woda-jason-2017-05-31f.mp4

Jason Woda [00:00:10] Oh! There's so many! Because of the amount of time that I spend on the water. Every day is different and I get to spend every day as a guide with different groups of people so there's no real charter that stands out. You know, fishing for me started as a lifestyle as a very young kid. My greatest memories are with my dad. Traveling all over the state, chasing salmon somewhere on Lake Michigan. If there was a specific time it was-- boy I had to be 10 or 11 years old and we went to Sturgeon Bay Wisconsin, which is a pretty nautical place since there's a lot of ship building company, stuff like that. And in the fall the salmon returns to the Strawberry Creek up there. We just had a 17 foot aluminum boat. And we spent 10 hours one day, just trying to trying and finally, after 10 hours, we hooked a big king up there. I still have a picture of it, this day-- to this day, and every time I look at it, it makes me think of that time. But it was-- it was really cool. So every memory I have is based on the fishing lifestyle because after that point, then we got into big boats and stuff like that.

Jason Woda [00:01:23] Yeah. He never-- never chartered, he never guided. But since I was probably 8 or 9 years old, we always had boats in the marinas. That's how we spent our weekends, was fishing on the Great Lakes. Some folks go camping, some folks do other stuff. Every weekend, every Frida,y Saturday, Sunday, we were in the marina fishing. So, he worked for General Electric for 35 years and how I ended up in the business was, [he] came home one day, said, I'm retiring in three weeks. I'm not buying anymore boats or paying any more fuel. You're on your own, kid. I said, All right, I better go buy a boat. [laughs] So it was an addiction at that point, so I couldn't do without it.

Jason Woda [00:02:14] [sighs] To answer that question properly, it would be say-- be saying, What other better job is there? I get the fish every day for a living. After 19 years there's days where it can, you know, get old or played out so to speak. But, you know, just like this morning, every time that rod goes off with a fish, I still get that adrenaline rush. So, that's what I like most about it. I was born a people person, so I really like meeting groups of people. It's just a fantastic way to earn a living. Phenomenal.

Jason Woda [00:02:56] We have five species. So we have rainbow trout, brown trout, lake trout, and then we have coho or silver salmon and chinook salmon-- king salmon. That's pretty much it for us. As the lakes biology and ecol-- ecology all changed. We used to do some some yellow perch fishing, but those have kind of-- they're making a bounce back, but they're not to the levels where you can really harvest them with any numbers. But, you know, depending on where you are on Lake Michigan, Green Bay area has got one of the world's finest walleye fisheries. And pretty much that's on the bay side and on the lake side, all the way around the lake, including the Michigan side, Indiana, Illinois, just-- just a phenomenal salmon and trout fishery. Just phenomenal.

Jason Woda [00:03:54] Well, I wish we had more time to talk about it, but I'll keep it short and sweet. Twenty years ago was when we first started to see the-- the biggest factor in the changes that we've seen and that's in zebra mussels and quagga mussels. Zebra mussels got in and for most of us, we know that zebra mussels filter out the lowest end of the food chain. As that spills up the food chain, it causes a depletion in the forage base for our salmon and trout. Now there's a bunch of other factors there that factor into that, but for the most part it's the food chain process that has diminished-- not wiped out, but diminished the bait fish population that we're now seeing a bounce back in as well. I'm a firm believer that Mother Nature has a way to figure it out and she usually does. But the zebra mussel changed-- changed everything. Changed the way we fish, changed how the

fish react on a day to day basis. The biggest factor, they made the water crystal clear. So that's, by far, the biggest change that I've seen. It's just water clarity and water quality itself. Zebra mussels are great for that one thing. They sure take out a lot of pollutants and dirt and heavy metals, you name it, they filter it out. But on the flip side they also take out some very good things that we need for the lake. So fishing, in my opinion, hasn't changed all that much over the last 20 years or so. But we as fishermen have had to change to be able to still catch them. But, there's some things starting to happen now, on the lake with-- with stocking cuts and changes and stuff like that where 10 years from now we'll probably see a couple more changes. It's constantly evolving. Constantly.

Jim Thull [00:05:52] What about in terms of changes in species, species density, things like that. I know when I was a kid we had smelt runs, the perch fishing and was-- was great...

