

Jayme Warwick

Oral History Interview
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Carson G. Prichard
March 29, 2021
Jayme Warwick'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: Alright, so my name is Carson Prichard and I'm here with Jayme Warwick at his house in Rogers City. Today is Monday, March 29, 2021. It is 6:09 p.m. So Jayme, thank you for taking the time to do this interview with me. And before we begin, could you just state for the recording that you do agree to being recorded and consent to participating in the interview?

WARWICK: Yes, I agree.

PRICHARD: Okay. So to begin, could you just tell me a little bit about yourself?

WARWICK: Yeah. I'm fifty-one-years old and I've lived in Rogers City since I was about twelve-years old. My family's from Rogers City. I moved over here with my dad years ago, and I love the area. I had opportunities to move to other places and I didn't because of family and the resources of fishing and hunting in the area. I've got three daughters, a wife, and work a fulltime job. Try to fish when I can. (laughs)

PRICHARD: Okay. Is that mainly how you relate to the salmon fishery is as a recreational angler, then?

WARWICK: Yes. (Prichard: Yeah?) Yep. I do a lot of—I do all the tournaments (Prichard: Okay.) that I can. I'm pretty competitive in salmon fishing, and trout. But mostly recreational, yeah.

PRICHARD: So the tournament started in '86. Is that right around the time you were—came to Rogers City?

WARWICK: No, that was about in '83 (Prichard: Okay.) that I'd come over here. (Prichard: Okay.) Yep.

PRICHARD: So do you remember—like, was your first—what are your, like, first memories associated with salmon fishing? When did that get on your radar?

WARWICK: Yeah, that was—my dad took me out in about eighty—oh, 1983 it was (cat meows)—in a little fourteen-foot (cat jumps onto table) aluminum boat, tiller steer, go out there when it's calm. And just got hooked right then. Of course we had to pick the days (cat meows) and the weather, but yeah it was really fun. I was addicted—the first time I went out—to it.

PRICHARD: Did you catch fish, then?

WARWICK: Yeah, sure did. Lots of big salmon at that time. That's when we were targeting mostly.

PRICHARD: (pause) I've got a cat on my notes, here. (both laugh) That's alright. Um—sorry.

WARWICK: No that's alright.

PRICHARD: So that was junior high-high school, and you've just been—was there a prog[ression]—like, fish with your dad mostly until you could have your own boat? Or, I know there's a lot of fishing off the harbor, or, and the breakwall certain times of year.

WARWICK: Yeah, I would also fish off the breakwall and in the streams and creeks around here whenever I could. But, yeah I'd fish with my dad in the little fourteen-foot up until I could get my own boat, or I'd jump on other boats with friends and go out. Back then I'd go out after school all the time. I'd come in at night at dark. Just get enough time to do my homework and get some sleep. Yeah it was good memories.

PRICHARD: Yeah.

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PRICHARD: You say you participate in the tournament? From having gone back through the newspapers, you know, the tournament started in 1986, and it's like every year until sometime in the early to mid-nineties you're getting more participants, the size of the winning fish is getting bigger and bigger, and did it feel like it was just getting bigger and better through that whole time period? Like, what were your feelings about the fishery as it was developing like that?

WARWICK: Yeah, absolutely it was getting bigger. When I first started only remember maybe a dozen boats being out there. And then just as the years progressed there was just—people started flocking here. The boat harbor at that time was smaller and they redesigned it, which my dad had a hand in. He was assistant engineer of Rogers City and he helped design the new harbor and the breakwall and everything. But it was getting so full of people they had to redesign it to accommodate all the people coming in. And yeah, it was getting crazy where you were in line to put your boat in the water.

PRICHARD: Was that just for the tournament itself, or just like every weekend starting at sometime in July, or—?

WARWICK: The weekends were getting filled up. Even weekdays, people were taking vacation days through the week. But the tournaments—yeah, it just progressed into a huge huge tournament over here. If I remember right, there was around three hundred boats—limit—to get into this tournament. And then there was like a fifty boat waiting list. And then, it was three ports you could fish out of: Rogers City, Presque Isle, and Hammond Bay. And those harbors were just full. And the tournaments got into where they would have concessions down there. The local churches would make food and raise money. It was a big deal.

PRICHARD: Yeah, can you describe kind of what the scene was and how much it has changed since the peak?

WARWICK: Yeah. It was just excitement. I looked at it like opening day of rifle season, some people would look at—or even Christmas. I just looked forward to it all year. A lot of people did. And it was just excitement from all over the place. People from the west

side of the state, downstate, out of state. And that slowly went downhill. Even that Rogers City Salmon Tournament no longer exists. And we do have smaller, other tournaments. The Fat Hogs in the fall, we have. And they have a ladies Fat Hogs tournament. And they're a lot smaller. You don't see the people. There is people coming up here and still fishing and it's still a good fishery, but it's like a mixed bag fishery now. You have to work for your catch, so to speak. You may go out there and get skunked, or you can go out there and catch your limit. Now you have to know what you're doing and know how to read the water and read the fish. Before, you could pretty much go out there and you're going to catch fish no matter what you're doing. You know, get lucky. But there was so many fish that they just were easier to catch.

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PRICHARD: When did you get your own boat and start fishing out there?

WARWICK: Just right out of high school. (Prichard. Okay. Oh, so, yeah.) Yeah. In '89, 1989, got my own boat. And I've had plenty since then.

