



## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Thad A. Wind for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology presented on May 27, 2016.

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How do fishing guides of the Cascade and Coast Range rivers negotiate the conflicting tensions between their client's desire to experience the wild and the extractive nature based tourism of their role as fishing guides? How do they position their services relative to the environment and an imagined landscape that serves as a metaphorical boundary area for their clients? By situating these professionals as guides to a human impacted and discursively constructed wilderness in the context of the Anthropocene, I show that the guides are entrepreneurs meeting the desires of their clients to visit an imagined landscape and participate in what they see as ecotourism. The extractive nature of the nominal activity that has been defined out of its proper context does not prevent the guides from positioning themselves as providers of wilderness experiences. By a combination of applied focus and ethnographic methods, I show that the tension involved in catching and killing fish is less important than satisfying the need to experience a connectedness with the wild.

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Fishing Guides in the Anthropocene

by

Thad A. Wind

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Thad A. Wind, Author

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## 1. Introduction

The city of Springfield lies mostly on the left bank of the McKenzie River. It is hard to miss the connection the city, and to a lesser extent this is true of neighboring Eugene, has to the guides - and their boats - who work the river. McKenzie River drift boats and associated iconography of boats or fly fishing are scattered throughout town. The river holds a certain amount of fame amongst anglers. The boat that was adopted and designed to meet the conditions of the river (before being exported back out to rivers around Oregon, up into Alaska, and back east at as far as Idaho and Montana) holds a similar amount of notoriety. Rowing those boats and helping people from around the world, and a wide range of experiences, catch fish is a respected occupation.

These guides are engaged in a combination of practices and perspectives that can be thought of as contradictory. On the one hand, they are small business owners – entrepreneurs – who respond to the demands of building a business, balancing costs with income and marketing themselves to customers. On the other, they are in extended intimate relationships with clients in a space that speaks to them of the sacred and where they find satisfaction in showing their clients a landscape that they feel connected to. How they navigate between these areas, how they understand their role in relationship to their clients as they balance the ostensible reason their clients have engaged their services forms the focus of my investigation.

The guides are the classic in between figures, they are not locals, nor are they tourists. They build an occupation out of technical knowledge, fishing and boating,

understanding and connection of place, the rivers, and entrepreneurial skills that provides a special access to nature. Superficially they provide their services to nature based tourism clients which might categorize them as employees. Yet they enjoy durable relationships with their clients and conceive of them as friends, complicating the client-guide relationships. As guides, they occupy a privileged position as experts and as interpreters of the experience their clients desire. I seek to show that they are not wholly employees and not completely intimates. Lastly, they occupy a space that can be thought of as equally a boundary space, not wilderness, but not society. Civilization is generally within the range of a well thrown rock, even as imagination easily shuts out roads and houses in favor of mossy oaks and waterfalls.

The metaphor is fairly blunt, with the river serving as a boundary between the urban, constructed and maintained, or at least altered, world of humans, and the affected, but relatively untouched natural world. In our case, the river is the boundary between here and elsewhere that Auge (1995) suggests that anthropology has ever focused on, with the caveat that the elsewhere is the wild and thus a constructed place that can never be here and now. The guide then is a fairly literal guide, able to traverse the in-between space of the river while keeping their clients safe and secure as they expose themselves to the sacred. The clients might be in search of a pseudo-event (Cohen 1988) or some idea of authenticity, but the guide is not although they recognize that the pseudo-event is the nominal reason for which their profession is named, namely "fishing guide."

I begin with an introduction to the tradition of the profession of fishing guide as it is situated in the mountain streams of western Oregon and then walk the reader through a day on the river as told in ethnographic style before moving into theory and data.

This work seeks to explore the perspectives of these guides in the theoretical framework of the Anthropocene as entrepreneurs and as mediators. Given the relatively recent environmental understandings of the human impacts on nature, I start the literature and data portion by exploring the concept of the Anthropocene as a model for understanding how guides understand nature.

Nature and the natural world as a destination for clients involves investigating and defining a definition of place. This definition of place is something I emphasize because it is both important to how guides position themselves and recognizes the objectives of their clients. I develop the understanding of place as an imagined landscape as most reflective of how the guides experience it and how they discursively approach the rivers they work. This imagined landscape is the site of their work and it is the destination of their clients.

While I argue that the guides are not tourists, their clients could be and the type of tourism they are engaged with is important because part of their entrepreneurial activity is defined by that discourse. Following the literature on this point, I compare the activities and experience of nature based tourism and ecotourism with how the guides understand their profession and suggest that ecotourism is a better framework for describing their aspirational narrative.

Finally, I investigate the occupational aspect guiding as it is revealing in understanding the tension between the material success of their business and the mythologizing they undertake in attempting to construct themselves as more than extractive agents involved in selling expensive fish. The conflicting loyalties to other guides and their profession must be resolved while the clients are part of a team with conflicting aims. Catching and killing fish is both the goal and described as secondary and the guides resolve this contradiction through the ways that they negotiate team membership. How they manage the performance resolves the conflicts between friends and employees and between connected local and tourist for their clients.

## 2. Methods

My initial introduction to the fishing guides that became the subject of my study began with an internship at the Oregon Folklife Network (OFN), under the direction of Dr. Rachel Saltzman in the spring of 2015. Together, Dr. Saltzman and I did a pilot interview with one of the member guides of the McKenzie River Guide Association (MRGA), seeking to develop a project on the oral story telling associated with a respected and deeply rooted occupation in the Eugene/Springfield area. The goal then, and still is, to offer every guide in the organization an opportunity to be interviewed.

Using the listed membership on their web site, "McKenzieguides.com," I contacted each guide, asking them to be interviewed, making clear the dual nature of my motives in contacting them. All of the guides were contacted by phone, leaving voicemail as appropriate with a follow-up call. Any guide with an email address was also contacted via email, again explaining both interview intentions and asking for an hour of their time to be interviewed.

The interviews were loosely structured using an interview guide that I memorized before scheduling the interviews. Every participants was asked the following three questions:

- How and why did you become a guide?
- What makes a good guide?
- Do you think fishing is more important, or being on the river?

Each interview that I include was recorded digitally and then later transcribed. Notes were also taken, and the transcriptions and notes were reviewed for themes as they became apparent or developed during research into the literature. Through this I gathered fifteen interviews as well as several less formal follow-up conversations.

Participant observation in the traditional sense was not possible for occupationally oriented anthropology in the timeframe of a master's thesis. Over the course of the last year, I have attempted to take advantage of occupational gatherings associated with the McKenzie River Guides, and taken multiple trips with key informants, from which I developed an understanding of what a typical day on and off the river looks like from a guide's perspective. Each year the guides have two main gatherings: The MRGA Boat Safety Rodeo and Dutch Oven Cook Off, and The McKenzie River Wooden Boat Festival. By attending these gatherings I was able to have multiple opportunities in a less formal fashion to speak with and observe, using the less formal conversations to test conclusions and assumptions as I formed them.

There are limitations in this study which need to be considered. For limitations of time and scope, I have not interviewed clients in any formal sense. While I do have a background in rowing and boating, I lack any skill at fishing and so I was not able to act as a fishing guide. There is also a question of gender, by the count of the guides I interviewed, there are not more than four or five female guides based in Oregon, and I was only able to interview two of those, one of whom does not work the rivers associated with the MRGA or use the drift boat that is central to the occupation of the

others. Equally troublesome from the perspective of extrapolating any findings, the guides I interviewed are all members of an organization, the MRGA, which requires potential members to be sponsored and vetted before a vote is taken to include the new initiate. As I note later in this manuscript, the guides are a remarkably homogenous group in many ways, so talking to professional guides outside of this group could provide insight not available from within the group.

As I mentioned, I do have some experience with rivers. Growing up, we were constantly on the McKenzie, the Rogue, and several other local rivers in kayaks and rafts. For a couple years out of high school I worked for a series of rafting outfitters guiding on the Rogue and Deschutes rivers as well as the McKenzie during the summers.

### 3. History and Ethnographic Context

Guides to the natural world have a long occupational history and demand for their services. As we come to understand the ramifications of a human experience that is fundamentally affected by and affecting the natural world, these professionals combine ethics of service, local knowledge and stewardship to act as intermediaries for their clients. The advent of the Anthropocene as a new ontology that rejects a separate human and natural understanding means that individuals and organizations acting in boundary spaces have a unique opportunity and role to play.

The rivers of the Pacific Northwest are home to a tradition of guiding that stretches back four generations. These guides have developed specialized equipment, techniques, and values that have since been exported out of the area to rivers in Montana and Alaska. Each generation of guides has been comprised of a combination of the children of the previous generations and newcomers who are trained and recruited by existing practitioners.



*Fig 1. The McKenzie River Drift Boat*

The mountains of the Coast and Cascades combine with high annual rainfall, glacial melt, and underground springs to create a set of fast moving, cold, rocky rivers that serve as the habitat and spawning grounds for trout, salmon, and steelhead. Fishing enthusiasts from around the world make the trip to try their luck with a fishing rod, paying several hundred dollars for what may just be a day in the rain. However, it doesn't take long to realize that the fish aren't the only motivator for the guides or their clients. Often enough it can appear that the fish are secondary to the experience of place, the river.

