

bakke-bill-2016-04-04.mp4

Bill Bakke [00:00:10] Well that's. It's a whole barrage of experiences. It's mainly experience since I started out with trout fishing and fly rod with the worm on the Big Lewis. And what I discovered there is that the trout fishing was incredible as a wilderness backcountry environment. Very very seldom saw another fisherman. You saw bears and you saw cougar and you saw this great big grand river with huge trout in it and oftentimes a very high catch rate.

Bill Bakke [00:00:43] And now my big lesson from that was that as my dad says you can't fight progress. And I never agreed with them after they built swift dam that killed the river. And since that time I've been concerned about the rivers and the fisheries that they supported and my own experiences with those rivers and what a means to future generations because without those healthy big rivers and having the privilege of being in a remote country to fish and having the ability to be influenced by everything else that's going on around you. Is really important I think for the future of fishing and I lost that on one river. Began to see it being it's being lost on other rivers now and I think that that's gonna reshape angling in the future and how close the how closely anglers pay attention to their the quality of their angling experience, environments that they like to visit to fish at, and what kind of future we're going to have. Is it going to be all catch those hatchery stock Rivers with variable catch rates in kind of heavily used waters? Or is it gonna be something more like remote areas, wild fish and the fishery not always good but at times exceptionally good.

Bill Bakke [00:02:28] 60 60 61 something like that. Swift Creek Dam is the third dam on the big Lewis. The aerial dam the first one went in back in the early nineteen hundreds killed the salmon run in the Big Lewis. That's a Washington Southwest Washington tributary to the Columbia. And it was a fantastically productive system. But in those days they build dams. You mitigate it with hatcheries. So it was assumed that the hatchery would replace the fish that were lost. But that promise actually has never been kept. And we have experienced the declining opportunity for fishing. The areas that we're fishing for salmon steelhead are shrinking because of dams have been built on these rivers and consequently that sport has been changed a lot. Over time. But that's what caused me to be influenced by what we do to rivers like building dams and what happens to my experience personal experience and recognizing that I'm not the only one having those those losses the experience those losses.

Bill Bakke [00:03:53] So I became more interested in conservation although I have all I'm a dedicated fisherman and I love to fish fly for steelhead. That's just one of the things that keeps me going. Well. I think Montana made the right decision. But it's all based upon evaluation and study.

Bill Bakke [00:04:21] It wasn't just something that the agency decided to do. It was you know.

James Thull [00:04:26] You have to have the science.

Bill Bakke [00:04:27] Justified by the science. And it works there and it would work everywhere same way.

Bill Bakke [00:04:37] But what I'm finding out is it took me a while to catch on to this is that there is more money in hatchery fish for the agency than there than comes from wild

fish. Now Montana's done a good job of promoting their wild-caught fishery, become kind of a Mecca. And so people come from all over the world to fish Montana. That's another thing that has escaped like states like Oregon. They haven't managed their fishery even though it has.

Bill Bakke [00:05:13] A world class fishery in many respects. They haven't promoted it that way.

Bill Bakke [00:05:19] So in a way it's like the Skeena river.

Bill Bakke [00:05:22] in B.C. people come from all over the world fish stealhead on the Skeena and it's a huge economic benefit to the province British Columbia that a fishery is all based on the wild production.

James Thull [00:05:39] So does that that economic benefit is that because I would argue in some places like Montana and other places that economic benefit is what can really save a wild river.

Bill Bakke [00:05:50] Yeah it is. It's it's we our culture is based upon making money. We follow the money and it becomes the dominant and primary purpose of our activity.

Bill Bakke [00:06:06] So if a fishery can is has a tremendous amount of economic value, like the Skeena and like the Montana trout fishery, western Montana, then it's competitive with other uses. And then you have a large client base for that fishery. And at client base it's oftentimes very wealthy.

Bill Bakke [00:06:31] And they have a way of getting their point of view across to legislators and to departments that are making decisions. So it's it's becomes political and as well as economic. Oh without that economic justification it's harder to defend it, and that's one of the reasons why like the state of Oregon the fishery was one of the things the commercial fishing in the Columbia back in the eighteen.

Bill Bakke [00:07:07] Eighties forward was what helped settle the country. It was the primary industrial benefit to them to the territory to the state and to Washington as well. But as time has gone on that fishery is diminished, other things have taken over. And the fishery is becoming less less important economically and within state government. And that shows because we're not doing a good job of managing.

Bill Bakke [00:07:43] Oh really. I think it began with, for me it began with.

Bill Bakke [00:07:49] My father taking me fishing every Sunday we would go long distances to go fishing. A couple hours drive from home.

James Thull [00:07:59] That was out here in Oregon.

Bill Bakke [00:08:01] We drive down to collect the Grays River down near the coast of southwest Washington or Columbia River.

Bill Bakke [00:08:10] There's a long haul. Well we have we I saw a lot of country as a result of that. But intellectually you know what brought everything home for me is reading Roderick Haig Brown, his books and then high school were all the way I group that fished a lot of reading that stuff and.

