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Gregory Wood [00:00:10] I was born and raised in a little town north of here about two hours. My parents had a trout stream that ran through our property on the farm. You-- Everything good with the camera? Okay. Charleston Rantsen Farm when I was grow'in up, prior to being a teenager. Did a lot of spin fishing on that river. The one day I watch this older gentleman, probably in his 60s, late 70s, early 70s, standing on the same banks I used to fish casting a fly rod, taking trout off left and right all day long and I couldn't catch one. So approached this gentleman, talk to him, and he told me to go out and buy a fly rod. Next day my mom took me to Wal-Mart, went out and bought the, whatever rod I could afford. I think it was a Shakespeare, at the time, that came all in one box, the line and couple of flies. That same gentleman was there the next day. Watched him, watched him. Taught myself how to cast on the stream. Basics. Caught my first trout on a tan elk hair caddis that that gentleman ties. His name was Jean, um, uh, he tied. Um, from there, every day of my summer vacation or non-working days as a kid, I was at my parents yard putting a coffee can out there, balloons or something, and sit with the fly rod, and just trying to hit things. Trying to perfect my accuracy, perfect my casting. Um, that's really where it started. Right then and there in the home water on my parents farm, actually.

Gregory Wood [00:01:36] Absolutely, that would probably be, a list of importance in, in my fishing career, that'd be number one. Um, I find that being a guide slash educator that the education part of it is more important than anything else. Teaching people the proper etiquette, the way to treat other anglers, the way to treat fish, the way to treat nature that is first and foremost to me, because without that you have too many idiots on the river that create issues that create laws that create bans that create private property shut downs, things of that nature. So deep down my in my heart I'd rather teach all day long than actually fish. I'd rather stand there and instruct somebody the proper way to do things until they learn how to figure it out on themselves. And they go from there, teach the next person, the next person like I was taught in my younger years.

Gregory Wood [00:02:32] Yes, sir. So my company name is Zerokill Guiding. The name speaks for itself. I don't kill fish. I believe in catch release 100 hundred percent just due to the fact that I do it for a profession and I do it for an income, so killing the fish off is gonna kill my income and kill my ability for my clients and my friends to enjoy a day on the water that we all do enjoy as anglers. My company started about seven years ago. I was in a LLC with another gentleman located in my parents area up there. We had a fly shop together. Long story short, Cabela's moved in about six miles away. Business declined dramatically. Uh, we shut down the brick and mortar. We kept it there just for education. He was in his late 70s, this is not the same guy I met was younger, but late 70s, got a little older got a little grouchier, I guess with people and stuff like that. And I started noticing that he wasn't there to serve people anymore or be that helping hand. He was just there for money. And that part, I didn't care about it, I didn't want that part of it in my life yet. It wasn't, I know I'm never gonna be a millionaire unless I win the lottery and know where I am in life. And from there I sold my partnership out from him and went on my own for guiding. I took half my clients with me. To this day we still talk, we're still good friends. And that's, that's how I ended up where I am. Just local, local support from friends and the guides around the area that we all work together. I just don't do it myself, if I have a river I don't fish very often, I call a local guide up, get some information, pass him the trip. If I need someone else help with the trip, I always bring a local guide along and pay him just as much as he needs to be paid. It's not about me. It's about the clients who keep the local area goin', so.

Gregory Wood [00:04:29] Yes, one hundred percent, because we're the people that are on the front lines. Not all, like myself I'm not there all day long, but your guides that do it full time, their livelihood is in that water. Well, what's underneath the surface. If the things aren't underneath the surface, I'm talking entomology and the fish and stuff like that, vegetation, cold water, ya know, the fish aren't going to survive. Neither are the anglers be able to make any type of money or income or impact on the environment in the future.

Gregory Wood [00:05:04] So I'm gonna stick to the area I live in now, growing up, the winter time was snow, the summertime was warm. Now going 34 years in advance, summertimes are wet, winter times are wet. Not as cold, not as snowy anymore. I feel that we've lost the spring season here in Pennsylvania. I feel like it goes from winter and all of a sudden it becomes hot and humid and things just grow. It doesn't feel like we have that normal spring of, you know, April and May like most of our four-seasons have, four-seasons states have. So the up, upwards in rainfall. The colder temperatures and sometimes extremely hot and humid summers from all of the rainfall and things like that. That plays an effect of everything we do as anglers and outdoorsman period.

