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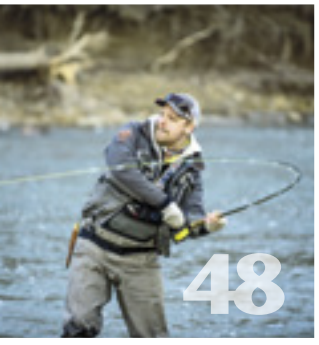
From the Creel
Fish-Handling Refresher

EXPOSURE
Western New York



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Volume 15, Number 1 • January/February 2019

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Photo by: Joe Janiak

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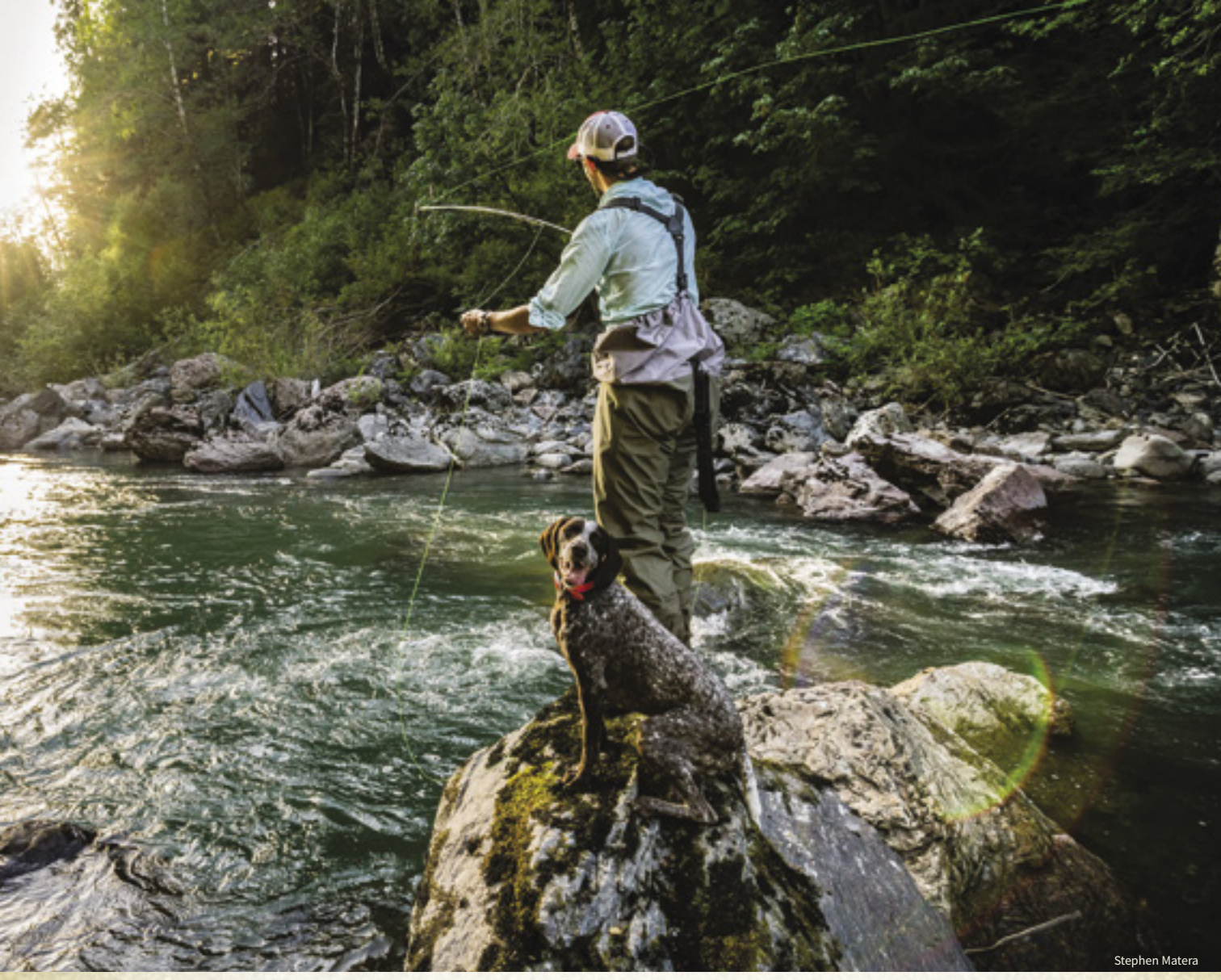
Stephen Matera

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From the Editor

Floods and Fires

This past year—2018—was fraught with natural disasters nationwide. Fires raged in the West. Floods swamped parts of the East, as well as the West. Such seems to be the pattern these days, with fires larger and more intense and floods seemingly more frequent. As I write this, the seasonal rains are a month late in arriving in California and the state is once again afire. These disasters extract a heavy human toll, of course, but they also test nature's recuperative ability, which is formidable.

Nonetheless, when flooding and fires, or prolonged drought, damage fisheries and imperil native fish, a helping hand can go a long way. Whether it's replanting denuded stream banks or restocking fragile creeks with indigenous trout species, anglers can play a big part in mitigating the damage wrought by natural disasters, and many people lend a great deal of their time to such efforts.

But even without such helping hands, I'm always amazed by nature's ability to rebound, and by the natal drive of species to persist, to persevere, even to pioneer. I'm reminded of wild chum salmon, which, when certain coastal rivers flood and send water out into dairy fields and coursing over roads, swim out of their rivers and follow the water where it may go. It's always amusing to see salmon swimming across a field or finning across a road, backs out of the water, but they are great pioneers, these wild salmon, and I often think that if humans disappeared tomorrow, not many years would pass before salmon repopulated rivers from which they've long been extirpated.

PHOTO BY JOHN SHEWEY

This past summer I was peering into a tiny desert stream, its fragile waters guarded by riparian willows but shriveled to a frighteningly low flow by persistent drought. Tiny wild redband trout held in the shaded pools as choking, noxious gray smoke permeated the basin, having drifted in from a distant but terrifying and damaging wildfire. I opted not to cast to those little natives; they seemed too vulnerable, and pursuing them didn't feel like fair sport.

That evening the sun melted into the western horizon through impenetrable, pervasive smoke, turning a deep and abiding shade of red. Or it seemed abiding. But I awoke the next morning to clear air. The winds had shifted; the firefighters were winning. The transformation was marked. So too, I thought, would these little trout rebound. Just a matter of time for Mother Nature. At least I hope so.

John Shewey
Editor in Chief

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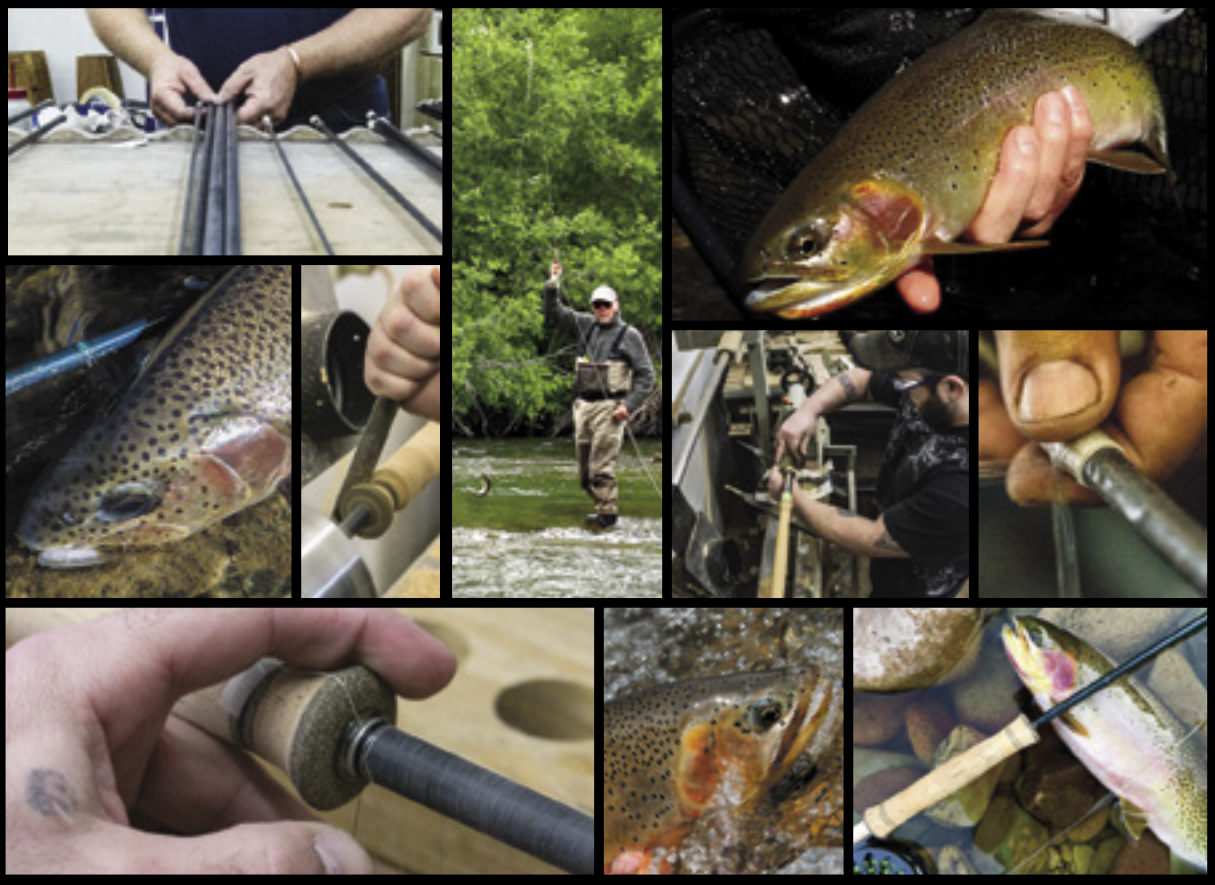

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Cast a Caption

January/February 2019 Contest

November/December 2018 Finalists

1. **"Are you putting Velveeta on that fly?"**
   Stephen Veltri, Phoenix, Arizona

2. **"I spy the fly you tie!"**
   Mark Pilip, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

3. **"I know you're using worms, Johnny!"**
   Matthew Opalka, Columbia Falls, Montana

CAST a CAPTION WINNER!

September/October 2018 Winner!

"Geez, the wives will stop at nothing to keep tabs on us!"

David Hoekzema, Glenwood, Maryland

Each issue we present a Gene Trump cartoon in need of a caption. In return, we ask that you, the readers, submit captions online from which we choose finalists. Caption submissions for this issue's contest must be received online by January 10, 2019. Above left are the finalists for the November/December 2018 contest; please go online to vote for your favorite. The winner will be announced in the March/April 2019 issue and will receive a one-year subscription or extension to the magazine of their choice. The September/October 2018 winner appears above right.

To cast your caption, go to

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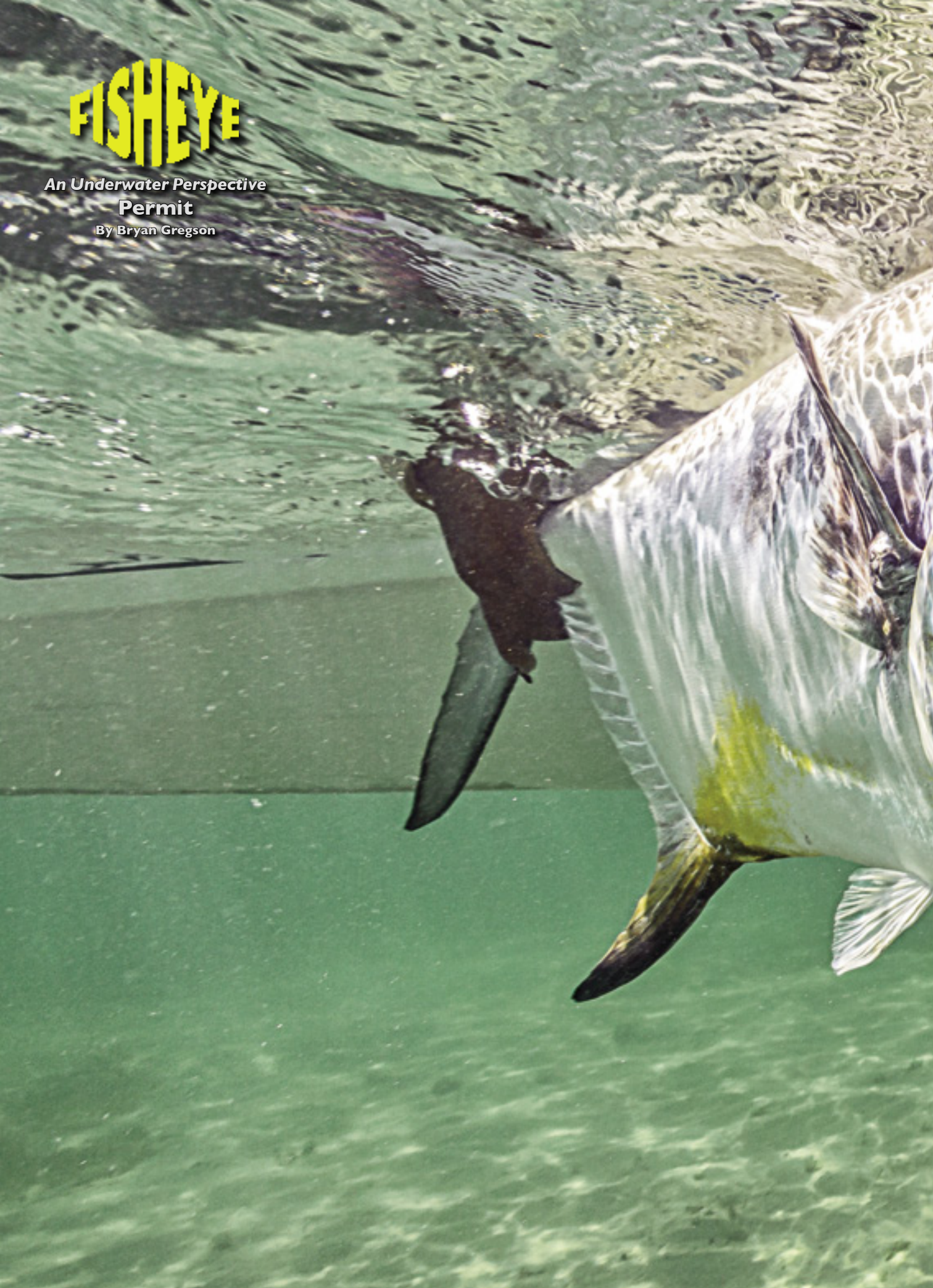

An Underwater Perspective

Permit

By Bryan Gregson

Masters at the Bench

Ryan Williams/By Don Roberts

When viewed through the lens of sober practicality and the challenges of everyday existence, fly fishing could be perceived as frivolous and the swirl of feathers and fibers surrounding fly tying as mere fluff. On the other hand, one cannot overlook the redemptive quality of such an inherently engrossing pastime. Case in point: Ryan Williams.

Williams was born and raised in Vacaville, California, where his father worked as the director of forensic mental health for Solano County. Working with the mentally ill, especially those who commit crimes, can be a particularly arduous undertaking. However, at home it was actually Williams's mother who provided the foundation of the family. He explains, "My dad is an amputee, so physical labor would often become an issue for him; consequently, my mom really held the house down. … She basically got her Ph.D. in being a stay-at-home mom and has the best work ethic of anyone I've ever known."

As will shortly become clear, neither the apple nor the work ethic fell far from the tree.

It's a good thing to have a best friend who fly fishes, but it's an even better thing to have a best friend's father who

fly fishes. Williams admits that his best friend, Matt Lopez, "wasn't too serious" about the sport; his father, Rick, however, was nothing less than ardent. Rick Lopez became Williams's mentor, and, in 2002, at age 14, Ryan Williams fell totally under the spell. Meanwhile, in addition to the relatively sedate machinations of fly fishing (if you're getting aerobic, you're probably wading too deep), Williams engaged in the breakneck sports endemic to today's youth, including wakeboarding, snowboarding, and BMX (off-road bike racing and stunt riding).

A close family friend named Mike Kaul gave young Williams his first fly-tying demonstration and thus introduced him to the allure of fur and feather. "I was always into art and drawing," Williams observes, "so I was intrigued from the get-go."

His parents—recognizing keen intensity when they saw it—wasted no time enrolling Williams in a fly-tying class at Toby Uppinghouse's fly shop in Vacaville. "But obviously the thing that allowed me to really get into fly tying," says Williams, "was my parents' willingness to support me on this new hobby and purchase all the stuff I needed, bit by bit, slowly but surely."

While he was still a 16-year-old keeping up with his high school studies, the ever-aspiring kid angler went out and nailed down a job at Sweeney's Sports in Napa. Having spent every spare moment of his teenage years fly fishing on nearby Putah Creek, Williams was uniquely qualified to offer walk-and-wade guiding to Sweeney's clients. Things went swimmingly—until they didn't. During his senior year in high school, Williams was diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma, a rare bone cancer that occurs in bones or in the soft tissues around the bones. In Williams's case, the cancer presented in one knee. Starting the day after high school graduation, he began a yearlong course of chemotherapy.

While his guiding ambitions came to a more or less screeching halt, Williams's formal education continued

PHOTO COURTESY OF RYAN WILLIAMS

California fly-fishing guide and innovative fly tier Ryan Williams spins up one of his deadly effective baitfish imitations.

with a two-year stint at Butte College, where he earned an associate degree in social and behavioral science. However, when he wasn't cracking the books, his focus turned to scoping out "the diverse fishing opportunities in the North Valley" and "putting [his] drift boat to use" on fisheries like Lake Oroville, the lower Sacramento River, and the Feather River. Perhaps propelled by academic momentum alone, Williams went on to attend Chico State University with the intention of pursuing a bachelor's in sociology. However, after another year of navigating the marble halls of academia—an experience that can seem stilted or even sterile compared to the brio of life on the water—Williams decided to drop out and become a full-time fly-fishing guide. Today, four years later, Williams contends he's "still happy with the decision."

A return bout of bone cancer in 2010 may have put mortality and questions of contentment—in other words, following one's bliss—in perspective. Only this time around, Williams's course of treatment entailed replacement of a knee and femur, followed by another year of chemotherapy. Due to the effects of such an extensive surgical procedure, Williams was forced to give up his more physically taxing sports—any board- or bike-oriented activity where crash-and-burn figures prominently in the enterprise.

Yet, rather than feeling dejected, if not bitter, Williams broaches the subject with matter-of-fact stoicism, sounding upbeat—indeed, unsinkable. "Knee and femur replacement made me give up all my previous [more strenuous and risky] physical activities," he says, "so now I'm able to focus exclusively on fly fishing … and able to pursue all the species I do now."

Besides guiding trout trips—both walk/wading and drift boat excursions—Williams has expanded his reach into shad, stripers, and largemouth and spotted bass, which he pursues year-round. Asked whether getting around and wading with an artificial knee and femur ever presents a problem, Williams wryly remarks, "My mobility and balance is just fine; in fact, I have to slow down my wading speed so others can keep up with me."

As an angling pragmatist, Williams regards his fly patterns as utilitarian, as tools, not pretty objects you hoard and put in gold-embossed frames. He ties ordnance—ammo—the kind of flies you enlist rather than enshrine. He says, "I don't like fishing too many different patterns, because it's too much of a hassle. I want to spend as much time fishing as possible, while spending as little time tying. … I try to utilize the same materials as much as I can, yet each of my patterns has a specific purpose to cover different scenarios in different seasons for stripers, largemouth, smallmouth, and spotted bass. These scenarios include top-water, indicator-style flies, shallow-swimming streamers, and deep-water streamers."

Williams makes an exception to the keep-it-simple rule when it comes to his more elaborate Masked Rainbow, Double Barrel poppers, and Pole Dancer, which, unlike store-bought flies, are weighted in back for easier casting and also incorporate a more "flashy/realistic body" and Fish-Skull Living Eyes.

Williams credits his Wakasagi pattern, based on Japanese pond smelt, with "enabling fly anglers to target bass year-round in any sort of water, from neighborhood ditches to California's largest reservoirs."

The key to effectively fishing a Wakasagi is a technique called float and fly, originally popularized by tournament bass pros for targeting large fish in cold, clear water. In essence, the technique boils down to suspending a jig-style baitfish pattern below an indicator. Determining the proper depth and retrieve is where finesse (and hiring guides like Williams) comes into the picture.

Today, Williams takes particular pride in the fact that he pioneered winter fly fishing for spotted bass in Northern California. Truly a man—and his flies—for all seasons.

Don Roberts is an Oregon-based freelance writer and frequent contributor to Northwest Fly Fishing, Southwest Fly Fishing, *and* Eastern Fly Fishing *magazines.*

GO WITH THE FLO.

Fish Food

Soft Hackles/By Matthew Reilly

Simplicity, effectiveness, and versatility—these are the characteristics that define the time-honored flies that anglers around the world stock in their fly boxes the way they keep a supply of milk, eggs, and butter in the refrigerator. Patterns like the Woolly Bugger, Adams, and Prince Nymph. The first choices and the last resorts. The confidence flies, made so by their almost supernatural ability to produce under almost any circumstances.

Soft hackles, too, fit this bill, yet are often relegated to a rarely considered corner of a rusting fly box and left to decompose like obligatorily purchased spinach greens in the back of the bottom fridge drawer. Perhaps it's their simplicity and relative lack of traditional attractiveness (after all, fly patterns must catch anglers as well as fish to remain at the vanguard of fly-angling popular culture) or their apparent obscurity that betrays them. The Woolly Bugger is perhaps the most popular streamer pattern, and the Adams is a prominent dry-fly contender. But what exactly is a soft hackle?