Bill Bakke [00:08:38] Some other books as well that were important. And then I got a chance to meet Haig Brown and have dinner with him and corresponded with him a little bit. And so that all helped me understand his perspective and his perspective became my perspective. He was a conservationist as well as an angler and he cared about is the place where he lived and where he fished, and he had this ability to convey that important connection between himself and the places that he he valued like the Campbell River and the Nimpkish other streams of Vancouver Island.

Bill Bakke [00:09:19] So that was that was important because he was a place-based philosopher and natural naturalist that fished.

Bill Bakke [00:09:27] He wasn't just a traveling angler that visited places and lived somewhere else. He knew the environment that he lived in. And what it meant to him. And I hope that his observations and experiences helped educate him about the place where he lived and became a defender protector of that place.

Bill Bakke [00:09:51] And that's I think a good message. It was a subtle message it is one that you learned about later but that's what's really going on. But that's really true for all of us. We have our favorite places whether we live there or not and taking care of those places becomes part of the fabric of protecting the future. Well it's kind of yeah fish the Deschutes a lot for trout and steelhead.

Bill Bakke [00:10:23] That's the place I normally fish. I have a hard time going south. On 15. To go steelhead fishing. I'd rather go east I guess. But that's.. I've learned life from that river and also the, early on, I fished the Klickitat. And my mainstay was the Wind River. Got to know the Wind really well and had a good history. Some people like you know Bradner talked about it in his book Northwest Angling. And I spent a lot of time there and I learned a lot from the Wind about Steelhead. It's really interesting. We had at the time we had access to the fish way and we counted fish jumping the falls. You know it's interesting to watch the Steelhead because the wind historically only had steelhead above the falls.

Bill Bakke [00:11:27] To it is actually two high, three three different falls, but the upper one is too high for steelhead to actually clear on a jump. And so steelhead the only way that you get up over that falls is to target their jumps so that they hit the green solid water coming over the falls. And they had to wait until July when they get there. You know they came in the river as early as April. They ended up waiting until the green water began to fall over the falls and they would target that and hit it perfectly. So other than hitting it head on and going being forced down they had a kind of belly flop into that and get traction in that green water and swim over the falls. Almost vertically into the river. And if they if they hit miss the green water and got into the foamy water they can't get traction and they would be swept back down. So very accurate and you look at them down below and you watch him and they're poking their heads out they come out. They're looking at the water, poking their heads out, and then accurately jumped to the green water.

James Thull [00:12:45] That's impressive.

Bill Bakke [00:12:46] It was amazing. It taught me a lot about that animal and how adaptable and how adapted it is to its environment. And then they built the fish way around the falls and there's the salmon are going up and they couldn't get up they couldn't get over the falls steelhead could but salmon couldn't. So what they did is they built these strong these great big tarpaulin with large holes drilled into them and across the falls and

hoping that that would stop the salmon hit the tarpaulin and fall back and eventually find the fish way and go over the.

Bill Bakke [00:13:28] Falls to the fishway. Well I didn't work that well because both the salmon steelhead were below the tarp and they're doing this watching the tarp and the wind the downstream wind would blow and billow the tarp out and all the fish would scoot in underneath to and beyond the tarp. And the salmon couldn't get over the high falls.

Bill Bakke [00:13:49] So they're stuck. It was amazing to watch that.

James Thull [00:13:55] That's impressive. That's cool.

Bill Bakke [00:13:58] So I learned a lot about those animals. The one time another thing on the Wind, there's a place called that Enis Spreader calls her rock pool. That's the biggest pool in the river and it's a very steep gradient. Big boulders, steep gradient, small stream, and the less the rock pool so big. I call it the lake pool because it's the biggest one in the whole canyon. It is remote, yeah you had to really hike into it into the canyons steep canyon. And I was down there one time and you know as a grasshopper flew out great big green grasshopper, I don't know the species, flew out landed in the pool right in front of me and three or four steelhead were on it.

Bill Bakke [00:14:43] Immediately. Pool would hold several hundred that are constantly circulating the pool. And there's always fish somewhere. And when that grasshopper hit three or four it came to it right away. And it was gone. After that after the big splash and flurry on the surface and water it quiet down the grasshopper was gone. So I found one and flipped it out there. Same thing happened.

Bill Bakke [00:15:12] Now it's time for a dry fly right.

Bill Bakke [00:15:17] So I put a dry fly on and I threw out there. Same place same thing happened this huge flurry of fish water being thrown white water. And afterwards my fly was sitting there by itself.

Bill Bakke [00:15:32] They refused it. It's very very humbling right.

James Thull [00:15:38] Yeah. That's pretty good.

Bill Bakke [00:15:42] And then another time same thing same place. Fish were circulating. Were going I watched him coming up. So I throw a fly. And let it sit there and wait for a fish to come along. And my leader was going in and out of the water.

