Rx Fly Fishing!

The monthly newsletter of the Delta Fly Fishers!

Volume LI | Number 1 | January 2026 | Randall Baxter, Editor | Stockton, California

Calendar

January 14, General meeting, John R Williams High School. Meadow Ave., Stockton. 6:30 pm (pg 1& 2).

January 21, Board of Directors Meeting, Oak Grove Nature Ctr, Eight Mile Rd., Stockton, 6:30 pm (pg 3).

January 28, Open fly tying Oak Grove Nature Ctr. 6:00 pm. (see pg 3 for details)

Find DFF online at

https://www.deltaflyfishers.com

And on Face Book at

https://www.facebook.com/Delta-Fly-Fishers-Inc-265097290192284/

Club Announcements

- ***Celebrating 50 years promoting fly fishing, conservation and comradery***!
- Mokelumne River outings January 1st and 7th (details pgs 2 & 8)
- New column starting this issue by Tim Costello. An introduction to fly tying, starting with necessary tools and equipment (pg 8)..

Delta Fly Fisher November General Meeting

Date: Wednesday, January 14th

Location: John R Williams School, 2450 Meadow Ave. Stockton

Time: 6:30—8:00 PM (or thereabouts)

Doors open at 6:30. Club business begins at 7 pm. Presentation at 7:30. All are welcome! Open to the public!

Presentation Information: Our speaker for January will be Doug Rodricks of Sierra Drifters Guide Service who will be talking on Eastern Sierra fly fishing opportunities from Eagle Lake to Bishop

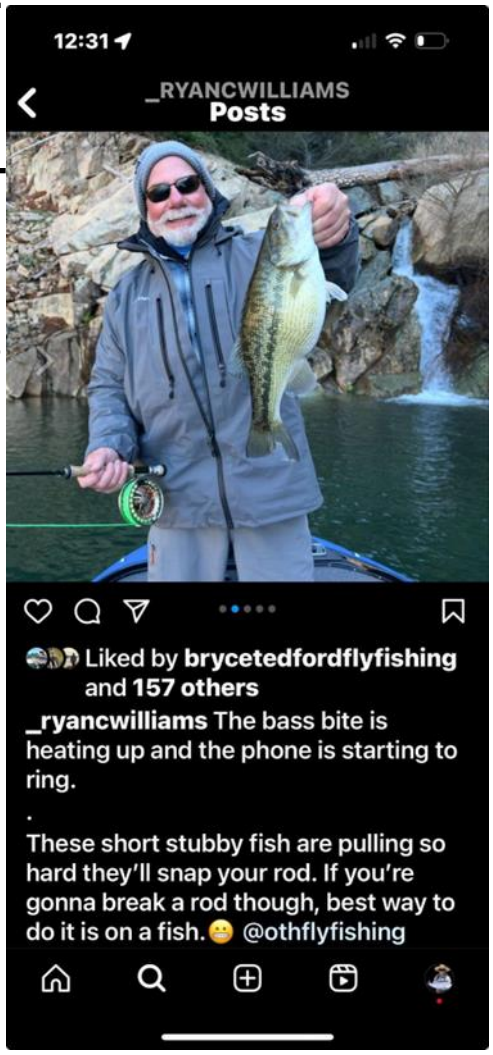
Tentative Outing Calendar for 2026

By Bob Fujimura

The tentative outing schedule for 2026 can be viewed or downloaded by clicking here. This is just a starting list as many outings will be developed and posted as the year progresses. Many thanks to the club members who volunteered to lead these club outings or events. As previously mentioned, we are looking for more members to lead their favorite fly fishing trip or outing. Please contact me (email: deltaflyfishers@gmail.com) if you want to add your outings to the club's outing schedule.

Upcoming Events with Delta Fly Fishers

By Bob Fujimura



Mokelumne River Gathering – Thursday January 1: Come celebrate the New Year and join in the annual DFF tradition of hanging out or fly fishing on opening day at the Mokelumne River Day Use Access Area below Commanche Dam. We will have coffee and donuts in the morning and probably hot dogs and chili for early lunch. Early birds arrive with the coffee around 6:30. Look for the DFF banner and tent! More details on this event in the DFF newsletters or upcoming email announcements.

Mokelumne River Outing – Wednesday January 7: Fish for resident rainbow trout and steelhead on our home waters. We'll meet at the first parking lot of the Mokelumne River Day Use Access Area at 8:00 AM – more information in the article in this issue of the newsletter.

