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James Woods [00:00:10] I do and I've been thinking about this for a little bit and it goes back to about 1963 and we were fishing on the Battenkill in a place called the Dugway which is on route 313 by what's known as the Pink House. And it was a hot summer's afternoon and we were up for two weeks with my father from Cleveland. And so we fished whether it was hot or not and a cold front started to come in towards 2:30 or so. And as the atmosphere changed, something happened in the river and this incredible like Cahill hatch came off at about 2:30 just before the storms came through and the nymphs were just underneath the service, surface, and out of nowhere in thin water all these 12, 13, 14 inch brown trout started appearing started sucking up the nymphs. And I happen to have the right fly. My father with my brother and father my younger brother who was about 100 yards downstream. My father was another 50 yards below him and we all observed this and we all started fishing to this incredible subsurface Hatch at that point and picking up a fish here and there. Yeah. We're letting the dog out.

James Thull [00:01:27] You can go ahead.

James Woods [00:01:28] And I I. I took a couple of fish and my father and brother took a couple of fish and it's pretty much unheard of to see that kind of hatch in the middle of summer in the afternoon. The storms came through. I cleared everything off. We had a brilliant sun with the northeast northwest wind which came through with it. And so for an hour we had this kind of remarkable fishing on a hot July afternoon and why it represents fly fishing I think for me in many respects is because we had an unusual event both in terms of the hatch that came off at the time of day. We had remarkable weather that was incredibly dramatic and beautiful and I was with my family and later we were sitting there with, in those days we kept fish, we had about 6 to 8 12 to 14 inch incredibly beautiful Battenkill native brown trout with us. And it was just one of those experiences that you remember and kind of sums up what fly fishing has been to me. Aesthetics and family.

James Woods [00:02:36] Well I think it's the big thing I think is for people to understand the history of fly fishing because it's one thing for somebody to start off at fly, with fly fishing and it's an immediate and present thing that occurs but they often have no sense of what happened before them or could be able to look back and absent collection like you have at Michigan State University whether it be the oral collection or the library or the visual collection they get to see exactly the antecedents of the fishing the literature or the people that are so fascinating they're involved in fishing so it it it it amplifies the depth of the experience remarkably I think.

James Thull [00:03:22] I have done it myself but it's it's I refer to it as Michigan itself but it's Montana.

James Woods [00:03:28] Montana State University.

James Thull [00:03:29] Just wanted to make sure we got that right for the record.

James Woods [00:03:32] We'll get it right. Let me apologize. My wife went to Michigan State University.

James Thull [00:03:38] It's okay. I have property in Michigan. It's a great place.

James Woods [00:03:40] My mistake.

James Thull [00:03:41] No it's all right I just wanted to make sure that we had it right for the record.

James Woods [00:03:45] Absolutely.

James Woods [00:03:51] Yeah I think if I had a special spot it would be in Montana for three summers. For about a week each summer I fished it Odell Spring Creek in the early 90s and it was owned, it was, it was owned privately then still is by the Granger Laszlo family and a friend of mine had a lease and I was a guest with him and so we had I don't know it's probably 20 or 30 miles of fishing on that Creek between all the branches it sprouts out next to the Madison. And there's one section that was above the airport and one section was below and the section that was the middle was the subject of Nick Lyons' book Spring Creek. So we had that stream first year in June, second year in July and last year in early September so we got to fish the green drakes in June which is pretty spectacular experience. They come down these little flotillas and the pools just explode with the rising fish. Then the PMD in Pale Morning Doves that's right was what you have in July. And then of course the hoppers in September. And in those days we put a sandwich in a backpack couple of jugs of water one of us would take the lower section the other take the upper section we'd have the stream entirely to ourselves and the visually it was just extraordinary to look at the is the Beartooth, the Bear Swice?

James Thull [00:05:19] Yeah, you got the the Beartooths, Absarokas.

