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FLY FISHERMAN

» George Daniel
His favorite trigger nymphs



THE LEADING MAGAZINE OF FLY FISHING

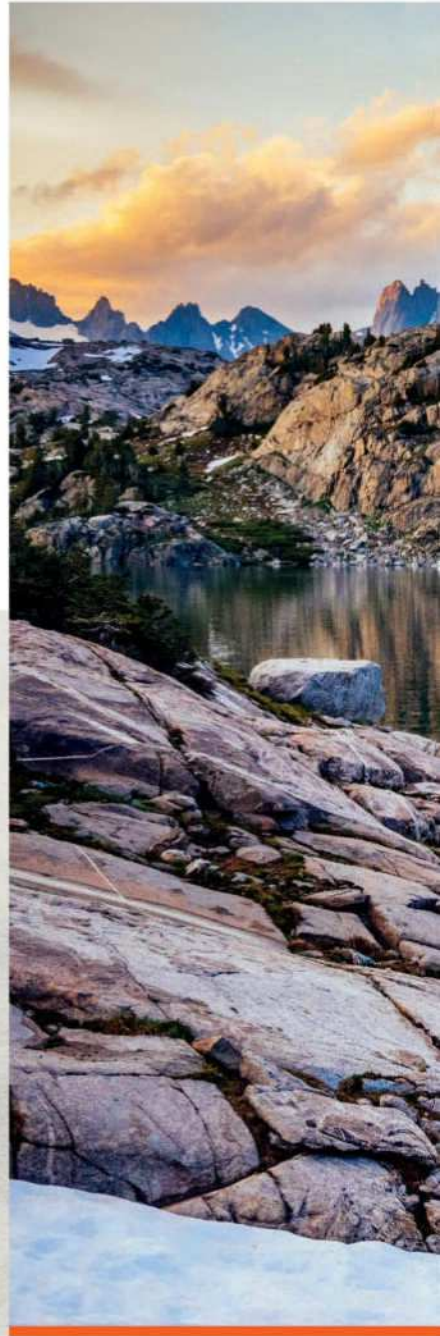
Bristol Bay's LAST STAND



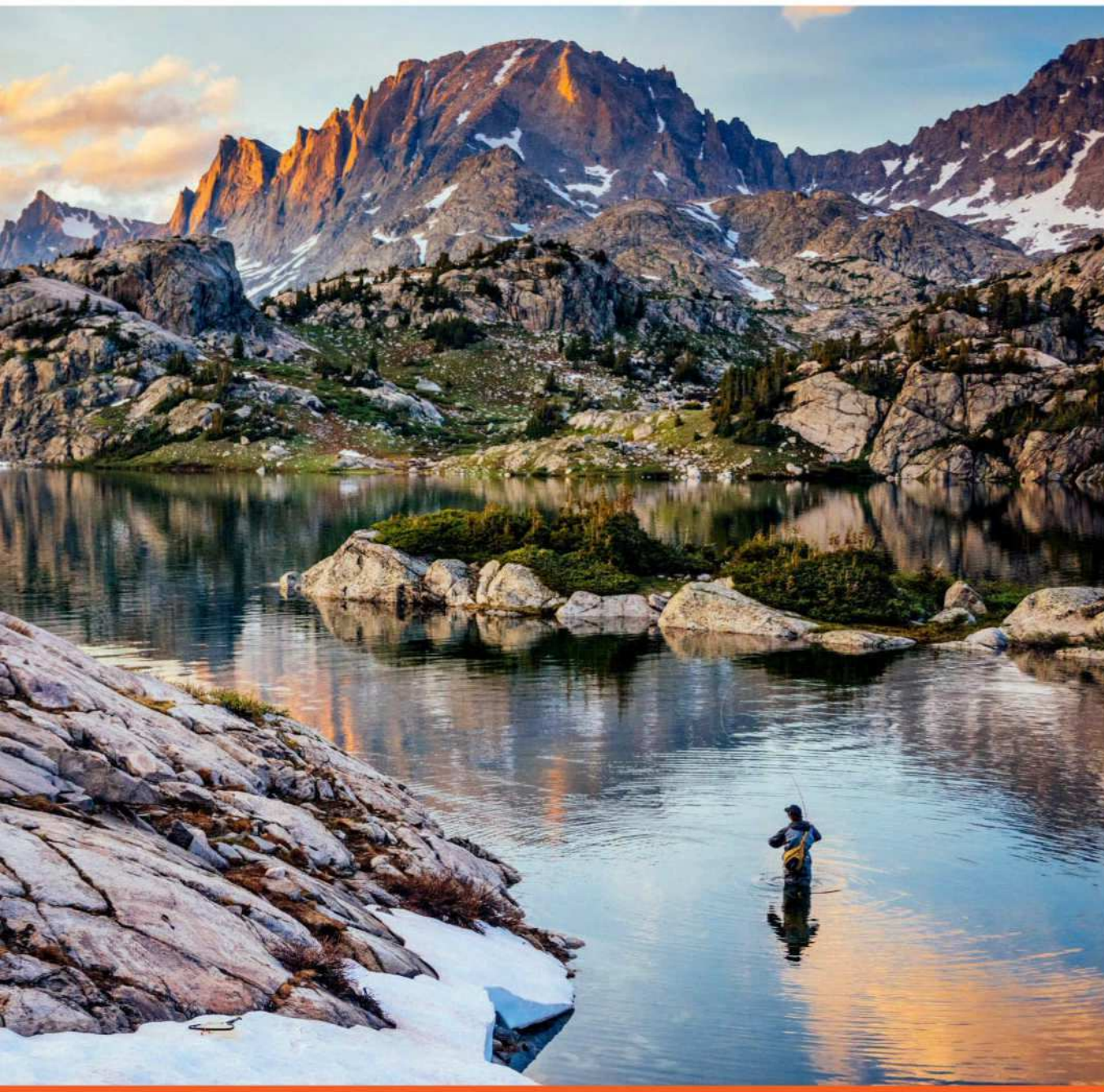
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WAKING GIANT

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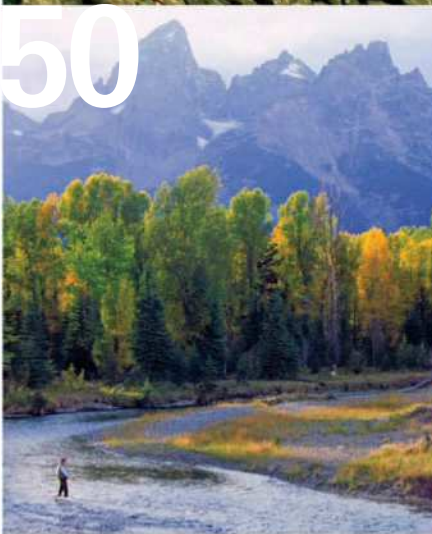


Shane Grimes soothes tired legs with some ice water immersion therapy 12 miles into the Wind River Range, Wyoming. JEREMIAH WATT © 2018 Patagonia, Inc.

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AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2018

The Leading Magazine
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VOLUME 49 • NUMBER 5

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// **Boots Allen**

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ON OUR COVER: A rainbow trout from the Kulik River, Alaska. The Kulik is a tributary of the Alagnak River and of Bristol Bay. The region is home to the greatest remaining Pacific salmon fishery on earth. A statewide ballot initiative in November could save Bristol Bay from future mine threats. Read how in Guido Rahr's story "What We Stand to Lose" on page 16. Cathy & Barry Beck photo

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NAUTILUS PRO GUIDE DATA SHEET

NAME: Oliver White

BIO: Professional angler and guide, lodge owner, writer and conservationist.

TARGET SPECIES: Anything that swims, I love it all, especially getting out there and exploring.

GUIDED ANGLERS TO: 28 lb. brown trout in Tierra del Fuego and a 200lb. arapaima in Guyana.

FAVORITE FLY: I'm a believer in custom flies on the best hooks. Enrico Puglisi are the best commercial flies out there - his spawning shrimp is standard in my box.

FAVORITE WATER: The flats

FAVORITE TYPE OF FISHING: Sight casting of any kind. Bonefish, permit, tarpon, trout, arapaima if you can see it all go down that's fly fishing at its best.

FAVORITE NAUTILUS REEL, WHY?: Monster - if I'm breaking out the Monster then we are chasing something special.

Yellowfin tuna, arapaima, GT's. No matter what it's guaranteed to be exciting.

BEST DAY FISHING: I had a day in Tanzania tigerfishing that can't be beat. 20 lb. tigerfish, elephants and hippos, and a monster vundu catfish all with great people.

BIGGEST FISH EVER LOST: Been spooled more times than I can remember. I've hooked an arapaima over 400 pounds that embarrassed me. A 10-12' tigershark ate my fly and took my entire line and backing without slowing down.

DREAM DESTINATION: New Zealand, Papua New Guinea

WHO WOULD YOU LIKE TO GUIDE ONE DAY: David Letterman and Jim Harrison

WHEN NOT FISHING: I love live music - acoustic and lyrical. Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, The Avett Brothers. Or in the woods with my long bow or in the field chasing birds with a shotgun.

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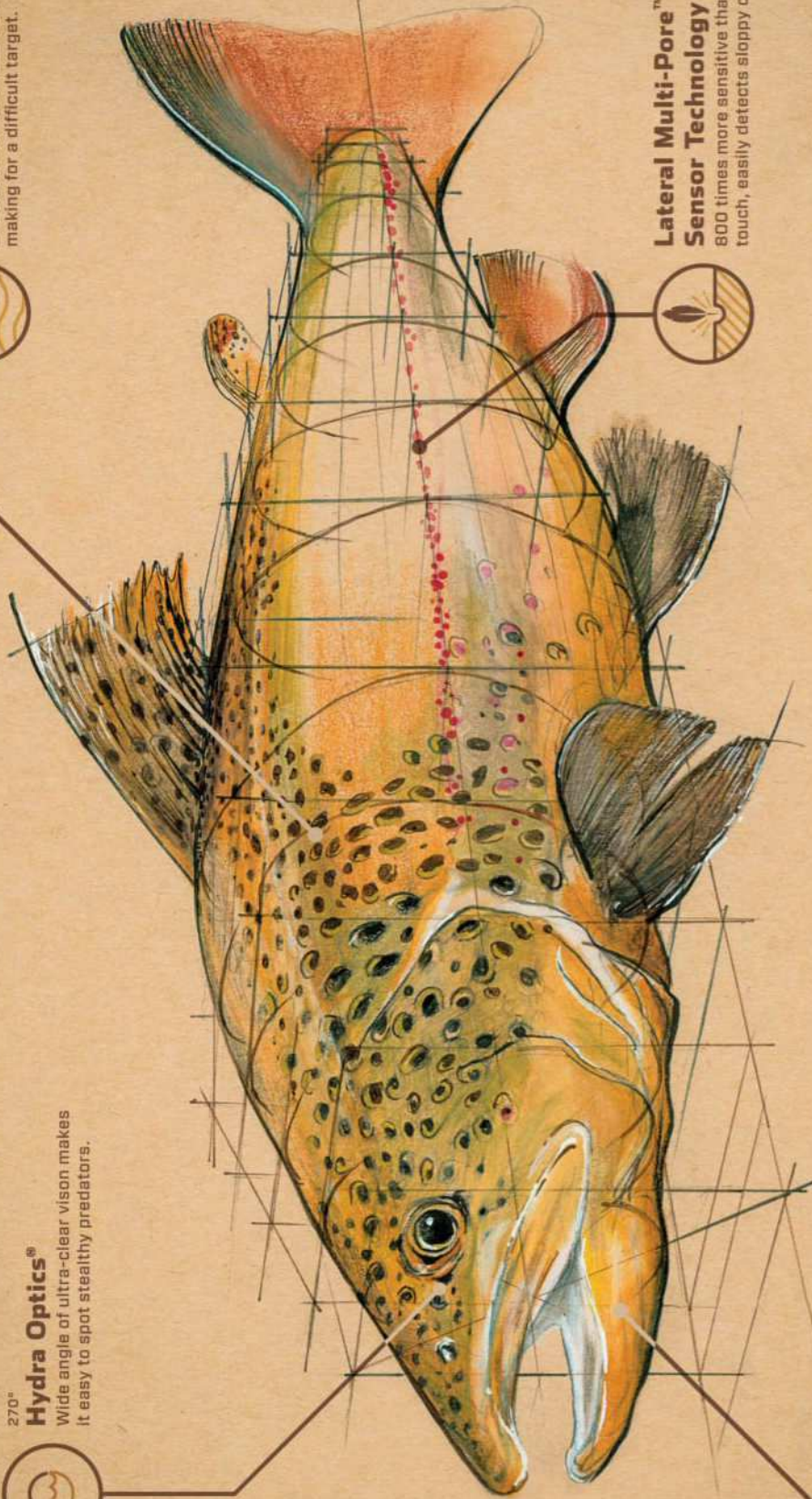
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CLEAN THE DREAM

Colorado River Sweep

Join organizers Landon Mayer and Brandon Kramer Aug. 4, 2018 for the third annual Clean The Dream River Cleanup. Everyone is invited to meet at the gauging station parking lot in the Charlie Meyers SWA at 9 A.M. Donuts, trash bags, and orange juice will be provided.

At 1 P.M. there will be a BBQ and raffle with prizes provided by Yeti, Simms, and many others. In 2017, a group of 47 volunteers removed 600 pounds of trash from the South Platte River. Help us eclipse that mark in 2018!



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Trash removal projects like the Clean the Dream River Cleanup are happening all around the country. It's just one small example of what a few key volunteers can do to improve their watersheds. Most of these good deeds go unnoticed, but not all of them. In 2019, FLY FISHERMAN's Conservationist of the Year will receive a \$1,000 shopping spree from Simms. Make a nomination today!





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.

WHO IS NEXT?



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.

Backwater Giants



Photo | Cathy & Barry Beck

► **Only one** thing is better than big trout, and that's big trout in small water.

train headed to the far end of the slough—a place I knew was a dead end. I gave chase, tracking the path of the trout as it powered 50 yards up the slough, under an arched sunken log with a gap under it, and then over it and back toward me until the line came taut. Suddenly, the trout was tethered on a short leash around that log, and when the line came tight it jumped in desperation and broke the 4X tippet. As the trout swam past me toward the main river channel, I could see it was still shaking its head, irritated by the #16 Pheasant Tail lodged in its lip. Success or failure? You decide, but Barry convinced me that those little potholes, sloughs, lagoons, side channels, and backwaters have their own special rewards. 🐟

LAST SPRING I walked with author Barry Beck to a backwater slough connected to one of Pennsylvania's best freestone streams. The eroded limestone cliff on the far side of the slough suggests that at one time, this was an outside bend in the main river channel. During flood events, water might still flow into the top of the slough, but in fishing conditions, it ends in a narrow neck of dead-end water, and connects with the river along a single deep, mysterious seam.

At the time, Barry was writing his manuscript "River Detours: How to catch trout in side channels, potholes, lagoons, and small tributaries" (page 44 of this issue). He was excited about the topic because he had recently caught a 10-pound brown in an insignificant side channel of the Limay River in Argentina. It wasn't just notable because it was the biggest trout of his trip, but because it came from a trickle of a side channel. His lesson was that big trout often "hide" in places that fly fishers overlook in their rush toward obvious riffles and deep holes.

Barry invited me to fish with him because he had scouted a big brown in this stillwater slough. He estimated the trout at 30 inches, an incredible size for Pennsylvania, but then I remember Joe Humphreys's 34-inch, 16-pound brown from Fishing Creek. Nearly every good trout stream has a few giants that are seldom seen. But Barry knew this fish. He had seen it the previous season, and this year had some shots at the same fish but hadn't been able to hook it.

Barry knew the trout cruised in slow circles around the backwater, so our plan was to sneak into position, make the cast, and wait for the fish. I had on a foam Super Beetle as an indicator, and to suspend a nondescript #16 Pheasant Tail where the trout would see it.

Crouched in the willows to disguise our profiles, I cast nearly parallel to the shoreline where Barry thought the trout would travel. The rings from the fly had just died away when we saw the trout approach over the weeds, slowly at first, but it seemed to accelerate when the fly came into view. Just when I thought "Oh my God, he's going to eat the beetle," I saw the white of the fish's mouth, and heard Barry shouting "Set! Set! Set!"

I lifted, and was immediately connected to a runaway

RP

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› 5,000 MILES

Thank you for the attention to the spectacular Flathead River, and the 50th anniversary of the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. Hilary Hutcheson's article in the June-July 2018 issue captures the magic of this iconic place, and its significance to anglers, native fish, and our nation's river conservation movement.

In celebrating all that the landmark Wild & Scenic Rivers Act has given us, we hope your readers will keep advocating for more. We're using this 50th anniversary to push for 5,000 new miles of Wild & Scenic designations for deserving rivers across the country. This includes native fish strongholds in the Yellowstone, Missouri, Gila, Eel, Trinity, Hoh, and Farmington river watersheds, as well as many other rivers that deserve protection.

Now is the time to set the bar high and insist on protections that will safeguard our best rivers, and our best fishing, for the next generation. We welcome your readers to sign our petition to Congress calling for new Wild & Scenic protections at 5000Miles.org.

BOB IRVIN

PRESIDENT AND CEO,
AMERICAN RIVERS

▶ **The Flathead** River was the inspiration for the federal Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. American Rivers is working to protect 5,000 more river miles to celebrate the Act's 50th anniversary.

› CARP UNLIMITED

In the April-May 2018 issue I saw something that made me groan loudly. It was a feature titled "Trash Fish" and it announced the Midwest Golden Bones Tournament, as well as urban fishing opportunities in and around the Chicago area. Have we as noble fly fishers sunk this far?

Let me state my premise: I've done everything a person can—in my writings, in my art, and now on a 10-year fly-fishing journey across America—to explore, journalize, and reveal the sheer beauty of fly fishing in all of its manifestations, including its local histories and traditions.

I set out on my journey with the belief that you can see this whole great country just by fly fishing your way through it. From the tailwaters of the Southwest, up through the famous rivers of the northern Rockies, across the Great Plains, through the sandy streams of the upper Midwest and the Great Lakes, down the ridges of the Appalachians, and up the spine of the Cascade Range.

What I've found so far is both encouraging and disturbing. Wild and native trout, native bass, and other true sport species can still be found and caught on fly. On the other hand,

our rivers themselves are embattled. Strip mining, strip forestry, recreational prospecting in streams, reckless state stocking programs, urban sprawl—none of this is good for the venues I've visited. Thus, I journalize. It has always been part of my *River Gypsy* project to create a record of the way I found the rivers—good, bad, or ugly.

