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[00:00:11] Fishing for me not just fly fishing but fishing in general is really the quieting of my mind. That's really what I'm looking for so I've got a very active brain and constantly thinking about projects and things that we can do things where we can be useful. And so the opportunity to go fishing. Really. Gives me the opportunity to kind of clear some of that stuff out of my mind. I've always found that with fly fishing in particular you have to be incredibly present. So you know you're paying attention to the water you're paying attention to the bugs to the wind to all the different things that are happening around you. And that attention to detail a lot of time takes all the um, the other stuff that I'm thinking about and kind of lets it go away. It's been it's been a great way to kind of to kind of chill out and relax.

[00:01:07] No, my dad introduced me. He came out here from Baltimore Maryland. He played football at Carroll State University and one of the guys on the team had grown up on a ranch and knew how to fly fish. So he went and took a bunch of the guys and taught him how to fly fish. And so my dad had me fishing. Probably before I could walk or really close and I was fly fishing on my own when I was five. So I'm 46 now, been doing it a long time. Yeah I think absolutely he.

[00:01:42] You know my dad never got to see me become a professional angler or or an owner of recreation outdoor businesses fly fishing companies and things like that. But it was a great time that we got to spend together. It was great being in the outdoors. I grew up up in the mountains and so I really kind of threw off my mountain persona when I moved to the city and I really enjoy being in the city I like like an urban lifestyle. But those opportunities to get back up to the mountains and fish particularly are very important.

[00:02:22] Yeah I think there's a there's a couple of spots. I love Cheesman Canyon. You know in Colorado.

[00:02:27] Growing up here in on the front range or Denver. That's really the spot where where you cut your teeth. So if if you can go up there and be successful and catch fish consistently you know you've kind of made it as an angler. And so I think that's that holds a lot of special memories. For me I spent there were years. Where I would spend upwards of 100 days in the Canyon hiking back in there and fishing all the nooks and crannies. I've had some some really fantastic days back in there. I also love Saltwater Creek on a section that we built our Fly Fishing Club. We had an opportunity to take a body, body of water that had been totally destroyed by water delivery systems and mining and sanding gravel and lots of different manmade influences and to kind of bring that back and give Mother Nature an opportunity to regain itself. It's become a tremendous fishery and it's it's always nice for me to be able to go out there and spend the day.

[00:03:39] Yeah absolutely so I started my first company when I was 26. It wasn't really a company so much as it was a job I couldn't find a job so I started a job myself. And as that grew we found some tremendous success in construction and real estate development. But about five or six years in I realized that the time that I was spending in work was affecting my personality. I had kind of been a happy go lucky kind of a friendly guy and working in construction. You know 80 90 hours a week it was making me a lot more aggressive than a lot more quarrelsome than than I that I liked to be.

[00:04:23] So I had the good fortune of being able to sell those companies in my late 20s and early 30s and what I really wanted to do was rebuild kind of my my business skill set

and my and my assets around the ability to control my time. And one of the things that had been the most important to me during that first run as a entrepreneur was the time where I got to go fishing. It was really like I said before the opportunity that I had to clear my mind. And so the first company that I bought with my with my private equity firm was a fly fishing outfitter. And. I did it because I wanted to stay connected to fly fishing. I wanted to stay connected to the opportunity to go into the outdoors. I wanted it to be something that was so ingrained into the business that it would never be a question of whether or not we were taking time away from work or from our families to be able to go and fish. It was something that was that was mandatory and necessary. And so that's really how it started and.

[00:05:32] The opportunity to bring. I would say a high level of business acumen into the the fly fishing industry.

[00:05:40] At the time when I got into it there weren't a ton of people that were really focused on the business aspects it was more of a hobby job or a hobby career where people had retired and opened up shops or had gotten into guiding kind of that's a as a transition from either full time employment into retirement or from kind of out of early schooling undergraduate or high school into whatever their careers were going to be. And so there was a great opportunity there to to formalize some of the business process and by doing that we were able to find a tremendous amount of success.

