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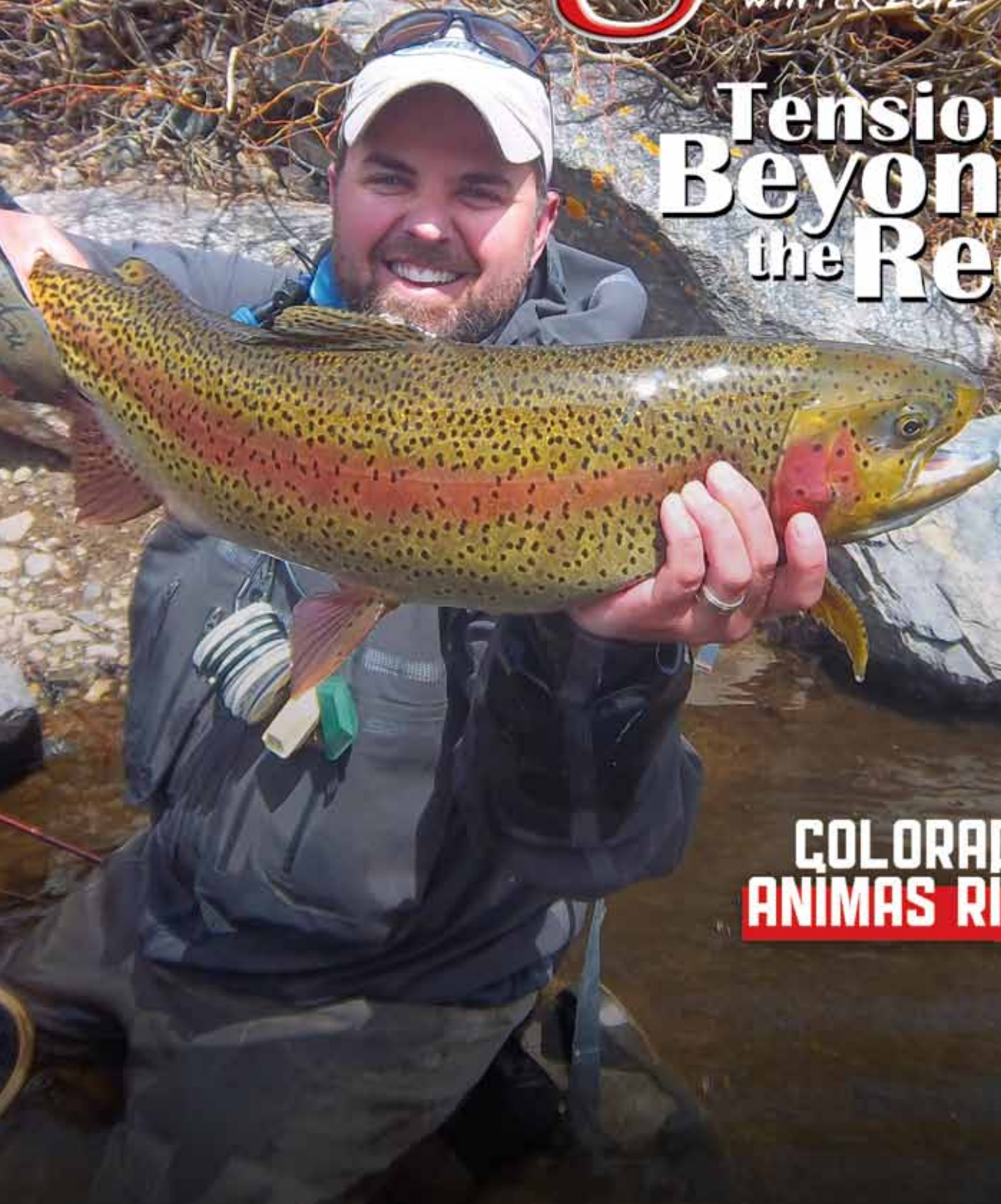
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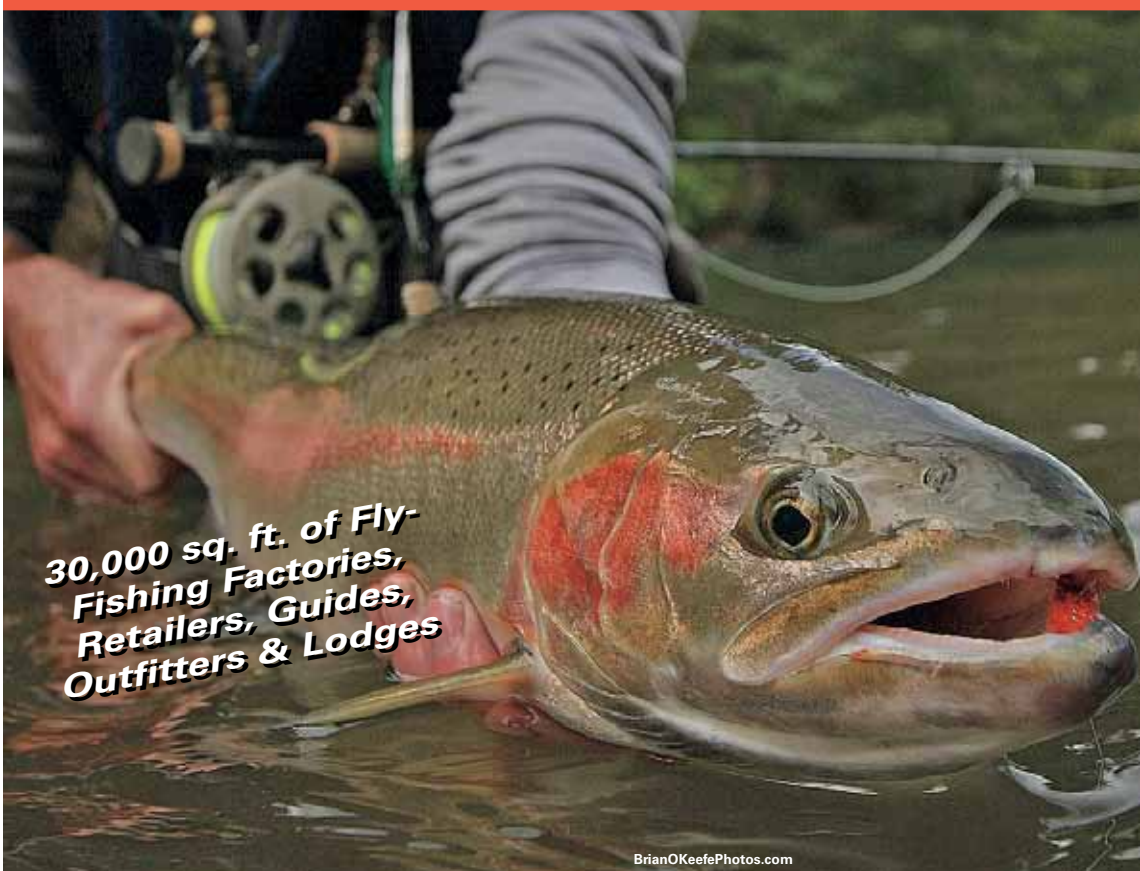
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April Vokey runs Fly Gal Ventures, guides BC's Dean River, writes for Fly Fusion, and is a master tier.



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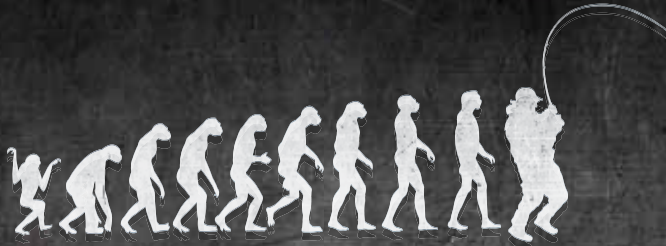
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# Show Season

I was well into my thirties before I had my first opportunity to fly fish. A group of guys from our church was heading to San Juan and invited me to go with them, so I jumped at the chance.