I'm clearly an outsider when it comes to carp on fly. But I submit that if those who claim carp a worthy sport fish knew some verifiable facts, they might shudder.

Common carp are an invasive fish in North America, have been since their introduction in 1831, and have been shown to have negative environmental consequences. They are damaging and destructive to native ecosystems by outbreeding and out-competing more desirable fish. They can extensively modify and muddy clear waters due to their feeding habit of grubbing through bottom sediments for food. As omnivores they may uproot, disturb, and eat submerged vegetation, causing serious and unwanted damage. They displace precious native fishes and waterfowl.

Finally, in my experience, the vast majority of carp are snagged—

Photo | Lee Cohen



something most fly fishers will not admit to. Carp rarely eat flies unless presented in clear water. There are already too many nails in the grainy coffin of fly fishing, and promoting these harmful fish as a fitting quarry for the fly rod adds yet another. Another thought: If carp are so revered, why is there not a Carp Unlimited?

WAYNE SNYDER

RIVER GYPSY

› CARP HATCH

I greatly enjoyed your recent article on fly rodding for carp. On Kinzua Reservoir near Warren, Pennsylvania, there's a floating barrier to keep boaters from getting too close to the dam. My first carp experience was 25 years ago when I found carp feeding there near the surface. I broke out a 9-foot 8-weight rod on my next excursion.

Casting a size 10 Green Drake pattern, I was amazed by just how wild these fish are. You can easily spook them, and they won't move far out of their way to take a fly. It was a welcome challenge. Long, accurate casts to cruisers was the solution. When one finally takes, it's nothing short of combat fly fishing. I've had fish run so hard that just the drag of the fly line in the water was enough to break the 8-pound-test monofilament leader. These fish are tough! It's nice to see them getting a little respect.

JIM SCHWAB

LEWIS RUN, PENNSYLVANIA

› TRASH FISH

The article "Trash Fish" by Patrick Burke certainly highlighted a challenging target for fly fishers. His concluding paragraph, however, is very misleading. While common carp do have the ability to survive in degraded aquatic systems, they are far more than symptoms of damaging human activities. At least across the Midwest, common carp are hands down the most damaging aquatic invasive species to enter the U.S. Their feeding habits disturb bottom soils, uproot aquatic plants, and suspend sediment that releases phosphorus into the water column. The resulting turbidity and subsequent loss of rooted aquatic plants creates an environment unsuitable for native fish and other aquatic wildlife. As one Australian researcher put it, "They are the cause and the effect."

RAY NORRGARD

DALTON, MINNESOTA

› TACKLE HOTLINE

I am planning to purchase a new trout outfit, so I was keenly interested in Ed Jaworowski's informative article on line weights. It was so technically well written that I immediately e-mailed the author and asked his advice on what line I should consider with the specific rod I was interested in purchasing. I suspected he probably wouldn't have time to respond to me, but I heard back from him in a matter of minutes. He answered my questions and helped make my decision. He surely is an asset to the entire fly-fishing community and to your fine publication. Thank you for the quality of articles in FLY FISHERMAN.

CHICK BIANCHI

HAGAMAN, NEW YORK

› A NEW STANDARD

I'd like to make a few comments on the excellent article "Weighty Matters" in the April-May 2018 issue. Author Ed Jaworowski certainly has his history right. In the 1960s, most rods were made of fiberglass and the industry standards in that era worked for that material. In the 1970s, graphite was introduced and over the years, the modulus of graphite has gotten higher each year, with quicker recovery from casting oscillations. Fly line manufacturers have had to keep pace.

This is sort of a "which came first, the chicken or the egg" situation. As the former owner of RIO Products, I helped design many popular fly lines. I am no longer an owner of RIO but still consult with the company on fly line design.

Over the years, I have suggested changing the AFFTA standards to a longer length of line. I have also suggested a new standards conference involving rod and line manufacturers in order to adopt standards of a more reasonable 40 feet of fly line.

However, there are problems with this idea. A shooting head is generally 30 feet. West Coast angler Dan Blanton promotes 28 feet for casting out of a boat for striped bass. He also likes a line one and a half to two sizes heavier than that required by the rod weight.

Spey lines are completely out of standard as far as grain weights go. When I first started designing long-belly Spey lines, a 10-weight Spey rod normally had a head weight of 650 to 750 grains (43 to 45 grams). The AFFTA specification for a 10-weight rod is 280 grains.

The popular Skagit lines first developed by Scott O'Donnell and Mike McCune are short, fat heads useful for turning over heavy sink tip lines. They can be 100 grains heavier than the longer Scandinavian heads. Also, the Skagit casting method using a sustained anchor is different than the splash-and-go method of Scandi heads.

As Jaworowski points out, all fly rods can handle several line weights. Anglers who are new to fly casting might feel more comfortable with a heavier line than accomplished tournament casters who like lighter lines.

I remember many years ago Florida Keys Capt. Nat Ragland told me how much better some of his anglers did with the RIO QuickShooter. It has a 31-foot head that helps you get the fly out quickly to a cruising tarpon. My wife Kitty also loves this line. I prefer a much longer-bellied line like the Tarpon Technical with a 60-foot head because when I make a bad cast, I can lift the entire head off the water and lay it down again softly ahead of the fish without spooking it. However, I realize this line is not for everyone, nor all the conditions encountered on the flats.

All fly line companies make specialty lines in trying to solve angling challenges, and there isn't one line that suits every person and every situation. We enjoy specialty lines for particular species, for delicate flies on bamboo rods, and big flies for muskies or dorado. If we can't get a new standard, perhaps rod and line companies can state in their catalogs the weight parameters of what each rod takes, and line companies can list how their lines vary from the 30-foot standard.

JIM VINCENT

BLACKFOOT, IDAHO

Log On:

We encourage you to submit your letters to the editor via e-mail to:

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.

Adventures with Huckleberry

○ How fatherhood changes your fly-fishing priorities

▲ OLIVER WHITE

I HAVE A FRIEND who claims I have a golden horseshoe up my ass. In many ways, I truly am the luckiest person I know. I'm able to make a living doing exactly what I would do if I had all the money in the world. That's an incredibly fortunate thing, and I don't take it for granted.

I also don't think it could have been any other way. I'm not lucky in the silver spoon kind of way; I've found and made my own way through life. We are all lucky in the people we meet, and I have met more great people than most. I've also made the most of opportunities that came my way, and I've worked very hard. All of it has culminated in an incredible lifestyle. I'm able to spend an inordinate amount of time in remote corners of the globe, sleeping outside, stomping through jungles, wading endless white sand flats—all in search of something that drives me. We call it fishing, but it is so much more than just the fish. Fishing is the common thread that ties my life together, but it is so much more than the fish themselves. It's the adventure, the travel, the exploring, the process, the people, the discovery, and yes, also the fish.

Last year fishing took me to 16 different countries. It's hard to keep going like that, but in many ways I've fallen down a rabbit hole. When I tick things off my wish list, the list only seems to get longer and longer as I learn of even newer and crazier places and fish. I cherish this adventurous life and wouldn't have it any other way. I had no intention of stopping, or really even slowing down. "Had" is the key word there.

I've recently found myself on a new adventure, one that is rewriting my playbook and opening up possibly the greatest adventure of them all—fatherhood.

► **Oliver White** is taking on new adventures showing his son Huckleberry Fellows White the rivers of his childhood in North Carolina.

Photo: Beth Sweeting



I had my first son in December, and Beth and I named him Huckleberry Fellows White. The moment I held Huck there was a moment of clarity where my priorities in life were instantly shifted into an appropriate order.

Nothing could have prepared me for the level of emotions I tapped into. No matter what life I had planned, I knew there was a newer and greater chapter about to begin. Don't get me wrong, I'm not going to stop traveling and fishing—it is as much of who I am as anything else. I have lofty ambitions of dragging Huck around the world and sharing my life's adventures with him. I plan on showing him the world, and its wild places, every chance I get.

While in Bhutan in November (you'll read that story in *FLY FISHERMAN'S* 50th anniversary issue), I was scheduled to get home only 12 days before Huck's due date.

At the prompting of Huck's mother, I wrote a letter to my unborn son. I had a lot on my mind at the time, and the letter was more emotional than I've ever really been. Bhutan is a Buddhist country and seemed like an appropriate place to be more reflective on my life and where I was headed,

both figuratively and literally.

That moment started a tradition. I now try to send Huck a card or letter from every country I visit—Oman, Sudan, Lesotho (all future articles) have already been checked off. These letters will help me share my adventures and the world with him. Hopefully they will plant a seed of adventure and exploration with him. The world is magical, and experiencing other cultures has helped me become the person and the fly fisher I am today. Hopefully one day they will help him to understand what I do, and to understand me.

I truly look forward to sharing the world with Huck. It's inevitable, but there is a pitfall I did not adequately anticipate: the desire to be home. Not just to be home with him, but to share all the places that I remember fondly from my own childhood. These are the places that shaped the person I am today.

Home for me is North Carolina. I was born in the western part of the state, and I've loved the outdoors my entire life. It wasn't always fly fishing. I did it all: hiking, camping, canoeing, rock climbing, skiing, and mountain biking.

I always loved to fish. I remember

chasing horny heads in the creek with a can of corn and a bamboo pole, and searching out farm ponds for bass. However, it was the small wild trout streams of the Appalachians where I cut my teeth fly fishing.

I look back over the last decade or more and remember some incredible adventures, but some of the most vivid fishing memories of my life are from my home in the South. I realize now that I've neglected these fisheries for a decade or more.

My brief time in fatherhood has produced an incredible amount of emotional growth, and an unexpected consequence—a happy accident if you will—is that I'm more excited than ever to get back to my roots and share all of my home waters and boyhood haunts with my own son.

I plan on taking Huck outside and showing him the places where I fell in love with the outdoors and fishing. I'm planning local adventures—float trips and camping, hiking into small streams in search of palm-size fish—with Huck strapped to my back. I want him to be there for all of it.

There is a whole new world to rediscover, and I can't wait until he gets old enough to want to go on his own



► **Start your** child with bass and panfish in a farm pond or suburban lake. They may grow up to catch parrotfish in the Sea of Oman.

Photo | Beth Sweeting



► **When you** are on the road half the year, you need to maximize your time at home, even if it means sharing time at the fly-tying vise.

two feet, with his own fly rod to catch his own bass and trout and panfish. I hope he falls as deeply in love with wilderness as I have.

My calendar is filled with wild adventures and exotic trips. I'm still looking forward to all of them, but the most exciting things on my calendar now are my times at home with my family. It's mild on the adventure scale, but meaningful in so many other ways.

I smile just thinking about Huck's future moments of discovery where his passions are triggered. Selfishly, it means I'm going to be able to revisit and in many ways rediscover all the places and techniques that helped put me on this wonderful trajectory. I almost feel guilty for being able to experience this joy again. Almost. 🐟

Oliver White is a partner in two fishing lodges in the Bahamas—Abaco Lodge and Bair's Lodge. He travels extensively, hosting small groups in exotic locations and guiding in the American West.

Photo | Jako Lucas



► **While he** was on a three-week fly-fishing trip to Bhutan, author Oliver White started writing letters to his unborn son. Here he pens a letter from Lesotho, South Africa, alongside a sketch from a local guide.

What We Stand to Lose

○ A state ballot initiative in November could be the last chance to save Bristol Bay

GUIDO RAHR

CRISTAL CREEK LODGE owner Dan Michels banked the plane for a better look. Next to me in the plane, lodge co-owner John Childs was grinning. There they are!" he shouted over the roar of the engine "Those gray dots . . . those are salmon!"

From the window of the Beaver that morning, a pristine tapestry of land and water spread out as far as I could see: a glimmering gray sheet of ocean to the west, the blue waters of Iliamna Lake to the east, and now, below the circling plane, the Kvichak River flowed in a labyrinth of channels and riffles across the lush green floodplain. Visible in the crystalline waters was a band of gray and silver shapes, proceeding upstream along each bank of river.

We could see the thousands of ocean-bright sockeye salmon as clearly as if they were swimming in the air. They were gradually working their way up the river, their sides like mirrors, and weeks away from developing the brick red bodies and green heads of their spawning coloration.

This was July 2016, and we were witnessing one of the greatest migrations on earth—the movement of millions of salmon into the rivers and lakes that flow into Bristol Bay, Alaska.

Bristol Bay produces the largest remaining salmon runs on earth. Last year, almost 60 million sockeye returned the these rivers, more than half of the world's sockeye salmon. Hundreds of thousands of coho, chum, pink, and the largest remaining wild Chinook salmon runs also swim through the rivers of Bristol Bay, along with Arctic char and rainbow trout. The annual salmon runs make this basin home to one of the greatest ecological phenomena known: the movement of millions of tons of salmon biomass from the Bering Sea into this vast lake and river system.

► **Bristol Bay** sockeye salmon are major drivers in an ecosystem that supports a \$1.5-billion commercial and recreational fishing industry. Pebble Mine could end it all.



Photo | Pat Clayton



These fish are considered “key-stone species” for the ocean, rivers, and lakes of western Alaska, feeding bears, eagles, marine mammals, and supporting Alaska Native people who have coexisted with these abundant salmon runs for millennia. The salmon runs also support a \$1.5 billion (annual) commercial and recreational fishing industry creating 20,000 jobs and the greatest concentration of high-end sport-fishing lodges in the world.

We may lose this treasure.

Foreign Development

This story began in 2001 when the Canadian mining company Northern Dynasty announced plans to build one of the world’s largest open-pit copper and gold mines in the headwaters of Bristol Bay, directly upstream from Iliamna Lake and the headwaters of the Nushagak River. The company presentation to Pebble Mine investors described a gaping hole in the earth 4,000 feet deep, and a tailings dam that was three miles long and 740 feet high—higher than Hoover Dam. Most alarming was the risk posed by the 10 billion tons of toxic waste rock,

known as tailings, that would be left upstream from the pristine rivers and lakes below.

Alaskans were enraged, and 65 percent of the state’s inhabitants—including Alaska Native tribes and sport and commercial fishermen—eventually came out against the mine in a statewide referendum. Under the Obama administration, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was preparing to block the permit needed to move the project forward when a lawsuit initiated by Northern Dynasty brought those protections to a halt. But soon after the election of President Donald Trump, EPA Secretary Scott Pruitt settled the lawsuit with Northern Dynasty and put the Pebble Mine back on track. Northern Dynasty’s stock rebounded, and investors soon put tens of millions into the project.

Pruitt’s move triggered a flood of comments, more than 1 million in opposition to the Pebble Mine. Pruitt responded by agreeing to keep the option of blocking the mine open while it goes through the permitting process.

Then, in March of 2018, the Army Corps of Engineers announced that it was fast-tracking the permitting process, and expected to complete the critical Clean Water Act permits and federal environmental impact statements by September 2020—an unprecedented time line for what may be the most controversial mine in U.S. history. Now it looks like Northern Dynasty could secure both the state and federal permits needed to begin construction in three to five years. Once 65 miles of new supply roads, a 188-mile long gas line, and a new industrial port facility are built, dozens of other mine claims will have the infrastructure needed to become economically viable, creating what could be a mining district throughout the Bristol Bay region. The Pebble Limited Partnership alone has 415 square miles of mining claims.

The proposed location for the Pebble Mine could not be worse. Copper and gold mines generate a permanent source of acid mine drainage to the waters downstream, and can upset the chemistry of the rivers and lakes where the salmon rear as juveniles. Furthermore, the region is rocked by

► **Kvichak rainbows** spend most of the year in Iliamna Lake, and look markedly different than the red-striped leopard rainbows that are resident in many other Bristol Bay rivers.

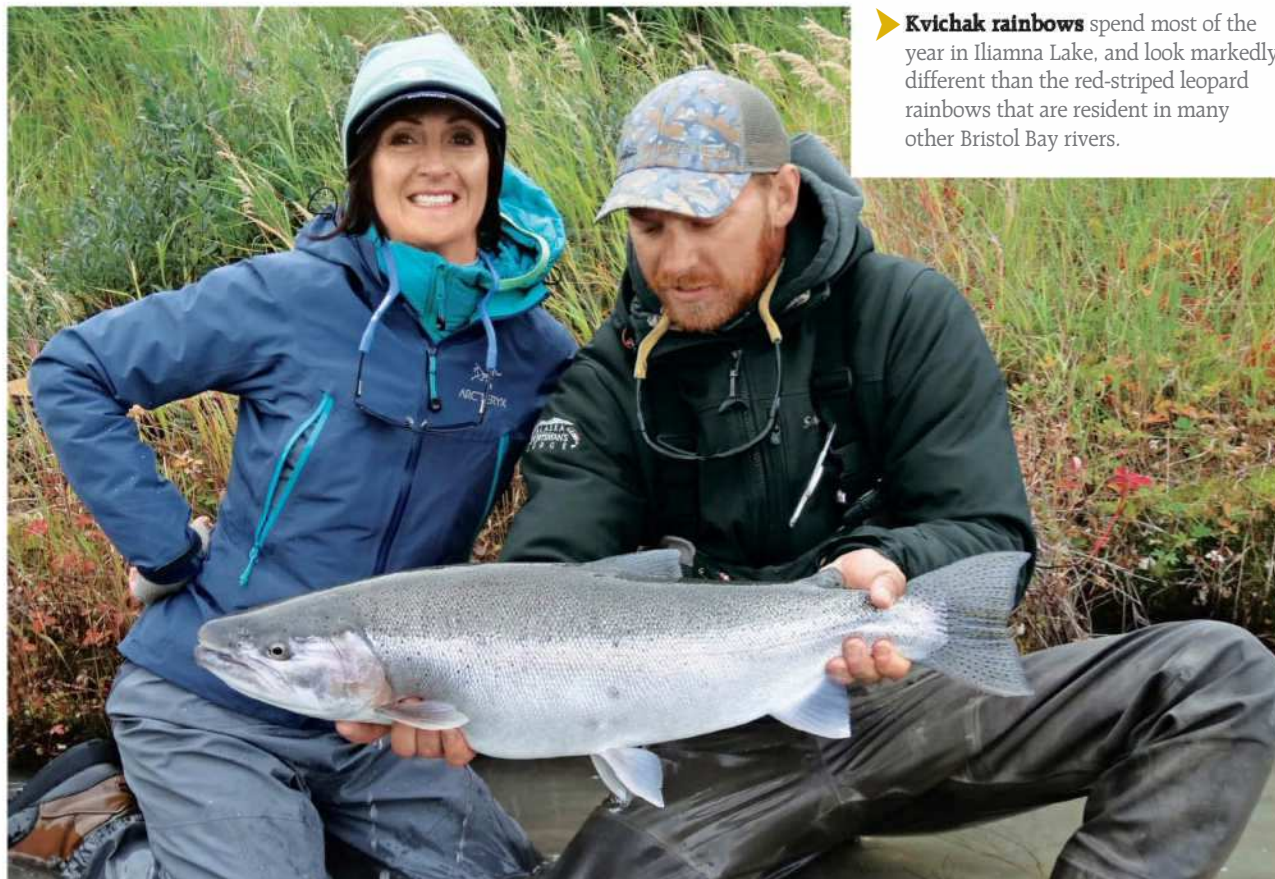


Photo | Brian Kraft

frequent earthquakes, and any failure of the earthen dams that hold the toxic mine tailings would have a catastrophic impact.

