

SCOF



THE (f)ARTS ISSUE

S.C.O.F ISSUE NO. **32** SUMMER 2019
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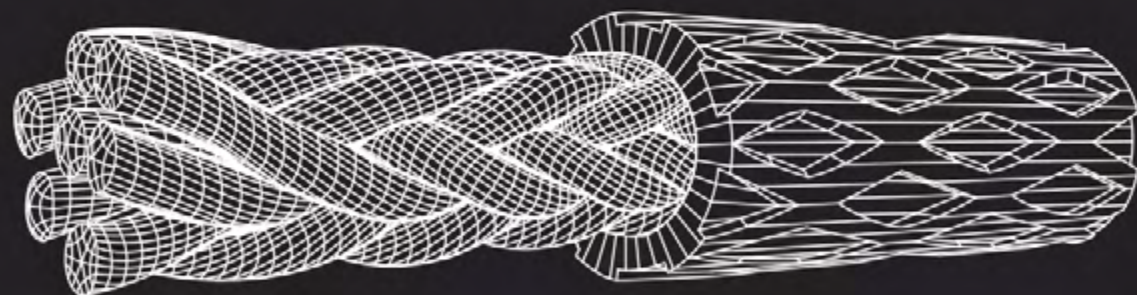
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Photo: Lower Florida Keys - 2019, Capt. Joel Dickey

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THE (F)ARTS ISSUE

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Summer 2019

The sun sets on every summer, my friends. By the time this gets digitally published, we'll only have just over a month left. Have you done everything on your list this season? Have you caught everything you wanted to catch? Have you fished with everyone you wanted to fish with? Have you jumped through a campfire? Have you shot a gun at the moon?

My personal account of summer has me batting well below my career average. I did drive to within peeing distance of Canada to chase smallmouth. I haven't caught a river striper as the last light creeps away. I have put a fair amount of folks onto their first fish on fly. I haven't caught a tarpon, or a floodtide red in the grass. But I was able to tick off a day purely devoted to bluegill. The equinox hasn't happened yet; there's still time. Did you know that astronomically speaking, most of September is still considered summer? All the time we've wasted not fishing is now in the past. We can't dwell on the stupidity of mowing the grass, or schlepping the family to the beach. In fact I was interrupted in the middle of this paragraph with a phone call to go try and tick that river striper off the list.

So my advice would be to cancel all of your other responsibilities immediately. Go to the water and stay there until October. You'll need an excuse for all of the "others" in your life. A good excuse should keep you off the radar for five weeks, but can't be terminal because you'll eventually need to return to your regularly scheduled programming. Something in the realm of jury duty on a murder trial, chronic gastrointestinal distress, or even a family emergency in a foreign country will fit the bill nicely. Once you cast away your societal shackles, I want you to leave it all on the water. There are no tomorrows anymore, just more to-days. This is the fourth quarter of the summer, and we have to own the fourth quarter. No one is going to give us our summer we have to take it (I am now gesticulating my fist wildly in the air. I also might be in the middle of a *Friday Night Lights* Netflix binge). Also, if you don't want to do it for yourself, by God people, do it for me. Once the thermal underwear peaks out of its' drawers, we will be the victors of the last month of summer, and no one will ever be able to take that away from us. Just like that state championship, but different. Also on a side note, I have developed a pair of fire-retardant duct tape chaps to make campfire jumping as safe a proposition as possible.



