

Matthew Hollabaugh

Oral History Interview
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Carson G. Prichard
June 16, 2021
Matthew Hollabaugh's residence
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

The interview takes place on the porch of Hollabaugh's house. Some road noise from nearby US-23 can be heard at times.

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PRICHARD: My name is Carson Prichard, I'm here with Matt Hollabaugh—am I saying that correctly?—

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah. Perfect.

PRICHARD: —at his home in Rogers City. Today is Wednesday, June 16, 2021, and it's 1:38 p.m. And so just to start, Matt, can you just tell me a little bit about yourself?

HOLLABAUGH: Well, I was born in Toledo, and my dad was a big fisherman. He fished Grand Lake south of here for walleye. And that's when we ended up—he wanted to move up north, but he couldn't get a job here in Rogers City. We lived in Alpena for a while. And then he got a job at the Dolomite quarry in Cedarville in the UP [Upper Peninsula of Michigan], so that's where we lived in the UP. And then he got transferred back down here. I didn't want to end up leaving the UP because I loved it up there. That's

heaven for a young guy. But we ended up back down here. And I worked at Calcite. I had eleven years in there, and then I ended up working at Lafarge in Alpena, at the cement plant—I'm retired now. (Prichard: Okay.) Three kids—a boy and two girls.

PRICHARD: Do a lot of recreational angling still?

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah. I get out—yeah. I do a lot of lake trout fishing. Salmon fishing. Not so much right in the middle of summer. And then deer hunt. I like that. So yeah, I get out quite a bit if I can. It's not like it used to be, though, like I said, now it's more of the quality. In fact, I hate to say it but even sometimes I'll let fish go when I catch them. It's like, Well, I got one to eat now. Especially if it's like a lake trout, because they don't die like salmon do, I'll let a big spawner go back, you know, I don't want to kill it. Not now, nowadays. (Prichard: Yeah.) When I was younger, yeah I probably would have. It's the difference.

PRICHARD: Yeah. Well before we turned on the recording we were talking about Ken Partyka who I interviewed yesterday, and how he won the first Rogers City Salmon Tournament in 1986. (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) And then I guess you won it in 2010.

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah. Yeah, and he—I think then it was the heaviest salmon.

PRICHARD: Yeah. Well they had a daily boat, (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) and then—

HOLLABAUGH: And you could see through the years—that was more, like in, I think that was maybe in August when that tournament was held. And the fish started slowly declining. And so people started saying, “Well, maybe we'll just have a tournament later in the year.” And they started out as the Last Chance [Super] Tournament. And we

started getting into that because it seemed like that's when the fish would stack up in Swan Bay and stuff. And slowly they started going with three fish instead of the biggest fish, because the fish were getting smaller, too. And when Ken won, I don't know what his fish was. It had to be something like twenty-eight or thirty—

PRICHARD: That one was twenty-eight pounds—or twenty-five pounds eight ounces.

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah, twenty-five eight ounces, and this was our total for six fish when we won, and it was 53.81 [pounds], 2010. (Hollabaugh refers to an open album with newspaper clippings)

PRICHARD: Okay. (laughs)

HOLLABAUGH: You know, so you could really see the difference. I mean there were some people on the board with a 1.52, you know?

PRICHARD: Wow. Huh. I interviewed Jayme [Warwick].

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah. Yeah. So I mean these fish, they really decreased (Prichard: Right. Yeah.) in size. Now they're coming back in size but there's just not very many. But, I kind of wanted to let you know like how, at first, the way the fishing was here. The first fish I ever caught, I snagged in Ocqueoc. And that was in October because we figured salmon just came in the river and that's where you fished them. We didn't know anything about the big lake. I mean we fished, like, perch and pike out there and stuff like that. And we dipped smelt. And then the alewives, of course they came and were dying on the beaches and stuff. But, we thought they wouldn't bite. So, for those first few years, that would have been in the seventies, snagging was legal, too. And I look back on it