Free Casting Lessons in SF Park – Saturday January 10: Free casting lessons continue at Golden Gate Casting Ponds at 1232 John F Kennedy Dr. San Francisco, CA 94122. Lessons run from 9:30 to 12:30. Rods available for loan for the lessons. Clinics available for all levels of casting led by the Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club of San Francisco. Participants must preregister online via the GGACC website. Best local casting instruction with a free hot dog lunch afterwards. A few of the DFF members participate in this monthly GGACC event; contact Amy Terra for more information on these monthly classes.

Putah Creek Cleanup/Trail Restoration Project – Saturday January 10: Northern California Council Fly Fishing International with CDFW is leading a general cleanup of the public access areas and doing streamside trail restorations. NCCFFI is seeking volunteers from local clubs to improve angler access and safety to this valuable fly fishing stream. More information on this project and how DFF members can volunteer can be found at this link of the NCCFFI website: https://www.nccffi.org/content.aspx?page_id=4091&club_id=195494&item_id=2777180

General Membership Meeting – Wednesday January 14: Our January speaker will be Doug Rodricks of Sierra Drifters Guide Service who will be talking on Eastern Sierra fly fishing opportunities from Eagle Lake to Bishop. Check on this issue and upcoming email announcements for more information. Our monthly meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at the John R. Williams Elementary School, 2450 Meadow Ave, Stockton, CA 95207 near Hammer Lane. Doors open at 6:30. Club business begins at 7 pm. Presentation at 7:30. Open to the public.

Annual Dinner and Celebration – Saturday January 17: Join your friends and fellow club members at the DFF Annual Dinner on Saturday

(Continued on pg 3)

(Continued from pg 2)

January 17. We are celebrating our **50th anniversary** of our club in addition to our usual informative program, great dinner, and the biggest raffle and silent auction of this year. Find out who 'earned' this year's Incomplete Angler Award. It is a lot of fun and goodwill. We will be holding this event at the Italian Athletic Club, 3541 Cherryland Ave, Stockton CA. Latest information on the celebration in this issue or past email announcements.

Open Fly Tying Session – Wednesday January 28: Join the first 2026 session on January 28th. It will be a monthly opportunity to tie with your fellow members, sharing the latest fishing stories, and hang out with new and old friends. For those interested tying next month Fly of the Month, Bob Fujimura will be tying his version of the Garbage Scud – materials and instructions will be available for those members who wish to tie it. There will be hot apple cider and seasonal cookies to keep you warm. This session will start at 6:00 PM in the Nature Center in Oak Grove Regional Park, Eight Mile Road, Stockton. Contact Bob at deltaflyfishers@gmail.com if you are coming and to get information on how to enter and exit the Park after hours.

Video Watch Party – Saturday January 31: Amy Terra is hosting a video watch party on fly fishing along Sierra Mountain highways between 9 and 12 noon. More information in this issue of the newsletter (see below).

Making Plans for 2026!

By Amy Terra

The Wulffies leadership is making plans for 2026. This means that we are going to repeat our favorite outings and try some new stuff too. The Wulffies are opening up the fun we have to the general membership of DFF too. Look for the Wulffies+ activities that will be open to all for part of the activity.

The Wulffies are going to have watch parties and fly tying for January, February and March. Not only does this give us a chance to socialize, but we will also have a focus for each month. **January** we are going to be a part of the club wide watch party to plan outings on highways 108, 395 and 120. Join us **January 31st** at 10:15 at Tandem Bikes, 9 N. School St. in Downtown Lodi.

(Continued on pg 4)

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Casting
Amy Terra

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Rx Fly Fishing!
Randy Baxter

Trout Bout (November)
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Webmaster
Amy Terra

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Any correspondence regarding this publication should be directed to:
The Delta Fly Fishers Inc.
PO Box 77862
Stockton, CA 95207-7862

FLY FISHERS INTERNATIONAL
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COUNCIL

(Continued from pg 3)

In **February** we will have a fly box organization party. With fly fishing videos in the background, we will sort flies, organize boxes and I am sure there will be lots of flies up for grabs. You can also bring your vise and tie. Date in February to be chosen. The location is Tandem Bikes.

In **March** we will have a reel winder available. Bring your reels and any backing and line you want changed out or put on. Also bring your vise to hang out and tie flies. We are gearing up for Fishmas- the season opener in April!

April will be our Women's welcome at our Annual Casting Day on April 11th at Panella Park in Stockton. 9 am to 11 am will be women only casting. After 11, lunch will be served and we will open our Casting Day to the public.

