flyfisherman.com // June-July 2018

FLY FISHERMAN

THE LEADING MAGAZINE OF FLY FISHING

» Ted Williams Explains
Why Wild Trout Matter

WHAT Trout SEE *From Below*

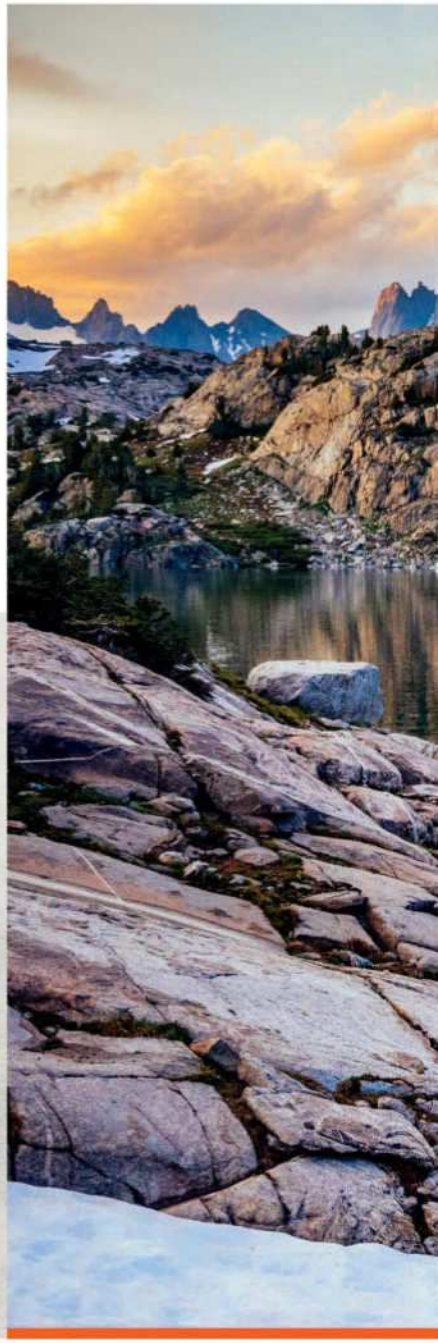
Montana's
Wild & Scenic
Flathead River

Flyathlon:
Run. Fish. Beer.

+

SMALLMOUTH BASS
On the Surface

HOW FAR CAN WADERS GO?



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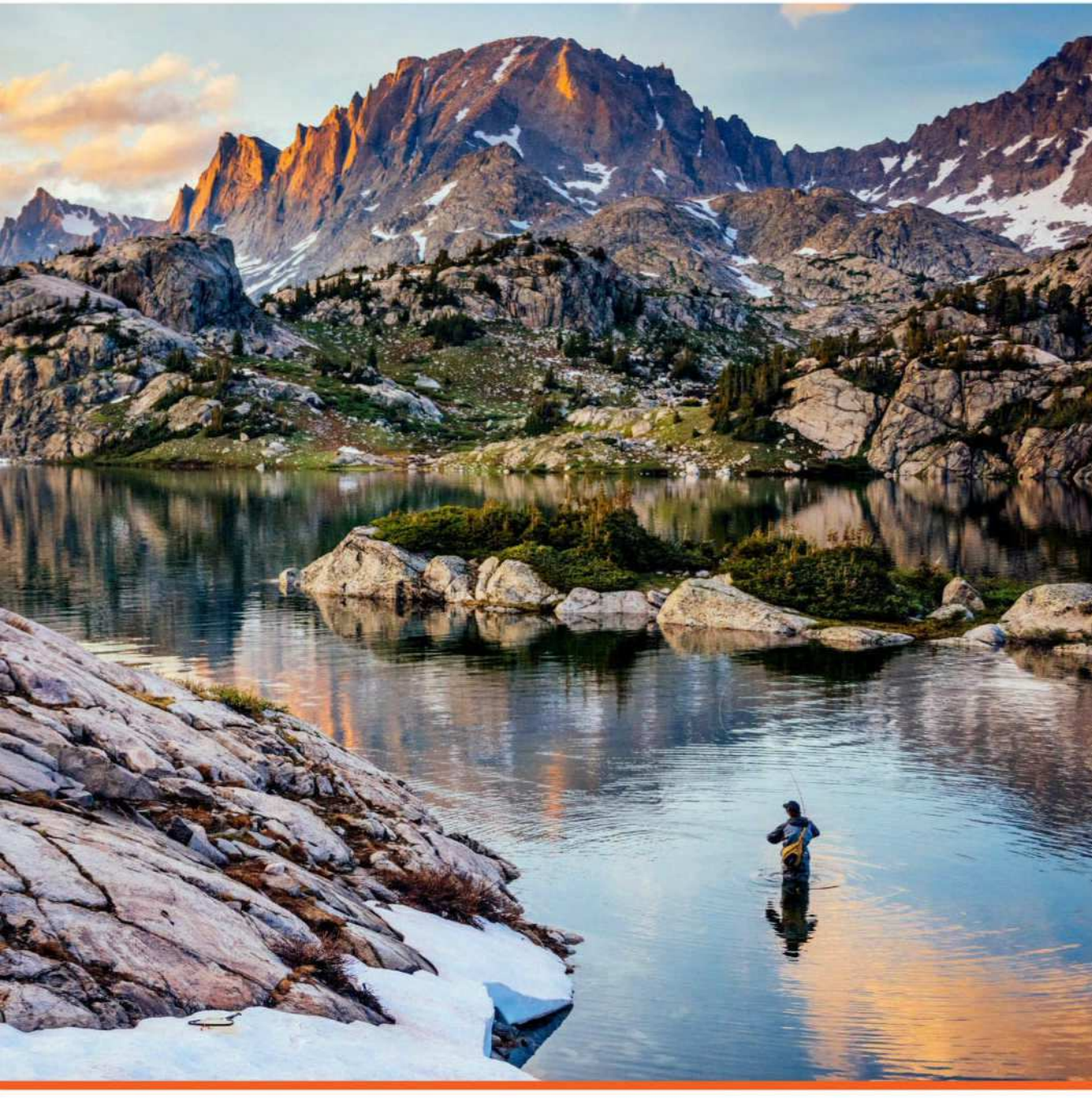

Shane Grimes soothes tired legs with some ice water immersion therapy 12 miles into the Wind River Range, Wyoming. **JEREMIAH WATT**

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VOLUME 49 • NUMBER 4

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Springtime is just a couple months away in

PATAGONIA

Chile

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el saltamontes

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I JUST RETURNED from a trip to Chile, spending three weeks experiencing our trio of world-class lodges, and am happy to report my Missing Link was a hit! At El Saltamontes there was a trio of big browns in a Nireguao back eddy that couldn't resist a #16's low profile; at Trouters a foam line of rocket-fueled rainbows that would touch nothing else but a #20 Missing Link; and at Patagonian BaseCamp some fellow guests described a stellar day sight-casting to big browns and rainbows on Lago Rosselot with the #12 Green Drake version!

– Mike Mercer

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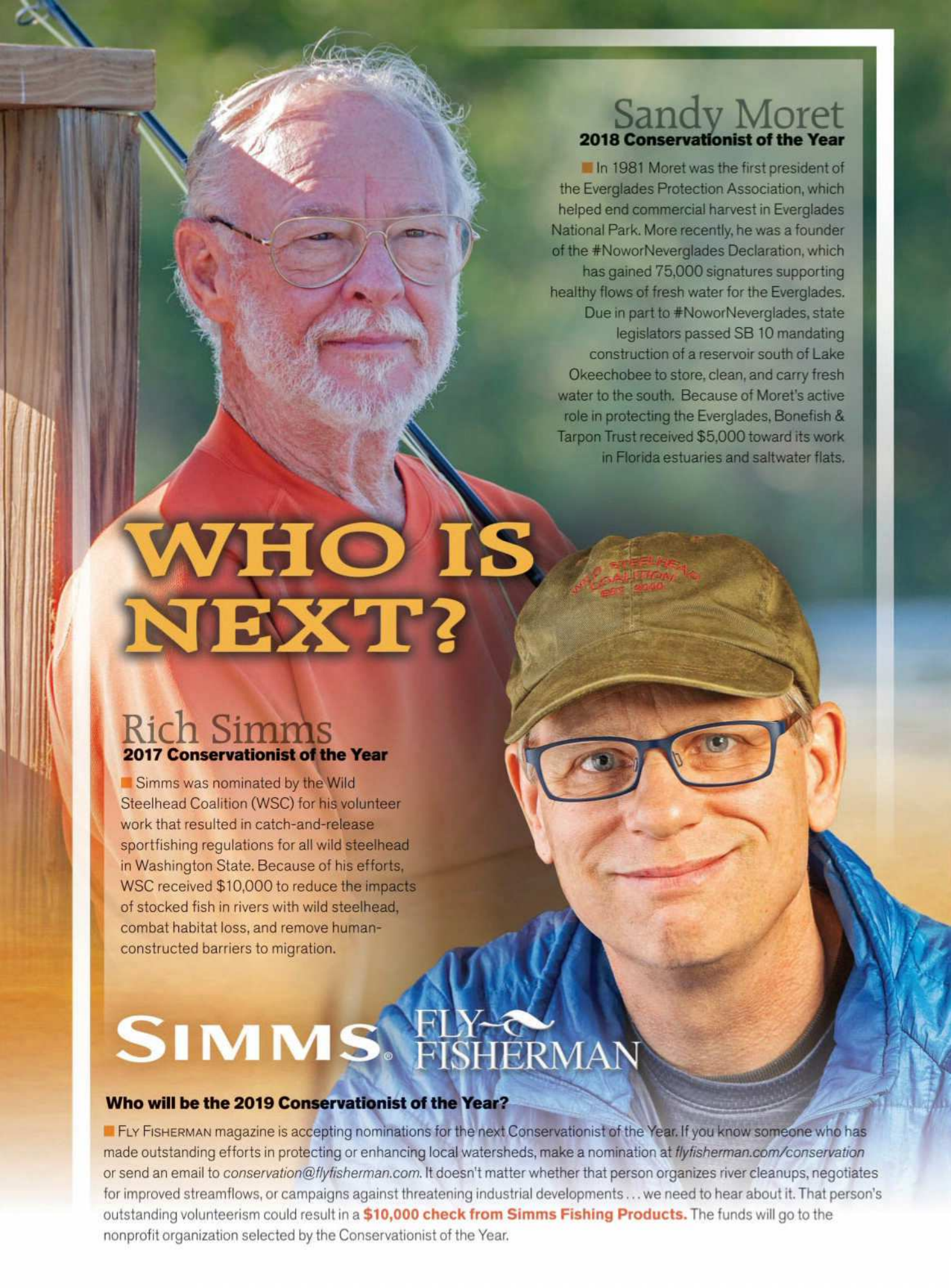

WHO IS NEXT?

Sandy Moret
2018 Conservationist of the Year

In 1981 Moret was the first president of the Everglades Protection Association, which helped end commercial harvest in Everglades National Park. More recently, he was a founder of the #NoworNeverglades Declaration, which has gained 75,000 signatures supporting healthy flows of fresh water for the Everglades. Due in part to #NoworNeverglades, state legislators passed SB 10 mandating construction of a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee to store, clean, and carry fresh water to the south. Because of Moret's active role in protecting the Everglades, Bonefish & Tarpon Trust received $5,000 toward its work in Florida estuaries and saltwater flats.

Rich Simms
2017 Conservationist of the Year

Simms was nominated by the Wild Steelhead Coalition (WSC) for his volunteer work that resulted in catch-and-release sportfishing regulations for all wild steelhead in Washington State. Because of his efforts, WSC received $10,000 to reduce the impacts of stocked fish in rivers with wild steelhead, combat habitat loss, and remove human-constructed barriers to migration.

SIMMS® FLY FISHERMAN

Who will be the 2019 Conservationist of the Year?

Fly Fisherman magazine is accepting nominations for the next Conservationist of the Year. If you know someone who has made outstanding efforts in protecting or enhancing local watersheds, make a nomination at *flyfisherman.com/conservation* or send an email to *conservation@flyfisherman.com*. It doesn't matter whether that person organizes river cleanups, negotiates for improved streamflows, or campaigns against threatening industrial developments . . . we need to hear about it. That person's outstanding volunteerism could result in a **$10,000 check from Simms Fishing Products.** The funds will go to the nonprofit organization selected by the Conservationist of the Year.


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Written by Guides

WHEN I STARTED at this job in 1996, the first thing publisher John Randolph told me was that we don't publish "Me & Bob went fishing" stories. In other words, we don't do tourist travelogues. It amazes me that 22 years later, I still get queries from writers who are planning their very first trip to Yellowstone (or similar), and they want to write about it.

What we do publish are stories written by local experts who are often guides. That's the foundation of Fly Fisherman—a magazine not written by professional writers, but by guides, fly shop owners, fly tiers, and other specialists who can provide a deep level of understanding, and act as conduits for highly trusted information.

This issue is a classic example. Who better to write about the three forks of the Flathead (page 34) than Hilary Hutcheson, who has spent most of her life fishing, guiding, and rafting on the river that was the birthplace of the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. (The act is 50 years old this year.) If you plan to visit one of the most pristine, intact cutthroat and bull trout ecosystems in America, who would you want your information from . . . a seasoned veteran like Hutcheson, or a fellow tourist?

Yes, Oliver White owns Abaco Lodge, so he has "skin in the game" but he also has more current global fly-fishing experience than anyone else out there, so he can accurately and informatively compare "the bonefish highway" to other sublime moments he's had in the wilderness. And he's hosted Bonefish & Tarpon Trust researchers who have studied the phenomenon of massive new and full moon bonefish migrations (page 16). So he doesn't just have firsthand guide experiences, he has science to explain what he's seen on the water.

Capt. Bruce Chard has been poling the flats of the Lower Keys for 25 years . . . that's just about the right amount of time to have a son, watch him grow up, and then in one summer teach him how to become a saltwater flats guide (page 40). In that educational process, there's much for the rest of us to learn as well.

Tim Landwehr coauthored with Dave Karczynski our story about topwater fishing for smallmouth bass (page 50). Tim and his wife Sarah met in Big Sky, Montana, while Tim was guiding on the Madison, Gallatin, and Yellowstone rivers and together they now own Tight Lines Fly Fishing Company in De Pere, Wisconsin. Tim has built a business guiding for smallmouth bass, and to be successful at that, you probably know how to dependably catch big bass. It helps if you can do it with floating lines and surface flies like wigglies, skaters, and poppers.

There's much to learn from these seasoned guides, and the others represented on these pages, so enjoy soaking it in. I know I did!

Photo | Lee Cohen

Starting on page 34, guide Hilary Hutcheson explains how the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act helped protect one of Montana's most pristine cutthroat and bull trout ecosystems.

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Salty Humor

A Fly-Fishing Diptych from John Van Vleet

Illustrations | John Van Vleet

#ONECOAST

Irma, Harvey, and Maria might have laid waste to some iconic fishing communities, but their resiliency has been inspiring. In the news item "Costa Cleans up the Keys" (Feb.-Mar. 2018), you touched on this, but I thought the people I worked with in days after Irma deserved a few more words.

Seeing the devastation after the storm plowed through the Lower Keys—leaving scars where people's lives once stood—was almost too much to bear. We wove our convoy of Costa vehicles around boats thrown into the middle of the road by unprecedented storm surges, and rolled past mountains of twisted metal, plastic, and wood from winds of more than 100 mph. I vividly recall tearing up as the contents of one home was strung out in front of me. I thought, "What could we do to make a difference?"

But as we got to work, cutting, hauling, dragging, and unbending what once constituted homes, something magical happened: The people we went to help emerged to lend a hand to neighbors, friends, and even, in a few cases, once sworn enemies. The work was hard in the calm, muggy heat that followed the storm, but that did not deter the guides of the Conch Republic. As we moved from property to property, what really struck me was how, at every stop, whoever we helped joined our wolf pack.

We arrived as eight sets of hands from Costa, but by the end of the first day we were dozens. Swiftly, we could do in hours what would normally take weeks or months. I believe we provided a catalyst for residents who could not see how they would put their lives back together. Most impressively, after our short time in the Lower and Middle Keys, these wolf packs of helpers continued working for months to help numerous families get back to normalcy. The Keys community is special, no doubt, but what I witnessed was a reaffirmation of the good in humans.

There is still a great deal of recovery that will take years, but the fishing has returned and if you want to make a difference, book a fishing trip to the Florida Keys, the Texas Coast, or Puerto Rico.

PETER VANDERGRIFT
COSTA FLY COMMUNITY LEADER

BASKET RECOVERY

I like the idea behind the Photarium shown on page 53 of the Feb.-Mar. 2018 issue, but I suspect that the average guy in a 14- to 16-foot craft will be unable or unwilling to use it. Fred Foiset, founder of Central Oregon Guides and Outfitters (Sun River, Oregon) uses, and encourages his customers to use a light-weight alternative to the Photarium.

Foiset takes a simple plastic laundry basket, uses a hole saw to add a few additional bottom holes, attaches closed-cell pipe insulation to the top edges (fastened with ties), and ties the basket to the boat with a short rope. When we land a fish and remove the hook, the trout goes into the basket for a short recovery period. After the trout fully recovers, we can lift it for a quick photo, the trout goes into the basket again for another recovery period, and then it's released safely. The basket is inexpensive, it's easy to stow, and it floats alongside the boat while you are anchored or drifting.

JOHN O'CONNOR
EUGENE, OREGON

GUYS WITH FLY RODS

Thank you for highlighting Indifly's work in the Oct.-Dec. 2017 issue. Rewa Eco-Lodge's success is often attributed to Indifly and our team, but the simple fact is success would not be possible without the hard work and perseverance of the Rewa community. Their vision is inspiring.

Indifly cannot accomplish our mission alone. Indifly carries out its mission through the support, passion, and generosity of individuals who read your magazine, and companies like Costa Del Mar.

We use fly fishing as a tool for transforming the lives of indigenous people and protecting valued environments. Done right, this creates a sustainable local economy that empowers communities to conserve natural resources. These are things every fly fisher should care about.

If your readers were inspired by the story "1 Guy with a Fly Rod" I would ask they consider making a tax-deductible donation at *indifly.org*.

MATT SHILLING
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INDIFLY

ICONIC 'STONE

I was glad to read a neighbor's take on what makes Montana's premiere river so iconic. Paul Weamer's story "Liquid Treasure" in the Feb.-Mar. 2018 issue reminds us all of our commitment to ensure the Yellowstone continues to pump the lifeblood through the heart of our region.