These rivers provide ecological and economic services to the surrounding communities, but they are also perceived as places of wildness. A complex intermingling of back yards, pastures, flow control, dams, irrigation demands, National Park, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and privately held timber plantations is more indicative of civilization than anything we might think of as untrammled wilderness, but all that becomes difficult to see from a boat in the middle of the water.

The McKenzie River features prominently among these rivers because of historical context and its fame as pre-eminent fishing destination, primarily for trout, but also for spring Chinook salmon and summer Steelhead (“Flyangersonline.com,” “o2fish.com.” Woodward 2010).

In the early 1900’s, several men began taking clients down the McKenzie River to fish, and to experience the natural world. Most famous of these was Prince Helfrich, along with Veltie Pruitt and John West (Fletcher and Manning 2007). Initially most held other jobs and guiding was something they did on weekends or evenings. As the number of clients grew, some of them became full time guides and outfitters. By 1931, there were enough of them that they formed the McKenzie River Guides Association, which is active today with over sixty members, many of them full time guides. The Association is active in policy discussions governing fishing and the environmental use and health of the McKenzie River (“McKenzieguides.com”). The group is also developing plans for a historical interpretive center, plans have been proposed and are currently undergoing a feasibility study through the University of Oregon.

Few professional guides limit themselves to the McKenzie today, flexibility in river selection, especially in the winter when one river may have more favorable conditions due to rain and sediment, is important to success and a good experience for their clients. Winter Steelhead fishing might be better on the Siletz one day and the Alsea the next. The various seasonal runs of fish, as well as a pragmatic diversification into rafting or float tours, mean guides spend a sizable amount of time traveling to different destinations and an equally sizable investment in learning new rivers.

Guiding as an occupation combines skills and traditions passed down from those first guides who were as much inventors as expert fishermen. The eponymous boat that the guides use, the McKenzie River drift boat, was a design that was undergoing modification and development by the guides as they invented their occupation. To this day guides will make tweaks and improvements that fit their particular needs. Similarly, the skills and knowledge, the occupational lore that makes up their profession, is both like and unlike the traditions of those first guides. The boats are mostly aluminum and even the wooden ones are constructed with more modern laminates. Oars are now constructed out of a mix of carbon fiber, fiberglass, and wood sourced from across the world.

Managing clients has also undergone similar technology driven changes. Guides are experimenting with web pages, social networking, and online booking as ways to expand and retain their clientele. Newsletters are electronic and blogging has joined books and magazines as outlet and information sources.

### 3.1 A Day on the River



*Fig. 2 Dawn on the River*

*It is somewhere south of the middle of the night, pre-dawn is still hours away, when we pull past a line of trucks next to the darkened windows of the Little Chief Restaurant. People mill in pairs and threes in the orange glow of streetlights next to boats, McKenzie River drift boats easily identifiable by the flat stern - transom, graceful arc, and sharply pointed bow. These are all aluminum models, wood versions are traditional, but increasingly rare among working guides.*

*We look around for our guide, but faces are tough to discover in the dark amidst rain gear and baseball caps. The lights in the diner finally blink on and there's a general shuffle toward the door as we spot Curt. Introductions over, we find a table, and a woman tosses Curt a pad, "You can get their coffee, too!" He shrugs, his smile somewhere between embarrassed and amused, and fetches a coffee for me and one for himself, "I guess you could say I was a regular." Orders taken, he explains the plan for the day.*

*We're here for Winter Steelhead, a large fish about the size of a salmon, which spawns in the coastal rivers after spending the year out in the Pacific. A number of rivers serve as home, but Curt feels the Siletz has the right conditions of water clarity and flow to offer the best chances. We'll be using a technique he calls "Bobber Dogging," a carbon fiber pole fitted with a bait casting reel and on the end of the line a single hook headed by a little pink ball of fluff. A large oblong bobber is meant to keep the hook just bouncing along the bottom which is thought to either irritate the fish, causing it to bite at the offending pink fluff ball, or stimulate its instinct to bite at nearby food – spawning steelhead don't feed normally but some guides feel that while they won't seek food out, they'll bite at it if it is in their face.*

*After breakfast, Curt ducks into the kitchen to make himself a sandwich, there are some perks to being an honorary wait staff. We settle the check and follow our guide out into the still dark morning. I have to hope I'm following the correct transom and taillights, as we circle around the city of Siletz and drop the keys to Curt's truck in a drop box. The*

*local mechanic runs a side business shuttling trucks to the take out, a nice convenience.*

*From there we park our truck, and ride with Curt to the put in, the darkness finally softening into pre-dawn.*

*The boat ramp is busy, but efficient. This early, it seems to mostly be other guides and they maneuver their boats in and clear the space for the next person with silent practice.*

*The clients stand awkwardly to the side, trying to look casual. A last check for gear reveals we've both forgotten something, my gloves and David's hat are still in my truck.*

*Nobody wants to lose time going back, and spares are quickly found, hardly interrupting the process of backing into the water, launching the boat, and then we're standing half in the river as the sky turns to the grey of dawn while Curt parks his truck.*

*Life vests, self-inflating tubes that fit around the shoulders like an ox yoke, are secured and we awkwardly straddle hop into the boat. A propane heater warms our toes through the rubber of our boots while Curt explains the intricacies of casting. A little trolling motor, the size of a house cat, draws us up stream through the explanation. Other boats are launching in a steady rhythm, heading up like us or down, putting a polite distance between each. We test cast, my first attempt ends with the bobber and hook assembly whipping madly around, the metal hoop (later I find out this is called the "bail") has to be preset for a successful cast, otherwise the line doesn't feed out and the rest is physics. Shortly, we master the technique and begin the trip down river.*

*Near vertical embankments rise up the right side of the river, held improbably in place by half exposed root systems of the Firs and Conifers that haven't given up the fight. Those*

*that have lay in the water with weather stripped bark, bones of trees with skeletal arms reaching back up toward the sky. Moss covers the leaf bare branches of oak and alder along the left bank. It is pasture land, close cropped grass coming right up to overhang the eroding river's edge.*

*We quickly fall into a pattern of casting and dressing, striving for the ideal float of bobber and line. Curt gently adjusts our technique, directing each of us, "Ten feet toward the left, good, dress your line a bit, Thad, that's right." A steady patter of guidance that puts the hook into channels and deeper water that might be holding the prize, a fish. We slalom from bank to bank, following the opposite of the natural channels while trying for the perfect presentation, something that will irritate the fish into biting without scaring it off. The only breaks brought about by rapids or a short motor up to the top of a particularly likely stretch for another pass.*

*It is easy to forget the other boats, a curious sense of isolation despite the frequent intrusion of vehicles heard above the right bank or drifting past houses. Some are carefully maintained retirement homes, thematically imprinted with whatever the owners found important, Swiss flags or carefully manicured lawns in the midst of forest. Others with sagging roofs and green moss reclaiming in the fashion of rain soaked jungle with ferns growing out of gutters and splits in the siding.*

*Passing or being passed by another boat is accomplished more often with a nod than words, although as the morning wears on without a catch, a low key inquiry about the other's luck accompanies the nod and wave, "Anything?"*

*The other guide gives a small shake of the head, "You?"*

*"No."*

*And we slip on, still looking for what LD explained as, "Edges and ledges, that's everything you need to know about finding fish."*

*Every so often, one of the rods will arc, the line taught, but still, no twitch or jerk and Curt answers our excitement with a steady, "Snag, try and get clear." After a moment of pulling and twisting, the hook comes clear or we are told to point the tip at the offending spot and jerk quickly to snap the leader off without putting stress on the pole. The rod is exchanged and it is back to cast, dress the line, re-cast.*

*When a fish does bite, the rod jerks and twists, pulling one moment and flexing back the next. I reel in and it is instantly clear I've caught something but it's small, hardly anything at all. A poor trout making bad life choices instead of the two feet plus monster we're looking for. As it nears the boat, it pops out of the water jerking spasmodically in the air. Curt snags the line with one hand the fish with the other, pops the hook free, and it darts back into the water. Too small to warrant even a photo.*

*The difference between a hand sized trout and the real thing is startling. David's rod jumps in his hands and the tip flexes like an angry witness jabbing a forefinger at the accused. There! There! There's a clicking whir as line feeds out, pulled by the invisibly angry fish as it whips upstream before doubling back down river; toward the boat and then away, fighting to escape. David reels madly when he can and just hangs on when*

*he can't until the fish tires, allowing itself to be pulled slowly toward the boat. There's another burst of mad flight when it gets close enough to see. I imagine it seeing the huge mass of the boat as some sort of ocean predator, improbably far from the coast where fully grown steelhead should be relatively safe, there is not much that can threaten a 30 pound fish eight miles from the coast.*

*Curt talks David through the fight, nearly as calm as when we've snagged a rock, or I've tied an intricate puzzle knot half way up my line instead of casting, "Ease him up to the side, don't let it go under the boat, slowly, keep the line away from the side, good." He has a large net in one hand and the other out to control the line. When the fish is next to the side he scoops the net down to trap the fish with a little twist of the handle.*