Indeed, the recent failure of the earthen tailings dam at Mount Polley, in British Columbia, released 4.5 million cubic meters of waste into salmon bearing rivers. Even the late Republican Senator Ted Stevens said, “wrong mine, wrong place.”

Mine cleanups are expensive. The American West is littered with multi-billion-dollar, taxpayer-funded cleanup projects. Once they are abandoned by the mining companies, these projects need permanent treatment to control the tailings waste. If the salmon runs of Bristol Bay are damaged, their recovery is far from secure. Why would we put some of Alaska’s—and America’s—greatest public resources at risk?

Most of the great salmon runs along the Pacific Rim are already gone or much depleted. In the Pacific Northwest, the Sacramento, San Joaquin, Columbia, and Fraser rivers all are just fractions of their former abundance. The declines are working their way north, and Bristol Bay remains the most important stronghold for wild salmon on earth.

A review of the last 150 years of salmon declines yields an inescapable insight: That it is far cheaper and easier to prevent the destruction of a salmon river in the first place than to pay to restore the wild salmon and river habitat afterward. We are already spending hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars per year to recover salmon and steelhead listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act.

In that light, the decision to allow the Pebble Mine may be America’s most important natural resource decision this decade—for anglers and wild fish advocates, it most certainly is. Will we allow history to repeat itself?

Back to Bristol Bay

In September 2017, John Childs, Dan Michels, and I had dinner with Alaska Governor Bill Walker. He agreed that the mine was a bad idea, and said he doubted the mine would be built. But to date, neither Walker nor any of Alaska’s top officials have taken steps to stop Pebble Mine.

The next day, Michels and I flew back to the Kvichak River with guide Ryan Burge. The river here flows out of Iliamna Lake, and down a wide



► **The braided**
Alagnak River in Katmai National Park is one of the many fingers of the Bristol Bay ecosystem.

Photo | Guido Rahr

glacial valley, the remnants of Pleistocene glaciers that carved the region’s valleys and its network of sockeye salmon lakes.

It was cool, gray day and the river flowed translucent blue in graceful bends and braids across the lush green floodplain. The runs were shallow and smooth bottomed, with vast gravel beds ideal for spawning salmon. The guides were reporting that a race of large lake-run rainbows had appeared in the river, feeding on the free-drifting sockeye and chum salmon eggs left over from the late-summer spawning frenzy.

Burge positioned the small johnboat at the head of promising runs, and with his hands on the oars, we floated downstream while casting and mending our lines. We drifted our egg patterns deep in the smooth, gliding runs, stack mending to keep the flies drifting freely and just above the bottom. Every now and then a spawning salmon showed itself.

Burge watched our indicators intently: “How about a big mend . . . good drift . . . wait, did you see that!?”

My first strike was unexpected. Before I could feel the weight of the fish, a steelhead-size rainbow was powering upstream along the far bank, jumping like only a rainbow can jump—panicked, with head-shaking leaps high above the river’s surface. We finally landed and released the 27-inch rainbow: silver sides, clear fins, and a faint blush of pink along its sides. It was clearly a lake-run fish, and indeed this race spends its summers in the depths

of Iliamna Lake feeding on sockeye fry. Burge high-fived me, and we floated downstream in silence, savoring the moment.

Fortunately, we still have a chance to save this place from the Pebble Mine. In addition to helping fight the federal permitting of the mine, the Wild Salmon Center is working with Stand for Salmon (standforsalmon.org), which is a coalition of Alaskan anglers, commercial fishermen, Alaska Native leaders, and organizations including SalmonState, Trout Unlimited, and Cook Inletkeeper, striving to protect fish habitat across Alaska.

The campaign’s most promising strategy is a statewide ballot initiative to strengthen the law that governs development in and around all of Alaska’s salmon streams. It would set new standards for responsible development and require all developers—Northern Dynasty included—to maintain clean water, fish passage, and riparian buffers over the long term.

If this legislation passes, industry won’t be able to sacrifice spawning streams in exchange for protections elsewhere in the state, dump toxic tailings in salmon streams, or replace wild runs with hatcheries—as is allowed under current law and has happened countless times in our destructive relationship with wild salmon. To learn more, go to standforsalmon.org.

Guido Rahr is the president and CEO of Wild Salmon Center, an international organization with local programs and partners around the North Pacific.

Guide School

○ Dan Vermillion and his team are training the next generation of experts and conservationists

HILARY HUTCHESON

FROM THE ROOTER to the pooter." It's a phrase used by BBQ pork aficionados, and translates to using all parts of the pig, from the snout to the tail. Two thousand miles from this adage's southern roots thrives a Montanan whose fly-fishing business runs on the same concept. For Dan Vermillion, the "whole hog" includes fishing lodges, adventure travel, guide education, fish and wildlife management, public lands advocacy, and legislative action, all thickly marinated in environmental stewardship.

Vermillion and his two brothers have owned and operated Sweetwater Travel (sweetwatertour.com) for more than two decades. Based in Livingston, Montana, the company emerged from the brothers' collective desire for adventure and the opportunity to foster the health of unique fisheries. Their first operation developed a remote camp for Mongolia taimen. Today, Sweetwater Travel has ten adventure fishing destinations across the globe.

As their global fishing business developed, so did the opportunity to provide employment to ambitious and capable fly-fishing guides and lodge staff. Vermillion says Sweetwater Travel is intent on providing jobs for residents in each lodge area. But often, the staffing demand extends beyond what the local workforce can provide.

"There's a specific skill set when it comes to guiding and working in fishing lodges," says Vermillion. "So we decided to give any potential employees the opportunity to benefit from a top-shelf, hands-on education before venturing into that world."

➤ **Dan Vermillion** (on the right) is doing more than training a new generation of fly-fishing guides. He's training future riverkeepers, mentors, and conservationists.



Photo: Lynn Donaldson



In 1997, Sweetwater Travel Guide School held its first weeklong session, boasting a curriculum of entomology, fisheries biology, hydrology, client interaction, drift boat and raft rowing, river safety, advanced casting, knot tying, jet boat maintenance, and more.

As the program grew, the Vermillion brothers appointed Ron Meek—a 20-year veteran of Sweetwater Travel—to the helm of the guide school along with senior guide Steve Wilson. Wilson and Meek now lead sessions through the spring, summer, and fall on Montana’s Bighorn and Yellowstone rivers. Vermillion says most students who complete the weeklong, \$2,700 all-inclusive course are trained for their dream job.

“A great fishing operation isn’t just about the place or the fish,” says Meek. “It’s about what the right guides can do in that place, and with that fishery, to create an unforgettable experience. And we have students who go on to be fishing managers and even lodge owners. One reason they do great in the profession is they were committed to

investing in their ability to get a job.”

Vermillion applies his former experience as lawyer to the guide school as well, padding the curriculum with content on the outfitting world’s laws, systems, business structure and regulations. “Even beyond guiding, there’s a lot of opportunity out there for people who want a career in fly fishing,” says Vermillion.

Vermillion says the notion that working in the industry jeopardizes personal fishing time is a farce. “You should always make time to fish, especially if the whole point is to be an expert,” he says. “Almost every lodge offers hosted trips where guides can go with their clients to experience other operations, so it opens the chance for guides to fish all over the world.”

Conservation isn’t merely a segment built into the syllabus at the Sweetwater Travel Guide School. It’s a fiber woven into the overall study. Vermillion wants students to recognize their responsibilities as conservation leaders before moving on in the profession.

He says guides need to be equipped with the powerful belief that their role in environmental sustainability is important. “When you enter into guiding, you can affect positive change,” Vermillion says. “And the people you’re spending all day with on the boat are helping fund conservation initiatives and supporting the brands in the industry that make a big difference.”

Public lands issues are often discussed throughout the course, as guides must be keen on the land and water access rules in the various states where they work. A passionate public lands advocate, Vermillion says most would-be guides are eager to learn how land management can impact their careers. “They realize it can be lost, so they’re inspired to protect it. Many of these participants have seen firsthand what’s been lost where they live all across the country—in New Hampshire, New Jersey, California—it’s not the same as it was 25 years ago.”

In the decades that the school has been training and placing guides, Meek says increasingly more women

▶ **A typical** guide school class has students of all ages and from all walks of life. Front row from left to right: Callan Wink, James Young, Wesley Hodges, Jared Zissu, Ed Beacom, Frank Flux, and Scott Montross. Back row: Lizzie Strazza, Caroline Schlegel, Ron Meek, Steve Wilson, and Mark Endres.



Photo: Ron Meek/Sweetwater Travel Company

are enrolling, an important outcome in an industry where increased female participation is a high priority.

"About 20 percent of the participants are women, and we'd like to see this number increase. A lot of them want to be guides, but some also want to become a better anglers overall," says Meek.

Considering a big picture directed by his moral compass, Vermillion says his business and peace of mind are lifted by a global fly-fishing industry that protects and enhances sustainable fisheries. As his guide school groomed new waves of potential river conservators, Vermillion simultaneously cranked the heat on his own environmental stewardship in 2007 by stepping up as Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commissioner for Region 3.

"Like a lot of people, I thought FW&P did things that didn't make sense but, after becoming a commissioner, I learned that they are so good at what they do. Realizing what good people the department has was an eye opener," says Vermillion.

"As a commissioner, we sometimes hear feedback that guides and outfitters are making our rivers too crowded. I disagree. I'd like people to look at the value guiding brings to the rivers. Guides do, and should, play a positive role in the management of our aquatic resources. Like when there was a massive whitefish kill on the Yellowstone River a couple of years ago . . . it was a guide who called it in."

When the commission is considering a fishing regulation changes, Vermillion says they run it by the guides, and work closely with the Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, and concerned stakeholders from all parts of the community.

"It's heartening when the various agencies, industry professionals and the greater public work together around the same passion for our rivers," says Vermillion.

"We know these regulations impact a lot of people, so we want it to be the right thing. We don't just look at how it affects recreational or professional anglers, we look at how it affects landowners, tourists and future generations of fish, wildlife, and humans."

Leadership of Montana's fish and wildlife commission isn't always an easy wade. Vermillion says he spends

Photo | Lynn Donaldson



► **Dan Vermillion** has been a Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commissioner since 2007, and in 2018 is running for state senate in Montana's District 30.

an hour or two on the phone each day talking with concerned hunters and fishermen about elk, wolves, or trout. He admits that trial and error has led him to certain management philosophies.

"We do a lot of listening to the public and to fisheries biologists. Sometimes what we're hearing between them doesn't match up, and we have to make a decision one way or another. It can be stressful because the decisions hold a lot of weight. So we take it very seriously."

Vermillion will leave his post as a fish and wildlife commissioner at the end of 2018. And by then, if all goes according to his plan, he will have a new role in public service. Vermillion is running for state senate in Montana's District 30.

"I'm running because there are good people whose livelihoods are centered on the outdoors, and there's a need for leadership to protect these special resources that sustain us," says Vermillion. "I believe in the legislative process and its ability to build futures for communities, and I want to be a part of a structure that's helpful and meaningful."

Vermillion hopes his choice to run for office will set an example for others who have the ability to positively

impact their communities, but have shied away from politics. "We can all be part of the process," he says.

"I've found in the fishing business that there are some people contributing a lot, and some contributing nothing. I want to contribute more to my community, and I encourage others to do the same in whatever way they can."

Vermillion's leave-no-river-rock-unturned approach has produced a successful fishing and travel business, fostered the training of hundreds of new fishing guides, helped shape fish and wildlife administration and allowed him to share a meaningful life with his wife, Lynn Donaldson and their three children. His story is that of a complete angler, with a head-to-toe resolve that might impress the shrewdest of pork BBQ fans. 🍖

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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.

New & Notable



Simms G3 Guide Wader

How do you take the greatest workhorse in the history of breathable waders and improve it? You don't merely add frivolous bells and whistles. These are "guide" waders, after all. You make them tougher, and you make them more breathable so they last longer and perform in the harshest conditions. That's what Simms has done with the new 2018 G3 Guide Waders (\$500, simmsfishing.com).

With 4-layer Gore-Tex Pro Shell in the seat and legs, and 3-layer Pro Shell in the upper wader, they are the most breathable waders ever built in the Simms Bozeman, Montana facility. They are also lighter, more puncture resistant, and with an improved fit, there's less baggy extraneous material—the waders are more comfortable.

Admittedly, there are some nice bells and whistles here as well. A zippered, reach-through, fleece-lined handwarmer pocket, elastic suspenders with opposing buckles, a zippered top-load outside cargo pocket, and a removable flip-out tippet tender ensure that "comfort" means more than being sweat free.



Abel TR

I have a friend who refers to trout reels as "jewelry" for your rod. That's not quite right. A fine trout reel is more like a highly engineered precision watch. Do you need a timepiece that is both beautiful and tough; something that can withstand Mt. Everest, underwater depths of more than 200M, explosive impacts, and never skips a millisecond? Nope. You don't need it. But damn . . . *you want it*. It feels good to have something on your wrist that is flawless.

It's the same way with a fine trout reel, and the lightweight masterpiece Abel TR (\$395, abelreels.com) has the same kind of appeal. It's designed to be perfectly simple and elegant.

The partial porting on the lower half of the frame cuts weight, and leaves space for three artistic milled silhouettes—a stonefly, caddis, and a mayfly—on the inside of the frame. You are the only one who will see them, but you'll know they are there just the same.

Most reels have a counterbalance on the spool, but an integrated precision-balanced clicker on the Abel TR spool eliminates the need for a counterweight—the drag mechanism is the counterweight. Ideas like this reduced the new Abel TR down to only 21 machined parts, including the threaded quick-release cap and the reel foot.

The deliberately exposed palming rim helps add extra pressure when that clicker isn't enough to slow down a big fish. The TR is a large-arbor design with two sizes—a 2/3 and 4/5—and a seemingly infinite number of colored finishes and handcrafted patterns, including Abel's new "fade" design that uses two or more colors. Mine is a "Rasta Fade" with green, yellow, and red.



DSP Grand Slam

Some stand-up paddleboards are made for yoga, riding waves, or just cruising. This is not one of those SUPs. The DSP Grand Slam (\$1,300, davecaddenpaddlesports.com) is a craft with one purpose: flats fishing.

The inflatable Grand Slam is 11'6" long, 36" wide, 6" thick, and weighs 29 pounds. The board and the pump all pack neatly into a roller duffel, so you can easily roll it through the airport, into the trunk of a rental car, and onto your favorite saltwater flat.

I used the Grand Slam for tarpon fishing in the lower Florida Keys, and the slick functionality of this board turned every day into an adventure. There are 14 tie-down points on the perimeter—a key for all-day fishing as you'll need to secure a cooler, an anchor system, and your rods while you are paddling. The cooler isn't just for beer, it helps to have something to sit on when you are tired or the waves are choppy; and something to stand on when the ocean is flat and you want a height advantage. While many SUPs have a long single fin, the Grand Slam has a removable dual fin system so the fins are shorter, and you don't run aground on shallow coral or sand as frequently.

—Ross Purnell



► **Multiple tie-down** points on the DSP Grand Slam help secure your rods, cooler, and waterproof pack. Shorter dual fins on the underside allow you to you navigate extremely skinny water at low tide.

Photo **Ross Furnell**

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Bookshelf

Tying Steelhead Flies With Style

Tying Steelhead Flies With Style by Dec Hogan and Marty Howard. Wild River Press 2018, 379 pages, \$100 hardcover with O-ring binding, ISBN 9780999309315.

Every book has a back story. And despite the impressive nature of this massive steelhead fly-tying tome, the story behind this book might be more interesting (or at least more controversial) than what's inside.

Authors Dec Hogan and Marty Howard both contend that Wild River Press publisher Tom Pero doesn't have the right to print and sell *Tying Steelhead Flies with Style*. They wrote the manuscript, and photographed the striking fly-tying sequences, but say they never agreed to terms with the publisher or signed a contract. Hogan says they want to publish the material themselves, and plans to take legal action against Wild River Press to stop sales of the book. His advice: "Don't buy this book."

Pero says he spent months editing the manuscript and designing the book, and that at the last minute, the authors wanted to use his printer-ready files to self-publish the material. Pero says he'll pay the same royalties as Hogan's previous Wild River Press book, *A Passion for Steelhead*.

Drama aside, there is plenty within these pages for fly tiers and steelheaders to be excited about; 25 chapters

containing detailed photos, anecdotes, history, and helpful tying instruction for 25 of the authors' favorite steelhead flies, from old classics like the Steelhead Bee to Ed Ward's Intruder.

Top Saltwater Flies

Top Saltwater Flies by Drew Chicone. Wild River Press 2017, three-volume set, \$250 for all three books, hardcover with O-ring binding, ISBNs 9780989523684 (*Bonefish*), 9780989523691 (*Tarpon*) 9780999309308 (*Permit*).

Drew Chicone is one of the top saltwater fly-tying minds today. His previous book *Feather Brain: Developing, Testing, & Improving Saltwater Fly Patterns* (Stackpole Books and Headwater Books, 2013) provided a ground-breaking methodology for designing your own flies. It helps you discover the right hook for each fly type, shows how to test the sink rate of your flies, swim them in a test tank, and fix problems by weighting or trimming the fly.

In comparison, *Top Saltwater Flies* may be for tiers who are a little less creative, and perhaps more results driven or even dogmatic. I know I don't have the time or inclination to experiment with a new permit fly when I go permit fishing—I want the exact recipe, right down to the hook size and brand, the thread, and the specific size and color of rubber legs. I also want detailed instructions to help me tie proven fly patterns exactly as they are meant to appear, so I know they will sink and swim correctly.

When it comes to saltwater flies, I don't have an overpowering need to design my own patterns, I just want

something I can have confidence in because it's a known fish catcher, and I tied it correctly.

Chicone's 3-volume set individually named *Tarpon*, *Bonefish*, and *Permit* does exactly that. The books take tiers step-by-step through the entire process of tying flies already proven on saltwater flats species like permit, bonefish, and tarpon.

