

BONUS: Fly Fishing with Roger Smith, Matt McDuffie and Chris Walker

Did you know ECS launched a podcast? [Coffee Talk: From the Ground Up](#) is meant to be educational, entertaining and encouraging with practical advice you can apply directly in your work and life. Listen and subscribe now on [Anchor](#), [Spotify](#), [Google Podcasts](#), and [Apple Podcasts](#).

**

Intro

Steve Gosselin:

Welcome to Coffee Talk, From the Ground Up an ECS podcast where we strive to provide a more personable way to communicate with employees. I'm Steve Gosselin, but you can call me Gosse and I'm part of our senior leadership team. And I'm joined here by Julie Smith, who is part of the marketing communications team and our resident chocoholic. Say hi, Julie.

Julie Smith:

Thanks Steve. Hey everyone. I'm glad you're joining us today. So, Steve, what are we doing here?

Steve Gosselin:

Great question, Julie. One of the struggles with a company our size is getting a message to the masses without it being diluted along the way. From projects and people to services and career insight, we hope this podcast helps provide an avenue to communicate the stories that are worth sharing. It's to learn about our culture and feel more connected and to have some fun along the way.

Julie Smith:

So what you're saying is we hope this podcast is educational, entertaining, and encouraging with practical advice you can apply directly to your work and life.

Steve Gosselin:

Well said, Julie, and that's why you're in marketing.

Julie Smith:

So grab a cup and settle in. Our attorney makes us say this. This podcast is for entertainment and informational purposes. Only nothing herein shall be construed as providing professional engineering services or used to establish the standard of care. This podcast and the comments contained therein represent only the personal views of the participants and do not reflect those of ECS. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors.

Steve Gosselin:

Welcome to Coffee Talk, From the Ground Up. Today we'll be talking all things fishing with Chris Walker, Roger Smith, and Matt McDuffie. But before we get started, let's start with a safety minute like we always do. Today I'm going to talk about loud noise and hazardous noise exposure. Loud noise at work can damage hearing. Approximately 22 million US workers are exposed to hazardous noise at work. To minimize occupational noise induced hearing loss, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, that's NIOSH, recommends that workers should not be exposed to noise at a level that amounts to more than 85 decibels for eight hours. So for our fisher people out there that are listening, if you've got a loud motor at the back of your head there, be careful. In most cases, the preferred approach is to eliminate the source of hazardous noise. When elimination is not possible, substitution of the loud equipment for quieter equipment may be the next best alternative to protect workers from hazardous noise.

Steve Gosselin:

If the hazardous noise cannot be controlled through elimination of the source or substitution of quieter equipment, engineering controls may be installed to reduce noise to safer levels or remove noise at the source. Personal protective equipment or PPE such as ear plugs or other hearing protection devices is the last option in the hierarchy of control. PPE is generally less effective than elimination, substitution, and engineering controls because they rely on human actions to reduce noise. NIOSH encourages occupational safety and health professionals, employers, and workers to learn more about controls for hazardous noise exposure. Consult a workplace safety and health professional to determine solutions for your work setting and employees. And take it from me, protect your hearing. I suffer occupational hearing loss although some of it is loud rock concert induced as well.

Steve Gosselin:

Make sure you have ear plugs with you all the time when you're in a work setting and even at home doing yard work. You'll be glad you did later in life. Take my word for it. Okay. I'm really excited about this podcast, not that I'm not excited about all of them, because Julie's glaring at right now, but today we're going to talk about fishing and I absolutely love to fish. So before we jump in, let's learn a little bit about our guests. We're going to start with Chris. Chris, just tell us a little bit about yourself, where you're located, what you do for a living, and something you think our folks would love to hear about you.

Chris Walker:

Sure. Well, yeah, thanks for having me again. My name's Chris Walker. I'm an environmental attorney in Charlotte. I'm a partner at the law firm, Alexander Ricks. I'm born and raised in Charlotte but left for about 10 year period where I was a fly fishing guide. So this is bringing back some good memories and I'm looking forward to spending some time talking about fishing here.

Steve Gosselin:

All right. That's awesome. A guide too, man. I'm going to love to hear about that. Okay. Next, Roger Smith.

Roger Smith:

Hi, I'm Roger Smith. I'm a principal geologist with ECS here in Charlotte, environmental department. Grew up in West Virginia, which I think that just automatically require you to be a fisherman and a

hunter I think if you grew up there at least the way I did. Don't actually remember a time my life when I haven't fished. So I think I've been doing it and my dad was probably carrying me around on his back when he was fishing the streams and lakes growing up. I think it just comes natural for the fishing, but always excited to get on here and talk fishing. And Chris and Matt and I have done a few fishing trips in the past and we've got a nice one scheduled coming up later this year, too. Glad to talk about it.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. Cool. Yeah. I run into Roger frequently in the hallways and we always talk about fishing, what we've caught lately, where we're going, things like that. All right. And Matt McDuffie and I've got to caveat this a little bit. Matt is a University of Georgia grad and maybe this will be the opportunity for us to wean him off talking about that national championship for the dogs. So here's your chance to talk about something else other than the George Bulldogs national championship?

Matt McDuffie:

Well, I'll do my best. It's difficult I have to say. I've been in ECS, I don't know, four and a half years or so. I am a principal geologist as well. I manage our regional management for our environmental services. I sit in Charlotte, I did grow up in South Georgia. I did attend the University of Georgia, graduated from the University of Georgia and I am very happy with our national championship. That was going to be my something interesting about me, Steve. But I will say this since the topic is fishing, I grew up in a small town. I was technically inside the city limits, but you could throw baseball and be outside the city limits and spent most of my time growing up, my parents were big on you forgot to get outside. We didn't spend much time inside. So I had a pond right across the street and like Roger, I don't really remember not liking to fish and fishing on a regular basis. So I'm looking forward to having this discussion this morning.

