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Richard May [00:00:10] Well, I was a naval officer for a couple of years, and when I got out of the Navy I was married, and my in-laws dabbled in fly fishing for trout. And so I kind of picked it up from there. As a boy, I had a couple of tries at it. Throwing a salmon egg in a stream somewhere, and having little or, little or no luck. But I got into fly fishing, and then, so I became interested in the dynamics of trout fisheries. How they were being managed by the state, and I decided that they weren't doing a very good job. So, I and a few other fellow anglers, decided we would try to do something about that. And we were also concerned about the proliferation of dams on rivers, throughout the state of California. I think there was, oh, dozens and dozens of dams on rivers, and there were very few of them left. Especially those on the north coast, that supported, what looked, what remained of our salmon and steelhead resources. So we had concerns about that too. That there were plans for dams to be built on all of those North Coast streams. I think, two dozen dams were proposed. At one time. So we became organized to try to do something about trout management, and the preservation of the salmon and steelhead rivers, on the north coast.

Richard May [00:01:56] We started out as a unit of Trout Unlimited, a small, a small chapter. That experience didn't work out for us.

James Thull [00:02:06] In about what year would have this been?

Richard May [00:02:08] The mid-60s, mid-60s. And so, we divorced ourselves from that alignment, and founded California Trout. About a dozen of us. And we went from there. Probably important to know, is that we decided, we, in order for us to change the way trout were managed in California, other than with a hatchery truck. Was that we had to add some demonstration projects, so we could convince the public, and government, that that was a better way to go. We did that with first, a small project, where there was a very short piece of stream, between two lakes, up in Shasta County. Which looked like it could be quite useful for spawning purposes, but there wasn't any gravel in it. It was all volcanic stones. And. That kind of material. So we, one of our colleagues, at the time, was fellow by the name of Jim Adams, who was the biologist for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, who managed that property in northern California, and so he had suggested this as a project, a demonstration project, to us. And so we brought in truckloads of gravel, and put, put them in the stream, between the two lakes. And within weeks, there were spawners on there. And we were joyful that we'd made this demonstration. But that wasn't enough, and we needed to do more, so, well. Another project that was actually suggested by Jim, was for, for a project on Hat Creek, which was a beautiful spring fed stream, in Shasta County, not far from the original project, that I've just described. And it's problem was that it was infected with tons and tons of suckers and squawfish, that emanated out of a lake that had been created by PG&E, his employer, on the Pit river. The suggestion was based on Jim's knowledge of a project similar, that had been proposed many years ago, for another stream in Northern California, and that project never went forward, on the North Fork and the Feather River. And that idea, was to build a barrier, over which, fish could not migrate upstream. When you had a problem of non-game fish migrating into trout waters, potential trout waters. And to remove all of the non-game fish from the stream above. And restock it with the wild strains of fish. In our case, we restrict, did that. Restocked with rainbows and brown trout, and it was a very highly successful project. Proving to the government and the public that, wild trout management was feasible. We decided to label it, not just wild trout management, natural Trout management, management. And what we pursued was, the correct protection of the habitat. And the limitation of, of harvest. To the extent that the

population of trout, in terms of numbers of fish, and sizes of fish, would not be changed from season to season. And that can be done by strictly restricting harvest. So, and focusing what harvest is allowed. On some selected sizes of fish. And those that could be cropped somewhat, without affecting the population overall, from season to season. So that concept was, in essence, adopted by the state of California, and it was labeled The Wild Trout Program by the state. And a dozen streams were placed in it, initially, and then added to from over the, over the years to. Now, a couple of dozen, I guess. And a lake or two.

Richard May [00:06:59] They didn't, they dom. They were dominated. Absolute dominated it. And the population of trout in, well let's say, we removed, I think, three tons of non game fish, in a section of stream that was around three miles long. The trout that we recovered, numbered, not in pounds, but in numbers of fish, was like 384 fish. So you can see what the domination was. It, it, was incredibly dominant. So. Those, those fish, I think, probably are in that stream, now. They, they've come back. But because they don't have access from the lake, where they spent most of their year. They don't have access to get back up into the stream again. So they will migrate out, and then they're stuck, they can't get back in but some will come in from above. And they're present in the stream.

