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## Mike Olson Remembered

Long-time member Michael Olson passed away on February 9, 2023. Mike joined NFA in 1992 and the club and its members became an important part of his life from then on. Mike could have been the poster child for the spirit of volunteerism. In 1998-1999, he served as co-chair for outings, put together the Year in Review Slide show (yes, we had slides in the early years), was Holiday Party Chairman, and served on the Awards Committee. Mike frequently wrote articles about the NFA outings for the Flypaper exhibiting his humor and great story telling skills.

In 2003, he served as Club President and received the Merit Award in 2004. He served as the Awards Chairman in 2005 and during the years of 2013-2019. Together with his wife Susanne, Michael enjoyed hosting multiple outings and was a champion at directing members on the



putting up and taking down of the club equipment from his red folding chair. Mike especially enjoyed taking members for a float trip down the river, especially new members who might otherwise not have an opportunity to fish from a raft.

In 2018, he served as NFA President for the second time. Mike believed in stepping up to help the club carry out its activities. While

President, whenever new members were inducted, he would shake their hand and not let go until he got an answer to the question- "And what committee do you want to serve on?" But perhaps Mike's greatest contribution was his way of including everyone, taking time to share a joke or story, and making members feel welcomed. He will be dearly missed.





## President's Message - Wytold Lebing

Spring is a good metaphor for NFA right now. The 3-year winter of the COVID Pandemic was a difficult time for the club to navigate. Group meetings had to be stopped because of safety concerns. We tried Zoom meetings, but since everyone was already getting "Zoomed out" by work, family gatherings, virtual birthday parties, etc., we had some limited success. Trips became more difficult to run. The club suspended dues and other money raising activities. It was difficult to keep the club together and functioning.

But this spring it feels like it's time for NFA to regroup and start to fully function again. We have a full schedule of outings, and we are back to in person meetings.

Additionally, we are reviving the Fly Paper. Members of the steering committee have stepped up and will be publishing the newsletter again on a bimonthly basis. Members can help by providing news items and fishing reports. As always, we welcome anyone who wants to volunteer and help with club activities,

Remember to watch your back cast - Wytold



## Membership - Susanne Staats

Hello! I want to thank Jill Mosqueda who volunteered to replace me as membership chair last fall when I had to step down. Jill did a great job welcoming new members, answering questions from renewing members and attending monthly member and steering committee meetings. Due to Jill's move to the south sound region, Jill asked if I could return as membership chair. I agreed and looked forward to reconnecting with the club starting in April.

As a reminder, membership dues for 2023 were due January 1<sup>st</sup>. Members have until April 20, 2023, to retain their active status as members. If you have not paid your annual dues, please remember to do so. A member must be active to participate at club fishing outings, education classes, and special events. If you are unsure of your membership status, please contact me.

I want to welcome two new members to our club. Mark Souza joined in February and Brereton Strafford joined in March. Please extend a warm welcome to Mark and Brereton if you see them at club meetings or outings.



## Education – Vance Thompson

Since the Club is not offering a fly-casting class this year, the FFI Casting Fair at Lake Ballinger on 29 April looks like a good opportunity.

Here is a link

<https://www.tickettailor.com/events/washingtonflyfishersinternational/838754>

## Coffee Pot Lake



Photo by Vance Thompson

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## Munn Lake Outing

Susanne Staats (chief navigator and primary fisherperson) and I arrived at Munn Lake at 8:15ish on March 11<sup>th</sup>. We could see the lake, but the launch was hard to find. By the time we navigated around dead ends and through neighborhoods to the launch site, it was 8:30. We inflated my 10' raft and started trolling around the margins of the lake. No other fishermen had shown up by that time (not a good sign). One side of the lake is bordered by mostly small vacation homes, while the other side has large and stately homes. The shallow edges are mostly marshes with many nesting geese. The lake was planted with 300 rainbows in Dec. 2022 and 200 in Feb. 2023. Jim had told me that if we were lucky enough to catch a fish that it would be 18-20" inches.

We were fishing with a floating line and chironomids on a dropper and slowly trolling down the side with the stately homes. About 30 minutes later, we noticed James Schmidt and Jim McKeown had arrived at the launch. We trolled down both sides of the lake and when we got back to the launch, we changed to a full sinking line with a leech. By this time, there were approximately 6 fishermen on the lake.



We saw somebody we didn't know catch a fish. While we were fishing near the launch, we saw James with a fish on his rod and from the bend in the rod we could see, that it could be large. After about 5 minutes, James

called over to us asking if we had a large net. We rowed over to where he was struggling to land his fish and finally got it netted. It was a beautiful 19-inch rainbow with broad shoulders.

