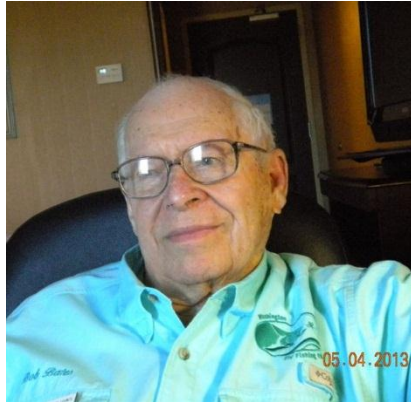




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This interview was conducted Bob Bates on May 4, 2013, in Ellensburg, Washington. The interviewers are Danny Beatty and Jerry McBride.

DB: I'm Danny Beatty. We are in Ellensburg, Washington for the Seventh Annual Washington State Fly Fishing Fair. Today is May 4, 2013. I'm here with Bob Bates and Jerry McBride to do Bob's interview. We'd like Bob to start talking about his early fishing, and then move into his fly fishing.

Bob, I'm just going to let you start talking about your life and fly fishing, but we'll be asking questions as we go.

BB: Okay. I guess my fishing really started early on, it was all bait fishing, for catfish and grunts and things like that. And in 1958, I moved to Colorado with my wife. I thought this would be a good opportunity to get into the fly fishing end of things. So I bought a rod. My wife and I went fishing all through Colorado, all over the place. Of course I had an out-of-state license, a nonresident license, and I caught two fish that year. Of course when I told the guys at the office about my lack of success, one of them said, I'll show you how to fish. Well he was a bait fisherman, worms. And for the next year, he taught me how to bait fish. And I think I became pretty good at it. I could pick up fish after other people had fished through a run, or something like that, but always with worms, even grew my own worms for a while.

Then in, what, 1960, I decided to get back into the fly fishing thing. I was fishing up at Estes Lake, which is right out of the park there, and it was kind of a windy day like it usually is in the mountains. I had a nice big fly out there that I could see, but I kept getting hits but never a connection. You know, I never hooked up. So I finally—the wind calmed enough so that I could see the water surface, and those silly fish were hitting the knots in my leader. So I said, Well, they must want little flies. So I went to the local fly shop, and he didn't have any little flies in stock, and I asked him how much he was going to charge me to tie a size 22 black gnat. He went into a little bit of shock, but said 75 cents. At that time, the Japanese flies were a nickel or a dime, the good quality Hank Roberts flies were 45 cents, and this guy wanted 75 cents? That was a tremendous amount of money. So I had a friend up in Longmont, and he tied flies, and he showed me how to tie a wooly worm, so that was the start. He also gave me a Herter's catalog. Most guys know about the Herter's catalog from the old days. And I started tying flies. I got the Herter's book, and what is it, Professional Lure Making and Fly Tying (sic). And they had pretty good descriptions on how to tie flies, so I started tying flies. I also got tied in with the international hook supply in Denver, and they had a lot of little hooks. So I went fishing with that and started being more successful in the high country lakes. That was kind of the start of it. I didn't do much writing at that time except the official reports for the Bureau of Mines, and mine inspections and things like that.

And then moved to Spokane. I spent about 5 ½ years in Denver and then moved to Spokane.

DB: About what year was that?

Bob Bates Edited Transcript – May 4, 2013
Fly Fishing Collection

BB: That would be 1963, that I moved to Spokane. And I'd been keeping track of all my fish caught and released in Colorado, so I had good lengths and species, and all like that. I did the same thing when I got here to Spokane. I found that the fish around Spokane were a little bit larger by a ½-inch, ¾ of an inch, or a little more. So I was happy to work out here and continue fishing.

DB: What required this move from Denver to Spokane?

BB: I was with the U.S. Bureau of Mines, which was part of the Department of Interior. In Denver I was doing mine inspections in the uranium mines, did some safety inspections and things like that.

DB: Did this work take you to where the fishing—into the mountains and stuff where you would expect to find good fishing?

BB: Oh yes, but since I was driving a government car, I couldn't just haul off and then go fishing.

DB: Okay. Right, but you could at least see areas that might work out, that looked like a good place to go, on the weekends.

BB: Yes, there were some times that the car stopped alongside a stream so I could have lunch, and I partook of a little fishing at the same time.

DB: Where are the mines in the Spokane area? Where was the area that you were in?