PHOTO BY ALAN PETRUCCI

Traditional soft-hackle flies are wet flies with hook shanks dressed sparsely with materials like thread or floss. Their name comes from a trademark collar of soft hackle fibers from partridge, grouse, and other game birds that breathe liveliness into the fly when acted upon by moving currents. Enter the Partridge and Orange and the Pheasant and Hen. The motion of the fine hackle fibers on these flies is suggestive of the struggling legs and/or wings of emergent aquatic macroinvertebrates.

Such prototypical simplicity implies both ancient development and incredible effectiveness, and, indeed, the soft-hackle wet fly is most likely the oldest style of fly pattern still in common usage. Also called "spiders" or "hackle flies," soft hackles were first written about in Dame Juliana Berners's 1496 *Treatyse of Fysshynge with an Angle*. Kebari, an iconic style of fly with a reversed soft-hackle collar, used in the ancient Japanese fishing style of tenkara, dates back to the 1500s, when it was used for food fishing by fishermen in mountain villages.

Much later, W. C. Stewart, in his 1857 book, *The Practical Angler*, described a pattern dubbed the Black Spider, introduced to him by James Baillie, a widely renowned professional angler of the day. It was, simply, a wet-fly hook with a shank wrapped with brown silk and the palmered soft-hackle fibers of a starling feather for the body. Regarding its performance, Stewart wrote, "The only objection to spiders is, that the feathers are so soft that the trout's teeth break them off, and after catching a dozen or two of [sic] trout, little is left of them but the bare dressing, rendering it necessary for the angler to change them; and if the trout are taking readily, this has to be repeated two or three times a day." Despite the deadliness of soft-hackle flies like the Black Spider, the development of dry flies stole the spotlight through the 20th century.

PHOTO BY GARY KRAMER/WWW.GARYKRAMER.NET

Widespread across its native range in Europe, the grey partridge (aka Hungarian partridge) is an introduced game bird in North America, where its feathers are prized for tying soft-hackle flies. The small body feathers are handsomely vermiculated in shades of gray, tan, and rust (above). The Soft-Hackled Fly Addict *(1981) was the second of three books Sylvester Nemes wrote about these simple wet flies. His 1975 book,* The Soft-Hackled Fly, *propelled the term "soft-hackle fly" into angling parlance and introduced these flies to a wider audience (top).*

Still, throughout this time, soft-hackle flies were used by some, particularly in the north of England, where the specific style of soft hackle popular in the region came to be known as the North Country Spider. It wasn't until

1975, when Sylvester Nemes published *The Soft-Hackled Fly*, that this style of fly was popularized among fly anglers in the United States, and it was then that the designation "soft hackle" became widely used.

As the variety of patterns cited in Nemes's book suggests, the soft-hackle style is incredibly versatile. They can be tied simply to imitate nothing in particular and everything at once, or, with bits of added details, to zero in on a specific imitation and presentation style. An adaptation of the soft-hackle platform meant to imitate a mayfly nymph, called the "flymph," as shared with the world by James E. Leisenring's and Vernon S. Hidy's 1971 *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly & Fishing the Flymph*, is detailed by a tail and a dubbed body. Likewise, caddisflies can be imitated with shorter-shank hooks and no tail. For deeper presentations, heavy wire hooks, non-lead wire wraps, and/or beads can be employed.

Given the unique utility they wear around their collar, soft hackles are most commonly fished by casting across and just slightly downstream and allowing them to swing and pulsate downstream with the current. Upon delivery, the fly will sink slightly in the water column and begin to rise as the current removes slack from the system and the swing begins, creating an effect imitative of an emerging insect. This technique is an invaluable prospecting tool, and will often outperform both dries and standard nymphs just prior to a hatch.

When you fish this way, the depth of the belly in the fly line will determine the speed of the swing relative to the current speed, and the rod tip can be used to impart mends to fine-tune the swing. It is helpful, if not imperative, to keep a 90-degree angle between your rod tip and the fly line while swinging wet flies, as the built-in "give" in this angle will cause the fish to hook themselves upon striking, and will convert more short-striking fish into hooked fish. It will also prevent immediate break-offs of light tippet when fish take the fly as it dangles directly downstream, as they often do with ferocity.

Chouinard's Improved Pheasant Tail
Fly courtesy of Umpqua

Mercer's Swing Caddis
Fly courtesy of Umpqua

Will's Pale Flymph
Fly courtesy of Fulling Mill

DW Catchall Spider
Fly courtesy of Fulling Mill

DW Green Drake
Fly courtesy of Fulling Mill

Dally's Orange Tailwater Soft Hackle
Fly courtesy of Rainy's

BWO Soft Hackle
Fly courtesy of Rainy's

Swink's Brown Core Caddis
Fly courtesy of Rainy's

Dally's Mother's Day Caddis Tailwater Soft Hackle
Fly courtesy of Rainy's

Of course, soft hackles can be fished a number of other ways, too. They can be fished singly, or as a system of two or more flies (all soft hackles, or otherwise). Still-water anglers will do well by imparting small twitches or short, slow strips to their flies. Soft hackles can wreak havoc dead-drifted or, as I've found in my own fishing and guiding, on a kind of "hybrid drift," which begins with a delivery 45 degrees up and across the stream, is followed by a high-sticked dead drift through 45 degrees downstream, and ends with a classic swing, which effectively imitates every vulnerable stage in an aquatic insect's life cycle, from tumbling along the stream bottom, to mid-column struggling or swimming, to being trapped in the film during emergence. Furthermore, incorporating a soft-hackle fly into a rig automatically makes it friendlier to novice anglers and those still practicing their dead drift.

Trout chasers hardly have a monopoly on soft hackles. Steelheaders and salmon anglers both have a use for soft hackles, and some fly anglers sight-cast to carp with the bugs. They are equally deadly on panfish and bass. As he wrote in *America's Favorite Flies*, a 2017 collaborative text by John Bryan and Rob Carter, Yvon Chouinard, the pioneering climber and founder of Patagonia, caught, in less than a year, bonefish, barred perch, snappers, trout, sea-run brook trout, Atlantic salmon, steelhead, king salmon, and sockeye salmon on a Soft Hackle Pheasant Tail, only changing the size from 20 to 4, depending on the species. "Only once or twice did I feel I could have done better with a different fly," he wrote.

There is a subtle beauty to simplicity, and soft-hackle flies are simply beautiful. Their sparse, time-honored figure implies a genius construction using everything needed to fool fish to take a hook and absolutely nothing more. Anglers, both novice and advanced, could benefit from moving them to the front row of their fly boxes.

Matthew Reilly, www.mattreillyflyfishing.com, is a Virginia-based freelance writer, photographer, and fly-fishing guide.

Fish-Handling Refresher for High-Pressure Fisheries/By Toner Mitchell, Trout Unlimited

PHOTO BY MIKE VALLA

Upon meeting Jeff Massey, owner of the Soaring Eagle Lodge on the San Juan River, you might first be struck by his calm and pleasant nature, one he's cultivated during a guiding career spanning more than 20 years. Old-school in the model of Doug Swisher, Carl Richards, and Gary LaFontaine, he's a master of technique and quick with a laugh. Massey has no sense of humor, however, when it comes to taking care of the San Juan's trout, having witnessed the gravest of fish-handling sins from anglers who should know better.

According to Marc Wethington, San Juan River fisheries biologist with the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish, the San Juan absorbs approximately 300,000 angler hours per year and a landed fish rate of one fish per hour, meaning that each fish probably gets landed several times per year (hooked and fought several times more). Wethington says age-class surveys of San Juan trout show that the river's trout rarely survive past five years. Predators (poachers included) take their toll, but the data strongly suggest that catch-and-release angling has by far the heaviest impact.

"They're just wore out," Wethington says.

The San Juan River is hardly the only popular stream where wild trout are routinely subjected to less-than-conscientious catch-and-release practices. But it certainly serves as a prime example of how important proper fish handling is to the future and health of not only the most popular fisheries, but also the little-known waters throughout the nation.

Along with the basics—don't touch gills; wet your hands; keep the fish in the water— Massey is adamant about fighting fish aggressively, keeping a roundly bent rod with either running or charging fish, and adjusting your reel drag and retrieve speed to that end. Apply side pressure in the opposite direction of where the fish is headed and use the strongest tippet you can get away with: 6X for dries, 5X or 4X for nymphs, 2X for streamers. Don't use 7X; if you're expert enough to land fish on it, you're expert enough to hook them on 6X.

Use a fish-friendly net. Landing fish by hand, especially fat fish such as those of the San Juan, and then removing tiny hooks causes a lot of fish squeezing and wrestling, leading to consumed time and injured fish. A net allows you to rest your fish in the water if hook removal is difficult. Massey believes in becoming an expert with your forceps; and hook-removal tools, such as the Ketchum Release tool, are designed to allow you to remove a hook easily with little or no fish handling. Make it even easier on yourself by checking your barbs. Barbless hooks are required on myriad trout waters, but sometimes anglers need reminding.

The use of pegged egg beads on the San Juan has concerned Massey for several years. He's seen too many anglers set their beads too far away from the hook, leading to foul hooking and needlessly long fights that end in break-offs. He's also seen anglers peg beads more than a foot above a red hook, which trout mistake for red worms or annelids. If a second fly is added, the rig has three lures, a violation of the spirit, if not the law, of regulations. The same tactics are used on other rivers, and the bottom line is that a pegged bead more than 1 or 2 inches from the hook is, simply put, a snagging rig.

Another way to reduce foul hooking is by paying better attention to your indicator. In slow current (common on the San Juan), lazy feeding is transmitted to indicators in pauses or flutters, or the indicator just plunks below the surface. Hone your focus so you can set at the first sign of a grab. In slow water, if your indicator bolts a foot or two, the odds are that a fish has eaten and spat, or body-bumped, your flies and is speeding away. Try not to set the hook when this happens.

Imagine being tethered to a truck tire, dragging it at top speed for one minute, then immediately being dunked in a river to get your picture taken. Jeff Massey asks, would you be smiling? You would definitely be dying, which is why he demands that his clients recover their fish completely before shooting pics. Let fish rest in your submerged net, and when you think it's had enough time, give it more. Set up your shot, hold the fish just barely above water or, better yet, partially submerged; support its body to prevent pain, consequent struggling, and knee-jerk squeezing of the fish. Practice efficiency and speed—shoot the pics rapidly, never keeping the fish out of water for more than two or three seconds. Rest the fish again before releasing.

PHOTO BY JOHN SHEWEY

Jeff Massey understands that we all make mistakes when handling our fish. Fights take too long, cold fingers fumble with forceps, and yes, debarbing is forgotten from time to time. Maybe today's fish was mishandled last week, as it may be again tomorrow. But while we can't always be perfect, he thinks that if each of us does that one extra thing, our fish will recover more easily and have a better chance for survival. Healthier fish fight harder, live longer, and grow bigger.

PHOTO BY JOHN SHEWEY

PHOTO BY JOHN SHEWEY

Several times a year, I see pictures of Jeff or his client holding a trophy San Juan trout, some 30-inch colossus that most of us fish a lifetime without catching.

"There's always that question," he says. "Is he going to make it? Sure, it's my living. But that's not what keeps me up at night. It's the fish."

Toner Mitchell is a freelance writer, a former guide, and the New Mexico water and habitat coordinator for Trout Unlimited. He leads TU's Rio Grande Community Initiative, which seeks to achieve conservation outcomes that stimulate economic development in New Mexico's rural communities, which depend on surrounding landscapes for household income, revenue from tourism, and food derived from fishing, hunting, and agriculture.

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Restoration of Minnesota's Camp Creek/By Jeff Erickson

Beginning in the 19th century, southeastern Minnesota lost a king's ransom of trout streams to deforestation and agricultural impacts. When watersheds like Camp Creek were settled, cleared, and plowed, a deluge of silt and pollution—along with warmer water temperatures—devastated native brook trout. Some valleys were entombed under a dozen feet of eroded soil.

This lost bounty is incrementally being resurrected through tenacious, cooperative conservation work. Camp Creek exemplifies what is achievable when diverse private, public, and nonprofit groups pull together. It might take many meetings over beer and fried chicken, but mutual distrust gradually dissolves, overtaken by commonalities and the gestalt of diverse talents. In his restoration bible, *Better Trout Habitat*, Christopher Hunter put it well: "Each stream is a whole greater than the sum of its geologic, climatic, hydrologic, and biologic parts. The design of a successful restoration project requires the efforts of a team."

Today, there are more than 600 trout streams in the Driftless Area, a unique region in the upper Midwest. Camp Creek is a pastoral gem feeding the South Branch Root River near the historic town of Preston. The Root ranks among Minnesota's largest and most important trout and smallmouth bass watersheds, bolstered by a web of fertile spring creeks.

Since most Driftless streams like Camp wind through private land, working with conservation-minded landowners is critical. But many landowners are unable to take on stream restorations alone. Among other ingredients, stream rehabilitation requires money: in Minnesota, $13 million of Outdoor Heritage Council funding has helped more than 30 trout stream projects since 2009, including Camp Creek. JP Little, Minnesota Trout Unlimited (TU) council chairman, reflected on its importance, saying, "We are honored to have the opportunity to utilize dedicated [sales tax] funding for habitat projects which not only benefit trout … anglers, but all Minnesotans who value clean water and the economic benefits of cold-water angling."

At various levels, TU has been instrumental in realizing projects like Camp Creek's restoration. National TU's Driftless Area Restoration Effort started in 2006. Since then, up to 20 stream miles have been restored per year, with more than 400 miles of public fishing access easements secured. Minnesota TU provides leadership, lobbying, and grant application writing. And like indefatigable beavers, TU chapter volunteers undertake much of the on-stream work. Federal, state, and local government is critical, including Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) expertise.

As on Camp Creek, work often focuses on narrowing channels, increasing currents to scour silt, deepen pools, and expose spawning gravel. Boulders, lunker structures, and other cover are installed, providing the security trout crave. Eroding banks are reconfigured and stabilized, anchored with wildlife-friendly native vegetation. Subsequently, trout numbers can increase ten-fold.

The Camp Creek project was completed in 2014; anglers are now reaping the benefits. The DNR manages Camp as a wild brown trout fishery, abetted by a modest number of stocked rainbows. Trout biomass reaches a respectable 180 pounds per acre, with 200 browns per mile over 12 inches long. Some of Camp's best water is lower down, where the DNR has access easements and three disabled-accessible fishing sites. Much of the stream is followed by a 12-mile-long DNR bike path running from Preston to Harmony, a spur off the popular Root River State Trail.

Rehabilitated fisheries stimulate local economies. While Preston remains an agricultural center, visitors are making cash registers ring: a TU study found anglers generate more than $1 billion in annual economic activity for Driftless communities. Improved angling has shifted Preston's self-image: "Get Hooked on Preston" is the town's marketing motto, its annual Trout Days is a popular festival, and trout art livens downtown. Preston is also home to the National Trout Center, an environmental learning center offering sage stream tips.

Restoring clean water, riparian habitats, and healthy fisheries requires money, effort, and good policies, but the dividends are substantial. TU's Little summed it up nicely: "We are thrilled to be able to directly improve fish habitat, fishing, and access for anglers, while engaging volunteers, landowners, and local communities in conservation work."

PHOTO BY JEFF ERICKSON

PHOTO BY JOHN WALDMAN

Barachois, Quebec By John Waldman

Striped bass have invaded the home of the Atlantic salmon, and the next world-class fly fishery may be for stripers in Quebec's far-flung Gaspé Peninsula. A little research before I began the 600-mile tour around the edge of this great land mass that points east from Quebec City and deep into the Gulf of Saint Lawrence steered me to the village of Barachois. And the Barachois coastline whispered sweet striper habitat; *barachois* is a French Canadian term for a lagoon behind a sandbar.

The following day, after experiencing the thrill of landing my first Atlantic salmon on a fly in the pristine York River, I drove a short distance south and checked into a motel in Percé, one of the few touristy villages in this out-of-the-way corner of Canada. Scouting Barachois at midday, I was aided by a young man who regularly makes the 450-mile drive from Quebec City to fish here. The morning had been slow, but the evening before he'd caught "too many stripers to count," with some as large as 20 pounds. He added that the fishery is spanking new, with the first *bar* ("bass" in French) seen here in 2012. The fish now show reliably sometime in June and leave in September, with fly anglers tussling daily with stripers in the clear sandy channels.

I returned in late afternoon, encountering a diverse throng that ranged from novice spin fishermen casting lake trout lures all the way to moonlighting Atlantic salmon guides. While I awaited the stripers, I enjoyed the scenery: the giant and iconic Percé Rock in the distance, an ancient rusty train bridge over a fast-moving gut, and endless flats and grassy islands on the inside of the sandbar that were reminiscent of Cape Cod.

As evening darkened the sky, a line of fly casters set up along one bank and soon two or three stripers were being fought at any given time. I joined them, missed the first take, and then on my next retrieve connected with an 8-pounder. On the other side of the inlet, far out of reach, the water erupted as a large school of striped bass blasted baitfish under diving birds, but there were so many stripers throughout the channel that blind-casting produced hookups on every few casts. Most fish ran 6 to 10 pounds, and they were warriors, having fattened on the Gulf of Saint Lawrence's rich stores of mackerel, sand eels, smelt, and sticklebacks.

PHOTO BY JOHN WALDMAN

In a world of increasing climate stress, the striped bass of Atlantic Canada may be one of the winners from warming, with the species now appearing in never-before-seen locations such as Cape Breton, New Brunswick, the Gaspé Peninsula, and even Labrador. In fact, government fishery managers are faced with the novel challenge of managing an expanding fish stock, one that rose from about 5,000 fish in the mid-1990s to nearly 1 million spawning-size stripers today.

The major source of these riverine spawners is the Miramichi, a famed salmon river, which now offers extraordinary spring striper fishing in its lower reaches. A portion of this population then migrates north and eastward throughout the giant Chaleur Bay, where, despite light fishing activity, a few striper-holding locations are now known. Barachois is the most celebrated among them. Yet, as reliable as that spot appears to be, there are hundreds of miles of coastline and estuaries that still need to be explored for these far-north stripers.

PHOTO BY JEFF ERICKSON

Big Spring Branch, WI

By Jeff Erickson

Rugged southwestern Wisconsin is riven by a dense web of exceptional trout streams, and the Blue River drainage holds some of the best. There is abundant public water, ranging from crystalline, brookie-

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filled spring creeks to larger, lower reaches sheltering surly browns that periodically forget their anger management training. The Blue's Big Spring Branch is among the finest of the more intimate waters.

Big Spring Branch wanders through pastures, forests, limestone bluffs, and contoured cropland a short drive south of Muscoda, accessed via Big Springs and Pine Tree Roads. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) land protects the upstream reaches. From a DNR parking area at the uppermost bridge, anglers can hike to the impressive headwater fountainhead, part of the Big Spring Fishery Area. *On the Fly* (a now-defunct blog that was "dedicated to everything trout in Wisconsin") said in a 2013 entry, "No creek I can think of typifies the Driftless area better than Big Spring.… At its headwaters is a fast roiling waterfall that emerges from the valley wall and feeds the stream…. The headwaters and waterfall that source Big Spring Creek look exactly like what I have envisioned that an underground river would look like."

Completing this pastoral picture, the DNR has public angling easements on a large portion of the farmland on the lower stretch below the state land. Nonangling respite is conveniently located in the middle of all this fine water: the family-owned, 16-acre Spurgeon Vineyards and Winery produces 21 different wines; tours and tastings are available (www.spurgeonvineyards.com).

The DNR classifies Big Spring Branch among their Exceptional Resource Waters, which the agency characterizes as "surface waters which provide outstanding recreational opportunities, support valuable fisheries and wildlife habitat, have good water quality, and are not significantly impacted by human activities… waters that the State of Wisconsin has determined warrant additional protection from the effects of pollution."

Part of what this designation means for anglers is prolific wild trout and a stream that usually runs low and clear, even when nearby waters might be blown out by thunderstorms. The DNR has cooperated with Trout Unlimited and other partners to improve in-stream structure and stabilize banks with native prairie vegetation. Additionally, the agency has installed information and a boot cleaner to help anglers prevent the spread of exotic pests to the creek.

Brook trout are native to the Blue watershed, but browns predominate now, with rainbows mixed in. I have taken all three species in Big Spring Branch, somewhat atypical for a Driftless area stream. While most trout are pan-size, DNR survey crews have shocked corpulent browns up to 21 inches in length. A variety of hatches, along with terrestrial insects, spell dry-fly action for anglers, and scud and cress bug patterns are very effective drifted through the waving aquatic vegetation. On overcast days, especially in spring and fall, Woolly Buggers are good bets for provoking a bruiser lurking in sometimes surprisingly deep pools.

Without a ghost-like approach, however, your main impression will be observing hordes of terrified trout bolting around like pinballs. While Big Spring is loaded with trout, it's not necessarily easy to fish; by early summer, high grass will help conceal your presence, but will also snatch wayward casts and impede your travel. This stream demands Zen-master patience and a light touch: 3- to 5-weight rods are perfect.

The upper Blue above the mouth of nearby Sixmile Branch is also wonderful trout water, but other tributaries, like Fennimore Fork (aka Castle Rock Creek) and Doc Smith Branch are enticing destinations of their own. And the Blue system feeds the Wisconsin River, hosting a rogue's gallery of muskies, northern pike, and smallmouth bass, as it rolls to its Mississippi mouth at Prairie du Chien.

A maze of scenic local byways—including County Roads G and Q—provide access to much of the Blue watershed. Pack a detailed map and/or GPS gear, or you may get twisted on these convoluted back roads. In addition to Muscoda, services are available in towns like Fennimore, Boscobel, and Dodgeville. Governor Dodge State Park and the Blackhawk Lake Recreation Area offer excellent camping facilities and hungry bass and panfish—part of a regional fly-fishing paradise surrounding Big Spring Branch.