James Woods [00:05:21] Right on either side of that big valley and they're you know you're walking down to the river from the bench and there pronghorn, herds of pronghorn antelope get down to the water and bluewing teal are flushing off, pintails are flushing off they're, you know broods going here and there and then you hear this kind of a primeval noise up in the air and you look up and I'd never seen a sandhill crane before and it looks like a pterodactyl right over your head. So the entire experience was so extraordinary that I'd like to fish that again and of course the size of the fish is remarkable. You know I mean every day we catching 15 or 20 fish averaging 18 inches and there'd be one or two that would be in 23 and 24 inch range. So it was a pretty remarkable experience.

James Thull [00:06:11] It sounds like the fishing was wonderful it sounds like the the aesthetics and the environment you were in led as much to the experience or added as much to the experience as any.

James Woods [00:06:20] Absolutely it goes back to my reflection on the first question. It's all a question of friends, family, aesthetics, which make up the experience. Well I find the quality that I like the best is they don't talk fishing to me. That they're reasonably well rounded people, that they enjoy talking they're knowledgeable about fishing but they don't have to demonstrate it to me and I don't have to demonstrate it to them. We don't have to talk about all the Latin names of bugs and we can just say it was a green bug or a white bug. And so and and easygoing and a good sense of humor you know and and a person that can talk about a lot of different things. So.

James Woods [00:07:14] I think to find somebody who would take the time to show them the ropes and teach them and that they don't have to be didactic about it but to be able to take them to a stream, put, show them how to cast a little bit and then let the individual learn on their own because you learn best what you learn yourself you know. So that's really important. I've tried to mentor a few people mostly colleagues who want to learn how

to fish and you know I'll help them with casting and I'll take them up the stream and I'll guide them a little bit but they're fishing themselves you know. And so I think that's the most important thing and that person that the one who is mentoring can also introduce him to those aspects of fishing which are beyond the present present here and now of fishing. The literature and the museums the Montana State collection, things of that nature so that's what I would suggest.

James Woods [00:08:17] Well I think the two threats right now one is obvious and that's global warming and I thought, and I was a little ignorant about the threat posed to the west which you would be more conversant in. But I saw Craig Matthews film recently about that it was posted on his blog about preserving the Western streams and how to, how we have to address global warming. I thought it was really prescient really important and I understood at that point the threat it poses to the west. I know what threat it poses to the east it's going to be a rise in sea levels and flooding and a variety of other difficult situations for the East Coast. So that's one obvious threat. The second one which I think is a little less understood especially in the West and the West and the West in particular is that the infrastructure for water pollution treatment on the East Coast is broke. So in 1972 when the Clean Water Act was passed it provided a funded mandate to a whole host of cities small big cities little cities towns where they were could fund pollution treatment plants. They had a responsibility to maintain themselves. Of course most of them did not. So all across the East Coast all across New York state all these pollution treatment plants are basically broke. So on Lake Champlain you know four or five small cities which are unable to treat the pollution that they take in for the pollution treatment plant because the plant can't handle the inflow at this point. And that's not just Lake Champlain. It's all across the state of New York as well as many of the other Eastern states as well. So that is a threat that I think is under the radar that's substantial and it will cost millions billions and billions of dollars rectify right now and there's no it's not a fund it. It's not funded by the federal government at this point. It's it's the town's problems the local governments problems and it's going to be all the state's problems too.

James Thull [00:10:43] When I met with Nathaniel Reed he had talked about that a little bit as well. And it seems like especially right now with that with the crisis in Flint which I know is different yes but it really highlights the problem with our aging infrastructure all over. And about how what an environmental catastrophe that can be if we don't do something about it.

James Woods [00:11:05] Absolutely and it's not really talked about much, quite frankly. I mean the people that work in the business know about in that region know about of course and certainly all the people that work in New York State Environmental Conservation Department know about it.

James Thull [00:11:21] Are there solutions being tossed around for that? It is that I mean what do you think what what are our options.