Bill Bakke [00:15:59] So it's causing a broken shadow on the bottom. Fish come close coming up and came between the and and the line and he encountered that shadow and he stopped right there, turned, went out and around my fly and leader came back in to where he was traveling before and continued his journey.

Bill Bakke [00:16:23] And I said at that time how do you catch these fish.

Bill Bakke [00:16:26] It's impossible to catch these fish. So I learned a lot about steelhead back in that river because you could see them, and there were exceptional animals. I mean they're still there but fortunately now it's a it's a gene bank managed river and

they're managing only for wild steelhead which is a good change in management because they're releasing non-native hatchery fish in there. That wasn't good for the river. Well.

Bill Bakke [00:17:07] We're losing access and mean Francis when they build a dam and they built and they lose the river and get a reservoir and so people who fish out of boats and like to troll for defenders and worms have more access than they had when the river was there but you still don't have the river. And for people who fish rivers, we're losing river miles. And the rivers typically, well you're losing overall river miles. So that's that's a loss that's you can't replace. At one time they're saying well we can accommodate more anglers in reservoirs than we can on rivers therefore the reservoir is good. And that's the fish commission saying that. Which is odd. Just like the fish come out, one of the biologists for Oregon Fish and Wildlife one time told me that people who spend money on power boats are better fishermen because they're spending they haven't invested more in their fishing than you.

Bill Bakke [00:18:09] Who fishes on the bank. I thought that was odd too.

Bill Bakke [00:18:15] And so it's all a numbers game. Yeah. Losing river miles and gaining reservoir Miles is good for the fishery and good for the fishermen. I don't think so. So we're we're losing and the hatchery has been treated as a replacement for wild fish. And that promise hasn't been kept. We haven't, mitigation has never been, equal to what we lost in terms of the fish themselves, their productivity as well as their numbers. And so if we're losing river miles we're getting Reservoir miles and the hatchery promise. hasnt lived up to it's... To be real.

Bill Bakke [00:18:58] So overall we're experiencing a diminished opportunity and experience as anglers. But each generation has to learn that lesson, is if you don't know what's been lost or what was there beforehand.

Bill Bakke [00:19:18] You can't really equate it with what today's environment is like. It's kind of like that same thing in science. It's like the shifting baseline. So what you experience each generation what it experiences, it makes a judgment call that that's way it always has been. And it hasn't it's been much better. The way each generation is experienced. And consequently if you're not aware of the history and what happens.

Bill Bakke [00:19:50] To the places where you fish then you become kind of an advocate for the status quo or what exists today rather than trying to achieve what was better earlier before your time. And Montana has had a good chance to maintain that because it placed emphasis on a wild trout. So you have to take care of the environment and hopefully not you know not plug rivers up with Culverts and roads and dams so that you can maintain the fishery and the healthy rivers. So that that maybe is less of a problem for some people in Montana.

Bill Bakke [00:20:36] That fish for trout but for anadromous fish on the West Coast it's a huge problem.

Bill Bakke [00:20:42] We're losing capacity and opportunity. And the crowds are expanding, and the quality of the fisheries from my point of view is going down. Where you have to compete with other people in order to fish a run. It's like a friend of mine one time we're camped on the Deschutes and we're up O dark 30 to get down to the spot before we're road fishing.

Bill Bakke [00:21:08] You get to run so you can have it to yourself at least one run a day. And I said Where are you going to fish? And he says I want to beat the black Jeep and that's so because that black Jeep was in the run. He wanted to fish every day. And he was down there two hours before daylight parked waiting to go fishing. So that's the kind of competition, that's not good. That's not a good experience beating the black Jeep. Should be on the walk down to the river and enjoy a piece of water that is productive. And you don't have to compete for it. And that's where like they manage the middle fork of the salmon in terms of float trips. You never see another floater, even though there's a lot of use because they stagger the launch dates. And I think that's going to have to happen if you're going to maintain the quality experience for fishing who has have limited access. Not banning access. Everybody will have an opportunity but it's kind of like drawing a deer tag where you can hunt and fish in order to maintain at least on some of the real valuable rivers where everybody seems to want to go and order fish. In this you know Skeena is kind of like that.

Bill Bakke [00:22:32] And the Deschutes will probably end up going in that direction. I would think. It doesn't. It's impossible.

James Thull [00:22:47] Hatchery fish can't.