Steve Gosselin:

Yep. And so right now I'm looking at Julie, Chris, Rog, and Matt and over it would be Matt's left shoulder on the wall is what about a six pound bass that's hanging on?

Matt McDuffie:

And I did not plan that, but you're right. I caught that thing fish. I was about 11 or 12 maybe. I wanted to fish one morning. My father said, "You have to be back by nine o'clock because we've got yard work to do." So by 8:30, I caught the fish and it's the only fish I've ever had mounted. It used to be proudly displayed in my living room but then I got married and my wife said, "That would look really good in your office." And so that's where the fish has been since then. So I didn't plan that, but that was great.

Roger Smith:

I have a similar thing. I have a Northern Pike mounted at my house that I caught when I was in Canada. I think I was 16, 17 at the time with my dad on a fishing trip and his buddies and I'm like Matt, as a single man, it used to be inside. It's now hanging in my garage at my house. My wife will not allow it in the house. So no more dead animals in the house is what I'm told.

Steve Gosselin:

I'm sure we all have similar stories about things we used to have hanging on the wall that aren't allowed anymore.

Roger Smith:

Yeah.

Steve Gosselin:

Okay. So before we jump in about fishing, I'm going to do a little rapid fire go around the horn and I'll ask each one of you, one at a time, a different question, just to find out a little bit more about you. So we'll start with Chris. Chris, what's your favorite food?

Chris Walker:

Favorite food is a restaurant in Charlotte, Nakato's. I love those hibachi places where they cook on the table in front of you.

Steve Gosselin:

Yay.

Chris Walker:

So that might be my favorite.

Steve Gosselin:

All right. Cool. Roger, dogs or cats?

Roger Smith:

Oh, dogs. Absolutely dogs, had dogs for whole life.

Steve Gosselin:

All right, Matt, this might be a softball, but a favorite sport or hobby.

Matt McDuffie:

My favorite hobby is probably fishing. I do enjoy college football though quite a bit, but college sports in general. I'm not a big pro fan, but I do like college sports.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. Okay. Chris, what's your favorite season of the year?

Chris Walker:

Oh, fall.

Steve Gosselin:

Okay. All right. Good. And Roger, what job would you be terrible at?

Roger Smith:

Wow. A lot of them, probably. I would not be a good doctor, I don't think. The sight of animals don't bother me, blood and stuff, but a human, that gets to me. So I probably wouldn't be a very good doctor.

Steve Gosselin:

Okay. All right. Good. Fair enough. So Matt, we'll finish up with you. Ford or Chevy?

Matt McDuffie:

Chevy, drive one right now.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. Roger's nodding his head as well too. I park next to Roger's Silverado every day. All right. Cool. All right. We'll jump back up to Chris and just tell us a little bit about your fishing experience. When did you learn to fish? Who taught you? What kind of fishing do you do? I mean, obviously being a guide, you probably have a few good stories. Where have you fished, where have you traveled, do you know those type things?

Chris Walker:

Sure, sure. So I'll start with kind of when I learned to fish who taught me and all that. So I've loved to fish since I first picked up a fishing rod. As early as I can remember, I was carrying around my fishing rod, but it was really my uncle, my mom's brother, who taught me how to fly fish. He gave me my first fly rod on my fourth birthday. I mean, I still have that fly rod today. My earliest memory of a good fishing experience with my uncle was when I was about eight. I grew up in North Carolina like Rog and Matt, spent a lot of time fishing in ponds, bass fishing, bream fishing, things like that. But when I was eight, we got together with my uncle's family and my family, we went to the Pere Marquette Fishing Club up in Michigan, kind of near the town of Grand Rapids or Big Rapids, Michigan.

Chris Walker:

It's a fairly tough place to fish. It's a steelhead river with lake run steelhead and it has some trout in it. And I was just having a really hard time catching anything. I was out there all day, fishing from sunrise to sunset, trying to catch these fish and just wasn't getting anything. So one afternoon I was telling my uncle how hard of a time I was having and he has two daughters and no son, so he really took me under his wing. And he took me out and said, "We're going to go catch a fish this afternoon." So we went, we spent all afternoon fishing and nothing. He wouldn't catch anything. I wouldn't catch anything. So it's starting to get dark and he says, "All right, Chris, let's pack it up. Head in."

Chris Walker:

And of course I said, "Come on, uncle John, one more cast." And of course I made one more cast and of course on that one cast, the last cast of the day, hooked into a really big brown trout. I remember it being 25 inches, the pictures tell a different story. It's probably more like 18, but that was it for me. I still remember every minute of that fish. And since I hauled in that big fish, I've really never wanted to do anything else. So my uncle, we'd always meet up and fish and go on trips. And then when I was about 13 years old, my uncle moved to Telluride, Colorado. And so as soon as I heard that, I canceled everything I was doing this coming up summer and told my parents that I'm moving in with uncle John and went out there and we fished all over the west for years and I stayed with them in the summers. And so he really taught me my passion so I owe him a lot. So that's kind of where I learned to fish and my first big fish story.

Steve Gosselin:

Sweet. So share a story or two about your guiding experience. I'm really curious about this. I've got to hear about this.

Chris Walker:

Yeah. So when I was 13, I started working in one of the fly shops in Telluride, really small ski town in Southwest Colorado. And so I worked in those shops, you're not allowed to legally guide in Colorado if you're 18. So when I was 16, I started guiding for one of the less popular guide services in town because they were not too concerned about the rules. So I started guiding when I was 16, guided that shop for two years. And when I turned 18, I got a call and moved across the street to the real popular shop in town that had all the guides. And that was like I've finished life, I've done everything I needed to do at that point. I was a fishing guide. This is when I was 18.

Chris Walker:

I was living on my own in Colorado. I hadn't started college yet. It was like that in-between year. And I just fell in love with guiding. I would jump out of bed in the morning, just couldn't wait to take people fishing, but it's a tough job to get started at. It's one thing to catch fish, there's another to get people who've never fished before on fish on the fly rod. So it was really challenging, but I spent a lot of time on my own when I wasn't guiding and I'd be right out there fishing these rivers, trying to learn everything. And it just became the most rewarding thing I've really ever done. It's been way more rewarding than my legal career.