Jason Woda [00:06:01] Right. Well everything reverts, oddly enough, back to the zebra mussel. The perch population, there was there were some commercial harvesting issues that really put a dent in those a number of years back. And it kind of never recovered from that. It's slowly happening, but that's something that takes a long time. Lake Trout are-- there are great fish. But for Lake Michigan in my opinion there's there's too many of them. Twenty years ago there was a lake trout rehabilitation program started 20 plus years ago. I'm not exactly sure what year they started it in. And. It's almost as if there's too many because there is talk of there being no forage based problems feed fish problems. And they want to cut the salmon numbers but the crop numbers are exploding. So. We really got to keep an eye on that. But as far as everything else you know all the salmon the the other four species so Lake trout are the only native one. And the other four species are all stocked by all four of the different states. Coming. Are stocked by all for the different states. So those numbers they change. Using whatever data the data they collect from year to year as far as forge based numbers how many are harvested. Lake Michigan being a. A manufactured fishery. The states have to be on top of that stuff. So it's. It's pretty neat to watch especially with all the years that I've been out here it's.

Jason Woda [00:07:45] It's ever changing. But it's it's as good now as it has been in the past. It's good fishery. Who's.

Jason Woda [00:07:58] Listening to stakeholders. So fishermen like myself for the private boater that doesn't charter guy. Really listening to what. Those guys want. Most Lake Michigan fishermen in my opinion would rather catch the silver fish so coho salmon Chinook salmon steelhead rainbow trout. Lake Trout kind of on the bottom of that list and with that rehabilitation program that they started many years ago and the lake trout flourishing the way they are. We were very much headed to Lake Michigan being. A. All lake trout fishery and eventually phasing out salmon completely. Which kind of ruins the ideology that they started 50 some odd years ago now that. They created a world class fishery and now it's starting to turn the other way and I think it's it's more of a political. Money move than it is for the outdoors itself. So I think that's where they. Where they're going wrong. But this year there was a lot of changes that were made. A group of us guys got together and banded together and worked hand-in-hand with the state.

Jason Woda [00:09:10] And they took our opinions on it and they listened. So it's a great step in the right direction. So I think if. If you can continue that path of working with the state. With the fishermen with the weekend fishermen the commercial fishermen we keep those lines of communication open and say hey we nobody really wants these lake trout. Give us give us salmon. That's what we're really after so let's manage it.

Jason Woda [00:09:33] For that. Now that's that's goes for Wisconsin Michigan and kind of has their own idea ideology going on. Indiana and Illinois. I. Don't have a real big chunk of lake shore. So what they do is is a much smaller scale than the states that surround it with more mileage. So Illinois stopped their stocking program altogether this year. So pretty much Wisconsin and Michigan are carrying carrying the weight for everything. But all the states work together. They need to I mean it's even though we're separated by eighty six miles of lake. These fish swim everywhere. So whatever they do whatever we do affects everybody. So it's working out well. I think it's hugely important for a number of years. People including myself. Just kind of took for granted that everything was was good and and everything was going in the direction that it should be and.

Jason Woda [00:10:39] We really took it for granted until we really started digging into it. This this past year. Wisconsin and Michigan agreed that they wanted to cut. 65 percent of the King stocking. Pretty much. How Lake Michigan lays out. The southern part of Lake Michigan probably wouldn't have seen that much of a change in the fishery. We get all kinds of coho salmon down here because salmon the Coho salmon migrate from the south to the north probably up to about Sheboygan Wisconsin and then they they push off shore and they don't really migrate any further north than that. On the southern end of the lake. We have phenomenal lake trout fishing which they don't have that great. The guys north of Sheboygan the Door County areas stuff like that rely heavily on King Salmon Fishing for their fishing industry. And with those cuts that would have. Kind of shut small towns down especially ones that need the tourism dollar to keep it open. So from a political standpoint how do we allow that cut to happen. That could have affected not just only charter fishermen or marinas I mean the tumble effect of that into gas stations hotels. You name there's so many things that surround the fishery here. In Wisconsin. That. The trickle effect. Until you sit down and actually write it on paper you don't realize how many people rely on. So I think people need to be very aware of it and if if they don't like something or if they don't agree with some just going through the proper channels to get your opinion heard sending emails phone call and just handling yourself professionally and. Then saying hey.

Jason Woda [00:12:21] We don't like this idea is there where we can figure something out. But I think we need to be really. Really. Really.

Jason Woda [00:12:32] Absolutely. I think it's a huge responsibility especially for the charter captains and guides that work this lake. You know oddly enough there's there's kind of a. What Lake Michigan as it's called a put and take fishery. So states put them in. People take them out. If we don't take them out because there's no real natural reproduction on Lake Michigan Michigan says they have some small percentage of Chinook reproduction and the lake trout natural reproduce off shore. But the other species don't naturally reproduce so they live out their life. And if they don't get caught they just they die naturally. But if we don't take them out then we end up with an overpopulation issue putting more pressure on the forage base. So I feel a greater responsibility for the good of the lake. To.

