

Ohio Trip Report



A First-Timers Take on Steelhead Fishing

or

Catching Big Fish Despite Having No Idea How to Do It

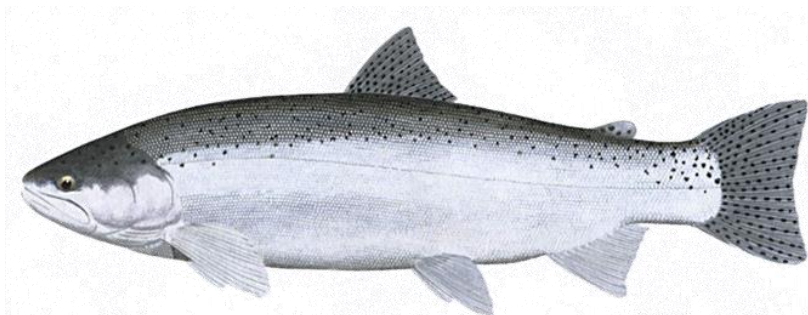
A grayscale background image showing a person in a waders and hat, standing in a river and fishing with a rod. The river flows towards the right, and a dense forest of bare trees lines the banks. The text is overlaid on this image.

A First-Timers Take on Steelhead Fishing

Preface / Disclaimer

You already knew all this.

**Despite having heard & read about it,
it was new (and surprising) to me**



Ohio Trip Report

A First-Timers Take on Steelhead Fishing

- **Introduction**
- **Trip Overview**
- **Our Fishing Experience (Planned vs Executed)**
- **First Timer's Comments**
- **Assessment**

SHORT TAKE

- **7 + hour drive from Hell**
- **< 2" of rain blew out the major rivers**
- **1 hour + drive to find fishable tributaries**
- **Combat fishing sized crowds**
- **Only 5 fish to net in day-and-a-half of fishing**

A grayscale photograph of a person rappelling down a rope in a forest stream. The person is wearing a helmet and a life vest, and is holding a rope that extends from the top right of the frame. The background is a dense forest with many trees. The text "SHORT TAKE" is overlaid on the top center of the image.

SHORT TAKE

**ONE OF THE BEST TRIPS EVER
AND CAN'T WAIT TO GO AGAIN.**



(LAKE ERIE) STEELHEAD TROUT

Steelhead are just migratory rainbow trout

Summer in the Lake, migrate into streams in the Fall, spawn in the Spring *

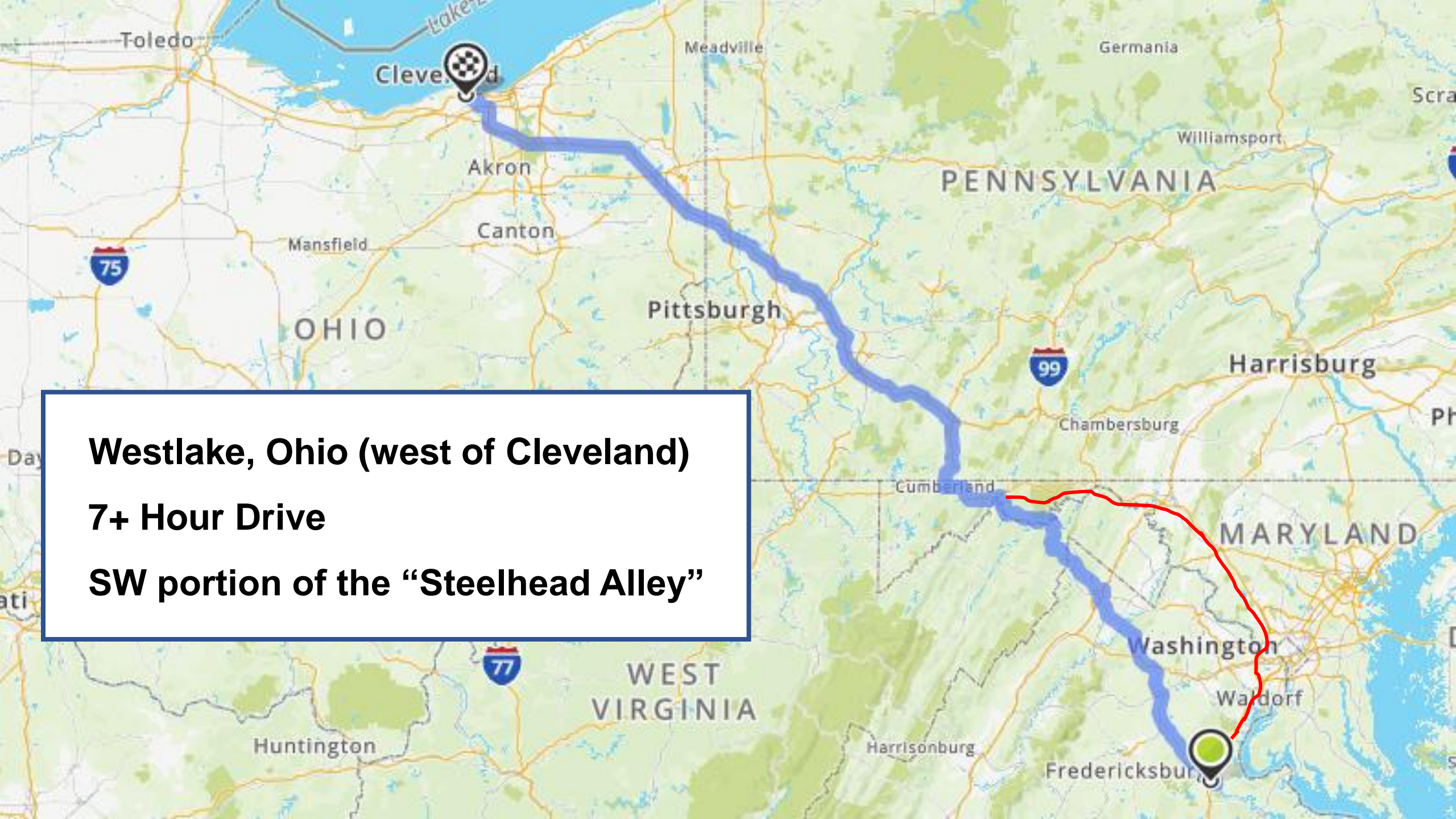
In Ohio – almost exclusively stocked fish (little natural reproduction) **

