

# Klamath Reborn

## with Mikey Wier

**D. Roger Maves:** [00:00:00] Welcome to ask about fly fishing internet radio your source for learning more about fly fishing in cold water, warm water, and salt water. Hello, I'm Roger Maves, your host for tonight's show. On this broadcast, we'll be featuring Mikey Wier. He'll be answering your questions on Klamath Reborn. The show will be 90 minutes in length and we're broadcasting live over the internet.

If you would like to ask Mikey a question, just go to our homepage at [askaboutflyfishing.com](http://askaboutflyfishing.com) and use the Q and A text box to send us your question. We'll receive your question immediately, and we'll try to answer as many of them as possible on the show tonight. And while you're there, make sure you sign up to receive our announcements so you don't miss out on any of our future broadcasts.

Just fill out the form on the right side of our homepage and we'll let you know when the next live show will be. This broadcast is being recorded and will be available for playback on our website about 48 hours after the show ends. You can also find it on any of the podcast sites like Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Stitcher, wherever you listen to your podcast.

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In fact, if you have a moment during the show, we'd sure appreciate it. The content of this broadcast is copyrighted and it's the property of The Knowledge Group Inc. Doing businesses ask about fly fishing. When we return, we'll be talking with Mikey Wier about Klamath Reborn.

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Before we introduce Mikey, I'd like to let you know about the great prizes we have to give away tonight for our drawing tonight we'll be giving away a one year membership to Fly Fishers International and a one year membership to Trout Unlimited.

Now, if you haven't registered yet for the drawing, you can do so now. Just go to our homepage at [askaboutflyfishing.com](http://askaboutflyfishing.com) and look for the link under tonight's section that says, register for our free drawing. Click on that link, fill out the form, and we'll announce the winners at the end of the show.

We'll also be giving away a book courtesy of Stackpole Books. So I've got a short list of books that I have available here to give away, and whoever wins tonight, we'll get to choose from one of those books. So here's how you win. You have to be the first person to answer the question I ask at the end of the show.

The question will be about something that Mikey and I have talked about during the show, and you must submit your answer along with your name and location [00:03:00] using the text box on our homepage. So listen closely. Use your best typing skills, take some notes, and maybe you'll be proud winner of a Stackpole Book on fly fishing.

Our guest tonight is Mikey Wier. Growing up in the Sierra Foothills, Mikey was always close to nature, spending a lot of time on the lakes and rivers he learned to fish and tie flies at a young age. Once he moved to Lake Tahoe, he began to split his time between snowboarding in the winters and fly fishing in the summers.

He spent 15 years fishing and guiding the waters of the Truckee, Carson and Walker Rivers and surrounding waters. In 2001, he started BURL Productions specializing in adventure and outdoor films. Notable titles to his credit include Fish Eye videos, Trout Bomb Diaries 1, Soulfish 1 & 2, and Cali Rush.

Mikey now works for California Trout, helping to protect California's trout, salmon, steelhead, and blue ribbon waters. [00:04:00] He is an ambassador for Patagonia Fly-Fishing, Smith, Loon Outdoors, Galvin Reels and Outcast Boats.

Mikey, welcome back to ask about fly fishing internet radio.

**Mikey Wier:** All right, Roger, thanks for having me back.

It's been a little while here.

**D. Roger Maves:** It's been a while. Let me just, uh, let me just check on that really quickly. Yeah. I mean, you, uh, gosh, I interviewed you like way back when. I was kind of just getting this started, I think met at one of the fly fishing shows and, uh, yeah. You were big into the film back then and have moved on into conservation and, and helping preserve what we've got and making it better. Right?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah. You know, a great career transition for me after spending quite a few years guiding and utilizing the resources and the riding was kind of on the wall around, especially around Tahoe, just in the direction our fisheries were heading. And so [00:05:00] I've always been into conservation and into really just trying to preserve the wildness of California and.

So for me, kind of transitioning into the field of conservation, first started with video, started making little environmental documentaries and you know, especially about fish issues, working with Cal Trout and with Trout Unlimited. And then Cal Trout offered me a full-time job and um, of course I jumped on it.

And that was about 13 years ago now. So

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** It's been at least that long since we were on the show last time. And, uh,

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah,

**Mikey Wier:** It was, uh, it's been super fulfilling.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, February 15th, 2012, and Mikey and I talked about the Truckee River back then and fishing the Truckee River. I had told him earlier when we were setting up the show that I had visited Reno and Lake Tahoe and was driving next to the Truckee River and thought about you, Mikey.

I said, yeah, I remember we talked about that. I've [00:06:00] never fished it. And that time I didn't either. We had a different agenda, but I got to see your home waters back then. So that was kind of a treat. I was really impressed. We stayed in a highrise Airbnb and downtown Reno, right on the river, and I was just amazed at all the fly fishing that was going on right downtown on the Truckee there, and that they had created some structure and there were people out there waiting and fishing while we were there.

So they've done kind of a nice job there, right downtown.

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, you know, they sculpted the river quite a bit down there. They kind of made, quote unquote a whitewater park down there, which was for, you know, kayakers and inter tubers and stuff. But of course it's also great fish habitat. And the Reno section of the Truckee is kind of an anomaly.

I mean, it really is an incredible fishery for flowing right through such a heavily populated urban area. It has great water quality, great structure for fish, and just a really solid population of wild [00:07:00] trout and pretty incredible resource for sure.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, it is, it is. Well, to get this one out of the way, Phil McCartney from Kentucky wrote in and because of the picture we have of you up on the website.

Uh, so I wanted people not to confuse that you had just caught that out of, uh, the Klamath River. Phil asked, can you tell us a story of the frighteningly massive fish shown in the photo? Is it a trout? Where and when did you catch it? Please do not tell me, it was not the largest one you caught. The fish appears to have a large streamer in its jaw, but not too big for a fish that size.

So you wanna tell your fish story before we get started on the Klamath?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah. You know, that photo was a little bit older and, um, that, that is a really special photo for me. I'm glad that, you know, you used it again and kept it up there. That was a hucho taimen from Mongolia and. That was my second trip to Mongolia.

The first trip I was there with a guy named Peter Mullet [00:08:00] and a few other, uh, crew that he put together from Colorado and myself. And we went and explored around Northern Mongolia for

almost a month, just driving overland, checking out rivers. He had a camp with an outfitter he had been working on, on the Eagan Gold River.

And from, you know, we spent a week there and then we decided to go just explore some other rivers. And at one point we came across a really remote river. We were some of the first westerners, if not the first ever fished, this particular stretch of river, if not the whole river. And it was really unique and amazing experience. And I filmed some of it for Soulfish one. And so we kept dreaming about that river. And two years later we mounted an expedition and we went back there. And Peter, I. His girlfriend at the time, and myself and a friend from California, Brett Dawson and Jeff Currier and one of his buddies, the six of us went and with a team of Mongolian, we floated a hundred miles down a river in [00:09:00] North Mongolia that had never been floated and fished before.

It was a full on expedition type adventure. And you know, that actually wasn't the biggest fish of the trip. That was, you know, kind of medium, a medium sized one. I did catch my biggest taimen on that trip, which was redemption for a huge one that I had lost in that river two years before that I was still dreaming about, but definitely a memorable fish. Those things are mas, they're not a trout, but they are a salmonid. So same family, different species.

So within the greater salmonid family, you have trout, salmon, char, and then huchen. And there's actually five different huchen, different strains of huchen around the world. And that's hucho taimen and that's what they got in Siberia and Mongolia and yeah, really incredible fish. They are the largest salmonid in the world. The biggest one was [00:10:00] recorded in the river flowing outta lake by call at over 230 pounds. And in Mongolia they get up to about a hundred pounds or so. And so technically they are the world's largest trout.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Yeah. Very cool. Very good story, it sounds like.

And you going with Jeff Currier, that must have been a blast. Uh, he's such a fun guy. So, uh, yeah, that must have been quite the trip, quite the adventure.

**Mikey Wier:** Oh yeah. Currier was awesome, super fun to be on a trip with him like that. I. I think it was the year before that when we were filming for Soulfish two, we went to Egypt together and fished a little bit on Lake Nasser, on the Nile.