Chattahoochee River, GA

By Nick Carter

Shoal bass weren't even a recognized species until 1999. Before then, these natives of the Apalachicola River drainage in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida were considered a subspecies of redeye bass. Recognition as a species was a big step up, and from a fly fisher's perspective it was well deserved.

PHOTO BY NICK CARTER

Shoal bass are among nine widely recognized species of black bass. There are smallmouth bass, a couple of different types of largemouth, and two species that could be grouped as spotted bass. The rest are river bass that evolved isolated in one system or another. Shoalies are the kings of river bass.

True to their name, they love shoal-broken rivers, where they hunker in eddies to ambush prey. They are aggressive and feed on top from spring through fall, which makes them a ton of fun with popping bugs. But what raises shoal bass a notch above the various other river bass is their size and strength. While a redeye tops out at 16 inches in length, shoal bass grow to 2 feet and longer. And because of the swift water they prefer, shoalies pull harder than largemouth twice their size.

PHOTO BY NICK CARTER

It's a shame this species isn't more widespread. Their native waters include the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers in Georgia, which feed the Apalachicola River in Florida. They inhabit tributaries to the same system in those two states as well as in Alabama. Shoal bass were also introduced to middle Georgia's Ocmulgee River, where they thrive.

With such a limited range and specialized habitat needs, long-term survival of the undiluted species is a concern. When extensive damming after the 1940s turned the Chattahoochee into a series of reservoirs along the Georgia–Alabama border, much shoal bass habitat was lost. There are only a couple of stretches of this 430-mile-long river where they remain. Also, introduction of nonnative bass has muddied the genetic waters.

On the upper end of the Chattahoochee, upstream of the Atlanta-area playground that is Lake Lanier, native shoal bass defend a stronghold. Georgia Wildlife Resources Division (GAWRD) biologist Jeff Durniak says he catches a lot of pure shoal bass on the upper river. There is danger of interbreeding and competition from introduced spotted bass, but the shoal bass fishing remains very good.

Farther downstream, on the northwest side of Atlanta, GAWRD has been stocking shoal bass for more than a decade into a stretch of the Chattahoochee below Morgan Falls Dam. This water is a popular delayed-harvest trout fishery in winter. In summer, it warms into a great place to chase bass. Durniak bemoans the workings of what he calls "bucket biologists" illegally introducing smallmouth bass into this stretch of river. The bass action can be outstanding, but he says there are a lot of smallmouth/shoal bass "mongrels."

Currently GAWRD is collecting genetic samples to inventory what is there and determine the extent of genetic dilution occurring. Durniak stresses the need to conserve this unique species while it is here. After all, it's the only place in the world where shoal bass exist.

Matheson Hammock Park, FL

By Jack Ballard

In common English parlance, the word "hammock" evokes images of a web of woven cords upon which humans slumber. In the vocabulary of ecosystems, however, the "hammocks" of southern Florida are nuanced features of the coastal landscape, modest humps rising above their surroundings, in some cases only a few inches. The extra bit of elevation is just enough to support large hardwood trees in a sea of underling foliage.

Matheson Hammock Park, south of downtown Miami, takes its name from the ecosystem as opposed to a popular sling in which to lounge. The park boasts a man-made coastal atoll lagoon, an extensive boat dock, and beachfront. Damaged quite severely during Hurricane Irma in 2017, facilities at the park are slowly being repaired. Although the rebuilding has closed portions of the park to the public, its impact on anglers has been modest, primarily confined to cordoning off a portion of the beach along the atoll to prevent foot traffic and wading.

PHOTO BY JACK BALLARD

Although lightly used by fly fishers, Matheson Hammock is attractive because anglers can access part of Biscayne Bay by foot or small craft and target a variety of species: snook, speckled sea trout, barracuda, and a variety of other species. Wading anglers can fish an extended flat on the north side of the park at low tide or cast toward docked boats early in the morning before visitation picks up. Sunrise and sunset are also good times (with fewer beachgoers about) to target the deeper water and the transition zone along the boat channel just beyond the atoll that swings from the marina northward toward the Miami skyline.

If you have a kayak or other small watercraft, the park is a fine launching point. The bay on the north side is ringed by large homes and encompasses an expansive flat. Docks and the boat channel toward the homes are prime locations. To the south, a long, sandy flat parallels the shoreline for more than a mile. I like to paddle here in an inflatable kayak, then anchor and work the flat on foot.

Trout like the flats north of the park. Sand holes among the grass are excellent places to target them. Snook occur near structure and the mangrove edges both north and south of the park, and they prowl the flats on incoming or outgoing tides. Barracuda sometimes hunt near docked boats at the park's marina; I've also caught them along the edge of the flat to the south.

Crevalle jacks (aka jack crevalles or jacks) inhabit the Matheson Hammock area, particularly in and around the boat channels and docks. On a recent outing to the park, my finest catch of the day was a hard-fighting jack that took a fly cast into the boat channel just out from the atoll. Mangrove snappers, blue runners, pesky puffer fish, and other species also attack flies. Rumors of itinerant permit and bonefish on the flats around Matheson Hammock persist, but actual encounters are tough to verify. Tarpon are an outside possibility. On a late-April outing I missed a fleeting shot at what appeared to be about a 40-inch tarpon on the flat south of the boat launch.

PHOTO BY JACK BALLARD

Matheson Hammock Park is located at 9610 Old Cutler Road, Miami. The park is open sunrise to sunset. Parking is $5 on weekdays and $7 on weekends (weekdays see much lighter crowds). You can buy a parking pass prior to the opening of the entrance station at 8 a.m. via an app. The Fly Shop of Miami, (305) 669-5851, www.flyshopofmiami.com, offers excellent advice and all the right flies and tackle.

PHOTO BY JEFF ERICKSON

Swift River, NH By Jeff Erickson

Rambling through the Swift River watershed in New Hampshire's White Mountains during the fall is a roller-coaster ride through a forest wonderland, a Technicolor explosion reflected in crystalline water. But the allure of this drainage is a seasonal constant: spectacular vistas; feisty brookies, browns, and rainbows in the streams and ponds; quiet backwoods trails; frothy waterfalls; and picturesque covered bridges and other historical sites.

The beguiling Swift River rises in the heart of White Mountain National Forest, draining the slopes of 3,700-foot-high Mount Huntington and Mount Kancamagus. Gathering mountain tributaries along the way, it flows east toward the Saco River alongside the Kancamagus Highway (State Route 112), a designated National Scenic Byway threading 35 miles between North Woodstock–Lincoln and Conway. Anglers can find good food and lodging in these towns or camp at several streamside Forest Service campgrounds. There are also numerous turnouts and picnic areas, making public stream access excellent.

As its name implies, the Swift is a rambunctious freestone river, punctuated by boulder-strewn pocket water. It is a flashy stream, subject to rapid changes in flows during spring runoff or following a summer thunderstorm.

The most reliable angling and hatches run from late May through early July, after which the water warms and the fish become more sluggish. During the dog days, savvy anglers pursue wild brook trout in cooler tributaries like Douglas Brook. Nearby mountain ponds are also an option for brookies.

PHOTO BY JEFF BRICKSON

As with probing Montana's quick-paced Madison or Gallatin Rivers, one challenge for nymph anglers is getting bugs quickly and efficiently to the rocky bottoms of riffles, runs, and pools, where the trout lurk between hatches. With sufficient weight, standard patterns like the Woolly Worm, Hare's Ear, Pheasant Tail, Prince, and caddisfly wets will all gain the attention of hungry trout. Regarding dries, buoyancy is a key attribute: consider bushy patterns like Wulffs, Humpies, and the Elk Hair Caddis, in addition to the reliable Adams, Light Cahill, and March Brown for mayfly hatches. In late summer and early fall, terrestrials bring fish to the surface.

An allure of the Swift River—beyond its own wonderful attributes—is a lifetime of other worthy waters within easy striking distance, including the Mad, Saco, and Pemigewasset Rivers. Tucked within the national forest are stream-bisected state parks like Franconia Notch and Crawford Notch, along with several designated wilderness areas for those who wish to combine backpacking and fly fishing.

There is plenty of diversion during fishing downtime. To the north is 6,288-foot high Mount Washington, New England's loftiest peak and home to some of the fiercest weather in North America (with recorded winds of up to 231 miles per hour). It's accessible by trail, road, and vintage steam-powered trains employing cogwheels to negotiate the world's second-steepest (37 percent) rail grade. Antique-train lovers can also select one of the routes offered by the Conway Scenic Railroad and survey prospective trout water from the comfort of a refurbished Pullman coach.

The nearby towns are worth poking around too. North Woodstock, for example, is a pleasant, historical village whose centerpiece is the Victorian Woodstock Inn, (603) 745-3951, www.woodstockinnnh.com. In addition to its own fine dining, it boasts the adjacent Woodstock Inn Station & Brewery, an old train depot where beer lovers can satisfy their craving for New Hampshire's finest brews. Nursing a pint, as my wife, Mary, and I did one evening, anglers can plot their next excursion and regale companions with the tall tales so integral to the fly-fishing life.

New Book
Fly Fishing the Southeast Coast

By Gordon Churchill
Skyhorse Publishing

From talented new author Gordon Churchill comes a glossy, fully illustrated 224-page guide to fly fishing from Pamlico Sound, North Carolina, to Saint Augustine, Florida. Churchill shares his tips, tricks, and passion for fishing and explains that you do not have to travel to the Bahamas or any other exotic island to find quality fishing in both fresh water and salt water.

Churchill details the different species available in the region and provides expert guidance on tackle choices and flies, as well as concise information on the best locations and times. In *Fly Fishing the Southeast Coast*, he writes candidly and provides detailed information that's invaluable to novice and veteran anglers alike. In each chapter, he explains where to find and fish for all the key game fish, from striped bass in the Roanoke River to mahi-mahi in the Gulf Stream 40 miles off Morehead City, North Carolina. He also covers speckled trout, Spanish mackerel, false albacore, largemouth bass, and many others. In addition, Churchill makes it clear that our rivers, lakes, oceans, and the fish they contain are under constant threat, so we must always be aware of the effect we have on the environment and remember to put the planet first.

Churchill has been an enthusiastic angler all his life, ever since, as a young boy, he would go fishing with his father in the beautiful lakes of upstate New York. He brings the family along in a vivid narrative of fly fishing in Florida and North Carolina, and expertly helps you get the most out of your fishing trip. This handy guide is a must-have for any fly-fishing aficionado seeking excellent advice on fishing along the southeast coast, and a solid introduction for anyone looking to pick up the craft.

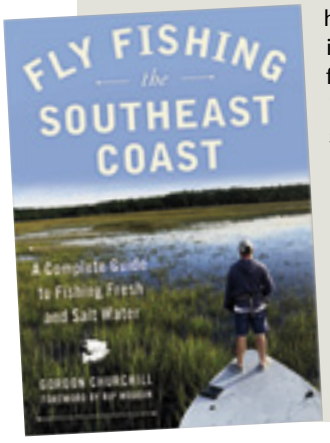

PHOTO BY LOU ZAMBELLO

Hands-on Advocacy Group Benefits Vermont's Winooski River

By Lou Zambello

On August 28, 2011, Hurricane Irene walloped Vermont with up to 11 inches of rain that caused massive flooding. Entire communities were cut off, as rampaging rivers took out roads and bridges. The Winooski River and its tributaries in west-central Vermont quickly overflowed their banks and kept rising. Houses near small waters, such as the upper reaches of the Dog River, flooded up to their second stories. Beloved and historic covered bridges that had safely perched above modest waters for more than a century were badly damaged.

In Irene's aftermath, Friends of the Winooski River (FWR), a nonprofit conservation organization that had been working to restore and protect the Winooski River and its tributaries since 1998, realized that the storm was a game changer. Climate scientists were predicting an increasing likelihood of more flooding events. Work needed to be done to make the Winooski watershed, and its associated bridges, roads, and culverts, more resilient to extreme weather events to protect people, property, and the ecosystem.

FWR is a hands-on organization helping to coordinate restoration projects, such as planting trees, stabilizing riverbanks, monitoring water quality, green stormwater management, and dam removal. Members include canoeists and kayakers, anglers, swimmers, and land- and homeowners around the river. The Vermont state government has a vested interest in FWR's work because tourism is an important part of the economy—the river empties into Lake Champlain, Vermont's crown jewel.

Hurricane Irene and subsequent flooding events have shown that the Winooski River and its tributaries and floodplains need such advocacy. After Irene, the town of Northfield demolished flooded homes along the Dog River, and FWR assisted with floodplain restoration by removing four tons of soil and creating a park that gently slopes to the river. During future high-water events, this newly restored part of the floodplain will absorb and hold water that would otherwise be pushed downstream, exacerbating the flooding.

FWR receives its funding from grants and individual donations, and leverages this by employing its members as volunteer labor to plant thousands of trees, monitor the water, and coordinate a variety of other activities. To get involved and to donate, go to www.winooskiriver.org and follow FWR on social media.

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EXPOSURE

Winter Adventures in Western New York

By Joe Janiak

Blue skies and the sound of fresh snow crunching underfoot fuel anticipation on a perfect day in Steelhead Alley.

Raffi Altounian tight to his first Great Lakes steelhead on Oak Orchard Creek

The power of steelhead never ceases to amaze anglers, and it all starts with the propeller.

On many rivers this would be a trophy brown, but lake-run browns from the Great Lakes grow far larger.

Kevin Bruce hooks a steelhead in high flows. When the water is up, solitude is easy to find and the effort often pays off.

Josh Janiak swings a fly through a gorgeous tailout on a postcard-pretty winter day.

When the air is below freezing and wind gusts exceed 40 miles per hour, guides freeze up a lot faster than you would hope.

After a long spell of arctic winds and heavy snow, western New York was encrusted in ice, but Steve Kowalski still found enough flowing water for swinging flies.

On a comparatively mild winter afternoon in western New York, little brown trout were happy to rise for midges.

The reward for numb extremities and hours of cast, swing, step—this fine buck steelhead shows just a hint of color.

Standing on the frozen flow of a winter trout stream

On days like this you needn't bother keeping beer in a cooler.

Joe Janiak is a part-time photographer from Buffalo, New York. His work has been featured in many leading fly-fishing publications and industry marketing campaigns.

New River, VA

Smallmouth in the Old Dominion

By John Hoffman

"Hit that far bank where the little creek is spilling out into the weedbed," guide Shawn Hash of Tangent Outfitters instructed within the first few strokes of our float down the beautiful New River on a balmy July afternoon. Hash, all business from the get-go, wanted to make the most of our half day together on the water.

I fumbled my first cast but regained composure and flipped the hefty streamer up into the crease on the second go-round. *Wham*! Instantly a hungry smallmouth hammered the fly and streaked toward the deeper green water of a swirling eddy. After a few hard runs into the bounding current, we netted the first of about 40 bass we caught that day.

The New River, breathtakingly scenic, stretches some 360 miles, flowing mostly northward through North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia to finally join the Gauley River to form the Kanawha River. The New River received special attention on July 30, 1998, when President Bill Clinton designated the New, along with 13 other U.S. rivers, as American Heritage Rivers under the American Heritage Rivers Protection Program. This means that because of the unique natural, cultural, scenic, environmental, historic, and economic characteristics of the river, the Environmental Protection Agency will designate support and funding for special programs and initiatives that benefit the river system.

I was in the area during a vacation and we'd planned a family float trip the first half of the morning from Eggleston down to Pembroke, approximately 6 river miles, using the shuttle service provided by Tangent Outdoors; later, I'd join Hash for an afternoon guided trip, but that morning I was anxious. This was the first time my wife, Carrie, and I would take our 7-year-old son, Henry Knox, on a canoe fishing trip. Knox loves the outdoors and is a good swimmer, but the first trip is always a little nerve-wracking.

Eggleston to Pembroke

We met at Tangent Outdoors—something of an outdoors-oriented general store in Pembroke—around 8 a.m. and piled gear into the van for the short shuttle to Eggleston. The Eggleston put-in can be accessed just south of the quaint little town by turning south onto River Road off Eggleston Road (State Route 730). After crossing over the railroad tracks, turn right and continue following River Road south approximately 0.5 mile, and the launch will be on your left.

As our caravan bumped over the narrow rolling roads, I recalled my first canoe trip with my dad on the Spring River in Arkansas. Wide-eyed Knox asked question after question about the mountain, the river, the fish, and the rapids

PHOTO BY JOHN HOFFMAN

we would encounter. Clearly, his major concern was not whether we would catch fish, but rather if he was about to get thrown from the canoe into churning white water. But the rapids are rather insignificant. Caution, courage, and curiosity are all good character traits for a young boy. For me it was just another family fishing trip, but for him it was an introduction to beautiful wild places and, I hoped, a lifelong love and respect for those places.

My main goal on the float was to keep everyone safe and try not to hook myself the way I had managed to do a year earlier, when I had yanked my fly from a tree branch and managed to bury the large streamer hook deep into my shoulder.

PHOTO BY STEVE MAEDER

The New River holds lots of smallmouth bass, and they can grow to impressive sizes. These aggressive bronzebacks will hammer subsurface patterns as well as poppers and other surface bugs (above). The New River valley gorge is breathtakingly beautiful, with jagged rock backdrops jutting up from lush green canopies. Here, guides Shawn Hash and Steve Phlegar target fish holding in a slow eddy (left).

My brother, Hunter, and I started fishing immediately, and we each soon hooked our first fish of the day. This stretch of the New River is mostly deep and slow, so we opted for clear sinking lines and leaders less than 6 feet long. Large beadhead Krystal Buggers, crawfish patterns, olive sculpin patterns, Clouser Minnows, hellgrammite patterns, and meaty articulated baitfish patterns all worked.

The Eggleston-to-Pembroke section has three modest Class II rapids, the last of which can become a more serious Class III at water levels above 3.5 feet at the Radford gauge. These rapids are easy to navigate with a little common sense and a few well-placed paddle strokes. Anglers have ample opportunity to wade-fish the shoals above and below each of the rapids. We stopped above and below each rapid and fished the numerous creases, eddies, and runs with great success, and even landed a few fish in the frothy white water right below a rapid.

This stretch contains lots of structure where smallmouth ambush prey. Inside the river bends, sheer rock palisades rise from the cool green water, forming exotic-looking pockets, indentions, and underwater caves. The outside bank is lined with thick green grass beds and dotted with old tree stumps and the occasional private boat dock. We tried to drop flies in every likely-looking spot as we drifted lazily down the ancient river corridor.

At the last set of rapids, roughly two-thirds of the way through, we stopped for a much-needed shore lunch, complete with fresh brats over an open fire. After lunch, the hookups continued. I switched to a large yellow/black popping bug that enticed several bass along the edges of floating grass mats.

Hunter enjoyed consistent success with a white Clouser fished in the deeper pools; he even hooked fish on a second rod by trolling with a chartreuse Clouser off the back of his canoe.

We rounded the last bend at 12:30 p.m., and the Pembroke bridge came into sight, the take-out at Snidow Park nearby. My son was giddy with the excitement of the float, and, best of all, he was hungry for more. Otherwise, our party was ready to get off the water—except for me. I was eager for round two.

Pembroke to Ripplemead

My family trip completed, I headed for Tangent Outdoors, where I met Hash and store co-owner Steve Phlegar. I picked out some new ammunition from their selection of creative flies. Hash has been working on the New River since 1988, and he knows his stuff; he decided to introduce me to the 2-mile float from Pembroke to the Ripplemead boat ramp. We launched at 2:30 p.m., and Hash had me positioned on the bow casting as soon as his oars hit the water; that's when I hooked that first bass, the boat ramp still in sight.

Taking advice offered by Hash and Phlegar, I then tied on a rubber-legged beadhead Crystal Bugger. Just below

the bridge, in the first sweeping left-hand curve, there was a shoal followed by some boggy water and then a small Class II rapid. Hash positioned the boat just above the shoal long enough for both Phlegar and me to hook bass in the clear, bubbling water. Here the river widens a bit and the large thick grass mats become more plentiful. This section also has several islands with shoals and channels that almost all hold a bright, colorful smallmouth or two. As Hash rowed us through the chop above the small rapid, I cast along the banks and landed another fish just before he slid the boat between two car-size submerged boulders into calmer water.

Winding through the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, the river here is a little swifter than on the section I had drifted with my family that morning. It's shallower overall as well. For the Pembroke-to-Ripplemead drift, a gauge height (at Radford) of 2 to 2.5 feet is ideal for a spring/summer float; during winter, the river generally runs between 2.5 and 4 feet.

We soon approached a series of lush, green islands, which create numerous places where anglers can get out and wade-fish. Several bass exploded on the surface, so Hash dropped the anchor as Phlegar and I secured popping bugs to our tippets. Soon Phlegar hooked a spirited 14-inch bass that leapt out of the water, tail slapping side to side like an old screen door in the wind. I didn't have to wait long before another fish erupted on my popper from under a weedbed. Halfway through the float we had already hooked about 20 fish.

Below the islands, several more shoals and channels prove just as productive. For the last stretch of water, I tied on a big articulated baitfish pattern I picked up at Tangent—the largest fly I had ever tried to cast. I started slow, giving line little by little, trying to lob the big streamer into a crease in the currents that looked promising. It felt like a baseball tied to the end of my line, but I generated enough momentum to place the fly reasonably close to the target.