PRICHARD: Okay, so you were there for all the best years.

WARWICK: Yeah. Yep, up until now. I still am looking forward to unwrapping the boat that's in the yard here now and getting it in the water.

PRICHARD: Do you remember thinking anything, like, in the nineties and two thousands, like, was there any sense of worry associated with anything? I mean, I remember in the newspaper articles I read, as early as the early nineties biologist Jim Johnson was raising concerns about, Do we have—what is the balance between predators

and prey? And they were starting stomach content analyses with the Michigan DNR [Department of Natural Resources] and the University of Michigan. And so I'm kind of curious, and curious on your perspective, too, it's like, were those concerns that people that were fishing had? Or was it kind of just like things are pretty good, not really on the radar of the potential for it ever to go away, kind of thing?

WARWICK: Yeah, never had any type of thought of it going away. I just, I planned—I could have moved out of the state. I could have took jobs other places. Family and salmon fishing kept me here. It really did. And there's a lot of other contributors. But I never foresee the so-called crash of the salmon. There was no thought in my mind whatsoever. I actually wanted to charter fish, and pretty confident I could make a good living off that. But other jobs kind of sidetracked me a little bit. But then the salmon fishing started declining a little bit when I was really interested in doing that, and then there was a scare and a worry that, Wow, what's going on here?

PRICHARD: And I don't mean to be disparaging and call it a crash. (Warwick: Yeah.) I know that word gets thrown around and maybe I should just call it a decline or something, but you said "so-called" so it made me think, Maybe I should—

WARWICK: No, it's true. Something definitely happened here. And I have a little—different opinions on things. I don't understand how the invasive species don't get across the Straits of Mackinac into Lake Michigan where a so-called crash could happen. Which, I know there's issues going on there, also. But they still have a better fishery than us. Or even Lake Ontario, it's thriving with numbers and big fish, also. But it never

discouraged me to stop fishing, and it really is good fishing. Don't really want to discourage anybody from not being here. It's just different now.

PRICHARD: Yeah. Well that was a major takeaway I got from my interview with Bruce [Grant] is—he emphasized, too, it's still really good fishing. And it is different. But there is definitely a difference in the participation. And maybe that's coming back, because I spoke with Wayne Saile the harbormaster—well, who actually gave me your contact information—and then Rob [Kortman] at the wastewater treatment plant, and they—and Frank [Krist] has told me this, too, it's like last year was the first year that the wastewater treatment had to handle the fish waste differently from the fish cleaning station. And I don't remember exactly what that was, but it was on their radar for the first time in a while, and it hadn't been. So they weren't—Rob and Wayne weren't necessarily sure if that was, Well, we've got more participation so you just have more people out there fishing, that's why there's more fish. Or if the catch rates were increasing, but—

WARWICK: Yeah. The last five years you're seeing more people (Prichard: Okay.) fishing so that could contribute to the, maybe, the more fish being caught. We're seeing healthy fish. It's encouraging. And like I said earlier, things are changing. We're seeing, from my perspective, the salmon run that runs up—majority of them go up the Swan River to the weir there—it's later in the season, now, it seems. I don't know if it's water temperature or the fish are just—the big swarms of salmon that come to run up the river, it seems to be later when everybody's starting to put their boats up, starting to think about bow hunting.

PRICHARD: So, end of October, early November, that late?

WARWICK: Not so far that late—

PRICHARD: Or, you said bow hunting. Yeah, so—

WARWICK: Yeah, you know, archery. End of September, getting into October you see a good push of fish. (Prichard: Okay.) And there's different theories of that, it's only opinions where, you know, some people say they're going all the way to Lake Michigan to eat and they come back around to spawn in Swan River. Maybe it's taking more time to get here, I don't know, but you do see a good amount of fish when most of the fishermen are—got their boats put away.

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PRICHARD: I was wondering if—what your perspective on the difference between, say, the nineties and early two thousands and the years after the decline of who was still fishing. Were the people who were in—like, the Rogers City community members who fished before the decline—the people that are predominantly fishing after the decline? And what was the major change? Was [it] people coming from elsewhere to fish? Or if it was kind of a shift overall? And who is re-entering—or entering the fishery as it's coming back? Is it new anglers? Younger anglers? Or is it people that had stopped fishing for a while kind of starting to fish again? I wonder what the landscape is there.

WARWICK: Yeah. You have a bunch of diehards in Rogers City that just haven't stopped or given up. If they have it's not because of our fishery. There may be other reasons. But you see young kids are into it. A lot of the parents have their kids going out when they're younger and I'm seeing them come up and they just—they're out there all

the time. Now they're captaining the boat and it's encouraging. You're seeing people from out of state coming, and that's more towards when the salmon are here staging to go up the river when we have a better amount of them. I'm meeting people from other parts of the state, which maybe ten years ago you really didn't have that and now that's coming back. Even like you have a group of guys from Alpena area that fish Presque Isle Harbor towards late—or middle August—right on through to when they lay the boats up. They come up here and they're putting their boats in the harbor to fish out of Rogers City. So that's what we have going for us, there's still that salmon plant for the egg take that's holding the fish here.

PRICHARD: How many—do you know how many fish it is? Or is it less than it used to be?

WARWICK: The plants?

PRICHARD: Yeah.

WARWICK: It is less, but I'm not sure the numbers. (Prichard: Okay.) A friend of mine always tells me but it just—I just don't remember.