- started in 1870s with Au Sable (MI) rainbows, then PA strains later**
- current stockers are raised in Ohio from Manistee River (MI) eggs**

Big Fish (Ohio State Record – 38" & 21 lbs / Average – 25" & 5 lbs)

Trip Overview

- **Getting There**
- **Steelhead Alley**
- **The MetroParks System (public access)**
- **Gear and Flies**



Westlake, Ohio (west of Cleveland)
7+ Hour Drive
SW portion of the “Steelhead Alley”

STEELHEAD ALLEY



Our Focus Area

DIY Trip: No Guides

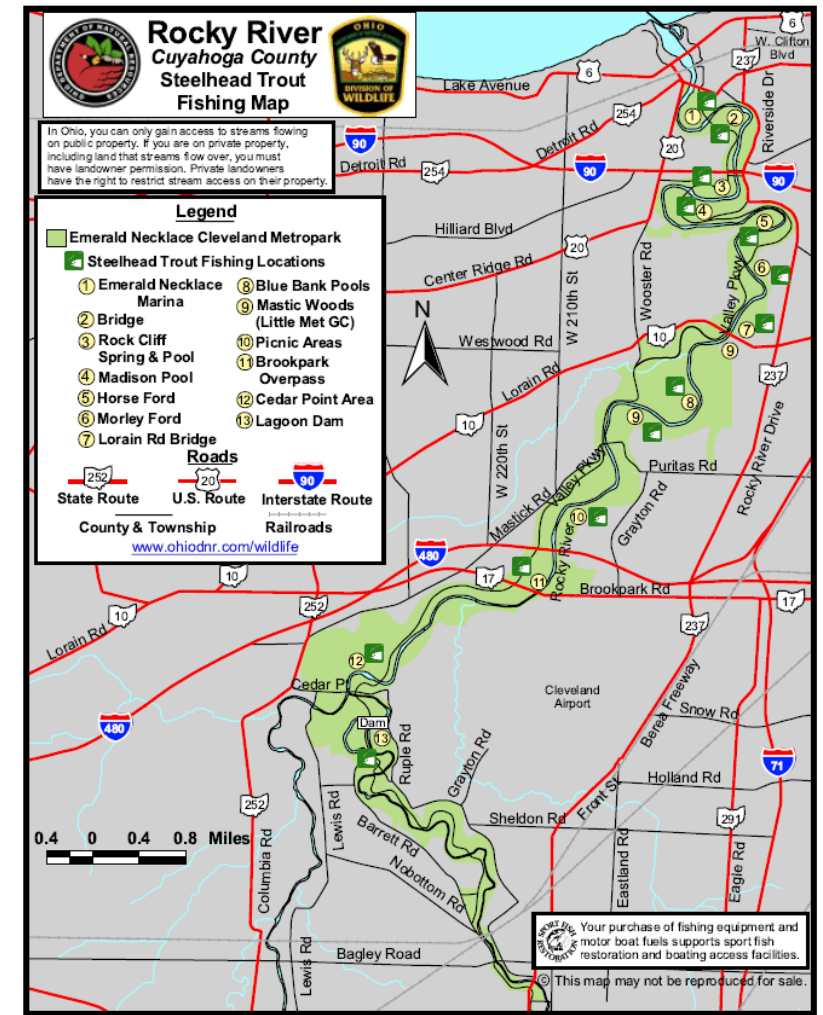
- Although guide costs very reasonable
- Lots of help from local fly shops