Most of the flies in these volumes are Chicone's own creations like Chicone's Kung Fu Blue Crab, Peyote Palolo Worm, or Coyote Ugly. These flies catch fish, and they are the flies that caught the attention of flats fishermen the world over and made them take notice of Chicone.

But there are also plenty of old favorites here like the Classic Cockroach, Bauer Crab, Avalon Shrimp, and Anderson's McCrab, where the author pays homage to the fly creators with authentic ingredients, the background story behind the fly, and just a few extras from Chicone on things like how to make the proportions look right, or how to handle materials properly to make tying the fly simpler.

In other cases, like the Modified Meko Special, Chicone does both—he gives tribute to the original but throws his own twist into the patterns, in this case by using coyote body hair and Hareline's shrimp pink Diamond Braid. In all cases, Chicone makes it easier for you to tie the fly exactly as intended, and gives you the confidence you need to use the fly on those days when you have a legitimate shot at the fish of a lifetime. If you're serious about saltwater fishing and saltwater fly tying, it's \$250 well spent.

—Ross Purnell



Unique Lodge & Fishery

LITERALLY A STONE'S THROW FROM THE BEST HOMEWATER IN ALASKA
 – THE BIG KU RIVER – AND A SHORT BOAT RIDE TO
 THREE OTHER EQUALLY IMPRESSIVE TROPHY TROUT STREAMS.



*This intimate, wilderness lodge operation offers it all
 – a comfortable small occupancy lodge, amazing trout fishing,
 and full immersion in the Katmai wildlife experience.*

Big Ku Lodge

*The only boat-based operation in the Katmai region able to deliver its anglers
 to four of Bristol Bay's most renowned trout streams, without being dependent
 on the vagaries of weather and the high costs of bush aircraft.*

Mark Lance photo

As we look ahead to our upcoming 2018 season at Big Ku Lodge, it is worth looking back at 2017. . . and what a season it was! Following a third monster year of sockeye salmon returns – with the attendant food sources for trout of salmon eggs, flesh, fry, and outgoing smolt – we saw fishing that was the equal of anything we've ever experienced at the lodge. And 2018 appears poised to be even better!

THE KUKAKLEK RIVER in Southwest Alaska is the epicenter of the famous Katmai Basin trophy trout fisheries. The point where the river leaves Kukaklek Lake is home base to a massive, season-long concentration of trout following millions of salmon on their natal quest from Bristol Bay to spawn each summer in the "Big Ku" and other upriver tributaries. The salmon smolt, carcasses, and eggs turn into the rocket fuel that powers a phenomenal population of big, spot-covered rainbow trout, renowned for dazzling runs and acrobatic jumps.

Big Ku Lodge is nestled on a bluff above its namesake river with a spectacular vista of the river, lake and the Alaska wilderness panorama. It sits on a 5,000-acre, leased parcel of Native-owned land stretching for miles downstream from the lakeshore and it is totally surrounded by federally protected Katmai Preserve parklands.

Big Ku Lodge couldn't be better situated. It's within easy range of 4 of the finest trophy trout streams in Alaska. This isolated outpost combines the best of all worlds for serious trout anglers – quick and easy boat access to those four incredible rivers, and to home water that's as productive as it is remote. Guests can walk from the intimate lodge to the heart of the legendary Big Ku River anytime they want, stretching their fishing day to match their stamina, often within sight of massive grizzlies sharing the river, oblivious to anglers, focused intently on the legions of spawning sockeye salmon. A week here is like stepping into a National Geographic special.

There are plenty of A-list rivers throughout the region, but nowhere else in the state are there so many, so close.

The great innovation at Big Ku – something totally unique in the central Bristol Bay region – is the shedding of a reliance on float planes in preference for boat access to the area's top trophy trout rivers. Each

morning anglers step into jet-boats that either whisk them over several beats on more than 5 miles of the home river, or zip across the lake in a powerful, fully-enclosed, heated jet drive inboard – comfortable and seaworthy in the worst of weather – to fish the Little Kukaklek River (10 min.) or Battle Creek (40 min). Only forty-five minutes away, directly across the lake, is Moraine Creek, where guests will be met by their guides using smaller jet skiffs able to access the best portions of the shallow river. This is a terrific week-long dance card, and the ultimate river wish list for nearly every serious trophy trout hunter.

Being "on the water" gives Big Ku anglers a double-edged advantage over fly-out lodges that target these same streams. They'll arrive earlier and effortlessly with little or no concern for fog or weather conditions that can ground or delay a bush plane. And, without daily reliance on expensive aircraft, the cost of a week at Big Ku Lodge is only a bit more than half what a deluxe fly-out lodge would run.

Big Ku is the only lodge on the shoreline of this massive lake, and the only operation able to launch a boat-based package that includes these rivers. The reputation of the fishing in these streams is as strong as the reputation of the Branham family (owner/operators of Big Ku Lodge), who have been outfitting Alaska wilderness-bound fishermen for two generations. Big Ku Lodge is limited to a maximum of 6 anglers, and the modest price tag this season includes the 600-mile round trip Anchorage charter flight between Anchorage and the lodge.

- ▲ 7 night/6 days July 14 through September \$6550 Home Water Package
- ▲ 7 night/6 days July 14 through September \$6750 One Fly Out Package

*If you are interested in visiting Big Ku Lodge,
 please let us know. There are a few spots remaining during some
 prime summer and fall weeks. Don't hesitate, give us a call today!*



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Waterproof Packs

WHETHER YOU ARE deep wading a river in the Pacific Northwest, or wading the flats on the west side of Andros, if you're game for all-day or all-week adventures, you need a waterproof pack. This isn't a luxury just for photographers. We've all got stuff we need to keep dry, whether it's a passport, money, jacket, or a sandwich. None of those things are pleasant when they are soggy. In the past two years we've tried a dozen waterproof bags from many different manufacturers. These are three of our favorites.

—Ross Purnell



Simms Dry Creek Z Backpack

I'm an organization freak, and by that I mean I'm not naturally good at it. I want to be organized, but I need some help to get there.

Most waterproof bags have a single spacious main compartment. You throw all your stuff in there, and when you need something, you have to sort through the debris to find what you're looking for. Simms solved this organizational crisis with the Dry Creek Z Backpack (\$320, simmsfishing.com)—a perfect carry-all for precious cargo in the outdoors.

I've used this bag on fishing trips to the Bahamas, Florida, Guyana, and Brazil. Whoever designed it seems to be from a parallel universe, because all my stuff fits in there as though the bag was designed specifically for me. I always have a camera, and the Simms Padded Organizer (\$60) is shaped to nest neatly and comfortably inside the bag. The Padded Organizer has moveable Velcro dividers you can shape however you want. I use four compartments for compact binoculars, a mirrorless 4:3 DSLR camera, and two extra lenses. My laptop slides in flat against the padded back panel and there's still room in the main compartment for a compressible puffy jacket, neck pillow, water bottle, and whatever else I need to travel. When I get to where I'm going, the laptop comes out, and all my fly boxes and reels go in there. Outside, there is a fly patch, rod tube straps, and an outside pocket with a water-resistant zipper. The outside pocket is exactly the right size to hold airplane boarding passes. Coincidence? I don't think so. Inside, there is a zippered security pocket designed for cash and a passport; and a stretch mesh pocket for headphones, and other small items that could be lost in the main compartment.



Patagonia 30L Stormfront Pack

There's a reason life jackets are orange, and why the old storm suits worn by commercial fishermen were historically either orange or yellow. It's so you can easily spot a man overboard. For the same reasons, the orange 30L Stormfront (\$300, patagonia.com) pack is easy to pick out on a luggage carousel, overhead bin, or anywhere else look-alike bags are stolen or mistakenly swapped. Sneaky thieves won't likely try to make off with this bag—it draws too much attention. (The 30L Stormfront also comes in black and gray.)

The TPU-coated 800-denier nylon bag has a waterproof TiZip zipper for access to the main compartment, and a zippered nonwaterproof stretch outside pocket for easier access to things like tippet material, leaders, or a fly box. Two outside loops securely hold a fly rod tube. The main compartment has ample space for a DSLR camera, jacket, lunch, tools, and all your extra fly boxes. There's also a small zippered mesh pocket inside the main compartment for your wallet or a passport.

Need to carry more stuff? The Stormfront is compatible with Patagonia's Convertible Vest, so you can have access to all your split-shot, floatant, flies, and everything else, right there in the front where you need it.

Yeti Hopper Backflip 24

To be fair, this isn't technically a waterproof bag. It's an insulated cooler that is engineered to be nearly indestructible, and to keep ice water contained inside. But with all that soft insulation and a cavernous top-loading lid, I instantly thought the Hopper Backflip 24 (\$300, yeti.com) would be a perfect camera bag. The same insulation that keeps beer cold also protects your camera from the thumps and bumps of rigorous travel—and no water is getting inside this bag unless you add it in the form of ice.

I believe Yeti always intended for this pack to go fishing, as the optional waterproof SideKick Dry (\$50) is designed to be affixed to the outside of the Backflip, and it's the perfect size for fly boxes, leaders, tippet spools, and anything else you might need quick access to. The TPU-coated nylon SideKick Dry has a foldover magnetic HydroShield Closure that is quick and easy and 100% waterproof. It also works pretty well for your cell phone and car keys when the main compartment is filled with beer.

I used the Backflip while wading The Marls on Great Abaco, and found it comfortable for long hauls. Not surprisingly, of all the waterproof bags we tested, this one had the most comfortable harness for heavy loads, and with all those handles and attachment points, it was pretty slick loading in/out of boats.

It should be noted that Yeti makes three sizes of waterproof duffel bags called Pangas (\$300-\$400) that I've used in rafts, pontoons, skiffs, and drift boats around the world. They are perfect for hauling luggage but the 50L, 75L, and 100L volumes make them impractical to carry while you are actually fishing. The Backflip does that job perfectly well. 🐟



NO FISH IS SAFE FROM AN
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The Royal Flush of Flats Fishing

Photo | Capt. Brandon Cyr



Flats fishing in Florida can be tough. Most fly fishers consider themselves extremely lucky to catch just one of the “big three” species—a tarpon, permit, or a bonefish. If you can catch all three in a single day, it’s called a grand slam. A permit is the hardest one to catch, so many grand slams include a small schooling bonefish, or a baby tarpon from back in the mangroves to complete the trifecta. But that’s not how Connor Flanagan rolls.

Flanagan, who works for Simms Fishing Products in Bozeman, Montana, was fishing with Capt. Brandon Cyr out of Key West in April when he landed a permit measuring 27 inches from the nose to the fork of the tail. He followed that up with a 5-pound bonefish, and that’s when the pair decided to get serious about the grand slam. Near dusk they “leadered” a 90-pound tarpon. It’s one of the highest-quality slams we’ve heard of in a long time, especially considering that Flanagan also landed a 34-inch cobia that day. We’re not sure what to call it with the cobia included, but it’s the fly-fishing equivalent of a royal flush, and very likely the best possible day anyone could have flats fishing.

▶ **This permit** was the start of a grand slam that also included a 34-inch cobia.

▶ **The Fly Shop** will donate 2% of the total trip cost when members of CalTrout or The Conservation Angler book domestic or international fly-fishing travel.



Photo | Gary Sanpei/The Fly Shop

2% For Trout

The Fly Shop in Redding, California has partnered with California Trout (caltrout.org) and The Conservation Angler (theconservationangler.com) to help support and fund conservation efforts in the American West.

The Fly Shop is one of the world’s top booking agents for domestic and international fly-fishing travel. Now, every time a member of CalTrout or

The Conservation Angler books a trip with The Fly Shop to Alaska, Kamchatka, Argentina, Mexico, or any other fishing destination, The Fly Shop will donate 2% of the trip cost to support wild fish and their habitats at home.

California Trout is a nonprofit organization that protects wild trout and their environments in California. The Conservation Angler advocates for the protection, scientific study, and conservation of iconic wild anadromous fish populations and their natal rivers and streams.

The Fly Shop (theflyshop.com) has been in business for 40 years and is one of the largest independent brick-and-mortar fly-fishing retailers in the world. In addition to publishing a 164-page full-color catalog mailed to more than 200,000 fly fishers annually, it operates an international travel department that services in excess of 2,000 fly fishers a year, a local Northern California guide service, schools, as well as fly-fishing camps for children and families.

Ireland's Gerald Downey Takes Gold

Ireland's Gerald Downey once again proved he is one of the world's best Spey casters by winning the overall men's title at the 2018 Jimmy Green Spey-O-Rama with a four-cast total of 713 feet. He also made the longest single cast in the competition, a right side Snake roll cast of 187 feet. Downey holds the tournament record in both departments with a 193-foot single Spey and a 724-foot four-cast total (both set in 2016).

Whitney Gould won her sixth consecutive Spey-O-Rama women's title with a long cast of 140 feet and four-cast total of 525 feet. Gould owns the women's records for a 559-foot four-cast total, and a single cast of 150 feet. Both those records were set in 2017.

Considered the world championship of Spey casting, the 2018 event at the Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club April 21-22 drew an all-time high of 66 competitors from ten countries.

Photo R. Valentine Atkinson



► **Gerald Downey** (shown here) makes a long cast while competing at the 2018 Spey-O-Rama.

More Access to Steelhead Alley

Fly fishers pursuing steelhead and other gamefish on three of Pennsylvania's renowned Lake Erie tributaries will soon enjoy expanded stream access. The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PF&BC) voted April 24 to acquire new property and easements on Elk, Conneaut, and Crooked creeks in Erie County in northwestern Pennsylvania.

► **The Pennsylvania** Fish & Boat Commission used \$460,000 to purchase 180 acres of land known as the Gilmore Farm (shown here). The money came from sales of mandatory Lake Erie fishing permits.



Photo Jack Hanrahan

The board approved a grant of \$460,000 for the Lake Erie Region Conservancy to purchase the Gilmore Farm, which includes more than 180 acres of land on Elk Creek, Pennsylvania's largest Lake Erie tributary. The Conservancy will transfer the property to the PF&BC, after obtaining further funding through the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. As a result of the Gilmore Farm purchase, fishermen can access an additional 1.2 miles of streambank off Beckman Road, immediately south of I-90. Also benefiting Elk Creek anglers, the board approved \$11,500 to buy a 760-foot fishing easement downstream of the PA Route 98 bridge off Luther Road. Elk Creek is famous for large numbers of steelhead, and is one of the most popular streams in the strip of Lake Erie shoreline known as Steelhead Alley.

On Conneaut Creek the board agreed to purchase 8 acres of land—including approximately 1,200 feet of streambank for angling access—at a cost of \$24,500. The newly acquired property is on Griffey Road near the town of West Springfield.

The board also agreed to pay \$176,000 for about 8 acres of land on Crooked Creek, one of the smaller Lake Erie tributaries. This new acquisition is expected to provide about 1,300 feet of public angling access where Lucas Road intersects Happy Valley Road near East Springfield.

These and previous access improvements are funded by Pennsylvania's mandatory Lake Erie permits and Combination Trout/Salmon/Lake Erie permits. According to PF&BC Executive Director John Arway, the permit fees have enabled PF&BC to add 22.5 miles of stream access in Pennsylvania's Lake Erie watershed. 🐟

Trout

TROUT HAVE BRAINS THE SIZE OF A PEA. They are capable of eating all available food sources, but sometimes they focus on specific triggers that suggest a specific emergence stage, size, shape, movement, or color. In other words, they become “selective.” We all realize there are instances when trout develop this laser focus on some specific food sources. This is especially true on insect-rich streams where options for food are great, and trout can afford to be choosy about what they eat.

On the reverse side, on small mountain streams where less food is available, trout will chase down and eat anything resembling a possible food source. In these cases, variations of Pheasant Tails, Hare's Ears, and other suggestive patterns will catch fish all year. Suggestive patterns are the proverbial “killing two birds with one stone.” Look at the how many possible may-fly species a Hare's Ear can imitate.

Most of the time, however, our trout fishing exists somewhere between these two extremes, and while the trout might not be completely selective, merely suggestive patterns aren't what the trout are looking for either. In most situations, fly fishers need to exhibit “situational awareness” and fish nymphs designed to trigger a strike when trout are keyed on a particular food item. It doesn't have to be an exact match, but you must be able to trigger a response.

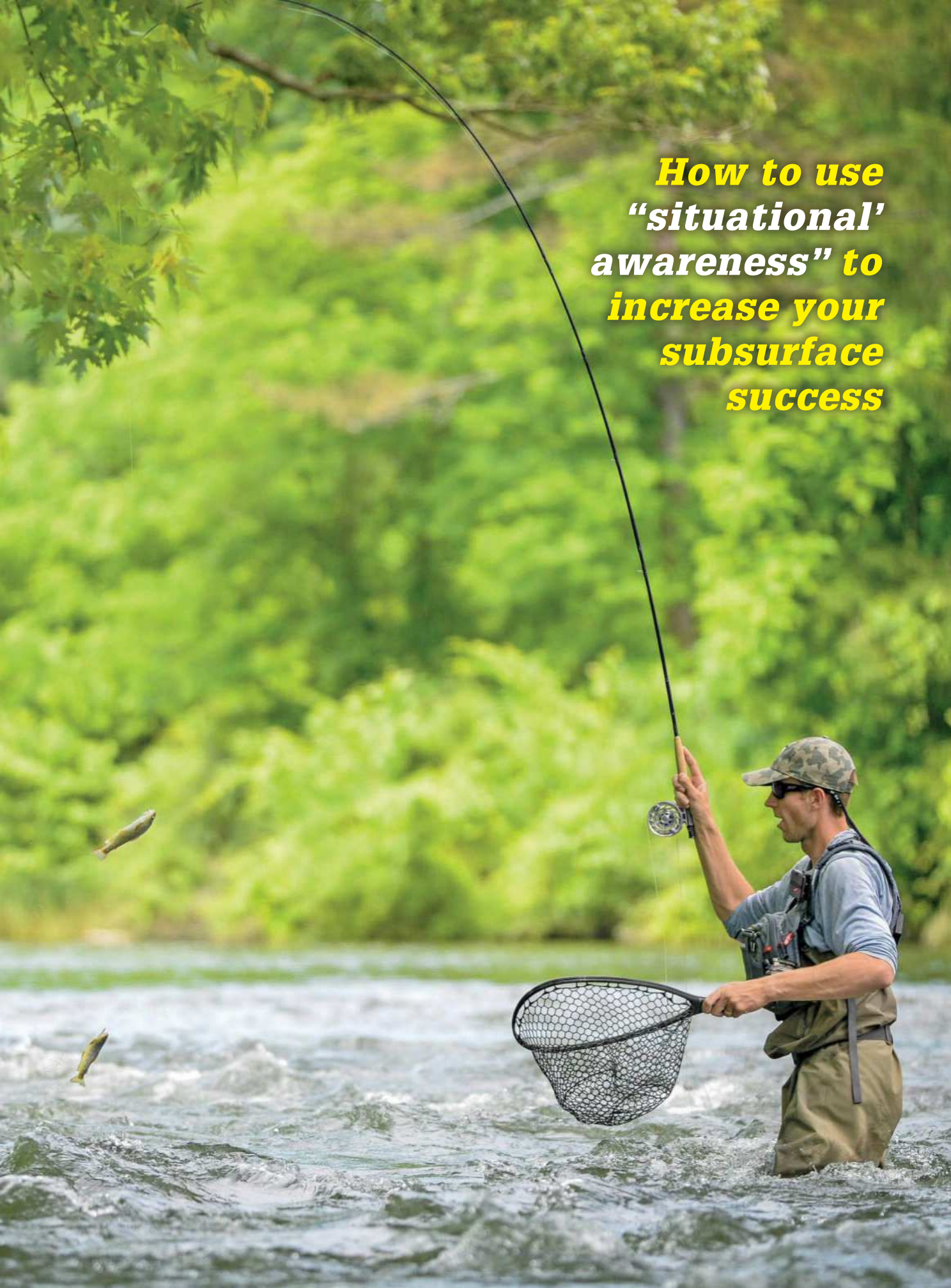
▶ **Being a** complete fly fisher is much more than just matching the hatch while dry-fly fishing. You should also know how to effectively tip the odds in your favor while nymphing.