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PRICHARD: I mean, I could look it up. I guess the reason I was asking is because I was wondering, do you think the fishing is better or worse depending on how many they stock there at the Swan River?

WARWICK: You know, my opinion is, I think we could have more fish planted, really. From what I see with the baitfish and different things. Back in the heyday when the alewives were here you'd see them wash up on the shore. And you don't see that anymore. But I am seeing—there's times I'm down on the beach—and the shoreline's only a quarter mile away from here and I'll go watch the shore—and I'm seeing ducks, like diver ducks, school alewives up to the shoreline so they can eat them. I just seen it last year. And there was a swarm of them. They're jumping out of the water, they're getting beached. And the ducks and the birds are going crazy. But I'm not any type of biologist to see what's really happening out here. I do read up on it and things. But I just hope it isn't a decision that they don't want to plant any more here because of our low population number, or, because of the treaty that's going on, they don't want to plant because they don't want them taking the fish, or overharvesting. But I think we could see more (Prichard: Okay.) to tell you the truth.

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PRICHARD: Do you think that Rogers City is different with respect to what you're seeing with alewives? And your thinking that more could be stocked here—is it different than other port towns on Lake Huron that are further south and southeast down the coast?

WARWICK: I'm not real familiar with the waters down there. (Prichard begins a sentence while Warwick talks, but it is difficult to understand) Anything south of Alpena, I'm not real familiar. So I really can't say.

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PRICHARD: For someone that's never done a Great Lakes salmon fishing trip, can you just describe for somebody that might listen to this recording what that's like and why that's valuable to you?

WARWICK: Yeah, it's—it's peaceful. And challenging. If you like a little challenge when you go out fishing, it's something you have to—really concentrate on the elements, and the little details on how to catch the fish. It's just relaxing. I really like it out there. It's peaceful and relaxing. But for someone that's coming up, you get a good size salmon on the line, it's going to take you ten plus minutes, sometimes a half hour to bring a big fish in. So, anybody that likes that excitement of reeling in a big fish that fights hard, that's a king salmon. And they have real aggressive strikes. You're sitting there watching your downriggers and your planer boards that are out there and you're just trolling along, and everything's nice and quiet, but then when a fish hits you have the reels—the drag is going and the reel's screaming. Gets a little chaotic, but it's fun. It's a fun—and it's good table fare. We have a fish cleaning station here, you clean them all up and it's good eating. And good stories and memories with family. You take families out there. Get some good weather you take a group of friends out. It's a good time.

PRICHARD: Do you do most of your fishing with other people on the boat? Like friends or family?

WARWICK: Yeah, I usually do. Yeah, my boat's big enough now it's hard to handle with one person, (Prichard: Okay.) but I do have a smaller seventeen-foot boat that I'll take out by myself, I'll do that. Most of the time it's friends—I've got friends calling me from all over trying to get a date together to go out. And if they can't come up, definitely

my family. My daughters got raised on salmon fishing and they talk about it. They've got pictures of their biggest catches. And the smiling faces of seeing someone that hasn't caught many salmon or any at all, (cat meows and jumps up on the table between Warwick and Prichard) of reeling a big one—sorry about that.

PRICHARD: That's okay. (laughs; Warwick picks up his cat and places it in another room) That's alright.

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PRICHARD: I'm wondering, is there—maybe if you—even when the salmon fishing was good, or anytime more recently, do you have any remarkable or memorable trips or a series of events or experience that really sticks in your mind or that is something that you always go back to?

WARWICK: Yeah, a lot of—I think about—of course, me and my dad out fishing—he isn't here anymore—but in that small fourteen-foot boat. There's times in the fall we would anchor out and cast for them instead of troll. I mean, we're catching twenty-five-, thirty-pound fish that—thirty-pounder was always a big fish; to this day it still is, but—and actually literally pulling up the anchor because we couldn't—it was so big we had to follow it around, and it would actually pull the boat around a little bit in the water. Just those times. So many that I think of with friends and tournaments. And the ladies tournament—my wife and her friends get into it. But my dad catching his thirty-pound salmon was probably the biggest memory I have.

PRICHARD: When was that?

WARWICK: You know, it was probably back in 1984. (Prichard: Oh, really. Okay.) Or '85. Yeah. It was exciting. We had come back in and of course a small boat like that, you don't have livewells or anything. If anything you have a stringer over the side of the boat, and hopefully you remember to bring the stringer in when you take off—that's some of the other memories. We'd go and they're flopping around and some of them were getting off. But the bottom of the boat just full of salmon. (Prichard: Yeah.) I mean, you couldn't even step. The slime and everything was there. Yeah, it was just great times.

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PRICHARD: One thing I was kind of curious about is—and how this changed over time—is where do you get fishing gear in Rogers City? Like, then versus now. Or even, where? Or has that changed over time? Maybe it's moved more online, probably.

WARWICK: Yeah, a lot of it's online now. You can get anything you want. YouTube. You watch the videos. And the new colors of lures that are coming out, that's a big deal. You know, Adrian's Sport Shop sells a little bit of tackle here. The Dry Dock sells a little bit of tackle. Years ago we had Terry's Bait & Tackle, and he's been fishing forever, also. He doesn't have that tackle shop anymore. And I think he pretty much had to give that up when we had the decline. (Prichard: Okay.) We just didn't have the fishermen here anymore.

PRICHARD: Is that guy still around—Terry?

WARWICK: He is, yeah.