*The fish writhes again, splashing the surface, one last effort to be free and then lays still, wrapped in netting and exhausted. Every so often it flops once or twice as it is extricated from the net and the hook removed, carefully to prevent further damage. It is a native, probably on its first return trip to spawn.*



*Fig 3. Curt with a Winter Steelhead*

*Curt hands it to David, protecting the skin with a wet cloth, for photos before easing it back into the water. He holds it steady for a few moments before releasing it, giving it a chance to catch its breath like a runner ready for the next stage. Or a prizefighter the next match.*

*We all settle back to our places, the oars are out, and the rhythm of the morning resumes. "Try about halfway to the bank there, Thad, good. David, upstream of that. Right there."*

*My fingers and wrist are cramping by lunch. Curt eats the sandwich made in the pitch dark of the morning before and we keep casting, looking for fish by feel. I've learned to distinguish between the slight twitches of the hook scraping along the bottom and the line tight solidness of a snag. Where before each arcing of the rod could have been the strike of a fish, now I recognize the solidity for a tease, coated by optimism, but still not what we've come for.*

*Early afternoon brings another native, improbably bigger than the first. It takes both arms to hold it up for pictures. Giant versions of trout with rainbow dappled sides of pure muscle. I've been told that people seek out the natives, pure versions of their shadow hatchery brethren, but I'm pretty sure David's grin would be twice as big if we were taking it home. We maintain an air of relentless positivity. Crooning to the opaque water, "Here, fishy fishy," in some sort of failed summoning ritual.*

*Waterfalls and houses slide past, points of interest sprinkled into the cast, float, dress, and reel for another cast. We note the trees undercut by collapsing bank, tips and top halves submerged into the river below their fellows with roots exposed, next year's victims waiting for the floods and rains of next winter.*

*By late afternoon my hands ache. I'm repeating the cast, drift, dress, reel, and recast more out of a desire to not be judged than any expectation of fish. We've passed so many ramps, that when the takeout comes into sight around the sweeping arc of the river, I merely give it a wistful glance and watch my line in the off chance that a steelhead will become suddenly aggravated. I am all too happy to secure the hook and*

*hand the pole back to Curt. We have fished every second out of the day, not unsuccessfully, but without something to take home.*

*Getting the boat out of the water is as efficient as launching. I stand in water up to my shins, holding the boat, while Curt backs the boat down the ramp, without direction or assistance, and then hand cranks it back up to the trailer. A state patrolman strolls down while we wait and it feels a little like fighting a fish. He mentions but doesn't ask to see our licenses, just stands with his boot toes in the water while we wait. By the time Curt is backing down, we're fumbling out the required papers, eager to be done with the question.*

*The trailer is backed down until it is part submerged and a line hooked into a metal tab with a hole in it for the purpose. Curt winches the line back up and the boat slides over rollers until the prow is snug against the winch. We follow the trailer up the ramp to stand around chatting while Curt bustles about, stowing poles and gathering the debris from the day. The wrappers, cut fishing line, and now empty containers are scooped up leaving the boat looking much the same as it had in the morning with the exception of a layer of mud grit that coats the floor.*

## 4. Theory and Approach

Since I am foregrounding the Anthropocene as congruent with the relationship that my informants have with their occupational space, this theory and literature review begins with a discussion of the Anthropocene concept. Where appropriate, I include the point of view of the guides who I develop more fully in the following chapter. After the Anthropocene section, the next two sections deal with major threads of the guiding profession, covering place and tourism in relation to the Anthropocene and specifically environment as a place and a destination. An understanding the occupational space, the river, involves delving more deeply into the different possibilities. When I first envisioned this project, I assumed that the guides would be as focused as I was on a specific landscape, the McKenzie River. The section on place and landscape attempts to reorient that fixation. The chapter finishes with an assessment of how tourism theory and environmental tourism literature applies to the guiding profession.

### 4.1 The Anthropocene

Globalization has produced the concept of assemblages (Ong and Collier 2008:4) to reflect the combined and complicated interactions between local process, global process, and actors at both levels enacting power and constraints. If nature and human were ever actually distinct then a useful metaphor for thinking about the relatively recent entangled state of affairs would be to conceive of natural assemblages (Ogden et al. 2013) in a similar fashion. Human activity on whatever scale combines with policy as

conceived and policy as enacted in a multitude of threads concurrently with natural processes.

Despite an ontology splitting humans and human activity apart from nature and the natural world, it is becoming increasingly clear that this separation was probably imaginary leading up to the last century and that our reach now extends to every part of the planet, affecting and being affected by nature. There are no natural processes, no natural assemblages, which are not affected by human activity and human behavior. Even where humans are not explicitly in nature in the Heideggerian sense, human activity is in the world (Seamon 1984).

In the first half of 2000, Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer sketched out their conclusion that anthropogenic activity had reached a point where it could be seen in the geologic record and that such activities were the equivalent of other natural forces that shaped and were visible in the stratigraphic record. Published in a newsletter, the rough outlines for the evidence and the subsequent suggestion that this event should mark the end of the Holocene and the beginning of a new geologic era, the Anthropocene, was both a call to action and a recognition of the consequences of human activity (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). As a framing concept, its reach far outstrips geology into issues of interest to a multiplicity of fields covering the breadth of the sciences (Latour 2014). Cook et al define it as a super concept adaptable to many uses (2015). We must be wary with such a thing, decontextualized it risks becoming Latour's "Immutable Mobile" to be deployed without contextualized meaning (Cook and Balayannis 2015). In

any form, it is entangled and complex (Gibson and Venkateswar 2015, Malm and Hornborg 2014). For our purposes, it touches on issues of ethics, stewardship, and the ontological divide between human activity and non-human activity.

That divide, framing our discourses, is at least in part responsible (Lövbrand et al. 2015) for the ways in which we talk about ourselves and nature and it perpetuates an imaginary that is both inaccurate and detrimental. As two distinct wholes, domination of nature was the norm (Buck 2015, Wapner 2014). It neither represents the way we experience our world, nor does it permit us to understand how entangled we are. Paul Wapner writes that both have always been incomprehensible in isolation, finding meaning only with the inclusion of the other (2014). The Anthropocene breaks down the barrier between the two (Lövbrand et al 2015). If there ever was a use for framing such a separation, the newly named age is an ideal time to stop. The harm perpetuated with a dominated nature and a series of intermediaries between us and nature outstrips any usefulness as a theoretical frame as Malm and Hornborg suggest (2015). Extractive, harmful, economies lose their validity when we stop thinking of them as extraction from the other and start thinking of them as consumption of ourselves and the things intimately connected to ourselves. Instead, a better model would be one of hybridity (Wapner 2014).

There are multiple ethical considerations that the Anthropocene foregrounds as ethics and consequently politics are built in (Kersten 2013, Corlett 2015). The concept explicitly identifies our responsibility and reminds us of the inequities built into the institutions

and processes leading to this point. Responsibility is meant in both senses. As a recognition of our responsibility for the current state of the planet, and not least the impending peril for systems and inhabitants of the global environment (Steffen et al 2011). And in the sense of the onus to protect, mitigate, and correct those systems and inhabitants, human and not. The evidence of our culpability in this regard is extensive. Additionally, the equity imbalance involved is similarly overwhelming (Cook and Balayannis 2015, Lövbrand et al 2015, Buck 2015, Malm and Hornborg 2014). The benefits of industrialization and consumption overwhelmingly accrue to the wealthiest nations, while the negatives - in the form of externalities, off-shoring, and export – likewise are overwhelmingly experienced by the poorest and least able to compensate for the radical changes in their future.

That we cannot continue as we have, in the face of the evidence of the uncertain future we created is evident. Climate change is merely the most talked about, left in the wayside are issues of peak oil, peak phosphorous, and threats to both human and earth systems which redouble the risks facing us. Of course, earth systems include bits of human at almost every level (Corlett 2015, Latour 2014, Kersten 2013). The struggle between the extremes - technological and engineered fixes versus dissolution of contemporary societies along with population reduction to relieve the pressure - are problematic or come with event horizons well outside of practicality. Not to speak of the difficulties inherent in applying solutions at either end in our current governance systems. The way forward lies with accepting our responsibility, with becoming

stewards of our environment (Steffen et al 2011). We have already accepted this on a state level, nature has been constructed physically for some time by states as we create the idea of wild culturally (Wapner 2014). Active and adaptive management efforts are already increasingly common (Corlett 2015) and the stewardship ideal is much closer to many mindsets than fortress conservation was.

Natural places, places that are constructed in some sense as holding qualities of the wild are processes that are in roughly three states: impacted or altered but functional, not functional, and replaced. Impacted natural processes are assumed to be largely performing as they would without humans, within a tolerance given that they are all altered in some fashion. The big systems of the natural world might be thought of in this sense. The cycle of evaporation, condensation, rain, and flow back to the sea that grade school science teaches is largely happening in this respect. Non-functional processes are those that have broken without being replaced. Likely this is a one way transformations which cannot be returned with current systems and technologies. Generally, even if replaced or assisted, original function isn't achieved. Ocean dead zones and species extinctions are examples of the second, a broken natural system, state. Replaced systems include human performed pollination, replacing bees, and fish ladders on dams. Conceived as a continuum, the further from replaced or assisted systems, the more sacredness is found. Experiencing the sacredness of nature is both a goal of the clients and a combination of the benefit of the job and what they conceive as the true purpose of their work.