I'm particularly glad he highlighted not only the ecological diversity of the watershed, but also the threats that keep us fighting to keep the Yellowstone a healthy, viable waterway. Weamer notes that "mining, ranching, and industry," come first in Montana, but what that industry looks like today is morphing across the state, due to an annual $7 billion outdoor economy—much of which is driven by anglers from all corners of our world.

At GYC we're grateful to have the support of businesses like Simms, Sage, and Yellow Dog Flyfishing Adventures, and nearly every local shop owner who understands we've got only one shot to keep this river flowing free from the potential impacts of two proposed gold mines.

I'm taking Weamer's advice. I've called my senator and I've asked for the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act to remain a political priority, and be passed through Congress as a win for not only every Montanan, but for every fly fisher on the 'Stone who hopes to find a cutthroat on the line this summer.

LIZ PURDY
GREATER YELLOWSTONE COALITION

NOISE VS. RESULTS

Thank you for the article "Liquid Treasure," which provided an unlabored summary of fly fishing the Yellowstone, and some of the challenges facing this majestic watershed.

I'm a native Montanan and member of the Yellowstone Gateway Business Coalition mentioned in article. We are the spear tip opposing proposed gold mines near Yellowstone National Park. I started fly fishing on the Yellowstone 45 years ago, and I fish it more than 150 days a year. But the fly-fishing community isn't the only one that cares about our watersheds. In order to protect what we love, we need to look outside our own ranks as fly fishers, acknowledge our own impacts on watersheds, and form strategic alliances to broaden the definition of what a watershed conservationist can be. The most powerful alliances we have formed are with some of the same stakeholders author Paul Weamer either assigns some level of blame or ignores as possible allies.

Trophy homes on large parcels aren't necessarily bad for conservation. These homeowners bring diverse experience, political influence, and financial resources to the debate over sustainable use of private and public lands. Often, they share a common value with Montanans; namely, the need to protect our land from overdevelopment. Let's team up with these homeowners to protect against subdivision of private lands, and corporate exploitation of public lands.

Ranchers can be our friends also. I know many ranchers who have put conversation easements on their property, who have leased water rights back to the state, who love to fly fish, and some of who even run fly-fishing businesses. In order to produce results, the fly-fishing industry needs to do more to form partnerships and dialogues with ranchers to advance watershed conservation.

Finally, we need to make watershed conservation work on both sides of the aisle. Democrats and fly fishers shouldn't have exclusive rights to watershed conservation. I encourage all of us to pursue more results through partnerships. The fish we love so much deserve it, and their survival perhaps depends up on it.

JEFF REED
EMIGRANT, MONTANA

Log On:

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tightlines@flyfisherman.com

You can also mail your letters to:

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Due to the amount of correspondence we receive, we regret that we cannot respond to each letter. Mailing addresses are required.

RUN. FISH. BEER.

How to "win" the Driftless Area Flyathlon

PATRICK BURKE

"**WE'RE GOING TO** start you off in true Iowa style," announces race organizer Ryan Rahmiller. A volunteer jogs 40 yards down the trail holding an M-80 and a lighter. It's raining, but the wick sparks to life with a hiss.

There are around 50 of us at the starting line, stamping our feet against the damp chill and nervously glancing skyward. The race time was moved up an hour, in hopes of beating the incoming storms, but most of us were up late drinking around campfires. In our present state, outrunning the forces of nature is a lot to ask.

I look around, sizing up the competition. Some look like serious anglers, but maybe not avid runners. They pace around, tentatively stretching random muscle groups and tightening shoelaces. Others look like serious runners, but they fiddle with their fly rods with unfamiliarity, and stare at patches of borrowed flies as if stumped by a quiz. But there are some who look confident, if comically divided in half: from the waist up, they could be right out of the pages of this magazine; from the waist down, from *Runners World*.

The Flyathlon logo reads: "Run. Fish. Beer." The slogan pretty much sums up the event, but omits one key point: Flyathletes enjoy these things at roughly the same time. On the surface it's a questionable combination: trail running and fly fishing. Sure, it brings together two things that many of us love, but just because we love two things doesn't mean we should enjoy them simultaneously.

For example: I enjoy spending time with my dogs, and I enjoy watching fireworks. Or, I like making toast, and I like snorkeling. Some things are better apart. It's fair to question the wisdom of running with a fragile and expensive fly rod, or wet wading a trout stream in sneakers. Yet I am about to do both. We shuffle up to the starting line, past a ClackaCraft that's been repurposed as a beer trough. The M-80 detonates, the crowd erupts in a cheer, and the 2017 Driftless Area Flyathlon is underway.

Flyathlons bring together a subniche of fly fishers, and they raise money for nonprofit conservation organizations. The most recent Middle Creek, Colorado, Flyathlon raised $28,000. The inaugural Midwest Flyathlon raised $7,000.

Photo Clint Johnson


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Rules of the Game

Flyathlons vary in length. This one is short, just under 5 miles. Runners carry fly-fishing gear with them and, at some point along the route, must stop, assemble their rod, then catch and measure a trout. You can fish as much as you want (provided you finish before the cutoff), but only one trout is scored, by snapping a photo alongside a provided measuring tape. For each inch of fish, two minutes are subtracted from your finishing time. Get skunked and you'll have 20 minutes added to your time.

The race is the invention of Andrew Todd, who drove here from his home in Denver for the first official Flyathlon outside of Colorado. "It's just what I always did," Todd says. "I worked for the U.S. Geological Survey, so I found myself all around Colorado and the West. I love to run, so I just started taking a fly rod with me."

The first Flyathlon was an unofficial race near Grand Lake, Colorado in 2013. "It was mostly friends and family," Todd recalls. "It went through wilderness and was totally illegal." The following year, the first official event (with insurance and permits and everything!) was held at Middle Creek, in Saguache. Forty runners raised more than $7,000 for Colorado Trout Unlimited. "That's when I realized that I could use this as a vehicle to get people psyched about conservation," Todd says.

Since then the Flyathlon has grown, adding more events, longer courses, and more participants—although organizers cap the number of runners, based on what the resource can handle. Andrew and his partners have also created the nonprofit organization Running Rivers to help direct how the funds raised by flyathletes are allocated. This summer the Middle Creek event alone raised $28,000. The inaugural Driftless Area Flyathlon raised more than $7,000.

"It's a great, great thing," says Iowa DNR ranger Ryan Retalick. "Anything to have more support for these areas, more constituents for legislation, more funding to keep these areas available to people."

Driftless Area

The 2017 Driftless Flyathlon was in the Yellow River State Forest, in the heart of the Driftless Region—an area of limestone hills rolling across parts of Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The spring creeks that wind through these valleys draw anglers from across the Midwest, and beyond.

"The concept of a run/fish/beer event is a natural fit for our region," says Rahmiller, co-owner of Driftless on the Fly. "It offers great fishing opportunities, benefits coldwater conservation, and gives participants the chance to sample some of the state's best craft brews."

Dave Kuntzelman and I were already training for two other races when word of a Midwest Flyathlon reached our social media feeds. We registered immediately, and just in time. The 60 slots sold out quickly.

The race day schedule reads like a strange, landlocked cruise ship itinerary. At 8:30 A.M. we board a hay ride to the starting line. Race time is 9:30. By 12:30 P.M., all runners must cross the finish line, where they are handed a local beer. We drink beer and eat barbecue until 3:30, then pick teams for an afternoon one-fly competition. At 6:30 there is a single-elimination pellet gun beer can shootout.

I have a strained hamstring. After breaking his clavicle in a cycling accident, Kuntzelman hasn't run in months, so we decided to forgo our dreams of a podium finish and instead focused on fishing together. Among the contenders, however, there is a fair amount of strategy. The serious runners know their paces, so the fish is the only variable. How long will it take to catch a trout? Do you score the first fish, regardless of size, or spend precious minutes chasing a larger one?

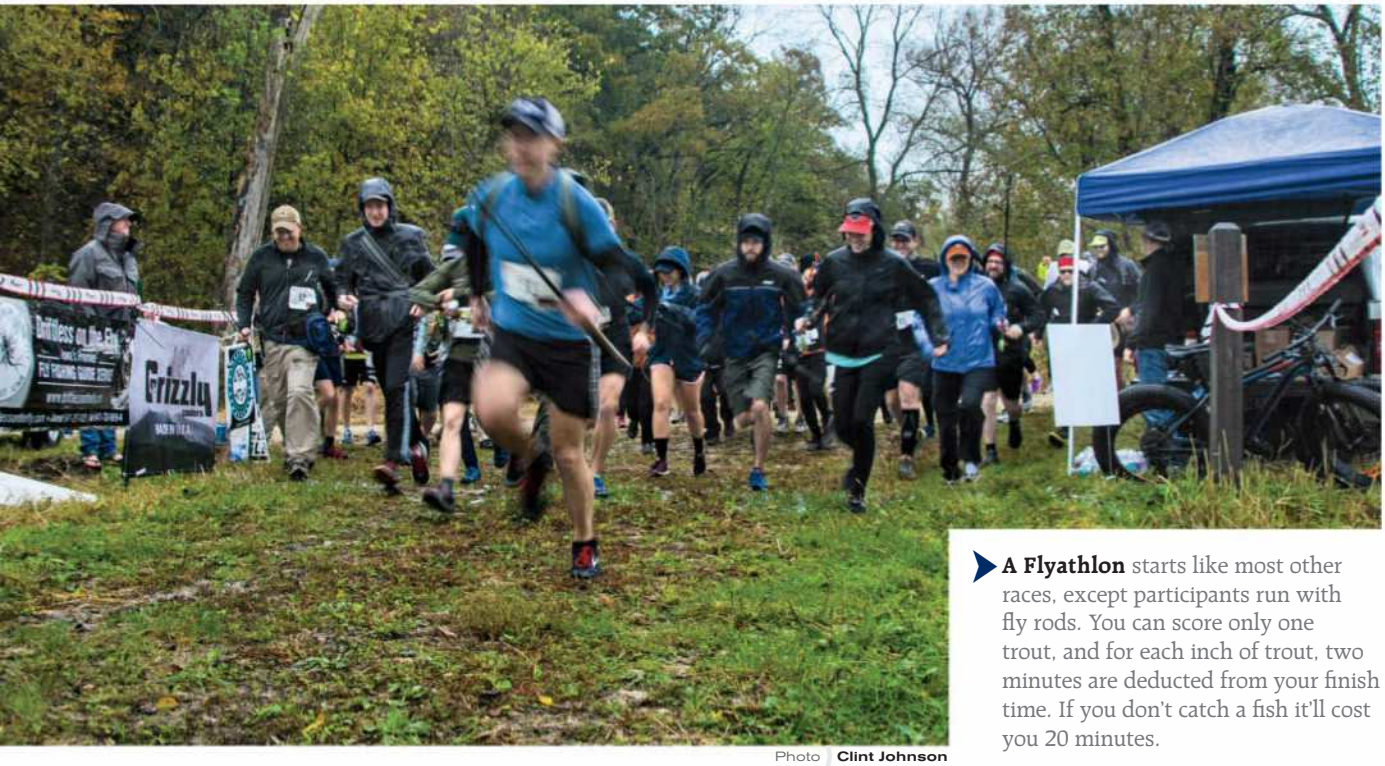


Photo | **Clint Johnson**

A Flyathlon starts like most other races, except participants run with fly rods. You can score only one trout, and for each inch of trout, two minutes are deducted from your finish time. If you don't catch a fish it'll cost you 20 minutes.

Some opt to fish early, then bang out the miles once the fish question has been answered. Others go with a run-first-then-fish-hard strategy.

A quarter mile into our run we spot a promising stretch of riffles and pools. We push through the underbrush, emerging on the bank comically covered in burrs. The prickly hitchhikers will cause serious chafing issues during our run, but for now we're focused on fishing. I manage to quickly catch a 12-inch brown on a #14 beadhead Pink Squirrel. This quintessential Driftless Area nymph has become something of a punch line among local anglers, but I am not ashamed. I'm on the board in under 10 minutes, subtracting 24 minutes from my finish time.

Soon we're back on the trail—damp and muddy, our feet numb from wet wading. The race is not a loop, it's there and back. At the turnaround, volunteers hand out not water, but shots of locally distilled whiskey. We let the elixir warm us while we dump pebbles from our shoes.

We finish near the back of the pack. By noon, the last few fly fishers slog across the finish line. Fish lengths are logged, arithmetic is done, and the winner is Jim Reilly, of St. Paul, Minnesota. I corner him in the beer tent and press him to reveal his strategy.

"I was kind of hungover, I really didn't give it any forethought. Just run fast." Reilly says. "I'd scoped some water on the way out, and nobody was in that hole on my way back. So, I just jumped in, waded across, and got 'er."

The rest of the weekend unfolded according to the itinerary. The fishing stayed good all weekend, and the beer was cold. But the highlight was definitely the people. If fly fishers already occupy a niche, then this group has carved out an eccentric and friendly sub-niche.

"I feel like fly fishing, trail running, and craft beer can all be kind of . . . douchey, you know?" Todd laughs. "If you go into a fly shop you feel it right away—unless it's a good fly shop. The same goes for the starting line of an ultra marathon. People think their sport is the coolest thing on earth. But this? You felt it today, it's a laid-back environment."

I met a surprising number of people who'd run one or more of the Colorado Flyathlons, and everyone I spoke with plans to return for the Driftless Area event next year. This concept, crazy as it seems, resonates with people. Todd sees room to grow.

"I think it could go to many other places," he says. "It just takes that local element. That's why this is so exciting, to see someone else take it and make it their own. If it's just me putting on events, my wife is gonna divorce me and I'm gonna lose my day job. But if people want to do this, we can give them the bones of how to do it."

Patrick Burke lives in the Chicago area, and works in advertising as a writer and creative director. He is also a freelance outdoor writer and content producer, with a focus on the Midwest and Great Lakes regions. His last story in FLY FISHERMAN was "Trash Fish" in the April-May 2018 issue.

The Great Bonefish Migration

New science helps explain the fall, big moon spectacle

OLIVER WHITE

THE BEST THING about a life lived outdoors is the opportunity to experience moments of greatness in nature. These are the moments when everything is perfect, where you can stand in awe of what is happening around you, and feel truly lucky just to witness it. These are moments on slicked calm flats where the horizon is blurred, you can't distinguish the sky from the water, and there are glistening bonefish tails in every direction; when a hatch starts pouring off and every fish in the river is almost drunk on protein; a sabalo massacre in ankle-deep water as a pack of 30-pound dorados destroys them. These events are largely unpredictable, and the recipe for participation is a commitment of time.

I'm fortunate to be in wild places more than most people, which translates to being able to experience these moments of perfection more often. If capturing these moments is winning the lottery, I'm buying more tickets than almost anyone I know—and that makes me pretty damn lucky in more ways than one. Of all these ephemeral, random moments of perfection, there is one that I know of that is as predictable as clockwork. It happens annually on Abaco Island in the Bahamas, and the locals call it simply, "the migration."

In 2008, I had just moved to the Bahamas to build and open Abaco Lodge. I was learning about the island, the culture, construction, and the fishery. I'm a fishing guide at heart, and when I wasn't doing real work at the lodge site, I was exploring the labyrinth of The Marls—running through the endless wilderness in a 16-foot Carolina Skiff with a 25 hp tiller. I brought with me a handheld GPS unit, 5 gallons of water, and a sleeping bag just in case I left myself high and dry chasing tails, and had to spend the night.

The "bonefish highway" on Abaco is a mass migration of bonefish toward specific aggregation and then spawning sites in deep water. Studies of these events and locations by BTT led the Bahamas to create The Marls and Cross Harbour national parks.

Photo Adam Barker

When learning any fishery it's all about pushing boundaries and growing your knowledge. Your goal is to do something new every day, fish a new spot, look around the next corner, and see where that channel leads. I took this approach while learning The Marls, and I pushed that sphere of comfort a little further each time I ventured out. When the fishing is tough, it is easier to explore, to look for good habitat, and hope to stumble onto something new.

The day I stumbled into the migration, fishing in The Marls had been uneventful. It was clear and calm, but bonefish were hard to come by, and the ones I found all had a mysterious purpose—like they were late to a party. They would still opportunistically pick up a fly on the run, but for the most part, they weren't the happy feeding fish The Marls is known for. I didn't have an explanation, just an observation that something was off.

Finicky fish or not, I was committed for the day, and tough fishing meant more exploring. Around lunch I found myself on the outer edge of The Marls. The habitat changes dramatically there—the ground hardens, the colors change, it "feels" different. I was looking down a long white flat and I did a double take as I saw a literal highway of bonefish, 8 to 10 feet wide, that extended as far as I could see into the horizon. It was an endless train of moving bonefish.

I anchored the boat, and stood in awe expecting it to end soon. It didn't. So I pulled fish after fish out of the passing traffic pattern until I had enough. Then I sat on the bow, drank a beer, and watched this unbelievable event unfold. Eventually there were small pauses in the stream of fish, but it soon picked up again. I'd also occasionally see small groups of stragglers that had been left behind, and they seemed to be catching up to their friends. I had no idea what I was seeing, but I thought I'd found Shangri-La. I stayed out late and by the time I got home, I was still euphoric about the spectacle I had witnessed.

Aggregation sites are where bonefish gather in massive schools in the days before the full or new moon when they spawn. The shoals attract sharks, and ethical fly fishers should probably leave these vulnerable fish alone.

Reality Check

As soon as I could, I drove down to Cherokee Sound to try to find someone to share my experience with. It was Donnie Lowe who I told first, a veteran guide with that weathered look that screams "deep local knowledge." As I tried to spit out the information, he just laughed. "Of course," he said. "It's the migration. Happens every year."

I'd witnessed one of the most amazing sights of my life, and he shrugged it off as commonplace. He explained that it was all related to spawning.

The "bonefish highway" I had witnessed was the interstate they used to travel to the big date night. The migration lasts a few days while the fish move to aggregation sites. When the gathering is complete, they disappear into deep water on the night of a full or new moon to spawn. They return home hungry and happy in the days that follow.

I haven't witnessed this phenomenon every year since then, but I've seen it a number of times. It's still magical . . . almost surreal. The first time I saw it I felt like I'd found the end of the rainbow.

Photographer Adam Barker was on Abaco in 2017 to witness the migration, and was able to photograph what I call the bonefish highway (see previous page). He called me that evening and said it was amazing, and in fact too good to bother with fishing. Luckily he was able to catch it on camera, along with some larger schools of bonefish we call pre-spawning aggregations.