May 8-10 will be our One Fly weekend in Arnold. Always a blast and lined up with the One Fly Contest at White Pines.

June is super busy- We have a Lake Manzanita outing on the 12-14th, our Rancho Seco outing on the 19th and our Yosemite outing from June 29- July 1st.

July will be our always popular smallmouth bass outing with Bryce Tedford on Friday the 10th.

In **August** we will have surf fishing and a Hwys108/395/205 road trip.

September is TBD- Thinking about a Yuba adventure… more info to come!

October will be a resurrection of Bridgeport outing from the 5th to the 8th.

November we will have a beginner fly tying class and **December** is our Tying Day on Dec 5th!

There is always room for more so if you have any ideas- just reach out. We also highly encourage "pop ups" which are spontaneous plans that are shared. Shoot me the info and we will send it to the Wulffie mailing list! Looking forward to a fantastic 2026!

A Watch Party — Let's make some plans!

By Amy Terra

Winter always feels like the perfect time to tie flies, get gear in order and make plans for fishing. For me, part of the planning is watching YouTube videos, looking through Google earth and making lists of places I want to fish. I recently came across some really fun and informative YouTube videos from an account called "A Bush in the Woods". What led me to the videos aside from the nice editing and drone shots, was the locations of the videos. A Bush in the Woods is a local person who fishes places I either want to fish or have fished and want to fish again. As a matter of fact, if I had watched these videos last winter, I would have gone left instead of right at Lee Vining Creek and upstream instead of downstream at another spot. Luckily, I can make these changes next summer after watching the videos.

I was at Tandem Bikes downtown, talking to the owner Brian and telling him about this video series that covers Highway 108 to 395 to 120. We simultaneously said that we should put it on the big TV's at the coffee shop and hold a watch party. So we picked a day and time and are holding a watch party and all of you are invited.

On Saturday, January 31st, starting at 10:15, we will put the video series on the screens at Tandem Bikes located at 9 N. School Street. Sit at the bar and take notes or bring your vise and tie some flies. The 108/395/120 series is a total of an hour and a half. There is another set of videos on fishing the Tuolumne that is another hour that we can play if people want to hang out more too.

This event is open to the public. I know Brian is working on setting up the fly fishing materials corner of his shop over the holiday so hopefully it will be up and running for you to check out. The shop sells a variety of drinks and food items. See you there!

This Month's Fly Box

FLY TYING

Useful Tying Tips

By Bob Fujimura

On Delta Fly Fishers' Fly Tying Day, I was reminded of valuable tips that expert tyers have shared with me in the past.

At this event, I touched bases with Tillman Sherman who has trained numerous beginners and expert tyers in our area. Previously, his first gift to me was his favorite hackle tweezer by Tyflyz Toolz (pictured). It was lightweight, had strong jaws, but could easily handle fragile feathers with excellent finger control. Before using it, I was never satisfied with most hackle pliers. I became so dependent on this tool that I recently panicked when I misplaced my gift tweezer and immediately ordered an extra pair from J. Stockard Fly Fishing.

At this year's event, Tillman gave me two more gifts, first, a small container of SortKwik fingertip moistener. He uses it regularly to soften and moisten his tying fingers hygienically and conveniently. I had never considered how dry and rough my fingertips were or how my skin would affect my tying. It was another game-changing item on my tying desk.

Lastly, he shared his latest discovery, a keychain LED UV light. The convenient size seemed perfect to carry into the field for activating UV material or repair UV glues. I doubt it will replace my bench UV flashlight. However, its low cost makes for an ideal backup item or a novel tyer's gift. Of course, our guest tyer, Scott Sugimoto, also provided numerous tips and tool recommendations during his clinic, where he successfully educated and challenged students with a wide range of tying experiences. Overall, the session reminded me that most tyers, like fly fishers, joyfully share their expertise with others.

Mettler

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2 column inches each newsletter issue for the year for $400 or in-kind goods and services, six months $200, quarter $100, one month $40. The ad may include artwork and will link to the advertiser's website.

Additional column inches of ad space may be purchased at $200 for the year, $100 for six months, $50 for a quarter year, $20 per month.

Included:

A digital subscription to the club's monthly newsletter.

Permission to post specials and other advertising on the club's Face book page, 2 per month.