The list of gear I needed was longer than my budget, so I got most of it at Walmart. My first rod was a \$69 combo pack—the only one I could find without a picture of Barbie on it. And I found a pair of neoprene hunting waders with built-in rubber boots for about \$50. I found a cheap vest, a box of assorted flies, some cheap shades, and a handful of other accessories I thought I would need.

I looked like a walking Goodwill store on the river, but man did I have fun! I was hooked the minute I laid into my first 10” Rainbow. It took me ten minutes to get him into the net, and another ten to get him out, but what a thrill! Fly fishing was more

fun than a Yugo full of circus clowns, and I knew it was sport that I could get into.

Twenty years later, I still get a thrill every time I hook into a fish. And I’ve learned two important lessons along the way. The first is, equipment really does make a difference. Good gear isn’t cheap, but it’s worth every penny. And the second is, if you want to learn to fish, hang out with people who excel at the sport.

Each winter, you and I have a golden opportunity to meet both those objectives. The Fly Fishing Show comes to 7 different cities around the country, and the International Sportsmen’s Expo hosts events in 5 different cities, all between January and March. You can meet your favorite celebrity, and learn what’s new on the market, all under one roof. So mark your calendar and make a day of it. I’ll see you there!



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# Wandering About In Waders

I eased into my camp chair, feet blissfully free from the confines of waders and boots. The evening sun was setting below the distant mountain tops, the bourbon in my hand the crowning touch to a memorable day. It's a good thing fishing is neither an exercise in sound economics, nor rational thinking. If it were either, I reflected, all but a few touched souls would pack it in for more sentient pursuits, like predicting earthquakes or calling the lottery.

It was our last night camping on the South Fork of the White River, near Meeker, Northwestern Colorado, a stretch of water of stunning beauty, crystal clarity, and for a couple of hacks like Caveman and myself, largely devoid of fish. I did the math: three days fishing, twenty six miles hiked, for a personal tally of three fish landed and two broken off. Caveman had fared marginally better—he'd beaten me by two fish: a tail-hooked cutthroat and a whitefish. I'll give him a hard time about the whitey for years to come.

With stew bubbling in the pot, cold beer aplenty, and the October night rapidly darkening and cooling, we wished we had another day at our disposal, another opportunity to push deeper into the heart of one of the most stunningly beautiful places I've had the privilege to fish. The White flows out of the Flat Tops Wilderness Area—a place I'd heard little mention of. The occasional fisherman I'd guided who knew of it commended it for its beauty and lack of a crowd. I subscribe to the viewpoint that the function of famous rivers is to keep most people away from the really good ones. The river flows along a road less traveled—most fishermen passing through Meeker continue north to Dutch John, and the waters of the Green.

The origins of the Flat Tops Wilderness Area trace back to the vision of Arthur Carhart, a Forest Service surveyor who made an impassioned plea to his superiors for its protection in 1919. While there is an obvious irony to the term "wilderness management," Carhart was the first Forest Service employee to grasp that

some places deserve being left alone to just be, and we are all the richer for it.

We spent our first day near Trappers Lake, on a delightful little tributary of the North Fork that cascaded out of a serpentine valley thick with spruce, the occasional stand of aspen shimmering like golden beacons in a vast sea of green. Tall timber and a low sun kept the stream's course in perpetual shade. Snow lay in patches on the ground, and across the tops of deadfall spruce that crisscrossed the stream in places, making the fishing tight and technical.

By late afternoon, we'd advanced three or so miles from camp, the gradient of the stream never quite leveling off to create consistent holding water. Nevertheless, we landed a couple of lovely little brookies, at the cost of multiple flies lost to the

trees, logjams and undergrowth. Hiking back up out of the valley to regain the trail, we headed downstream to camp, determining to try our luck on the South Fork the next day.

This was a different proposition—bigger, wider, faster—a bona fide river in its own right. The water was crystal clear, reminding me somewhat of New Zealand, its depth difficult to ascertain. Charging downhill from its origins near ten thousand feet, it cut a course straight and true, its velocity unfettered by the meanderings that are the hallmarks of a lesser gradient.

Good holding water was sparse. On the north-facing slopes, spruce stood straight and tall to the river's edge, the low-arc sun backlighting the aspen and scrub oak on the opposite bank in neon splendor, while toward the head of the valley basalt cliffs rose imposing, dusted with snow. Fall is absolutely the best time of the year to be in the mountains, a humbling reminder of the transience of



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life, and all living things.

This terrain dictated long stretches of in-river wading with multiple crossings. We'd seek out placid places, side channels, pockets behind larger boulders, and the insides of an occasional bend. While I was fishing a rare side channel, a large fish rose up from the bottom of a deep trench, lazily inspected my dry fly, and returned, phantom-like, to its station. For the next forty five minutes I tried unsuccessfully to coax it back up, exhausting my fly selection, before tipping my hat to it and moving upstream.

The fish I did land during two days of trying here was a beautiful rainbow, sixteen inches, that threatened to overpower my three weight as it charged cross-current for a log jam, before I was able to turn it and coax it into the shallows. It had sat in a barely discernible depression in the riverbed, invisible to the eye, a perfect predator lurking.

But it is the fish that broke me off late on the second day that I'll remember. The sun was already low, shadows masking the riverbed, when I happened upon a slow moving pool, a tail out from a small rapid, across the far side of the river. Deep, fast water between me and the pool precluded

wading across, and overhanging spruce at my back made a backcast problematic.

The only feature I could make out in the pool was a large boulder, two or three feet below the surface. Wading out as far as I felt prudent, I was able to roll cast across and into the pool, a couple of aggressive mends buying me perhaps five seconds of drift. After five minutes or so without success, I decided to move on, heaving out one last cast. As my indicator floated past the boulder, it gave a little stutter and I set. Something heavy twisted and writhed upon itself, flashing silver in the depths of the pool. With my rod tip bucking and flexing in response, the fish turned and charged downstream, me mid-river, rooted to the spot, my predicament dawning on me. I'd given no thought to what to do if I hooked up. As I scrambled back up to dry land, there was a loud crack, my indicator shot high in the air and settled on the water, and my rig was gone with it.

My shoulders sagged. Elation to misery, victory to defeat, in less time than it takes a Porsche to go from zero to sixty. I waved the white flag, wound in my line, and sought out Caveman for the long hike to camp. As we made our way wearily

downstream, we encountered a cowboy, packing up into the hills from whence we'd come.

"How's the fishing?"

"Pretty slow, but it sure is beautiful up there."

He nodded agreement. "How far up did you get?"

"About seven miles or so."

He nodded again. "Doesn't get any good 'till ten," he replied, tipped his hat and rode on into the gathering dusk.

Back in camp, we studied the map. Maybe the cowboy's right, but we'll have to wait for next year to find out. Besides, when it comes to fishing, "good" is a relative term. It was plenty good enough for me.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

A native of New Zealand, Hayden first came to the Colorado mountains in 1990. He has spent over twenty years guiding on many rivers both in Colorado and New Zealand. While not on the river with a rod or oars in his hands, Hayden works in real estate, and enjoys mountain biking, snowboarding, raising his two daughters to be good stewards of the land, and writing his blog at [www.flyfishsalida.com](http://www.flyfishsalida.com).

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# Tension Beyond the Reel

by *Landon Mayer*



One of the most common phrases used in fly fishing is a “drag free drift”—removing tension from your leader and line by mending up or downstream. While this technique can be effective in achieving depth in your drift, sometimes tension can produce better results in the low clear water of winter. As anglers, we deal with tension on a regular basis: tension in the cast, tension in the fight, tension between you and the trout. However, the one area where tension is overlooked is during the presentation. With winter supplying low clear water conditions, it is not uncommon for a trout to hold in shallow water while looking for warmth, cover, oxygen, and food. This is when you want to break the mold and go beyond drag free drifts—allowing a swinging tension of your fly.