Bonefish & Tarpon Trust has been doing research in the Bahamas for almost a decade. They have done an amazing job of coordinating with local guides and lodges. They listen to the people who are on the water every day, and they incorporate those anecdotes into hypotheses for real science. The tales from Abaco of the migration and of pre-spawning aggregations—giant masses of bonefish swimming in circles—promoted some intense research into the spawning behaviors of the most important gamefish in the Bahamas.

BTT has tagged over 10,000 bonefish in the Bahamas. This extensive tagging and recapture program puts solid science behind what the old-time guides already knew. Here are the key things we've learned:

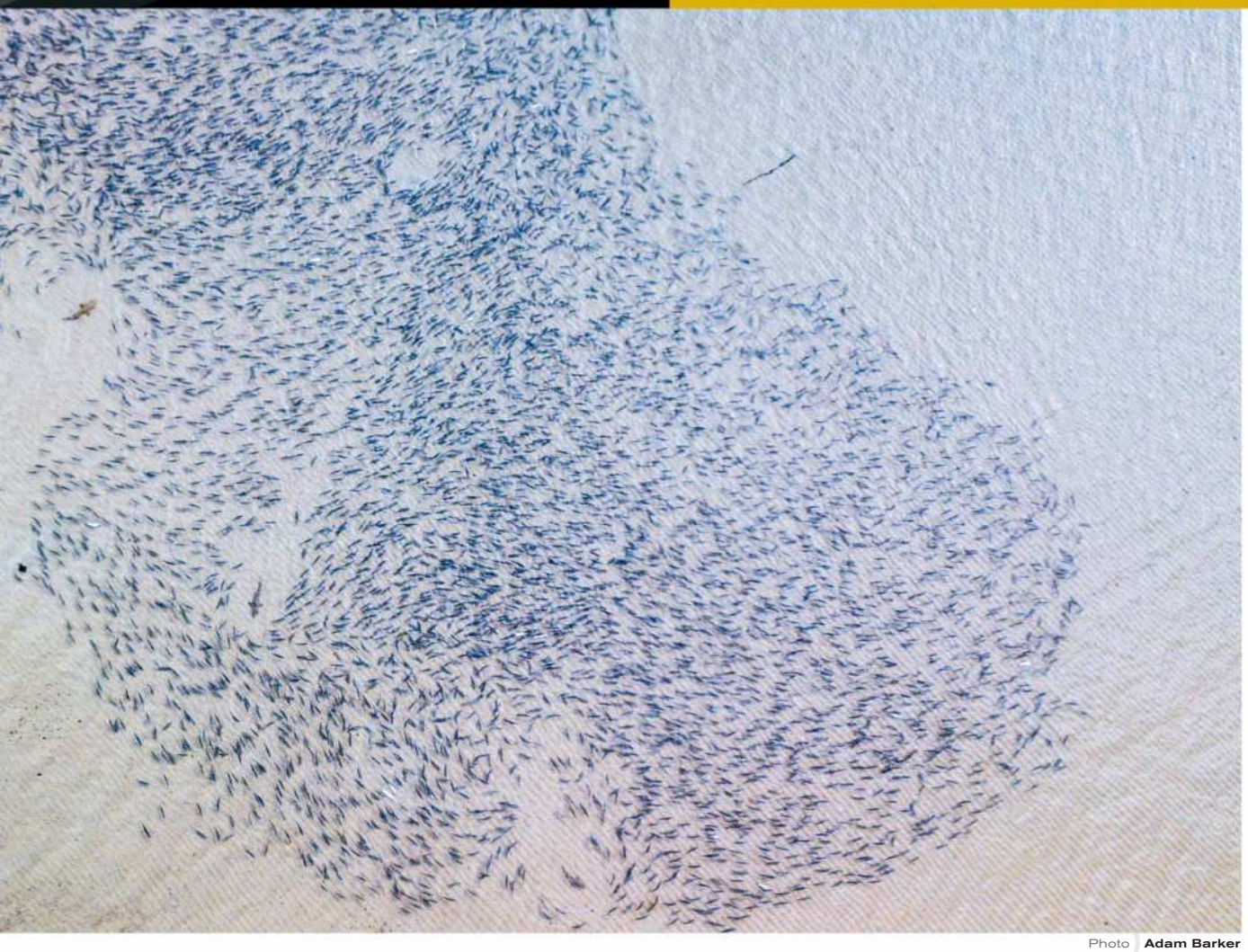


Photo | **Adam Barker**

• Bonefish travel a long way to spawn. One fish was documented traveling more than 100 miles in her spawning effort.

• Outside of that annual spawning migration, bonefish have relatively small home ranges. Most are recaptured within a kilometer of where they were originally tagged.

• The other key data revolves around specific spawning sites. As a result of BTT tagging efforts, these sites are now accurately documented, and it appears that most islands in the Bahamas have only one or two spawning sites.

I asked Justin Lewis, the program manager for BTT in the Bahamas, his thoughts on fishing for these migrating bonefish. You wouldn't (or shouldn't) fish for actively spawning brown trout on redds, but picking off steelhead or salmon en route to their spawning sites is a little different.

Justin's response followed the same logic. He has witnessed guide boats at an aggregation site "harassing" the fish as they were getting ready to spawn. He suspected it caused some of the fish to leave the aggregation site early without spawning. On the other hand, catching fish along the bonefish highway seems less intrusive, but there is no science to support that either.

Part of being a fly fisher or a guide is being a good steward of the environment, while practicing and promoting good conservation. BTT has been instrumental in sharing this ethos with guides and the local communities who are already aware of the value of bonefish and their habitat.

This massive aggregation of bonefish, and movement of the species to a central location means they are inherently vulnerable. A significant part of the population is together at one time for spawning—that makes them susceptible to netting or other illegal harvesting that could have a truly disastrous impact on the population. The spawning locations themselves are also at risk for habitat degradation or development. Good spawning aggregation sites also happen to be great places for marinas.

The good news is that the information from BTT—with the help of local organizations, guides, and lodges—has led to the creation of several new national parks in the Bahamas intended to protect these important areas where bonefish live and spawn.

On Abaco, The Marls and Cross Harbour national parks were created in 2015 for this exact purpose. Hopefully, that means those great moments in nature I've witnessed along the bonefish highway will continue for many years to come.

Oliver White is a partner in two fishing lodges in the Bahamas—Abaco Lodge and Bair's Lodge in South Andros. He travels extensively, hosting small groups in exotic locations and guiding in the American West. He cofounded IndiFly (*indifly.org*)—a nonprofit that works to help indigenous people use sport fishing as a method of conservation.

Why a Native Fish Coalition?

Fish are wildlife, too. One new group wants to see them treated as such.

TED WILLIAMS

FOR MOST AMERICANS, including the majority of anglers, fisheries managers, and environmental groups, fish don't count as wildlife. Fish are furless, featherless, cold, slimy, silent and, for most people, unseen. Their function in the natural world is mainly perceived as rod benders and table fare.

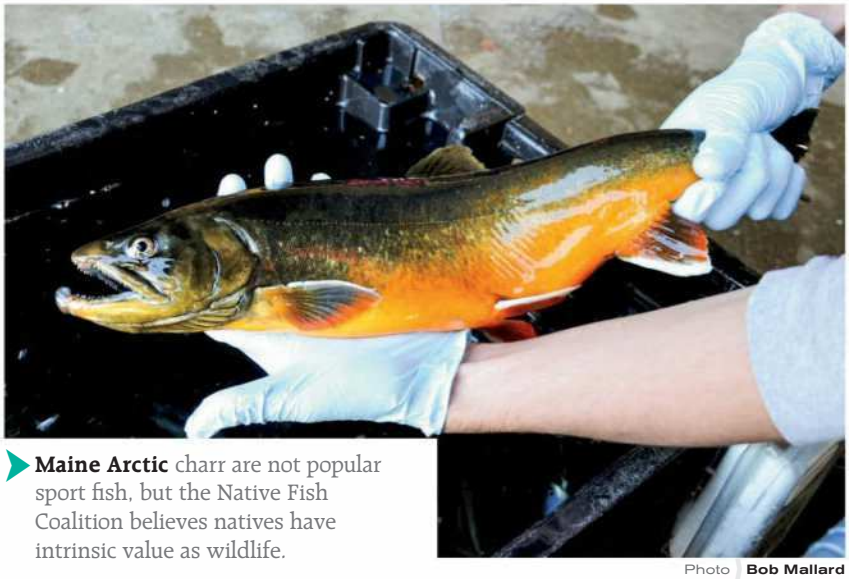
If that sounds harsh, consider stocked "tiger trout," wildly popular with anglers throughout the U.S. and Canada. They're created in hatcheries by crossing not just species but genera—brown trout from Europe with brook trout from North America. Google "tiger trout," ignoring everything by me, and you'll find only effusions about their alleged "beauty."

Consider also "golden rainbows" (aka palomino trout), all the rage across North America. In 1955 a pigment-impoverished female rainbow trout turned up in a West Virginia state hatchery. So enamored were fish managers with her banana-hued flanks they reared her in a separate tank, fertilized her eggs with milt from normal males, then selected and cultured increasingly off-colored fry. By 1963 they had enough of these garish fish to start widespread stocking. Despite West Virginia's 500 miles of native brook trout streams, the "golden rainbow" is depicted on the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources logo.

Artificially concocted hybrids like tiger trout and genetically altered fish like golden rainbows attest to what's lacking in the general public and fishing public: respect for fish as wildlife and what George Bird Grinnell, editor of the old sporting weekly *Forest & Stream*, called "a refined taste in natural objects."

The Native Fish Coalition believes that hatchery fish should never be stocked on top of native fish such as these Yellowstone cutthroat trout. Where possible, nonnative fish should be removed in favor of preserving populations of declining native trout.

Photo | Fish Eye Guy Photography



Maine Arctic charr are not popular sport fish, but the Native Fish Coalition believes natives have intrinsic value as wildlife.

Photo | **Bob Mallard**

In 1970, when I signed on as an "information and education" officer with the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Game, I assumed that my job would be to inform and educate. I was wrong. It was to promote ongoing programs, whether or not they served the long-term best interests of sportsmen. We stocked genetically impoverished hatchery trout on top of our few remaining natives. We even adorned some of these hatchery fish with tags that could be exchanged for such prizes as tackle boxes.

While I was there we changed our name to Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, but it wasn't until long after I'd left that nongame started receiving attention. With management of birds, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals (everything society calls "wildlife") the agency has progressed light years from the 1970s; in fact it's a national leader. But in 2018, about the only thing that's changed with trout stocking is the addition of tiger trout.

One might suppose that the environmental community would defend native fish and the vital role they play in aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, but it rarely does so. For example, the stated mission of the Adirondack Council, which generally does excellent work, is protecting "natural communities." Because it rightly sees loons as symbols of wilderness, there are two loons on its logo. But it doesn't recognize native brook trout that share loon habitat and help sustain loons as part of "the natural community." So it blocked New York brook trout managers when they attempted to eliminate invasive nonnative fish with rotenone (the only tool available). It wasn't so much rotenone it objected to as "wilderness disruption" with "noisy" motorboats briefly needed to apply rotenone. When I confronted the council's public affairs director, he asserted that the managers' sole motive was "to create sporting opportunities."

Another environmental outfit, Wilderness Watch, aims to "preserve wilderness" and frequently succeeds. It features a grizzly on its logo. Wilderness Watch sees grizzlies as icons of wilderness, but not imperiled native fish. So it has no problem challenging and frequently blocking native-trout recovery throughout the West, basing its opposition entirely on popular misconceptions about rotenone. Here's how it dismisses efforts by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to keep the threatened Gila trout on the planet: "It is both sad and ironic that it was Aldo Leopold who convinced the Forest Service to protect the Gila as our nation's first wilderness in the 1930s—now, it is in danger of being converted to a fish farm for recreationists." That's like proclaiming that whooping cranes are being saved merely to pleasure birders.

Wild & Valuable

Now there's a new nonprofit NGO, comprised of passionate anglers, that seeks to change society's perception of fish from playthings and food, to wildlife and parts of beautiful but poorly understood machinery we tinker with at our peril.

That group is called Native Fish Coalition (NFC). It believes that hatchery fish should never be stocked on top of native fish or even where they might have access to native fish. Hatchery fish, it notes, are products of unnatural selection. They're conditioned to crowded, coverless, cement raceways that erode fins. Instead of avoiding moving shadows they're attracted to them because they're often fed by hand. And they become easy pickings for avian predators because, even when fed by machine, they're conditioned to feed on the surface. They are everything wild fish aren't, so they do poorly in the natural world. And when superimposed on wild fish they compete with them for food and space, disrupt spawning, and sometimes pass on their inferior genes.

When hatchery fish naturalize they regain some of what they've lost, but they also can degrade native ecosystems. On a few waters, naturalized trout threaten endangered fish and frogs. So, following their legal mandate under the Endangered Species Act, agencies like the National Park Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and state game and fish agencies have been reducing (but far from eliminating) nonnative trout. Opposition comes primarily from the angling community.

Battles over nonnative trout control have been avoided by organizations specializing in salmonid conservation; participation would alienate many of their members, donors, and sponsors. NFC, on the other hand, is not about fishing; it's about native fish—all native fish. NFC will always defend natives over nonnatives no matter how much members love to catch the nonnatives or how incapable the natives are of bending rods.

The apt shibboleth "take care of fish and the fishing will take care of itself" has largely been replaced with "take care of fishing and the fish will take care of themselves." The catch-and-release message that saved so many of our native populations from severe degradation, or worse, is being challenged as somehow elitist, extreme, or unnecessary, even by some fish conservation organizations.

Native fish are now missing from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most of the nation's best-known trout water. You won't find them, at least in significant numbers, in the Beaverhead, Bighorn, Madison, Missouri, Henry's Fork, Fryingpan, or South Platte rivers, or Hebgen, Quake, Henry's, or Ennis lakes, to mention just a few. Nor have the fabled trout waters of Yellowstone National Park escaped the nonnative plague. Slough Creek and the Lamar and Yellowstone rivers are infested with rainbow trout; and Yellowstone Lake, the most important native cutthroat lake in the county, is under assault from lake trout.

In the East, the storied Battenkill and Neversink rivers; Willowemoc and Esopus creeks; Maine's St. John River, Moose River, and Rapid River; and Moosehead Lake, Belgrade Lakes, and Rangeley Lakes, again to mention just a few, are now polluted with naturalized nonnatives.

Still, native trout remain in natural habitats; you just need to know where to look and be willing to work a bit harder to find them. You'll encounter them in waters like the Snake River and Flat Creek in Wyoming, Maine's Rapid and Magalloway Rivers, small ponds deep in the Maine woods, and headwater rills across the nation. But many of these have nonnatives as well.

Native fish are strong fighters, but NFC members don't want to "fight" them so much as join them because, in the good words of John Voelker, they "will not—indeed cannot—live except where beauty dwells." For NFC members catching and releasing, say, a landlocked Arctic charr in Maine (the only contiguous state that still has them) is the equivalent of a birder encountering a painted bunting or Ross's gull.

Again, NFC supports and defends all native fish, but it formed in Maine to first address landlocked Arctic charr, pond-dwelling and sea-run brook trout, and the nation's last wild Atlantic salmon. It then added chapters in New Hampshire and Vermont. Its goal is to work its way south, providing a local presence throughout the brook trout's native range. NFC is also focused on, but not limited to, stream-dwelling brook trout, landlocked salmon, lake whitefish, cusk, and striped bass.

While the threats to native fish are many, NFC's founding members recognized that anglers and the managers who serve and sometimes indulge them are mostly responsible for the illegal and legal spread of nonnative fish. Nonnatives, one of the biggest threats to native fish, can degrade entire ecosystems, often beyond repair. NFC has undertaken major sign projects to educate and inform anglers about this danger.

Chemical reclamation is important where needed. But it's not management; it's CPR. Preventing invasive fish introductions is the better option. And law enforcement is far less effective than law abiding. No fine, jail time, gear confiscation, or license suspension can offset the introduction of nonnative fish or the loss of, say, wild, breeding-age Atlantic salmon.

Research is critical as well. Advocates for native fish can't act if they don't know what to do. NFC has been working with the University of Maine to help replace aging equipment used in its important and ongoing Arctic charr study at Floods Pond, a municipal water supply closed to fishing. Floods is the only place biologists can monitor a wild, native Arctic charr population without having to deal with the impacts of angling, recreation, and land use.

NFC sets special priority on management policy. It is working to strengthen and expand Maine's State Heritage Fish law, and New Hampshire's Wild Trout Management program. And it looks to establish formal wild trout programs in all states that sustain native trout.

Native fish matter—not just for their appeal to anglers, but for what they are. They're sustaining parts of earth's biodiversity. They manage themselves. They are indicators of clean water, uncompromised land, ecological health, and good stewardship. They belong. They're wildlife.

Ted Williams was conservation editor and columnist for *Fly Rod & Reel* for 30 years until its demise in 2017. He is the national chair of Native Fish Coalition (*nativefishcoalition.org*) and writes the monthly "Recovery" column for The Nature Conservancy's online magazine *Cool Green Science* (*blog.nature.org/science/profiles/ted-williams*).

Mission of the Native Fish Coalition

NFC seeks to upgrade the image of native fish from public commodities to functional parts of ecosystems. No other group has ever attempted to do so. That said, great work on behalf of specific native fish or specific native genera is underway by such groups as the Downeast Salmon Federation, Atlantic Salmon Federation, Sea-Run Brook Trout Coalition, Trout Power, Protect Rhode Island Brook Trout, and, in the Pacific Northwest, Native Fish Society, Wild Fish Conservancy, and the Wild Steelhead Coalition. But NFC is unique in that it works for all natives from darters to sculpin to Arctic charr to Atlantic salmon.

NFC believes that no lake, pond, river, or stream is truly restored, healthy, or whole until its full complement of native species is intact and it's devoid of nonnative and hatchery fish. While this is not always attainable, it's our goal.

NFC strives to bridge gaps among anglers, fishing and sporting groups, fish conservation organizations, environmental organizations, state and federal resource agencies, water protection organizations, outdoor media, and educational institutions.

NFC members enjoy catching naturalized nonnative trout, in some cases even stocked trout; and we have nothing against either except when they threaten native fish. NFC doesn't pick fights we can't win; there's simply too much to do. So, while we promote catch-and-release, we don't lecture anglers who legally kill and eat native fish. Sometimes we kill and eat native fish ourselves, but we target species that can take, even benefit from, exploitation—bluegills, crappies, yellow and white perch, for example.