Bill Bakke [00:22:48] their survival is poor. You know they're on steelhead for instance you're seeing a change. You take a wild fish and run it through the hatchery program and its survival rate is lower than what wild parents is. Just that hatch experience has reduced its ability to survive but it survives better than the old old hatchery fish have been cultivated generation after generation, survives lot better than them. And when it spawns naturally with wild fish then the progeny from that mating so have a lower survival rate than it was just two wild fish. So and so it has both an ecological and genetic impact on a wild run. The hatchery fish do. And yet there's there's you can't replace because the environments are different things. Like one biologist says the only thing that that hatcheries and rivers have in common is the water. Otherwise everything else is changed and you can't expect an animal in these these animals, what they've done is they've adapted the constantly changing environment so they have to be very flexible trait wise and have a good genetic diversity in traits to constantly cope with changing environments. And that's why the hatchery works. You can bring him a wild fish into the hatchery and although it's not easy to begin with because they don't convert food well they don't graze rear very well in that environment but in a couple of generations they fit pretty well. Get them to do and you've got to have a hatchery stock then. But initially they don't do well at all but it's because they're so adaptable that they hatchery actually gets a foothold and can be productive. You can release Smolts from a hatchery and get adults. But you can't.

Bill Bakke [00:24:54] You can't replace a naturally spawning rearing animal with a hatchery fish because they don't work well once they are adapted to the hatchery in the wild environment.

James Thull [00:25:05] Smolts have more potential than adult fish.

Bill Bakke [00:25:09] They have they raise them to a good size so they can avoid some predators and their survival rate is higher than if you release them at a smaller size in younger age and so you can you know they can survive to adult stage and return as adults. So they get some and some hatches have gotten you know as much as 5 percent return rate. most time is 1 percent or less. When you're releasing millions of hatchery fish and that ends up being quite a few fish.

Bill Bakke [00:25:51] You mean exotics.

James Thull [00:25:52] Well the browns brookies.

Bill Bakke [00:25:58] Well they're going to be and they're sharing the same habitat to some point they are competitive. Brown, the brook and the, and the

Bill Bakke [00:26:07] And the bull trout don't get along because they're both charr. They both prefer the same kinds of habitats. And they also interbreed. So that's been a real difficulty in bull trout which are listed as an endangered species to to recover bull trout. Because you're all there, most of the streams up they're in have Brook trout have been released into. So that's a big problem.

Bill Bakke [00:26:35] Brown Trout can be predations as well.

Bill Bakke [00:26:39] They seem to have a certain age become more prone to eating fish than insects. But the rainbow and the cutthroat don't get along well because they interbreed and they're competitive with one another. So there's always a problem associated with having mixed you know non-native and native fish in the same system. As always there's a downside to it, usually. It was interesting I asked a friend of mine who was in Trout Unlimited kind of involved with some leadership positions about developing a wild native wild trout program. Between Trout Unlimited and the organization I was running. And he says Well wild it's fine but not native. It's mainly because in Montana you have a lot of non-native species and Montana is very important to Trout Unlimited funding so you don't want to insult the people that are funding you.

Bill Bakke [00:27:47] So wild native became that was impossible but wild certainly was yeah. Yeah. But why sanctuaries. Why why not.

Bill Bakke [00:28:03] State fish and game and federal fisheries like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service.

Bill Bakke [00:28:10] We also committed to and through the Endangered Species Act. Ultimately we have an obligation to be committed to protecting the native species. So why not start there. And.

Bill Bakke [00:28:25] That's, but that obligation is a good one. What I am concerned about is that there is kind of a thought.

Bill Bakke [00:28:33] In people's mind, the institutional thought as well as angler is that we if we if we if we have native wild fish in the left branch river then we can have hatchery wild non-native hatchery in the wild in the other rivers. So you're kind of zoning your environment.

Bill Bakke [00:29:02] Well the environments change. Forest fire and volcanism we've had this big experience with Mount St. Helens which is an incredible experience in terms of fish.

Bill Bakke [00:29:15] So what's your habitat you choose to zone for wild native may change over time and what you want to have is your wild populations productive and

diverse throughout the landscape. And your approach should be landscape based not zoned into particular chunks of the landscape because it's so.

Bill Bakke [00:29:41] again that's a false promise. Actually though that would be able you would be able to persist there. Climate change may change a lot of that. That's been so for a while. Maybe fish, like Yellowstone Lake.

Bill Bakke [00:29:56] I don't. I don't know how the lake trout got in the Yellowstone Lake but it was. It's been a disaster.

Bill Bakke [00:30:04] And he had the bucket brigades among the anglers who were fighting that all the time small mouth bass being planted everywhere other predations and competitive Steelhead and salmon. Walleye appeared in the Columbia the best walleye River in the world right now apparently.

Bill Bakke [00:30:20] And so it's now it's all over and the scientists are saying that the impact of these non-native fish like Bass and walleye and channel cats are as having as a huge impact as habitat change and dams on the salmon runs. And the only way, how do you get rid of them? once they're there you can't get rid of is impossible.

James Thull [00:30:46] Yeah. I just interviewed Todd Cole and Dan Wenk from Yellowstone and Dan was saying we'll never get the last two.

Bill Bakke [00:30:53] No no no. But. Yeah. the bucket brigade is very active. You know they could maybe get the last two. That doesn't mean they're not going to come back. And that's that goes to angler education. You know what they value.

