulls it up and down—air has got to be level. The pipes have got to be level. And when you start that thing up in December, and all of a sudden the air comes this far and then quits, and you find that there's all kinds of monofilament line around this other end, you've got to go down there barehanded and start leveling things up again—

PRICHARD: No.

RASCHE: —no. You just can't. But there are places we do let it happen. But not around—the majority of it you can't fish on. And I think that's not uncommon [at] most marinas, especially if they have an aeration system. The other thing with salmon, and again where cruising boats and salmon fishermen really aren't compatible—most of the salmon fishermen had coolers; a lot of them didn't. You get off your boat at the end of the dock. You wrap a couple of lines through the gills of a salmon and you drag it behind you up the docks, and a few minutes later a couple little kids are walking up there and they slip and fall on fish slime and guts—you think you don't have an angry boater on your site? So, we tried to run a very tight ship, okay? And probab[ly]—you know, I pissed a lot of people off. But I'm sorry, I treated everybody the same. And if I wasn't doing a decent job the city wouldn't have had me there for seventeen years. (Prichard: Right.) But yeah, it—the two, cruising boaters and fishermen, just were not very compatible. (Prichard: Okay.)

|01:02:21|

PRICHARD: I mean, that's kind of covered a lot of what I had thought to ask coming in here. I'm wondering if you have any other thoughts about what is the legacy of the

salmon fishery. Or, what parts of the story of the salmon fishery might have we not covered that you would have a good perspective on.

RASCHE: You know, it was a real economic boom. I—certainly, I don't think you can fault the DNR. I think these exotic species—first of all the alewife was a problem, then you had the zebra mussels. I don't know. I don't think you can—you can't lay the blame on anybody. It's—I know the DNR would have never predicted it. Maybe we should have recognized it sooner, I'm not sure. Had we recognized it sooner and stopped planting as many fish as we did, maybe it would have lasted a little bit—maybe it would have ended up being more like Lake Michigan, where the alewife population is still there to some degree. From what I understand Lake Michigan may be running into the same problem that we are, and a lot of it I think has to do with Wisconsin. They are still planting a lot of fish. So, I don't know, Carson. It was fun while it lasted. (Prichard: Okay.) I'll put it that way. It was a real economic driver for our area. Like anything else there's good parts of it, bad parts of it. I think the good far outweighed the bad. From my standpoint, it made my job tougher. But, I didn't have to stay there. I could have walked away anytime I wanted to.

|01:04:40|

PRICHARD: The legacy's more—at least, from your perspective, more of something like, That was a really awesome thing to have experienced—

RASCHE: Yeah, it was.

PRICHARD: —and it's not so much, like, Oh, man, I wish we could go back to that time—not so much?

RASCHE: Oh, no. No. No. (Prichard: Yeah.; laughs) I don't think I would. I don't think I would want to go back to it. Even now. Of course, maybe I'm saying that selfishly, I shouldn't—. I'm living far enough away from it that it wouldn't affect me one way or another. But, it would be good for the city, if it happened again. I think I would—if I had a wish, I think, I would wish that the DNR would concentrate more on getting like a walleye fishery or something here. It's not as exciting a fish, but it's a nice fun fish to catch, too.

PRICHARD: Yeah. Certainly, places in Michigan, (Rasche: Yeah.) it does well for them.

RASCHE: Yes, it has. Saginaw Bay has turned into a real gangbuster. So, I think we are catching more walleyes than ever, but they're all incidental. They're not fishing for them. So, I guess if I had a wish that's what I would wish for, (Prichard: Okay.) to see more walleyes. I'd like to see the perch come back. I'd like to see, like up in Drummond Island where you can go out with a fourteen-footer, and you don't have to have \$40,000-worth of equipment. I can remember down at the Calcite plant where, before they had security and stuff, where everybody went down to the loading docks and fished perch and caught tons of them, you know? Now that's good eating fish as far as I'm concerned. We usually—well, the last couple years we haven't for some reason—but we usually go up to Drummond Island early in the spring when the ice just goes out, and we have had some phenomenal catches of perch. And I guess I've—it's kind of like hunting, I don't have to shoot a deer anymore. I've shot a lot of them. And I don't have to catch a thirty-pound

salmon. Would it be fun? Yes. We went up to Alaska a couple years ago, went halibut fishing. You want an interesting fish? That's amazing. And we also went salmon fishing. But the salmon fishing—like I said, salmon in [Alaska], totally different than the salmon in the Great Lakes. I mean, the color is more like your shirt than it is, like—but our fish are coming that way and the taste is phenomenal. It really is.

I hope I've helped you.

PRICHARD: Yeah, well does that about cover it—

RASCHE: I think so. I can't think of—

PRICHARD: —for your side of the story? Okay.

RASCHE: —anything else I can tell you. It's been an interesting ride, it really has been. As you said, I'm glad we experienced it. Would I—if it—it would be good, prob[ably]—it would be good if it came back to Rogers City, for the community. And, would I get involved in it again? Maybe fishing. But that's—not at the marina. (both laugh; Prichard: Yeah.) No, definitely not at the marina.

PRICHARD: Alright. Well thank you, Ken.

RASCHE: You're welcome.

PRICHARD: I'm going to turn this off now.

end of interview