

Film

Wild Caught

Wild Caught: The Life and Struggles of an American Fishing Town. Documentary. 2006. 98 minutes. Producer and Director: Matthew Barr

The following background to the film is in the words of the director, Mathew Barr (<http://www.unheardvoicesproject.org/background.html#>)

Wild Caught: The Life and Struggles of an American Fishing Town is a feature-length documentary that explores the lives of small-scale commercial fishermen living in Snead's Ferry, North Carolina.

For over 300 years the fishermen have made a precarious living catching shrimp, clams and finfish; now, the forces of globalization, imports, rising fuel prices and explosive coastal growth are threatening this hard-fought and deeply ingrained way of life. They don't do it for the money—they fish because they have to, because they love the freedom. They are some of the last true independent spirits left in America, and their struggles to keep afloat in Snead's Ferry is symbolic of what is going on around the country, and around the planet.

In 1999, on North Topsail Beach, I used to see shrimp boats go from the ocean to a river inlet in the Intracoastal Waterway. Curious, I drove inland to see where they docked and discovered the village of Snead's Ferry.

The fishermen of Snead's Ferry, North Carolina, as I first knew them in 1999, were struggling but putting groceries on the table—and were providing some of the best seafood money could buy. They were surviving in a job known as the most dangerous in the country, where death and serious injury are common. As small-scale fishermen knowledgeable in the 'folk' ways of fishing, their priority has always been to work in harmony with the environment and to monitor the fish stocks that provide their livelihood. Though

lumped together with large-scale freezer-trawler operations under the job title 'commercial fishermen', they had as much in common with them as the man on the moon.

In 1999 and 2000, as I began filming, things were tough, but survivable. As I became accepted in the town, fishermen and their families shared their knowledge, techniques and sea stories. They practise a sustainable type of fishing, limited by scale and locality to being ecologically sound. Their experiential knowledge base, handed down from generation to generation, is enormous. Some have spent half of their lives at sea.

As fascinated as I was by the visceral process of fishing, the fishermen's philosophy and sea stories became a layered underpinning to the story. Why is this way of life so powerful? Does it come from the strong sense of spirituality fishermen feel out in the ocean? What is the sense of freedom that the fishermen kept alluding to?



Ultimately, *Wild Caught* is about community, so hard to find yet so central to who we are as human beings. The people of Snead's Ferry have a deeply imbedded sense of togetherness. They really do look out for one another, even though they have little money.

Ultimately, though, the story itself changed. The fishermen of Snead's Ferry have had to deal for a long time with complex regulations and hard times.

But by 2005, they had to cope with ever-expanding competition from cheap imported seafood, unparalleled coastal growth, escalating taxes and lowered prices. Now, in 2006, with most of the fish houses up for sale, the fishermen's very survival is in jeopardy.

And that is the story of *Wild Caught*.