NFC is an apolitical, all-volunteer, grassroots, donor-funded, 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Many of our board and advisory council members also belong to other organizations. Our goal is to work with anyone who shares at least part of our vision. NFC is made up of academics, scientists, unpaid senior staff, media professionals, guides, outfitters, anglers, and environmentalists. You can learn more about us at *NativeFishCoalition.org*.

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New & Notable

Orvis Ultralight Jacket

In November I packed the new-for-2018 Orvis Ultralight Wading Jacket ($250, *orvis.com*) as part of my luggage for a trip to the Rio Marié—a tributary of a tributary of the Amazon River. I knew it would be wet in the rainforest, but we also had a 40-pound weight restriction on the float plane. Fly boxes were left behind, backup reels didn't make the cut list, and I brought only two sets of shirt/pants/underwear because I was counting on staff on the mothership doing daily laundry for us.

A good breathable shell seemed critical, and this new jacket from Orvis packs down into a small footprint that weighs only a few ounces. On the water, you can pack it into a boat bag, a large sling, or the back pocket of a vest.

In Amazonia, we had afternoon heat of more than 100 F. followed by torrential downpours, so the potential of overheating and sweating inside the jacket was very real. At first, I was tempted to go without the jacket, but running in the skiff through the heavy rain resulted in a stinging barrage—I didn't need the jacket just to keep dry, but also to protect against a painful pelting that felt like I was losing a game of paintball.

The two-way stretch, three-layer shell fabric with a 20,000 mm waterproof rating and a 30,000 gram breathability rating kept me comfortable in the most humid conditions possible. A DWR finish repels water so the material doesn't get soaked and heavy. The seams are taped, and the Dolphin Skin Cuff system keeps water from running up inside the sleeves, even when holding a rod upright.

The water-resistant YKK AquaGuard zippers are flexible, easy to slide, and keep the elements out. The three-way adjustable storm hood with a brim catcher allowed me to wear a trucker hat inside the hood to improve my field of vision and keep drips off my face.

The surprising thing about this lightweight jacket is that it has all the comforts and features you'd expect in a regular wading jacket. In addition to the Dolphin Skin Cuffs, there are rubberized tabs for tool docking, two front storage pockets, and side zip mesh pockets for extra breathability. There's also an internal mesh pocket for added storage and a rear yoke D-ring for a net.

I got the jacket as a lightweight alternative just for travel, but I was so impressed by all the features that I've been using it as my primary wading jacket—not just a lightweight travel alternative. It has everything I need, and none of the extras that I've a carried around for years and never used. See *flyfisherman.com/blogs/editors-notebook/* for a short video of me using this jacket during a typical Amazon downpour.

—Ross Purnell

Plan D Pack Articulated Plus

Sure, they catch fish. Big ones. But when you try to organize them neatly in a box, articulated flies like the Steelhead Intruder, Gonga, Drunk & Disorderly, and Sex Dungeon flip-flop around like that fish you threw up on the bank when you were a kid. It makes a mess. And for Type A personalities who like to have our flies arranged in neat rows, articulated flies threaten our sanity.

The Plan D Pack Articulated Plus ($45, *plandfishing.com*) solves this problem by allowing you to affix the eye of the fly onto a stainless steel hook. Pull the fly body tightly in a straight line, and sink the hook into the high-density slit foam. It's easy. The Pack Articulated Plus is about 9"X5" and fits 20 large flies, each up to about 4.5" long.

The box has a clear polycarbonate lid so you can see what you've got without opening the box, the bottom is an ABS thermoplastic polymer, and the hooks and hinge are 316 marine-grade stainless steel. It's indestructible by any normal means, waterproof, and it has a one-way waterproof vent to release pressure so the box doesn't become vacuum sealed when you change elevations.

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Simms Dry Creek Boat Bag

A fly-fishing press release sent out some years ago proffered an insight so incisive that I copied it my notes: "Anglers operate in a wet environment."

I'm guessing it was a revelation to some PR intern who'd never fished; the rest of us don't really need it pointed out. What we do need is equipment that keeps our stuff dry in all this wetness. And to that end, a waterproof boat bag is an indispensable piece of gear when on any type of watercraft, a beach or jetty, and even in camp.

This year Simms introduced an updated version of its Dry Creek Boat Bag ($280 large, $230 medium; *simmsflyfishing.com)*, and an already highly useful bag got a good deal more so. Intelligently revamping a popular existing product can be a tricky, baby-and-bathwater negotiation that's as much about keeping what works as it is about tossing what doesn't or adding new features. And the right moves were made here, first in keeping the distinctive magnetic closure on the lid, but changing to a new latch style. I find the latest version significantly simpler to open with one hand—a blessing when reaching into the bag while holding a rod—and a convenience that makes the Dry Creek ideal for strapping on a pontoon boat, where twisting around to access rear storage with two hands is at best uncomfortably acrobatic and at worst unsafe. And the new magnetic lid closure docks on the bag body more reliably than in the past; just drop the lid, and the latch snoops around until it finds its mate and closes by itself.

Simms upgraded the chassis material to a tougher, more durable 420-denier Double Mini Ripstop TPU-coated waterproof nylon fabric and beefed up the lid with a waterproof, PU compression-molded material; the bag shell is more substantial and rigid than the first incarnation and provides better protection for contents. The sides of the bag are now chamfered on top so that the lid centers itself accurately over the bag opening, aligning the two halves of the latch for closure and creating a shingle effect around the perimeter for extra rain protection.

The addition of two waterproof external side pockets makes good sense, giving ready availability to frequently used gear and corralling smaller items, like phone or car keys, that otherwise tend to migrate to the bottom of the main compartment. The pockets will hold a midsize fly box and are detachable; you can snap them on a wading belt and take them with you.

What's held over from the original bag is just the good stuff: a bathtub-style bottom for abrasion resistance, movable interior dividers, and dimensions that allow for a reasonably compact footprint (a real plus in smaller boats) without making a bag so tall that contents at the bottom are impossible to locate.

Product "upgrades" can be hit or miss, but the new Dry Creek Boat Bag is all baby and no bathwater.

—Ted Leeson

Gerber Magniplier

Gerber's new fishing-specific pliers have the perfect axis and space between the handles to exert maximum pressure on small items like hooks, monofilament, and braided fishing lines. The index finger hook—Gerber calls it Bearhand Control—gives you no-slip pulling power when you're trying to tighten a knot on 80-pound fluorocarbon.

The price is right on these 7.5" hot-forged pliers ($74, *gerbergear.com*) with reversible carbide cutting blades. When one blade wears out, you can flip them and have a brand new cutting surface. The pliers also have replaceable stainless steel jaws and a lock button so they slide into the nylon sheath safely and easily.


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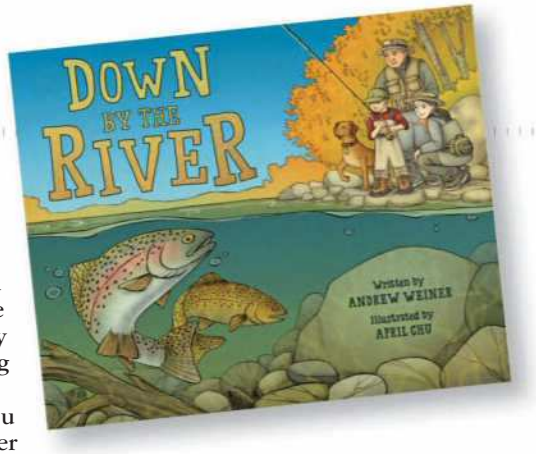
Bookshelf



Down by the River

Down By the River by Andrew Weiner, illustrated by April Chu. Abrams Books for Young Readers 2018, 40 pages, $20 hardcover, ISBN 978-1419722936.

The day is finally here! Art is going fly fishing with his mother and grandfather for the first time. Through Art's childhood experience, the author introduces the items you might pack for a fly-fishing day trip; types of trout; the importance of being aware of your surroundings; the understanding that mistakes are okay, and that it is the experiences shared with others that are important. These shared experiences provide future generations with the foundation necessary to entice, invigorate, and build on ambitions of exploring, sharing, and enjoying the outdoor world with those close to them.

Through careful blending of candid, yet descriptive text, and soft, detailed illustrations, author Andrew Weiner and illustrator April Wu set a beautiful stage for young readers ages four through nine. Each illustration, full of warm colors and emotion, helps portray the bliss of family members venturing to the water's edge. The ambience of peace and connection most of us associate with fly fishing and the outdoors is cleverly captured in the tranquil expressions upon each character's face.

Our seven-year-old old son and nine-year-old old daughter took turns reading this story with us. Within the first couple of sentences, the author built our anticipation of what Art might experience on his first fly-fishing trip. "Where are they going?" "What will they catch?" "What will they see along the way?"

As the story continues, you learn about Art's mother and her eagerness to fish at a young age, just like Art. You hear stories of her first trip with Art's grandfather and their favorite fishing area. You discover what season they are fishing in, and the anticipation building within Art about what kind of fish he might catch, or how big.

Woven into Art's story, these tales help you learn the importance of sharing, not only fly-fishing skills, but also experiences/stories with your family. When an osprey makes an appearance from high above, and Art sees the golden leaves of fall, the author reminds both young and seasoned fly fishers alike that there are many joys to fly fishing in addition to catching fish.

Our children cringed when Art made a small mistake, but giggled loudly when Art's grandfather says: "Did I ever tell you the story of my first fishing trip? My brother took me along with some of his friends, and the first thing I did was hook my brother. On my very first cast, in front of everyone. Biggest thing I ever caught."

This tale sprinkles in a bit of humor and humility. It also introduces the understanding that mistakes happen to all of us, but with persistence, optimistic thinking, and a well-placed cast, you just might get a beautiful reward. In this story, Art's reward is vividly depicted on two full pages.

The story ends, just as it began, with a family sharing time together along the very stream Art visited with his mother and grandfather. Who the family is, and who is leading them to the stream to fly fish, I will leave for you to find out for yourself.

As a bonus, the book also includes three pages of "intro to fly fishing" gear, conservation messages, and end papers that display a variety of beautifully illustrated, popular fly patterns.

In the end, I believe this illustrated book will not only encourage young anglers to give fly fishing a try, but will also resonate with adults who might find themselves reminiscing and/or eager to create new experiences with their families. Enjoy the journey, I highly recommend it.

—Amidea Daniel

Fly Fishing the Greater Yellowstone Backcountry

Fly Fishing the Greater Yellowstone Backcountry by Bruce Staples. Stackpole Books 2017, 288 pages, $30 softcover, ISBN 978-0811716208.

The "golden triangle" of fly fishing encompasses three states: Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. At the very core of this trout-fishing mecca is Yellowstone National Park, literally straddling the boundaries of all three states. As the name "mecca" indicates, there are often far too many fly fishers in and around the most popular fly-fishing sites, but if you're willing to walk just a little ways from the roadside pull-outs and trailheads, you'll invariably find better fishing and far more solitude.

This undeniable fact of the Yellowstone region is well known by author Bruce Staples, who has fished the area for 35 years, and in this book shares his intimate knowledge of often ignored rivers like the Gros Ventre, Shoshone, Fall River, and the Clarks Fork; and of backcountry lakes like Bradley, Taggart, Leigh, Shoshone, and Culver Pond (aka the Widow's Pool) and many others. Staples is also an exceptional fly tier, and his color plates and notes on fly patterns are exceptional for a guidebook of this type. The next time I go to Yellowstone, I'll certainly have this book with me.

—Ross Purnell

Film

Seriously North

Seriously North produced and edited by Phil Tuttle. InTents Media 2018 with Cortney Boice, Sam Parkinson, Derek Olthuis, 14:50 minutes, part of the International Fly Fishing Film Festival (*flyfilmfest.com*).

Have you ever experienced fishing that was so dismal, you were compelled to get down on your knees and pray?

That's how desperate the boys from InTents Media became after getting dropped off on the tundra, and fishing for seven days without even seeing an Arctic char. The four Rocky Mountain anglers had flown thousands of miles, camped in rugged, barren land, and walked 10 miles per day looking to find the fish of their dreams—brightly colored Arctic char—but no one had yet seen one. Worse, the group was there to produce a fishing film for the International Fly Fishing Film Festival (IF4). Seven days into it, they had very little to interest a hyped-up fishing audience.

So they dropped down on their knees, and with the cameras rolling, asked God to send some Arctic char their way. What fisherman hasn't at least secretly done this? I have, but it never worked for me as brilliantly as it did for Sam Parkinson, who soon after made a Hail Mary cast and caught a fish that filmmaker Phil Tuttle predicted "will go down in the history of fly fishing as maybe one of the greatest char of all time."

The greatest char of all time? You be the judge at upcoming showings of the film. For a complete listing of upcoming U.S. dates or to see the trailer, visit *flyfilmfest.com*.

—Ross Purnell

A Night with Sandy

On January 1, Fly Fisherman named #NoworNeverGlades founder Sandy Moret as the 2018 Conservationist of the Year (see the Feb.-Mar. 2018 issue for complete details). The real celebration took place a few weeks later at the Bonefish & Tarpon Trust annual fundraising dinner at the Islander Resort in Islamorada, where Sandy Moret was the guest of honor. "The Conservationist of the Year Award is focused on finding environmental activists who are finding success and making a difference in their fisheries," said Fly Fisherman publisher Ross Purnell. "Sandy has spent his life defending Florida fisheries and the Everglades in particular." Moret was one of the founders of the #NoworNeverGlades declaration, which has now gathered support from more than 75,000 companies and individuals, and was influential in passing SB10, the first legislative step toward recovering the Everglades. More than 222 people attended the event, where Tag Kleiner of Far Bank Enterprises presented Moret with the Fly Fisherman award, and a custom Sage fly rod. Sage sponsored the award and donated $5,000 to BTT in Moret's name. Nominations are now being accepted for the 2019 Conservationist of the Year at *flyfisherman.com/conservation*.

Photo | Greg Poland

Sandy Moret accepted the award for Conservationist of the Year at a Bonefish & Tarpon Trust fundraising dinner in Islamorada Jan. 21, 2018.

Bighorn Mismanagement

The Bighorn River Alliance (BRA) has released a damning new report that shows the fishing economy, taxpayers, property owners, and agriculture have all been hurt by poor management of the hydropower dam regulating the outflow of Bighorn Lake at Yellowtail Dam.

The report *A River at Risk* is aimed at getting federal officials to be more responsive to the needs of users below the dam, and it argues that water management decisions have been unfairly dictated by the needs of Horseshoe Bend Marina, which requires a lake elevation of 3,617 feet to operate.

Photo | Steve Galletta/Bighorn Angler

The report *A River at Risk* shows the financial costs of hoarding water prior to Memorial Day, and then flooding the river downstream in the summer months.

While the dam operators focus on filling the reservoir early to keep boaters afloat during the Memorial Day weekend, they have allowed $64 million in potential hydropower revenue to wash away later in the year, when high water escapes around the power turbines. The BRA argues that more constant flow from the lake would keep those turbines generating revenue, and reduce the wildly fluctuating flows that have plagued the river for the past decade.

Eight of the last 10 years have seen devastating flooding that hurt the fishing. Floods have also caused massive bank erosion, impacting agriculture production. Farmers and ranchers along the river have lost at least $7 million in income due to poor management practices over the last 10 years.

Fly shop owners in Fort Smith report seeing a 40 percent decline in business due to unpredictable river flows. The Bighorn River is a major economic driver for the state, contributing more than $102 million to Montana's economy in 2015.

Photo | Patagonia

Patagonia Sues Trump

At the Outdoor Retailer show in Denver—which was moved from Utah over objections to that state's actions on public lands—Patagonia turned the McNichols Civic Center into a light show supporting national monuments.

Patagonia is suing President Donald Trump for reducing the size of the Bears Ears National Monument. The suit, joined by several conservation and preservation groups, says Trump's decision to reduce the size of Bears Ears from 1.4 million acres to 220,000 acres exceeds his authority under the 1906 Antiquities Act.

Patagonia makes fly-fishing waders and other apparel, and has been active in many environmental campaigns since it was started in 1973 by climber and environmental activist Yvon Chouinard. In the past decades, Patagonia has also funded the causes of native trout, produced the film *Red Gold* to speak out against the proposed Pebble Mine, and championed dam removal and river restoration around the country. Patagonia commits 1 percent of its total sales or 10 percent of its profit—whichever is more—to environmental groups, and owner Yvon Chouinard is a founder of One Percent for the Planet, an organization that urges other businesses to make the same commitment.

Former President Barack Obama designated Bears Ears as a national monument in December 2016 over the objections of Utah's political leadership. Trump, with the backing of Senator Orrin Hatch and others, substantially undid his predecessor's action.

Other groups participating in the case are The Access Fund, Archaeology Southwest, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Conservation Lands Foundation, Friends of Cedar Mesa, The Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, and Diné Bikéyah—the Native American conservation group that originally lobbied for creation of the Bears Ears National Monument. The case is Utah Diné Bikéyah v. Trump, 17-cv-2605, U.S. District Court, District of Columbia (Washington).

Photo | Tahavee Kay

Local experts say the Lower Owens River will recover from the most recent wildfire, just like last time.

Owens River Fire

A wildfire along one of California's most popular catch-and-release trout streams left the valley charred and smoking, but with spring coming, a local fly shop owner says there will be little evidence of the fire in just a few months.

David D'Beaupre, owner of the Sierra Trout Magnet shop in Bishop, California, says the fire started Feb. 18, 2018, on a Sunday when the valley was dry, and high wind warnings were issued due to a coming storm. "It was a recipe for disaster," said D'Beaupre, who estimated the fire burned about 3 miles of the valley on both banks of the lower Owens River. It snowed two days after the fire.