Chris Walker:

So I guess to tell a good story, I've taken a lot of big shots fishing, really famous people and things like that. The one I remember the most is this guy I would take fishing. I took him fishing for maybe five summers and I never knew he had a son. So maybe the sixth year I was taking him fishing, he said, "You mind if my son comes along?" I said, "I don't even know you had a son. Of course." And then they show up and his son is five years old and has Down syndrome. He didn't give me the heads up on it. He's never mentioned it to me before. And so he said, "Chris, can you handle this?" And I said, "I'm not sure. Well, let's see." So we went fishing and this kid just was so excited to catch a fish.

Chris Walker:

But we had a really hard time. He couldn't wade in the river. He was too small. He had a hard time following directions, but we spent all day. The dad said, "Don't even talk to me the whole day, just sit with my son." And we didn't catch anything all morning, having lunch, the kid was getting disappointed and then something happened in the afternoon and that kid just started catching fish left and right, hauling them in. And he had a big smile on his face, but then looked over his dad and that dad, I've never seen a dad more proud. And so that that story, I've been all over the world fishing, I've taken all kinds of movie stars fishing, rock stars, but that's the story I remember most about what it really means to guide people fishing and really see somebody experience that for the first time that I remember experiencing when I was eight, that was really special to me and something I'll never forget.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. What a great story, man. Thanks for sharing that with us. That's wonderful. Roger, so tell us a little bit about your fishing story, background, history. Where'd you learn? Who taught you? What kind of fishing and some of the places you've traveled to fish?

Roger Smith:

Yeah. I guess go back even before me, my dad was a huge fisherman, but he got that passion from his uncle, kind of similar to Chris. My dad's uncle or my great uncle never had any children. So he kind of took my dad under his wing. My grandfather, my dad's dad was a farmer and busy. He hunted but he really didn't have a lot of time doing any fishing so my uncle took my dad fishing, would take him to the mountains of West Virginia, trout fishing and stuff. And they eventually started going to Canada. Well, my dad kind of took me doing the same thing. So when my dad would go, when I was in, I don't know, middle school, high school, my dad would go on these fishing trips to the mountains of West Virginia and camping and go trout fishing.

Roger Smith:

And he would go with his buddies and stuff, the people he worked with, but he always invited me. So he always took me along too. So it was me and my dad and my dad's buddies. And then my dad's buddies had kids my age, but they never went. So my dad always took me. And tell me, "Hey, grab a friend or a cousin or something and go." So my dad always took me and we went fishing. So went all over the mountains in North Carolina, trout fishing, did a lot of bass fishing, stuff like that, and farm ponds and creeks and rivers around where I grew up but trout fishing is really where I got hooked. And then my dad used to go to Canada every year, the second week of June with his uncle, my great uncle. And I always wanted to go.

Roger Smith:

So my dad said, "You have to be able to pull your own weight. You have to pay your way. You have to be able to drive," because they drove up overnight. "It's a 24 hour drive to get there, load everything on boats, go around the lake and camp on an island on the back of this lake, see no other humans for like 10 days. You have to cook, do all that stuff." So dad said I had to get to the point where number one, I'd pay my way and number two, I pulled my weight. I mowed yards every summer and would save up my money to pay my way. So when I got 16, I got my license. Literally a week after I got my license, I was pulling a boat trailer up through on the way to Canada and we loaded up and went fishing there.

Roger Smith:

So we did that for years. And then I went away to college and graduated and moved down to North Carolina, started working. And then in 1994, at the company I was working for at the time I had a ton of frequent flyer miles and my wife had just started a new job and had no vacation time and I had a bunch of vacation I had to take or lose it. So my dad had just retired. My brother just got out of the army and I had to take some vacation time. We always wanted to go out west and go trout fishing and stuff. I said, "What if I get us some airline tickets, we just fly out to Denver, and rent a car, take our own fishing stuff, camping stuff, and we just take off for two weeks?"

Roger Smith:

So my dad and my brother and I did that, went all over out west fishing, fly fishing, spin fishing for trout everywhere. And that really just kicked in. So we went back about every year after that. I mean, I still go out west all the time, but now I kind of got also into saltwater fly fishing and Chris and Matt and I are going to the leagues later this year, chasing the tarpon and permit and bonefish down there. So it'll be my second trip down there. So I'm really looking forward to that. So yeah, I love fishing, basically about anything, but fly fishing is really the passion I have. Doesn't matter if it's fresh or saltwater.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah, absolutely. I can tell man. That's great. I mean, it just oozes from you when you're talking about fishing. You just got this big smile on your face.

Roger Smith:

Yeah.

Steve Gosselin:

All right, Matt, you're up. So other than catching a trophy bass when you were a kid, tell us a little bit about your fishing experience, how and where you learned, who taught you, what kind of fishing you do, where you traveled, that type stuff?

Matt McDuffie:

My earliest memory fishing, and it's a lot like Chris and Roger, it was my grandfather and he had a cabin in the Florida Panhandle. And we would go down there. That's probably my earliest memories of that, but a lot of my fishing too, I mean, he and my father both kind of gave me the tools, "This is how you do it," but I was very lucky. Where I grew up, there was a small pond literally right across the road. And there was a gentleman who lived on the pond. His house was on the pond. His name was Carl Adams and it was Carl Adams's pond. And he allowed the neighborhood kids to fish in his pond. I don't know that I would extend this now, but I mean, I can remember it would be before daylight and we would be in the dock in his yard fishing and he didn't care.