I always teach others to start light with your weight, and high in the water column, giving the trout a chance to lift to consume the food source. This keeps you from going too deep too early, spooking the fish. Similarly, by applying tension, you keep your fly in the top or middle columns where suspended feeding trout tend to lie without the pitfalls of the drag free counterpart. With the tension drift, strikes are detected easier, the flies ride above the river bottom preventing snags, and lastly with a swing or a twitch, you can place your fly into the trout’s viewing lane more accurately. The following three tips will help you have more success using tension:

## *The Arm Roll Cast*

The arm roll eliminates false casting above the trout. The cast helps you keep tension on the fly or flies, which helps you load the rod at short distances and places the fly in the same location each time. You can perform this cast with three feet or thirty feet of line out of the tip, while keeping tension to the line, leader and tippet as it moves behind you.

Start with your rod tip at the surface of the water, pointing downstream. Then keeping your arm straight, bring your arm in an upward rolling motion on the back cast. Continue the roll through the forward stroke, ending at the water’s surface where you want your flies to go. To complete the cast, add a reach on the forward cast before the rod tip stops at the water’s surface. This works well in fast-moving water when you are rapidly presenting a fly to a fish without the time to mend. The cast is simple, and it is the most effective way I have found to present the flies to wary trout.

## *Tension Drift*

In shallow water drifts, it is hard to keep from snagging the river bottom. Snags spook the trout, because pulling the rig free disturbs the water. Tension drifts or moving flies in shallow runs will keep your rig off the bottom. This also gives you more control of the drift and may trigger a strike when the flies swing in front of the trout. When you drift to the fish, keep your flies just above or slightly to the side of the trout—preferably on the side where you are standing. This will keep your flies from rubbing or snagging the trout if it does not eat on the first or second drift. If you are off, instead of picking up your flies to recast and maybe spooking the fish, simply strip in line (or feed line out) to compensate.

The goal is to control the flies as they drift naturally back toward the bank you are standing on. Do this by keeping tension on the flies, even after you have mended the line, placing it above the flies. Make sure your presentation is slightly short of the trout as it drifts downstream,

allowing the fish a chance to turn and take the fly without lining or spooking. Six inches can make or break your presentation, so start short and allow the trout to turn and take the fly.

### Tension Lift

Each position above, across-stream, or below, requires a specific rod position to set the hook. When you are above the fish, the challenge is to lift and put tension on the trout without pulling the fly out of its mouth. Any vertical lift from the rod pulls the fly away from the trout's jaw. You must be patient when the trout takes the fly, and make sure when you see the fish eat it has closed its mouth on the fly. Once you see the take, lift your arm, keeping the rod vertical to the trout with a slight bend in the rod. The tension and power from the trout are on your reel without applying too much power, which might allow the trout to break off.

To perform the set correctly: After the trout takes your fly, lift the rod at a 45-degree downstream angle or sideways, with the rod tip a foot or so above the water. Don't allow the rod tip to break the plane of your shoulder. Once the tip has broken the imaginary line from your shoulder downstream, the rod has reached its maximum flex, allowing the trout to break off. When the trout begins to shake its head, bring your rod back to a vertical position. The fly will be in the corner of the trout's jaw, the best place to apply maximum tension and control during the rest of the fight.

If you are below the trout, your hook set is a little bit more forgiving. The main objective is to elevate the rod to place the fly correctly. Remember that your main goal after the set is to gain control: get to the river's edge and move upstream to prevent the fish from swimming upstream and finding structure, or bolting downstream at you, causing the line to go slack.

Keep your rod pointed at 11 o'clock throughout the lift, and raise your arm as you lift the rod. This keeps your rod high enough to get the proper tension on your line: your arm adds more length. By keeping the rod at 11 o'clock, you can drop the rod tip to adjust to a run when the trout begins to fight. To maximize the hook set, make sure that you wait until the trout closes its mouth on the fly before you lift.

With powder days offering rewards on the water, timing tension becomes a crucial part of productive casts, drifts and sets for the year's wariest trout. Try these tips the next time you find winter trout feeding in shallow water.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

Landon Mayer is a veteran Colorado guide and author of several books, including the upcoming Colorado's Best Fly Fishing, due out in August 2011 from Stackpole books. He has co-produced 2 fly fishing DVDs with John Barr, both available from Mad Trout Media. Visit Landon's website at [www.landonmayer.com](http://www.landonmayer.com).



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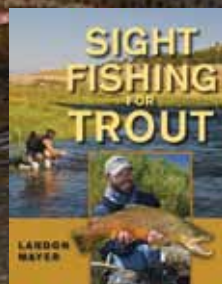
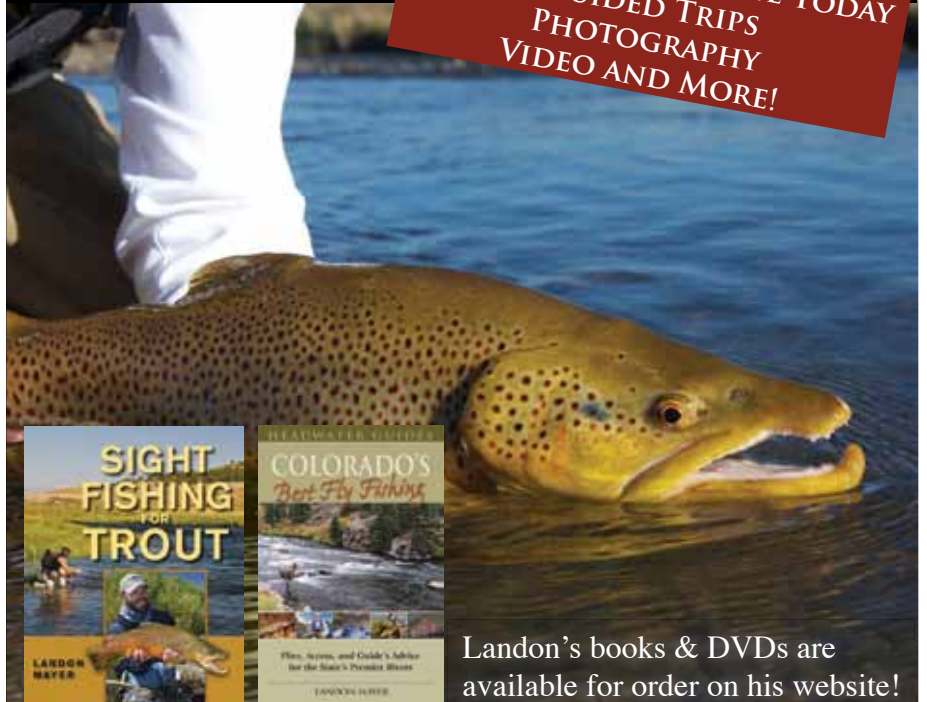
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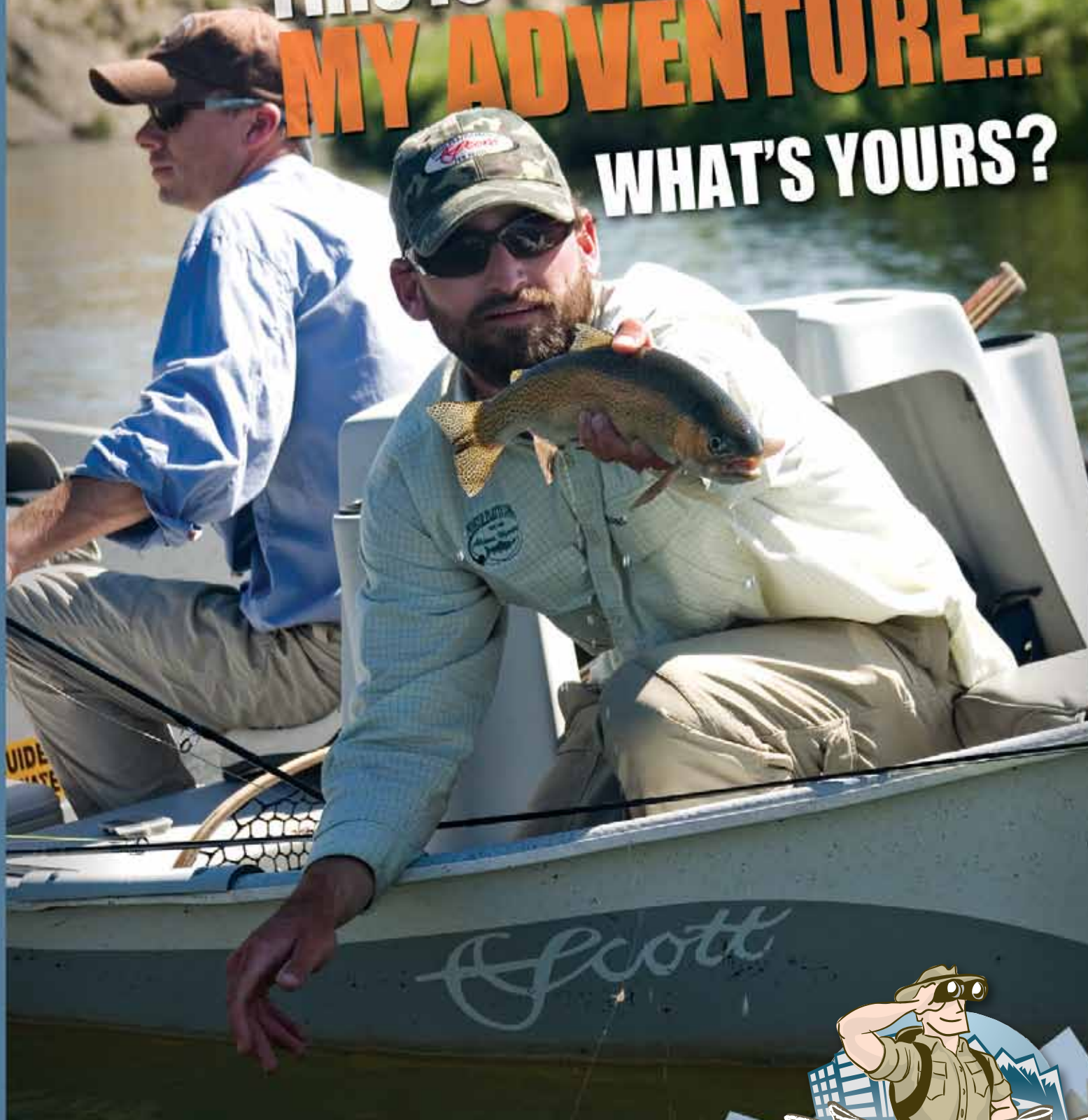
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# The Ides of March



