

## "Do it yourself" Fly Fishing Tips in the Northwest by Dave Schorsch, WFFC Outings Committee Chair

Yep, here it is, February, cold, wet and windy. You have been trapped indoors, both by COVID-19 and the season. What to do with that fly rod in the closet, and the waders beside it? Simple answer, go fishing.

The late winter and early spring have evolved into one of my favorite times on the water. Options include desert streams, tidal estuaries, and lakes successfully managed as winter quality waters. Big rivers may be an option for those diehards that want to swing a Spey fly for late running native steelhead, but some of us would rather catch something.

The first thing to take into account is the reality of the weather. For winter fishing in our local quality waters lakes, that means having some comparatively stable weather for a few days so the lake can settle down into layers, and the fish can go back to acting normal instead of riding out windblown mixing and inches of cold rainwater running in.

Lakes managed for winter fishing around here include Lost (mason county), Nahwatzel near Shelton, Gibb and Leland (Jefferson county) and many more. All the lakes managed in this way get late season and early season plants, as well as having outstanding growth rates of fish that are already there. Some have catch and release regs, like Munn, Gibb, and Cady, others have general regulations, but produce really well. Nahwatzel, for instance produces some really big fish. An easy way to find these lakes and more, is the wdfw website. Go to fishing, then stocking reports, then run through the list. Cross check with the regs, to avoid the inevitable madhouse at the put and take spots.

You will need a floating vessel or device, float tube, boat, pontoon, to fish a lake. Period. This time of year, a full sink line and fairly buggy, "swimmy" flies like woolley buggers, lake damsels, and mohair leeches work great. Once in a while, on a sunny day, you might get a chironomid "buzzer" hatch, usually over deep water, so bring a dry line rigged rod for standby. This is the time of year that I get the biggest fish, with the least competition.

For those of you who just don't like fishing in the rain, (me sometimes) you can head east. Just remember the statement above about weather! Sunny and cold is the rule! For the lakes that are open year-round and the Columbia Wildlife refuge lakes that open March 1, remember that open does not mean unfrozen! That's a long way to drive (and hike) to find a sage brush ice rink. That being said, many of those little lakes are fishable from shore with waders, and right after the ice breaks up can be gangbusters fishing! Check out Quail lake, and the dozens of ponds in that area. Google is a great tool. Another sleeper for after the ice is out is Homestead Lake north of Moses Lake. About a mile walk in, and adjacent to Crab creek, spring browns are to be had.

For the stream fisher who isn't afraid of some exploration, the wasteways of the Columbia basin provide open, fairly warm water! There are literally miles of spring creek type streambank to hike along, with trout hiding in some of the fishier looking spots. Again, google earth is your friend. Frenchman hills wasteway looks like a Montana creek in places, and harbors some ridiculously huge trout, although they can be far between. I don't think I've met any of the big browns yet (up close) but three-pound rainbows are a daily occurrence. Some are much bigger! This is ground water from seasonal irrigation, so the early spring is when the wasteways are low, and the shorelines passable. Later, after April, they turn into huge trout growing swamps, and the fish are safe until next winter. Bring your big trout streamers! We've had luck with Dali Lamas, gold bead buggers, and clousers. Occasionally I see a fish sipping tiny bugs under a bush. Spooky is the word for these guys, so dry fly guys bring your "A game". PS good hiking wading shoes a plus.

For the salt; a lot of the fish we normally chase are overwintering in the streams. Immature (non-spawning) cutthroat are around the rocky shorelines, and feeder Coho can be fun when you get into them. A dry line and long leader ending in a bright attractor fly is my choice. My favorite is a bright orange (almost yellow) body, hackle, and tail, with an arctic fox white wing topped with a few strands of chrome Flashabou. As for where to go, I have some actual good advice... Skip where the fly shop tells you to go (along with the other twelve dozen guys fishing Olalla beach) and check out a resource I've found for beach exploration. Don't tell the "guide community" but on the wdfw website, under shell fishing is a list of maps of public oyster and clam digging beaches. All excellent cutthroat spots, as they are undeveloped, and lack the super destructive "aquaculture" crap management seen all over the sound now. The maps show where the access is, and the boundaries of public land. You might find your new favorite spot! Don't forget to look for beaches with small streams nearby.

Well, there's my early spring list of places to hide out, and maybe catch a fish. Good luck and tight lines!

Dave Schorsch (2/9/21)