**D. Roger Maves:** Oh yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** We caught these giant Nile perch and African tiger fish. And while we were on that trip, I was talking up Mongolia and, uh, little wild down the road, we mounted that expedition and went and checked it out and it was a treat just to yeah, be on that river and just what an honor to see that landscape and be some of the first Westerners [00:11:00] to really ever make it down there.

And, and we had really good fishing. Jeff caught this beautiful big, amur pike at one point on that trip in the river. And then we caught quite a few taimen, like altogether over the course of the trip, like close to 50 of 'em.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** And that's pretty unheard of

**D. Roger Maves:** Wow.

**Mikey Wier:** For a trip to Mongolia these days.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Yeah. Very productive, that's for sure. Well, good, good. Well thanks for sharing that with us. And I did do a show with Jeff on that Nile Perch years ago too. So it's on, it's in our archive. So folks, if you wanna search for the, the show I did with Mikey on, on the, uh, Truckee, you can type in Mikey Wier or a Truckee and you'll find it out there. And likewise on the Nile Perch with Jeff Currier. So, yeah, that was fun to talk about too.

Well, let's talk about the Klamath and, 'cause you knew it before the dams were taken down. So can you kind of tell us what fishing was like before that, and in general, how you would fish it back then?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, you know, [00:12:00] I've been fishing the Klamath for over 20 years.

My brother lives not too far from it up there in southern Oregon, and so he started taking me over there quite a few years ago. And back then we kind of started fishing just below where the dams are. He lives in Ashland and the dams are only about 20 minutes from there, or we're there the rivers only about 20 minutes from there.

And so we used to go and mostly fish for trout and steelhead. And there was some, you know, decent steelhead fishing below the dams there. That upper stretch is really productive for both nymphing and swinging flies in the early days where mostly either kind of high sticking or indicator lift nymphing, basically just drifting and swinging small nymphs and streamers on a dry line with a long leader and then eventually indicator nymphing.

And then as my. Steelhead fishing progressed. I got mostly into just swinging flies with a switch rod [00:13:00] and a short tip for the clam, like a four weight switch rod with a eight foot sink tip. Works pretty good and it's kind of smaller flies the fish when they get high up in that system, they're mostly summer steelhead and when they've been in the river a while and they get that high up there, they're very trouty, so to speak, and they, they love taking bugs, they love feeding on dams and they're pretty good about grabbing a swung fly in there. So,

**D. Roger Maves:** mm-hmm.

**Mikey Wier:** That's definitely lots of memorable days. And then in the last five or six years, I kind of got into fishing the lower Klamath. And to me that's some of the best swing water in California. When the conditions are good, it's big water, but there's just beautiful swing runs down there, and that's when you really wanna bust out the real spey rod, the 13 footer, and just fire shots across the river and making more classic style swing fishing. There's some really great water for that down there. And then just lots of good fishing in between. And then I've done quite a bit of fishing on the Klamath above the dams as [00:14:00] well back in the day. And also even around Klamath Lake. And the tributaries to Klamath Lake are some of the best trout fishing in the west.

There's some beautiful spring creeks up there, the wood, the Williamson, the Sprague, and that's the habitat that salmon are gonna be able to access again now. So it's really high quality, high productive habitat. And that was part of the big goal of this dam removal was to get salmon back up there, that high quality habitat above the lake.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, now when the dams were in place, was it, it was just, uh, obviously no salmon or steelhead up there, just what, what did you have? Rainbows and browns or brooks or all the above or,

**Mikey Wier:** You know, there's a very distinct strain of red band trout that inhabits over Klamath Lake and they really ain't easy to distinguish from any other trout. I mean, you could show me a lineup of a hundred photos of rainbow trout. And if you had two that were Klamath Lake Red Bands, I would be able to pick 'em outta the lineup there. They have hardly any spots. They, in the [00:15:00] lake form have kind of a purple queue to their side and kind of a nickel gun, barrel gray back.

And then when they get up in the rivers, like in the Williamson and the wood, they get a little more kind of red to pink on the side, but that same kind of dark back and hardly any spots. And they're very distinct and they get really big. I mean there's, you know, several documented 20 plus pound trout that have come out of the systems.

And so again, that just highlights the quality of that habitat up there. And then in the wood river there is a bit of a brown trout fishery as well. We used to target browns in there. So there are some, a few browns still lingering around up there. And then oddly enough, there's actually a, you know, I don't wanna get too off on a side story tangent, but

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** There is a tributary up there to the wood, a remote tributary that flows off the flanks of the volcano up there and it has bull trout in it. And the bull trout has been [00:16:00] native and they've been hidden and protected up there for many years. And a while back, Trout Unlimited did a project to reconnect that Sun Creek with the wood River.

And so now those bull trout can get back in the wood and potentially back into Klamath Lake and potentially back down to California. And if you know the assemblage of California native fish, we have more variety of native salmonids throughout California than any other state in the lower 48. And out of our 32 distinct species of salmonids, 11 of which are native inland trout, we used to have a bull trout.

And the bull trout is the only trout that has been extirpated from the assemblage of fish in California, meaning they're, they've gone fully extinct. The last documented one was caught in the McLeod River in 1976 on the Nature Preserve. The Nature Conservancy preserved there, and it was pretty well documented, and no one's had a confirmed documented sighting since [00:17:00] then.

And so, as a random side story, maybe just maybe after the dam removal, there's a chance that the California Bull trout could someday return to its home waters.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, yeah that was gonna be my next question is it's, I did read about some adverse kinds of conditions that the dams created, warm water, algae blooms and stuff like that, uh, that you get with, you know, water that's impounded like that.

What do you think's gonna happen with the red bands and the bulls and so forth in these browns now that the dams have been removed?, Will they move about?, Will it have any adverse effect on those fisheries that were sounding pretty good back in the day or still are up until the dam remover?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, still are. And um, you know, the dam removal is really not going to affect the quality of those fisheries above Klamath Lake at all, you know.

**D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

**Mikey Wier:** If anything, eventually it's gonna add some [00:18:00] biomass to 'em because. The goal is that salmon are gonna return to those fisheries. And if you know what salmon do to a fishery, it's nothing but beneficial. They bring, you know, the greatest purveyor of ocean nutrients into the inland environment. I mean, it's one of the greatest gifts of nature, the way that that fish was designed. It's just such a selfless giving species. You know, they go to the ocean and get big and eat all this high mineral rich, high protein, carotene rich diet.

And then they bring all that nutrient back to the inland environment and then they drop their eggs. And of course tons of trout love to eat those. And then they. Die and their bodies, you know, go back into the system and a lot of that's eaten by other fish and then spread out through the forest and through the ecosystem.

And so, you know, in the long run, I think if anything, it's gonna greatly benefit those fisheries. And then also the potential is there for all those red band to turn back into steelhead. So not only are you gonna have your resident [00:19:00] red band fishery up there still, then hypothetically there could be a steelhead fishery eventually. I'm sure it's not gonna take very long for those summer steelhead to find that habitat and you know, they're going to inter breed and mix in with those red bands. It's totally possible for a resident red band to spawn with a steelhead that's been to the ocean. And so if anything, I think in the long run it'll help boost those fisheries with um

**D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

**Mikey Wier:** Some new genetics and also a lot of new nutrient coming back into the system.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. So is it expected that the steelhead and the salmon will go all the way up to Klamath Lake or.

**Mikey Wier:** Oh yeah, they're already there.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah,

**Mikey Wier:** They, they already made it all the way up there. There's actually two small dams that are staying in place, so that's kind of a misconception on the

**D. Roger Maves:** Oh, okay.

**Mikey Wier:** Klamath is that, you know, it's completely free flowing river now, which it is. It's free flowing and has volitional fish passage. But there are two small impoundments below Klamath Lake

Link River Dam and Keno Dam, [00:20:00] and both of 'em are small dams are basically there to keep the water at a certain level and to divert water into a network of flumes for agriculture and stuff like that.

And both of them have fish ladders and volitional fish passage. And so both of them are staying in place and so. Fish are already documented over keno, and I've heard some rumors of the first fish, salmon, and steelhead spotted in the Williamson, but I don't have a 100% documented sighting. There was a little bit of an issue with Keno Dam.

It was mostly designed to pass trout and Klamath suckers and stuff like that. And so when the big adult Chinook got there, they were fine. That the bigger Chinook couldn't make it through a debris grate on that dam that was, the SLAs in it basically were a little too thin. And so they're currently retrofitting that. And so by next year the run will be able to pass through there a lot easier. But there was definitely already some fish passage this year into the upper basin.