Given the opportunity, I could sleep through winter and emerge in March, refreshed and as new as a stonefly that just molted for the last time. I am writing this article during Thanksgiving week, and giving thanks that in around three months, March will appear, along with the hope for a new fishing season. Winter simply does not intrigue me much anymore. I was never big on Turkey, and Christmas, with the exception of the celebration of Christ's birth, seems to only hold magic for children, as well it should.

I understand, that even though I used to fish in the winter and enjoy it, the ice on the rod guides and my frozen fingertips hinted that perhaps my mind was slipping, and that I was only trying to convince myself that I was having fun. Like my first ski weekend in 1966, when I fell down the mountain all weekend and proclaimed that I was a skier by golly, and that it was great fun. When I really learned how to ski, it really was fun. I know that I am

supposed to support the fly fishing industry by trying to convince everyone that winter fishing is great fun and equitable to fly fishing the rest of the year, but it simply is not unless you are in Argentina where it is now summer, and the dragon flies are hatching on the Rio Manso. Darn it, it's just cold in the Rocky Mountains during January and February!

Before I get too carried away with my disdain for winter, let's discuss what really can be fun for a fly fisherman like me during the cold months. I know that the young guys like my son and others really do like fishing during the winter, so try to think like an old man for a minute. That shouldn't be too hard for some of you. Perhaps, over the past year, I have just become older (not old, mind you; there is a difference). I used to fish the Frying Pan on January 1 every year just to start out the year on the right note. Now, I like to sit near a fire with a glass of scotch and watch DVDs of last spring's BWO hatch, or watch a college football game just to remind me how much the BCS has messed up the college game. Now, you may think that I'm just an old grouch, but I'm not, at least according to me. Spring just puts me in a better mood.

The Ides of March, at least according to the Roman calendar, means the middle of the month, or approximately the 15th. In Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, poor old Julius needed to "beware the ides of March" according to the local soothsayer. Soothsayer is a good job, if you can get it. I've tried forever to be one in relationship to fly fishing, but very few folks are willing to heed my warnings. Warnings such as, "calling a bobber a strike indicator will quickly fade away in the sport"—a statement made by me in 1993. Another prediction around the same time was that using beads on the heads of nymphs would be a passing fad, and that no one in their right mind would continue to try to make a fly into a lure. So therefore, my soothsaying has had about the same success rate as the Debt Commission's work.

But I digress. So, what can you do during winter if you fall into my category? Well, since bead head nymphs have certainly not disap-



## C-4 STONE

**HOOK:** HEAVY SCUD HOOK # 6/8  
**BEAD:** 3/16 BURNT ORANGE LUCENT TUNGSTEN  
**THREAD:** 6/0 TAN  
**UNDERBODY:** TUNGSTEN STRETCH LACE  
**TAIL:** TAN GOOSE BIOTS  
**RIB:** MED. AMBER WIRE  
**BACK:** 1/4" CLEAR ACUD BACK  
**ABDOMEN:** GOLDEN BROWN ICE DUB  
**TRIGGER SPOT:** CHINESE RED UNI FLEX

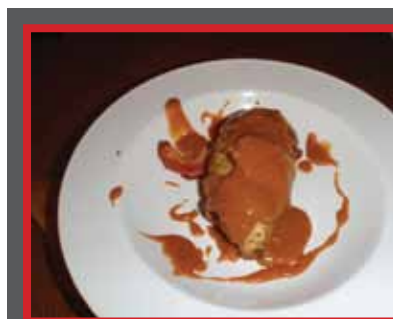
peared from the face of the earth, I am embracing them by tying up Czech nymphs for the spring. If you're going to make a nymph heavy, then let's wrap an anvil on the sucker. Czech nymphing has grown out of international competition where it is illegal to use split shot or strike indicators. Since the Europeans and others have made it illegal to use bobbers and lead, I think that they are on to something. A #6 nymph with two tungsten beads and several wraps of heavy lead underneath the body is simply turning the split shot into a fly, but at least it's a fly. I have even, over the years, come to admire the beauty of many of the new bead head nymph patterns. The fact that they are imaginative and look good, though, does not seem to overwhelm the fish if you can't get a drift.

Czech nymphing seems to not consider the drift so much as it focuses on getting to the bottom in a hurry so the fish sees the offering. You are even taught to drag the system downstream at times, just to keep from hanging up and to keep the fly in front of the fish. This seems to work like a vacuum cleaner as the deep running systems pile up the numbers if you're into that sort of thing. That's pretty cool as well, because you can fish totally different than how we were taught. For years



## C-4 CADDIS

**HOOK:** HEAVY SCUD HOOK #6/8  
**BEAD:** 3/16 BLACK TUNGSTEN  
**THREAD:** 6/0 BLACK  
**UNDERBODY:** TUNGSTEN LACE  
**RIB:** MED BLACK WIRE  
**BACK:** 1/4" CLEAR SCUD BACK  
**BODY:** CHARTREUSE RABBIT WITH CADDIS GREEN ICE DUB AND GREEN ANGORA



## BACON WRAPPED CHICKEN BREAST WITH CHIPOTLE DRIZZLE

Pound a Chicken breast until flattened, season it with salt, pepper, and dried oregano. Spread a chunky mixture of Portabella chunks and chopped onion and wrap up the breast like a burrito. Wrap the breast with bacon slices and bake for 45 minutes at 350 degrees. Make a Chipotle drizzle by putting a can of Chipotles in adobo sauce in the blender with a few cloves of chopped garlic, some chopped onion, a tablespoon of hot chili powder, a handful of cilantro, and a small can of tomato sauce. If you want it hotter, add a fresh Jalapeño or Habenero.



