Salters: The Remarkable Return of Sea-Run Brook Trout

With Tom Pero

[00:00:00] **D. Roger Maves:** Welcome to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio, your source for learning more about fly fishing in cold water, warm water, and saltwater. Hello, I'm Roger Maves, your host for tonight's show. On this broadcast, we'll be featuring Tom Pero, and he'll be answering your questions on Salters: The Remarkable Return of the Sea-Run Brook Trout.

[00:00:19] **D. Roger Maves:** This show will be 90 minutes in length, and we're broadcasting live over the internet. If you'd like to ask Tom a question, just go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and use the Q&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.

[00:00:38] **D. Roger Maves:** 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.

[00:00:55] **D. Roger Maves:** You can also find it on any of the podcast sites like Apple Podcasts, [00:01:00] Spotify, Pocket Casts, or wherever you listen to your podcasts. So if you have to leave early, you can return to our website or any of the podcast platforms at your convenience and listen to the recording at any time. If you're out and about on Facebook, Instagram, or X, we'd sure appreciate it if you'd share our podcast.

[00:01:13] **D. Roger Maves:** And when you do, use #askaboutflyfishing and #flyfishing. In fact, if you have a moment, do it while you're watching the show and really help us out to spread the good word. The content of this broadcast is copyright. It's the property of The Knowledge Group Inc., doing business as Ask About Fly Fishing. When we return, we'll be talking with Tom Pero about Salters: The Remarkable Return of the Sea-Run Brook Trout.

[00:01:40] **D. Roger Maves:** Fly Fishers International needs your support. Its conservation projects at both the national and the club level are addressing critical issues of importance to fly fishers. The organization provides grants to help with the restoration of habitats like Wolf Creek in Idaho and Sands Creek in Delaware County, New York, and funds projects that [00:02:00] collect valuable data about fish and their habitats like the Peacock Bass Study in Miami, Florida.

[00:02:05] **D. Roger Maves:** FFI serves as a strong advocate for fly fishing in all waters for all fish to preserve and to promote the arts of fly casting and fly tying and to help ensure that future generations can enjoy these one-of-a-kind experiences. These efforts won't nearly be as effective without your help. If you're not already a member, we invite you to join Fly Fishers International as they work to cultivate conservation, education, and community within the sport of fly fishing.

[00:02:31] **D. Roger Maves:** Join Fly Fishers International today and help support their fine work. For more information, go to their website at flyfishersinternational.org. That's flyfishersinternational.org.

[00:02:44] **D. Roger Maves:** Before we introduce Tom, 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.

[00:02:57] **D. Roger Maves:** Now, if you haven't registered yet for the drawing, you can do so now. Just [00:03:00] go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and look for the link under tonight's show that says register for our free drawing. Click on that link and fill out the form, and we'll announce the winners at the end of the show.

[00:03:11] **D. Roger Maves:** We'll also be giving away a copy of Tom's book, Salter, courtesy of Wild River Press, and if you'd like to know more about Wild River Press and what they publish, you can go to their website, wildriverpress.com. And we also have a link on our homepage there with the book that'll take you right to the book, uh, to Salter, in case you decide to buy the book later on tonight.

[00:03:33] **D. Roger Maves:** Wild River Press, Tom is the principal of that company, publishes all kinds of just wonderful books, so check 'em out. Now, here's how you can win. You must be the first person to answer the question I ask at the end of the show, and the question will be about something that we talk about during the show, and you must submit your answer along with your name and your location using that text box on our homepage.

[00:03:54] **D. Roger Maves:** So listen closely, take notes, pay attention, type fast, and maybe you'll be the, the proud [00:04:00] winner of Tom Peros' book, Salter.

[00:04:04] **D. Roger Maves:** Tonight our guest is Tom Pero. Tom, you know, I didn't even think about pronouncing your... Is your last name Pero or how do you pronounce your last name?

[00:04:14] **Tom Pero:** I answer to all of the above.

[00:04:16] **D. Roger Maves:** All of the above?

[00:04:17] **Tom Pero:** Yeah.

[00:04:17] **D. Roger Maves:** I wanna roll my R in there, but, uh, that's a different thing.

[00:04:23] **Tom Pero:** Yeah. I, I grew up with my family pronouncing it Pero with a hard E, but it probably, the way you pronounce it is probably more accurately accurate historically, because I think there was a T on the end. Remember H. Ross Pero from Texas?

[00:04:41] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:04:41] **Tom Pero:** That was my original name. Having nothing to do- Oh ... with him by the way, but just by-

[00:04:45] **D. Roger Maves:** Oh, yeah. Yeah ...

[00:04:46] **Tom Pero:** By this election-

[00:04:47] **D. Roger Maves:** Pero ...

[00:04:47] **Tom Pero:** Period reference.

[00:04:49] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Okay.

[00:04:52] **D. Roger Maves:** Uh, yeah, I did, you know, it's something that I didn't think it was complicated, and then as I'm thinking about it, I said, "This could be complicated."[00:05:00]

[00:05:00] **D. Roger Maves:** Anyway, hey, uh, for more than 50 years, Tom has been a central figure in fly fishing publishing. Starting as a teenager, he edited Round Table, an International Fly Tying Magazine. In 1977, he was hired by Trout Unlimited as the first full-time editor of Trout. During his 16-year tenure, twice the publication was recognized as Conservation Magazine of the Year by the Natural Resources Council of America.

[00:05:24] **D. Roger Maves:** For the last two decades, Tom has been publisher at Wild River Press, home to many of the great fly fishing books in print today, including Atlantic Salmon Magic by Topher Brown, Fly Fishing for Striped Bass by Rich Murphy, Wild Steelhead by Sean Gallagher, Flies for Atlantic Salmon and Steelhead by Trey Combs, and the enduring Passion Trilogy, Passion for Tarpon by Andy Mill, Passion for Permit by John Olph, and Passion for Bonefish by Ian Davis.

[00:05:55] **D. Roger Maves:** So Tom, welcome to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio.

[00:05:59] **Tom Pero:** Hello, Roger. [00:06:00] It's about time I showed up here, I think. A lot of my authors have already.

[00:06:04] **D. Roger Maves:** I think all of them. Almost all of them. Yeah. Yeah. Well, you didn't write a book, but then, you know, that doesn't mean I shouldn't have interviewed you, so I apologize in adv- But we're doing it now, and we got a good reason to, because you created again another wonderful book.

[00:06:20] **D. Roger Maves:** So we're gonna talk about that tonight, and I hope all of you will enjoy that. Hold on just a second here. Okay. All right. So yeah, what started all this, Tom? I mean, who inspired you to write the book Salter, and why were you compelled to tell the story?

[00:06:41] **Tom Pero:** Well, I grew up in coastal New England. I grew up in Massachusetts fishing for sea-run trout, what few there were around at that time.

[00:06:50] **Tom Pero:** And when I was 19 years old, I formed my own chapter of Trout Unlimited in the area to [00:07:00] promote the resource. And this year, 2026, is the 50th anniversary of a stream improvement project that I was part of on Cape Cod, on a little stream called Laquashnet. And a couple of years ago, I was back there visiting with friends whose several of whom had been involved

in this effort, and got the idea, you know, it's, it's coming up on 50 years. That's a hell of a long time, and it's the longest running wild trout restoration project in America, maybe even in the world.

[00:07:34] **Tom Pero:** So that's essentially why I thought it was time to tell the story.

[00:07:40] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay. Jessica in Laguna Beach, California, wrote in, asks, "When did you first realize that you had a passion for fishing?"

[00:07:48] **Tom Pero:** Oh, as usual with young people, boys and girls, I felt that urge very early on. I grew up next to a little river. It wasn't a trout stream actually, [00:08:00] but I fished for pickerel and horn pout and various, uh, perch, various other fish that lived in the stream, and it just kind of grew from there. And then eventually, as you point out, I became involved in trout fishing and Trout Unlimited, and thought it was a pretty good way to see the world, which is what my love of fishing enabled me to do.

[00:08:22] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Yeah. In reading your book, the research you did was really impressive. I mean, I'm just thinking how hard it must have been to find a lot of those nuggets that you have in the book. How long did it take you to research and write the book?

[00:08:38] **Tom Pero:** Just about 18 months. And actually, it's kind of you to say that, but it's a hell of a lot easier now to do this than it would've been decades ago. I mean, the internet's a marvelous thing.

[00:08:49] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:08:49] **Tom Pero:** And a lot of the material, including a lot of the visuals, the old maps and old illustrations and so forth that I feature in the book, I found online.[00:09:00]

[00:09:00] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Yeah. I was, um, well, I never got around to doing it, but I was gonna write a book on this valley that I lived in up in the mountains here in Colorado that nobody had documented or anything, but it had quite history. But, but I was having to go down to the county, you know, Fairplay County and Park County, Colorado, and dig through the files and find old clippings and stuff, so so, you know, there it wasn't that easy. They weren't very automated, so that's kind of what I imagined you were doing.