Matt McDuffie:

He let us come anytime we wanted to and fish. My first job was teaching swimming lessons and I saved every penny of it and bought a small Jon boat. And Mr. Carl let me keep that boat tied to his dock. And so I literally had five minutes to walk to his pond and several of my buddies and that's what we did if we weren't playing basketball or baseball or shooting birds with pellet guns and things like that. We were fishing in that pond. And then as I got a little bit older, the Flint River ran about a mile behind my house if you walked through the woods. So between the river and that pond, I don't want to say I taught myself, but it was kind of a self-taught thing. That's what we did.

Matt McDuffie:

It was a trial and error. And I had a friend who had a fly rod but we really didn't use it that much. I had one, but again, I really didn't use it all that much. We were into trying to catch big bass and big catfish and things like that. But in college, I worked with a guy who was a big fly fisherman, and I kind of caught the fly fishing bug. And that was before the internet. I think I had a book. Even then in Georgia, there were people fly fishing in North Georgia, but there wasn't a fly shop on every corner like there is almost, it seems like, now. Again, it was a trial and error thing. I remember fashioning these what I thought were good flies and I was fishing in North Georgia, not catching anything.

Matt McDuffie:

And I went to a fly shop. There was a fly shop at that time in Helen and I met some really nice folks and what it amounted to was a couple of guys that got together because they wanted to buy stuff wholesale. And they formed themselves an LLC, made a fly shop, and they were open on Saturdays only. And I walked in with a pair of beat up tennis shoes and a cutoff pair of Duck Head pants and a fly rod

and I opened this box and said, "Which one of these will work?" And the guy looked at it and he said, "You might catch something on that one." But they kind of took me under their wing a little bit and helped me along and gave me enough information to be dangerous. And I also caught the fly fishing bug.

Matt McDuffie:

I still have spinning rods and my children, we still use, but I prefer to fly fish now. I learned early on there are fish everywhere. We go on the family vacation, I take my flyer. I don't get as much use out of it as I did when I was single and before I had children, but my children are getting old enough now. I keep a fishing journal and I used to joke that I would fish about 70 to 80 days a year before I got married. And then it got reduced a little bit. And then when I had children, it got reduced a little more. I remember one year looking back, I'd only fished seven days in the year, but so I've tried to remedy that a little bit.

Matt McDuffie:

That's kind of it in a nutshell. My wife let me take a fly rod on our honeymoon. She knew who she was marrying and I did too. So actually the trip we are planning to Belize is probably my first big fishing only trip. I've been out west a number of times, but I take my fly rod everywhere we go. If I can steal away for 30 minutes or if I can steal away for a whole day, I do it and just enjoy it. I think fishermen fall into two camps. I think there are people who like to catch fish and there are people who like to go fishing. And I'm the one that likes to go fishing because fish don't live generally in ugly places. So there's always something. Even if you don't get catch fish, it's always a good job.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. Wow. That's wonderful. And listening to y'all tell these stories, I'm telling you, it brings back so many memories. It's amazing how similar avid fishermen really are about their stories, how they learned, how they track stuff, the base they use, et cetera, et cetera. And Matt brought up a good point. And actually what I was thinking about when I was listening to him, they don't call it catching. They call it fishing and everybody's nodding their head, that's right. But I know for each of our guests, and our listeners really want to hear this, I mean, there have been at least a handful of days where you were catching. I mean that you were out there and the fish were biting. It doesn't happen often, but when it does, man, it is a lot of fun. I'll jump up to Chris and just say, what was your best day when the fish were really biting, when you were catching?

Chris Walker:

Yeah. I got two stories I think that are standing out to me about my best fish days. I guess the first one is probably my saltwater fish of a lifetime that I caught in Baja, California down in Mexico. So when I was a fishing guide in Telluride, I had a lot of friends who went down to Baja in the off-season. We have seasonal work out there. We'd be busy during the summer, guiding fishing, busy during the winter skiing as much as we could. Then you had the kind of fall and spring where the town would shut down for six, eight weeks, no tourists in town. So that's where we'd go explore and fish other places. So I had a good buddy that I guided with, who had made a fishing movie with some friends and they called it Running Down the Man.

Chris Walker:

And that's a movie they made down in Baja about catching a fish called a rooster fish, which is something you don't see everywhere. You got them in just a few places. So I watched that movie and I told him, I said, "Well, when are we going?" And he said, "Well, let's go next week." And so as soon as I

saw the movie, next week I was on a plane down to Baja and was down there interviewing for a job to guide fishing. Never seen a rooster fish before and I was interviewing for a job to guide rooster fishing. So went down there and fell in love with rooster fishing. It's one of the most unique fish out there and the way we catch them on the fly rod is no boats, no bait, you're site fishing them out in the ocean, you're running down the beach with a 10 weight, trying to cast a giant fly at them into the wind.

Chris Walker:

And they're really spooky fish and hard to catch. But I started spending a lot of time in Baja. I just loved it. Then after that I graduated law school and took the bar exam here in North Carolina. I mean, that was in July. Then I went and started my first job as a lawyer until November. So I had a little bit of time there. So day after I took the bar exam, I got on a plane and went down to Baja and rented a house for a month, spent the first two weeks by myself fishing, walking up and down the beach all day long, 10 hours a day, trying to catch fish. First week was great, landed a bunch of good rooster fish.

Chris Walker:

Nothing huge, but catching a fish or two every day, which is pretty good for roosters. Then a cold front came in the second week. Cold winds, cold water really got rid of all the bait in the water and then all the roosters were gone. I didn't see a rooster fish for a full week, did not see a single one. Then I had a buddy come who was going to stay the second two weeks with me. And so he came down. The first week he was there, same story. Walked the beach all day long, nothing. So we were saying, "There's got to be some fish somewhere." So we got in the car and we decided to drive some different places. I heard of this place called the Bahia de los Muertos, Bay of the Dead. And so we decided to go, it was about two and a half hour drive.