Richard May [00:08:09] We focus just on, on trout and Steelhead. Ah, well, we dabble in salmon, as well. But there are other organizations that are dominant in the salmon area. So we, we're collegiate with those groups.

Richard May [00:08:32] Well it's been, it changed the whole concept of trout management, in the state. From just a hatchery truck operation, to actually managing the resource. It was a hard sell. And it took years to do it. But that, that's the dominant management effort now. Throughout the state of California. Streams that can be managed for their wild trout are managed that way. Those that can't be, they received the dumps of what Joe Paul famously called, "Liver fed guppies wrapped in maimed rainbow skins."

Richard May [00:09:19] Well, I think it's, there are areas where browns will dominate. But we found, to our surprise, that they didn't dominate in Hat Creek, the Rainbows did. And, eventually, the Browns became just a shadow of their, their former population, there. So it depends on what fits the fish best, and browns are still stocked down in the, I believe, in the Eastern Sierra. There's some of them produced down there, and stocked in places like Hot Creek, I think, and maybe the Owens River.

Richard May [00:10:10] Well, to us, it's very important. And we support all of those efforts, and we originate some of them. 'Course I've been, I've been retired for 20 years but. Those that came after me, they spent a lot of effort on that. So. We want to retain as much of the diversity that California was born with, as much as we can. And we worked to that end.

Richard May [00:10:47] Well it's, the, it's the challenge. And interfacing with nature, in a very intimate way. I don't know of any other sport that quite equals it. And serenity that surrounds you, when you're doing. So, yes. I hunt birds, with my bird dog. But it's, it's, it's more for him, than it is for me. The trout fishing is, that's for me.

Richard May [00:11:22] Well. A lot of them are endangered. Lot, a lot of the species in California, of which there's 10 or dozen. Lost track. But, some of them are, are endangered, and we, we fight hard in those areas, where they can be sustained, and

sometimes restored, by efforts of removing non-game fish, and non-native fish, and securing an area where they can dominate, and be sustained.

Richard May [00:12:08] Well, anglers have a better understanding of what the needs of the resource are, and what the threats to that resource are. Than politicians. So, anglers have to become politicians, on the amateur side. And they spend a lot of time in the legislature, and in state agencies that manage the resources that we depend upon. That means that anglers are involved, politically, in forest practices, and forest management. Stream diversion. Water diversions. Dam building. All of these things that threaten the resource, that they depend on for the sport.

Richard May [00:13:00] I would say that's one of the most important things that we have done, and do. For instance, the Wild and Scenic River System in California. Was initiated by us, and won by us, at the state level. And later on we, we levered all of those protected streams into the National Wild and Scenic River System. And the purpose of that, from our perspective, was to retain the salmon and steelhead historic runs, on the northern coast of California, which were depleted by forest practices in, earlier in our history. That's, a lot of those bad practices have been turned back, and reversed. Dams are not allowed on those rivers. Water diversions are minor, because the needs of the river itself are primary. So that that's something that anglers have to be focused on, and are focused on, through organizations like ours.

Richard May [00:14:20] I think we've got a pretty good handle on overfishing. That, that's something that we've, we've got pretty well tied up. If a harvest of fish in a particular fishery is too high, we'll go to bat for more restrictive regulations. Even if it's zero limit. We don't favor a zero limit, we think that anglers should have a choice, but that choice should be very restricted. As far as the health of the rivers, we've got a lot of pressure here, in California. By population, I mean. When we got started I think the population was, like 20 million, now we're over 30. So it's a lot of population pressure to provide more water, for homes and businesses. And we've got to find out and support ways that will use water more efficiently, when it's taken out of the stream, so not not so much is taken out. We've got a project in California now, there, where we're restoring water. To streams. In fact, I don't know if your other people have ever talked about Mono Lake in California. But it's a Saline lake in Eastern Sierra. That was dying out, from a lack of water from streams that used to flow to it. And we were instrumental in getting streams that fed, that historically fed into Mono Lake, rewatered. At the expense of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. That lake has been stabilized now. And it's support of wildlife has been restored. So, that's, those are things we can still do, we can rewater our streams. We can prevent too much water from being taken out. The upper San Joaquin River is being restored now, and it's quite controversial. But the state recently mandated. Or I guess it was a proposed mandate. To restore water into the upper San Joaquin River. With the, with the purpose of restoring runs of salmon up. Into the Sierra, through the delta of San Francisco Bay. The fish would have those that go north in the Sacramento River, and then there would be those that, again, from, from their history, would go south. In the San Joaquin system to reproduce. So. Those are things that are being done, and have been done, in California. But we were under tremendous pressure from population increase, and demands on those streams.