[00:09:29] **Tom Pero:** Yeah. Well, I've been through my share of that over the years as well, and-

[00:09:33] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah

[00:09:33] **Tom Pero:** As you can imagine, I have an extensive personal library of fishing and historical information I've collected over the years, and so I was able to draw on that as well.

[00:09:42] **D. Roger Maves:** Ah, okay. Okay.

[00:09:45] **D. Roger Maves:** Can you share any interesting stories that, you know, while you were researching? Did anything, uh, fun happen or-

[00:09:51] **Tom Pero:** Well, I don't, I don't know how interesting. It's a pretty boring activity for anybody who's tried it. So, you know, getting [00:10:00] up every day and turning on the computer and searching for all this stuff isn't exactly exciting. I will add- ... one thing that actually has nothing to do with the research, but last month, as you know, I spent the better part of October traveling around my old stamping grounds in New England, doing book readings and events to promote the book and to promote the Salter Brook Trout resource.

[00:10:26] **Tom Pero:** And toward the end of my trip, I was giving a talk at an organization called the, uh, Association to Preserve Cape Cod, a wonderful conservation group, and this guy walks up to me, kind of a shortish guy with a ZZ Top perfectly manicured white beard, and- ... he gets in my face and he says, "I bet you don't know who I am."

[00:10:52] **Tom Pero:** And it was kind of an awkward moment. I don't really like that.

[00:10:56] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:10:56] **Tom Pero:** And I stuck out my hand to shake his, and I [00:11:00] said, "Uh, actually, I don't." And he said, "My name is Vinnie. Remember me?" And all of a sudden it just, like a flash, it dawned on me that this was a kid I went to Cub Scouts with t-

[00:11:11] **D. Roger Maves:** Oh my gosh.

[00:11:13] **Tom Pero:** 60 years ago. 60 years ago.

[00:11:16] **D. Roger Maves:** Wow.

[00:11:16] **Tom Pero:** And he was talking in the audience later with a friend of mine, a, a contemporary friend of mine, and he evidently leaned over to this guy and he said, "Yeah," he says, "I remember visiting Tommy in his mother's basement where he was skinning squirrels and tanning the skins." He said, "That Tommy had some pretty strange hobbies."

[00:11:44] **D. Roger Maves:** Oh, boy. That is... See, now that's a good story. Yeah, I knew there was something there. Yeah. How fun. Yeah. Yeah, I've had that a couple times in my life where people just walk up to you and you go, "Oh my gosh," you know? I just, the coincidence of the whole thing is incredible.

[00:11:59] **D. Roger Maves:** [00:12:00] You began your book with a written piece by John C. Phillips. And him recalling Cape Cod trout streams and fishing back in the day when he was writing. And tell us about, you know, and feel free for, to read from the book if you want, but what kind of picture did he give you of that time and place back then when things were quite different?

[00:12:24] **Tom Pero:** Yeah. Well, actually the best thing, and I'll be quick with this, but the best thing for me to do is to quickly read, uh, the opening passage that... and you'll see why I chose to begin my book with, with something that he wrote literally 100 years ago. Um-

[00:12:38] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay, sure ...

[00:12:39] **Tom Pero:** Here, here's Phillips. "Down on the south shore of the Bay State from the head of Buzzards Bay, out eastward almost to the elbow of the Cape, lies a belt of country cut by numerous little streams and rivers, all flowing south and discharging into saltwater creeks and marshes.

[00:12:58] **Tom Pero:** Adapted especially [00:13:00] well for trout and highly peculiar in many w- of their features, their virtues and attractions have never been properly recorded either by the poet or the fisherman. The mountain streams of the Berkshires, the highlands of New Hampshire and New York have attracted their share of praise, but the lost waters of the Cape should be sketched into the annals of New England field sports before their very channels are forgotten."

[00:13:25] **Tom Pero:** And then he goes on for pages to describe what the fishing was like in his youth. And he at that time, as I said, this is in the 1920s, and even by then the fishing had largely deteriorated, so he's remembering the late 1800s. And he's a marvelous writer. He, um, he was a medical doctor, graduate of Harvard.

[00:13:49] **Tom Pero:** He was a Boston Brahmin. He came from a fairly elite line of, of wealthy individuals. One of his ancestors was the first mayor of Boston. He had an [00:14:00] uncle or a great uncle who was Wendell Phillips, the famous abolitionist, and he was a sportsman. He traveled the world. He had the resource to travel the world. He hunted in Africa, all over the place. He was an avid waterfowl hunter, and a quite a famous ornithologist at the time, actually.

[00:14:17] **Tom Pero:** And he, every April and May, he traveled from Boston to Cape Cod to fish in these saltish streams while they were kind of, uh... Well, they had already seen their heyday, but there was still enough resource or fishery there that he could talk about it.

[00:14:35] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Interesting. Yeah. Already they were showing, yeah.

[00:14:40] **D. Roger Maves:** We'll dig into that a little bit more later. So the piece that he wrote, it was... There other writings that he had that you found?

[00:14:48] **Tom Pero:** He never wrote anything else about salters. He wrote, he wrote about-

[00:14:51] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay ...

[00:14:51] **Tom Pero:** Ducks. He wrote about ducks and waterfall hunting. He belonged to a private duck and goose hunting club north [00:15:00] of Boston that hired the famous waterfall carver and shore bird carver, Elmore Krell, when Krell was quite young.

[00:15:09] **Tom Pero:** So he had this whole connection to all that classic-

[00:15:12] **D. Roger Maves:** Hmm ...

[00:15:12] **Tom Pero:** New England sporting scene.

[00:15:16] **D. Roger Maves:** Well, let's, before we talk about the rivers and what happened and what's happening, let's talk about the fish itself for a few minutes.

[00:15:24] **D. Roger Maves:** What exactly is a salter? 'Cause after I had my idea of what it would be before reading the book, and now I understand a bit more. So can you share that with folks about what a salter is?

[00:15:38] **Tom Pero:** Right. Well, yeah, essentially it's, as the title indicates, it's a sea-run brook trout. It's a, an ordinary brook trout that lives in a small freshwater stream and migrates out into the saltwater. It doesn't go very far, which is what differentiates it from, say, a [00:16:00] salmon or a steelhead or even a sea-run brown trout.

[00:16:04] **Tom Pero:** So it just kind of wanders around in the estuary or the bays of, in this case, Cape Cod, puts on some weight, and then comes back the following spring as a fat, silvery fish, and that's what's called a Salter.

[00:16:20] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay. Now, yeah, that's what surprised me because when you talked about in the book, it was, um, they pretty much kinda go out into kinda estuary areas, right?

[00:16:30] **Tom Pero:** Yes.

[00:16:31] **D. Roger Maves:** And that's... See, I was thinking they went out like steelhead and came back, but, um, that's what surprised me.

[00:16:34] **Tom Pero:** No, no, they don't have the-

[00:16:35] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah ...

[00:16:36] **Tom Pero:** They don't have the physical capability to do that. They simply don't grow... Uh, pardon me. They don't, um, they don't grow old enough, and they don't have the physical capability to-

[00:16:46] **D. Roger Maves:** Ah

[00:16:46] **Tom Pero:** The genus Salvelinus generally does not have the physical capability to go out into open water. So they really just, I would categorize them more as a wanderer. They wander around in these estuaries [00:17:00] and coastal bays, and not all of them do, by the way. That's another thing that separates them from fish like salmon or steelhead. They, not all of the population does that, just some individuals. So it's somewhat erratic in that sense.

[00:17:17] **D. Roger Maves:** Well, let me, um, we'll talk about why they leave in just a moment. I gotta take a quick break, and when we come back, we'll dig into why they do go to the salt. I'll be back in just a moment.

[00:17:29] **D. Roger Maves:** The Ugly Bug Fly Shop in Casper, Wyoming has been serving fly fishers in Wyoming and around the world since 1983.

[00:17:35] **D. Roger Maves:** Their selection of top-of-the-line gear and a huge assortment of flies is one of the best in the land. All products are available in their fly shop and online. Looking for advice? Just give them a call, and their expert professional staff will help you with whatever you need.

[00:17:48] **D. Roger Maves:** Visit the Ugly Bug Fly Shop today at uglybugflyshop.com, or call them at 866-845-9284. Again, it's the uglybugflyshop.com, [00:18:00] or 866-845-9284.

[00:18:04] **D. Roger Maves:** You're listening to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio, and we're talking with Tom Pero about Salters: The Remarkable Return of the Sea-Run Brook Trout. So if you'd like to ask Tom a question, just go to our homepage, fill out that form there, the Q&A form, send it in, and we'll try to get it answered on the show tonight.

[00:18:21] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay, Tom, before we dig into why salters go out to, uh, salt, tell me a little bit about Wild River Press and what you're doing in the fly fishing world today.

[00:18:31] **Tom Pero:** Well, I, uh, as you pointed out in the introduction, I've been doing this for 20-odd years, and I've tried to produce... Under the banner and the brand of Wild River Press, I've tried to produce some top quality fly fishing books, among several other subjects. But fly fishing has been my, as you know, it's been my major topic, and you've mentioned a bunch of the authors that I've published.