PRICHARD: I'm wondering if I could speak with him maybe at some point. (laughs)

WARWICK: Yeah, I could try to give a number, somehow, to you.

PRICHARD: Okay. We can talk about that. (Warwick: Okay.) I was just thinking about if there was an impact on local businesses like bait shops. Or thinking about influxes of people, if they're coming in for tournaments, like 350 boats on a weekend, and they've got issues with their gear, their motors, I don't know, you had to be able to accommodate that I imagine. So I was wondering what those kind of concerns were and how they were handled, and maybe how things have changed over time.

WARWICK: Yeah. There used to be a different marina in town, not so much a boat harbor marina, but it was out on M-68. Michigan Midwest Marine. He would repair boats and accommodate people. If they had breakdowns he'd come down to the harbor and work on them. And as for tackle, it's the same—pretty much the same tackle shops now besides Terry's Bait & Tackle. But now we have a marine mechanic that comes down to the harbor, also. (Prichard: Okay.) Wayne may have mentioned. He's out of the small—not small engine shop—the engine shop south of town—that comes up and he'll work on your boats, also.

PRICHARD: Okay. So he's employed by the city, then? Or is he just on call, kind of? Or do you know?

WARWICK: Yeah, I'm not sure. (Prichard: Okay.) Yeah, I'm not. Wayne would know (Prichard: Okay.) that information a lot more, but he's always down at the harbor wrenching on something. Maybe he's contracted through the engine shop. (Prichard: Okay.) I'm not sure how that works. But we're a small town so we don't have a whole lot of facilities to—big marinas and different things like that.

PRICHARD: But have you seen a change in the local economy with respect to the Chinook salmon fishery? And whatever demands on the local economy, or different aspects of that that people coming here to fish put on things?

WARWICK: The big thing I notice is just the motels and hotels in the area, (Prichard: Okay.) just a lot barer in the time when salmon fishing would start, you know, and really—towards the end of June, first part of July is when the kings would start showing up here. And you'd see the people come in, and they were full through the summer—especially in the fall. The hotel—they were just packed full of vehicles with trailers on them bringing their own boats. There was charter captains back then, charter boats here. Now there isn't one charter boat out of Rogers City. There's other people that will trailer that are from Alpena area, charter boats that will trailer up here if people want to, but for the most part there's nobody running besides maybe one part-time guy out of Rogers City right now. And for, I imagine, the restaurants and everything else—I've never seen any businesses go bankrupt, so to speak, because of the salmon decline, but it had to hurt them. Absolutely.

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PRICHARD: One of the things that I hadn't really thought of before speaking with Bruce [Grant] earlier today was he wondered, or thought maybe the fishery here got so big in the eighties and nineties that when it became less than that, it got so written off that—and maybe framed in too negative of a light—and now the focus and the writing and the publicity and the attention is on Lake Michigan. And he was advocating a sentiment that was like, attention just needs to be—if you want to revitalize interest in fishing Lake

Huron, it's not a matter of the fishery not being here, it's a matter of how the thing was framed and the attention that is all going to the Lake Michigan side of things. And I was wondering if you had any thoughts on that?

WARWICK: Yeah, I agree with that 100 percent. Yeah, that's spot on, for sure. Like you said, it's got such a bad rap that, you know, I hear people saying, "There's no salmon in Lake Huron," which is not true at all. And we never totally lost our salmon population. There's less fish, and at times not as big fish, and you just—I think people were so used to going out there and just throwing lines over the side with any color lure, and not paying attention to the currents and weather condition, and where the salmon will migrate in the different areas. Maybe they've given up on that because maybe they're not that good of a fisherman you know? That could be it. But from what Bruce said, yeah, I agree with that. It just gets a bad rap. And all through this we've always had—anywhere you'd go, people would say this is good fishing. We were spoiled on what we had where it was phenomenal fishing.

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PRICHARD: Yeah, I talked with Randy Claramunt who's with the Michigan DNR, and when I was pitching to him the idea of focusing on Rogers City he was like—well, places in Harrisville and Oscoda, where they didn't have the diversity of species to fish for, they experienced a major change. But in places like Rogers City you could still catch lake trout and maybe now walleye, Atlantic salmon. So I'm learning through speaking with people that what was experienced in all the different coastal communities is different. But

one of the things that differentiates Rogers City is the ability to still have a really viable fishery, it's just, to a large extent interest was lost.

WARWICK: Yeah. I think that's—you're correct there that just the interest—like you say, being a small town and it was so easy for us to be put in the shadows. And we don't have a lot of voices here to keep the interest here, besides the Hammond Bay [Area] Anglers Association. Without them, what would we have? They do a great job of voicing the sportsmen's opinions and concerns of the lake and trying to keep our fishery like it is, or even making it better. Yeah, it would totally be lost, I think, if we didn't have that little bit of voice. And I know they do a lot, but still, we don't have a population, and the charter captains, and all the different voices over there in Lake Michigan. They have a little issue with a plant or whatever, you hear about it on the news and it's in the papers and YouTube videos, it's just blowing up. Here, you don't really hear about it—any issues or concerns from the fishermen. It's like, do they not want to hear us? Or, they just want to keep it—that's Rogers City, just keep it a small-town thing. It's confusing to me.

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PRICHARD: Would you like to see more people coming to Rogers City and fishing? And do you think that—or is your concern or what you'd like see have more to deal with just having the DNR have more of a focus or more of an attention paid to Rogers City? Or a combination of both, or—?

