

*the buzz on the fly-fishing biz*

# Angling<sup>®</sup> TRADE



## INSIDE THE 2018 SHOW ISSUE

The Swag Patrol | Ambassador Game |  
Looking Back 10 Years | Women in Fly Fishing |  
New Product Skinny... And More

*July 2018* [AnglingTrade.com](http://AnglingTrade.com)

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# Features

## 28 ANGLING TRADE... THE 10 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE



A look at where this market has come from, and a guess on where it's going, from the editors of this magazine. We look at 10 specific issues that impact the business of fly fishing.

*Written by the AT Editors*

## 42 A RIVER OF SWAG RUNS THROUGH IT



Does anyone pay retail for a fly rod anymore? Maybe it's time to clamp down on the free swag being given away to fundraisers, self-appointed product reviewers, and other cheapskates.

*Written by Marshall Bissett*

## 46 ANGLING AND THE FUTURE OUTDOOR ECONOMY...

Are we going to be key players?

*Written by Jonathan Lee Wright*



## 52 ARTEMIS... GIVING WOMEN ANGLERS A LOUDER VOICE IN CONSERVATION



Two of the most important issues that will decide the future of the sport—gender equality and conservation—come together in this important organization.

*Written by Kara Armano*

## 56 AMBASSADORS OR NOT?



The legions of faces holding fishes, backed by companies pumping product (so they can pitch their products through social media) is growing. Which is cool until someone breaks the law.

*Written by Geoff Mueller*

# Department

## 4 EDITOR'S COLUMN

### 8 CURRENTS

All the latest people and product news, including reviews of products that will debut at the IFTD trade show in Orlando.

### 62 BACKCAST

Searching for more moments in the moment.

*Written by Geoff Mueller*

*the buzz on the flyfishing biz*

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## DON'T EVER SIMPLY "CHECK OUT"



One of my favorite quotes is: "If you're not the lead dog on the team, the view never changes."

It's good to be out front. But sometimes, it's also good to be in the middle. Not that any test-taking student should aspire to land in the woefully anonymous, milquetoast center of a bell-curve; rather, sometimes it is better to have an ability to take the blinders off, and understand an issue from both sides.

To wit, I offer an example from a few weeks ago, when *Angling Trade* ran an online guest editorial from a law professor at the University of Colorado that raised an (admittedly) lightning-rod issue on stream access and a pending lawsuit on the Arkansas River that could, in fact, significantly impact stream access in the Centennial State and beyond... or not.

We immediately received a note from a real estate broker in the region (whom, I guess, is also a guide of some sort, otherwise he wouldn't get the E-newsletter in the first place), chiding us for "advocating" against private property rights.

We unsubscribed him, as he wished. He has every right to stick his head in the sand as far as he wants to, and selectively listen to whatever messages

he wants to hear. After all, that's en vogue these days, and Americans are getting particularly good at it.

If you don't like what you hear, call it "fake." Undercut the source. Create your own reality. But reporting is still reporting, and I'd humbly suggest that we need a lot more consideration of all points-of-view, rather than less. *Angling Trade* merely tries to place all issues on the table, because we trust you to decide. When we've run one point-of-view, we've often been asked to run a counterpoint. And we have... every single time we've been asked to do so.

Perhaps one of the most prominent examples of "my way or the highway thinking" playing out these days has to do with the National Football League, and players taking a knee during the national anthem. Some choose to see that as an insult to our country, or worse, our veterans, but others see it as a platform to challenge the issue of racial injustice.

As a white, middle-class man, I can tell you that I always stand for our anthem, hand on heart. But I've never been tased, or beaten, or singled out by law enforcement because of how I look. African-American athletes earned my attention on this issue through their actions.

And I don't know how many of you are Catholics or Episcopalians, but in my experience, in those churches, going to the kneeler has always happened in the places in the service when humility is paramount—when you're admitting, and asking for help, because you realize you cannot do it on your own.

God, politics, and such are big-league concerns, compared to the trifling things we deal with in the fly-fishing world.

But the principle thought that, "I'm going to tune you out, because you stand for public access." Or, on the flip-side, "If you do not respect what someone has earned, and paid-for, and wants to enjoy as part of their fishing experience," well, that can be wrong also.


If you don't like the "ambassador" because of how she holds a fish in an Instagram photo... if you don't agree with an organization's stance on how ocean fisheries are managed... if you don't like someone's attitude on lead tackle... or hatchery fish... or "catch-and-keep" regulations... heck, if you don't like it when we say a rod is fast when you think it's slow, or any of that noise... that's fine!

Let's talk about it. THAT'S AMERICAN!

But as soon as you check out, or "unsubscribe," or disengage from the conversation, or become unwilling to listen to another point of view, you're no different than an angler who says: "I'll never fish a woolly bugger again, because no fish ate my woolly bugger today... woolly buggers suck, let's ban them."

Of course, we all know better. We all know that the essence of fly fishing is not enforcing your will upon the fish, rather, it's all about watching, and listening, and being open-minded, and allowing ourselves to deliberately choose the best course of action.

That works, almost every time, when we go to the river (or flats, or lake, whatever). Why in the heck would we not act the same way, as we do business with one another, or react to political issues, which are now more important than they've ever been, as we do when we actually get on the water and try to catch a fish?

—Kirk Deeter, Editor 



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## Five ways to increase your efficiency at IFTD

*Written by Nick Hoover*

Every year I go to IFTD I never have enough time to do what I need in three short days. Meetings run long, catching up with old friends slows me down, and all the new shiny gear keeps distracting me. Over the years I've developed a few tips that keep me running at peak levels of efficiency while I'm at the show. With a few cups of coffee and our 5 tips on increasing your efficiency at IFTD, you'll be on your way to gaining more loyal customers.



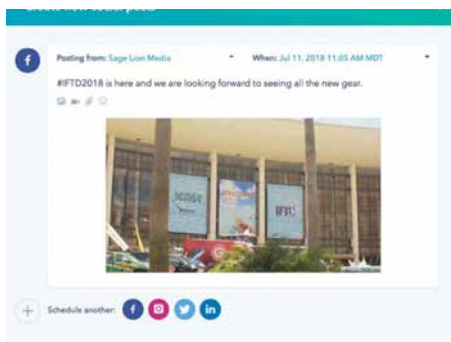
### Pre-Schedule Meetings

It's tough to squeeze everyone in at the show. If you're an exhibitor one of the best things you can do is let show attendees book time with you. There are a ton of apps out there for doing this, but I like youcanbook.me. It's pretty easy to set up and syncs with your Google Calendar. Just prefill in your availability, fire off a quick email to your target accounts, and let them book a time that works with their schedule.

### Visit the New Product Showcase First

If you can get into the new product showcase, that's the place to start. It's got all the new stuff in one locale. You can explore the gear you want to learn more about while visiting with manufacturers later in the day. Take a notepad and scribble down initial thoughts. You'll want to refer to it when meeting later. Once the marketing spiel starts, it's easy to forget your first impressions of the product.

But all good marketers know you need to keep your customers current.



### Automate as Much as Possible

Every second counts when you're manning a booth. The last thing you want to do is send out an email or social media post while you're at the show. But all good marketers know you need to keep your customers current. I recommend pre-scheduling as much of your content as possible. Spend the week before IFTD finishing your "during show" emails and schedule them to go out at 8:45 a.m. (just as the show opens) or at 5:15pm (just as the show closes).

Social Media posts are a little trickier to automate, but they can be a lot more fun and engaging if they are spontaneous. If you see one of your favorite fishing personalities cruising the floor, grab a shot with them or flip

the camera around and do a quick "Facebook Live" update for your fans back home.

If you don't want to go through the hassle of publishing at the show, most online publishing apps will let you pre-schedule ahead of time. We like Hubspot and Buffer for these tasks.

Get the ICAST Mobile App



### ICAST App

If you're cruising the show floor be sure to check out the ICAST App. The built-in map is worth the download alone. It makes it super easy to find that one retailer you have to see.

### Create a Plan for Success

Last year I wrote a post with five things you must do before IFTD. Not much has changed in 365 days. You really need to build a concentrated plan to have a successful trade show. It's getting harder and harder to turn big investments like trade shows into profits. The buyer has unlimited information just one short web search away. But buyers still turn out for tradeshow. A successful plan should have the following:

1. Create A Brand Story-> Make yours relevant, compelling, and focus on the people using it and you'll start generating interest.
2. Set Your Goals For The Show Now->

Make sure you have the ability to quantify each of your goals so that you can measure success.

**3. Find Your Target Audience->** Use a CRM to track email opens, clicks, engagement, and follow up.

**4. Identify Important Deadlines->** The show is only two months away. What marketing deadlines do you need to hit prior to the show?

**5. Start Building Buzz->** It's not too early to start getting people excited. IFTD is probably on most people's mind already.



### Don't Forget the Snacks!!

Working on an empty stomach is a recipe for disaster. Trying to work through the big dinner with clients from the night before makes it even worse. We put together a free IFTD emergency kit to help you get through those long days. It includes a few sticks of protein, some sugary treats, a couple aspirin, and some earplugs for your noisy hotel roommate, all wrapped up in a cool pinch pouch from Vedavoo. Just pop over to our site and we'll be sure to pack you one for your time at IFTD.

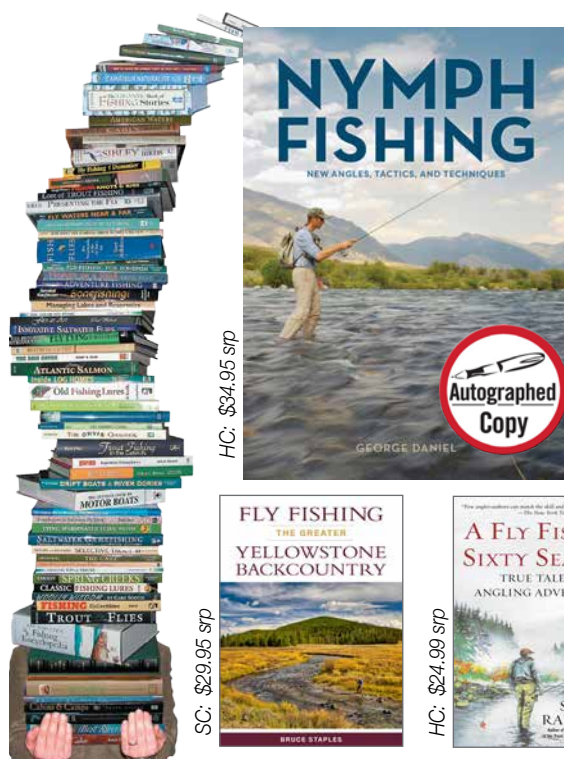
IFTD is a whirlwind of a tradeshow. With zero planning you can easily get trapped in your hotel room sending emails and experiencing FOMO (fear of missing out) because you don't have time for late night "meetings."

*continued on next page...*

## Books & DVDs



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Doing some pre-planning, utilizing technology, and snagging a free IFTD emergency kit can help you maximize your time at the show and still have some fun.

We look forward to seeing old friends, new friends, and that new fancy gear at the IFTD 2018 trade show!

### Products (New Stuff Worth Noting)

Here's some product skinny from Kirk Deeter on some of the larger players in the market:



**RIO Products** is entering the fly business. And we don't mean "fly" as in the generic trade name, rather, RIO is going to manufacture and market fishing flies. That's obviously a broadening of the brand, and it introduces another instant major player into the realm of fly shop suppliers.



**Sage** is Introducing two new rod series for next year: The Igniter is an ultra-fast action, freshwater models 4-6 and saltwater 6-10, with and MSRP of \$900; and the

Dart series is a fast action, precision rod for throwing smaller flies on smaller waters. Best at short range, 0-4-weight models, 7'-6" long, MSRP \$700.



**Redington** is launching a machined, large arbor reel called "Grande," which uses the same drag technology as Behemoth, but is now with full-sealed carbon fiber technology. Sizes range from 5/6/7 to 9/10/11, and are priced from \$280 to \$350, respectively.