[00:06:23] Well we were looking to vertically integrate the fly fishing model. So we had you know we had successfully kind of privatized guiding where. Years before that in Colorado. If you were an independent guide you could work for any outfitter. There was no there was no exclusivity. So we had gotten exclusive. We spent a lot of time guiding on the public water, guiding in Cheesman Canyon. And what I realized was that it was hard for us to differentiate our product from anybody else's product as we were all selling the same guys in the same water. So as we just started to privatize the guide side what we were looking for was a way to have more exclusive access to water. And we wanted to try to do that in a way that didn't impact. The general public when they were out there fishing. So that when they showed up there were guide trips spread out everywhere and there was nowhere for for you to fish which is what I remember when I was just out fishing by myself. And so we started to lease private water kind of a day at a time and then we started to lease it for a season at a time and then eventually we got to the point where we were managing Private Fishing Club. And that experience kind of led to the idea that it all makes sense. But as long as you're leasing the land in the water it's hard to do the improvements that you would want to do the leasehold improvements that you would do in any kind of tenant finish scenario where you could really improve the fishery and make it really positive for fly fishing so you could give great experiences to people who had never been before and you wanted to make sure they had some success all the way up to people who had been fishing for years like me 40 years and still wanted the challenge of of having to find the hard and the difficult fish to catch in the water that was kind of more raw.

[00:08:23] And so a member of that club Keith Van Horn and I started talking about the idea of maybe setting up a different model of a club. And he actually found the first property that we purchased up in Lincoln Hills on a flyer that was in the local grocery. And so when we went up there and looked at it it was it had been on the market for a long time and it was something that. You really had to have a lot of vision to be able to see the possibility of what it could be. It was it had been sand and gravel mined most recently but many years of hydraulic mining. And then about 50 years of it being kind of left kind of as a dump. So there were no. Washing machines and old cars and roofs and you know anything you can imagine kind of dumped on the property and around the river corridor

and the river was in a channel that was kind of a minimum 10 feet on about a 70 degree angle straight down in it in some places as many as 60 65 feet straight down. So even for a young athletic people once you got down in that river quarter you really couldn't get out. There were no large rocks of any type. They had all been taken out. And so every time there was a runoff cycle the river just kept you know grinding itself further and further down into this channel.

[00:09:53] And it was very very difficult to fish at anything above maybe a hundred CFS and the average flow through that section of river was 350 CFS so you can only imagine a little bit in the spring when it first came out from it and the ice and then you know right you know late in the fall when the water had dropped down before the before it froze again were really the windows that you could fish. And so you know we decided to take a chance on it and we bought that property and we started stream improvements and about six years of stream improvements later.

[00:10:29] And I think now we've acquired 22 23 properties. Keith actually was bought out by my current partner in 2010.

[00:10:42] And so we've been at it for for a long time. Robert Smith is my is my current partner. Um one of the neat things about Lincoln Hills is it's an African-American resort community that was started back in 1922 so 1922 in Colorado. The mayor and the governor were both openly in the Klan the Klan was marching up and down Broadway and Lincoln Hills was the only place that African-Americans could go and recreate in the outdoors in that time frame. There were three other similar resorts but Lincoln Hills was the only one west of the Mississippi. The only one that was that was founded by an African-American owned company in the one that had a philanthropic nature to it. So in that respect it's it's special to me. And we've worked really hard to to provide access to as many people as possible give them opportunity to come up and learn about the outdoors.

[00:11:37] All right. Is it important also for you to preserve that kind of history and culture and heritage there?

[00:11:42] Absolutely yeah. We've, uh, not just preserve it but I would say re invigorated and bring it back so it's alive again. Lincoln Hills.

[00:11:52] Was in its heyday from the early 30s through the mid 60s and then after civil rights when African-Americans could could buy properties and move to different places like Vail and Aspen and Steamboat, Lincoln Hills kind of fell on on disrepair. And it was like that for about 50 years. And so we've really worked hard to bring that back bring a lot of the culture and the arts the enjoyment of the outdoors the opportunity for lots of different people to come up and spend time. And so we're we're making great progress in terms of bringing that that spirit back.

[00:12:36] Yeah absolutely I would. I would disagree a little bit in that. I think. Fly fishing is. Is an Anglo-dominated sport. But I would say fishing in general is. Is something that has been practiced by you know. All people near water for ever.

