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Fishing Wild Trout-X By Bob Jacklin

Welcome to West Yellowstone, Montana and Wild Trout Symposium-X. We in the local fly fishing business community welcome all “Brothers and Sisters of the Angle,” to our great outdoors. Over the past thirty three years, we’ve met in this area starting at Mammoth Hot Springs until it became too small, then Bozeman, at Old Faithful Lodge, and now for the first time in West Yellowstone. One of the important reasons we came here is West Yellowstone’s rich fly-fishing heritage and the matchless quality of the surrounding salmonid fisheries that so many enjoy. We would be amiss, therefore, not to include some information on these fabulous fisheries in our welcome.

Wild Trout has been the catalyst that brings us together from around the world. Even more than latest technical information, we have a unique opportunity to interact with peers in an informal setting. Your participation in WT-X can certainly be a fishing highlight of the year; the perfect opportunity to make new friends, reunite with old pals, exchange ideas as well as share our knowledge.

The first questions of many visiting fly-fishers are: “Where, When, and How do I sample the surrounding beautiful waters? Should I spend a day or two before or after, the Symposium to enjoy what is most important, the fly-fishing?” My answer, “Yes!”

The Fishing around West Yellowstone in mid-September and early October, truly provides visiting fly fishers with opportunities to sample our wild native fisheries. The fall-fishing has been noted as second to none. West Yellowstone is just one mile from the upper Madison River in Yellowstone National Park. Some of the best fishing starting in September and running through the fall is on this Upper Madison just five minutes from town. The famed Henrys Fork of the Snake River is just a short 30 minutes as is the Gallatin River, the Lower Madison, Quake and Hebgen Lakes. Traveling Farther inside Yellowstone Park brings you to the Firehole River and a good chance for some good dry fly fishing. The Upper Yellowstone River is still fishing in mid-September and October with hatches of Baetis most every afternoon. In the Northeast corner of Yellowstone brings is the Lamar Valley which is one of the last good strongholds of our native Black Spotted Cutthroat Trout. The Lamar River and its tributaries, Soda Butte and the famous Slough Creek, all fish very well in mid-October. Now let us look at some specific waters.

The Madison River The great fact about the Madison River is that it has a quality and self-sustaining populations of brown and rainbow trout throughout. The Upper Madison is formed at the junction of the Gibbon and Firehole Rivers within Yellowstone National Park. From Madison Junction to Hebgen Lake just north of West Yellowstone, a distance of fourteen miles, the Madison offers one of the finest brown trout spawning runs and quality fly fishing experiences. The fall run of browns is only half the story because the Madison has a very heavy run of wild rainbows also on a spawning run up the Madison. What! A fall run of rainbows! That is correct. These rainbows average between two to four pounds and closely resemble and act like their steelhead cousins. The rainbows along with the browns start to move up the Madison out of Hebgen in late August and into September.

By early October, this run is in full swing. As a quick side note, these Upper Madison River rainbows spawn in late December and January at Madison Junction. That is their spring spawning as the temperature in this Upper Madison River is at its coldest in December and January because of all the thermal activity from its main tributary the Firehole. I find this fall run rainbow fishery very interesting and have watched it evolve over the last forty years. Fishing the wet fly, nymph or streamer fly is the order of the day for this time of the year. However, it is possible to catch a small hatch of Blue Wing Olives which can make the fishing all the more challenging. Most of the fly fishermen enjoy fishing with streamers. The fast movement of the streamer fly and the aggressive nature of spawning fish presents a great combination with lots of action. The slower pace of the wet fly and nymph is also very rewarding. Fishing terrestrials during this fall season is best on bright sunny days with some wind. The meadow and open reaches of the Madison along with other regional streams are prime locations to enjoy top water action.