Gregory Wood [00:05:55] I do find that climate change will affect our future and that we have to take a step ahead of it in order to preserve the world we live in. The world we live in nowadays, if we have the right people taking care of it, it can be preserved forever. Um, so I come from a farm. I watch a lot of farmlands get sold for developments, housing, industrial stuff like that and all that fresh air and beautiness goes away with tall skyscrapers and mortar and bricks and stuff like that. The irrelevance of dams. My local river, which would be the Lehigh River. It is not classified as a trout stream in Pennsylvania, ah, due to the water quality and/or the temperatures of the water. The Francis E. Walter Dam, which is located Whitehaven, Pennsylvania, is a bottom slash top release dam. That area also produces a lot of income for white water rafters and a lot of, trying to think of the correct word to use here, I guess river professionals would be the broad term. Those guys generate so much more revenue than all the guides in the world could combined in a day to make any type of progress. So what happened to the Lehigh is that these companies have monetarily influence to the dam, the Army Corps of Engineers and the government, where they control more of the dam flows and the outflows and how much water they're going to release, when they're going to release it, how it's released, in the top or the bottom. It's going to be cold water release or a warm water release. And what that did to the Lehigh was it's-- it is destroying a great fishery compared to out the west. I would compare the Madison River to the Lehigh River. Of Montana. Madison, Montana compared to Lehigh River, that's, that's a phenomenal fishing. It does hold. The same time one day you could float down at four hundred CFS and get a nice flow. The next day you're floatin' at twenty five hundred because whitewater guidess needed a release in the top of the dam to go down to the gorge and make their revenue, also for the whitewater guides. Ah... Opinion? If I'm- am I allowed? [unintelligible]. My opinion is: I believe we should share the water. I don't believe that money should control anything that we want to do as a recreation or a livelihood. I don't think that one person or one company should have a say in everything goes on and control our government and control our people. They don't ask for our opinion very often about what we're so concerned with. Our board members and Lehigh are about 30 people. Yeah, the whitewater guidess have hundreds, hundreds of people up there trying to make money and stuff like that. And I understand that we all have to survive in our life. We have to make our money. But one day we're gonna we're gonna kill every last tree or every last river in this world and what do we have left? To eat dirt. Yeah, we're not- Everybody has fly rods or huntin' gear around and it's going to be all destroyed. There's no sense to be used anymore. 'Cause just corporate America and just our livelihood. Just been keep on building better things and

gotta keep on going and going. Instead of taking a stop, take a deep breath and close your eyes and open them up for a minute and actually took a look around and what's, what's happening and how it's truly affecting who you are and your family and your community, which I have a great deal of respect for. So with us fighting with a dam and stuff like that on a yearly basis since we're in meetings with those guys and, and pleading and pleading and pleading. Over the past 15 years of those-- of those guidess going up there and doing that, we've seen a better change in the dam control. We've now acquired, I guess you wanna call us and start fishing. We acquired a "bottom release only" out of the dam. So any time they ever release water, that's below one hundred seventy five CFS, it has come from the bottom. Average temperature forty one to forty seven degrees, which we all know for trout is ideal instead of seven seventy five to eighty one degrees in the top of the water being dumped out into the river. So, that's my answer to that question, sir.

Gregory Wood [00:10:06] Yes, sir. I cannot remember how to say the river. Its name. We were there for four hours of the group from work. The Australian guide that was with us, he was actually from California. He lived in San Clemente, California. That's where he was born raised. Moved over there to go backpacking Europe. When you and I where walking up here, talking about backpacking Europe? He backpacked Europe, but all of a sudden found a river he really enjoyed. Had his fly with him. Started catching fish. Bought a piece of land. Made a little bungalow. Created a little guide business. We weren't with him for very long is our time schedule was very tight when we were over there checking machinery and stuff like that. Traveling wise, I've traveled across the states, Pennsylvania. You know, from here to California to Montana, live there. I had the fortunate ability to travel around the world twice, literally, in the service and through work, uh, other jobs I've held after the service. Anywhere from Iraq to Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia to Qatar to Germany, Austria, China, South Korea, you name it from there. So it was, I look back now and regret not packing my seven--piece fly rod in my sea bag or anything else. I did tie flies in Iraq actually, that's- [chuckles] I had a lot of downtime over there. I was a crew chief for helicopters, but I didn't get to fly every other day and I spent months behind a vice when I was deployed for two years. Months. I'm talking, I'd be in my tent or my room and just ham Radix. I had nothing else to do. I literally had nothing else do besides work out or go for a run or go watch a movie. So the first year I was in Iraq, I actually ended up tying about thirteen thousand flies. I had another group of individuals I actually taught how to tie flies. We took all these, most of the flies. They were auctioned off at an [slurs speech] Orvis raffle out in San Diego at their wha- local company out there. They'd raffle off and they made money for the Wounded Warriors.