[00:18:59] **Tom Pero:** This is my [00:19:00] latest book, Salter, and one of the few that I've written personally and that has my name on it prominently. Mostly I've edited and supported other people's works. We, uh, last year we published, as you indicated, Ian Davis' Passion for Bonefish, which is the third in the trilogy series of tropical saltwater books.

[00:19:28] **Tom Pero:** And I'm now working with a fellow named Steve Hoovler, who is a co-owner of Big Sky Anglers in West Yellowstone, on a new fishing guide to Yellowstone National Park. There hasn't really been a good Yellowstone guide for, oh, at least 25 years, and so we're excited about that. I took a couple trips to Yellowstone this spring and summer working with Steve, and we expect the, that book to come out next spring.

[00:19:59] **D. Roger Maves:** [00:20:00] Hmm. Nice. Nice. Yeah. Always productive and always beautiful books. The Passion series is... Or it's some of my favorite books. Yeah, so... And I've even given the one on, um, one on permit I gave to my guide down in Belize. I gave him a set. So, uh, yeah, it was, uh, I really enjoyed those.

[00:20:22] **Tom Pero:** Did he, help it catch a fish?

[00:20:24] **D. Roger Maves:** I think he appreciated, but you know, they probably think they know everything about it anyway.

[00:20:29] **Tom Pero:** Right.

[00:20:29] **D. Roger Maves:** So I don't know. But he seemed to appreciate it, and he's turned into a very good friend over the years, so yeah.

[00:20:37] **D. Roger Maves:** Um, but the books are heavy. I had to cart them down in my suitcase. Uh, leave out a, a bit of fishing gear there.

[00:20:47] **D. Roger Maves:** Well, let's get back then to the... Yeah, yeah, thanks for sharing. And did I get the URL, wildriverpress.com?

[00:20:53] **Tom Pero:** Yes.

[00:20:54] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:20:55] **Tom Pero:** Yes.

[00:20:55] **D. Roger Maves:** And, uh, like I said, folks, if you wanna learn more about Tom, you can go to that link with the [00:21:00] picture of the Salter cover on our website, and it'll take you right to Tom's site there, and you can explore. Yeah, so... Well, thanks for sharing. I appreciate it.

[00:21:09] **D. Roger Maves:** So you said they were, salters were explorers, but there must be a purpose for them to go to the salt. Why do they go out there?

[00:21:18] **Tom Pero:** A brook trout or any trout or salmon that has access to the sea does so primarily for the same reason that the famous bank robber Willie Dixon robbed banks.

[00:21:30] **Tom Pero:** He said he robbed banks because that's where the money was.

[00:21:33] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:21:33] **Tom Pero:** And a salmon or a trout that goes out to the saltwater does so because that's where the food is.

[00:21:40] **D. Roger Maves:** And what kind of food are they finding out there that, um-

[00:21:42] **Tom Pero:** In the ca- in the case of these little fish, these little coastal brook trout, historically they fed primarily in the estuaries on two main species.

[00:21:53] **Tom Pero:** One is called a killifish or what we call a mummichog, and another one is a, a simple grass [00:22:00] shrimp. Those historically were the prey species that drew the brook trout out into the, uh, estuaries. Their demise is part of the tragic story of the disappearance of salters. W- we can talk about that in a while as well.

[00:22:16] **Tom Pero:** But in the stream, they're just ordinary little brook trout. When they grow up, they eat bugs and, and worms and larvae and all kinds of little things. And these coastal brook trout have the advantage of schools of out-migrating herring, river herring. The species are blueback herring and alewives. And so in the late spring and early summer, in most of these small streams, these coastal streams up and down New England, these tiny little fish, an inch and a half, couple inches long, are migrating out by the thousands or even millions collectively.

[00:22:57] **Tom Pero:** And that really gives these [00:23:00] brook trouts something to pack on the pounds and grow up into healthy little fish that enables them to be large enough and healthy enough to go down to saltwater.

[00:23:12] **D. Roger Maves:** What kind of physiological change do they go through when they go to the salt?

[00:23:16] **Tom Pero:** The trout?

[00:23:18] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:23:18] **Tom Pero:** Well, it is the same as all salmonids that go to saltwater pretty much, with the exception, as we've already discussed, that these brook trout do so more randomly than in-

[00:23:31] **D. Roger Maves:** Mm-hmm ...

[00:23:31] **Tom Pero:** Kind of organized groups, which steelhead and salmon do. But the physical change is essentially the same in all these fish.

[00:23:40] **Tom Pero:** When in the fresh water, they're born, of course hatched and, and raised, nursed in the fresh water, and they, in the process of breathing, they breathe of course through their gills, and they take in oxygen, dissolved oxygen in the water. And in doing so, they take in salts, and they [00:24:00] retain those salts. Those are an important part of what they do.

[00:24:03] **Tom Pero:** And when they go down to the salt water, they go through something called, the scientists call osmosis, where their bodies sort of miraculously turn on a switch or turn off a switch, however you wanna put it, and they excrete the salt. So they literally piss it away, you know, excrete it through their skin, through their urine, and through their gills.

[00:24:29] **Tom Pero:** And that's what helps them, or essentially helps them maintain that chemical equilibrium. They also physically, on the outside, they also take on the appearance of, uh, silver. Their outside skin takes on a silvery sheen, and that's caused by something called purine crystals, and guanine in particular. And that allows them to [00:25:00] have kind of a mirror-like finish the way all sea fish do, so they can avoid predators when they're out in the salt.

[00:25:09] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, very pretty fish. The cover on your book is incredible. Do you want to give that artist credit here on the show? 'Cause he d- whoever did it-

[00:25:17] **Tom Pero:** Yes ...

[00:25:18] **D. Roger Maves:** Did a wonderful job.

[00:25:19] **Tom Pero:** Yes, he did. That's a fabulous job, and yeah, anybody looking at that'll get a perfect idea of what a sea-run brook trout looks like. That was painted by a gentleman named Flick Ford in New York State.

[00:25:32] **D. Roger Maves:** Hm. Hm, very good.

[00:25:33] **Tom Pero:** Flick Ford.

[00:25:33] **D. Roger Maves:** Very good. So you did say, you know, not all these brook trout go to sea, go to the salt. Uh, you said it's just kind of random, huh? So it's th-

[00:25:44] **Tom Pero:** Particularly compared with salm- populations of salmon or steelhead.

[00:25:49] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. So I'm just imagining how this happens. They get downstream, they get a little closer, a little closer, they start finding some food, and they just move on out there, and their bodies are able to handle it, I guess, huh?

[00:25:59] **Tom Pero:** Well, some, [00:26:00] yeah, some. But some just don't. Some after spawning-

[00:26:02] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah ...

[00:26:02] **Tom Pero:** This, they spawn, there's, in Cape Cod right now, November is when these remnant populations of sea-run brookies are spawning, literally right now.

[00:26:13] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

[00:26:14] **Tom Pero:** And, um, in November. That's the principal month when they spawn, and they bury the eggs, of course, like all trout do, and the eggs will stay buried through February or March when they hatch.

[00:26:26] **Tom Pero:** And the little ones, the ones that grow up and decide to, for whatever reason, decide to go downstream, they come back in year two, in year two plus, as spawning fish, and they follow the herring or alewife runs upstream from the, or either follow or mingle among them, these river herring runs.

[00:26:53] **D. Roger Maves:** Mm-hmm.

[00:26:53] **Tom Pero:** So that's essentially what the pattern is. So the, the important thing is that these sea-run brook trout or [00:27:00] salters spend the winter in the estuaries.

[00:27:03] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

[00:27:04] **Tom Pero:** Whereas, for example, Canadian sea-run brook trout in areas, let's say, of the St. Lawrence or Labrador Coast or New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, et cetera, they go out for brief periods of time, weeks or months, in the summertime, and they come back in the fall and spawn, and they stay in the fresh water all winter long. These salter brook trout are in the sea. That's the, the behavioral pattern that they've evolved to survive and to grow.

[00:27:38] **D. Roger Maves:** So the salters are the ones that aren't spawning for that year?

[00:27:43] **Tom Pero:** Uh, well-

[00:27:44] **D. Roger Maves:** Or do they-

[00:27:45] **Tom Pero:** Yeah, no, they all potentially can spawn when they're pretty small. I mean-

[00:27:49] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay ...

[00:27:49] **Tom Pero:** The little, they're, particularly the males that first, let's say they hatch in February, some of those males that they grow up to be [00:28:00] three, four, five inches by that fall, they're physically capable of spawning that fall.

[00:28:06] **Tom Pero:** The females-

[00:28:07] **D. Roger Maves:** Oh, wow ...

[00:28:07] **Tom Pero:** Generally are the ones that go down and, and go into these estuaries.

[00:28:11] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

[00:28:12] **Tom Pero:** So that, so those, the, the important spawners are the females, and those are the ones with the large quantity of eggs, et cetera, and they come, they typically come back in year two or even year three. But none of these fish, and this is another important point, none of these fish lives much more than three or four years. Maybe occasionally you might get one a little bit-

[00:28:33] **D. Roger Maves:** Oh ...