MetroParks System

- Public water and access points
- In Ohio, land owner owns the stream

Excellent Maps

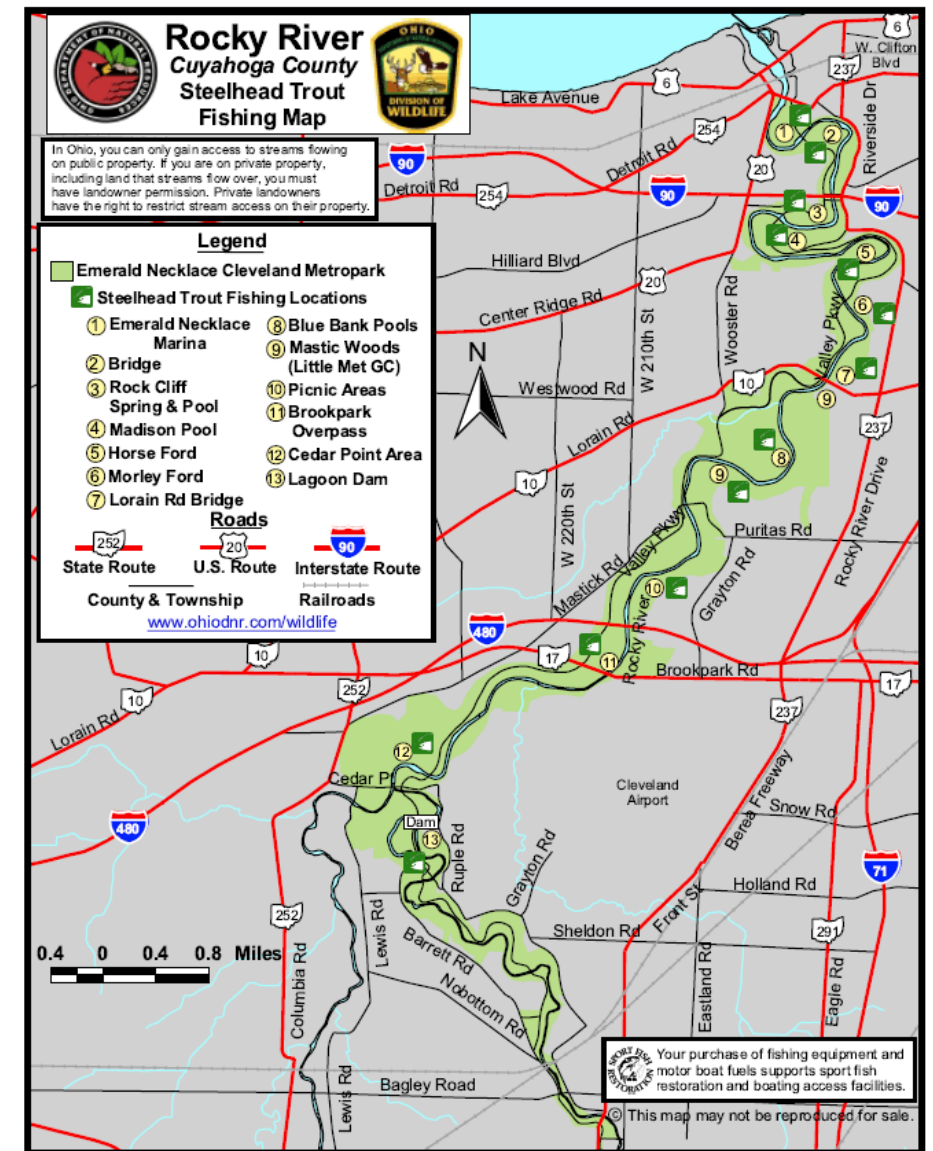
- Available locally and on-line (DNR, DIY Fishing)