James Thull [00:12:14] Wonderful!

Gregory Wood [00:12:14] We had like seven guys. They were all gung-ho Marines. They would sit there with little feathers and string and you know, hundred fifty degrees outside, we're tying flies and tying elk hair caddis and wooly buggers. San Juan worms was al-- it was almost like, I don't mean this a derogatory way, it's almost like my little Indonesian fly shop, Fly Tyers I had. Yeah, that was- It was a wonderful experience to teach people how to do that. I'm not, I'm not a fly tyer much anymore, but that's my wife's part of it, is that, yeah so.

Gregory Wood [00:12:47] She is... She is my better half as we always say. Um, she's the one who keeps me going. Sometimes I get down on my luck and I realize I can't do things and she's the person who says get your ass up, get the car and go. Take the trip. Go do it. Doesn't matter if it's a hundred fifty degrees outside. Go do it. You know, it's all about you and who you are and it's-- She's very proud of me. She-- As I said, she supports

everything I do. She fly fishes. Ah, she also rows. Ah, I would never date a woman that couldn't fly fish and/or row, because every time I have to row, I can't fish. So it has to just work out mutually that way. So I'm thankful that I met her in my life, that she's helped with my business, help with advertising, help with going out, talking to people and pushing me a little harder than I probably would have pushed myself in the past couple of years. So I'm-- I'm thankful I have her. I really am.

Gregory Wood [00:13:45] To tell you the truth, I was influenced by local homegrown fly tyers. Ah, not gonna-- There's no one in particular that I would give a big name like Mr. Kelly or somebody from out there in Montana. I don't-- I appreciate what they do. I don't, I don't follow what they do. I don't educate myself on that. I was more into the, going to the Trout Unlimited meetings. Watch the old-timers sit there, tie flies. Why do you tie it that way compared to Kelly Galloup? Well, I do it this way for this river. I do this... Okay. So I learned and educated myself on that. Watch 'em. And that's actually how my wife got-- That's actually my wife got into it. Going to Trout Unlimited meetings and seeing all these people fly tie. She's an artist by trade. She's a glassblower. So her artistic ability is phenomenal. I don't have that. My artisticness is with a fly rod in my hand or oars in my hand. For her, beauty is painting and glass work and tying flies, building rods, helped me build boats, designing and stuff like that. It's phenomenal. So I'm glad.

James Thull [00:14:47] That's great.

Gregory Wood [00:14:48] I don't follow anybody in particular besides just local people.

Gregory Wood [00:14:58] Lake sides that get behind the water, yet. Ah, Cuba would be one of them. Argentin-- Argentina and Chile. I have not been to Alaska yet. There's a reason I haven't gone because I'm afraid I won't come back yet. Um, my mother says it to me all the time. Go buy a one way ticket or take a drive up there and just make sure the car breaks down and you'll never come back. That's what she wants from me, but... Overseas wise, I would have to say, it'd be the Central America, South America. Any those countries I'd-- I'd go put a line in anywhere. Just for something different.

James Thull [00:15:35] Yeah.

Gregory Wood [00:15:36] I'm used to trout fishing, small mouth fishing. I don't care. I don't care what it is on the end of the rod. As long as it shakes it, it excites me. From a chub to a sunny to... Actually, I lie. I was in Jamaica. We fly fish for blue, blue marlin out there. Ah, 2007 landed my first blue marlin. Uh, an hour and thirty minute flight on a 10 weight. Craziest experience I ever had in my entire life. I had goals in my life and that was number two. I want to fly rod and I look back, that was a pretty spectacular day, actually. Pretty, pretty amazing just to do something like that.