Photo | Jay Nichols

▶ **GEORGE DANIEL**

Nymphs

***How to use
“situational
awareness” to
increase your
subsurface
success***



Best Guess

If you've ever witnessed a great hatch on a legendary stream like the West Branch of the Delaware River, Henry's Fork, South Holston, or Silver Creek, you'll recall seeing surface-feeding trout keying in on specific insects. The same phenomenon occurs below the surface, but we can't always see what's happening. All we can do is look at possible variables and come up with a best guess approach. Situational awareness occurs when you are able to understand these critical clues about what's going on in a trout's world, and develop a strategy based on those observations.

In the past I've been guilty of stubbornly trying to force feed trout what I want to tie on, but as a friend of mine once said to me years ago "You can't dictate to the trout what you want to

want—more success on the stream. Take your time to read the water and in time, the stream will tell you what it's currently advertising.

My hope with this article is to provide you with several situations I see on my local waters, and provide you with examples to look for when fishing your home waters. Hopefully this will get you thinking about possible variables that can effect pattern selection during your own nymphing adventures.

Freshwater Scuds

My home state of Pennsylvania is known for its spring creeks and limestone streams, but these types of trout

meal to pick off, or that it contains a belly full of extra protein in the form of eggs, is anyone's guess. Both are workable theories.

What we know is that trout see orange scuds on a regular basis, especially in specific locations. Scuds are killed when they flush through the dam turbines. They turn orange, and their corpses float through the upper reaches of many tailwaters. Bring a small section of orange scuds with you next time you fish near a dam release or any scud kill zone. You may find yourself with a few additional trout to net.

The methods of adding orange to scud patterns are endless. Some tiers use all orange, a hint of orange through the entire pattern, orange hot spots in specific locations, or an orange beadhead.

Photo | Jeff Simpson



► **Flies that** take advantage of situational feeding opportunities are important parts of your fly selection. Sunken terrestrials, sucker spawn, swimming nymphs, mayfly nymphs with pronounced budding wingcases, and flies that imitate dead or dying shrimp should be in your play book.

feed them. Let the trout tell you what they want." He mentioned this after seeing my box full of only suggestive patterns. His rationale was that with good technique, any nymph pattern has the chance to catch a fish at given time. But to increase the odds of success, we need to show trout what they are looking for. We need situational awareness.

When Mother Nature is advertising a specific food item, we need to be good salespeople and give trout what they want. Don't try to sell trout a deep-drifting stonefly when they are eating sunken spinners less than a foot under the water. Give trout what they want, and you'll get what you

waters exist across the nation from California (Hat Creek and Hot Creek), to the Rockies (Paradise Valley spring creeks), and throughout the Driftless Region of the Midwest.

Freshwater shrimp (aka scuds) thrive in these types of waters, and provide trout a year-round food source. Scuds are also an important food source in major tailwater rivers like the Bighorn below Yellowtail Dam and the Colorado River below Glen Canyon Dam at Lees Ferry.

For many years I read about fly fishers using orange-colored patterns on the Bighorn to imitate dead or spawning scuds. Whether a trout knows an orange scud represents an easy, lifeless

One of my favorite scud patterns is a "guide-style nymph," which means it takes only a couple minutes to tie. Guide-style flies are typically not pretty to look at, but very effective.

Trout Crack was created by John Wilson, who at the time was a guide on the White River in Arkansas. He's now the president of Cortland Line Company. Trout Crack is essentially a strip of orange V-rib pulled over the top of a tan or olive dubbed body, and ribbed with clear nylon monofilament or wire. A head of orange thread gives the impression of a dead or pregnant scud.

Another option is a version of Sexy Walt's Worm that contains a 50/50

blend of natural Hare's Ear dubbing and orange Ice Dub. Trout Crack and Sexy Walt's Worm are my two confidence patterns whenever I'm in scud country.

Sucker Spawn

I once heard someone say that the best hatch in Pennsylvania isn't Sulphurs, Blue-winged Olives, or even Green Drakes . . . it's sucker spawn. It's hard to argue that point. This event not only influences the types of flies the trout will take, but where the trout locate themselves in the stream. When suckers are spawning, trout don't seem to care about much else.

I've heard many people say that egg imitations aren't "real" fly fishing. I disagree. Where I live, sucker spawn is part of the natural system just like mayflies, caddis, and stoneflies. If sucker spawn isn't a real fly, then neither is a baitfish imitation in saltwater or drifting sockeye egg imitations in Alaska. Refusing to switch over to sucker spawn at times is merely a failure to observe and react. I've seen situations where it seemed every trout in the stream was focused exclusively on sucker spawn, and acknowledging this situational variable was critical to catching fish.

Many of the streams I fish contain white suckers, a species that begins to spawn in the spring when water temps reach 50 degrees F. Suckers seek out shallow riffles with pea-sized gravel, normally at the ends of larger pools. I've witnessed short sections of streams that appear to be devoid of trout, until I find a pod of 30 trout congregated into a small area fighting over displaced sucker eggs.

Because competition is fierce among these hungry trout, presentation is not as important as other times of the year. For example, when I began teaching my kids how to fly fish for trout, I realized I needed to provide them with immediate results. Our hard-fished local waters can be challenging for all angling skill levels during normal conditions, and sometimes it's downright difficult for kids to catch trout.

So whenever I located a pod of spawning suckers during a guide trip, I'd take both of my kids out that evening to the same sucker spot, and they were rarely disappointed. I rarely use the word "epic" but if you find a group of trout feeding immediately downstream of actively spawning suckers, you'll have an Homeric experience.

All Great Lakes tributaries have

spawning runs of different types of suckers, which explains why steelhead there are so partial to egg and sucker spawn imitations. In Alaska, trout feed on eggs from spawning Pacific salmon, and in the fall, some rivers with Rocky Mountain whitefish have similar occurrences. It's always a good idea to carry flies that imitate eggs and spawn sacs from other fish.

Budding Wingcases

Less than 10 years ago I was coaching the North Carolina Fly Fishing Team. I frequently drove to western North Carolina, coached for a few days, and then drove back to Pennsylvania. I always stopped at the South Holston River on my way back. I parked at the lot near the outflow grates, curled up, slept in the back seat of my Toyota Corolla, and woke up at first light to get on the water. It was a great opportunity to fish one of the more challenging East Coast streams.

On one occasion I stopped at the local fly shop, and the guys behind the counter suggested nymphing with split-back Sulphur nymphs. Up to that point, I never heard the term "split back" but the shop guys suggested that the highly educated South Holston River trout keyed in on the yellow budding wingcase of these mayflies during their emergence. As it turns out, the pattern fooled many wary trout on the South Holston, and I soon discovered how effective it was on my local waters as well.

The version I tie has a budding wingcase made of a tuft of yellow Holographic Tinsel. The key to any variation is building a budding wingcase to match the size and color of the natural you're imitating. For example, you can turn any Sulphur pattern into a budding wingcase pattern by merely adding yellow holographic flashback. Another good option is using Mike Mercer's Trigger Nymph concept and using a tuft of protruding dubbing to imitate a budding wingcase.

The concept doesn't just apply to Sulphurs. Budding wingcases trigger a feeding response in trout on highly pressured waters everywhere, and it's a great element to add to any Blue-winged Olive imitation.

Currently my favorite dubbing for a budding wingcase is Hareline's Laser Dub. Light yellow is a great color for Sulphurs and PMDs. I use gray for Blue-winged Olive nymphs. The options for creating mayfly imitations with budding wingcases are endless.

Trigger Nymphs

Swimming Nymphs

Another important mayfly nymph trait is movement. Perhaps there's no better example than *Isonychia* nymphs. These long, sleek mayfly nymphs wiggle as they actively swim, and they have prominent gills located along their sides. These insects have such a prominent wiggling motion that I feel it's important to tie and fish these nymph patterns to mirror these movements.

While some mayflies drift helplessly to the surface to hatch, the majority of Iso nymphs swim actively toward the shoreline and then crawl onto nearby rocks or vegetation to hatch. You'll see the nymph shucks on the rocks and vegetation, as with stonefly nymphs earlier in the year.

A dead-drift presentation works for Iso nymphs through most of the year, but during an actual emergence when Iso nymphs are actively swimming toward the shore, swinging the nymph toward the bank produces greater results. You can also add short strips with your line hand as you would with a streamer. Use a no-slip loop knot to provide additional movement.

It's important to buy or tie patterns that breathe and wiggle. Gills made of ostrich or emu breathe in the water like the natural gills of the insects. Tails constructed of marabou, or a small pinch of Arctic fox, also wiggle during the swung presentation and give the impression of life.

Just as with the split-wing concept

being adaptable to more than just Sulphurs, this swimming tail concept can be applied to other patterns as well. One of my favorite stonefly patterns is a Mega Prince variation with a marabou tail for extra movement. I swing it toward the bank during the early summer stonefly migration. When you swim your nymphs, the fly doesn't have to be an exact replica. It's the movement the trout tend to focus on.

Sunken Terrestrials

It's no secret that trout love terrestrials, but fly fishers place most of their attention on dry-fly patterns. As the name suggests, terrestrials don't respond well when falling into the water. These helpless land-dwelling insects become easy meals for trout once they find themselves in an aquatic environment. In some instances, terrestrials remain in the surface film for a short duration, but even a small amount of turbulence pulls them under. Once they become submerged, they drift downstream for long distances, which makes them easy pickings for trout.

Trout find a steady supply of drifting terrestrials through the summer, but a strong breeze or a brief summer rainstorm often displaces terrestrial insects in greater numbers, causing trout to at least temporarily focus on this important food source.


Nymphing doesn't mean bouncing your rig on the stream bottom. Trout are inured to seeing drowned terrestrials, but unlike aquatic insects, terrestrials don't start their journey at the bottom of the river, they enter the water from above. As a result, I nymph with lightly weighted terrestrial patterns and fish them higher in the water column. This means I may fish a sunken terrestrial higher on the leader when fishing a tight-line nymphing rig. Or I use a dry/dropper rig with a lightly weighted terrestrial a foot below a high-vis dry fly.

Because I favor keeping these sunken terrestrials immediately below the surface, tungsten beadhead patterns are usually not my first choice. Instead, epoxy-style bodies or fur-dubbed patterns are all you need. Keep the sunken patterns sparse, and often the hook weight alone achieves the correct depth.

One of the best lessons I got in sunken terrestrials occurred when central Pennsylvania had its last appearance of the 17-year periodical cicada. Some of the best dry-fly fishing I've seen occurred within the first week of their arrival, but angling pressure eventually slowed it down.

My friend Brian Keen watched the effectiveness of dry-fly imitations diminish while seeing a number of cicadas drifting below the water's surface. He thinned the wings of his

dry flies and used split-shot to sink his patterns. While it was difficult for him to move away from watching trout smash his #6 cicada dry fly on the surface, he couldn't argue with excellent results of using a giant sunken terrestrial. Brian showed me photos of some of the biggest brown trout he caught during the cicada invasion, and they all came from his decision to use a drowned terrestrial as a "nymph."

Understanding these triggers isn't a complex physics formula. Instead, it's simple observation and understanding the seasonal ebb and flow of what trout are eating. This ability to observe the aquatic world, understand its behavior on trout, and make adjustments is the kind of situational awareness that makes you a far more successful fly fisher. Experience on the water, help from your local fly shop, and good literature can also help you better understand when you need to be more specific with how you choose your flies. This kind of informed intuition can lead to better days onstream. 

George Daniel is the author of the new book *Nymph Fishing: New Angles, Tactics, and Techniques* (Stackpole Books, 2018). He owns and operates the company Livin on the Fly and presents schools, seminars, and private lessons across the country.



► **Flies like** Trout Crack or Sexy Walt's Worm are tied to imitate dead or dying scuds, but almost any small nymph tied with a fluorescent orange thread head will also do the job.

Photo | Jay Nichols



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How the Lackawanna went from la

THE LACKAWANNA RIVER BEGINS IN THE SOUTHEAST CORNER OF SUSQUEHANNA COUNTY, WHERE ITS EAST AND WEST BRANCHES FLOW INTO STILLWATER RESERVOIR, JUST SOUTH OF UNION DALE AND ABOUT 4 MILES NORTH OF FOREST CITY. The lower 40 miles of river running through Lackawanna County provide the setting for a truly remarkable comeback story. Just 50 short years ago, the river was left for dead. Inefficient and substandard sewage systems, along with a booming coal industry that put Scranton on the map, created an acid-filled funnel of waste. For the past 27 years I've only known the Lackawanna for what it is today: a wild brown trout mecca snuggled amidst the city I've grown up in. Scenery on the river can be hit or miss, and the hatches even less reliable. These two factors have kept crowds off the river and may still for the foreseeable future. What the river does have is character and magnificent trout that rival any in the state.

The Lackawanna contains more fish-filled public water than almost any river in Pennsylvania. The 37 miles of river below Stillwater Dam contain significant populations of mostly wild, naturally reproducing brown trout, with little to no private water. Ongoing rails-to-trails projects are providing more access every day, with an anticipated goal of stretching from the top to the bottom of the river. Nearly 18 of those miles are designated by the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) as either Class A or Trophy Trout water. There is an additional 8 miles of Stocked Trout Water above that. The remaining lower 11 unspecified miles, running through a city of nearly 80,000 people, supports a healthy population of fish as well, and could greatly benefit from some implemented regulation.

► **At one time,** sewage and mine waste made the Lackawanna toxic for fish, and unfit for human consumption. The river today is one of Pennsylvania's best wild trout fisheries.

Photo | Adam Nidoh

PENNSYLVANIA'S

WAKING

ckluster to a Class A trout stream



> ADAM NIDOH

Giant

A River Returns

Anthracite coal mining began in eastern Pennsylvania as far back as the 1790s and in the Lackawanna Valley by the 1820s, lasting for nearly 150 years. Many of our coldwater fisheries suffered mightily from it, and still do to this day. By 1866, the year Scranton became a city, the Lackawanna was declared unfit for consumption due to wastewater from improper sewage disposal, mining, and other industries. The next 100 years showed little improvement.

By 1900, the river was devoid of its native brook trout and other inhabitants, except for the occasional rat. The coal, iron, rail, and textile industries, along with commercial development, had taken their toll on the river. In 1937, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed a Clean Stream Law, unfortunately allowing an exemption for the coal mining industry. By the 1960s, however, coal mining in the area had ceased, and Scranton was finally able to afford an updated sewage system. In 1966, both the Lackawanna River Basin Sewer Authority and the Scranton Sewer Authority were formed. Further protection would follow with the federal Clean Water Act of 1970.

Initial trout stockings began in the late 70s, and the river began its comeback. Water from abandoned mines up and down the valley continues to seep

into the river, but the water runs cold and the iron levels have been reduced to minimal significance. The four sewage treatment plants along the river discharge clean water into the river year-round and at approximately 55 degrees F. Water from the city sewer lines enters the river only during periods of heavy rain. Not ideal, but still a vast improvement.

Ironically, the valley mine drainages and sewer plant discharges are what make the Lackawanna the year-round fishery it is. Stillwater Dam was completed in 1941 by the Army Corps of Engineers as a flood control project, protecting the Lackawanna Valley. Stillwater Reservoir is a long, narrow, relatively shallow and weedy lake, where temperatures reach well into the upper 70s, if not the lower 80s, by late summer. Although the gates can be controlled to release more or less water, the river below receives water primarily through a spillway, providing no coldwater relief for the trout downstream until cold water enters the river from the first of four sewage treatment plants in Forest City, and the coldwater mine drainages beginning in Jermyrn. Upstream of the reservoir, there are decent numbers of small wild browns and brookies. Wild fish are also found through Forest City, Simpson, and down to Carbondale. However most fish in this section are stocked.

road runoff all pose possible threats to the waterway. Endless efforts by the Lackawanna Valley chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Lackawanna River Conservation Association keep these factors at bay and preserve this magnificent natural resource.

For me, the Lackawanna stands as the blueprint for how a river heals. As Dr. Ian Malcolm said in *Jurassic Park*, "Life finds a way." Yes, some initial aid was needed, just as every toddler needs a helping hand to make their first steps. But for the most part, the river benefited greatly by being undisturbed.

The strain of brown trout running through the Lackawanna are a special breed: 70-degree water temps in the summer, acidic mine water, urban pollution, subpar food sources, and yet, they thrive. These are circumstances that stocked fish cannot overcome. They are proof—for the PFBC and the agencies across the country who control our waterways—that if you want to improve a resource, you protect it, you don't try to populate it.

Where to Fish

From the Meredith Street bridge in Childs downstream, the Lackawanna is a thriving, year-round wild trout fishery. The final 3 miles of river, beginning at the Connell Street bridge in Old Forge, have been too severely scarred by abandoned mine drainage (AMD) from the Old Forge borehole to support trout or any aquatic life.

As you follow the river downstream from the reservoir, the first coldwater relief site as well as the first access site can be found at the Forest City Sewage Treatment Plant and the adjacent D&H Trailhead. Downstream through Vandling and into Simpson the river's trout-holding characteristics begin taking shape. Although the river valley is not densely forested, high banks and thick streamside brush make fishing from the shore almost impossible. Fishing upstream is a must. The water here is small with an abundance of pocketwater.

