



# Kapiti Fly Fishing Club

## July 2023 Newsletter



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*You are invited to our next Club meeting on Monday 24 July when Gordon and Greg will share their knowledge of fishing in the Taupo Fishery*

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**In this month's newsletter:** This month's photo is of the Wilkin River that flows into the Makarora River as it enters Lake Wanaka -South Island.

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## Club activities

Date	Event	Coordinator
Sunday 30 July	Fly-Tying workshop – Dry Flies, Emergers, other things	Gordon
11 to 13 August	Tongariro and Tauranga -Taupo Rivers	TBC
Monday 28 August	Club meeting – Guest speaker TBC	Graham
15 to 17 September	Manawatu River	TBC
Monday 25 September	Club meeting – Guest speaker TBC	
Sunday 1 October	Opening Day on Waikanae River	
13 to 15 October	Rangitikei River area	TBC
Monday 23 October	Club meeting – Guest speaker TBC	
10 to 12 November	Tukituki and Waipawa Rivers	TBC
Monday 27 November	Club meeting – Guest speaker TBC	

## *Presidents report*

Well, I have been back from the UK for 4 weeks and haven't been out with a trout rod. The rivers I like to fish are still too high, with the Rangitikei and Manawatu especially being unfishable (as they are so often in the winter). I keep looking at Horizon's flow charts, but they continue to have the same message – too high to contemplate even thinking about it.

A couple of our members tried the Mangatainoka a week or so ago and found some clear water, so the smaller streams might well be OK, but make sure you don't inadvertently roam into closed water.

I have been down to the Otaki mouth with my saltwater fly rod several times as its only 2km from my home – to no avail. But it has been good to be there, and this week took another member down and helped her with setting up her new saltwater rod and then her casting, which I think improved. Look at that nice layout.....



At our recent committee meeting, we decided to try to get our meetings more vibrant and informative and generally 'up' the club's profile so that we can attract and retain new members. If you have any friends or others who potentially might be interested in learning or just meeting and talking to fellow trouters, please ask them to come along to any of our events or meetings. And if they do come, please make them welcome.

The reports from the central north island have been mixed, but in the last couple of weeks, pods have been moving into the Tongariro and good catches reported – if one can get out of the gales that have been making it nearly impossible. In those conditions, moving to the smaller streams like the Hinemaia is not a bad option, except everyone else will be having the same idea. But even then, it pays to watch what the other anglers are doing, you might well learn something that helps you. And you will need a lot of flies as you will lose a lot to the snags in that smaller, tree littered water.

And that is of course the focus of our next club meeting – talking about fishing in the rivers of Taupo. Gordon and Greg will be taking the floor and they will have a lot of great information on how to and perhaps even where to.

I might even be able to add a bit as I have been fishing the Turangi rivers for 58 years now. How the rivers have changed – as all rivers always do – and so each trip might mean that you need to re-learn it all over again. Even a few cumecs difference in flow can well change where the fish

are sitting – and of course, the fact that the rainbows are moving through the river on their spawning runs during the winter means that finding the pods is probably more important than having great skill – although there is no question that competence helps.

And there is also no question that modern materials have been a great boon to trouters. I started with a 10-foot cane rod. It was rather like waving a small telephone pole. We did have nylon leaders rather than gut. And the rubber waders allowed the cold to seep into your bones. We were deep wading – at least waist deep fishing big wet flies on sinking lines, lining up on the bank before 5am, when the first through the pool was usually successful. But after an hour, a trip to the bank was usually necessary to relieve the cold and other pressing parts of the body. And the runs were more distinct – the early run-in late April/ May and another in June/July, then it was largely over and recovering fish were the norm from then on.

But always, then, and now, the river fills up with fish after a good fresh and that is really when Taupo is at its best with everyone enjoying success, although there is no question that the competent and adaptable anglers will catch the bulk of any caught.

So come along and learn, increase your competency so you can catch more, and we are pretty certain that it will make your fishing experience more enjoyable. And then come along on the club trip in August to put into practice what you have learnt.



### ***Annual membership subscriptions are now due***

On behalf of the Management Committee, I would like to thank all those members who have renewed their membership of the Kapiti Fly Fishing Club for the 2023-24 year. We still have a few members who have not renewed their membership and we would appreciate your continued support, all you need to do is pay by Direct Credit or by cash at our next club meeting to our new Treasurer, Kras Angelov.

You can pay by Direct Credit to **031531-0042482-00** (Westpac Coastlands), please add our **name in the reference field** of the Direct Credit transaction.

The new subscription fees for 2023/23 financial year are unchanged from last year as follows: -

Adult Member subscription:                   \$38.00

Family subscription (2 adults)               \$46.00

Junior subscription (under the age of 16 years) free, we will automatically renew your membership.

### ***Fly Casting Tuition by Gordon Baker***

Club member Gordon Baker is available for one-on-one casting tuition. Gordon is a casting instructor with Flyfishers International (USA). He is available to help beginners get off to a good start and to assist more experienced members improve their distance casting skills. Although not yet an approved two-handed casting instructor Gordon is a keen learner willing to share new skills.

Email Gordon [kiwiflyfisher@gmail.com](mailto:kiwiflyfisher@gmail.com) or phone 0274946487 to arrange a suitable time for a lesson. There is no charge.

### ***Mid-Week Fishing trips by Hugh***

For those members who are lucky enough to be able to fish mid-week during the forthcoming season please confirm your desire to be included in the mid-week fishers email list to:

[hugh.driver.nz@gmail.com](mailto:hugh.driver.nz@gmail.com)

The emails are often sent out only giving very short notice to take advantage of the prevailing conditions and members availability, as an example the afternoon of day before the proposed trip.

