

smith-travis-2018-01-21.mp4

Interviewer [00:00:10] How did you get introduced to fishing?

Travis Smith [00:00:11] So I was pretty fortunate, I grew up in Sheridan Montana on the Ruby River. My parents own a ranch there and my dad who is originally from Wisconsin. When he first moved there he was introduced to fly fishing by one of the old guys in town and he just fell in love with it and so he taught me how to fly fish. And we got to fish all that area rivers around southwest Montana when I was growing up. So it's it was my dad. It was great.

Interviewer [00:00:47] What do you love about fishing?

Travis Smith [00:00:54] I like the first of all being outside and the solitude and the one on one with the fish. And you know basically when you grow up in small town Montana and you grow up outside all the time you just like doing that. And so having a river in the backyard and loving to be outside is really what got me into it originally. And I just love being around the water. I love the beauty the being out side and just getting to enjoy nature.

Interviewer [00:01:37] What motivated you to start your business?

Travis Smith [00:01:43] Rance my business partner and I he originally came down here one winter and I had a job at another place that that fell through in Argentina and we grew up fly fishing together in southwest Montana. We're Best Buddies in second grade and when we were we I came down a year after he and we both guided for an Argentine and we were down here saying Man what would we do if we owned this lodge and the place was not doing all that well it was it was not run the way we thought it should be and we were guiding in the states as well so we'd seen how some lodges and things had run and worked for him for a couple of years in the last year year we worked for him he forgot to pay us so we went back to the US kind of with our tails between our legs and we were drinking heavily one night and of all the times we've been talking about we own the lodge and when we own a lodge and when we have our company we decided let's show how we do it in Montana and came down here and started our business.

Interviewer [00:02:56] What is it that you love about guiding?

Travis Smith [00:03:03] I love people. I love interacting with people and teaching people and showing them something that they might not be able to do on their own or seeing they might not be able to see it unless I show them. But mostly you know one of the great things about being a guide is you have you are able to connect with people that you would never be able to. I would never be able to probably hang out with you know when you're. Two days ago one of our fishing clients sent me a message a text message and he said he just had a meeting with President Macri and he plugged patagonia river guides. That guy is a friend of mine and we go fishing together and I can call him on the phone and he's he's always available. He's, they can always pull him out of a meeting somehow when you call him. So it's it's more of an interaction with people in the nature and just teaching people that maybe never got the chance to do what I got to do as a kid and showing them the great the great outdoors.

Interviewer [00:04:08] Do you think people like yourself who make their living off of natural resources have more of a responsibility to protect and preserve the environment?

Travis Smith [00:04:14] For sure. I I I think that's the most important thing I make a living off of natural resources everywhere in Montana and here. And it's one of my most important things is to take care of the environment. I think it's it's one of the most important things period. It's one of those deals that they're not. They're not making it they're not making anymore and the more we screw it up the worse it it gets. And I've fortunately been able to travel all over the world and there are some places that have been abused and even some places in the US and places in Argentina where people are allowed to do things that they shouldn't be able to. And so as far as the environment is concerned I don't think we can do any less to help it out and take care of it. I want my kids to be able to fish as well and I want their kids in every generation to get to do it and right now it's a little bit scary.

Interviewer [00:05:20] In the near future, what concerns do you have for fisheries and trout and salmonid habitats?

Travis Smith [00:05:28] Global warming is a huge concern. You know this year we had in Argentina one of our biggest snow years and we're having one in Montana. But we still last summer in Montana we had a great snowpack and in May I ran a little bit in from from June through really October. We didn't have any rain and the rivers were hot and dry and it's it's. There is something going on and it's it's not the way it was back way back when. And so I'm worried that this we're producing. We're growing grapes in the area that we're in here which apparently would have never been done. No one would even have tried it 30 years ago. So. So I think it's one of those that the biggest concern is there might not be rivers in the spring creeks might dry up and you know the fish might die and we might. There will be fish but they might be bass or something rather than a trout. And you know I have concern with that more than anything and then pollution. And here in Argentina they don't have very good regulations on people can just take a backhoe and dig a trench through the river and no one's watching for it and that really can ruin a lot of habitat and things so there are a lot of different things but the main thing is global warming and just human abuse of of the resource.

