

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE 2025

CUSTOM WEBBING BELTS BY DRIFT BELT COMPANY

Let's face it: fly fishing and wingshooting are Laesthetic pursuits. Old shotguns are pretty, fly casts can be graceful, fish flanks can be gorgeous, and fowl feathers can be downright spectacular. Many of the places where we hunt and fish abound in natural beauty. Most of us revel in these facets, just as much as the performance aspects of our chosen avocations.

Some of us also enjoy advertising our outdoors passions via sartorial choices. Alas, with due credit to neckties festooned with waterfowl and garish shirts printed with various fish species, options have been limited.

Fortunately, thanks to the Drift Belt Company, it's now possible to wear a belt featuring just about any aspect of fishing or hunting you can imagine. Based on the banks of the Willamette in central Oregon, proprietor and chief designer Jesse Kamper really gets rivers, mountains, fly fishing, and wingshooting – precisely the activities we're passionate about here at OTFM. And that's exactly what the graphics on his belts feature: over a dozen species of fish, a half-dozen recognizable mountain ranges, five styles of camo, and much, much more. Each belt is reversible; most of the fish scale patterns carry a river topo in subdued complementary colors on the other side, enabling a single belt to be worn both in settings where bright, vibrant colors are appropriate as well as when subtle shades are more appropriate.

The belts are 1.5IN tall, which in my opinion is the perfect height. I have a number of 1IN tube webbing belts, and they tend to get rope-like over time; 2IN belts don't always fit through belt loops. It's surprisingly hard to find 1.5IN tube webbing, so I was pleased by the dimensions of the belts. They're made from 100% polyester webbing, meaning that they're extremely strong and durable; they dry quickly since they don't really absorb water, and the patterns don't run

or bleed, even in hot water. Drift's distinctive buckles are made from 6061 aluminum, anodized in a variety of attractive colors. They thread smoothly, remain secure, and are easy to loosen.

Although I'm not a professional biologist myself, a number of the folks I regularly hang and fish with are, and their persnicketyness regarding anatomical correctness tends to wear off. We recently helped Jesse refine some prototype designs for his new redfish belt, and it pleased me greatly to find that he was extremely careful to depict the scales and spots with as much resemblance to the real thing as the medium allows. He's constantly working up additional designs – more waterfowl patterns to come!

Drift also makes a range of other attractively patterned webbing-related products, including dog collars and elastic wading belts, and custom designs are possible – check the website for more details.

MSRP US\$35

Website: www.driftbelt.com



GS MINI TRAVEL GUITAR BY STIO + TAYLOR

For many of us, what happens after the fishing or hunting can be just as important and memorable as the time we spend on the water or in the field. For some, that's about good food, libations, and certain traditions. For a few of us, an evening spent around a campfire would be woefully incomplete without some music. Sure, we love jamming to tunes from the Turtlebox (see reviews of the Ranger and Grande in the Summer 2025 issue of OTFM), but sometimes we'd rather be strumming a guitar and singing, or just noodling through some old Doc Watson tunes.

Thing is, there's a pesky trade-off in play here: you don't dare bring a genuinely expensive guitar into the backcountry where it can be nearly impossible to keep temperatures and humidity levels within the relatively narrow ranges preferred by most high-end acoustics, but most of the so-called "travel guitars" make severe compromises on sound quality, volume, and playability. That's the niche where the Taylor GS Mini has thrived for over a decade, and their collaboration with Stio on the Mountain Series adds style to the sound.

Each of the ten top designs was created by a different artist with roots in the region featured; check the website for more information.

All models in the Mountain Series feature a solid Sitka spruce top (a significant differentiating feature, as most other backpacking guitars have plywood tops) with layered sapele back and sides. The short-scale necks are mahogany, and the fingerboards are ebony. Sorry, southpaws – these guitars are currently offered only in a right-handed configuration. The hard-soft case comes with backpack straps and fits easily into the overhead compartment on an airplane.

Based in Jackson, Wyoming, Stio has been creating high-quality adventure gear since 2011. Look for a Stio Mountain Studio near you!