Chris Walker:

We're in this really junky rental car driving on gravel roads through sand. I don't know how we made it, but we finally, after about two and a half hours, got into this place called the Bay of the Dead, saw a bunch of local fishermen out there and started talking to them, bought them a bunch of beers and sat there for about two hours in the afternoon. After these guys got done fishing, talked about where the roosters were. They got out a map and they showed us one place. The guy says, "I saw some there yesterday." So we said, "All right, that's where we're going." So the next morning we pulled up to this spot, sun rising and the second we got there, there were just rooster fish everywhere. My buddy would catch a couple little ones and all this and thinking we'd already had a great day.

Chris Walker:

And then all of a sudden, I see this wake a hundred yards out in the ocean coming right at us. It looked like a submarine moving through the water. And so it was my turn to cast. So I stepped up there, made the best cast I could, threw it out there, made two strips and then something just stopped. Something just hit my fly so hard and then I saw this big comb, which is what the roosters have on their back. Their dorsal fin is a big comb, saw this thing sticking out of the water right where my fly was and it was just giant. And so hooked into this big fish, probably took me 45 minutes, an hour to bring it in. And it was by far the biggest rooster fish I've even hooked. Weighed in about 90 pounds.

Chris Walker:

And I got a picture of me, one knee on the beach, the other knee with a big rooster fish hanging over my legs. I couldn't hold the thing up in the air. That fish took a long time to revive. We had him in the ocean

standing there 20 minutes, all these pictures of me holding this giant fish by the tail with him, get out there. And then finally, he felt good and that thing swam away. And while I still love to rooster fish, I kind of already feel like I've done the best I'm ever going to do.

Chris Walker:

It's going to be hard to match that day, with one of my best buddies I grew up with, having such a tough two weeks beforehand, and finally getting into those fish that day is something I'll never forget. You got that one fish where you got a picture of it home, but you don't even need a picture anymore because you got it in your head, that's that fish for me. Oh yeah, so I told you got two stories. So that's my saltwater fishing trip. My freshwater trip is going to be an unnamed river in Southwest Colorado. I'll never disclose the name of this river to anyone.

Steve Gosselin:

That's a true fisherman right there. "What were they biting on?" "Yeah. I can't tell you."

Chris Walker:

Well, I'll tell you what they're biting on, but you're not going to find out where this is, but I'll give you a few hints. Well, this is my favorite river that I've ever come across in anywhere in the world to fish. It's kind of one I spent a lot of time on. It's off of a highway that used to be called Highway 666. Well, we called it at our fly shop Guides' Graveyard. It's where guides go to die because it's so hard to catch fish there. So that's a place. I just love the challenge. I love the style of fish and it's off-site fishing. You're never casting unless you see the fish you're casting to. And if you see a fish, you probably spend an hour before you make that first cast.

Chris Walker:

You're watching them, you got to crawl on your hands and knees to get up close enough to cast to them. So it's really technical, tough fishing, but I went there every day I could. I just loved that style of fishing. I loved the hunt and I was also one of the only guides out of my fly shop that would guide down there. There's two of us that would take trips down there. And I wouldn't take everybody down there. You had to fish with me two days on the other rivers before I'd agree to take you to this river. So it was only for repeat clients. My roommate in Telluride was a fishing guide as well. He loved this river too and we'd spend hours walking up and down this river looking for fish. But these fish, like I said, they'd hear you come from mile way. You step on on a stick and it breaks, this fish would go hiding down under trees and under rocks.

Chris Walker:

We were there for a big drought period. So the river flow was very low. So that made it even tougher, fewer places for these fish to hang out. On a good day with guides that fish all the time, if we catch three or four fish in a day each that'd be a very good day. So that tells you what the river's like. So one day we were down there in the fall, off season so we weren't guiding, spent about a week down there camping on the river, fishing, didn't see a single person the whole time we were there. There's about 12 miles of public river and not a car on the river that whole time we were there for that week. We've been doing pretty well, catching probably five fish a day, doing better than average.

Chris Walker:

And it was our last day and it started pouring down rain, about three in the afternoon. That put the fish down. These fish, they're rising on top. So when you have some rain, they stop eating. So we decided to kind of sit down, talk about the fish during the week and just kind of see how that rain lets up. And then that rain slowed down a little bit, never really stopped. We decided let's go out there and fish a little bit more, just see if we can get one last fish before we leave. So we get out there and we're fishing together and we look upstream about 50 yards and we see the river's just boiling up there. We're saying, "What is going on up there?" I mean, water splashing everywhere.

Chris Walker:

We could hear it. Just something was going on up there so we walked up there, taking our time, trying not to spook the fish. But the closer we got, nothing really changed. These fish were just lined up in the same line of the current for 50 yards, a long line, these fish just lined up, eating every few seconds. And so we get up there and we think we know, we've been fishing all week. We know what they're eating. So we start making cast up there. And I mean, the fish were eating everything around our fly, just wouldn't touch it. So we're sitting there, we just couldn't figure this out. We say, "We're guides. We should know how to figure this out." We throw everything in our fly box at them and nothing happens.

Chris Walker:

We just say, "We must be idiots. These fish are eating everything they can eat and we can't do it." So then my buddy kind of saw something on his hand and it was a flying ant. And so he looked at me and says, "Chris, is this it? Is this what we've always heard about?" And I said, "Yeah, this is what we call an ant fall." It's this legendary thing that happens on this river and it happens on other rivers too. And it happens, you can't predict them, but it's when these flying ants hatch, which we learned that, maybe I'm not getting this exactly right, but this is the story I was told, which is when ants want to go establish a new colony, they are able to hatch these flying ants.

Chris Walker:

And so they can fly and find a new place to start breeding and have a colony. But what I also learned is these ants are like candy to these fish. I mean, who knows what it is, but these fish just love these flying ants. So as soon as we figured out what they were eating, we both tied on some ant patterns and we found out it didn't really matter what ant pattern you put on, as long as you put something that somewhat resembled an ant. First cast, we both made up there with an ant pattern on, we both hooked in the 20 plus inch fish right away and that ant hatch lasted probably four or five hours. And we each caught more than 20 fish from all on dry flies, all site fishing.