For additional information please e-mail randy.baxter23@gmail.com

Casting Corner —

By Amy Terra

This year I am making some fun plans for our local fly casting program. We will continue our traditions like the April casting day (April 11th this year!) and Friday night casting sessions starting in May and continuing through October. In addition to these open and free activities, every single club member is eligible for one free half hour casting tune up. I have had several club members take me up on this offer and we have had a blast. Don't hesitate to reach out to schedule your tune up today!

This year I am also planning on scheduling a day to work on saltwater casting for those preparing for saltwater outings and an afternoon focusing on casting sinking tips for striper fishing in late summer. I may also see if there is any interest in a spey clinic. Let me know if that would be of interest to you. If you are interested in working through the bronze, silver and gold fly casting skills development program, please reach out. I am available to see what skills you have met the requirements for and help with some guidance on casts you are working on for you next level. My goal is to make sure each and every DFF member has the cast they want to fish with- Remember- cast better and you will fish better!

If there is any casting topic you would like to see addressed, send me a text or give me a call at 209-329-4801.

Remember- there are monthly casting lessons at Golden Gate Casting Ponds on every second Saturday. There are free casting lessons and Fly Casting Skills Development opportunities at the Pleasanton Fly Show, February 27th through March 1st. Just head out back to the lawn area in Pleasanton.

Contribute to the club's welfare

I was asked to put this box in the newsletter so that those club members that live at unreasonable travel times to the club's monthly meetings might have a way to contribute to the club's welfare. At their request, I've set up a group of alternative contribution amounts. Those who participate will receive a tax deductable receipt via email.

$5 $10 $25 $50

Or send a check to:
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Paying it forward…

By Amy Terra

I so enjoyed Scott Sujimoto's presentation in November before he returned and led our fly tying day in December. Scott said one thing in particular during his presentation that really stuck with me. He talked about all the people that helped him and how he didn't worry about booking trips, but rather concentrated on paying things forward. If you know Scott, you know this is true. He is the first to donate a trip, donate his time and knowledge. I have seen Scott volunteer for Casting for Recovery, Healing Waters and a variety of other amazing causes. He gathers other guides to do the same. He shares the love of fly fishing, his time, his knowledge, and time on the water.

Member David getting his first non-guide fish on the fly!

Scott is a great example of the amazing people you will find in fly fishing. Lucky for us, our club is filled with amazing people just like Scott. I remember Larry giving me and so many other people casting lessons. Jerry taking me fishing. Marty mailing me flies. Bryce donating swag and discounts and working out women's outing opportunities. Bob hosting awesome outings. Mary M. arranging fun outings for the Wulffies. Nancy hosting Wulffies outings. Brenda organizing absolutely everything. Dena doing everything for everyone- everywhere. All the officers and board members working tirelessly behind the scenes to make this club function. Too many people to mention. Too much thanks to adequately convey. It seems insufficient to say thank you for all you did in 2025 but I will say it anyway. Thank you all so much. You are exactly what Scott was talking about.

As we move to 2026, we will continue the traditions we have had in place for so many years. We are also open to new ideas, activities and outings. If you have ever considered getting involved in an activity, fishmeistering an outing, or wanted to host something, this is the time to reach out and put something on the club calendar. Don't want to do something so formal? Reach out to a new member. Introduce yourself, share a few flies or take them fishing. David C. had that opportunity with a DFFer and got himself a number of wild trout to hand in a fun outing (See picture above). Ask Bob or Randy to send out a last minute announcement for a fishing experience. Things don't have to be planned months in advance- they can be last minute pop ups too.

Let's pay it forward in 2026. You are what makes this club so amazing!

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Lower Mokelumne River Outing — January 7, 2026

By Bob Fujimura

Unable to fish on New Year's Day? We will be fishing for resident rainbow trout and steelhead below the Camanche Dam in the **Mokelumne River Day Use Area** east of Clements on Wednesday January 7 between 8:00 AM and 3:00 PM. This is a walk and wade event suitable for beginners and fly fishers on various experience levels. The wading is easy to difficult depending on flows. We will meet at the first parking lot on the left of the entrance.

Bob Fujimura will be the host of this 'pop-up' outing; **please contact him** (email: deltaflyfishers@gmail.com or phone: 209-329-1692) **if you are planning to attend** or have any questions about this event. DFF Members inviting guest(s) are responsible for the needs of their guest(s) and getting their signed 2026 Liability Waiver to the host prior to fishing. Click the DFF Membership page link for the waiver at: https://deltaflyfishers.com/membership All participants must have a valid CA fishing license and a 2026 Steelhead Report Card.

