



Naches River

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## President's Message Wayne Balsiger

The **March meeting** should be good as we learn from our own member, Professor **Tom Quinn** about Bull Trout. See more details in the Flypaper. You won't want to miss it. **Scott Keenholts** will be discussing some options for the Upper Yakima Outing he is hosting. Your input is welcome. **James Schmidt** is discussing the Munn Lake outing. Invite your friends to a meeting. Invite them to join the club.

**The 2024 Outings** are posted now on the website. We have several of our favorite Outings on the calendar. We do still need your help as a co-host or host. We are open to options on the food side of it as well. So let Russ know. It's a good time to volunteer!

**Phone Tree:** You may be getting a call this week if you live in the Puget Sound area and were not at the February meeting. If so, you missed a good meeting that was well attended with 35 – 40 members enjoying camaraderie with club members and with two nice presentations: Dave Campbell on fishing the Skagit/Sauk; and Washington Water Trust's Chris Czarnecki only on water rights.

**Conservation Chair:** I am happy to announce **Colene McKee** is organizing some conservation events this year with the help of others. She is looking for ideas and any guidance and support you can give.

**Monthly Raffle:** We are looking for a volunteer to host the meeting Raffles. We have items to raffle so this is not chasing goods. Let me know if you are interested in helping with this activity.

**The club** was founded in 1972 as a family friendly club and it still is. This is our 55<sup>th</sup> year. We are looking for new members. You will enjoy the club and the camaraderie, outings, meetings, and fishing. Invite your friends to a meeting.

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Invite them to join the club. Our activities and dues are a bargain. You can spend more on a dinner out than one year of dues.

**Annual Dues:** Time to pay your dues if you have not done so. Still a bargain, do it today via the website.

Tight Lines,  
Wayne

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## Membership – Susanne Staats

This is your last formal reminder to renew your membership dues by March 31, 2024. If dues are not timely renewed, you will go into the “suspend” category, which means you will no longer be able to sign up for club outings or other events throughout the year. So don’t let this happen to you! You can easily renew online via the NFA website, or mail in a check, or pay via cash or check at the March



monthly meeting. If you don’t know your current membership status, or are having problems renewing your membership online, please contact me at <mailto:sstaats02@gmail.com> or call me at (206) 794-1553.

At the February meeting, we inducted two new members. Jim Oswald was a member many years ago and recently rejoined thanks to the urging of fellow club member Roger Young. Jim is looking forward to going on the Canadian Rock Island outing. He prefers to fish rivers but also enjoys lake fishing.



Raymond Yu has been trout fishing for the last 30 years. He moved to the Pacific Northwest about one and a half years ago and is looking forward to learning more about local lakes and rivers. Raymond also wants to learn about spey casting. Please welcome Jim and Raymond if you see them at club meetings or outings.

Susanne

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## Where Have All the Trip Leaders Gone? – Wytold Lebing

I was on the NFA website this morning and noticed that for 5 of the planned club outings the hosts were TBD. Of these 3 were single day outings and 2 were weekend outings. This is quite disappointing. We are rapidly approaching the point where we will have no choice but to take these outings off the calendar.

Outings are one of the best things about belonging to NFA. Outings are a bargain. Day outings are free and weekend outings cost \$25. Where else can you get two home cooked meals for that price. They are great opportunity to fish new waters, to get to know other club members, and to improve one's skills with mentoring from other club members.

As we have said before the Pandemic was a difficult period for the club. We were forced to cut back on in person meetings and outings. As the pandemic has been brought under control the club been returning to normal. We're having regular in person meetings with good speakers, we were able to have a fun banquet in December celebrating 50 years of the NFA, and we've restored the Fly Paper. This has been possible because a relatively small group of people have been carrying the load. Unfortunately, people are just not volunteering to do the things necessary for the club to thrive. And finding outing hosts has been a particularly vexing and symptomatic of a lack of volunteers.

So, standing on my soapbox this is what I want people to know: NFA can only be successful if YOU are willing to volunteer. We need YOU to get involved. We need YOU to be willing to lead trips. We need YOU to serve as officers and committee chairs. It's your fly-fishing club and YOU are the ones necessary to make it successful.

-Wytold Lebing  
past President

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## Bull Trout - March Membership Meeting Presentation

