



Winter Fishing Tips, Options, and Thoughts

by Joe Rotter

The fishing and guide season slows down just enough at Red's for us to spend some quality time at home around the holiday season and pursue a few sports and hobbies of our own. Other than the Christmas sale rush, which keeps us moving steadily between the UPS store and the fly shop, our wintertime season allows us to get out and do plenty of fishing ourselves. In December, the nymph fishing and streamer fishing will be pretty steady on the Yakima River, unless the water temps get below about 34 degrees or so. Our focus is definitely on the warmer days, and one thing to keep in mind is that water temperature's most relevant attribute is the trend, and not the specific value. You can have great fishing in 36-degree water as long as you are catching it on an upward trend and conditions are stable. The streamer fishing can be great during the winter as well, and as guides we will sometimes head out with nothing but a sink tip line and a Sculpin pattern all day. Slow presentations with natural colored streamers and buggers are the hot ticket, think slow and low. When presenting a streamer in cold water. Prepare to lose a few flies on the bottom.

Look at both the daytime highs and the nighttime lows, sometimes the sunny days that top out at 40 will have nighttime temperature in the low teens, whereas the cloudy days will sometimes remain a relatively constant temp with lows in the mid 20.s and highs only in the upper 30.s. Try to fish the days with the warmer nighttime lows if possible. Midge hatches are pretty common during the winter and like most hatches, appear on the warmer cloudy days. Concentrate on the feeding fish and if they are boiling without actually tipping their head back above the surface, use some subsurface techniques to get them. A Black WD-40 in a size 20-22, Zebra Midge, Brassie, or chironomid pattern will do. Fishing it just under the surface with a tiny indicator or a dry fly as an indicator. Long leaders and 6X tippet are standard. If they are tipping all the way back, use a parachute midge pattern or if they are working in clusters use a Griffith's Gnat. It is possible to catch fish on dry flies 12 months out of the year on the Yakima River, a few of us lucky ones have done it. There is something truly satisfying about landing trout on dry flies with a snow covered backdrop. We will also hit the Wenatchee and Methow a few times over the course of the winter and we look for the same trends in the weather forecasts. By this point in the year, the swinging productivity will be almost non-existent with water temps seldom reaching the 40-degree mark on either stream. A stone nymph with an egg or a big beadhead nymph behind it is the hot ticket there. We As the winter rolls on and the days begin to lengthen in February, start thinking about a focus on stone fly nymphs in the size 10 range to imitate the Skwala Stonefly hatch that begins as early as late February sometimes. The easiest way to know if the hatch has begun is to look for schucks along the bank. When you start to see these, the hatch is on and you can count on seeing a few adults during their egg-laying cycle in the afternoon hours. Some of our most beautiful and healthiest trout are caught during the winter months. Cold water, little to no fishing pressure, and plenty of food keeps them strong and healthy. The biggest rainbows are the ones that have to continually feed and metabolize so our average size fish can sometimes be quite large. Not a numbers contest, it is the size that matters!