“Just being on the water is the most important thing, it doesn’t matter if I’m fishing or rafting. I grew up in the water. When I had polio, when I was three years old, the therapy tanks were some of the most comforting things I recall experiencing as a child. I’ve been in the water since I was three years old. I grew up in a family that the ocean was integral to our life. My grandfather was a hunter gatherer from the Pacific Ocean, water has always been a positive aspect of my life.” – Frank

#### 4.2 Space, Place, and Landscape

Kelsey: I think for a lot of people, fishing’s an excuse to be out exploring a new place.

TW: So, is it the fish or being out there?

Kelsey: Don’t get me wrong, I like catching a lot of fish, but it is...I think you have to enjoy the act of fishing and most of that is taking in where you are. That’s my favorite part. Sharing different places and teaching them about it.

Appadurai (1998) states that anthropology can be understood as a process of going to an other place and engaging with a cultural other, as defined by that place, in a relationship that has complications of power. Place can be both a set of coordinates – relatively unambiguous and straight forward – and a construct of human intervention and action (Richardson 1984). Certainly, when we talk about culture and nature, specific place and power are often observably critically embedded and this is at the heart of ethnography that concerns environmental issues like *Flammable*, by Auero and Swistun (2009), or *Toxic town*, by Little (2014). Work of this sort involves a scale of place with understood boundaries that is specific enough that while the line might shift a city block this way or that it is concrete enough to be a discussion of local rather than existence.

Environmental activism works both like and unlike what we need. Protests, negotiation, and legal action are often hooked to a specific place where human impact is either impending, as in a timber sale in the Pacific Northwest where the sales are given names for ease of reference in discourse and the media, or ongoing. The contested Jazz Timber Sale (Becker 2014) in the Mt. Hood area is an example of this. While the place in question is quite clearly defined and can be mapped using easily accessible software via website (ArcGIS in this case), that specificity isn't particularly important to the discourse. The groups opposing the sale don't mention it in their discussion of the issue and the media locates it in the "[S]outhern end" of the forest (Becker 2014). The exact place is less important than the idea of the timber sale and the subsequent environmental impact. Impacted areas can be like the suburb in Flammable or the town in Toxic Town, but they can likewise be more like the timber sale, large areas with specific boundaries that are abstracted for their use as an idea. Individuals and groups involved in the narrative may be aware of the specifics but are equally likely to be only generally concerned with the actual site.

Laclau (1990) uses the term, "Land," and positions it as both physical thing and empty signifier. I suggest that he means that it is discursively constructed and appropriated and it occupies the same role as "place," place or land are interchangeable in this sense (Du Toit 2013).

Discussion of an Anthropocene, of the differing impacts and experience of human activity on the environment, depends heavily on a consensual understanding of place

that may not exist. When the place and its boundaries are more conceptual, it is rather more difficult to define a given place than it is to talk about the edges of it, we often know what it isn't more than we can say what it is. Places in either case are constructed, imaginaries, that take on qualities as they are narratively defined (Appadurai 1988). These definitions necessarily consist of blurred boundaries, be they nation-states, national parks, or rivers (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Depending on how microscopic it is useful to get, a qualitative distinction of meters can be argued.

Fishing from the bank is a different experience than from the middle of the river. The Proxemics are different (Hall 2003) if nothing else. The question of scale that refers to is meaningful and explicitly qualitative; it is the difference between being at the boundary and being in the boundary. The design of the boat puts the guide at, or near, the center point with generally two clients forward of the oars with their backs to the guide.

Fishing along the bank, or in a differently designed boat, presents differences – some of which are meaningful and some likely not. From a performance perspective, this design permits a division between front stage and backstage that isn't as easily established on a sled with its steering podium in the center of clients who are both fore and aft of the guide. While either client can quite easily traverse the metaphorical distance between front and back by merely turning around, they are unlikely to do so both because that would be disruptive (Goffman 1959:213) and impractical – the covering goal is to catch fish which requires careful attention to line and bobber. In both cases the embodied space (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003) is different enough that the space itself is

different in a way that the same distance on dry land might not be. If we imagine a large symbolically laden barrier between the two on dry land as well, that clarifies the distinction.

Hirsch (1995) argues that “Landscape” may be more properly the concept that we need, dividing the term into physical and constructed categories. Landscape and place are paired as well, with landscape serving as both physical reality and imaginary, while place serves as the embodied experience of landscape. Functionally, destinational place works quite well as landscape. One can speak of going skiing in the physical reality on a specific trail with well-defined start, middle, and end points that can be located in space or on a map with very little contestation – leaving aside orienteering skills. Likewise, the same activity can be referenced in broad, constructed imaginary terms by locating the destination in terms of broad areas that can only generally be fixed on a map and physically are quite vague. Hirsch argues for landscape as process rather than a specific identifiable spot that we can fix and certainly not something we can describe using a map. The problem in using landscape as a fixed point, instead of space, lies both in its origin as an abstraction of humans from nature and that it also implies a specificity of place. It still commonly serves that purpose, reflecting a separation that needs protecting (Selwyn 1995). Since the separation is largely artificial and not reflective of lived experience, landscape doesn’t serve unless we view it as a process, subject to discourse and mediation.

“Every form of culture is historically situated” (Susen and Turner 2011:196). The historical memory, the historical discourse is part of what forms Anderson’s (1996) imaginary of nationalities and it likewise contributes to the idea of landscape that we have been working toward. The imagined landscape of a tourist situates and is the place where both the tourist and the ethnographer go to relate to the other.

Tourism studies hold a concept of “tourism imaginaries” through which we can better examine inhabited spaces (Graburn and Gravari-Barbas 2011). These imaginaries, be they of castles, mountains, or rivers are discursive constructs, creating at the same time as they are remembered (Graburn and Gravari-Barbas 2011, Russell 2012). Landscapes in this understanding are the ur-imaginary, idealized images of human affected scenery, generally with humans in the image in some fashion, sometimes as slight as a trail or path, but human constructs nonetheless. Tourists visit their destinations imaginatively prior to physical presence, constructing tourist imaginaries which then are reified, discarded, and reproduced as part of the ritual (Turner 1969). In other words, when the space that is landscape becomes embodied space (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003).

“Tourist imaginaries” isn’t precisely correct, though. Treating guides as tourists confuses important distinctions in power, gaze, and voice.

It is in the combination of visiting of actual places, something Russell (2012) calls landscape engagement, physical realities that we can locate and place, and the landscape as process – a narratively mediated understanding that encompasses multiple physical places – that we approach the appropriate theoretical understanding. Each

individual river is a physical reality, bearing in mind that the whole immediately shifts into abstraction as it can't be experienced simultaneously as we might a place and so becomes a process of landscape. Multiple processes of landscape can, and are, likewise combined into an imagined landscape. As we experience a river, we are simultaneously imagining rivers, the river we are experiencing is a combination of the imagined landscape which continues into the present and the experienced landscape (Russell 2012). A sort of essentialized combination that retains the desirable qualities that they all largely share while discarding incongruent specifics that don't assist the narrative. In a boat, in the middle of a river, the guide and their clients experience this combined narrative, revisiting it later in conversation and memory and anticipating future experiences that will be added to it.

I am arguing that the river is a particular imagined landscape in which the guides conceive of themselves as privileged interlocutors with their clients. Additionally I suggest that the river serves a metaphorical role as boundary between the first two states of the Anthropocene and the third. Conceptually, a sacred space. In a sense, this all fits with a "rite of passage" as outlined by Van Gennep (1960), and if the population were clients of the guides, that would be difficult to avoid. Certainly there is a certain amount of sacredness that my interviewees consistently expressed when asked about their primary motivations. It is an obvious area for further study, but is not quite a good fit as it is hard to envision as ritual, "[E]xpression of an individual's transition from one status to another" (Kimball 1960:xvii). Given the regularity, every day for 45 or more

days in at least one account, and that it is not reflected in their accounts or my observation, it is something to look for in their clients and not particularly appropriate for the guides.

#### 4.3 Tourism

Tourism, generally, involves several qualities which are important for understanding the guide's role. Importantly the clients in the front of the boat are on holiday while the guide is at work, or what Burns (1999) calls the "leisure-service distinction." This becomes fraught terrain for some guides as they find themselves navigating the divide between client and friend with clients they may see multiple times each year for long stretches of relative isolation in a small boat. The client can be presumed to have chosen to be in that boat, at the mercy and whim of the guide, as part of a non-ordinary experience (Graeburn 1989). Anthropology tends to look at the tourists or the locals when examining tourism (Stronza 2001). This flows out of a dichotomy built early in social science research on tourism consisting of hosts and guests (Smith 1989). Clearly delineated boundaries between roles or teams and locality become porous when we attempt to apply them to specific settings as Sieber (1997) found with cultural-historical tourism in Boston when trying to distinguish between local and tourist. He suggests that is partly a function of the role that cities, place, play in a wider community.