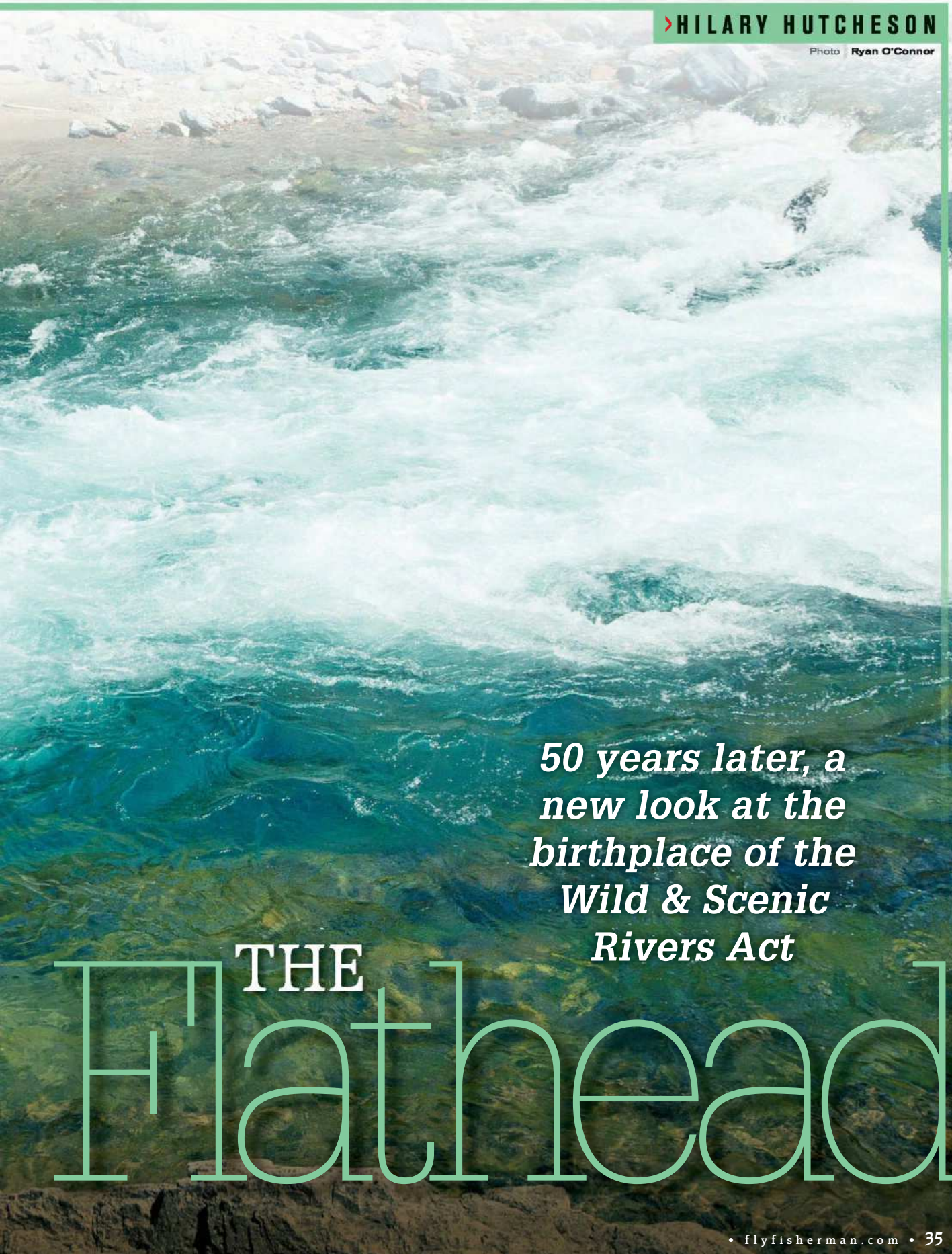
D'Beaupre said the river hasn't suffered any ill effects, and within days, his clients were out catching healthy trout. He said there was a similar fire in 2007 that seemed to invigorate regrowth of riverside willows, rushes, sedges, beardless wildrye, and other grasses.

The Middle Fork of the Flathead in John Stevens Canyon has technical Class II-IV whitewater and is best fished with seasoned, professional

guides. The North Fork has easier public access, better wading opportunities, and fantastic views of the mountains.

›HILARY HUTCHESON

Photo | Ryan O'Connor



50 years later, a new look at the birthplace of the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act

THE Flathead

IF THE THREE FORKS OF MONTANA'S FLATHEAD RIVER COULD BE EMBODIED, I IMAGINE THEM AS A STRIKING TRIO OF ENERGETIC, PRECOCIOUS WOMEN. These spirited dames are proportionately lusty and graceful, muscular and delicate, cruel and nurturing.

In the late 1980s, my grade school self showed up on their buxom banks with a leaky, inflatable kayak to ride piggyback as these leading ladies moved with purposeful spirit. They offered more adventure than I expected in even the longest life. I itched to mimic their mannerisms, noticing how they earned respect at every bend. I laughed when they laughed, and whispered when they whispered. They educated me through dangerous close calls and hands-on lessons in entomology, hydrology, wildlife biology, and botany.

I figured they prevailed as their own renewable fountains of youth sweeping toward the Columbia. They were innately strong, ageless, and immutable.

As I got older, textbook science eked its way into my magic-based relationship with the rivers, and I learned that since the last Ice Age, the Flathead River system has been a rare stronghold for native trout and is one of the most biodiverse freshwater aquatic landscapes in the United States.

"It really is the last of the best," says fisheries program manager for the United States Geological Survey, Clint Muhlfeld, Ph.D. "It still has the full portfolio of intact, cold, clean habitats and is one of the last remaining places in the U.S. where people can catch a native trout that represents this evolutionary legacy of biodiversity."

It's not by simple fortune that the Flathead still has template-level interconnected habitats and a remarkably sound ecosystem. "I think it's in large part because parts of the Flathead became a protected corridor," Muhlfeld says.

Over the last five decades, industrial development blasted holes in the pristine nature of many rivers across the country. But on the Flathead, the bullets of degradation bounce off a flak jacket known as the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. The 1968 act, innovated by John and Frank Craighead and Olaus Murie, led Congress to create the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to "preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations."

River units are classified and administered as wild, scenic, or recreational rivers, based on the river's condition, the amount of development in and around it, and the degree of accessibility. Today in the United States there

The Flathead River was the inspiration for the federal Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, and was Montana's first river designated as such. As a direct result of these protections, the Flathead today is Montana's greatest intact coldwater ecosystem for native cutthroat and bull trout.

THE Flathead

are 208 river units with 12,708 miles in 40 states and Puerto Rico. This is less than one-quarter of one percent of the nation's rivers.

So, as the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, why have so few rivers been designated in the last half century?

"Establishing Wild & Scenic designation for a river takes about ten years of very hard work," says American Rivers Northern Rockies Director Scott Bosse. "That work starts with getting people together to create a focused and broad-based campaign aimed at gaining this special protection. A bill must be introduced in Congress, and if it goes through, a river management plan has to be created, and that takes considerable time and effort."

For the Flathead, that arduous effort was born when John and Frank Craighead began the dedicated push to prevent a large dam on what is now the most protected section of the Middle Fork. So, the Flathead River isn't simply one of the few rivers in the country enjoying Wild & Scenic status, it's the birthplace of the law. It's our first Wild & Scenic River.

Bosse says: "The Middle Fork, and the Spruce Park section in particular, is where the creation story for the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act took place. It was in

Photo | **Lee Cohen**

Photo | **Lee Cohen**

Flies for the Flathead

The Flathead isn't a fishery that requires complex, multi-element rigs or detailed match-the-hatch patterns. Fly fishers can have productive days on any Flathead stretch with a standard setup of a 9-foot 5-weight rod, floating line, 9-foot tapered leader, 4X or 5X tippet, and classic attractor dry flies. There are certainly more creative and thoughtful setups used by locals and guides with specific goals, but a basic rig isn't wrong.

Various seasonal strategies are fun to navigate, especially with a guide who is dialed on the subtle changes to flows, temperatures, and bug life. As the river starts to clear, post-runoff, a favorite but unconventional cutthroat-wooing tactic practiced by guides and locals is sinking large, untreated stonefly drys by letting them saturate in fast water, and stripping them back on the seam. This method is best with a shorter leader and tippet no thinner than 3X, as even smaller cutthroat hit hard and turn quickly.

Midsummer is the time to experiment with flash and color, including Krystal Stimulators, purple Chubbies, Carnage Attractors, and PMX patterns.

In late summer, cutthroat become wiser to the suspicious surface wakes, but not necessarily picky, so presentation becomes more important. This is when I throw smaller mayflies and midges.

In the fall, many anglers enjoy the matching game with Mahogany Duns and October Caddis, but I prefer using small Black Ants and Fire Beetles. In the colder months, the game isn't as much about what they're eating as it is about finding the fish. Fly fishers should look for places along the river where the snow has melted, signaling groundwater that's a bit warmer in the wintertime.

After more than 37 train derailments in the Middle Fork corridor, the nonprofit American Rivers is urging the federal government to develop a safety compliance agreement with Burlington Northern Railroad.

this boulder-choked canyon, where the roar of whitewater echoes off bedrock walls, where the Craighead brothers came up with the simple but powerful notion that some of our nation's last untamed rivers should remain wild and free. To this day, we're the only country on earth that has had the foresight to pass such a law."

The protected reach on the Flathead was established in 1976 and includes the North Fork from the Canadian border downstream to its confluence with the Middle Fork, the Middle Fork from its headwaters to its confluence with the South Fork, and the South Fork from its origin to the Hungry Horse Reservoir. With just 2/10ths of 1% of Montana's river miles established as Wild & Scenic, the three forks of the Flathead boast well over half of the entire state's 368 protected mileage. Their waters touch Glacier National Park, The Bob Marshall Wilderness, and Great Bear Wilderness before joining near Hungry Horse to create the mainstem Flathead River, a major tributary to the Columbia River.

The 97.9-mile "wild" sections of the Flathead are primitive and unpolluted, dam-free, and accessible by trail. The 40.7-mile "scenic" river sections are dam-free, largely undeveloped, and accessible in places by roads. The 80.4-mile recreational sections are easily accessible by road and railroad, with various development, including some homes along the banks. Full-service municipalities, hospitals, tourist attractions, hotels, and Glacier Park International Airport are just minutes away.

"One of the great things for fly anglers is that Wild & Scenic Rivers foster recreation," says Bosse. "That means any federally authorized activity that would undermine a designated river's recreational values would be prohibited. That's pretty cool when you think about it. None of our other major environmental laws protects recreational activities so explicitly."

The activity of fly fishing here centers around native westslope cutthroat trout, greenish in color with black, non-rounded spots, and bright orange slashes at the lower jaw. Westslope cutthroat are Montana's state fish and the primary targeted species in the Flathead, under catch-and-release practices. However, they're also listed by federal and state agencies as a sensitive fish of special concern, as hybridization with invasive rainbow trout and habitat degradation have reduced their range. Fluvial cutthroat higher up on the Middle Fork tend to get larger in size, sometimes filling up an 18" net, since their spawning trek to nearby tributaries is considerably shorter than the longer migration to Flathead Lake taken by their adfluvial brethren lower on the system and on the North Fork.

Native bull trout—the grizzly bears of the fish world because of their need for unaltered habitat—are found in all three forks, but are legal for targeting only during a short season on the South Fork with a special catch card under catch-and-release practices. It's not legal to target them at any time on the North Fork or Middle Fork. Bull trout are listed as a threatened species, meaning federal wildlife officials say it's likely to become an endangered species (in danger of extinction) in the foreseeable future.

An incidental bull trout hookup is not uncommon, so anglers should be prepared to quickly release them with as little handling as possible.

Given that the two most celebrated species in the Flathead are at risk, it's evident the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act can't fully shield the Flathead from threats that reach beyond industrial development. Climate change, hybridization between native and nonnative species, and the risk of an oil spill from passing freight trains expose the river's clear vulnerability. "As we degrade the environment, we reduce the ability for these native species to adapt to stressors as they have for thousands of years," says Muhlfeld.

Hanging tough in a warming world is challenging for rivers whose flows are impacted by unseasonable and dramatic melting. USGS studies show that as outdoor temperatures are consistently getting warmer sooner in the spring, mountain snow runoff is happening two to three weeks earlier. The water that was provided to the streams from the snowpack is melting faster on average, which leads to reduced flows in summer months. That, scientists say,

THE Flathead

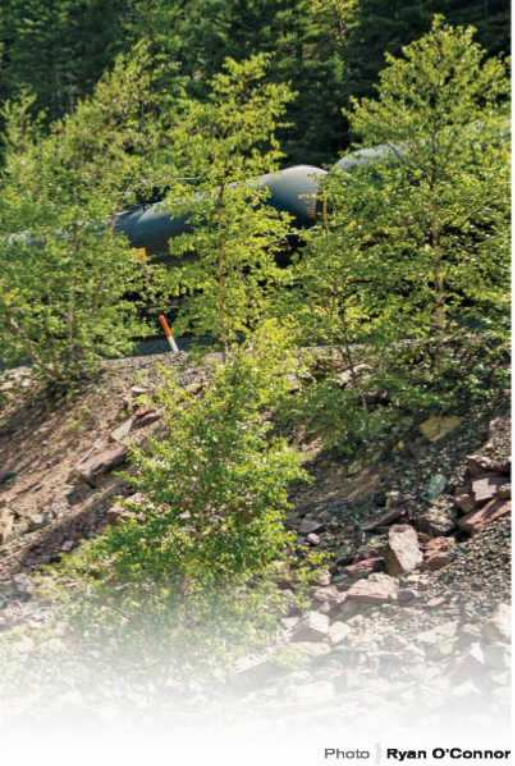


Photo | Ryan O'Connor

leads to elevated stream temperatures, which is particularly unhealthy for native cutthroat and bull trout.

And, USGS scientists say, precipitation that once fell as snow in the fall is now falling as rain, which can cause unseasonable flooding events that have the ability to scour bull trout redds and spoil reproduction.

Bull trout don't tolerate high sediment levels in their spawning streams. Increased runoff stirs up sediment and can suffocate developing embryos before they hatch. "Bull trout are affected by changes in hydrology," says Muhlfeld. "Flow is the master variable."

Muhlfeld says another serious threat climate change poses to worldwide biodiversity is how it assists the viability of invasive species like rainbow trout, and the ensuing hybridization with cutthroat. "Hybridization proliferates in warmer water," says Muhlfeld. "And disrupts the gene complexes that enable cutthroat to persist. Hybridization creates a less-fit cutthroat, and jumbles the patterns of genetic health that have allowed the species to evolve while keeping the ecosystem intact."

Scenic & Endangered

Despite being recognized as one of the most pristine river systems in the country, last year the Flathead landed on the American Rivers list of Most Endangered Rivers. The nonprofit river advocacy group cited the strings of freight trains carrying volatile crude oil from fields in North Dakota on tracks running alongside the Middle Fork Flathead en route to refineries in the Pacific Northwest. Between 2000 and 2012, 37 train derailments happened in the Middle Fork corridor.

"Had any of these contained oil or other hazardous materials, it would have been a disaster for water quality, wildlife, fish, plants and humans, says Kascie Herron of American Rivers. "The economy would suffer greatly."

Rather than the reactive reliance on a multi-agency response plan in the wake of an oil spill, American Rivers wants the Federal Railroad Administration to address the threat by developing a safety compliance agreement with Burlington Northern Railroad.

"We'd like to see the avalanche sheds installed at critical sites along the corridor, as well as more rail track inspections," says Herron. "And anglers can help by voicing this to their elected leadership."

While communication with legislators may be the most important thing anglers can do to help their fishery through voicing concern of an oil spill and dependency on fossil fuels that warm the planet, biologists suggest fly fishers also consider their own fishing habits when aiming for a healthier fishery.

Fisheries biologist for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Leo Rosenthal, says the cutthroat population has held stable in the Flathead system since the agency instituted catch-and-release regulations in 1998. Rosenthal says the protected habitat has helped keep cutthroat numbers steady. However, it's the condition of the fish he's concerned about, citing evidence of overfishing. "We're seeing an increase of hook scarring on fish," says Rosenthal. "The same fish are being caught over and over, and being handled. We're asking anglers to limit their catch and do their own conservation by truly thinking about their individual impact."

Although state law doesn't require it, Rosenthal suggests anglers use single, barbless hooks, handle fish sparingly, and keep their gills underwater during the catch-and-release. And, he says, fish benefit when anglers recognize they don't need to catch every fish in the river to have a good day.

Whitewater & Wading

All three forks of the Flathead are wadable, but there's an abundance of dynamic water to be found by boat. The upper Middle Fork of the Flathead in the wild section runs through wilderness areas and is widely known as a bucket-list adventure. It's best fished with seasoned, professional guides, given the technical class II-IV whitewater and intricate backcountry nuances.

Outside of the wilderness area, the Middle Fork's 10-mile whitewater stretch through John Stevens Canyon is one of my favorites to fish in the fall, since it's cold, aerated, and offers all-time pocketwater for expert rowers. The North Fork from the Canadian border down offers fantastic mountain views, opportunities to see wildlife in open meadows, dynamic but not highly technical stretches with plenty of public access, and eager cutthroat in gin-clear water. Since the busiest time on the river is July and August, anglers should plan their trips on either side of prime tourism season to take an edge off pressured fish.

Floating in early fall, I sense my female river trio splashing high fives, slowing down, and sighing as the falling leaves ride piggyback all the way to the lake. It's then that I most realize the importance of the Wild & Scenic River Act's guardianship, and why an act can't act alone . . . that it needs us to appreciate our role in the zone.

When I was a child, the three forks of the Flathead shaped my future. I believe that's true in some way for anyone who has experienced the fun, adventure, peace, and connectivity found on free-flowing water all across the country. And it's why we share in the desire to reciprocate by helping shape the future of the rivers we love.

Hilary Hutcheson started guiding fly-fishing trips when she was a teenager in West Glacier, Montana. After a short career as a broadcast news anchor, she established the PR and marketing company Outside Media, and began hosting *Trout TV*. She now owns the fly shop Lary's Fly & Supply in Columbia Falls, Montana, where she lives with her two daughters and a yellow Labrador named Jolene.

All fly-fishing fathers hope their sons take up the sport, but what if your son wants to follow in your footsteps as a fly-fishing guide?

Photo | **Jeff Edvalds**

INHERIT THE SALT

›CAPT. BRUCE CHARD

The most important things I wanted to teach my son about fly fishing the flats

I'VE BEEN A FLORIDA KEYS FLATS GUIDE FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS, AND LAST YEAR MY SON BJ CHARD DECIDED HE WANTED TO DO THE SAME. As a father, knowing that your son is interested in following your footsteps gives you the confidence to believe that you've made at least a few good choices.

INHERIT THE SALT

BJ dedicated most of his young life to the sport of hockey, playing for a nationally top-ranked AAA hockey team based in Detroit by the time he was 10, and moving to Sudbury, Ontario, to play Canadian Jr. Hockey when he was only 17. After playing a full season as the top minuteman on the team, BJ turned in his skates and revealed his desire to become a guide. The problem was, I hadn't spent enough time flats fishing with BJ during the peak of tarpon season, and my longtime friend Conway Bowman—host of *The Outfitters* TV show that airs on the Sportsman Channel—was booked to film a show with me right during the peak of the tarpon season.

When I explained my time crunch problem to the production crew, they loved the idea of a father/son team effort. Great. That left two months for me to train my son to be the best guide possible, and show his skills on national television.