James Woods [00:11:27] Well what we've seen so far is and I've participated in a couple situations where you give in terms of enforcement actions you give the small town the time and to put together a program to renovate their their water treatment plant or pollution water treatment plant and you kind of stretch it out. And during that period of time the state and local government assist them in getting various grants that come from some come from the federal governments some come from the state some come from you know community development area so they're able to piece together enough money to undertake a phased approach to correcting the problem. And that's probably the only way

at this point absent substantial federal state legislation that these situations are going to be properly addressed.

James Woods [00:12:29] Well I think most importantly we've gained a better understanding of the sport and the resource which has allowed us to implement regulations that have given us a lot better access on streams. There's like for instance on the Battenkill twenty five years ago they, or 30 years ago they initiative initiated program which purchased access rights to 30 or 40 feet along both sides of the stream so people could walk up and down private property and have access to pools they would not otherwise have had access to. This has occurred in various places across the east where there are streams that are fished heavily. Additionally we have catch and release which has allowed excellent fishing to exist which otherwise probably would not exist. That's to the normal person you're fishing an area which perhaps the fishing, I remember in 1980 when the 80s in the 80s when the Battenkill was fishing really well. It was all native fishery and the fishing was probably as good as it had ever been. And there was no stocking and you know that was not available years before and we've had some issues with the Battenkill. But at that time for a period of about 15 years the good old days were then. And so we have game in that manner and I think that's true with the Beaverkill but for some of the thermal problems down there as well. One of the things we were losing which is due to the popularity of sport is is we're losing the solitude of the fishing some time on the East Coast. You're in a situation where you're fishing current pool in the Beaverkill, you're not going to be alone at any time. Which when I was a kid we used to fish it even on a summer's night a good summers night that maybe one other person there instead of people every 30 or 40 feet. But that's you know as long as anybody respects everybody else you can do that and it's fun to watch other people catch fish too.

James Woods [00:14:44] Well you know I thought about this question a little bit and I was not really conversant with what what TU is doing on a national level. On a local level, they work with a couple of other organizations but we have had two or three organizations up here. The Battenkill Water Alliance which Rich was president of at one point which is a grassroots local group. There was another group called the Battenkill Conservancy in Vermont. Another grassroots local group was to be distinguished from what's known as the Battenkill Conservancy which is another group here in New York State. The group in Vermont back in 15 or 20 years ago got together and raised enough money to buy two miles of stream which was being threatened by condominium construction along the banks. So that's a grassroots small organization who is able to preserve two to three miles of stream what was known as The Little Farm where it might give or take mileage but. And then of course the Battenkill Alliance and I'm trying to, that and Battenkill River Alliance which Rich was the president of. They. That's another another local group they have in the last two years done extraordinary construction habitat reconstruction and what along the Battenkill which is having really remarkable effects and I had been aware of this work for a long time. And even if you were to really find out in greater detail about this work there was an article last the last quarterly of the American Journal of Fly Fishing which covered it which was just really fascinating story of how they're recreating habitat and areas in the Battenkill. So the answer being small local groups seem to be doing the best as far as my own empirical experiences.

James Woods [00:16:55] It would be my father. My father started fly fishing in the early 30s or so and it wasn't even a question of whether we were going to be fly fishermen. He dragged us along. This all started with farm ponds out in Ohio and then trips when we were ten or eleven east to the Battenkill and other streams to fish for trout. So it was wasn't a choice.

James Thull [00:17:21] So have you always been a fly fisherman? Did, did you do bait casting or spinning when you were younger?

James Woods [00:17:26] Oh yeah. I love all kinds of fishing and I lived across the street in the middle 60s from a pond on Long Island which had trout, bass, and carp in it and at various times I thought I've caught more caught carp in the early 60s I caught carp before it was popular.

James Thull [00:17:48] A great sport fish in Europe, yeah.