With many destination based activities, the guides would be, in some sense, local and therefore the hosts, and the clients would generally be the guests. This would generalizably be true even in ecotourism, where the inhabitants of the near area

provide the services that make travel and experience of place appear somewhere on a continuum between possible and pleasurable. Certainly, as the narrative implies, guides are sometimes enfolded into the performance of hosting, as in the case of that early morning breakfast at the Little Chief. If that was the entirety, or even the majority of the trip, it would be enough to suggest that the guide was merely an agent of the local host acting in a professional capacity. Of course that is not the case, the river is the place, both of focus and time, and if it is local to the guide – if only fleetingly so, it is at best boundary to the local. On the river the guide is host, and the clients are guests.

“It’s cheaper in the store. You can go to the store and buy salmon for less than the license and a day in my boat.” – Lacy

Guides are neither tourist nor local, they adopt local as it suits their needs, but they are local to an environment, not a specific place. They are “marginal men” as Nunez (1989) describes it, but instead of brokering culture, they are brokering the sacred journey. They are capitalizing their previous experience, with fishing, rivers, and boats, to offer an experience beyond the normal and beyond the grocery store worth of a particular fish. The front region’s boundaries are open to debate, but the guide, the tourists host, is on stage performing, having routinized what he can and improvising – but still fronting from a selection of possibilities – what he cannot (Nunez 189:271).

Burns also notes the increased desire and frequency of tourists to value and advocate for the cultural areas their tourism may be harming. Nature based tourism and ecotourism both lead to improved rates of advocacy, in part because much of nature

based tourism features educational components and advocacy (Weaver 2001).

Specifically cultural tourism has been the target of severe critique, Kincaid (2000) goes as far as to suggest that the only way to avoid the pitfalls of colonialism and domination is to abandon the activity entirely. That is an unlikely suggestion and insufficient as a general option at any rate since it is a remedy for a small subset of a large phenomenon of which the colonial culture based tourism of Antigua is just a small slice. Tourism is “pervasive and complex,” requiring study, not general prescriptions (Chambers 1997).

Local involvement and reaction to tourism is equally varied and complex and the localities and institutions that serve the industries involved are not unaware of the potential harms and the ways in which tourism is perceived.

In the case of environment based tourism, many hunting and fishing organizations advertise their sustainability initiatives prominently and members take active participation and subsequent pride in them (nwsteelheaders.org 2016). The Northwestern Steelheaders participates in forestry collaboratives as well as sponsoring their own restoration projects and lobbying for conservation policy initiatives. Many of the guides I worked with are active members of several such organizations and are also active in the governance of them. On a sunny day in April, a relative rarity in western Oregon, I sat and talked with one of the guides, a past president of the Steelheaders, as he managed a fishing flea market, selling poles for a dollar, floats of every size and shape, and even a set of filet knives hidden under a pile of line on spools of every conceivable weight and color. The money being made, in addition to a raffle, was

destined for one of their community outreach programs helping veterans cope with reintegration while teaching them conservation principles.

Chambers suggests that tourism is generally mediated, and the trichotomy of local communities, guides, and client institutions are all active in attempts to define and shape the perceptions that are significant to them.

The opposite of ecotourism is not so much cultural tourism but specific socio-cultural site tourism. Specific socio cultural site based tourism implicitly involves designated areas where tourism happens and areas where it does not - with the attendant heavy impact upon the local resources. The consumption and waste of endless series of tourists presents an ecological footprint which ecotourism seeks to define itself in opposition to (Donohoe and Needham 2006). Weirdly, those boundary defined areas are blurring for socio-cultural tourism as consumers constantly seek out authenticity, judging the smooth performances and facades of designated sites as in-authentic, while ecotourism seeks to reinforce them in order to reduce the environmental impact of their activity. Of primary importance to the ecotourist, and consequently of the industry and institutions that support them, is at least the appearance of low or minimal impact.

Tourism studies break ecotourism into several categories. Hunting and fishing are considered separate from ecotourism. Ecotourism is defined by Weaver (2001) as tourism that has as its primary focus the environment but distinct from other forms, each of which has its own list of distinctions and activities. There are multiple models of ecotourism that range from wide eyed admiration of nature to an explicitly counter

cultural ideal of ecotourism as dialectical response to mass tourism (Jafari 1980). Where mass tourism is big box store style attractions and accommodations with colonial power trappings, this alternative tourism model would be small, artisanal, and low impact on the local place. Weaver develops this further into a vision of nature based tourism that stresses sustainability and education while still being distinct from what he terms, “extractive tourism” (1989: 21). If we follow Weaver, then, a consensus is forming around ecotourism being defined around four qualities: The target consumer must be definable as an ecotourist, a focus on the environment, a focus on learning and appreciation, and environmental and social sustainability.

All of these apply to multiple categories of nature based tourism, including sport fishing, but are defined out of ecotourism.

Even replacing consumption with extraction, it seems that this distinction obscures something about the motivations and experience of the guides and their clients. There is a temptation to consider the large fish involved as having more in common with whales or elephants than they do with trout from an experiential standpoint. Winter Steelhead are large, impressive, fish. More than two feet in length and massive, it is the experience of seeing one that seems to be particularly singular. The wild, or native, examples are released back after the pictures are taken, making the entire experience somewhat reminiscent of an encounter with charismatic megafauna more than fishing to catch fish.

Weaver's definition seems to rely on taking something physical from the environment. The general understanding seems to be that the putative fisher would not be in the wilderness if the fish were to be found elsewhere. Fishing is conceived as like hunting, where the goal is to find, and generally, to remove the target species from the environment. Of course this is often some part of the goal for the average fishing trip.

"I probably try too hard to catch people fish. Catching fish is pretty important to me. Some other guides, a guide that is more process oriented than goal oriented is probably happier. When you get somebody in the boat that you don't know, you have to figure out what they want. Some people are process." – Don

What complicates that vision, is that often the goal is explicitly not to harm the fish or remove it from the environment. Measures are taken which reduce the likelihood of catching anything in order to achieve that goal. Great care is taken when a fish is caught to prevent harm on the part of the guide and the fisher. Once netted, the fish is handled in such a way as to prevent damage to the mucus layer that protects the fish and the guide is careful to control the fish when handing it over for a picture so that the client doesn't harm the animal either. Once pictures are taken, the fish is eased into the water and assisted until it is able to swim freely. Catching fish, then, is more akin to a methodological approach to experiencing and treasuring the moment in that place, than something that separates it from eco-tourism in a significant and meaningful way.

What ecotourism and nature based tourism are is still something of an opposition to the things that cultural tourism are, except when they aren't. Cultural tourism focuses on specific places that are often designed around tourism, with a subject population that

engages in the leisure::service dualism of Burns and the imperialism::submission assertions of Nash (1989). Ecotourism should be qualitatively different in terms of cultural environmental stability and sustainability, without the scarification of cultural tourism that turns Stonehenge into a photographically manipulated imaginary or fills the beaches with left over debris and damage from millions of Bermuda shorts wearing identical strangers. Nature based and ecotourism are seeking outcomes closer to the “native world,” and as far away as possible from the “tourist world” (McKean 1989). Combining the deliberately educational aspect with the oppositional stance, ecotourism seeks to produce something that is apart from cultural tourism but as it does so, “traditional” tourism adapts and responds, evolving in competition and in response to changing attitudes and tastes that were the impetus for the growth of nature based forms originally. The distinctions that I note here that aren’t clear are so because of the evolving nature of both groups.

## 5. Interviews and Cases

The guides I interviewed and observed operated with a particular tension. In the preceding chapter I have made the case that they valorize their profession on the basis of meeting a demand from their clients for that values being connected with the natural world and experiencing places that reflect their imaginings of the wild. This chapter extends that argument while also showing the occupational demands that the guides must be responsive to if they wish to remain in business. The chapter is organized around character sketches of some of the guides, chosen to represent a cross section of the three groupings mentioned earlier.

I begin the cases with Don, a lifetime fisher, football coach, and guide. Don talked of the importance of the client's experience and focus on that as part of being successful. James expresses similar sentiments, focusing on the clients and coaching. Jim is next, he works with Cabella's combining guiding with promotion. Jim was one of two guides who were most focused on the business end of a spectrum that runs from small business entrepreneurship to almost a spiritual viewpoint on the profession. Transiting that divide is Frank. Frank is deeply connected to the water and the experience of the river, but also extremely mindful of the technical entrepreneurship of running a business. That middle area is where I found most of the guides, including Kelsey. She runs an outfitting business that has been handed down from generation to generation starting with the guides who first designed the eponymous boat and drifted the river as an occupation. Kelsey talks about connectedness, about the business as a means to a greater end that

she finds rewarding. Following Kelsey is Lacy, the only other female guide I was able to interview. Taken together, Kelsey and Lacy touch on the different ways that women are taking up the occupation. I end with two more guides. Jon represents the far end of a deeply spiritual understanding of his occupation, following the concept of a spectrum. I finish the case studies with Kevin who is also on that end. My experience with Kevin helped me understand how intricately the combination of business and connectedness is navigated by the guides.