Richard May [00:17:44] Yes. I have.

James Thull [00:17:46] And what type of changes have you seen, and what type of effects have that those had.

Richard May [00:17:50] Well. We see it here locally, with, with the fog, the coastal fog patterns. The rain patterns. The drought. The droughts seem to be more extensive, and longer lasting than. The amount of snowpack. Seems if you chart, if you charted it, I think you would find that it was a downward slope and the snowpack. There, February once in a while, there'll be a blip of a really good winter. But it's, the general slope is downward, I think. So it's a matter of some serious concern, especially with the population continuing to grow.

Richard May [00:18:41] Well, we usually support regulations that would allow that, to a certain, to a certain limited extent. But, there still is the hatchery program, and those things are born to be eaten. So, those streams that can't really support a robust wild trout population, they're stocked with these manufactured fish. So most of the regulations that we have established, and sup, and continue to support, allow for a fish or two. Usually restricted to certain size range, because, that size range has been identified by biologists as being croppable, to a certain extent, without, to a certain extent, without affecting the population over, season to season, so. That's usually smaller fish. Because there are larger numbers of them in there, a lot of them die off. Over winter anyway. So it's, it's a complicated formula that's needed, and is applied.

Richard May [00:20:05] We need more right-minded people. And we don't care what the color of their skin is, or what their gender is. We just need more people that understand the problem, and to stand up to doing something about it. Those people don't always come from the fly fishing community. They come from other walks of life. But fly fishermen, for reasons of their mentality, have been the leaders in this area. For many decades. I think that Cal Trout is not as fishing oriented, as some of these other groups, like The Federation and Trout Unlimited. But we, we're fish first. And fishing second.

Richard May [00:21:13] I think, I think it's crucial. And groups like the Federation, and chapters of Trout Unlimited, which emphasize more the fishing slant on things. That's something that we would have to depend on, for them to do. I don't see that it's being very effective. Right now. We don't see the numbers of youthful anglers and young adults. That are on the streams, and, or are joining groups like ours, and other conservation groups, that care about these things and are doing something about it. There's so many things for kids to do these days. And this one, the ones that we adore, sport that we adore. Requires, probably a lot of effort, to get good at it, so you can enjoy it to the fullest. So. It's, it is a problem. I don't think it's, I don't think our group is going to solve it, but groups that I've mentioned. They, they certainly have a leg up on it.

Richard May [00:22:32] I was successful in getting my son very interested in it, and I thought at one time, that he would follow me into the business. But he was killed in a car accident, when he was 19 years old. My grandchildren, they have not, despite my efforts, they have not picked up on it. Well, they, they tried it. They kind of liked it, but so many other things that they are drawn to.

Richard May [00:23:12] We are producing good numbers of professionals. Biologists. We have a strong affiliation with the University of California at Davis. I don't know if you know the name Peter Moyle, but, he's rather, well he's a, he's an Emeritus now, and we established a chair in his name.

James Thull [00:23:39] Oh, wonderful.

Richard May [00:23:40] At UC Davis. And they, they're cranking out professionals all the time, and we're closely aligned with them. We use them for advice and counsel, and they come to us for it, come to us with ideas, from time to time, so. But I guess there's not enough.

Richard May [00:24:13] Yes. We certainly do. Instant gratification is one of our main things isn't it?

Richard May [00:24:28] Focus on the resource. That's, that's my advice. And that's what we in Cal Trout have tried to do, and have been successful doing it, and the results have been quite good. Given the challenges that we've had to face.