Thursday, March 21st

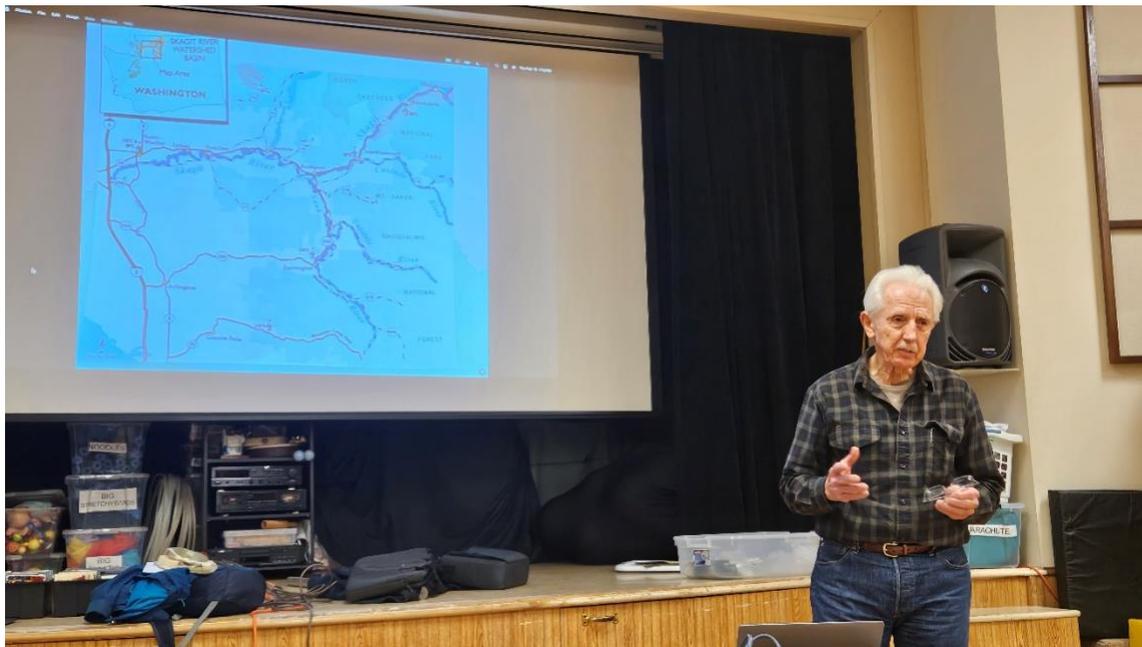
"Bull trout: what are they, where do they live, do they migrate to Puget Sound or not, how long do they stay there, and how do we fish for them? All these topics and more will be covered by NFA member Tom Quinn, based on his team's research on bull trout, mostly in the Skagit River system, and his efforts (successful and not) to catch these fascinating fish."

## Membership Meeting - Thursday February 15, 2024

### 1st Presentation:

Dave Campbell: Fishing the Skagit/Sauk walking and wading.

Dave provided an interesting overview of the geological history of the area, including the fact that the Sauk – Suiattle system formerly flowed into the Stillaguamish River rather than into the Skagit as it does now. Thus, in earlier times (some thousands of years ago) the Skagit would have been smaller and the Stillaguamish larger than they are at present.



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Fast-forwarding to the present, WDFW has opened portions of the rivers to catch and release only fishing for steelhead, as they estimated that the wild run can sustain the level of “take” associated with catch and release. The Skagit is open from Concrete to Marblemount, and the Sauk from Darrington to its confluence with the Skagit, five days a week until mid-April, but anglers are strongly advised to check the WDFW website for changes, closures, etc.

Dave provided some warnings for walk-and-wade anglers, especially on the Sauk River. When the river drops quickly, areas that look like easy, safe wading are quicksand. The river’s flow goes below the surface and upwells, creating very treacherous conditions. As always, be careful!

Flow and temperature data can be obtained from the USGS website:

<https://waterdata.usgs.gov/wa/nwis/rt>

Dave showed photos of a variety of flies, some gaudy and some more subtle, that work for steelhead. For those seeking more information and specifics, Dave’s presentation file is included later in The Flypaper.

## Program

Washington Water Trust’s Chris Czarnecki described their organization’s activities protecting and restoring healthy rivers and streams in Washington.



Is Washington's freshwater as abundant as most people think? Despite its perception as a water-rich state, many of Washington's rivers and streams face flow challenges, particularly during the late summer months when salmon migrations are occurring. Our precipitation depends heavily on the winter snowpack and even slight increase in winter temperatures are shifting the snow to rain, and thus reducing the amount of water stored as snow. That water is needed for irrigation (where 59% of it goes, based on the graph he displayed), as well as industrial uses, consumption by humans, and the in-stream needs of fish and wildlife. Mr. Czarnecki showed photos of streams with low flows and in some cases large numbers of dead salmon, highlighting the dangers of low flows and high temperatures.

Regrettably, water practices and laws are complicated. The approach taken by Washington Water Trust is not to resort to lawsuits but, rather, to negotiate arrangements to provide more of the water to the river by brokering deals with the local landowners and those holding water rights. Many examples of their successes were described, and he explained their process.