now, it was a bad thing to do, but everybody did it, and it was enjoyable, actually, to snag, and you'd get a lot of fish. I mean there was times in Ocqueoc River when there'd be a hundred people out there and everybody would be getting fish. So, as we got into that we—my father-in-law, he was quite a character. He ended up, like when we were deer hunting and stuff we would see fish in the rivers and stuff, and he built his own—like these big hooks and stuff that he would bring them out (Prichard: Oh.) with. But nobody wasted the fish. They all ate them all. But it was a totally different idea—it wasn't sporting, when you think back, but that's the way we thought it was with salmon. And actually even to eat them, because normally you wouldn't be getting fish until September and October, and we thought they were only good for smoking. Nothing fresh, you know. Very rarely would you even see a silver salmon. And then as we started to fish a little more—well we all had fourteen-footers, most of us, just small boats, just tiller mount. And we would go out on the big lake, in maybe like the end of August, and you'd see them jumping out there. And there was times when my buddy and I that fished a lot, that we would go out off of Nagels or Smith Creek, and there would be a hundred fish in the air at one time, (Prichard laughs) in twenty-feet of water, and you could just see clouds of dark fish moving through the water, and nobody out there. We'd just take our boat, we'd row—we'd get up close to them and then we'd start rowing into them so we wouldn't scare them, you know? And we didn't know how to even—we'd cast red and white Daredevles to them because that's how we fished for pike. And we'd get some, but that's not what they were—. So eventually then when they got the Little Cleos, they started inventing those, that's when we really started catching that way. And then started (unclear) up for them out there. But at the boat harbor it was the same thing, I mean that

was a circus down there, casting. And there was maybe fifty people there a night, you know, same people every night, and they'd be casting off the breakwall and stuff, getting a lot of fish. But it just seemed like it was an endless source of fish, I mean they were all over the place. My buddy, he went to Lake [Superior] State [University] and I was at Michigan Tech[nological University]—this would have been in the mid-seventies—and I got homesick and came home. He went to change his curriculum—he was going to go to Michigan State [University]. So we were both home in the fall that year, and that would have been in seventy—let's see, it must have been around '74. And it was just like, that was probably the best year of my life. All we did was fish. We fished all the time. And then that was when they had stopped the snagging. That was outlawed. But, we took Little Cleos and put these big snagging hooks on the Cleos—in the lake it was legal (Prichard: Okay.) to have a larger-shank hook—and started wondering, these fish were hitting those Cleos. You know we would snag a lot of them but they were hitting them, too. So we started to slowly change, you know, that salmon actually do bite. And after that, these guys came from Petoskey and started showing us how downriggers—and we knew nothing about—my father-in-law, again, he built his own downriggers. He looked at that, he said, “Oh, I can build those.” So he went out to the country and he got some farm implements and he took the big—the pulleys off there, and made his own for us. We couldn't buy any, you know? So that's when we started doing that. That was amazing down there at the boat harbor, though, I mean every morning they'd be down there fishing, and people—. It was really exciting. And we just thought it was an endless amount of fish. And you would also, like I noticed like in the spring when I'd be fishing for lake trout and stuff out there that there'd be a lot of alewives you'd mark, a lot of big

schools of alewife. I don't see those anymore. (Prichard: Right.) I'll mark gobies on the bottom but I won't mark alewives anymore, anything like that. Even smelt, school of smelt, you don't see those much either. But we saw some crazy stuff out there. We had a guy that—I won't say any names, but he fished in like a ten-foot boat out there. (Prichard laughs) And it was like, well they say “salmon fever,” (Prichard: Yeah.) he must have had it because he was out there and he'd be trolling and we thought he'd never make it back but he did, every time. And he was a bit of a big guy, too, and it was like, wow. And another one—I don't know if anybody told you about this was when a lot of the trolling—it would have been after Ken's; that would have been—if his was eighty-, what'd you say, eighty-?

PRICHARD: Eighty-six.

HOLLABAUGH: Eighty-six. So this would have been probably like the mid-nineties, was we always called it the “mafia boat.” There was a boat from Detroit that came up and this guy is well known—I think he's passed away now—but the name is very well known with the Jimmy Hoffa and everything. And they could fish. And we would always laugh because there would go the mafia boat. And they loved to fish, they'd be up here all the time. It was really interesting, you know? (Prichard: Yeah.) Yeah, it was kind of neat. Just, some crazy stuff you'd see.

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PRICHARD: So when you were talking about the mid-seventies, that's before the big plants.

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah, but we were getting—yeah.

PRICHARD: But it was still really good fishing, even then.

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah, because—but see, we didn't realize that—we didn't even know where the salmon came from or anything, that they were out there. It was just, we would wait until September to snag them in the river mouths and stuff. (Prichard: Okay.)