MSRP US\$699

Each guitar is made-to-order; details on the website

Website: www.stio.com/pages/stio-x-taylor-guitars

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TRUCK BED DRAWER SYSTEM BY DECKED

I don't tend to purchase items based off commercials or web advertisements, but the Decked system was an exception. My back seat was always a cluster of shotguns, ammo, fly rods, and fly boxes. It was literally useless as a seat. For those not familiar with Decked, it's a secure storage solution that sits in the bed of a pickup. It's drawer-based and modular with multiple boxes and divider options to help keep gear hidden, organized, and dry.

Decked is built with a HDPE (dense plastic) top-mounted on a steel frame. This makes it sturdy enough to support loads of up to about 2,000lbs above the drawers, which means that you're still able to use your truck bed to haul things. The top and frame form a platform for the drawer – usually a single drawer on small trucks, multiples on full-sized models. The drawer faces are reinforced, and the drawers themselves ride on smooth slides and industrial-grade rollers. The ease of opening even while loaded down with shotguns and shells is simply amazing.

Another impressive thing about the Decked system is that it's waterproof. I have pressure washed the bed on multiple occasions, and the contents of the drawers stay bone dry.

Installation is, for the most part, as easy as advertised. The assembly is straight-forward and simple to understand, and the official installation videos from Decked (available on YouTube) are very helpful during the assembly process. That said, it's also labor-intensive due to the bulk of the system; having a second pair of hands is very helpful. All-in, installation of the full system took a little less than two hours.

The fun starts after installation with the customizable storage options. There are loads of accessories available: trays

and bins, cases, dividers, foam inserts, tie-downs, and more. I bought extras so I could be uber organized. Locks are available for both the drawers and the two top-side storage compartments, but I didn't bother since both my tailgate and camper shell lock.

As with everything, there are pros and cons. Here's my list after two full seasons of use:

PROS

1. Comprehensive organization options both gave me back my backseat while streamlining gear layout for outings.
2. The fact that it's proven to be waterproof over time gives peace of mind that my gear is safe and dry.
3. Retaining the ability to use the truck bed to haul large and heavy items is critical.

CONS

1. The system does take up some depth in the bed. This is somewhat offset by the cargo tie-downs integrated into the deck.
2. If you haul dog boxes and want to have a camper shell, it'll need to be a high-rise shell rather than cab height. That didn't impact me since my dogs ride in the cab, but it'll be significant consideration for some.
3. It's not cheap. Then again, neither are shotguns or fly rods.

I am 100% satisfied with every aspect of the purchase. The Decked system is highly recommended.

MSRP US\$1,599 for the base system providing decking and drawer(s), depending on vehicle bed size. Accessories sold separately.

Website: www.decked.com



SPOT 400-R HEADLAMP BY BLACK DIAMOND

My favorite headlamp died last year, so I went on a quest to find a replacement. There are a staggering number of choices available today, and it can be challenging to select a model that fits your needs. After eventually choosing the Black Diamond Spot 400-R and using it for most of this year, I can recommend it wholeheartedly. I won't be so bold as to claim that it's hands-down best in class; there are plenty of great headlamps out there right now. My goal here is to explain what features motivated me to select the 400-R, and even to buy a second one as a backup!

Size and Weight: The trade-offs here are brightness and battery longevity. Bigger and heavier means brighter and/or longer runtime. I use headlamps mostly for camp tasks, so it's rare that I need extended battery life or to light up a wide area. The 400-R has a smaller form factor than some; it's very comfortable to wear and easy to pack.

Flood vs Spot: trade-offs again, this time between spread and distance. Flood lamps are great for camp work and rigging, but they don't push light very far. Focused spot lamps throw a tighter beam farther. Despite using "Spot" in the model name, the Spot 400-R has two white LEDs, one wide and one tight. It's possible to use either or both simultaneously, which is ideal for me.

Lumens: The bigger the number, the brighter the light. Most cheaper headlamps put out around 200 lumens; the top of the mainstream range is around 1,000-1,500. If you're trail running or caving or spotlighting rogue aliens, give those mini-sun models a look. For me, the 400-R (400 lumens max) on the low setting does most of what I need, so it's hard to argue for more weight and cost.

Red Light Mode: Red light doesn't blow out your night vision, and it's my preferred mode for working in the dark. This was a must-have feature for me.