Photo | Christian Hoffman

In this screen shot from *The Outfitters* TV show, BJ Chard poles host Conway Bowman on the white sand flats of the Lower Keys.

I wrote down the top five areas we needed to focus on, and I later realized that these lessons are important not just for saltwater guides but for everyone who fishes the flats and wants to be successful at it.

Learning the Water

The holy waters of the Florida Keys create a vivid visual connection for most fly fishers that is filled with bright contrasting colors, and dreams filled with the highest expectations. To fill those expectations, BJ and I started by looking at nautical charts of the lower Florida Keys. Talk about intimidating! The Lower Keys make up approximately 400 square miles with hundreds of islands that span from the Middle Keys 60 miles to the West, all the way to the Marquesas.

Wherever and whenever you fish, starting with a chart or a map is a logical first step. They can reveal lagoons, ponds, oxbows, channels, and other places that might otherwise pass unnoticed. Whether you are fishing in a maze of mangroves or traversing canyons on mountain streams, charts not only reveal fishy places, they help you navigate to/from those fishy places, leaving more time for effective fishing.

However, charts are just a starting point. The real expertise comes through learning to read the water, and this takes time on the water at all different tide levels and with different wind directions and lighting conditions. One flat can take years to truly learn.

BJ started out by studying specific areas where the most fish should be moving during our expected filming dates. We focused on oceanside flats where huge schools of tarpon travel, and also on tidal bottlenecks where we might find the palolo worm hatch. We couldn't just scout these spots once or twice. It was crucial for BJ to see how the fish behaved at different tide levels, and how to pole the boat in different winds.

It's very much the same on a trout stream. You don't really know a pool until you've fished it during high water, low water, and during different hatches to see how the fish react to different circumstances. Reading the water is a skill that requires time to develop, but you've also got to know what to look for, and have a plan to use that information. Most important, you've got to develop the smarts to apply what you see in one spot to other situations. That way you can go to a brand new fishing

location and read the water based on what you've seen in other circumstances. It's perhaps the most important skill a fishing father can pass to his son.

Fly Function

Sight fishing for tarpon centers around the visual connection between fish and angler. What sets a great tarpon angler apart from a novice is the ability to see not only the fish but the fly as well—and both at the same time. If you're a tarpon guide, this kind of vision is a prerequisite. You must know where the fly is at all times.

The best fly-fishing guides I have fished with have all been good fly tiers as well. When my guide has a strong connection with their tying vise, my confidence in that guide goes up immediately. It tells me they've put the time and effort into studying where and how the fish take a fly in the water column, and perfecting their own flies for the situations they see most often.

Any father can and should teach his son to tie flies. It's not merely a part of guide training. With BJ, I started by teaching him about different materials and hooks and how they should work together, not against each other. I didn't spend time teaching him specific fly patterns, I focused on functional principles like how the different weights and sizes of the hooks combined with different materials influence how the fly swims, and that determines whether the fish will even see it or not.

Learning fly profiles and colors was next, along with thread tricks and techniques to make the flies durable, and to tie flies quickly and efficiently. My goal was to create a fly-tying foundation from which BJ could develop his own patterns he could have confidence in.

Communication Skills

Most of the things I've discussed so far—charts, reading the water, fly tying—are equally applicable to fresh and salt water, but the communication between a flats guide and his angler is unique to that universe. Conway Bowman has been a fly-fishing guide himself for years, so I knew he'd expect BJ to be well-versed, and give clear and concise directions from the poling platform. I knew it would be a pressure-cooker situation with the cameras rolling, and of course I wanted my son to be successful in front of a television audience of millions.

Communication is much more than being able to quote distances and positions on the clock. How you quickly instruct your angler to present and retrieve the fly, and with the right tone in each situation is key. A guide's ability to give constant positive encouragement along with precise instruction while in the heat of the moment can reduce buck fever.

You have to keep everyone comfortable and positive. This helps to focus on the fish and have the best reaction skills possible while under pressure. This also builds confidence in the fly fisher that flows toward complete trust in the guide. This solidifies a bond between the guide and angler, and creates an efficient team that takes full advantage of most opportunities.

One of my favorite Bahamian guides, Freddie (from Andros, now at Abaco Lodge) shows his communication skills every time he's on the water. He sings between fish to keep people relaxed, and if his angler can't see the fish, he says in a calm, cool, collected voice: "Buddy, don't worry about it, just give me a nice straight cast at 11 o'clock.

INHERIT THE SALT

Photo | Brian Grossenbacher

A good guide is an expert with tackle and rigging, but is also a teacher, and passes that knowledge along to his guests.

shots, and won't waste time making shots outside that range. Guides should anticipate the time needed to get the slack out of the system, and build that component into the communication process. Like a comedian delivering a good joke, it's all about timing.

The best way I could share this kind of knowledge with BJ was to have him join me on my guided trips as much as possible before Conway showed up for filming. I couldn't explain exactly why I was saying the things the way I was, but after a few weeks of watching me with different anglers of varying skill levels, he began to quickly absorb and appreciate what it takes to be a good guide.

Even though BJ was in his rookie season, by the time the crew arrived, Conway was impressed with BJ's guiding skills. They became a great team right out of the gate, and that became the foundation of their success.

With BJ on the poling platform, Conway stuck a 120-pound tarpon he picked out of an early-morning school of daisy-chaining tarpon. Glassy conditions made the fish wary and tough to feed, but adjustments to techniques and rigging allowed Conway get hooked up. It was incredibly satisfying to teach these concepts to my own son, and see it bear fruit within weeks. All fathers know that feeling of satisfaction when their son succeeds, whether it's a 120-pound tarpon, a tie-breaking goal, or taking their first baby steps.

The Art of Poling

Learning how to dock the boat and pole the skiff in the right direction takes time to master. With BJ, I started in a protected canal where he could practice stopping and pivoting the skiff. Docking soon became second nature, and the confidence and control of his skiff were high within no time.

The real work began when we used those skills in actual fishing situations where the wind and tide play roles, and you need to turn the boat to provide the best possible casting angles. With his athletic background, BJ had no problem with the physical aspect of poling a skiff, and the mental aspects like anticipating wind and angles came quickly once he mastered the foundational skills we learned in the canal.

Just running around with the skiff was important as well. The average boat owner puts anywhere from 25 to 75 motor-running hours on their boat a year. To get BJ ready for *The Outfitters*, he was averaging 20 to 25

As far as you can, mon." Then he talks his "buddy" through the retrieve to bring the fly back in front of the bonefish. He uses a completely different set of directions to deal with advanced anglers who can see the fish and throw more pinpoint casts. He uses the appropriate language and directions to match the skill set of his angler.

As the bond between fly fisher and guide grows, the guide learns the capabilities of his angler and can figure out how to anticipate according to the angler's abilities and experience. A good guide learns the maximum distance at which his angler can make effective

motor-running hours per week. By the time Conway arrived, BJ had accumulated more than 250 hours in 3 months.

Rigging

A complete examination and analysis of your guest's tackle and rigging is the first thing that should happen at the dock in the morning. Both BJ and I knew *The Outfitters* host Conway Bowman was a great angler. We also knew that he was going to need the right tackle and rigging to take full advantage of all our Lower Keys opportunities—no matter what the weather.

"Rigging" covers the entire fishing/casting system, and starts with a deep understanding of fly rods and their actions; the fly line, and how it will present the fly in relation to the angler's abilities; and the leader system that needs to be adjusted for daily weather conditions and fish behavior. BJ soon learned that as a saltwater fly-fishing guide, you absolutely cannot afford to be lazy about any of these elements if you expect to have a successful hunt.

The best time to teach anyone knots and rigging is off the water. You don't take someone to a PMD hatch on a spring creek, and with trout rising everywhere say, "Now it's time to learn the blood knot." This is the preparation work that you do before fishing.

BJ and I used late evenings, tropical depressions, and windy days to practice his knots and rigging, and every day we fished, we used that time to analyze what we could have done better in terms of tackle to improve our chances. Honestly, it was a good chance for me to be more critical and get out of some of the ruts I was in.

Knots and basic leader construction are easy. The mental challenge comes when you try to figure out when to change them. If your angler is having a hard time getting the fly to lay out straight, weather and fishing conditions change, or the fish change their attitudes, a good guide needs to adapt.

BJ's rigging crash course not only made him more capable, but it made him a better educator. Tying the leader is the first step, but explaining why you did it that way, and how it makes a difference in your fishing, is next-level expertise. Being a guide is also being a teacher.

As I look back and realize how much work BJ did to prepare to fish with Conway and the film crew, I couldn't be more proud. He worked 18-hour days for a long time to ensure that we got the best results.

The response of viewers who watched the original airing of the show in late 2017 was astounding. Everyone loved the show, and the footage we were able to get of tarpon feeding on palolo worms was spectacular. I am so proud to be working with my son and watch him grow. His first success as a guide was better than catching my first tarpon. If you are a father, you know the feeling.

Bruce Chard has been a Florida Keys guide for more than 25 years. He is a frequent contributor to Fly Fisherman. His previous story was "Tarpon Caviar," the cover story of the June-July 2016 issue.

[*The complete episode "Tarpon Training" is now available through the MOTV app or at* motv.com. The Editor.]

THE MISSING LINK

"MISSING LINK: THAT FLY PATTERN WHICH LINKS TOGETHER COMMON FEATURES OF MANY DIFFERENT INSECTS, AND INSECT LIFE CYCLES, MAKING IT APPEAR A SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE MEAL TO FISH IN NEARLY ANY SURFACE-FEEDING SITUATION."

Have you ever watched as a trout 20 feet away rises with seeming reckless abandon, but momentarily vanishes each time your fly passes over its feeding station? Do you remember the feelings of personal inadequacy as this creature with a brain the size of a #16 Parachute Adams steadfastly rejects the next half dozen patterns you show it using perfectly timed, drag-free drifts? It's these experiences that either crush, or feed the resolve of creative fly tiers.

A Fly is Born

The Lower Sacramento River was in rare form. All day long we'd been nymphing up 16- to 20-inch wild rainbows from her wide riffles and endless current seams, sweating like Arizona roofers in the 105-degree July heat. Then, as the sun dipped low on the mountainous horizon, fish began to porpoise on the surface, inhaling dry caddis, and prompting a familiar twinge of apprehension. For the three decades I've thrown caddis drys at these summertime risers, my success rate has been wildly erratic, causing my confidence level to follow suit. This twilight surface feeding spree is fairly dependable—there are almost always reaches of the river where the big trout come up for the last

The view of Mercer's Missing Link, as seen from below.

What

SSING

Text by
MIKE MERCER
Photography by Ted Fauceglia

This underwater view of a Sulphur Dun emerging from its nymphal shuck shows what a trout sees from below, but the trout might interpret this information differently than we imagine.

fish see, and the process of creative fly tying

THE MISSING LINK

hour of light. Finding trout to throw to has rarely been a problem. But unlike other fisheries—including some pretty darned technical ones—the Lower Sac had always toyed with me. One night I'd land half a dozen big rainbows and be on top of the world, certain I had finally solved the dry-fly mystery; two nights later, same number of fish working, same pattern, and I couldn't touch a fish. What was the deal?

One night, following a particularly memorable beating from these fish, I sat down to create a "new" dry. I badly wanted to think outside of the box in its design, not limiting myself to traditional fly-tying thought processes. Though there is a lot of good to be found in the ideas of those who have come before, safely staying in those confines can also significantly reduce the potential for discovery.

It occurred to me the one life stage of caddis I'd rarely even considered had nothing to do with a nuance of emergence, but was instead at the reverse end of the cycle—a dead or dying insect. I presumed the body needed to emulate a "wasted" natural's abdomen—wispy, yet with a touch of sparkle for what little trapped air might still remain. And I wanted an abdomen that hung down in the surface film, appearing drowned, rather than floating high and dry on top.

Rejecting a conventionally dubbed body as being too meaty, I recalled a friend who ties many of his mayfly drys with simple thread bodies. Why wouldn't it work here? Yet that didn't address the subtle flash I desired, so stealing an idea from my Poxyback series of nymphs, I ribbed the thread body with a strand of Flashabou. Wanting to create an illusion of depth, in a desiccated but still tasty abdomen, I coated the thread with a film of Softex, which also served to guard the frail rib against trout teeth.

Realizing dying caddis often appear splayed on (and in) the water's surface, I felt a downwing profile could be key. This was something I'd rarely seen incorporated in caddis patterns, though from "retired" specimens I'd collected, I sensed the potential to elicit a strike trigger here was considerable. I wanted these drowned wings to resemble the naturals—extremely frail and somewhat translucent, not opaque or with a defined profile. They were supposed to look haphazard and . . . dead.

I chose Z-Lon yarn, and tied each sparse wing in front of, and tight against a dubbing bump to make sure the yarn fibers didn't simply collapse against the hook shank when wet. The idea was for them to appear swept back, but still recognizable as two separate entities.

Knowing that trout often fixate on drowned adults (of all insect types), I preened these wings downward, slightly below the axis of the hook, wanting them to be just below the water's surface.

Finally, wanting a low-riding profile as well as a visible back-wing silhouette, I borrowed Ralph Cutter's ingenious idea from his E/C Caddis, and parachute-hackled an elk-hair wing. I inspected the finished product in my vise—frankly without a lot of enthusiasm, due to its sparse, unremarkable appearance—and tossed it into my box, certain it would never find its way to the end of my leader. It just didn't have "the look."

The next evening on the river I started with my standard favorites, but to little avail—the fish were rising everywhere, but not to what I was offering. More out of resignation than hope, I finally reached in and plucked what I called the Cadaver Caddis from the box, and knotted it on. First cast—"slurp"—and a hookup. My friend watched mutely from upstream, slightly surprised.

Convinced it was a fluke, I dried the bug on my shirt, picked a new target, and cast again. Slurp—and I came tight again! Now my heart rate started to elevate slightly, and I noticed my fishing partner begin to edge slowly down toward me. Still not convinced (30 years, remember), I threw to yet another rise 20 feet from my rod tip,

An underwater view of a spent adult caddis, with its wings outstretched on the water.

and it happened again—three fish in as many casts! I went on to hook many fish in one magical hour that night, and missed several other takes, eliciting strikes from every single trout I cast to. Unbelievable.

Even more astounding, the fly continued to produce at this torrid pace for the rest of the summer. Evening after evening, my confidence soared as I knew I had a good chance of hooking nearly every trout I put a good cast on. It was like a dream.

That autumn, another friend and I found ourselves in the Rockies, plying the demanding flows of the Firehole River. Each cloudy afternoon flotillas of *Baetis* drifted down the gentle flats of Biscuit Basin, with the greedy mouths of rainbows and browns interrupting their journey.

It was exceptionally demanding, with fish immediately going down at the merest hint of drag, or anything else out of the ordinary. We felt fortunate to take one fish out of each pod before they wised up, and we'd have to go in search of more fish. Just on a lark, as the trout were confidently sucking in the tiny mayflies (but completely ignoring my imitations), I took off my #22 parachute and tied on my new Cadaver Caddis. Don't ask why, it was one of those strange decisions based on very little coherent thought.

I proceeded not only to catch a fish on the far-too-large #16 dry, I hooked all eight fish in the pod. Could this truly be a magic fly? I moved down to the next group of risers, and quickly stuck over half of them. I then realized that this pattern had something that attracted fish even in situations I never would have imagined.

Years later, this pattern is almost always my first choice when fishing a dry fly—whether for selective trout fixated on a particular mayfly or caddis, or simply covering water as a searching pattern. There is clearly something about it that inspires confidence that it is a safe and easy meal.

As a creative tier, I want to understand this phenomenon. Why would a heavily pressured trout feeding exclusively on tiny mayflies suddenly and gullibly agree to take a much larger fraud, one which to my eyes wouldn't seem to even remotely resemble the existing naturals?

It's my experience that much has been considered about the intellectual process of creative tying—using focused and purposeful imagination in design and material selection to imitate various fish food—yet the intuitive part of the design process remains largely ignored. Why did I decide on this particular combination of materials for the fly I eventually renamed the Missing Link? I couldn't continue calling it a caddis, as it worked too well over a broad range of situations.

Why has this pattern proven to be so irresistible to fish, while seeming a bit straggly and unimpressive to my eyes? The truth is, understanding how fish see—both natural prey and our emulations—is an imperfect science. Our eyes are created differently than theirs, for different purposes, and so we are forced to make certain assumptions when designing imitations of their food that may or may not translate accurately. This can be frustrating when seemingly perfect emulations elicit only refusals. Magic happens when some (often) unintended combination of materials proves deadly effective.

If I'm honest, when I was trying to mimic trapped air bubbles on the drowned abdomen of the Missing Link, was a Flashabou rib the first thing that sprang to my mind? No. Not even close. My mind immediately went to the need for a spiky, slightly flashy dubbing. Makes sense, right? A dying caddis has some small hairs on its body, some of which will likely still trap tiny air pockets. Yet part of me struggled with the bulk dubbing would create, and before I could even reason through this, my mind took an immediate, on-its-own jump to my friend's thread-bodied drys. Something else intuited I still needed flash, and out of nowhere my fondness for Flashabou-ribbed nymphs drifted into my mind. And when my lagging, one-dimensional, controlling thought processes finally caught up, the work had already been done. All I had to do was coat some goop on, and apparently I'd created something fish really like.

Some might call that process intuition. And as is so often the case in such matters, I didn't immediately appreciate my own creation. Sure, the fly immediately worked exactly as I'd hoped, yet I pulled out the pattern only when I felt fish were keying on dead and dying caddis. It might have languished in ignominy as a limited-use specialty fly. Instead, it turned out to be the single most effective dry fly I have ever used.

MERCER'S MISSING LINK

HOOK: #12-18 Tiemco 102Y.

THREAD: Camel 8/0 UNI-Thread.

ABDOMEN: Thread ribbed with pearl Flashabou, coated with Loon UV Flow.

THORAX/WING SPLITTER: Small clump of UV brown Ice Dub.

DOWNWINGS: Dark dun Z-Lon.

UPWING: Elk body hair.

HACKLE: Dark dun saddle hackle, tied parachute.

I could ramble on about the importance of this same process of intuition in devising other parts of the Missing Link—and about how this fly must imitate what fish often see from below—but as creative tiers, I think we would do well to keep an open mind. Fish see differently than we do, and it's not always possible to logically put ourselves in their shoes. Your gut instincts can also play a powerful role in the creative process.

Not all materials are best used as advertised. And as we sit down to create something new, it can be useful to let our imaginations wander and relax a bit, meandering outside of the strict and rigid lines of what we think is true. Be willing to fail occasionally, knowing that this is sometimes necessary if we hope to discover just exactly what it is that fish really want.