WARWICK: Combination of both. The selfish part of me would say, No, I don't want any more people. Because I can go out there and maybe see three-four boats which are my buddies, and that's it in the evening. You get a lot of boats here, you get some people

catching fish, you get crowded. But I would like to see more people here because the more people that's here, the more interest, the more word that's out there, the more that people will have concerns and bring to the attention of other organizations or our DNR. And just see the younger generation. If you get a group—a family comes up and the kids are interested in it, then they'll be the voices to keep this fishery going.

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PRICHARD: Are you a member of the Hammond Bay Area Anglers Association? I don't even know how much of a thing they are anymore, but they definitely were in the eighties and nineties.

WARWICK: Yeah, they're a big deal with what's going on with the tribes right now and the consent decree. I am not. I always plan to be. And I was thinking about today with the interview with you, I said, "I need to sign up," you know, to help these people out. And I think they do a great job, for sure.

PRICHARD: Yeah. Yeah, I know it was a big part of Bruce's experience and involvement.

WARWICK: I go to their meetings. They'll have meetings at the senior center, wherever, and get emails from different things, but I need to sign up this year yet.

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PRICHARD: For people who aren't necessarily anglers in Rogers City, how important is the fishery to them? How on the radar is it? And, maybe, how does that compare to in the nineties or two thousands?

WARWICK: Other people outside Rogers City?

PRICHARD: No, like people in Rogers City who aren't necessarily anglers. How much a part of their, I don't know, life, or the culture of Rogers City, how much of an influence does it have?

WARWICK: You know, I think it has a lot. Our marina—our boat harbor that Wayne Saile's doing an awesome job now, with—that's our focus point of Rogers City. I don't know if you've been down there or not and seen it.

PRICHARD: Yeah. Yeah, I've walked out there.

WARWICK: You have the parks there, and you have the pavilion, the ice cream shop that sells food, and people are down there all the time. Our festival we have in the fall is right down there. So even though they're not fishermen, I think they like to see what's going on there. If we didn't have that, and some boaters—and now Wayne's doing just an excellent job with the boat harbor—and convenience, and the fishermen, and the pleasure boaters. You're seeing more boats in the harbor, and fishermen. And I kind of got off the question there a little bit. But I think they like to see the people instead of a vacant land down there—the people that aren't fishermen—because they're going to know somebody that is. They're going to have a grandson, or a niece or a nephew, a cousin that fishes out there. So they're going to want to see that continue for them in the future.

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PRICHARD: Do—I'm picturing, or I'm thinking of somebody in high school right now, and, would they be taught, or would the story be, the marina that we have right now, that's thanks in large part to the fishery? Is that more or less true?

WARWICK: Yeah. When they redesigned that boat harbor years ago, they did it to accommodate more slips, and a better boat launch to accommodate more boats to be able to get in and out of the water faster. A bigger parking lot. They put in a fish cleaning station. And it contributed to—the fishery part of it contributed to that boat harbor. Yeah.

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PRICHARD: So I kind of want to focus in on the years of where the downturn was happening. And from what I know about the surveys that were done, it was like, they had the 2003 prey fish survey, which is a bottom trawl survey, they caught very few adult alewife, but they caught quite a few young of year alewife. And then in 2004 and basically every year thereafter they haven't caught very many alewife. And so I was wondering from you, do you have memories of fishing—salmon fishing—in like 2004 2005 and having concerns or wondering about the size of the fish, or the health of the fish that were caught? Because I have seen pictures, or there's been—I have some idea of there were fish that were long and skinny, this kind of thing, and I was just wondering if you noticed fish that seemed to be unhealthy around that time, that you were catching.

WARWICK: Yeah, but—I remember seeing a few. Some. But nothing where you're really catching a bunch of them and saying, "Wow." I remember saying, "He hasn't been

eating very good.” He was longer and skinnier. But not like a whole catch of them.

(Prichard: Okay.) I would still catch probably more healthy ones than I would unhealthy ones. But the numbers were going down at that time. Seems to be, for some reason like 2008 and ’7, it seems like that’s when it started declining. (Prichard: Okay.) Maybe the net surveys were showing that and then the fish were finally reacting to the less amount of baitfish. And through the years you’d still catch a good number of fish, but they weren’t the big twenty-five-, thirty-pounders, they were just smaller. A four-year old fish is a mature salmon, and you were catching four-year olds that are twelve pounds, and fifteen pounds, and ten. But it’s coming back, though. I know of at least three or four—

PRICHARD: The numbers? Or the size? Or both?

WARWICK: It seems like the numbers, kind of, have been going up and down the last five years. But last year I know of five salmon that were thirty pounds (Prichard: Wow.) plus. And that’s just me on a weekend. I have my boat in a slip down there in the marina and just talking to the guys on the dock. So what was being caught that—the trailer boats are coming in that—they’re people from out of town, who knows. But, it’s encouraging, what’s going on. And I heard of a big smelt run this year at Thunder Bay River in Alpena. People were actually catching them through the ice. So that’s another baitfish that the salmon will feed on. So maybe that’s coming back around, also.

[00:40:46]

PRICHARD: Was there a transition where you’re probably maybe really focused on salmon in the—before the downturn—and then [unintelligible word] learn new

techniques? Or you kind of already knew the techniques for catching lake trout or different species, but it's just a matter of committing to them? What was that like?