On the third cast I was suddenly playing tug-of-war with my largest smallmouth bass to date. It wasn't one of the monster 24-inchers known to lurk in the New River,

PHOTO BY JOHN HOFFMAN

Guide Steve Phlegar lands another beautiful bronzeback late in the afternoon as the golden summer sun washes the surrounding countryside. As you approach the Ripplemead takeout, look for the small islands and jetties that hold nice fish.

but a fat, beautifully speckled 16-inch bronzeback is still quite a prize—and it was enough to motivate Hash to finally take a break from the oars and join in on the fishing. The three of us whipped out cast after cast, meticulously working our way around various river features that all looked fishy, and most of them produced fish. During the last hour our trio hooked nearly 20 bass.

The float consumed less than five hours, including plenty of stopping time so we could fish on foot. We boated about 40 bass, a level of productivity that Hash says is typical on various reaches of the New River.

Possibilities

With the boat ramp in sight and the setting sun dipping behind the rim of the hazy Appalachians, a graceful flock of nine Canada geese glided over us 30 yards off the water. "Now, if you are into the cast-and-blast deal," Hash said, "you should come back in the fall when we regularly have 100-fish days and shoot 20 to 30 Canada geese on the float as well."

He had my attention. He continued, "In the fall, smallmouth are actively feeding, preparing for the cold winter months, and the bite it is on. The Canada geese group up into large flocks and roost along the riverbanks before and after feeding in the nearby fields." I was all ears as he explained, "It's fairly normal to get into three or four good flocks in between landing multiple trophy smallmouth."

He had me at bass; the goose hunting would be a wonderful autumn bonus on one the best smallmouth fisheries in the Old Dominion. The numerous rock outcroppings, ledges, and dense grass mats make for ideal smallmouth habitat where the fish grow big and healthy. This river produced the current 8-pound, 1-ounce state-record smallmouth in 2003.

The New River is a diverse system, and, in various stretches, also supports excellent opportunities for other species, such as muskellunge, walleyes, spotted bass, striped bass, crappies, catfish, and bluegills. The New River Water Trail stretches for 37 miles, flowing through scenic Giles County. The water trail is a community-supported effort and highlights river activities while also connecting with hiking trails, wildlife viewing, and local lodging and dining options. The majestic Appalachians also offer a plethora of other fly-fishing opportunities in the secluded creeks of Jefferson National Forest, where wild brookies abound. Several freestone streams near Pembroke have both trout and smallmouth, and are well worth exploring.

The world-class fishing, along with the area's natural beauty and the easygoing, laid-back demeanor of the local residents, leaves you yearning for more. I can't wait to return—in the fall, of course.

John Hoffman is a Tennessee-based freelance writer and photographer.

New River NOTEBOOK

PHOTO BY JOHN HOFFMAN

When: Year-round; best from late spring–autumn, when flows at Radford are below 5,000 cfs.

Where: West-central VA.

Access: Wade-fishing options via bank access are limited. Best as a float fishery; numerous launch sites are outlined at www.dgif.virginia.gov/waterbody/new-river. *New River Water Trail*: www.newriverwatertrail.com/NRWT.

Appropriate gear: 5- to 8-wt. rods, floating and sinking lines, 1X–3X tippets.

Useful fly patterns: Popping bugs, Darkes Multi Minnow, crayfish patterns, stonefly nymphs, sculpin patterns, Clouser Minnows, Woolly Buggers, Crystal Buggers, Murray's Hellgrammite, large articulated baitfish patterns.

Necessary accessories: Lightweight packable waders, life vest or float belt, polarized sunglasses, season-appropriate clothing.

Nonresident license: $8/1 day, $21/5 days, $47/annual.

Fly shops/guides: Tangent Outdoors, (540) 626-4567, www.tangentoutfitters.com; New River Fly Fishing, (540) 250-1340, www.newriverflyfish.com.

Books/maps: *Far Appalachia: Following the New River North* by Noah Adams; *New River Guide* by Bruce Ingram; *Fishing the New River Valley* by M. W. Smith. Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com.

Sandy Creeks, NY

Upstate Trifecta

By Ryan Sparks

In winter, upstate New York's Sandy Creeks are nearly abandoned, and every snowfall brings a stillness that slows time to an interval of casts.

On a cold December day, snowflakes lazily drifted in the wind as my wading boots rhythmically crunched in the snow. The absence of boot prints let me know I was the first one there since the evening snowfall. I did have company, though. A set of deer tracks followed the creek for several hundred yards before turning into the woods downstream. I stopped and peered into the trees, noticing the deer staring back at me before it continued out of sight. I resumed my walk long enough to break a sweat in my winter layers until I came to a spot where the current flowed into a small side channel and slowed as it settled into a deep run.

As I made my first cast, I tried to remember a few months earlier, when the creek was thick with salmon and anglers lurked around every bend. As someone who values solitude as much as fish, I've always found the Sandy Creeks more appealing than the larger, better-known tributaries of Lake Ontario. Winter is my favorite time to fish these smaller creeks because most anglers have hung up their waders and retreated to their tying desks for the year.

Several casts later, as I connected with a fiery winter steelhead, I was reminded why I tolerate numb fingers and frozen rod guides. When the fish's silvery flanks slid into the net, the snow doubled in volume as if white confetti rained from the sky to celebrate that there are creatures in the world as beautiful as trout.

Exploring the Creeks

Many anglers know of the massive salmon and steelhead runs in New York's Salmon River, and I've met anglers from as far away as Virginia who consider it their home river. With all the attention focused on the Salmon, many visitors miss other great opportunities in the area, and the Sandy Creek system is one of the best. The three Sandy Creeks, located north of the Salmon River, draw runs of steelhead, chinook salmon, coho salmon, and brown trout, although the fish are not as numerous as they are in the better-known rivers. Making a detour to these creeks is easily justified when you realize the number of anglers is also considerably lower. From sight-fishing for massive chinook in the fall to technical steelhead fishing in the winter, the Sandy Creek system has something to offer any angler.

While winter is an excellent time to explore the Sandy Creeks, they are fishable nearly year-round for a variety of species. These creeks may be small, but they hold their own in terms of fish size and natural beauty. Don't be fooled by their name. These creeks flow over massive sheets of limestone and granite substrate, winding through wooded hills and open pastures. You would have to look for a while to find any sand. Close to the lake, the water changes from dark teal to a soft jade color. These creeks are beautiful in every sense of the word.

There are three creeks in total: North Sandy Creek (sometimes called Sandy Creek), South Sandy Creek, and Little Sandy Creek. Each has the aforementioned runs of salmon, steelhead, and brown trout, and they also draw a summer influx of smallmouth bass. Coho average 10

PHOTOS BY RYAN SPARKS

Winter brings the fewest anglers to the Sandy Creeks, but offers some of the best fishing of the year for anglers who don't mind occasional snow, like that encountered during an outing to North Sandy Creek. The fish didn't mind the heavy snowfall (spread). George Rawlinson trudges through deep snow in search of Great Lakes steel on Little Sandy Creek (above). The author holds a beautiful Great Lakes steelhead while snowflakes blanket the creek (top right).

pounds; chinook reach 35 pounds. Most anglers ignore the summer smallmouth, but this oversight is a mistake. They are loads of fun and hard fighters, and will take streamers, large dead-drifted nymphs, and even top-water flies.

Fish numbers largely depend on water levels, as these smaller creeks are plagued by low water. Reduced flows can be a good thing when larger rivers are blown out and running high, because the creeks give anglers other options. However, when flows are good the creeks can experience large runs of fish coming out of Lake Ontario. You can hit a run of fresh fish just after a large rainfall. The increased flows encourage fish to enter the creek, and these fish, fresh out of Lake Ontario, are a handful when hooked. If you have access to a boat, try blind-casting for salmon and steelhead near the mouths of the creeks.

PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

Little Sandy Creek might be small, but it holds large fish. This aggressive steelhead chased down a crayfish-imitating streamer.

Most steelhead and brown trout enter the creeks from about the first of October to the end of December and stick around until rising water temperature or low water levels make them uncomfortable, usually around April. The first eager male salmon appear in mid-August. Weather plays a significant role in determining when the bulk of the salmon run into the creeks. Cold fronts, high offshore winds, and rainfall all entice salmon to make their runs. Typically, Labor Day weekend marks the start of salmon season. By the end of October, the salmon have spawned and died.

South Sandy Creek is reputed to offer the best fishing of the three, but that means it attracts more anglers, especially during the salmon run. South Sandy receives healthy runs of fish and access is plentiful thanks to public fishing easements along most of the creek. The state annually stocks it with around 100,000 chinook salmon and 30,000 steelhead, but numbers vary from year to year.

I particularly enjoy fishing South Sandy's braided sections for spring and winter steelhead. Most of the fishing is downstream of Ellisburg, and the majority of anglers access the creek along South Landing Road or the bridge in Ellisburg. The middle section between these access points winds through wooded hills and absorbs the least

amount of angling pressure. It is worth the hike. Nash Road, which parallels the creek to the south, also has a fishing access site. There is a 1-mile section of fishable water upstream from Ellisburg that sees far less pressure than downstream, but fish cannot pass Monitor Falls upstream. This short upper section has lots of riffles and runs, and can hold large numbers of fish.

North Sandy Creek is my favorite of the three creeks. It is not stocked, but draws substantial runs of salmon and steelhead that stray from other waters. There is a very short section of fishable water below State Route 3, although it is quite slow and marginal water for salmonids. The best fishing is between the Route 3 fishing access and the village of Woodville. There are many ledges, sharp drop-offs, and deep runs that hold fish. Above Woodville, North Sandy Creek becomes harder to fish and sees fewer anglers. I have had luck fishing for steelhead directly below the slate slide, about half a mile above the Woodville bridge, using small egg and worm patterns. This section continues all the way to the village of Belleville, just over 3 miles upstream.

In total, North Sandy has about 5 miles of fishable water, although, being a braided creek, it actually offers more than that, and it's easy to spend an entire day on the creek. There are dozens of holding areas that spread out both fish and anglers, making it an enjoyable area to explore. In winter, North Sandy Creek is infamous for its colossal ice jams that have at times risen above and closed SR 3. However, before the ice forms, North Sandy is an excellent winter steelhead fishery that draws surprisingly few anglers. When the salmon are running, don't be surprised to see the fishing access site full of vehicles from both New York and out of state, with overflow parking spilling onto the highway. North Sandy has excellent salmon runs and a reputation for large fish.

Little Sandy Creek is farther south, closer to the Salmon River. For anglers who want to split their time between the Salmon and a smaller creek, it is an excellent choice, being just a few miles to the north. While the creek is not stocked with steelhead or salmon, it does get runs of both species if water levels are high enough. In fact, Little Sandy Creek is one of the few Lake Ontario tributaries that supports a run of wild steelhead. The juxtaposition between the fast-flowing Salmon River and Little Sandy Creek gives anglers the chance to experience both a large eastern river and an intimate creek. In some places, Little Sandy is barely wide enough for a cast. Access to Little Sandy Creek is most prominent along County Road 15, south of the creek, but there is additional access off Interstate 81, US Highway 11, and SR 3. There is also a small fishing access easement in the town of Sandy Creek on Ellisburg Street at the bridge. Little Sandy Creek is indeed little, but the fish it harbors can be quite large.

Many anglers will be familiar with the nearby town of Pulaski. Not only is it adjacent to the most famous salmon and steelhead river in the Northeast, but, with numerous tackle shops, motels, restaurants, bars, and other amenities, it makes a perfect home base for any fishing trip to the area. A 10-minute drive reaches Little Sandy Creek, and it's only 20 minutes to both North and South Sandy Creeks. Their nearness to one another makes it possible to fish all three creeks in a single day.

G.S.E.

Hook:	Daiichi 1120, size 8
Thread:	Pink Veevus or similar, size 10/0
Underbody:	8 turns of 0.035-in.-diameter lead wire coated in Zap-A-Gap
Rib:	Fluorescent pink BR Ultrawire
Flashback:	Pink Saltwater Flashabou
Body:	Hot pink and hot orange UV Ice Dub

Comet

Hook:	TMC 200R, size 4
Thread:	Chartreuse Danville, 201-denier flat waxed nylon
Eyes:	4 mm Allen brass barbell eyes
Tail:	Barred chartreuse craft fur
Body:	Flat diamond pearl braid
Wing:	Pearl Flashabou and 2 chartreuse schlappen feathers

Local Flies and Tactics

A variety of tactics are effective on the Sandy Creeks. All species will take a streamer, especially at first light. Once the sun puts the fish down, try dead-drifting an unweighted streamer under an indicator. Both salmon and steelhead are conditioned to eat small baitfish from their time in Lake Ontario, and it's tough for them to resist such an easy meal. Try an Autumn Splendor in white or any small baitfish imitation. Although invented in the Pacific Northwest, the Comet is a favor-

PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

A chinook salmon cannonballs back into the water after a jump while John Relyea-Voss does all he can to keep it pinned (above). This South Sandy Creek steelhead fell for the author's G.S.E. pattern. It's easy to tie and catches a variety of species (below).

ite local pattern for both steelhead and salmon. The Comet imitates small alevins or newly spawned salmon and trout. Fish a Comet on the swing and tie them in a variety of bright colors, including chartreuse, pink, and red.

Swinging flies is popular on North and South Sandy Creeks. Intruder-style patterns, Spey-type flies, and Egg Sucking Leeches are excellent choices. If you find fish are following your fly but not eating, try downsizing your offering by swinging a stonefly nymph, such as a Blue Charm or a Pat's Rubber Legs. Little Sandy is too narrow to swing flies, so anglers generally use dead-drift methods.

PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

By far the most effective way to catch fish on these creeks is nymphing with an indicator, yet I rarely see anglers using this method. Maybe it's my western roots, but I haven't found anything that works better for salmon and steelhead than indicator nymphing, especially when fishing deeper runs. Anglers coming from out of state should take note that New York does not permit the use of tandem flies, so you should pick a fly in which you have confidence.

Egg patterns are especially popular for both steelhead and salmon, but the fish soon learn that enormous clown-colored ovals are dangerous. For this reason, I like to use smaller egg patterns. These flies are so small they also imitate sowbugs and scuds. My two favorites are the Ray Charles and a pattern of my own called a G.S.E., on which I have caught brown trout, steelhead, and even brook trout; I once watched a spawning chinook salmon move several feet to take the fly. I consider it a guide fly, so to speak—a pattern that is simple and easy to tie, but very effective. The weight and shape of the G.S.E. assure that it sinks quickly, while its hybrid construction gives it wide appeal. It is my go-to fly for winter steelhead and any time there are salmon in the creeks. The Ray Charles is an excellent fly for steelhead, but unless it is tied on a heavy-wire hook, it won't hold up to the stress a salmon will put on it.

Angling Pressure

Most fly anglers enjoy the solitude and quiet time in nature that fishing provides. That is precisely why I enjoy fishing the Sandy Creeks rather than busier rivers. However, the creeks can also become quite crowded, especially during the heart of the salmon run. Anyone living in the East who wants to fish for salmon in complete solitude has to pay for the privilege of fishing private water. These fish draw crowds for a reason. They are spectacular fighters in terms of both speed and raw power. Expect to encounter other fly anglers as well as center-pin and bait anglers during salmon season.

Once word gets around that the creeks hold good numbers of steelhead, you will find many locals on the streams, but out-of-state anglers are rare. When snow starts to fall and temperatures dip south, angling pressure is nearly nonexistent.

If you want to avoid crowds, arrive early in peak season. My friend and I have even slept in the truck in the parking lot to be the first ones on the creek in the morning. That may sound extreme, but when you are poor fishing bums, it kills two birds with one stone—avoiding the cost of a motel room for the night and giving you free run of the creek in the morning. Obviously, the creeks are busier on weekends, so sneaking in trips during the week is always better. And remember that a bit of hiking goes a long way toward finding some solitude. Most anglers don't fish far from well-known holes close to the parking lot. Do a bit of exploring and find the out-of-the-way fish that people are either unwilling to walk to or overlook.

A word on etiquette. Even if avoiding other anglers is your goal, when you meet someone on the water you should give them the same respect you would want to receive. Give them some space and respect their method of fishing. That should be understood, but I've witnessed interactions between anglers that made me wish I had stayed home that day. As anglers, we need to work together to preserve our fisheries. That goes beyond just fly anglers and extends to bait-fishers, center-pinners, kayakers, birders, hikers, and anyone else who enjoys the resource.

Say hello when you pass someone on the stream and pick up any litter you see. It might seem like an inconsequential gesture, but it goes a long way to building a community of people who care for our fisheries. And the three Sandy Creeks are definitely worthy of such respect.

Freelance writer and photographer Ryan Sparks, www.flywatermedley.com, fishes, hunts, cooks, and talks nonsense to his English pointer, Tippet.

Sandy Creeks NOTEBOOK

PHOTO BY H. RICHARD KUHNS

When: Year-round except during ice conditions.

Where: The Sandy Creeks flow into the east end of Lake Ontario in upstate NY between Syracuse and Watertown.

Access: Excellent access, with a variety of public access points for walk-and-wade anglers.

Headquarters: Pulaski. *Information*: Pulaski Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce, (315) 298-2213, www.pulaskichamberofcommerce.com. *Lodging*: Whitaker's Sport Store and Motel, (315) 298-6162, www.whitakers.com.

Appropriate gear: 6- to 8-wt. rods, floating and sinking lines.

Useful fly patterns: Ray Charles, G.S.E., Comet, Autumn Splendor, San Juan Worm, Evil Olive, Pheasant Tail Nymph, Blue Charm, Egg Sucking Leech, McFlyFoam Egg, Sucker Spawn, Estaz Egg, Woolly Bugger, Hickman's Fish Taco, Crystal Meth, Pat's Rubber Legs.

Necessary accessories: Polarized sunglasses, waders, cleated wading boots, sunscreen, landing net, a good attitude.

Nonresident license: $10/1 day, $28/7 days, $50/annual.

Fly shops/guides: Whitaker's Sport Store, (315) 298-6162, www.whitakers.com; Fat Nancy's Tackle Shop, (315) 298-4051, (877) 801-FISH (3474), www.fatnancystackle.com; All Seasons Sports, (315) 298-6433, www.allseasonssports.com.

Books/maps: *Flyfisher's Guide to New York* by Eric Newman; *The Orvis Pocket Guide to Fly Fishing for Steelhead and Classic Steelhead Flies* by John Shewey; *The Orvis Pocket Guide to Great Lakes Salmon and Steelhead* by Matthew Supinsk. *New York Atlas & Gazetteer* by DeLorme; New York Public Fishing Rights Maps, www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9924.html; Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com.

PHOTO BY CAPTAIN JAMIE ALLEN

Charlotte Harbor, FL

Abundance of Riches

By Rusty Chinnis

Boca Grande Pass, at the mouth of Florida's Charlotte Harbor, is famous for its world-class tarpon fishing. The area is known as the "Tarpon Capital of the World" and was responsible for enticing some of the first tourists to Florida in the late 1800s. It was tarpon, not the sun and white-sand beaches, that attracted the attention of well-heeled sportsmen before the invention of air conditioning.

While tarpon are still a big draw for anglers, the bay is equally rich in snook, redfish, trout, and every other fish that swims Florida waters, both seasonally and year-round. It's the second-largest bay in Florida and one of the richest wetlands in the state. Charlotte Harbor's estuary covers over 270 square miles and includes the Myakka, Peace, and Caloosahatchee Rivers.

Like so many Florida waters, the area is threatened by rapid development, poor land use, and the misuse of resources. Fortunately, it's been designated an Outstanding Florida Water and is part of the National Estuary Program. The title of Outstanding Florida Water is given to a body of water that has been designated worthy of special protection because of its natural attributes. The Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program originated in 1995 when former Florida Governor Lawton Chiles made a nomination to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to establish it as an area of national significance. On July 6, 1995, it was one of seven nominations to be accepted into the program. The area also features Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park, which protects large, noncontiguous swaths of wetlands, uplands, and several major tributaries. This vast and productive habitat creates an area of incredible diversity for anglers.

Captain Jamie Allen lives nearby in Englewood and has logged more hours exploring the Charlotte Harbor region than most local guides. He moved from Colorado to Florida in 2000 and has been unlocking the secrets of the area ever since. Allen fishes from a 17-foot Grand Slam flats boat he has customized. He enjoys sight-fishing whenever possible; on clear days, it's a big part of his time on the water. "One of the best ways to learn about catching fish is

watching them," he says. "Seeing how they react to our presentations helps me find a fly that will be effective."

Allen estimates he fishes over 200 miles of flats and productive shorelines. He ranges from the harbor's confluence with the Peace and Myakka Rivers south to Pine Island Sound. This area includes miles of white sand and oyster bars that line the east and west sides of the harbor, as well as a tapestry of flats, creeks, and mangrove shorelines in Turtle and Bull Bays. To the northwest, there are also the contiguous waters of Gasparilla Sound, Placid Harbor, and Lemon Bay.

The upper harbor is an excellent place to target reds and snook on low incoming tides and provides some great opportunities to sight-fish for tarpon in the warmer months. During the cooler months of the year, when the waters are south of 70 degrees F, Allen concentrates on snook and redfish. When the visibility allows, he sight-fishes for them over grass flats and by working mangrove shorelines. He also fishes specific locations, including some that are unusually hard to get to. These are areas where he has located concentrations of baby tarpon (up to 30 inches) that are reliable targets year-round. These more remote areas also provide a respite from cold winter winds.

During the fall and spring migrations, Allen leads his clients to reliable little tunny, Spanish mackerel, and tripletail action on beaches from Stump Pass to Cayo Costa. He also targets king mackerel and cobia during these transition times. Fishing for little tunny is a run-and-gun game in which you watch for birds that seek out schools of feeding fish, then close the gap to those feeding birds as quickly as possible, intercepting the feeding fish with small baitfish patterns. Allen uses the same strategy to target king and Spanish mackerel, but also works the edges of bait schools wherever he finds them on the surface.