Rocky River Steelhead Trout Fishing Map

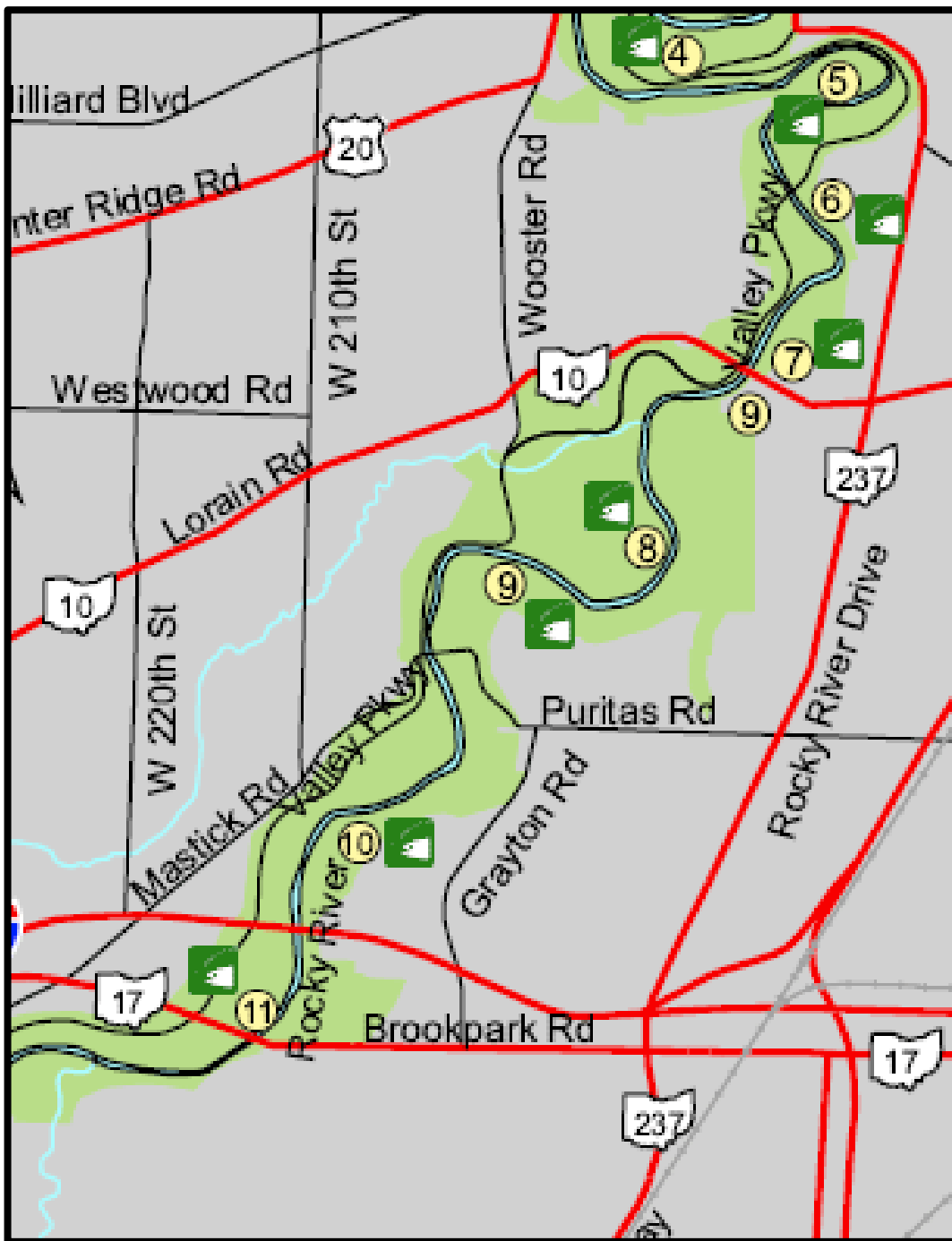


County Wide Overview



Rocky River Steelhead Trout Fishing Map

Individual Reserves / Parks



Metro Parks maps outline public use land and fishing access points

Include addresses for GPS entry

Parking areas not always addressed

Arcola Creek Park 941 Dock Rd., Madison Twp. 44057		Fairport Harbor Lakefront Park 301 Huntington Beach Dr., Fairport Harbor 44077		Lake Erie Bluffs 2901 Clark Rd., Perry Twp. 44081 3301 Lane Rd., Perry Twp. 44081	
Baker Road Park 4960 Baker Rd., Leroy Twp. 44057		Girdled Road Reservation 12926 Radcliffe Rd., Concord Twp. 44077 12415 Concord Hambden Rd., Concord Twp. 44077		Lakeshore Reservation 4799 Lockwood Rd., North Perry Village 44081	
Beaty Landing 477 East Walnut St., Painesville 44077 543 East Walnut St., Painesville 44077		Grand River Landing 1181 N. St. Clair St., Fairport Harbor 44077		Painesville Township Park 1025 Hardy Rd., Painesville Twp. 44077	
Big Creek at Liberty Hollow 6735 Fay Rd., Concord Twp. 44077		Gully Brook Park 2100 River Rd., Willoughby Hills 44094		Penitentiary Glen Reservation 8668 Kirtland-Chardon Rd., Kirtland 44094	
Blair Landing 5280 Blair Rd., Perry 44081		Helen Hazen Wyman Park 6101 Painesville-Warren Rd. (Rt. 86), Concord Twp. 44077		Pleasant Valley Park 38990 Pleasant Valley Rd., Willoughby Hills 44094	
Blair Ridge Park 5360 Blair Rd., Leroy Twp. 44077		Hidden Lake 6850 Kniffen Rd., Leroy Twp. 44077		River Road Park 5808 River Rd., Madison Twp. 44057	
Chagrin River Park 3100 Reeves Rd., Willoughby/Eastlake 44094 1000 Rural Dr., Eastlake 44095 37699 Erie Rd., Willoughby 44094		Hidden Valley Park 6500 River Rd., Madison Twp. 44057 (pond) 4872 Klasen Rd., Madison Twp. 44057 (river)		Riverview Park 4895 Bailey Rd., Madison Twp. 44057	
Chapin Forest Reservation 9938 Chillicothe Rd. (Rt. 306), Kirtland 44094 10381 Hobart Rd., Kirtland 44094		Hogback Ridge Park 4700 Emerson Rd., Madison Twp. 44057		Veterans Park 5730 Hopkins Rd., Mentor 44060	
Concord Woods Nature Park 11211 Spear Rd., Concord Twp. 44077		Indian Point Park 12951 Seeley Rd., Leroy Twp. 44077 12701 Seeley Rd., Leroy Twp. 44077			