The Class A water begins in Carbondale. However, with its bustling Main Avenue and long stretches of stone walls channelizing the water, most anglers don't fish until the towns of Mayfield and Jermyrn, where deeper holes and longer riffles begin to form, providing better habitat for the river's larger fish, and numerous mine discharge

As Dr. Ian Malcolm
said in *Jurassic Park*,
"Life finds a way."

Today, the Lackawanna has become a haven for more than just trout. Growing populations of eagles, hawks, herons, mallards, mergansers, geese, turtles, frogs, beavers, otters, minks, and more have all made the Lackawanna their home. While transformed into something previous generations would have never imagined, the river is still facing potential threats. Harvesting, illegal dumping, flood control projects, fracking, accidental industrial spills, siltation, and rock salt and

Giant

sites inject cold water into the river.

Still narrow in some places, the river's fish numbers and the scenery greatly improve as the river winds into the town of Archbald. As the river flows 5 miles through Archbald, Jessup, and Olyphant, it is Trophy Trout water. This label has created a lopsided amount of pressure on this area. While this section is wonderful and plenty of trailheads and neighborhood parks allow for easy access, there is a lot of great water downstream as well.

As the river flows into Dickson City and the city limits of Scranton, shopping centers, busy intersections, and denser neighborhoods begin to line the stream. Parking becomes tricky throughout this stretch, as most of the river is accessed via side streets.

Fish numbers remain strong throughout the city, with only the insect life apparently affected by the urban conditions. Pocketwater and riffles begin to give way to longer glides and deeper pools, providing plenty of refuge for larger browns. On the downside, much of the debris and locally discarded trash begins to collect in the lower stretches of the river. It is not uncommon to see shopping carts in the water.

The lowest reaches of the river, through the towns of Taylor, Moosic, and Old Forge, differ greatly from the rest, nearly doubling in size after the three largest tributaries—Leggetts Creek, Roaring Brook, and Spring Brook—flow into the river. Some fish through this stretch might not see a single fly or lure in a year. Long stretches are too deep to wade from either side and accompanied by tree-lined banks. Access is also limited, as many major roads and neighborhoods veer off from the river for several miles. The easiest access points in this stretch are the Moosic Little League field and the Depot Street trailhead in Taylor.

Favored Flies

I've had wonderful days of nonstop dry-fly action on the Lackawanna, rivaling any stream I've fished in the state, but if you want to catch fish with any consistency, your flies need to be in the water. A basic assortment of caddis and Pheasant-tail Nymphs are really all you need, though I find that showing the fish something new works well at times. Essential nymphs for me include #14-18 natural Soft Hackles,



Photo | Adam Nidoh

#16-18 Biot/Quill Body BWOs (Fulling Mill), #12-16 Holy Grails (Fulling Mill), #14-18 Rainbow Warriors (Lance Egan), #16-20 black, red, and olive Zebra Midges, #8-10 Golden Nemec Stones (Fulling Mill), #12-16 orange and pink Frenchies, #12-14 Sexy Walt's Worm (Loren Williams), and my own designs: #8-14 black, brown, and golden Adam Bombs, #12-16 tan and olive Cloud Cover Caddis, #12-16 Hare's Ear 2.0, #12-14 caddis green Case Closed Caddis, and #14-18 Slanted Pheasant Tails. [For more information on Sexy Walt's Worm, see George Daniel's story "Trigger Nymphs" starting on page 32. THE EDITOR.]

Aside from the 8 miles of Stocked Trout Water that are closed from March 1 to the opening day of trout season, the rest of the river is open

▶ Perhaps due to the relative lack of aquatic insect life, Lackawanna trout quickly become piscivorous and show rapid growth rates.

year-round. I spend about half the year fishing from our fly shop in Dickson City downstream through Scranton and into Old Forge, when the temperatures and flows are of no issue. Areas that run through the city can fish just as well as any of the Class A or Trophy sections upstream. I believe the largest fish in the river roams somewhere within the Scranton city limits.

June through September I concentrate on the water from the shop upstream to Jermy. These stretches can be a degree or two cooler than the water in the city, and the canopy provides additional shade and relief for the fish.

I prefer a 10-foot, 3- or 4-weight rod for nymphing, a 9-foot, 4- or 5-weight for dries, and a 9-foot, 6- or 7-weight for streamers. Most fish in the Lackawanna aren't too line or leader shy (although the increased numbers of anglers over the past few years are starting to change that), so I generally try to use the heaviest tippets I can to reduce my risk of breaking off those 20-inchers. I've found the fish to be opportunists most of the year, making general presentation and tactics far more important than overall fly selection. That characteristic is certainly welcoming, compared to some waterways, such as the Delaware.

▶ **The 37 miles of the Lackawanna below Stillwater Dam has plentiful public access, and nearly 18 of those miles are designated as either Class A or Trophy Trout water by the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission**



Local Hatches

The Lackawanna has a fair number of hatches, but the most important are midges, BWOs, Sulphurs, Tricos, and assorted caddis. You can encounter rising fish at any time, in any stretch. I have, for instance, come across pods of fish feeding on Early Black Stones in downtown Scranton in early March. Sulphurs are perhaps the marquee mayfly hatch and bring fish to the surface between mid-May and mid-June that are unseen the other eleven months of the year. As the river gets more pressure, lower-riding patterns such as parachutes and Comparaduns seem to take the lion's

Photo | Jay Nichols



I believe the largest fish in the river roams somewhere within the Scranton city limits.

share of surface-feeding trout.

I like to use #14-18 Ramsay's Sulphur Half and Half or my own Sulphur Biot Body Parachute. Caddis definitely outnumber the mayflies here. A simple collection of caddis nymphs and dry flies is probably all you'd really need to catch fish year-round. A tan or green/olive caddis larva or pupa should be tied on any nymph rig at all times. Lower-riding CDC caddis patterns such as tan and olive Orvis Low Rider CDC and Elk-hair Caddis (#14-18) tend to fool more fish in lower summer flows.


Late summer provides more dependable surface opportunity with morning Trico spinner falls. Your best bet to find Tricos will be on the upper stretches of the river, north of I-81. What Tricos lack in size, they usually make up for in numbers. While this period generally shows off the many smaller fish in the river, catching a 20-plus-inch brown on 6X to 8X tippet is still a possibility. My favorite spinner pattern is a #22-24 Ramsay's DNA Spinner (Trico).

Even though most of the river runs through urbanized areas, plenty of canopy still drapes the river. Summer terrestrial action can be good, with beetles (#12-16 Orvis Flash Beetle), ants, and inchworms dropping in on a regular basis. The somewhat sparse numbers of mayflies and stoneflies make it rare for the trout to resist a juicy meal, especially the unpredictable and frenzy-inducing flying ant hatch, which can boil the water.

Once summer settles in, the larger fish hunker down for much of the day, returning in the evening to cruise and chase baitfish. Summer nights are great times for streamers. Unweighted flies with some bulk that will push water, fished just below the surface, work best.

Fall usually brings with it low flows, lingering terrestrials, and sporadic hatches of caddis, BWOs, and midges.

I've found late fall/early winter is a great time to find post-spawn fish aggressively striking streamers. Fall streamer fishing can be hit or miss depending on water flows. Due to mine outflows and sewage plant discharges, the Lackawanna remains ice free, except during the coldest of winters. Streamers are my go-to winter patterns, simply because indicator nymphing a deep slow pool with 6X tippet and two tiny midges has never been my favorite thing (although effective). When choosing streamer patterns, keep in mind that the river has plenty of brown trout, suckers, dace, sculpins, crayfish, and leeches. I think that due to the less-than-stellar insect life, fish in the Lack turn piscivorous earlier in their lives than most trout generally would, leading to rapid growth rates. My favorite streamer patterns include olive and brown Fish-Skull Skulpin Bunny (#4-8), olive and black Orvis CH Woolly Bugger (#6-10), GD Sculpin Snack (#8), olive Fish-Skull Zonker (#4-8), and a Black Tung Jig Bugger (#8).

Rising fish can even be found on the river in winter. Any reasonably warm and sunny winter day, I guarantee there's a fish somewhere sipping midges in the film. This past Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the sky was blue and the air temperature a balmy 17 degrees F. I waded into a pool in Scranton and saw dimples everywhere. I caught nearly a dozen fish on a Griffith's Gnat before my fingers became too numb to tie another knot. 

Adam Nidoh and his father Greg own A&G Outfitters (agoutfitters.com) in Dickson City, Pennsylvania. He guides on the Lackawanna, Susquehanna, Lehigh, Delaware, and Lackawaxen rivers. Portions of this article are excerpted from *Keystone Fly Fishing: The Ultimate Guide to Pennsylvania's Best Water*.



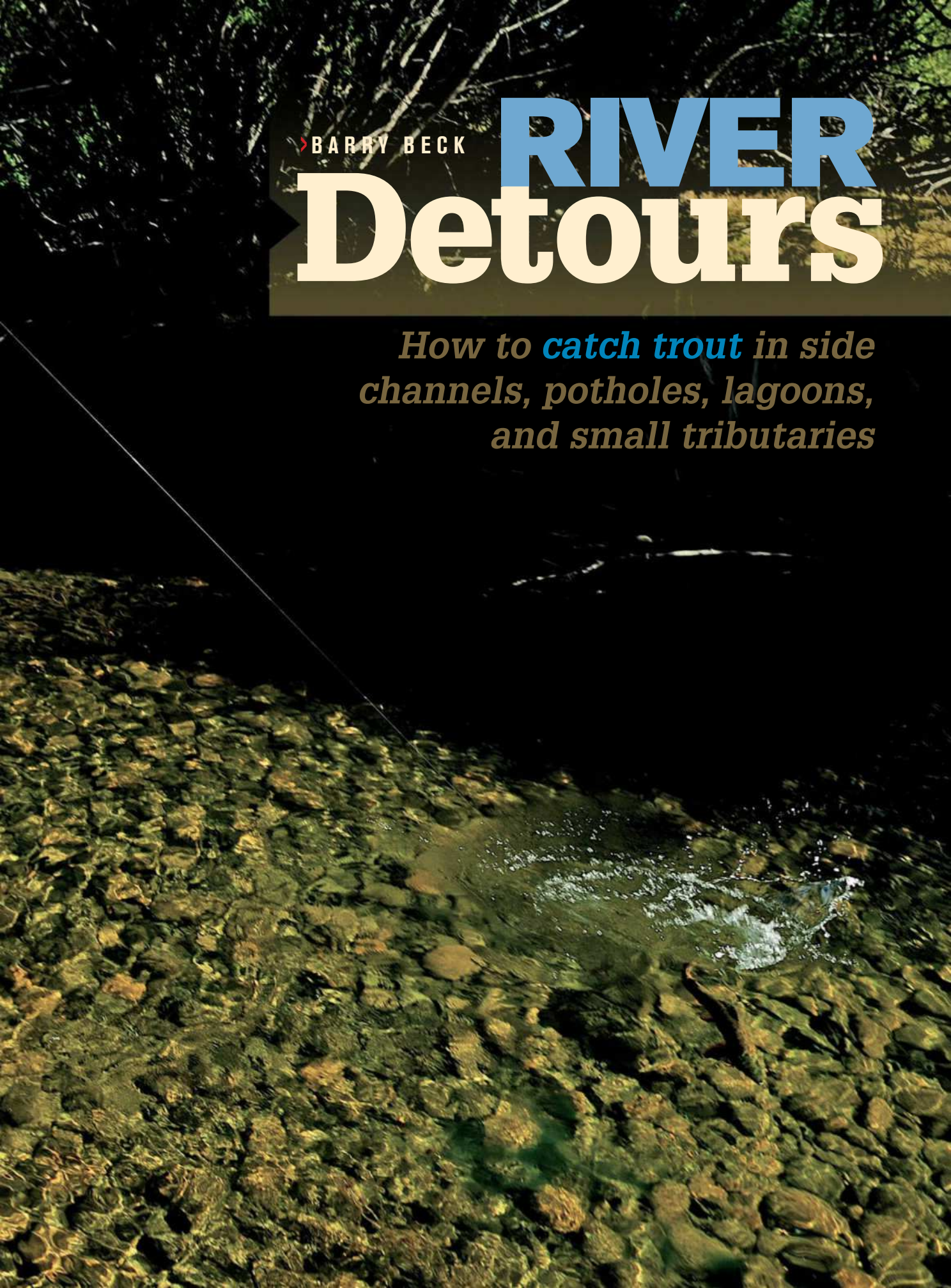
▶ **Small water** with large trout can be both challenging and rewarding. Trout tend to be wary of predators in these skinny conditions, but they are more willing to feed if you can be stealthy.

Photo **Cathy & Barry Beck**

> BARRY BECK

RIVER Detours

*How to catch trout in side
channels, potholes, lagoons,
and small tributaries*



Most Fly Fishers

ARE EXPLORERS BY

NATURE. How many times on a new stream or piece of water have you wondered “what’s up around the next bend?” Or perhaps you come upon a small trickle of water that enters a larger river, and you wonder where it leads? Or you’re on a river like the Yellowstone, Bighorn, or the Missouri and you come to a side channel that looks inviting, but unknown. Do you take it, or go with the main flow? I encourage you to be a trout hunter and explorer. Walk up those small tributaries and take a look to see what’s there.

► **This side** channel on the Bighorn River offered protection from the wind, and slow water where Tricos collected on the surface.

When you’ve spent most of your life looking for trout—either for yourself or with paying clients—you quickly learn to take advantage of whatever comes along. As a young guide,

I spent most of my time on the upper end of Fishing Creek, my home stream, in northeastern Pennsylvania. There was a steel bridge just above a Boy Scout camp—Camp Lavigne—and my day started at the bridge. I often fished with my clients up through Long’s Farm then through Stauffer’s Farm, eventually ending up at a covered bridge spanning the creek. It was an all-day affair, and I covered a lot of good water.

In those days, we found some beautiful wild brook trout and a good number of wild browns. There were a few really big fish, but what the trout lacked in size they made up for in beauty and numbers.

Less than 100 yards above the bridge a small braid of water trickled down over the bank and fell into Fishing Creek. One day a client and I got plastered by torrents of rain, and although the stream this far up rarely colored up, I could see the mud coming. Raingear in those days was not what it is today. Gore-Tex was years away, so we were soaked, and soon we were chilled. I suggested we walk back to the car to have lunch and



Photo | Cathy & Barry Beck

RIVER Detours

warm up. As we walked back, the mud-laden stream rose and in a matter of minutes it was too high to fish. But when we walked past the small braids that had now become a small stream, it was running clear. We stopped and looked at it, and I asked my client if he would mind if I just walked up through the woods to check it out. I gave him the car keys, and started up the tiny tributary.

At first I found a series of braids that I followed for about 50 feet, and then up ahead I saw what looked to be the tail of a small pool. Due to the heavy rain and poor visibility, I walked right up to the tail of the pool, and immediately saw the wake of a fleeing fish. I knew I had made a mistake, so I headed for the car to allow the fish to settle down. After lunch, my client looked at the high, muddy water and moaned, "We're done."

"Maybe not," I replied. The rain began to slow as we approached the little pool back in the woods. This time we moved slowly, and then stopped well short of the pool to take a look. I was astounded by what we saw. Fishing Creek is a freestone stream, but this small lagoon was full of water-cress and weeds, and reminded me of a spring creek from the central part of the state. Even with all the rain, there was hardly any current. "Look," my client said, and I followed his hand to the upper end of the pool where we saw a rise form.

The water was as clear as tap water, but the light in the woods was horrible, so I tied on a #12 black Letort Cricket and suggested that we go slowly and blind cast, working our way up to the head of the pool. The first cast brought a 5-inch brook trout. We laughed, but it was a fish. A bit upstream, and four casts later, another small brook ate the cricket. Good, two fish to the net. Well, I didn't actually use my net on those small fish, but still it was two fish.

We were almost to the head of the pool when the cricket simply disappeared from the surface. I yelled to set the hook, and in short order I used my net on a very healthy 14-inch wild brown. We admired the beautiful colors on the fish, and it disappeared in a rush when released. By the end of the day we had discovered three more pools that held fish. The last was the head of the spring where the water



Photo: Cathy & Barry Beck

► **Lagoons** are places that flood during high water. Large trout take shelter in them during high-water events, and are later isolated when the water recedes.

bubbled out of the ground. In the end we had 11 small brook trout and three brown trout.

Through the years I have found five other springs similar to the one on the Long property. All held fish, and I confess that I never found any really "big boys," but they have saved my day on many occasions when Fishing Creek was not fishable due to high, dirty water. Most of the year, the pools were landlocked with no water running in or out, yet they were deep enough and cold enough to support trout all year. Sadly, the upper end of Fishing Creek itself has pH problems and the fishing has dropped off, but the little lagoons are still there and still have trout.

Lagoons

I use the term "lagoon" loosely here because lagoons in North America are most often associated with shallow coastal bodies of water that are separated from the ocean by land or a barrier reef. In Argentina, fly fishers and guides use the word "lagoon" to describe any body of water that is separated from a river except during flood stages.

Unlike side channels and tributaries, trout lagoons for the most part are

landlocked. Most lagoons receive their trout from rivers when they have extreme floods. Trout are relocated during the high water, then are trapped when the water recedes. The best lagoons often have cold springs that help to keep the water temperature cold.

In New Zealand they merely call these places "small ponds." Call them whatever you like, when you find large trout in these little places, you can create some incredible memories.

In Argentina, most major river systems have lagoons along them. The problem is often just finding them. Cathy and I were lucky enough to have some exceptional lagoon fishing with an American guide in Patagonia who was working for legendary angler Jorge Trucco. His name is Mike Poore, and his home base is Jackson, Wyoming. Poore was born a trout hunter, and his passion is finding large trout in out-of-the-way places.

Through our years of fishing with him, Poore showed us some of his favorite lagoons where we caught some humongous trout. Poore was a river guide, but on every day off he explored lagoons that looked promising. He fished in an arid area, so he looked

for green willow trees that suggested moisture. He walked many miles, and more often than not, he found nothing. But every once in while he hit pay dirt. In the end, he mapped out the best lagoons along all the rivers he guided on.

One day we left our drift boat to hike in to a large lagoon. Along the way we saw what Poore called a pothole. It was a small, deep hole in the ground. There was green vegetation around it, so Cathy quietly crept up and made a cast with a foam beetle. The fly disappeared in a splash, and she landed a healthy 18-inch brown trout.