D. [Signature]



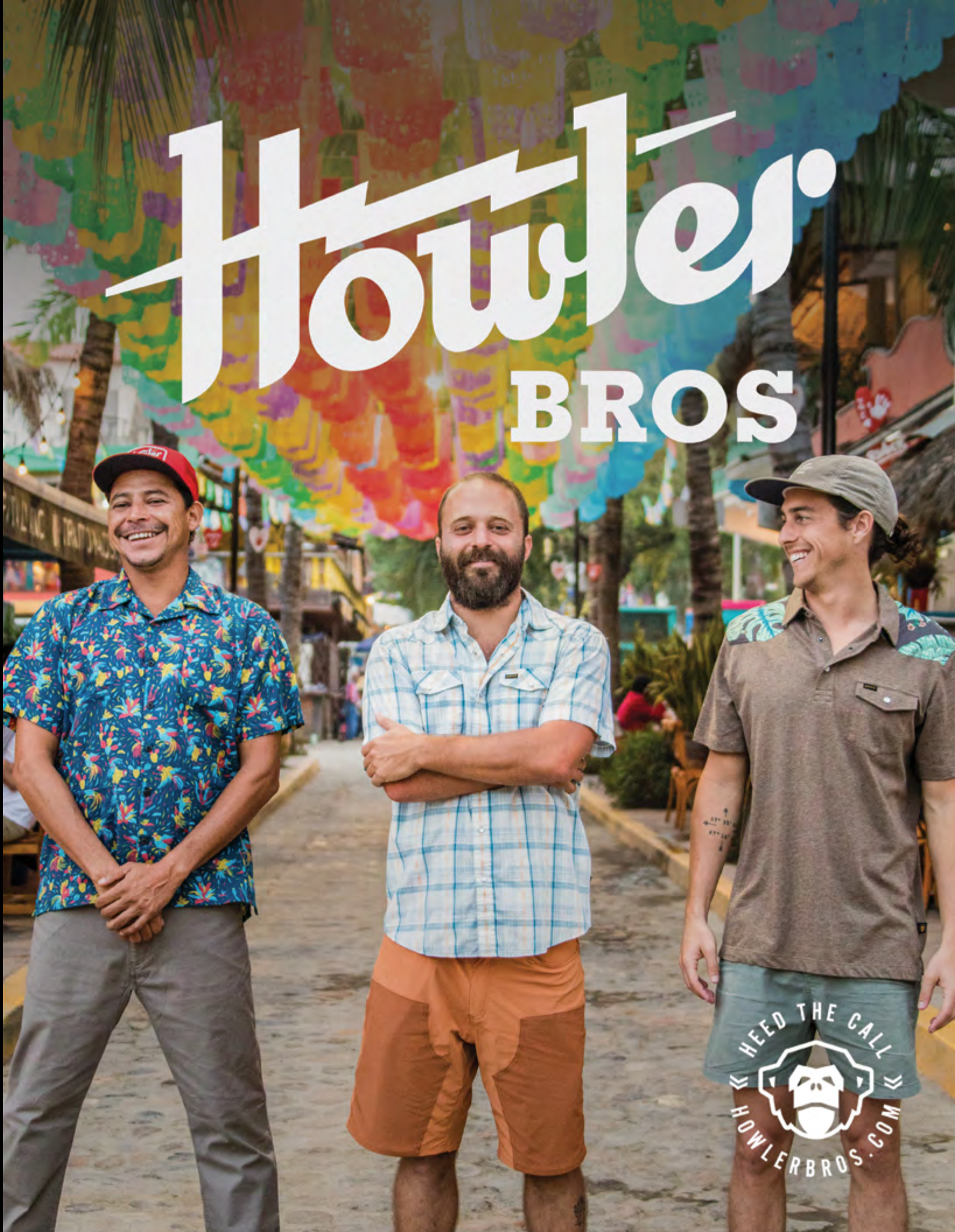
Haiku

with Capt. Cornelius McGillicuddy

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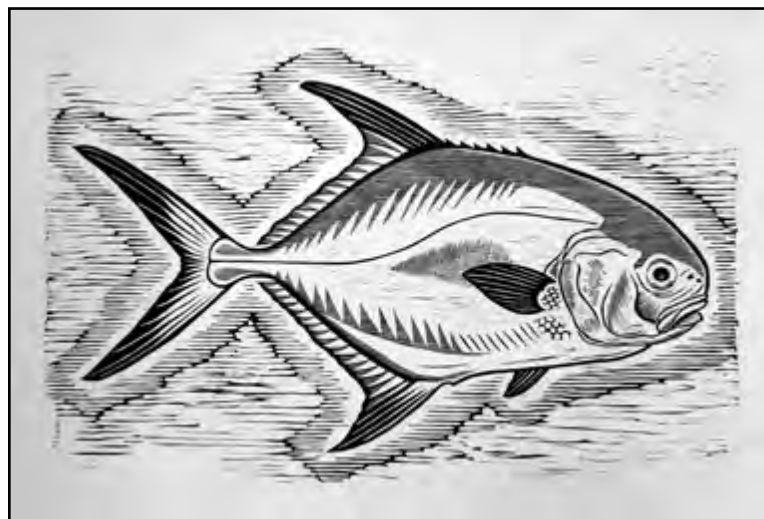


TYLER HACKETT
ADDITION THROUGH SUBTRACTION

Images: Tyler Hackett
Intro by David Grossman

The accessibility of Tyler Hackett's art is what first drew me to it many years ago: Imagery that spoke to me at a price I could afford on a guide's salary. Over the years, I've seen Tyler's art featured in many places around the industry, from t-shirts, prints and stickers, to poster images for the last two Fly Fishing Film Tours. But if one truly wants to geek out on Tyler's work, you only have really start looking at the details. Every scale is meticulously cross hatched and shaded. Every feather in the fly has each fiber and bar carved away. The only thing I can liken it to is watching a truly great mandolin player's hands. Everything is played and carved so precisely and on such little real estate.

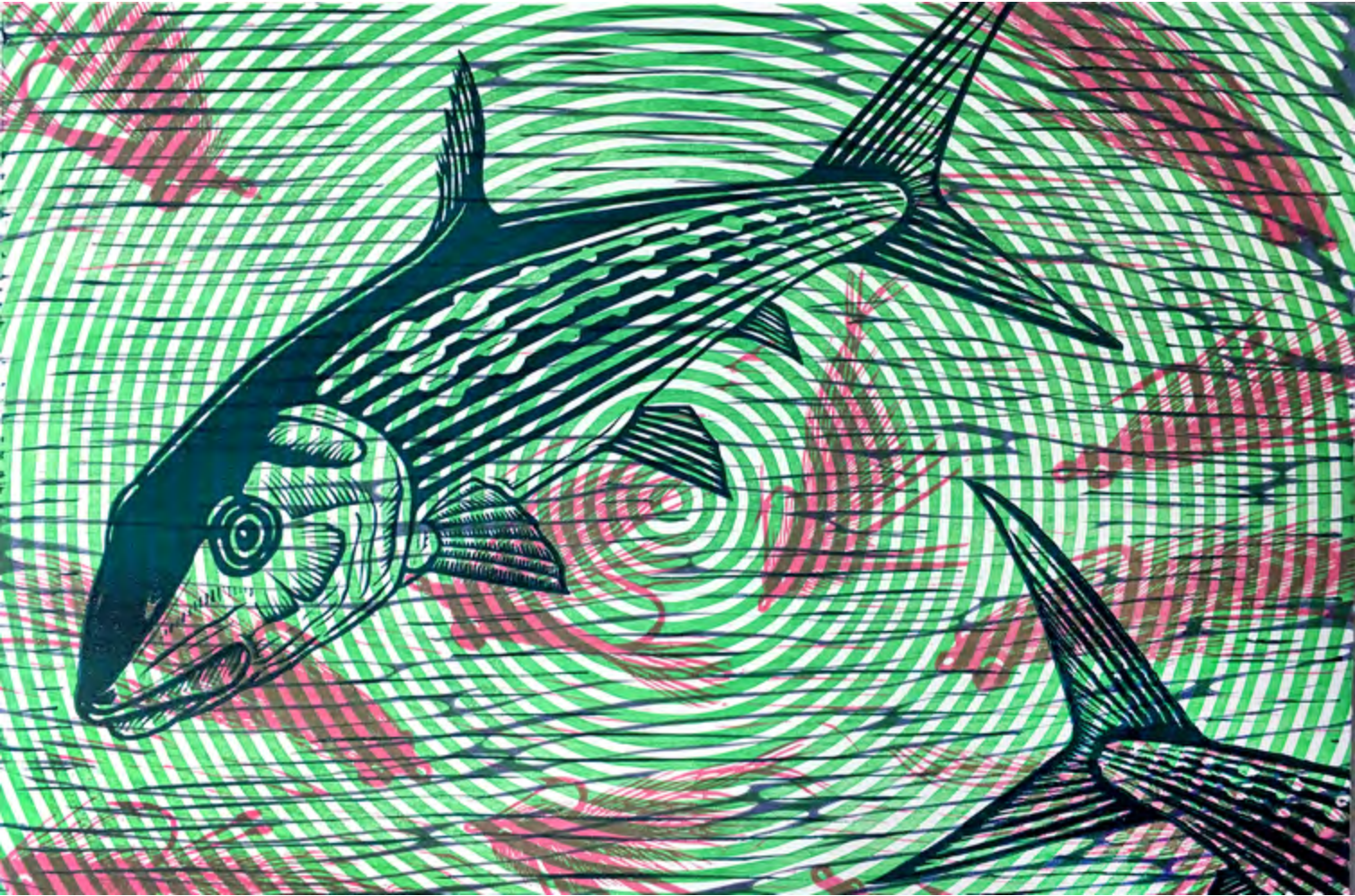
Tyler Hackett is not an old guy, but the prints he creates often harken back to the youth of a soul much older than his own. This nostalgic feel is often invoked in his "pulpy" choices in subject matter and style, but the mere act of woodcut printing, a process that dates back to China around the 200's, imbues vintage Americana with each void carved into the wood.