**D. Roger Maves:** [00:21:00] Hmm. Wow. That's cool. That's cool. How many miles up is that from the, what was the lowest dam on the system? The gate, what was it? Something Gate.

**Mikey Wier:** Iron Gate Dam was the lowest

**D. Roger Maves:** Iron Gate.

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** And I wanna say it's about. 50 miles or something up to Klamath Lake, 60 miles, somewhere in there.

**D. Roger Maves:** Wow.

**Mikey Wier:** I don't have an exact number for you, but the, the closest to, to Keno was only, I think five or six miles from Keno.

**D. Roger Maves:** Mm-hmm.

**Mikey Wier:** Was JC Boyle, and that one's gone. And then it was another, I think 15 miles to Copco and then Copco Reservoir bed was about four to five miles, and then another mile down to Iron Gate and the reservoir bed, there was another four or five miles. So

Yeah. But somewhere under, around 40, 50 miles.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, it's pretty nice little journey for a salmon or a steelhead to get up that far. So, uh, yeah, kudos to them.

**Mikey Wier:** They'll blast through there in a couple days. No problem.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, yeah. Cool.

**Mikey Wier:** As soon as the [00:22:00] dams came down, we were kind of a little worried 'cause there was a lot of sediment floating through the river and turbidity and it was a messy dam removal is a messy process. There's no denying that, and it, it has ecological impacts to the river. And I think even the most staunch supporters of dam removal were a little worried there. You know what, how that was gonna impact the salmon run this year. But it literally, as soon as the dams were out, fish started moving through there, there were timed so that the construction window would be done just before the bulk of the salmon run came through and fish started plugging up there past the old dam site right away.

**D. Roger Maves:** Cool.

**Mikey Wier:** Cal Trout is actually, doing the fishing, the fish monitoring above the dam above the former dam sites. And so we have a, what's called a Dyson camera, which is a sonar camera that scans a beam across the entire river. So even when it's turbid, you can count fish. And we had our first hits within a couple days of the coffer dam being removed, you know, which was the last phase of construction that [00:23:00] opened the river up to fish passage.

And then within two to three weeks, I think by week three, we had documented over 6,000 Chinook passing the former dam site. Those fish were documented all the way up into Oregon within days, tons of documentation of them spawning in the tributaries above the former dam sites. And so, you know, that's kind of the nice thing about salmon conservation. It's like the field of dreams. Fish, give 'em the habitat and they will come and, uh, you know, you build it or in this case you unbuild it and they will come. And they, they did and in great numbers.

**D. Roger Maves:** In this case, all we had to do is get out of the way. Right. By removing dams.

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah. I mean, some of those fish hadn't been back in that habitat in almost a hundred years. Uh,

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** It was that upper stretch of in Spencer Creek and some of those tributaries in Oregon. Those fish hadn't been there in close to a hundred years. Pretty,

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** Pretty cool to see 'em back in there.

**D. Roger Maves:** Mikey. We gotta take a quick break and then we'll come back, talk more about the Klamath [00:24:00] here. And what's been happening there, so hang tight. We'll be right back.

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You're listening to ask about fly fishing internet radio. We're talking with Mikey Wier about Klamath Reborn. If you'd like to ask Mikey a question, let's go to our homepage at [askaboutflyfishing.com](http://askaboutflyfishing.com). Fill out that form and send us your question, and we'll try to get it answered on tonight's show.

Phil McCartney, one of our long-term [00:25:00] listeners, had sent in a whole bunch of questions. So maybe you can kind of, you know, I'll read them off and maybe you can kind of answer them all in one swoop. But he wanna know if there was similar dam removal projects that served to inform how this project of dam removal would proceed? What were the goals? How was the support for the project generated?

Who paid for the removal? What was the timeframe sequence of dam removal? And what were the most important lessons that you and others learned from that? So can you kind of give us that story here and a one fell swoop?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, it's a, I can kind of start checking some of those off. Um, but, you know, I guess the best thing would just be to give kind of the listeners an overview of the project and

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** The Klamath Dam removals is the largest dam removal project experiment in the world. It's the largest river restoration endeavor ever undertaken. [00:26:00] So there was four dams removed from the main stem of the Klamath. Three of 'em were pretty large scale dams with big reservoirs behind 'em. One of 'em was a smaller dam that was a diversion that sent the water into a pen stock and down into a powerhouse.

That was the first one to be removed. Copco one. All four dams. Well, Copco one was removed in 2023, and then the three remaining large scale dams were removed simultaneously in 2024, starting in the late, well, starting really in February, they started, or even in January, they started releasing the water from the reservoir to drain 'em down.

That was in anticipation of the plug of spring water coming through. And then they'd have the reservoirs pretty well drained, and then the spring runoff would come through and they got 'em all drained, so the construction could start in June. And Kiewit was the contractor that got the contract to remove the [00:27:00] dams, and they went in there and started slamming on it. You know, it was a huge project to remove three large scale dams simultaneously. And it's also a lot of sediment to move through the system at one time. And there's a lot of, I can go into a ton of details. I'm not sure how detailed you want me to get, but we could talk a little bit about the backstory of how we arrived there to this dam removal?

**D. Roger Maves:** Sure, go ahead.

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, so the Klamath is, well, it's historically the third largest salmon producing system on the west coast. It's a huge, very prolific river, uh, very diverse habitats. It's one of only three rivers

that cut from the eastern basin of Oregon through the Cascades and then down through the coastal range out to meet the Pacific Ocean.

So the river originates in what would be considered the Great Basin, the eastern Plains of Oregon. It's very deserty and sagebrush and kind of high desert [00:28:00] type environment. Most people call the Klamath an upside down river for a couple reasons. But the ecologically, the original reason was that it has a huge.

Wetlands marsh complex at the top of the river, almost all rivers flow down into a lower basin. And the wetlands, floodplains marsh are at the bottom of the river system. Whereas the Klamath is kind of the opposite where it meets the ocean in a kind of fairly high gradient coastal canyon and just goes right into an estuary between two mountains and into the ocean. And there is an estuary and there's definitely some riparian habitat, but in the grand scheme of things, estuary's kind of small. Whereas the Klamath Lakes were a beautiful natural lake.

Tons of all spring fed and a bit of snow melt driven as well. And just a huge wetlands marsh complex these days, a lot of that's been developed into agricultural land and has been, you [00:29:00] know, converted into fields and is being used for AG. It was a giant producer of food and of animals, livestock and stuff like that. And, uh. So it's, it's really unique in that aspect that the, the wetlands complex was at the top of the river instead of the bottom of the river. And then also later, it, it was called an upside down river because the water quality coming from the dams in the middle of the river, that when the dams were put in, it basically cut the ecosystem in half.

So you picture this giant, super prolific functioning ecosystem habitat. The river is the lifeblood of this section of land, and you put these dams right in the middle of it. And so you basically cut the ecosystem in half. So the ecosystem above there was isolated, and the ecosystem below there was massively impacted by the different water quality issues associated with these dams, and so.

The worst water quality in the entire basin was the water coming outta the bottom of Iron Gate Dam. And [00:30:00] all the tributaries below there, there's miles of river and dozens of beautiful tributaries. And some of these tributaries of the Klamath were, are beautiful rivers in their own right. You know, when you talk about the Klamath, really the Klamath is just the highway that connects all these amazing tributaries. And so we're talking rivers, the Scott River, the Shasta River, the Cow Salmon, the New River, Blue Creek, Dillon Creek, Clear Creek, Indian Creek, all these amazing, and the biggest one of 'em, the Trinity River, which you know in and of itself is a hugely famous river for fly fishing and for salmon and steelhead, and it's the largest tributary to the Klamath. And so you have all these amazing rivers that are flowing out of one of the most remote, isolated landscapes in all of California. The furthest away from any major population centers. And it's really remote, rugged, wild country up there. And so most of these tributaries flow out of wilderness type settings or public land and forest service, and they're fairly protected up there. And so the water quality coming out [00:31:00] of these tributaries in most cases is pretty good.

And so the further you go down the river, you know, each tributary put some better water back into the river. And so it went, the water that started out warm and pretty sludgy coming outta the bottom of the dams, each time another river would flow in, it'd actually make it a little bit better.