Recommended Equipment

5-7 wt rods
Floating or sink tip fly line
3x to 4x tippet
Indicator & split shot
Waders, wading belt, and wading staff
Wading boots with studs or cleats

Flies

Most Rainbow trout nymphs, streamers and egg patterns work. Nymphing is the most productive. Streamers will also work.

Please bring a bag lunch and a folding chair. We will meet back at the parking lot around noon to take a break and share stories.

Hope you can make it to our home water!

Bench Basics — Hardware

By Tim Costello

Welcome to the incredibly rewarding, absorbing - and at times frustrating - world of fly tying! As a seasoned tier and instructor for our club, I'm thrilled you're considering taking up this essential craft. Tying your own flies is more than just a hobby; it's a direct connection to the fish you pursue, offering a deep satisfaction that store-bought flies simply can't match. I'm writing this in order to help you get started, so let's talk about some initial investments in tools and materials, and the best way to leverage the knowledge of your local community. (*continued pg 9*)

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An important note about equipment before I jump into some of the basic tools. A LOT, and I mean A LOT, of fly tying whether it is equipment, materials, patterns, etc it really comes down to a personal preference. Just because a tool or piece of equipment is expensive, does not necessarily make it the best. For example, some of my favorite bobbins were less than $10 and while I tie on a Dyna-King vise it is one of their less expensive models. I say this because, I want to warn against buying equipment and other tools sight unseen. Some of the tools you will want to hold them and test their feel, much like you would a fly rod/reel.

Essential Equipment: Setting Up Your Tying Bench

The first question every beginner asks is, "What do I actually need to buy?" The good news is you don't need to break the bank to start. The single most important piece of equipment is the **vise**. A vise holds the hook securely while you work, and I strongly recommend investing in the best quality vise you can reasonably afford, as a wobbly or difficult-to-adjust vise will lead to frustration and hinder your learning. While high-end rotary models exist, a solid, entry-level vise with good clamping power will serve you perfectly as a beginner.

A fly tying vise needs to be able to accomplish two things: hold the hook tightly enough so it doesn't slip while you tie and sturdy enough not to move while you are tying. There are two very basic questions you must ask yourself, when looking for a vise: 1.) Do I want it on a pedestal or a C-clamp to hook to a table, 2.) Do I want it fixed (meaning it does not rotate) or rotary? Before you even start looking, these 2 questions should be answered as they will determine your shopping.

Each type of vise, pedestal or C-clamp has their pros and cons. Usually the price is no different for one or the other. The pedestal is handy for traveling (vacations, fishing shows, etc) when you never know what kind of a surface will be available to tie on. Likewise, if you do not have a designated fly tying area, you can place it anywhere and then pick it up and move when you are done. Unfortunately, often they are not heavy enough for some serious thread tension when tying larger flies, or large deer-hair bass bugs. It is quite easy to tip a pedestal vise over if you really crank down on the thread.

C-clamps are more secure (it drives me nuts when the vise moves during tying) which eliminates the moving when tying. Likewise, you can adjust the height of the head on the vise as well. The major downside of C-clamp vises is that the clamp may not be large enough to fit over the table whether you are at home or traveling. Likewise, it may be an issue in the family if you clamp the vise onto the dining room table. My solution to this was I bought the C-clamp version and then created a pedestal out of discarded marble from a countertop, drilled a hole and bought a pedestal. I carry both with me.

Cost: fly tying vises can be found from as low as $50 to as high as $1000! Many of the manufacturers have a couple different models available and sometimes in different colors. Most popular manufacturers are: Regal, Renzetti, Peak, Dyna-King, HMH and Griffin. Some of the lesser known are: Tiemco (yes, the hook maker), Norvise, Wolff and Stonfo. Lots of choices and decisions; However, you do not need to break the bank. You can find a quality vise to last you a while from $150 - $300 range.

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I started tying on an old Thompson Super AA vise and it worked just fine for many years. I then upgraded to a Peak which was also just fine, but as I started tying more, I needed a better vise. So I put out the money and bought a Dyna-King that I probably will never have to replace. Dyna-King can be a bit pricey, BUT they have some very low cost models like the Trekker. Additionally, you can get midge and salt water jaws. All Dyna-King jaws have two openings for small and large hooks.

Next are the core **tools**: a good quality **bobbin** to hold your thread (ceramic-tipped bobbins are excellent for preventing thread fraying), sharp, fine-point **fly tying scissors** (never use them for anything but thread and materials!), a **hackle plier** for wrapping feathers, and a **whip finisher** for tying the final knot. While you can technically learn to hand-whip finish, this tool makes the process much faster and more secure. Don't worry about buying every gadget right away; start with these core five items, and you can add specialty tools as you begin to tie more complex patterns. Let me take a quick minute and talk a little more about each one of these tools.