Tripletail are located by "running" the stone crab trap float lines. When Allen spots one, it's a matter of doubling back and setting up for a cast. This can be challenging, as tripletail tend to keep their nose right next to the trap float. Getting a shrimp fly close enough to the fish without hooking the trap line or float can be challenging. A monofilament weed guard helps.

During spring, drifting over deep grass flats can be very productive for redfish, snook, and big sea trout, but Allen prefers to sight-fish for them in the harbor and Pine Island Sound. When the water warms into the mid-70s, it's tarpon time. The tarpon range from 20 to 200 pounds. They are reliable targets from as early as mid-March through the end of September. Allen says he is finding them later every year. While sight-fishing for tarpon, he often finds large cobia in the harbor and catches them on the tarpon flies. "We find them in clear water over a sandy bottom, often following rays and manatees and sometimes free-swimming on the surface," he explains.

While the transitional months of the year can be especially productive, the harbor is a dependable year-round fishery for redfish, snook, sea trout, jack crevalle, mangrove snapper, grouper, flounder, bluefish, mackerel, sheepshead, sharks, and a few other offbeat species.

PHOTO BY RUSTY CHINNIS

Captain Jamie Allen with a Charlotte Harbor tarpon caught on an annual trip with angler Dan Portanova. This productive fishery offers shots at big tarpon along with lots of opportunity for baby tarpon (fish up to about 30 inches long), (left). Captain Rick Grassett casts to a redfish working the edges of a Charlotte Harbor flat. The area is loaded with productive flats that consistently produce excellent sight-fishing.

PHOTO BY CAPTAIN JAMIE ALLEN

Seth Dempsey holds a large Charlotte Harbor trout that fell for one of Captain Jamie Allen's custom top-water Yum-Yum flies.

Floating lines suffice during the warmer months, but in the coldest months an intermediate line is useful for probing deeper, warmer water. Allen mostly fishes a variety of baitfish patterns and puts weed guards on all of his backcountry baitfish flies. These flies mimic finger mullet, killifish, and scaled sardines. They are tied on size 1/0 through 2 hooks. He loves fishing poppers for small tarpon, snook, and jack crevalle. He coaches his clients to keep their flies moving with a darting motion when targeting snook, increasing the speed as the ambush feeders track their prey. When targeting redfish, he advises the opposite strategy, getting their attention and then pausing when they give chase.

Of all the species the harbor has to offer, however, big tarpon are Allen's favorite. He favors EP-style baitfish patterns and Tarpon Toads tied on size 1/0 or 2/0 hooks in a variety of shades, from tan or yellow to black, purple, or red. He says the big fish don't require much fly action to entice a bite. The pinnacle of this fishing is feeding laid-up or floating fish. They are most easily found when the water is clear and the sun high, very challenging conditions that require anglers to get the fly close to the tarpon's head without spooking the fish. When the fly lands, wait for a response before strip-retrieving. If the fish comes toward the fly, move it away with small, short strips.

For traveling tarpon, you need to cast out in front of your target, leading it by at least 6 feet and letting it approach the fly, and then strip-retrieving the fly when the fish closes to within 2 feet. Make sure the fly is at or below the tarpon's level in the water column and moving slowly enough for you to keep it in their path as long as possible.

When fishing along a beach, Allen prefers to stay in 4 to 9 feet of water. He generally stays atop the poling platform so he can maneuver the boat to help get the best casting angles for his clients. He also studiously avoids groups of anglers, preferring undisturbed fish that "didn't just have to swim through a gauntlet of boats and anglers."

Many anglers don't realize that late summer, from mid-July through August, can yield excellent tarpon fishing, especially for inexperienced tarpon anglers. The water tends to be more turbid because of summer rains, so the fish are less spooky. By then they're through spawning, are hungry, and have fewer anglers chasing them.

Another Charlotte Harbor regular, Captain Rick Grassett, lives an hour north, in Sarasota. While he does most of his fishing in Sarasota Bay, he spends a lot of time in Charlotte Harbor from fall through early spring. He also enjoys poling the harbor and sight-fishing, and loves the area's diversity. He often fishes from Gasparilla Sound south to Pine Island Sound, spending much of his time near Boca Grande in an area that includes Gasparilla Sound, Turtle Bay, Bull Bay, Catfish Creek, Whidden's Bayou, and the backcountry area that connects them all.

Weather permitting, Grassett favors the sandbars that front the backcountry from Gasparilla Sound around Cape Haze to the lower reaches of the upper harbor. These areas provide his clients with some world-class fly fishing for reds, snook, and trout. He ties a lightly weighted fly he calls the Flats Minnow, as well as a Bendback pattern that he varies according to the season.

Grassett Flats Minnow

By Rick Grassett

Hook:	Mustad 34007, sizes 1–4
Eyes:	Medium gold bead chain on size 1–2 hooks, small gold bead chain on size 4 hook
Thread:	Chartreuse
Body:	Medium olive Ice Chenille or Estaz
Wing:	White and olive bucktail, gold Flashabou, peacock herl
Weed guard:	25-lb. Orvis Mirage fluorocarbon
Head coating:	Flexament

In winter he ties it shorter and with rubber legs so that it looks more like a crustacean; in the spring he ties it to mimic baitfish. The fly is generally weedless, but he ties in a weed guard when targeting tailing redfish.

Grassett takes advantage of the extreme low tides during winter to target tailing redfish on various flats in Gasparilla Sound and in the southern reaches of Charlotte Harbor. The best fishing is on the last of the ebb, the slack, and the beginning of the incoming tide—what he calls "a window before the tide gets too deep to spot tails." He designed his Flats Minnow specifically for tailing reds and ties it with bead-chain eyes and a weed guard.

Like Allen, Grassett targets little tunny, Spanish mackerel, and tripletail seasonally along the beaches. He runs the crab trap floats looking for tripletail and coaches his clients to pull their flies right into the face of the tripletail. Unlike most species, which will reject a fly coming at them, these ambush feeders target prey that mistakes them for aquatic weeds on the trap lines.

Starting as early as April, tarpon gather in Boca Grande Pass. This is a focal point for schools of fish that are migrating north and south. The beach, sandbars, and passes from Stump Pass to Johnson Shoals on the north end of Cayo Costa Island are the principal domain of fly fishers. While most anglers concentrate their efforts on the beaches and bars, Grassett also targets laid-up tarpon over grass flats in the harbor. When fishing the beaches, he likes to anchor along a defined edge and wait for tarpon to swim within casting range. "I found out a long time ago that moving around a lot and chasing fish doesn't work," he says. "I only move if I observe fish consistently taking a different track. I can't tell you how many times I've seen anglers move after a short time and tarpon show up five minutes later."

Grassett also enjoys dependable fishing for juvenile tarpon from late summer into early winter in the upper harbor near the confluence with the Peace and Myakka Rivers and in creeks and residential canals in the Punta Gorda area. In the canals he targets rolling fish with weighted flies fished on sinking-tip lines. He prefers a floating line when the conditions and water depth allow.

No matter what fish you target or the time of year you can get there, Charlotte Harbor provides a breadth of resources and depth of possibilities that please both neophyte and experienced fly fishers. From the fresh waters of the Peace and Myakka Rivers west to the Gulf of Mexico and from Gasparilla Sound south to Pine Island Sound and Matlacha Pass, the variety of species and habitat is engaging, entertaining, and exciting.

Florida-based Rusty Chinnis is an award-wining outdoor photographer, fly-fishing and travel writer, and U.S. Coast Guard–licensed captain.

Charlotte Harbor NOTEBOOK

PHOTO BY RUSTY CHINNIS

When: Year-round for most species. Prime time is March–November. April–July is best for big tarpon in all habitats; tarpon and snook prospects are weather and water temperature dependent.

Where: Southwest FL between Sarasota and Fort Myers.

Access: Primarily a boat fishery, with numerous public boat ramps available and several excellent guides who work the area.

Headquarters: Boca Grande. *Lodging*: Innlet on the Waterfront, (941) 964-4600, www.theinnlet.com; The Palmetto Inn, (941) 964-0410, www.thepalmettoinn.com; The Anchor Inn, (941) 964-5600, www.anchorinn-bocagrande.com; Gasparilla Inn & Club, (941) 964-4500, www.the-gasparilla-inn.com.

Appropriate gear: 7- to 12-wt. rods, floating and sinking-tip lines, 10- to12-ft. leaders, 20- to 80-lb. tippets.

Useful fly patterns: Clouser Minnows, Grassett Flats Minnow, Bendbacks, poppers, Seaducers, deer-hair streamers, Tarpon Toads, Keys-style tarpon flies, EP Streamers.

Necessary accessories: Polarized sunglasses, sun protection, wading boots, wading pack.

Fly shops/guides: *Boca Grande*: Boca Grande Outfitters, (941) 964-2445, www.bocagrandeoutfitters.com. *Port Charlotte*: West Wall Outfitters, (941) 875-9630, www.westwallboats.com. Capt. Jamie Allen, (941) 628-9031, www.jamiesoutfishin.com; Capt. Rick Grassett, (941) 923-7799, www.snookfinaddict.com; Capt. Joe Harley, (239) 443-7412, www.snooktown.com.

Maps/information: *Florida Atlas & Gazetteer* by DeLorme; *Charlotte Harbor and Lemon Bay Inshore Fishing Chart 1F* by Waterproof Charts, www.waterproofcharts.com; www.floridadep.gov/fco/aquatic-preserve/locations/gasparilla-sound-charlotte-harbor-aquatic-preserve.

Chagrin River, OH

For the Love of Steelhead

By Rick McNary and Daren Niemi

If your heart accelerates when a steelhead hammers a fly and you enjoy fighting a fish that wins more battles than it loses, head to the Chagrin River near Cleveland, Ohio. Although steelhead fishing is often equated with the Pacific Northwest, Great Lakes steelhead are some of the finest chrome you will ever net.

If you're accustomed to catching small trout in mountain streams, prepare for battle with a trout that will make your reel scream. Even experienced guides fist-pump like Tiger Woods after they release a fresh-run, chrome-bright steelhead large enough to eat most mountain-stream trout.

Fishing for steelhead in the Chagrin begins when other types of fishing wind down. The fish come in from Lake Erie in mid- or late September, but sometimes earlier during cool, wet summers, and return to the lake in April or early May. Weather permitting, the Chagrin offers up to eight months of fishing.

Weather permitting. Everything about fishing the Chagrin depends on the weather. Weather variations can cause spikes in water flow or drastic swings in water temperature that affect the fish, dictating their inclination or hesitation to strike. Fishing the Chagrin successfully requires paying close attention to the weather and water.

The Chagrin River, classified as a State Scenic River, glides more than 50 miles over Chagrin shale and yawns into Lake Erie. The verdant, forest-lined river courses through contrasting agricultural and urban areas, but has consistently maintained high levels of water quality. In addition, the river valley hosts an eclectic mix of terrestrial and aquatic plants as well as abundant wildlife. The watershed is home to more than 90 bird species and 49 species of fish.

Numerous public access points make it a popular destination for nature lovers and anglers. However, some of the river travels through private land. Ohio law permits landowners to own the streambed: you can float these waters with a boat or raft, but you can't stand on the river bottom without the landowner's permission.

Fish Stocking Program

Each year, the Division of Wildlife of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (DNR) stocks the river with about 90,000 6- to 8-inch steelhead smolts. In late spring, as the water warms, the smolts migrate to the open waters of the lake, where they feed so voraciously that they gain 2 to 3 pounds per year. Most fish return to the Chagrin after two or three years in Lake Erie; a 3-year-old steelhead in the Chagrin is typically about 26 inches long and weighs 6 to 7 pounds. Unlike their Pacific salmon cousins, steelhead can survive to spawn multiple times.

The DNR stocks the Chagrin in the spring and fall with the Little Manistee strain of steelhead from Castalia State Fish Hatchery. The stocked smolts are only one generation removed from wild fish: they are the progeny of wild adults that return to the Little Manistee in Michigan, a river managed for total natural reproduction. This assists in preserving genetic diversity and limits the steelhead stocked in the Chagrin from showing traits of domestication. Stocking is the main component, but there is limited natural reproduction in the Chagrin thanks to high-quality cold-water tributaries in the upper branches. Even in the best of years, however, with cool, wet summers, natural reproduction accounts for less than 10 percent of the returning fish and alone cannot support the caliber of the current fishery. Therefore, stocking is necessary.

Lake Erie, which is divided into the eastern, middle,

ALL PHOTOS BY RICK MCNARY

Even experienced guides fist-pump like Tiger Woods after they release a fresh run, chrome-bright steelhead. Here, Chagrin guide Daren Niemi leans into a hard-running fish (above). The bulk of the steelhead returning to the Chagrin enter the river between late February and April, making these some of the best months for fishing. This time of year, fresh fish mix with fish that have completed the spawn and are dropping back to the lake; both types will eagerly take a swung fly (left).

and western basins, provides cool-water shelter for the fish during the summer, and the majority of the fish congregate in the eastern basin, which is the deepest. Cleveland, near where the Chagrin empties into the lake, is in the western part of the middle basin.

Steelhead begin moving upriver in September, and by mid-October there are fishable numbers in the Chagrin. Fishing remains productive throughout the fall and into the winter, when ice can become a problem. Some winters the river freezes over and access is impossible. During mild years or periods of midwinter thaws, anglers can find open water. Often, when the Chagrin opens after a long freeze, the fishing is fantastic if you can tolerate the cold. Though the fishing can be hot this time of year, temperatures are not. In winter, even when the water is open, daily lows can be in the teens or lower, and highs near or below freezing.

The bulk of the steelhead returning to the Chagrin enter the river between late February and April, making these some of the best months for fishing. This time of year, the river holds a mix of fresh-run fish and fish that have completed the spawn and are dropping back to the lake, both of which will eagerly take a swung fly. Swinging streamers into the deeper runs and pools can result in electric grabs. Be forewarned: some fish returning to the Chagrin weigh into the mid-teens and can stretch the tape longer than 30 inches.

Steelhead Green

The optimal condition is when the river turns a shade known as "steelhead green," a murky emerald color that hides your boots when you're standing mid-thigh deep. Rainfall can easily darken the river after a storm, yet it returns to fishable flows in two or three days. As the water clears and drops, providing greater clarity, fishing usually picks up as steelhead use spikes in water flow to run into the river from the lake. If you can see the fish, the fish can see you, so stealth becomes more important with greater clarity. Although a heavy rain will raise and stain the water, it is still fishable with 12 inches or more of visibility, though fishing is tougher in those conditions. Snowmelt will increase the flow as well, but with snowmelt the water usually remains clearer, though much colder. Carrying a water thermometer is useful. The fish are less active in colder water and tend to become more aggressive as the water warms. During a cold morning, fishing picks up when the sun crests the tree line and falls across the water, warming the flows.

Steelhead are fish on the move—the river is not their home; it's a place of transition. They are moving toward a destination, pushing upstream to find clean riffles in which to spawn. They don't take up residence in pools or under a bank like a brown trout might. Although fresh steelhead might hold in one area for a while to rest before pushing on, they have their bags packed and move out on a moment's notice as the flows dictate. Once they arrive near the riffle where they will spawn, steelhead seek out deeper water and wait until the urge to procreate drives them into the shallow, fast riffles.

The farther up the river you travel, the better the canopy. As is the case in most rivers, the more you move away from points of easy access, the more elbow room you will have. Anglers along the river are known for their

etiquette and, even when it's crowded, will give you space. They are there to enjoy themselves, catch fish, and treat the fish and fellow anglers with respect.

Other than understanding how weather affects the river, learning how to read the water is the next biggest key to success. Once you understand that the water is filled with moving fish, there are key things to look for. First, the fish like to hold over gravel or cobble substrate. When they pause while traveling, they look for gravel first. Sand and silt irritate gills, and steelhead will hold over slate only if it provides some sort of structure and deep water, but if you find a place where the bottom of the river consists of gravel or larger cobble, that's a good place to start.

Little Manistee–strain steelhead are stocked in the Chagrin River in spring and fall. The stocked smolts are only one generation removed from wild fish: they are the progeny of wild adults that return to the Little Manistee River in Michigan, a river managed for total natural reproduction (above). The Chagrin River, classified as an Ohio State Scenic River, glides more than 50 miles over Chagrin shale and yawns into Lake Erie. The verdant, forest-lined river courses through contrasting agricultural and urban areas, but has consistently maintained high levels of water quality (below).

Fishing good water well is traditional advice that is never truer than in fishing for steelhead in the Chagrin. Before you wade into the river, study the places where the fish are likely to hold and don't forget they might be just a few feet from the bank in shallow water.

As you study the water, consider the various methods and presentations you might use to fish that section. While some anglers are successful in repeating the same method, there is something mystical about a steelhead river that challenges you to try a new, and more difficult,

Each year, more than 90,000 steelhead smolts are stocked where the Chagrin River meets Lake Erie. When the fish mature, they move upstream in the river, with the run lasting from September through the end of April.

technique. Fishing the Chagrin, or steelhead in general, is about more than the end result of catching a fish. It is the journey itself—progressing through the spectrum of methods and techniques to discover that there really isn't a wrong way to fly fish for steelhead. If your only goal is to catch fish, then tie bait on a bobber and let it drift downriver. However, if you pursue steelhead for the challenge of testing new methods and perfecting old ones, the fish you catch will provide greater satisfaction and probably more compelling stories.

Choose Your Weapon

Six- to 8-weight single-handed rods are ideal for the Chagrin. If you can take two rods, rig one for fishing streamers and the other for indicator fishing. For streamers on a single-handed rod, a weight-forward floating line with a sinking-tip is best. Match your tip to the depth and speed of the water, using higher-density (fast-sinking) tips for fast and/or deeper runs and pools. A variety of steamers work, with the standard equation that darker flies work best in darker waters. Once you fish through the deeper water and the tailout, don't just quickly retrieve your line. Keep swinging it through the shallow, still water. The number of fish you catch there will surprise you.

For indicator fishing, a two-fly rig works well. Try a Woolly Bugger above an egg pattern. For many fly fishers, a box full of egg patterns is essential to steelhead fishing on the Chagrin. Depending on the water flow, you need appropriate weight to quickly sink the flies to the proper depth. Indicator fishing is the go-to tactic for many anglers.

Spey rods also enjoy a presence on the Chagrin. Two-handed casting is advantageous on wide pools where backcasting room is hindered by riparian trees and shrubbery. With Spey rods, you can swing big flies with little concern about backcasting room. Though you probably won't catch as many fish as with indicator tactics, when you're swinging tight and fishing through a run, the fish hit hard. It's not uncommon for a fish to move several feet for a strike, turning hard to hammer the fly.

A 12.5-foot 6-weight Spey or switch rod works well, matched with a 450- to 480-grain Skagit head. This setup has enough backbone to cast a heavier tip and big flies into the wind, and to handle a big fish, while not overpowering the smaller steelhead.

For swinging flies, look for runs between knee and chest deep with current flowing about as fast as a brisk walk. Again, match your sinking-tip to the water conditions. You want the fly to be deep in the flow, but not snag on the bottom. A good indication that you are at the right depth is feeling a single tick or two of the bottom near the end of the swing as the line straightens below you.

Whiskey Hangover

By Daren Niemi

Shank:	40 mm Senyo Shank
Hook:	Octopus-style Intruder hook, sizes 2–6
Connector:	Lightweight Intruder wire
Weight:	Lead dumbbell eyes with black/yellow pupils
Body:	Pearl Polar Chenille and peach Cactus Chenille
Wing:	Blue craft fur, topped with Rainbow Flash, topped with black craft fur
Cheeks:	Jungle cock
Collar:	Hareline black/orange tiger barred rabbit, cut from the strip and spun in dubbing loop

Start fishing high on the upstream end of the run, well above where you think the best section would be, and slowly work your way into it. Making casts slightly down and across the current is the usual delivery; as needed, mend line upstream to slow the fly and allow it to gain depth, or mend downstream to speed up the fly as it enters shallower water. Fish the fly all the way until it hangs directly downstream, because steelhead will often follow it in or even lie on the shallow part of inside seams.

Keep your first casts short and tight. Begin swinging with just the sinking-tip out to cover the shallow inside water first. After each successive cast, work a little more line out until you are casting as far as you think appropriate, then start to take a step or two downstream after each swing. How far you step between casts depends on water temperature and clarity. Take shorter steps if the water is cold and murky.

When a fish takes on the swing, you'll know it. It is not the dainty pickup of a nymph or egg drifting in the current. It is an ambush by a predator set on disabling a substantial offering, and it can be extremely violent. Often steelhead takes on a swung fly will be a two-pull take: the first sharp pull as the fish makes initial contact with the fly, followed quickly by the second, harder, and longer pull as the fish turns away. It is important to wait until you feel the weight of that second, longer pull to set the hook or you can pull the fly from the fish's mouth. Once you do, sweep the rod hard and low to the downstream bank, setting the hook.

Bucket List Item

Whether you're a novice, intermediate, or expert fly fisher, Chagrin River steelhead angling is well worth the effort. This pristine river offers plentiful access, high-quality steelhead, and ample opportunity to hone your skills.

If the stories you tell focus more on the way you caught fish rather than how many you caught, then you are perfectly suited to the Chagrin in particular and steelhead fly fishing in general. Rest assured, hooking fish is not the hard part. The challenge is whether you're skilled or lucky enough to land these powerful fish.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes the intersection of skills and challenges as the "flow." He says that if our skills outweigh our challenges, we soon become bored. Conversely, if our challenges outweigh our skills, we soon become frustrated. True enjoyment comes when we increase our skills to meet increasing challenges.

The Chagrin is waiting to help you find your flow.

Based in Kansas, Rick McNary, www.rickmcnary.me, is a wide-ranging freelance writer and photographer. Daren Niemi is the owner and head guide at Fish Lake Run Outfitters, www.fishlakerun.com.

