

EPISODE
CLOSED CAPTION
SCRIPT

Into the Outdoors

RIVER REBORN

DAM REMOVAL AND RIVER RESTORATION

Waskwane - Why should you care what happens here?

Devyn - And what's going to happen?

birds chirping

Todd - Any river in the country, in the world has three main purposes. One, is to carry water from upstream to downstream. Two is to carry material from upstream to downstream. And three is to support the life that lives within it and when you put a dam in you significantly negatively impact all three of them. Primarily number two and so what you get is this dead zone right downstream of a dam because the only thing that's transported downstream of a dam is water and it's not all the other critical components of life that are required for a world class healthy river system.

Heather - So when you pinch off an ecosystem like you've done here, where you've constructed four dams, instead of having one large river system now you've got fragments. Fish have the biggest impact because now you've disconnected populations. You've got genetics that don't refresh themselves, you've got fish that can't pass into certain stretches where maybe they've historically spawned. So, it's a big deal when you fragment a river system like that.

Frank - We have thousands of lakes in this region. We have one cold water river system that feeds the Grand Traverse Bay. Thirty percent of the water in the bay comes from this river. A hundred and ninety-three million gallons a day that feeds into the bay that everyone loves and cherishes comes through this river system. We have one cold water river system that feeds the Grand Traverse Bay the quality of the water in this system is paramount to the quality of the water in our bay.

Todd - The license for Brown Bridge Dam was set to expire and in order to generate hydro power you have to have a license.

Jim Pawloski - If you're the owner of a dam you're required to comply with the dam safety regulations. Engineering studies were done, and it was discovered that these three hydro-power producing facilities didn't have adequate spillway for the current regulations and so in order to add that additional spillway capacity they were looking at multimillion dollar projects and the reason these dams don't produce electricity any longer is that it basically became uneconomical. The hydroelectric potential is the product of the amount of flow in the river and the height of the dams. These dams did not produce enough energy to power Traverse City. These facilities were about one megawatt apiece, that's ten thousand, one hundred-watt lightbulbs. And our job is to have safe dams and a big part of that dam safety is making sure that you have enough spillway so that when the flood comes it goes around, over, or through the dam safely and doesn't cause the dam to fail. You've got a structure here that's fifty or sixty feet tall impounding eighty or ninety acres of water upstream of a highly-populated area. We've seen a number of extreme storm and flood events just over the past few years. If we had twenty inches of rain in a twenty-four-hour period here on the Boardman river system, it's likely that every one of these dams would fail and starts heading into Boardman lake and downstream into Traverse City.

Frank - So thousands of folks, hundreds of hours in meetings got together and looked at eighty-four different options and decided on this system the best thing to do was remove three of the dams and modify the fourth.

Todd - And I think that the environmental aspects of the Boardman had a voice through all of the environmental experts that participated in the project and it had a voice above and beyond the environmental aspects that had a voice that also incorporated human uses. So, the social uses, the recreational aspects, the tourism aspects and in order to sustain not only the environmental aspects of the Boardman river in the future but also serve as an environmental foundation to sustain and enhance the economic prosperity of the region.

Dave - 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.

Stay with us, something unexpected is about to happen.

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