[00:28:33] **Tom Pero:** Longer, but that's why they don't get that big. That's why a-

[00:28:37] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay ...

[00:28:37] **Tom Pero:** A 14 or a 15-inch sea-run brook trout is a big and rare fish.

[00:28:41] **D. Roger Maves:** Big fish, huh? Yeah, yeah. DB in Bozeman, Montana asks, "Are salters different genetically from other brook trout, or are they simply a product of location, et cetera?"

[00:28:54] **Tom Pero:** Yeah, that's an interesting question, and it's vexed anglers and [00:29:00] biologists for a long time. The quick answer is no, they're not really genetically different from other brook trout.

[00:29:07] **Tom Pero:** However, studies, and I'm thinking of one in particular that I talk about in, extensively in the book, studies on Prince Edward Island in Canada indicate that the trout that do have- Anadromous parentage, particularly the females, they have a greater propensity t- for sea-run behavior, but they probably are not genetically different from other brook trout.

[00:29:37] **Tom Pero:** One thing that has been determined, and within the last 15, 20 years from DNA studies, as that technology and, has become more sophisticated, one of the things that has been determined is that on Cape Cod anyway, and even actually extending down the one remaining salt stream on Long Island, the brook trout that are [00:30:00] native to those places are distinct from the brook trout that are native to other streams, individual streams.

[00:30:08] **Tom Pero:** And there is no, as best as can be determined, there is no intrusion, so to speak, from hatchery fish. So despite the fact that hatchery fish have been put into these streams for, you know, 100 or more years, in some cases in ridiculous numbers, which we, we can talk about, the fish that are there are distinct and resilient.

[00:30:34] **Tom Pero:** And they are singular. They are part of the original wild populations that have been there for thousands of years.

[00:30:43] **D. Roger Maves:** And they're still there. There's still some existing.

[00:30:46] **Tom Pero:** Yeah. Well, yes.

[00:30:47] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:30:47] **Tom Pero:** And there, and there are more of them now than there were 50 years ago because of these stream projects.

[00:30:51] **D. Roger Maves:** Right. Right. Wow. Wow. That's a close call it sounds like.

[00:30:56] **Tom Pero:** Yeah, you can't say that about many other things, many other [00:31:00] wild-

[00:31:00] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah ...

[00:31:00] **Tom Pero:** Critters.

[00:31:01] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:31:01] **Tom Pero:** Especially trout.

[00:31:04] **D. Roger Maves:** Well, when the, uh, people first came to the United States on the East Coast, there were only brook trout, right? There were no rainbows, there were no-

[00:31:13] **Tom Pero:** No, rainbows-

[00:31:13] **D. Roger Maves:** Uh, brown trout ...

[00:31:14] **Tom Pero:** Rainbows are native to, native to the West Coast of the US-

[00:31:19] **D. Roger Maves:** Right

[00:31:19] **Tom Pero:** And up to the Aleutians in Russia. The Russians actually encountered rainbow trout before American d- Americans did, and then brown trout are of course native to Europe. But yeah-

[00:31:30] **D. Roger Maves:** Right ...

[00:31:30] **Tom Pero:** the salmonid, there were only two salmonids on the East Coast of North America, Atlantic salmon and, uh, brook trout. And in the northern reaches of course char, arctic char. But in the-

[00:31:42] **D. Roger Maves:** Right ...

[00:31:42] **Tom Pero:** In the southern areas that we're talking about, New England down to Long Island, there were only brook trout.

[00:31:50] **D. Roger Maves:** Right. Right. There were a lot of historical accounts on, you know, the size of salters back in the day. [00:32:00] You already mentioned what a good size salter I think you were saying today would be. Were they much larger back then, or-

[00:32:06] **Tom Pero:** No ...

[00:32:07] **D. Roger Maves:** were they still about the- No. No. Okay.

[00:32:08] **Tom Pero:** No, I've, I've done extensive research into that, and a lot of the story, I devote a fairly interesting section of the book to the mythological story of Daniel Webster, the famous 18th century s- or 19th century statesman catching a 14-pound salter brook trout in a place called the Carman's River on Long Island.

[00:32:32] **Tom Pero:** That's all BS. That, it physically could not have happened because the brook trout don't get that large.

[00:32:39] **D. Roger Maves:** 14 pounds, that's a big fish.

[00:32:41] **Tom Pero:** Yeah, it's a ridiculous story. Yeah, it's been repeated time and time again. I equate it to-

[00:32:48] **D. Roger Maves:** Hmm ...

[00:32:48] **Tom Pero:** You know, the legends of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox. It's in that genre.

[00:32:53] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay. Yeah.

[00:32:54] **Tom Pero:** Um, but a, a typical sal- Well, for example, we're talking about John Phillips, so 100 years ago, [00:33:00] he's reminiscing in his story that I reprinted here, and he said that, I'm looking at the book right now, his sportsman's scrapbook, and he said that a typical salter was a fish of a pound to a pound and a quarter.

[00:33:13] **Tom Pero:** And the biggest- one he ever saw, the biggest one this guy Phillips ever saw 100 more years ago, was three pounds that he caught in the stream that was being destroyed to build the Cape Cod Canal, and he caught it in the shadow of this giant diesel dredging machine, which is pretty bizarre.

[00:33:36] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. That it was still hanging out there, yeah.

[00:33:39] **Tom Pero:** Yeah.

[00:33:39] **D. Roger Maves:** Geez. Yeah. The other numbers that were extraordinary to me were the accounts of people kind of measuring what the catch was for the day by pounds of fish caught, like 20 pounds-

[00:33:52] **Tom Pero:** Right ...

[00:33:52] **D. Roger Maves:** 59 pounds, 191 pounds of fish in a day.

[00:33:56] **Tom Pero:** Right.

[00:33:57] **D. Roger Maves:** Um, did they just not consider conservation [00:34:00] back then? And were there-

[00:34:01] **Tom Pero:** No

[00:34:01] **D. Roger Maves:** just that many fish?

[00:34:01] **Tom Pero:** Uh, in, in a word, no, no.

[00:34:03] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:34:03] **Tom Pero:** It's difficult for us to understand and get our hands around that, but you have to realize this is the era of wiping out the buffalo on the Great Plains. The 1800s were not kind to wildlife in America. That's when everything was wiped out, the passenger pigeon, the bison in New England, the destruction of these giant brook trout in the rangeley region area of Maine.

[00:34:30] **Tom Pero:** Those fish did get to be 10 pounds. That's another story, but the typical angler of that time thought almost nothing of just killing everything in sight, and the few anglers who did fish these areas of Long Island and Cape Cod, they killed everything. And I have a long account in my book, Salter, about this, a group of wealthy anglers from New York who traveled up to Cape Cod in, [00:35:00] I think it was 1840 or so, and this is all written up in a sporting newspaper when they got home, so it's all documented.

[00:35:08] **Tom Pero:** And they were very specific about exactly how much these fish weighed and how many of them there were and all that. They probably were far more accurate than anglers are today about how big fish are. Uh, as I've often said, catch and release has done wonders for the size of fish.

[00:35:28] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh-

[00:35:31] **Tom Pero:** But they did, yeah. This one party in 1840, in a period of several weeks fishing all around, they travel all around Cape Cod, they caught something, some unbelievable, like 400

salter brook trout, and many of them they put in, they iced down and sent in champagne baskets, as they called them, back to hotels in New York.

[00:35:57] **D. Roger Maves:** Hmm. I was just gonna ask you, what, did they eat them or what [00:36:00] happened to them?

[00:36:00] **Tom Pero:** Yeah. They, yeah, they did. They didn't waste them, but their, the fish are still dead.

[00:36:05] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Yeah. How did they catch them back then? Were they catching that many fish in one day? What was their angle there, besides-

[00:36:11] **Tom Pero:** Well, first of all, there were, there was no competition. The locals, quote, unquote, the last thing that some poor hardscrabble farmer or commercial fisherman on Cape Cod was interested in was a little colorful brook trout in a local stream.

[00:36:28] **Tom Pero:** There just was no competition, so these guys could go around and fish anywhere, and there would be nobody angling anyway-

[00:36:35] **D. Roger Maves:** Mm-hmm ...

[00:36:35] **Tom Pero:** for these fish. And they had some pretty sophisticated equipment actually, you know, and you can look at some of these rods, or at least in photos, or you can go there personally to the various museums, the Catskill Museum and the, the American Museum of Fly Fishing in Vermont, and see the rods that they were using. They were long, essentially, uh, hickory-based rods of, I don't know [00:37:00] exactly how long, maybe 10 or 12 feet or something like that, very stiff, with very fine horsehair and silk lines.

