

Call number: 02-00-133-16 PT. 1

Edmund Lord talks with Karen and Roger McPherson about fishing on the Yukon and the Tanana

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Notes: Original in 7-inch tape, master copy on CD. Produced by Roger McPherson. THESE TAPES WERE PRODUCED AS A PART OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM NOW DEFUNCT AND WERE BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

The tape begins with sounds of a river and a boat motor.

At 2:23 a man's voice [Edmund Lord, as indicated in the notes accompanying the tape] talks about losing ground and letting the government take care of things. People from all villages come in "to talk about this stuff." Roger McPherson asks what they think [unclear who], and Edmund says that [unclear].

At 3:43 Roger asks Edmund to tell when he started building fish wheels. He tells that he started when he was 9 years old. He had his first wheel and it was in [unclear], where his father had a big mink ranch. The minks were at good price at the time. They had the fish wheel to fish for minks over the winter since they had over a 1,000 minks and they had to breed them. His dad was a white man.

Edmund says he had his own fish wheel with which he fished to his dogs and half went to the old man. He had to cut 60 cords of wood every year on top of it. They had big gardens where they lived. [He points to the direction where the garden was.] "Them days you don't get nothing. You just had to earn your way."

Then they had to do it, but now Edmund thinks that the government is spoiling people. If the government would give some of the money to the speaker, he'd buy fishing wire and nails. [Unclear talking.] The guys who get assistance never go trapping. Edmund says he made good money trapping, but nobody does it anymore even though the government gives them money to do it. They just spend the money

and then ask Edmund for things. The guys are trying to loan wire from him, but they never give back, so Edmund has to turn them down. Just yesterday, he turned down 6 people who didn't have money to buy it [fish wire].

6:34 Roger asks when Edmund started building his fish wheel. He says he starts at June, after muskratting. He comes back in early June and starts right away, like everybody used to do. The first thing they do is that they get poles, raft-logs [drift wood?], when the water is high and tie them to the bank.

Everybody used to have kinoos [sp?] and there used to be 30 kinoos along the river shore, all the way up to Thomas Albert's camp. Kids had lots of fun. Now, nothing. Now they just play basketball. White people ruin them.

Roger asks if they pull in the logs that drift down the river. Edmund explains that the logs are used for fish wheel rafts and axles. Wood is also piled up and used for firewood in the winter. Roger asks if the logs are made into a raft that floats the fish wheel, and the Edmund agrees. Then one builds a box and a shoot [?] and everything is made of poles since they didn't use to have wire then [the basket was made of poles?]. When he first built a wheel, it was all made out of small spruce willows. There was no fish wheel wire because they had no money. Long ago they didn't even use nails but tied everything together with willow roots. Edmund says he could do it but that he wouldn't because "there's nails and stuff."

9:07 Roger asks if he did any ice fishing in winter and Edmund tells that he did lots of ice fishing. They put nets through ice. Now his wife makes fish nets, like the brand new 40-foot long white fish net that she made "this spring." It's made out of nylon string.

Roger asks how many days it took them to make a fish wheel in the old days. Edmund says it took generally 3 days from the time they started getting all the logs together. They are making a basket today and they might finish it by tomorrow. [Break in the recording.]

Edmund talks about how somebody used to build a fish wheel "down there" and he had a little boat which he rowed up the river. They made their own fish nets from twine, but people don't knit nets anymore. Roger asks how many people had fish wheels and Edmund tells he doesn't know since he didn't travel on the Yukon. All

he knows that between Beaver and Fort Yukon almost everybody had fish wheels. There were fish camps all over. Chandalar people used to come down [unclear] and in Beaver too there were lots of fish camps. They had to catch the fish for winter. There was no other way. Now they can go to Fairbanks where the “handout office is” and get some. If they shut that out, maybe people would start working again.

11:49 Roger asks how many fish wheels there are in the area now. Edmund says there are 6 wheels and there were 8 last summer. There used to be about 20 wheels in 1960, but everybody quit. Roger asks if the fish wheel size has changed, but Edmund says it hasn't. Different people make them differently, and it all depends on how deep the water is. Some older people and women had smaller wheels too, and some stronger men go out to the fish camps with big wheels to get away from their families. When they are gone, the younger boys take care of their wives.

13:25 Roger asks where the best place to put a fish wheel is. The interviewee says that the best place is in the river [laughter]. Karen clarifies the question and asks what the best place in the river is. The interviewee says that he can't tell that secret, and asks Kurt if he knows it. Kurt says he does and Edmund asks Kurt to keep the secret to himself.

Roger then asks how far from the shore the fish wheel is placed. The interviewee says it depends on the water. One can put it 8 feet out from the bank, or 10-15 feet, depending on how the water is. Then one has to put in leads [?], but another thing is that there's a law now that one can't make leads.

Roger asks if there are many laws that restrict fish wheel use today. Edmund is of the opinion that since Alaska became a state, they have made lots of laws. Alaska promised them that they could retain their Native rights even when Alaska became a state, but they lied. Native people didn't use to have to have permits to operate a fish wheel and they could sell the fish to the stores. As soon as Alaska became a state, they “gave us a big horse slap.”

15:25 Roger asks about some of the other restrictions on fish wheels. Edmund says they have a commercial fishing license and a fishing license to run gill nets and stuff like that. They need a \$15 dollar license.

He talks about his project that's going to produce him money that he's going to invest in equipment to help other Native people get started in working for themselves. He'll give them equipment that they'll pay back from the fish they catch, but he won't give them money.

Karen asks if he needs a license to have a fish wheel, and Edmund explains that they have to have a license if one wants to sell the eggs, but one can also throw the eggs into the river. If one gives them to someone else, it's like giving a person \$20 dollars, and because it doesn't feel right, many people just dispose of them. They also have limited commercial licenses so that one can get them any time now. If one puts in a fish wheel and gets a commercial license, one can sell fish, but if one sells fish without it, to supplement food stamps, they can be turned in. It's safe to have a license because one never knows when one wants to sell that one fish. If a kid sells a fish, his or her parents might go to jail for it.

19:04 Roger asks if one always has to have a license for a fish wheel. Edmund says that they didn't use to, until now. Then he says that's it's ridiculous to talk to Roger and Karen because his time is running out. He has too many people to feed to be talking to a tape-recorder. The tape is going to benefit many people but not his family. When he tried to stop fishing "this spring," they [unclear who he is talking about] came from Minto and begged him to go back. They were scared that nobody would do it anymore. Even people from Nulato buy dried fish from him. He lists also Venetie, Beaver and Fort Yukon who bought dried fish from him.

He's trying to work hard to make ahead and to help his people. He's not going to have a wheel in Minto but just take fish up by a boat. BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] should help people like him because he benefits others.

[End of the recording.]