When she released the fish, we saw just how deep this little pocket of water was, and noticed a tree root at the edge of the water had a deeply undercut bank. The air temperature was in the 80s but the water in this pool was ice cold, and apparently influenced by an underground spring. If we hadn't been with Poore, we probably would have walked right by it. Another lesson learned.

Side Channels

Montana's Bighorn River is one of our favorite Western destinations, but it has the reputation of being crowded.

Our favorite section of river is from the Bighorn Access to Mallard's Landing. This lower section doesn't see the same pressure as the upper 13 miles, and it also has a good number of intimate side channels.

This past season we saw Trico hatches that seemed to bring up every fish in the river. We also ran into some wind, and on the main river the spinners quickly disappeared when the wind blew. By searching in the side channels, we found protection from the wind, and plenty of rising fish feeding in slow water where the Tricos collected. We just had to do a little searching.

The key to good side channels is cool enough water temperatures to support trout. In side channels, the amount of flow is critical. In high flows, big fish move into side channels for protection from flood current. When the water drops, they will stay to feed in small water if the temperature is cool enough and they are undisturbed.

Side channels at some point end up coming back into the main river. These junction pools are always worth exploring. A few years ago a bunch of my friends from Frontiers Travel along with Jorge Trucco and three of his guides did a float trip down the

Limay River in Argentina. The Limay has a reputation for big fish below the dam. The weather was perfect, no wind, no clouds, warm, and there was very little boat traffic on the river. The morning produced a lot of nice fish on foam dry flies, and a few fish on large white tandem streamers.

We parked our rafts at a junction pool and decided to have lunch. The side channel to our right looked inviting, so while everyone in our party was enjoying a glass of Argentine wine, I picked up a rod and walked up the side channel.

The water was thin, maybe 2 feet deep, but it had potential. Ahead I thought I could see a shadow moving across the bottom. It looked way too big to be a trout, so I kept advancing. As the shadow got closer, I realized that it was a double-digit trout.

I quickly crouched down and looked at my fly. By mistake I had picked up a 7-weight Sage with a white tandem streamer. In this clear, low water I felt that my chances with this setup were little or none, but I made a cast anyway, leading the fish by 20 feet. I watched the leader and streamer sink to the bottom, and out of the corner of my eye I saw the trout charge. I never moved the fly, the big brown simply picked it off

► **The author** caught this 10-pound brown trout by leaving the boats and exploring a side channel with insignificant flow.



Photo | Cathy & Barry Beck

RIVER Detours

the bottom, and I set the hook. About 20 minutes later, and some distance downstream in the main river where my friends were finishing lunch, I landed the fish. Ten-plus pounds of Limay brown trout made a lot of smiling faces, especially mine.

My point is that there can be a lot more fishing opportunities than just the main stream or river. Being willing to explore side channels—even if there is just a trickle of water—can sometimes pay off. Finding pools or lagoons cut off from the river can be more difficult, but good local guides often know these spots, and you can find them yourself if you're willing to walk away from the river and explore.

I've had a lot of failures and disappointment when I risk my time to explore new places, but the excitement and satisfaction when things do work out makes it all worthwhile. —

Cathy and Barry Beck are on the advisory staffs of Sage, Redington, RIO, and Tibor Reels. They are also travel hosts for Frontiers International. Their previous story "When Caterpillars Fall" was in the June-July 2017 issue and is now available at flyfisherman.com.



Photo: Cathy & Barry Beck

► **Small tributaries** are often the domain of small trout. A beautiful native brook trout or cutthroat in small water is a worthwhile reward in its own right.

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*Wyoming's Snake River may be the
best native trout fishery in America—
and it's been getting better*

Cutthroat



▶ **The Snake** River in Grand Teton National Park isn't just scenic, it may be the center of the cutthroat universe.

Photo | **Chad Ehlers / Alamy Stock Photo**

▶ **BOOTS ALLEN**

Universe





Photo | Josh Gallivan

In the Feb.-Mar. 2018 issue, author Paul Weamer wrote an excellent description of the Yellowstone River, which drains the north side of the park. Draining the southern end is another stream that in many ways is the crown jewel of fly fishing in the Greater Yellowstone Area. This stream is the Snake River, and it just may be the center of the cutthroat universe.

All rivers have certain traits that set them apart from other waters. This is certainly the case for Snake River. Flowing through the valley of Jackson Hole and alongside the Tetons, the Snake is unquestionably one of the most scenic rivers in the world. It also runs through an area of intense wildlife abundance rivaled by few others.

Despite the scenery, the most attractive element of the Snake is perhaps its trout population. It remains one of those few major river systems where native cutthroat trout—in this case Snake River fine-spotted cutthroat (*Onchorynchus clarkii behnkei*)—still dominate the ecosystem. This particular subspecies has experienced the same policies of mismanagement that wreaked havoc on many other streams and on native

THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE AREA IS A STORIED LAND IN THE WORLD OF FLY FISHING.

Even today, after more than a century of attention, it still draws an endless number of anglers every year. The names of this region's rivers—the Firehole, the Madison, the Yellowstone, the Wind River, the Henry's Fork—evoke visions of incredible fishing for wild trout.

Fishing the Lakes & Tributaries

The Snake River is the main attraction of the Jackson Hole Valley, but many tributaries also offer worthwhile fishing. Pacific Creek, the Buffalo Fork, and the Gros Ventre, Hoback, Greys, and Salt rivers all provide excellent fishing. Flat Creek, particularly where it flows through the National Elk Refuge north of Jackson, is a world-class fishery in its own right. This is a place where 18- to 22-inch cutthroat trout are common, and sight fishing with 6X leaders and super-imitative patterns is required. Don't expect a double-digit day. Working several hours toward that one big fish is often required. Flat Creek should cure anyone who still thinks cutthroat trout are "easy," as this is one of the most demanding fisheries in the West.

Many of the tributaries feeding the Snake originate from lakes on both sides of the valley. These provide exceptional stillwater fishing, and they are dependable backups when the river is in runoff. Runoff happens to coincide with ice-out on most of these lakes. If you look for them, you'll see large trout cruising flats that are 2 to 6 feet in depth. This shallow-water fishing can last for a month or more, generally from the end of May until the beginning of July. One of my favorites is Lewis Lake in Yellowstone National Park. Originally a fishless lake, it was stocked with lake trout and brown trout in the 1890s. The result is a stillwater known for remarkably large trout that grab streamers, nymphs, and at times, dry flies in the form of *Callibaetis*, Brown Drakes, and carpenter ant imitations. Jenny Lake, in Grand Teton National Park, has a coexisting population of lake trout and cutthroat that offers similarly exciting fishing.



Photo | Boots Allen



Photo | Josh Gallivan

▶ **The Snake** River today holds more 12- to 18-inch cutthroat trout than ever before.

cutthroat throughout the West. Yet through it all, Snake River cutthroat continue to thrive.

Historically, cutthroat trout of any species were held in low regard throughout North America. They lack the aerial dancing of rainbows or the long, downstream runs of brown trout when hooked, and were therefore considered less formidable. Many fly fishers considered them opportunistic feeders that are too easy to catch. Some even claimed that, with the exception of the Lahontan strain, they were incapable of reaching the 20-inch mark.

These are old, tired arguments today, but such sentiments lasted well into the 20th century. In the late 1980s, a good friend of mine submitted exquisite images of cutthroats to a well-known fly-fishing publication. “We don’t want photos of cutthroat trout,” the editor told him flatly. “They’re too easy to catch and don’t fight.”

Times have changed, but Snake River fine-spot cutthroat have always had some enthusiastic followers. As early as the 1950s, visiting anglers extolled the virtues of bulldogging cutthroats using the river current to their advantage. Ernest Schwiebert, in his encyclopedic, two-volume work *Trout* (1978), wrote of his post-WWII visits to Wyoming’s Snake River, and the impressive battles he had with this native gamefish.

Many astute fly fishers have noted that while Snake River cutthroat might be easy prey with artificial flies in the main channels, they are exceedingly difficult to fool on the numerous spring creeks and slow-moving side channels found throughout the river valley. As noted writer Paul Bruun has stated, “I can show you some fine-spotted cutthroats that are going to be pretty damn selective about what they are not going to be selective about.” Anyone who has fished the Snake’s spring creek tributaries like Flat Creek are familiar with what Bruun is talking about.

Top to Bottom

The entirety of the Snake River—from its headwaters to its terminus at the Columbia River in Washington—is approximately 1,070 miles in length. Wyoming’s portion is about 120 miles, less than 15 percent of this distance. The Snake begins as a series of finger creeks flowing from the Continental Divide before coalescing into one stream in Yellowstone National Park. The river courses generally south, flowing through the valley of Jackson Hole, Snake River Canyon, and eventually into Palisades Reservoir and then the state of Idaho.

Most of the stream flows through public lands, including Yellowstone

and Grand Teton national parks, Rockefeller Memorial Parkway, Bridger-Teton National Forest, and parcels of county and state lands. Only about 15 miles of the Snake flow through private land. If you are a defender and advocate for public land and public access, the Snake River might well be your poster child.

The vast majority of the river is an outflow from Jackson Lake Dam. Officially, the Snake is a tailwater. However, 5 miles below the dam, the Snake is fed by a large tributary called Pacific Creek. A mile farther downstream, another major tributary, the Buffalo Fork, enters the river. More tributaries continue to feed the Snake River all the way to the Idaho border, so the river fishes much more like a free-stone stream. These feeder streams drain thousands of square miles of mountain range that receive between 300 to 600 inches of snow each year. They influence river levels and water temperatures on the Snake far more than the dam.

When the snow melts in the spring, runoff can be overwhelming. But the degree and duration of runoff varies from year to year. A big snowpack can result in runoff lasting well over two months. Light snowpack can result in a runoff of six weeks or less. Start time can also vary.



Photo | Josh Gallivan

The average start of runoff is generally during the first couple days of May, but I have seen it begin as early as April 23 and as late as May 10. The warming air temperatures of spring dictate when runoff gets underway. When it happens, anglers can expect several weeks with visibility less than a few inches.

Runoff on the Snake River is what makes the 5-mile tailwater immediately below Jackson Lake Dam important. This is the one piece of stream that runs relatively clear year-round. With an average gradient of 4 feet per mile, it exudes a slow, intimate quality characterized by large recirculating eddies, seams, and long runs devoid of much structure.

At times, rising cutthroat seem to be everywhere. These fish have a lot of time to study what they are eating. Refusals are the norm. It is the perfect place to test those fly fishers who still believe that cutthroat trout are purely opportunists.

The stream gradient picks up significantly below Pacific Creek. Most reaches average a drop of between 16 and 25 feet per mile. The holding water also changes below Pacific Creek. The big eddies and long seams found below the dam are replaced by fast riffles, substantial drop-offs, braided channels, and lots of structure in the form of fallen firs and cottonwoods.

This is technical fishing, but not in ways you'd think. Slow approaches, light leaders, and highly imitative patterns are not necessarily required. What is more important is working tight current lines where trout hold. Inches matter. Don't expect a take to occur if you are a foot from your target. A good rule of thumb is to be no more than the width of a closed fist. Cross-current is another challenge. Working a seam may require your line and leader to be across two currents with different velocities. Drag is going to occur faster than you think. Having a deliberate presentation with the adequate amount

of slack on the surface (to allow for a decent drift) is crucial for success.

At the southern boundary of Grand Teton National Park, a levee system channelizes the Snake River, impeding its ability to flow through the historical floodplain for 26 miles. No portion of the river has been more impacted by man's drive for development: Multi-million dollar homes now populate the former floodplain. The vertically impounded Snake rushes by at an alarming pace. You would think this would be no-go land for trout. Yet Wyoming Game and Fish Department data consistently shows this portion of stream holds the highest concentration and average size of cutthroat in the entire drainage. The fishing through this leveed tract reflects this fact. I have caught the majority of my 20-plus-inch trout here, and it is my favorite part of the Snake. And regardless of nearby property development, the abundance of elk, moose, and bears in this area is impressive.

The levee system ends just upstream of Bridger-Teton National Forest and Snake River Canyon. The gradient here relaxes noticeably. It averages around 12 feet per mile, and the holding water changes once again. The riffles here are longer, and the drop-offs are less abrupt. The banks are punctuated with large, submerged boulders. There are also deep ledgerrock pools. All of this provides substantial holding areas for trout.

This is arguably the easiest part of the Snake to fish. Your target area is much wider than what exists upstream. I have observed cutthroat dart several feet from a current seam to take a nymph dropper. If I am looking for fishing that requires a little less effort, the Snake River Canyon is where I go.

Seasons and Hatches

The long, warm, sun-filled days of summer are hard to beat on the Snake. The river generally clears by the first week of July, and the larger cutthroat

are finished spawning. Dry-fly fishing with larger attractors, PMD imitations, Yellow Sallies, and Green Drake patterns is the name of the game.

The Snake flows through two of the most heavily visited national parks in the U.S. as well as a top-ranked national forest for recreation. Around 3.5 million people visit the Jackson Hole area every summer between June and September. A fair number of them are fishing, so don't expect to have the river to yourself.

There's no reason to avoid the Snake this time of year, just realize that you will be dealing with some pressure just about anywhere you go, and you should be willing to share the water with fellow fly fishers looking for a quality experience.

September through November is locally recognized as the best time to be on the water. There is gorgeous fall foliage, much of the wildlife is migrating and easily sighted from the riverbed, and all the streams are low and clear. Heavy hatches of *Claassenia* stoneflies, *Timpanoga becuba* (Great Red Quills), *Paraleptophlebia adoptiva* (Mahogany Duns), and October caddis occur throughout much of autumn. It makes for terrific surface action. The streamer fishing is also very good. The river is clear enough to see larger cutthroat chase your baitfish patterns.

This is also my favorite time of year to fish area lakes for spawning lake trout and the mouths of lake tributaries where brown trout stage in preparation for their fall spawning run. I dedicate several days each October and November to fishing Lewis Lake and Jackson Lake for these fish, which are not native species.

Best of all, the crowds dissipate significantly by the first week of October. It is possible to fish the rest of the year and see only a few other fly fishers a day. Some days you don't see anyone.

Winter fishing on the Snake River is a rather new phenomenon. Prior to 2004, all the local streams were closed to fishing in winter. Since then, more and more fly fishers are hitting the Snake to see what winter fishing offers. As in autumn, the Snake is low and clear. It is easy to see the fish you are targeting. Most cutthroat pod up in deep areas with relaxed currents. This is great water to fish #18-22 adult midge patterns for slow-rising trout.

When the fish aren't on the surface, streamer fishing is the name of the game. Small (#8-10) forage fish imitations on floating lines work better than larger patterns on sinking tips.

A slow retrieve with long strips is the best way to go.

Some people assume that a ski town with Jackson Hole's reputation would be too cold and snow packed to offer comfortable, quality fishing. The truth is that the lower valley only receives about 65 inches of snow a year. Much of this melts off through the winter. What is more, the warm winters we are experiencing throughout the West are occurring in Jackson as well. We have 40-degree days with sunshine every winter month, and 50-degree days are not uncommon. Unfortunately, the trade-off is water temperatures in the upper 60s during late summer. It's definitely not good for coldwater fish, but it feels pretty comfortable during the winter. It's easier for the trout to survive the winter ice jams as well.

Spring is an off-the-radar time for fishing the Snake. Most of us on the water this time of year are locals, or visitors who know what pre-runoff fishing can produce. The river is low and clear. Cutthroat lose their winter lethargy and begin to feed more consistently as water temperatures warm. They are feeding heavily to build up the reserves needed for the spawning runs they make in numerous tributaries in May. Streamer fishing in March

and April often outproduces the summer months.

Blue-winged Olives generate excellent afternoon surface action, especially on days with cloud cover and a little precipitation. But nothing is more anticipated than the first emergence of *Skwalas*. These medium-size stoneflies appear around the middle of April and peak the first week of May. It is the first chance of the year fly fishers get to cast large attractors to rising trout. You can count on fishing Chubby Chernobyl patterns or rubber-legged nymphs for a month until the Snake eventually goes into runoff in early May.

On the Rise

It's interesting to hear Snake River fly fishers of different generations debate the quality of the fishing now compared to 40 years ago. Old-timers rave about the lack of pressure back then, and the good numbers of fish in the system. A younger generation points to electroshock data that suggests in some cases the fish numbers are stronger now. They believe we are fishing in the Snake's golden age.

The Snake is unquestionably healthier now than what it was in the 1960s and 1970s. Flows from Jackson Lake Dam are today managed more

progressively. Abrupt ramp-downs—which left invertebrates and trout trapped in side channels to die—almost never happen nowadays.

Catch-and-release has led to far less harvest than in previous decades. There has also been a lot of rehabilitation work done on spawning creeks and other tributaries. The result is a more balanced ratio in terms of size and age structure of trout. Forty years ago, a day of fishing often resulted in a bunch of 12-inch and smaller trout, with a couple of bruisers over 19 inches. Today, there is a robust population of 12- to 18-inch cutthroat, as well as a good number under and over that size.

Opinions aside, the Snake River continues to provide a fishing experience duplicated on few other waters. It can be challenging at times and, like most other quality trout streams, fly fishers must deal with angling pressure during a certain part of the year. But these challenges can be worth it. And even when trout are not cooperating, you are still fishing in one of the most stunning places you'll ever see.

Boots Allen is a fly-fishing guide and writer who lives with his wife and two kids in Victor, Idaho. His latest book is *Finding Trout in All Conditions*.



Photo | Josh Gallivan

▶ **Snake River** fine-spotted cutthroat are viewed by some as a variety of Yellowstone cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii bouvieri*) and by others as a completely different subspecies (*Oncorhynchus clarkii behnkei*).

Grillos's User Friendly

Trout can't resist it, and it's easy to keep it floating

▲ CHARLIE CRAVEN

OVER THE YEARS, I have become a bigger and bigger fan of flies that solve problems.

"Improved" patterns often start out as ways to make flies float or sink better, be more durable, require less maintenance, or simply present a better footprint or silhouette to the fish. In some cases, you might set out to solve a single one of these issues, and in the process hit on all of them. Andrew Grillos's latest offering, the User Friendly, has done just that.

I've written about Grillos previously when his spectacular Low Rider Stone pattern impressed me, and here he is again with yet another great problem-solving pattern with a modern twist or two.

Grillos is a master of dry flies with buggy silhouettes, and his other patterns illustrate this point quite well. The ever-popular Hippy Stomper features a fat foam hump, heavy hackle, and angler-friendly wing to create a buoyant, durable pattern that pulls fish up with a nondescript

USER FRIENDLY

Andrew Grillos

HOOK: #12-16 Tiemco 100.