**Simms** is answering the prayers of every angler looking for added stealth (and/or who also hunts waterfowl) by introducing a line of camouflage waders. The G3 Guide Stockingfoot Wader – River Camo means Simms' multi-award-winning wader is now available in River Camo, specifically designed to distort a fish's ability to detect shape and movement. This wader allows anglers to go undetected & get one step closer to that perfect casting moment. Constructed with breathable 4-layer GORE-TEX Pro Shell fabric in the legs and 3-layer in the upper, the

*continued on next page...*





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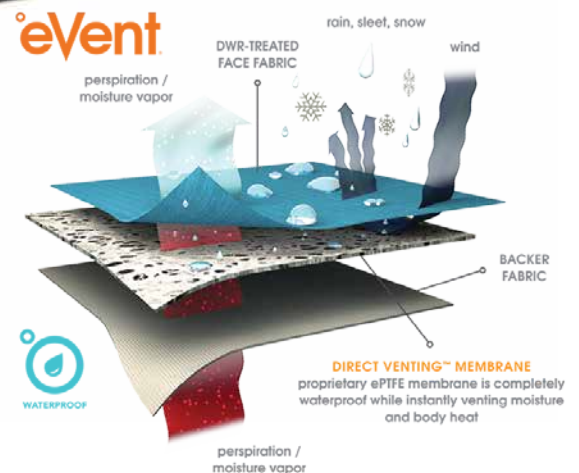
### **Latchless Closure**

*Patent pending latchless gasket closure keeps the box securely shut*



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**Loon** has come out with a range of non-toxic, tin split shot. This functional non-lead alternative comes in camo and matte black colors. Pricing is 4 Division Multi Packs - \$12.50, 6 Division Multi Packs - \$17.50, 8 Division Multi Packs - \$25.50, and

Twist Pots: \$8.95. We've been testing these on the rivers in Montana and Colorado, and like them, though we do recommend hanging them above a knot on your nymph rig.



If you were crushed (like I was) when **Danner** stopped marketing wading boots, fear not, because Danner is going to be making wading boots for **Patagonia** now. That means rugged, tough performance boots that will

sell to any angler who understands footwear. More details coming soon (check online at [anglingtrade.com](http://anglingtrade.com)).



**Winston** is going to be one of the major players on the new rod scene next year, introducing its Saltwater "Air" series—a fast action, high performance rod available in 6-12 weights. MSRP on those will be a cool \$950, but they're both powerful and pretty, and will flip the switch of Winston fans. On the other side of the spectrum, Winston's "Pure" series is for light line weights (2 through 5). These are classic lookers that list for \$850.

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We have some good intel that suggests **Scott** is going to be showing off some exciting new fiberglass stuff, and **Thomas & Thomas** has something big cooking though we won't know what until July 11 at IFTD.



## FAR BANK

One last nugget of intel is that **Far Bank**, parent company of Sage, Redington and RIO is going to welcome another brand in the family as it has acquired **Fly Water Travel**. The Ashland, Oregon-based specialty travel firm has ushered anglers to some of the best destinations in the world, and Far Bank says the acquisition "broadens the consumer offering" by giving anglers places to go, as well as the gear to take with them.

And because fly-fishing gear isn't always just about actual fishing gear... here are seven of Tim Romano's favorite ancillary products that will help round out any day on or just off the water:



**Astral Otter 2.0 Kid's Life Jacket**, \$130 – astraldesigns.com. My

daughter (age 6) has not complained once since putting on the Otter 2.0 and will comfortably wear it all day in the boat. It comes in three colors, fits kiddos 50-90 lbs and most importantly has a handle on the back for easy rescue.



## Walls Outdoor Goods Workwear

(www.walls.com) I've been building a wooden fishing boat the last 8 months and doing 90% of it in Walls Outdoor goods Coveralls and some of their work pants. Their clothing is comfortable, rugged as hell and very reasonable priced. Perfect for the shop or and overnight fishing adventure.



**Mission Workshop Sanction – VX Backpack**, \$285, missionworkshop.

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**Sunday Afternoons - River Guide Hat, \$42,** [sundayafternoons.com](http://sundayafternoons.com). Looking for that stupidly large brimmed hat that floats, won't come off in stormy weather and doesn't bend in the wind? Look no further than Sunday Afternoons River Guide. This thing even has a patented sunglass lock

and specialized brim that lets you pack it.



#### **Nemo Equipment Riff Sleeping Bag**

(\$399.95). I'm a side sleeper and have never really been comfortable in most sleeping bags, until now. Nemo's "Spoon" bags are designed with more room in the elbows and knees, a waterproof footbox, and Nikwax Hydrophobic down. One of the best sleeping bags I've ever used.



#### **BioLite SolarHome 620**

\$149.95 – [bioliteenergy.com](http://bioliteenergy.com) Biolite's Solar Home 620 comes with a 6W solar panel, 3 overhead lights, a motion sensor, wall mounted switches, and a control box with a built in radio. I set mine up in my backyard gear shed, but the system was designed for backcountry cabins, RV's, remote lodge operations or any other place that's off the grid.



#### **Fishpond Submersible Duffel**

\$300 - \$400, depending on size. Fishpond's fully submersible and completely waterproof duffel bag can actually carry a full-length, 9-foot, 4-piece rod tube, and also comes with removable backpack straps. It's made out of 840 denier recycled nylon and is welded together for maximum durability.

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## Opinion Editorial: Stream Access

Long considered a solid bastion for landowner/river rights, is open access in Colorado actually on the table?

Whose Side are You On? Why Does Colorado Want to Block Public Rights in Navigable Waters?

*Written by Mark Squillace*

Roger Hill is a 76-year-old Coloradan who likes to fish while standing on the bed of the stream. One of his favorite spots is a stretch of the Arkansas River near Texas Creek. A local landowner claims that Roger is trespassing when he stands on the bed adjacent to the landowner's property, and the landowner has repeatedly harassed Roger while he is fishing, throwing rocks at him and leaving threatening notes on his car. The landowner even shot at one of Roger's fishing buddies. Fortunately, no one was hit, but the landowner did time in jail for that little stunt.

Roger claims a right to fish from the bed on the grounds that the stretch of the Arkansas River where he fishes is navigable and that Colorado thus owns the bed of the stream. If Roger is right in claiming that the Arkansas River is navigable, then he stands on firm legal ground, but he does not want to risk getting shot to prove his

point. So, Roger sued the landowner. Now, Colorado has moved to have the case dismissed, not because the Arkansas River is not navigable, but rather because the State claims it is an indispensable party to any case determining title to the bed of the Arkansas River, but further that it cannot be made a party without its consent. Mind you, the State could simply waive its claim of immunity to suit and allow people like Roger to protect their legal right to fish. Instead the State is actively seeking to block Roger's claim that he has the right to access navigable streams.

The notion that States own the bed of navigable streams derives from a constitutional principle known as the "equal footing doctrine." It provides that when States enter the Union they do so on an "equal footing" with other States. Among the rights that States secure when they become States is title to the bed of all navigable streams and lakes. Despite the fact that Colorado is home to many substantial rivers and streams none have ever been officially declared "navigable" for purposes of determining title to the bed. This is a much bigger problem in Colorado than in most States because most States afford the public reasonably broad access rights whether or not they meet the federal navigability test. Indeed, in Colorado, you are deemed a trespasser if you merely float over the river bed adjacent to private property. As a result, Colorado recreation boaters and fisherman use Colorado's waterways at the sufferance of private landowners. One good way around this problem, at least for Colorado's larger rivers and streams, is to have them declared "navigable" for title purposes and that is what Roger Hill is seeking to do on the Arkansas River.

The U.S. Supreme Court considers waterways to be navigable for title purposes if they were used or were susceptible to being used at the time of statehood as highways for commerce. The Arkansas was in fact used by fur traders to move their furs and by railroads who sent hundreds of thousands of logs downstream for use as railroad ties. So it seems that the State owns the bed of the river, not in the conventional sense of a party owning land, but rather as a protector of public rights. The Supreme Court's most eloquent expression of the nature of the title to the bed of navigable streams came in the context of a decision upholding Illinois' rights to the bed of Lake Michigan in Chicago Harbor. According to the Court, title to the bed of navigable water bodies "is a title different in character from that which the state holds in lands intended for sale.... It is a title held in trust for the people of the state, that they may enjoy the navigation of the waters, carry on commerce over them, and have liberty of fishing therein, freed from the obstruction or interference of private parties."

If the State were properly exercising its trust responsibility to the people of Colorado, and promoting the enjoyment of navigation, commerce, and fishing on our navigable waterways, then it would have filed this case itself on behalf of Roger Hill. Short of that, it might at least have intervened on his side after the case was filed, or even just stayed out of the dispute. Instead, it seeks to dismiss the case and undermine boaters and fisherman seeking to exercise rights guaranteed to them by the federal constitution. Think about what this means. State leaders are charged with protecting public

*continued on next page...*



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rights in navigable waters are instead actively seeking to block those rights.

Colorado is renowned for outdoor recreation, including boating and fishing and it seems foolhardy for the State working to interfere with citizens seeking to exercise constitutionally-protected rights to state waterways. Come November, the people of Colorado will elect a new Governor and a new Attorney General. Let's elect leaders who are prepared to stand up for the people of this State and protect our public rights, including the public's constitutional right to access Colorado's remarkable navigable waterways.

Mark Squillace is a professor of law at the University of Colorado Law School. He represents Roger Hill pro bono in the ongoing dispute over Hill's right to access the Arkansas River.

(Editor's note: We are not advocating one side or another, we are merely bringing the facts to light. We welcome anyone who wants to submit a counterpoint op.ed. to do exactly that.)



### Company Spotlight: Korkers

There are very few rivers I enjoy fishing more than the Deschutes in Oregon.

And there are fewer rivers I hate wading in more than the Deschutes.

It's a quirky situation. Anglers aren't allowed to fish from a boat, which is inevitably a good thing in terms of giving fish some refuge in places where you simply cannot get them. Where you can get out and wade along the bank, the bottom is usually a jagged array of slick rocks and the currents are deceptively strong. It's hard to stay vertical.

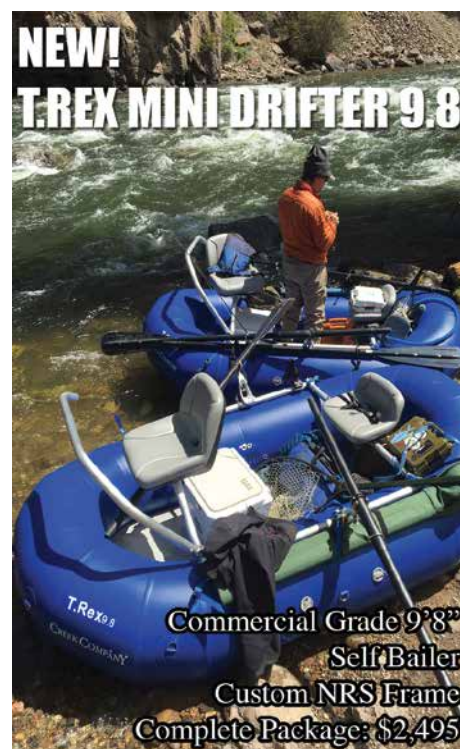
Which is exactly why it is the perfect place to test wading boots. If you can cut it here, you can cut it anywhere. And the company that tests the most, lives and breathes that river, and churns out innovative product that's often named after various stretches of that river is Korkers. It's a family business, led by CEO Brian Chaney.

I have to say I liked Korkers from the onset (long before they let me join them on a float during the epic salmonfly hatch on the Deschutes) because of the family angle. I have always felt that fly fishing was built on—and I deeply hope it continues to grow—via the mom & pop or family business. This sport is dependent on substance, and substance inevitably starts with passion. And in my experience, some of the deepest, most honest passions are born of family traditions, respect for the culture, and genuine devotion to fly fishing. Family is what brought me into this sport, and family is where it will rest, so long as I fish and write about it. From fly shops to product manufacturers, the number crunchers and "hot ideas" tend to come and go. But real passion cannot ever be faked. That's the kind of passion I recognize from Brian and the entire team from Korkers.

But let's talk about product. Everyone has a "hook" and Korkers' selling proposition is its interchangeable sole system for the bottoms of wading boots. Sometimes replicated, never really equaled, the concept is beautifully simple: rather than having different boots, with different bottoms, for different conditions (e.g. cleats for slick bottoms, plain rubber for wearing in a boat, felt for where you can get away with it...) you wear the same pair of boots, and switch the soles out day by day.

What's the number one problem you have with wading boots? They wear out at the seams and stitches, right? Well, Korkers has an innovative fix for that in the form of its WRAPTR boots (\$200 with two sets of soles). Single seam construction melded with an abrasion resistant material make for

*continued on next page...*



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what I believe are the most durable boots on the market right now. (Time will ultimately tell, but I've already gotten more river miles out of these than I typically do with other boots). They're also comfortable and light.