**If you are interested in participating on any mid-week fishing trips, please email Hugh Driver with your contact details and you will be added to the email list.**

### ***Winter Fly-Tying workshop by Gordon Baker***

Lat last year our monthly fly-tying stopped due to a lack of interest from member so a new initiative will offer members an opportunity to participate in an afternoon fly-tying workshop over four weekends, the last two Sundays in June and July.

Gordon Baker has created and will present each session. Join fellow members on **Sunday afternoons between 1 and 5pm at Te Ara Korowai, 8 Weka Road, Raumatī.**

Refresh your skills and learn new ones, each session will focus on specific aspects of fly-tying. This is a perfect opportunity to get started in fly tying, each session will feature additional skills that utilise tying gear, as an example braided loops first then joining fly lines to backing.

**Sessions are limited to about 10 members.**

Please bring your fly-tying kit, there will be tools there for beginners. Tools and materials will be provided by our usual sponsor **The Flyshop.**

Please contact Gordon ([kiwiflyfisher@gmail.com](mailto:kiwiflyfisher@gmail.com)) to ensure your place.

**Session Four Sunday 30 July - Dry Flies, Emergers, and Other Things.**



## *Kapiti Women on the Fly by Leigh Johnson*

### **Practical Skills Meetup & Shared Lunch**

This was held on Sunday, July 16th at the Otaki Bridge Club. 12 enthusiastic ladies from across Wellington met for an excellent session on leaders, flies, and knots under the instruction of Gordon Baker and Greg du Bern. (Thanks guys.)



### **Central Plateau Women's Social Fly-Fishing Tournament**

This weekend, club members Ruth McKenzie, Jane Inge & Jenny Tracey and I will be at this social tournament along with 45 fly chicks from around New Zealand. This event is a fundraiser for the NZ Fly Ferns, who will provide group and one-on-one tuition to the participants throughout the two days.

### **Fish & Game NZ**

As the coordinator for WoTF, I was invited to attend a **Fish & Game NZ Influencer's Forum** in Christchurch last week hosted by Corina Jordan of Fish & Game NZ and Tim Gale for the [Game Animal Council](#). In the room, there was a diverse range of representatives from fishing, hunting and conservation organisations plus other industry stakeholders including professional guide bodies, retailers, and communication consultants.

The agenda for the day explored the issues affecting angling and hunting in New Zealand, such as the government's recent thread to remove trout and salmon from the Natural & Built Environment Bill, which would also affect the role F&G plays in protecting the environment.

It was an informative day, the outcome of which was considerable agreement between those present to collaborate more in future to protect and enhance the opportunities for angling and hunting recreation in New Zealand.

### **Kapiti Women on The Fly Workshop 2023**

Due to popular demand, we're doing it again! The venue, **TALTAC**, will provide accommodation for 20+ ladies with overflow accommodation available nearby. Or bring your motorhome and camp on site.

We will kick off on Friday evening. Saturday through Sunday morning will be workshops, fishing and fun. For now, please reserve this weekend. More details will be released in due course.

Where to find WoTF?

Please follow our activities on this [Facebook Page](#).

There is also a private [WoTF Facebook group](#) that provides a safe space for women who fly fish, (or would like to fly fish) to share information, arrange fishing activities, and learn from each other about all things fly fishing. Or contact me directly at [leigh@leighjohnsonnz.com](mailto:leigh@leighjohnsonnz.com) or visit [www.womenonthefly.nz](http://www.womenonthefly.nz).



### *Double Haul Casting Clinic by Gordon Baker*



Eleven members met at Mazengarb Reserve with Gordon Baker on Sunday June 11. The weather was perfect for casting - sunny, dry and no wind. Gordon explained and demonstrated the benefits of the Double Haul before offering tips to each of those present.

The event clashed with a WoTF day on the Hutt River so a number of our women members couldn't make it. Fortunately, they had an excellent day on the river, hosted by Hutt Valley Anglers.

The casting clinic is likely to be repeated later this year for all those unable to attend.

## ***Significant progress in our mission to safeguard the future of fishing and hunting in New Zealand by Fish and Game NZ***



Parliament's Environment Select Committee has reported back on the planned Natural and Built Environment Bill (NBE), which we believe would have had significant implications for the future of fishing and hunting in New Zealand and the role of Fish & Game.

Over the past few weeks, almost 12,000 people visited Fish & Game's 'Our Future' [website](#) and nearly 3,500 Kiwis sent emails outlining their concerns to the Government and MPs.

Following this public outcry and the hard work of the Fish & Game team, the select committee has now recommended changes to the proposed law.

These changes include:

- enshrining the protection of the habitat of trout and salmon alongside the protection of indigenous species
- recognition of the values Kiwis place on public access to lakes and rivers
- recognition of the recreational use and enjoyment of the natural environment – and for these values to be maintained and enhanced

**Generally, we believe this is a win for recreation, a win for anglers and hunters and a win for all New Zealanders.**

The initial draft of the NBE Bill completely ignored the value Kiwis place on recreation and enjoyment of our great outdoors and removed the habitat protection of trout and salmon so these recommended changes are positive for Fish & Game and licence holders like you.



We were worried this Bill heralded the beginning of a suite of legislative changes that would threaten the future of fishing and hunting and the species we harvest in this country.

For trout and salmon, we have always been clear that any law must recognise both the national importance of these species and the reason why we need to protect their habitats – to safeguard the habitat of all freshwater fish. On the face of it, these changes go a long way towards addressing those concerns.