### Don.

“You gotta remember who’s fishing” – Don

Don was easily the biggest guide I met. Well over six feet with a lean weathered look, he reminisced over fifty years of guiding. Before going to college, he worked the swamper with an older guide and by the time he had his degree, on a football scholarship, he was a regular on the McKenzie during weekends and summers. “Teaching was an avocation, guiding was a vocation,” Don spent the next thirty years guiding part time and teaching P.E. at one of the local schools as well as coaching football. That experience teaching physical skills comes out as he describes the fractional second between a fast rod and a slow one and how to teach a client to hesitate just a moment. Competition on and off the water drives him as it does other guides, and there’s a hint of self-promotion that I also recognize.

“Same guy that talked me into guiding, talked me into doing it. He watched me do it and he was encouraging. He gave me the same speech, ‘Oh your hands are

too big, you'll never be able to do it, you'll never know how to do it.' By the time I got done, he was using my flies." – Don

Goal oriented people want to catch fish, and process oriented people are out there to be on the water and become involved in the experience. Don told me the process people would be happy with two or no fish, but a goal person would have a bad day. Feeling out the client and shifting approaches to one or the other was something he felt was the mark of a successful guide.

"I want to catch the fish more than they do. One doctor turned to me one time and said, "Now who's fishing?" – Don

### James.

Like many of the guides, James met and started working for a Helfrich as his introduction to guiding. He is part of the older generation, he moves with the stiffness of a lifetime of demanding physical work showing on a man in his sixties. Starting in college, he worked first for Ken Helfrich, then for Dave Helfrich, and finally for Dean Helfrich for twenty seven years before starting his own business about ten years ago. He started first as swamper, and later as a guide building his own client list. The primary requirements for swamper are hard work and muscle, "The river was going to be low and they looking for guys to provide the muscle." The swamper generally works late into the evening as they set up camps, serve the clients, do the cleanup, and finally tear down the camp and head downriver to repeat the process the next day.

James learned by observing, copying the rowing skills of the other guides, and then doing the same for fishing. He is unusual in that he didn't have much fishing experience before going to work for Kevin Helfrich. He was expected to pay attention and learn on the job. In part, this seems to be part of a competitive urge that many of the guides articulate, but few as directly as James:

“Since my last name wasn't Helfrich, I tended to get the poorer anglers and it taught me to be a better coach because I had to compete. I wanted to compete with those guys. Not in a bad way but in a good way. It made it so I had to hone my skills.” – James

He does not extend that competitiveness to his interactions with other guides and anglers. He shares information about particular flies that are successful and feels a responsibility to being open with someone who is looking for help, giving them tips or a couple flies if he's having a good day and they are struggling.

Coaching, teaching, is the largest part of the interaction with clients during the day, “Trying to make an angler out of them, rather than just a rod holder.” His clients become friends through this process to where he feels that progression in relationship is a valuable part of the role. He does not feel any awkwardness in that combination between friends and clients.

James: Obviously you are a guide to catch fish, but you're also a guide to show people a nice experience on the river. Ultimately you are there to show your clients a nice day, an outing.

TW: Is it being on the river or is it the fish?

James: People come to catch fish. People love the scenery and stuff, but the want something tugging at the end of the line, you know?

James' understanding is similar to the other, older guides, putting more priority in the extractive nature of the profession while simultaneously recognizing that his clients are also there for the experience of the river. Even when the fish aren't at the end of the line, he stresses the importance of that experience and helping the clients experience the landscape.

Jim.

"I'm Jim, Professional River Guide, Cabela's Field Staff, Tackle review team, and Field testing team." – Jim

Jim splits his time between guiding for Steelhead and Salmon and his job with Cabelas. Over breakfast at The Riverstop, we talked about his experiences and what building a business while being the official face of gear reseller was like. JM has an easy laugh that encourages you to laugh with him and the engaging friendliness that many of the guides practice. He played college baseball and spent the early mornings before class fishing. Eventually, a guide friend encouraged him to start doing it for money, hiring him to run a boat on larger trips and introducing him to clients.

"There's just about every personality out there, for me, I tell people, "The two most important people on the river are sitting in the front of my boat, right there." – Jim

Jim believes his competitive advantage is the "cure" he uses for his bait. The bait he uses is made from fish eggs that have been soaked in some formula that results in what is known as a cure. Each guide has their own and some will tell you more and some less,

but borax is generally used and then whatever other ingredients the guide thinks will get to the reflexive nature of the fish. The important thing for Jim is not to rest on a given formula, or practice. Constant experimentation and adjustment is a requirement for a successful cure, and that lesson applies to a guide business as a whole.

Jim: I had one, I come back, and the guys are telling me another guide picked up the eggs I had in the boat and was smelling them and all this kind of stuff.

TW: Was that crossing a line?"

Jim: He did. He only did it once. I waited until everyone was gone and then I let him know. He tried to blow it off like it was no big deal and everybody does it. It is a big deal and not everybody does it and you won't be doing it with my boat ever again."

Each guide is introduced to the profession, or at least helped into it, by a mentor, and there does not seem to be a general commonality to learning style or transmission of knowledge. Kevin, Kelsey, and Lacy all talked about the responsibility to mentor and coach other guides as well as their customers. Others, like Jim, were more reticent. Some information, what lures people are using, equipment choices, are generally thought of as public knowledge. But some lore, the recipes Jim uses for his cures, are closely guarded secrets, not to be divulged even to peers, "I gave Curt some cures, I gave him some eggs, but I didn't tell him what's in them." How that is handled reveals a bit about the complex relationships guides have with clients and fellow guides. Clients are both peers, in Jim's way of speaking, the most important people on the river who work with him as a team, and the audience, and so not privy to backstage talk between the transgressing guide and himself. Similarly, giving his friend a chance at a little bit of a

boost is part of the teamwork, but it doesn't extend to inside knowledge that might allow his peer-competitors to surpass him. When I asked if there was a competitive edge, he replied, "Absolutely."

"I'll just tell you this, at the risk of being arrogant. We go fishing out here, and there's ten boats. You get a chance, ten boats? Make sure you get in mine." – Jim

It is all about the fish and not, for Jim, a "Foregone conclusion. Anytime I put that boat in the water, I expect to catch fish." At times he is very focused, bragging that he brought home the biggest trout when he was twelve, anecdotally comparing hundred fish days when the river has been stocked, and always walking a fine line between supporting his fellow guides and being better than them. When asked directly, he is clear though, "If you don't get fish, you're taking something home that day. Whether it's a good day, or you had fun."

"I've got about 75% repeat business. That's what you want in any business. I'm really bad because I don't call or bug people. My calendar stays as full as I want. I always tell people, 'You're ready to go, here's my card, give me a call, let's do it.' But I don't feel like you have to drum up business. I feel like your good guides don't have to." – Jim

While that is true to a certain extent, most of the guides talk in terms of having a high rate of repeat customers and more people looking for days than they have days to offer, it also does not take into account the early career activities that build to that point. Attending outdoor conventions, making contacts, and putting themselves out there that builds to the point that Jim is referring to.

Frank.

“If you don’t have a diverse business, you just have a hobby.” - Frank

Frank is a wiry and fit early sixties, his left wrist and hand are encased in a molded plastic brace – the legacy of childhood polio. He grew up fishing and made friends with a guide after moving to the area in the early eighties. Within a couple years he was making his own wooden drift boat and started a partnership guiding with his new friend and has been guiding more or less full time since. He operates as both guide and outfitter, a designation with the coast guard that involves a bond and the ability to take larger deposits, for trips that might involve several boats for group and family outings. The size of the boat limits the number of clients to two or three under most conditions. Larger groups then rely on an outfitter to gather a number of boats to accommodate the group. By diversifying and acting as an outfitter Frank can do more business with more clients. He describes the alternative, one guide in one boat, as, “[A] tough way to make a living.”

Each guide and outfitter has connections with other guides in reciprocal relationships to work as part of these larger efforts, being both independent boats in the river and co-workers for a day, responsible for the joint success to each other.

Frank combines work as a fishing guide with rafting trips in the summer, outfitting multiple boat trips, writing, and more entrepreneurial activities reaching out to clients and potential clients. His wife does the book keeping, ties flies for fly fishing, and has guided as well. He produced and manages his business web site, runs a distribution list

on fishing tips and conditions, and serves in the governance of local fishing groups as well as other outreach and marketing efforts as they come up. One side project is a web delivered graphic, "Perfect River Levels," charting ideal water levels for fishing or rafting that is featured on a local fishing show – and drives visitors to his site. Much of his time and effort appears to be an endless task of combined self-promotion and knowledge sharing. The rest is spent in the myriad activities that take up any small business owner, including the overwhelming dedication of time and energy.

"In the late eighties I became a partner in his business. I actually helped him re-organize, I have a marketing and sales background. He introduced me to sportsman's expositions and I introduced him to targeted marketing and sales by objective and the things that I had learned in the pharmaceutical industry." – Frank

Sportsman's expositions are a common strategy guides cite for building a client list although all cite a high return rate for their customers such that they stop participating in them as much once they are as busy as they would like to be. Going to them is an expense, they are keenly aware that they aren't earning money on those days that they are not on the river and travel time and expense puts them even further in the red for that day.

Leaving his job in the pharmaceutical company was an anxious time for Frank, "It was a little scary, we were admittedly real successful at that and so we walked away from kind of a big income, some big commission checks and potential." But he was also suffering for that success with persistent stomach problems and even hair loss, "Not in male pattern, no, patches, little patches is what I was losing! It was all just stress related." He

credits the transition for better health, including his hair growing back, and a better relationship with his wife who also used to guide as they built their business.