## CHEDDAR, BACON & BEER SOUP

- 1/2 lb. smoked, sliced bacon
- 1/2 cup butter
- 2 small leeks, trimmed, chopped
- 2 onions, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 cup flour
- 6 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups of Fat Tire Micro Brew (drink the rest)
- 2 pounds of yukon gold potatoes
- 1 1/2 lbs. grated Vermont Cheddar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon coarse ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 cup heavy cream

Render the bacon and set aside. Sauté onions, garlic and leeks in bacon grease and then melt 1/2 cup of butter into bacon grease and then gradually stir in flour until you have a roux. Pour in chicken broth and beer and place small pieces of the potatoes to blanch until fork tender. Season with salt and pepper and blend with a boat motor (hand held soup blender) until smooth in texture. Melt in and stir the cheddar cheese. Finish with the heavy cream and add back in the bacon—either torn or chopped. Dollop a little more grated cheese on top for serving. This stuff is like eating pure gold.

now, I have proclaimed that I will only work on fish that will play in the top 12" of the water column.....i.e. dry flies and wets. I'm getting pretty tired of not catching many fish, even though the top is still what I prefer. So this winter I am going to acquire a 10ft 5wt graphite rod and tie up a bunch of Czech nymphs that look like a Nash Metropolitan. I will be ready for the Ides of March, molting stoneflies, and oh yes, the cane rod and the #20 Blue Quills will still stand by, ready for action.

If you are tying this winter, take a look at Larry Kingrey's new Czech nymphs, the C-4 (stands for the explosive) series. One is a Stonefly and the other is a mega Caddis Larva. Both are deadly. Food recipes should be warm and hearty during the winter. I've thrown out a Chicken Breast drizzled with a Chipotle sauce and a bowl of Wisconsin Cheddar/Bacon/Beer soup which includes three ingredients that no one should live without, cheese, pork fat, and Fat Tire. Go for a walk after eating it though, if you want to live to see the spring.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

Bill Edrington is a retired sociology/criminology professor who has owned Royal Gorge Anglers for over 20 years. He has authored several books and magazine articles. You may follow his fly fishing and cooking adventures on his new blog "Tight Lines and Tasty Spoons" at [www.tightlinesandtastyspoons.blogspot.com](http://www.tightlinesandtastyspoons.blogspot.com).

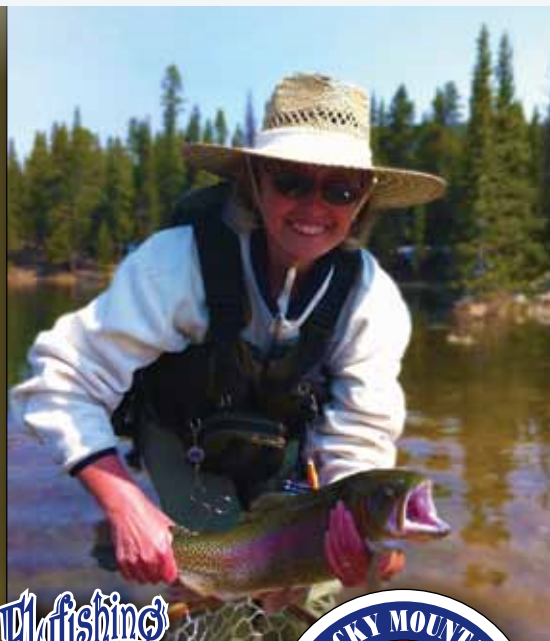
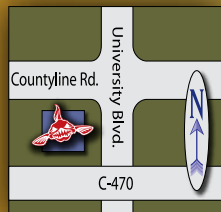
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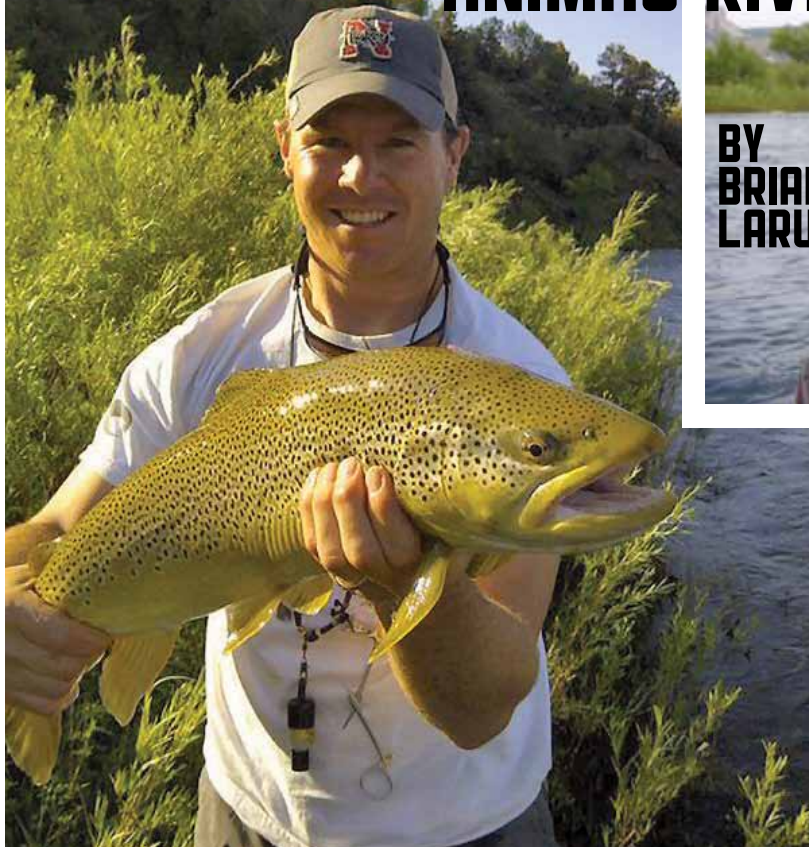
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# COLORADO'S ANIMAS RIVER



BY  
BRIAN  
LARUE



the 18- to 24-inch range, you will not add to this notion of lost souls.

Throwing yellow, white, or black streamers, or baby trout patterns will always produce. If you're wading, toss your streamer on a sinking line and give it plenty of action at the head or tail of a pool. In winter and spring, try bouncing something like a Woolly Bugger along the bottom, and pair it with eye-catching nymph.

Fishing in the cooler months before runoff is simply awesome here, and anglers enjoy opportunistic rainbows and browns for the most part. During the coldest part of winter when flows are low and water temperatures are at their lowest of the year, your standard smaller nymphs

When most folks think of fly fishing in the Durango area, they think of the San Juan, some 45-minutes away, but in fact, fantastic fishing can be found almost anytime on one of Colorado's few freestone rivers right in town. Try the Animas River today.

This gem is loaded with 12- to 14-inch trout, and you can fish it right through town, or take an adventure and explore some wild water away from Durango's city limits. This is a true freestone river—one of Colorado's last remaining—and it is home to some healthy monsters, too.

"There are over two miles of Gold Medal water two blocks from the shop," said Durango-based, San Juan Angler (www.sanjuanangler.com/970-382-9978) head guide and former Team USA Fly Fishing member Brian Capsay. "The river has over twenty miles of floatable water several months of the year, and lots of wading access, so there are a lot of options any time of the year."

The Animas is wide and easily accessible for wade fishing. Capsay suggests throwing streamers to browns on this fishery known as the "River of Lost Souls." Hopefully, if you connect with a brown in





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and midges will do best. Tie on size 20-22 RS2s, blood midges, and zebra midges. These patterns will produce when fished behind larger Princes and Copper Johns in size 18.