[00:37:09] **Tom Pero:** Very expensive, extraordinarily expensive, so only rich people could do it. And they fished mostly with bait. They were not fly fishers for the most part, at least it's for these salters. They were... Fly fishing did happen, of course, in the inland areas for brook trout in Maine, Quebec, and different places, but this early salter fishery on Long Island and Cape Cod, they were fishing mostly with bait. Not exclusively, but mostly with bait, and they fished with these mummichog. And they also, on the Mashpee River, which was, uh, was and still is largely a tribal land owned by the native local Wampanoags, they hired these guides, these Wampanoag guides, who knew how to take a herring, a bright fresh run herring, [00:38:00] and take a strip out of it.

[00:38:02] **Tom Pero:** And, would cut a strip out of it in kind of the way that freshwater bass fishermen historically have used pork rinds.

[00:38:10] **D. Roger Maves:** Right.

[00:38:10] **Tom Pero:** That's the impression I get. And they would hook it up in such a way that the bait would twirl, and they would throw the... These are small streams, I mean, you know, 10, 15 feet wide maximum, and they'd find these holes or these pockets next to the bank where they thought maybe one of these salters might be, and they'd throw this, this hooked up strip of shiny herring in there and sort of tease the fish out.

[00:38:38] **Tom Pero:** And again, Phillips, w- another reason why I find his essay so fascinating, which, and why I started the book with it, is because he describes exactly what they did and how they caught the fish that way.

[00:38:51] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Now, did they fish, you said, you just said streams now, but they didn't fish in the, the salt in the estuaries for them, or did they [00:39:00] fish in the estuaries?

[00:39:00] **Tom Pero:** Well, yeah, I, I say streams. Yes. Th- actually in certain of those places, notably in Walkwith Bay where the, where the Quashnet River and the Coonamessett Rivers enter the salt, most of the fishing actually was at the mouth of these rivers-

[00:39:15] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay ...

[00:39:15] **Tom Pero:** Uh, in the actual salt marsh. So that's a good point, and thank you for, for pointing that out.

[00:39:20] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:39:20] **Tom Pero:** But the, in, in Mashpee, for example, they fished in the estuaries as well, but mostly they fished up in the stream.

[00:39:27] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

[00:39:27] **Tom Pero:** There were a bunch of famous places that for 100 years or more, mostly wealthy anglers from Boston fish.

[00:39:36] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay. What was the original geographic range of these salters, and where do they exist today?

[00:39:44] **Tom Pero:** Well, I mean, the original range is the same as it's been from, since the Ice Age. I mean, it-

[00:39:50] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay ...

[00:39:50] **Tom Pero:** the original range of the species, Salvelinus fontinalis, is from the mountain streams in Georgia and, and [00:40:00] the Carolinas all the way up through Labrador and through the Midwest and so forth. And these salters, these sea-run brook trout, their original range was roughly speaking from Long Island all the way up the, the coast to Labrador, and it still is. I mean, the, again, these fish that are, that I've written about in Cape Cod and Long Island, and Maine to a lesser extent, those are re- these are remnant populations. I wanna make that quite clear. They are not robust, you know, populations that one would travel to fish for. You can, but they're not anything like they used to be.

[00:40:39] **Tom Pero:** But the salter populations, they call them, they just call them sea trout in St. Lawrence and up along the Labrador coast, Prince Edward Island, certain areas of Nova Scotia, those are still pretty viable populations.

[00:40:56] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay. So yeah, brook trout, like you say, [00:41:00] all the way down to Georgia, but salters only exist Long Island and Cape Cod and, and north of there. They don't do the same kind of activity further south.

[00:41:10] **Tom Pero:** No, they-

[00:41:11] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay ...

[00:41:11] **Tom Pero:** The salt water is, the coastal area is too warm.

[00:41:15] **D. Roger Maves:** Too warm, okay. Gotcha.

[00:41:16] **Tom Pero:** They, yeah, and the, yeah, and the, the estuaries are too warm. They, uh-

[00:41:21] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay. Gotcha ...

[00:41:21] **Tom Pero:** Long Island was pretty much, in modern times, Long Island was pretty much the southernmost range of, of the fish.

[00:41:30] **Tom Pero:** The streams on Long Island and Cape Cod are notable and quite distinct from streams farther north in that they are primarily spring fed, and that's-

[00:41:43] **D. Roger Maves:** I'm gonna hold that, hold that thought. I wanna get into that, but I need to take a quick break and then-

[00:41:47] **Tom Pero:** Okay ...

[00:41:47] **D. Roger Maves:** yeah, yeah, talk about the spring fed streams. So hang onto that thought. We'll be right back and dig in.

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[00:42:50] **D. Roger Maves:** You're listening to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio, and we're talking with Tom Pero about Salters: The Remarkable Return of the Sea-Run Brook Trout. Now, if

you'd like to ask [00:43:00] Tom a question, just go ahead and to our homepage, fill out that form, send it in, and we'll try to get it answered on the show tonight.

[00:43:07] **D. Roger Maves:** A couple questions came in here, not totally on topic, but let me shoot this one by you. Phil in Kentucky wants to know if, if you're familiar with the strain of large brook trout in Lake Superior, and if so, are there any parallels you see with the work done to preserve salters for those fish up there?

[00:43:27] **Tom Pero:** Yes, I am familiar with those fish. They're called coasters. That's kind of the colloquial equivalent to the term salter. They're called coasters. And I don't know a great deal about them, but I, I've read a little bit about them and I've talked to people who are, who fish for them and know about those populations. And those fish, interestingly enough, do get or have historically gotten a lot larger than their sea run cousins on the East Coast.

[00:43:57] **D. Roger Maves:** But they're going from streams into a freshwater [00:44:00] lake, right? Rather than to the salt.

[00:44:01] **Tom Pero:** Yeah, yeah, going to... Well, freshwater seas, basically. They're going-

[00:44:04] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah ...

[00:44:04] **Tom Pero:** Yeah, they're going into Superior.

[00:44:06] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Right. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that is a freshwater sea. Big water. Okay, so yeah, let's go back to where we left off here a minute ago and talk about these spring-fed streams. I think you referred to them as spring sapping.

[00:44:21] **Tom Pero:** Yes, that's correct. Um,

[00:44:22] **D. Roger Maves:** What is that? Dive in.

[00:44:24] **Tom Pero:** That's what geomorphologists call these Cape Cod streams, spring sapping. And essentially what it amounts to is they, Cape Cod is a very low-lying arm of land, a giant sandbar, essentially, that reaches out into the North Atlantic, left there by the last glacier. And these streams bubble up out of this porous soil and drain these small, narrow valleys and enter the, the estuaries after just a couple or three or maybe five [00:45:00] miles.

[00:45:00] **Tom Pero:** They're quite small streams. And because they gather strength as they flow, as most rivers do, they take on the character of that inflow. Most trout streams, as we're familiar, come out of high mountain areas or glaciers or high mountain lakes, so they get warmer as they get into their lower regions. These Cape Cod streams are exactly the opposite.

[00:45:32] **Tom Pero:** If you can envision the palm of your hand with outstretched fingers, all those fingers are feeding that mainstream trout river. And the farther downstream they get, the colder they become. So for example, on the Mashpee River, electrofishing surveys generally turn up very little in the way of fingling trout in the upstream areas.[00:46:00]

[00:46:00] **Tom Pero:** But when they get down in the middle areas and toward the estuary, little fin-wild fingling trout are all over the place.

[00:46:09] **D. Roger Maves:** Seeking that cooler water. Mm-hmm.

[00:46:11] **Tom Pero:** Yes.

[00:46:12] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Mm-hmm. Interesting.

[00:46:14] **Tom Pero:** And thriving in it. Yeah.

[00:46:15] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:46:16] **Tom Pero:** The, the brook trout, it, temperature is essential to wild brook trout. Their, their ideal temperatures is roughly speaking between 50 and 65 degrees Fahrenheit, roughly speaking.

[00:46:31] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:46:32] **Tom Pero:** So any place you get streams that kind of maintain that level of temperature and don't get too cold in winter and nor too warm in summer, that's ideal brook trout habitat.

[00:46:49] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. That's why I guess, you know, like here in the Rockies, we see them at the higher altitudes because of those cool waters, and primarily in high mountain lakes where I guess it's deep [00:47:00] enough in the wintertime and, and it's cool enough in the summer.

[00:47:03] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Um, tell us the story about the disappearance of the Monomet River. Uh, what was lost and, uh, I know it's a long story, but, you know- ... give us the, uh, CliffsNotes version of it.

[00:47:16] **Tom Pero:** Yeah, of course. Well, yeah, the quick story is pretty simple. I mean, anybody who's driven over the Cape Cod Canal over one of two bridges, the Bourne Bridge or the Sagamore Bridge, if you look out your window and look down at that big sea level canal, the largest in the world, largest sea level canal in the world, that's the remnant of the Monomet River. It was a salter stream up until the time they dredged that canal beginning about the World War I period.

[00:47:49] **Tom Pero:** I think the first opening in the canal with the Atlantic Ocean from the north rushed into, it rushed into the canal and ended up in Buzzards Bay. It's about a seven or [00:48:00] eight-mile stretch. I think that happened in 1914, and thus disappeared a prime salter brook trout stream.

[00:48:12] **D. Roger Maves:** And there's nothing left of it today?

