

EPISODE
CLOSED CAPTION
SCRIPT



RIVER REBORN
DAM REMOVAL AND RIVER RESTORATION

Steve - We had the pond drawn down thirteen feet and had another twenty feet to go.

Todd - When you are working in a natural environment there are things that you just absolutely cannot plan for.

Steve - But here's a geyser coming out of the center of the dewatering structure and I'm like "this isn't good." That geyser soon became a roaring river within minutes. It took boulders, two to three feet in diameter, and just knocked them together and threw them around like pool balls.

Frank - Two minutes after we saw the initial rush of water we called 911, kicked in the emergency services and it was like absolute bedlam for the next twelve hours.

Dave - So he called us and told us that there's going to be a flood. We backed the car into the driveway, we took the few valuables that we have and put them all in the car and we were ready to make a run for it. The river just started going up and going up and I mean you could see it going up. I never quite got up to the house. I don't think most people have the appreciation for the power of the river.

Frank - There were trucks hauling in large stone to drop in the river to try to slow up that energy. That happened for five or six hours during the day and at some point, in the midafternoon things were under control again and what happened, it took about twelve hours for the water to work its way underneath the watering structure and out. So, we had a rapid release but not a catastrophic failure. We released what was supposed to be released in twenty days in about six hours. It raised the elevation of the water about five, five and a half feet through the whole system, it flooded some homes, it damaged some property. It was very disappointing to the whole design team and all of us watching it happen, but no one got hurt.

water flowing, bird chirping

Devyn - I wonder what it takes to Restore a river?

Waskwane - Can it even really be restored?

Joann - I believe that you can have a rebirth, or a river can be reborn. So, when you look at it from the human perspective, if the blood in your veins isn't free to run how it hurts your body physically and so when you can make that same connection to the river that for many years the rivers vein was clogged and now it's free and how much healthier life and all of the plants and animals that will benefit greatly from the river being able to run freely again.

Tom - And maybe it'll take a long time to heal but everything starts with that first step as you go through life. That's what we try to teach our children, that's what we try to teach our community. You need to recover and come back to the way that was given to you, the understanding of your path in life.

Todd - To restore the basic, fundamental function of that Boardman River that makes it so unique and makes it such a world class fishery, yes, that is doable and that is what is being done through this

Boardman dams project. We are restoring those basic functions, the functions of moving material down the river, the functions of providing real cold, clean water to these species that are so revered throughout the state and throughout the country, such as the brook trout. Those basic fundamental functions of the river can definitely be restored, and they are being restored through this process.

Hank - Since the pond is no longer here we're here with a unity group from the Grand Traverse Band Ottawa and Chippewa Indians and the youth are in here planting right now today a hundred geeget, which is cedar. Putting in the cedar here will help to replenish what used to be here, this is what made this such a healthy environment was the cedars that walked right up to the edge of the river all the way down through this watershed. I believe it's important to get the youth involved in restoration because when you're actually planting a tree, that brings you into a connection with mother earth by planting that. Then you start to realize as a native youth your responsibility towards our mother and that you can have an ability to help improve things around here.

Brett - Within two years at Brown Bridge I can take virtually anybody that was against the project because they were looking at a black, stump strewn field essentially and now see this emerald green, vigorous valley and they'll remark commonly how quickly that came back.

Kristen -The rebirth of a river happens one step at a time. Let's see if it's working.

Brett - As part of the project we have to monitor and evaluate the impacts or the changes in the river and the biologic community in particular to understand what kind of positive impacts that dam removal and habitat restoration might have so this university offered the services of students to help us collect fishery data. So, we were looking at the species composition, their growth, their abundance, and as it changes through time. By doing that every year before and after the restoration actions occur we start to understand how much and how significant the change is whether it's positive or negative. What we expect and what we are indeed seeing is a positive change in the fish community. This is a brook trout. Brown trout are not native to this region; brook trout are and typically we see smaller numbers of brook trout in these larger portions of the river and more brown trout. However, we're seeing an actual equalization of those two populations and the fact that we see more brook trout abundance compared to brown trout is a positive thing because that species requires very high-water quality.

Frank - More so what we're seeing is fish in a piece of a river that there haven't been fish in a long time. So really what's important is to have people out here saying "ya know, this river is coming back strong and it's coming back fast."

Desmond - We look ahead to seven generations; we make decisions based on not today but based on the impact they'll have in the future. When you think like that and you remember that you have to honor seven generations ago because somebody thought of you that far ahead it gives you a different perspective and looking at the Boardman River dams restoration project and doing what's best for this river and our environment and you really truly believe inside of your heart that you have to make decisions today that are going to be the best for the future seven generations and you have to carry yourself and show honor to where you are in the here and now because somebody thought of you. It's not an insurmountable goal, you can do that.