Chagrin River NOTEBOOK

When: September–May.

Where: Near Cleveland, OH.

Access: Primarily a walk-and-wade fishery with multiple access points; some of the river flows through private property. Private landowners own the riverbed, so you can float it, but if you get out of the boat to stand, you must have permission.

Headquarters: Cleveland and surrounding communities. *Information*: Destination Cleveland, (800) 321-1001, www.thisiscleveland.com; Ohio Department of Natural Resources, (614) 265-6565.

Appropriate gear: 9- to 10.5-ft., 6- to 8-wt. single-handed rods with floating lines and sinking-tips in various densities; 12.5-ft., 6-wt. Spey/switch rods with 450- to 480-grain Skagit- or Scandi-style heads.

Useful fly patterns: Whiskey Hangover, leeches, baitfish patterns, Woolly Buggers, egg patterns.

Necessary accessories: Waders, wading staff, heated socks, extra gloves, hat, polarized sunglasses, layered clothing, polarized glasses.

Nonresident license: $19/3 days, $43.50/annual.

Fly shops/guides: Orvis Woodmere, (216) 591-1681, www.orvis.com/cleveland. Fish Lake Run Outfitters (Daren Niemi), (330) 240-0086, www.fishlakerun.com.

Books/maps: *Advanced Fly Fishing for Great Lakes Steelhead* by Rick Kustich. Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com; www.ohiodnr.gov/Portals/wildlife/Maps/Rivers%20&%20Streams%20Maps/chagrinriver.pdf.

First Fork Sinnemahoning Creek, PA

Solitude in the Pennsylvania Mountains

By Ralph Scherder

I was 14 when I experienced my first mayfly hatch on First Fork Sinnemahoning Creek. Clouds of Light Hendricksons filled the air for almost four hours, and the mysteries of fly fishing suddenly became less mysterious as trout after trout inhaled my dry fly. The trout must not have realized I was new to fly fishing, and their eagerness to rise made me feel like a seasoned pro. It was a beautiful introduction to matching the hatch.

Twenty-five years later, the bugs are still there, and if I time it right, I can still hit that Hendrickson hatch, same as ever. That's First Fork. Time has changed so many other places, but the First Fork valley has remained the same since I was a kid.

Like many great Pennsylvania trout streams, though, First Fork suffered its share of adversity in the 1800s, when industry began exploiting the valley's resources. In 1880, what was then the world's largest tannery was built near the present-day town of Costello, right on the banks of First Fork. For over 40 years, discharges from the tannery stained the water an inky color until the tannery closed in 1924. It took decades for the water to return to its natural clarity. By

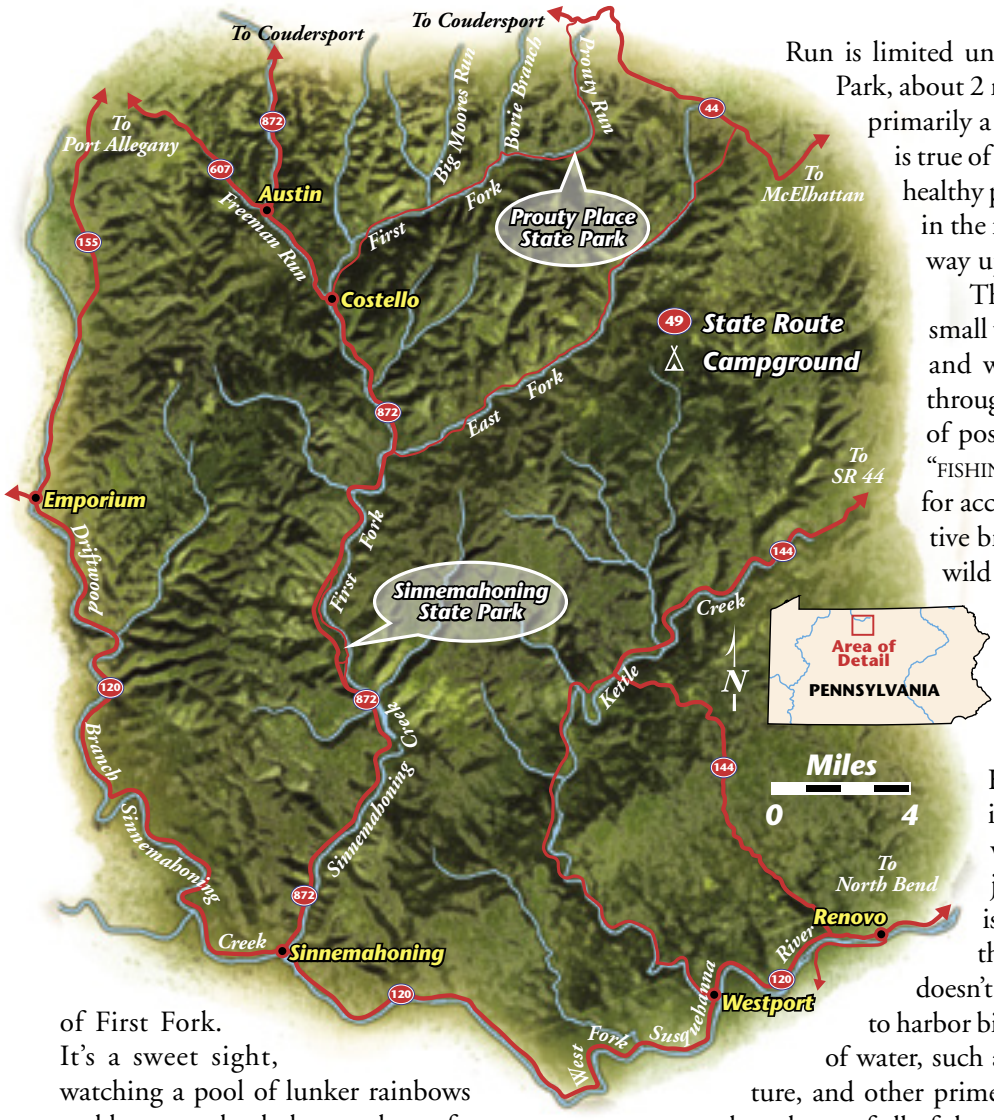
ALL PHOTOS BY RALPH SCHERDER

During the fall, it's not uncommon to have First Fork all to yourself. The stream receives a fall stocking of trout in early October, and beautiful autumn weather makes for pleasant days on the water (left). First Fork has long been known for producing wild browns such as this. The stream abounds in aquatic insects, along with sculpins and crayfish. Retrieving streamers through deeper holding water can be extremely effective (top right). One of the author's favorite stretches begins where Big Moores Run flows into First Fork, which is where this hefty wild brown was caught (middle left). First Fork produces several drake hatches, including Green Drakes, which begin hatching around Memorial Day weekend. Brown and Slate Drakes soon follow, making June the best month for fishing this stream (middle right). First Fork is one of Pennsylvania's most accessible streams. The 1.67-mile special-regulations stretch is popular because it closely follows the road and is stocked heavily with larger-than-average fish. The mayfly hatches along this section can be spectacular (bottom right).

1900, extensive logging had removed much of the virgin timber and opened up the headwaters to dramatic warming and erosion. All of this affected the mayflies, but over time the canopy has returned and the insects have persevered. On First Fork, it's still possible to hit blizzard-like hatches.

I target several hatches in particular—Hendricksons, of course, but also Brown Drakes and Gray Fox mayflies in late May and early June, followed by Slate Drakes from early June until October. All these hatches can be quite heavy. Drive along the Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only (DHALO) section during any of these hatches and you'd better have a good set of windshield wipers.

The Green Drakes are perhaps the most prized mayfly hatch of all on First Fork, as they are on many famous trout waters. They traditionally begin around Memorial Day weekend, with few exceptions, followed by the spinner falls (Coffin Flies). Making things perhaps even more interesting is the fact that the DHALO is part of the Keystone Select Stocked Trout Waters program, which means that this section of the stream receives a stocking of substantially larger trout than the rest



of First Fork. It's a sweet sight, watching a pool of lunker rainbows and browns take drakes on the surface.

From the 1950s through the 1970s, First Fork was renowned for wild and holdover browns, some of which grew to monstrous proportions. By the time I came of age, most of those fish had faded to legends, but that didn't stop me from plying every pool and pocket in search of their descendants. A 20-inch wild brown is a true trophy here, and I've been fortunate to have caught a handful of them over the years, but they're by no means what you should expect from your first few fishing trips. First Fork has many secrets and gives up none of them easily.

Exploring the Valley

First Fork Sinnemahoning offers easy access to good fishing. State Route 872 parallels the stream for 28 miles, from its mouth in Sinnemahoning all the way to the town of Costello. In Costello, bear right onto First Fork Road and follow that about 6 miles or so to the stream's headwaters.

First Fork Sinnemahoning forms where Prouty Run and Borie Branch intersect west of Prouty Place State Park. Both branches hold lots of native brookies, and Prouty Run, though tiny, occasionally coughs up some nice wild browns. Unfortunately, access to most of lower Prouty Run is limited until you reach Prouty Place State Park, about 2 miles upstream. By that point, it's primarily a native brookie stream. The same is true of Borie Branch, which is home to a healthy population of native brookies, and in the fall the occasional brown finds its way up there, too.

The first 3 miles or so of First Fork is small water with lots of undercut banks and woody structure. Trout stocking throughout this stretch is spotty because of posted private property, so look for "FISHING PERMITTED. WALK IN ONLY" signs for access points. This section holds native brookies and a smattering of small wild browns and rainbows.

Although I've fished every mile and have found tremendous fishing throughout, my favorite section begins where Big Moores Run enters First Fork. Here the stream almost doubles in size, averaging about 30 feet wide. The next 4 miles or so, to just below the town of Costello, is where I've encountered most of the wild and holdover browns. It doesn't always take a lot of holding water to harbor big fish. All it takes is the right kind of water, such as undercut banks, woody structure, and other prime sheltering lies, and this section has plenty of all of those.

From Costello downstream to Wharton, First Fork increases in size with the influx of cold water from Freeman Run. The stream averages around 40 feet wide, with numerous deep pools and productive runs. This section is more heavily pressured than the upper part. A counterpoint, though, is that it's also stocked much more heavily than the upper part. Wild browns persist here, but they are few. If you do catch a wild fish here, chances are it will be large. There's a scattering of native brook trout throughout this section, as well.

East Fork Sinnemahoning enters First Fork at the town of Wharton, and the stream again increases in size. During normal springtime levels, this is big water, and caution should be used while wading. In some places, First Fork runs 60 feet wide and deceptively deep, especially the section from the DHALO to where it enters George B. Stevenson Reservoir.

The first couple of miles downstream from Wharton are where First Fork no doubt got its reputation for monster browns so long ago. Most anglers consider it marginal trout water, but fish can be caught here all season during almost any year, with the exception of drought years. It's

also where I've encountered some of the biggest fish in First Fork. I believe the shot of cold water it gets from East Fork provides just enough relief for those browns to survive the summer. It's where I caught my first 20-inch wild brown many years ago and where I've caught and encountered numerous lunkers since.

The DHALO begins where Bailey Run enters First Fork and extends downstream approximately 1.67 miles to the bridge upstream of Berge Run. This beautiful section of stream has few, if any, wild fish, but it is stocked heavily in both spring and fall.

Keller's Boat Launch Creep (Olive)

Hook:	MFC 7026, size 10
Thread:	Olive, size 6/0
Bead:	Hot orange
Tail:	Olive/grizzly marabou blood quill
Body:	Olive Woolly Chenille
Overbody:	Olive Skinny Skin
Rib:	Medium copper wire
Collar:	Olive hen neck

Tributaries

One of First Fork's greatest attributes is its tributaries, especially those upstream from George B. Stevenson Dam, all of which hold populations of wild and native trout. The most notable of these include Bailey Run, East Fork Sinnemahoning, Freeman Run, South Woods Branch, and Big Moores Run. Each stream is worthy of adventure but also offers options in case heavy rains make First Fork unfishable for a day or two.

The lower mile of Bailey Run is unimpressive, barely 6 feet wide in some places, but the farther upstream you go, the steeper the gradient, and you'll find numerous plunge pools teeming with native brookies and wild browns.

East Fork Sinnemahoning is a darn good trout stream, too, and people travel great distances just to fish it. East Fork flows more than 15 miles from its origin in Cherry Springs to where it empties into First Fork at the town of Wharton. The first 2.5 miles, from its headwaters to Dolliver Trail, is Class A native brook trout water that can only be accessed by hiking in. The section from Dolliver Trail to its confluence with Wild Boy Run is stocked by the PFBC and easily accessed via various turnouts near the stream. From Wild Boy Run to Camp Run (2.9 miles) is again designated Class A mixed brown and brook trout water. East Fork is then stocked from the confluence of Camp Run down to the mouth. East Fork holds natives as well as wild and holdover browns up to about 18 inches. They can get bigger, but they're tough to sneak up on in that ultra-clear water.

Freeman Run is another little gem in the First Fork valley. This stream is stocked heavily and has some very nice deep holes, considering its diminutive size. A scattering of native and wild trout inhabit the stream. Approximately 1 mile north of Austin on Route 872, you'll find Austin Memorial Dam Park. In 1911, the Bayless Paper Mill dam broke, killing 78 people and virtually wiping out the towns of Austin and Costello. The dam ruins can be viewed up close and personal, as a great section of Freeman Run still flows among them. There are also numerous hiking trails throughout the park.

South Woods Branch is another stocked trout stream that is often overlooked for its native trout potential. Other streams get more attention, but, in my opinion, South Woods Branch is the best native trout stream in the valley. It is fertile, with a diverse assortment of mayfly hatches.

Big Moores Run receives annual stockings of brook trout but has a strong population of natives as well. The water gets pretty skinny in the summer, which makes stalking and casting to fish challenging. If you're fishing that time of year, it's best to wait until after a rainstorm colors the water a bit. On spring and fall trips, though, you'll find plenty of eager native brookies, wild browns, and even good numbers of wild rainbows to make for an entertaining day.

Green Drake Wulff

Hook:	Standard dry fly, size 10
Thread:	Black, size 6/0
Tail:	Dark brown bucktail or moose body hair with 3–4 strands of yellow bucktail mixed in
Body:	Cream dubbing
Wings:	Yellow bucktail
Hackle:	Natural grizzly

The First Fork Fly Box

When winter breaks early in this region, expect hatches to start early, too. I've hit massive Black Caddisfly and Tan Caddisfly hatches in mid-April.

Almost all of First Fork's tributaries contain populations of native and wild trout. South Woods Branch, shown here, is one of the best. Success on these streams often means a sneaky approach and a careful presentation (above). Native brook trout are often synonymous with small streams. However, First Fork offers anglers an opportunity to catch native brook trout in bigger water. For big numbers of natives, day trips on any of the stream's tributaries are sure to entertain (below).

The Blue Quill, Quill Gordon, and Light Hendrickson trifecta begins around the same time and lasts until the first week of May.

Almost every evening from mid-May until mid-June, trout rise to Sulphurs. I do best with a size 18, especially along the DHALO, where the trout tend to be more finicky later in the season. For the Gray Fox hatch, a size 16 Adams is hard to beat. When Light Cahills are emerging, imitations in sizes 14 and 16 work well. First Fork's Green Drakes are roughly a size 10. Although standard dry-fly versions work, I've always caught the most fish during the hatch using a Wulff-style pattern. It utilizes brown bucktail for the tail, cream dubbing for the body, yellow bucktail for the wings, and grizzly hackle. This imitation produces well for me when fishing over all of First Fork's drake hatches, as well as the Coffin Fly.

What separates First Fork from many of its tributaries is its abundance of big foods such as crayfish and sculpins. Streamers work great all season. Keller's Boat Launch Creep in olive/brown has become my go-to fly for most subsurface situations. In sizes 10 and 12, this pattern does a great job imitating crayfish and sculpins as well as the nymphs of the many species of drakes that live in the stream. When fishing First Fork in mid-June or later, carry an assortment of crayfish patterns and chartreuse-colored streamers for the smallmouth bass that migrate upstream from George B. Stevenson Dam. Smallmouth bass can be found in good numbers all the way to the headwaters, but the highest concentration is usually found in the long, rocky pools along the DHALO all the way to the lake. It's not uncommon to see smallmouth feeding on the surface in July during an evening hatch of Slate Drakes.

Come August and September, terrestrials are the ticket on First Fork, and I never hit the water without a good selection of hoppers. Some of the best hopper fishing I've experienced has been in the first week of September, right through the middle of the day on the DHALO section where lots of tall grasses line the banks. Those oversize rainbows are suckers for big, juicy hopper patterns.

Through the Seasons

Post–Memorial Day weekend is my favorite time to fish First Fork. The various drake hatches start coming off, and the whole month of June is prime time for wild browns. This is also the time of year when it seems every fish in the stream comes out of hiding, and I've had banner days on pools I thought had been fished out.

Summer fishing depends on rainfall. Drought years make conditions difficult. Sections along the DHALO

can get quite shallow, although you'll still find trout in the deeper pools. In the headwaters and tributary streams, water temperatures stay good all summer. Night fishing can be very good in July, and you can often find trout cruising long, shallow flats near holding water. I prefer stripping unweighted streamers at night and pick up a lot of fish in water not deep enough to hold trout throughout the day. By September, nights start getting cool again and fishing picks up throughout the stream. Later in November is a good time to hunt for browns, working up from George B. Stevenson Dam.

The First Fork valley has always been home to abundant wildlife, including white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, and wild turkeys. In recent years, elk populations have expanded into the valley. When the elk rut ramps up in late September and October, it's possible to fish along the DHALO and listen to elk bugling in the hollows. There's a wildlife viewing area about a half mile south of the DHALO section, on SR 872, where you can regularly see elk in the evenings.

Potter County is a sparsely populated region of the state. The estimated population of Coudersport, the largest town in the county, is 2,449, and once you get into the First Fork valley, you'll notice that very few of the houses are lived in year-round. This is camp country.

My great-grandfather first set foot in Potter County in the 1930s, and First Fork has been a regular fishing destination for my family since the 1960s. In 2010, I finally bought a camp along Borie Branch, the headwaters of First Fork. It took me eight years to meet the owners of several neighboring camps, despite the fact that most of my weekends from April through November are spent there. Perhaps I'm just antisocial. But I also like to think that many of the other people who love this area as much as I do prefer to keep to themselves and enjoy the solitude of the Pennsylvania mountains.

Ralph Scherder is an award-winning writer and photographer from Pennsylvania. Read more of his work at www.KeystoneFlyFisher.com.

First Fork Sinnemahoning Creek NOTEBOOK

When: Late March–November.

Where: North-central PA, in Potter and Cameron Counties.

Access: Some sections along the stream's first 5 mi. are posted "NO TRESPASSING." "FISHING PERMITTED. WALK-IN ONLY" signs indicate where you can access the stream; you'll find plenty of places to park along First Fork Road and SR 872.

Headquarters: Streamside cabins and campsites are available at Hemlock Campgrounds, (814) 647-8403, www.hemlockcampgrounds.com, and Austin Campground, (814) 647-8777, www.austincampground.com. First Fork Lodge, in Costello, is a B&B with themed rooms and Victorian décor, (814) 647-8644, www.firstforklodge.net.

Appropriate gear: 9-ft., 6-wt. rods for larger waters downstream from Wharton, 4- to 5-wt. rods for upper portion of First Fork; floating line; 3X–6X leaders and tippets.

Useful fly patterns: Dries/emergers to match Blue Quills, Black Caddis, Quill Gordons, Light Hendricksons, March Browns, Light Cahills, Sulphurs, Blue-Winged Olives, Gray Fox, Green Drakes, Brown Drakes, Tricos, Slate Drakes; Keller's Boat Launch Creep and various nymphs for subsurface.

Necessary accessories: Chest waders, wading boots, polarized sunglasses, wading staff.

Nonresident license: $26.90/3 days, $34.90/7 days, $52.90/annual, plus $9.90 trout/salmon permit.

Fly/tackle shops: *Austin*: Hemlock Campgrounds, (814) 647-8403, www.hemlockcampgrounds.com; Perry's Country Store/Sports Shop, (814) 647-8856. *Coudersport*: Potter County Outfitters, (814) 274-0772, www.pottercountyoutfitters.net. *Wharton*: Wharton General Store, (814) 647-8973, www.whartontavern.com.

Books/maps: *Pennsylvania Trout Streams and Their Hatches* by Charles Meck; *Keystone Fly Fishing* by Jay Nichols, Henry Ramsey, Mike Heck, et al. *Pennsylvania Atlas & Gazetteer* by DeLorme; Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com.