BB: Well, kind of changed disciplines when I moved to Spokane.

DB: Oh, okay.

BB: This was a research center here in this town. Actually a friend of mine was running it, so when he was in Denver I rustled a job with him for Spokane. My wife had, on one trip, we'd go through Seattle, Spokane, down back to Denver, and we were just about at the Colorado, or yes, the Colorado border when she said, I'd like to live in Spokane. Why didn't you tell me when we were there? I would have rustled Ernie for a job. So I did rustle him for a job the next time that he was in on business.

DB: So your business was in mining, and you finally ended up in Spokane. You're still there so that was one of your good moves in your career.

BB: Yes, that was a great, good move.

DB: So now we can go back to you fishing in Spokane.

BB: Okay. Well, I did a lot of lake fishing around Spokane. The guys in Denver, or Spokane were kind of, not quite ridiculing my small flies, but they didn't think they would work. At the time, the fly you had to use was, oh, a size 8 or so, and green, olive-green. So the size 22 really didn't cut it. But since then, a lot of the guys are tying size 22s. They found that the insects are such that you got to have a small fly to imitate the insects.

DB: Did you get into this chironomid fishing that we hear about in the Spokane area?

BB: That was a little later.

DB: A little later, okay.

BB: Yes, I was using-- Actually in Colorado I was doing chironomid fishing but I didn't know it.

Bob Bates Edited Transcript – May 4, 2013

Fly Fishing Collection

2

DB: I see.

BB: I was using a small dry fly and small nymphs, and actually they were imitating the midge larvae, pupae, and adults, and they were all size 22, so 22, 24, and clear down to a size 28. So I was in it back in 1960, but really didn't do the chironomid fishing until I hooked up with Jerry McBride, and he's trying to teach me how to do a chironomid fishing.

DB: So from the get go, small flies were your forte.

BB: Yes.

DB: Okay. That's great.

BB: I had to use them because that's what you caught fish.

DB: Okay. So how about presentation that's different from what you thought was fly fishing with the bigger flies, so is there a change in your whole way of—

BB: Yes. The bigger flies, I've used a dredging technique, wet line, and drag it through the water. With the small flies, originally, in Colorado I was using a fly on a bobber technique. And had a floating bobber and 6-8 feet of leader between the bobber and the fly, and the fly out there.

DB: Oh, okay.

BB: It worked beautifully for the high mountain lakes. When I got into Spokane, a kind of a different story. I started using sinking lines. And also, by the time I got to Washington, I had learned how to fly cast, so I put away my fly on the bobber, and started on-- And I went ahead with the standard fly gear, and that worked pretty good.

DB: And so, by now you had pretty much converted to the small flies, then. That's what you stayed with pretty much ever since in that type of fishing.

BB: Well, selectively. I still use a lot of larger flies, size 12s and things like that. For years I was a dredger. I'd throw out a fly and a sinking line and dredge it back, catch fish that way.

DB: So, I read that you attended Gonzaga University. Now was that after you were in Spokane that you—

BB: Yes.

DB: --that you did some work there?

BB: Yes, I had received a bachelor's and master's at the University of California, Berkeley, in mining engineering. And when I got here, because we were doing research and a lot of mathematical stuff, I started taking math courses at Gonzaga. So I wound up with an MS in math also. So that was just kind of a side issue that I got thanks to work.

DB: Yes, so was the math associated with your mining?

BB: Yes.

DB: So, how did you get involved with the fly fishing groups of Spokane? I think you didn't get involved with a fly fishing group in Denver, did you?

BB: No.

DB: Okay, so Spokane was where you got involved with more people and more fly fishermen?

BB: Well, I joined the Inland Empire Fly Fishing Club and stayed there for quite a while.

DB: About what time was that? What year?

BB: I don't remember.

DB: In the Sixties, though?

BB: Yes, probably.

DB: Okay.

BB: But, they needed an editor for their newsletter, and I opened my mouth and said I would I would do it, and so.

DB: After you joined—

BB: After I joined the Inland Empire Club.

DB: And so, I want you to work on that a bit, because that idea of communications has continued now for over 40 years.

BB: It's been a while, yes, yes.

DB: Tell us some more about that, how that has evolved.

BB: Okay, well I started out as editor of the newsletter for the fly club. I was invited up to, oh, where was it? Oh, it was Moses Lake. We had a board meeting of the Washington Council, and they needed an editor for their quarterly newsletter, and I agreed to do it. So automatically I became a board member and—

DB: This was quite a few years later, though.