Low / Mid / High: Cheaper models offer just one level of brightness; richer feature sets provide the ability to scale the illumination. Battery life is a consideration here: lower settings stretch your power supply. If I have to use white light, I prefer to go with low settings, so this was important for me. The 400-R allows scalable lumen levels for each white LED (and the red as well), and it remembers those settings each time you power off and back on.



Strap: For spelunking or nighttime trail running using headlamps with supplementary battery units, the three-strap design makes good sense. My needs are less demanding, and I want to be able to wear the headlamp with or without a baseball hat. The simple single-strand adjustable elastic strap works just fine for me.

Water Resistance: Inclement weather and unscheduled swims are constant possibilities for me, so at least moderate water resistance is a must. The Spot 400-R is IP67 certified, meaning that it's designed to operate up to 1m underwater for 30 minutes. Both of mine have gotten thoroughly soaked multiple times, once with saltwater. No issues so far.

Buttons and Lock: Controls must be intuitive for use in the dark and without looking. Most models have one or two multi-function buttons to toggle the various mode, plus a lock so that it doesn't turn on accidentally. The 400-R packs many different functions into two buttons, and it usually takes me a few misfires, I'm back on track.

Batteries: Some models use standard alkaline batteries; others use proprietary removable rechargeables. The 400-R has an integrated battery which is charged via a standard USB-C cable. I'm packing a lot of devices these days, and it's become a priority to standardize my charging regime. The 400-R uses the same adapters and chargers that I'm already carrying for my other devices. No more disposables!

Note: most commercial airlines prohibit transporting Lithium-Ion batteries in checked luggage, so remember to put your rechargeable headlamp into your carry-on. But that's where it should go anyway – let there be light!

MSRP US\$69.96

Website: www.blackdiamondequipment.com

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7.5FT 3WT 6PC UPSTREAM TRAVEL FLY ROD BY DOUGLAS

For many years, the fly fishing industry has struggled to provide a high-performance multi-piece fly rod for travel and backpacking. Most attempts have either been too heavy or the action was about that of an overcooked spaghetti noodle. Some were poor quality or overpriced for their performance. That conundrum has been solved by Douglas Fly Rods. Their Upstream 6-piece travel rod seems to have all the qualities we need in a travel fly rod. It comes in three 3WT models with lengths of 7FT, 7.5FT, and 8FT. The Upstream series also includes a number of other 4pc models from 2WT to 4WT with lengths ranging from 7'3" to 8'8", and also a 2-piece 3WT at just 6.5FT. All are perfectly suited for approaching skittish trout in small backcountry streams, but it's the 6-piece rods that travel best.

Since weight is key for travel rods, that was the first focus. The 7.5FT rod used for our testing weighs a mere 1.75oz. This has been achieved mainly by using sliding rings on an elegant cork handle for the reel seat rather than a full-on threaded locking seat. It is noteworthy that the handles are not overly slim. Too many previous iterations of travel rods have skinny handles that don't work well in wet hands. The handle is larger in diameter than most comparable rods, and sets very well in an angler's grip.

The action of the rod is appropriately slower than most modern graphite rods, more akin to a bamboo rod. The energy transfer and smooth action work thanks to spigot ferrules, an age-old technology that makes the angler forget that it's a 6-piece.

As we at *On the Fly Magazine* have stated in many rod reviews, testing a rod with only one line provides an extremely narrow perspective. Most all-purpose rods we review get tested with a minimum of a half-dozen lines, but this is a purpose-built rod intended for small water. This naturally limits the line choices; I fished this rod with three different fly lines:

- RIO Selective Trout WF3F
- SA Amplitude Smooth Trout WF3F
- Royal Wulff Bamboo Special WF3F



My favorite for all-around small stream fishing was the RIO Selective Trout. It was the most accurate with this rod out to 50ft, a very long cast on small water. The SA and Wulff offerings were both fine lines, and they'll certainly catch fish. But given the slower action of this rod design and my casting stroke, the RIO worked a bit better.

Packability is where the rod really shines. These 6-piece rods will sit across the top of a backpack without extending past most users' shoulders, keeping it mostly impervious to tree limbs, vines, and other objects. If you've got room on the side, the aluminum tube will fit nicely into a water bottle holder and can be lashed to the body of the pack. The tube also fits inside most tackle bags making them as "handy as a shirt pocket" when flying into fishing destinations.