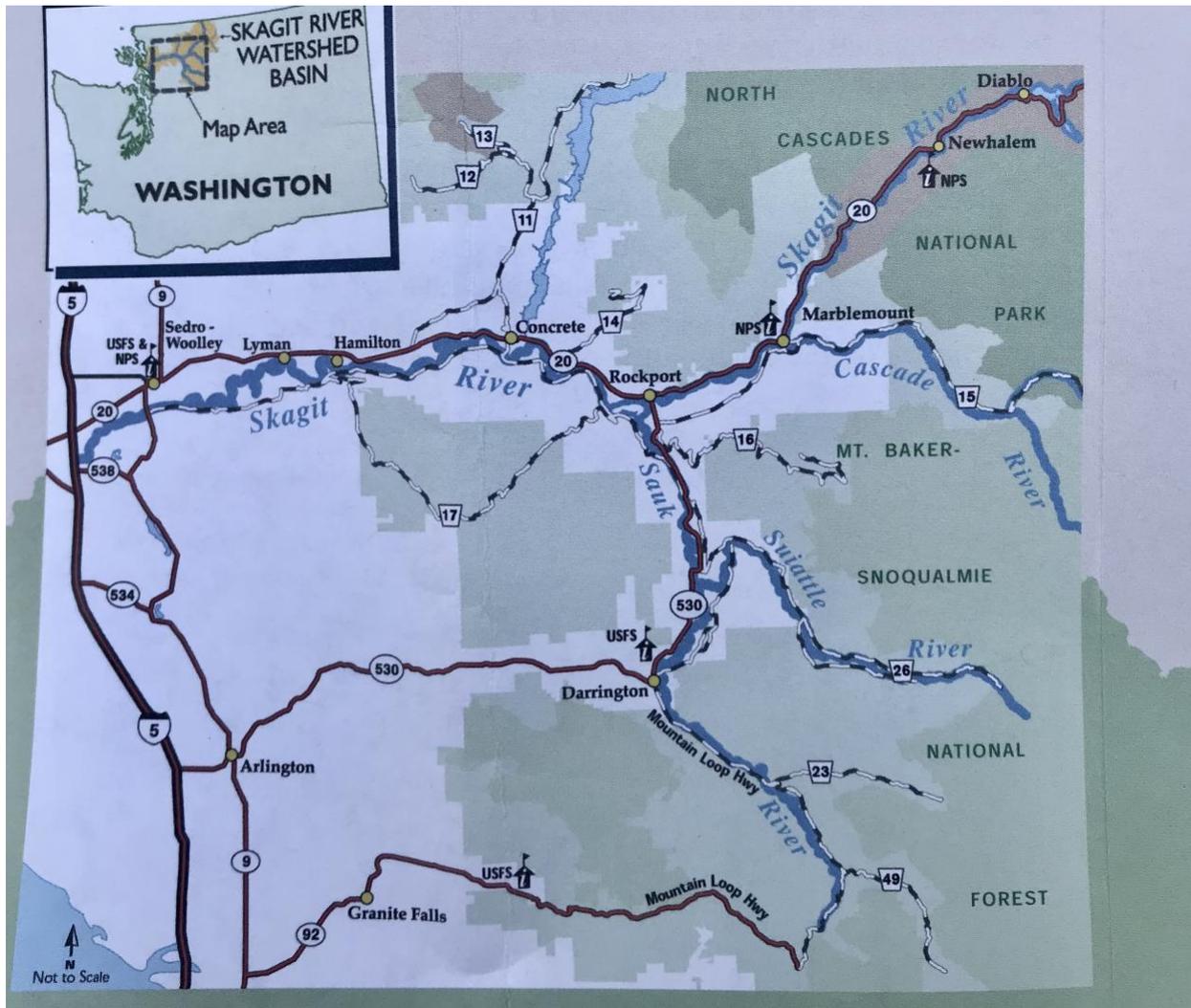
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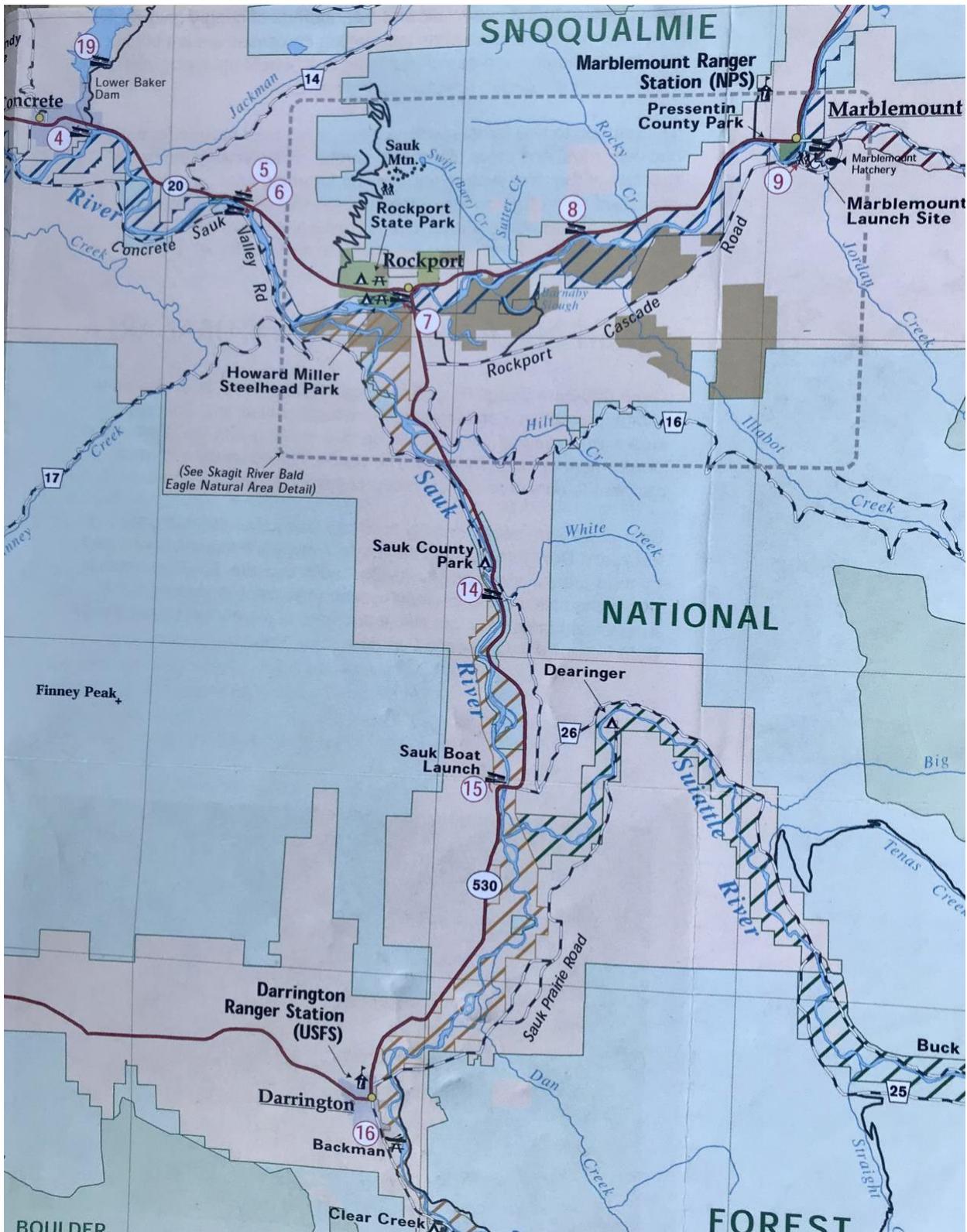
## Dave Campbell Skagit/Sauk Presentation 2/15/2024