James Woods [00:17:50] A wonderful sport fish here and we fish for them with ultralight spinning rods and little tiny tiny balls of bread with with a size 14 hook and we'd be catching four and five pound carp in shallow water and they'd, we lose them most of time but they jump if they're in shallow water. Great sport fish. They were a lot of fun so and I even this time of year I have a trout stream that goes right through the village here and in another month or so it will be too high to fly fish and it's kind of too small really to cast a fly rod fly fish in that time of year and I'll just take a single hooked Rapala with the with the barb spent down fished all through the village right here and pick up and released nice thirteen fourteen inch native brown trout, Brook trout. So I enjoy all kinds of fishing. I don't have a favorite. I like them all in their, in their proper form whether it be Salmon fishing in the Miramichi you know Mountain Brook stream which we have brook trout streams we have all round here in the mountains they're fun to fish and I enjoy catching all size fishes too.

James Woods [00:19:09] Well you know.

James Thull [00:19:11] Writers.

James Woods [00:19:12] Right. Sure. There. I have a lot. And I was thinking about this question too. And I guess I have two old writers which I really like a lot. One was I think it's Henry Plunkett Greene who wrote Where the Bright Waters Meet, and he was an opera singer in the late 19th century and an avid trout fisherman. He wrote about a stream that is just one of the most delightful books. And then there was William Scropes Days and Nights of Salmon Fishing on the Tweed which is a wonderful book too just both can really turn phrases and they're great writers. And then I think that the book I like contemporary book I like the most is and I've read a lot but I think I like Nick Lyons' Spring Creek the best. Just wonderful. An accurate reflection of of Odell Spring Creek. You know.

James Woods [00:20:14] Well I think it's important that we do bring anybody who would might have an interest into the sport. So to the extent it's minorities to the extent it's women to the extent it's anybody. That's fine. But. The difficulty is reaching them which is the point of your question. And the only way you're going to do that is by exposing them to that kind of experience. And I think that's going to depend in large part upon groups like Trout Unlimited to the extent that they have an interest in doing that. And I think some of the big fishing companies I think Orvis has kind of a responsibility to think about how they're going to bring more people. It's to their advantage. But they're located in all the major cities. So if they want to start courses that address or break or give scholarships to people of different races or economic classes, that would be an ideal situation and they could get people interested in that fashion. I mean the people in New York City that fish are remarkable. I don't know if you've been on a train between Albany New York but when you hit the Hudson River in the summertime people are fishing all the way down the

Hudson River through the East River all the way down to to where New York Harbor is. Literally hundreds on a summer day. So the the those people I'm sure they'd love to fly fish. It's just reaching them and maybe the responsibility falls upon the major organizations and the major and that's just Orvis but any any any major retailer for that matter. That's my you know that's the only thing I could think of.

James Woods [00:22:02] Definitely can support a certain amount of take. And I mean indeed it has for for a long time maybe not. It hasn't had the pressure it's had in the last 10 years or so but I do think it could be regulated and we have two I think catch and release sections on the Battenkill in New York State and then Vermont has a catch and release section in fact I think most of the stream is now catch and release but there are areas further west than New York State which are not catch and release and well and the fishing as far as I'm concerned is just as good down there as it is in Vermont or in the catch release section so can it support taking fish that are taken. Sure I think so. Maybe not 6 fish or 10 pounds as the limit used to be but it can support it. And I don't know that there is and there is probably an economic divide but in some cases there's not an economic divide. Certainly when I grew up people that fly fish were not from the upper middle class at all. They were people from all classes. And today if you went to Pennsylvania in the rural areas of Pennsylvania you'll find a lot of fly fishers who are not you know stepping out of an Orvis store or BMW and getting into the river. They're people like you and I you know, fly tyers you know work in factories that work in you know farmers you know so you, you, it's not always an economic divide. Where where where it does part I'm not sure you know. Well it's. That's a good point. And it's something that I've always had had the kind of fun with it. But little has. But I think the great equalizer is now Amazon and eBay. You can. Today you can get. You can outfit yourself for 50 dollars probably and get everything you needed in reasonably good condition to become a fly fisherman. That would include an Orvis rod. Might be an older Orvis rod but it would be an Orvis rod.

