

loranger-jim-2018-08-07.mp4

Jim Loranger [00:00:10] Father. When I was just a little guy I remember being, probably on Wise River, in the Big Hole. I was small enough to where I had to hold onto the back of his jean pockets. I had a pair of waders of my own, no rod. And just tagged along with him. And from the first time I saw him hook a fish, that probably wasn't very big, I just, I couldn't wait to do it. Couldn't wait to do it.

Jim Loranger [00:00:40] Maybe, I'm 59 years old, so, probably... Close to 52, or 3, or 4 years, I've been doing it.

Jim Loranger [00:00:53] First, I think it was just, I liked to catch fish. Now I, you know, working in a fly shop and. I still love to go fishing. But now I'm a fly tyer. I've been a fly tyer for a long time. I enjoy that, probably as much as I enjoy the fishing aspect but, just being outside. Being where, you know, fish have to live where everything is beautiful. The water is clear, the mountains are gorgeous. The trees. I just I like being out there.

Jim Loranger [00:01:29] Well, you know, I think trout, obviously. You know, they live in a, here is very, we're lucky to live where we live, right here. Just because of the Bitter Root, and Rock Creek, or Clark Fork, and the Blackfoot. What else do we have? Did I say the Big Hole and the Beaverhead? The Missouri's not very far away. But, you know, there's a lot of places where, you know, I fished and caught trout, where it's not the most aesthetically, at least not maybe not as aesthetically pleasing as western Montana, but the trout sure are. You know. I go to Alaska, and I fish for silvers, in September. And I've done that five or six times, I'm going again this September, so I look forward to that. That's kind of an adrenaline rush, I suppose.

James Thull (Interviewer) [00:02:17] Mm. Hmm.

Jim Loranger [00:02:18] Catching a big fish on a fly rod.

Jim Loranger [00:02:26] I've got a friend here, and I think a bucket list for me, it'd probably be New Zealand. And the issue right now is, you know, he goes for a month. I haven't quite figured out a way to pull off a month worth yet, but. One of these days, I would certainly like to do that.

Jim Loranger [00:02:48] I think. I think so. I mean. You know, when we talk about, you know, a lot of guys like to, and I'm one of them, once in a while, I'll go streamer fish for big browns, I think that's cool. But yeah. I mean, you know, the cutthroat trout is native to Montana. And, like you said, the bull trout. Even the mountain whitefish. And the grayling, of course, down in the Big Hole drainage. It is, it's fun, to be able to go, down there, and, you know, guys ask you, "Would you catch grayling?" And we did last time we went down there, and it was about that big, but it's a grayling, you know. And it's native to there, where we just don't have them, you know. And it's pretty cool. To catch a fish like that.

James Thull (Interviewer) [00:03:30] And they're beautiful fish.

Jim Loranger [00:03:30] Oh they are. They absolutely are. Especially when you hold them in the sun the right way, and you get the purple, and the colors that come out in 'em. Yeah they're cool.

Jim Loranger [00:03:38] That was another deal, with my dad. I told him that, he buys all his stuff, he would probably never have to buy another fly again. He's still fishing at 90, and I'm pretty sure I've probably come through on that promise. But yeah, I think there's something about it. I mean, I'm not going to say I've never caught a fish on a fly I didn't tie myself, you know, but I kind of like the idea of doing that. I especially like, when somebody'll come in here, and it might be an older pattern that we just don't carry anymore. And they'll say, "Can you tie this for me?" Kind of a challenge, you know. I don't do a ton of that, just cause I don't have a lot of time. It's more of a, more of a winter project, but. I enjoy it.

Jim Loranger [00:04:36] Well. I used to fish Rock Creek, in the early '70s, and there were some awfully nice fish in there. But I think that the keep limits were fairly liberal. And then they adjusted that, somewhere I'm going to guess, around 1975. So in that drainage, I don't think the fish are as big, but you know, here and especially in the West Fork, in the upper part of the Bitter Root, I think fish are very healthy. Obviously, there's more people, I think, fishing now, than there used to be. But I think that the biologists are smarter. People pay more, a little bit more, attention to habitat. You know, maybe barbless hooks are helping some. I mean, I, talking to a biologist here, he said there's no real scientific proof that mortality rate has changed a lot between barbed and barbless hooks, but, you know, you never like to see a bunch of hook scars in fish. So I'm, I'm all for the barbless. I think that's the barbless deal. I think the fishery here is in pretty good, pretty good shape. And I think that's, that's because a combination of the awareness of the anglers themselves, and probably all the fisheries biologists and everybody, doing a much better job with what's available to them to take care of it.