MSRP US\$519

*Other models in the Upstream series ranging from US\$439 to US\$529
Website: www.douglasoutdoors.com/fly-rods/upstream-series/*

LONE BISON FLY TYING TABLES BY CRIS JACKSON

Like many fly tyers, Cris Jackson is picky about his tools. He'd gotten frustrated with how fly tying vises secured with clamps would leave scratches on his tables, and he wasn't impressed by the fly tying tables available from the mainstream outlets. Most of them used less than premium woods, and the craftsmanship was subpar. Already fond of excuses to work with beautiful hardwoods, tie flies, drink good beer, and hang out with his dog in the shop, he started building his own fly tying tables.

After prototyping a few designs with fellow fly tyers and working through several rounds of refinements, he settled on the two models pictured here: the full-featured HERITAGE and the more portable NOMAD. Although he's standardized some aspects of the designs to maximize productivity (both his and yours), each table is aesthetically unique, a tasteful blend of fine contours and the vibrant natural colors of Oklahoma hardwoods. Subtle use of strong magnets keeps hooks, tools, and the modularized toolbars where they belong during transport; these toolbars can be detached and placed on the desk to maximize space on the fly tying table itself. Cris also offers a unique mechanism to clamp the vise itself in place, for which he's seeking a patent.

Anticipating retirement from his full-time job as a special education teacher, Cris registered Lone Bison Fly Tying Tables in 2022, relishing the autonomy and ability to pay some bills with a craft that's also a passion. His tables have been featured in Fly Tyer Magazine and Sports Illustrated, and they're in use on at least three continents. Each includes his embossed leather bison, and Cris works to support the National Buffalo Foundation.

NOMAD
MSRP US\$174

Patent-pending vise clamp design – no tools needed



THE NOMAD



THE HERITAGE

HERITAGE
MSRP US\$335

*Features two modularized, detachable "island toolbars"
Patent-pending vise clamp design – no tools needed*

Website: www.LoneBisonFlyTables.com

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RIVERSMITH: THE HAULER WATERPROOF TOTE

Like many avid fly anglers, over the years I've found myself straying deeper and farther into the adjacent discipline of photography. As a shameless gear head, it's like discovering a whole new toy store just next door to the fly shop, and every bit as expensive. Alas, unlike most fly gear, cameras and lenses and drones tend to be much more allergic to water, especially saltwater. I've therefore found myself on a quest to find luggage that's the right size to carry a bunch of gear comfortably, sturdy, and weather-tight if not waterproof and fully submersible.

Unfortunately, there's a pesky trade-off here that we've discussed in other reviews: the more waterproof the bag, the harder it is to access what's inside. Sometimes this results in not using whatever you've been dragging around all day since you either can't get to it fast enough or because it feels like too much trouble. Other times it results in procedural laxity: roll-top bags often don't get rolled down and zippers don't get fully zipped.

We've been working with two bags from Riversmith during this summer and fall, and they've hit on an ingenious compromise that helps to solve a few of these challenges. Their innovative approach has been to combine zippers and roll-tops into the same piece, thereby enabling full waterproofing when necessary but retaining the ease of access via zipper. This design yields another useful benefit: it's possible to isolate your sensitive gear from other pieces that can tolerate wetness – and vice versa, you can lock away wet stuff for transport in a sealed compartment that can easily be rinsed out later.



We've been using **The Hauler** primarily as a boat bag for the OTFM skiff. It comes in two sizes, 45L and 60L; we're running the 60L version, and it provides ample space for a full-size digital camera and several large lenses in padded bags, a drone with all the fix-ins, an action cam with accessories, binoculars, a bag of snacks, and our rain gear.

That still leaves some space, and I like how nothing gets cramped or buried; it would work equally well for fishing gear. Although the bag isn't insulated, the waterproof compartment could be filled with ice for use as a makeshift cooler for drinks, food, or fish.

Access is either through the roll-top or, for smaller items, via the waterproof zipper on the side. There are four sturdy handles plus a removable shoulder strap, and two rows of webbing loops circling the bag for attaching tools or MOLLE-compatible accessories. The sides and bottom are flexible, but they don't collapse; it's something like a large and robust tote bag with a built-in waterproof compartment that can be accessed quickly via zipper. I was initially skeptical about the roll-top being recessed

inside the upper lip, thinking that water might pool on the top. In practice, that's been a non-issue, and the benefits of that recess as a place to stash items that don't need to be stowed but also shouldn't be rolling around or blowing away have outweighed any concerns about the top getting flooded. Even if water does accumulate, it's easy enough to ignore or simply dump off before opening the bag.