James Thull [00:24:17] That's a good point.

James Woods [00:24:23] I think it'd be nice to be able to preserve certain areas where only brook trout were the native brook trout remain indigenous and you knew you were gonna fish there. There are I believe I think the Rapidan is a perfect example of an area which is a brook trout fishery which they preserved and there are a few other streams there. I think it's a worthwhile effort. I don't know. I don't view invasive species necessarily as as bad things per say but in terms of fish certainly as you pointed out the brown trout and rainbow trout and the East Coast have provided remarkable sport over the years. But to answer your question if it can be done I think it should be done. And to some extent I find that it's done and I don't know why but we it's kind of, it's I don't know whether it's Darwinian or not but we certainly have in this area small streams which are predominantly brook trout still and I assume that most of those that the genetics is the same that have that have been there for a while. I mean you may see the odd brown trout or rainbow trout in you know Ashgrove Brook but for the most part it'll be you know brook trout so. But I think it's worthwhile to try to do it if we can.

James Woods [00:25:55] I think their greatest accomplishment has been the preservation of the artifacts of the sport whether it be reels, rods, flies. I think what they've done and what they're doing right now is currently those things that are going to be important 10 years down the road. The exe...the the most recent exhibits the graceful rise in fly fishing about women fly fishers is really important show shows to to anybody who who is a woman or a young woman. There are women out here have been fly fishing for 15 20 30 40 years who have been leading the sport and so they shouldn't feel concerned about

getting involved or they can find mentors that will be happy to help them. Similarly we're in the process of developing a salt water fly fishing exhibit which will document the history of salt water fly fishing and that's going to be out and about within six months to a year. And what that'll do is bring the history of salt water fly fishing the personalities the tackle to the general public so they have an understanding of what's happened over the last 60 70 80 even 100 years. The importance of this all is that it's going to be both digitized and available through the museum's website. So it'll be constantly available. So I think I think the importance is about making this available to the general public ultimately will be the important thing after 10 years. You don't want to have a museum that nobody knows about sits in a small little town in Manchester. And it's just like Montana State University is going to make all these tapes available so that's going to be one of their most important contributions in the next 10 years.

James Woods [00:28:06] I thought well as a prosecutor I would say the major environmental issues in the late 1980s that we prosecuted and into the middle 1990s were the illegal disposal of hazardous waste because while a lot of large companies were addressing this because they had the money to some of the small mom and pop shops were not doing that or even medium sized businesses so they'd be generating say plating waste. And the easiest thing to do was put it in the barrel and leave it in somebody's backyard. So we did a lot of those prosecutions. I also did a lot of water pollution prosecutions where even some large companies. What would happen is a supervisor would decide that in fact they were not going to ship this waste to where it should go. So they just pour it out into the river. And we had some prosecutions that took place. Actually several prosecutions took place where people violated the Clean Water Act intentionally. In addition we had some Air Act violations that were criminal. And in one case a poorly made tank car or poorly made railroad tank car wasn't made up to spec was contained had an ammonia type gas in it and on a hot July night in Fort Edward started leaking and forced the entire evacuation of all of Fort Edward which is this small community. Well industrial communities north of us for two days. So we prosecuted that criminally. So uh in terms of the criminal stuff I would characterize it as mostly hazardous waste prosecutions and felony water violation of Clean Water Act. We did a lot of civil work too which was mostly mostly dealing with what we call Superfund sites which are hazardous waste landfills that been left. And we have to find people that are responsible for it and make them pay for it. So we a lot of our work is that too on the civil side.