And so the further down you got, the better the water quality got, which is again, unlike any other river system I've ever seen in the world. Typically the lower down you get, the more input you get of pollution and of, you know, high nitrates from agricultural operations and this and that. And so by

the time the trinity flows in down there, the confluence around the Weitchpec and the Hoopa reservation, it, the water quality significantly improves. And so if you drive over, I-5, any given day in the summer, you'd look down at and be like, yeah, yeah, that looks pretty scabby. But then you drive over the Klamath on the 101 along the coast. You look down, it's crystal clear and fairly clear and nice, and you're like, oh, wow. You know, it's almost like a completely different river down there. And so,

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah,

**Mikey Wier:** In both of [00:32:00] those respects, it's kind of a, you know, people call it an upside down river.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. How did the project get started and who paid for it?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah. I mean, it's a long process, and there was 25 years of negotiations leading up to the dam removal. The main catalyst was the FERC relicensing of the dams.

So all dams that are operated in America fall under the Federal Energy Regulatory Committee, or FERC and FERC issues, licenses to these, to operate these dams. Most of these dams are operated by either. Water agencies or power generation companies like PG&E or in this case a company called Pacific Corp.

And so the relicensing came about, and Cal Trout got involved in dam relicensing basically to advocate for flows that benefit fish. And it started by intervening in these FERC relicensing process to get flows for trout fisheries. The, the most notable was the pit [00:33:00] river in northern California. And at the way that it's operated, there's seven different dams and powerhouses up and down the pit. It's one of the largest power producing rivers. One of you know, all spring fed will grow super prolific tributary to the Sacramento River. And at one point, the way that the managers with PG&E in this case was managing that river, they pumped water into a pen stock and down to a powerhouse. And they had a section of the river that was completely dewatered, and so,

The original founder of Cow Trout, Richard May got involved in the FERC licensing and advocated for flows, and it was a long, convoluted process. And anyway, he got water put back in the river for the fish and for the ecosystem. And now that stretch of river is one of the greatest and most prolific wild trout fisheries in all of Northern California.

And so he, we saw that as a tool pretty early on. And so when the FERC relicensing came up, our Shasta program manager at the time and science director, who is now the executive director of California Trout at Curtis Knight, got involved in the process and basically [00:34:00] just to advocate for Fish and to advocate for, you know, the Klamath has some listed species, spring run, Chinook, um, and coho salmon. And so we're advocating for both flows and for, you know, hypothetically fish passage is what would've been great to get those listed fish around those dams, that upper habitat.

And then, but you know, we were just one stakeholder in a group of many stakeholders. There's, you know, the power company there, there's AG operators, there's or AG interest, there's ranchers, there is tribes, there is other NGOs that are advocating for different things. There's boaters, you know, there's lots of different people advocating for different things throughout these processes. You know, a lot of times you get whitewater groups in there advocating for flows, for rafting and

kayaking, and you get frog groups, you know, in their auto bond type groups advocating for frog spawning habitat and turtles. You know, there's all kinds of different people advocating for different water uses.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. [00:35:00]

**Mikey Wier:** And our role in that was to advocate for the fish. And so things really hit ahead. In 2002, there was a massive fish kill on the Klamath, which some people in the audience might remember. It was, you know, national news. It was all over the, the news and it got to a point where the water coming out of the dam was ripped, too warm for the salmon and everybody knew it. And the, the managers or NGOs, people that cared about the fish that, and the tribes especially asked that they release some water from the Trinity into the trinity to help cool down the water in the lower Klamath and save these fish.

And instead they sent the water over to AG operators in the Central Valley that were advocating to use that water. And it resulted in a massive fish kill. Some estimated as many as 70,000 Chinook died almost the entire fall run, which is a huge cohort of fish. And that, um, massively impacted the lower climate and really, you know, activated the tribes.

The one of the big [00:36:00] catalysts. I guess backing up a little bit, the, one of the main catalysts for the tribes was their historic fishing rights in, when the. The Yurok, Hoopa, and Karu, the three main tribes of the Lower Klamath River were put on reservations after the Indian Wars in the 18 hundreds. There was, uh, Indian policies in California, which resulted in a lot of conflict and then genocide and a lot of Indians getting sent off to boarding schools. And the rest of 'em put in reservations and.

The Yurok actually fought for their territory, but it got to the point where they had to sign treaties. And unlike most Native Americans in California, the reservations that they were given was in their ancestral land. It was right where they've always been from almost all other Native Americans, you know, throughout California especially, and in most America, were sent to reservations that weren't necessarily their native territory.

But the Yurok, the Hoopa and the Karu stayed in the Klamath and they basically said, okay, these are your reservations. We're gonna stop [00:37:00] fighting, but you're gonna stay here. And you know, that's that. And, but they were given in their treaties, fishing rights, they said, you can stay here and you can fish in perpetuity and, you know, honor that aspect of your cultural heritage. I mean, this is something that these tribes have been subsisting on salmon for centuries and um,

**D. Roger Maves:** Right.

**Mikey Wier:** Things came to a head in the late seventies, early eighties. There was another big news story called the Klamath Salmon Wars. And it got to the point where there was low numbers of salmon in the Klamath and the feds said, Hey, we're gonna close fishing on the Klamath for a few months to see what happens with these salmon this season. And the tribe said, well, you know, we live on these salmon, we can't just quit fishing. And so they were out there doing their traditional subsistence fishing, which mostly was netting in the estuary. And it got to the point where grannies were out there and the boats pulling nets. And you know, locals and the feds were coming out and riot gear and literally clubbing people on boats and trying to steal the fish and [00:38:00] the nets and trying to get 'em to stop fishing, and.

Some arrests were made and one of the cases went all the way to the Supreme Court. And the Supreme Court heard the case and ruled in favor of the Yurok tribe that, you know, their traditional fishing rights and their treaties were gonna be upheld.

And it's a pretty cool story. The story mean these people against massive odds standing up for their rights to fish and for what they believed in. And so they were, their fishing rights held up in the Supreme Court. And so,

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah,

**Mikey Wier:** Later down the road when salmon number started getting low again, they started looking at the real culprit, which was determined to be these dams. They were causing a lot of problems in the clam for water quality. And so all of a sudden the attention in that fight turned to the dams. I mean, they, they seemed, a lot of the science was saying that those are, that was one of the main contributing factors to low numbers of salmon in the Klamath. And so it wasn't their subsistence fishing, it was, you know, more environmental causes. And so they really came to the table. The [00:39:00] tribes wanted the dams out, and they stepped up through this entire process and really advocated for that from the start.

And at some point, you know, all these stakeholders came together and there was all kinds of different alternatives talked about, and you know, I won't get into all the details, but at some point the stakeholders landed on dam removal as being the preferred alternative. And this was a decision that wasn't necessarily forced on 'em. I mean, this was a decision that was reached by the managers as well, the people that owned and operated these dams. It came down to a business decision for them because they had to retrofit in order to continue generating power. I mean, the dams were old and in a lot of ways they antiquated and they had to retrofit 'em for seismic activity and for fish passage and for other various reasons.

And so, you know, they took a hard look at it and said, well, from a business standpoint it probably makes most sense to just remove these dams. And it originally went to a, what they call the multi the, uh, [00:40:00] Klamath settlement agreement. And that went to Congress and uh, the original agreement. Congress would've had to vote on it to pass it, and they dragged their feet and never voted on it, and it all kind of fell apart.

And then, so the constituents came back to the table and came to another agreement. And in this last iteration of all things, it really came down to Warren Buffett, Pacific Corp dams, or owned by the parent company of Berkshire Hathaway of, of course, who the main shareholder is Warren Buffet. And, um, you know, they took a hard look at it and crunched all the numbers and made a, a business decision and a free market capitalist economy that that was the best thing for them to do, was to remove these dams.

And so that's kind of the, the long and short, I mean, obviously there's lot more details in there, but gives you a good overview of how that came together.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, I think I read in your article or something when you wrote Fly Fishermen about this, um, that they actually paid for a lot of the cost of the removal, which, [00:41:00] so I guess it made more sense to, it was probably less costly to remove them than to keep them up and keep maintaining them.