BB: A few years.

DB: Yes.

BB: But, you know, I had quite a bit of time there to—

DB: Well, what system were you using at that time, in terms of writing newsletters? I want to bring up where you, up to where your computer and all this stuff up. That's a big part of what you've done for the federation.

BB: Yes. I did have a computer, and I was using WordPerfect to produce letters. I would print them out and then give them to the printer to copy, and he would do that. In the early days, there was a lot of cut and paste type thing, glue the paragraphs together, and go from there. So gradually I worked up to Microsoft Word, and that's what I've been using ever since.

DB: Yes, but in going way back, did you use mimeograph and those systems? Or were you always in a computer?

BB: Well I was kind of always in a computer from the early Sixties.

DB: Oh, okay.

BB: Because I had taken data down to Denver for running on their computer, and then when I got here, I started working with the community college. They had an IBM computer, oh, what was it, 1620.

DB: You were somewhat on the ground floor of this computer movement—

BB: Oh yes, yes.

DB: Both for your business and for—

BB: And for research.

DB: --and for the fly fishing communications.

BB: Yes.

DB: Right, okay, okay.

BB: But, you know we went a long that way, cut and paste, and I'd drive the copy to the printer and give it to him, and sometime later we'd get the copies in the mail. And so we had a mail list, and the printer always used the mail list to send things out. We had problems with that, but—

DB: And so now today, you do this from your home?

BB: Yes.

DB: With your private computer, and now you can send information throughout the whole state—

BB: Any place in the world really.

DB: Yes, with one touch of a button.

BB: With one touch of a button. When I was here in Spokane, I got tied up with the Outdoor Press, and for about five or six years, I produced a weekly fly tying article for that.

DB: Yes.

BB: And did my own photography. So that I could try and do things pretty fancy, I used the pin method of supporting the flies, so it looks like it was not—

DB: How often does that come out?

BB: Weekly.

DB: Weekly. So now, did that tie in with *Flies of the Northwest*?

BB: Yes.

DB: And how did that all—

BB: My club did the *Flies of the Northwest*.

DB: And how did that all evolve as that went through the various stages of edits?

BB: Well, by that time we had quite a few people on computers, and they would produce articles that would go into the *Flies of the Northwest*. We had five editors, I was one of them that would take the articles, massage them, and then assemble them.

DB: Now was this after Amato got involved?

BB: Actually it was before Amato got involved.

DB: Okay, okay.

BB: It was early on that we did that. I wrote some of the chapters for the *Flies of the Northwest*.

DB: And contributed some of the flies, didn't you?

BB: Oh yes. There's several of them—

DB: Mention two or three that might be significant.

BB: Let's see, the DF Damsel and the Backpack Damsel are mine. I'm trying to remember some of the others, I can't right now.

DB: Are these flies that you developed to fish the Spokane area?

BB: The DF Damsel is. I developed it to fish the damsel hatch at Dry Falls Lake, DF Damsel, Dry Falls.

DB: Okay, oh yes, that's the connection—

BB: Yes.

DB: That's right. And so you've been focusing up until now in this interview on trout and so forth, but I understand you also got into fishing for steelhead over here.

BB: Well, yes, that's a trout.

DB: I know, but it generally is a little different—

BB: Yes, I did quite a bit of steelhead fishing.

DB: And which river?

BB: Usually the Grande Ronde.

DB: Okay.

BB: Some in the Clearwater and some in a few other places, but mostly the Grande Ronde.

DB: Describe a trip to the Grande Ronde from Spokane.

BB: Well, before they closed the gates on Lower Granite Dam, I'd drive down there and fish two days, and usually at least get hits from, oh, three to five fish, and I'd land them, a couple of them. After they closed the gates on the Grande Ronde, or on the Lower Granite Dam, I went down there five weekends and didn't touch a fish, so I quit steelhead fishing.

DB: Oh, and you haven't been back since?

BB: No.

DB: Oh, has it, from what you hear, has it improved any you think?

BB: I don't know if it's improved, but I know people are catching fish in the Ronde and Snake and some of the other areas.

DB: So—

JM: I'd like to interject something in here -- why don't you talk a little bit about Hilary, because his son ...

Interruption

DB: Go ahead, just give a little bit about that, that'd be great.