Jason Woda [00:13:26] To get into the arena at times and speak my opinion saying well if we don't do this this is going to happen if we do do this. This is going to happen. And the charters and guides probably have more of a heartbeat on it than anybody else does. We're on the lake every day.

Jason Woda [00:13:43] We see what's going on as far as forage we see the health of the fish more often than most folks do. So I think our opinion. Matters. So. I think it's really important. Really important. Well a if you go back in the history of Lake Michigan in the fishery itself. Invasive species is why we have this fishery.

Jason Woda [00:14:10] With ale wife. So the ale wife kind of spawned this this whole plan that I believe that was in 1966 is when they first started stocking salmonoids in Lake Michigan.

Jason Woda [00:14:22] And that was. And there was also a time frame in there where there's another invasive species the sea lamprey. Almost wiped out the entire lake trout population. So those invasive have probably the two biggest impact on this fishery over the years. For one we wouldn't have this fishery if it wasn't for alwifes.

Jason Woda [00:14:45] And then the sea lamprey taking care of business well they got the sea lamprey under control. We still see him from time to time but nowhere near in the numbers that we did twenty five years ago. And then rainbow smelt used to be a great forage but they were invasive as well. And then they kind of got fished out and the lake changed along with the zebra mussels and other invasive. But now we're slowly starting to see a bounce back in the rainbow smelt. So nobody really knows kind of what's going on with this lake even from a scientific standpoint data collection because of the zebra mussel. Has changed immensely as well and they're still in my opinion using archaic methods to gain data. And they have the opportunity to use technology that will give you a better scope.

Jason Woda [00:15:30] Of things. But there's a lot of old school thinking going on right now but it all reverts back to invasive. So.

Jason Woda [00:15:40] Huge impacts by invasive and. Not it's not all negative. Everything revolves around native or invasive species here on the Great Lakes so it's kind of a neat story. You know.

Jason Woda [00:15:59] My biggest concern is actually the management end of it. I think you know the Great Lakes as a whole not just Lake Michigan. Everything's based on the management end of things. Now climate change you know I'm sure has. Some small effect but I'm but I'm also a huge believer that that climate change is going to happen.

Jason Woda [00:16:22] Slowly over a long period of time. It's not going away. We'll wake up tomorrow in Wisconsin are going to have palm trees. You know it's going to take a long time and like Mother Nature always does she kind of finds a way in Lake Michigan with it being so deep in such a coldwater water fishery. It's going to take decades and decades from that end of things. So so management and the other invasive you know that gets brought up a lot of times on charters is Asian carp. Which have been a problem I guess in the Mississippi River for 17 or 18 years. I don't think we're ever going to have that issue. The. I have a theory behind the Asian carp issue that if you and I walk outside. In 30 degree below weather we're probably gonna turn around and go back inside. Same thing's kind of going on with the Asian carp right now. The big scare that everyone kind of had. Was that they were going to spread like wildfire and eat up all the vegetation. Well right now they're all dammed up somewhere in Chicago. And in order for them to spread like wildfire they have to swim through large expanses of clear cold water which just isn't in their. Lifestyle. No. They won't do it. So. Nothing nothing really scares me or concerns me right now other than.

Jason Woda [00:17:53] Management. Management is probably our biggest fault right now. Oh.

Jason Woda [00:18:06] Just go do it. You know. Lake Michigan's a little bit different of a fishery typically. It costs a couple bucks to go to go have fun at it. A boat isn't always necessary we have some very good shore fishing here but it's spotty and only happens at certain times of the year.

Jason Woda [00:18:26] But boy. Where would I be if somebody when I was a kid would've said you know fishings silly. Why do you want to do that. Pat him on the back and say get after and we just we just did that this morning. Family bought a new boat for their family and they want to learn how efficiently Michigan. So instead of coming out on my boat. I went on their boat showed them the ropes. They had a they have a 14 year old son a 12 year old son of a 9 year old daughter. And. The one son. The 14 year old's name is Chris. He is he is totally into it already. He he's done it twice and he wants to learn everything about it. And. I saw myself in that kid this morning. It's kind of cool.

Jason Woda [00:19:11] Boy I have no idea how we would do it you know.

James Thull [00:19:14] Do you think it's important.

Jason Woda [00:19:15] I think it's hugely important because I think the less people that you have into it. The weaker your voices. And if you don't have people participating. Eventually just like if you own a restaurant nobody's coming there to eat eventually it's going to go away. I think it's hugely hugely important. And I think society is in itself. Has in itself. Changed changed young people getting into things like hunting and fishing and stuff like that. You know I've raised playing softball or basketball or there on 17 sports teams and there's there's just no time. I. Get it myself. My kids are very active in sports and. I should have my son out fishing a little more often. I'm riddled with guilt with that one once in a while.