Congress created the Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1968. The Skagit, Cascade, Sauk and Suiattle Rivers are part of that system.



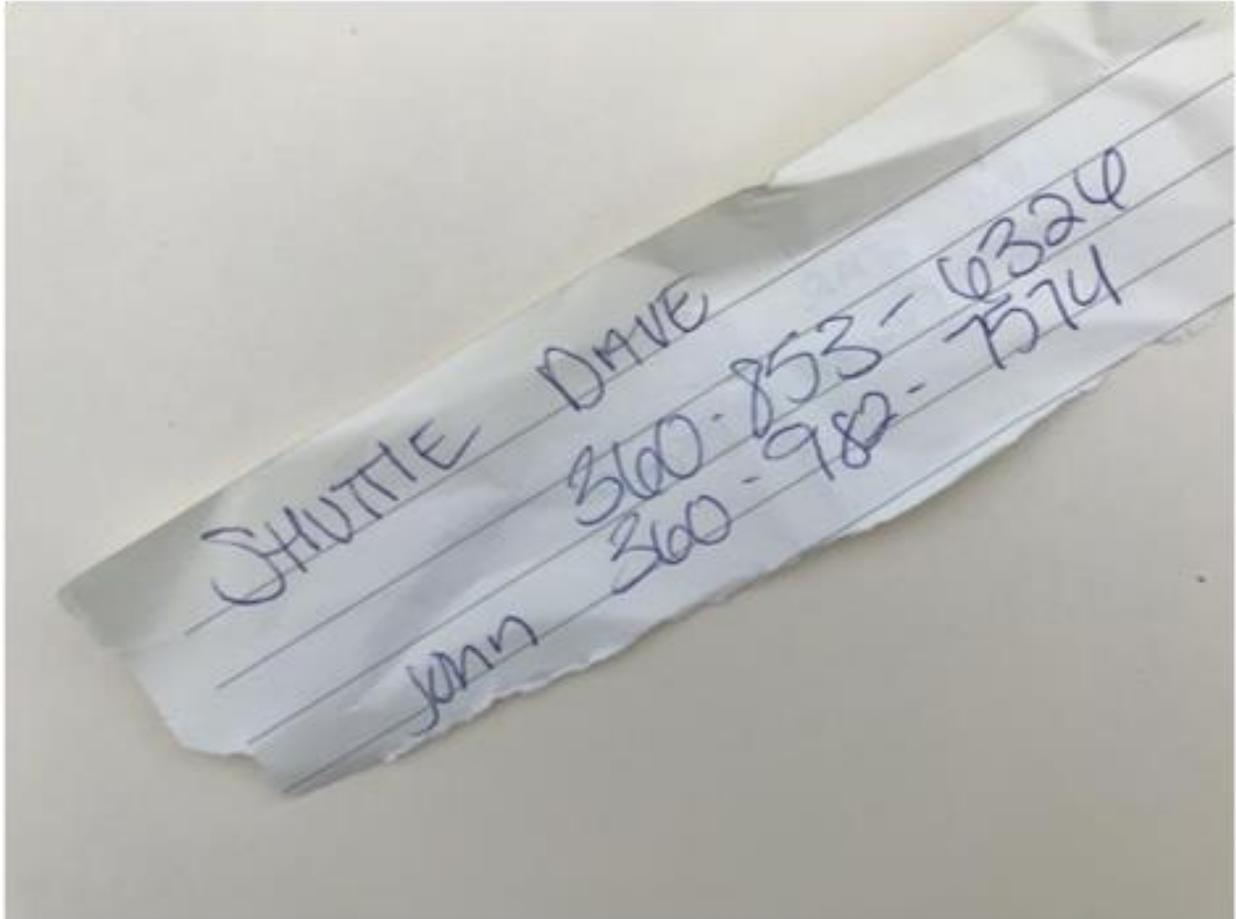
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## Shuttle Information

Be a sure-footed wader. Winter water very cold, very dangerous. Cold water shock can be fatal. Good traction river boots and wading staff recommended.