Pond fishing
 Lakeshore fishing
 River fishing

Gear and Flies

Standard 8 wt rod

WFF Line

0x – 2x Leader & Tippet

Full Waders

Studded rubber soled boots (but felt is permitted)



Wading the Streams*

(Generally) Well groomed trail system along streams

(Normally) Very manageable depth & flow

- - Rarely more than mid-thigh deep

Firm bottom, but various materials

- - Shale, free-stone, large rocks, sandy flats
- - Watch for the step offs (6" to 24")

* Based on the tributaries

Stream Bottom Examples



FLIES

What Flies Should I Take?



Received a list of ~40 patterns



Egg Sucking Leech



Copper Top



Purple Peril



Jack Scott



Green Butt



Ultra Maggots



Blue Charm



Brite Pink



Comet



Bomber



Krystal Meth



Glo Bug



Crystal Egg



Dot Egg



Nuke Egg



Egg Sucking Worm

I had 5 of them . . . and had never heard of most of them.

So I Grabbed What I Had

(and made a quick order to Big Y Flies)



Every egg pattern I could find



Bunch of Stones



Handful of nymphs



My Streamer
Box



And anything with a
hook like this

Of which 95% proved unproductive

What Flies Worked?



Estaz
Egg

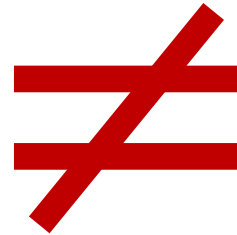


Red Rocket
(Steelhead version of Joe's Big Red?)



Steelhead
Dart

What Flies Worked?



Red Rocket

(Undisputed Top Producer)

But not this similar pattern

- - fished in the same hole,
- - at the same depth,
- - with the same weight,
- - & using the same technique

No Dries ?

Web Sites & Fly Shops said “no dries,” but -

Steelhead on a Dry Fly

BY JOHN DEEGAN JR.

“I don’t believe it! Did a steelhead really just take my dry fly?” Fortunately, the words were only thoughts and instincts took over. I raised my rod tip, set the fly, and the water exploded. I had just ignited a 10-pound silver missile, intent on reaching the sky and throwing my fly.

I had arrived at Walnut Creek around 7 a.m. on a Monday with my 6-weight rod in hand, hoping to find both water and fish. The rain had been stingy that year and the Lake Erie tributaries in the fall had all remained low and relatively clear. The steelhead had nonetheless crept in under the cover of darkness or discolored water and had poked their noses as far inland as they dared, flitting from hole to hole. I started fishing in the new holes below the Manchester Street bridge. Pressure on our beautiful steelhead had been very high. With all the publicity “steelhead alley” was getting that year, anglers from far and near had been pounding the water with everything imaginable. The press of too many anglers in a limited area had brought out the worst in both people and fish—boorish behavior and lockjaw.

I had moved from pool to pool exploring the new holding water and looking for some elbow room. I enjoy traditional steelhead fishing and lean toward the use of greased line presentations, Spey-style flies, streamers and wet flies. To me, the quality of the fishing experience, not the quantity of fish caught, is most important. Finding adequate space to fish was difficult and the water flow was barely marginal for the tactics I prefer. After picking up several fish, I had elected to abandon my preferred techniques and try small nymphs and spawn flies. Several more nice, fresh fish came to hand and were released. But the fishing wasn’t very exciting. Without sufficient water depth and breadth, the real power and majesty of the steelhead is severely diminished; steelies need water to leap, fight and run!

After lunch, I had debated whether I would stay at Walnut or try somewhere else. Elk Creek always calls to me because of its greater water volume. I decided, however, to try the main pool just above the Manchester Street bridge. Earlier



casting room and some current to work. I had fished hard for about an hour and had picked up two fish on streamers worked deeply and slowly. Clearly, the fish were uncooperative, so I switched to a 6X tippet and tied on an assortment of small (sizes 14 to 20) nymphs and spawn flies. As the ranks of anglers thinned, I moved up through the pool and managed to pick up a fish every now and then. The trick seemed to be changing flies and colors often. My challenge was to find and present something to the fish that they hadn’t seen recently and to find one that was willing to take my offering.