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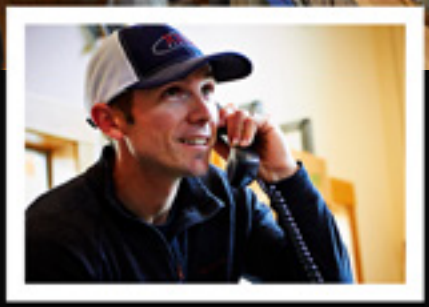

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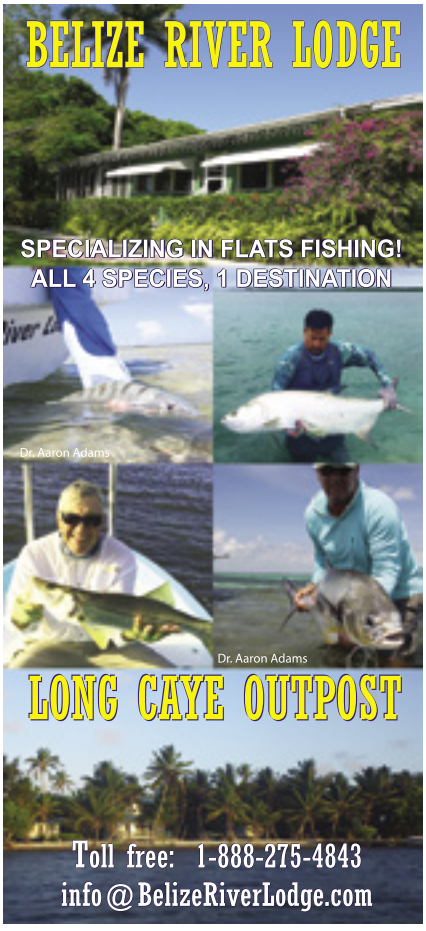

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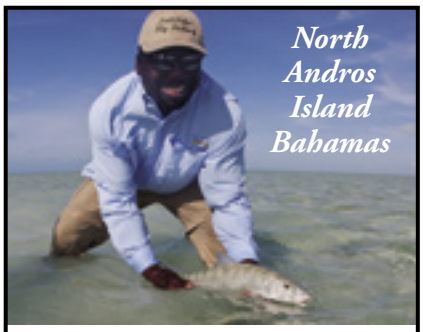

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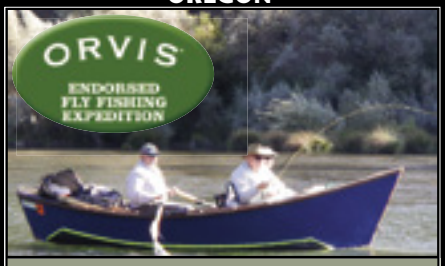

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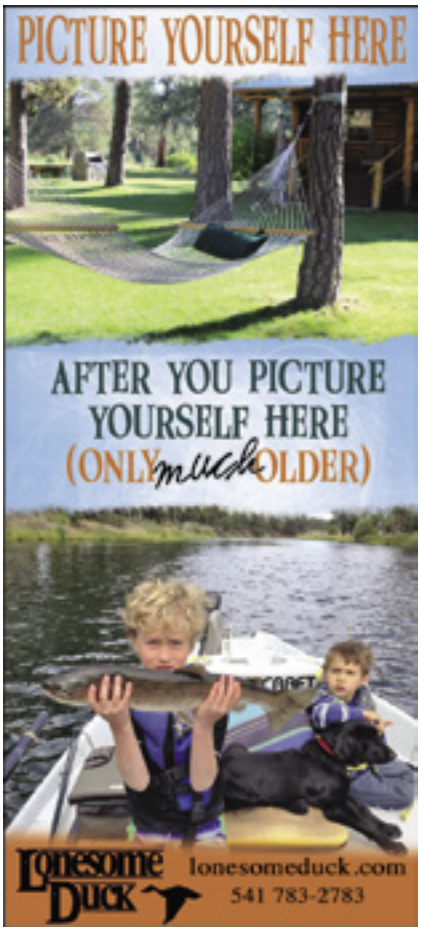

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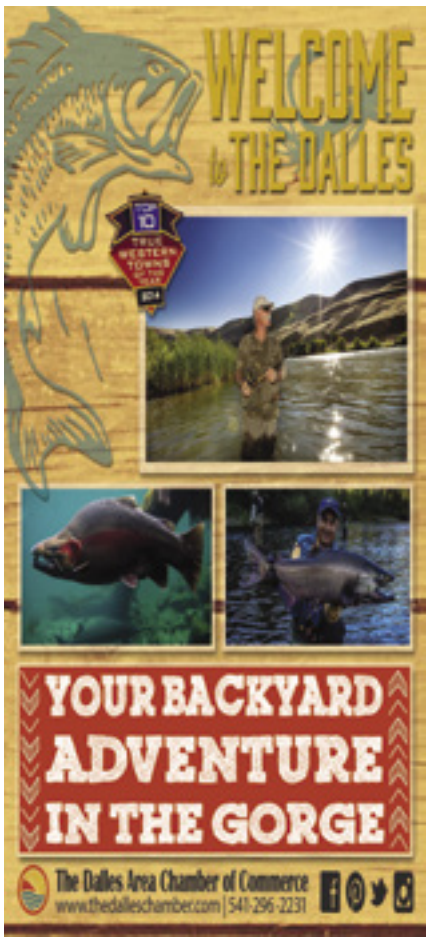

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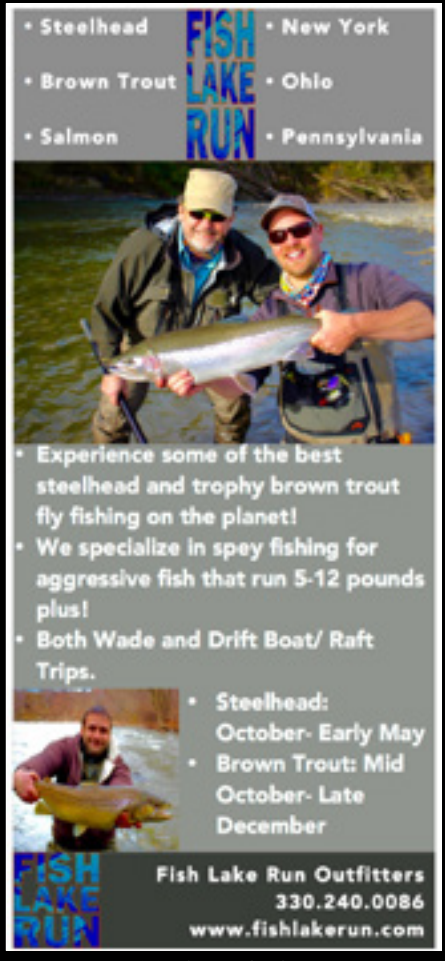

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In the Studio

William Mark Dalton/*By Greg Shimek*

"Where do I start? Every day in my studio there is something new. I love it!" exclaims William Mark Dalton of Dalton Art Studios. "I love the variety."

Dalton is well known for his meticulous hand-painted pinstriping, gold-leaf work, and lettering on some of the most luxurious vintage Formula 1 and other race cars. But he has an extensive portfolio, ranging from custom signs and logo design to original fine art and graphics.

"I love every project, but some of my most rewarding have been working with veterans and children with prosthetics, decorating them with art and designs that have special meaning to them. Their stories and smiles humble me," he says.

Besides Dalton's wife, family, and artwork, the thing that he says has been a constant lifelong passion is fly fishing for native steelhead and sea-run cutthroat trout and exploring the beauty of the surroundings and waterways where these unique fish reside. "I grew up here and have lived in the Pacific Northwest my whole life," Dalton says. "Some of my earliest artistic inspiration came from watching my mom paint beautiful pictures on our farm and on the camping trips we'd take deep into the rain forest. As a small child I remember my father teaching each one of my brothers and me the lessons of the forest, and how to wade and fly fish these beautiful majestic rivers and give them the respect they deserve. I miss him by my side and wish he was still with me on this journey."

Throughout his life, Dalton has witnessed change taking place in the land and rivers he grew up on. A decline in wild fish populations due to land development and an overall lack of funding for conservation led him to collaborate with local tribes and serve as a board member of nonprofits, such as the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group and the Coastal Cutthroat Coalition (CCC). "Witnessing these changes has had an incredible impact on my life and is creating a shift in my career to use my talents to make a difference in the community and the fisheries we all love," Dalton says. "I am committed to doing what I can for the conservation of numerous species throughout the United States."

Despite his demanding schedule, Dalton still finds the time to follow his passion. His volunteer work involves streamside management and design, such as replacing culverts to improve migration and spawning habitat, conducting genetic sampling, and counting spawning redds. "I love where the management and science of the CCC is heading. We are doing genetic and scale sampling to map the fish and determine where they spawn and how they travel during their lifetime," he says. "It's an innovative way to protect one of the last healthy anadromous wild trout species."

James Losee, a fisheries biologist with the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, marvels that "among the thousands of anglers of the Salish Sea, few have accomplished as much as Mark Dalton for the resource they love. Financial contributions, artistic inspiration, design and installation of educational signs along rivers and streams of Hood Canal, and data collection have led to changes to fishing regulations and an increased awareness of native salmon among anglers and nonanglers alike.

"Scientifically," continues Losee, "Mark's work has led to five scientific papers documenting when cutthroat trout spawn, how they move in marine water, and what factors limit their population size. Mark's most lasting contribution to this exceptional species may prove to be his work in helping to found the Coastal Cutthroat Coalition. Mark's vision to gather a group of conservationists, artists, scientists, and managers to identify scientific data gaps and raise money to study and protect these wild fish for the long term is likely to get cutthroat science caught up with other Pacific salmon and continue to give managers the information they need to protect them for generations to come."

In addition to donating original artwork to help raise funds for research and many worthy organizations from Washington to Florida, Dalton's latest endeavor has been creating a brand, Killer Spawn, with the tagline "The Rest Is in the Water." His original artwork and designs on apparel, decals, and more, as well as his lifelike fish artwork, are available on his website, www.daltonartstudios.com, and a portion of all proceeds go to the conservation of wild fish.

Mark Dalton can be contacted at daltonartstudios@yahoo.com.

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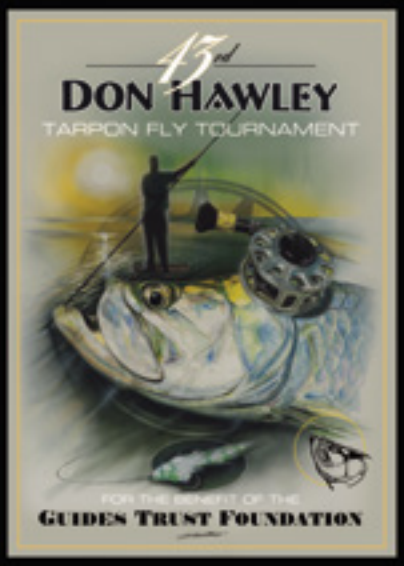

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New Products

New Hooks from Fulling Mill

Any fly is only as good as the hook it's tied on, and Fulling Mill produces a full range of outstanding hooks, primarily manufactured by Hayabusa, a distinguished Japanese firm famed for its superior steel and state-of-the-art manufacturing technology. Fulling Mill hooks are expertly designed and feature fantastic tensile strength and extra-sharp points. Among the latest designs are several high-performance specialty hooks. The 2X heavy Jig Force barbless ($12.95 per pack of 50) is ideal for nymphs and jig streamers, with an extra-wide bend that easily accommodates even the smallest beads. Available in sizes 8 through 18, the hook features a black nickel finish that reduces flash and adds stealth. The Czech Nymph barbless hook ($12.95 per pack of 50; sizes 10 through 16) is available in a bronze or black nickel finish, and is perfect for everything from standard nymphs and scud patterns to buzzer patterns and myriad dry patterns. Finally, the Bonio Carp barbless hook ($7.95 per pack of 25; sizes 8 and 10) is a super-strong wide-gape hook specifically designed for carp flies. Order online at www.fullingmill.com.

Echo River Glass Rods

Anglers fish fiberglass for a long list of reasons. At the top of that list are two qualities that make high-end glass rods especially appealing: you can more easily feel a fiberglass rod load, compared to graphite, and glass rods offer superior shock absorption. In short, a well-designed glass rod is a joy to fish. For 2019, Echo concentrated its years of fiberglass rod design experience into the new River Glass series, offered in lengths to cover the widest variety of freshwater fisheries. Each rod in the series is available in either glacier (a bright, cool green) or amber color, lending a stylish touch to these sensitive, accurate, expertly crafted rods. The series includes 2-, 3-, and 4-weight three-piece models and three different 4- and 5-weight four-piece models (all rods in the series are $249.99). All come with a rod sock and distinctive fabric-covered square rod case. For more information and to find Echo dealers, visit www.echoflyfishing.com.

Scientific Anglers Spey Lite Skagit Intermediate Heads

Part of the innovative new Spey Lite collection from Scientific Anglers, the Lite Skagit Intermediate shooting-head is designed for light double-handed rods and features a short, powerful taper that is ideal for smaller streams and trout Spey applications when getting a fly just below the surface is paramount. Available in grain weights from 150 to 420, this ultra-short head easily turns over heavy tips and weighted flies; it integrates perfectly with Scientific Anglers SONAR sinking leaders and textured TC tips. The Lite Skagit Intermediate ($49.95) also features a black marker at the end of the head that serves as a visible notification of where to begin your cast. From dredging for steelhead to swinging streamers for trout and even firing out big flies for bass, the Lite Skagit is a high-performance Spey on a smaller scale, and this versatile head even works with single-handed rods. For more information and to find Scientific Anglers dealers, visit www.scientificanglers.com.

New Patagonia Foot Tractor Wading Boots

Wading safely and securely takes a big leap forward with Patagonia's new Foot Tractor Wading Boots aluminum bar model, a collaboration with renowned boot maker Danner, based in Portland, Oregon. To achieve its goals of maximum durability and unfailing performance in a long-lasting USA-made boot, Patagonia paired its expertise in fly fishing and product innovation with Danner's proud tradition of quality and craftsmanship. Made by hand in Portland, the new Foot Tractor boots ($549) are engineered for the most demanding wading and fishing. Built with treated full-grain leather and stitch-down construction that creates a wide and stable platform, they're designed not only for comfort and grip, but also to be resoled as they wear to keep them on the water for years. These may well be the last wading boots you'll ever need to buy. For more information and to purchase, visit your local fly shop or go to www.Patagonia.com.

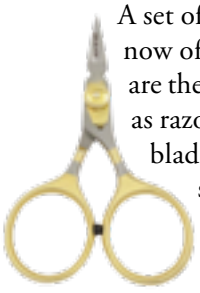
New Orvis Clearwater Rods

The new Orvis Clearwater rod series is not just a cosmetic facelift, but a complete overhaul from the ground up by the company's Vermont rod designers. Everything has changed except the value. It's still the best fly rod you can buy for the money, but with a significant upgrade in performance and aesthetics. Each rod was designed with a purpose-built profile and action to handle the kind of fishing the rod model is traditionally used for, from medium-action small-stream rods to medium-fast freshwater rods to fast-action big-game rods. The new Clearwater rod series offers 278 models, including 10 freshwater, nine big game, and eight two-handed rods; prices range from $198 to $398. The series includes a full suite of general-use models that perfectly handle a variety of angling situations, whether you need a short 3- or 4-weight for mountain streams and bluegill ponds, a 9-foot 6-weight for big Western rivers, a high-performance bonefish rod, or a two-hander that can tame the brawniest steelhead streams. It also features purpose-built specialty rods, such as a 10-foot 3-weight tight-line model, a 9-foot-4-inch 11-weight muskie rod, and an 11-foot-4-inch Spey design for trout. The new Clearwater rods feature striking black blanks with white accents, and each comes with a gray Cordura rod tube. For more information and to order, visit www.orvis.com.

Surface Seducer Popper Components

For everyone from dedicated popper artists to tiers who need to crank out a few top-water bugs for an upcoming outing, Flymen Fishing Company recently launched the first four products in its new Surface Seducer line. These handy new materials—the Double Barrel popper and slider body, Howitzer baitfish popper heads, Dragon Eyes, and popper hooks—facilitate all kinds of innovative tying. All components come in a range of sizes and colors for everything from panfish to sailfish poppers. "Popper fly tying and fishing is a lot of fun, but traditionally not many fly tiers ever get into popper tying because of its historically complicated nature," says Martin Bawden, founder and CEO of Flymen Fishing Company. "Our new Surface Seducer foam brand makes it possible for all fly tiers, regardless of skill level or time constraints, to easily tie flies that not only catch fish, but look great as well. Nothing beats the excitement of surface strikes!" For information and to purchase, visit www.flymenfishingcompany.com.

New Dr. Slick Razor Scissors



A set of three new Razor scissors highlights the 2019 products from Dr. Slick Instruments for Anglers, which now offers more than 350 fly-tying and fly-fishing tools and accessories. The new scissors models ($34 each) are the 3.75-inch Arrow, 4-inch All Purpose, and 4.5-inch Hair model, all of three of which are aptly described as razor blades with handles. Razor scissors, made from 440-grade steel, are fitted with a tension screw so the blades can be loosened or tightened as warranted by the materials you need to cut. "The extremely sharp scissors were engineered to cut through all natural and synthetic fly-tying materials like butter," says Dr. Slick president and CEO Steve Fournier. For more information and to locate Dr. Slick dealers, visit www.drslick.com.

Streamtech Steelhead Boat

Like all Streamtech boats, the new Steelhead boat is extraordinarily maneuverable, durable, and functional for fly fishing and river running. The Steelhead was built to answer requests for a larger boat capable of handling larger cargo loads and bigger white water while still providing Streamtech's top-of-the-line rowing performance and durability. The Steelhead is 14.5 feet long and 7 feet wide, with 21-inch tubes that diminish to 18 inches on the ends, resulting in a large cargo bay and a low profile to cut through the wind. The boat has a full bow-to-stern rocker. The raft portion of the package is manufactured by Maravia and features Class VI fabric, thermo-welded seams, urethane encapsulation, a drop-stitch floor, and a few new features, including a front splatter guard and textured urethane floor top. The base package ($9,300) includes boat, frame, two Sawyer Artisan Series Steelhead Square-Top oars with Shoal Cut blades, Clam Shell Pro padded swivel fishing seats, high-back padded oarsman seat, padded fishing stations with zip-on marine vinyl pad covers, anchor system, straps, pump, repair kit, and Maravia's 10-year warranty (five years commercial). A full array of accessories is available, including trailers, boat covers, decks, boxes, work trays, and more. For more information and to order, visit www.streamtechboats.com.

In the Vise

Jawbreaker Stone/By Jake Villwock

It was a cold fall morning, and I was standing in the middle of a Lake Ontario tributary with anglers all around me. We were all waiting for the sun to come up so we could start slashing at the water, trying to catch anything that would bite our flies, including steelhead and lake-run brown trout.

I had three boxes full of bright-colored flies—chartreuse, pink, red, orange, and blue. The interior of those boxes looked like a flourescent rainbow of flies. Excitement reigned, especially when my buddy, fishing next to me, hooked up his first cast and screamed, "Fish on!"

Without waiting for him to land that first fish, I began casting toward the dark silhouettes visible in the creek; I hooked several fish, but the action was short-lived. When the sun came up and the light hit the water, it seemed that no matter what I threw out there, the fish just moved out of the way of the drifting fly, exhibiting a serious case of lockjaw.

I took a closer look at my overstuffed fly boxes and found a few patterns not composed of gaudy colors—some Hare's Ear Nymphs, Pheasant Tail Nymphs, and an oddball stonefly nymph pattern that I had recently concocted using a variety of materials that had been littering my fly-tying desk. I selected this fly from the box, secured it to the tippet, and within a few casts a big brown trout moved about 4 feet to engulf it.

That was the day the Jawbreaker Stone was christened. After landing that trout, I made a quick study of the streambed, flipping over a few rocks to see what might be crawling about, and alternating rock flipping with liberal use of my hand warmers. It didn't take me long to realize that the creek was loaded with mayfly nymphs and small stonefly nymphs.

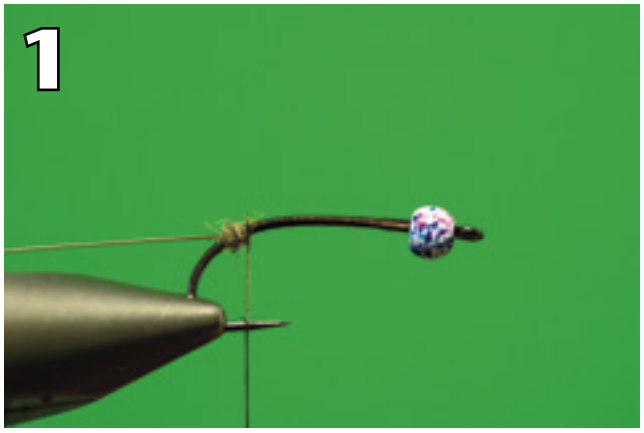
I decided that the next time I fished this stream, a change of tactics was in order. I was going to go totally natural and stay away from the flashy traditional steelhead and brown trout nymphs anglers typically use here. Back at the tying bench, I re-created that oddball stonefly, adding a slightly brighter bead but sticking to black and subdued hues of brown for most of the materials. I added rubber legs for the tail and antennae to add a bit of movement, and wood duck for the legs, not only for movement, but to add some light/dark patterning. Swiss straw served for the back and wing case. This material is easy to use and holds its shape when wet. Significantly, Swiss straw works best (for a shell back) when coated with some kind of glue. I have used both UV-cured glues and Hard as Hull cement; generally I prefer the latter. Hard as Hull takes longer to dry than UV-cured cements, but it seems to be much more durable and adds longevity to the fly. Squirrel dubbing has become a favorite of mine for most of my nymphs. It adds a natural bugginess to the fly, and the guard hairs hold water around the fly, making it look even more natural.

Materials

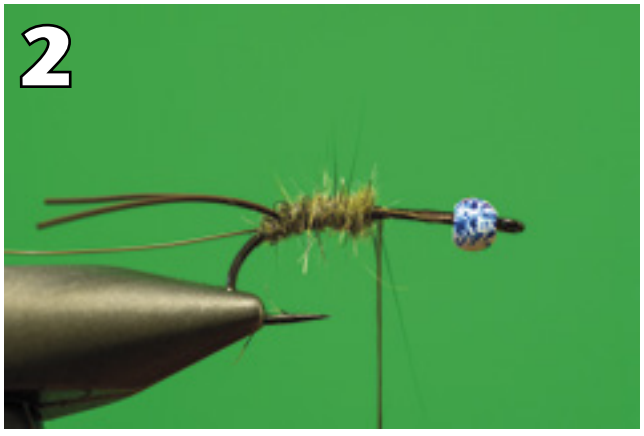
Hook:	Partridge Sedge/Caddis hook, sizes 8–12
Tail:	Brown round rubber legs
Rib:	Brassie-size copper/brown Ultra Wire
Bead:	White jawbreaker Hareline Plummeting Tungsten Bead
Abdomen:	Natural fox SLF squirrel dubbing
Shell back:	Brown Swiss straw
Legs:	Natural lemon wood duck
Thorax:	Dark brown SLF squirrel dubbing
Antennae:	Brown round rubber legs
Wing case:	Brown Swiss straw

On the heavily fished tributaries of the Great Lakes, I have discovered that keeping it natural, so to speak, results in more hookups, and for steelhead and browns, trout-fishing techniques and flies often have an edge. But the Jawbreaker Stone is hardly a Great Lakes specialist—it is equally at home on the trout streams of the West.