Interviewer [00:07:05] In your lifetime, have you seen any evidence of climate change?

Travis Smith [00:07:12] I would say; for sure. I don't remember um the rivers getting as warm in the summers when I was a kid as they do now. And one of the. And this could get me hung in Montana. One year out the first year I ever heard of that I was floating the big old river with a eighty seven year old fishing client and she and I got to the take out. She only wanted to do a half day in the morning and we got to the takeout and she and the Fish and Game was there and I knew the fishing game person and and uh he said hey Travis we're gonna shut down the river tomorrow at 2 o'clock because the temperature of the river is 70 some degrees in the center of the river and it's too hot for the fish and we don't want you guys you know abusing them. And so I was like what temperature does the river have to be for you to shut down all those guys irrigating upstream and at least at least have them you know be regulated a little bit. And he said whoa Travis we could never even think of doing that. And so you know all these places that have great fishing, a lot of the money that's coming into them is is tourism and a lot of it has to do with fishing. And I think there you know the the agriculture. Yes we need as much agriculture as we can but there's got to be a happy medium you know for the for the water the resource and how to do that if you don't use it you lose it thing is the worst idea. And so people would they just need to figure it out, rather than fighting about it. Sit down and talk about it and make sure everybody's got enough water and cold enough water to keep the fishing alive.

Interviewer [00:09:19] Do you think one way to help sustain rivers is by promoting the economic benefits of a healthy fishery?

Travis Smith [00:09:26] I think that's for sure. And I think the government um in Montana realizes it. In Argentina they don't realize it quite as much as they they could. Um they I think I think they need to realize it a lot more. There is there is not. The government has no idea. The employees that we have down here I mean they they should if they looked at it but they don't. They're like oh it's a hotel. They don't realize it's a fly fishing lodge and just the amount of fishing licenses we buy which most of the people in other lodges down here don't buy licenses because they don't have to. We do because we want to be as legal as we can. And yeah the economic impact is a huge deal. And that's I think the future is people realizing the economic impact and saying we need to preserve this. We actually need to stop guys from poaching and to stop people from stealing water and stop all that stuff. So yes for sure. And it's once once the problem is we're still a little behind down here and it's going to take a while for them to figure out that economic impact.

Interviewer [00:10:42] What are the similarities and differences of fishing in Argentina and Montana?

Travis Smith [00:10:50] Well I can tell you when I go to a put in say on the Madison. Um Lions bridge there if I get there at 9:00 in the morning there are gonna be twenty five other guides or private folks putting in and we'd rely on our boats up. We put the boats in float. I see people all day. When I pull over I have to look back to make sure another boat isn't coming and you know never pull out in front of them. In Argentina they don't have the public access like like we do there which is Montana. That's one of the great things about the US and we do have that public access but here we have to lease access to get to the river so you get there and it's on a dirt road and there in a ranch that you know it's. It doesn't see a whole lot of traffic. You get there there's no one around. You float. You don't see anybody all day and if you do you're like hey what's that guy doing on my river. And because of the the pressure the average size of most of the fish here that you catch are bigger than the average size that you catch there. And I'm not saying that there are bigger fish in Argentina but that there you catch bigger fish and more of them because there there are less people floating. And so we we try to take as as great of care of the resource down here as we can so we rest our areas and know that probably no one else has been in that river so that the access thing it's a it's a good and bad thing where we can access in in Montana. But you just. Everyone in Montana has got a truck a boat here. Very few people are able to use the resource. So um that's it.

Interviewer [00:12:45] Since trout are not native to the Southern hemisphere, how have they fit into the ecosystem and culture of Argentina?

Travis Smith [00:12:54] They're very valued by the locals. They. People love to eat them. And that's originally they were brought down here as a food source and they've turned into a reason for tourists to come down. They've they've been able to move in to pretty much every river creek um around here. The the most most bodies of water have been stocked at some point. And you know even even the high mountain lakes and things there we have stone flies may flies Midge and caddis flies down here and tons of terrestrial beetles and and grasshoppers and damsel flies and dragonflies and so the fish eat the same same insects and they also have a few of the native fish. We have some perch in a fish called a pure perc array and a fish called a fusion. And the trout like to eat them as well as do the perkeray or the perch like to eat the trout and as you do the perkeray and I think they've

been able to move in and do well and I I don't according to the Argentines that were you know then our National Park was stocked in the 60s so they did it once and they haven't done it since. But before that, everyone said Yeah, there aren't really any fish around here. And now you catch trout and you still catch a few of the other fish. So there's there. I think they're just that it's it's been a great thing and it was kind of something maybe they were missing down here because that's the this really the same environment except the fish. The Spanish here and they speak English in the US.