Because we didn't realize that they would hang along shore and on the drop-offs and stuff. Even like the big lake, we didn't have good graphs or anything. We didn't have the bottom that we could see, or the GPS [global positioning system] or anything then. So we really—it was kind of a mystery out there on the big lake. I know, my father-in-law, we'd go out and we'd troll for lake trout, and we would just go out to a point, and then we'd troll to the next point like three to four miles, and we would just troll the bottom. And we didn't even have rods, we just used wire line (Prichard: Okay.) with leather gloves and we'd feel the bottom (Prichard: Yep.) and you'd feel the lake trout hit that way. But we didn't know what we were going over. We'd lose a lot of weight and stuff. Break a lot of cables. We couldn't even tell what the bottom was. (Prichard: Right.) But yeah, that was, back then we did a lot of it. There was a lot of snagging going on then. It was enjoyable to snag them. (laughs) And my dad—that was before they had Cabela's, and we couldn't find any big hooks, and he ended up in Herter's, and he bought a gross of these big snagging hooks. And I still actually have—and now I use them on my big lake trout lures, and I have a couple of those left. (laughs) They don't have any weight on them. There was a guy—it was hard to get weight, hard to get lead after a while, because so many people were doing it—and somebody might have already told you about this guy, but at Calcite, he would, at night he worked in the boat loading operation, and he would take

lead off the cables, and he'd just shave a little off. One night he hit the power and he's lucky he didn't kill himself, (Prichard: Oh my god.) but he knocked the whole plant out. (Prichard: Geez.; both laugh) So people got kind of crazy about it. Just doing stuff just to get those fish, you know? Well, my buddy and I, that year that we left college and came home, and I went to work and he ended up at Michigan State the next year, but there was a smokehouse here, and the guy smoked chubs, things like that, herring, and he started buying salmon. And he'd buy them for like fifty cents a pound, dollar a pound. Eggs for like a dollar-fifty, two dollars a pound. And, you know, five fish, you had like a hundred dollars' worth of fish. And back then in the seventies, eighties, that was a lot of money. And we thought nothing of it, taking fish to him. And now when I think of it it's kind of a—it's not the way you should be doing it. But that's just what—we didn't know any better. That's what we did. And it wasn't really a sporting thing (Prichard: Yeah.) because—

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PRICHARD: So I've got a question about that because a couple of the people I've interviewed have said that people were snagging salmon and then selling the eggs. (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) What were they selling them for?

HOLLABAUGH: Well, that started—I'll go back. That started after. The guy that was smoking the fish, he took them, and he was selling them, so we weren't wasting any. And the eggs, somebody was picking them up. And they were using them—what I was told was they were using them for bait on the west coast, (Prichard: Oh.) because those eggs they could use for caviar, out of the ocean, but you can't use the ones from the Great

Lakes for caviar, that's what I was told. (Prichard: Okay.) And the company that eventually became—that were buying those was Tempotech, that's what they were called. (Prichard: Yeah.) And it started getting to where the eggs were getting more important than the fish, and people were stripping those fish of the eggs and stuff. And I remember a few times out by Nagels on the beach catching fish, and a guy would pull right in in a car, and in his trunk of his car like your car, you opened it up and he had a bunch of fish in there. And he was taking them over to Petoskey to drop them off to Tempotech—just all eggs and stuff. It was pretty bad, you know? Well, then people started snagging them and stripping the eggs, and the rivers got smelly and the people started complaining. And it wasn't right, that's not right, what they were doing.

(Prichard: Right.) The same thing with the boat harbor, and it made a mess. They weren't making use of the fish. I mean every time when we caught a fish, we either gave it away, we ate it, or we sold it to that guy. (Prichard: Okay.) We never let anything lay, but I know a lot of people that did. (Prichard: Yeah.) And usually, I'd have to say it was people from out of town, it wasn't so much the local people—not the people that I knew that fished. (Prichard: Yeah.) And that was kind of a sad situation. That was bad. So that kind of helped, when they closed a lot of that down. And then this guy eventually went out of business with the fish and all that, and we just started smoking our own or whatever. And the eggs, we would keep some, use them for steelhead, stuff like that. (Prichard: Yeah.) But as it got into more of the big lake fishing, and we bought downriggers and stuff, those things went away because you're out in the middle of the lake, then, catching.

(Prichard: Yeah.) And then more and more, the fish, you get more silver ones, and you'd

be catching them—I mean I remember the first time when we caught one in June we were just like, There’s salmon here in June? We were just amazed (laughs) that there’d be—.