[00:13:00] Certainly. And I should have clarified and said fly fishing.

[00:13:03] Yeah. So I think with regard to fly fishing you know I think fly fishing you know doesn't just have a kind of an inclusivity problem with respect to minorities and women. I think it has it has a problem in terms of bringing in new young anglers. And I think what

happened from my perspective like I said I've been fishing for over 40 years and the first 20 odd years of my fishing career. We were really inclusive. And I think the opportunities to learn and to share information about flies or good fishing spots or all that stuff was pretty ubiquitous there wasn't very many places where you could go and someone wouldn't help you. You didn't have to have you know 400 500 800 dollar rods or reels or waders or equipment. You know you could get a you know a dollar fly from the store and you could fish with with an old spinning rod like I did for the first five seven years that I fished with with an old antique reel taped to the to the button that spinning rod with electrical tape and you know an old line that I had gotten somewhere that had had it had so many cracks in it it looked like it was a special design on the line. And you know we didn't have leaders and Tippet. We just had straight motto that we were just tired of the end to be able to fish and we caught tons of fish and we didn't have waders we fished in our jeans and our sneakers and and we were we. You know we developed as as really skilled anglers I think. And then somewhere around a river runs through it. The entire mantra around fly fishing changed and it became a sport that was dominated by the more affluent. And with that and their their purchasing of a lot of the old hobby guys that had started those shops and who'd run those shops for those first 20 years we ended up with a new type of person in the shops and I can remember very clearly going into the shop that I ended up buying you know years later and I'd been a customer of that shop since I was. Teeny. And I went in there and there were new guys and I had been I was I'd been away at college so I hadn't been in in a while and when I walked in the first thing they said to me is well you know that there's no catfish up on the Colorado with the breeze unit. And I thought. Yeah I know there's no catfish. Like what. Why would you even say that to me. I kind of brushed it off.

[00:15:58] And I bought what I had taken me the entire summer to earn enough money to buy my first pair of Gore-Tex waders. So I had put three hundred and twenty dollars down on these waders and I was so happy and it was it was great because I was moving out of the old rubber boots that I had. And so I wore those waders all summer and I didn't realize or probably have enough money to buy gravel guards. I didn't even know gravel guards were. So the gravel had gotten in my boots and I had worn holes into the bottom of my stocking feet and so I brought them back at the end of the summer and I said hey I would like to send these back to save and have them put new stocking feet on. And they said there's absolutely no way you could do that you're just going to have to buy another pair waders. And I said I said no that's not that's not true I know you can send it back because I've sent other boots back and got new boots put on. They were like No they won't. They won't do that you're just going to have to buy a new pair of waders. And I thought that's that's really a terrible thing to say. I know there's absolutely no way I could buy another pair waders so I ran down the street to another one of the shops. Of course they sent them back and I got you know new boots foot feet put on my waders and when they got back I was able to buy some gravel guards too and so they lasted a little longer. But on that pair of waders I think I put five or six new set of boot feet on them over the years that I wore them. But I think that example is what happened to fly fishing and the people that were working in the shops didn't want to explain what Tippet was. They didn't want to tell you what a prince nymph was. They didn't want to tell you the good spots to go and I don't know why they decided to call it kind of collectively that that was the right thing to do. But really what it's done now 20 years later is there's very few people who are interested in fly fishing. There's been a lot of people that have been turned off. And now you know the average age of our anglers is probably in their mid 60s. And so as those guys are not able to fish anymore and obviously aren't buying a ton more equipment. How do we repurpose the energy and try to find and bring new people in. And I think if we can't get over.

[00:18:10] Kind of ourselves collectively as anglers. One of the things I love to say is that fly fishing is no more complicated than regular fishing. It's exactly the same thing you're just using a different type of bait. It's no different once you hook a fish. It's no different landing a fish or playing a fish or what you do. Once that process happens the presentation can be different depending on what you're doing. But that's not even true if you're someone who's used to fishing you know any thing other than live bait. And so if we can't if we can't somehow. Explain to people that it's not super complicated and make it ok not to own the most expensive equipment I think it's going to be a real issue for fly fishing as a sport.