BB: Okay. Well, like Jerry said, I took Hilary down to fish. I knew one spot on the Snake River where I could catch fish. And we were down there, he was about seven, I think about seven at the time. I waded out, stood on my secret rock, and caught a steelhead, went back to shore and gave it to Hilary and let him land it. That was his first steelhead, and quite successful there. And then we would go down other times and he would fish the different holes on the Ronde, and he got to where he could catch fish. And then he tied in with Jake Galkey and another fellow, and they really helped him out in learning how to steelhead, so he did become quite adept at catching steelhead. One time when I was down there with him, this was in his long hair days, he was throwing a very long line, and one of the guys up on the bank made the comment that, Hey, your daughter really throws a nice line.

DB: Oh, yes.

BB: I don't know if that was an incentive for him to get his hair cut or not.

DB: Okay. So, now, this fly tying though has continued on until today of course.

BB: Oh, yes.

DB: When did you get involved with demonstration tying? Were you involved with that program they had in Spokane on TV?

BB: No.

DB: Okay, so when did you get involved with demonstration tying?

BB: For my Outdoor Press articles, I went to the conclaves because they gave me a great source of supply, lots of information on different kinds of flies, and so I used that to write articles for the Outdoor Press. And on one of the trips in, oh, where, Livingston—

DB: About 1988, somewhere in there?

BB: Some place in there. I'm not exactly sure. Al Beatty came up to me and he says, Bob, bring your fly tying gear in here. I need more tiers. He had seen my articles and he's seen my flies, and things like that, so he asked me to become a demonstrator. I had left all the stuff at home, so the next year I brought it, and I think Al Beatty was still in charge of the fly tiers, so I wound up demonstrating, and I've demonstrated ever since in a lot of different places. Every time I go to a show I learn something, and I tie it into the, first the articles in the Outdoor Press, and then later I got involved with the fly of the month through the FFF.

DB: Talk about that a little bit, which includes your photography. We haven't touched on the photography yet, but that's evolved through this time.

BB: Yes. I have always been a photographer, even with the Bureau of Mines.

DB: Oh.

BB: I've done photography of one kind or another. And I usually had telephoto lenses or macro lenses or something else to work with. So when was this, in about, I'll say 2000, I wound up on an FFF committee, computer committee. And I was on the committee when our original Fly of the Month author quit. So we were searching all over for a new Fly of the Month author. The members of the committee would recommend different names, you know, of people that we thought would do the job, and my thought was get somebody more or less famous, you know, that has a name, and have them do it. Well, the committee chairman couldn't find anybody that would do it. But anyway one time in an email, I told him, Well, if so and so doesn't do it, I'll do it. So in about a microsecond I got the assignment. You've got it. You know, so that's when I started, and this was December 2001.

DB: So explain how photography and your past experience at that time with other communicative, the word communications, and photography, and you said macrophotography, and fly tying and all that, how does that all come together?

BB: Well, it kind of grew rapidly. I had done some close up photography with the Bureau of Mines for technical stuff, you know, strain gauges and things like that. And so I knew kind of the technology. I'd taken some courses in college actually on photography, so I knew the technical background. I tried to incorporate that into the pictures I took. First I was taking the pictures all at home, because I collected flies at a conclave, or I would tie them myself, and then I would photograph them at home, where I had control, and that was all with film. I did that for a long time. When I started doing the, you might say the serious Fly of the Month articles, initially I would send the articles to Livingston. We had a gal over there that actually posted them on the computer, on the servers. I would photograph them and crop them and prepare them for publication, and then she would do the posting.

DB: And you also did the write up about them.

BB: Yes, I did the write up.

DB: Yes. So there was this combination of things that you've done over the years that you put together.

BB: Yes. For a long time I've been an author of one kind or another, a lot of technical reports. I have some 21 reports of investigation for the Bureau of Mines, I don't know how many mine inspection reports, probably 2 or 300 of those. So I've always been something of a writer. And I got tied in with the Outdoor Press, and that was a weekly article. And then when I agreed to do the Fly of the Month for the Federation, that was once a month. I would send the information to Livingston, and the gal there would put it on the computer.

DB: Is there anything else that we've skipped over through the years up until a couple of years ago.

BB: Well, at the time I was talking I was still using film for photography, which meant that I had to photograph it, run it over to the drugstore, and get it developed.

DB: Oh, yes.

BB: And I advanced a little bit to having them produce disks for me so I could work with it on the computer. But then I upgraded to digital, and that has made life a lot easier for me.