Well, let’s see, what else we got here? A lot of times those tournaments—I don’t know if Ken was in the one that—they had 250 boats in one of the tournaments, over a thousand people one time. And it got pretty bad, I mean the town was—there was a lot of drinking and stuff. I saw one boat was leaving the harbor—motor was still running on the trailer. (Prichard: Oh geez.) You know, those kind of things. (Prichard laughs) And they’re lucky nobody drowned, really. They had a shotgun start (Prichard: Yeah.) for a couple years, and a couple boats almost capsized. (Prichard: Yeah.) And it’s like what are you doing that for? Just go on out and start fishing. So it got a little more laid back. (laughs) Yeah, you can’t do that with 250 boats out there. (Prichard: Right.) Because there will be times now I’m out fishing, especially in the—well even in the fall now for salmon, if we long-line in Swan Bay or whatever, I might be the only boat out there, even now. It’s a lot safer. (laughs)

[00:16:31]

PRICHARD: Well I talked with Tom Allum, who was a doctor, (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) and he said, “It’s a miracle that there wasn’t ever an emergency,” because, really, the city’s not equipped to handle a big emergency and it could have gotten bad.

HOLLABAUGH: No. I mean there could have been boats—yeah, because that happened on the other side of the State [of Michigan] that one time they had that big storm and a lot of fishing boats capsized. That was really bad. But yeah, fortunately here they never—we towed a couple boats in. It always seemed like I would be out there in my fourteen-footer

and somebody would—the one I had before this one; this is a sixteen-[footer]—but there'd be a bigger boat or something, and he'd break down I'd end up towing him in or something. (laughs; Prichard: Yeah.) But it was always something like that. But yeah, nobody—I can't remember anybody—there was, a lot of people would get hooks in hands and stuff like that, but never any drownings or anything. I was in Alpena one time fishing brown trout, and we would fish the cement plant—this is before I was working there; I worked at Calcite first. And we would fish the cement plant because they had a warm water discharge, and the brown trout would come in there like in March. Well, it was pretty bad weather yet in March, so we'd launch our boats over the ice, (Prichard: Oh, yeah.) push them over the ice. Well, we got out there and it got rough that day, and there was two other boats out there with us, and the two people in the smaller boat they drowned that day. (Prichard: Oh.) We made it in. We got into the harbor and we just waited for—the waves were breaking, about six-foot waves, seven-foot waves. And we rode up the crest of a wave, and our fourteen-footer landed right on the ice, came right up on (Prichard laughs)—I couldn't believe it. We pulled the motor up—didn't even wreck anything. And then the next day we heard that two people drowned in that boat that was right by us. That was probably the worst I was ever out in, it was like nine-foot waves that day, and I wouldn't go out in that now.

PRICHARD: Yeah. Super cold still.

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

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PRICHARD: I was reading back through the newspapers and saw that you were working at Blair's Bait and Tackle when it opened.

HOLLABAUGH: Yes. Yes I did. And that was when the harbor was really going strong. And a lot of kids would, if it wasn't during the week, if there wasn't school on, the kids they'd just go by steady riding their bikes down there to go fishing. And you don't see that nowadays, they're on their cell phones. And they'd stop by, and they'd buy hooks or whatever they needed, or Cleos or whatever from me. So that was kind of neat. That was in-between jobs. That was kind of a—I had gotten laid off from Calcite, and that was back in the recession back in there. So I needed a job. And he is—Blair, that's my wife's maiden name—that would have been her uncle. (Prichard: Oh. Okay.) It was his shop.

Oh, I was going to tell you about, back then, too, the families would buy boats—bigger boats. See, Partykas bought that Pro-Line down in Florida I think.

PRICHARD: The *Salmon Slayer*?

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah, and they brought it up here. Because you couldn't get a boat like that in Michigan yet. There was nothing—you know, like I said, we were using mostly fourteen-footers with tiller mounts. And so the families would start buying—they'd go together and buy a boat, and I knew quite a few that did that. And it was great when the fishing was good. But when the fishing started going downhill, it got kind of bad. Maybe one guy was a real—because we kept fishing even when it got bad. The diehards would stay out there forever even if they weren't catching anything. But some of the guys would maybe buy the boat from the other person. But it got—I knew some who were like brother-in-laws—(Prichard: Yeah.) and eventually a lot of those guys got out of—sold

their boats and stuff. Now I see it's—a little more now, there's a more diverse fishery now, and so I see people going, families buying bigger boats again now. But that was a big thing back then, somebody, oh boy, I got a new boat, had downriggers and everything. Well, they got it because they bought it with a brother or something, you know? And as the fishing got worse that didn't turn out too good. (Prichard: Yeah.; laughs) It was great when it was good, but not when the fishing went downhill. My son-in-law, his dad invented the Big Jon downriggers, (Prichard: Okay.) in Traverse City. And my wife's first cousin is Stinger Lures, (Prichard: Oh, okay.) owns Stinger Lures. So we've been (Prichard laughs) with those people. And he actually—he's passed away, my son-in-law's dad—but he has the biggest salmon in Lake Michigan so far that I know still to this day, I think, the biggest one caught. He caught it in Frankfort. (Prichard: Okay.) And that was back in the seventies I think. Eighties.