The changes rightly prioritise the health of the natural environment and recognise the importance of the recreational values New Zealanders hold so dear, not just now, but for future generations

### **Thank you**

Our licence holders deserve a lot of credit for taking the time to make their voices heard and help bring about this change. We were overwhelmed by the level of support for the campaign, which shows the passion of our anglers and hunters in ensuring the things we care about today will be enjoyed by all in the future.

### **Further changes are still needed**

Over the past 12 months, Fish & Game has raised its concerns about these reforms with environmental NGOs, officials, MPs from all political parties and ministers.

For the most part, it appears the decision-makers have listened, but there are still areas Fish & Game wants resolved.

- The Bill should be more explicit, in particular by ensuring the habitat of trout and salmon is protected, insofar as this is consistent with the protection of the habitats of indigenous freshwater species
- We remain concerned about the limits framework where the Government and local government will set environmental bottom lines for the environment
- We want communities to be able to have their voices heard in the development of new regional planning frameworks and consents.

# WAIKANAE WHITEBAIT

What are they and how to catch them?

A talk on what they are, the rules, regulations and methods of catching will be held at Otaihanga Boating Club on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> of August at 7pm.

All keen fishing people are welcome

Entry is free

## *Hookset Direction — Downstream by Domenick Swentosky*



If you find yourself thinking about hooksets or how to fight and land fish, then you've already done something right, because fooling a trout is the hardest thing out there. Burying the hook and bringing the fish to hand is another skill set entirely, and it's a little easier.

I've published a lot on Troutbitten about fighting fish. And a good fight starts with a solid hookset. We want it fast, sharp and — here's the key — downstream.

Of course, it's not always possible to set the hook perfectly downstream. An angler who is working flies upstream to get a good dead drift on dry flies or nymphs has the significant advantage of being behind the trout.

Fish eats. Hook set downstream. Fish on.

But other angles that we fish limit the perfect hookset. Swinging flies downstream, for example, puts us in the toughest situation for a good downstream set. So, we do the next best thing.

Fish eats. Swing the rod to the side. Fish on — maybe.

Let's break this down a bit more, thinking about why downstream hooksets matter and how to get them in a variety of river setups.

## **Why Downstream Hooksets work**

Trout face the current. They “breathe” and acquire oxygen by taking water through their mouth, passing it over-and-out through the gills. So, aside from the occasional back current or pocket water swirl, trout face upstream while holding or feeding. And when they take our fly, we know what direction the trout is facing — its head is upstream, into the current.

There is no doubt that we get the best hookset by pulling the fly into the fish and not away from it. Hooksets are best with the direction of the set back — into the weight and mass of the fish. Remember, we fish with relatively small hooks, with artificial, barbless flies. So as soon as a trout eats our fly, it tries to eject it. It pushes water out of its mouth and “spits” the fly. This often happens in a microsecond.

Trout know they’ve eaten something they don’t want to swallow, and they try to get rid of it. That’s why pulling the fly into the trout, setting downstream, results in many more hookups. If we pull the fly away from the fish (upstream) we are helping the trout eject the fly. Surely, we’re all lucky enough that a trout can’t get rid of the fly, or it hangs on the corner of its jaw plenty of times. But downstream hooksets result in more solid hookups. And that leads to a successful fight, ending with another trout in the net.

## **More advantages**

Most anglers lift for a hookset, straight up to the sky. I see this all the time. They lift and try to get everything vertical. For stillwaters fishing, or for very deep sections of a river, this is often a good idea. But for the vast majority of river scenarios, setting downstream is the better bet.

Downstream! And yes, somewhat upward. I often tell anglers to set toward the horizon, and around here, with mountains in the distance, that’s a good angle. Your terrain may vary, but you get the picture. For me, as soon as the fly hits the water, I’m ready to set the hook, and I almost always end up setting at the same angle as my backcast.

Setting this way keeps the trout lower in the water. And although everyone seems to love a jumping fish, most losses happen when a trout breaks the surface. Setting the hook downstream helps keep a fish in the water, with the fisherman in control. This angle also puts the fisherman in great position to get side pressure immediately, putting maximum leverage on the trout and tiring it quickly.

## **Some troubles**

I grew into fly fishing by using the same approach as I always had with a gear rod. I worked small waters by wading upstream, staying behind the trout, spooking fewer fish, getting good drifts with bait, and setting downstream, into the fish when they ate it. All of these hook setting habits came naturally because the angle I was fishing set me up for it.

But I remember trying my hand at swinging wet flies and sometimes streamers. As a young man with a fly rod, if I wasn’t fishing dries, my first subsurface presentations were based on swinging, and that happened downstream. I cast across or down and across, then let the flies swing, under tension, and I would manipulate the course and animation of the fly with mends, strips, or twitches. Right away I missed a lot of fish. And I’ve come to understand there were two reasons for this. First, a swung fly rarely looks **natural**. It can be an attractive presentation that makes trout curious,

but they don't often commit to the fly and rather tap it or mouth it with curiosity. Second, hooksets on a swung fly cannot be downstream. And as described above, we can't pull the fly into the trout.

When swinging flies, or anytime the fly is downstream of us, our best bet is to sweep the rod toward the nearside riverbank. Always set the hook downstream as much as possible, and for swung flies, that is bankside. When fishing nymphs under an indicator, if I let the rig drift past my position, I do the same thing — I sweep the rod downstream and toward the bank. This pulls the fly sideways into the trout's mouth.

Lifting upstream to the sky is the worst hookset when a fish is downstream of our position. This setting angle takes the fly away from the fish, pulling it out of the trout's mouth. It also puts maximum tension on the tippet at the moment of contact and pulls the fish to the surface.