Mike Mercer is Fly Fisherman's West Coast field editor, and the author of *Creative Fly Tying* (Wild River Press, 2006). He has been a travel associate at The Fly Shop (*flyshop.com*) at Redding, California for more than 25 years.

This angler demonstrates the right angle for a topwater hook set: straight up. Strip setting or even setting to the side can result in the fly being pulled out of a fish's partly open mouth.

Photo | **Kyle Zempel**

smallmouths on topwater flies

›DAVE KARCZYNSKI & TIM LANDWEHR

This feature article is an excerpt from Smallmouth: Modern Fly Fishing Methods, Tactics, and Techniques *(Stackpole Books, 2017).*

GAMEFISH COME EQUIPPED WITH A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT JAW STRUCTURES, EACH OF WHICH TELLS A DIFFERENT STORY ABOUT HOW THESE FISH EVOLVED TO HUNT PREY. Some species, like the channel catfish, have an obvious overbite—useful in pinning prey on the bottom. The brook trout has a jaw that occupies much of its face, a testament to how it evolved to eat during the relatively short growing season of northern latitudes and high-country streams (that is to say, all the time). Then there's the smallmouth bass. A look at its jaw structure shows a lower jaw that extends beyond the upper. The biology tells the story of a fish that evolved to feed up top.

The surface might look to the angler like an easy nut to crack, but in fact the opposite is true. Perhaps nowhere else in the water column does the how, and why, and when of smallmouth fishing have so many different nuances and possibilities. First off, to *Micropterus dolomieu* the surface is a place of food—and danger. Imagine a restaurant where the food was easy to get but where each excursion brought with it the threat of annihilation. Simply put, the surface is where a fish negotiates its willingness to eat with its wariness of death from above. And so we've classified topwater flies according to the sound they make. In fact, you might think of them as musical instruments producing a variety of different sounds, from the pianissimo of the wiggly to the fortissimo of a banging Boogle Bug to the deep baritone of a hair bug trapping large quantities of air in its spun body. In short, perhaps even more so than silhouette, what distinguishes topwaters is their sonic profile. For current purposes, we'll divide topwater flies into two basic categories: wigglies and poppers.

Wigglies

To tell the story of the wiggly we first have to tell the story of an elderly Southern gentleman by the name of Jack Allen. Jack was a longtime largemouth bass guide from the Florida Everglades, and when we met him at the boat launch one early summer day, we saw nothing more than a guy with a bad elbow and a box of tiny hand-tied flies with foam bodies and wiggly legs—"bluegill spiders on steroids," we called them. When we launched the boat that first day with Jack the winds were ripping the flags straight out and there were standing waves and whitecaps on the river—not the sort of conditions in which any of the guides would have suggested throwing something as small and delicate as one of Jack's foam and rubber creations. In the standing waves and whitecaps, it would have been hard to spot a big bright blockhead popper, let alone a small dark bluegill fly—jacked up on steroids or not.

Then Jack caught a 19-inch smallmouth. And another. The third fish we netted was a solid 20 inches. Afterward Jack flopped back down, wincing and rubbing his casting elbow. Shaking out his arm and getting back in the casting perch, he clarified to both us and the fish: "I prefer the 14-inchers."

In a way, fishing wigglies is not new. As far back as the 1880s, Dr. James Henshall was imploring the smallmouth angler "not to forget the spiders." But as we started fishing wigglies systematically on our Wisconsin rivers, we noticed different behaviors in the bass that we'd been catching for decades on poppers and hair bugs. There was a difference between the eats we got on the wiggly and the eats we got on the popper. Oftentimes the popper eat is aggressive, a toilet bowl woosh or topwater explosion of sorts—which suggests a fish could be scared or confused (or both) when

Photo | Kyle Zempel

How long it takes a fish to react to a topwater fly depends on a number of factors, with water temperature being foremost. The colder the water, the longer you should work a topwater fly before giving up on a cast. When the water heats up, be prepared for near-instant strikes.

it whacks a popper. But wiggly fish were a different story. There was never unnecessary commotion in the eat. A full ten times out of ten, a smallmouth bass simply sipped it out of the film. They were confident it was food.

Though the above anecdotes demonstrate a fish's willingness to eat the wiggly in a variety of weather conditions and forage situations, the real problem the wiggly solves is presenting to fish in shallow, calm water. This might refer to 1) the first shelf when there is "just enough" water to bring fish onto it, 2) shallow feeding flats in the evening, and 3) mid-river rock gardens and weed beds in the middle of the day. For these reasons the wiggly typically becomes an especially important fly in the smallmouth angler's arsenal once water levels drop a bit in early summer.

Fishing the Wiggly

The wiggly is not a popping bug, so the most important rule to remember when fishing one is simple: Don't pop it. That's because the power of the wiggly lies in its seductive subtlety—aka, the wiggle—which goes out the window when you yank it across the surface. Having fished these flies with hundreds of clients, we've settled on a single verbal instruction that accurately communicates how subtle of a motion the fishing of these flies requires: "Bend its legs. Don't move the bug, just bend its legs." How much line manipulation is needed to bend legs made of one-millimeter silicone? Not much. For anglers accustomed to micromanaging the actions of their streamers, fishing the wiggly can require a Zen-like patience and detachment. In addition, the true wiggly artist will master mending in such a way where you exaggerate your stack mend slightly to come into contact with a fly and give it the subtlest nudge—the exact opposite of what you'd be looking to do when dry-fly fishing for trout. We like to call this "touch mending."

Poppers

Before we get started about poppers, which have been around in either deer hair, balsa wood, or foam forms since time immemorial, it might be worth asking an obvious question: Why on earth does a smallmouth bass eat a chartreuse popper in the first place? Our years on the water have led us to believe that a big part of the reason that smallmouth eat things like gaudy fluorescent poppers is due to "the curse of no opposable thumbs." We have seen bass sip a spindly leaf with the same confidence as they would an adult dragonfly, only to kick it out once they recognize the mistake. The actionable difference is that the mistakes we throw their way have a hook at the end of them.

When and How to Pop

If there's a basic recipe for popper fishing, one that we might tweak based on the conditions at hand, it's this:

1) Land the fly as gently as you can. The sound of the fly hitting the water is the first possible cue to bring a fish in.

2) Let the bug drift at least until the rings of water clear. Or longer (because less is more, longer is better).

3) Mend if need be (ideally a "pop mend," like a "touch mend" but with more force).

4) Let the rings of water clear again.

5) Pop, and then repeat steps 2-4.

Photo | Dave Karczynski

Poppers make different sounds upon landing depending on their core body materials and level of dressing. A minimalist foam-head popper (far left) can be cast with great line speed for a sharp sound upon landing, whereas a spun-deer-hair body with plenty of hackle and rubber legs will invariably land more softly.

Photo | Dave Karczynski

A wiggly is not a popping bug, so don't pop it. Move it just enough to bend the silicone legs so the fly can work its subtle magic.

With that basic recipe established, there are several other factors that affect the way we fish popping bugs. The first is the depth of the water. The key with any popping bug is as follows: Shallow water gets a little pop, deep water gets a big pop. In situations where you're fishing a popper all the way back to the boat over water steadily increasing in depth, this means that the intensity of pops should increase commensurately.

In addition to depth, temperature is another factor that affects our approach to popping. Cool-water popping and warmer-water popping should be approached differently in terms of attitude and expectation.

Early in the season when bass metabolic rates are slow, you might get hit eight seconds into the drift because that's how long it takes for that lethargic fish to hone in. That's a time to stay focused on the fly throughout the drift, and not to lose your attention even after the fly has been sitting out there for some time. Later in the season, when bass metabolic rates are at their peak, the angler must be ready for the opposite: an instantaneous eat. When water temps are high, you don't want to be adjusting your sunglasses or unwrapping a line from around your reel seat when the fly lands. You want to be ready to strike.

So depth and temperature of the water are two things that we take into account when determining the intensity of our approach, but in clear water when we can see our quarry there's another dimension the thoughtful topwater angler must think about: the proximity of the fish. With a fish at distance you might have needed to shout to get his attention, but you don't want to keep shouting after you have his ear. In many cases, the fish will charge the fly and eat it after a single pop. But then there are other times when a fish will charge toward a fly several yards away and not eat but pause beneath it, laid up beneath your bug like a seal with a ball on its nose. In such circumstances, if you give your fly a normal pop, that bass will be gone. At times like this it's a whisper, not a shout, that will seal the deal.

Skating Flies

Skating flies has a time and place, but it is certainly not all times and it is not every place. This technique works best on small to midsize rivers where it's possible to cover most, if not all, of the river in a single swing. That's because skating flies requires "players" to work, and players of the type that chase skated flies can be few and far between. In this sense, skating flies is similar to fishing large, flashy streamers from a boat in an attempt to elicit territorial strikes. In both cases you are covering a lot of water, accepting that passive and neutral fish are going to ignore your offering but feeling confident that you're covering enough water efficiently enough to entice aggressive fish into eating. Though you can definitely skate flies with a single-handed rod, this technique is most satisfying to fish with a six-weight switch rod coupled with a Skagit head of a grain weight appropriate for the rod's action and the caster's style.

The same poppers and wigglies we've been discussing also make great skating flies, provided they are not too big. Because this technique is most successful when you can cover significant water, you need a fly that can be cast a considerable distance with relative ease. We've found that smaller foam terrestrial patterns in the size six neighborhood are ideal. Remember that the overall impression of the bug will seem larger given the fact that it is creating a wake on the surface.

There are two important components to this technique, the first and most important being the length of the cast. The skated-fly approach is most successful when you can cover most of the river in a single cast. If you can stand on the first shelf of one bank, cast to the first shelf of the far bank, and skate across the entire length of the river, you have found yourself skatable water. Using this technique, it is quite possible to present to every single fish in a given beat of water.

The second important part of this technique is the speed of the fly. Too slow and fish have too much time to think—we want them to simply respond. Too fast, on the other hand, and it just doesn't feel like food. So how do you know the right speed? One way to think about speed is by the size of your wake. When skating flies for smallmouth, you should aspire to a wake that is about the size of a slice of pizza. A too-fast retrieve will create too large a wake, a too-slow retrieve generally too small. Aim for a healthy pizza slice, and you're on your way to garnering reaction strikes up top.

The Topwater Hook-set

The best hook-set when fishing topwaters is not a strip-set or side-sweep. Instead, come straight up with the rod and at the same time make one long, strong strip until the rod has a good bend in it. Setting straight up and with a strip when fishing topwaters is tremendously important toward achieving consistent quality hook-sets. That said, setting to the side can also work if the rod set follows the current in a downstream direction, but unless you know which direction the fish ate the fly from, a low side set runs the risk of pulling the fly out of a fish's mouth.

With any popping bugs or wigglies, if we lose a fish it is usually within the first three seconds. Even if it's on the second, deeper shelf, a fish typically eats and heads for even deeper water—right at you, in other words. It can be very hard to catch up to these charging fish. What we tell our clients is this: "Strip aggressively as if you were trying to break the fish off—until you come tight to them again." This command puts into their heads that they have to be aggressive with the fish to make up all that slack line that a charging fish introduces. Practice a stripping motion that is large and all the way past your belt line—and don't stop. Oftentimes an angler might stop stripping because the lines goes slack and they think the fish is gone. Keep stripping with the biggest, longest strips you can muster. Odds are that bass is still there.

Be Ready for Anything

Fishing the surface for smallmouth bass is not simply for the pleasure of a visual eat. It's also for the thrill of your biggest fish of the season. We have a theory that certain much-larger-than-average smallmouth are not full-time crayfish eaters. That's because crayfish are not the most efficient food source when it comes to digestion. There's a lot of wasted energy produced while digesting these large crustaceans (think of how hard a bass's body has to work to process and expel all those exoskeletons). Higher up in the water column, however, bass can find many things that are denser in quality nutrients: damselflies, mice, voles, and frogs. The quality of the protein found in preystuffs that live at the surface is one way to explain the observation that all—not "some" or "most" but all—of the 22-inch fish we've caught over the course of our careers have come on topwaters. Follow these tips and you, too, might just score the best bass of your lifetime this year.

Writer and photographer Dave Karczynski is a Robert Traver Award winner and writing instructor at the University of Michigan. Tim Landwehr owns and operates Tight Lines Fly Shop and has been guiding for smallmouth bass for the majority of his adult life. He lives in De Pere, Wisconsin.

Beauty From Within

A smooth, solid foundation for frameworthy flies

CHARLIE CRAVEN

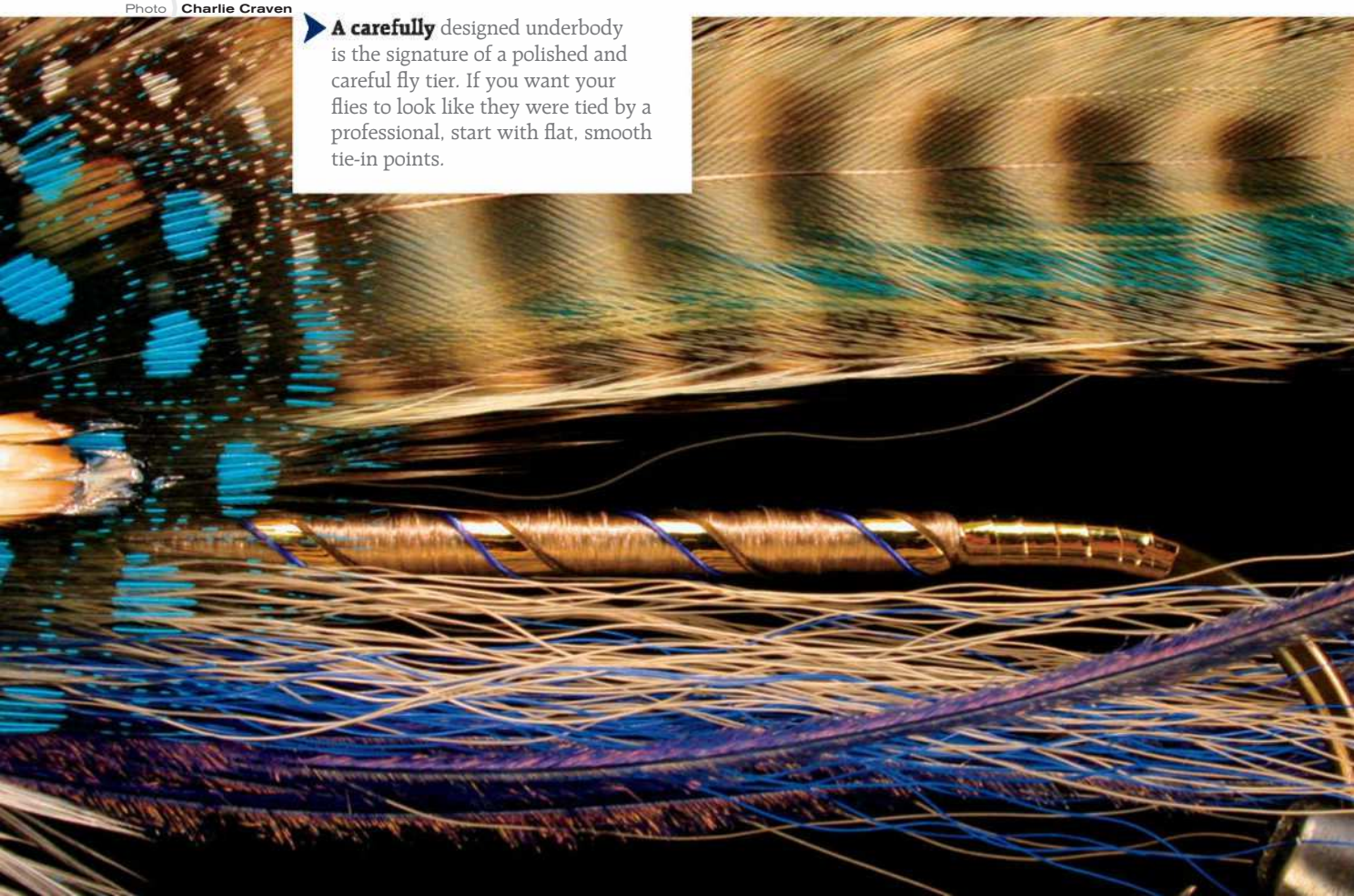
FLY TYING, LIKE fly fishing itself, is loaded with infinitesimal details. I'm convinced that's why it attracts all of us. We like those details, and no matter how long you're at it, there is always more to learn.

I happen to be a detail-oriented kind of guy, and fly tying meshes perfectly with my borderline obsessiveness. To that end, I want to take this opportunity to write about some of the finer details in fly tying that are often overlooked, but can make a big difference in the functionality and durability of your flies, and make them look a lot better. Some people view these techniques as exclusively the realm of super picky classic streamer aficionados or Atlantic salmon fly tiers, but these techniques make even simple trout flies more polished, professional, and attractive.

Any successful creative process starts off with a good foundation. Michelangelo didn't sculpt *David* out of a block of sandstone, he used marble. Fly patterns are no different. True beauty comes from within.

Once you've selected the hook, your goal should always be to make a perfect fly pattern. All of this starts with the simple act of attaching the thread to the hook. This is your foundation. If you start your fly by building a poor foundation, you'll find it impossible to make

Photo | Charlie Craven



A carefully designed underbody is the signature of a polished and careful fly tier. If you want your flies to look like they were tied by a professional, start with flat, smooth tie-in points.

a perfect fly. Maintaining a smooth thread base along the shank as the slim foundation for the tail and later, the body of the fly, requires knowledge, skill, and forethought.

I like to assure that the jam knot, as well as the initial thread base, is formed with flattened thread. By now my readers are familiar with unwinding the built-in factory twist in the thread to flatten it, after the thread is already on the hook, but that leaves a bump right at the start. [*For more information on flat and round threads, and a complete treatise on the types of commercial threads available to fly tiers today, read "A Tangled Mess" by Charlie Craven in the Feb.-Mar. 2017 issue.* The Editor.}

There are a few ways to flatten the thread before you start it on the hook, and doing any of them will help to form that clean, smooth foundation for tails and bodies rather than a coarsely corrugated thread base that is hard to anchor materials on.

My favorite method for flattening the thread starts by making a single turn of thread around the hook shank and rocking or sawing a length of thread back and forth to "push" the twist out. By flattening the thread in this manner, I form the smallest, smoothest jam knot and thread base possible. This smooth base makes it much easier to center the tailing material atop the hook shank and is the precursor to a smoothly formed abdomen.