Around three o’clock I was giving serious thought to moving on to Godfrey Run and fishing in the lake for a while. I had already had a very good day on Walnut, catching and releasing about a dozen fish. Perhaps, I mused, it might be fun to fish the big water where a hooked steelhead

Steelhead on a Dry Fly

By John Deegan, Jr.

Pennsylvania Angler and Boater, Nov / Dec 2001

Can be found on FFFF Web Site / Special Presentations

Our Fishing

**No Plan Survives First Contact
with a Thunderstorm**

THE PLAN

Wednesday Afternoon - Rocky
Thursday Morning – Vermillion
Thursday Afternoon – Rocky
Friday Morning - Chagrin

THE REALITY

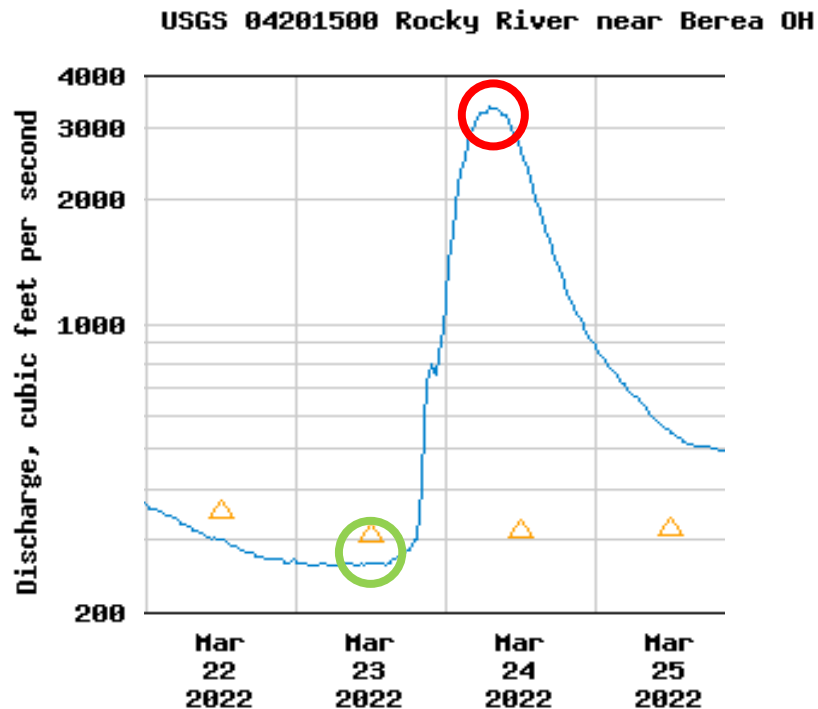
Wednesday Evening - Thunderstorm
Not a lot of rain - only 1"
Had some impact of the Rivers



SW Area River Conditions

A Tad Fast

A Little Off-Color



 Day Before – 170 cfs

 Morning Of – 3200 cfs





Water Height: ~ 50% Increase (from 5.7 to 8.3)