Gregory Wood [00:16:15] When I was working the flash up that we had, we were one of the only people on the East Coast that did a guide school, and that was what really got me loving the sport and loving the job, period. I loved having people come from Kentucky, Tennessee, Mass. Massachusetts. You know, just anywhere in the world they come down and they want learn how to be a God, they won't learn how to road drift boat, they won't learn how to fly fish better. They won't learn how. Guide People fly fishing. That part. There was a turning point my life watching other people do what I did and how much I really enjoyed it. I love catching fish. Don't get me wrong, I love going out fishing for myself with my friends. At the same time, I have with my wife and a friend. I'd rather just sit in yours and point fish out and get them in the places where they couldn't get to. To catch all day long

and just have a great experience. And with fly fishing, especially in the professional part of it, there's good guides, there's bad guides. You know, there's people that will sit there and teach you stuff all day long. There's people that sit there and criti-- criticize you all day long. I'd rather you pay me "x" amount of dollars and you come away with there with more knowledge than you ever thought your entire life. Coming from a thirty four year old, you know, young man. Yeah, I've taken people out who are 67 years old, been fly fishing for 50 years. The things I teach them or show them are just like, well, I never saw that before. No one ever showed me that. That fills my heart. That actually fills my net. I guess you would say more than the fish does, so.

Gregory Wood [00:17:52] What kind of qualities make a person a good fishing partner? Patience, uh, would be a key because we all know fly fishing can be challenging sometimes with weather abilities, people's own abilities, things like that. Um, respect is another big thing. Like people that fish with me, you know, I'm the guide that'll-- you, you're wading out on the river, I go behind you. If there's two inches of water. I get out my boat. I drag my boat behind you cause you were there first. Now I, I try to show my friends and stuff like that because the one day they're out in the river and they realize that that guide just blew right through them and knocked all our fish are sittin' there, watch them eat on the rise. Now they realize then, who the guides are that really do care about what they do or really care about their clients or care about what they're trying to pass along to society and the angling world. So I guess, yeah, patience, respect. Respect for the fish, respect for the environment. You know, I'm a recovering, recovering addict and alcoholic, so I don't drink doing that anymore. And I used to watch a lot people just come out on my boat and just go out there and drink all day long. I'm like, you're, you're missing what's around you. Take a look up from the bottle. Look at the mountains. Look at the trees. Look at the world. Look at the river. Look at the fish you're catching, you're not catching. So I guess the main thing is respect. Just respect for who we are as humans, the world, the fishing, the quality, our environment, everything. That's, that's a major point. I guess you would say that.

Gregory Wood [00:19:22] Yes. But what hap-- those rivers that I would name. Um, they're actually all catch and release now. Fly fishing only. So they've taken those great rivers I use-- that you were referring to in the question and they actually preserved them. I couldn't tell you anymore, sir, where you could go to catch a brook trout and keep it. Of the wild brook here or the wild brown, I couldn't tell you in Pennsylvania. I-- the Lehigh River, we had wild browns and wild brooks there and stuff like that, but they are kept and we don't allow that through our business. Lehigh River, I mean, the Lehigh River has a good population, but would not tell people to go out there and kill fish. Because you kill them all off, we're not gonna have anything left and it's going to have all white water rafting. You might as well go buy dri-- ya know, go buy a raft and just go paddling every weekend instead of putting a line in the water.

James Thull [00:20:11] Yeah.

Gregory Wood [00:20:12] So..

James Thull [00:20:12] Well I'm not even necessarily referring to just Pennsylvania. I would say, healthy populations, Montana has a lot of healthy populations of trout that, um, can certainly handle the occasional harvesting of the fish. Is that something that you feel... Is there a place for both people?

Gregory Wood [00:20:28] Is there a place for both people?

James Thull [00:20:30] When the population can support.