Essential Equipment: Scissors

Once again, as with other equipment and tools there are a lot to choose from. A *really* good pair of scissors is essential. However, I would suggest you have a minimum of three good pairs of scissors. You will need a pair of hair scissors, all-purpose scissors and micro or arrow point scissors for close in work. It's important to note here, your *good* scissors should *never* be used to cut hard material such as wire or bead chains. Get an old pair of scissors (or if you buy new ones, use the old pair) and use those so your scissors do not dull. Additionally, *always* cut the hard material at the back of the scissor blade. Finally, this is another one of those tools that you may want to hold them and test out a pair before buying them.

Personally, I use several different types of scissors for different applications. For example a pair with long blades for cutting long strips of Thin Skin, deer/elk hair, etc. I also like a short pair with a fine tip for small flies and fine detail work. Similarly, a pair of curved blades for shaping materials.

Essential Equipment: Bobbins

Just like vises, there are many different bobbins from many different makers: Umpqua, Smhaen, Dr. Slick, etc. just like vises there are various options for a bobbin: glass, ceramic, steel, etc. Many tyers use ceramic or glass as it greatly reduces fraying your thread while tying. They also vary in how heavy they are. Some bobbins such as Umpqua Dreamstream are on the heavy side, BUT have a good feel while, others like Dr. Slick or Tiemco are quite light.

A bobbin is essential as it holds tension on the thread and the spool of thread while you tie. Technically, you only need one to tie, but if you continue to tie over time you will end up with several. I always have several bobbins threaded and ready…this makes tying easier as you do not have to stop and switch thread in your bobbin. Try to avoid cheap knock off bobbins with cheap metal tubes. As you tie the thread moves around the inside of the bobbin and over time will make for sharp spots, leading to thread fraying and breaking.

Personally, I use ceramic bobbins, but beware you do not want the cheap knock-offs that employ a ceramic insert at the top of the barrel. The insert makes it harder to thread your bobbin *and* it can lead to fraying of your thread since the tube is still metal. IF you

(*continued on pg 11*)

(*continued from pg 10*)

use a ceramic bobbin, you want to make sure the entire tube or barrel is ceramic, not just an insert at the top.

Essential Equipment: Hackle Pliers

You will notice there is a theme here….LOL. As with all the other equipment and tools, hackle pliers are another area in which there are several options. By far, the most common types you will experience are the standard, spring loaded and rotary. You may also run across the long spring or the hook and tube (used for displaying flies) heckle pliers as well. Just like the other tools I have mentioned, it all comes down to personal preference. For example, I have tried the rotary, and while it is not my first choice I do have a pair for particular instances, such as tying parachute patterns. Normally, I use a standard pair for everyday use.

Essential Equipment: Whip Finisher

A whip finishing tool is *not* a must to begin fly tying. However, it does make life easier, but can be a difficult skill to learn and master. Several half hatches (3-5) is roughly equal to a well tied whip finish. There are two main types of whip finishers: a Thompson and a Terra(?). This is another tool you may want to try each type to see what you prefer. Additionally, just like with scissors, you may want a couple different sizes, depending on what you tie. *At least*, the standard size and maybe a midge finisher (if you tie a lot of small flies) or a magnum (for larger flies). Personally, and this is my opinion, I am not a fan of the Thompson and prefer the standard model. You may be able to find a dual tool, which is a whip finisher on one end and a half hitch tool on the other end. *IF* cost becomes an issue, you can do without the whip finisher and either whip finish by hand *or* just complete several half-hitches instead. I also think as a new tier a bodkin on your bench is indispensable. You can also find these with a bodkin on one end and a half hitch tool on the other.

The Power of Community: Clubs, Shops, and Lessons

While books and online videos are valuable resources, nothing replaces hands-on instruction. This is where your local fly fishing community is absolutely invaluable. I highly recommend seeking out your local fly fishing club. Clubs like ours exist to foster camaraderie and share knowledge. Most clubs host regular fly tying nights, often with experienced tiers teaching specific patterns. These settings allow you to ask immediate questions, get real-time feedback on your technique, and see the mechanics demonstrated right in front of you. Similarly, visit your local fly shop. These are not just retail outlets; they are the heart of the local fishing scene. Many shops offer dedicated, structured beginner fly tying classes, which can accelerate your learning curve dramatically. The small cost of a class is a fantastic investment, as an instructor can correct subtle errors in your technique—like how you hold your thread or position your material—that are difficult to diagnose on your own. Engaging with the community transforms a solitary craft into a shared journey, providing mentorship and inspiration as you progress from a beginner to an accomplished tier.

