

## amacker-craig-2017-02-12.mp4

**Craig Amacker** [00:00:11] In one word fishing is my escape from, you know, from everything else in the real world. In another sense, fishing is actually, I'm one of the lucky people who has been able to intertwine fly fishing into my livelihood and be able to participate in it and get paid for it as well, so it's both a job and a hobby. And a vocation but it's a nice balance of things, so for me, it's more than just a job it's

**Craig Amacker** [00:00:58] I think so. Yeah. Without those environments, we wouldn't have our livelihood, that's part of it. There's been many of us who do, uh, participate in the - in the industry and the job end of things know that if we didn't have that environment that we wouldn't have jobs and I think it does call on us to have a greater responsibility to help protect the habitat. Because we're using the habitat we're earning our living on it but, in some people's eyes we might be overusing it, or exploiting it. So to help protect it and help preserve it, so that it's here for future generations, I think we have a big responsibility of that.

**Craig Amacker** [00:01:55] Climate change for sure. Our Summers are being hotter, lasting longer, even this past fall here it was in the 60s and 70s in November which we know is having an effect on water temperatures. Um, pollution is also an issue. Where we're sitting right now, used to be farm fields, used to be, woodlands and grasslands. I mean, we used to be able to pheasant hunt out here. We're not doing that now and as the suburbs expand further away from the city, there tends to be I think more pollution issues. One of the things we talk about our home stream here of Black Earth Creek that's ten minutes from our store, has fewer species of insects than it once had. The base flow is as high as it's ever been, but part of the issue is Black Earth it's crossed plains has become a suburb of Madison now, and more people are moving out there and people with bigger homes that have to have the perfect lawns. I can't point an exact finger on it, so I'm not slandering these people that have to have golf course lawns, but I still think some of that run off is going into the stream and affecting it for sure.

**Craig Amacker** [00:03:34] That's been a big thing is it's been, again, the days of getting snow at Thanksgiving here, doesn't happen anymore. And we're seeing these big swings in weather, even like today for example its 45 degrees outside and warm enough to fish. Whereas 10 years ago 15 years ago, we'd be lucky if it was in the 20's. You know, and usually the kinda that mid January to mid February is when we have the coldest of the cold you know where it would be 5 above, 5 below you know, and we're walking around in spring jackets today.

**Craig Amacker** [00:04:29] Father starting me - started me out in fishing when I was five. You know, just fishing with worms and stuff for bluegills, panfish and that, and I took to it. And then when I was 11 I got my first fly rod. Probably what would be the most rudimentary fiberglass rod and reel and esse level line, and again fishing for panfish, bass, you know. Small bass, etc. And then branched out to trout later in our spring creeks here in the area. Now, I was fortunate enough to work two summers in Yellowstone Park and when I was in college. Cook in Canyon Village from five in the morning to one in the afternoon. And then fished the whole rest of the time and I got to know Bob Jacklin actually in West Yellowstone the first year. I still look at him as my Western fly fishing mentor, he didn't look down on you if your weren't buying, well at the time you know a \$400 fly rod or not taking one of his guide trips. He was really helpful, cool with inform- free with information, and we became friends. And when I came out next year my dad and I drove out early so I could take my car out and he would fly from Bozeman to Madison and then

back to Bozeman at the end of August. We'd fish and drive back. And my Dad saw these rope drums in Bob's shop. Long and short of it was he was my dad and Bob were both drummers in the 32nd Division military band at the same timeframe, at different courts. And of course my dad outranked him. Which Bob still lets me know of that. But that friendship took off too and it just took from there. Yeah we'd always go on family vacations out West every Fall every year. Where you know rent a motor home yeah me and my brother my mom and dad. We'd get to fish in like the Madison, the Firehole, Henry's Fork with snakes and stuff like that, still love it.