After landing the fish (which we now claim as our catch), we fished for about an hour more but didn't have any luck. Nor did we see anybody else catch anything. We packed up and Susanne treated me to lunch at the River's Edge Pub near a golf course. The food was very unspectacular. But the highlight of the day was yet to occur.

We started out toward I-5 north with Susanne navigating under the guidance of the Google lady. About 15 minutes after entering the highway, and almost simultaneously, we said to each other that the highway didn't look like I-5 north. And yes, of course, we were not on I-5. We were on highway 101 headed to the ocean. I take no responsibility for the misdirection, Susanne was navigating. We turned around, I navigated, and we eventually arrived at I-5 north. We had a wonderful time. (Brett Schormann)

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## Gary Todd Letter

In the fall of 1972, a new fly-fishing club was formed that was to become the Northwest Fly Anglers (NFA). A casting class had been put on by the WFFC in 1971. The NFA came about from the enthusiasm of the students in this class and the men who crossed the line to make a family-oriented club.

The individuals who crossed the line were Dawn Holbrook, Bob Graham, Andy Hall, and Curt Jacobson. There were several others, but in their names have left me. The first meeting took place at the Green Lake Field House and those in attendance would become chartered members of the NFA. Many individuals have passed through the portals of the club; Andy, Bob, Curt, and Dawn have all gone. Dawn was my mentor as was Andy. This club has given all of us the opportunity to meet new friends and has taken us to places that we would have never known.

This past year was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which was overlooked. This writing was to the best of my knowledge, and it wasn't meant to offend anyone. The club, with all my memories, all my fishing trips, as well as my fishing buddies Jimmy Fukuda and Al Ford who have left us, means a lot to me. (Gary Todd)

## NFA Fly-Tying Class

After what seems like eons of Covid-19 isolation, the NFA introductory fly-tying class, taught by Eric "Rockfish" Olson and David "Smallmouth" Williams, has resumed. The class, held once a week at Haller Lake Community Center, started with the basics, covering hooks, threads (did you know the 6/0 Flymaster thread is 70 denier, and 6/0 Uni is a whopping 135 denier? If you signed up for the class, you'd learn all manner of cool stuff) and simple materials, then rapidly moved into tying a Carey Special, an essential still water pattern. Since the students, Maureen Sullivan, Nick Sherman, Wayne Balsiger, Walt Shields, Errol Flagor and Peter Rubenstein proved so adept at tying, the class has already mastered five patterns: Carey Special, Chironomid, Woolly Bugger, Pat's Stone and Pheasant Tail. If this rate of success continues (and we expect it will be due to the diligent students and excellent instruction), we'll be able to add the Muddler Minnow. (David Williams)

## Lahontan Cutthroat Trout

Cutthroat trout are widely distributed, with many subspecies, including the coastal cutthroat trout in Puget Sound and the Pacific coast, and others on the west slope of the Rocky Mountains, Rio Grande, Yellowstone, and other systems. One subspecies is the Lahontan cutthroat trout of the Great Basin in the US southwest. It is named after Lake Lahontan, a very large, post-glacial

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lake that did not drain to the ocean. Thousands of years ago, it had a lot of water and a lot of fish, but as the climate changed it got smaller and the lakes became isolated from each other.

Lahontan cutthroat trout were native in various bodies of water including Pyramid Lake, Nevada where they grew huge (comparable to Chinook salmon). They spawned in the Truckee River, the outlet, and fed in the lake. They were extirpated by the usual mix of fishing, water extraction, habitat, and so forth but the lake's trout are now part of a big restoration project by the Paiute Tribe and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. I got there last spring with my brother and caught several of the two strains being reintroduced. The silvery one is known as the Pilot Peak strain, and the more colorful one that spawns earlier in the spring is called the Summit Lake strain. In Washington, there are transplanted populations in Omak Lake and other lakes, where these cutthroat can tolerate the water chemistry that would be stressful or lethal to other trout.

Pyramid Lake fishing is sometimes done from stepladders (yes - google it and you will see!) and it seems weird but it works, though there are also places where one can cast from shore. Some anglers favor chironomids below from strike indicators and others favor stripping. Long casts are beneficial, and many anglers use switch rods. The shoreline is very dry and can be windy but scenic in a geological kind of way, with pelicans and other birds out on the water.

