



**Fredericksburg, VA Chapter**

# **SMALLMOUTH FLY FISHING THE RAPPAHANNOCK**

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*Presentation Date: 4/15/25*

# Presentation Purpose & Agenda



## **Presentation Scope:**

To share my experiences and passion fly-fishing for smallmouth bass on the Rappahannock River.

## **Agenda:**

- Brief Introduction (About Me)
- The Gear I Use
- Where I Fish (The “Macro” and “Micro”)
- How I Fish (Tactics)
- Practicum

# Brief Introduction (About Me)



Started fishing at a very young age (3 or 4).

“Converted” to fly-fishing in my adolescent years.

Fly-fishing took me all over the US including living in CO to be a ‘trout bum’.

Former owner of “The Rappahannock Angler”.

Guided on the Rappahannock and the S. Fork Shenandoah Rivers.

“Retired” now – life caught up with me (got married, kids). May unretire.

## Turn On's:

- Intentionality & Approach
- Casting as Line Mgt (Less is More)
- Flow (As Camo)
- Fly Fishing As Art

## Turn Off's:

- “Wrong Fly” Mentality
- Long Hero Casts
- Gin Clear / Low Flow Water
- Sandy substrates

# The Gear I Use

Primary: Sage 906 Tip Flex w/Wide Arbor WFF6 Line

Secondary (Beefier): Same as above + WFF8 Line

Tertiary (Beefiest): Sage 908 Tip Flex + WFF8 Line

2x or 1x Leader/Tippet (8-9ft max) – Depending on Water Clarity

Usually No Strike Indicator – If You're Tight On 'Em, You Shouldn't Need One

Size BB Split Shot – If In Doubt, Add Another Weight

Not a Big “Fly Guy”, But Regarding Flies.....

## Dry Flies

Classic Poppers

Various Colors & Sizes

Not a Fan Of “Odd”

Shaped Heads



## Wet Flies

Generally BIG, but **diversity** in....

Silhouette (JD's Cheesesteak vs Clouser)

Color (I Love Black, Olive, White)

Weight (Head, Body, etc)

# The Gear I Use – Cont'd

## The JD's Cheesesteak – 2 Varieties

### JD's Cheesesteak (Standard)



- Weighted Cone Head + 0 Hook
- Marabou Tail
- Poly Yarn + Estaz Body (Weight Optional)
- Crazy Legs (2 Strips = 4 Legs Total)
- **w/Bunny Strip**

### JD's Cheesesteak "Lite"



- Weighted Cone Head + 0 Hook
- Marabou Tail
- Poly Yarn + Estaz Body (Weight Optional)
- Crazy Legs
- No Bunny Strip

I Make These In The Following Colors: Black, Olive, White, and Orange

# Where I Fish (The Macro)

As a smallmouth enthusiast living in FXBG, I prefer the 'Rapp.

I will go wherever there is structure.

Where is the structure? Vive la Google Maps!!!!



**Versus.....**



# Where I Fish (The Macro) – Cont'd



Some Really Solid Areas Near FXBG w/Great Structure:

**Kelly's Ford Area** - Off Sumerduck Road (off of Rt17). From Kelly's Ford Rd upstream about 1.5 miles. Tons of rock gardens. Great fishing. Not for faint of heart – very adventurous wading / travel corridors.

**“The Confluence”** – Arguably the best fishing on the ‘Rapp. No public access. Need to float into via Rapidan or upper ‘Rapp. TONS of structure.

**The Motts Landing “Bend”** – Off River Road, downstream of the Motts Landing parking area. Go to the westerly bend and work downstream.

**The Lower Rapidan** – My 2<sup>nd</sup> favorite water. Access via Ely's Ford Road (and float – best!) OR put in at the “new” Hunting Run Boat Launch.

**195 Corridor Rock Gardens** – Extremely fishy with TONS of structure. Bit challenging to get to and traffic noise not ideal.

Recommendation: Go where the people aren't, at both the “Macro” and “Micro” Level.