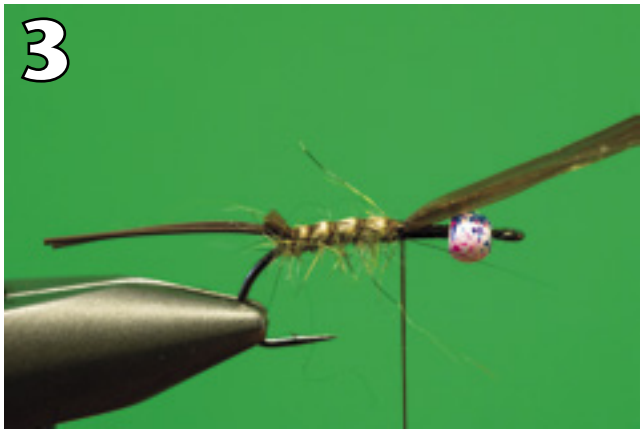
An Orvis signature tier, Jake Villwock, owner of Relentless Fly Fishing, www.relentlessflyfishing.com, guides in Pennsylvania and New York for trout, smallmouth bass, steelhead, and muskies.



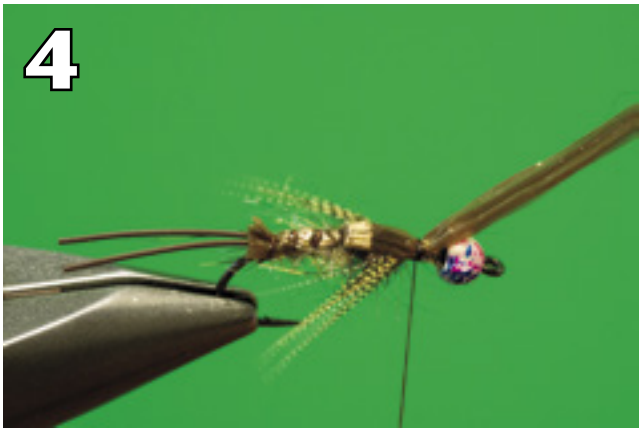
Step 1: Position the bead against the eye of the hook. Beginning behind the bead, create a thread base on the hook shank, securing a length of Ultra Wire as you progress rearward with the thread. Make a small dubbing ball at the top of the hook bend.



Step 2: Fold a section of rubber legs over the thread, making the rubber into a "V," and secure it just in front of the dubbing ball. Dub the body about halfway up to the bead.



Step 3: Lay a section of Swiss straw over the dubbing and tie down at the end of the dubbing. Spiral the Ultra Wire over the abdomen to form the rib, leaving a small tag of Swiss straw off the back.



Step 4: Fold the Swiss straw back and make a few thread wraps to secure it. Create half of the thorax with dark brown SLF squirrel dubbing. Measure the wood duck "legs" to about the length of the abdomen. Tie them in and trim. Fold the Swiss straw forward, creating the first wing case.

Step 5: Repeat step 4, leaving a small amount of hook shank open behind the bead; fill in the remaining space with dubbing.

Step 6: Tie in one rubber leg on each side of the fly for antennae. Whip-finish in front of the rubber legs, which helps pull the legs forward. Finish the fly by coating all the Swiss straw with Hard as Hull and let dry. The cement prevents the Swiss straw from puffing up when it gets wet.

Emotion Detector/By John E. Wood

Bunny-strip flies caught my eye early on in my angling career. The long, sinuous tail and the multitude of available colors make bunny flies (patterns tied with strips of rabbit fur) very attractive to both anglers and fish. Over the years, I tinkered with many versions of bunny flies, but to my eye something was always missing—namely, a contrasting color at the tail. Hence, I came up with the Emotion Detector.

While living in Wyoming, I became enamored with a group of local trout lakes and began spending much of my fishing time there. For the most part, small flies were the ticket except for those days when conditions were poor and the trout inactive. During those periods, big flies fished near the weed edges were much more effective. Casting and retrieving big bunny flies from my float tube, I imagined the fly sliding by resting trout, unnoticed. I began attaching a small so-called hot spot to the tail of the fly, experimenting with various glues to adhere the materials, but the attachments eventually failed. The hot spot made the flies more effective on the local lakes—as long as it stayed attached.

The problem with gluing the hot spot in place is that the leather of the bunny strip swells when wet. The glue doesn't swell or expand, and the attachment becomes weak.

The hot spot attachment revelation came when I purchased a tube fly adapter set for my vise. I sharpened the smallest pin in the set and inserted it into the end of the bunny strip. This made it possible to tie the hot spot to the bunny strip, just like attaching any material to any other fly. Once I worked out the attachment details, durability was no longer an issue.

Sometime later, before heading to Washington state to fish for steelhead, I added the collar of angora goat dubbing in place of a hackle. I also switched to an up-eye salmon/steelhead hook rather than the bass hook I used on the prototypes. I didn't anticipate, but quickly learned to appreciate, the added action that the upturned eye imparted to the fly, especially in strong current. During those few days of fishing the Kalama River, I hooked three steelhead on Emotion Detectors, but didn't land any of the sea-bright fish.

The next spring, I added a bundle of Krystal Flash fibers to the tail of the fly to help keep the bunny strip from fouling on the hook bend. I tested the new renditions the next day while waiting for the evening walleye bite just before dark. That evening I landed three hefty rainbows and quite a complement of walleyes, never switching to my normal walleye fly. That's when I knew for sure the Emotion Detector was a keeper.

Give the fly a try, using a sinking line to work the weed edges in lakes. Or cast to the bank and use a slow retrieve following the falling bank contour. Fish them in rivers using a dead-drift or downstream swing presentation. These flies have landed trout, bass, pike, steelhead, and salmon across the country.

Materials

Hook:	Mustad SL73 ULB salmon, size 2
Head:	Large (0.25-in.) copper cone
Weight:	10 wraps of 0.025-in. lead-free wire
Thread:	Olive, size 6/0
Flash:	Olive Krystal Flash
Underbody:	Yellow marabou blood quill
Tail:	2.75-in.-long dark olive rabbit strip
Hot spot tip:	0.5-in.-long yellow rabbit strip
Collar:	Light olive angora dubbing

John E. Wood, www.jwoodflyfish.com, is a freelance writer, photographer, and commercial fly tier and designer who pursues fishing opportunities around the country.

Step 1: Place a heavy sewing needle into the vise and insert it ⅝-inch into the skin side of the end of the rabbit strip. Part and groom the fur on the last ½ -inch of the strip; start the thread at the part, bind the end of the hot spot at that point, and whip-finish. Repeat the binding and whip-finish 1/16-inch from the end of strip to finish securing the hot spot.

Step 2: Place the cone on the hook and place the hook in the vise. Make 10 wire wraps on the hook shank, shove the wire forward, cover it with tying thread, and coat with head cement or UV resin. Attach the Krystal Flash bundle at the hook bend, wrap it along the hook shank to the back of the wire wraps, trim, and cover the trimmed ends with thread.

Step 3: Stroke the fibers of a large marabou blood quill toward the tip of the feather, allowing a few of the barbs that are not full length to remain. Below that point, strip all the fibers off the stem. Secure the tip of the marabou blood quill over, and the same length as the Krystal Flash, using several tight thread wraps. Do not trim the butt end of the marabou quill.

Step 4: To determine its tie-in point, position the rabbit strip on top of the hook with the front end just behind the cone. Part the fur at a point just over the tail tie-in and bind the strip down with stacked thread wraps. Use a large whip-finisher to secure the thread at that point. Wind the thread forward to just behind the cone.

Step 5: Grasp the stem of the marabou quill, twist it until snug, and wind it forward to just behind the cone. Bind the butt of the quill securely and trim the excess. Pull the rabbit strip forward and bind it securely to the wire wraps.

Step 6: Form a 3-inch dubbing loop and fill it with angora goat dubbing. Twist the loop, then wrap the dubbed collar into the space behind the cone, grooming the fibers back with each wrap. Whip-finish between the cone and collar. Use a sturdy bodkin to pick the dubbing loose to lengthen the collar fibers.

In the Vise

The Great Carpholio/By Andrew Grillos

Fly fishing for carp can be both entertaining and frustrating. Some days it seems like you just can't win. You either spook every fish or they're just not interested in your offerings. Other days the fish just seem like they're on the feed and aggressively chase down most any fly you get in front of them. Fly selection is less important on those great days, but when things get tough—when carp are discerning in their appetites—fly choice is critical. And, of course, fly choice for selective fish begins in the fly-design process.

Southwest Montana, my home base, has some great carp fisheries that are ideal testing grounds for new flies, one of which is my latest carp pattern, The Great Carpholio.

A few days each summer seem to fall into that "entertaining" category of carp fishing. However, one of my local fisheries has become increasingly popular with both fly anglers and bow-and-arrow carp hunters. Consequently, the fish seem to be getting tougher and tougher to fool. But The Great Carpholio has saved some otherwise tough days for me on that fishery. There's something about the combination of sparseness, minimal flash, and seductive silicone legs that makes The Great Carpholio a carp-catching machine. I've found that this fly works well in a number of shades, including olive, brown, black, tan, and orange. Modify the color scheme to represent the favorite foods of your local carp.

One of the fly's key design elements is a concept I borrowed from my winter steelhead patterns. I tie my winter steelhead flies with the underlying idea that I'm trying to achieve the illusion of bulk in the fly's profile, while actually tying a fly that will cast easily and sink quickly and easily. The Great Carpholio is a minimalist fly that doesn't absorb much water and sinks quickly, to get right in front of a carp's nose. In most carp-fishing situations, it's critical that you drop your fly close to the fish's face—accurate casting needs to be complemented by a pattern that enters the water quietly and sinks immediately. This is especially important when you target carp in moving water, where a fly must sink to the proper depth before the fly drifts away from the target zone and before the current causes the line to drag.

Having a fly that rides with the hook point up is also an important factor when tying carp flies. The fish are typically targeted in shallower water and they spend the majority of their time foraging on the bottom. Flies that will drop to the bottom and land with the point up allow the angler to twitch the fly along the bottom and not worry about hanging up or pulling in a wad of moss. It's my opinion that the jig hook is also much more effective at hooking a carp in its rubbery mouth. The carp sucks the fly up and the upturned hook point has a clear advantage at finding purchase in the fish's mouth.

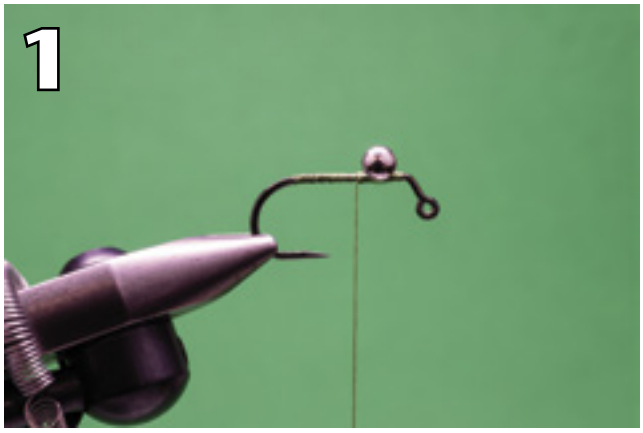
Materials

Hook:	Umpqua S506, sizes 2-10
Thread:	Olive UTC 140-denier
Eyes:	Hareline nickel-plated brass eyes (large for sizes 2 and 4, medium for sizes 6 and 8, small for size 10)
Tail:	Olive marabou
Body:	Medium olive Krystal Hackle, palmered over an underbody of black holographic tinsel
Legs:	Chartreuse/olive Hot Tipped Crazy Legs
Head:	Olive deer body hair, flared and trimmed

PHOTO BY AUTUMN GOODRICH

Fly fishing for carp is no longer the oddball pursuit it may have been 15 years ago; it's commonplace now and rightfully so. Carp fisheries are easily accessible to most anglers, even in the most urban settings. Carp fishing is highly addictive because it's mainly a sight-fishing game. And carp grow big and powerful, offering anglers excellent prospects for hooking a truly huge fish. I've hooked a number of carp well past the 30-pound mark that I just couldn't turn. That's not to say I won't keep trying, though.

Creative fly tier and Montana resident Andrew Grillos enjoys many forms of fly fishing. His innovative patterns are distributed by Umpqua Feather Merchants.



Step 1: Create a tightly wound base of thread along the hook shank (don't wrap thread on the upturned portion of the jig hook). Secure the eyes on top of the shank using multiple X-wraps of thread and wraps around the base of the eyes. Add a drop of glue to the thread wraps.

Step 2: Wind the thread to the rear of the hook shank, just ahead of the bend. Tie in two to three marabou plumes, making the tail about the same length as the hook shank, and the tag end of the tail about equal to the length of the body. Bury the tag end of the tail under tight thread wraps, forming a uniformly tapered underbody.

Step 3: Tie in the Krystal Hackle, followed by the holographic tinsel. Wrap a tight underbody of holographic tinsel. Palmer the Krystal Hackle forward so the sparkly underbody shows through. Note: in the next three steps, you may want to turn the fly over in the vise.

Step 4: Position three legs on each side of the hook shank, securing them just in front of the eyes. Use thread tension to flare the legs out to the sides of the fly a bit; this helps them stay on their respective sides of the fly.

Step 5: Clean, stack, and tie in a clump of deer body hair; the tips of the hair should line up with the hook point once the hair is tied in and flared. Hold the clump of hair in place while applying tension and flaring the hair to prevent it from spinning around the hook. The idea is to create a slider/crustacean-style appearance rather than a rounded Muddler-style head.

Step 6: Pull the tag ends of the deer hair out of the way. Carefully whip-finish twice in front of the deer hair. Don't let your thread head advance onto the upturned portion of the jig hook. Trim the tag ends of the deer hair to shape. Trim legs so they extend a bit past the tail.

Red Fish, Blue Fish

By E. Donnall Thomas Jr.

Red State, Blue State. Seriously (well, sort of). Like it or not, we are living in a time of unprecedented partisanship during which half of the country has stopped talking to the other half, and vice versa. For the record, I am a staunch independent. One might think that this political orientation would leave me free to talk to everyone, when in fact it leaves me feeling like a perch in a pond full of hungry pike. It's that bad nowadays.

The Red/Blue divide has permeated almost every aspect of our society. Nowhere is this schism more apparent than here in Montana, where an unmarked, unofficial line running from Alberta to Wyoming, approximately 100 miles east of the Continental Divide, separates the state into two different cultures. Living just to the Red side of this imaginary line, I already anticipate the day when I'll need a passport to fish the Big Hole River.

On the Blue western side: Subarus, microbrews, CNN, universities, recycling, vegetarian menus, alternative rock, hiking boots, jogging, soccer, spandex, Save the Wolves. And, to the point of this essay: spring creeks, barbless hooks, drift boats, 4-weight rods, floating lines, rainbows, cutthroats, browns, and brookies.

To the deeply Red east: diesel pickups, Bud Light, Fox News, homeschooling, beef, country music, cowboy boots, team roping, eight-man football, blue jeans, a gun rack full of coyote rifles in every truck. And, back to the point: reservoirs, treble hooks, outboard motors, spinning rods, sinkers, walleyes, northern pike, bass, panfish.

I am an outlier in this divided universe. Save for rare occasions when I really wanted to put some halibut in the freezer while I was living in Alaska, I haven't fished with conventional angling tackle in 50 years (and I even did most of my halibut fishing with a 10-weight fly rod and a high-density shooting-head). I also love to fish for warmwater species—the Red Fish of our brave new world. Sign me up for a pike's slashing strike, a smallmouth's powerful run, walleye fillets sizzling in a pan. Not infrequently, I drive right across some of the country's best trout streams to reach them.

Venturing into Red Fish territory with Blue Fish tackle can make a guy feel lonely. Pull into a boat launch on famous Montana rivers, such as the Madison, Yellowstone, or upper Missouri, during the summer and you'll see license plates from all over the country, including states I've never even heard of, much less visited. (Good luck finding a parking place.) Out on the prairie where the Red Fish live, I've hardly ever seen a plate that didn't have "Big Sky Country" painted on it. Matter of fact, I hardly ever see any license plates at all.

I've grown accustomed to strange looks when I do run into gear anglers on Red Fish water. Yet somehow—and here's some grounds for optimism at last—those encounters virtually always end well. On a recent trip to a prairie bass pond, I was releasing a largemouth when an old rancher carrying a spinning rod ambled up beside me on the bank.

"How's the fishing?" I asked.

"Catching a few," he replied—the universal answer to the universal question, which can mean anything from "I haven't seen a fish" to "So good I don't want to tell anyone about it." He then watched me in silence for several minutes as I double-hauled a fresh Clouser Minnow toward the middle of the pond.

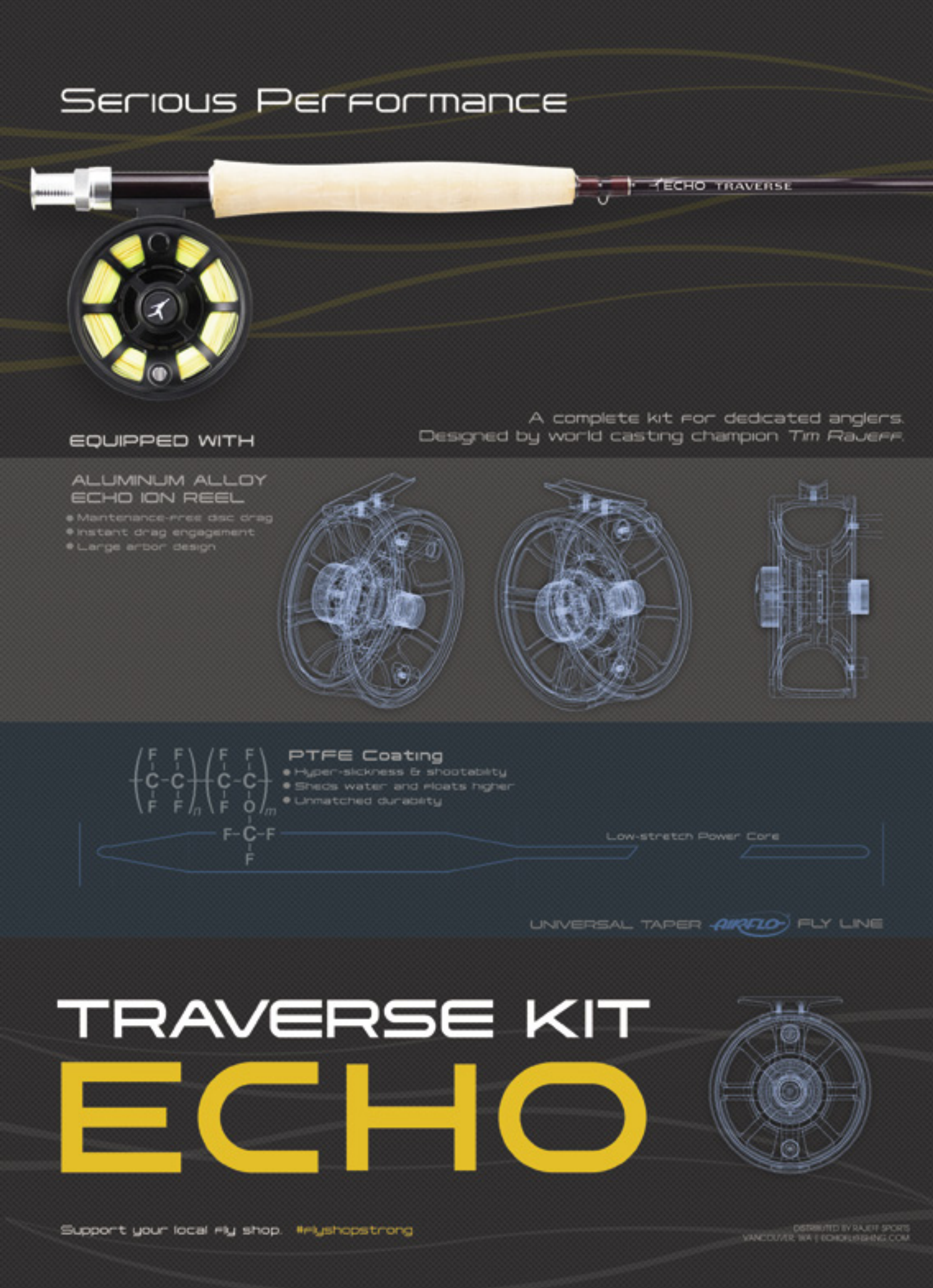
"What are you doing?" he finally asked.

"I'm fly fishing," I replied.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. Then he offered me a Bud Light from his creel.

If fishermen can bridge their divides, why can't congressmen and -women? If I ever learn the answer, I'll let you know.

Veteran outdoors writer and photographer E. Donnall Thomas Jr. is a longtime contributor to Northwest Fly Fishing, Southwest Fly Fishing, *and* Eastern Fly Fishing *magazines.*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