### **Do it**

Because trout face into the current, and because a river is fairly predictable in its flow, we know which way trout are facing. We use this knowledge to great advantage, both in our approach and especially at the point of the hookset. Set downstream, as much as possible, always.

**Fish hard, friends.**

## ***Your freshwater farm plan questions and answered by Ministry for the Environment***



**Freshwater farm plans provide flexibility as well as a framework to enable each farmer to put in place actions with the highest environmental value**

From this year, the Ministry for the Environment is introducing freshwater farm plans, to help farmers and growers protect waterways and lower the sector's impact on freshwater. But how will farmers be affected day-to-day?

Freshwater farm plans will be phased in across New Zealand over the next few years, starting in parts of the Waikato and Southland from next month. The new regime is part of the government's Essential Freshwater programme, designed to restore the quality of our water by improving practices in both urban and rural areas.

Farmers and growers will be required to review their environmental impact and identify, manage, and reduce risks to freshwater. Farm operators will need to show they have properly assessed on-farm risks to freshwater as part of certification, provide their action plan to local councils, as well as demonstrate the work they have done to improve outcomes when auditing time comes around.

All pastoral or arable land use of more than 20 hectares and horticultural land use of five hectares or more will require a freshwater farm plan. It is estimated that 34,500 farms will need to complete a plan by the end of 2025.

While industry groups see freshwater farm plans as a practical way for farmers and growers to identify and manage environmental risks, they want assurances the new system won't result in unnecessary red tape.

**Nadeine Dommissie, deputy secretary for policy implementation and delivery at the Ministry for the Environment, answers some of the key questions posed by farmers and growers:**

***How is the FWFP system different from existing regulations, and how will existing regional and sector regulations be integrated?***

The freshwater farm plan system is risk-based and tailored to the circumstances of an individual farm. Often, regulations are high-level, and everyone needs to implement them in the same way, but with this system, we've listened to farmers' concerns, as every farm is different. Farmers and growers will be able to address the risks that are most relevant to them.

The intention is for the system to be seamless for farmers who fulfil their current environmental obligations through an industry programme. We are working with industry groups so that existing programmes include the new requirements.

***Are FWFPs practical for smaller farms? Have the regulations been designed with them in mind?***

We've heard that farmers are concerned about getting more red tape and regulation that doesn't add value to their farms and products. The freshwater farm plan system comes back to the idea that every farm and every catchment is different. Farm plans will be tailored to the size of the farm, and farmers will be able to identify and manage their individual risks.

Smaller farms will need to consider what's relevant in their catchment and what they need to do to address these issues over time. Farm plans enable farmers to plan, over a number of years, the risks they need to manage and the investments they need to make. Irrespective of whether a farm is large or small, they will be able to develop a tailored plan.



Freshwater farm plans will be phased in across New Zealand over the next few years.

***Will this take up all of my time when I could be out on the farm?***

A lot of farmers will already have an industry plan in place. In those cases, they will simply need to keep doing what they're already doing, but they'll need to add some improvements over time.

Others might not have an industry farm plan in place, and they need to be aware that this is a new requirement to consider. There's help and assistance available across the country for farmers starting out on their farm plan journey.

We understand this is going to take time, and farmers have 18 months from when the system goes live in their area to prepare their first plan.

***How flexible is the new regime?***

We've designed it to be very flexible, and it all comes down to the environmental risk on each farm. For some, the focus might be on soil health, and for others, it might be on water quality, or adapting fertiliser use to reduce nitrogen.

Freshwater farm plans provide flexibility and enable the farmer to work within a framework to identify actions that are going to have the highest value from an environmental perspective. The plan will meet requirements, match with their long-term objectives, and add value to their farm and products.

***Will my farm plan data be private and secure?***

Absolutely. It's the farmers' data, and the material passed to councils will be the action plans and some administrative information. Councils will need this information to ensure compliance with the regulations as well as for monitoring the effectiveness of the system.

To learn more about Freshwater Farm Plans and how they will affect you, head to the [Ministry for the Environment website](#)

## *Trout and water temperature: How hot is too hot? By Chad Shmukler*

With vast swaths of the country currently in the grips of what seems to be an interminable heat wave, countless cool flowing freestone trout streams have turned into something altogether different. Even freestone streams with strong cold-water influences and spring creeks that normally remain temperature stable throughout the year have seen soaring temps with fish abandoning their normal feeding and holding lies in search of cold refuges.

Most of us who fish know that when trout streams get too warm, the fishing goes downhill fast. Fish are either nowhere to be found or aren't actively feeding.

For streams that straddle the borderline between the temperatures at which trout thrive and those at which they suffer, it's possible to find fish that are actively feeding, but for which you shouldn't be fishing unless you intend to keep said fish. The trouble for many fisherman can be determining where to draw the line. When it comes to trout, how hot is too hot?

The upper limits of the temperature range within which trout will feed, grow, and remain unstressed by thermal conditions varies by species, however not all that significantly. These upper limits — which may be as *high as 26°C degrees* depending on the species — can be very misleading.

These upper limits characterize thermal conditions under which trout that *are otherwise unstressed* will die should those thermal conditions persist for a certain period of time (typically 24-48 hours) — but they provide little to no information about how abnormally high-water temperatures can affect a fish that is under respiratory and other forms of stress as a result of being hooked and played by an angler.

Warmer water contains less oxygen than colder water. As temperature rises and dissolved oxygen decreases, fish begin to experience stress. These stresses begin to set in well before the water temperature reaches lethal limits. For example, rainbow trout are said to be able to survive in temperatures up to and exceeding 24°C, but stop growing at 23°C.