MSRP US\$249.99 for the 45L version

MSRP US\$299.99 for the 60L model

Available in Shadow Kelp and Gray Cadmium

Website: riversmith.com/collections/convoy-collection

RIVERSMITH: THE CONVOY DUFFEL

At 45L and rectangular, **The Convoy Duffel** applies some of the same design principles to a bag that's perfectly sized to be an airplane carry-on – and includes shoulder straps for use as a backpack – while also working well as a boat bag. I suspect that was the original plan, to create a bag that could go from the overhead compartment straight onto the raft or panga without missing a step. Inside it features construction similar to **The Hauler**: a molded padded bottom and stiff sides with an integrated roll-top dry bag which can either keep things dry or sequester wet gear. There are water-tight zippered compartments on both sides, plus an unsealed pouch with a hook-and-loop closure and more MOLLE attachment points which come with detachable lashes intended to hold rod tubes. The backpack straps are easily detached and can be stowed away in an external compartment on the bottom of the bag; it isn't a pack I'd choose for a long hike, but it's fine for short hauls.

My favorite features of **The Convoy Duffel** are found in the bag's top. On the outside are more webbing loops ideally positioned to attach tools you might want on the boat, like a tippet holder, pliers, nippers, etc. There's also a fleece-lined compartment sealed with another watertight zipper intended for sunglasses but also great for earbuds, a headlamp, and other small essentials. On the inside there's a large zippered compartment just the right size for my laptop (inside a neoprene pouch), plus three more mesh zipper pockets that could be used for documents, money, cosmetics, tippet, small fly boxes, or other fishing accessories. The result is the rare piece of luggage which effectively serves multiple masters: there's a compressible waterproof internal compartment, watertight storage inside with multiple organizational elements, quick-access watertight pockets on the exterior, and attachment points for tools – and it converts into a backpack. They've put a great deal of thought into this duffel, and it's become an essential part of my travel-to-fish retinue.

MSRP US\$249.99

Available in Shadow Kelp and Gray Cadmium

Website: riversmith.com/collections/convoy-collection



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REVO PRO TOOL BY PEUX FISHING

Alert readers might remember that last year's Holiday Gift Guide featured a review of the Fulgor semi-automatic fly reel, a spectacular piece of sophisticated engineering made by Peux Fishing. It reminded many of a fine timepiece, an observation that makes good sense since Peux Fishing is a consortium of Swiss engineers and machinists based in the Jura Mountains. Their factory is located in Le Locle, near the French border, a community widely thought to be the birthplace of watchmaking. Appropriately for designers steeped in horology, Peux continues to create innovative and extraordinary tools for discerning fly anglers.

This year we've had the pleasure of testing the new REVO Pro tool, an extremely refined multi-functional nipper which includes a clever hook threader. I'll be brutally honest here: after 40+ years of hanging around the fly fishing game, I've seen my share of gadgets promising to thread tiny eyelets and tie magical knots. When I was younger, I didn't understand why all the older guys struggled with light tippet and small flies. Now, as an aspiring geezer myself, I get it – threading 6X or 7X onto a #20 hook takes real patience, good light, and more powerful magnification than I'd like to admit. Still, after playing with numerous devices that promised revolutionary solutions, I've found that only a precious few have proven consistently useful.

As you might expect from engineers who work with the most intricate watches in the world, *nothing* about the REVO Pro tool is gimmicky or half-baked. In terms of build quality, the tool is robust and solid; the curves are elegant, and the ergonomics are comfortable and intuitive.

One of the simplest innovations is also the most compelling: whereas the majority of nippers on the market utilize a similar design, they offer only a single set of cutting jaws. If those get dull or misaligned, it immediately impacts their ability to cut line. The Peux REVO doubles the cutting



options: it offers two sets of cutters made from tungsten carbide steel. In addition to streamlining the nipping process, this effectively doubles the length of time before the blades need to be serviced. All four blades are identical and replaceable.