THE SOLUTION

Head East Old Men . . . Find a Tributary

Local Fly Shop sent us to a shop ~ 60 miles east

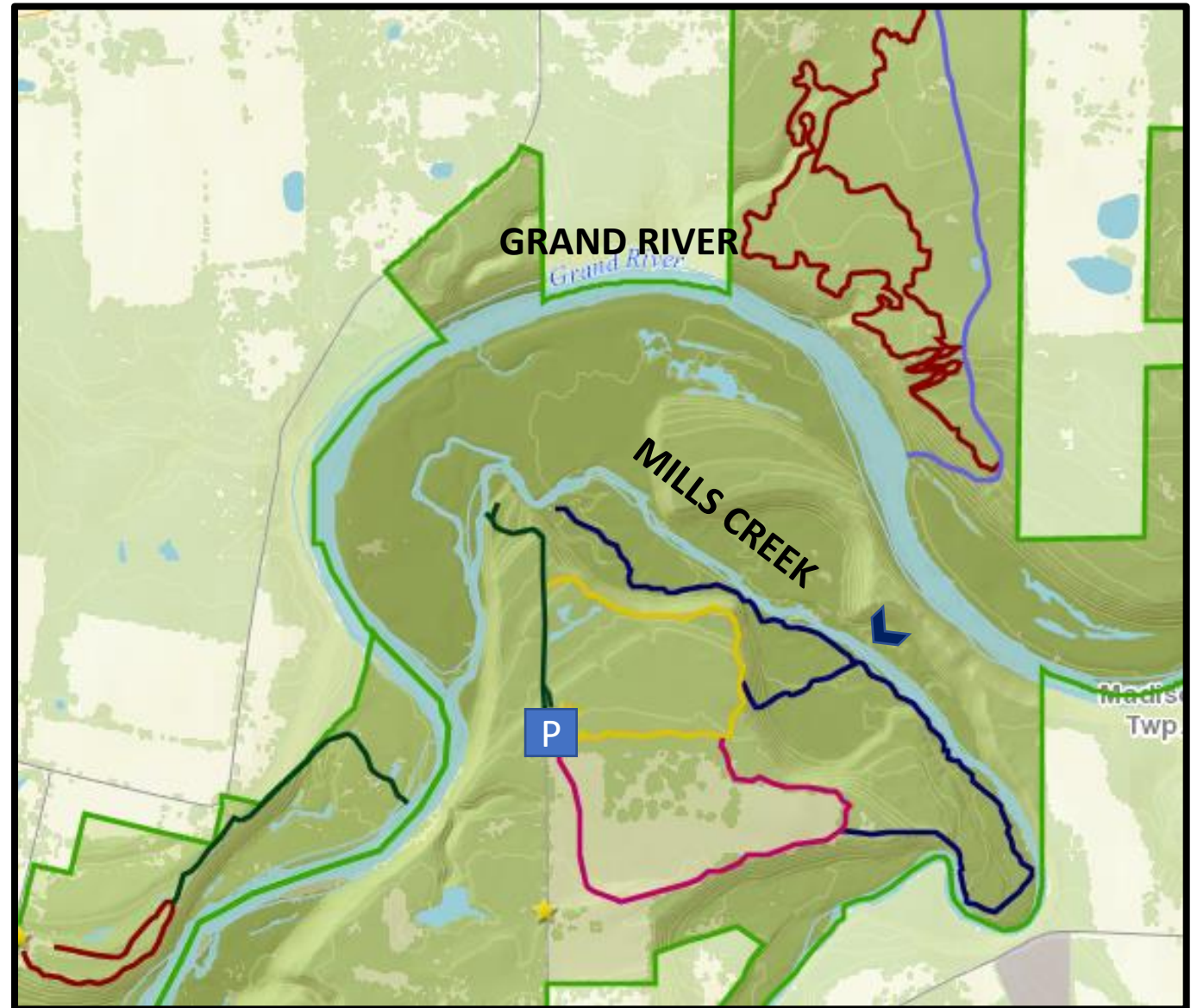
That shop recommended three tributaries

- Euclid Creek (25 miles west)**
- Big Creek / Kellogg Creek (5 miles)**
- Mills Creek (15 miles east)**

THE NEW PLAN



Hogback Ridge Park - Mills Creek



VIDEO OF MILLS CREEK

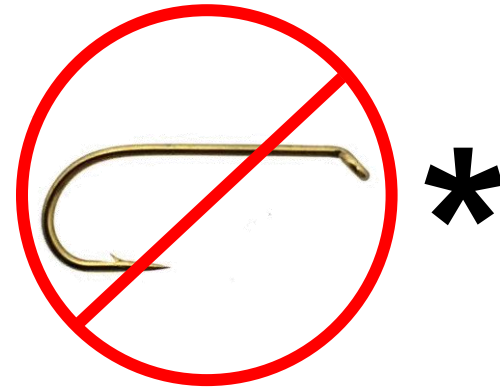
A background image of a dolphin leaping from the ocean surface, creating a splash. The dolphin is in the center, moving upwards and to the right. The water is dark and textured with white foam from the splash.

FIRST TIMER'S COMMENTS

(or what I learned that you already knew)

First Timer's Comment

Whatever patterns you choose – use Heavy Hook Flies

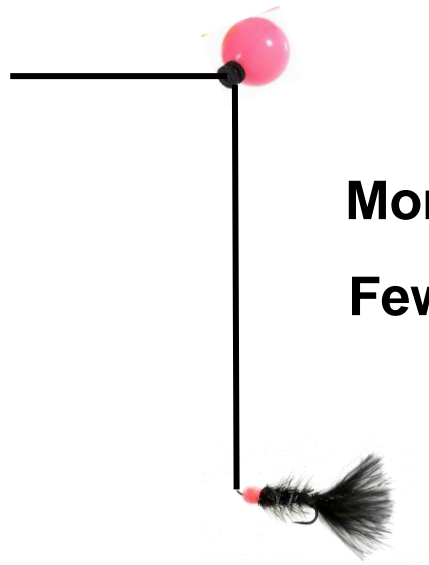


Steelhead comment: **“Cast again when you’re ready to show the proper respect.”**