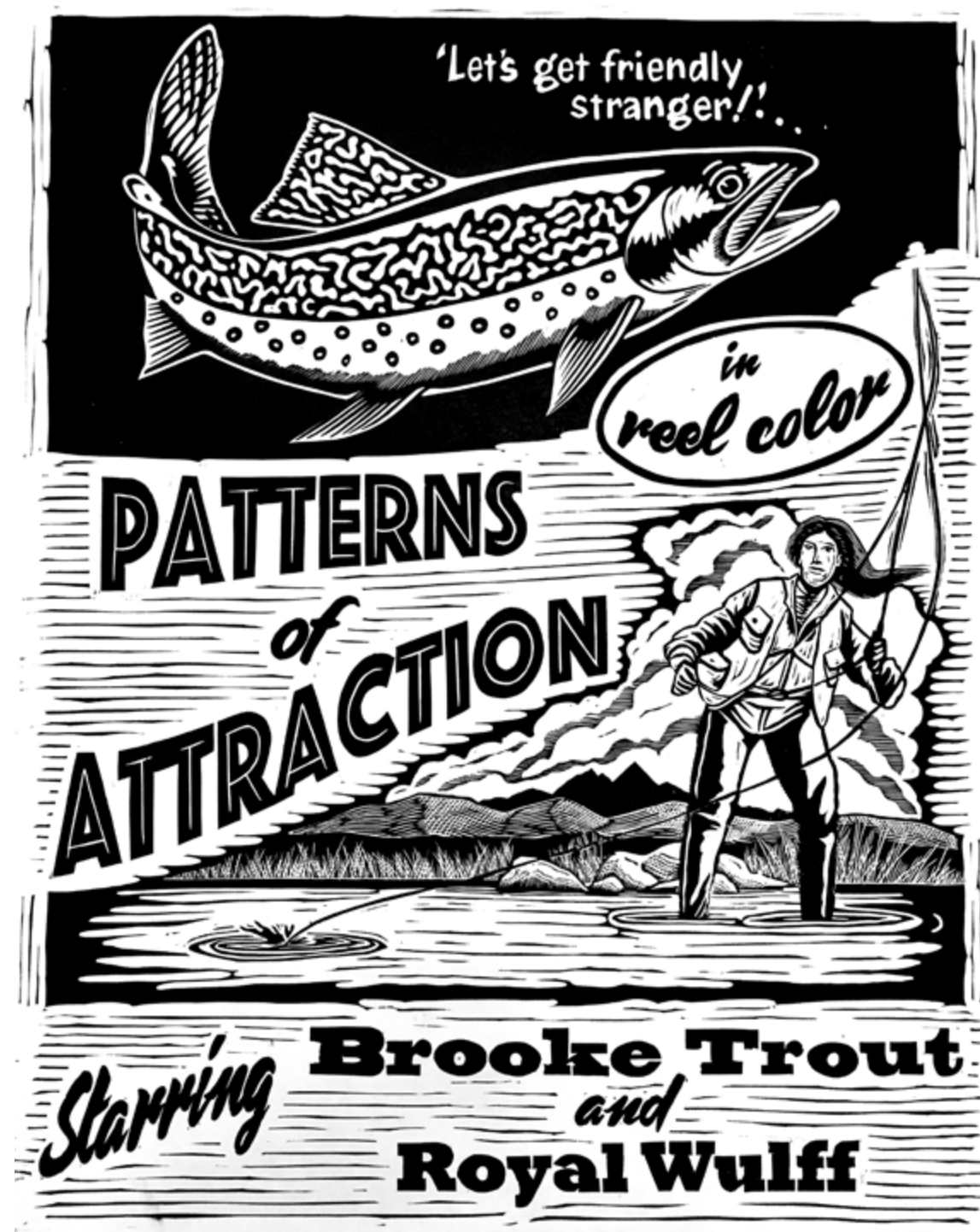


Each piece starts as a drawing plucked from Tyler's playful brainpan, then transferred to a wood block ready for the carving to begin. Tyler explains it as "making a giant stamp." Anything you

don't want printed is meticulously chiseled from existence, leaving an image where there once was just relief-less wood. The block is then ready be slathered with ink and run through a giant wheeled press, where the crucible of ink, pressure, and paper finally comes to a head delivering a final print.







The unique character of every chisel mark juxtaposed to the repetitive-ness of the final printing process lends a true utilitarian feel to the art above and beyond the response if Tyler were to just draw or paint the image. Woodcut printing truly allows each recipient of the print to feel and see the artists painstaking process, but makes it so that even the “have nots” in our society can feel ownership in something that inspires all of us. This can be directly traced back to woodcut printing in Europe during the 1400’s being the most common way to illustrate printed books—art for the people by way of wood and press.

Unlike a painter, whose process is additive by nature, Tyler’s art is a process of subtraction until all that is left is the image that originated in his mind— more akin to the sculptor who stares at a raw block of marble and being able to see the sculpture waiting to be exposed. I find the concept of making something by stripping away the excess until only what’s true remains, perfectly mimics the reason most of us have chosen the fly as our preferred means of expression and not the Rapala. (Not that there’s anything wrong with that.)





DOUBLE HAULIN'

2¢

MONTHLY

Featured
Pattern:

THE PIG
FARMER

MAIL IN OFFER:

Royal Stimulator
action figure

The Still Beating
Evil Heart by
J. JOHNSON

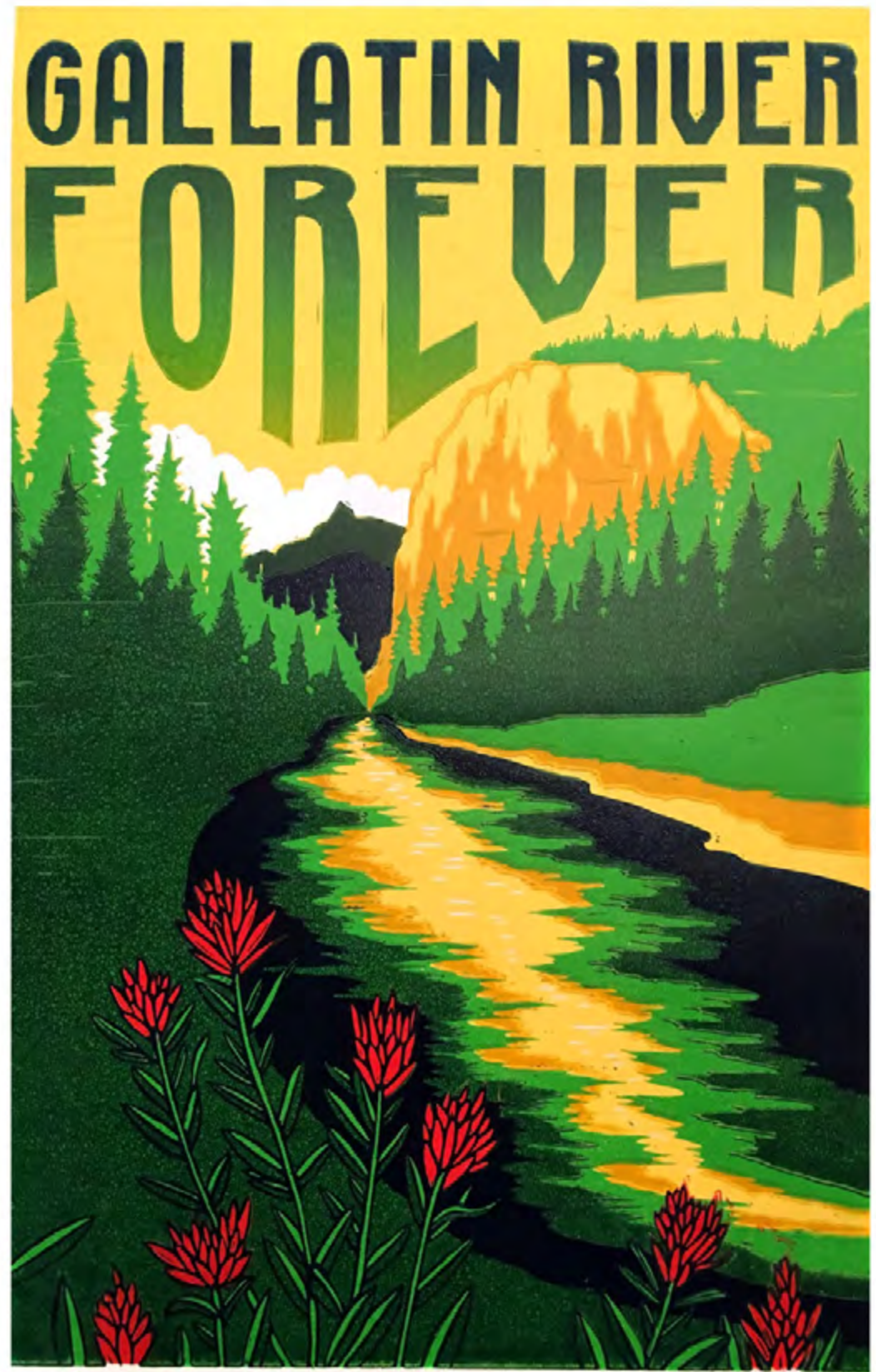
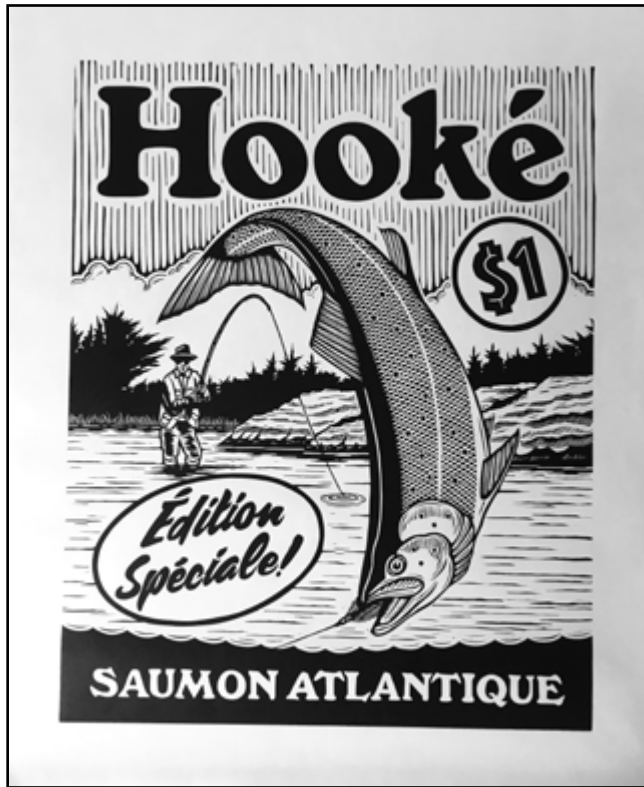
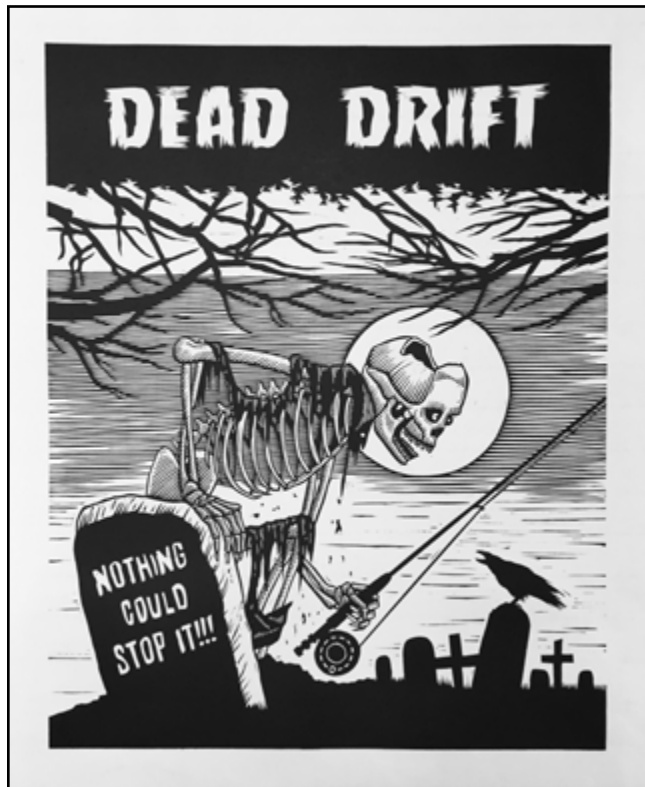


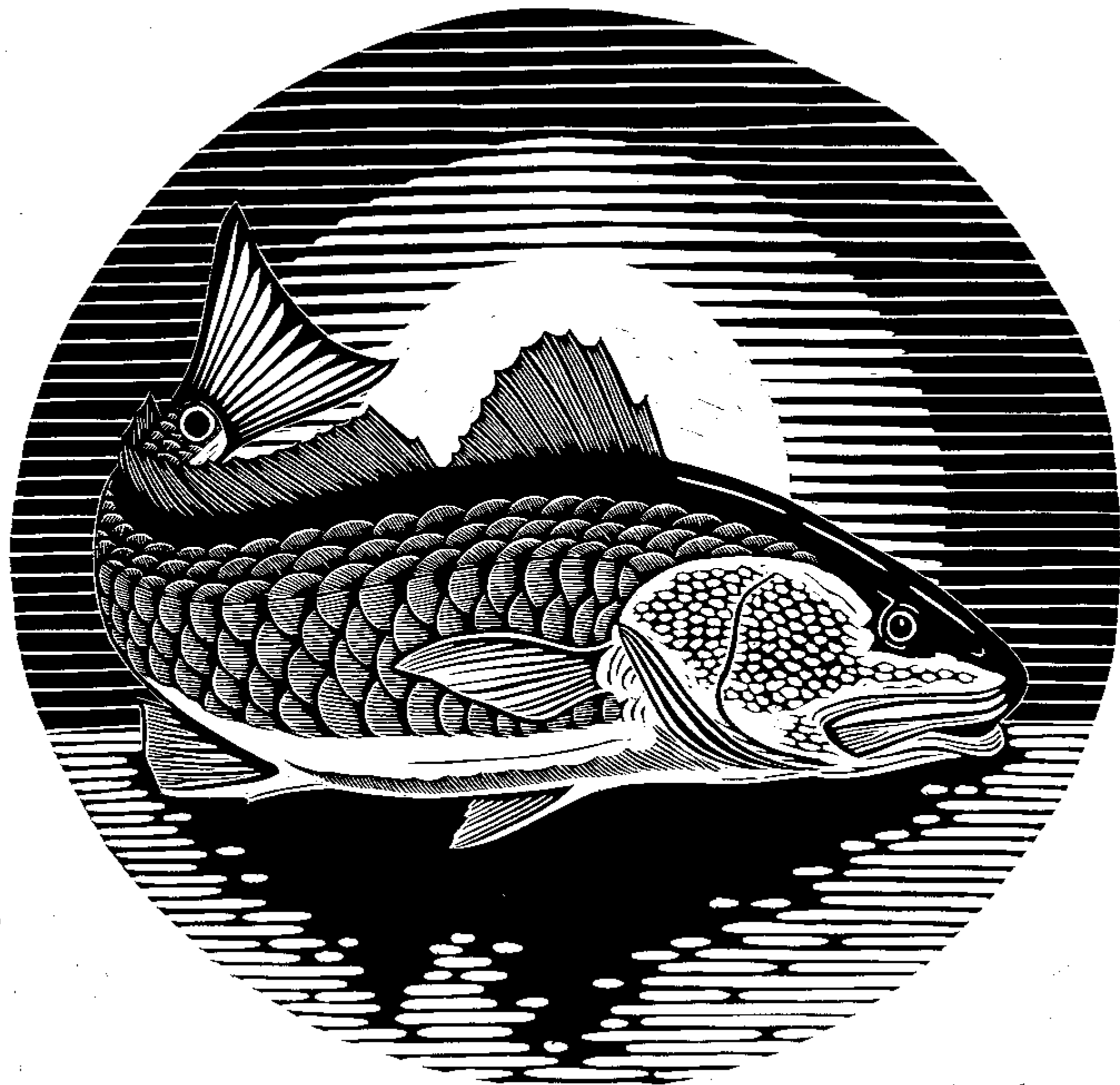
Witness recalls:
"saved by fly fishing!!!"