Back up just a little bit. We had a one year gap in there when we lost this gal in Livingston. We couldn't get the communication going to continue the work, you know, the people wouldn't answer my emails, was the main problem. Then late in 2001, Ron Cordes called me and said, Do you want to continue the Fly of the Month? I said, Sure. He said, Well, we're going to do some stepwise this time. So, ah stepwise, I was thinking of, you know, all the film I'd have to shoot to do stepwise, and I said, Well, yes, we can do that. So I started working stepwise, and of course during all of this I used the conclaves as a lot of source of material for my articles, you know, the Outdoor Press articles, and the later the Fly of the Month articles. And what I started doing was trying to highlight some of the good tiers in the Federation. There's a lot of great tiers in here, and I could photograph them, write it up, and of course give them the credit for all the tying. I just did a reporting job type of thing. And that kind of worked out pretty good. But it was a little difficult with film to do the stepwise because I would do the photography, and then get it developed, and then look at it and see if it was any good, and decide if it wasn't, go do it again. So I shot up a lot of film. When I went to digital it eased it quite a bit.

DB: I'm sure. You didn't have to develop the film. You didn't have to take it somewhere, you did it all right there at your own computer.

BB: I did all right there, you know, and that's what I've been doing for years now on the—

DB: And that was through all this communications, and you've moved now from paper communications, and now you're into digital communications. What got you started with designing websites and this sort of thing for the fly fishers?

BB: Well let's see. That goes back a ways to when this fellow was doing the Fly of the Month for the federation. There was one part of the federation website that had club information, and all the clubs in Washington. I would edit that and send it to this other guy, and eventually he would get it on the website. He was the guy that wouldn't answer my emails too. So it was kind of a struggle going on here, non-responsiveness. For a while I had a password to get into this section of the Federation web page and actually edit the club information myself, and so that kind of got me into web type things. And like so many things, it grew like rapidly from there. I had the software to do the job, but it took a while to build the knowledge before I got into it really.

So then, let's see, where are we? Oh, we got into the stepwise Fly of the Month. I did my own photography. I tried to expand that a little bit, get more people involved in contributing to the Fly of the Month. I just wrote up a four page article on how you structure Fly of the Month articles, and how you handle the photography, because there's a little bit of technology in the photography part of it, and cropping and to bring drop shadows on it, and things like this. I wrote the article and gave it to all the council presidents and all the members of the board of governors in the fly tying group. So, so far I haven't gotten any contributions, but we'll see.

DB: I spent quite a bit of time on talking about communications, because I think that's an important part of what you've done for fly fishers over the years. But on your personal note, your own fly fishing, is there anything more that you'd like to add in terms of your own enjoyment, what's the involvement of fly fishing for yourself?

BB: Well, up until a couple of years ago, or it was three or four years ago I guess, I did quite a bit of fly fishing, mostly out of a boat, in lakes and things. Then my right knee went bad, so the last four years I haven't done much in the way of fishing. I hope to get back to it. But I enjoyed the lake fishing, caught a lot of fish, fished the streams in North Idaho for the west slope cutthroat. That was a lot of fun. And then the stream fishing, I used things like a size 18X-caddis and caught a lot fish that way. It became my favorite fly after one of the fellows in the club had refusals on his elk hair caddis, and he says, Why don't you try it. I did and I immediately caught this fish that touselled me for about 10-15 minutes, but he got off, a big, big fish. I think it had to be one of those 20-inchers in the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene.

DB: Ooh.

BB: That was our guess when we could see it. So I'm hoping to get back into fishing more.

Bob Bates Edited Transcript – May 4, 2013

Fly Fishing Collection

9

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DB: The rest of us have-- It's been good for the rest of us as far as this communication is concerned, and it brings all this information. So your fly fishing was set aside for a bit, and it was still around Spokane, you like the lakes and so forth.

BB: Yes. Amber Lake and some of the others.

DB: I think I've pretty much covered—

JM: I think we should talk a little bit about some of the honors that he's received.

DB: Oh, okay.

JM: Within our Inland Empire Fly Fishing Club, he was voted Fly Fisherman of the Year in 1989.

DB: Yes, that would be good.

BB: Okay, well like Jerry says, I did get the Fly Fisherman of the Year in 1989. And I've gotten a few other honors from the club. I got Distinguished Service award in 2004. And let's see, what else? I think that was about it.