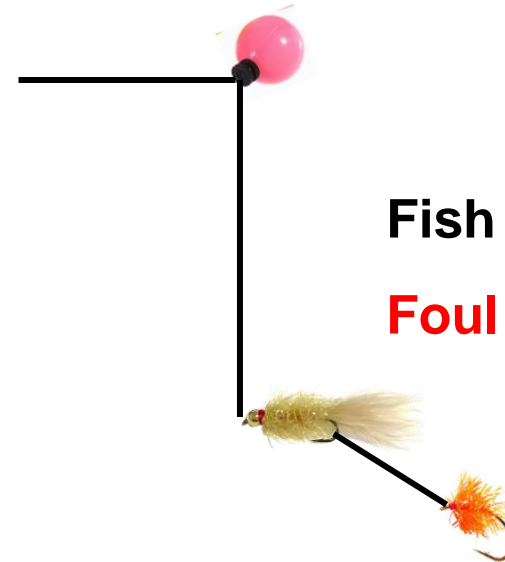
- - - after twisting a #6 streamer hook into a pretzel from a brief 4 second rodeo

First Timer's Comment

Single Nymph vs Dual Nymph Rig



**More Productive
Fewer Problems**



**Fish Seemd More Cautious
Foul Hooked Issues ***

*** Drag-overs, Body Attacks, & **Roll-overs once hooked****

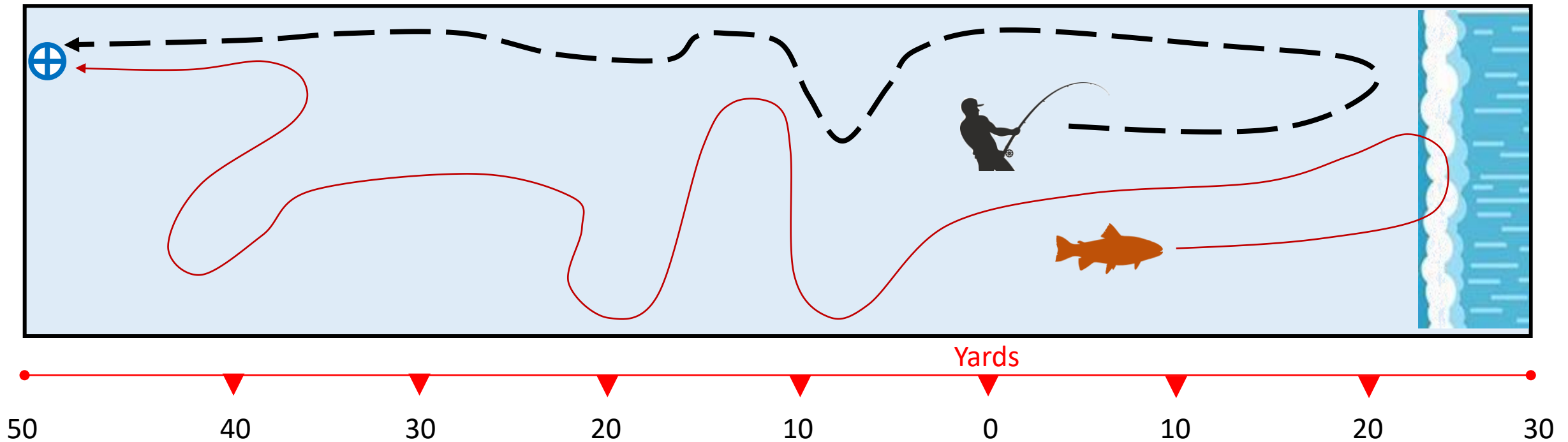
First Timer's Comment



Bring the Big Boy Net

First Timer's Comment

Be Ready to Move With and To the Fish



Know the bottom and depth.

Ask for net help if needed.

First Timer's Comment

Buddy System for Landing Fish



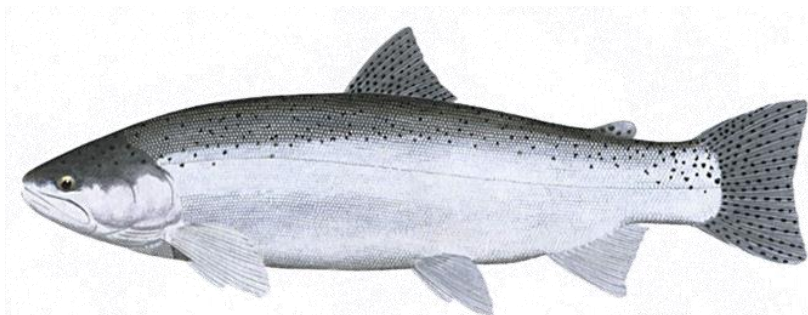
ASSESSMENT

+

- Number of Rivers / Streams
- MetroPark System / Maps
- Easy stream access / wading
- Cost (hotels, meals)
- The Fish

-

- The Drive
 - Difficulty, not length
- Potential Wx Impacts
 - A little rain = big impact
- Crowded Water
 - Combat fishing at top spots
 - Various attitudes



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Questions & Comments