James Thull [00:31:11] Yeah. And I think. And I mean in my mind anyway I think a good part of the reason why you, is that like you mentioned with TU but I think that a good part of the reason why we won't in a lot of places ever get back to native Fish or native fish will be forced to survive alongside invasives, Brown, brookies etc. is angler pressure. Yeah. Anglers want to you know. I mean brown trout are popular fish to go for, brook trout are brookies rainbows those are.

Bill Bakke [00:31:44] What initially when Brown out were brought into to New York the anglers were opposed to it. They want to protect their Brookies. That was thier fishery. And when the state decided that they're going to import brown trout from Europe the anglers were opposed to it. Now we're not. Yeah that's how time changes this.

James Thull [00:32:07] It's true it's true. So you think that it will ever get that way with the carp?

Bill Bakke [00:32:15] No, the carp I think are going to become more and more important to the fishery experience.

James Thull [00:32:19] Yeah, and it's really popular in Europe.

Bill Bakke [00:32:22] Yeah and you're seeing Oh I know people in Europe that come to Oregon and say carp fishing here is grand compared to England. England are so smart you can't catch them and Oregon very very catchable. In England they have carp that are named and every time somebody catches it it's recorded. What size and how much it weighed. So they have a roster of each fish in the pond that gets caught and sometimes

you sit in the pond and you'll be there for three days without a bite. Because even though the ponds full of fish because they are wise to you. So Carp are definitely a challenge. And I'm seeing carp flies in the fly shops. So it's become it as the salmon and steelhead go and go away is too much competition out there and all that stuff you traveled so far. Why not go down in the local pond on Sullivan's Island half hour away.

Bill Bakke [00:33:22] Great experience. Big fish, strong fish, fussy fish, hard to catch sometimes fish, all the challenges anglers like.

James Thull [00:33:32] True. The big difference I always saw in my mind anyway with carp. I think most of us grew up at least I did grew up harvesting fish you know I mean I had more than one brook trout and you know in my belly and of course when I was a kid in the midwest went for bluegill and walleye perch and stuff like that. Carp I don't think are as good of an eating fish, to my knowledge. Yeah but but certainly fun to catch I went fishing them once in Hungary and it was quite the experience.

Bill Bakke [00:34:03] Huh. Get get to know the place where you fish and where it's, what it used to be, what it is and where it's going and be an advocate for it. It really depends on you knowing more than what you know and put it in context so you can anticipate where it's going. And get your buddies to also think about these things and become advocates. Fish without an advocate angler advocates.

Bill Bakke [00:34:46] You see how the fish is being shaped because people are drinking the Kool-Aid and the agencies are primarily dumping fish in the river so they can sell licenses they're not conservation oriented. It's not part of the program. They may say so. May have policies like that emphasize the primary importance of conservation but it's not what they, that's not how they make their money. Wild fish costs money, they don't make money. So unless you're getting federal money like through the ESA there's no. And that's the wild fish become.

Bill Bakke [00:35:22] Value because it generates dollars. But what they've been doing the institutions the agencies have been spending that on hatchery production, wild fish conservation. So we don't have a like on the Columbia River basin and we do not have a wild salmon recovery program. We have a hatchery replacement program for salmon and steelhead on the Columbia River. And that's all we're funding. So the anglers have to be advocates for what they value and people who values place that their fishing experiences and they want to hand it off to the next generation which most want to do. Being an advocate is a natural thing to do and it's it's actually an essential thing to do. The future is whether or not they're aligned with nature and believe in nature. And want us to have government maintain the value and productivity of nature. And that that goes to how you protect streams how you manage streams. With regard to all the competition areas for the water for the grazing for the timber for the fishing that is having an impact on that stream. Those are complex social and political issues that you can't ignore. And so you have to organize and if you're organized in such a way that you're only only focused on one aspect and not coordinated with people that are also organized around some other aspect such as water quality water temperature habitat then you're not you're going to fail. But if you're if you're if you're focused on conservation, being an advocate for knowing the fishery for the fish themselves because that's the basis of your fishery and the environment that sustains those fish then you're and you grow that advocacy you organize you have to organize it in order to get your point across.

Bill Bakke [00:37:57] Then you have a chance to maintain something for the long term. It's not guaranteed to have a chance. A lot better chance than if you're just grumbling in your hovel about what's gone on and how you've been mistreated. That does not work. It doesn't work is to say I I want to keep this stream a secret. Yeah yeah that doesn't work either.

James Thull [00:38:21] No it will always get out.

Bill Bakke [00:38:22] Yeah. So, so the organizations, you know what like in Oregon we have an outfit called Water Watch. We didn't have Water Watch we would have to invent it because it is focused on fish but on water and fish and what you know I I hate water law. So Byzantine. That you just can't deal with it. But they have attorneys that deal with it and they hold the counties in the state and municipalities accountable for protecting streams and fish. And so that's a good group to fund. As an individual to fund it as as organizations to cooperate with in order to make a larger footprint of advocacy the places that you respect love and expect to pass on to future generations. So as that kind of organization I'm talking about not only anglers organizing their interest but organizing with other groups that are also making a huge impact on the protection of those environments. They're supporting your fish. So it's really a community effort. Initially in 1983 I founded Oregon trout at Dick May's request who had.