Jim Loranger [00:06:04] Almost probably, you know. You know, I'm probably not intelligent enough to talk about climate change. But I remember, as a younger person, now this year we had a big snowpack, big snowfall. Winter lasted a long time. And, you know, as a kid.... That was pretty standard operating procedure, for me. I mean, I can remember talking with my friends, they say, "Yep about the middle of July when that stream comes down, we'll be able to go dry fly fish." And this year it was, it was that. I mean, we had a lot of water. So if in fact, climate change is what's changing these winters, where we're not getting the snowpack, for the water that we need, then, yeah, I would certainly be concerned about that.

Jim Loranger [00:06:46] Well, you know, everybody talks about the smoke and the fires and all that kind of stuff, and I think that, you know, that goes in cycles. It certainly does. I mean, I'm retired from the forest service, so I know that, understand the fire cycle there, a little bit. But yeah, I mean, it's been awfully warm the last, you know, we'll get, you know, like I said, we had a good winter last year, where we get a lot of snow. It pushed into the springtime, but I was sitting in the shop here one day, talking to a gentleman, and we'd gotten, I think we got to 80 degrees in April, one year, and as all that snow came off, and I was talking to this guy, and I said, "Yeah, we'll be all right if we don't get 80 degrees again this April." And then, I'll be darned, if we didn't get 90 in May. So we kind of got the same thing, it just happened a little bit later, later in the year. But I think that's got a lot to do, you know, when that water comes down that quickly. And we're looking at, you know, warm water in the lower river, and the Hoot Owl thing goes into play. And of course, obviously, we don't want to fish for those fish. Mortality rate goes up when you stress them that way. So, but yeah. That's, that's certainly not good for the fishery. Yeah, I definitely, I think it's been a little bit warmer. For the last four or five years, in the summer.

Jim Loranger [00:08:08] I think it's imperative. It really is. I mean, you know, you hear them say every day, you're looking at a piece of land, they're not making any more of that. It couldn't be any more true. You know, I think that there's a certain amount of public land that should be used by the public for things. And I'm not big on more gold mines in the state of Montana. I saw what, you know, that copper mine, the effect it had, when I grew up in Anaconda. I think if it can be done without damaging things, I'm OK with that. But I just haven't really seen it. I was just reading an article about the Pebble Mine, up in Alaska, has kind of gotten a, I don't know if it's a rebirth to the permitting process, but it sure doesn't seem like that's in a very good spot for the biggest salmon population that I'm aware of in the state of Alaska. So yeah, I, I am. I'm concerned about that here. I think we need to protect those spawning waters, for cutthroat trout, and all trout. For that matter.

Jim Loranger [00:09:25] Well, I was more in the human resource side of the forest service, as, I worked at the job corps center. But I don't know. I've seen some. When I first came on with the Forest Service, I was given a tour by the district ranger, out of the, out of the Darby district. And he showed me a before and after photo of, maybe a 30 or 40 acre piece, that they'd gone in, and had done a thinning project in there. And when it was, before, it just, it was a cluster. Of just overgrowth, and not much revegetation, after, the sunlight couldn't hit the ground any longer. They went in there, did a thinning project, and when I saw that, I think, "Well, that's a pretty good idea." Almost anywhere in the forest, where, you know, you're starting to see that kind of, kind of stuff. Which, you know, requires removing some trees, but if it's done properly, I think it's, it's healthy for the forest. Certainly is. I'm not, I'm not 100% sure how to answer that question, though. You know, if things have gotten to a point where they could never come back.

James Thull (Interviewer) [00:10:35] No, no I just mean, like. So like with the Pebble Mine, for instance, in Alaska. If that went in and went sideways, like with Valdez, or something like that. Can that, you know, do you ever really fully recover from something like that?

Jim Loranger [00:10:50] I don't, I don't think you do. I mean, just because it's such a native return of fish. And anytime, and I don't know how they would do that, I mean, if you had a big fish kill there, I don't know if they would try to use a hatchery program, but they're not the same. They're just not the same fish. I mean, they may be the same for somebody who just wants to go fishing and catch a fish. But they're not, they're not, they can't be the same. I've seen the same with the Steelhead. You know, down on the Clearwater River, and I. I've never had a large opportunity to catch a bunch of native steelhead in another spot. But the few I have, they're, they're just they're different. They are, they're just different than hatchery fish.