Here is a pic of me with my brother (a famous fisherman, as it happens, but not a fly guy) with a Summit Lake strain fish, and one of me on the right with a silvery Pilot Peak fish. It was just under 10 pounds, and that barely qualifies as a big one. Fish to 15 and even 20 pounds are not unheard of, and back in the old days, fish to 20, 30, and even 40 pounds were taken. (Tom Quinn)







## Cowichan River

Some months back, my stepfather Brett Schormann heard of a river in British Columbia that was mentioned by a member of the fly club. On Vancouver Island, north of Victoria, the [Cowichan River](#) flows from its headwaters at Cowichan Lake some 30 or so miles to the sea. It reportedly hosts a vibrant trout fishery, as well as prodigious runs of native steelhead and salmon. The fellow fly club member owns a cabin on the river. He recommended we pay it a visit.

It wasn't long after learning of this that Brett called me up with renewed interest in catching a steelhead. Over the years, his enthusiasm for this effort has waxed and waned from excitement to abject disgust, and I can't really blame him; of all the times we have teamed up to chase steelhead together, we have caught nothing. Not one. This has instilled Brett's overall belief that steelhead are a myth—like the Loch Ness Monster—but it hasn't completely extinguished the desire to go hunting for one. When an opportunity arises that offers a glint of hope to attain this prize, he is all over it.

Of course, so am I.

The Cowichan River stands out to me as a mystery. It is in the greater Salish Sea region, not far from the Olympic Peninsula and north Puget Sound watersheds. As the crow flies, the Cowichan is due west from the city of Bellingham. Yet, it hosts a fishery that as far as I am aware is unlike any other in the region. The trout population—the fact that there *is* a trout population—sets it apart immediately. There are scores of rainbows that enter the river from the lake at its source, and resident brown trout lurking in its holes and shadowy cutbanks. From what we are told, the bug hatches can be voluminous. These are qualities of rivers found more on the east side of the Cascades. Why this occurs here, whereas other west side rivers are scant by comparison, I can't say.

Then, there are steelhead. While Puget Sound and coastal Washington rivers continue to flirt with peril, the Cowichan, just a few hours away by ferry continues to host a healthy native run of winter and spring fish. I don't know what makes it different, but it is.

One thing, the river is gorgeous. As habitat, it's easy to see why fish would thrive here. The clean water and copious gravel beds fit for spawning are surely part of the equation. For the visiting angler, it might be hard to figure out what *not* to fish, because it all looks good.

The upper half of the Cowichan, from its headwaters to Skutz Falls, is a catch-and-release fishery, and the upper half of that is fly-only water. The lower half of the river is popular with local gear anglers, especially during salmon season. Brett and I spent our three days on the upper water with a local guide, getting familiar with its riffles and turns.

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The prevailing fly-fishing method on this river appears to be Euro-nymphing—a tactic that seems to have overtaken indicator nymph fishing on many popular trout streams. Brett often tries to get me to do this and takes my polite refusal as either stubbornness or snobbery, or some aesthetic motive that means I am not actually interested in catching fish. He is partially right about the stubbornness. I don't think any dedicated fly angler can do without it. We argue our respective sides to the point of hurling comical insults at one another, which maybe amuses the guides, or at least gives them time to do other things while we occupy ourselves.

In fly fishing, if nowhere else in life, you should do what your heart wants. My heart wants to swing. Whatever may motivate you to pick up a rod and fish, if you do it with love and put your whole self to it, you will find success.

Maybe not right away, though. New rivers take time; they test your patience, and don't give up their goods until you have suffered a bit. Until you have exhausted what you think you know, and lamented over what you don't know. Until you go to bed with humility and rise in the morning to try again. Until you pay your dues.

Day one, our guide was telling us about all the fish we would catch that day, as though the history had already been written. We were excited. It wasn't long after starting out that our anticipation for the day was ratcheted up further by the sight of dozens of rainbows occupying shallow gravel slopes along the upper river. The low springtime water is gin-clear, with visibility to the bottom of the deepest holes, 10-20 feet down. You can see fish everywhere.

Their motivation however was less clear. We floated down through scores of fish, Brett at the bow with a deadly Euro-rig bouncing trout snacks along the bottom, with no takers. The longer this continued, the more puzzled we became, most especially our guide. Brett and I have confounded guides in the past, completely upending what otherwise seems like a surefire fishery. Together we seem to wield a power that shuts fish off like blowing the fuse on a strand of Christmas lights. When we came over a pod of Steelhead milling around in a shallow riffle, I swung the flies that have given me fish right past their noses without so much as a lick.

The first day this happens, you can rationalize it as a one-off, a break-in period, a getting warmed-up for the real fishing that is sure to happen the next day. When the same thing happens the next day, you turn inward. You wonder what you are doing wrong. You wonder whether the deodorant you bought is putting the fish down.

