

THE DAILY CALLER

<http://dailycaller.com/2011/11/29/ask-matt-labash-blood-on-his-hands-why-gramps-should-be-blamed-for-fishing-out-our-rivers/#ixzz1fCD0ggs5>

Recently, I watched an excellent, scarcely-seen documentary called “[Rivers of A Lost Coast](#).” Not only did it relate the tales of fly-fishing gunslingers like the late Bill Schaadt, a Mad Man of the River who was so eccentric that he used to tie flies with blades on the hook in order to cut the lines of rival salmon snaggers. But it also a story of decline, how majestic Northern California rivers like the Russian and the Eel and the Smith, once so thick with salmon and steelhead runs that you risked getting knocked into the drink if you waded through the riffles, finally turned into ghosts of themselves. Men who caught 200 steelhead a year in the ‘50s through the ‘70s are now lucky if they see even one after fishing hard all season.

There are, of course, plenty of contributing factors to this sorry state of affairs: from floods to droughts to logging to damming. But what one consistently sees in period [photos](#) of that time are rightfully proud fishermen, standing elbow to elbow in choice holes, or casting from prams as thickly stacked as bumper cars, desecrating the scenes of their greatest catches by holding stringers of silvers and chinooks and steelies and stripers as long as your leg. All of which they greedily kept as though the supply would last forever. The fish they took that day never lived to replenish the fish that they’d have liked to keep taking home in perpetuity.

In the [film](#), it fell to the great writer, artist and fisherman, Russell Chatham, now decades older and wiser and transplanted to Montana, where the fishing is still reasonably good, to honestly lay bare the error of their ways: “We missed it. Conservation didn’t mean shit to us. I mean it was just, ‘How many can we catch.’” And now in those rivers, there’s not many left for the catching.

It is not just lone men and their [fly rods](#), of course, who’ve helped fish populations plummet. Commercial fishing has given quite the boost to the fish holocaust. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, entire stocks of fish have now been either dangerously exploited or depleted, from Northwest Atlantic salmon, cod and haddock, to Pacific Bluefin tuna, to Mediterranean Bonito. Everybody takes what they need. Then they take a lot more.

by Matt Labash