Jim Loranger [00:11:36] I'm not an expert, but yeah. I think you can. I think you can, they're just. The colors are more brilliant. The piss-and-vinegar in a steelhead is more, I think, than a hatchery fish. I have no opposition to somebody that likes to go down to the Clearwater and fish for a hatchery steelhead, or a spring chinook, that comes up in there, I do it myself. But yeah, I think there's a difference. Certainly. I think you can even tell the difference.

Jim Loranger [00:12:11] Well I, you know, I think what we're doing right is, we don't stock streams anymore. And I think that's, 'course that's been in effect for over 30 years, or 40 years I don't even know. Quite, quite a few years. I think it's had a very positive benefit. I mean. I have friends that come here and fish, and you, no matter where you take them, and say, "Yeah. Those, those fish were born and grew up in this river." You know, where

they, where they come from, it isn't that way. and it might even be a Western state, that has the same typical type of free stone streams. But they still are using stocking programs to enhance, you know, their fish population. And we, are our fisheries, or most of them, the ones we fish here, are in awfully good conditions. You know. I think somebody, whoever they are, has done a magnificent job with it.

Jim Loranger [00:13:08] Well. There are several programs, at least here. Trout Unlimited helps sponsor the, it's called the Bitterroot Buggers. Its a fly tying program for, I believe, the age bracket is 8 to 14 years old. So kids meet in the wintertime, every Tuesday, to tie flies. And that's pretty well attended. Volunteers from around here that tie, and work in fly shops, are usually more than willing to go over there and donate their time to that. One of the female outfitters in town runs a women's only program that, she fills that thing up. It's one day casting retreat, that's done out at the Teller Wildlife Refuge. I think programs like that need to continue. And expand. Female guides. We're starting to see more and more female guides, and we see more females that want to come in here, and learn the sport. And wives of anglers, you know? Boy, women are awfully good students. Because they're not like a guy. You know, they walk out there, and they'll tell you right away, "I don't know anything." And, you know, they're willing to learn, and they pay attention, and they're fairly easy to teach.

Jim Loranger [00:14:31] Well. There's obviously the quality of the graphite, that the strength, how lightweight it can be nowadays. And yet, for myself, I have some of that kind of stuff. But I find myself going back, I've sort of developed a love of bamboo, and fiberglass. And I enjoy that, as well, but, you know, rod materials are certainly better now. Resins are better for those guys that are assembling rods. And then, of course, you've got warranty programs. For people to send a broken rod in and get it fixed. It's, and I think now, you know, there's some awfully nice equipment available. And, yet, if you want to be, just come in a store and say, "I need a rod and reel, I just want to go learn how to do it." You don't have to break the bank to do it. So I think that's a good improvement there, because of, the equipment is pretty decent for the price.

Jim Loranger [00:15:38] Wow. It probably.... I don't know. God, there's so many that I could. I could think of. Probably the first, first fish my son caught. You know, my, my dad took me so. Watching my son, I think he was probably 6 or 7, and I think the fish probably hooked him, I don't think he hooked the fish, but didn't matter. You know, just how excited and happy was.

James Thull (Interveiw) [00:16:12] Do you remember where it was?

Jim Loranger [00:16:13] Yeah. We were on. We live up Sleeping Child, and it was on Sleeping Child Creek. And we live across, our neighbor just let us walk across a five acre field, and threw it in there. And it was the little spot, if you hit the water with it, you know, it was always pretty good for a, for a cutthroat. And this fish happened to be about 9 or 10 inches, but. I don't think that mattered to him either. You know, it's just the fact that it ate the fly. He was tickled pink.

James Thull (Interveiw) [00:16:41] Does he still fish?

Jim Loranger [00:16:42] Oh yeah. Yeah. He's playing college baseball, out in Oregon. He's home this summer, and normally plays in a summer league. This year, he played for the Medford Rogues for about, I think he played for about three or four weeks, and came

home. Went to work, make little money for school next year, and, yeah, we've been out four or five times. It's been fun.

Jim Loranger [00:17:11] I don't know. I mean I, like I said, I just enjoy being out there. And it's not about the fish, anymore, I don't think. You know, I read a quote, I don't remember, and I'll get quote wrong, but. And you'll know who it is. It's somebody said, "Guys go fishing every day, and they don't realize that it's not about the fish." And it's kind of that way, for me. I mean, now don't get me wrong, I like to catch fish. But it's just a great time to be, a great way to spend time outside.