James Woods [00:30:36] Well it is for the most part the sum and substance of the legislation we have on the federal side. And he was part of that whole group of people that in the late 60s and early 70s and through the to 1980 brought about the passage of the amended Clean Water Act which amended the Rivers and Harbors Act, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act which addressed hazardous waste. This CERCLA which stands for compensation environmental. Comprehensive environmental compensation and liability Act. Acting in CERCLA which addressed hazardous waste that has waste landfill. And that group of people Nat Reed and there were others in the Senate and in the Congress and other proponents of that legislation brought up about all the the substantive environmental laws we have today basically. They were all passed up until 1980. We've had very few very little legislation addressing the big substantive issues and in the environment since then.

James Thull [00:31:43] Oh another thing that I saw that something that Nat said is that Nixon didn't really care all that much about the environment. He just wanted a good record on it. And to be fair he probably has one of the best records of any president.

James Woods [00:31:53] That's the irony of it. We all knew that Nixon couldn't care less but it all happened during his presidency. He delegated well.

James Thull [00:32:02] Well yeah that's great. So one of, one of his great legacies.

James Woods [00:32:12] Well I you know I must speak in general terms because I don't want to speak too specifically. I think that where we need in where some of our leaders have in fact shown leadership they need leadership basically to come forward and address these issues. And that has happened to some extent amongst some of the political leaders in the past 10 years. But it hasn't been consistent. But the particular attorney general I'm working for it is pretty conscientious about addressing these issues. And I wish that the other political leaders would pay as much attention.

James Woods [00:32:59] I think it falls to people's will I think a perfect example of that is what you are talking about in your previous question and using Nat Reed as an example. There is clearly a great upheaval with respect to people in the late 60s that want to see something done about the environment on a general basis and which brought about Earth Day which in turn brought about a lot of legislation and a lot of people like Nat Reed and others working to see the passage of that legislation. And similarly certain instances or some certain specific problems have brought about legislatio. RECRA the Resource Conservation Recovery Act was largely passed because the issues at Love Canal. They had to address Lois Gibb's group of constituents who who all were living on top of a hazardous waste dump. So so in fact that legislation followed little people there and in other places too as well. Other instances I can think of.

James Woods [00:34:04] Yes. No question about it. I mean would you know as enforcers or as environmental lawyers we may not be as efficient as we could be but still at the same time if you look at the work we've done over the course of the last 35 years it's all because of legislation. The Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Resource Conservation Act, the Superfund Act. So yeah legislation has led the way so. And the leaders bring us the legislation.

James Woods [00:34:39] Yeah. For the most part they are. And I think anglers and to a certain degree thoughtful hunters are they're kind of like the canaries in the cave. They're seeing the effects of detrimental things happening to the environment first and are the first ones to talk out about it. And and again I mean the perfect example is the film that Craig Matthews made out out west on acid rain with Yvon Chouinard. I mean, they're seeing it out there and they're talking about it. And I would never have known that there was an issue out west had I not seen that film. So I mean yeah.

James Woods [00:35:25] Well I'd started my career thinking that I wanted to be an outdoor writer. And I hit it the wrong part of the recession which started when I graduated from college in 1972, and I worked for a little bit as a freelancer for the Freshet Press. And after two years of pounding my head into the sand I knew that I want to do something for the environment so I, not pounding my head in the sand in my head against the wall I should say, and I decide well what else could I do that would have an effect upon or help the environment and what would my mission be. I decide that environmental lawyer would be the way I want to go and that I went to law school simply to become an environmental lawyer and I was very lucky to have a job market available. A burgeoning job market available when I graduated from law school.

James Thull [00:36:25] So do you feel your kind of experience growing up in a family that fished and was outdoorsy led to that?

James Woods [00:36:31] Oh yeah. You know you. Having grown up in that family I'd come to love the outdoors. We didn't call it the environment in those days. We called it the trout streams and the Grouse covers and the marshes and I knew that as a result of that experience that I in fact wanted to do something to protect it.