Finally, the goal of this monthly article is to provide some basic information to get you started tying. Next will be an article on some basic materials for starting out on your tying journey. Additional articles will include a whole article on thread…the different types and manufacturers, etc. Once we get all the essentials dialed in, I will start writing about a specific fly pattern each week.

CONSERVATION

By Ron Forbes, Conservation Chair

There's more to fly fishing than pulling fish out of the water. It's about pushing yourself to learn, to improve, and appreciate the wonders of nature. .

Author unknown .

Finally some well deserved recognition

When I joined Delta Fly Fishers, then president Steve Von Berg and I talked about the club and he suggested I take the position of Chair of Conservation. With reluctance I accepted, after explaining I had no real understanding of the environment issues, the Delta, and much less our fisheries. He was encouraging so I agreed. Within a month I was overwhelmed by the number of negative issues confronting our fisheries and the Delta's environment. When I talked with Steve again about all of the problems confronting the environment and our fisheries he looked at me, laughed, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Just what did you expect".

It's apparent most of our environmental and fisheries problems stem from inaction, mismanagement, greed, or politics. However, it was my pleasure last month to find several positive articles appearing online and in the media regarding the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) and the state's Mokelumne River Hatchery who have very successfully co-managed the Mokelumne River's salmon and steelhead populations.

The Mokelumne Hatchery is well known and widely regarded as the best hatchery in the state of California. Both EBMUD and the state financially support the hatchery's infrastructure and environment to maintain its ability to successfully preserve the river's fisheries. Together they are responsible for nurturing the Moke's "enhancement salmon". Enhanced salmon are those fish that are reared in a hatchery to increase the number of fish population. It's estimated these enhanced fish comprise about 25% of the current salmon population.

EBMUD operates under a salmon mitigation production requirement. The agency is required to be involved in the fish's entire life cycle within the Mokelumne River. The agency has performed this task with notable success. Over the years they have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars improving the river's environment and stream beds to vastly improve Moke's ability to support successful spawning of the river's salmon.

The hatchery receives money to support their efforts from fees paid by both commercial and charter fishing boats. You and I also help with their funding when we pay for our sport fishing license. The hatchery is very fortunate to have William Smith and an excellent team of technical staff that habitually produce healthy young salmon at a cost which is the lowest of any hatch within the state. California is reliant on the Mokelumne Hatchery's salmon egg production to help less productive hatcheries meet their salmon egg production requirements.

Aerial view of Mokelumne River Hatchery.

In a recent article Michelle Workman, Natural Resources Manager for the EBMUD, pointed out that the Mokelumne River has two water resources. Most upstream is Pardee Reservoir (215,000 AF). The reservoir is used for EBMUD's residence. Next is the Camanche Reservoir (417,120 AF) which supplies water for the hatchery and the river's fisheries (see Figure next page). Our club played a major part in requiring EBMUD to build the hatchery since Camanche Dam blocked the salmon's ability to spawn upstream.

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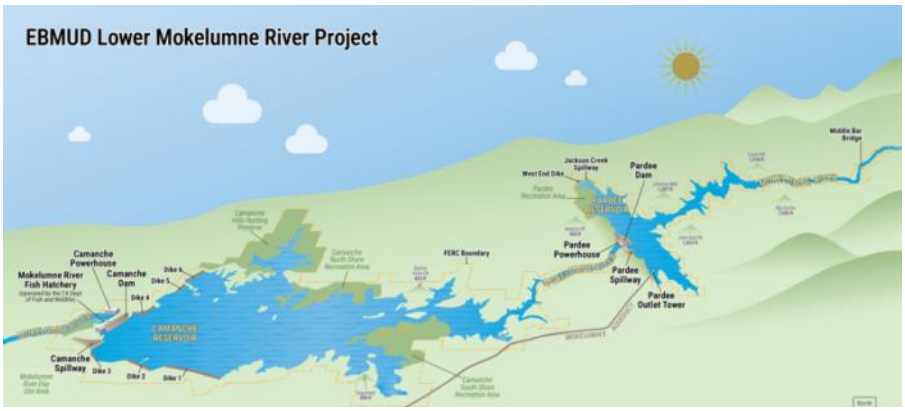

Map of the East Bay Municipal Utility District reservoirs, Pardee and Comanche, on the lower Mokelumne River.