What's another problem people have with wading boots? They're a pain to get off and on. Solution number two comes in the form of Korkers rear-entry boot, the Hatchback, which also has a BOA closure system. Like most Korkers boots, these are extremely light and easy to walk in, in and out of the river. They sell for \$240.

I personally like wearing the "Devil's Canyon" model, because I think they're the lightest, easiest hiking wading boot on the market now. They cost \$200 with two sets of soles, and I have 30 fishing days in mine (mostly getting in and out of boats) and I don't see any seam or stitch issues.

So what about the soles? I wear plain Vibram rubber in a boat, felt with spikes when I walk-wade, and aluminum bars or carbide spikes when I'm more stationary and not walking far. I think it's worth having four options (each priced around \$50-60, though, remember, you get a couple with the boots themselves).

How about those straps breaking and losing soles in muck? I think Korkers boots are better now than they ever have been in that regard. And for me, the key is keeping those soles and straps out of the sunlight. The ones that live in the dark chest in my garage have been around for a few years and are still kicking. I would, however, plan on traveling with at least two sets of soles if you're going on a trip.

I wanted to say all of this because Korkers will not, in fact, be at IFTD. They've been before, and will be

*continued on next page...*

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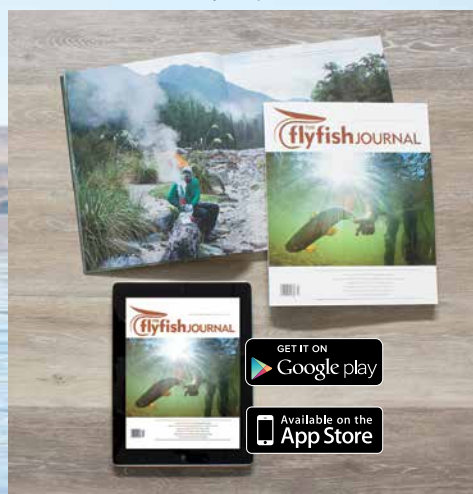
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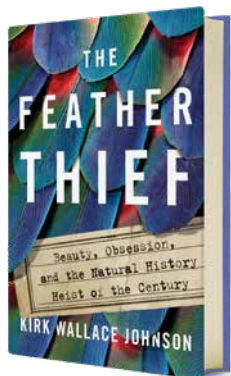
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back again. But if you are thinking about a boot supplier, don't let out of sight be out of mind, because some of the best product, and good people, in this market are easy to find in Portland, Oregon. Start with korkers.com.

Kirk Deeter



## Recommended Reading:

*The Feather Thief*

By Kirk Wallace Johnson

(Viking, \$27 hardcover)

If you'd like a good "truth is stranger than fiction" book, with a well-woven, tightly researched narrative, with the added bonus that it has a connection to the fly-fishing world, I have just the book for you. *The Feather Thief* by Kirk Wallace Johnson traces the story of Edwin Rist, who attempts a daring heist at a suburban London outpost of the British Museum of Natural History... for none other than a trunk full of rare and historic bird feathers collected from throughout the world. Turns out Rist thought they'd make the ultimate Atlantic salmon flies. I had the chance to fish with Johnson, where he filled me in on the basics, from how he learned of the story from a fly guide in New Mexico, to the five-year quest it took to nail the book down. I have since read the book, and really admire the writing as much

as I admire the author (and serious angler). If you liked books like *The Orchid Thief*, or *The Professor and the Madman*, or anything by Erik Larson, you'll immediately fall for *The Feather Thief*, because for any angler, it's even more interesting than those.

—Review by Kirk Deeter



## Texas Fly Fishing & Brew Festival Announces 2019 Dates

Fly anglers and craft beer lovers, take heart: The Texas Fly Fishing &



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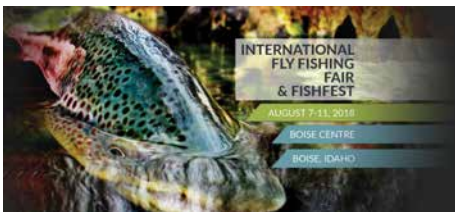
Brew Festival has announced its 2019 dates. Now entering its third season, the Plano-based event draws fly anglers from as far away as Arkansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and even Georgia.

Festival Director Beau Beasley is pleased with the event's turnout: "We thought our fly fishing and craft beer concept would work well in Texas, and we were right. We've had great sponsorship support from folks like Tailwaters Fly Fishing, TFO, Gordy & Sons, and the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation, and we look forward to having them support us again." Specialty vendors such as Hardy, Sage, Orvis, Yellow Dog, Patagonia, RIO, Dagon Apparel, and local and international guides and lodges also participate.



"We desperately want to help parents get their kids outside--so we've deliberately moved our 2019 event so that we don't conflict with Texas schoolchildren's spring break." Next year's Texas Fly & Brew will be held in Plano on March 23-24, 2019, and will incorporate new speakers and instructors. "We know having the right date for our festival is important," Beasley says. "Last year we moved our Virginia Fly Fishing & Wine Festival--held each year outside of Richmond--from April to the second weekend in January, and our turnout was the best we've ever had. There was standing room only in some of our lectures--even those as early as 10 AM!" The next Virginia Fly Fishing & Wine Festival will be held January 13-14, 2019, in Ashland.

For more information go  
[www.txflyfishingfestival.org](http://www.txflyfishingfestival.org) or  
[www.vaflyfishingfestival.org](http://www.vaflyfishingfestival.org)



## Boise Center for Fly Fishers International's 2018 Fly Fishing Fair and FishFest, Aug.7-11.

Thousands of the world's fly-fishers – from first-timers to seasoned professionals – will turn their eyes to the Boise Centre for Fly Fishers International's 2018 Fly Fishing Fair and FishFest, Aug.7-11.

Registration for the Fair and FishFest opens June 6, announced Len Zickler, President and CEO of the worldwide conservation/education organization.

The conglomeration of events includes FishFest, some 75 fly-fishing or fly-tying workshops, the Fly Fishers International Learning Center and two-day Youth Camp, announced Zickler.

The 2018 Learning Center program Aug. 7-11 includes a four-day potpourri of workshops "designed to develop and improve skills and knowledge in the areas of tying, casting, fly fishing and conservation," said Zickler.

"FFI's Women Connect Group will host a three-day beginner's tying workshop, a three-day intermediate tying workshop and a three-day fly fishing workshop. The tying and casting workshops are vast – both in number and variety. Whether a beginner, an expert caster, looking to achieve certification, a professional tier interested in earning the Fly Tying Group Bronze Award or virtually anywhere in between, you are guaranteed to find something of interest to you with on-stream casting and fishing courses or the multitude of non-angling workshops with options to explore the area, learn about local issues or explore a craft," he said.


FishFest, scheduled Aug. 9-11, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., will feature fly-fishing celebrities, authors, manufacturers, destinations and a casting pond in the 80,000-square foot facility. Demonstrations and presentations are scheduled by Dr. Gary Borger, Dave Whitlock and Brian O'Keefe along with tackle from Orvis, Patagonia, RIO Products, Sage, Scientific Anglers and Simms as well as Idaho-area fly shops, guides, lodges and artists.


Youth activities during FishFest include casting, tying, fish and insect identification.




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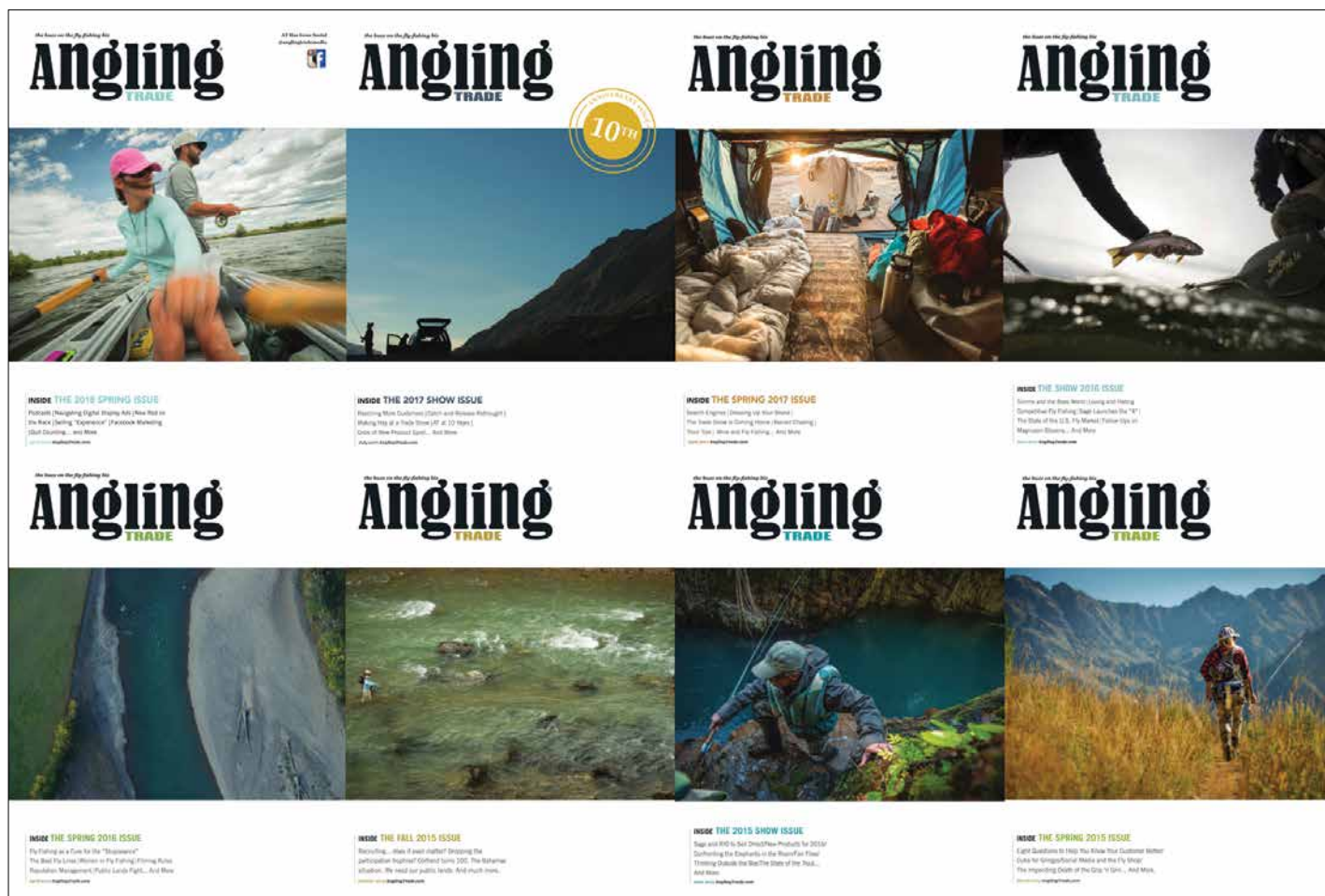


FEATURE

# ANGLING TRADE: THE 10-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

After covering this business for more than a decade, it's interesting to reflect on where we've been, and think about where we might all be headed. In some cases, same old/same old... in others, it's a brave new world.

Written by AT Editors Kirk Deeter and Tim Romano



We've been publishing *Angling Trade* for over 10 years now, believe it or not. And before that, we were editors of *Fly Fishing Trade*, which we acquired and folded into this business. We didn't know exactly what we were getting into when we signed up to cover the business-side of fly fishing, but we were game, because we were avid anglers who loved the sport. And we still love the sport (maybe even

more), despite having had a front-row seat at the sausage-making party.