[00:48:14] **Tom Pero:** There's a tiny little remnant right off. You can, I talk about this in the book. There's a tiny little remnant trickle of that stream-

[00:48:23] **D. Roger Maves:** Mm-hmm ...

[00:48:23] **Tom Pero:** right off a, uh, a turnout in, in a secondary highway that, that travels right along the canal. It's called a Herring Run Recreation Area. You can park there and walk across the street and look at this tiny little herring run that comes out of a place called Great Herring Pond in Plymouth.

[00:48:44] **Tom Pero:** But there's no brook trout there because it's, it actually illustrates my point because even historically, there probably were no brook trout there. The brook trout were down on the lower reaches once the stream had become cold and-

[00:48:56] **D. Roger Maves:** Right ...

[00:48:57] **Tom Pero:** Gathered its flow.

[00:48:59] **D. Roger Maves:** Is [00:49:00] that canal in use today?

[00:49:02] **Tom Pero:** The Cape Cod Canal? Yeah.

[00:49:04] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

[00:49:04] **Tom Pero:** Yeah. It's a major, um, yeah, it's a major place with traffic and I mean, it does- it's not as sig- economically, it's not as significant as it was back when it was built.

[00:49:17] **Tom Pero:** It was built primarily because there were just, in the day of sailing ships, there were wrecks left and right all around the, the peninsula of Cape Cod. And so this, the Cape Cod Canal was conceived originally under George Washington actually. It was conceived that long ago, and it took humans more than 100 years to finally get around to building it.

[00:49:40] **Tom Pero:** Now it's, you know, used by recreational, you know, sport fishing boats and so forth. There's no major, to the best of my knowledge, there's no major traffic. It's not like, you know, the Panama Canal or anything like that.

[00:49:54] **D. Roger Maves:** So that was one thing that affected, uh, in fact wiped out a stream. [00:50:00] What were some of the other things back in those days that were destroying these fisheries?

[00:50:05] **Tom Pero:** Uh, in a word, dams.

[00:50:07] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah.

[00:50:08] **Tom Pero:** Like all anadromous sea-run fisheries, dams are death.

[00:50:14] **Tom Pero:** And the dams that destroyed most of the small streams and major rivers actually throughout the New England coast were, uh, they're quite ancient by our standards. They're hundreds of years old in some cases.

[00:50:30] **Tom Pero:** And the real damage, however, that was done to these salter streams occurred in the late 1800s and the early 1900s, and that was the, uh, transformation of many of them into monoculture cranberry bogs.

[00:50:49] **Tom Pero:** These little rivers were dredged, channeled, turned inside out, and dammed systematically to the point where they were, were barely [00:51:00] recognized as natural rivers anymore. They weren't, in fact, natural rivers anymore. They were all controlled by this cranberry agriculture.

[00:51:09] **Tom Pero:** And so that's what... That, in a nutshell, that's what destroyed most of these salter streams in the late 1800s and, and early 1900s.

[00:51:17] **Tom Pero:** And it's taken 100 years, largely because the cranberries aren't as valuable economically as they used to be in that region. It's taken 100 years for these places to be reclaimed and restored to their original wild wetlands, and that's the essence of the story of my book. That's the exciting thing that's going on there, and has been for-

[00:51:42] **D. Roger Maves:** Right

[00:51:42] **Tom Pero:** The past 20 years.

[00:51:45] **D. Roger Maves:** So back then when the cranberry farms were there and so forth, and they putting in dams and stuff, basically was the, the salter fishery almost all but lost at that point? I mean, was there any preservation back then, or did it [00:52:00] take-

[00:52:00] **Tom Pero:** Oh, no, they had no- ...

[00:52:01] **D. Roger Maves:** The Francis Smith that,

[00:52:02] **Tom Pero:** Yeah.

[00:52:03] **D. Roger Maves:** That finally got this kind of-

[00:52:04] **Tom Pero:** No, there was no con- there was no consideration for the salter brook trout fishery anymore than there was any consideration for the bison on the Great Plains. You know, man just was ruthless and-

[00:52:15] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah ...

[00:52:15] **Tom Pero:** That's the last thing they were worried about. I mean, the herring fisheries. If they were to be concerned with anything, they would've been concerned with the herring fisheries because those were valuable economically.

[00:52:26] **Tom Pero:** Those had cash value, but they didn't care about that either.

[00:52:30] **Tom Pero:** No, the cranberry bogs were omnipresent. If you would've, 100 years ago, you would've drive around or walk around Cape Cod and up and down these streams, that's what you would've seen, cranberry bogs.

[00:52:43] **D. Roger Maves:** Mm-hmm.

[00:52:44] **Tom Pero:** The Quashnet River, for example, the owner used to brag that the Quashnet had become the world's longest cranberry bog. It was five miles from headwater to estuary of straight cranberry bogs [00:53:00] with a dam every thousand feet. Well, no brook trout can survive that.

[00:53:06] **Tom Pero:** And they certainly can't-

[00:53:07] **D. Roger Maves:** Now did... Sorry. Go ahead.

[00:53:12] **Tom Pero:** No, and they certainly can't migrate up and down the stream-

[00:53:15] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah ...

[00:53:16] **Tom Pero:** You know, with all those blockages in the way and all the, the canals ruining their, the spawning gravel.

[00:53:24] **D. Roger Maves:** Now, when did restoration actually get started on the Cape? W- was it Francis Smith that actually started it?

[00:53:30] **Tom Pero:** Yes.

[00:53:31] **D. Roger Maves:** Or was there-

[00:53:31] **Tom Pero:** Yes, that's-

[00:53:31] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay ...

[00:53:32] **Tom Pero:** And that's what this book is meant to commemorate and salute.

[00:53:36] **Tom Pero:** The first real restoration effort started exactly 50 years ago. It started this past May when a group of us, under the leadership of this man, Francis Smith, a, a career now retired plumber from Falmouth, Massachusetts, organized this group to rip out a collapsed stone [00:54:00] wall near Route 28 in East Falmouth, Massachusetts on this place called the Quashnet River, which goes into Waquoit Bay.

[00:54:08] **Tom Pero:** That is really the true beginning of stream restoration of salters on the Cape, and in fact, anywhere in, in New England. And it has since blossomed into this quite astonishing effort that has now involved federal agencies and other non-profit groups, state agencies, et cetera. Over the last 15, 20 years, more than $100 million has been spent on dam removal and restoration

of these wetlands from cranberry bogs, and it all started with that little effort of that group led by Smith.

[00:54:49] **D. Roger Maves:** And most of that work was volunteer work, wasn't it? Trout Unlimited and-

[00:54:53] **Tom Pero:** The work on the Quas- the work on the Quasqueton River has always been 100% volunteer work, with the exception of [00:55:00] the handful of professional biologists, state biologists that have overseen the project. A guy named Joe Bergen in the late '70s and into the '80s, and then more recently, a guy named Steve Hurley, who has recently retired.

[00:55:17] **Tom Pero:** Other than that, it's been Francis Smith and his gang of restoration workers that has literally s- stretched half a century. And, uh, I think Fran told me that he... More than 400 individuals have worked on that stream over the years and invested, I think, in excess of 30,000 volunteer hours in remaking this entire Salter Brook trout stream.

[00:55:49] **D. Roger Maves:** And that was, uh... Explain the kind of work that they had to do.

[00:55:54] **Tom Pero:** Well, yeah, briefly, I mean, when we first showed up on there and [00:56:00] looked from these old... the remnants of these old cranberry bog dams-

[00:56:06] **Tom Pero:** All you would see was just, you wouldn't even see a stream. You'd barely see any water at all. It was just all these-- There were these-- The ancient cranberry bogs had been abandoned in the 1950s after some big hurricanes, and they'd all grown up, and there were, there were just thickets of, uh, willow and other vegetation.

[00:56:29] **Tom Pero:** And so the first thing that had to be done was to take out this overgrown vegetation because the stream, it was no longer a stream. It was barely a recognizable channel, and it had flooded. What was left of the stream had flooded the river valley and the old cranberry bog, uh, contours such that, you know, the river, quote-unquote, what was left of it anyway, was like seventy or eighty feet wide and maybe anywhere from a few inches [00:57:00] to a foot deep.

[00:57:01] **Tom Pero:** There were virtually no trout. The state biologist, Joe Bergen, said that when he first went in there with electrofishing gear, he found a very few dangling brook trout in the side canals that still had some spring seeps in them, but there were no, you know, sizable trout. There was certainly no salters left in the, in what was left of that stream. So over-- So the first thing that had to be done was clear out all that brush, that sweet gale and, uh, willow, gray willow and other brush, and then let the stream... The basic objective was to return the flow to the stream so that it would flush itself of all the sand that had accumulated and was poured on these bogs for a hundred years.

[00:57:49] **Tom Pero:** That was another feature of the cranberry culture, was that, that every couple of years, they dumped sand on the bogs. So it was just an utter disaster for an [00:58:00] ecosystem, any kind of-- It was, you know, th-there was essentially no cold water ecosystem left. And, uh-

[00:58:07] **D. Roger Maves:** And pretty much all that, that kind of work was done by hand, right? Um-

[00:58:11] **Tom Pero:** Yes. Initially, yes.