Chris Walker:

And it was something that we'd only heard stories about before. We weren't even sure if the people telling these stories were legit, it sounded like a bunch of BS to us, this magical time that nobody will ever see again, but we experienced it and we were in heaven. That river just came alive. There was more fish in there than you'd ever imagine. It was amazing to see the river just kind of come alive. And I fished that river a hundred a day since then, never seen a flying ant again, never talked to anybody other than this one guy that told me about has ever seen it, but I can tell you that it exists. And if you ever get a chance to see it, you're probably never going to be able to beat that day.

Steve Gosselin:

What a great story. Wow. And that's exactly how it happens. I mean, it happens once in a lifetime, once in a lifetime deal and you just happen to be in the right spot and the right bay, everything's just right and it falls into place. All right, Roger, what's your best day when the fish were biting?

Roger Smith:

Well, again, I kind of have two. I got a freshwater story and a saltwater story. The freshwater was one year out in Wyoming with my dad and a buddy of mine. We had backpacked up in Wind River Range and been fishing. And we had a bear come in our camp at night. The bear knew we were there. He's going to be back. So we knew that we needed to leave. So we actually packed out a day earlier than what we had planned to. So we had an extra day on our trip to waste driving back towards to Denver to get our flights out. So we stopped in this little town called Saratoga, Wyoming, and ended up starting fishing, pulled into guide shop and poured into a parking lot upside the guide shop.

Roger Smith:

And there was the North Platte River flowing right around the guide shop parking lot. So we go into the guide shop and we're saying, "Hey, we got an extra your day to fish. This North Platte River right here looks pretty good. How's the fishing?" The guy's like, "Oh, it's tremendous. It's great fishing." And we're like, "Oh really? Where's a good place where you fish?" He goes, "Where do you park?" "We sit right here in the parking lot behind your building." He goes, "Right there's a good spot." So we literally walked back to our rental car, got our fly rods out, walked down over the edge, and just started. Literally in the parking lot. Just destroyed them. It didn't matter. And really, I wasn't that good of a fly fisherman. I was still learning and it's a good thing because no matter what you put on, you caught them.

Roger Smith:

I didn't know a dry fly from a nip from anything and no matter what I threw, they just destroyed it. And that's probably where I just became obsessed with fly fishing. And thank goodness, because if I wouldn't have had the luck I had the first day, not knowing what I was doing, I probably never would've stuck with it, but it was tremendous. So the saltwater fly fishing was chasing the Silver King, which is a tarpon. That's the itch that I'm still trying to scratch. It's all site fishing like Chris was talking about if you're standing out there in clear water. I've been to the Florida Keys several times and I've been to Belize and all these places trying to land a tarpon on a fly right on. I've had them on, I've fought them, but I've never got them into the boat.

Roger Smith:

They've got those steel hinge jaws that are hard to get a hook into to get him back. And then they jump and flip and all that stuff. But stand on a bow of a small boat and looking out in this clear water and just seeing these shadows coming at you underwater, these monster fish, anywhere from 60 to 150 pounds coming at you, just a whole school of them, you're thinking it doesn't get any better than this. And you're like, "All these fish coming at me, this is going to be easy," but they just go buy you one by one by one and you just keep casting and stripping and stripping and they just keep going by. And then about the time you give up, one will come from the back of the pack and just nail your fly and go running.

Roger Smith:

And I tell you what, they are fast and strong fish. I mean, you just hang on for a long time and then when they ease up jumping, you say, "Bow to the king," you give it slack, which is hard to do for a trout water fishermen, because you want to keep that line tight. But you've got to get them a little slack. Again, I've

hooked several of them, but I've never got one in on a fly right on. I'm hoping that with Chris's help this fall in Belize I'm actually going to get that picture of me holding one with a fly rod this year. So we'll see.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. It's going to happen this year. I'm confident.

Roger Smith:

My wife says it better because I've spent a lot of money chasing. She says if I don't get it this year, it may be time to change my bucket list around little bit.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. I promised myself, I wasn't going to talk about the cost of fishing today. We're not going there.

Roger Smith:

That's a good idea.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. Okay. Matt. So what about you? What was your best day when the fish were biting?

Matt McDuffie:

Well, I'll give you two stories too in keeping with, and I'll say this about fishing, there's a luck aspect involved too. So this first story, I'm not rubbing it in on Roger because I have not chased tarpon as much as he has, but I have caught one on a fly rod and my wife and I, it was our first anniversary, we went to Aruba and the internet was up and running at that point. And I had done some research and I was looking for places to fly fish in Aruba and Aruba's not really a fly fishing destination. At least at that time, it was not. I couldn't find hardly anything about it. And right before we left, I did one more Google search and I found this guy who fly fished in Aruba and was trying to start a guide business, but he did not have it up and running yet.

Matt McDuffie:

And he was a bartender. So I emailed him and he said, "Oh yeah, come by my bar and we can talk. And if it works out, we could even get fishing." So we got down there, we got settled in, we were looking around town or whatever. We went to his bar and had a beer. So he said, "Yeah, I'm fishing day after tomorrow. If you'd like to go with me, just come along." So I didn't have to pay him either, he's just going to take me fishing with him. So I said, "Great." We get back to the hotel. My wife said, "We don't know who this guy is." And this was after the Natalee Holloway incident and everything. And I thought it was very nice, but it certainly got kind of a bad rep with all that going on.

Matt McDuffie:

But this guy comes and picks me up in front of our hotel in this beat up El Camino and he had to kick the passenger side door opened from the inside because the handle didn't work on the outside. And my wife is looking at me like, "I don't know if this is a good idea." And I said, "No, no, it'll be fine. Don't worry. We're good." So I get in with this guy and I don't remember his name. I'm not sure I even knew his name then. First place we went to was to pick up his buddy, he was going with us and this was about, I don't know, early afternoon, maybe one o'clock and his buddy was already drunk. And so he piles in

the car with us and then we go to a very, very local that tourists don't go to bar to watch the end of a soccer match.