To be clear, our team (which also originally included the late Charlie Meyers) has consisted, and always will consist, of writers, reporters, editors and photographers foremost, and anglers secondarily. But the fishing was and is important. Put it this way: You need not have played a down in

the National Football League to be an awesome reporter covering that sport (ask Adam Scheffer from ESPN). You need not have run for or held a political office to effectively cover politics (ask Maggie Haberman or Eric Lipton of *The New York Times*)... but the minute you don't have your boots wet and your stuff in one bag when it comes to the fly-fishing realm, somebody is going to climb out of

*continued on next page...*



# BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS

The Sportsmen's Voice for Our Wild Public Lands, Waters and Wildlife

Public access to public waters is the backbone of the American tradition – and business – of fly fishing. However, efforts are afoot in several states to undermine citizens' rights to use waterways. From Louisiana to South Dakota, New Mexico to Wisconsin, BHA is fighting back to make sure every angler has a stream to wade, a lake to float or a bayou to paddle. Join us and stand up for the democratic right to #accessourwaters. Learn more at [backcountryhunters.org](http://backcountryhunters.org)



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the woodwork and call B.S. in front of everybody. (Actually, even if you do have your stuff in one bag and fish all the time, some dork will still call B.S. They just do it on Facebook, or comment on a blog behind an anonymous screen alias.)

Not to spoil the ending here, but we will tell you up front that we remain bullish on fly fishing. The sport is evolving and still faces many challenges, for sure. But it is an inherently beautiful, wonderful, honest, natural, immensely rewarding sport that connects families and friends to nature at a time when our world desperately needs more of those types of connections.

And the people in this business are, by and large, good, genuinely caring, smart, honest, and passionate people. There are some weirdos and bad eggs, just like in any other business, but the per capita prevalence of those types is really, really low. Ninety-nine percent of the cases where businesses or deals in this market go sideways are ultimately the result of people knowing and loving fishing more and better than they know or love business. We don't think that's a character flaw. Companies come and go. Products come and go. But 10 years later, a lot of the people are the same. And that's a good thing. That's family.

So, as a family, let's take a look at 10 hot-button issues in fly fishing... then, now, and thinking forward. Think of it as kind of a Thanksgiving dinner table conversation. We're not all going to agree on everything, and that's fine. But we'll take the first stab at the conversation starters, and as always, invite you to chime in, either on [anglingtrade.com](http://anglingtrade.com), or via letter to the editor (though it has been said that a letter to the editor is the first outward sign of insanity), or when we see you

at the trade show in Orlando (or better yet, on the water).



## 1. The Market Itself.

When we started covering fly fishing, the best data we found pegged the total market at around \$675 million annually. Of course that number can fluctuate dramatically if you include or exclude things like guide trips, books and other media, etc. Today, if you are generous and include guide operations, media, some crossover product, and more importantly online sales, we think the consumer market for fly-fishing is just south of a billion dollars per year annually. Which still makes it just a tad smaller than Coors Light.

You'd be surprised how relatively small some of the "big companies" in this market actually are. And, on the other hand, 10 years ago, we remember seeing a couple guys standing on a pile of coolers at a trade show in Las Vegas, and now, 10 years later, that's YETI, which has over a billion in sales, and is by itself bigger than the rest of the fly-fishing market.

We've seen estimates of the number of fly anglers range anywhere from a million to seven or eight million. To be clear, there might be several million people who fly fish in a given year (one can track them by the licenses they buy). But there are NOT several million hard-core fly-fishing aficionados in the United States. A million? Two million? Depends on how you define "aficionado." Is that someone who fishes a minimum of

20 times a year and takes at least one destination trip a year? Or is that the person who fishes the home pond several times a year? The manufacturers all have their own ranges. A fly-only, top-end product manufacturer selling \$900 rods might see only a million legitimate consumer-players in this country. An apparel company that crosses over into conventional fishing might see four million consumers. *Angling Trade's* estimate of serious, spending fly anglers in the United States is 1.5-2.5 million. And that's where we stand right now.

We think the market actually shows slight to moderate up-side. One only need look at the recent attendance at The Fly Fishing Show series to recognize that. We think the "dabbler" market might dip a bit, but as families, and particularly younger parents endeavor to connect their children to nature and pastimes that mattered to them when they were young, fly-fishing is actually going to see a bump. A quality bump.



## 2. Product.

The beauty of fly fishing is that it is the simplest, most basic form of fishing, where the exact same tools used 100 years ago will work perfectly well, and yet, consumers are absolutely driven to have the latest and greatest technologies to help them improve their games. The parallels to the sport of golf are striking. It isn't the new driver or forged irons that will get you tee-to-green in fewer strokes,

*continued on next page...*





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# FEATURE

it's a good swing. It isn't a new bug pattern, or a fancy rod or line that makes the difference in catching fish or not catching fish... it's a good cast, and a clean drift.

Of course the manufacturers want to drive consumers further and faster down the innovation curve with the passing of every model year. But therein also lies the critical role of the retailer—perhaps the last, best positioning of the retailer as gatekeeper that puts them in the catbird's seat. Because the retailer not only deals in product, but also in knowledge. The retailer can put the goods in the customers' hands, but the retailer (guide) is also the teacher. This symbiotic balance is what's kept the retailers who are still around, still around... and it's also going to be the key to keeping them around in 10-20 years. Much more on that later.

Has product dramatically improved in the past 10 years? Depends. In

some cases, sure. We wouldn't trade our newest-generation fly rods or waders for anything we were using 10 or 20 years ago, not one-for-one. But it's semi-ironic as well that those who pine for the good old days of a "classic" rod model they bought in the 1990s can still have exactly that, made from the same materials... it's just now branded and marketed under a different name, usually at a lower pricepoint, than other "flagship" brands.



### 3. The Role of the Retailer.

We saw it coming. We reported on it as it happened. We explained why

it happened. And frankly we see the trend continuing.

There are far fewer fly shops in America now than there were when we started producing this magazine. Several hundred (again, define "fly shop," is that a 100-percent dedicated specialty retailer, or a store that sells fly gear?) then... a few hundred now. California had dozens of fly shops then, not much more than a dozen remaining now. The herd is being culled, and will continue to be culled.

Look no further than E-commerce, and manufacturers selling direct to consumers to explain all of that. It was admittedly a big deal when Far Bank, for example, opened a direct sales channel, and Simms Fishing as well. Given market dynamics, what their competition (e.g. Orvis and Patagonia, among many others) were doing, technology evolution

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## GLASS BOBBINS

### 3", 4" or 4.75" Frames

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#### FEATURES:

- Synthetic feet for smooth even tension on the thread spool
- Tactile comfort grips
- Hyper-smooth small diameter dual glass inserts



Glass Insert

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### XBC STANDARD CLAMPS

5"; straight jaw; half smooth and half striated jaw structure

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### XBC SCISSOR CLAMPS

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#### The Multi-Tasker

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### XBC MITTEN SCISSOR CLAMPS

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### XBC NIPPERS

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#### Always Hanging Around

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**Metal:** 400 Japanese stainless steel.



and the evolution of E-commerce, those companies would have been idiotic not to implement some form of direct-to-consumer marketing. There are still some holdouts, for sure, and bless their hearts for trying. But that's probably going to change for most. In 10 years time, we believe almost all manufacturers in fly fishing will have at least some form of direct marketing. The smart retailer has already prepared for this contingency.

That is not to say, however, that the role of the retailer will be completely obsolete. To the extent the retailer teaches and has the credibility to help consumers better choose and use fly-fishing products, those retailers will last. Most (if not all) of

the manufacturers we've spoken with on this topic in recent years actually WANT that to be the case. They do value the role of the retailer, especially in fly fishing.

Look at other industries (as we have) and you will see that fly fishing lags behind the curve, but the evolution will come. Music (high-end instruments). Bikes. Skiing. Golf. Consumers will have unlimited pathways through which to acquire product. But the channels of understanding how to use (and, perhaps more importantly, where to use) products will remain relatively tight. Own that space, and you will be okay. Sales reps... you're still going to have to fight. The best will be strong

and do well, but we would not advise a right-outta-college nephew to become a fly-fishing sales rep today.



#### 4. The IFTD Trade Show.

An up-front disclaimer/clarification. *Angling Trade* has nothing to do with the American Fly Fishing Trade Association. We're not AFFTA's publication. We're not hooked in any financial way. AFFTA is the trade group that represents the fly-fishing

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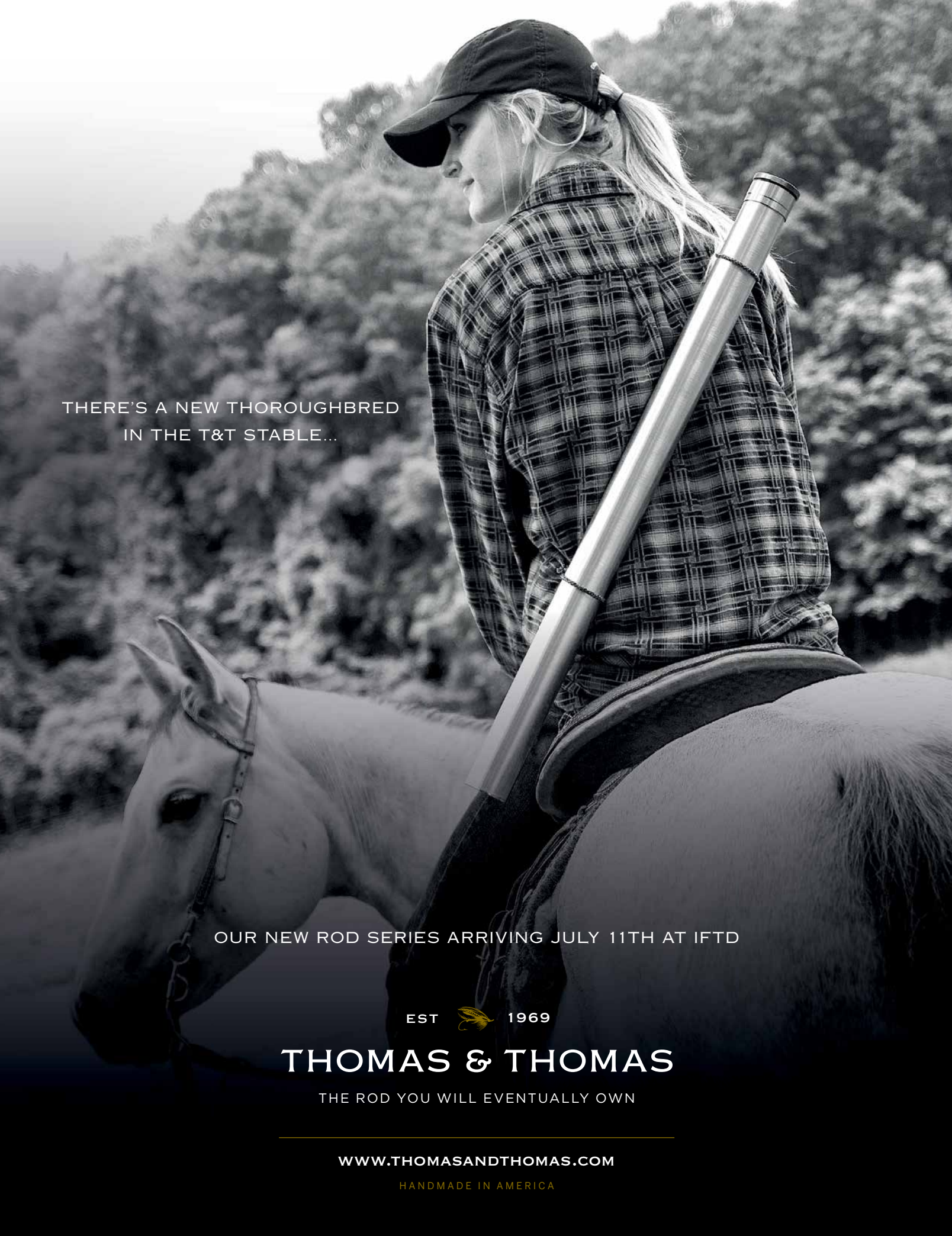


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industry, and is chartered to promote the sport of fly fishing. *Angling Trade* reports on the fly-fishing industry. In a sense, AT is a watchdog. And we've had ups and downs with AFFTA over the years. Right now, where things stand, looking at what AFFTA is doing, and how it is executing its mission with the resources it has available, *Angling Trade* stands with AFFTA, and is supportive of AFFTA.

We bring that up because, obviously, the International Fly Tackle Dealer trade show is AFFTA's flagship endeavor. It's a key source of revenue for the organization... AFFTA sells booth space... manufacturers come to the show and hear all about the cool product... bada-bing, bada-boom, that's how it works.

Ten years ago, we were all in Denver, enjoying a nice show there, but there was discontent among the manufacturers. Familiarity breeds contempt. AFFTA decided to move beyond the same-old, same-old, reach out to the salty side (and the East) and put a show in New Orleans. Nice, but small. And hot.