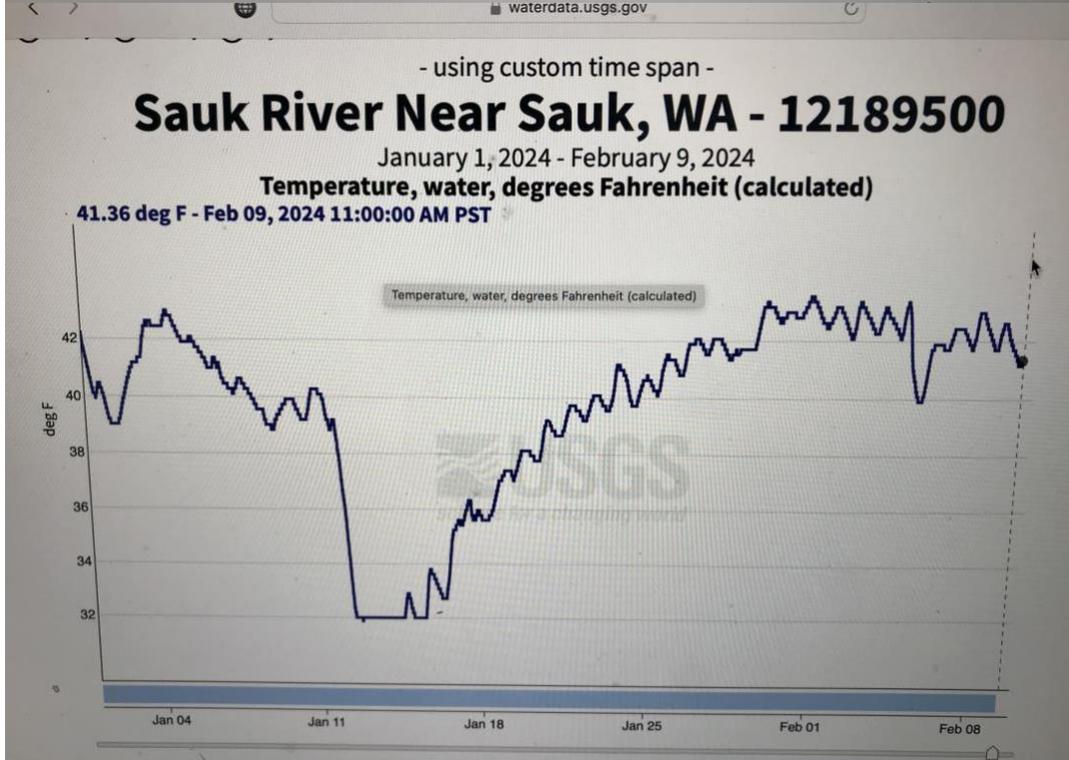
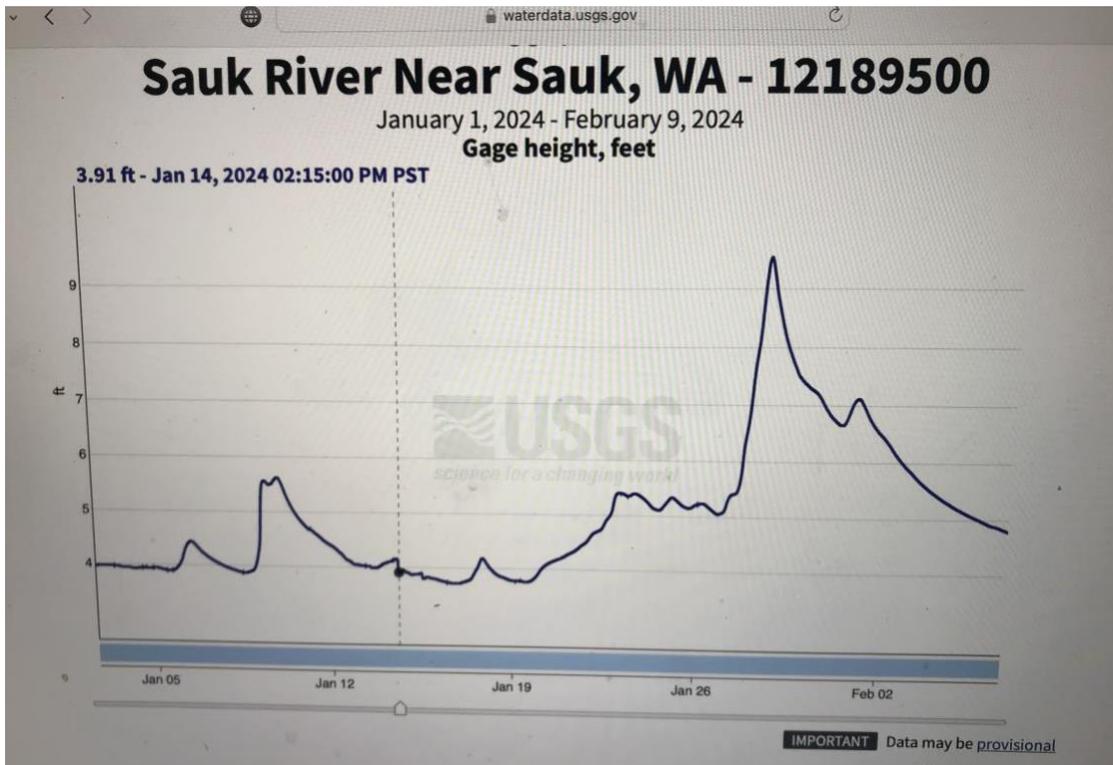
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Guy lifting steelhead out of water is a no-no, must keep wild fish in water.