[00:58:13] **D. Roger Maves:** Cutting and... Yeah.

[00:58:13] **Tom Pero:** That's correct.

[00:58:13] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah. Yeah. Now, that was, uh, all on the Quashnet, was, uh, has that expanded today into other areas, other streams?

[00:58:22] **Tom Pero:** Um, for, well, for trout, um, uh, for trout there really is only one other stream on Cape Cod called Red Brook in the Falmouth, uh, I mean, pardon me, in the, uh, Plymouth Wareham area. That's another story, and I devote a whole chapter in the book to the whole story of Red Brook owned by the Lyman family of Boston since the 1870s.

[00:58:47] **Tom Pero:** But that, the Trout Unlimited volunteers have also been working on that stream. And that, as I said, is, is another story. But there are other m-more contemporary [00:59:00] activities going on. There's a stream out on the, uh, the tip of Cape Cod in the n-headwaters in the National Seashore, the famous Cape Cod National Seashore, believe it or not, in Wellfleet that TU volunteers are working on now. I, I was part of a, an event there last month where the natural resource biologist for the National Seashore gave us a walk around the stream and explained what was gonna happen over the course of the next, just the next several months, these next several months Where a small dam is going to be taken out of a place called Fresh Brook, which historically had a sea-run trout population.

[00:59:41] **Tom Pero:** So that's an exciting thing. So they're basically, as far as these trout-oriented efforts are concerned, they're basically three streams. The Quashnet River... Pardon me, four streams. Quashnet River, Red Brook on the base of the Cape, the Fresh Brook on the tip of the Cape, and then Mashpee River, [01:00:00] which is, of all those historic Cape Cod streams, physically, that's the most intact. I have a lot of photos of the Mashpee in my book, and it looks beautiful and pristine, but it needs a lot of work because of dams in the headwaters, et cetera.

[01:00:15] **D. Roger Maves:** So are, a- any of those rivers, would you say, are back to where they were two hundred years ago?

[01:00:23] **Tom Pero:** No, n- and not ever probably will be fully, uh-

[01:00:28] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay

[01:00:28] **Tom Pero:** Because they've been so altered. For example, in the headwaters of these rivers, these small rivers, ditches have been dug. Ditches were dug a hundred years ago to connect them with these freshwater ponds to produce more wild spawning alewives for commercial purposes. So these streams will never be exactly the way they were, but they are being, particularly the Quashnet River, that's the prime example. They are being brought back closer to what they [01:01:00] ever were. And pardon me, I misspoke there. I said that those are the... There are two other streams as well near the Quashnet, one in particular called the Childs River, that has been fully restored. That has been done as part of this multi-million dollar effort over the last fifteen, twenty years.

[01:01:21] **Tom Pero:** That's been spearheaded by a wonderful organization called the Falmouth Rod and Gun Club. And then nearby, there's another river called the Coonamesset that is also under restoration. Those are more modern efforts. Those involve the state and federal funding, heavy equipment, quite remarkable projects in, to themselves.

[01:01:46] **Tom Pero:** But the Quashnet stands alone as an all-volunteer effort, again, led by this, I call him a river hero, Francis Smith.

[01:01:54] **D. Roger Maves:** Hmm. Mm-hmm. How many... I mean, I have no idea of how many of these streams [01:02:00] even exist there. Is there any way to know that? And is there-

[01:02:04] **Tom Pero:** Well, I just recounted how many are-

[01:02:06] **D. Roger Maves:** Being worked on, yeah

[01:02:08] **Tom Pero:** Are being worked on and have wild brook trout populations or have the potential. They all have wild brook trout populations except this fresh brook on the Cape Cod National Seashore. The wild brook trout are gonna have to reintroduce there when the dam gets pulled out, uh, maybe in a couple of years.

[01:02:23] **Tom Pero:** There are other sea-run brook trout streams, small sea-run brook trout streams along the New England coast.

[01:02:29] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

[01:02:30] **Tom Pero:** For example, north of Plymouth, there's a stream that I used to fish when I was a kid called the Jones River, and that is a historic brook trout stream. Dams were removed from there 10 or 12 years ago.

[01:02:45] **Tom Pero:** I don't know exactly the status of that as a trout fishery, but presumably because the dam was the main impediment to those fish getting upstream. If the herring are getting upstream, the eels are getting upstream, then the trout can get [01:03:00] upstream, and that's essentially the definition of these fisheries.

[01:03:03] **Tom Pero:** They're-

[01:03:04] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah ...

[01:03:04] **Tom Pero:** It's a, it's an integrated ecosystem. It's a wild system where all these, you know, if all these other s- species of fish are doing well, the trout are gonna do well.

[01:03:15] **D. Roger Maves:** Chris from Maine asked, are you aware of other small streams or rivers in Maine that still hold salters?

[01:03:22] **Tom Pero:** Well, the-

[01:03:22] **D. Roger Maves:** That I would love to get involved there. Yeah.

[01:03:24] **Tom Pero:** We had a big event we called Salter Saturday a few weeks ago in Maine to talk about all this, and the quick answer is yes, there's sea-run brook trout in all those coastal streams in Maine. That's... The character of the streams is different, however, and that does affect the population. They are not spring streams the way these streams on Cape Cod are.

[01:03:48] **Tom Pero:** They're more typical freestone streams that go into estuaries, um, in, uh, for example, is the Salter Stream in Acadia National Park, [01:04:00] and there's several little streams in the estuary of the Penobscot River, lower Penobscot River, and there's some streams around Freeport, Maine. We had a, a little walk along one of them during this event that we held there, called Frost Gully Brook.

[01:04:18] **Tom Pero:** These are little tiny streams. They're freestone streams, so they're not these spring sapping streams that are featured on, on, uh, Cape Cod. So there are, as I said, any place where brook trout or any salmonid can get out to salt water, they do. And so in the case of those main streams, my understanding, and I've interviewed Mary Gallagher, the head trout biologist for, for the state of Maine, about the situation there, and she essentially reported to me a similar situation in that these small populations of fish kind of wandering out and probably the time to fish for [01:05:00] them, if one were to do that, would be in the spring.

[01:05:03] **Tom Pero:** May would be a good time, for example. That's when they would go out and come back as little silvery fish. But if you get one of 12 inches that might weigh a pound, that's a big one. So don't have any illusions.

[01:05:16] **D. Roger Maves:** Chris was, Chris was asking about are there any restoration efforts going on in Maine or where he could get involved or volunteer?

[01:05:24] **Tom Pero:** Yes, I just, I, yeah, I just described the one on Frost Gully Brook in Freeport.

[01:05:29] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay.

[01:05:29] **Tom Pero:** And there are several others.

[01:05:30] **D. Roger Maves:** Who would he-

[01:05:31] **Tom Pero:** There are several others.

[01:05:32] **D. Roger Maves:** Who would-

[01:05:32] **Tom Pero:** Duck Trap River and the Maine Trout Unlimited organization, the Maine Council of Trout Unlimited and its local chapters are the ones working on these efforts.

[01:05:44] **Tom Pero:** So they would gladly welcome any help, and they would- Yeah.

[01:05:50] **D. Roger Maves:** There you go, Chris. Okay. Um, this is about out of time. So real quickly, we had a few questions come in. I'm gonna read a bunch of these, and maybe you can [01:06:00] kind of address the whole thing.

[01:06:01] **D. Roger Maves:** What's fishing like today there? What stream... We talked about what streams are available. Which ones are available to fish? Is there public access?

[01:06:10] **D. Roger Maves:** Jason asked what time of year to catch them. Um, do you fish for them in the estuaries? Are guides available? Is it wade-friendly? Do you use streamers, baitfish, and patterns, or more tube? So there you go. Just a random bunch of things, but why don't you just kind of address fishing today-

[01:06:30] **Tom Pero:** Okay

[01:06:31] **D. Roger Maves:** And, um, what it's like.

[01:06:32] **Tom Pero:** So, yeah. So, so, so quickly, these are, I wanna make it crystal clear here, these are remnant fisheries. It's encouraging that humans are restoring them, but I don't wanna give anybody any illusions that they can come there and catch a whole bunch of sea-run trout.

[01:06:48] **Tom Pero:** Yes, most of these are public access The time to fish for these trout would be exactly the same time that the old timers fish for them, which is April and May, [01:07:00] because that's when the herring come up.

[01:07:02] **Tom Pero:** They're little tiny streams, so they absolutely are easy to wade. And as far as what one would use for streamers, many, many years ago, I tied up a series of fly patterns that imitate the mummichog, green muddler, basically an orange, or pardon me, an olive muddler, and various other bait fish patterns to imitate the sand eels and silverside minnows in the estuaries.

[01:07:30] **Tom Pero:** As far as actual fishing is concerned, I guess what I would recommend, I would advise is look northward. Look to Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. That's where there are substantial populations of sea-run brook trout, and there you probably could find some guides, is my guess. And you could stand a reasonable chance of getting a two or three-pound sea-run brook trout.