Matt McDuffie:

Then we finally made it to the war and we fished for a couple of hours and caught some trash fish, but nothing to really speak of. But I was having a good time. And so it was starting to get kind of late. I said, "Okay," and getting about time to head back. He said, "Oh no, no." He said, "We're going to go fish at night underneath the bridge in this creek." And I said, "Well, all right." He said the tarpon are going to run up this creek. At this point, I have no idea where in Aruba I am and he rides us off. We have to walk through the woods down this trail with these bushes that have huge thorns on. And we end up underneath this bridge and sure enough, there're these small tarpon, well, a small for a tarpon, but still a 30 pound fish that are running up this creek.

Matt McDuffie:

And this is not a guided trip. I have the flies that I fish with in Georgia. And so I pull out a fly that I had tied, I cut it out of a flip-flop. It was a popper. And I start chasing these tarpon and sure enough, I hooked into one and it was a little like fighting him in a bathtub. It was not a real big creek. So it was kind of hand to hand combat. But I ended up getting him right to my feet and the guy who was starting to guide who's with me, he was going to try to reach that and grab it. And if the fly popped out, it was gone, which I was perfectly fine with. I had had all the bit of fun I had with it.

Matt McDuffie:

I had never hooked a tarpon. I considered it caught, I was tickled to death, but the guy that took me, he wanted a picture so that he could put it on his website to promote his guide service that he was doing. And he got really ticked off that I'd let this fish go in my feet. And so we had a little bit of a moment there, but it ended up being okay. I didn't ride back at the hotel at like 10:30. My wife was not real happy. We didn't have cellphones then so she wasn't sure where I had gone or where I had been, but it all turned out okay in the end. But it was really fun and eventful after day. I've had a lot of days where it seemed like every cash you could catch a fish.

Matt McDuffie:

I've caught some big ones too. But the other story is I mentioned the little pond that I grew up across the street from, and one of my buddies that I grew up fishing with in that pond, he and I, as we got older, we both ended up, we were living in Atlanta and we would fish the Chattahoochee. They have a pretty good, and especially in the fall, a pretty good trout fishery there. And we were fishing one night, right underneath the I-75 bridge and we noticed fish rising, what we thought were fish rising on the opposite side of the river. Where we were, you can't wade directly across. It was too deep. So we came back the next evening and we're going to try to catch these fish rising on the other side of the river. And we get over there. And there are about 50 carp that are held up in this hole.

Matt McDuffie:

And we never tried to catch a carp on a fly rod before. So we start the process of trying to get it to bite, like Chris was talking earlier. They just wouldn't take. And we figured out they were very snakey. You had to do a good job at it if they'd blow out. But they were big. So we made it our point to try to catch one of these carp. And we read on it. I called a guy that I knew that had a bumper sticker on his car that said, "I'd rather be carp fishing." I always thought it was a joke, but I called him and I said, "I know what

he's carp pod, are you really fishing for it?" And his response was, "Why do you ask?" Because he was keeping the secret too, because it is a very, very fond fish catch and a very difficult one.

Matt McDuffie:

Well, to make a long story short, it took us several months, trial and error trying to figure out how to catch carp. Again, there wasn't a whole lot of information at that time on how to do it. But I distinctly remember the morning that I found a carp held up in a log jam and I did a little boomerang cast to him. I was hidden, but he went 10 feet below me and I watched him suck the fly. And when I leaned on him, he went down river about 30 feet and did 180 degree turn and came back by me as fast as he could go. And I was hanging on for dear life. I ended up landing him. It's first carp I'd ever caught and I've been hooked since then on carp. It literally is my favorite fish to fly fish for. It's very difficult and very hard. They call it the poor man's bonefish, stands on his head just like a redfish or a bonefish.

Matt McDuffie:

And I find it a lot of fun to chase them and I would be remiss, this is a third one, but I'll tell this one too, Chris and Roger and I were-

Roger Smith:

I knew this was coming.

Chris Walker:

You knew it was coming?

Roger Smith:

That didn't make your top two, Matt. So I was just waiting for this one.

Chris Walker:

Yeah.

Matt McDuffie:

Roger and Chris, Chris got us permission to fish on some private water. I am not going to disclose where this one is either. And Chris had really talked it up and said there's these huge trout there. And we've all heard that before. And we're like, "Okay, great." We meet up, COVID had just started up. It was the first time I think any of us had seen each other and we were all stove up and ready to go somewhere. And we all agreed that we would ride in separate cars and wear our mask and be outside. And we get out of the truck and walk over to the riverbank and sure enough, there's this huge brown trout laying there. Roger tries to catch it and he can't catch it. So we kind of split up and start doing our own thing.

Matt McDuffie:

We ended up kind of getting back together again at some point and there's several really nice fish laying in a little eddy in a nice run and we're all taking different angles, trying to catch them. Actually, the fish that I hooked, I did not even know it was there. I was casting up for him to get to get a drift on another fish. But at any rate, I hooked the biggest trout that I have ever seen and it was probably fortuitous I hooked him in a spot where, the way the river was, I had the best chance to land him. Well, Roger started filming, but then he got tired and quit filming me. And I made my way down the river still trying

to catch this fish, probably, I don't know, 30, 45 minutes. And finally, I wore him out and I got my net and I tried to net him.

Matt McDuffie:

And he was so big that he would not fit in my net and I could not net it. And so at this point, although Chris and Rogers had been very supportive in the beginning, they knew how big it was, they just had a better look at it than me and they had gone back to fishing trying to catch the other, but I flagged Chris down and he actually came down and had to net it for me. And I got a real nice picture, but it is by far the biggest trout I've ever caught. It looks like a steelhead. It's huge. It's probably close to 30 inches long. I was so tired and so excited I didn't even measure him. We just put him together and let him go. That's my two and a half, three story, so to speak.