A major reason for the hatchery's ongoing success is their use of an advanced water treatment system that effectively removes pathogens from the water before the water enters the hatchery system. It also uses an advanced refrigeration unit that cools in-flowing water to temperatures that are optimum temperatures required for both trout and salmon. Workman stressed the importance of these procedures to prevent the rapid spread of pathogenic diseases through the hatchery system.

Mokelumne River Hatchery egg incubation facilities.

Over the years, those of us who fished the river, have seen tons of gravel alongside the river waiting to be placed in the river to enhance the natural salmon spawning beds. The enhancement of the river bed has been very successful and has greatly improved the Mokelumne's salmon population.

Workman also noted the two major challenges Mokelumne salmon face on their way to the Pacific Ocean. One is natural, the other is man-caused by our radically altering the Delta. First, the Delta is a very complex system the outgoing smolt must pass through to survive and make it to the Pacific ocean. The smolt must face predation, man made water diversions, and complex habitat challenges.

The second hurdle the young salmon face are the overwhelming problems caused by the powerful water pumps in the south Delta sending water to southern California. These pumps are so powerful the Delta is the only place on earth where water flows backward. Any fish near these pumps will die. Getting accurate numbers of salmon successfully passing through the Delta is difficult but it's estimated a very small percentage of fish survive.

Several years before the covid epidemic EBMUB'S then Natural Resources Manager, Jose Setka spoke to our club about a number of innovative approaches EBMUD was advocating to improve salmon survival. Their approach was not just innovative, it has been overwhelmingly successful. They trucked Mokelumne's smolts west of the Delta prior to release, thus bye passing the Delta entirely. Their innovative procedure has been so successful the Mokelumne Hatchery, although the smallest hatchery in California, has out produced all hatcheries in California including the federal Coleman Hatchery, the states' largest hatchery, by an overwhelming margin. In the 2024 salmon run, the Mokelumne's hatchery produced an all-time high rec-

Mokelumne River Hatchery smolt release.

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ord of 32,000 salmon. The Coleman hatchery produced less than 5,000 fish.

The EBMUD and the Mokelumne Hatchery are prime examples of forward thinking. It is difficult to understand why the other federal and state hatcheries seem unable to be more creative in their approach to prevent the extinction of our salmon population.

Given the record breaking salmon runs on the Moke for the last two years I looked forward with great anticipation to this year's run. Last year an all time high 35,450 salmon passed the fish counter at Woodbridge. I was blown away! This year only 10,435 salmon were counted for the 2025 salmon run on the Mokelumne River. That's almost 1/3 the fish of last year's run. The lower number is similar to the numbers of previous years' poor returns before EBMUD's successful interventions.

Because of the huge drop in the numbers of this year's salmon run I called both EBMUD's Michelle Workman and the Mokelumne Hatchery manager William Smith for an explanation of the poor numbers of this year's run. Both initially expected the 2025 returning salmon to be at the level of the 2023 and 2024 runs. Given the approaching holidays I was unable to make contact with either source but will continue contacting them to understand the unexpected reversal in the Moke's salmon production. An article in Lodi's News Sentinel (LNS) by Hanna Weaver, however, tried to explain part of the answer.

The reason for this year's poor return is, once again, due to water mismanagement. For salmon to migrate upstream [and to locate spawning streams, especially for fish trucked downstream for release as smolts [ed]] to spawn they are dependent on these pulse flows of water. According to Jason Julienne, an environmental scientist of the Dept of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), "The flows vary in order to accommodate competing water needs for agriculture and Delta towns. This fall, a reduced flow into the lower Mokelumne likely contributed to lower salmon returns."

It is difficult to accept Julienne's reasoning since Delta towns are not dependent on the Mokelumne's water and EBMUD has released water from Comanche Lake for needed water pulses previously to initiate its historic ruins of 2023 and 2024. However, even though the river 's number of return fish is low the hatchery feels it will be able to release 6.5 million smolts this year.

On a more positive note, the Moke's water temperature has been lower and close to the ideal for spawning. It's felt nearly all the newly laid eggs will hatch eggs close to March 1st. This will allow the naturally spawned fish to grow stronger and be more likely to a successful trip to the Pacific.

On another positive note, the hatchery had its largest returning salmon in more than two decades. The chinook salmon weighed 37 pounds!