[00:19:01] Bud Lilly once told me that the fish doesn't know whether you have a 60 on the rod or a 600 on the rod. You know it's all the same to them.

[00:19:08] It is all the same to them and it really comes down to your skill as an angler. A, a more expensive rod can maybe help you cast better but it certainly can't help you present the fly any better. And so I think that you know it's it's not the equipment that you're carrying that that creates enjoyment in a day out on the water. I know that's what the retail world needs and the manufacturers need to be able to sell the equipment. But but I would say at some point if we're not bringing in new anglers of all sorts. There'll be no one to manufacturer for. I do I think it's a I think it's a great way we've we've done classes on that. My my angling school does that. We use those rods a lot.

[00:20:03] With with our kids. In terms of the kids that we bring to our programs that come up to Lincoln Hills. The great thing about it is it's, they're, they are much more difficult to tangle.

[00:20:17] And so that is you know for anybody who's taking kids fishing the less tangles you can have the better right because the longer your fly's in the water the more chance you have of catching a fish. So. I agree with that. And you know Tenkara's a great it's a great way to do it.

[00:20:35] And even before tank car we were using just a regular cane pole which is you know it's kind of the precursor to uh to Tenkara. But I do I think it's a great way to not not just kids but but anybody who is apprehensive about the casting or the mending or the midline management or any of that you know it's a great way to to to get interested and engaged. I.

[00:21:08] What I really enjoy is sharing opportunities creating experiences for people that they wouldn't have otherwise had. And so I think the more people that we can collectively get in the outdoors whether it's hiking or boating or fishing. Fishing happens to be my favorite of of the outdoor recreational opportunities. But I think whenever we can do that it really means a lot because it kind of puts you on on par. You know in a one on one experience an example with with Mother Nature. And if you can figure out how to convince a fish to bite and catch it there's really a lot of accomplishment in that. There's a there's a ton of satisfaction that comes from the fact that you went out there and figured out how to do it. And if we can engage kids in that regard. Hopefully what we're building is adults that are willing to pay attention to conservation and and our the health of our waters and our ecology. And the flora and fauna around. The experience of being in the outside and just understanding how important that is. You know for for for a healthy mind and a healthy lifestyle.

[00:22:39] Yeah I agree. I think there's kind of a natural connection between I know for me some and it sounds like you as well. We're actually the same age we're both 46 but you know those experiences as a kid you know. I grew up in Wisconsin fishing those little brook trout streams and creeks and coming up on a baby fawn that was so young and it is still just draw. But having those connections to nature I think led me to be an advocate in later years and I think by experience you know showing kids that I think you're right. Because if there's nobody left to stand up for it especially in odd political times I guess it's certainly important to have advocates out there for this common benefit for us all.

[00:23:22] I guess yeah I think it builds great self-confidence. Being in the outdoors you know if you if you especially once you're. You know once you're old enough to kind of move around out there on your own and it doesn't mean you know miles away from other people but when you you know when you're old enough and you're.

[00:23:39] You know your guardians your parents will let you wander you know a couple hundred yards away and you're you're figuring it out and you're poking through stuff and you're you're looking at the at the stuff and you're figuring out what pokes and what doesn't poke and what could buy it. You know there's there's a lot there's a lot of there's there's lot there's a great sense of. Oh I think self-worth and responsibility and and. Responsibility that comes with figuring out how to be out there by yourself when it's not all manicured and groomed around you and you don't really know what's going to pop out around the next you know the next Bush.