As things begin to warm up with the approaching spring, start using bigger flies in the 16-18 range. Egg patterns, gold-ribbed Hare's ears, and flashback pheasant tails will start to kick in. Runoff is always feared on rivers in the Rockies, particularly freestone rivers, but runoff fishing can be quite good on the Animas as the seams along the banks become great holding spots. Quick flips with streamers along the banks, or a nymph rig will typically produce fast takes as these fish will come out of hiding for a meal.

Little do most anglers know, but the Animas has a reputation for its caddis hatches. Capsay says the Animas' caddis hatches are equal to anything in the West. You can capitalize on these great hatches from May through June. Bring a buff or something else to cover your mouth. They get thick and you'll get a mouthful should you yawn. No worries, though—action is fast and furious on this fishery, so it's doubtful that you'll ever yawn! In

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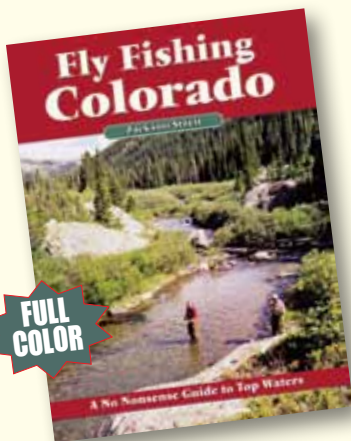


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addition to these prolific caddis hatches, mayflies also make a good showing. This means incredible dry fly fishing. There's even a solid stonefly population as well.

"The patterns that best match the caddis on the Animas are olive elk hair, tan elk hair, peacock CDCs, Goddard or a Henryville," adds Capsay. "If blue winged olives are around, tie on parachute Adams, parachute BWOs or an Umpqua Gulper special in sizes 14 to 20."

Lastly, the term freestone can be misleading here. The Animas is a healthy river, so stick with a 9-foot, 5-weight to control your casts and have the power to turn the head of a quality brown. If you're strictly going to throw dries, then, of course, you can throw a lighter setup. Tell 'em La Rue sent you!

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

High Country Angler contributor Brian La Rue enjoys giving fly fishers ideas of where to go for an adventure. His work can also be seen at his Examiner.com Denver Fly Fishing page. You can contact Brian by writing to [brian@HCAmagazine.com](mailto:brian@HCAmagazine.com).

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# Blue Ribbon or Bust? by Peter Stitcher

There is a common dream shared by every fly fisherman I know, and that is to one day own a piece of blue ribbon fly fishing water. But before you sign on the dotted line it is critical to make sure that the prospective water contains the necessary components to grow and hold trophy fish. When I talk with an individual looking at purchasing a piece of water, I often compare it to the purchase of a house. A savvy investor always makes sure that the property is structurally sound, that it is well built, and that it isn't infested by pests. Likewise, when looking at a piece of water, it is essential to examine the structural elements of the fishery: water quality, habitat, forage, and competition.

## Quality Water is Key

The single most important factor separating a trophy fishery from a sterile puddle is water quality. A laboratory analysis of the potential fishery will provide more than 23 parameters vital to fish health, such as nutrient, mineral, and metal levels. This test will show if the resource is prone to vegetation and algae blooms due to nutrient loading, if it has the capacity to balance chemical and pH shifts without endangering your fish, or if there are concentrations of metals that would be toxic to certain species. When looking at a lake or pond, it is recommended that dissolved oxygen (DO) and temperature profiles are conducted to determine what type of fish can survive in the resource and how much of the water column they can utilize.

## Room to Grow

When I say the word "habitat", I am speaking to more than just the volume of a resource, but to a diversity of structures, depths, flows, and substrates. Undercut banks, large boulders, root wads, and large wood provide protection from terrestrial predators and are excellent holding water for fish. Gravel substrates in streams or over springs are essential for trout reproduction. A moderate coverage of aquatic vegetation provides cover for young fish and food for invertebrates. The proportion and distribution of riffles, runs, and pools will directly affect how many fish the water can support and how big they can grow. A habitat assessment takes into account all of these variables.

## What's for Dinner?

To create a true, sustainable trophy fishery, it is essential to have an abundant, reproducing, natural forage base. I routinely receive calls from clients who supplement the diets of their fish with trout chow and wonder why they can never catch one on a fly! Aquatic invertebrates make up a majority of the food in most fisheries. Invertebrate sampling can tell you not



only the raw weight and distribution of these vital forage species, but what flies to tie on and where!

## Who's Home?

Just like a house, a piece of water can only hold so many bodies. Hundreds of rough fish (suckers or other non-game species) can stunt a fishery as easily as an over abundance of young trout. Other resources may be harboring top predators such as Northern Pike or Tiger Muskie just waiting for some plump stockers to be added to the buffet. Seeing is believing in this industry, and before you take someone's word that they are selling a piece of blue rib-

bon water, have a fisheries survey conducted to see who is really at home. A fisheries survey usually entails electro-shocking the resource to capture, measure, and then release a large percentage of the fish, to provide the necessary data to see what fish are present and how healthy each species is. Short of putting your head in the water, nothing will provide you with a better understanding of the health and makeup of the fishery. Almost every piece of water has the potential to become a trophy fishery. Arm yourself with sound scientific data to guide your search, and may familiar paths take you to waters where trophy trout always rise to your dry.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

Peter Stitcher is an Aquatic Biologist with Aqua Sierra Inc., specializing in the development and enhancement of trophy fishing waters. Fly fishing is not just his job, but his consuming passion. You can contact Peter at: [peterstitcher@aqua-sierra.com](mailto:peterstitcher@aqua-sierra.com).

# Newspaper Nymph

There is no right way to tie a fly—only your way. While we do have standard patterns, evolving materials, techniques, and tools are much of the fun of fly tying. As such, as tiers, we may focus on the new to the exclusion of the old.

Continuing my theme of the unusual and uncommon, here is a pattern that isn't new, since it has been around for decades, but isn't all that old either, because it uses synthetic materials. When I say synthetic, your mind probably races to the latest dubbing or winging material in a shiny package. Or maybe to the recently discovered oddity sold in bulk at the craft store just waiting to be adapted to a bug impression.

Well, think much simpler than that. Think common, in your house somewhere already. Think rubber band. Gasp! A low-tech rubber band from my local newspaper? Emphatically

When your unsuspecting buddy wants to know how come you are getting so many hook-ups, tell him to read the newspaper.



- Hook:** Nymph, swimming nymph or curved shank, #8
- Thread:** Black, 6/0
- Weight:** 0.020 lead
- Body:** Rubber band
- Head:** Green or black dubbing or peacock

yes. Here's why: it's easy to attach to the hook, starts small and thin if stretched, creates taper and bulk when relaxed, realistic segmentation, single body material, low cost, multiple colors, simple, quick to tie, and very durable against fish teeth.

Having fished this unusual fly for decades, it is my go-to pattern. My favorite version, likely imitating a caddis larva, is a medium sized red rubber band on a #8 weighted long shank swimming nymph hook. Try other colors (white and tan are good) and different widths – thin and thick, small and large hooks, and various heads and legging. When dead-drifted upstream in current as the dropper fly on a standard two fly, weighted leader, takes are hard and obvious.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

Joel Evans is a fly fishing writer, photographer, and long-time member of Trout Unlimited from Montrose, CO. You can contact him via the HCA editor at frank@hcamagazine.com.

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# Keeping Our Rivers Clean



regions of high-alpine rock and ice, places like the Alpine Triangle in Southwestern Colorado are the origin of major headwaters streams (in this case the Uncompahgre, Animas, and Lake Fork of the Gunnison). Protection of these and other critical headwaters areas matter most because this is where water begins its journey as snowmelt, eventually feeding rivers and streams with pulses of cold, clean water.

critical for the overall health of the watershed. When streams are “broken,” say with a culvert, dam, or a diversion, fish can’t migrate between their lower-elevation habitat and the critical cooler, higher elevation reaches. The habitat is chopped up and fragmented, and does not perform biologically as well as when the ecosystem is fully connected. In Colorado, TU is currently working on a number of projects to reconnect important streams, including recently completed work on Tomichi Creek and on Elkhead Creek near Steamboat. There are other important projects being done all around the state by our grassroots members, staff and partners.