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Recommend leader/tippet length 5', helps keep fly down with sinking line.

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Skagit system steelhead very robust, fisheries agencies have reported that steelhead can go from 0 to 25 mph in one second, good luck when you hook up! Traveling fish can often be found is 2 to 5' of water. Not necessary to cast across the river, depth and not distance more productive.

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## Science and angling for sea-run cutthroat trout in Puget Sound - Thomas Quinn

The Puget Sound basin hosts eight species of anadromous (sea-run) salmon and trout: Chinook, coho, sockeye, chum, and pink salmon, plus steelhead, bull trout, and cutthroat trout. They vary greatly in size and accessibility to fly fishing from shore. Chinook are the largest but tend to be fished offshore with lead downriggers and are only seldom (but we never say “never!”) caught by fly anglers from shore. Sockeye salmon migrate to the open North Pacific and are virtually never caught from shore either. Pink salmon are very suitable for fly fishing but are only abundant on odd-numbered years (weird but true), primarily in August and September when they return from the ocean to spawn. Chum salmon can be caught later in the fall, primarily along shorelines near the small streams where they spawn, but not at other times of the year. They are bigger and stronger than pink salmon but in a more advanced state of maturity and not prime table fare for most people. Steelhead come barreling in from the ocean in the winter and shore anglers can get them in a few places, but they are scarce and so seldom the target.



A resident Coho

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Many (on the order of 40%) of the coho salmon produced in Puget Sound streams remain within Puget Sound rather than migrating to the Pacific Ocean coast. These so-called resident coho are available to fly anglers from shore throughout the winter, spring, and summer as they grow to about 20 inches or so. Later in the summer, they are joined by larger coho that had been feeding in the ocean, and then they all enter streams to spawn in the late fall and winter. These coho salmon readily take a fly, though they are also taken in open water by people trolling lures of various sorts.

Bull trout are protected as Threatened under the US Endangered Species Act (as are Chinook, steelhead, and summer runs of chum salmon) and are not widely available in Puget Sound. Some of them do migrate to salt water but are there primarily in April, May, and June, at which time they go back upriver prior to spawning in the fall.

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This leaves the smallest of the salmon and trout, the coastal subspecies of cutthroat trout. In the larger rivers of central and northern Puget Sound, they tend to leave salt water in the fall, spend the winter in the river, spawn in spring, and go back to salt water for a few months in the summer (or not go to salt water at all). In contrast, cutthroat trout from the small streams of southern Puget Sound and Hood Canal are in salt water most of the year. They migrate downstream in the spring, feed in salt water until the following winter, briefly return to spawn, and go back to salt water. There is enough variation in when they spawn that there are always some in Puget Sound, as the early spawners have gone back out before the late ones migrate upstream to spawn. Interestingly, cutthroat trout and steelhead are closely related to each other and commonly occupy the same streams prior to seaward migration. Despite this similarity in ecology in streams, the steelhead make a beeline for the Pacific

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Ocean when they enter Puget Sound, swimming in open water, whereas cutthroat might not go more than 10 or 15 miles from their home stream in nine months and spend most of that time within 100 yards of shore. We know this from putting small tags in them that transmit acoustic signals that we detect with listening stations along shore, across the Hood Canal Bridge, etc.

Thus, one might cast from shore and catch cutthroat trout in salt water at any time of the year. Salmon, including coho, are governed by complex regulations regarding seasonal closures in the different marine areas, and a law-abiding angler can easily get confused and worry about getting stopped by an enforcement officer. In this regard, we are blessed because while we are never allowed to keep cutthroat caught in salt water, it is always legal to fish for them with appropriate gear (lure or fly with a single barbless hook). So, you are always OK to fish for them, but not to keep them, regardless of whether salmon are open or closed. For those of us more interested in the opportunity to go out fishing rather than filling the freezer, they are ideal.



Coastal cutthroat trout fishing is generally not about size or numbers but, rather, enjoying the shorelines where they live, and appreciating the beauty of these wild, native fish. Extensive sampling by the WDFW reveals that the average size is about 12 – 16 inches. Anglers tend to exaggerate and may boast of 20-inchers. Such fish do exist but are rare, and anything much over 16 inches is a good one.

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When casting flies from shore for cutthroat trout, it is worth keeping in mind that they tend to occupy shallow water, spending most of their time near the bottom in water about 4-6 feet deep (as determined from transmitters in the fish that report its depth from the surface). So, avoid the temptation to wade out as far as you can, or the fish may be behind you! In terms of flies, these fish are opportunistic feeders, and a dozen anglers will probably come up with a dozen different go-to flies, including clousers and other streamers imitating little fish such as chum fry and herring, or pink and white ones, or wooly buggers (white, black, green, etc.), larval crab and shrimp imitations, or sandworms patterns. Some folks favor dry flies (hey, they are trout, right?). Many of these patterns work for coho too, and catching both species is common.