[00:21:36]

PRICHARD: What did you start to notice in the mid-2000s when, I guess—you know, I know that the survey data show that in 2003 and 2004 was kind of where you had the major declines in alewife catches in the annual survey. (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) What were you seeing around that time and what were you thinking about the future of the salmon fishery?

HOLLABAUGH: Well, to tell you the truth, I wasn't really in with the whole salmon deal to begin with, (Prichard: Okay.) because we would catch beautiful perch out here and stuff, and there was pike too, and the lake trout were starting to come back (Prichard: Yeah.)—the native-type fish—and when they talked about a million salmon, I was like,

Why not just 100,000? Maybe I was a visionary rather than just lucky thinking that because it would have worked out a lot better with less fish. Well, we just noticed we were marking less alewives and the fish started getting smaller. You noticed a lot that the fish would be like a big head, but real skinny. It was really weird looking, you know? I mean they still tasted good and stuff but we're going, What the heck are wrong with these things? There's no gut on them anymore. And they wouldn't have anything in them. They also, you would see sometimes like how you see the bug slick out there, they would—and I swear there must have been salmon. Normally you would only see steelhead doing that, or Atlantics, but these were probably Chinook, they were trying to eat anything they could find. (Prichard: Okay. Yeah.) So that's kind of what we started noticing. Real skinny fish, not as big. But they still tasted good, we still would fish them. It's funny because we started going with lighter line and smaller hooks, and we didn't pay attention to our hooks and everything. Well now, in about—when they started getting a little bigger now, say in the last ten years or so—well not even ten years, say about five years—that now we've had to go back to our old, little heavier line, bigger, stronger hooks, keep them sharp. Because that's what—we weren't used to that. You usually would have to set those hooks on those big fish, those big salmon. You'd have to drive that hook (Prichard: Yeah.)—especially if it was a big male—into their jaw (Prichard: Yeah.) a couple times. But we weren't doing that with those small fish. They just hit on the downrigger, whatever, or you'd be casting, and you'd pull them in. Well when they started getting—and now again we're getting the bigger ones—and my son was the same way, he was like, What—? We're not—. I said, “Set it. You've got to set it. You're not

going to that big male like that, or whatever, that big jaw if you don't hit it (Prichard: Yeah.) a couple times.” So it was a learning experience again. (Prichard: Yeah. Huh.)

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PRICHARD: Did you ever fish out of—salmon fish out of ports other than Rogers City?

HOLLABAUGH: That's a good question.

PRICHARD: I was kind of—my interest in that is (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) wondering about how Rogers City compared with other places from your experience.

HOLLABAUGH: No. I've been to the other boat harbors and stuff. But, I know like talking to people, if you really—Ludington's the place for salmon. But no, not really. As far as being a nice harbor and everything, you know—but the fishing here is—it's a little different because we don't have a lot of structure. And it seemed like you couldn't always—one day the fish would be moving. I think it some days can be a little harder here in Rogers City than some of the other places. But no I haven't. (Prichard: Oh, okay.) I didn't really fish other—pretty much just fished here. (Prichard: Okay.)

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PRICHARD: Maybe we kind of talked about this a little bit, but I was thinking if you reflected back on when the salmon fishery was building and then really strong, and you know, they're stocking a million fish in (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) one place, (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) and did you have thoughts back then about, either like, Oh my gosh how big is this thing going to get? Or something more like, Is this sustainable?

HOLLABAUGH: Kind of, yeah, because the businessmen they pushed it and everything. And I can see—I can't blame them. They wanted business in Rogers City, they've got to do something. But I saw the perch fishing went downhill. And I said, I don't know if it was the salmon eating them, or they're eating something—maybe the smaller salmon were eating what the perch—who knows. But yeah, I was wondering, it doesn't seem—something's not right, you know? I kind of thought that it was too much. Because I was more—like now, you can go out now you can get a walleye, you can get lake trout, you can get Atlantic salmon. You might get a Chinook. You might get a coho. More diverse. It wasn't, then. Yeah, I wasn't—it just didn't seem like it was going to last.