Bill Bakke [00:39:52] Founded California Trout and I spent a lot of time with California Trout. I went down to your conferences and stuff gave papers and stuff like that back in early days.

Bill Bakke [00:40:03] back in the 70s and he says when are you going to do it for Oregon. OK I did it for you. We formed Oregon Trout. Friend of mine. In to Washington formed Washington Trout. We were on a roll. So getting these conservation advocate groups up the coast. Then Oregon Trout went away. Politics, you know.

Bill Bakke [00:40:25] So it's no longer exists. So I formed Native Fish Society which is carrying on the mission of Oregon Trout and the whole idea is to hold the fish agencies accountable for their management program. And you know like Oregon law state law that enables the Oregon Fish and Wildlife says prevent serious depletion of any indigenous species. That's state law. Is the agency doing it? No if you look at the record we're about 3 percent of what our native species abundance used to be. So it's not working. Why is it working why is it not working? And so that frankly comes down to we're focused on Harvest and hatcheries. The authority of the state agency. And we're supportive of the habitat. Rests like the water Oregon Water Watch and other groups. That want to take the main thrust of protecting particular habitats; forestry, grazing, water quality. We support them but we're not we're not the ones who are primarily focused on that. But we are primarily focused on harvesting hatchery impacts on native wild fish. And as it turns out and very few other people are other groups are there's a few more. In Oregon I can is basically its Native Fish Society. In Washington, there's three groups: The Conservation Angler, Wild Steelhead Coalition, and Wild Fish Conservancy that are focused on harvesting and hatching impacts. And just recently The Wild Fish Conservancy just sued the National Marine Fisheries Service over the operation of the Mitchell act hatcheries about 30 some hatcheries on the Columbia River. And that's gonna be a huge case. Even may even end up being showing that the ESA and the treaty Indian treaty rights are in conflict that. Some sort of compatibility has to be developed legally between the two.

Bill Bakke [00:42:43] It's going to be interesting.

James Thull [00:42:45] By ESA endangered species act is that your referring to?

Bill Bakke [00:42:49] And Indian Treaty rights and fishing rights and you know for the most part the state agencies. I don't know about Montana but I would be surprised if it's any different than Oregon for instance the and the Washington as far as I can tell, are not organized to protect and preserve the sustainable flow of public benefits from nature. They're only organized to address their constituent needs. If you're a water resources department taking water out of rivers and so a lot of there are rivers in Montana and Oregon everywhere are over appropriated. They have low flows during summer hotter water less habitat for trout and salmonids. The Department of Forestry, its job is to log provide benefits to its constituents. So the State Government isn't organized for conservation either. Federal government likewise until the spotted owl case came along with the National Forests. Wasn't organized to protect streams either but now they're trying to erode that there is constant pressure to erode conservation. And now that the Forest Service is under a lot of pressure in terms of expanding logging. Now there's like the militants that took over here for a while. That and that's a whole subculture out there that's organizing itself has gained traction with people like presidential candidates like.

Bill Bakke [00:44:40] Cruz that. Well we want to do this. We want to privatize all public lands. Well the public lands are our investment in the future and they are owned by the public and administered by the federal agency that's responsible for that public land. That public land is to be can be used as long as the public benefits aren't spoiled by the use. And that's what aggravates people like that are against public lands. They want to turn it all over to public benefit to private benefit. And that would be a disaster for the West. And that's that's what we're faced with constantly. And what I can't believe is that there you know there's a lot of people committed to environmental and to fish protection. But as a society we seem to be oblivious to what's going on. And without a greater public supporting the conservation movement knowing what's being what we had what we have and what we're likely to lose if things keep going the way they are unless they have that perspective and the general public supports you know protecting natural nature and public lands, we're gonna lose them.

Bill Bakke [00:46:20] Absolutely vital and it's, but once you got it you've got to protect it. And that's what I was one of the lessons I learned like I got the wild fish policy in Oregon passed by the Fish and Wildlife Commission in 1978. OK and. This one Assistant Chief of Fisheries told me as a friend of mine we fish together now that he was working at ODFW Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and that when that wild fish policy was passed, he says it was dead on arrival. Because the agency's conceptual foundation for how it manages fish and wildlife the wild fish policy didn't fit. I went to the legislature and got five positions through the legislature paid for an agency that was for a natural production program helping staff people responsible for natural production in Oregon Fish and Wildlife got the money and now they we hired to positions. They hired the positions they didn't want the position they didn't want the money. And they eventually eroded the program. So once you get it you got to learn how to keep it. And. You know once you make a change even a tiny regulation change like on the Deschutes I got a slot limit patterned after South Fork of the Boise River for trout for a slot limit on trout. And. That was 20 years ago. And just this last year a proposal was made to get rid of it by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. And the proposal was from an individual in the Department of Fish and Wildlife that's still disliked me because my changing the regulations 20 years ago and they tried to get rid of it. And that's that's how these things how you have to be vigilant always because once you make a change even this little tiny regulation trout fishing regulation

change you have to remain vigilant forever to keep the agency unless you change the mind of the agency and its in its premise how it operates. You got to protect it from the agency. A major impediment to conservation management that I have found comes first from this from the State Department of Fish and Wildlife .

