

## **Career Summary: Dr. Mike Duncan '02 – From Hampden-Sydney College to Yellowstone National Park**

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Dr. Mike Duncan graduated from Hampden-Sydney College in 2002 and has since gone on to oversee the local fisheries near Bozeman, Montana. The past 20 years of Dr. Duncan's life have been filled with exciting and unique opportunities both inside the lab and out in nature as he now works to manage the trout fisheries in southwest Montana. Before becoming a Fisheries Biologist PhD, he started his career in the old STEM building of Gilmer Hall.

Entering the gates of Hampden-Sydney in 1998 the young Duncan was unsure of what career to pursue. Early on biology wasn't even considered and he instead considered pursuing a career in the military or law enforcement. Growing up; however, Duncan's parents fostered an early love of the outdoors and nature with a variety of camping trips and fishing expeditions. His background in the outdoors would

spurn on his curiosity to experiment with a few ecology courses at Hampden-Sydney. Over his time in college, he would go on to take biology courses with Dr. Stan Gemborys, Dr. Alex Werth, and the now retired Dr. William Shear, all of whom would inspire him to fully commit to becoming a biologist.

Graduating in 2002 with a biology degree in hand Duncan would initially take some time to recollect himself after finishing out college. He would eventually make his way into Montana working as a fishing guide outside of Yellowstone National Park. While working in the Yellowstone area he would meet his future wife who was a wrangler at the same ranch. Inspired by his wife's desire to pursue a graduate degree he began looking for a higher education program. After emailing several universities with fisheries programs he would eventually hear back from a professor at Virginia Tech. Duncan started working on several reservoirs around

Farmville including Briery Creek Lake, which is only a few minutes from Hampden-Sydney. His hard work and dedication to the research team would see him being brought on as a full researcher working under a PhD student.

He would eventually finish up his time at Virginia Tech in 2008 leaving with a master's degree in Fisheries Science. Equipped with years of field experience and his new masters he would set out to attend a PhD program at Montana State University working on the Yellowstone River. He would finish his research in 2017 leaving MSU with a PhD in Fish and Wildlife Science.

After completing his rounds in higher education, the newly titled Dr. Duncan would pick up work as a visiting professor at Washington and Lee College in Virginia. His time at the college reinforced his desire to teach at a smaller college rather than a larger one. However, he was unable to land a tenure track position at a small, liberal arts college that checked all the boxes and would return to Montana State University to continue working on a variety of ecology projects.



Through his work at Montana State University Dr. Duncan was able to obtain a job working as a fisheries biologist working on the Madison and Gallatin rivers for the Montana department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks in 2020. He now serves as the Region 3 Fisheries Manager in southwest Montana, which entails the upper Missouri and Yellowstone drainages outside of the national park.

His most recent activities include securing \$3.5 million in support from the governor of Montana to help fund research efforts. Of particular note the funding is aiding three PhD students at Montana State University to elucidate the major limiting factors of the trout populations in the Beaverhead, Big Hole, Madison, and Ruby rivers. This is a particularly pressing problem as SW Montana is one of the most popular flyfishing areas in world. Recent droughts have put a concerning amount of strain on the mainstem fisheries and threatens the local tourism industry. By funding these projects Dr. Duncan hopes that future solutions will be discovered to improve the world-renowned fisheries so that people and the environment can continue to thrive.

In addition to the major projects, he also supervises nearly 20 fisheries staff throughout southwest Montana. Dr. Duncan has also become quite adept at public speaking and relations as he manages one of the highest-profile fishing areas in Montana. Quite often he is found giving updates to both local and national news outlets on the fisheries surrounding Bozeman. Even more spectacular is his work throughout the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and local fishing industry that have led to him working closely with the state legislature to field questions and give advice on new bills that may affect Fisheries in southwest Montana.



Dr. Duncan says that the work he does now would not have been possible were it not for the education he received at Hampden-Sydney College. The time he spent with STEM professors motivated him in his scientific pursuits, especially in that of ecology. Not only did they provide motivation, but opportunities to explore ecology through summer research. Dr. Duncan firmly states that the research he conducted with Hampden-Sydney's ecology professor Dr. Stan Gemborys provided him with invaluable hands-on experience that simply couldn't be taught at larger universities as he witnessed at Montana State University. Without the skills he learned over summer research at Hampden-Sydney or the connections he made along the way he may never have obtained his dream job.

When not working as a manager with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Dr. Duncan spends most of his time outdoors with his wife and two sons. Even when filling out tedious government paperwork outdoors it is never far away with his office being situated on one of the waterways he oversees. Dr. Duncan has truly hit his stride between his work and life balance thanks to his burning passion in ecology and his time at Hampden-Sydney College.