The Firehole River The Firehole River is possibly the most unique river that you and I will ever have the pleasure of fishing and knowing. Its drainage starts high up on the north-facing slope of the continental divide and flows northward where it meanders and heats up around the thermal and geyser area of the Old Faithful. The temperature of the water rises quickly as it flows down through these geyser basins and can reach above seventy degrees. The Firehole has two main tributaries, the Little Firehole and Iron Spring Creek, both entering the river just above Biscuit Basin. Both of these tributaries are cold streams and do help cool the Firehole somewhat. Originally the Firehole River was fishless. As the result of early introductions of various species of fish, however, the Firehole has a good, self-sustaining population of brown and rainbow trout. All stocking was stopped in the late 1950s. The fall time of the year is when the Firehole is at its best. The river fishes best on cool, overcast, rainy, and snowy days. The mixture of cold springs and thermal activity is what makes this fishery so unique. Just imagine fishing along the river with these warm springs and smoking geysers all around you. The fish tend to run small with lots of action when the hatch is on. Dry fly fishing with this Baetis family of small olive may flies in sizes 16 through 20 is the ticket. The best tactic is to drive along the Firehole and look for rising fish. I like to park at the Midway Geyser Basin and walk downstream and fish the many riffles and long slick glides.

The Henrys Fork The Henrys Fork of the Snake River or North Fork of the Snake River is the fly fisher's dream. This noted river is a tail water fishery below Island Park Dam and is just twenty miles from West Yellowstone. This section of the Henrys Fork flows through Last Chance, Idaho, and continues down through the Harriman State Park and holds some nice size rainbows and white fish. The water is flat and fall hatches of Baetis are quite predictable. Above this flat section and just below the Dam on Island Park Reservoir is a three-mile section of canyon water known as the Box Canyon. This section of the river holds some large Rainbows and fishes best in the fall with nymphs, large streamers, and Woolly Buggers. I enjoy the upper river above the Island Park Reservoir. The Coffee Pot Rapids is a small canyon with fast water and lots of large rocks that flows into the reservoir. Above the rapids is the Coffee Pot Campground and the water there is nice and flat with easy wading and lots of small fish and some larger trout. In the fall, this upper river offers a nice run of Kokanee Salmon, large white fish and, of course, some big rainbows.

The canyon section is best fished with nymphs, fished dead drift, and on the bottom, the Campground section of the river is flat and fishing the dry fly can also be rewarding. Located just five miles upstream from Mack's Inn, Idaho, is Big Springs State Park. This unique spring is worth the time to visit, for it is considered the official start of the Henrys Fork of the Snake River. The lower Henrys Fork down near the Ashton, Idaho, bridge on highway US 191 is very accessible and has good populations of small rainbows and some brown trout. One other section of the river that offers some good fall fishing is the area below Ashton, Dam and Reservoir to the Chester Backwater. This area is also very accessible and easy wading with flat water with good hatches.

The Gallatin River The Gallatin River, like its sister river the Madison, rises in the high meadows of Yellowstone National Park. The Gallatin starts out as a meadow stream for its first several miles. Then as it parallels highway US 191 and flows north it starts to take on a little more of the classic free stone river, shallow and fast with lots of rocks and pocket water. When the highway and the river reach Big Sky Montana the river enters the Gallatin Canyon, and it continues north another thirty miles before it enters the Gallatin Valley and continues to Three Forks where it joins the Madison and the Jefferson to form the Missouri River. It is the upper Gallatin that might be of interest for the fall fisherman. The headwaters section above where it meets highway US 191 is full of native Black Spotted Cutthroats. Using grass hopper flies fished along the edges and undercut banks on a nice windy afternoon is always a good bet. The five-mile section of river from highway mile marker 25 to 30 is a fast freestone river with undercut banks and lots of rocks. The wading is good and best fished with a dry fly like the Hopper, Royal Wulff and the Blue Wing Olive. This section of the Gallatin is more of a rainbow trout fishery with a good population of brown trout as well.

The Upper Yellowstone River This section of the Yellowstone River is my favorite fishery. I have often said "If the good Lord gave me only one day left to fish, I would fish the Upper Yellowstone." The Yellowstone River, from the outlet of Yellowstone Lake to the Upper Falls, is a fly fisherman's heaven. The

river offers lots of great hatches of aquatic insects and it has an easy flow with mixed water types. It is a large river, clear, cold and all natural. The population of native Black Spotted Cutthroat Trout has drastically declined over the last ten or more years due to the several factors, the most noted is the introduction of lake trout into Yellowstone Lake sometime in the past. There is still a population of what I call resident fish in this upper section of the Yellowstone River. These are trout that for some reason do not winter over in Yellowstone Lake and stay in the river through the year. Although the numbers of trout are down in this section of the Yellowstone, there is still some good and interesting fishing. The average size of the fish tend to run a little larger than the usual size of the Yellowstone Cutthroats and this makes the fishing even more rewarding. During the fall time of the year, there is a hatch of Blue Wing Olives almost every day on the Yellowstone. Fishing is best from around noon through the late afternoon. I recommend hunting for rising trout and enjoy the beauty of this wonderful river and fishery.