**Craig Amacker** [00:06:47] I think it does provide some degree of importance. I think the current tact they're taking right now in Yellowstone, with say up in the Lamar Valley where you've gotta kill all Rainbows and Brook Trout might be a little extreme. I've seen you know cuttbows in Slough Creek for example. I've seen a couple rainbows coexist there fine. The lake trout in Yellowstone Lake that's been very interesting seeing the eradication of that. Now I don't know if you know a gentleman named Deuce Brown in Bozeman. He worked at River's Edge for a while. He was a guide out of Bridge Bay Marina on one of the Grady Whites there spincasting for cutthroat. We went out there a couple of times you know on a booze cruise kind of deal fishing with him, and he had mentioned that in 1989 he caught a 20 pound lake trout out of Yellowstone Lake before they took they docks out. That was probably at least a 20 year old fish. Now of course they had been in there a lot longer than since the mid 90's. And of course Heart Lake - cutthroats, lake trout have coexisted there forever. So I don't know if that was part of a sudden boom in the lake in a year class of lake trout that messed things up or what it was, but the fact that the cutthroat just all the sudden dropped off precipitously. It's kinda scary. And I think they should have some responsibility in protecting those fish. The question is how.

**James Thull** [00:08:42] Sure.

**Craig Amacker** [00:08:42] The question is how. Like for example show the Firehole, Gibbon and Madison down in that part of the park if there weren't browns and rainbows down there there wouldn't be any fish in the stream.

**James Thull** [00:08:58] Yeah. The good news is I interviewed Todd Koel, he's fisheries biologist there.

**Craig Amacker** [00:09:04] Yeah.

**James Thull** [00:09:04] And the cuts in Lake Yellowstone are on the rise.

**Craig Amacker** [00:09:07] Good.

**James Thull** [00:09:07] Which is good.

**Craig Amacker** [00:09:08] That's what I've been hearing. A couple years ago I hadn't been out forever in the spring. My wife and I had gone out in the fall and she was going out to run the mar- the Yellowstone Marathon in West "wanna come?" "sure." Realized how much I missed it in the spring. But we looked over Fishing Bridge. This was in 2014, counted 9 fish.

**James Thull** [00:09:28] That's scary.

**Craig Amacker** [00:09:28] Where normally there were thousands of them.

**Craig Amacker** [00:09:39] This is the most diverse fishery in the lower 48. We have everything here that swims except for saltwater species. Maybe you know certain things like spotted bass what not or inland stripers. But the neat thing about it. We have world class spring creeks in the driftless area with wild browns and brookies. We've got a good salmon steelhead and lake-run brown fishery. In the Lake Michigan tributaries and our warm water fishery, you know small mouth, largemouth, Pike, muskie, walleye, crappie, bluegills, white bass perch, name and it's just off the charts and still not at it's full potential.

**Craig Amacker** [00:10:37] As far as doing well the restoration they've done on our spring creeks; to stabilize the banks, to prevent erosion, to narrow them up a little bit so they move faster and be colder. And of course protecting the trout with not having year-round seasons so they do have the ability to spawn and have naturally reproducing fish. In the past, there were some issues with they had these traditional seasons that didn't necessarily agree with science. So that, so not always listening to science or agreeing with science is what they've done wrong. There was a one week closure in April, for example, between our early trout season and the general opener the first Saturday in May so that people could fish that traditional opening day to "dumb trout" that haven't been bothered by anglers. No biological reason for it. No science reason for it, it was just that. Thank God they finally got rid of that. The fact that they're whittling away at the DNR. And not having as many scientists that's one of the things they're doing wrong. 'Cause these people not to sound like Mr. Gore in An Inconvenient Truth, but these people are saying "hey this is what's going on, this is what we need to do to prevent population decreases or really dramatic overpopulation, or something." You know, or of invasive species.

**Craig Amacker** [00:12:30] Oh I love our brown trout. I can be, I like to do a lot of destination angling like in salt water and out West and whatnot and I can be in the farthest place away. I can come back here I can throw a fly in one of our spring creeks, catch a 12 inch Brown and be just as happy. And they fight - I mean I like brown trout, small mouth bass, steelhead, and bonefish. If I had to pick a favorite fish.

**Craig Amacker** [00:13:06] Water Key, Grand Bahama Island, bonefish. The- it's some of the biggest bonefish in the Caribbean. It's wild though you land in Freeport you see a bunch of development on the back side of the islands all wild backcountry and mangrove creeks you see sharks, turtles, all kinds of cool stuff. And it's fun place, fact I'm going to be there in April.

**Craig Amacker** [00:13:45] Introdu- several things. Introducing new anglers to the sport. Also people that are avid fly fishermen who are from out of the area and just moved here. Introducing them to something they didn't know existed. And of course teaching beginners taking them for their first cast and their first fish.