James Thull [00:48:55] Now is that a place where organizations like TU and FFF can play a role and they need to organize and masses of anglers to kind of watch the gate.

Bill Bakke [00:49:05] They have to watch the gate once they change to get the gate open a little bit. They've got to put a block there to keep it from closing. Well they were. All climate change is a huge one. And we don't know how that's gonna work out. We don't even know if we're going to survive it.

Bill Bakke [00:49:28] I mean that's severe.

James Thull [00:49:28] I think you and I will be all right.

Bill Bakke [00:49:30] Yeah well but the next generation may be in a lot of pain. So we should be more concerned maybe about that problem since you know the earth is our habitat, that's our life support system and without it you know we're here by accident.

Bill Bakke [00:49:54] And we could be gone as a result of change.

James Thull [00:49:58] I just read something, they say there's less sea ice now than they've ever recorded.

Bill Bakke [00:50:03] Yeah. Oh it's. And it's the Earth has been here before not the first time. We're just helping along. Quite a bit. So that's one of the big things. How are you going to make adjustments. But for the most part I think what it is is that anglers you know people organized around the neighborhood.

Bill Bakke [00:50:25] OK. And they it's almost cultural differences among people. We separate ourselves based on the color skin the way we talk what we do. We live in neighborhoods so what we need to do is we need to expand that. We need to incorporate more diversity within our neighborhood. In order to protect the whole of the earth in order to maintain our life support system. And the anglers could take a note from that too is that they need and they need to begin to talk among themselves about what's really important? Fly fishing, lure fishing, bait fishing. Maybe that isn't the problem anymore. Maybe the problem is maintaining rivers that have fish in them and how and how can all of us whether we fish or not be concerned about that. Well I'll tell you another story. My dad my I got my dad to go fishing because I kept bugging him right. So we went down to a local pond in Portland called Triangle Lake is between a dump and a railroad grade. OK. And when we got there and there's a black guy fishing there. My dad my my family did not like black people as far as they're concerned. The reason I heard all that how is your property values will decline if you move in. OK so that was the cultural environment that I was in at five years old and six years old seven. So that's when my cultural environment. We get there and this black guy has fish I could have fishing. He's ready to go. He gave me his bait and he showed me how to fish. And then he left. I caught the biggest goddamn croppie in my life on his bait and I didn't get a chance to thank him. And I landed that fish up on the bank and I jumped on it. I was so excited trying to keep it from flopping back into the river. Into the pond. And since then I never agreed with my parents about black people.

Bill Bakke [00:52:38] That's that's the kind of experience that that carries you forward you know. And the more the more we we we learn how to to go beyond our own boundaries. That white guy fishing fly flies for Atlantic Salmon boundary. Better off we're all going to be. But that's still important. It's not that we want to diminish it. We want to share it. And I've you know on the Deschutes occasionally you see Indians fishing dip netting for trout. And oftentimes they do it in the winter for steelhead. And the Indians say you guys are you you want you want to play with your fish. And I said I talked to one of the guys from the warm springs. And he used to work for Intertribal Fish Commission. And I got to know a lot of them. And I said was it fun dip netting those fish? Yeah it was alot of fun catching those fish Well.

Bill Bakke [00:53:41] We're all guilty of having fun fishing.

James Thull [00:53:47] That's good. That's good.

Bill Bakke [00:53:49] And I it's all comes down to that. We enjoy it and we like to do it and we become very good at it and it's part of our experience it's part of our.

Bill Bakke [00:53:58] Of our lifestyle. And it would be nice to be able to expand that to Indian fishermen. Know like like I always maintain I support your treaty right now. I think they'd been abused tremendously and I don't support their biology at all. I think they're ruining the salmon runs. They're worse than the states and the states are bad enough you know. So you have to get beyond your own camp and see if you can form more of a emphasis on the future and the quality of your own life as well as everybody else's life. And to me the whole nation is suffering from the lack of everybodys in camps. We're not we're not working as a society as a community anymore to solve problems. That's all you are in the environmental community all your trying to solve problems. What you learn is you can't do it by yourself. I

Bill Bakke [00:55:03] You gotta expand it.

James Thull [00:55:04] And the more diverse you are I think the stronger you are. You have a bunch of different ponds you can dip that toe into so.

Bill Bakke [00:55:10] it's absolutely it's absolutely valuable because it a captures time.