Gregory Wood [00:20:32] Yes. Now, I'm going to go into this part. I was the president of Trout Unlimited for three years and a local chapter here in Pennsylvania, so we're always catch-release, catch-release. But then we started going into the part that... We started putting fish in rivers ourselves through stocking programs, to overpopulate, to try to keep the wild fish population at a-- a consistent base, a consistent level throughout the ecosystem, but allowing these table fair fish, as they call them in Pennsylvania. Like a-- runaway trout, or whatever you want to call them, able for people to keep. Ah, honestly, I've never eaten trout in my entire life until I was in Austria a couple years ago. I had it raw in a piece of sushi that they made. Some kind of sushi dish over there. I don't have the taste for it. Everybody tells me it's delicious. It's wonderful. I look at a trout as a piece of artwork. That I don't want to put the artwork in my stomach. You don't eat art. To me-- To me, you don't eat art. Now, my wife told me that the day I met her. You don't eat or you don't destroy art because it is made by somebody either God, nature, mother nature, whoever created it or a human, created that piece of artwork. They designed it. They made it themselves. It's their handiwork. Why would you want to put it down your throat, into your stomach? [chuckles] Now, ever since then I'm like, well, that makes a lot of sense to me now.

James Thull [00:21:49] Yeah. Yeah.

Gregory Wood [00:21:49] It really does. So... There is-- there is room for it. You'll be all-- any state that you pay for a fishing license you have the same right as I do. I have the right to return every fish I catch to the river. You have the rights within creel limits to catch and keep what you just, ya know, what you determine that you need for your family, for food, sustenance, stuff like that, and or just for sport. Take 'em home and grill him up. To each their own. Um, like I said I am a big advocate of catch and release, so if you want to kill 'em, that's-- that's your decision. I don't agree with it. Overpopulation... I don't know if there's rivers in Pennsylvania. We have overpopulated trout problems. [chuckles]

James Thull [00:22:34] Yeah. Yeah.

Gregory Wood [00:22:34] I like to know where they are. I had to go find them if they're starving. 'Cause I'm... throw like a size two... land at them. Um, but that I'm aware of, sir, I... There-- There's two of us out there, ya know, there's catch-release and there's people that kill 'em.

James Thull [00:22:48] Yeah.

Gregory Wood [00:22:49] I-- I-- Like I said, I have no problem with that. That's your-- That's your right as a angler, as holding a fishing license.

James Thull [00:22:56] Yeah.

Gregory Wood [00:22:56] You're-- you're able to make that decision if you want to kill it and keep it or if you want to take the hook back, release them-- release them in the wild, let them grow up, let them get bigger, let 'em spawn. So to each their own.

Gregory Wood [00:23:14] Uh, 2019... 2016 my wife and I, prior to us getting married, uh, were up in the West Branch of the Delaware. She hasn't fly fishing for many years, but a couple and I have been trying to teach her over and over, how to cast better, how to row