The Lamar Valley The Lamar Valley, in the North East corner of Yellowstone National Park, is the location of three very well-known rivers, the Lamar River and its two major tributaries, Soda Butte Creek and Slough Creek. All three of these rivers are home to our Yellowstone Black Spotted Cutthroat Trout. The fall fishing is quite good and is best fished with the dry fly. Good hatches of the little Blue Wing Olives and the much larger Slate Wing Olive Drakes hatch all through the fall. Fishing the Lamar Valley in the fall is a great way to experience some very good late season dry fly fishing in Yellowstone.

Flies for fall fishing the Yellowstone Area: This is just a very general list of some of the flies that I like to use in the fall for this area.:

Dry Flies

Blue Wing Olive sizes 14, 16, 18, 20:

Slate Wing Olive Drake: Sizes 12 and 14:

Hopper Flies: sizes 8 and 10: Ants and Beetles: sizes 14 and 16:

Wet Flies

Partridge and Orange, Partridge and Yellow, Partridge and Pheasant Tail, Soft Hackles: Sizes 10, 12, and 14:

Nymphs

Bead Head Pheasant Tail Nymph: sizes 14, 16, 18:

Bead Head Prince Nymph: sizes 10, 12, and 14: Stone

Fly Nymph: sizes 8, 10, and 12:

March Brown Nymph: sizes 10, 12, and 14:

Streamers and Woolly Buggers

Platte River Special: sizes 2 and 4:

Light Spruce Fly: sizes 2 and 4:

Dark Spruce Fly: sizes 2 and 4:

Muddler Minnow: sizes 4, 6, and 8:

Black and Olive Wooly Bugger: sizes 2, 4, and 6: Black and Black Wooly Bugger: sizes 2, 4, and 6:

In closing I offer you a warm welcome to West Yellowstone, Montana with the hope that you will be able to spend some extra time here to sample our great fishery and enjoy our town. I will be offering a free fly casting clinic during the symposium and for those of you who have never had opportunity to learn fly casting or who would like to improve your casting technique. I look forward to meeting as many of you, the professionals in our fisheries management areas, and to learning more myself about our fisheries. Thank You! Bob Jacklin



Bob's 30 inch, 10-Pound Madison River Brown Trout

Bob Jacklin is the longest standing outfitter in West Yellowstone who has been guiding West Yellowstone fishermen for thirty eight years and fly tying for over 47 years, inventing flies like the South Branch Chub when still in high school in New Jersey. Bob moved to West Yellowstone and was guiding by 1969, opening his fly shop in 1974. Bob has a degree from the North Western School of Taxidermy and is a licensed taxidermist. A world class fly fisherman, fly caster, and fly tier, Bob has taught thousands of people to fly fish. Bob was President of the Rocky Mountain Council of the Federation of Fly Fishers (FFF), one of the first FFF certified master casters, and is a member of the prestigious FFF Casting Certification Board of Governors. Bob is also a renowned fly tyer. His patterns for western and eastern waters are known and fished by some of the finest fly fishermen in the world, and in 2000 Bob Jacklin received the Buz Buszek Award. This golden feather represents the highest honor in fly tying as viewed by his peers. Bob was again honored by Federation of Fly Fishers in 2004 with the Man of the Year Award. In the same year Bob was also inducted into the Catskill Fly Fishing Center Hall of Fame.

On June 16, 2006 at 3:00 pm , while filming a casting video, Bob caught a 30 inch, 10 pound brown trout on the Madison River from a deep hole about a mile below Hebgen Lake. This brown, reportedly one of the largest-ever in the Madison, struck one of Bob's #14 green rock worm caddis nymphs. A partial interview about this notable achievement can be heard at: <http://www.askaboutflyfishing.com/speakers/bob/bob.cfm>

Bob co-authored Fishing the Yellowstone in the Park with Gary LaFontaine and has done books and CDs on fly tying. In winter Bob still travels around the country and internationally giving casting and fishing presentations.

When not on the water, Bob and his wife Sharyn can be found at:

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