Flat thread lies more smoothly along the hook shank than corded or twisted thread, and binds materials down over a wider area with fewer turns than corded thread. This means two flat thread wraps on the tail are all I need to hold things in place, and I don't need to build an unsightly lump along the hook shank to anchor the materials. When I think about it, lumps and bumps probably represent at least a third of all fly-tying troubles.

Another method that can be used to flatten the thread before attaching it to the hook shank is to run a length of the working end of the thread against the back edge of your scissors to push the factory twist out. You can even use your smoothly manicured thumbnail to do the same thing.

The idea is to start the thread as smooth and flat as possible so as not to build texture or bulk along the hook shank—this leads to a much easier process of building tapered underbodies and smooth tie-down points through the rest of the fly.

Once we have flattened thread started on the hook, there is still lots of work to be done. The shape and construction of the underbody is, in most cases, even more important than the final overbody. Overbodies using many hard materials such as wire, Super Hair, quills, and similar materials mirror the shape of the thread underbody, and even microthin dubbed bodies look better with a flat and smooth underbody. With this reasoning, you can see that a lumpy, bumpy underbody results in a lumpy, bumpy overbody and in all likelihood, an ugly, misshapen fly. Yes, I know they still catch fish. But it's not something you can (or should be) proud of.

Size & Symmetry

When building a tapered thread underbody, always downsize it a bit from what you have in mind for the outer dimensions of the finished fly. This accommodates the bulk of whatever overbody material you're going to use.

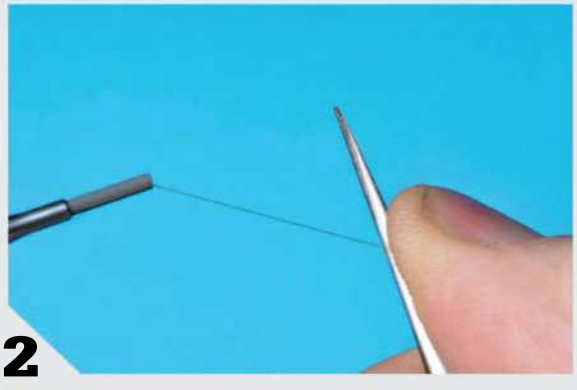
Think of the underbody as merely the skeleton and the overbody as the flesh and you'll get a pretty good idea of where you want to be.

Building a symmetrical underbody is the hallmark of a well-tied fly. Luckily, the overall balance is not thrown off—given the scale of the thin materials we work with—even when materials are tied in along only one side of the hook shank. Conveniently, we are able to use the hook shank as the core of the fly and attach materials along the sides, top, or bottom without really throwing off the center balance.

FLATTEN THE THREAD

Photos Charlie Craven

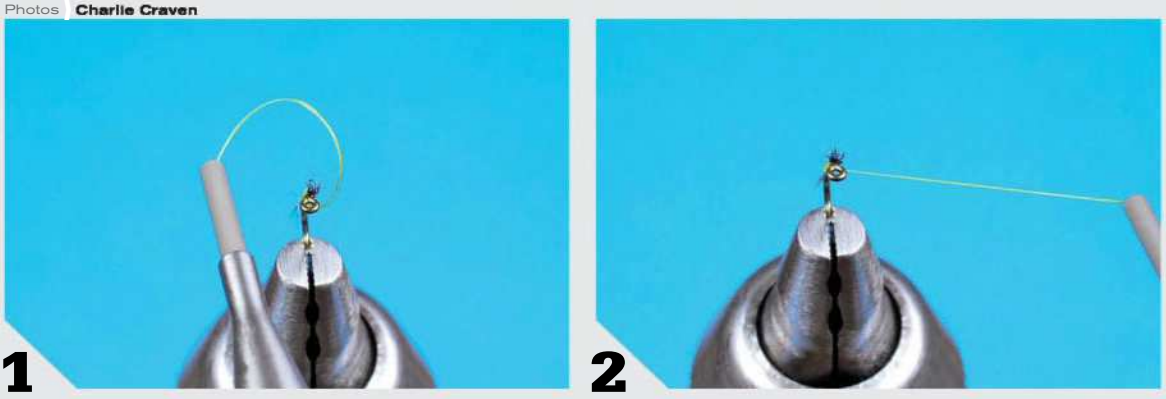
To flatten the end of the thread, make a single turn of thread and, while holding the tag end, "rock" the thread back and forth against the hook shank by pulling up and down repeatedly on the bobbin and tag. This flattens the thread and allows you to form a smooth jam knot and thread base right from the beginning.



You can also flatten the thread before you begin tying by running the first several inches of thread from your bobbin across the back edge of scissor blades. Flat thread forms a much smoother base and builds a slimmer core.

USE A D-WRAP

Photos | Charlie Craven



A D-wrap allows you to capture materials along the top or near side of the shank without letting them "crawl" due to thread tension. Execute a D-wrap by slightly lessening the tension on the thread as you bring it over the top of the hook shank and material, and then snap it tight in a straight motion across the bottom of the hook. The move travels in the path of a capital letter D, and causes the slack loop to close down abruptly over the material before it can be influenced by thread tension.

What I mean to say here is, there is no efficient way to keep a fly pattern tied on a round hook shank completely symmetrical throughout the 360-degree radius of the hook, but there are ways to help keep things appearing that way.

One of the tricks I use to assure a more even underbody is to try to start my thread wraps where I want the abdomen to end. This gives me a blank hook shank to gather my proportion points from. That blank canvas, to me, just seems easier to gather where the exact midpoint, or 75 percent point, or "just a bit back from the hook eye point" really resides. From there, I start the flattened thread and wrap back to the bend, then tie in the tail on top of the shank.

Rather than cutting the butt ends of the tails off near the bend, I always wrap over them to the starting point (where the abdomen will end) to keep the hook shank a consistent diameter all the way along that length of the hook. I take pains to keep these butt ends on the top of the hook shank by using what I call a D-wrap.

The D-wrap loses a bit of tension as I come over and around the top of the shank and material, and then tightens in a straight line toward my chest across the bottom of the hook, forming the shape of a capital letter D turned on its side. Executing this technique takes a bit of practice, but mastering it allows for much cleaner tie-downs, and keeps materials in place with simple thread control rather than constant finger manipulation.

If there is a rib to tie in, I attach it from the front of the abdomen and wrap back over it, typically along the near side of the hook shank—because I can see it most clearly there— all the way to the base of the tail. Again, this redundancy keeps the portion of the hook shank built up with the same amounts of wraps and materials all the way down its length.

If this is accomplished properly, I can tie in the body material or even wrap a tight strand of dubbing over a smooth, consistent-diameter thread base, and that helps me build a seamless, smooth overbody.

It is little details like these that make the difference between nice flies and perfectly tied specimens you want to frame. Constant care and attention to the foundational wraps and construction of the underbody of any fly always results in a more cleanly tied and more durable fly pattern.

Smooth thread wraps form a more solid foundation for body materials, allow for smoother overlapping turns, and keep their shape better than tightly corded wraps of thread.

Additionally, in the case that you need a small application of Super Glue or some other type of adhesive or coating, a smoothly tapered and shaped underbody lends itself better than a lumpy, twisted mess you've been fighting with previously.

Charlie Craven co-owns Charlie's Fly Box in Arvada, Colorado, and is the author of two books: *Charlie's Fly Box* (Stackpole Books, 2011) and *Tying Nymphs: Essential Flies and Techniques for the Top Patterns* (Stackpole Books/Headwater Books, 2016).

START WHERE YOU'LL END UP

Photos | **Charlie Craven**

1

2

Attaching body material at the point where it will also ultimately end helps form smooth, symmetrical bodies without any lumps or bumps (shown in figure 1). Tying any hard body material in at any other point results in an uneven body, as shown in the second example. Your children and all generations after them will be disappointed in you if they see an errant lump caused by bad planning.

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Continued from page 64

at dust devils whirling like spinning tops over furrowed fields. The unwritten rules of the road were to watch for farm trucks on blind curves, drive 50 mph on straightaways, and leave a dust plume for the next vehicle to eat. Grandpa was at his storytelling best on that trip, the last one we fished together. Leaning across the front seat, he spun tales about ornery mules, horseback rides to headwater trout, his latest bowling score, and past life at the Ganders & Winget bicycle store. We were like two peas in a pod.

What I remember most about that drive to the South Fork of the Walla Walla River was how good I felt. Grandpa's ability to make you feel special went beyond the way he told a story. His ever-present smile, sparkling eyes, and boyish vulnerability drew you near. His genuine concern for your feelings provided comfort when things weren't going your way. Those attributes I hoped to someday emulate.

Our day's fishing began at Elbow Creek, where the path of the river twists sharply to the north. Grandpa stayed close to the trail while I hiked upstream. When we met up at noon, I found him working a boulder-laden stretch shaded by overhanging alders, a battered willow creel strapped to his side. Using a full shoulder throw to deliver a Royal Coachman Bucktail to a deep run on the opposite bank, he lowered his rod tip and mended line to float his offering at the speed of the current. Grandpa's technique suggested form and function: "10 o'clock, 1 o'clock," he coached when my casting technique collapsed at the point of release. I can't tell you how many trout we caught that day, or how big they were, only that we had a great time.

When the next summer rolled around, I was a newlywed. Nancy and I had been virtually inseparable since we first met in college. "Can't keep their hands off each other," Dad often remarked.

From Mom and Dad's perspective, I was too young to get married, had limited financial resources, and future plans for a graduate degree would fly out the window. Looking back, I can't say I blamed them. Things settled in my mind, however, when I asked my older brother for advice and he said, "It's your choice, not theirs."

When heated discussions cooled, Mom and Dad signed the legal paperwork to grant me "underage" permission to get married. It helped that Nancy's folks were more than eager to pair her up. We migrated to summer jobs on the Oregon coast where I worked for the Department of Fish and Wildlife as a fish checker, and Nancy waitressed in a seafood restaurant. Five months later, we returned home to announce that Nancy was pregnant.

Illustration | Al Hassall

The downside was that Grandpa Harry didn't live long enough to share in the excitement of his first great-grandchild. My Dad entered the back bedroom of our home to rouse me from deep slumber. The December night was black and still. A crust of old snow covered the ground and ice plated the bedroom window. Dad whispered softly, "Sorry to wake you, but we just received a phone call. Grandpa Harry died last night following a sudden asthma attack."

Frank Soos wrote, "Death cannot be reconciled despite a wash of words." Neither did we find comfort in tired huddles. The sun did not shine for me that day, and victuals lacked flavor. I remember numb limbs, the salty sweet taste of tears, and my sleep-deprived brain screaming, "It's not possible!" But Grandpa Harry was gone. He would no longer greet me at his front door with a strong handshake and a ready smile. There would be no more fishing the South Fork together.

Until the day that Grandpa Harry passed away, my life had been sheltered from tragedy. Getting skunked while fishing, or losing the big one at the net did not enter into the equation. You could say I was naïve about life's possibilities. Back then, pregnant girls and delinquent boys were sent away until cured. Nobody's dog got euthanized. They were "put to sleep" or they "ran off." All husbands and wives loved each other, priests were one step from sainthood, and baseball stars were unsullied American heroes. Growing up in a small town can do that to you. The number of experiences and people you encounter limit your understanding of the world.

Because of that harsh dose of reality, I did not attend Grandpa Harry's viewing. I wanted to hold onto the image of our last day on the South Fork: his forward lean as he cast to the far bank; cold, clear water swirling around his knees; a bemused smile when a fat trout jumped at the sting of his hook. I can still picture the slice of his fly line in fast current and the deep bow in his trusty bamboo rod. In my memory, Grandpa landed the largest trout of the day (easily 16 inches) and released it so that others had the opportunity to do the same.

In 1999, I reluctantly put the Ranchero up for sale. The challenge was how to let go of my heartfelt memories: those carefree summer days tooling down the Oregon coast with a smiling bride by my side, the morning I brought my newborn daughter home from the general hospital, and teaching my son how to drive on weekend trips to the city dump. And what about that last sunny afternoon on the South Fork, sitting on the tailgate with Grandpa Harry while he tried to coax me into taking a bite of stinky Limburger cheese?

Five months after my first newspaper for sale ad, the Ranchero's one working brake light flashed goodbye as it turned the corner, its new owner at the wheel. More than three decades of family memories had been reduced to eighteen Ben Franklins. Regardless of its novelty, the fat wad of cash in my wallet felt inadequate. I crouched at the curb and traced the outline of crankcase oil, transmission fluid, and engine coolant that soaked into the asphalt. No matter how hard I tried to evoke magic, there was no flood of memory, no relief, no sadness. Like a death row prisoner resigned to his fate, I had let go. It was the end of an era, but you can't purchase tradition.

Dennis Dauble is a retired fishery scientist, outdoor writer, presenter, and educator who lives in Richland, Washington. He has written or edited four books and writes about fish and fishing for regional newspapers and magazines.

NAUTILUS PRO GUIDE DATA SHEET

NAME: Jose David Bravo

BIO: Fly fisherman from Colombia, a gifted place to live and fish! Jungles and flats is all I need. Two world records on the books and many places in my bucket list.

TARGET SPECIES: Peacocks, Vampire Fish, Permit, Bonefish, GTs, and many more

GUIDED ANGLERS TO: Giant peacocks and Payaras deep in the Colombian jungles.

BOAT: Nitro Z-17

FAVORITE KNOT: A variation of the Non Slip Mono Loop

FAVORITE RIVER: Mataven River

FAVORITE TYPE OF FISHING: Tailing Bonefish

FAVORITE NAUTILUS REEL: NV-G 9/10, it's just perfect. Beautiful, light, strong and the drag has the sensitivity that I need.

FAVORITE FISH: Payara Vampire Fish

FAVORITE SAYING: Monkeys don't eat flies dude, you have to put it in the water

BIGGEST FISH EVER LOST: Not the biggest ever, but I may have lost a world record Bonefish at New Caledonia

DREAM DESTINATION: Poivre Island

WHO WOULD YOU LIKE TO GUIDE ONE DAY?: Capt. Shane Smith, in the Colombian jungles. We will have fun!

AND ONE TIME A CLIENT: Trying to catch a world record on 8lb. tippet, my client lost more than 20 flies and I had to take out my materials and tie some right there in the boat and in the middle of a jungle river.

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A Ranchero Runs Through It

DENNIS DAUBLE

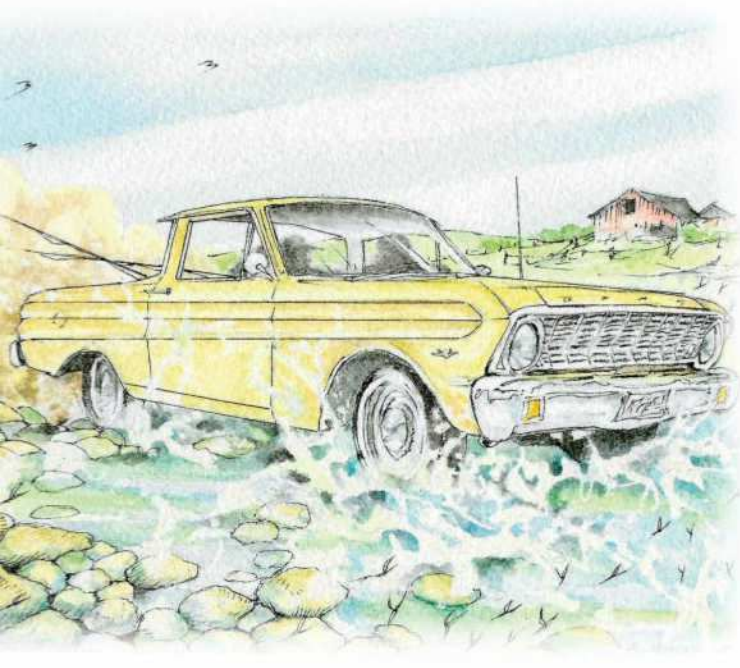

Illustration | Al Hassall

THE RANCHERO SAGA began in the fall of 1964 when Grandpa Harry drove it from the Teague Motor Sales showroom. It had whitewall tires, "honey gold" exterior, a 3-speed Cruise-O-Matic transmission, and was powered by a 200-cubic-inch straight six. How well I remember Grandpa chuckling with glee when he stomped on the gas pedal and was rewarded with a burst of speed. His ability to find entertainment at other people's expense was a behavior I grew to appreciate.

But as with racehorses and hunting dogs, old age inevitably caught up with Grandpa Harry. California stops, back-ups without looking, and T-boning a station wagon on the way to the bowling alley served notice that driving had become a challenge for him. At age 72, with his last vestige of freedom no longer in the cards, we took away the keys.

Rather than park his beloved Ranchero in the hay barn for pigeons to crap on, he offered it to my parents, who were badly in need of a second vehicle. The Ranchero reported for duty in the spring of 1967 with 11,000 miles on its odometer and vinyl seats that smelled factory new. "Ronnie the Ranchero," as we nicknamed it, proved to be a workhorse for our family. Over the next few years, my siblings and I drove it back and forth to college in the Willamette Valley, and to summer jobs.

In the summer of 1970, Lee Trevino won the 100th British Open, George Harrison played the sitar in the song Bangladesh, and Apollo 15 circled the earth. I was 19 years old. That summer was also the last time that Grandpa Harry and I fished together. On the morning of that last fishing trip, I punched the exit clock after working a night shift at the local pea cannery, and stepped from its cool concrete shell into the bright light of day where blue skies greeted me.

The Ranchero's bronze hood gleamed and its fine-tuned motor responded like a trustworthy steed when I turned the ignition key. A restless sense of anticipation followed the rush of stored-up adrenaline. Who needs sleep before your night off? I thought.

Driving directly to my grandparents' place, I approached the south pasture where winnows of fresh-cut alfalfa emitted mildewed pungency. A flock of gray geese worked over orchard grass lining the barnyard's rail fence. Bees circled lazily around a row of supers stacked three-high beside the small spring-fed pond that held Grandpa's pet trout.

My grandparents' brick-faced ranch-style home was fronted with two majestic weeping birch and a curved concrete driveway framed by boxwood shrubs. It was twenty minutes short of 8 A.M. when I nosed the Ranchero into a parking spot. Grandpa's creel, brown cotton vest, and two-piece bamboo fly rod with striped cloth case lay in a neat pile by the garage door. The metal "Farmers Exchange" thermometer tacked to the side of the house read 75 F.

I loaded Grandpa's fishing gear, and we headed south toward the Blue Mountain foothills. Our direction of travel took us past colonial-style farmhouses, Graybill's swimming pool, and goat pastures overgrown with teasel and bull thistle. We discussed the price of wheat and marveled

Continued on page 62

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