

CASTING CONFIDENCE

The *Flygirls* of Michigan

WRITER | JULIE FORD

PHOTOS | ANN MILLER FLYGIRLS OF MICHIGAN



Thirty years ago, fly fishing instructors Ann Miller and Dorothy Schramm saw a need. Women wanted to know how to fly fish, and once Miller and Schramm taught them the basics, the students would say, "Well, now what do we do?"

"We decided we needed some sort of group to provide events so there was a group of women they would feel comfortable with," Ann Miller, Flygirls of Michigan president, says. "We're not centrally located, there are no pretentious meetings, we just want to get on the river and fish."

And that's what the Flygirls do. They meet at Michigan's best fly fishing locations to learn, share and fly fish.

The first step to becoming a Flygirl is to join Fly Fishers International, an organization that supports the fly fishing community through conservation and education. There is no additional fee to join Flygirls. As soon as you receive your member number from Fly Fishers International, you can join the Flygirls and learn about upcoming events.

Currently, there are about 280 Flygirls, many of whom attend events that include a mix of recreational day and overnight fly fishing trips, retreats and learning about the various aspects of the sport. There are also Zoom meetings scheduled as needed to help event attendees feel comfortable about what they signed up to do. Events are posted on a monthly calendar and in quarterly newsletters.

Event details include the necessary equipment and skills needed to attend, but in case a member lacks essential gear, she just needs to let the event host know. Some events are for beginners, while some are best tackled by experienced anglers. If an event states wading skills are needed or it's a late fall steelhead excursion, those trips would not be for beginners.

"Bare minimum equipment is a 5- or 6-weight rod, reel, line, leader, polarized sunglasses and a hat," Miller says. "And a wading staff — I fished for years without one and now I always have it with me." Miller explains that a person's balance changes with age, and a wading staff assists with navigating in and along rivers.

"Once you are in a club, people have things they are willing to sell reasonably or pass along," Miller says. "Or you just learn the proper equipment you should buy. Fly rods are kind of like buying a car and a Lincoln Navigator isn't great for someone who is 4 feet 8 inches tall. Fly rods really vary, and some feel better than others."

Women interested in learning the sport of fly fishing are encouraged to join the Flygirls of Michigan and other fly fishing clubs. Flygirls members are from all walks of life, from beginners to expert anglers and fishing guides, to women who work full-time and want to do something for themselves, or those who have just retired and can finally take the time to learn fly fishing.

"One thing that has happened over the years is little pods of friendships form," Miller says. "Those little pods now schedule their own events, and they found their roots in Flygirls — that's been really special to see over the years."

For Miller, fly fishing is a puzzle. She says it starts out as a 100-piece puzzle when you are learning, but then becomes a 1,000-piece puzzle once you get involved in learning the lifecycle of insects in the water and the fish species that feed on them. Miller is an aquatic biologist and writer who shares her thoughts on successful fly fishing.

"To me, the entomology is just the key to the whole puzzle of fly fishing," Miller says. "You can spend a lot of money on gear, but if you understand why you are choosing the fly when you are using it, you will be more successful."

For more information, contact: Flygirls.ws or FlyFishersInternational.org □



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