DB: That award isn't given very often, I know—

JM: No it isn't, not very many people on that. And then he's gotten awards from the Washington Council and also the national Federation of Fly Fishers.

BB: From the national Federation of Fly Fishers, what was it, Award of Excellence, I guess.

JM: Well, you've got the council—

BB: The Council Award of Excellence.

JM: --Award of Excellence.

BB: I got that. And let's see, I don't know what else I've gotten from national.

JM: You got the Distinguished Fly Tier, or something, whatever the title is, of the Washington Council.

BB: The Washington Council, it's the Washington Fly Tying Hall of Fame award. I got that; and the Washington Council Federator of the Year.

End of Tape One, Side One

BB: There are various plaques around the house, on various awards that I've gotten, just any award type thing.

DB: Well people have recognized your contributions to fly fishing in different ways; groups, clubs, councils, and the Federation have recognized that Bob Bates is somebody that's done some good things for fly fishing.

JM: That's the way I see it.

BB: Yes, I guess that's true. It's a way you could look at it.

DB: Okay.

BB: I haven't gotten any of the big awards from way up at national, but who knows.

DB: Well, I think we pretty much covered it? An oral history is supposed to kind of give your life and fly fishing—

BB: Yes.

DB: So it's been certainly more than fishing.

BB: Oh, absolutely.

JM: It's been for the benefit of all of us.

DB: Okay. So are you, you know, I always give the person a chance to—if there's something that they thought would be, that they'd like to tell and put on the-- now's your chance.

JM: I like your story about Bailey Lake. We've talked about several interviews—we've interviewed several people from Spokane, and they all have their stop the leak in Bailey Lake story.

BB: Oh, yes.

JM: He had very good connection with the—

DB: I didn't even get to it that he was involved with the youth program in Spokane— teaching young people how to fly fish.

BB: It's how to tie flies and fly fishing and things like that. I still, when I can, take part in the Bighorn show, which is orientated towards kids in Spokane.

But the Bailey Lake thing was—was working with Hardy Kruse, was the guy that was really the prime mover in trying to stop the leak in Bailey Lake, and this is up in the Little Pend Oreille game range, originally, now it's the game refuge. This lake would be completely full in the spring time, and then by late summer it was way down, and it had a lot of grassy areas and things like that. We tried a number of ways of stopping the water from going out of Bailey Lake. The problem really is that there's a huge rubble slide off the hill on one side and it comes down. And these are huge boulders, the size of the bed or bigger. And it's such a rubble pile there that you can't fill it up with anything.

DB: Oh.

BB: We tried foam. The original owner of Bailey Lake tried filling it up with bentonite. They'd take a team of horses across the ice and pile the bentonite on the ice surface, and then in the summer it would melt and then sink down, and that helped a little. We tried bentonite, but we weren't too successful at it. We tried regular flexible foam chunks and concrete.

DB: What state agency did you have to work with to make this happen? There must have been some agency that was involved.

BB: I believe we got permission from whoever was in charge of the game range or game refuge.

DB: So this would be Fish and Wildlife or Game Commission?

BB: Let's see, who owned the thing originally?

JM: I think the Feds owned it, but Washington State administered in it. But today the Feds took it back, and today there's no way you would even think about doing something like that, let alone actually—

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11

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DB: DNR involved, maybe.

BB: No DNR.

DB: Oh, okay.

BB: Yes, there was a lot of political activity to get it into the hands of the state.

DB: Yes. Well, that's what I—yes.

BB: And we did a lot of things there that—they didn't really hurt the environment, but they would be questionable I think.

DB: Okay. But Bailey Lake is a quality water lake.

BB: It's a fly fishing only lake.

DB: A fly fishing only lake. That would be why it was important to—

BB: That was why it was important to the club members. They wanted to improve it.

DB: Okay.

BB: And we had various techniques we used to fish it. In the early days there was a thing called the Bailey Lake retrieve, used a sinking line, let it go down to the bottom, and then haul back on it as fast as you can, and stop when the fly got to the surface.

DB: Oh.

BB: And usually the fish would chase it clear to the surface and nail it there. And that worked in a lot of places.

DB: Okay.

BB: It's been a fun time, the rainbows 20 inches or so, and the brooks, they got to be 18 inches or so, didn't they?

JM: (Inaudible) deep—

BB: They were hiding, yes, they were fat, yes.

DB: Okay, okay.

End of Transcript