It stands to reason that a fish, one which is already oxygen stressed while positioned carefully in current that minimizes its energy use, will be dramatically more stressed after being hooked and attempting to fight its way to freedom. In fact, in many cases, a fish otherwise properly handled and released under thermally stressful conditions may be likely to not survive.

So how do you know when the conditions remain comfortable enough to fish your target stream without creating a lethal situation for its residents? Unfortunately, studies vary and there doesn't seem to be any one set of accepted limits. That said, there is a considerable consensus that all three major trout species (brook, brown and rainbow) begin to experience some level of stress at around 20°C, with that stress increasing rapidly as the temperature rises further.

Of course, these are merely guidelines. Water temperature is not the only determining factor of dissolved oxygen (speed of current also plays a factor, for example). Trout which spend extended periods of time living on these generally accepted thermal margins will likely have a greater tolerance outside these margins. However, 20°C - 21°C represents a valuable limit outside of which — provided you don't know otherwise — trout should not be fished to.

On days when temperatures soar, and especially during extended periods of high temperatures, the catch and release fisherman should pay specific attention to stream temperatures throughout the stream he or she is hoping to fish. Play it safe—when temperatures in moving water hit or exceed 20°C, it's best to call it and return another day.

### ***Lost & found: A story of survival by Tom Davis***



**Bill Madsen and Mazie, reunited after 21 days**

Troy Galow hadn't planned to hunt that January day a few years back. But a friend of a friend was looking to shoot a "cull buck"—a nice but non-trophy animal, basically—and Galow, who makes his home in Liberty Hill, Texas, and has a deer lease on a ranch in the South Texas brush country, was happy to do what he could to give the guy his chance.

After dropping him off at one of the two Atascosa-style box blinds he maintains on the property, Galow parked his truck a little distance away and walked back. The guy was standing at the foot of the ladder, looking up.

"There's something in the blind," he said.

This came as unwelcome news to Galow, knowing that in South Texas "something in the blind" typically means either barn owls or undocumented migrants. The problem with the former is that they tend, in Galow's words, "to make a giant mess," and when a pair of owls exited the premises at his approach his initial thought was to drive to his other blind and hunt there instead. But dawn was beginning to break, revealing the spiky textures and muted greens, tans, and ochre's of the brush country, and when he swept his flashlight across the interior of the blind and saw that it was unsoiled (meaning the owls couldn't have been there long), he decided to stick with Plan A.

They set up facing north, looking down the long sendara (open lane) directly in front of them. After a while, though, Galow noticed that his guest, who was sitting to his right, kept glancing around him to their left, where another sendara extended through the brush toward a feeder pen.

"I think there's a white dog near your feeder pen," the guy said at last.



“I didn’t believe him,” Galow recalls. “I’d been hunting there for years, and I’d never seen a dog. I figured he might have seen a coyote, so I just said ‘Let’s stay focused on what we came here for, OK?’

“Well, he kept insisting he saw a dog, so I finally raised my binoculars, looked for myself, and saw this beautiful white bird dog going around and around the feeder pen. I’ve often wondered since then if she was attracted by the scent—a lot of quail and doves come there to feed on the corn—or if she was looking for something to eat.”

Deciding to cut the deer hunt short in order to try to corral what was almost certainly a lost dog, they jumped in Galow’s truck and drove towards the feeder pen.

“We stopped about 50 yards away,” he recounts. “The dog seemed pretty skittish, so I knelt down, said ‘C ’mere, pretty girl,’ and she came right to me. She was skin-and-bones—her collar looked about ten sizes too big—and she was covered in ticks. The nameplate on her collar gave the name and number of her owner, William Masden, and also her name, Mazie.”

After calling the ranch manager to confirm that a lost dog had been reported in the area, Galow called Masden’s number and left a voicemail to the effect of “I have Mazie, your dog. She’s in rough shape, but she’s alive.”

Bill Masden, who lives in San Antonio, called back instantly. “How do you know it’s my dog?” he asked.”

Choking back tears, Masden said, “I’ll be there in two hours.”

It had been 21 days since Masden had last laid eyes on his dog. The third in an unbroken line of cut-from-the-same-cloth female English setters—dogs whose small size and sweetly affectionate dispositions belied the intensity and tenacity they brought to their job—Mazie was 35 pounds of high style and fiery purpose. Over the course of their partnership, they’d hunted from Georgia to Idaho and from Saskatchewan to Texas, pursuing a smorgasbord of gamebirds that included Huns, chukars, sharp-tails, prairie chickens, ruffed grouse, woodcock, pheasants and, of course, bobwhite quail.

The day before Mazie vanished, in fact, Masden and a friend, hunting on Masden’s quail lease near Tilden, Texas (roughly 20 miles from Troy Galow’s deer lease), had both killed 15-bird limits over her. The day the nightmare began, on the cusp of the Christmas holiday, they shot a few birds over one of his friend’s lanky pointers, then Masden suggested they give Mazie a turn.

It was an act they’d played out thousands of times in hundreds of places, but this time, instead of the beeper collar that Mazie had always hunted with, Masden, at his friend’s urging, strapped a GPS tracking collar around her neck. He’d owned it for a while but had never used it before.

“How does this thing work?” Masden asked.

“You just turn it on,” his friend replied.

Except it’s not quite that simple. Masden turned on the “handheld” but, owing to his lack of familiarity with the unit, neglected to activate the collar itself. Over the years the sound of the beeper had become Mazie’s de facto “start” signal, and in its absence, it took Masden several

prompts to reassure her that she was OK to go. That's when, in his words, "She shot off into a waist-high sea of grass—and I didn't see her again for 21 days.