better... And the one day we decided that I wanted to take her to the West Branch of the upper Delaware. Um, if you know anything about the West branch, it's a very, very hard river to fish, fly fishing wise, because it seats so much pressure. The fish they call, they say that they're a lot smarter. Um, so I never wanted to take her up there because I didn't want to push her that hard. Where you row 18 miles and maybe make five casts for a fish that rises. A lot of people dry fly fish. Uh, last May, I mean, 2017 in May, we were decided to go up there. Decided to take her up there. I was explaining to her on the three hour drive up there. I'm like, listen you know, this is not the easiest river. This isn't the Lehigh where we can catch 20, 30 fish a day. Go home with a big smile on our face. We're going to drive over here three hours. We could get skunked. We can make a nice float and get a sunburn and not catch anything. So that was her concern. She's always worried about proving herself to me and things like that. So we get in the boat. We're rowin'. See the first riser. She lets me take a stab at it first. Make the casts, then make the drifts, comes up, eats and I pull the hook out of its mouth. I'm famous for this. I don't know why. I'm just-- I get so excited when a big, big fish eats little flies. So she says, my turn now. She was-- you lost your opportunity. OK, sounds good. Front of the drift boat, I'm rowing, coming down, we see a couple heads come up. ... I'm trying to... I'm gonna drop anchor here. You're going to take a cast. You gonna make a mend. To explain to her exactly what I need her to do in order to catch this fish. She listens to me. She stands there. All of the sudden. She never learned how to double haul. She's standin' in the front of my boat, takes her fishing shirt off and has her swimsuit underneath, stands there and starts double hauling. I'm sitting in the boat and I'm like, Who are you fishing with, that wasn't me? Now, I'm getting angry about this. I'm like, who were you with that you learned how to do this? She wouldn't answer while she's casting. She makes the cast, makes the drift. Fish comes up. It's a size 14 sulfur. So it goes in the corner of the mouth, the 6-weight bends over, the reel screams, pull the anchor, chase the fish down, land the fish. Don't even care about her catching the fish if she did everything right. I still want to know who taught her how to double haul. The past seven years of her watch me fly fish and guide and stuff like that. She was taking videos and be sitting in the back of the boat. Casting, watching me, watching my arms move, my legs, my techniques. Then one day she wanted to prove me and surprise me. And that would probably have to be the best story of my entire life. I didn't know... You know, people say that if you're a good person, if you do the good things when people aren't watching. Same thing here. I didn't know she was watching. I didn't know she was learning that much from me. My little quirks in the way I do things. She made a 70. It was a 70 foot cast and I was blown away. I was almost in tears, but I was more concerned about who would teach her how to fly fish, ya know, because it wasn't me. But, the long story short, she sat there and watched me all the time she didn't fish on the boat. Where she sat there, had a glass of wine, read a book or listen to music. She was sitting there doing things. When I was at work she'd be out and I couldn't figure out why fly rods were half-way together or they weren't put back together right some times. She was actually using them when I wasn't around watching videos on YouTube and really educate herself so that she could be my true partner in life. She know that we were married and we were soulmates, but she knew when my-- get that rod in my hands, yours in my hand, I was a different person. I wasn't her husband any more. I was connected to the world. I was connected to the earth, the water, the fish. And she wanted that connection with me. And I'm glad she did. I'm glad she made that decision in life to do something I love, but she also loves it, too. And it wasn't forced on her. I wanted her to fall in love with that wonderful love of nature and the river and traveling and meeting people, fishing with different people and stuff like that. And she did. And I would have no problem, uh, in-- in my ability to say that she could take a client out and be able to do it. That would be a proud moment for me. That's probably one of my-- my story I would tell people without guiding. Ya know, my favorite fishing story. However you want to classify it. Wasn't even about fish. It was about

me about being pissed off, pissed off with the world because I was more worried about what was really happening than what was happening in that moment. I didn't listen to my own advice of stopping, taking a breath, close your eyes, open your eyes and seize the moment. My brain was takin' over society. And I've learned a great deal from that day.

Gregory Wood [00:28:10] I honestly want to say a huge thank you to my mentor and the fly fishing world. His name is Charlie Limper. He is the one at that taught me how to row. Taught me how to double haul a lot better. Taught me how to fly tie better. He overall made me a better fly fishing guide slash fly fisherman. So I'd like to say a big thank you to him. He's off and around the world right now. Somewhere fishing and working. I'm not exactly sure where he is anymore. Um, advice that I would leave for the world? There's a reason why there's guides out there that do what we do. We're not just out there to make money. We're there to also educate you, take you on a river you never been on before and point things out. Yeah, a lot people don't want to hire a guide because it costs money and I understand that, but at the same time, they're the pros. Go out, talk to a local guide, even make a phone call. People call me all the time. If I don't book a trip with them, I will tell them where to go. I'll tell them the flies to use. 'Cause I don't want them to go to Cabella's. I don't want them goin' to Dick's Sporting Goods and big box stores. I send them to a local fly shop like TCO here in Philadelphia. I'll send them there. I'll-- I'll pass my business along to somebody else in-- inside the fishing community to make it a better place. To bring more people into the sport. Um, the last good advice. Let's get more women out there fly fishin'. It's been changing greatly in the past couple years and it's a beautiful thing to see. When I first started fly fishing, I couldn't tell you one woman I knew that fly fished. Or I fly fished next to on a river. I never seen a woman fly fish on the river. For the past probably 10 years, it's dramatically changed and it's-- I see that as a good thing because in my story I have my wife and if I didn't have her, I'd be back on drugs or I'd be back on alcohol. I'd still be fishing, but I wouldn't have the drive or the determination I have nowadays to keep myself going and better myself and better people around me.