Jason Woda [00:20:03] Because I do it for a living. It has changed fishing for me. Where it used to be this huge. Exciting thing to do all the time now. It's kind of like work which kind of ruined it for my son a little bit but. We're getting to it. But that's what I'm saying that adults are so busy nowadays and kids are so busy nowadays. I think I think we just need more people to take the time out from life and enjoy the outdoors fishing hunting camping whatever it is. We need it.

Jason Woda [00:20:35] And we need it soon. On. License sales. I know in Wisconsin from a hunting standpoint I know it has nothing to do with fishing but hunting sales because kids aren't getting into hunting. Sales are down like 50 or 60 percent fishing in Wisconsin is still. Still a pretty big family pastime. So I'm hoping that keeps spilling over. But how to get people in a promotion. You know you've got to promote it. You know there's a there's a couple local TV shows that you can catch on free TV but you know you got the big networks that are on you know pay for cable and stuff like that. It just doesn't give enough face time. Fishing does not get enough face time. Lake Michigan itself it's kind of an eclectic group of folks. Everybody kind of knows everybody from here to 200 miles up the lake. And. It's it's a big group. But it's also a very very small group. And. You know we introduce people to fishing through chartering but that costs quite a bit of money to go a charter. So to get it. Spread more out I'd love to say I'd love to take everybody off free I can't do it but. More promotion of it in all the states really kind of. You know what no matter

what state you're in the States spending a little money on advertising about fish. You know you always see about. Camping bike trails riding stuff. And fishing.

Jason Woda [00:22:02] In my opinion kind of gets put on the back burner. It should. It should. Nothing. Too scary. Years ago so this probably was my third year in business so we're gonna go back 15 years ago. I had. It was before the age of really high power smartphones. Which keep us very informed nowadays. We had a thunderstorm coming on us and I wasn't paying attention. We were tucked up tight to shore so I couldn't see over the tree line. And I didn't know that the storm was there. And I turned around. I had a gentleman.

Jason Woda [00:22:45] Kneeling on the back deck of the boat and he it's holding a space like this. I said Oh did you know when I met fish I bring the net handle back. I said did I get you in the face with the. With the. Net. He goes No he. Is his crowns were asking in his mouth because there was no electricity so much electricity in here. He said he felt like he had a nine volt battery stuck to his tongue. And I looked at him and looked at everybody else in the group. I said it's time to leave. So by the time we got back to the dock the wind was blowing 70 80 miles an hour or whatever it was a big storm. That was probably the most scared I've ever been. But I got I got a million one stories. We don't have enough tape. You know. It. Just. That's probably the scariest most memorable scary moment. Best moment.

Jason Woda [00:23:34] Watching my son catch his first salmon. And that was. That's pretty cool.

Jason Woda [00:23:46] I've had so many on my bucket list for so long and I know where I'd start. We're doing vast Louisiana next year for four Yellowfin that's all ready to go. I'd like to do something. And we're doing Alaska. So. That's happening. But if I want to trip. Has to be some. Rain Forest. You know something very very remote where I have to live in a mosquito net. And. You know wake up in the morning make a fire every night. Peacock Bass you know stuff that I get I've seen only on TV real remote places where you've got to take your canoe. So you know. I've seen some cool shows but Brazil.

Jason Woda [00:24:29] I really like saltwater. I'd really like to do South Africa. I'd really like to do South Africa. I hear the bill fish fishing down there is amazing. And then I'd take a day trip and go watch sharks jump out of the water and eat fake seals. great question. I don't have enough lifetime to do all the things I'd love to do. But I'm hoping hoping. Oh. Just.

Jason Woda [00:25:05] Keep it close to your heart. You know. I can't tell you how many hours I've spent on this lake if I tried to calculate it. It's an ungodly number of hours. And there's guys they've been doing it for longer than I have. The reason I do it is because I love it. And because it's it's one of the world's greatest fisheries and the fact that it's man made makes it an incredible story. Probably the greatest outdoors experiment that has. Ever. Worked. So to let it change. To a point where someday it might not be there is a little heartbreaking for me.

Jason Woda [00:25:46] So that's my word of wisdom. Keep it close to your heart. Pay attention. No. Make sure you're involved. And just love it. Love it and tell everybody how much you love it. Keep the buzz alive and. When you could. Get your kids out there. Though go enjoy it. I swear to you. I'll be doing this a long time. I don't know what I'd be doing if I didn't have this. Since I was this big. You know.