So that's the financial decision that was probably made, it sounds like, and to make a lot of other people happy at the same time. Right?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah. I mean that's what it boiled down to, you know, I mean, in addition to being of all the ecological benefits of dam removal, you know, I mean, it did come down to a business decision.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** But there was also obviously a ton of ecological benefit. It's the largest river restoration project in history, and it's also one of the greatest social justice win in our country in a long time.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** I mean, you know, reconnecting the native people of the Klamath with their traditional lifeway, their history, their, uh, their salmon, their rights to fish for salmon and perpetuity on the Klamath is, that's huge from a social justice standpoint.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** Alone, definitely. I mean, it's, it's an incredible project. And then, you know, a lot of people view it as an incredible win. And of course, you know, it can't go [00:42:00] unmentioned that there's a lot of people that are anti dam removal and then are still anti dam removal. And it's, it is a very contentious issue.

Most of the opposition to dam removal is coming from the locals, you know, the Klamath flows right through the state of Jefferson. You know what would've been the, you know, I'm sure people out there have heard of the, the State of Jefferson. And originally that was gonna be Siskiyou County and Del Norte County in California, and Jefferson County and Oregon. And the climate flows right through the middle of that.

And so there's a lot of folks that viewed this as going backwards and, you know, why take out these killer dams that are functioning and they were a monument to, you know, our people that came before us that did all this hard work.

**D. Roger Maves:** Mm-hmm.

**Mikey Wier:** And conquered nature, so to speak. And, you know.

There's two sides to every story and

**D. Roger Maves:** Oh, yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** You know, um,

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, there always is. Yep.

**Mikey Wier:** So there, you know, it can't go and mention that there's still a lot of people that are unhappy about it and, and the way it turned out. [00:43:00] But then there's a lot of people that, like I said, view it as one of the greatest ecological wins in American history and also one of the greatest social justice stories in our modern times.

And so, yeah. You know, yeah, it's a big one. There's a lot of different ways you can come at it and ways to look at it. And, um, we come at it from the, I'm in the fish camp, so I come at it from the perspective of fish, and I think that it's a huge win for our native fish. And it's, you know, they're gonna have a stronghold where they can weather out climate change and all these other adversities and have a place that hopefully salmonids can thrive into the future and also have a viable fishery.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yep, yep. Um, Mikey, let's take a quick break and then come back more and talk about, you know, the future of fishing there and. You know more about what you've seen since the dams came down, so hang tight. I'll be right back.

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If you'd like to ask Mikey a question, just go to our homepage and fill out that form. Send it in. [00:45:00] We'll try to get it answered.

Question came in on the internet here, Mikey, uh, Dennis Olson in Medford. He says This restoration like this typically successful or is it a splash and then slows back down?

**Mikey Wier:** It's hard question to answer because every system is different. The closest kind of dam removal type projects that we have to look at the most similar would, probably the closest in nature would be the Elwa River in, um, Washington, and then also the White Salmon River in Washington. And in both cases, the um, the recovery of native fish above there has been astounding and surprising and very successful.

We're hoping that the Klamath is gonna be a similar story. You know, there was a lot of ecological disturbance that happened below the dam, so you let a lot of silt out from below these dams. And so you know, it's [00:46:00] gonna take, it just kind of depends on nature at this point. If we have some big winters, like luckily we did this winter, we got a lot of water moving through the system. It mobilizes a lot of that sediment. Most of the sediment that was trapped behind the dams was fine

sediment. The river canyon above the dams is mostly volcanic and coarse, and there isn't a lot of, or there isn't a lot of coarse sediment in there. You know, there's some big, big rock, but not a lot of gravel.

And so there wasn't a ton of sediment transport through that canyon. So most of the stuff that was behind the dams was kind of what's considered fine sediment. And so a lot of that mobilized in these high waters and pushed through. And so there are some ecological changes to the river below there. I mean, there was, you know, some times where the dissolved oxygen dropped pretty low and they first started releasing sediment.

But salmon monitors are meant to deal with that. You know, salmon and steelhead in particular are super, super well adapted, dealing with turbidity. They're used to dealing with high water and flood events. They're used to dealing with landslide, mudslides, rock slides, this stuff, [00:47:00] nature. The changing landscape of the West coast has been throwing these kind of obstacles at 'em for centuries or

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah,

**Mikey Wier:** Really well adapted to dealing with them. And you know, like I said, salmon and steelhead in particular, kind of the field of dreams, fish, you give them the habitat, they're gonna show up and make use of it. And so I think that, personally, I think that from a fish perspective, um, it's gonna be a good, a success, you know, by most measures. And. Again, time will tell.

It's a bit of an experiment. We don't, nobody knows exactly what's gonna happen, but all the models that are projecting good success and seeing how many fish made it above the dams, even through all that high turbidity this year and showed up and they were still in great shape and had a super successful spawn and, and all the tributaries and so,

**D. Roger Maves:** Mm-hmm.

**Mikey Wier:** It's, uh, yeah, it was great to see.

**D. Roger Maves:** Chuck in Placerville, California wrote in, he says now that the steelhead migration up the Klamath is possible, how many years are we looking at to see the Klamath to become, once [00:48:00] again a legendary fishery with world class steelhead?

Any predictions on that?

**Mikey Wier:** You know, again, it's just, there's a lot of factors that go into something like this, you know, and most of them are out of our control.

And so some of the biggest factors that are affecting our native salmon populations that are our agronomist fish anyway, fish that go down to the ocean as part of their life history.

Are affected by ocean conditions. And there's a lot of things happening on the Pacific Ocean right now that are affecting salmon.

And so as restoration practitioners, we can only do what we can do within the rivers. And then there's factors that are out of our control, like what happens to the fish in the ocean. And so I think by most measures, within a couple years, the fish of the Klamath will be fishing great again. And who knows, you know, within 10 years it might be world class again.

You drive into the little town of Happy Camp, which is a long highway, 96, about 20 miles from the I-5 and about 30 miles or so from where the [00:49:00] dams were. And the sign, the chamber of Ber sign says, welcome to Happy Camp Steelhead Capital of the world. And I have no doubt in my mind that when they put that sign up, it was, I mean, everybody talks about how insanely prolific these runs of steelhead were on the Klamath, and a lot of it has to do with the diversity of habitat. I mean, all these tributaries are just.

Steelhead producing amazing habitats and

**D. Roger Maves:** Mm-hmm.

**Mikey Wier:** And so there will always be steelhead in that system. I mean, no matter what, they're one of the most resilient fish there are. As long as the temperatures stay good. I mean, that's the big, a huge limiting factor for them in fresh water.

They can display the greatest variance of life history strategies of any other sound on it, and probably of any fish on the planet really, meaning there's a lot of different things they can do, run, timing, and places they can go and they can go out to the ocean and back in the river multiple times.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** Or one of the few animals that can go through multiplication. It's a physiological process to go from breathing fresh water to breathing salt water. [00:50:00] And there's only a couple organisms in the world that can make that transition, especially going from salt water back to fresh water, and then to go back again.

**D. Roger Maves:** Right. Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** And seal that are one of the few animals that can do that fairly seamlessly, multiple times. And so they're gonna be good. You know, salmon are the ones that are a little more susceptible to, or a lot more susceptible to environmental changes 'cause they don't have as many life history strategies. You know, they all come up and spawn similar times and they're, they're run timing is similar and they all kinda leave at the same time. And you know, it's kinda like a big army.

Although the climate historically had five different runs just of Chinook alone. It had fall run, Chinook, you know, three different waves of fall run Chinook. It had spring run Chinook, it had winter run Chinook. And so

**D. Roger Maves:** Does it. Uh,

**Mikey Wier:** There variance.

**D. Roger Maves:** Is there only Chinook in the river now? No. Other types of salmon, other species.

**Mikey Wier:** There's also coho and historically we've had all five of the Pacific species.

**D. Roger Maves:** Oh, okay.

**Mikey Wier:** The managers, the fisheries, biologists, the Turok tribal [00:51:00] fisheries, biologists that told me that they do still occasionally catch a chum salmon or a sockeye.

Or, um, a pink salmon in the river, but the majority of the fish are fall around Chinook. And then we also have coho in the Klamath and the coho are the ones that are kind of teetering on the brink of extinction.

And so we're really making a lot of efforts to recover them. I mean, Cal Trout in particular has put huge efforts into recovering coho.