Perhaps the central mystery of Mazie's disappearance is what happened to her immediately after the grass swallowed her up and why she didn't come in, as she'd always done before, when Masden whistled for her. You can speculate endlessly, but the answers to those questions, like the answer to the question of how Mazie survived those 21 days, will never be known.

What *is* known is that Masden searched night and day for her for the next 36 hours: on foot and in his truck, by the light of the sun and by the light of a headlamp, whistling, calling, blowing the truck horn, firing his shotgun into the air, doing anything and everything he could think of to get Mazie's attention and toll her in.

Along the way he killed six rattlesnakes, saw several more, and bitterly pondered the dangers his little white dog—a dog who slept on his bed at night—was facing in that harshly unforgiving environment, a place still ruled by the law of fang and claw where even the vegetation bites back. He printed up a hundred "Lost Dog" flyers offering a substantial reward; some he sealed in Ziploc bags and duct-taped to ranch gates and oil field guard shacks, others he posted in cafes and feed stores. He made dozens of trips, 80 miles each way, back to the area; friends searched when he couldn't.

One particularly tech-savvy friend, Jennie Dallman, posted word of Mazie's disappearance on Facebook and other social media sites. A few calls came in from people who claimed to have seen "a white-and-orange dog," but while Masden followed up every lead they all proved to be dead ends.

He tried to stay positive, but he was all too keenly aware of the terror and confusion Mazie had to be feeling, lost, alone, and fighting to survive—if she was even alive. He was eaten up with guilt, too, knowing that a single careless, costly mistake on his part had set this tragic chain of events in motion. This is a man, you come to understand, who holds himself to a blazingly high standard of responsibility; as he put it in an email, "I failed as a hunting dog owner."

And then, early on a Saturday morning in January, Masden retrieved a voicemail from someone named Troy Galow.

They met on a road near Galow's deer camp. As he describes it, "Mr. Masden got out of the truck, sat down cross-legged on the ground, and Mazie went right to him. She curled up on his lap with her belly up, and he just started to bawl.

"I'll never forget something he said to me: 'Troy, I've cried enough tears to flood San Antonio.' It's the most emotional dog story I've ever been a part of; when I think of all the things that had to break a certain way for me to find Mazie, I can't help but think that an angel was looking out for Mr. Masden and her, and that I was chosen to be the one to reunite them."

Masden's joy was tempered, though, by Mazie's appalling condition. Her nails, which Masden had trimmed weekly since she was a puppy, were grotesquely curved talons; clumps of hair had fallen out of her coat (likely as the result of sleeping in sub-freezing temperatures); her skin was stretched drum-tight over her ribs; she hosted a horrifying number of ticks. As Masden recalls, "I sat on the ground pulling ticks off her for four hours.

There were so many ticks inside her ears that you couldn't get a knife blade into them."



Sadly, that became a lasting legacy of Mazie's ordeal. While for the most part she regained her health (although the hair she'd lost on her back never completely returned), her hearing was irreparably damaged by those ticks that had burrowed into her ears.

"We hunted together a few more times in open country where she could see me," Masden explains. "But it was never the same for either of us."

She remained his boon companion, though. And when you consider that she had the opportunity to point literally thousands of birds over the course of her career—and to retrieve a goodly percentage of them, too—it's pretty clear that Mazie enjoyed the kind of rich, full, happy life that only a handful of dogs are lucky enough to experience. I'll tell you this: If I were reincarnated as a bird dog, I'd want to belong to Bill Masden.

When Mazie died at the age of 17, Masden laid her on her favourite cushioned pad and buried her beneath a branching oak tree. He included several totems emblematic of their life together—a pair of 20-gauge shells, a brace of wild Texas bobwhites—along with a few articles of well-worn hunting clothing and his dog whistle.

He wouldn't be needing them anymore.



## ***The Zealand River: A Blueprint for Failure and Opportunity for Success by Bob Mullard***



*The Zealand River at its best*

***Deep in New Hampshire’s White Mountains lies one of the most beautiful rivers you will ever see. To call it the quintessential New England freestone stream would be fair. Undeveloped and located wholly on public land, White Mountain National Forest, the Zealand River is everything a river should be. Unfortunately, it is also everything a river shouldn’t be.***

The Zealand River rises on the east slope of 4,000-foot Mount Hale. It flows northward, dropping 1,700 feet in elevation before terminating at the Ammonoosuc River, another White Mountain stream where exploitation and poor management has taken its toll. At roughly 6.3 miles in length, it is not a particularly long river. Nor is it a very big river, with normal flows in the tens of cubic feet per second (cfs) not hundreds.

***At its best, the Zealand River is the perfect wild native brook trout stream. At its worst, it is one of the most distressed rivers in the region. While Mother Nature did everything right, man has done everything wrong. For more than a century, man has exploited the river and surrounding forest. When problems arose, the powers that be started trying to “manage” the river. As is often the case, we failed, and miserably.***

While the hand of man has brought the Zealand River to its knees, no single event, action or activity is solely responsible for the current seriously compromised condition of the river. Like many maligned waterways in the United States, the Zealand River is the victim of death by a thousand cuts. And it took decades for it to bleed out.

### **A railroad to remove timber**

The first action that negatively impacted the Zealand River was the construction of the Zealand Valley Railroad which had both direct and indirect, and immediate and delayed impacts. Built to transport virgin timber cut from the surrounding woodlands, and in operation from 1884 to 1897,

the railroad left more than just a stump field behind, it opened up the area to access, and when access wins the resource usually loses.

### **A rail becomes a road**

Soon after the railroad shut down due to a lack of marketable timber, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) built a road along the Zealand River that traversed the old railroad bed for much of its length. The road now provides access to a small dam, a pair of busy campgrounds, several popular hiking trails, and 4 kilometres of the middle river. This changed the river in many ways and is still negatively impacting it today.