There's also a spike to clean eyelets; it's conveniently located at the front of the jaws, just far enough inside that the user doesn't get stabbed or snagged during regular use or while wearing the nippers.

Last but not least, despite my cynicism about the myriad fly threading contraptions on the market, I'm pleased to report that the eyelet threader really does work. It's simple, quick, and most

importantly, it works consistently. There are two slots for eyelets, one slightly larger than the other. The bigger one handles flies sized #12 to #17 (yes, #17 hooks are a thing!), and the smaller one is intended for hooks from #18 down to #22. The magnet is quite strong, so it's easy to place the fly's eyelet into the slot. Once the eyelet is secure, simply slide a tippet end through the hole in the side of the nipper, then draw the textured panel back to release the now-threaded fly. It's always the simplest clever designs that seem to hold real genius, isn't it? Other fly threaders have used a similar approach, but this is the

first time I've seen it integrated into nippers and executed to such an exacting standard.

Although they remain controversial in some circles, high-end nippers have arguably gone mainstream in the past few years. For the genteel angler looking to transcend the dominant brands while gaining useful functionality, it doesn't get more cultivated than the REVO Pro Tool.

MSRP US\$269

Current color choices include Electric Blue (shown here), Sockeye Red, Salmon Orange, and a Green / Brown Camo (US\$330). Available from the Peux Fishing website and select fly shops. Website: www.peuxflyfishing.com/en/products/revo-pro/

INTER-FLO HIP SYSTEM BY METHOD WORKS FISHING

The road to fly fishing carry system nirvana is long, rocky, and difficult. My personal journey started with a vest, then a heavier vest, then an ultralight vest, then a sling, then a chest pack, then a backpack, then another (bigger) sling, then a backpack with an integrated chest pack – and those are the just the ones I used regularly. Many others were tried and discarded along the way, and I'm still tweaking my systems. Please don't ask whether I sold off the old ones when I migrated to a new pack.

Truth is, I haven't settled on just one pack – more like six or seven. There's one for saltwater inshore that lives in the skiff, another one for the saltwater flats, one for urban warmwater that resides in my trunk, another warmwater bag for bass and bowfin, a travel bag, and a couple others that get pulled into service when other trips hit the radar.

My trout kit has been the hardest to get sorted, partly because I don't target salmonids frequently these days. Instead of just a couple fly boxes with essentials, I usually end up bringing a slew of boxes and other gadgets since I'm no longer dialed into the fisheries. If I'm honest, I've always brought too much gear on trout adventures, and managing water and weight have been perennial challenges. I've learned that a submersible backpack serves me well for coats and lunches and camera gear, but not for stuff I actually need on the water.

Enter the InterFlo Hip System from Method Works Fishing, a fresh start-up based in northern Colorado. Although their basic concept isn't unique – a sliding lumbar pack mounted on a waist belt supported by a shoulder strap – they've built an exceptionally solid chassis and nailed the sizing and features. It effectively combines the

weight-carrying merits of a belt-mounted lumbar pack with the easy access of a sling, and it works equally well with or without waders.

At 9L, it's spacious enough for my load of too-many fly boxes (nine, currently), and the magnet-sealed front pocket keeps tools easily accessible. Hypalon attachment points and sleeves on either end allow for staging of tippet and tools, and the system comes with a water bottle holster included. The belt is tall, includes a net slot, and allows a great deal of modularity; I particularly appreciate that the buckle is intentionally placed off-center, avoiding a stacking of buckles and enabling the bag to be swiped all the way around and centered on your back. The whole system is reversible and adjustable, so it should be able to fit just about anyone.

My only complaints are the lack of an external fly drying patch (easily addressed by a variety of accessories) and that it isn't submersible. The shell (made from PU-coated 420D nylon) is weather resistant when closed and dries quickly enough, and they've used YKK® AquaGuard® zippers for the external closures (along with powerful magnets), but the bag will still flood if you wade too deep. That said, if you've played with submersible bags, you already know that true water-tightness and ease of access and internal compartmentalization don't yet coexist in a single pack. Until that miracle product arrives, the Interflo Hip System is one of the most versatile, comfortable, and affordable carry alternatives available.

MSRP US\$129.99

Website: www.methodworksfishing.com/products/interflo-waist-system