One of their favorite tributaries, the Scott River, and also the Shasta River is another great tributary for coho. And we've had a lot of really hard fought relationships with ranchers up there that we've made and working in this watershed and have made great strides and restoration and working with AG operators in both of those basins on coho recovery and so, there's a lot of efforts underway to make sure that they don't blink out, but they're, they're kind of swirling down the drain, so to speak. And they're,

**D. Roger Maves:** Is that, is that on the, is that just,

Are you saying in [00:52:00] general or just in the, the fisheries that we've been talking about.

**Mikey Wier:** In California in general, they're threatened across the board and especially so in the Klamath. I mean, they're at a fraction of their historical numbers, but they are hanging on and there is still wild reproduction and a wild run. And they're, they're there just they need some help right now.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. I just, in fact, one of my clients is involved in fish, uh, well basically the trading of fish throughout the world.

And he just said the last run of Cohos, I think up in Alaska was were the whole run was smaller in size. And they don't know why. They just don't know why. But what he was talking about was kind of interesting to me is how that affects things, you know, on down the line. So these are fish that are being caught for food and if they're smaller, then [00:53:00] the restaurants can't cut the same portion size that they normally would out of a fish. They might lose a portion. And then, you know, it goes and I go, gosh, I just never thought of how, you know, and then the smoker, the people that smoke salmon, like the bigger fish. So now the prices of the big fish have gone way skyrocketed up because there's less of them and on and on and on.

It was quite the story he was telling me about that I didn't know about how that all took place. But anyways, it was kind of interesting. But there again, the coho in Alaska were coho in Alaska, have

always been, you know, pretty, pretty, uh, I think well sustained, but maybe that's changing too up there. So

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, for those that don't know in the audience, a, a coho is the same thing as the silver salmon,

**D. Roger Maves:** Right.

**Mikey Wier:** Been to Alaska and fifth for silver salmon. That's a coho. Um,

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** Some people down here, in California still call 'em silvers, but most people call 'em coho salmon. But it's the same species and. There is a lot of factors that are driving size down and in general [00:54:00] the size of salmon across the west coast is down. You look at the, the pre is it?

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** You look at the pre gold rush data. Luckily we do have some data on fish going all the way back to the early 18 hundreds in California, mostly from canneries. Back then there was large commercial canning operations on the mouth of the Eel River and on the mouth of the Smith and on the mouth of the Klamath.

And so they have cannery records and there was a time in California where the average adult king salmon was like 80 to a hundred pounds. You know, an adult male king salmon. It wasn't rare to catch an 80 to a hundred pounder. In fact, that was the, the norm. And then slowly it's driven further and further and further and further down. I mean now the average adult is like 12 to 15 pounds and if you see a 35 pounder, it's a really big fish.

**D. Roger Maves:** Oh wow. Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** The last really big one in California was recorded on Battle Creek. I wanna say it was like 2005 or oh [00:55:00] six or oh four or something. They found an 86 pound Chinook, a male adult Chinook carcass.

That was the last large recorded one. And yeah, it's, uh,

**D. Roger Maves:** Is uh, water temperature a cause for a lot of the salmon deterioration in California? I mean, I imagine that the, it's kind of just moving north, it's just like the trees are moving north, you know, as to what can be sustained.

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, I mean, temperature is a driver.

There's predation, there's a lot of predation on salmon from pinnipeds, sea lions, stellar seals, orcas eat a lot of salmon. And for most of the predators, the large predators in the ocean, you know, if we're talking about just sea lions and orcas, the bigger fish are easier for them to get, and they're

more protein or better snack, and so they target the bigger fish. And so that's a driver of size food availability.

They started doing sampling, commercial [00:56:00] fishermen start, you know, Noah and other fishery managers started working with commercial fisheries, you know, all the way back into like the eighties. And so they would take stomach samples of salmon that were caught off the coast.

And back then a lot of their diet was sardines and squid and other food and anchovies made up a small portion of their diet. But now along the coast of California, the anchovy population has exploded and the sardine population has severely declined. And so the salmon and a lot of other animals are eating a lot more anchovies.

And the, the anchovies have a very specific, um, enzyme in their stomach that disrupts thymine production. And so in a lot of our salmon populations, they're experiencing a thymine deficiency that makes their eggs soft. And so a lot less. Success with getting to gestation period of their eggs. You know, basically if their eggs hatching, the shells are too soft 'cause of this diamine issue because of the anchovies.

I mean, there's just a cascade of, of ecological effects that are happening out there. And then ocean [00:57:00] and then harvest, you know, you got these giant offshore trawlers, you know, I'm not gonna call out different country names, but they're all just waiting right there on the line and just trawling up these massive, you know, amounts of salmon. So,

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, the guy I was talking to earlier today was telling me about that too. And I didn't realize that salmon caught in Chile or in Alaska are sometimes shipped to, um, uh, China or Vietnam for processing. And they move 'em all the way across the ocean for processing and then ship 'em all the way back over here for us to eat.

I, I just thought it was like, oh my gosh, this is craziness. You know?

**Mikey Wier:** It's insane. I mean, you know, yeah. That's a whole other conversation, but our

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, yeah,

**Mikey Wier:** System is broken. It's broken in all way. Is that, you know, what

**D. Roger Maves:** He was talking, he, he was talking about people making a fuss about salmon farming, but he says if you looked at the carbon footprint of a wild caught salmon, it's probably [00:58:00] causes more environmental damage than the farm. But like you say, that's a whole nother conversation itself, but yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** One thing I'll say is, you know, wild salmon is, is a, is a super sustainable. And super nutrient rich food source salmon supported almost all human inhabitation across the west coast. I mean, that is the true natural heritage of this landscape.

It's a salmon producing ecosystem. Almost all native villages we're centered around salmon runs, going all the way up into Eastern Oregon and Idaho and places like that. They still, salmon was a

important food source for 'em for at least part of the year. And you know, that's what we're trying to do is recover salmon back to a sustainably harvest population.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah,

**Mikey Wier:** They're a great food source and they have been for a long, long time.

**D. Roger Maves:** We're running out of time here, so let's take the last few minutes and talk about, you know, [00:59:00] what's available now on the Klamath as far as fishing goes. What seasons, when would somebody want to come out there and fish? And for what?

Let's start there.

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, I think by next fall we're gonna experience some great steelhead fishing on the Klamath. As I mentioned before, all the trout fishing above the lakes is still totally intact. If you find yourself in the upper Klamath basin, there's lots of great trout fishing opportunities up there.

One of the things that's gonna be one of the most interesting changes is a lot of the steelhead that enter the Klamath are what? Well, a lot of the steelhead that people fish for in the Klamath are what would be considered a summer steelhead. And so they enter late summer, early fall and start working their way up.

And historically, a lot of 'em entered even earlier in the summer, and they'd go into these deep pools, these cold deep pools and these tributaries, and sit there for sometimes two or three months waiting for the early range. And that was kind of their life history strategy, these summer steelhead. And so.

A lot of the fish [01:00:00] that people are catching in the Trinity and higher up in the Klamath are these classic remnant genetic summer steelhead. And the Klamath does have a run of winter steelhead, just like the eel and the smith, these big chrome winter fish that are average 8 to 12 pounds, you know, up to 20 pounds.

But most people rarely fish form on the Klamath because that time of year, January, February, March, typically the lower Klamath would be huge. Low water year on average would be 30,000 CFS down there. Uh

**D. Roger Maves:** Oh wow.

**Mikey Wier:** Big water year. Like this year there was times where over 150,000 CFS are moving through the lower Klamath and so a lot of those classic winter fish jam up in really high water, go into lower tributaries and spawn and get out of there.

Whereas the summer steelhead come into the system earlier when it's low and clear, they spend a lot more time in the system. And so that's what most people are targeting on the Trinity in the fall and on the Klamath. And so all those fall run steelhead, the summer steelhead [01:01:00] used to stack up below Iron Gate Dam.

And so there's some guides that are bummed because that was a great resource. I know guys, that that was their spot for a good couple months outta the year when a lot of the other fisheries were not working. They would fish that, that first five miles below the lowest dam there below Iron Gate in a, a section called Hornbrook.

And those steelhead would stack up below that dam that was, you know, they, their instincts to go up river and that was the highest they could go. And so they'd kind of just all end up stacked up in that first few miles. And you used to go up there and have 20 fish days sometimes floating through there.