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PRICHARD: Another thing, because you talked about walleye and lake trout, is there's still really good fishing and a good fishery out of Rogers City—

HOLLABAUGH: There is. Excellent. Yeah.

PRICHARD: —and—

HOLLABAUGH: It's different, very different than what we were used to.

PRICHARD: —my impression is that it's underappreciated, probably from like a tourism aspect, drawing people in that are interested in good fishing. One of the things I talked about with Bruce Grant, and that was a concern to him was that the publicity that was associated with Rogers City in the salmon fishing heyday left and went to Lake Michigan, (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) and part of that was because the narrative of Lake Huron was that salmon fishing collapsed in Lake Huron, and then it would be like, Well why

would we go to Lake Huron to fish? Well, you still have a good fall salmon fishery in Rogers City. And you've got, depending on who you ask, the best lake trout fishery between lakes Michigan and Huron, (Hollabaugh: Yeah. Yeah.) out of Rogers City. And so, I've tried to ask people about, Well, how important could the fishery that still exists be today for Rogers City from a tourism aspect? And from your perspective, would you like to see more fishing tourism and more promotion of the fishery that exists here and try to draw more people?

HOLLABAUGH: Well, it doesn't really bother—you know, being a local it's like, I enjoy being out there by myself but it doesn't really bother me, I think it's great that more people come here. But, I think a lot of it is that the salmon—especially the Chinook are the glamour fish. And if you're not getting these big huge fish, you're not going to get the high-rollers or whatever, (Prichard: Yeah.) people coming in. You're just not going to get it. And you're not going to get a lot of tourism just to fish for the lake trout, even though they're a great fish. The lake trout we have now is a hundred times better than the old lake trout. (Prichard: Yeah.) Those old things, they were like a real fatty type fish. They were just—you'd have to trim them all down. You didn't know what the heck was in their belly, probably, what, maybe some kind of a heavy metal or something. (Prichard: Yeah.) But the ones we have now, they'll eat on the bottom, but they seem to live up higher in the water column all the time. It's not so—they just are nicer-looking fish, too, just beautiful-looking. They look like the ones in Canada we'd get. So that part is great, but people don't gravitate toward that. Even like the walleye here, too. There is walleye here but you just don't get—they have Saginaw Bay. (Prichard: Yeah.) So I don't know if that would ever—I mean it would be great to advertise it, but I don't know if it would

ever catch on real big because it just seems everybody is after Chinook. (Prichard: Yeah.)
They want the great big fish.

PRICHARD: Or piles of walleye.

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah. Well yeah. You can't blame them there. (Prichard: (laughs)
Yeah.) Yeah. (laughs)

[00:29:55]

PRICHARD: When the salmon fishery really declined, how much of an impact do you
think that had on the culture, or even the economy of Rogers City itself, or—

HOLLABAUGH: Oh it did. (Prichard: Okay.) I'm sure it did. Yeah, I mean it was bad
probably for like restaurants and stuff, you know? And even the bait shops, most people
order from the catalogs, but if you need something right away you'd go there. I'm sure it
hurt them. It probably hurt a lot of different things. Even staying, places where people—
motels, I remember boats being at the motels, and you don't see that now. Maybe during
the tournament or something. So it definitely did affect it. I mean Rogers City could use
anything they could—need anything they could get. And anything could affect—just a
small thing could affect them pretty bad. So yeah, it certainly did.

[00:30:50]

PRICHARD: What, I guess—like you have a social network of friends I guess, and like,
how much a part of fishing and fishing out of Rogers City is that now or was it or has it
been while you've lived in Rogers City?

HOLLABAUGH: Oh, you mean just the people that I knew and everything?

PRICHARD: Yeah, just like your kind of, you know, your social life and your friends and your relationships (Hollabaugh: Yeah. Oh yeah.) and identity here.