WARWICK: Yeah, back in the day when we were just out there focusing on salmon, you catch a lake trout that was two pounds it was like, no. In the tournament we'd take turns, you know, me and my buddies, catching fish, and you'd lose your turn if you catch a fish, right? So when a guy brings in that lake trout, you were bummed out. You were trying to shake him off the line before you put it in the net so you can get another turn. We didn't want anything to do with a lake trout. And now we're targeting them, we're fishing for them. And now they're better eating than they used to be.

PRICHARD: I was going to ask about that because people say that. I didn't ever really eat them before the past five or six years. I think they taste pretty good. (laughs)

WARWICK: Yeah. It's my wife's favorite fish, is a lake trout. And I'm like, "No way," so I tried one. And it was pretty good. And from what everybody says they're eating gobies now instead of the alewife that would have a certain enzyme in them that give them a crumbly taste or whatever. We have good lake trout fishing and big lake trout. So, for tactics-wise, seems like for lake trout are the same as we would fish them years ago. But the salmon fishing now, with the water clarity we have totally different tactics. It's more stealthier. We have such clean water now. You can watch your cannonball on a bright, sunny, calm day drop down to forty-foot of water and you can still see it. You can see the rocks down there. You never had that years ago. It was cloudy.

PRICHARD: So you think the salmon see the rigger ball. Do you think they see the boat and they're affected by that?

WARWICK: Can be. If they're up in the water column higher the boat could spook them. And the cannonballs now are spooking them. And at times that will attract them in. (Prichard: Okay.) But the sun starts coming up and they're going to start spooking from that gear so you try to get everything away from the boat on a calm, clear day.

[00:43:14]

PRICHARD: So if you put yourself in the perspective of somebody who's not from Rogers City and wasn't here to experience what the fishery was, I'm wondering what you think is the more accurate legacy. Is it the story of a collapse and then thinking about having to recover or wanting to go back toward some previous state? Or is it more like just remembering and feeling like, Oh, that was awesome to take part in this great fishery that was here, and thankful for having had that? Or is it somewhere in between?

WARWICK: Yeah. I'm thankful for having that memory. We're never going to have that fishery again. Just the way the invasive species are and everything. And I look at it—I'm glad to experience it and have it, and through the years, seeing what happened, I kind of look at it—it is what it is. But I'm really hoping the DNR can focus more on Rogers City than I think they are, but like I say I'm not any type of expert. It's just my own opinion on things. We don't have the people here. We don't have the voices or the money. But I just wish they could at least keep it the way it is. And I'm thankful for what we have, for sure, the type of fishery, because it is a good mixed bag fishery. We're catching walleyes now, like you said earlier. Atlantic salmon. Lake trout. Steelhead. Then the kings, of course. And you can go out there, right now, you can go out and fish and catch some

steelhead and lake trout. We used to have a brown trout (Prichard: Yeah.) fishery, also, that's went to the wayside.

|00:45:18|

PRICHARD: Yeah, I'm curious about—well, I'm—just so you know, tomorrow I'm speaking on the phone with Jim Johnson who was a Michigan DNR biologist, and I want to ask him about what happened with the brown trout fishery and why that's not a focus anymore. But it seemed like people really valued that and they got really big and you could fish them nearshore and so what are your thoughts on what that used to be and how it changed?

WARWICK: Yeah. I used to love that. Me and my friends, we would take a fourteen-foot boat out when there's still ice on the shorelines, down at the ball diamonds, shove the boat over the ice, throw the motor on, and we're fishing—that's when the harbor's still frozen yet, we couldn't get a boat into the boat launch, and you go out there and you have a blast with brown trout. We'd be fishing them this time of year right now. There's—you don't even go out and target them anymore. Now you may catch one on occasion, on accident. But not too often. So why? I don't know. Why—they're not planting them anymore. (Prichard: Okay.) Just some opinions—I've heard rumors that walleyes—have have a big population of walleyes that might—we don't have it; Alpena does—but the walleyes will flood up to Rogers City in the fall. But were they eating the eggs, or vice versa, the brown trout? Because I believe their baitfish is—a brown trout will eat a goby. The king salmon may, but he's not targeting them. It may be a fluke to find one in a

stomach. But a brown trout will eat that. He'll eat shiners. He'll eat bugs just like a steelhead. So it's a question of mine, also. Why did that go to the wayside?

PRICHARD: Yeah. But that's something you think could exist again.

WARWICK: In my opinion, yeah. Unless there's some type of issue where they won't spawn, or, I don't know.

|00:47:34|

PRICHARD: I'm curious what your—what would be your opinions on what a better fishery would look like in Rogers City. And, I mean, maybe you're unsure. That's fine. (Warwick: Yeah.) But I'm honestly wondering what your feelings are. If you were going to see something improved or done differently, what would that be?

WARWICK: It'd be a brown trout fishery. Have that again. And also, it would be nice to get an Atlantic salmon plant here. I don't know why they avoided Rogers City when they started planting in the east side of Michigan. They planted up in the Soo [Sault Ste. Marie] there, and we'd get a—we'd get those fish down here. And I believe they would survive. I used to go up to DeTour and fish the Atlantics all the time and they're really fun. They're like a steelhead. (Prichard: Yeah.) And they're not relying on alewives and smelt. They'll eat them, but it isn't a thing for them to survive. So it would be nice to see an Atlantic plant here. Because they're *here*. So I don't know—that's another one of my opinions about—they cater to the population. They go down, Alpena, south, around the thumb there's more people. There's bigger streams where the people can go to—and public—and fish them. The piers there. Little Rogers City, here we go, again. Why not

plant here? Don't have the voice? We don't have the population's my theory. (Prichard: Okay.) But there may be other reasons.