Nearly everyone reading this article discovered Trout Unlimited through his or her passion for fly-fishing. You may know the history of Trout Unlimited—that TU was founded in Michigan by group of anglers who discovered a direct correlation between the health of a river and consistent success catching big, beautiful trout. The founders of Trout Unlimited set out to protect these places for the benefit of their communities, anglers, and future generations.

Over time, TU has continued to evolve as a coldwater conservation organization with its roots firmly planted in the sport of fly fishing. Because our members consist primarily of anglers who are drawn to TU by their passion for angling and rivers, we still hear questions from members and nonmembers about why TU sometimes takes on seemingly “political” issues, instead of simply promoting the angling tradition more generally.


In Colorado, we are blessed with the best, most abundant, and in many cases, the healthiest places to enjoy this passion. It’s no coincidence that there is also a strong and vibrant TU presence. Our staff, chapters, member-volunteers, and partners work throughout our state every day to conserve, protect, and restore the places where we all love to fish. We do this work using methodical, common sense strategies that guide our activities. We refer to this strategy as the “PRRS model,” which stands for Protect, Reconnect, Restore and Sustain. In Colorado, we apply this model to successfully tackle the challenges facing the future health of our rivers, streams and trout across the state. Please allow me to explain:

**Protect** – This generally refers to places like headwater areas that are critical to the long-term health of our most important watersheds. While composed of mostly roadless


protected, than the rivers and streams downstream are less likely to sustain healthy populations of trout—meaning fewer epic hatches and less successful catches.

**Reconnect** – Reconnecting streams are

**Restore** – Most TU members are very aware of Restore projects, since so many of our 23 locally-based chapters have restored hundreds of stream miles within their home watersheds. In 2011, a couple of major projects were completed, including riparian planting along on Trapper Creek on the Roan Plateau, home to one of the most genetically unique populations of Colorado River cutthroat trout. A second section of river restoration on Clear Creek near Mayhem Gulch was recently com-



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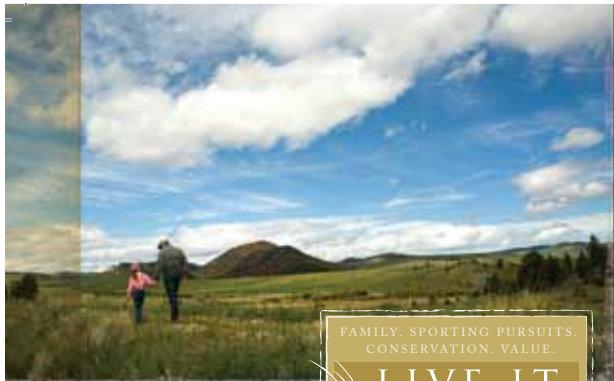
pleted, and local volunteers continue restoration work on the Middle Fork of the South Platte near Fairplay. A number of new projects are on tap for 2012, including work on the Purgatoire River in Trinidad and on Lightner and Hermosa Creeks in the Durango area. Restoration work represents one of TU's strongest strategies – we do a lot of it and are very good at it because of the dedication of our boots-on-the-ground member-volunteers!

**Sustain** – Sustaining our work to protect and restore our rivers and streams is often pursued outside of the stream itself. Recruiting new members, educating our youth, monitoring water quality, and finding ways to build community support and awareness for our rivers are all important ways to ensure the vitality of streams into the future. We even work at in the State Legislature and on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. to make sure laws made there support the health of our rivers and streams here in Colorado. Partnerships with businesses, communities, and other organizations who are interested in keeping these places viable are other effective ways to sustain these resources for future generations. Supporting your local fly shops and outfitters also helps, since they are the eyes and ears of the river every day, and are most directly impacted if a river's health starts to decline. Our partnership with Upslope Brewing, through the 1% for Rivers program, highlights how everyday businesses care about our water, and are willing to pledge some profit towards working together to sustain our resources.

Using the PRRS approach, TU in Colorado is able to fulfill our mission to Conserve, Protect, and Restore Colorado's coldwater fisheries. Nearly 10,000 people in Colorado belong to this movement and promote the preservation of our waterways. These are our rivers, so let's take the best care of them we can!

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR.



Sinjin Eberle is the president of Colorado Trout Unlimited. You can contact him via the CTU website at [www.cotrout.org](http://www.cotrout.org).




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# Friends of the Forest

More and more conservationists are realizing that collaborative efforts are key to successfully protecting and restoring our ecosystems – that is, bringing together a synergy of skill sets and knowledge from various like-minded organizations for a common purpose to accomplish more than any could do alone.

Or put more simply: a watershed can never have too many friends.

Fortunately for Clear Creek, its watershed has some good friends in MillerCoors, the National Forest Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service, and Trout Unlimited.

The National Forest Foundation (NFF), chartered by Congress in 1991, works with the U.S. Forest Service to engage interested parties in community-based and national programs that promote the health and enjoyment of our National Forest system. One of the more noted NFF initiatives is called “Friends of the Forest,” which attempts to build a constituency of people to support National Forests by conducting public outreach, education, and volunteer activities, including hands-on stewardship events.

Recently, the NFF, under the sponsorship of MillerCoors, invited the West Denver Chapter of Trout Unlimited to participate in a one-day Friends of the Forest event involving stewardship volunteer activities on Mad Creek, a tributary of Clear Creek located near Empire. The U.S. Forest Service was also a participant. The project included planting trees and shrubs, repairing trail drainage structures, repairing roads, restoring campsites, and constructing and repairing fences. West Denver conducted water sampling from two sites on a Mad Creek tributary.

For MillerCoors, it was an opportunity to give back to its home watershed of Clear Creek, made famous nationwide by Pete Coors standing along Rocky Mountain streams in advertisements. As the project sponsor, MillerCoors not only provided financial support for the project but also brought out employees for a day of volunteering on-the-ground. “Water stewardship is a priority for MillerCoors and our employees are as passionate about making a difference as they are about making great beer,” said Al Timothy, vice president of community affairs for MillerCoors. “We are happy to partner with Friends of the Forest to get involved in protecting a resource that is not only critical to our business, but also to our communities.”

In all, thirty-nine participants from four organizations (NFF, Coors, U.S. Forest Service,

and West Denver) contributed 195 volunteer hours that day, and their accomplishments were impressive –for example, 2 miles of road maintenance, ½ acre of habitat restored, 500 feet of fence mended, 2 campsites restored, 15 trail drainage structures repaired, just to cite a few activities. This event exemplifies how leveraging the capacity of multiple partners can lead to effective, meaningful and, hopefully, sustained conservation solutions and actions.

The West Denver Chapter has been a strong proponent of such collaborative efforts. For seven years, West Denver has participated in River Watch, a water quality-monitoring program operated by the non-profit Colorado Watershed Assembly in cooperation with the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife. Gil



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Hassinger leads the Chapter's participation in this program; in fact, Gil's devotion and expertise in this endeavor has resulted in his being appointed as the River Watch Chairperson for Colorado Trout Unlimited. For the Friends of the Forest event that day, Gil and his Chapter colleagues methodically collected water and insect samples to establish a water-quality database for that site.

West Denver's participation in successful partnerships – in education (for example, working with Orvis, the Jefferson County Open Space System, the Jefferson County Public School System), in their river restoration work (Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife, Colorado Water Conservation Board, City of Golden), and humanitarian endeavors (U.S. Forest Service, Joseph's Journey, Clear Creek Watershed Foundation) – are one of the major reasons the chapter was recently recognized with a Silver Trout Award from National Trout Unlimited.