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, the people here. I mean, you know a lot of the people that fish. But now, like I said, I was young back then when the old-timers were starting everything, and a lot of them have passed away. I'm kind of like the old-timer now, (laughs) yeah. You don't know a lot of the people down there now. And a lot of the younger ones, usually I'll talk to them and say, "I think I know your dad," and they'll say, "You know my grandpa." (Prichard laughs) "Oh yeah, I know your grandpa. Yeah. Yeah, I knew him." (laughs) But yeah, you still talk to them. You see people. But I don't really—I know like people on the social network, they're always, Fish are biting here and there. I take that with a grain of salt sometimes, that fishing—you know, where they're biting, and what they're biting on because fishermen are known to lie a lot. (laughs; Prichard: Yeah.) And so mostly I just like to go and find out for myself what's going on. Or somebody that I know, I talk to them or whatever, get info from. But yeah, we used to have good times. My son had a real nice boat. He sold it now to buy a camper, and more family stuff. But when he was single and first got married he had a beautiful boat. And we used to have a lot of good times in there, a lot of the guys, brother-in-laws, and nephews and stuff on the boats. And they do a lot of that now, I see a lot of families do that, with some bigger boats, they have a lot of fun doing that. But most of the time I fish by myself now. (Prichard: Yeah.) Go out in the morning, you now—(laughs) I kind of go, if there's a big crowd of people—especially, I noticed in the fall, we started—I'm sure Kenny [Partyka] told you about the long-lining (Prichard: Mm-hm, mm-hm.) in Swan

Bay because he likes to do it, and I do too. We kind of ended up kind of pioneering that whole thing, with Bombers. And it took us a while to figure out what kind of hooks to use on the Bombers. You don't use the ones—you throw away the ones you bought it with. (Prichard: (laughs) Yeah.) Take those hooks right off, throw them in the garbage, they're no good. And we had to learn all that kind of stuff. And that's a lot of fun in there, and you get some big fish in there. And it's kind of fun there and you have a good time doing that. I know he does.

PRICHARD: Yeah, he must be—well, when he was salmon fishing in the eighties and nineties he must have been just the most hardcore salmon fisherman.

HOLLABAUGH: He was, and we all kind of were. (Prichard: Yeah.) But yes, he was. Their family was. Yes, they were really very much. But you know wherever we were they were, too. We'd see them. But yeah, you just had, I don't know, it's like a drive, you know, like a feeling that you've got to get out there. You've got to get out there again, you know. You've got to get out there, you've got to get as many as you can, got to find out who's getting them where. (laughs) It's kind of weird (Prichard laughs) because as you get older you don't worry about that anymore. They say there's like three phases in fishing. There's one, you just want to catch fish, when you're little. When you're a young man, you want to catch as many fish as you can. When you're an old man you want to catch them the way *you* want to catch them. And I found that true because I'll fish now for—especially like lake trout because they're around all year, I'll mess around with them with different kind of things, you know, different lures, different ways, you know, that you never would have done before. (Prichard: Yeah.) But it's just like, Eh, maybe they'll

bite on this. I'll try this, because it's something different. And then when you do have success it's always kind of cool. It's like, Eh, that worked. (laughs)

PRICHARD: Yeah. That must be why my dad won't go steelhead fishing with me. (laughs) I can't get him out.

HOLLABAUGH: We used to fish quite a bit of steelhead fishing, we did. I don't do that anymore but used to quite a bit. Steelhead used to be really—we used to go down to Rockport, which is right north of Alpena, and fish steelhead. And we would fish them in the fall. And *oh* that was fun. We would take these little, we'd take a little pencil bobber, and we'd either use a slip bobber if we had to but if they were right underneath, about six feet down use a little pencil bobber, and just a single egg, egg hook, like a number twelve, number ten. And then we'd just throw a handful of eggs out there. And that bobber would—. (Prichard: Huh.) We caught some big steelhead that way.

PRICHARD: You just anchor, or fish from the—?

HOLLABAUGH: No we would fish from—it was from the dock. (Prichard: Okay.)
Yeah. Yeah.

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PRICHARD: I guess if you think back about the history of the salmon fishery in Rogers City, is there anything you would like to add about the story of the fishery here? The legacy that it has had?

HOLLABAUGH: Probably not. Probably with the guys you've talked to they probably went through the same, pretty much the same thing I have. I kind of, looking back on it, like I said before I wish they would have only planted 100,000. I think we would have had great fishing in Rogers City with everything else. But, that's easy to look back and say that's the way we should have done it. It was great while it lasted. (laughs; Prichard: Yeah.) Now you think of it, that wasn't going to last. You can't put a million fish in and expect to—there wouldn't have been enough, what do you call it, biomass, out there, that would have—?