[01:07:57] **Tom Pero:** And summer, probably June and [01:08:00] July would be the time to go there, I would think.

[01:08:02] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay. Okay. So to end here tonight, after researching the history, the science, extraordinary people behind all these rivers and the return of the salter, what does that tell you about the future of these fish and these fisheries? And are they just merely hanging on, or do you believe we now have a genuine opportunity to restore sea-run brook trout to-

[01:08:25] **Tom Pero:** Oh, no, they're more than hanging on. There's, I mean, for example, in the case of the Quasqueton River, there were no wild brook trout, essentially no mature big wild brook trout there when we first started that work 50 years ago.

[01:08:39] **Tom Pero:** And now it's a real functioning ecosystem again. There are literally thousands of wild trout of various sizes from an inch long to potentially, you know, 14 inches in the rare sea-run fish that comes back in that stream now. So that stream, as [01:09:00] best as it can be given modern conditions, has been restored.

[01:09:05] **Tom Pero:** And all these other streams are in various phases of being restored. The big threat to salter restoration on Cape Cod is sewage. It's the seepage of human waste, uh, filtering through the porous Cape Cod sandy soil and destroying the estuaries and the bays which are critical to these fish growing up and spending the winters.

[01:09:31] **Tom Pero:** The eelgrass that was so critical to these fish historically has essentially been destroyed in all these places. So the one thing that needs to happen, and it's a much broader issue than simply doing some overhead covers or patching up, ripping out a couple dams. The big thing that would have to be done for these saltier populations to come back in any strong [01:10:00] numbers to their historical size is the cleaning up of those estuaries and bays.

[01:10:06] **Tom Pero:** And there are major efforts underway to do just that, but it goes well beyond just the issue of trout. It goes to everything that really Cape Cod stands for. So That has to be done before salters can truly return to those streams.

[01:10:24] **D. Roger Maves:** Mm-hmm. Yeah, yeah. Hope. There's hope, and, uh, a lot of hard work going into that hope. So, um, sounds good. Sounds good.

[01:10:35] **D. Roger Maves:** Well, we gotta wrap it up here, Tom. Stick with me here for the next few minutes 'cause we're gonna give away a few things, like a one-year membership to Fly Fishers International, a one-year membership to Trout Unlimited, and a copy of your book, Salter, courtesy of Wild River Press. So hang tight. We'll do that in just a moment.

[01:10:52] **D. Roger Maves:** The Bonefish and Tarpon Trust works very hard to safeguard the future of our beloved flats fisheries, from protecting spawning sites threatened by [01:11:00] unsustainable fishing pressure, to securing historic funding to restore Florida's Everglades and estuaries.

[01:11:06] **D. Roger Maves:** Thanks to their members, they've expanded their conservation to The Bahamas, Belize, and Mexico. There's still much more 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.

[01:11:20] **D. Roger Maves:** Visit btt.org and become a member of the Bonefish and Tarpon Trust today. Again, that's btt.org.

[01:11:30] **D. Roger Maves:** Just a quick 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 in the section under tonight's show that says, "What'd you think of the show?" Just click on that link and leave your comments. We'd really appreciate it.

[01:11:43] **D. Roger Maves:** Well, 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 so for our next show so you don't miss out on a chance to win some of these great prizes we have.

[01:11:58] **D. Roger Maves:** If you are one of the lucky winners, we'll contact you [01:12:00] after the show to collect your information so that we can deliver your prize to you.

[01:12:04] **D. Roger Maves:** So first, we'll give away a one-year membership to Fly Fishers International, and to learn more about Fly Fishers International, go to flyfishersinternational.org.

[01:12:13] **D. Roger Maves:** They, along with Trout Unlimited, are great organizations to support here. So the winner for the Fly Fishers International is, that is going to be Terry Little in Colorado. Terry Little. So congratulations, Terry, and you'll be a nice proud member for FFI going forward.

[01:12:35] **D. Roger Maves:** And for Trout Unlimited, and to learn more about them, is tu.org, and our winner for that is Mike Murray in Ohio. Mike Murray in Ohio. So congratulations to both of you.

[01:12:47] **D. Roger Maves:** And now, okay, make sure my queue's cleared. Okay, so I'm gonna give away a copy of Tom's book, Salter, courtesy of Wild River Press now. And to do that, [01:13:00] I'm gonna ask a question, and you need to give me your name, your location, your answer on that form on our homepage of our website.

[01:13:08] **D. Roger Maves:** Okay, so the first person that gets it correct will win the book, and I know you'll enjoy it. It'll be a proud addition to your library.

[01:13:17] **D. Roger Maves:** The question is, there were two things that Tom said. One, he's mentioned many times during the show, but there were two food sources that the salters love in the estuaries. What are those two food sources?

[01:13:31] **D. Roger Maves:** Let's see if we get an answer. Now, Tom, it takes a moment. There's a delay before they actually hear me talking, and then of course they have to write in their answers and stuff. So we have to do like kind of a little song and dance here while we wait.

[01:13:49] **D. Roger Maves:** Take a breather. You can take a breather, Tom. You've had a lot of great answers tonight to my questions, and I really enjoyed talking with them, [01:14:00] talking to you about them.

[01:14:02] **D. Roger Maves:** Oh, wow. I think we got it. First one in here. Um, here's the answer. Tom, you tell me if it's right. It's the killifish or mummichogs and grass shrimp.

[01:14:14] **Tom Pero:** Yep, that's right.

[01:14:16] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, and guess where this guy's from?

[01:14:18] **D. Roger Maves:** Mark Graham from Pembroke, Massachusetts.

[01:14:22] **Tom Pero:** Wow.

[01:14:26] **D. Roger Maves:** So, uh, yeah, he's probably got an inside scoop on this too a little bit, I guess.

[01:14:31] **Tom Pero:** Oh, they're out his front door.

[01:14:33] **D. Roger Maves:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah, they're all... Yeah. So anyway, hey, congratulations, Mark. First one, and, uh, got it spot on. Spot on. So congratulations. Mark, what you need to do is, um, send me your address.

[01:14:48] **D. Roger Maves:** Uh, you can use the same box that you just filled in. Give me your shipping address in there. I do have your email address and your name, so I just need that shipping address, and then I'll get that over to Tom, and then Tom will send you [01:15:00] out a nice copy of Salters, so. Um-

[01:15:02] **Tom Pero:** And I will, I will inscribe that to him.

[01:15:05] **D. Roger Maves:** There you go. Hey, your lucky night, Mark. Congratulations.

[01:15:10] **D. Roger Maves:** Tom, thank you so much for being with us tonight. It's always the talk fishing, but this was a, a much different conversation than I normally have on the show and, uh, it was a real pleasure. Thanks so much for sharing all your knowledge.

[01:15:22] **Tom Pero:** Thank you.

[01:15:24] **D. Roger Maves:** Well, hopefully you've all found the podcast archive on our website.

[01:15:27] **D. Roger Maves:** If you haven't, just look for the link on the top line of our menu, and in the archive you'll find all of our past shows. I think over 446 shows now, which you can search by keyword, a keyword phrase like trout, tarpon, and soon you'll be able to do salters in there. So, uh, go ahead and explore, and I think you'll be pleasantly surprised by what you discover.

[01:15:47] **D. Roger Maves:** And our next broadcast will be on November 16th, uh, 7:00 PM Mountain, 9:00 PM Eastern Time. In the next show, I'm gonna interview Andy Kitchener, and our show's going to be The Hatch Code: Understanding Insects to Catch [01:16:00] More Trout.

[01:16:01] **D. Roger Maves:** So why do trout ignore your fly when you're rising all around you? The answer may lie in understanding what they're eating and how they're feeding.

[01:16:08] **D. Roger Maves:** Join Andy, author of The Hatch Code: Trout Are Not Entomologists, as he reveals how practical entomology can transform your fly fishing. Discover how to recognize important insects, identify their life cycles, read trout rises, anticipate hatches, and choose the right flies and presentations. Learn to stop guessing and start observing and catch more trout.

[01:16:31] **D. Roger Maves:** So be sure to add this show to your calendar. You can find a link under his photograph on the homepage, which says, "Add to calendar." So put that on your calendar and don't miss it. Andy's, uh, he's the, uh, founder of Semper Fly, if you're familiar with their fly tying materials, and he'll be calling in, I don't know, about 3:00 in the morning or 4:00 in the-- you know,

to do this show. So I hope we get a lot of attendance for that and, uh, give him a good audience to talk to.

[01:16:57] **D. Roger Maves:** I'd like to thank Fly Fishers International, Trout [01:17:00] Unlimited, Bonefish and Tarpon Trust, Olympic Peninsula Skagit Tactics, The Ugly Bug Fly Shop for sponsoring our show tonight, and don't forget to visit our website at askaboutflyfishing.com.

[01:17:10] **D. Roger Maves:** And make sure you sign up to receive our announcements so you don't miss out on any of our future live broadcasts.

[01:17:15] **D. Roger Maves:** 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.