Actually, I think a moment of dejection is useful. Sure, it sucks, but it opens you up to thinking differently. If you manage to survive it without too much of a hangover, it puts you on the hunt for new ideas, because all the other ones have been tried and spent. It's the moment where you might, with some luck, expand your game. You start to observe, and experiment.



Trout may be weaning off the egg spawn they gobbled up through the end of winter and are looking to the emerging mayflies. A time of transition. You run with this theory, and suddenly your line goes tight.

The steelhead holding in shallow lies in full sunlight and clear water don't give a rat's ass for attractor flies, no matter how big or small. Just when you start to think, *will trout patterns work on these fish?* A fly-fishing junkie who happens to be floating by hands you a #2 Muddler Minnow and suggests swimming it as slowly as possible. Ten casts into this experiment and the water erupts, your rod bows to the beautiful violence.

Happy endings are nice. I might prefer however to call it a happy beginning. I think we are just getting started here, having so much still to learn. The next time we visit, the game will probably be different from last time, causing us to rethink, reorganize, and bring every box of flies we have in the house. That will be a reminder to us that the history isn't written yet. (Wes Fullerton)



## Yakima River Outing

Westin Rivers Conservancy hosted the Northwest Fly Anglers spring skwala fishing outing at their property just below the Umtanum BLM boat launch (be sure to look up what Western Rivers Conservancy is doing on the Yakima) over the weekend of March 24 through March 26. There were twelve club members planning on attending the outing. However, threats of snow and cold weather weeded out the less hearty and only seven of us ended up at the camp out.

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Jake Campbell from Western Rivers Conservancy joined the party and by the time we all met up Friday evening for appetizers, dinner and adult beverages a fair number of us had fishing reports to share.

The water temperatures had come up the previous week to the high 40s and on Friday the water temperature started at 40° and came up to 44°. That really started the skwala activity and the fish were keying on both skwala nymphs and occasionally skwala dries, particularly in the evening. The water flows in the lower river at Umtanum were running at about 1,100 CFS. The nighttime temperatures had been dropping into the low 30s and high 20s. Perfect for stopping the flows from increasing. We couldn't have asked for a better spring skwala fishing!

I had spent the day fishing Friday, from Hanson Ponds to the east Cle Elem BLM boat launch with a friend of mine. The day was not particularly fast fishing. However, a fair number of large fish were caught, including a lovely, rainbow hen, and a very nice cutthroat. We had a short day of fishing from about 9:30 in the morning till about 3:45 in the afternoon. And it really looked like the activity was increasing as the day wore on. It is very difficult to leave good fishing even if it is forward to join wonderful company!

We had some hearty dinners both Friday night and Saturday night. Everyone seemed to enjoy these meals. Being as there was a nice fire ring set up we had a lovely campfire and spent the evenings reminiscing about the fish we missed during the day and growing our caught fish, bigger, and bigger as the evening wore on. I got up early in the mornings and made sure there was hot coffee ready for everyone who wanted it. Matt and Leslie joined us for dinner both evenings.

Matt brought his boat Saturday and floated the river with Wytold. Nick took his newly acquired, pontoon boat up and floated from Ringer to Umtanum with the drift boat for his maiden voyage. The rest of us went out for a walk and wade on Saturday.

On Sunday morning we discussed fishing tactics when you're walking and waiting several sections of the river for the skwala hatch. And also talked about the effectiveness of the hopper dropper combination. Nick ended up pulling a very nice 20 inch rainbow out from under the brush just above the Umtanum footbridge. I managed to catch a lovely 18 inch rainbow that was aggressively feeding on blue wing olives up near the Umtanum gauging station.

That brings me to the blue wing olive hatch. On Friday the blue wing olive hatch started about 2:00 in the afternoon and ran until about 3:30 in the afternoon. we never saw fish keying on the blue wings. We did occasionally see a splashy dry skwala take but I only managed to take one fish on a dry that afternoon. On Saturday the blue wing olive hatch started slowly about 12:30 in the afternoon and was full on by 1:00 in the afternoon. The fish in the Umtanum slick did start keying on the hatch. Of course, I had no small dry flies with me (I had even left all but one of my



skwala dry flies at home with my boat bag) and had to jury rig up my swinging, single-handed spey system with a cobbled-up leader to be able to fish a dry stimulator. It was effective! Though, I did have to pass the stimulator a fair number of times over each fish that I caught.

Well, even though the nights were cold, and there was frost on the ground and ice in the buckets in the mornings the conditions were ideal for a spring skwala outing. (Peter Maunsell)