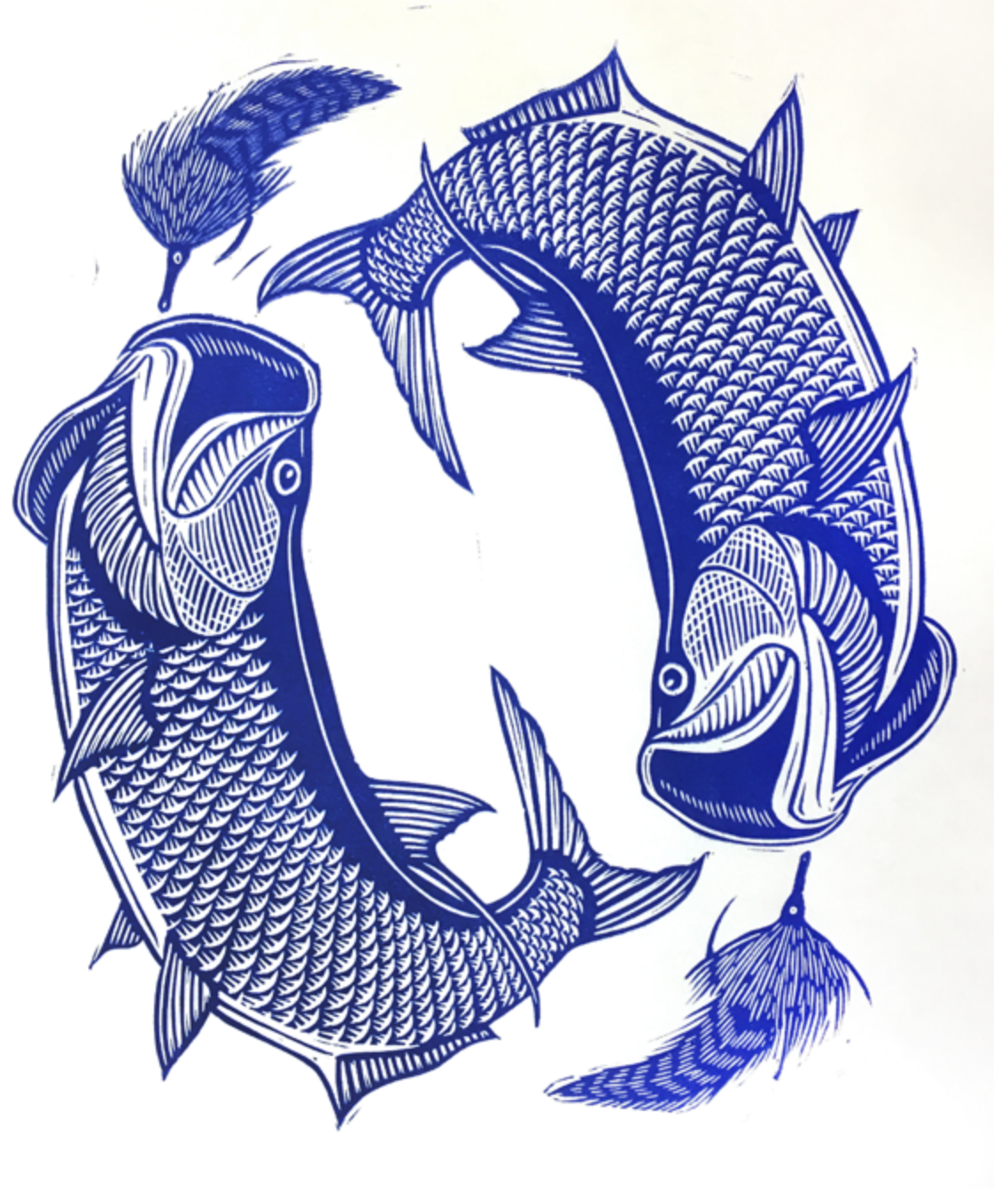
CHERNOBYL'S ANT

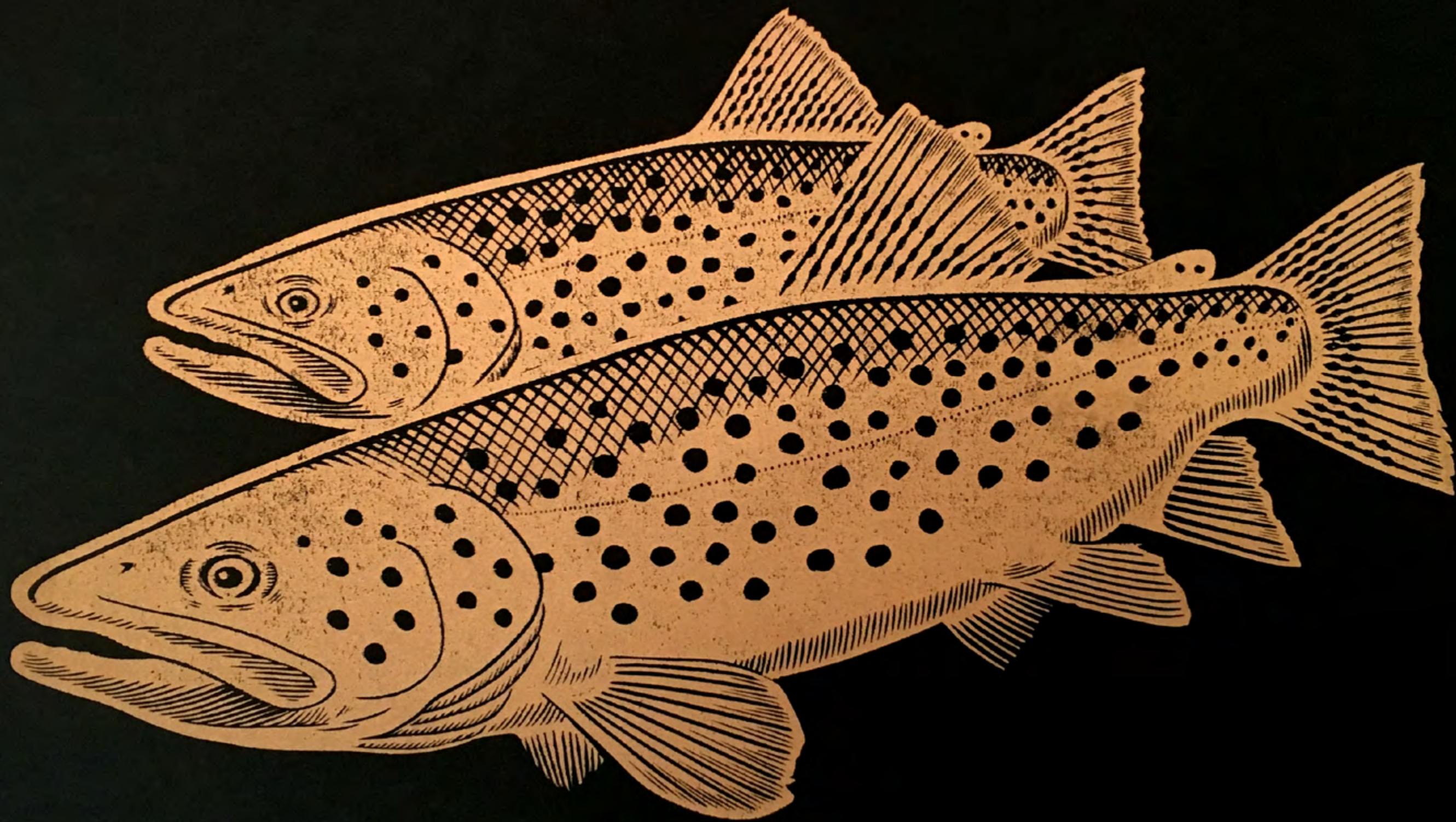


IT'S GONNA BE A REEL BLAST!!!