IFTD moved to Reno, Nevada, which in AT's opinion, is where it all more or less hit rock bottom with low attendance and so forth, and AFFTA was tasked to find a new path. The choices boiled down to two: marry up with Outdoor Retailer, and be a part of the "total outdoor" scene... but be relegated to being an outpost in that show; or, join with the American Sportfishing Association and its ICAST show, and bring fly fishing into "all fishing," though the ICAST show first involved being in Las Vegas and for the past few years has been in Orlando, Florida, in July. Yuck.

AFFTA, absolutely, positively made the right call by going with ICAST. The late John Merwin of *Field & Stream* was strongly in favor of putting fly fishing back in all fishing... and so the AT editors were in favor of that move too.

Joining ICAST saved the fly show. It was important, and worthy. Orlando in July sucked, and still sucks, not only in terms of the weather, but it also demands many in fly fishing to depart their home waters, where good fishing is actually happening, to go to Florida in the lull of the (fly) season there. Still, we stand by the notion that it was a good move, and for a while, it brought ASA and AFFTA closer together.

But as these past few years have evolved, it's been increasingly apparent to us (AT) that fly fishing has been, and always will be an afterthought to ASA. There are other conservation-related matters (more later) that highlighted an ideological divide between fly and conventional (AFFTA and ASA), and AFFTA has now decided to break off and do its own show, next year, back in Denver.

What goes around comes around. But there are some key thoughts to consider. We (AT) feel it is OKAY for fly fishing to be fly fishing. Fly fishing is about many things, in many places, but at the end of the day, it's about trout fishing, foremost. The show needs to be where there are trout. The show must be at a time when people who deal in trout, can actually go to the show and not interrupt the primes of their seasons.

We fully expect a full-tilt, happy

homecoming in October of 2019. After which time, various manufacturers will start bitching and complaining about the timing and location, and we'll all be right back where we were 10 years ago.

Times have changed, the relevance of trade shows (in terms of interactions with the shrinking corps of dealers, described before, have changed). But manufacturers will now have to buck up. Do you really like fly fishing, and a fly-fishing trade organization, and however many fly dealers you've left? If so, great. Suck it up, deal with a fly show, in a fly market, and make it the best you can, at a time that works for dealers. And dealers, go to the show, or risk not having a trade organization that works in your interests. Period.



## 5. Conservation.

Without the resources, there are no fish. Without the fish, there is no fishing. And without the fishing, there is no market, no business, no nothing.

Trout, bonefish, tarpon, salmon, etc., are remarkably strong and beautiful species, but they are fragile species, and it is incumbent upon anyone who derives a living from fly fishing—from guide, to manufacturer, to retailer—to be in tune with, and supportive of, efforts to ensure as many healthy fish in our waters as possible. Granted, there is certainly room for differing opinions on how conservation

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happens, but to only “sell” and never “put back” is a shameful place to be. Conscience matters to the vast, vast majority of people in the fly-fishing industry.

One of the greatest obstacles, particularly at this time and in this political climate, is the in-fighting amongst various conservation organizations dedicated to protecting the habitat that makes fishing possible. “My brand of conservation is better than yours” is killing the conservation effort. Be that in the form of one organization undercutting another, or the individual on social media who complains that a person who posted a photo of a fish that wasn’t kept wet enough. By disclaimer, the AT editors are also deeply involved with Trout Unlimited and other organizations. As a case in point, we recall a situation where we ran a photo of a person with a wild steelhead in *TROUT* magazine, who had just donated a quarter of a million dollars to wild steelhead efforts... only to have that person pilloried by some blog-niks who didn’t approve of how deep the fin dipped into the water in the photo. The point was well-taken, and we can all endeavor to handle fish better. But if you want zero chance of killing a fish... don’t fish. And since we’re all in the fishing business, it might be better to aim our vitriol at the folks who don’t care about clean water, or open spaces, than it is to pee in each others’ Cheerios.

To wit, one might also ask about AFFTA’s recent stance in favor of Magnusson-Stevens, and our saltwater fisheries management. ASA and AFFTA are at loggerheads over that now.

On the one hand, red snapper have about as little to do with fly fishing as

mule deer do. Far more important to consider the assaults on the Clean Water Rule, and all that, than how red snapper are managed. But on the other hand, it is a slippery slope, and managing species is a concern to AFFTA, inshore and offshore. AFFTA has a right to go down this path. Others, including ASA, have a right to disagree with that path.

*Angling Trade* has a right to not get involved in the argument.

Care about the fish that matter to this market. Act accordingly, beyond words. Do not distract yourselves with ancillary issues, no matter where the money comes from.

Our sport is woefully under-supported by the companies that primarily deal in fly fishing, from the conservation standpoint. You could say it is embarrassing, when compared to how Ducks Unlimited, for example, is supported by the shooting industry. But our industry is admittedly smaller.

Some companies fight above their weight class: Orvis. Costa. Scott. Patagonia. Others. Many are surprising lightweights. We’ll stop there.



## 6. Media/Film.

Media has certainly changed a lot in the past 10 years. There used to be *Fly Rod & Reel* magazine, for example. For a traditionalist, its demise might

be a sad indicator of the state of outdoor media. Then again, there are slews of E-zines, and blogs, and social media and such... which give power to the proletariat. That’s by and large a good thing, but it also comes with potential pitfalls (see the Geoff Mueller feature on “Ambassadors” in this issue for further context).

As people who actually work in media for a living, we won’t lie to you... it took school, and a lot of years, and many hard-rolled miles to earn our bylines and attention, and frankly, when someone steps into a social media void, snaps a photo, and claims to have a Ph.D. in fly fishing, it’s laughable. But it’s reality.

Is print dead? Of course not. Look at *The Drake*, or *The Flyfish Journal*. Thank goodness for Tom Bie and Jeff Galbraith, because they’ve kept that genre alive—though, in truth, the real reader demographic in this sport isn’t 27 years old... it has been, and will continue to be, 50-70-year-old white guys, who just wish they were 27 years old.

One of the most interesting phenomena in fly-fishing media over the past 10 years has been video, and the Fly Fishing Film Tour.

It arrived, years ago, as a splash. Who the heck didn’t absolutely love our weird little sport being immortalized through cool videos? Who didn’t want to watch a trout sip a dry fly, or a tarpon crash on the flats? We hadn’t seen that before, at least not much.

But then it became old hat, and many of us were left sitting in the audience, watching yet another fish eat... cha-cha-cha... funky music... cha-cha-cha... whatever.

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It all started with conscience (see “Red Gold”) and we’d posit to you that it’s all come back to conscience, at least that’s what the last version of F3T showed us. A daughter talking about her guide mother (when two years ago we were deluged with criticisms about the lack of female perspective). Veterans in wild places. Drug runners turned fishing guides... Every element of the Fly Fishing Film Tour this year showed at least some modicum of “conscience,” which was a major step forward and perhaps solidifies the relevance of F3T for the future.

At the end of the day, the media situation shadows the retailer situation. Content is king. Credibility is queen. Good writing is good writing. The consumer is now strapped with the responsibility of wading through everything. The retailer... the guide... the aficionado, is empowered with the ability and opportunity to help tell them what is worthy, and what is not.



## 7. Access.

If you build it, they will come. If you build a fence around it, most of them will obey the signs you hang on your fence, but some will not.

Outfitters, guides, shops... you cannot have it both ways. If you like “pay-to-play” and you profit from that game, that’s fine, and it’s up to you. But the greatest threat to the sport of fly fishing, in terms of growth, is that anglers cannot find solitude on the water. And let’s face it, solitude is a big part of fly fishing.

If we knew that every time we wanted to fish a run in a river, we’d have to wait for the group in front of us to pass through... well, we’d just play golf, because that’s what golf is.

Access to fishing opportunity will decide the future of fly fishing. We already have enough anglers to adequately fill the waters that are available to them. That said... nothing is going to change, for the better. The only possible changes, are those for the worse.

We’ve talked to many lawyers in many different states, where the water laws are all different. While we would love to see private water designation open up for the masses, we don’t see that happening in our lifetimes.

We do, unfortunately, see the possibility of what is public now, becoming private later, in our lifetimes, and that’s huge threat to the future viability of this sport.

Utah is ground zero. AT has been behind the Utah Stream Access Coalition 100 percent, from the beginning. We will continue to be there.

Montana is scary, because every now and then somebody decides to press the law. But in the end, we think most people in Montana will understand that the only reason Montana is Montana in terms of its fishing stature, is because someone can climb in a river at a bridge and stay within the high-water marks, and be completely within the law.

To lose that, Montana, would be beyond stupid. Montana would become glorified cattle and sheep range (with the occasional open pit mine) in a harsh climate, with thousands of Californian land-owners wondering, what-the-hey?

As an industry, we must hold the line. We have enough to worry about, to

keep what is public, public. Frankly, the greatest public access issue facing fly fishing, by far, is the public lands issue that would cede management of Bureau of Land Management and other federally-controlled lands to states. TU, TRCP, NWF, BHA and others are on this. Make it a priority. Support public lands, no matter where you are, no matter where you live. The massive swatches of public lands, particularly in the West, are of vital importance to your business, whether you realize it or not.



## 8. Diversity.

The “holy grail” in fly fishing over the past 10 years AT has been covering this market (and before) has been diversity. How do we get more women involved with fly fishing, and how do we include more people of color?

In terms of women in the sport, we definitely see a rising tide there. As Kara Armano point out in her “Artemis” story in this issue, women are now 25 percent of all anglers, which represents a 90-percent jump in the past 15 years. We see more active, more vocal, more visible female anglers, and the sport, as a whole, has done a lot more than it was doing 10 years ago, when the prevailing attitude was simply to “pink it and shrink it.”

But by and large, our diversity efforts are still woefully lacking. Women are still woefully under-represented in fly fishing. The products made specifically for women anglers, while better than they were 10 years ago, still barely scratch the potential, the need, and the opportunity.

We hold high hopes for the 50/50 campaign spearheaded by Orvis.

Women are better anglers than men. Moreover, women are the decision-makers in most families (ours, for sure). The future of diversity, in this sport, is not so much a matter of targeting products and opportunities toward women (though that is extremely important). It's about families, and making fly fishing a family endeavor, as it has been for many of us who enjoy the sport now. All members of the family are important, and that actually starts with mom... or sister.

In terms of people of color, fly fishing has made some in-roads, but that's also woefully lacking. We are becoming a more diverse nation by the minute, and until fly fishing makes more concerted efforts to target the Latino and African-American communities, specifically, it will be stuck in the status quo.



## 9. Diversity of Species.

Over the past 10 years, many of us jumped on the bandwagon of belief (ourselves most definitely included) that if we could only convince more anglers to chase species other than trout, or salmon, or bonefish, or tarpon, with a fly rod, we could blow this sport up and grow it by leaps and bounds.

God bless the common carp. It's an ugly, stinky fish, to be sure, but it also happens to be supremely difficult to hook with a fly, and better yet, it lives seemingly

everywhere. The fly angler in Terre Haute, Indiana, can be every bit the fly guru (if not more) than the fly angler in Missoula, Montana, if he or she could master the art of hooking carp on the fly.

Why do we discredit bass? Bubba's got it right. Those fish are everywhere, and they're fun! Muskies... total jerks, and so hard to catch, but why don't we hold them in the same esteem as permit? What's more fun than catching bluegills off a dock on a lake with a yellow humpy fly, especially when you're doing that with your 10-year-old granddaughter?

It's all edging, ever so slightly, in that direction, and that's inevitably a good thing.

But let's not mistake the facts. It's a trout world, baby. Eighty percent of the rods sold in this country are 9-foot, 5-weights. We aspire to catch bonefish and tarpon. We must recognize where the bread gets buttered and take care of those resources, foremost.

But we need to push the boundaries.

One of the easiest, most obvious boundaries to push is the jungle. And for anglers willing to travel, going to South America is the new frontier. What's happening there, right now, is akin to what was happening in Africa during the golden age of the safari, a century ago. That is the last, best realm of exploration for any fly angler living right now. They can catch "new" species the world is just now starting to understand. And, frankly, for the well-heeled angler who lives in Atlanta, for example, the logistics of getting to the true jungle are easier, and faster, than they are to get to Alaska. If you're not already sending customers to the jungle to fish, you will be within five years.