Interviewer [00:14:45] How important are national parks to the preservation of wild areas?

Travis Smith [00:14:52] I I love the park system in both countries. The park in Argentina is a little different than it is in the States. As far as they don't have that they don't have a national forest in Argentina and so the people that don't own these huge Ranches around here they don't have the luxury that we do where you can just you get to a certain point. The mountains are owned by all of us in Montana. Here is more national parks and they do a great job of preserving it. They're way behind here. They they don't have the resources that we do in the States. But you also don't have the traffic in the national parks but the one great thing they are doing is making sure that no one's building no one's no one's ruining the resource and they actually in Argentina they actually regulate places so there are certain parts of our national park where you can't go and it's mainly a safety issue because they don't have like people that can come rescue you. But there are certain places that are completely off limits and there places that I've been that where someone's been hurt that they've changed the law and made it so it's off limits so you know I think the park part of a national park it should be able people should be able to use them. And so I'm not for that cutting off certain areas but as far as preservation if you go down the the spine of the Andes from maybe 400 500 miles north of here all the way down south. They've done a pretty good job of putting national parks through some of the really really amazing parts of Argentina. And I love the national parks and the states and I wish they would stop taking them from us.

Interviewer [00:16:50] How important is it for anglers to be politically aware and active?

Travis Smith [00:16:56] I 100 percent agree with that. I think that that it's very it's stupid to take away land that's already a national park and to sell it to the private sector or anything like that where we're fortunate that people have donated or the government has um preserved places. And the fact that and I'm not going to get too political but we have a pretty high up guy from Montana who claims he loves um loves the outdoors and the guy is taking national parks parts of national parks and it's disgusting. So. I'm not I'm not into that. And all fishermen hunters they are they should be trying to preserve as much of that as they possibly can because they're the people that love the outdoors and so yes.

Interviewer [00:17:54] Are there organizations that you would encourage anglers to join so they have a larger voice?

Travis Smith [00:18:02] For sure. And I'm all I'm all for land trusts and conservancy foundations. And I love I love smaller river foundations. I think that any place that's got at least a voice is somebody that you shouldn't be afraid to to donate to and most of America. You know 20 bucks a pop. And so I know for most fishermen most fly fishermen. I think they should be any any place that they go they should try to find out who is who is trying to protect that and try to help that because it's better to have a voice than not have a voice in every particular place. And then the national of course the national big big guys you know

nature conservancy try to limit it to a point. I think there they're great at it at least keeping public access and keeping even private lands from being developed.

Interviewer [00:19:12] Do you think there is a connection between experiencing natural areas and then later becoming an advocate for those areas?

Travis Smith [00:19:20] I think definitely seeing these, if you if you haven't seen them there's no reason for you to um. What what you you wouldn't understand. And to you know a lot of people they drive to a place or drive through a place but to actually get out and go fish a river and walk that river or even float that river um you're seeing it and it's really it's most uh I don't know uh intimate or um not fragile but but like it's it's it's you're seeing in a way that not everyone sees it. It's not the way you see it on TV it's not the way. And so yeah if you if you see the great outdoors you should be an advocate for taking care of that.

Interviewer [00:20:06] Do you think it is important to get more of the youth involved in angling so that later they will become advocates for preserving wild areas?

Travis Smith [00:20:11] For for sure. And I think it's part of it is you know the way they're taught um the way they're raised. But yeah I mean my kid I grew up. I'm 42 so I grew up you know we didn't have iPads. The Nintendo's came out the no friendno's is what we called it but. But of course we played them. But you know now I think the more kids you can get out and show the show them the outdoors the better. Any programs for the outdoors it's it's healthy. It's not just that I think anybody that is exposed to the outdoors is typically going to enjoy it. And I think I I honestly see young people that are very interested in fly fishing so and the outdoors where we live. So you know I know that the industry as a whole is saying yes maybe there's not as many young people but there there are a lot. I know a lot of young people that are really into it and maybe it's just the area that we live in. But yes the more people we can get outside and get out of the house and out off the couch and off the computer the better. I mean.