In general, a floating or clear intermediate line is used by most anglers from shore, depending on the water depth, weight of the fly, and other considerations. One can also fish for them from boats but when doing so we tend to cover the

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same water as the shore anglers, casting towards shore whereas the shore anglers are casting out. The main thing is to find suitable habitat, and this usually means avoiding sand and mud and seeking rocky, gravel beaches with oysters, shell hash, overhanging trees, and structure. Many anglers swear that tidal flow is critical, and that may be so. However, I have found them to be abundant in places with negligible currents if the habitat is good. Proximity to their spawning stream is important too, as they tend not to go too far from home. Once you find suitable habitat, remember that the fish are not migrating rapidly along shore, as salmon might be, and so you might want to start up-current and cast down along the shore, then offshore, and gradually work your way along the beach, letting the fly swing and strip as you might in a river. The fish may follow your fly until they get very close, so keep stripping all the way in. It is not uncommon to start pulling the fly up to recast, only to have a cutthroat grab it right in front of you! I suspect that they follow the fly but they also feed close to shore. They strike quickly and, with barbless flies, a good number get off but that is OK too. They tend not to jump much, as they feed or after caught, whereas resident coho salmon seem much more inclined to jump and may be farther from shore as well.

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Shoreline access can be difficult to locate, as so much is privately owned. Look for state and county parks, read some of the books listed below, find a friend, and enjoy the beautiful shorelines of Puget Sound, the wildlife, and perhaps be rewarded with some of these lovely trout.

Les Johnson. 2004. Fly-Fishing Coastal Cutthroat Trout. Frank Amato Publishers, Portland, OR.

Steve Raymond. 1996. The Estuary Flyfisher. Frank Amato Publishers, Portland, OR.

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Richard Stoll. 2017. Sea Run Cutthroat Trout - A Saltwater Fly Angler's Guide to Their Biology, Prey, Angling Strategies, and Conservation. West Sound Angler. Poulsbo, WA.

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## Float Tube Forum 2 – “How to” for beginners who want to get out on the water – Nick Sherman

This is the second of a series of articles written to help a beginner break through a common barrier to fly fishing by using a float tube.

So, you now have a float tube and associated gear and are ready to go. The next step is to find a lake. WDFW has great information under Find a Lowland Lake.

Things to consider:

- Find a stocked lake. Trout do not reproduce in lowland lakes. By far, the best catching is after stocking (May is usually best), although holdover fish at later times are bigger and stronger.
- Small lakes are better for float tubes, with less wind and often fewer boaters.
- Find a lake with a boat launch or a put-in place convenient to unloading; preferably close to parking since you need to haul your gear to the water. Note that a float tube can be launched from many spots that are not boat launches.
- Scout out lakes and find ones with other float tubes, pontoon boats, or fishing kayaks.
- I fish non-motorized lakes exclusively. It is a far better experience.
- The optimum choices might be far away. But nothing beats a fly fish only, no motors, catch and release lake.
- Are there many fish there? Check stocking reports. Find less trafficked lakes that haven't been fished out by bait fisherman taking their limit of five. Once the uneducated newly stocked fish have been taken, your fishing will be more big game hunting for wily holdovers.

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This is heresy to many in the club, but the best way to break into catching fish within a half hour of your house is to go for stocked trout in early May. But it is pleasant getting out on the water any time of year. Take a reel with a floating line to work on your casting. Float tubes are great for maneuvering to where you can lay down a soft cast to a perfect spot near the bank. Retrieving a fly stuck in a bush on shore is not so easy with fins on your feet, however. You can easily position yourself with your fins to practice casting in the wind to all points on the compass, a key skill to gain. Because you sit low, your back cast will tend to hit the water behind you until you improve your casting technique. Your casting WILL improve with this practice.

But if you want to catch more fish and get practice with playing and landing trout, go to the dark side. Yes, that means trolling more than fly casting, but I've caught 90% of my trout in lowland lakes this way. Get a reel with a full sinking line (4 inches per second if you can). Use a wooly bugger or my favorite - a leech imitation. A fluorocarbon leader sinks better, but mono is fine. The leader can end up as short as 4 feet before changing. 2 or 3x is fine - the heavier leader lets you pull off weeds or snags without losing as many flies as possible. I use a size 6, 8, or 10 hook in catch and release lakes where the trout are bigger, but for stocked lakes, a 10 or 12 is better (these are 11-inch fish). My go to fly has always been an olive leech, but the last two years, brown or red has worked. These are very good flies to tie yourself - quite easy to tie and you don't get upset if you snag on the bottom. Keep it simple with one fly. Using a dropper fly is harder to cast with a sinking line, leads to tangles, and picks up more weeds. The exception is when nothing is working, I've tied on an olive leech followed by a brown leech or vice versa - without exception the trailing fly nearly always catches the fish. Maybe its movement looks more natural.

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Both Kathy and the trout were open-mouthed at how effective of an olive leech on a sinking line can be.

Cast out behind you and kick away while stripping out a lot of line so the leech is down near the bottom, or 15 feet if the lake is deep. I strip out nearly all the fly line. Point your rod straight at the fly with your rod tip in the water. You now have a tight line from the fly to your stripping hand with zero flex in the rod to dampen the feel. Kick across the lake very slowly and strip the line to jig the fly. Try three six-inch strips and then let the line back out so the fly sinks. Repeat this process as you kick across the water. Do not jig the fly by raising your rod - you don't want the flex of the rod entering the process.