## 10. Conscience.

Frankly, the biggest eye-opener, in all that we've discussed above, has been that, over the past 10 years, we've seen fly fishing develop more of a conscience than we have ever noticed before.

That spreads from manufacturers, to retailers, to media, to others.


To a tee... those who had the hot idea, but didn't care about the culture, or the market, or the environment, or what might help the "common good" when it came to fly fishing... well, they're all gone. Cleansed. Adios. Out of the picture.

Some of them might be now nibbling at the edges, and trying to get in, and all that. But they have a tall hill to climb.

The bottom line is that the good companies, and the good people, last, and the pretenders get sorted out.

That's not our doing... it's the market.

## Conclusion

Be credible. Exude substance. Leverage that substance. Forge strong manufacturer partnerships. Ride their coattails. Don't trust that your manufacturer coattails will be there all the time. Know that the very manufacturers that supply you will sell against you. Also know that they need your expertise. Your trade organization is small, but mighty. Your world likely revolves around trout but trout are only part of the puzzle. It's a much bigger fly-fishing world. Conservation, in all regards, is critical. Access is critical, whether the issue lives your state or not. One angler who has a legitimate "conscience" is worth 10 who "dabble." You decide the future of this sport. 





## FEATURE

# A RIVER OF FREE STUFF RUNS THROUGH IT

**How Fly Fishing Has Created a Donation Monster**

*Written by Marshall Bissett*



A Colorado sales representative recently asked his office to log the requests they receive for donations or discounts. The results he shared with me surprised both of us; prompting me to contact manufacturers, fly shops, sales reps and guides across the country. The

question: "How often are you asked to supply free stuff?" was met with laughter followed by a diatribe against freeloaders, cheapskate customers, dodgy charities and unscrupulous guides—everything from mild cynicism to apoplectic rage.

Ben Mintz, a well-known industry publicist, said, "Guys used to ask for a couple of flies, now they want a trip to Belize." The paradoxes are everywhere. If the sport is full of medium to high net worth white guys with lots of disposable income, why do they

only buy discounted gear? If the cost of entry is so much less than 10 years ago, why do buyers go to such lengths to bypass traditional retail stores? Why does fly fishing equipment never sell for its true value at auction? Most shocking, I learned of two cases where shell companies were set up just to establish trade discounts with manufacturers. The scam was only uncovered by tracking serial numbers when the items showed up on eBay.

## MANUFACTURERS – THE FOUNTAINHEAD OF FREEBIES

The top manufacturers are the first call for eager club fundraisers, prospective guides or writers reviewing the latest gear. Here the perception that rod, reel and clothing companies are immensely profitable somehow makes it easier than asking for similar discounts at department stores, restaurants or car dealerships. Marc Bale, vice president of Far Bank Enterprises dispels that notion: “The industry is much smaller than people think – less than 10 companies do more than 10 million dollars a year – most do substantially less – outsiders think there’s an extra zero on our sales numbers. An organization like Far Bank has many points of entry for persistent callers and the constant pressing barrage of requests can make the office feel like a fortress under attack.”

That being said, it’s rare to see an auction without at least one Sage rod, Rio line or Redington reel. Jeff Patterson, Sales Manager for Abel/Ross reels also fields “a thousand requests” giving clubs the chance to buy reels at a discount where there is no conflict with local fly shops. “We want the clubs to thrive – they are our customers. I would rather speak to a club about a donation than someone bitching about a reel they bought on eBay!” he jokes. Toby

Uppinghouse, California sales rep for TFO keeps it simple - selling one rod and one reel per year at a 50% discount to recognized Clubs and organizations. If you’re keeping count, there are 22 FFI member clubs in Southern California and Southern Nevada and about 300 nationwide. If a rod/reel combo lists at \$500, that’s \$150,000 of lost sales. This would not include TU affiliated chapters or environmental groups that could drive the total well over 1000.\*

- *Footnote: As a point of clarification, TU spends over \$1 million per year on product from the fly industry (mostly rods and reels) to use in membership campaigns. The industry collectively spends less than half that amount to support the conservation programs of TU.*

ORVIS holds a unique position as a manufacturer and a retailer. “Hutch” Hutchinson, their western regional sales manager, admits to receiving at least four donation requests a week by phone, email and social media. “Every week somebody is looking for something for free,” he says with a laugh, “I can’t imagine how many requests Tom Rosenbauer (marketing manager) is getting.” Hutchinson recently lost a sale to a client who deviously found a 40% off deal from a rival rod company. “I had to laugh when I saw him drive out of the dealer’s parking lot in a late model Lamborghini,” he said with only a touch of bitterness. ORVIS, as you would expect of a large well-run company, sets rigorous standards for its multi-level endorsement programs. Guides such as George Daniel and Glenn Ueda, are ORVIS endorsed as much for their social media presence as their angling ability. Hutchinson sits on the boards of other outdoor companies and believes that quid pro quo is standard across the outdoor industry. “Ski shops are big

offenders– the owners and employees all expect gear in exchange for a stocking order.”

## SALES REPRESENTATIVES – PRESSURED ON ALL FRONTS

“Sales reps have the hardest position in this business – they get crap from the manufacturers and they get crap from the dealers,” says Steve Ellis, owner of the Fishermen’s Spot in Van Nuys, CA. In 42 years he has seen the profile of sales reps change: “Back in the day reps were old alcoholic white guys who smoked cigars and were on their third marriage. Now they’re keen young guys with families who got into it to fish but can’t because they have to work too hard.”

Scott Harkins, President of Five Oceans Inc, representing Simms, Solitude and Nautilus in Colorado, (and the inspiration for this article), gave up counting donation requests after three months. “We had at least one a day from dealers, film festivals, non-profits – we couldn’t keep up,” he said of his experiment, “we will always support our main dealers even when the donations exceed our allowances and we wind up paying for it.” In the ‘no good deed goes unpunished’ file, donations to clubs often upset retailers especially when an item at a fundraiser sells for less than half its retail price. In California, Simms sales rep John Sherman, facing a steady demise of fly shops from seventy five down to about nineteen says, “We have to be very strategic with our donated product or it comes out of our pocket.” Alex Ramirez represents Far Banks, Fishpond, Tibor and Solitude in the Southwest. He remembers his days working retail in a San Diego fly shop: “We saw a lot of celebrities, pro athletes and large company owners – they all wanted special deals on gear – I think that’s human nature.”

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## "Go to a fly fishing fundraiser and a \$300 reel will sell for \$75 bucks if you're lucky - go to a Ducks Unlimited or Safari Club event and a plate with a duck on it will raise five grand."

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### FLY SHOPS ON THE FRONT LINES

David Leinweber of Angler's Covey in Colorado Springs often finds himself in competition with the organizations he is trying to help: "The high end fly rod market has so many things working against it that growth is almost stagnant. The big manufacturers offer these discount coupons which are then sold at club auctions for about \$50, effectively driving the market down." He has had to distance himself from a local group that has formed a virtual co-op whose sole aim is to get discounted gear from manufacturers. "They then have the gall to ask my store to put line on the reels they avoided buying from me," he says, "and none of them are on the poverty line." Ellis has identified two breeds of customer – the old rich and the new rich. "The new rich are the worst – they will always challenge a stated price even if it's a 75% discounted item – they just want to grind – it's in their nature," adding, "the millennials are just as bad." Echoing Leinweber's concerns, he is often up against manufacturers who sell or donate directly to Clubs and end users. Don't get him started on guide programs. "Anyone with \$200 can become a California guide and buy gear cheaper than I can."

Jamie Lyle, who for many years ran one of California's most successful fly-fishing sales businesses, has moved to Bozeman and works for SITKA products, a leading outdoor clothing manufacturer. He

witnessed first-hand the steady attrition of Southwest fly shops as soon as "fifty-year-old guys were confident handing over their credit card to an out-of-state vendor." He believes that the outdoor industry has to promote itself through influencers. "In a certain era it was guys like Lefty Kreh – now it's younger people with a huge Internet presence – the trick is to identify your brand with the right influencers."


Many are concerned that fly shops are the most adversely affected. None defended their cause more vigorously than photographer (and retired sales representative) Brian O'Keefe. "We all like a deal or a discount, on a car, a TV, something on eBay. My only gripe is that the independent fly shop is on a slippery slope. Don't they draw maps for anglers to good fishing spots, recommend the hot flies, teach knots, casting and tying? Shouldn't retired businessmen (deal seeking with women is not nearly as common), who can afford today's tackle, just pay retail?"

### THE NO IMAGINATION FUNDRAISER

The fly fishing industry seems determined to feed on itself. The hundreds of fundraisers across the country are a good example. We've all been there – the long table with obsolete fly lines, unremarkable fly plates, wrong-sized clothes and the miscellany that make up a typical fishing club auction. There is no reason why clubs and non

profits could not hit up their local wine merchants, movie theaters, spas and restaurants for lifestyle auction items, giving the fly fishing industry a welcome break. Marc Bale has seen his share of auctions: "Go to a fly fishing fundraiser and a \$300 reel will sell for \$75 bucks if you're lucky – go to a Ducks Unlimited or Safari Club event and a plate with a duck on it will raise five grand."

The FFI (Fly Fishers International) have a solution they hope will work for all parties. In 2016 they created the "Industry Partner Program" whereby FFI acts as a central clearing house for donated or discounted products from participating manufacturers and retailers. Currently they have agreements with eight manufacturers to provide equipment to FFI who in turn pass it on to their affiliated clubs. "This takes the pressure off the industry partner who can hand over donation requests for us to administer," says Rhonda, Operations Manager of FFI based in Livingston, MT. "We handle all parts of the transaction - it is part of the service we provide to clubs and councils." The FFI hope to expand this program over the coming months.

Almost everyone agrees that the river of free gear could use a few lock keepers to regulate the flow. If donations promote brand loyalty and get newcomers into the sport they serve a useful purpose. If not, they are a misdirected and pointless subsidy. 

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## FEATURE

# ANGLING AND THE FUTURE OUTDOOR ECONOMY

**Are we going to be key players?**

*Written by Jonathan Lee Wright*



The fly-fishing industry is a zebra. On one hand, it has strong roots in conservation and environmental advocacy, with long-standing volunteer efforts for river clean up, trail maintenance and, lately, support for veterans recovery groups. At the same time, the business end of things -- both at the manufacturing and retail level -- has become much more intensely technical and

competitive, where hard analysis of sales, customer data and social media marketing are now crucial components for even the average fly shop. In an industry where carrying the wrong color variant of a specific fly pattern for your drainage can kill your walk-in traffic, crunching numbers down to specific unique bar codes has become the new normal.

I recently attended the Outdoor Economics Conference in Las Cruces, NM, where the finer policy points of outdoor recreation were impressed on me in no uncertain terms. Organized and presented by the Outdoor Industry Association and featuring some of the more heavyweight voices in the business, the returning theme of the conference was that Outdoor

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# FEATURE

Rec is now not only an economic force in this country, but also one whose future crucially depends on the sustainable management of public lands. The recent relocation of the Outdoor Retailer trade show from Salt Lake City to Denver was a direct result of leading manufacturer Patagonia making a business decision to boycott the Utah venue based on state policy surrounding national monuments. The financial fallout of this has not gone unnoticed in the legislature there.

At Las Cruces, panelists from across the country came to relate stories of businesses built from the ground up based on the premise of public access to unspoiled space. Angling, white water outfitting, camping, biking, and other markets were all represented in making unified statements as to the core value of the preserved integrity of wilderness and open lands. Chambers of Commerce from highly visible and successful regions gave their take as well, with leaders telling how outdoor recreation has been key to overall growth in their areas, both urban and rural alike. Not only does Outdoor Recreation drive the economy in these locales directly, but it provides an incentive for businesses without regional ties like Tech to relocate in the interest of attracting and retaining key talent on the basis of quality of life.

Luis Benitez, Director of the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Office, and Keynote Speaker at the conference, comes from a background of guiding high altitude mountaineering, with multiple ascents of Mt. Everest to his credit. This is someone who is used to getting things done. Luis grew up

in a modest town in the midwest, where his father ran a hardware store that was one of the first Orvis dealers west of the Mississippi. His appointment and bureau were made by a direct mandate from the governor, who recognized the economic value that similar offices were having for two other states, Utah and Washington. As director of his state office, one of Benitez' responsibilities as dictated by the Office of Economic Development is to engage and act as a liaison to state agencies on behalf of the Outdoor Industry.