Check out and buy Tyler's work at Wanderingbluelines.com.



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Helium balloons go to die in the mountains above my home.

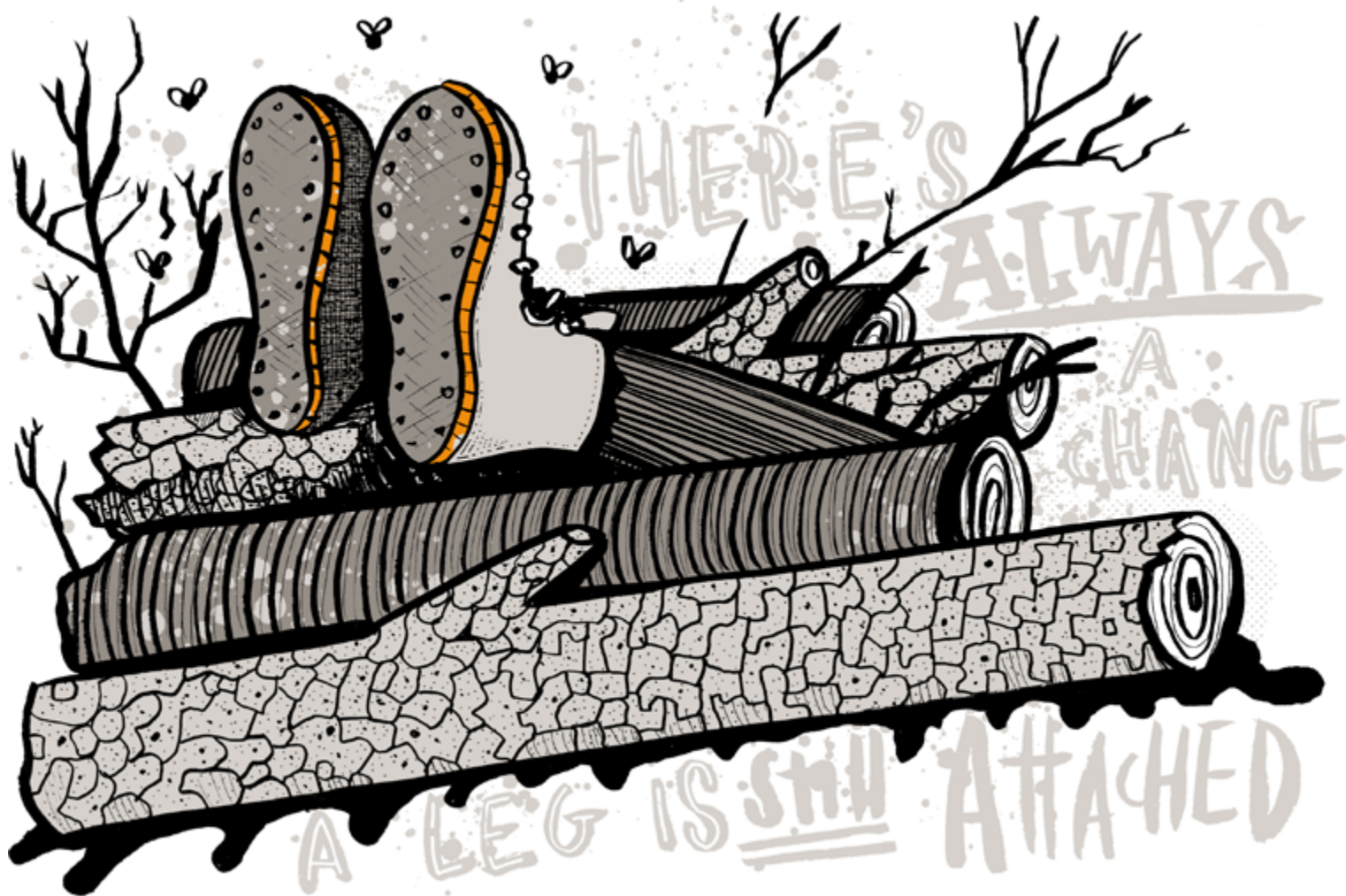
I find them draped in trees, collapsed in nettle patches, wilted on the trail, and drowned in the stream. The next time you're at a birthday party, graduation ceremony, or a baseball game and you see a balloon climbing the sky, remember that the neon orange or purple will be popped somewhere in southern Appalachia and land, deflated, near me.

Out of the 96 chemicals that make up a typical car tire, I don't know which one or combination of three possesses people to throw them in rivers. I can only assume this reaction triggers a release similar to sneezing or orgasms,—the only reasonable motive why I see more rubber than ducks in the water. A friend and I walked a 50-yard stretch last night and I counted 20 tires half-buried in the gravel or stuck under exposed roots.

Football rules in my town like a tyrant king, yet I find more waterlogged basketballs spinning in eddies than any other piece of sporting equipment, including Skoal cans.

I can only assume this reaction triggers a release similar to sneezing or orgasms,
the only reasonable motive why I see more rubber than ducks in the water.





I once caught three rainbows out of a submerged grocery cart. I landed two, but the third wrapped me around a wheel and snapped me off.

After a July thunderstorm, I found a 15-foot blue boat capsized in the river. The bow was cracked and I didn't want to get too close, afraid I'd find a body underneath. That's why I don't reach for upside-down shoes in

logjams: there's always a chance a leg is still attached.

Because no one around here can afford expensive, exploding targets, I find Dollar Store-brand shaving cream cans filled with .22 holes. People will blow up milk jugs with Roman candles, throw cherry bombs in the stream, and stick sparklers in the creases of shagbark hickory trees.

The rusted tracks of narrow-gauge railroads that helped clear the mountains of lumber and coal in the last century jut out from the bank and sit at the bottom of pools like long, orange snakes. The winches used to bring logs out of the deep hol-

lows are still drilled in the rocks. In July, when the ferns are high, I watch my step so I don't trip on any tools the shifting talus has exposed: wrenches, hammers, a canvas bag filled with pots and pans already torn open by raccoons.



Noah Davis hunts and fishes along the Allegheny Front near his home in central Pennsylvania. His essays have appeared in *American Angler*, *Southern Culture on the Fly*, *The Drake*, *The Flyfish Journal*, *Anglers Journal*, and *Fly Fishing & Tying Journal*. Davis studies poetry at Indiana University.

We haven't met Peter face-to-face yet, as he is Dutch? Netherlandian? Whatever they are in Amsterdam, so we can't speak to the fact of whether he is actually a Perch. We can say that his stuff is about to be everywhere you look and we're kinda happy about knowing him when. Check out and buy his work at peterperch.com.