Interviewer [00:21:25] Over the years, what kind of changes have you seen to the angling business?

Travis Smith [00:21:34] Um I mean we've our business our our company grew has been growing for 18 years and so my my business has changed a little bit from being you know a really fun guy fishing guide every day and now I manage a bunch of people and deal with their lodging and restaurant but the support that's personal as far as the business is concerned I think it's the it's it's grown a lot with a lot of younger people and there's they, as much as I was saying, everyone should get outside they're using a lot of the social media and Instagram to make it cool. And they're trying to get younger people involved and more women involved. I know that's a huge sector that most women love it but they're a little intimidated by it because it's a male dominated sport but there are a lot of young women that are really showing people that they can do it. And I have two daughters so I want that as much as possible. But as far as the business is concerned I think it's become a little more cutting edge um a little more um not. One thing especially for us in Montana is is. Rance, my partner and I we grew up fly fishing and a lot of the regulations in Montana have made it so unless you have a lot of money you cannot be an outfitter. And they're changing the barriers of entry and so there are a few examples but it's it's big money people are buying out permits and they're not, rather than letting maybe the best guy for the best guide take on his clients and be an outfitter there is you know a CEO of a company buying up all the permits and he's he's basically controlling a lot of things and so things have changed as far as that's concerned. But so it's there aren't as many good old

boys maybe running running the industry but so it just made it made it maybe a little bit like I said more cutting edge or more sophisticated but you're missing some of the hardcore guys that really are the passionate people. A lot of those people can't afford to own their own places.

Interviewer [00:24:12] This project is part of MSU's efforts to develop a trout and salmonid collection. What is the value of a collection such as this?

Travis Smith [00:24:20] I think it's phenomenal. Any any-not just MSU and not just the Angling I think any type of great history you can get and um I I know this is an oral history thing there. I know there is at least one guy that's been interviewed that passed away almost two years ago. So I think it's pretty cool that they're that there's- they have him speaking about what what it was like when he was first in the industry and I think it's great because it can it can continue on and it will show the difference between what was happening in the in the 40s and 50s and the. I'm talking 1940s and 50s in the 2000s. My kids call it the nineteen hundreds. But I think I think it's phenomenal and in any of the more than the better.

Interviewer [00:25:12] DO you have a fishing story you would like to share?

Travis Smith [00:25:26] Well it comes to mind. I. I was guiding a guy who he showed up at the fly shop. I was on the Henry's Fork and I was telling someone a=this story the other day that he was 96 years old shows up at the shop and he said I want to fish dry flies to rising fish but I can see. And it's like OK you know this guy probably can't walk too far again. So I took him down downstream below Harriman State Park is the famous dry fly section and I took him to a place where I knew they'd be rising and they were. And he caught a couple of those. He was like no really Travis I want to find a fish that sitting there, eating dry flies and I want to fish I want to match the hatch and I want to fish to that particular fish. And I knew of a fish that I hadn't been able to get anyone into at all. And every time I get anywhere near it it would spook. And so I took this guy in my boat. We went to a totally different section and I took him in my boat and I forgot to mention he was 96 and he had every piece of brand new equipment you could have. Every brand new rod reel it's like how cool is that. And you can cast. And so I take him to this spot. I can see the fish rising and it's probably seriously like 300 feet from me. And I knew exactly where it was. And we get out of the boat and held arms. It took us about an hour to get in position. We didn't spook it and I realized Okay well I've been going a little too fast to get toward this fish. And anyway he was in a position made a couple of false casts, throws the perfect cast drifts over the fish eats his fly. Takes off breaks them off. He was the happiest guy in the world and so was I. And I was like 20 some at the time. He left that day and I never saw him again but it was it was a really cool experience to see that in you. Yeah it was I'll never forget that guy. It was pretty cool and just his passion for wanting to do it the right way. And. The fact that he had new gear and he was 96 and did something about fly fishing that it's a passion that you can be a little kid you can be. You don't have to be strong you don't have to be. You don't have to be a great athlete but you can always you can you can fly fishing nets. It's so awesome so.