In his address to the the conference, Luis drove home the power of Outdoor Recreation by citing numbers from analysis produced in collaboration with major corporate partners including REI, Patagonia and The North Face. Stunningly, the final tally for what Outdoor Rec represents to the national economy is currently \$887,000,000,000.00 per year, creating 7.6 million jobs. With the entire US economy now valued at roughly \$11 Trillion, the \$887 Billion that the outdoor industry brings to the table is a significant piece of the pie -- larger than the Automotive, Pharmaceutical and Fuel industries combined.

Angling, in particular, was well represented in the analysis. While Camping as a distinct category leads the list with \$166 billion in sales, Fishing was ranked second with nearly \$36 billion, paying \$2.5 billion in federal taxes alone. (The subcategory of Fly Fishing has been determined by internal analysts within our industry to represent approximately 10% of these totals overall.) However, most of the separate categories incorporate

camping in the activity, so the Camping numbers are supported by the rest of the industry. Anglers definitely camp when they fish, as do hunters, mountain bikers and almost everyone else enjoying the outdoors. The takeaway message here is, Angling is being recognized by the OIA as a leading component in this economy, despite having a historically distinctly separate identity and culture that is probably more closely aligned to anything else than Hunting, which holds the #3 position via \$27 billion in sales. All of these statistics included the purchase of vehicles to specifically support the activity.

Mr. Benitez's presentation was followed by a round-table discussion with the directors of the Utah and Washington state Outdoor Recreation offices, who related similar positions and reinforcement of his message in terms of the benefit that the outdoor economy has brought to their states. The fundamental political equity that outdoor recreation represents was not lost here -- what people do on the weekends is a primary motivation for what make them suit up and go to work the other five days of the week. Put this at risk, and you have a real voter problem.

Bend, Oregon was recently host to the US National Fly Fishing Championships, a selection made in part owing to the diversity of fishing resource there, with trout, steelhead, bass and pike all readily available in the immediate area. Keveny Dugan is president of Visit Bend, a forward-thinking and data-driven tourism board that is paying close attention to the efforts of

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# FEATURE



the bureau of Outdoor Recreation and Economic Development in neighboring Washington state. Dugan was part of a panel that made comments on the coming necessity of the industry to engage politically to ensure that the basic resources driving the powerhouse outdoor industry are protected. With the local economy in Bend shifting from timber and ranching to tourism, having an assured natural environment is a clear advantage in a regionally competitive market for visitor dollars.

The primary reason New Mexico was chosen for this version of the Outdoor Economics conference was to educate local managers and politicians to the benefits of developing a dedicated office of Outdoor Recreation -- which the state currently does not, despite having natural resources that are on a par with others in the region. Fly

fishing figures heavily in this, with world-class tail water trout fishing on the San Juan river, adventure floats in the Rio Grande Gorge near Taos, high mountain small stream fishing, and excellent bass and tiger musky populations in lakes statewide. Coordinating the conservation of these resources with state agencies and their budgets could both fine-tune the economic potentials and ensure ongoing benefits for the public and business. At conference conclusion, attendees were asked to call for local referendums across the state requesting the creation of a NM Outdoor Recreation Office.

While the Intermountain west and Pacific regions are well known outdoor destinations, the South Atlantic market from Virginia to Florida is larger than either in terms of dollars. New

England and the Middle Atlantic have their own attractions and long-standing threats as well. The need for economically driven management of natural resources is now national.

I asked Luis Benitez if he could give a statement specifically addressing the Angling market, and he responded,

"Regarding the conservation and stewardship of our economic engine, we are ALL connected, and should start behaving accordingly." Initially, this struck me as the kind of blandly political statement that is hard to write about. But as I considered it more fully, this has profound implications. A coalition of outdoor industries working together, despite any specific differences, is a much stronger force not only for change, but for things to remain as they have been. 🐟





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## FEATURE

# ARTEMIS: GIVING WOMEN A VOICE FOR CONSERVATION AND THE OUTDOORS

Written by Kara Armano



## Artemis

Conservation runs through my blood. Ever since my great grandmother spent time with me as a young child outdoors showing me how to observe mountain ranges, rivers, plants, animals, insects, and fish, I've felt an obligation to protect our lands, waters and wildlife. As a lifelong angler, I have a duty to

conserve and preserve, and as a woman, my voice is powerful.

I'm certainly not the only sportswoman who yearns to expand the narrative around conservation, so in early 2017, 10 sportswomen came together to consider how our voices as female anglers and

hunters could be used for effective change. With that, Artemis was born. Women make up more than 25% of anglers and 20% of hunters with a 90% increase over the last 15 years, so there is a significant groundswell for women's voices to be heard on conservation issues. There can never be enough voices for conservation, especially now.



Understanding the value of the land and wildlife that gives as we take is at the heart of the National Wildlife Federation, of which Artemis is an initiative. We embody sporting conservation traditions when we land a burly brown trout or take a deer or elk for sustenance, and we embrace the idea that these values should be shared through our voices with our fellow hunters and anglers, with our game and fish managers, with our elected officials, and most importantly, with future generations.

*The Women of Artemis*

*continued on next page...*

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## FEATURE



*Artemis founder Kara Armano chucks some feathers in the Colorado high country.*

Artemis supports public lands and waters because they are an American treasure to all citizens and at the backbone of our sporting traditions. We vehemently defend these lands and waters and work to keep them healthy and accessible for ours and future generations by shining the light on hunting and fishing opportunities here, speaking to our elected representatives, and even passing legislation to help promote and support these sacred areas.

Artemis celebrates all wildlife species and habitats, but we focus specifically on mule deer and cutthroat trout because both species are primary to our sporting lives and both have seen significant declines in numbers due to development, fragmentation, and


other factors. The protection and conservation of these two species is a large task, but we support those working on behalf of them and work to educate hunters and anglers of their importance.

Lastly, Artemis is on a mission to empower new leaders in the conservation space. We urge women to hold a seat at the table, to be vocal, to set an example of ethical hunting and fishing practices, and to pass those values and traditions to future generations. We support women currently holding wildlife and conservation leadership positions and encourage and foster women in leadership roles – on local, state and national levels.

Currently focused on six Western states (WY, MT, ID, CO, SD, and

NM), Artemis is putting together the framework to engage sportswomen for events, volunteer work, social meet-ups, letter writing, communication, and more that will eventually spread nationwide.

Women's voices are powerful. We tell stories with passion and emotion about our successes and failures while hunting and fishing. We are thoughtful and contemplative about the places hunting and fishing take us. We understand the value of passing sporting traditions to our children. Artemis provides the outlet sportswomen need to have our voices heard by our peers, political leaders, and all anglers and hunters.

Find out more and join Artemis at [artemis.nwf.org](http://artemis.nwf.org). 





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## FEATURE

# BUILDING YOUR BRAND (AMBASSADOR)

### What your influencer says about you

*Written by Geoff Mueller*



Everybody loves something for nothing. Or at least the appearance of it. Brian Runnels, owner of the subscription fly-pattern business PostFly.com, knows this well. When he advertised for ambassadors in 2017, his company received more than 2,000 applications. “There’s no money in it. They’re going to receive some free product, and in turn we’re going to repost some of their photos,” he says.

Runnels selected 20 anglers for the gig. And the lucky few will help fuel his social-media feeds and website pages with still imagery, video shorts, and blog content for the duration of their contracts. This content exchange between ambassador and brand is the new standard in an evolving digital space. And although the fly-fishing celebrity—insert April Vokey or similar—is alive and well, what you may be surprised to learn is that you

won’t recognize most of the faces in Runnel’s ambassador squad.

“Part of what we’re trying to fight is the elitist attitude. For the most part, our ambassadors are fishing in their backyards,” he explains. “They’re doing what we can all do on the weekend—go fish a local stream or hit a golf-course pond. It’s extremely relatable for our customer base, and that’s why I think it works so well.”

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## FEATURE

These days, specific criteria for brand ambassadorship inclusion varies. One company wants LeBron; another wants a talking gecko. But in general, these smiling faces (or stoic, if you prefer) are selected to represent and promote products and/or lifestyles in a positive, on-brand light. Ideally, the chosen ones understand what a business stands for, and they're able to convey that message to a city-size audience of potential consumers. In order to do that, it's increasingly essential that brand ambassadors come with a built-in following, whether it's on Instagram or Facebook, or through their connections in a specific community. Being the face of a brand includes also a wide range of responsibilities that goes beyond farming for "likes." Or at least it should.

Although Runnels doesn't use angling expertise as a make-or-break qualifier, marketing execs at many industry brands place an emphasis on fishing skill. A person's etiquette, both on and off the water, is another key consideration. And it's something Thomas & Thomas fly rods was recently forced to evaluate after one of its pros, Patrick Duke, fell into an Internet inferno following some objectionable behavior.

"We did get our fingers burnt with everything that happened with Patrick," says Neville Ormond, T&T's CEO. "He fished on redds. He got caught without a license. And they sold their pictures from that day to a major magazine. They posted those pics for the whole world to see. That was pushing it way too far."

Duke has since been cut from T&T. Despite the controversy, Ormond maintains that his remaining

ambassadors are actively involved in progressing the sport for the better, and that includes representing a conservation ethos that parallels the company's core values. At T&T, with a booming four-tiered ambassadorship program made up entirely of career fly fishers, etiquette isn't part of any written contract. It is, however, expected.

"If you get to this stage, the best ambassadors shouldn't need a contract telling them how to act," he explains. "And if you're going to make stupid mistakes, there's going to be consequences."

Like PostFly, T&T annually receives thousands of applications for its ambassador positions. And that deluge directly coincides with a rise in social media popularity. As Sage's Brand Manager, David Lantz notes that social has become one of the most important tools in a marketer's kit. "At this point our Instagram account is about 10-fold what our daily interaction is on our website." The difficulty, he says, is that you have a mere fraction of a second to make an impression on social media. "So how valuable is that? I care more about the person who sat down and watched all five minutes of a video that we made specifically for the site."

To that end, Sage sees engagement as the crucial measure. In other words, the act of generating discussion, over other factors such as a person's volume of followers or the number of likes he or she generates with any given post. The brand chooses its ambassadors based on similar ideals. "For me, the biggest thing is being a steward in your community," Lantz says. "If I hear otherwise, you're not going to be on the team." Sage

recently brought on Olympic Peninsula guide Gray Struznik, because of his wild steelhead conservation efforts and due to how well respected he is as an area guide. "As other people transition off the team, he's a good example of who I want to add."