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NOT IN ANYONE'S BACK YARD

THE BACK FORTY MINE

By David Grossman
Photos: Rand Harcz



Menominee rolls off the tongue in much the same way the tannic river waters, bearing its name, snake their way between Wisconsin and Michigan. Smoothly, with just a few trouble spots along the way. None of you have heard of the Menominee River. (For those few of you in the South who have, great. But I enjoy a sweeping declaration, dammit, so just let me have it). Your ignorance in no way diminishes its place as one of the best topwater smallmouth bass fisheries in the country. The reason no one's heard of it, is that the only people guiding it for the last ten years have managed to do the impossible: keep a secret.

"What, whaaaat, whaaaaaat?"
"A fly fishing secret in this day and age?"
"That's preposterous, that's profane, that good sir is the vilest of poppycockery."









But alas, true story. These guys had themselves a veritable Garden of Eden bass fishery. You may ask, “Well hell, Dave, how’d you find out about it? A leaky client, disgruntled former guide on social media, the enhanced interrogation of a midwesterner?”

No. The beans were spilled by the purveyors of Eden themselves, and the only reason they did it was the threat of a poisoned apple in the form of the Back Forty Project.

I am by no means an expert on this specific mining project, but here are a few of the unfortunate facts:

- The open pit metallic sulfide mine will be located approximately 150 feet from the banks of the Menominee River.
- The materials will be processed onsite with the tailings also stored onsite.
- When sulfuric mine tailings come in contact with fresh water, the result is sulfuric acid.
- The Menominee River has seen record flooding the last five years is a row.
- The company proposing the mine, Aquila Resources, is Canadian. **CANADIAN.**







With this kind of donkey show coming down the pipeline, the guides on the Menominee led by Tim Landwher of Tight Lines Fly Fishing, felt like they no longer had a choice. Their only path was to energize as many of us as possible to fight this Canadian boondoggle to the bitter—and hopefully not inevitable—end.

Tim and the boys were relying on something that is tough to achieve in the game of human nature: In order to save the Menominee, they need us to defy self-interest. We as a species generally care about things that affect us on a personal level. Things that affect someone else are most often filed behind “Z” for “zero fucks given.” Self-interest is where the phrase, “Not in my backyard!” lays its head down at night. “Not

in my backyard” means that someone else’s backyard is about to get a giant dump in it. If we want to protect what is at the root of our passions, we need to say, “This shit is unacceptable in any of our backyards.” The natural progression of “not in any of our backyards” is that we in the South should give a shit about some Canadian douchebags lining their pockets by laying waste to natural resources in the Midwest. The next time some asshat wants to ruin one of our marshes, mountains, or rivers, we want our ketchup-abusing Midwestern brothers and sisters to give a shit, too. There aren’t enough people who share our immediate concerns for us to further diminish our own voice by only caring about what is quite literally within peeing distance.



When it comes right down to it, the story is the same whether it's about the Back Forty Mine, Pebble Mine, or one of a million projects perpetrated to vulnerable communities and resources in the South since the dawn of industrialization. An outside company discovers a resource that can be converted into profits. They dangle jobs to a community in desperate need of them. They then leverage those jobs to operate in the least responsible, most profitable manner. Once they have depleted the resource and topped off their coffers, they are gone in the middle of the night along with their pittance of jobs, leaving behind messes on the scale of superfund sites for the community to live with, because in the end they're still to impoverished after all those "jobs" to even begin to clean it up.

Everyone who came before us has failed to end this cycle, and we have lost places we love in the wreckage. There is a straight line between our failures in the past and our hyper narrow focus of what we care about as a community. Too many times we have settled for complacency because what was happening was over there. There can't be any more "over there's." I'm imploring all of you to give a shit about all of it, so that they'll give a shit about us when the time comes. Once we're all giving an equal amount of shit, we can really get some shit done. Let's start by saving the Menominee, and putting the Canadians at Aquila Resources on notice. This shit will not stand.

There is a straight line between our failures in the past and our hyper narrow focus of what we care about as a community.







Check out the links below for shit's sake.

noback40.org

www.wisconsinrivers.org/back-forty-sulfide-mine



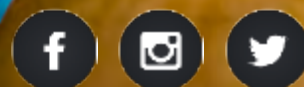
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GUIDED TRIPS AND TRAVEL



strategizing
Capt. Joel Dickey

Two Lines
are Better Than One





Photos: Joel Dickey

It can get quite confusing when you walk into a fly shop and stare at that large wall of different fly lines, wondering which one is best for you. In reality, if you spend much time on the water, the answer is: all of them.

First, you must understand the different parts of a fly line. All weight-forward lines have what is called a “head.” The head consists of a front taper, belly, and a rear taper. Line companies manipulate the lengths of the front and rear tapers as well as densities of these parts to optimize casting in the conditions for which the line was designed. As an ambassador for Scientific Anglers, I will give examples using their current lines, because that’s what I’m using.





WINDY DAYS

For example, the Scientific Anglers' Amplitude "Grand Slam" line has a shorter, denser head. The front taper is extremely short at approximately 3 feet with a belly at approximately 17 feet, and a rear taper of approximately 20 feet.

Shorter, denser heads load the rod faster, allowing you to deliver quicker more accurate casts in windy conditions. It turns over bigger flies and longer leaders in the wind much easier. Lines with shorter heads are also generally overweighted a full line weight to help load the rod quicker with shorter amounts of line outside the rod tip. These lines are not designed to carry large amounts of line beyond the head when false casting and in turn, are not as effective in situations where you have to deliver a really long cast carrying over 45-50 feet of line.



CALM WATERS

On the other end of the spectrum, you have a Scientific Anglers' Amplitude Infinity Saltwater fly line. This particular fly line has a longer head that is designed for longer, more delicate presentations. The longer less dense head allows you to carry more line. This type of head design lends itself to situations with calmer wind, when fish are particularly spooky. To be more technical compared to the Grand Slam fly line that only has a 40-foot head, the Infinity line has up to a 53-foot head, which allows you to carry more line while casting. Noting the Infinity line is overweighted a half a line weight, it is probably best not to use it in extreme windy conditions as it does not have the density to punch through stronger wind.