Part of that building is where Frank relies on the sales and marketing skills he had before becoming a guide, part on new skills like web site design, and part on non-fishing activities like white water rafting.

At the same time, Frank understands his position as guide in more than just a commercial sense. He recognizes that his clients are looking for a specific experience that includes catching fish but is not limited to it. He understands part of his success comes from an understanding and connection to the river that both serves him financially and permits him to reach out to his clients to communicate about more than fish and fishing. A complicated blend of imperatives combine for Frank that he is reflexive about. The clients often see the primary motivation as the fish and the guides are obligated to work hard to make happen, but it isn't the totality of their experience or what they have to offer. In part, he sees his role as assisting the customer to realize the imagined landscape that they have by delivering his version of that as part of the on the river experience. Depending on the length of the trip, much or a majority of his time can be seen as efforts to get them into the river where FA can then focus on what he calls "The show." The show is about being on the water, with fishing being relatively less important. Once in that situation, clients can need a number of different things from the guide as part of the experience of place, from bar tender to therapist, to the naturally assumed role of tour guide.

Kelsey.

“Everybody works for the Helfrich’s at one time or another.” – Jon

The Helfrich’s have been guiding on the McKenzie River since 1925 in an unbroken family tradition that stretches across five generations (Welch 2013) and includes ten members of the McKenzie River Guides Association, an organization Prince Helfrich helped start in 1931, and at least 15 licensed guides. Kelsey is proud to claim part of that history in her own life and work as one of a very few women working as drift boat guides in the Pacific Northwest.

Kelsey grew up riding in the back of her father’s boat, taking the oars for the first time in a raft at the age of 12, and was guiding her own fishing trips by 16. She now is part of the partnership that runs her families branch of the business, leading and outfitting trips of her own as well as continuing the traditions of customer service they attribute back to Prince Helfrich while innovating new practices like online booking for trips.

Like many guides, a year round business of guiding must take into account the extreme seasonality of different conditions of the rivers and fish habits and life cycles. When I interviewed Kelsey, she was in Idaho, home base in the winter for trips on the Salmon River, but in summer she expected to be on the Rogue and McKenzie, with other trips on the Snake River as well. Each river and fish requires specialized knowledge about water flow, clarity, and insect hatching, along with skills and expertise in providing a comfortable experience for up to a week away from the technologies and conveniences

of modern life – the same conveniences that her clients are seeking to distance themselves from.

“I think what probably drives me to guiding more than anything is the ability to introduce people to these amazing places. You know, these rivers are so special and so beautiful and every time they’re out there it offers a new experience and so being able to be the person that takes people on this trip to go out and see these places and catch fish and hike and explore and just the whole package and being able to also offer them really nice amenities and keep people comfortable and not put people too far out or their element at the same time. ” – Kelsey

That is where Kelsey finds the biggest value in her role. Helping people to disconnect, in a literal sense, and connect, in a metaphorical sense, with the special places that she brings the client to.

“If you create real connections with people but you’re also helping them reestablish the connection with the outside world and in the natural world and I think people really they miss out on that in their everyday lives and I think we need to be in nature and when people get out there, they’d start to realize that and it’s a pretty neat thing to be a part of.” –Kelsey

She views her part as part of a team, each person in the boat is part of that team, with her as guide to “fish without holding the rod.” She also cites a similar sort of team concept with the other guides. Competitive with herself and the fish, but part of a larger team providing an experience of the wild to their clients, each guide functioning as part of that larger team since a good experience for one boat at the expense of the others produces an experience of the place that turns out to have a more negative over all imaginary than if each boat is a little bit successful.

“One of my favorite things that happened this last year on the Rogue River is I had this little girl on my boat and she was about probably I think she was about 12 years old and she had what they called Williams syndrome. It’s kind of similar to autism and so she had a hard time focusing on things and she had a hard time focusing on things and she had a hard time sitting still and everything but fishing, she came on a trip with me on the McKenzie for a day and just fell in love with fishing, and then her family brought her back down on the Rouge this last fall and she was in my boat and she’s just – it’s like question after question after question but she’s so focused on the fishing that she wants to know everything about it and that trip we haven’t been seen a lot of bigger steelhead around. We are mostly catching those half-pounders, those one-year-old jack steelhead like some have been to the river which is a lot of fun too, but she really wanted to catch a big steelhead on a fly rod and she gotten my boat on the third morning and within about half an hour, she hooked into this huge adult steelhead. One of the biggest steelhead popped down there and she hooked it, she brought it in, she landed it all by herself and that was one of the most rewarding days I think I’ve had on the river. Just watching her go through that whole experience and being able to be a part of it.” –Kelsey

As mentioned earlier, there is a gendered component to the profession, and Kelsey feels that is both a missed opportunity and a result of a gender bias in previous generations.

Many guides spoke of being able to train people to become guides, there was no inherent qualities that would prevent someone from becoming a guide, and Kelsey agreed with this sentiment in terms of feeling a responsibility to find and coach interested women as well as a general ethic of mentorship.

### Lacy.

I met with Lacy in a busy Starbucks along the interstate, she lives part time north of Portland and part in a trailer community of fellow guides during the fishing seasons. She combined an easy conversational style with a light, energetic manner as she explained

how a lifelong tradition of fishing combined with an ethic of pushing herself forward into her career as one of the few women guiding.

She and her husband share ownership of their guiding company and maintain a distinct set of approaches and individual style.

“So we’re at the point where Kevin and I have completely separate client lists. And so we don’t like to mix clients because of the way he handles clients and the way I handle clients is very different and so when we mix clients because ‘oh that’s now how Kevin does it’ or ‘that’s not how Kevin does it’ and so it makes it easier if we don’t mix clients.” – Lacy

Lacy likes to focus on the coaching aspect and the experience that she can offer and the relationships she can build over years of fishing with the same people.

“The people that we have, Kevin does most of our booking, I’m truly the technician in our partnership I would rather change motor oil, rig rods, ease the sails. He does a really nice job of making sure the clients fit.” –Lacy

Her entry into guiding was a combination of encouragement from family and friends, and something that built within herself over time.

“So Kevin’s business was growing, we would be back at the doc together and I would fish in my boat and he would fish in his boat and his clients would get off and say you’ve got to get your license. So it really came from a lot of encouragement from his group to say go get your license, go get your license. So that’s when I finally did.” –Lacy

She describes her parents as her, “[F]irst official clients,” but also describes encouragement she has gotten from peers and acquaintances in the industry who have sought her out as a way to build the health of the industry.

Jon.

“The river cleans out all the assholes.” - Jon

Growing up off of Puget Sound, Jon learned fishing and then boating from his grandparents in the waters off shore from their house. By the time he was in his teens he was fishing the rivers in Northern Washington after school and weekends, hitching a ride up river and then walking the bank down, arriving home in the dark. He began guiding after moving into Eugene and connecting with some of the local guides. In his early fifties now, he keeps busy year round, moving from season to season, except for November which he takes off for hunting.

Jon imagines the river as a spiritual place where the connection to that spirituality is the most important aspect, something without which guiding isn't sustainable. Helping his clients, he uses the word, “guests,” feel that connection is empowering and part of transitioning them from clients into friends.

There is something of the fisher poet in Jon, or perhaps in how he would like to be framed. He spoke at length comparing guiding to a body in an extended metaphor. The front of the boat is the feet, the oars are the guide's arms, the guests in the front the fingers through which the guide examines the river.

Kevin.

*Kevin's enthusiasm and positive attitude are comforting as I practice creative knot tying as part of my inexpert casting. The day started in the dark, sliding his boat down a*

*muddy patch of grass on the side of the road, more river bank than boat ramp. We slide down the bank to join the boat and then muscle it into the water where Kevin finishes final preparations as the black blue sky turns a hard grey and then to rain.*

*By lunch time, cold rain and mist has seeped into every available gap and turned my coat into a darker shade of itself as even it becomes sodden. A tiny white gas heater keeps our toes warm through rubber boots, but it isn't enough to chase away the chill beyond a foot or two and trickles of ice run down my neck if I peer out to check the bobber.*

*There are three of us in the middle of the Alsea River and we haven't seen another boat or a fish in hours. Giant moss covered trunks stretch up to the sky while blocking sound, if not rain, so that all we hear is the plunk of the hook and a periodic chunking as the oars shift in their locks. Every so often we chase a heron downstream for a couple bends until it tires of us and flaps out of sight.*

*Lunch is hot roast beef slow cooked in the au jus with horseradish on the side. Dipping is impractical in the boat, but guides find ways to overcome the rough in roughing it for their clients. Trout fishing generally includes a fish fry for lunch, but that is just a beginning. The traditional start of the McKenzie River trout season is a Dutch oven cook-off that includes stuffed mushrooms, fish stew, enchilada casserole, and bacon wrapped brie croutons as well as fresh baked bread.*

*The food is a welcome break, our fingers are stiff and cold from casting as we search, but do not catch, for steelhead. Kevin is hopeful that our luck will change, but isn't too concerned if it doesn't. "Sometimes the fish'll cooperate and sometimes they don't. But*

*as long as a person can enjoy it and we have a good day and most of the time the fish'll cooperate in that's kind of my job to help them figure that out. "*

"It was the coolest summer job you could ever have." - Kevin

Always ready with a ready smile and an even encouraging tone, Kevin started guiding in college as a summer job after he met Kelsey. He spent summers learning the business, working for Ken Helfrich, and still fills part of his year with them on the Snake River. During his last year of college, he participated in an entrepreneurial program where he developed the business plan for starting his own guiding business.