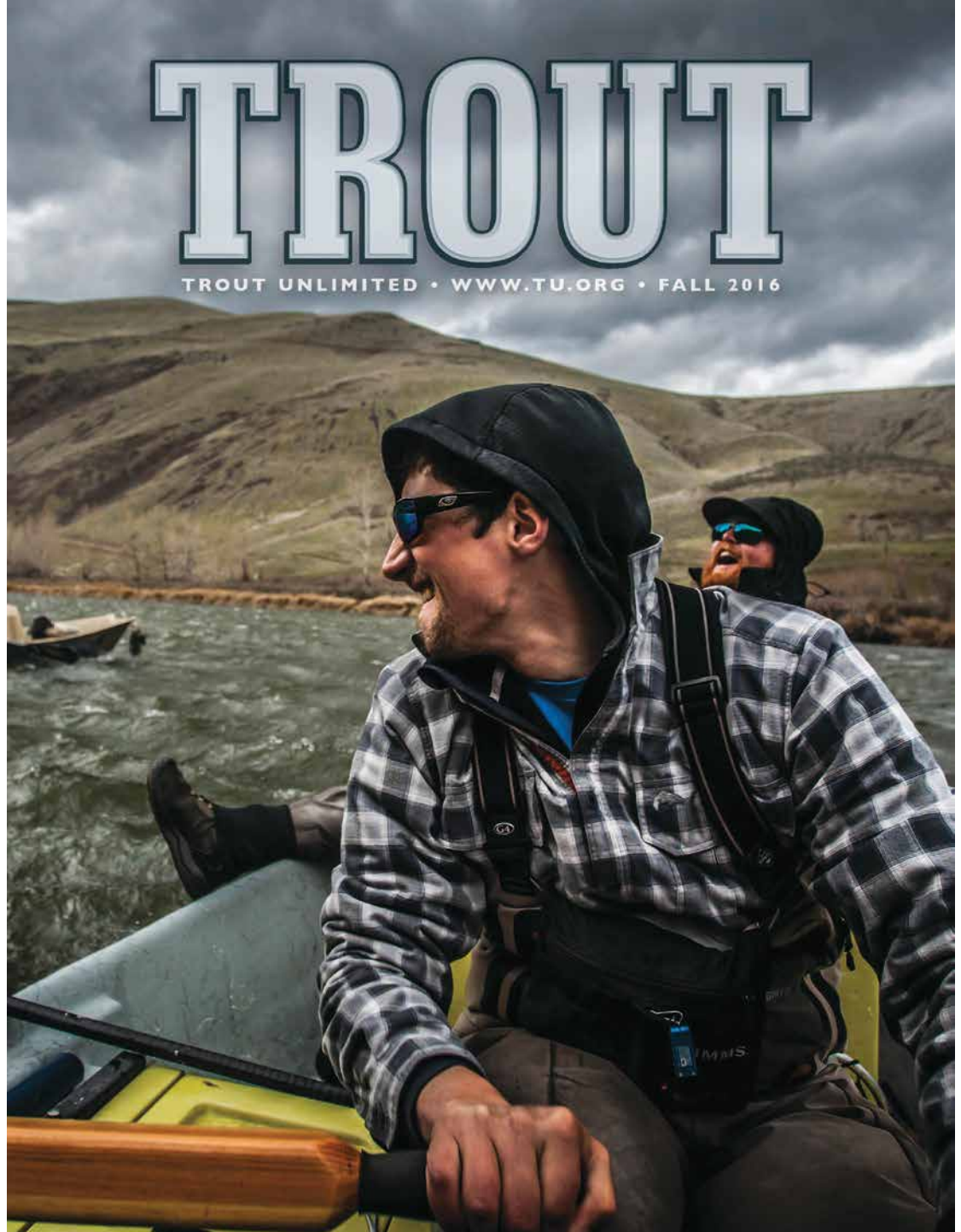
Born and raised in Forks, Washington, a hotbed for anglers targeting declining runs of winter steelhead on well trafficked rivers such as the Hoh, Struznik says that balancing a brand's agenda with an ambassador's personal opinions can sometimes be a challenge. "You're not just representing yourself when you're connected with a company, you're also representing them. So when shit hits the fan, you have to keep your cool and go about things in a professional manner."

On the water, that translates to leading by example. And it's a role that Struznik also takes seriously off of it, especially in how he portrays himself and his guide business within the social media bubble. Online behavior has been the subject of several late-night conversations between fellow guides this past winter, he says. "Where do you draw the line between promoting a livelihood versus protecting the fragile fisheries it's based on?" For Struznik the answer is obvious, "I now have enough business that I've made it a point this year to post fewer pictures of wild steelhead. Otherwise, you're just taking this special fishery and turning it into a chest-beating game."

Struznik is in a unique position that has allowed him to wind down content creation in exchange for ramped up efforts in the community, trying to resurrect good fishing through his work alongside an active Olympic

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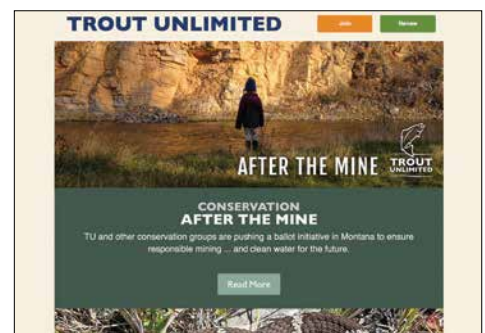


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# FEATURE

Peninsula Guides' Association. But most brand ambassadors don't have that luxury. Instead, they've chosen to embrace a role that, by design, demands a high output of both self and brand promotion.

Oliver White, part owner of Abaco and Bair's lodges, and an ambassador for Howler Bros., G.Loomis, Costa, Yeti, Nautilus, and Yellow Dog, maintains huge (for this industry) social media followings, while showing no signs of slowing down when it comes to feeding those followers his off-the-grid storyline. It's a role he enjoys. And it's not one that he takes lightly.

"People not only look to you to be an example, but there are a whole lot of people looking to make an example out of you," White says. "My emphasis has always been to live this life that I've chosen—running lodges, guiding, hosting trips, writing. My role as an 'influencer' really just developed naturally, as an offshoot of these other aspects."

Similarly, the companies White has relationships with are the same companies he's been familiar with as a consumer for years. And transitioning from consumer to ambassador, he says, has been an exercise in creating an honest dialog through his busy social media interactions, as well as through conversations that occur in person and on the water. White's position as a flyrodding nomad, someone with a long trail of passport stamps, puts him in a good position to lend credible insights on gear that's getting a legitimate workout in the

field. From a brand's POV, that kind of PR is gold.

"I think the consumer is very savvy these days," he adds. "They do a great job of sniffing out authenticity. And in a lot of ways that's the real value of a good ambassador."

When most anything can be faked on social media, including fly-fishing prowess, honesty is admirable. Maybe your ambassadors shoot marginal cell-phone footage, or maybe, like White, they don't leave home without a professional photog in tow. Whoever they are, full transparency lends itself to credibility and likeability, and in many cases employability.

"It's easy to be really snooty about ambassadors and to say that you only want the best angler, who shoots awesome photos and has a massive following," says Josh Prestin, who recently departed Redington for a marketing position with Sitka. "But that can be like finding a unicorn. Sometimes we need someone who's going to embrace the educational journey. If we're trying to recruit more people to the sport—that can be cool and welcoming."

As for recruiting ambassadors, with so many so-called social media icons roaming the landscape, there's no shortage of choices. And that makes choosing wisely all the more important. 🐟

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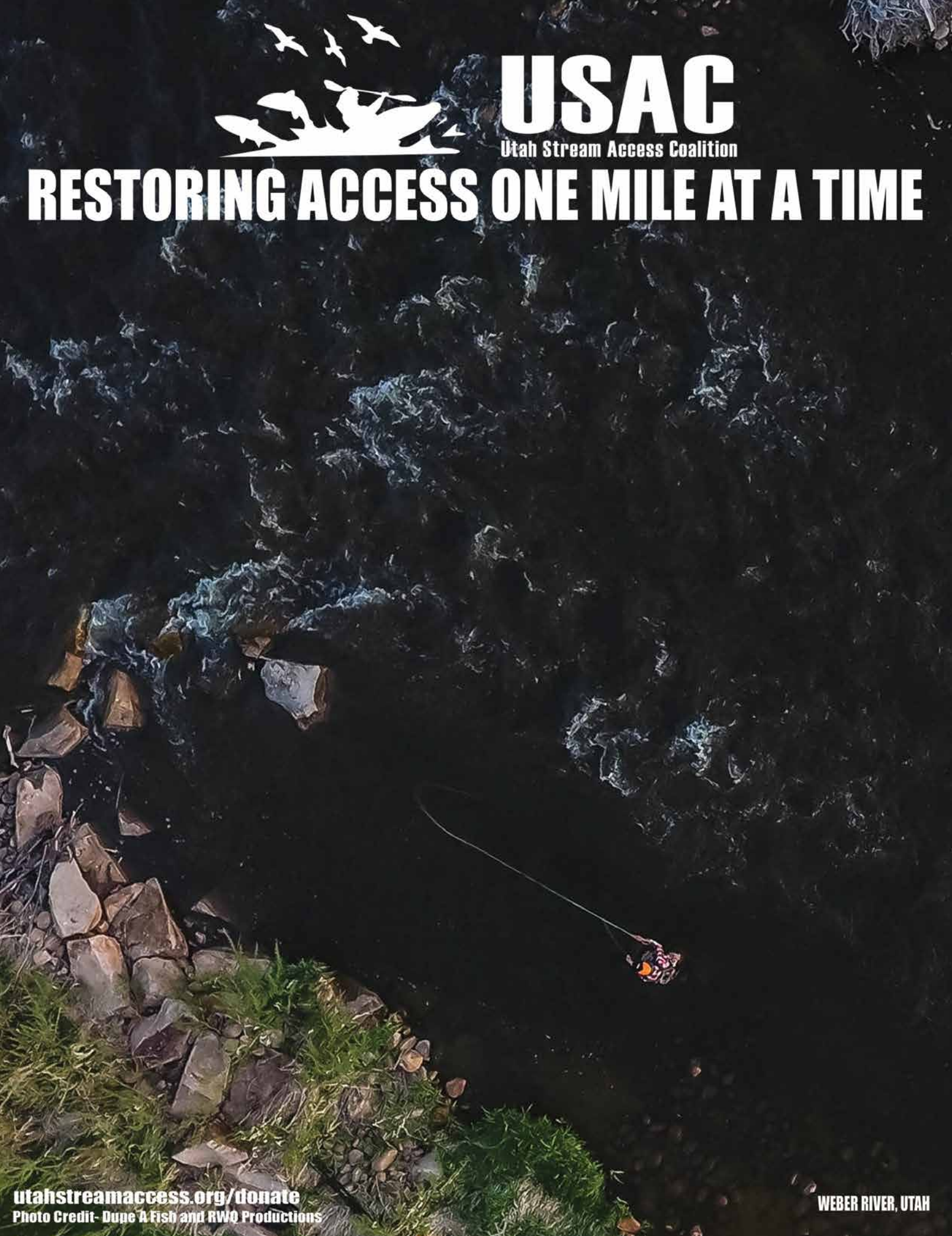
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## NO SERVICE

### *Searching for more moments in the moment*

*Written by Geoff Mueller*

The most imposing anchor you'll find on the water these days isn't the 30-pounder hanging off the stern of a driftboat or raft. It's more likely the one that fits snugly in your chest-wader pocket. The same 4-oz. device that incessantly relays the texts, headlines, and email that tether you to a world that has no place on a river.

Silent mode can be a decent temporary buffer, because whatever's causing all that noise can surely wait. But just as you pull a strand of 6X through that impossibly tiny hook-eye—you're now vibrating with the news that your bank account has cratered. And along with it, so has your fishing day.

Thankfully, there are still a few phone-proof habitats left to explore. Rivers that require carrying bear spray and/or a portable pooper are perfect. Remote floats, from Alaska's

Togiak to Idaho's River of No Return Wilderness, are good for annihilating cell-phone bars. Unpopulated atolls work well, too.

Closer to home, eastern Montana's Bighorn River, coursing through a land still populated by the descendents of Crow Nation warriors, has always been one of those straight-to-voicemail strongholds. During a long drive from Colorado through Wyoming, there's a point where you cross the Montana line and enter the reserve at Lodge Grass. A few miles down the road, you'll hang a right on the appropriately named Good Luck Rd. And that's where the magic happens; the phone resting on your dashboard immediately goes dead, while at the same time you conveniently go AWOL.

It's always been a pretty slick move. And on the other side of the technological divide there are some subtle changes worth noting. There, especially on the water, the art of conversation takes precedence over the task of deciphering a string of emojis. Instead of looking down at your lap, your posture undergoes an upheaval—shoulders back, chin to the wind. At the same time you'll find more hours for sharing daylight with the people around you, and for appreciating the cell tower-free surroundings that engulf you.


Those same surroundings, this time of year, are in transition. Hillside grow greener by the day as they slip into their seasonal coats of prairie grass and wildflowers. Temperatures rise with the onset of summer, and there are river-born bugs hatching by

the thousands. Ahead on the water, trout noses quietly cut through the surface in harmony with the midges and bluewings that bounce overhead.

Along the bluffs on river left, where the pods are thick with smart trout, the dry-fly rod comes out. And standing in the current, casting into the lane—you've never felt more disconnected to one world, yet connected to another, in your life. Everything is quiet in that sublime moment—except for the fact that something is now ringing.

Lodged between a tin of chew and a tube of gink, I can hear and see the culprit. Full bars. Unknown caller. Goddamnit. Fort Smith, with a handful of fly shops and a single trailer park, with no recycling facility or beer store, suddenly has bandwidth. And with it, the anchor rope I've been so conveniently able to sever over the years has formed into a noose. So of course I check my email. It's a habit. And it's nothing but the usual alerts and requests, as well as the ever-present spam.

The thought crosses my mind that I should probably fire off a couple of quick replies. Or I could opt for airplane mode and stay adrift just a short while longer. No one has to know.

Several minutes into this internal debate, I look up to notice that the fish are still rising and my companion for the day is still fishing. The kid's on T-Mobile, and he constantly complains about getting no service anywhere. But right now, he doesn't seem too concerned. 



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