If stripping in slow jigs doesn't get results, try stripping fast - say two-foot strips with a pause until the fly is near the float tube. I think this simulates a minnow.

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However, then you must cast again. A pile of sinking fly line gathered in your lap is very prone to tangling. Make a moderate cast and then kick away to deploy the rest of the line. I have lost a lot of fishing time untangling a knotted fly line because I tried to cast too far. Kathy always out-fishes me by casting fewer times and keeping the fly down there in front of the fish.

Rather than kicking along, you can also cast to the bank. This often where the brown trout are. Let the fly sink – it takes 15 seconds for a 4 inch per second line to get six feet down, so don't rush it. Jig the fly in slowly and then cast again. You'll soon learn how much line you can manage to cast without tangling in your lap.

Because the line is taut all the way to the fly, you can feel with your stripping hand if a fish taps the line. If there is a solid tap, do a strip set (a long, fast strip). This will set the hook and if it doesn't, the fly is still in the area where the fish or his buddies may strike again. Don't raise the rod to fight the fish until the hook is set. With a taut line, you can learn to tell by feel when you've picked up a weed. Regardless, pull in often to make sure your fly hasn't picked up a weed.

Oftentimes, strip setting the hook quickly doesn't work. Trout eat a leech by tapping it, which makes the leech curl into a defensive ball. Then the trout swallows it whole. So, try letting the fish tap two or three times before setting. On the other hand, a large trout attacking what it assumes to be a minnow hits one time hard, and it is difficult to bungle that hook set.

As always, the fly line runs under the forefinger of your rod hand, ready to apply pressure to and play a hooked fish. All this jiggling and stripping will rub a groove in your forefinger, so wearing a glove helps.

With a fish on, play it as you normally do. It is easier in a float tube where you can orient yourself to the best position. Look around for eagles or ospreys, especially since rainbow trout jump a lot. If an eagle swoops down, give slack so the trout stays under the water. Grab your net, which you have tied on with a cord behind your seat and land the fish. Lay your rod, which you have tied off with a cord,

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across your lap while you free the fish. Using a barbless hook is often required and always makes it easier to unhook the fish.

Yes, tie loose belongings on with cord. I have kicked back a quarter mile to retrieve a lost net. I have a lifetime guaranteed Orvis rod with a Ross reel sitting somewhere on the bottom of Pass Lake. I did, however, with my sinking line manage to snag a fine Sage Graphite IV rod from Pass Lake, so I'm almost even.

Since all the action is taking place underwater, your eyes are free to enjoy nature. Many eagles stake out the stocked lakes and they WILL try to take the fish off your line or grab dazed fish that you release. Ospreys migrate in, seemingly to catch the opening day of trout season, and make spectacular dives to snatch fish. Great Blue Herons are beautiful. You can enjoy your Spotify playlist, a definite plus when the catching is slow.

Chironomids are a great way to catch trout in lakes. You will need to add an anchor to your outfit. I haven't learned the technique myself; it seems even less like fly fishing than trolling, but I've seen fishermen catch dozens of trout while I am being skunked. Go to an NFA expert or look it up on YouTube. Chironomids are easy to tie yourself.

Float tubes are wonderful for traditional casting with floating lines. Throw wooly buggers close to logs and bushes for brown trout, or dry flies on those days when lake fish are hitting on top. A lake with smallmouth bass and bluegills can be a hoot with poppers. Or just get out on a lake and practice casting into or across the wind.

Next month, I'll talk about where you might go.

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## JUST SOME THOUGHTS FOR FLY ANGLING - Gary Todd NFA Emeritus

(from a pamphlet Gary published)

Take the road to the world of Fly Angling and Fly Casting, a place in the outdoors either on the moving river or the quiet lake deep in the woods. Now that you are going to try your hand at this beautiful sport, let's get to the fundamentals.

The Rod: consider how long of a rod, what weight line and reel, and most of all, what type of fish you are going to go after. Next your wading boots; the preferred ones are with cleats. Next the waders, chest high, stocking, and breathable with a belt. When wearing your waders, never wear jeans - wear polar fleece and over time you will be glad you did. Now, the weather comes into play, especially for this year as it has been a very mild winter. It's the start of the trout season with cold water temperature and no surface activity going on, so I must figure out - do I use a sinking line, a sink tip, or an intermediate line? But I didn't purchase these when I got my first rod and reel. So, I later bought two extra spools and lines, having learned the hard way. I got an e-mail asking, "Why the extra spools?" If you are making your own casting heads then you can forget the extra spools, but it is wise to buy them since manufacturers change reels over time and you can't buy more spools to fit your favorite reel.

Now, to casting keeping your back cast high. When casting using your forearm, raise the rod to the 12:00-12:10 position. If you don't see your reel, you have gone too far. This is one of the problems new fly casters have, which makes for a bad forward cast. I found this out when I received a call from a gentleman who wanted to get lessons. As we processed, he said the lessons that he had didn't teach what we had done so far. Just remember a good back cast will get you a good forward cast and possibly a take on the rise.

Happy Angling from an old friend!