Preservation of the Zealand Road has led to several direct and indirect problems. As is often the case, our infrastructure-obsessed society and government agencies have placed a higher value on what man created than we have what was there before we started meddling. When it comes to maintaining the road, we have left no stone unturned, literally.



**When rivers meet roads while the river may win the battle, the road usually wins the war**

### **A dam for drinking water**

Starting in the 1920s, burgeoning White Mountains communities began constructing small dams on local rivers to serve as municipal water supplies. Miles of underground pipelines carried cold clean water from the backcountry to homes and business in the front country. One such town was Bethlehem, New Hampshire, which constructed a small dam roughly 6.5 kilometres up the Zealand River.

Still in operation today, according to Bethlehem Public Works the dam on the Zealand River is their primary source of water providing the town with 1800 Liters of water a minute. That's 110,000 Liters an hour and more than 217,500 litres a day. This equates to a loss of close to 1cfs of water throughout the year, including periods of drought.

While flow data is not available, the USGS gauge on the Ammonoosuc River roughly 12 Kilometres downstream from its confluence with the Zealand River regularly records flows below 70cfs in the summer months, and sometimes below 40cfs. Assuming the Zealand River contributes 1/3 of that

flow, this means that the river could be running at less than 15cfs during low water periods with humans taking 1/15<sup>th</sup> of that.

The dam on the Zealand River also blocks fish passage, disconnecting the upper 2 plus miles of critically important headwater stream from the rest of the river. While there is a natural falls just upstream of the dam that may block fish passage at certain times of year, downstream passage is always possible and upstream passage is likely viable at some levels.

It is also likely that the small shallow impoundment upstream of the dam is warming the water released downstream of the dam to at least some degree. This is due to increased surface area, the loss of canopy and increased light penetration. There may be some level of increased evaporation as well. This could be confirmed by installing flow gauges and temp loggers above and below the dam.



**The small shallow impoundment above a water supply dam on the Zealand River**

### **Protecting the road by controlling the river**

Further compromising the Zealand River was the use of extensive gabion in the early 1960s to try to reduce the impact of flooding on the road. Said to be the second oldest large-scale gabion-centric stream stabilization project in the United States, hundreds of feet of stone-filled wire mesh baskets were installed over roughly 2.5 kilometres of the middle river.

Gabion was used in the Zealand River to create what are referred to as revetment or retaining walls, grade-control sills, and groynes or deflectors. These structures are used to try to direct the flow of rivers and streams, prevent bank erosion, and lessen streambed scouring. Unfortunately, over time they tend to degrade, and as has happened on the Zealand River, can have the opposite effect of what was intended.

*“I have been to this site multiple times over the years, but it still catches me a little bit by surprise when I see the scale of the project and the immensity of the mess it left behind. The Zealand River is a classic example of how overreaction to a flood can lead to projects that create decades of bad outcomes for rivers and the fish they contain.”*

- Douglas M. Thompson, PhD, Connecticut College

Over the years, much of the gabion on the Zealand River has failed. Retaining walls have pulled away from the bank and collapsed into the river, baskets have been emptied of rocks due to undercutting, and deflectors have been left high and dry. Small sections of gabion, likely remnants of old sills can be seen mid-river. Other sections, possibly old retaining walls or deflectors, are now yards away from the water.

As sections of gabion wall fail and collapse into the river, they take dirt, gravel, rocks, and trees with them. In some places, deep pools have been filled as a result of failed gabion wall. In other places, the gabion structures have forced the river to one side, leaving expansive gravel flats in their wake. These areas are typically devoid of fish.

Less obvious is the impact the gabion is having on the Zealand River streambed. As the upstream end of failed gabion scour downward, the lower end rises as rocks moved from above collect below. This has created a step-like situation where consistent gradient has given way to slow, long, shallow pools in some areas. The streambed is deepening and narrowing in places which speeds up the current.

Much of the Zealand River and surrounding shoreline is now littered with collapsed gabion wall, fragments of gabion, empty rusted wire cages, and twisted jumbles of rusty wire. This is bad for the river, bad for the fish and wildlife that inhabit it, and bad for recreationists including anglers who have to navigate the obstructions and dodge the hazards.

### **Mother nature responds, man retaliates**

When it comes to the Zealand River, the road is the top priority of the powers that be. This is especially true with regard to the municipal water supply, as without access to the dam they could not respond to problems or perform routine maintenance. Unfortunately, Mother Nature could care less, and she occasionally threatens the road with an assist from the now badly compromised gabion work.

In 2017, tropical storm Philippe released a deluge on the White Mountains region of New Hampshire. The area got hit hard again in 2019. These events caused significant flooding and resulted in notable damage to many area rivers and streams, the Zealand River included. When the water receded, the river was barely recognizable. What man did after the fact to mitigate the damage may have been worse, and longer lasting.

According to the USFS, “the Town of Bethlehem worked on the banks of Zealand River after tropical storm Phillippe as well as a 2019 storm event.” They went on to say, “NHDES ([NH Department of Environmental Services](#)) issued the permit for the work, and Forest Service assisted in the 2019 effort with a portion of the funding and assisted in the permitting process but did not perform any of the on-the-ground work.” That USFS did not oversee work on their land is concerning.

What was done to repair the road and try to prevent further intrusion of the river onto the road was environmentally and aesthetically damaging as well as technically unsound. At one point where the river had jumped the road, heavy equipment was brought in to bulldoze the streambed, riprap the outside bank, and reroute the flow into the inside corner. The outcome resembled a strip-mining site.