"I was able to pencil it out how many days I need to work. These are my bills and expenses and so when I got out of school it was like, "This is what I need to do in the first year." You know, I didn't get there; I had to borrow money from my parents then. I ran out of money in the spring and summer I need to work more days but now I'm way past that." – Kevin

Most of Kevin's business is, like the other guides, repeat customers who have been going on different rivers with him for years. But part of it is also constant effort, "We're all kind of always marketing a little bit. I could probably do better, I'm always thinking about that."

Reaching out to customers and maintaining relationships with them is complicated since the guides view many clients as friends as well as clients, as Kevin said, "It's a little tough because they're friends also, if I haven't been in touch with someone for a little while, I make a note, if it's been a while, I call."



*Fig 4. Not an official boat ramp on the Alsea River*

Kevin feels a responsibility to be involved in the rivers, like Frank and Jon, he participates in river clean ups and organizations that take an environmental view toward caring and maintaining the rivers they frequent.

“I’m involved in the McKenzie River Guides Association, which works to protect the river. Not only for the guiding community, but the local community and everybody else that uses it.” – Kevin

Part of that could be seen as self-interest, the rivers are the infrastructure of their profession and maintaining it merely makes sense. Yet, every guide I spoke with talked

about participating and, like James, talked about the health of the river that brought to light a deep emotional connection and respect for the environment. Kevin participates in multiple river cleanups throughout the year and while he recognizes the marketing value in them, he values the health of the river more.

## 6. Themes

A few themes came out of the interviews, observations and time spent on the river, and later analysis. Conceptually, it became clear that the guides fall into three broad age related categories and that all three are almost entirely men. It also was clear that the guides exist in the tension, balancing the demands of operating a business, with the aspirations of their clients to both experience the imagined landscape and catch fish. Lastly, due no doubt to the questions I asked about what made a good guide, there was a clear idea that guiding required an attitude and facility with people but the mechanical skills could be taught to anyone.

Most of the guides, like Curt from section 3.1 or Frank and Jon from the case examples are part of what I come to understand as the middle cohort, guides with more than a decade of experience, generally on their second career after making the transition from middle class day jobs to full time fishing guides. Mostly in their forties and fifties and with longtime wives and partners who also generally have careers and jobs of their own in the white collar industries these men have left.

And it is an overwhelmingly male dominated profession. Interviewees could rarely name more than two female guides, one of whom – and the only member of the association – is the daughter of one of the branches of the Helfrich clan. I was able to locate a couple more working on the Columbia, but the gendered nature of the profession is stark.

While this is not atypical of many professions, the scarcity in this case was dramatic enough to be frustratingly compelling (Butler 2004). It raises questions about how that

arises and is maintained which I lightly touch on in my interview with Kelsey, but the small numbers make drawing any conclusions or making statements prohibitive.

Besides the middle cohort, there are a few younger guides who have gone more or less straight into the profession that comprise a younger cohort, and an older, retiring cohort formed from a previous generation with two past generations before that. This older set is a mix of men who took up guiding full time after retiring from their previous jobs, often having worked summers, weekends, and evenings for many years leading up to that retirement. A couple families, notably branches of the Helfrich clan, have members who have worked as part of guiding businesses going back four generations to Prince Helfrich and others who began guiding and developing the skills and equipment in the 1920's.

Although each cohort talked about the business, the entrepreneurial aspect, of the profession in distinct ways, the case studies in the previous section and my interviews show that this is a central fact of their daily lives. The older cohort were free to take up the profession in a more casual way by leveraging their previous professions retirement options or guiding during the summers and weekends while holding more stable jobs. The middle group didn't wait. They built intentional businesses by participating in varying levels of marketing and outreach. Curt, Jon, Frank, and Jim all left previous jobs by taking a risk and developing a set of skills that helped them build a customer base they could rely on. Where guides like James and Don talked about having that base, it seems to have been a result of years of guiding rather than the sort of tactics the other

two groups spoke of. Drawing out the combination of their reflexive thoughts on success, and their attitudes toward their profession and occupational space, shows how the guides find satisfaction in their role while also balancing the conflicting demands of clients, the rivers, and staying in business.

It isn't being able to catch fish or run a river in a metal bucket, a bucket that will sink to the bottom the moment it tips just a bit too far, that makes a good guide. Every guide claimed that the fishing skills and boat skills can be taught, learned by observation, or acquired through practice.

“I think an attitude, a work ethic, and a personality is the most important. You can teach a person the boating and the fishing. A guide has to be real flexible, to work with other guides. There's been some really good fishing guides, who were good with their customers, that didn't have the business sense to be successful. There's kind of both sides of it.” – Kevin

Working with clients, the flexibility to work as a sole owner-operator one day on the McKenzie and as part of a team of several boats on the Rogue or Snake rivers the next, and marketing a business are what make the difference for the guides I spoke with. Relationships with other guides, most of whom are competitors as well as co-workers from day to day, are generally friendly but cliquish, “In a good way!” as one guide put it. It is difficult not to be a little skeptical, since the majority of the guides had been fishing for their entire lives. Several did learn the boating skills after getting involved in the business, but fishing, the ability to coach, and knowing where to find fish are skills that seem to be discounted.

## 7. Conclusions

As I become enmeshed in the research, several questions developed. How do the guides position themselves as guides to sacred space while concurrently facilitating extractive tourism? How do they resolve the tensions of small business owners, entrepreneurs, and guides to an imagined landscape?

Each guide's experience is different and singular, yet each one talks about nature, the wild, and the landscape in particular connected ways that do not speak of a separation conceptually. It is, as Frank put it, "part of." Sharing that connection is at the center of their occupation. Of the guides I talked to, each of them said something similar to Frank's, "Fishing is just an aspect of the overall experience."

"If you create real connections with people but you're also helping them reestablish the connection with the outside world and in the natural world and I think people really they miss out on that in their everyday lives and I think we need to be in nature and when people get out there, they'd start to realize that and it's a pretty neat thing to be a part of." – Kelsey

Kelsey understands her role as aiding people to re-connect, to re-establish a connection that they've lost in their daily lives. She views people as connected to nature and the separation as something to be corrected.

Of course, not every guide feels that way and fishing is part of the experience. It may be that there has been a shift since the second wave of guides. Two of the oldest guides I spoke with, one had been guiding for fifty years, put catching fish ahead of any process or connectedness with the wild.

A connected, intertwined view of the relationship between society and nature more adequately reveals how guides experience their occupational lives, and it reveals a primary value that guides feel they can offer their clients. "Fishing is fishing and not catching," as Lacy puts it, but mediating that relationship, helping their clients feel part of nature that is both part of them and sacred is something that the guide can always offer. Guides repeatedly talked about teaching anyone to row a boat or catch a fish but guiding went beyond those skills into a moral range that could not be taught.

The moral component that I suggest comprises part of the tension for guides between their role in showing their clients the sacred and helping them to realize the embeddedness of the wild in their lives, as Kelsey and Frank explained, is entangled with the selves they construct as small business owners and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry. River guides occupy a relatively high status, in part due to the adoption of the drift boat as a symbol by the local communities, and in part because of a long history of the occupation. As one guide, Jim, was careful to point out early in our conversation, "The McKenzie River Guides is the oldest guide organization in the world." That may speak more to the sense of pride and prestige that the guides feel than any historical accuracy, but it is that honored status which is part of why situating them as tourist guides is not reflective of their experience.

There is a thread of narrative valorization that the guides could be involved in, but valorization is not particularly required. They are engaged in a well-compensated and respected profession. The guides are engaged in small businesses that are generally

successful, arguably a respected class by itself. Yet, they consistently talk about finding meaning and reward in the non-fishing aspects of the profession. These conversations highlight the satisfaction they find in showing and connecting clients to landscapes that are reflective of an engagement with nature. It is in the time spent in a boundary area, showing as they develop relationships that are deeper and more personal with the wild and with their clients, that they find real value.

The answer to the first question, then, is that even when the clients are there to catch fish, the guides are positioning themselves in ways that steer the experience and the conversation towards an experience of connection with nature. They see their value, not as catching fish, but in helping people to be in, and recognize the being, nature.

The second question is more difficult in that I saw a conflict in the theory that the data does not support a conclusion on. One way of approaching it would be to view the entrepreneurial activities as a means to an end. The marketing, self-promotion, and client maintenance are merely part of what is required so that the guides can practice their profession. This does not take into account the competitiveness that many of them talk about, not does it account for how Frank and Jim approach it. Jim's statement about whose boat you should be in (his) reveals more than just a desire to have enough business. This is an area that I felt a strong pull, but not consistently enough to develop as a theme that conclusions could be drawn from. The competitive nature of many of the guides is definitely an area of some interest.

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