THREAD: Black Veevus 14/0.

TAIL: Medium dun Mayfly Tails.

BACK: Black 1 mm Wapsi Razor Foam.

ABDOMEN: Purple Hareline Micro Fine Dry Fly Dub.

WING: Gray McFlylon.

LEGS: White, fine round rubber, barred with a Sharpie marker.

HACKLE: Grizzly rooster.

THORAX: UV Purple Ice Dub.

○



Photo: Charlie Craven

► It's **slimmer** than most attractor patterns, and because it sits lower in the water the User Friendly makes a suitable mayfly imitation that is easy to spot on the water. It was originally tied in shades of yellow for Pale Morning Dun hatches.

buggy silhouette that can match a variety of insects, just depending on how you hold your mouth when you fish it.

The User Friendly is Grillos's idea of a mayfly-profile attractor pattern with a slimmer shape, and it uses many common attractor materials, yet produces a stealthier pattern.

Grillos started off with a standard dry-fly hook and built a tiny ball of dubbing at the bend to help spread the synthetic tail fibers for a wider footprint.

He created a slender Razor Foam hump over a slimly dubbed abdomen that he cross-hatches with thread to add segmentation and durability.

A pair of synthetic McFlylon wings are mounted upright and divided for both fish and angler appeal, and a pair of finely barred, wiggly rubber legs are added to create movement and surface area before a thick hackle collar is wrapped palmer style through the Ice Dub thorax.

Less Prep Work

The end result is a slender pattern reminiscent of familiar flies, but with an obviously modern take on materials

and design. The User Friendly is built to require little in the way of maintenance on the water because it uses materials that are not easily saturated. The entire fly—save for the hackle—is composed of entirely synthetic components.

While the User Friendly seems to be a bit more on the attractor side of the spectrum, it really does act as a hatch matcher when tied in the appropriate colors. The original version was tied in yellow to match the Pale Morning Duns Grillos encountered one day on a Montana spring creek. He was as surprised as anyone that the burly dry fly produced fish after fish, and held up so well to the mauling.

Grillos owes this to the User Friendly's attitude on the water—it sits lower than traditional collared mayfly patterns. He reasons that the flatter footprint matches the naturals a bit better, and I'd have to agree with his assessment.

The durability of the fly was no surprise given its man-made components and built-in buoyancy. The fly lives up wonderfully to its name, requiring little in the way of on-stream maintenance to keep it floating. It also

presents a pair of highly visible, light-colored wings to the guy on the other end of the string.

The fact that the fish eat it so well is the main focus for all of us, but those extra-helpful attributes make it a no-brainer when choosing from a box of many patterns.

I'm looking forward to seeing the rest of this series. Right now, the User Friendly is available from Umpqua Feather Merchants in a PMD version, as well as black, and the purple one shown here.

Grillos mentioned in our conversations something about a Green Drake version . . . and that now has my brain running wild with the possibilities. We live in the good old days of fly tying, and guys like Andrew are leading the way. Lucky us. You can see more of his signature patterns at andrew-grillos.com and at umpqua.com.

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).

TYING THE USER FRIENDLY

Photos **Charlie Craven**



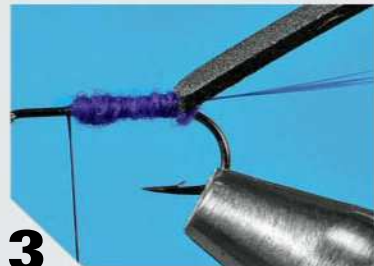
1

▶ **Begin by** dressing the hook shank and building a tiny ball of dubbing at the bend of the hook. Tie six Mayfly Tails in and wrap back over them to the dubbing ball to spread them. Wrap forward to just past the midpoint on the shank and clip the excess.



2

▶ **Cut a** strip of Razor Foam that is about half as wide as the gap of the hook. Cut one end to a point and tie it in at the base of the tails, taking care not to create a lump.



3

▶ **Dub a** slightly tapered abdomen up to the 75% point on the shank.

Continued on page 58

TYING THE USER FRIENDLY

Continued from page 57



4

▶ **Pull the** Razor Foam forward over the dubbing and tie it down at the front of the abdomen. Cross-hatch the thread with three turns back to the bend, then wrap forward again, forming Xs over the foam strip.



5

▶ **Wrap forward** over the remaining foam strip to the back of the hook eye. Tie in gray McFlylon at the middle of the thorax area using X-wraps as you would to tie spinner wings. Lift both wings and make a few tight parachute wraps at the base to stand the wings upright.




6

▶ **Tie in** a single strand of fine white rubber legs along each side of the thorax from the back of the hook eye to the front of the abdomen.

Photos | Charlie Craven

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7

▶ **Tie in** a grizzly hackle at the front of the abdomen with the inside facing the hook. Dub the thorax with a pinch of UV Purple Ice Dub.



8

▶ **Wrap the** hackle forward with two turns behind the wings and another two in front and up to the hook eye. Clip the excess. Lift the foam strip and rubber legs and sneak a whip finish in behind the hook eye.



9

▶ **Use a** black Sharpie to bar the legs, and then trim them to length. Clip the foam strip square so it extends over the hook eye. Trim the wings longer than the hackle, and snip a notch in the bottom of the hackle collar.



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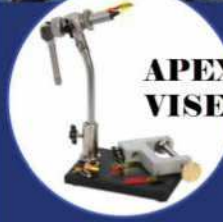
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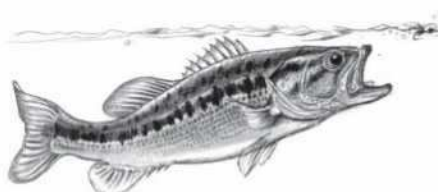
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FLY-FISHERMAN SIMMS.

Continued from page 64

out that override apple smell that yellow jackets crave. If odor was a color, this creek's would be that royal blue-green that the eiders dive into off Otter Cliffs in Acadia National Park, full of the mystery of the North Atlantic. I smile every time I walk by.

Back in the Berkshires of northwestern Connecticut, the Housatonic has a different aroma. It smells muddy, more geologic than biologic, somehow Western—a silky sensation of sedimentary rock with a tinge of microbiology, rather than the usual oaky, earthy scent of the rest of our running water. If I had to pick a color to represent that odor, I'd choose a light ochre, a combination of clay and sand.

After a decade of marvelous fishing on the river in its prime, I found myself there on a picnic with my wife and new baby girl. Spring was glorious. Alderflies hatched and skipped along the surface, and big brown trout were rising. My old friend Pete swung by, waders wet, eyes excited, and we visited briefly before he returned to his casting.

From our blanket on the grass overlooking the sunlit Housatonic, I realized my days of chasing trout at will were over for a long while—and they were. I'm free now and return regularly, but 40 years later the river shares my infirmities. Like Atlantic salmon returning home after four years at sea, following your nose leads you to the right place, but there is no guarantee that place is the same.

Given that the nostril/brain connection in a human is immediate, quicker than that of any other senses, and given that as a teenager I jumped off the local bridge and got water up my nose over and over, I may have imprinted on the Housy, even as a parr. My olfactory sensors, like yours, number more than a thousand, each receptive to only one molecule, and my sense of smell is thousands of times more effective than sight, taste, hearing, or touch. But it is no longer essential for human survival, if it ever was. That's why we are generally poor at odor recognition and identification—despite the profound sensitivity of our noses, we have no organized classification system for them like we do for colors and tastes.

Deaf/blind people use smells as compensation for their loss and it is tuned to tolerances much finer than yours and mine. Oenophiles can tell



Illustration Al Hassell

astonishing things about a sip of wine, not just the grape, but the climate the grape was grown in. And all of us remember events better if triggered by a scent. The perfume Tabu will always conjure for me high school dates and the steamed-up windows of my dad's car. When I knew this extended period of idyllic making out would take place, I'd carefully shave my pitiful whiskers in order to dab on my own culturally approved scent, Old Spice. And I'd worry all through the dance in the hot cafeteria that I was sweating too much to lift my arm onto the seatback as she snuggled close on the ride to the church parking lot overlooking our sleeping town. Sound familiar? Our attraction to other people is based on pheromones, unconsciously perceived, and that opinion is then confirmed rather than decided by looks, personality, and even perfume.

A fish's nostrils are only for smelling (gills do their breathing). During the transformation from parr to smolt, a salmon imprints the chemical composition of its home stream to memory, and continues this process on its way out to sea. Using those olfactory waypoints in reverse sequence is what enables it to return to the place of its birth. As amateurish as my own sense is, it opens a window into the ability of salmon to find a river mouth along the coastline and then perhaps the exact pool, the exact shallow, gravel-bedded, richly oxygenated tailout that it was born in years ago.


They say that ancient Polynesians used the smell and taste of ocean currents to make their thousand-mile voyages. Were those South Pacific senses once tuned to a level far beyond our own by evolution and genetics? Like having perfect pitch, could a human detect fresh water from a thunderstorm or a change in global currents

by a mere whiff of the ocean's surface? I wonder if the smell of unseen land—dirt and rock and coconut palms growing in the hot Pacific sun—thrilled those seagoing voyagers the way the smell of trout water does to me, the way many of our hearts lift at the scent of ocean.

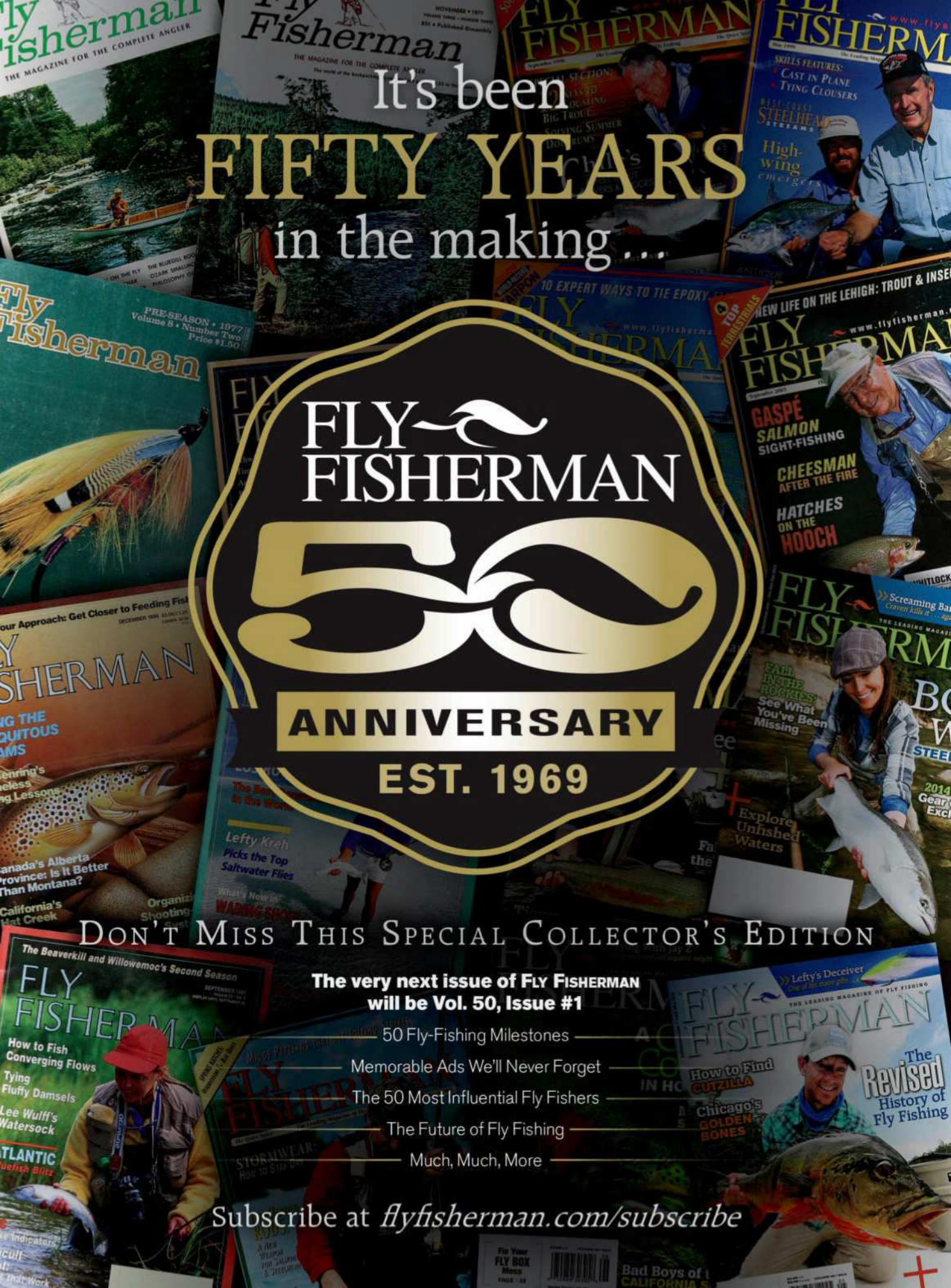
"Following one's nose" is an idiom meaning to trust your instincts, not just a phrase for the tracing of a scent to its source. Once on a stream, both are true. Working a familiar stretch of a familiar stream with a fly rod, though it always yields surprises, feels like a well-worn path in the brain. Like an endorphin trail trampled by continuous drug or alcohol use, the path that leads to addiction by repetition, one's mind is programmed as well as comforted by the enchanting, unchanging flow of one's home river.

Just as the river carved a channel in bedrock over geologic time, it has carved a path from brain to heart. This path is filled with memories: sights, sounds, and smells, anticipation and disappointment, physical connection with creatures, the eternal movement of molecules. But the gate only opens when my nose detects it. Lest you become jealous, be aware that this intimate connection to a loved place evaporates when I'm not in close proximity.

I often try to remember the fragrance of the Housy in the fullness of late spring. Like a sublime classical melody I once knew but no longer do, from a concerto whose name is on the tip of my tongue, that aroma has evaporated. It's as lost as the days once spent jumping off that bridge.

Last fall I determined that a final trip to the river, with fly rod, was in order before winter set in. You understand . . . I just had to do it once more. I brought back home with me a Mason jar full of Housatonic water, to smell it out of context. It sits here on my desk. If I open it, it'll bring up memories and associations from my treasured 40 years of fly fishing there. Pretty soon it'll be time to dump it out, but not yet. Not just yet. 

George Jacobi lives and works in Mansfield, Connecticut, adjacent to the University of Connecticut and Eastern Connecticut State University. His artistic pursuits jump from writing to music to visual art. He is a fly fisherman, a hiker, and an amateur naturalist. His website is georgejacobiartist.com.



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Following One's Nose

“If I knew the way, I would take you home”

Robert Hunter

▲ GEORGE JACOBI

SUPPOSE I BLINDFOLD you the next time we go fishing, drive for a couple of hours, and then open the door. Your first sensation is the sound of the river, right? Your second sensation—though I bet it happens unconsciously—is the scent of that waterway. Would you know where we are?

I am not a serious wine connoisseur or gourmet. My nose is an ordinary one, yet I realized last week that I know the odor of the Housatonic River. I can differentiate it from other streams by its bouquet. I have a few “home waters,” and this is one of them. For a trout fisherman like me, home water probably means a stream that has entertained many of the best parts of your angling life. You may even have considered having your ashes scattered there.

The Housatonic is different than any other New England river. It flows through the Marble Valley, where ancient seas left beds of mud, shells, and other marine fossils to be compressed and later metamorphosed into marble. That alkaline, silty smell of the Housy is part of my knowledge of the place and part of the affection I have for it. It comes from the limestone geology of the valley, dissolved and filtered through the water like tea.

It seems odd to talk of a scent so faint, so soft, it doesn't even rise to a conscious level most of the time, but it is genuinely distinct. I guess it doesn't hurt that I grew up along the Housy, but I find I know a few other trouty places by their scent as well. There is a landlocked salmon stream

in far northern Maine that I frequent. It's about the same distance away from here as my favorite Pennsylvania spring creek. There's no way I could mix the two up, blindfolded and ear-muffled, as soon as I got out of the car at either place. This information is not stored in the analytic part of the mind—it resides in the ever-so-short connection between my nose and my emotional right brain.

The smell of a river is part of its personality, how we recognize it. Like a landlocked salmon, I know when I'm home. To walk by the hatchery on the way to that Maine stream is to smell something so organic, so full of life that some noses shrink from it. Not mine. It carries the endless coniferous forest of Maine, the tannins from primeval bogs, and the centuries of salmon that have come home to restock their race over and again, all condensed within. It smells like living salmon. The same scent is present as well in the free-flowing, astonishingly clear water that pours over the dam and bubbles by on the right, past the apple tree that my wife made apple pie from on the trip my daughter was probably conceived. That apple tree, in each fall that I make it back there, is sending

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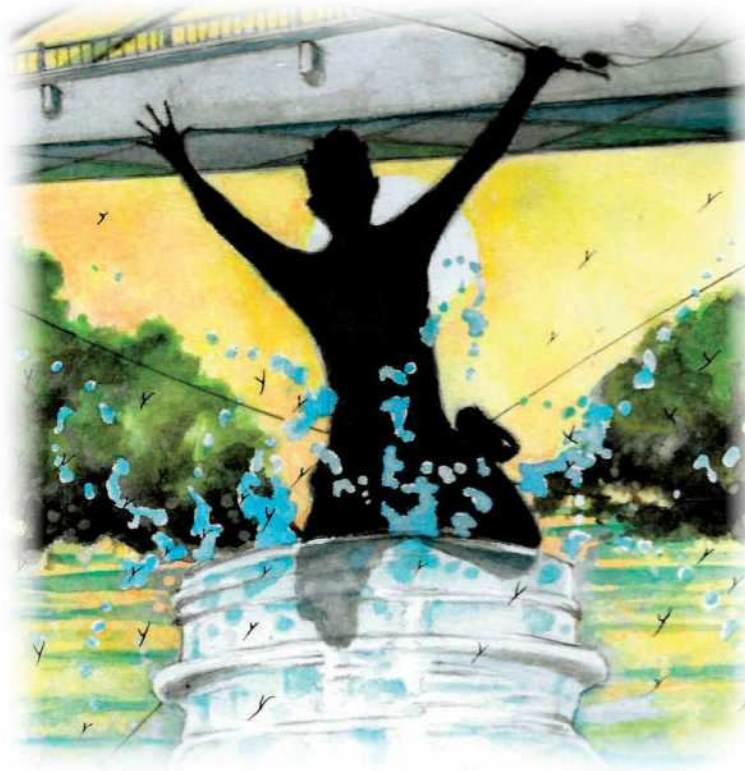


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