Steve Gosselin:

Great stories, fellas. I appreciate y'all sharing as much as you could. And like I said, in true fisherman fashion, I knew you weren't going to disclose everything, but great stories. So we're going to wrap this up. I'm going to ask a slightly different question than what we normally end with. I'll throw it to you, Chris. How has fishing helped you in your career and with your relationships?

Chris Walker:

That's a good one because fishing really has been huge for my career. I'm one of the few lawyers in Charlotte that doesn't play golf. So I don't have that business development activity, go out and play golf with your clients and things like that. But one thing I've done is made a lot of connections with places I've worked regarding fishing. Perfect example, Matt and Roger here. We work together all the time on environmental sites, but I'd say we spend just about as much time talking fishing as we do talking work. Every time we talk about work, we spend the first few minutes talking fish and we say, "Oh, I guess we got to start talking about work now, move on."

Chris Walker:

But fishing has been kind of the thing that I've been able to identify that has really made me make personal connections with people in work. And I've found that finding somebody else that has a passion for the same thing you do, you're just kind of immediately friends. It takes it beyond the client relationship. That's been on every twist and turn of my career, that fishing's been something that I've been able to connect with people with. And it's just made this more than just a job where you're actually interacting with friends and people that you enjoy spending time with. And that just makes your day a lot more fun. It's a lot more fun to people you care about and share a common interest and takes it to another level for me and makes work a lot more enjoyable.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. Right. Great response. How about you, Roger? How has fishing helped you in your career and with your relationships?

Roger Smith:

I'm going to have to echo what Chris said. I tell you when Chris was talking, I was thinking about it. I remember the day I met both Matt and Chris. I met Matt on the Mitchell River. I used to rent the Mitchell Riverhouse and take clients. And I had a sales rep for elaborate... "I know this guy. He likes to fly

fish. Can we invite him up?" And I'm like, "Sure." And that's how I met Matt. We started fishing and we fished and become friends. And now obviously, work together here.

Roger Smith:

And then Chris, I was meeting with the attorney he used to work with at his former law firm. And he brought Chris along and Chris and I found out that we liked to fish. And next thing you know, we started talking about fishing and gosh, I don't even know how long that was now. But that's like Chris said, it started off as work but we always get into fishing and talking. And I consider both of them more than just work colleagues, but friends and fishing. We're going to Belize for a week together, so that's above just a working relationship at that point.

Steve Gosselin:

Yep. Wonderful. Thanks, Roger. And how about you, Matt? How has fishing helped you in your career and with your relationships?

Matt McDuffie:

I would have to, again, echo what they're saying. And I thought when you asked the question to Chris, I thought about the same trip Roger was thinking about. I was new to North Carolina. I had been working in the business a while, but had just recently moved to North Carolina and was still learning who the players were and who my colleagues were. And I was invited to go on that fishing trip. And on that fishing trip, there were folks that I still know and keep in touch with today. I got in the lab, which we all needed as environmental consultants. I have a colleague and now competitors, so to speak. There was an environmental contractor who ended up being an environmental contractor. There were relationships that I built on that one day fishing that have lasted me or helped me along in my career in finding my way in the consulting and regulatory arena in North Carolina.

Matt McDuffie:

So from a networking standpoint, I think it has helped. I agree with Chris. We're consultants, we're not making widgets. It's about relationships. It's about the service that we provide and building those relationships. And it's very nice when you can call your clients your friends. On top of that, it is an extra little bit getting to know them a little better. I mean, I liked Chris when I just knew he was an environmental attorney, but I have to admit, I liked him better when I found that he fished. I mean, that is just the way you kind of migrate to people.

Matt McDuffie:

And I think about this too, when you do get to go, I also don't play golf, so getting to take clients fishing is great for me. And at least for that one day, I get to call myself a professional fisherman because I'm getting paid to go fishing that day. So that was that good and I stole that line from Roger. He shared that one with me. It's something that I enjoy doing and I enjoy doing it with other people who enjoy doing it. And if you can work or dovetail work in your professional career in with that, it's just that much more to it.

Roger Smith:

One thing I guess I need to say, probably for all of our sake, is we're very lucky to have the wives we have, that's understanding of our passions and allows us to do these things. I say all the time, my wife says that, "Hey, you did this before I came along. Why should I say stop you?" So I'm very appreciative of

her. And then obviously if Matt's wife and Chris's wife allow us to do these things. So that's the relationship that sometimes has to be handled tenderly. But other than that, all the relationships about fishing are great.

Steve Gosselin:

Any final comments, parting shots, anything else you'd like to share with us before we wrap this up?

Chris Walker:

Just call us back after our Belize trip. We'll have more stories for you.

Matt McDuffie:

There you go.

Steve Gosselin:

That might be our first repeat podcast. We'll definitely check in with y'all. On behalf of our listeners, I just want to thank you very much for spending time with us today, taking time out of your busy schedules. I know how much stuff y'all have going on right now, and just to share a little bit about yourselves, your lives, your passion for fishing, relationships, things like that. I share everything that you say, and I'm an avid fisherman as well too. And it's just great to hear these stories. And I know our listeners are really going to love hearing what you all had to say. So thank you very much.

Roger Smith:

Thanks for having us.

Chris Walker:

Thanks for having us.

Matt McDuffie:

That's great. Thanks.

Outro

Steve Gosselin:

Thank you for listening to Coffee Talk, From the Ground Up. We hope you enjoyed today's episode. If you have an idea on future topics, guests, or up for a round of call, you can call me, text me, email me, just get in touch with me and I'll get it to Julie and we'll get it set up.

Julie Smith:

And for those of you that don't want to play golf and you may hate talking on the phone, that's okay. You can send us an email at ecsmarketing@ecslimited.com. Be sure to follow us on social media and subscribe to this podcast so you never miss an episode.

Steve Gosselin:

Thanks Julie. Here's to having a great day.