While the 2011 Friends of the Forest project was a great success, what is most exciting is the promise of the future for Clear Creek. With friends like MillerCoors, West Denver, the National Forest Foundation, and the Forest Service, that future looks bright indeed.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

Jon Weimer is the President of the West Denver Chapter TU.

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# Stream Explorers



Inspiring the next generation to experience the natural world is part of Trout Unlimited's (TU) mission, and the mission of the Collegiate Peaks Anglers chapter of TU. Since 1986, TU has taught hundreds of youth about the

aquatic environment and fly casting, and provided scholarships for students interested in studying conservation.

A new opportunity to more fully engage young people emerged when budget cuts forced Salida Public Schools to

a 4-day school week. Using TU's Stream Explorers materials and lessons prepared by volunteers, our chapter provided a series of special conservation workshops during three-hour blocks every Friday for five weeks. The emphasis was on hands-

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on learning and scientific data collection.

During the first 2 weeks, youngsters investigated the behavior of aquatic life, including insects, shrimp and fish. They explored what life forms lived in their river, where they lived, their sizes, shapes, and how and where they moved. Students did experiments exposing organisms—including fish—to hot and cold, light and dark, and changes in gravity. Using their recorded data, they were asked to hypothesize on the effects of seasonal changes in temperature and light on the behavior of fish in their river. Then students tied flies that imitated the insects in the river.

During week 3, students reviewed their bug lessons and traveled to the river to learn how to “read” the water. Volunteers provided basic instruction on fly rods, gear, casting, basic knots, spin casting, and safety, including hook removal and catch-and-release techniques. Students practiced fly and spin casting. Youngsters took home activity sheets to identify organisms that live near the river, and were charged with researching a helpful fishing-related website.

Week 4 brought a snowstorm and a cold front. However, the students showed up in 25-degree clear weather. Utilizing the services of the Chaffee County Shuttle, we drove to Mt. Ouray Ponds. Students fished with fly and spinning rods in the lake and river. There were a few bites and 2 fish caught, but students mostly enjoyed the gorgeous day and being outside.

In week 5, students studied fish biology. They visited the Fish Hatchery where they learned about fish rearing and observed fish scales and fry under microscopes. At the end of the day, our chapter provided pizza, and invited parents to see their students “graduate.” All participants received Stream Explorer certificates, an Embrace a Stream hat, t-shirt, and a folder with all kinds of good information to take home. Of 11 students who started, 6 earned Stream Explorer membership with Trout Unlimited by attending 80% of the sessions.

Our chapter reached its goal: teaching young people about the aquatic world. Due to the success of this program, the Collegiate Peaks Anglers TU Chapter plans to provide additional programs for youth—possibly including a series of winter fly tying sessions—since many students were quite excited about their brief exposure to this art.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

Fred Rasmussen and Karen Dils, Collegiate Peaks Anglers, TU Chapter.

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## Too Much of Good Things

**Q** *Colorado's Water Quality Commission is studying water quality standards for nutrients, such as phosphorus and nitrogen. Wouldn't more nutrients in our lakes and streams lead to higher productivity, greater numbers of fish, and larger fish? Why limit the input of these nutrients?*

**A** This question seems especially appropriate during the Holiday Season when many of us gorge ourselves with "extra nutrients." The simple answer is: just like humans, lakes and streams can take in too many nutrients...too much of good things. We get fat; lakes and streams get choked with excess vegetation and the whole structure of the aquatic ecosystems changes. However, like most things in aquatic ecology and resource management, many factors are involved and the exact effects differ from one water body to another.

The problem of too many nutrients in lakes, called eutrophication, has been the subject of thousands of studies and reports. Stream eutrophication is common, but has not received as much publicity. In the rest of this article, I'll focus on the effects of excess nutrients in streams.

One of my first graduate students studied the water quality and ecosystem structure above and below nutrient-rich discharges to three streams in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Yes, total primary productivity (photosynthesis) was higher below the discharge points, but the numbers of fish desirable to anglers were far lower. The aquatic insect communities were greatly different, with mayflies and stoneflies completely absent. In addition, the amount of oxygen gas (called dissolved oxygen) in the water varied greatly from day-time to nighttime, often approaching zero by 4:00 AM. The oxygen that fish use to breathe is the dissolved form—not the form that is part of the compound, water. All of these changes were driven by large increases in the amount of slimy mats of filamentous algae. In comparison, areas above the discharge points were free of these slimy mats. Other forms of algae, called diatoms, were dominant above the discharge points. Diatoms provide the base for the food web and also contribute far more dissolved oxygen than they use. The effects of the discharges were particularly striking in a soft water stream that originated in an area of igneous and metamorphic rocks.

The study of factors that control the productivity of ecosystems (called limiting factors) has been common throughout the history of ecology. Whatever needed factor is shortest in supply will limit the production of the entire ecosystem. The most common limiting factor

in lakes is the amount of phosphorus in the system; therefore, efforts to enhance lake productivity, or to limit the effects of excess nutrients, have focused on phosphorus. Stream productivity is often a different story. Carbon in the form of the carbonate-bicarbonate ions (inorganic carbon) frequently limits stream productivity. Hard water streams originating from or flowing over limestone formations are generally more productive than soft water streams, because hard water is rich in carbonate-bicarbonate ions. Aquatic plants use the bicarbonate ions in photosynthesis, and the entire system is higher in productivity when these ions are abundant.

Nitrogen is seldom a limiting factor in shallow, flowing waters. Nitrogen gas is readily available from the atmosphere, so it is seldom limiting in streams. Phosphorus can limit stream productivity, but additions of it seldom produce desirable results, probably because it usually is in forms that cause pollution rather than fertilization. Excess amounts of organic carbon (ie; carbon from decomposing plants and animals, or animal wastes) have an entirely different set of effects. Excess organic carbon combined with nitrogen and/or phosphorus from these same sources, causes pollution. Remember, pollution is not limited to things that are directly toxic, such as metals and poisons.

Polluted waters, excessively enriched with organic carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus, are characterized by high "biochemical oxygen demand" (BOD). The decomposing plant and animal matter, plus the bacteria feasting on this material, require extreme amounts of dissolved oxygen, which is the same oxygen that fish require for respiration. In effect, decomposing plant and animal matter rob fish of the oxygen they need to survive. In the absence of regulations to limit the amount of organic material dumped into streams, "dead zones" with no dissolved oxygen will develop.

Regulations controlling toxic pollution are generally easy to understand. If something is toxic and will kill fish, it should never be discharged into a stream, or lake. Regulations

controlling organic carbon, phosphorus, and the various forms of nitrogen are harder to understand... and harder to design. The effects of too much organic carbon, too much nitrogen, or too much phosphorus vary with the characteristics of the water receiving these nutrients. Large, fast flowing rivers can "metabolize" or get rid more organic matter more quickly than small, slow flowing streams, or the standing water of a lake or stream.



Effective regulations consider not only the concentrations of polluting materials at a specific time and place, but also the total amount of material discharged over time, fluctuations in discharges over time, and the highest levels of pollutants discharged at any given point in time. Regulations often tend to look at average concentrations of pollutants – but averages can be meaningless. Discharges that contain lethal concentrations of any substance at any time cannot be tolerated, even for brief periods

of time. Having conditions that sustain fish life 98 per cent of the time is not good enough. Trying to live in lethal environments two per cent of the time means being dead all of the time.

In summary, a little additional phosphorus, or nitrogen, or even organic carbon may produce a temporary, localized increase in productivity; but, in the long run, allowing extra discharges of such nutrients is an invitation to disaster.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

John Nickum, is a retired PhD. fishery biologist whose career has included positions as professor at research universities including Iowa State and Cornell University, director of the Fish and Wildlife Service's fisheries research facility in Bozeman, MT, and science officer for the Fish and Wildlife Service's Mountain-Prairie Region. He was inducted into the National Fish Culture Hall of Fame in 2008.



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