### **Post-flood excavation done on the Zealand River to protect the road**

The process was repeated roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile upstream over a distance of a couple of hundred yards. The streambed was excavated, the outside bank was riprapped, and the stream was left wide open and sans any depth, structure, or notable gradient. The result was a section of river literally devoid of fish and left unaddressed likely to remain that way for decades to come.

### **Fishing Trumps fish**

The Zealand River is home to wild native brook trout. While the population bumps up and down from one year to the next due to weather conditions and angler traffic, wild native brook trout persist even during the worst of times and are always present. While small young fish represent the bulk of the fish caught, wild brook trout up to 6-inches are encountered but fish larger than that are rare.

Unlike National Parks where the National Park Service has jurisdiction over land and water as well as fish and wildlife, responsibility for the resources in National Forests is split between U.S. Forest Service, a branch of U.S. Department of Agriculture, and state fish and game. The former has jurisdiction over the land and water while the latter controls the fish and wildlife that inhabit it.

Like most rivers and streams in the area, New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG) manages the Zealand River under General Law regulations: Unrestricted tackle, 5-fish per day (or five pounds which is irrelevant in this case,) and no minimum length limit. The fishing season is open from January 1 through October 15, with angling traffic starting in May and running through the end of the season.

While all types of angling are represented on the Zealand River, as a result of the general tourism traffic, bait fishing is not at all uncommon on the river. The same holds true for harvest, and it is not at all unusual to see anglers leaving the river with stringers of fish. In fact, I believe it would be fair to say bait far outpaces flies and lures, and more anglers harvest fish than not.

### **Stocking your way out of trouble, or not**

As a result of easy access, heavy tourist traffic, and close proximity to three Forest Service campgrounds, two private campgrounds, informal campsites on nearby National Forest land, vacation homes, and rental cabins and motels, the Zealand River sees a lot of anglers. Based on



what could fairly be called inconsistent fishing, especially near the road, the river cannot sustain the level of harvest NHFG allows.

As is often the case, when the recreational angling cannot hold up to what the powers that be want to allow, they resort to what is referred to as “supplemental stocking,” or deliberately and knowingly stocking over wild fish. In the case of the Zealand River, wild native fish. While this may provide temporary fishing for stocked trout, it stresses the wild fish population.

The Zealand River receives approximately 1,000 hatchery-raised brook trout a year. They are stocked in 4-5 spots over roughly two miles of the middle river easily accessed from the road. The stocked fish average 8 inches and 0.25 pounds, much larger than the wild fish found in the river. This results in competition for food and space, as well as some level of predation on wild fish.



**A wild native brook trout from the Zealand River**

I’m often asked how much a river or stream can take before it collapses. The Zealand River has taken a lot, and while down it is not out. The river is proof of nature’s resilience, and how much a resource can take before it collapses under the weight of man’s hand. Imagine what it could be if we stopped trying to tame it, stopped “managing” it, and stopped exploiting it.

The wild native brook trout population in the Zealand River bounces up and down from one year to the next, likely due to the fact that there is no longer any room for error. But it never ceases to exist, and when conditions are favourable it reminds us that it is still there and still viable. But the anglers keep hauling out fish and NHFG keeps stocking it to mask the problem.

Given half a break, the Zealand River could once again be a relatively healthy cold-water ecosystem. In spite of our best efforts to the contrary, wild native brook trout still persist, albeit in greatly reduced and radically fluctuating numbers. The pieces are all there: Protected public land, cold clean water, and enough wild native brook trout to repopulate the river. It just needs some help ...

For the first time in decades there is some good news in regard to the Zealand River. USFS is scheduled to begin removing some of the failed gabion this summer. Their primary goal is reconnecting the river to its historic floodplain. This will help heal the river in the immediate vicinity of the work, as well as lessening further degradation downstream to some degree, and possibly a high degree.

While some will see this as a happy ending to a sad story, I see it as a beginning of a new story. With any luck, this could be the point where those charged with protecting the river shift from a pattern of abuse and exploitation to a pattern of reasonable use and preservation. The challenge will be getting NHFG, Town of Bethlehem, anglers, and others to follow suit.

While reconnecting the Zealand River to its floodplain is one of the most impactful things we can do, many other sections of failed gabion should be removed as well. To lessen damage to the riparian area and streambed resulting from the use of heavy equipment, Native Fish Coalition would like to see an effort using volunteers to manually cut away wire and allow the rocks to fall back into the streambed.

It would also help to restore some banks and streambed damaged as a result of attempts to mitigate flood damage and protect the road. In many places, the Zealand River has been left without any in-stream structure which has resulted in long featureless stretches that are virtually devoid of fish. The addition of large wood debris and large rocks could help reestablish pools and meanders.

As for protecting the wild native brook trout, this falls squarely on the shoulders of NHFG. With miles of heavily stocked easy access water in the area that is open to bait and liberal harvest, the Zealand River should be managed as a wild fishery. For this to happen, the New Hampshire fish conservation community will have to unite under a common cause and work together to restore this unique resource.

The story of the Zealand River is still being written. As soon as we close one chapter, we open another. While most of the previous chapters have been bad news centric, the next chapter may offer some long overdue good news. Hopefully we can build on what USFS looks to do with regard to reconnecting the river to its floodplain and take the next steps toward a holistic healing of the Zealand River.

There are many lessons to be learned in regard to the Zealand River. Easy access usually comes at a cost, and the resource pays the price. When we build roads too close to streams we invite problems, and in the end neither truly wins. We must also show restraint when rivers encroach on roads, and act calmly and carefully. Lastly, we need to stop turning to hatcheries to try to fix our fishing woes as this is a temporary band-aid not a cure.

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