PRICHARD: Yeah, I think that was part—my understanding is that was part of the story of why they pushed that initiative to stock kings here in the eighties was, Well, they're here, so there's something good about this area for kings. I think a big component of that was it's very convenient to be able to set up the weir on private property, and we can stock a lot of fish here and we don't have to worry about snagging and all of the dead fish because we have this weir here. And they had a contract to do the commercial harvest there. (Warwick: Right.) So, I guess it is a little different with Atlantic salmon. But yeah, I would be interested in knowing what the decision making processes are for where they stock them and where they don't.

WARWICK: Yeah, that's—I don't know their reasoning, either. I have my opinions. But to go back with your question of a better fishery, of course I'd like to see more king salmon planted. I'm not talking like the heydays or whatever because I do understand there is a change in our ecosystem. I realize that. But is that an excuse for them to back off from our little Rogers City area, northeast, northern lower Michigan, and start catering to the voices and the money—because it takes money to raise a Chinook salmon. Well, are the voices getting heard over there, is that where it's going? It's just a thought I have. With the Atlantics, the same thing, it's, boy, if we had a town the size of Alpena would we get a plant? Or you get down by, what is it, Lexington, down there? Harbor Beach. (Prichard: Yep. They get the Atlantics down there.) Yeah, and they have such a bigger population of people. And now, from what I understand in Lake Michigan, what is it, Muskegon area? They couldn't plant the steelhead last year because of Covid, so they

didn't get a steelhead plant, so they're going to get a Chinook salmon plant this year.

(Prichard: Okay.) So I just kind of shake my head and think, That's great. I'm happy for them. But isn't this about the food chain that's going on there? A steelhead will eat bugs and shiners and gobies or anything. But they're going to plant kings, instead. Well, I thought they were worried about the alewives. So it's kind of a—

PRICHARD: Yeah, I know they are increasing the numbers of kings they're stocking in Lake Michigan for this spring, from what it was the most previous recent years. But, yeah—

WARWICK: And if they do here—

PRICHARD: —it's contentious over there, though, with all the decision making, and the different states. Because here it's just Michigan. Over there it's Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin.

WARWICK: And, you know, I was thinking about that today, of what we'd be talking about, and I didn't know where the discussion was going to go and the different questions, but, okay, you have Wisconsin. They're putting salmon plants in. How many I don't know, but I know they are. Indiana. Michigan is. Lake Huron, here we go again. Canada. There's a lot of shoreline there without towns on it. They may be planting, but nothing compared to the Chinook salmon plant that's going on in Lake Michigan from all the different states. And they're surviving. We have a couple sites here on Lake Huron that are getting minimal amounts of plants. Very few probably in Canada. But I don't understand why they wouldn't see that to make up for what Canada isn't planting, or the amount of salmon—Chinook salmon—that are in Lake Huron.

PRICHARD: Yeah, I don't know as much about the decision making in Lake Huron with respect to planting. But I know on Lake Michigan it revolves heavily around trying to figure out how many of the different predator species they can stock in some kind of combination, and to not exceed their understanding of the amount of alewife, essentially. And so they watch that very closely, and move it [the numbers of fish stocked] up and down. So I don't know—I just don't know if that same decision making even goes on in Lake Huron. But I guess I'm in the position where I could figure that out for you and relay back some information to you on that. And I—

WARWICK: Yeah, I'd be interested to see—

PRICHARD: —I do not know—and it may not be as well known—what the Canadian side of things is with respect to stocking. (Warwick: Yeah.) But I do know that natural reproduction in their streams contributes significantly to—or at least it did in the nineties and into the two thousands—natural reproduction of Chinook salmon was a major component of the population. And I don't know how much that's gone down numbers-wise, but my understanding is that there's still salmon runs on eastern Lake Huron, and those are predominantly (Warwick: That's good.) naturally-reproduced fish. And that was a new thing that kind of started to develop throughout the nineties. But the guy I'm speaking with tomorrow, Jim Johnson, has done the research on that, and so I'll get a better understanding of that story from him.

WARWICK: Just my point of view, you have all those cities: Milwaukee—I'm losing my train of thought—Sheboygan—all those cities along there—Kewaunee, or what's the—

PRICHARD: Kewaunee.

WARWICK: Kewaunee. (Prichard: Yeah.) All them through there. And you take—you look at across from us and Canada, it's like—

PRICHARD: It's much smaller. (laughs) Yeah.

WARWICK: And these fish are just getting poured into Lake Michigan, and I'm thinking over there, those invasive species don't stop at the Mackinac Bridge and say, You can't enter Lake Michigan. (Prichard: Yeah.) But like you say, with that natural reproduction, maybe that's helpful, I guess, in a sense.

PRICHARD: But like you were saying earlier, they did a paired stocking study where they tagged fish that were stocked on either side of the straits. And of the fish that returned—or that were caught—that had been stocked in Lake Huron, most of them were caught in Lake Michigan. Now does that mean that—and this may be known and I may not be remembering things perfectly (Warwick: Sure.)—but there's not as much fishing effort in Lake Huron, so I don't know how well that was corrected for. There's definitely a lot of people salmon fishing in Lake Michigan, still. (Warwick: Yeah.) But some component of the salmon—Chinook salmon—that are stocked in Lake Huron are able to go over to Lake Michigan and survive. And probably would come back if they weren't caught. (Warwick: Yeah. Right.) But that's just my understanding of how that's being looked at.