**Craig Amacker** [00:14:14] Well yes and no. Women do listen better. But every once in a while you will get some men and women that are - whether it's you know upper executive level corporate people that are used to being in charge, and not having somebody tell them what to do. They can be a little bit harder to teach. And that can, that goes for both men or women. I've had wonderful experiences teaching both, actually I have. Yeah. There are women that they will listen a little more or slow down. You know or not try - not try to overanalyze it and figure it out themselves.

**Craig Amacker** [00:15:12] I would say with fly fishing eleven or twelve. I found that out. I did guide a gentleman once with his nine year old son he says "yeah we're doing a full day

trip." Couple hours into the deal and you can tell you the kid was struggling. So it's like okay we'll do some stream samples, look at insects. We'll go behind dad and skip some rocks you know, whatever. And at lunch its like okay I get a choice. We can either go upstream and trout fish more or we can go over to Blackhawk Lake and fish bluegills. Kid said bluegills. Let's just say he had an easier time with that and it saved the day.

**James Thull** [00:15:55] Is that a good way to start out a kid fishing is with bluegill, stuff like that?

**Craig Amacker** [00:15:55] The best, the best, the best , yep, yep. And when I have kids on our guide trips I like to say I like 'em to be about 11 or 12, just from the attention span or maturity standpoint, and be comfortable in the outdoors. If somebody does want to take a kid that's under eleven. We go out to Salmo Pond by Blackearth Creek there's where we can do a casting lesson. The stream's right there, the pond's right there that's got some stocked trout but also bluegills in it, and make it a half day and a half a bag of Twizzlers.

**Craig Amacker** [00:16:42] Yes. Yes. It is very important. Our T.U. Chapter has an excellent women's program. With a women's clinic every June that I've helped tech at. I think that's a huge. The big thing is I think we just have to be more welcoming to everybody. And, this may sound interesting coming from somebody who runs a shop, but we have to send the message of, you don't need a nine hundred dollar fly rod to start fly fishing. You don't. You know, some of these kits today hundred and fifty bucks. They're great. Everybody asks "is that a good rod?" And it's like, I wished my first fly rod were that good.

**James Thull** [00:17:31] I went fishing with Bob and Bud one day, Bud Lilly and Bob Jacklin. And they both said the fish can't tell whether you're using a fifty dollar rod or a five hundred dollar rod.

**Craig Amacker** [00:17:39] It's exactly - it's exactly right. In fact Bob and I are both very big cheerleaders for St. Croix for that reason.

**Craig Amacker** [00:17:55] You know there's a couple of 'em. As far as fly tiers go, one of em, Larry Dolmer. As crazy as that sounds. He got a lot of people in this part of the country into fly- into fly fishing warm water species. He was a guy that made it sound cool, and look cool. Fast forward fifteen years later you'd got to T.U. and you'd give a talk, and you'd, I've got to talk on fly fishing Southern Wisconsin and I come to my smallmouth section. People would look at me as if I were fishing carp.

**James Thull** [00:18:39] Which is big in Europe.

**Craig Amacker** [00:18:39] Yeah.

**James Thull** [00:18:39] I've fished for them in Hungary.

**Craig Amacker** [00:18:39] Exactly.

**James Thull** [00:18:39] They're a great sportfish.

**Craig Amacker** [00:18:40] And now they're listening. Now they're listening. But for awhile they weren't you know. And he, Larry made us think that fly fishing, that's just for trout. As

far as authors you know there's a lot of good ones out there, Gary Borger. Read a lot from Gary Borger. Landen Mayor. He does a very nice job. And Ed Engle.

**James Thull** [00:19:12] Sure. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Craig Amacker** [00:19:12] Yeah, those guys for sure. I've read Bob's stuff and read Matthew's stuff as well.

**Craig Amacker** [00:19:28] OK the cool thing about this part of the country that I left out earlier. The past the present and the future is happening right now. And I've been privileged- felt very privileged to have been a part of it. You go over to the other side of the Lake in Michigan, and I mean even some of the fly fishing shows there have like 75 year heritages. You know, and the fishing is 200 year plus heritages. And here, that's all happening right now.

**James Thull** [00:20:09] That's great.

**Craig Amacker** [00:20:09] So it's been fun, you know, being in on the front end.