And so that aspect is gone. But now those fish are gonna stack up at Keno. And Keno is a really, it's higher up in the watershed and it, it's really unique water. I mean it was a, a great red band fishery. But, it's like if anybody's been on the pit river or it's like a cross between the pit river and the East Walker are kind of what I would compare it to In California, it's kind of a little darker colored water coming out of the dam. Typically a little higher nutrient load 'cause it's coming outta Klamath Lake and it's [01:02:00] really leggy and pocket water and it's kind of combat wading. You gotta have a wading stick and you know, every step could go from two feet deep to eight feet deep in one step. And so you, you gotta really be careful.

But you know, now those steelhead are gonna stack up in there and people can be high sticking or indicator less ming to eight to 10 pounds steelhead in there next fall. Or even right now potentially. So one thing to mention is the river through where the old reservoir beds used to be. So from the top of where, where JC Boyle Lake started below Keno down to the Oregon line, and then from the neighborhood of Copco at the top of where Copco reservoir where used to be, all the way to the bottom where Iron Gate is, is close to fishing for five years. And so that is mostly to let the, there's a lot of revegetation restoration happening in those old reservoir footprints. And so a lot of that is just to keep the public out of there so that that re-veg, you know, it's very expensive, very costly, time consuming process to try to [01:03:00] revegetate those landscapes and conduct restoration.

And so they just don't want people stomping around that. But from below, Iron Gate down is still open with the normal regs and above Copco.

**D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

**Mikey Wier:** California state line is open too, and so just check the regs before you go check the supplemental regs. But some areas are catch and release and some areas are open year round.

Some areas have a little bit of a season on the upper basin, but the lower Klamath is pretty much open to fishing year round.

**D. Roger Maves:** What about the salmon?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, you can target salmon. You're allowed to keep a hatchery salmon in most of the places that are open there. The lower Klamath is where most people target salmon, and that'll be like late August and September when the first part of the fall runs coming through.

And in that lower river, around Klamath Glen, they're beautiful. They're chrome bright, just fresh outta the ocean. They're still great eating. By the time those fish get up to Iron Gate, some people

catch 'em and eat 'em, but I wouldn't want to, they're pretty beat up and have been in fresh water for quite a while by the time they get up [01:04:00] there. Um,

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** But there will still be a season for salmon.

**D. Roger Maves:** Are there still or were there ever, are there any hatcheries on the river now for salmon or,

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, that's a great question. You know, there was a hatchery below Iron Gate, the Iron Gate fish hatchery, and like most river systems, when they built a dam, that was the main mitigation strategy for salmon was to just build a hatchery.

And so there was a, a hatchery operating below Iron Gate for many years. And it was a pretty contentious point throughout restoration of whether or not to keep any kind of hatchery on the Klamath or to just let it go wild. And I think Cal trout was kind of in the wild camp, but a number of stakeholders and constituents wanted some kind of hatchery program to stay.

And so they rebuilt a smaller version of the hatchery on a tributary called Fall Creek, which is just up river away from where the old hatchery used to be. And right now the plan is to maintain that hatchery for 10 years and then shut it down. And so [01:05:00] we'll see what happens when that time comes. But in the meantime, they're releasing fall run Chinook, and I believe some coho as well.

And I think maybe some steelhead, but I'd have to double check on that. But they're definitely still rearing salmon and releasing 'em into the river for the time being.

**D. Roger Maves:** So is the idea behind that thinking that with the dams removed, this will help build that fishery up to. Better standard than it was before the dams removed to get more fish in the water. So more fish come back. Is that the, the idea?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah. From a conservation standpoint, I kind of mentioned a little bit earlier, but cow trout had been working extensively in the upper tributaries, uh, for over 20 years. And that was really in anticipation of dam removal because the fish that were returning to the Shasta and the Scott, which were both once very, very prolific salmon producers and were still pretty solid producers of wild salmon, there's no hatch tree on those [01:06:00] tributaries.

And so those were the fish that were programmed to go highest in the watershed. And those are the fish that are gonna repopulate those tributaries above the dam. Now the dams are out, they have more options and so there is gonna be a lot more wild reproduction and a lot of, um, almost 400 miles of additional habitat for those fish to make use of.

And then the hatchery is to continue to supplement the population as well. And again, to keep fish in the system, you know, for commercial people to catch offshore, for subsistence fishermen in the river, the tribes to catch, and for recreational fishermen as well. So, you know, hopefully that the, the stocks will rebound naturally, but the hatchery's definitely gonna

**D. Roger Maves:** Gonna help Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** Help boost that.

**D. Roger Maves:** Right.

**Mikey Wier:** I mean there's, there's different ways to look at it. You know, I think a lot of managers are realizing the hatcheries aren't the necessarily the, um, end all, be all solution to, to fish recovery. They keep, you know, [01:07:00] fish in the water, but they aren't really like creating sustainable runs of fish that are genetically adept and are, you know, genetically super adapted to those systems. Like the wild fish used to be,

**D. Roger Maves:** I guess what I was kind of, yeah, I was. Uh, what I was thinking is like to boost the population is one thing, but uh, or is the hatchery more to provide, put and take fish for, you know?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, that's it. Like I said, the regulations call for you to be able to keep hatchery salmon and steelhead and so fish would clip fins.

And that's kind of what they're there for. They're there to harvest.

**D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

**Mikey Wier:** It's hard to have qualms about bonking, a hatchery steelhead. That's kind of what they put 'em in there for. And

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah,

**Mikey Wier:** The genetics, you know, you don't want those genetics interbreeding with the wild populations anyway, in case of steelhead and salmon as well, they go down to the ocean.

It's not like a hatchery trout, it's been eating hatchery food and thrown into a lake. And [01:08:00] they're a steelhead. They were chucked into the fry. They go all the way down to the ocean. They're eating wild food, just like the wild steelhead are. So when they come back in the river, they're, they're good eating.

And um, so yeah, that's kind of what they're there for, is to create additional fishing opportunities and opportunities to take fish home and eat 'em.

**D. Roger Maves:** Uh, Zach Morgan wrote in, he says, do you have any information about boat access ramps above Iron Gate and above Wards Canyon?

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, there is a recreation plan for those areas as part of the restoration.

They're, they're building some new boat ramps in there. Ward Canyon is pretty heavy, you know, it's, it's some stout white water in there. It's, it's one of those sections of river, kinda like I mentioned before, in the pit where they didn't have much water flowing through there. In fact, it was, it was

almost completely dewatered. During the summer. They sent the water through a pen stock and down to a powerhouse below there. And so Ward Canyon had almost no water flowing through it for a long time. And so.

The Yurok Construction Corporation came in there pre dam [01:09:00] removal and removed a bunch of brush and trees and stuff that had choked out the river channel.

And, but either way it's just, it's a rocky good class four section of whitewater. And so, uh, I wouldn't recommend it unless you're a serious whitewater boater and you got the skills and the, the right equipment. But there will be some fish floats above there, and there's plenty of fish floats below there.

**D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

**Mikey Wier:** And that's one good thing about this dam removal that doesn't get talked out about a lot, but the Klamath is gonna be one of the greatest multi-day. Rafting destinations in the lower 48, if not the world. I mean, there's like almost 300 miles of raft water. You could put in a keno and raft all the way to the Pacific Ocean, with the exception of one rapid down there called Ishi Fishy Falls, which is a sacred site for the Caru tribe and non-tribal folks aren't really allowed there, and you wouldn't wanna run it anyway.

It's like a super messy class five. It's nowhere you want to be in a raft or probably even a kayak. It's pretty messy. But other than that, you can float the entire river. I mean, it's, [01:10:00] you know, you could spend two weeks on the Klamath.

**D. Roger Maves:** Are there, are there places all along the Klamath to, uh, camp out on a multi-day trip or,

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, there's tons of great camping.

**D. Roger Maves:** Oh, okay.

**Mikey Wier:** Tons of public access, especially from above I-5 and below I-5. There's lots of public access to the river down there. As you get down around the confluence of the Trinity and the Klamath, it is reservation, it is tribal land down there, and so it's open to the public and you can recreate down there.