WARWICK: And that's a scary thing because from what I've heard and read on different blogs and YouTubes and—they're not happy with our fish going over there eating their alewives and their baitfish and then coming back here to spawn.

PRICHARD: Well, right, because that's fewer that are going to be there for them in September. (laughs)

WARWICK: Yeah. And not to cause an argument or whatever else, but I know that a lot of these eggs that are taken from Swan River are being planted over there, (Prichard: Yeah.) so at least Rogers City's a backup plan, I guess, and we still get the fish. When their—was it Platte River Hatchery, or something—

PRICHARD: They raise Atlantics and coho there.

WARWICK: Okay. In one of the years they had a bad batch of fish that wouldn't take, whatever, so they had to take some eggs here over there. So there's a give and take, so to speak.

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WARWICK: Yeah.

PRICHARD: Well, so just to close here, is there anything else about the Rogers City Chinook salmon fishery that would be important for future researchers, somebody listening to this recording, either about the eighties-nineties-two thousands, or the transition, or now? For them to get a sense of the experience, or what it felt or meant to be yourself, a member of this community, anything important that you'd like to add?

WARWICK: I guess I don't know how important it is, but it's just, it becomes a way of life. At least in my eyes, it is for me. It's a way of life. My wife knows, she'll—(laughs) when the season's coming, I'm getting my boat ready, I'm going to go out there, and

that's what I'm going to do when I can. Of course, I have family life and everything else. But when I get the opportunity, I want to go catch a king salmon. And it would bring—if we had a better king salmon population—heyday—it's going to help the economy. I mean, just from what we talked about earlier, just the flock of people. No matter if they're buying lures or not. Selling boat motors, or just spending money at the restaurants and wherever, all the shops in town. But, it's still there. So we don't have the massive amounts of people anymore, but there's still a fishery. And people have got to see that it's fun. You're not going to be bumping in—and you get into the fall, there's a good amount of boats that come here, still. But for the most part, if you can get up here for a weekday to fish, you may only see a couple boats and have it all to yourself and still be able to catch fish and enjoy the fishing itself, and the shoreline. And Rogers City, being a small town. And go out to Ocqueoc River, walk the trails. And the scenery is just phenomenal. It's a big part of my life, anyways, (Prichard: Yeah.) and I know, a lot of my friends, it is theirs, too. There's—yeah. It's a big deal to them. We're buying new boats and buying new gear. How much tackle—

PRICHARD: You're still here, too.

WARWICK: Yeah. I could still pack up and leave and go to Lake Ontario and fish over there. Or go to Lake Michigan and start a charter or whatever. But yeah, I'm going to stay right here and enjoy the fishery we do have, still.

PRICHARD: Alright, well, thank you. I'm going to stop the recording now.

Shortly after the interview, following some conversation off the record, Warwick thought of something that he wanted to add to the recording.

|01:01:39|

WARWICK: You know, I had another thought with how it—the king salmon fishing brought people from other places. I know people that would come up in their boats and live in their boats for the whole salmon season. (Prichard: Really.) They wouldn't get a motel or anything, (Prichard laughs) they had a big enough boat they'd sleep in their little cuddy cabin. There's a couple friends of mine that did it. And they're from downstate—different states. And they lived in their boat. Retired guys, they come up—and there's still a couple that do it—but they would just live in their boat. They call their wives up, “Yeah, maybe I'll come down next weekend, but it looks like the weather's good.” Next thing you know, they're up [the wives]. And they buy a house in Rogers City for the salmon fishing. There was a lot of people that did that. And Hammond Bay, we talk about Hammond Bay harbor, up through there there's cabins all along the shoreline up there. People were buying them. Couple friends I'm thinking of down in the thumb area, they had cabins up here because they would come up in the later fall and stay here for weeks. They sold them and moved on out. But there's people that would move here just for the salmon fishery. And now it isn't as good, and some are a little older now, and different priorities, but they had sold and left. Now if that fishery was still good and like the heyday or better, whatever, I don't know, would they still be here, you wonder. That was just another afterthought that I had.

PRICHARD: Yeah. Yeah, I've never heard of that. People just sleeping on their boats. (Warwick: These guys, some of them—) What'd they do with all their fish? (laughs)

WARWICK: They'd clean them at the harbor. (Prichard: Okay.) They'd clean them and they had freezers for them, or have friends that would freeze the fish. And when they'd go down back home to the wife (Prichard laughs) they'd take a bunch of fish down. But yeah, these guys were sixty-, seventy-years old (Prichard: Really?) sleeping in their boats, getting up in the morning while I'm going to work, and they're going out fishing. Some of them by their selves. Three of them that I know would mostly fish by themselves. And come in. If they want to go out in the evening, they would. But usually they'd fish the mornings. But, yeah, they had the showers right there. (Prichard: Oh, yeah.) The restaurants around. And they had their vehicles here if they wanted to go on a little tour. And they had a place to sleep. And they had fishing. (both laugh) Yeah. It's kind of unique. But it goes to show you—and some of them, there's only a couple left that do it, but—and years ago in the heyday there was more of them people that would live right in their boat all summer. It's kind of neat.

PRICHARD: Yeah, that is cool. (laughs)

WARWICK: Yep.

end of interview