Bill Bakke [00:55:22] Captures time so that you can experience it at least partially. That's why I read old documents you know fisheries reports 1895. Sure. It gives me a perspective on what they're doing then helps me realize what's been going on since then in my own time and how we're similar or different from that time. So that that's a really important. I'm not expressing it very well but it's really important because you're capturing time and you're capturing experiences you're capturing inspiration and capturing observations that people through time can experience and learn from. And that that creates a a continuum. Of experience that each generation can share with future generations. And each generation can learn from previous generations about what was important to them vital. The Oregon Fly Fishing Club has such a library. In the Multnomah county library and they they used to publish Creel about the place the rivers and the fisheries and a huge library of literature. It's all there for us to learn from. Haig Brown was a teacher not just of his time, on how to respect it, but for all time.

James Thull [00:57:04] I always think that's how we move forward as a culture as society as a species we historically we've built upon what those that came before us learned and figured out. And if we lose that then we're not taking that step forward that we could be.

Bill Bakke [00:57:22] That's absolutely vital. I think that that collection of history is as important as any collection history of the world. However it's focused and I've learned like AG Wood fishing fishing Atlantic salmon he developed a white fly. Oh.

Bill Bakke [00:57:40] That's odd it's just kind of like a painted hook it was just a painted hook catching salmon on it that's how you fish it. And the receptivity of the fish at the particular time of year you catch him on a riffled hook you don't have to have feathers on it. And I've learned that steelhead for instance I started learning you know fish up for size 4 hook I used to fish only 4's for steelhead, I'd get pulls. English called it fluffing the fly, pull on the fly the steelhead, it but they wouldn't take it they pull. People say What was that was a trout. No that was not a trout. Steelhead pull soft, trout grab. So I heard somewhere maybe reading Hewitt. They dropped a fly down in size maybe pay attention to color but size for sure and I get a pull. But a hook up fishing the same fish that pulling before take the fly. I said well why not fish a fly that's smaller all the time. I don't get a fluffed right. So I started fishing. You know I've got I've caught steelhead on size 18. I've been fishing tens and 12's an 8's and doing well and I don't get out to fish much. So my experimentation is rather brief but it's been over about four or five years now. Fishing a small fly during the summer for summer steelhead and having good success. Its a kick to fish a trout fly and catch a great big searun rainbow.

James Thull [00:59:28] That's excellent. That's a great story.

Bill Bakke [00:59:32] And that's what I found out in England and eastern Canada fishing Atlantic salmon, when the water warms they bring the flies down. They're fishing 12' for Atlantic salmon you don't see steelhead fishermen around here doing it but it works.

James Thull [00:59:46] I just talked to some Atlantic salmon guys James Woods, Gary Tanner. Folks like that and. I think it was Gary that said he's he's almost convinced some days that it does not matter what color fly you have. They don't care. There it is it's so random what they're going to strike on occasion he said it's just getting that right fish in the right moment you know and it can be blue green whatever that.

Bill Bakke [01:00:16] But there are those times when that size and color matter. So I'm not the one who has bought into the idea well it makes no difference. But, but the because I've had selective Steelhead. Fussy. And I used to fish on the Wind River I started fishing following the direction of Haig Brown fishing on the.

Bill Bakke [01:00:41] Hubner no the Heber River and Gold river.

Bill Bakke [01:00:47] On the island and his fishing upstream dry. Now people, steelhead fishermen so I kind of run dry fly. No you caught it on a Skinner fishing like a wet fly on the surface dragging it across the surface. I'm talking about fishing upstream dry dead drift. Steelhead love upstream dry dead drifted flies. Most a lot of people don't fish them that way. Something about it. If you do see this riffle coming in by some big mossy rocks and deepens to green pool, you throw up the number 10 caddis bucktail on to that green pool big head comes up takes it down.

Bill Bakke [01:01:30] That's exciting.

Bill Bakke [01:01:32] I see that so often on the fishing. I learned how to fish it on the Wind river and I caught my first fish on a dry fly on Little White. Salmon, the eleven pound female on a dry on a steelhead bee.

James Thull [01:01:49] I bet that doesn't get old.

Bill Bakke [01:01:51] No. It's pretty exciting And you know what. And actually it's you know on a small clear stream that's probably the better way to fish because you're always coming up behind the fish, so fishing down to it. Less likely to see you and your less you know disturbing the water your not scent in the water you know not disturbing the bottom and creating you know sand and dirt fog.

James Thull [01:02:15] Sure.

Bill Bakke [01:02:16] And so that's actually probably a more effective way to fish on small streams. And Lee Wulff that they're fishing on the Upsalquitch I guess it was and nobody is catching anything on wet flies. The water is 70 degrees. Jesus. That's stressful as hell for salmon are all located near a thermal refuge all strung out and nobody can catch any. So they start they start fishing on dry flies. He says high water temperatures like that dry flies work better than wet flies. Interesting.

Bill Bakke [01:02:54] It's interesting.

James Thull [01:02:55] Something I wouldn't have considered.

Bill Bakke [01:02:57] No but that's what a reading does it opens doors