PRICHARD: Yeah. Part of the—I spoke with retired fisheries biologist Jim Johnson, (Hollabaugh: Oh yeah. Yeah.) and, you know, the way he explained it to me was at the time, he had concerns about, What is the balance between the predators (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) and the prey. And, because they were trying to see how many they could stock, and then they were doing all these studies to improve the survival of the fish that they did stock, (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) so even if they weren't stocking more they were effectively stocking more (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) because more were surviving. (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) And he had concerns about that. And they did a study where they marked every fish that was stocked into Lake Huron in, I think, 2000-2001-2002, some three-year period in that time, and when they got the first returns back from fish cleaning stations and saw just how many more wild fish there were than stocked fish in Lake Huron, (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) he was like, Well, we essentially have no control anymore even if we did reduce stocking by that point. (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) And then, he talked about, you know, he saw his first zebra mussel sometime in the nineties, but there was a long period of time before they really thought that those were having a huge impact, but then, between the zebra

mussels and quagga mussels really affecting the amount of food in the lower parts of the food web, he has come to think that that's maybe the biggest part of the story is zebra and quagga mussels (Hollabaugh: Could be.) kind of limiting—. (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) But they're still managing Lake Michigan very carefully because the management strategy over there is, Be very careful about how many fish we stock because we don't want to (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) over-pressure the prey base that's out there. (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) And so we had an interesting conversation about—I was like, Well if the way that—your understanding of how things played out on Lake Huron is true, how likely is the way they're managing Lake Michigan to work?

HOLLABAUGH: It sounds like they're doing a better—I mean they probably learned, yeah, something much better.

PRICHARD: Yeah, they had the Lake Huron story to—to be careful about.

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah. When you look back on it it was kind of dumb, a lot of the stuff—we didn't know what we were doing. (laughs) But that's it, if you don't know—we didn't realize that those fish would bite. (laughs) It's kind of one of those—nobody ever even thought about that.

[00:39:43]

PRICHARD: Do you think kids today that are in junior high-high school have any idea of the salmon fishery that existed in the eighties and nineties?

HOLLABAUGH: No. (Prichard: No.) No I don't think they have a clue. (laughs)

PRICHARD: Yeah, see that's part of my interest in doing a project like this is because like, just from talking to people, it was really something, (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) and I just think it would be cool, especially for the local history of these places, for them to be able to be, like, This is a large reason why we have the marina, (Hollabaugh: Yeah.) probably, that we have, you know, is the salmon fishery.

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah, some of the things, like back then when we were, essentially we were casting Cleos to the big schools of fish in the fall, we didn't carry nets in the boats. We all had gaffs because it was quicker. (Prichard: Oh.) You would get them up by the boat and gaff them. (Prichard: Huh.) Or, I know Kenny [Partyka], he would tail them, and he'd pull them up by the tail.

PRICHARD: That's scary. You get a hook in the eye. (laughs)

HOLLABAUGH: Yeah. Yeah, but see those are the things—yeah, they would never— (Prichard: Yeah.) because the gaffs were legal in the big lake. You couldn't take a gaff on the trout stream, but you could use them on the big lake. So we just, every boat would have a gaff. Why would you waste time with a net? (Prichard: Yeah.) It's just a salmon, you know? So yeah, they wouldn't even think about those things. (Prichard: Yeah.) That wouldn't even enter their mind, they wouldn't be able to picture that. And those schools of fish, I mean, just amazing to see that many fish.

PRICHARD: The alewives or the salmon?

HOLLABAUGH: Well, same thing, you know, alewives too. At first, on the beaches, piled up dead. And then as we started marking them when we all got started getting

graphs and stuff when we would mark the baitfish and stuff, too, it would just be top to bottom alewives. And these huge balls of fish. I don't see that anymore. (Prichard: Yeah.) A couple of years ago I did lake trout fishing, but it wasn't the big schools of alewives. It was probably small smelt, and they weren't that big. Not these great big, round balls of fish. Yeah, it'd be almost—those alewives were almost like, because you see those documentaries in the ocean, when you see the herring in those big balls of fish going around, that's what (Prichard: Really?) the alewives looked like. And the salmon would be, probably they were on the outside picking them off. It was something. (Prichard: Yeah.) And you'd even see them coming out of the water, too, the alewives. Like in the fall or something we'd be out there, and they would be—you'd start seeing fish flying out—well the salmon were obviously feeding on them. (Prichard: Yeah.) You don't see that much anymore. (laughs) Maybe you would once in a while but not very often. Stuff that we'll probably never see again.

end of interview