# Where I Fish (The Micro)

## Pocket Water / Rock Gardens:



## My Tactics & Thought Process:

- Generally creates wonderful pools and seams (“soft spots”).
- Remember, #1 need of trout (ands smallies) is protection from the current.
- Pick your spots BEFORE you begin your approach.
- Use the rocks and boulders to your advantage (cover, travel).



# Where I Fish (The Micro) – Cont'd

## Riffles & Riffle Tailouts



### My Tactics & Thought Process:

- Provides wonderful aeration (oxygen) – focus on in summer days.
- The substrate and depth is key. Remember, protection from predators is the #2 need of trout (and smallies).
- Key on visible boulders OR submerged rocks (steering flies!!!).
- Approach from downstream up. Riffles can provide some cover.

# Where I Fish (The Micro) – Cont'd

## Eddies



### My Tactics & Thought Process:

- Eddies provide a respite from the current for feeding smallies.
- Eddies provide close proximity to the main current.
- Eddies generally are deep due to the 'cut out' of the current.
- Techniques: poppers into the soft water and wet flies on the seam.

# Where I Fish (The Micro) – Cont'd

## Grass Beds



### My Tactics & Thought Process:

- Pop up in summer – generally in 6” - 24” of water.
- Provide serious smallie ambush opportunities for small bait.
- Most productive early (daybreak) while water temps are still cool.
- Techniques – (1) popper, especially tight to back of structure, or (2) minnow pattern stripped through the grasses or dead nymphed on seam.

# Where I Fish (The Micro) – Cont'd

## Foam:



## My Tactics & Thought Process:

- My absolute favorite! Combines protection from current and predators.
- The foam line (edge) will tell you exactly where the seam is.
- Techniques (1) popper into the foam (eddy) – watch your line!, or (2) v high stick nymphing along the seam line.
- Dry side = easier approach for poppers....wet side easier for nymphs.

# How I Fish (Tactics)

“How I fish” is the application of the three-steps (in order):

## 1. Assess & Approach

*Assessing the “big picture” - maximizing the number of fishable areas, not spooking fish, and getting into quality position.*

### Key Elements:

- Identify the big picture’s targets,
- Identify travel corridors (rapids, land),
- ALWAYS approach downstream up,
- Stay low (if your body allows)

## 2. The Cast

*Putting your flies on fish such that it maximizes the number of quality, catchable opportunities.*

### Key Elements:

- Start close, move away,
- Be intentional - play “Battleship”,
- 1<sup>st</sup> time thru = the best shot,
- Shorten, shorten, shorten cast

## 3. The Technique

*Manipulating the flies in such a way that it produces results!!!!*

### Key Elements:

- Get deep first, then work up,
- Target areas - structure and ground,
- Steer flies to spot, then stop,
- Long-sticking as much as possible,
- Prepare to set on flashes

# Case Studies



# How I Fish (Tactics) – Cont'd



## Wet Flies (My Favorite Techniques):

**“High Sticking” (aka “Dead Sticking”)** – Rod tip up, line OFF water. Stare at your indicator or where the line enters the water. Focus on structure.

**“Downstream [Lateral] Drift** – Cast across stream, lift rod, let current ‘swing’ flies laterally across water column. Need flow. Best in riffles / tailouts.

**“Strip Retrieves”** – Used in large pools with little / no current or behind large boulders. Rod tip down. Longest casts. Steer flies around submerged rocks.

## Dry Flies (My Favorite Techniques):

**“Standard Popping”** – Have a focus, cast intentionally. Focus on structure and less current areas. Two keys (beginner / intermediate mistakes): (1) have line under trigger finger and (2) no slack in line BEFORE the fly hits the water.

## Both Dry and Wet:

**“Fun and Gun”** – When not crazy about what you’re necessarily seeing, cast, move, cast, move, cast, move, etc. If there are smallies around and you put a good approach / cast on them, they’ll hit “first time through”.

# Practicum

*(Real World 'Rapp Scenarios)*



# Practicum – Scenario #1



# Practicum – Scenario #2



# Practicum – Scenario #3



# Practicum – Scenario #4