But I always just tell people to be respectful. You know, it is tribal land and so just, yeah, be respectful. But there are places to access and places to camp. And the lower 50 plus miles of the river are basically roadless. So when you leave the river, highway 96 leaves the river around the confluence of the trinity there in Weitchpec.

And then from there down to the 101 is basically a roadless section of river that the only way to access it is either float down it [01:11:00] or to come up it in a jet boat. And so it's remote and it's beautiful. And there's this, you know, down there you're in the the coastal ecotype. And so there's redwoods along the river and giant conifers everywhere.

And then you go into this, pretty beautiful remote canyon down there before it leads into the ocean. And that again, is some of the best swing water for steelhead. If you, especially if you get a low water year and the flows down there are reasonable, you can find some really decent fishing, certain years down there, a lot of years it's too big and you get hardly any fishing at all.

But the years when the, you know, if you keep an eye on the gauge and the flows are good, and especially in the fall, you can have some really great spey fishing down there.

**D. Roger Maves:** We've run out of time, but one last question. What advice would you give to anglers who are planning their first trip to the Klamath since the dams were removed?

**Mikey Wier:** Well, right now I would check on conditions. There's still a lot of sediment moving through the lower river from dam removals. It's gonna take a couple or a few years for that sediment to really stabilize [01:12:00] and so. I think by this fall we're gonna experience some great fishing on the Klamath, but right now there's still a lot of water moving through the system.

And below the former dam sites, there's higher levels of turbidity than normal still. And so it's gonna take a little bit for that sediment to flush through there. So just check, yeah, check conditions, talk through the local, um,

**D. Roger Maves:** Local shops. Yeah.

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah. Hit up will at the Ashland Fly shop and, and, uh, ask him how it's looking.

You know, there are some local resources for you to call and, um, and see what's going on. But above the dams, there's great fishing to be had right now. And, uh, even below the dams, there's probably some fish to be caught.

**D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, yeah. Good, good. Well, we've gotta wrap it up now, run out of time, but stick with me, Mikey, until the end here. We're gonna give away a book and we'll have you help me out with making sure I get the right answer to our question for the night. And we're gonna give away a one year membership. [01:13:00] I'm sorry

**Mikey Wier:** If you, if you'll let me real quick, I'd like to give a little plug for California Trout. Um,

**D. Roger Maves:** Sure.

**Mikey Wier:** We are a cold water fisheries conservation nonprofit.

Uh, we focus just on waters within California. And, um, you know, the Klamath Dam removals was a large project we're involved in, but we're also involved in tons of large scale restoration in advocacy and in policy throughout California. So please become a member. Check out our work at [californiatrout.org](http://californiatrout.org).

**D. Roger Maves:** [californiatrout.org](http://californiatrout.org).

Good. Good. Well, uh, yeah, we will everybody, uh, if you'd like to help them out and see what's going on. There you go, [californiatrout.org](http://californiatrout.org). And, uh, thanks Mikey for all the work you're doing with them. Sounds like you've learned a lot and really are involved. So that's really, uh, encouraging.

We are gonna give away a membership to Fly Fishes International and a, a membership is Trout Unlimited in a book, again, courtesy of Stackpole Books so hang tight and we'll do that in just one minute. [01:14:00]

The Bonefish and Tarpon Trust works very hard to safeguard the future of our beloved Flats. Fisheries from protecting spawning sites threatened by unsustainable fishing pressure to securing historic funding to Restoring Florida's Everglades and estuaries thanks to their members. They've expanded their conservation to the Bahamas, Belize and Mexico. There's still much work to be done, and they need your help with your support. They can ensure that the flats fishery is healthy and sustainable now and for generations to come.

Visit [btt.org](http://btt.org) and become a member of the Bonefish and Tarpon Trusts today. Again, that's [btt.org](http://btt.org).

Just a reminder to everyone before you leave the website tonight, please take a minute and give us your feedback about the show. You can find a link on our homepage and the section is tonight's show that says, what do you think of the show?

So click on that link, leave your comments. We'd really appreciate it. Now we're gonna give away a few prizes. The winners for our drawings are randomly selected from the show's registration database. If you didn't register for tonight's show, it's too late now. But make sure you do for our [01:15:00] next show, and if you are one of the lucky winners, we'll contact you after the show. To collect your information so that we can get your prize to you.

So first, we'll give away a one year membership to Fly Fishers International. To learn more about FFI go to [flyfishersinternational.org](http://flyfishersinternational.org), [flyfishersinternational.org](http://flyfishersinternational.org). And our winner for that is Wendell Kerr in California, Wendell Kerr. So Wendell, congratulations on your membership to Fly Fishers International and we're give away a membership to Trout Unlimited.

To find out more about Trout Unlimited, go to [tu.org](http://tu.org). And our winner for that is Hong Chin, Hong Chin in Massachusetts long ways away from California. But, uh, congratulations on, on, uh, winning that membership to Trout Unlimited.

So now we give away a book, courtesy of Stackpole Books. I have a list of books that I have available, and whoever wins tonight will get to choose from that list. So, and the way that we do this [01:16:00] is you fill out your, put your answer, your name, your location. On that form on our homepage, and the first person that answers the question correctly, will will win the book.

So the question is, what's the name of the lowest dam that was removed on the Klamath River? The name of the lowest dam that was removed, the one closest to the ocean, to be clear. So Mikey, we'll see if anybody was listening that closely, but we did talk Yeah, bring it on quite a bit. Bring it on. Yeah. So we gotta wait a second because there's a slight delay before people hear the question. And then of course we gotta get the answer typed here. So let's see if we can get an answer here in just a few seconds here. And still waiting. I hope that wasn't too hard. Uh ooh. Close. I don't know. I'm

gonna ask Mikey. The first answer [01:17:00] I got is Iron Dam. That's not really the full name, is it? Uh,

**Mikey Wier:** It's close getting there.

**D. Roger Maves:** It's close and

**Mikey Wier:** Half right?

**D. Roger Maves:** Half right, half. Right.

And it looks like we've got another, another one that I think is full right? Iron Gate?

**Mikey Wier:** That's correct.

**D. Roger Maves:** That's correct. Phil, you've want another book? So Phil McCartney in, uh, Kentucky. And Phil, I will send you the list and then you can pick a book from that list and I'll get it sent out to you. So thanks for paying attention, Phil. You always do. He is a good listener and uh, I think he's listened to every show that I've ever done over the years, so I always appreciate seeing him on the shows when we do them.

Mikey, I really appreciate you being on with us. Gosh, [01:18:00] your wealth of knowledge about the California fisheries and conservation on there. It was. I learned so much tonight. But thanks so much for being on the show and taking your time out to, to educate us tonight.

**Mikey Wier:** Yeah, thanks for having me again. It's my pleasure.

**D. Roger Maves:** Well, hopefully you've all found the podcast archive on our website. If you haven't, just look for the link on the top line menu.

In the archive, you'll find all of our past shows over. 400, I think it's 419 shows. Now you can search by keyword, keyword phrase. So like if you wanted to find out what shows Mikey Wier has done, put in Mikey Wier, or California or Klamath River, or Trinity River, or whatever you're looking for, put in those keywords and I'm sure you'll find out a show that will make you happy.

Our next broadcast will be on April 16th at 7:00 PM Mountain Time, 9:00 PM Eastern Time. And on that show, I'm gonna interview Jack Mitchell. And our show's gonna be Yakima River, A Blue Ribbon Trout Fishery. Jack is a [01:19:00] seasoned guide in well traveled fly fisher, having fished throughout North and South America.

From Alaska to Chile, he considers the Yakima his home water and is guided there for over 35 years. This designated Blue Ribbon Fisheries one for your bucket list. So join us and learn everything you need to know about how to fish this outstanding fishery and make sure you get the live show.

Just add it the upcoming show to your calendar. Just click on add the calendar button under Jack's photo on our homepage and you'll be all set.

I'd like to thank Fly Fishers International, Trout Unlimited, Bonefish and Tarpon Trust, Olympic Peninsula Skagit Tactics and the Ugly Bug Fly Shop, Water Master for sponsoring our shows tonight.

Don't forget to visit our website at [askaboutflyfishing.com](http://askaboutflyfishing.com). Make sure you signed up to receive our announcements so you don't miss out on any of our future broadcasts.

Thanks for listening to ask about fly fishing internet radio. We hope you enjoyed the show. That's it. Good night everyone, and good fishing.