[00:24:22] I think that the health of our ecosystem in general is something that we have to constantly be aware of. I'm not overly concerned from a climate change perspective. Because I'm just from I'm on. I'm on the I'm a trustee at our. Nature and Science Museum here in Denver. And you know we've had a number of different warming and freezing cycles over the years. It seems that clearly to be accelerated in this model. I don't know what that means. But on a on a local level the concern for me is that we have so many more people that want to use the resource. And I think we we we all should want everybody to be able to use the resources as much as we can. And so I think that there there needs to be just a continued awareness of what human pressure does to our our natural places. And the more that we can manage them thoughtfully and respectfully in a way that that continues to allow Mother Nature to grow and to thrive and to be strong I think it continues to. Create an opportunity for future generations to enjoy the outdoors. That's one of the main reasons why we we founded Lincoln Hills is because the public waters that we fished growing up just. They they they have not been able to sustain the fish population that you would want. To be able to introduce new people to the sport. The fish are small and there's not as many of them and they're highly pressured. And so it's it's really difficult on the public water to get a brand new person into a type of experience where. They want to come back again. And I know there's a lot of discussion and talk about whether or not just being in the outdoors and and kind of enjoying a day on the water is enough. But what I can tell you is if when I was a kid going outside on the water fishing meant not catching any fish or most of the time not catching any fish. I don't think I would still be fishing today. So to me it's really important that we can manage the water thoughtfully enough that people can catch fish and you know we talked a lot about catch and release. You know and from my perspective catch and release is certainly the the way to go it's not a silver bullet. Because you know a fish that's caught once has a I think somewhere around a 5 percent chance of dying. And so if you catch and release the same fish enough times sooner or later it's not going to turn out well for the fish. That being said I caught and killed hundreds of fish when I was growing up. It was part of what we did. And you know I hate to say it but we didn't eat all. And so sometimes it was just bringing the

trophy home so I could show my dad what we had done. And so I think we need to be sensitive that. Not every single person is going to wake up as a catch and release advocate. But if we can manage our fisheries in a way that over time people become catch and release advocates I think we have a better chance of. Sustaining our our fisheries. You know in the long run. I do think that. I would I would I would correct you a little bit in saying that the work that we do in the outdoors in terms of our.

[00:28:23] Fly fishing Country Club and our guide service in our schools. Those are those are.

[00:28:30] Those are more like break even ventures. OK. You know we don't make a ton of money off that but we didn't do it to make a ton of money what we did. We did it. We wanted to it to you know pay for itself. What we really did it to expose more people to the outdoors and have great places where we could go.

[00:28:46] That being said I think anyone who could spend time in the outdoors and certainly people who can derive revenue from being in the outdoors have a responsibility to be great advocates for what good conservation looks like. What good catch and release looks like what reds look like what spawning fish look like. And kind of carrying that banner about water quality and you know the health of the riparian areas and I think all of those things are important in terms of. Creating sustainable fisheries and outdoor areas.

[00:29:37] I've I've spent tons of days chasing permit and I have yet to have one eat. So I'm I'm looking forward to the day when when that permit chooses me then I will continue pursuing that. I think I'd like to at some point be able to catch an Atlantic salmon.

[00:29:57] I think that would be a great great experience and a great fish to be able to catch. I've heard I've heard really interesting things about them and in terms of locations I have not been all the way down to Tierra del Fuego yet and have not been out into Kamchatka in in Russia. So those are a couple places that I would still like to be able to go. I actually have a trip planned to the Seychelles in the not too distant future so I'll get to go out there and try to catch a giant trevally. But those are kind of the ones that are still on my list.

[00:30:34] So yeah I've heard that from other people about permit as well that it's the most challenging fish to catch in some respects.

[00:30:41] Yeah. You know it's. I haven't fished for them a ton of days. It's it's kind of weird. The times when I've been in the boat where we have caught them it really is like the fish just chooses that that's what they want to do. And then the other ones you can fish and fish and fish at them and if they're you know sometimes they don't just they just don't want to do it. But. You know like all things more more time on the waters is I think how you how you win at that game. I would just say that we have to manage our fisheries in the U.S. because especially in the U.S. where we have massive metroplexes as we have to figure out how to manage them and I think I think it really has to be a public private partnership because our natural resources departments do not have the.

[00:31:37] Funds available to effectively help manage those fisheries. And I think on the private side we've done some really good work in learning how to introduce hatchery fish while at the same time. Encouraging a wild population. And I don't think that those are mutually exclusive concepts. I think you can do it. Well and I think you can do it together and I think it's something especially in art in our cold freshwater fisheries that are not

attached to the to the ocean. I don't have great knowledge about that other than fishing them but it's something that we've got to learn to do. Better because if we don't do it we're gonna have a lot of beautiful water that doesn't have any fish in it.

[00:32:31] And to me that would be a that would be a shame.