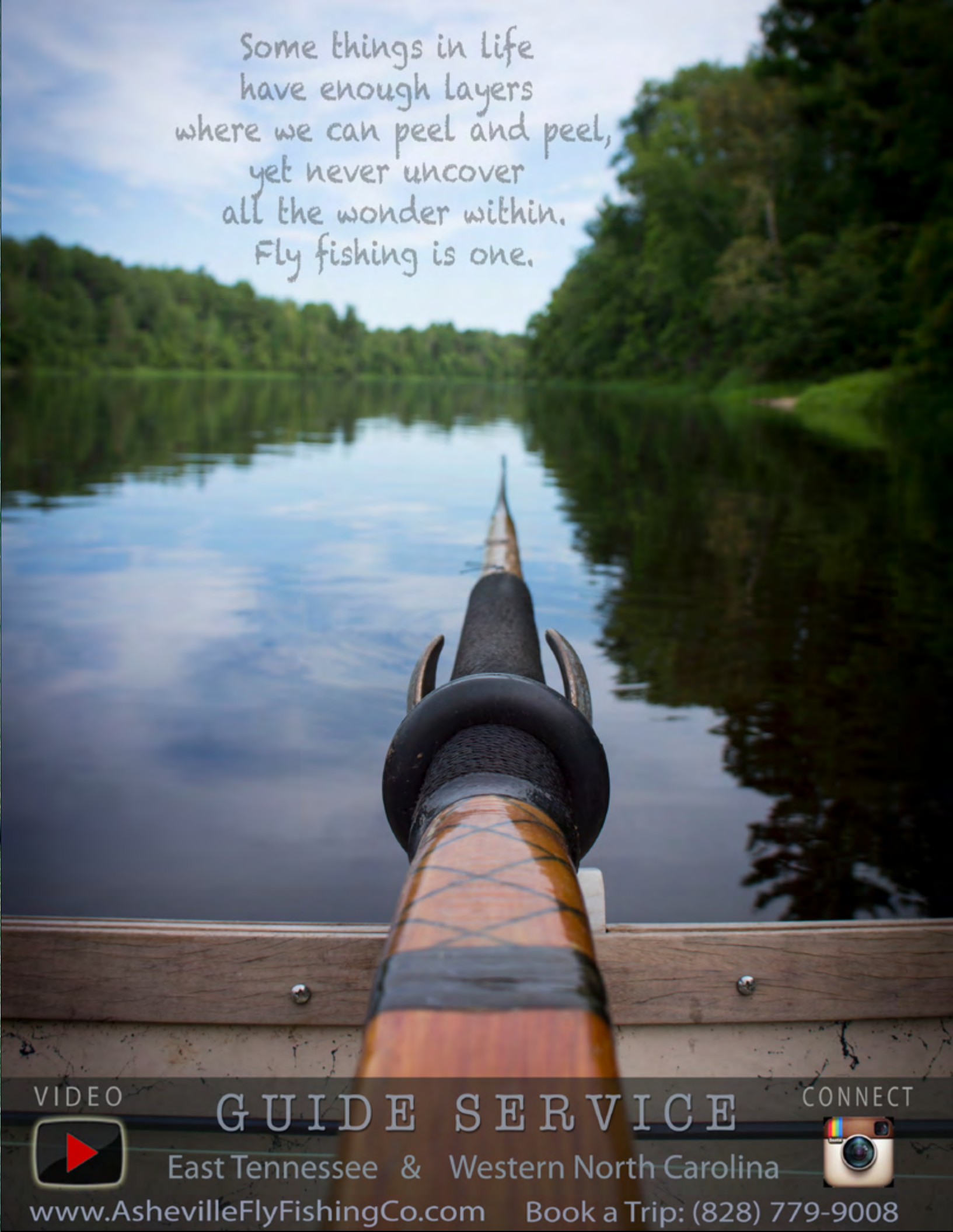
I have a saying about the weather in the Florida Keys: If you don't like it, wait 10 minutes and it will change. For this particular reason, having both types of fly lines is extremely important. You have one designed for windier conditions and the other for much calmer conditions. Yes, you might be able to get away with using one, but having both is going to up your game exponentially.



Captain Joel Dickey once drank a whole 12-pack of Mountain Dew, smoked a pack of Marlboro Ultra Light 100s, shat lightning, all while landing a 200lb tarpon one-handed. True story. My brother saw it. My cousin saw him bare-knuckle fight a barracuda until the barracuda tapped out. Don't mess with Captain Joel Dickey. Book him at captainjoeldickey.com.



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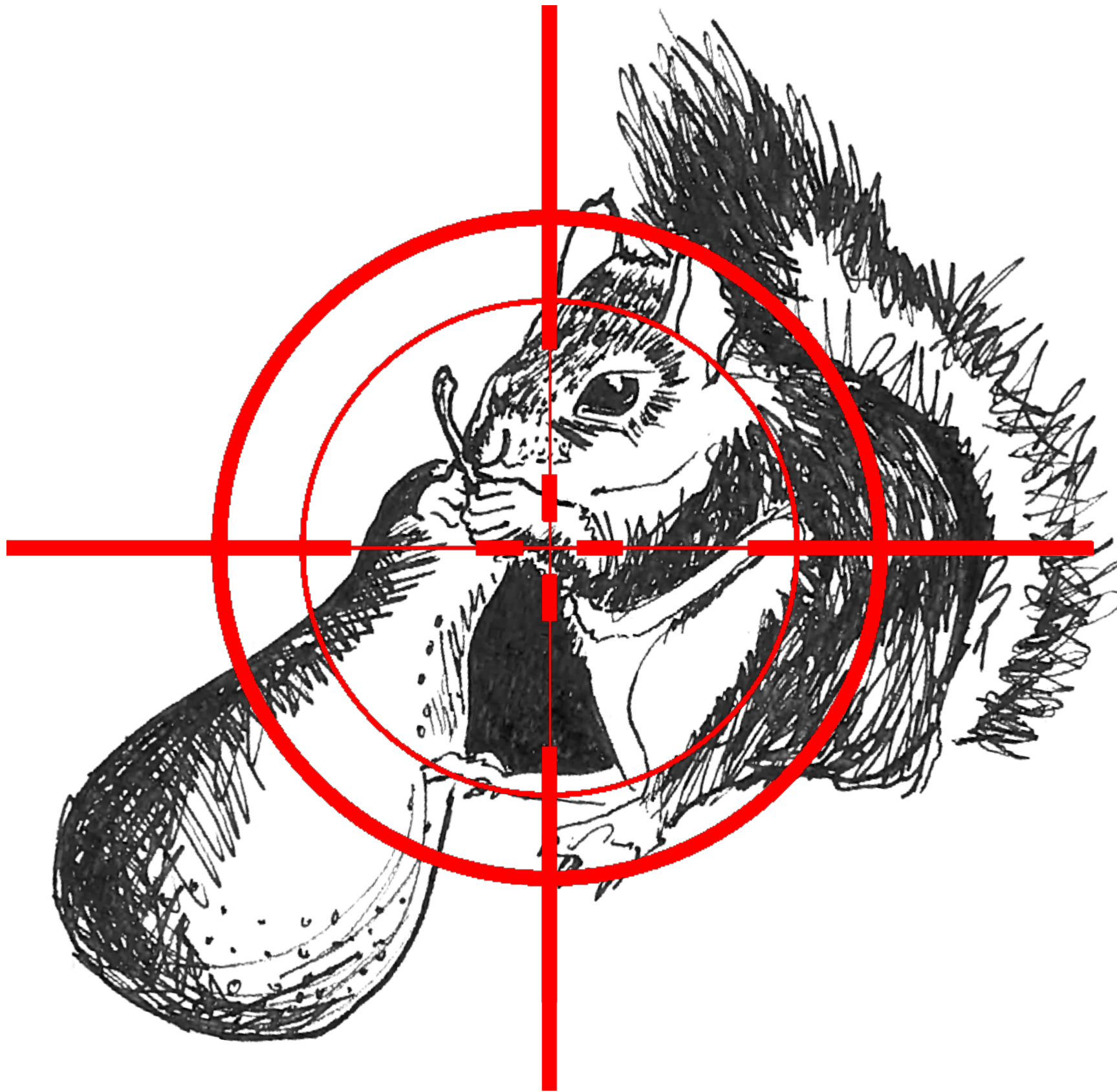
Captains For Clean Water is a Grassroots Nonprofit Organization
Advocating for Clean Water & Healthy Estuaries Across Florida.



ZONKED

By Knox Campbell

Illustrations: Zane Porter



Every morning, before my feet even hit the floor, I roll over and look out the window and see an old pear tree. This old tree brings me peace and lets me know that even as I age I, too, can be productive and handsome albeit a little haggard. Now, if you look at that pear tree and bounce your gaze upward from limb to limb, you'll see the branches reach out and almost brush up against the long, blank trunk of a giant poplar. Follow that trunk up until you come to its lowest limbs, which reach way out and graze a longleaf pine.

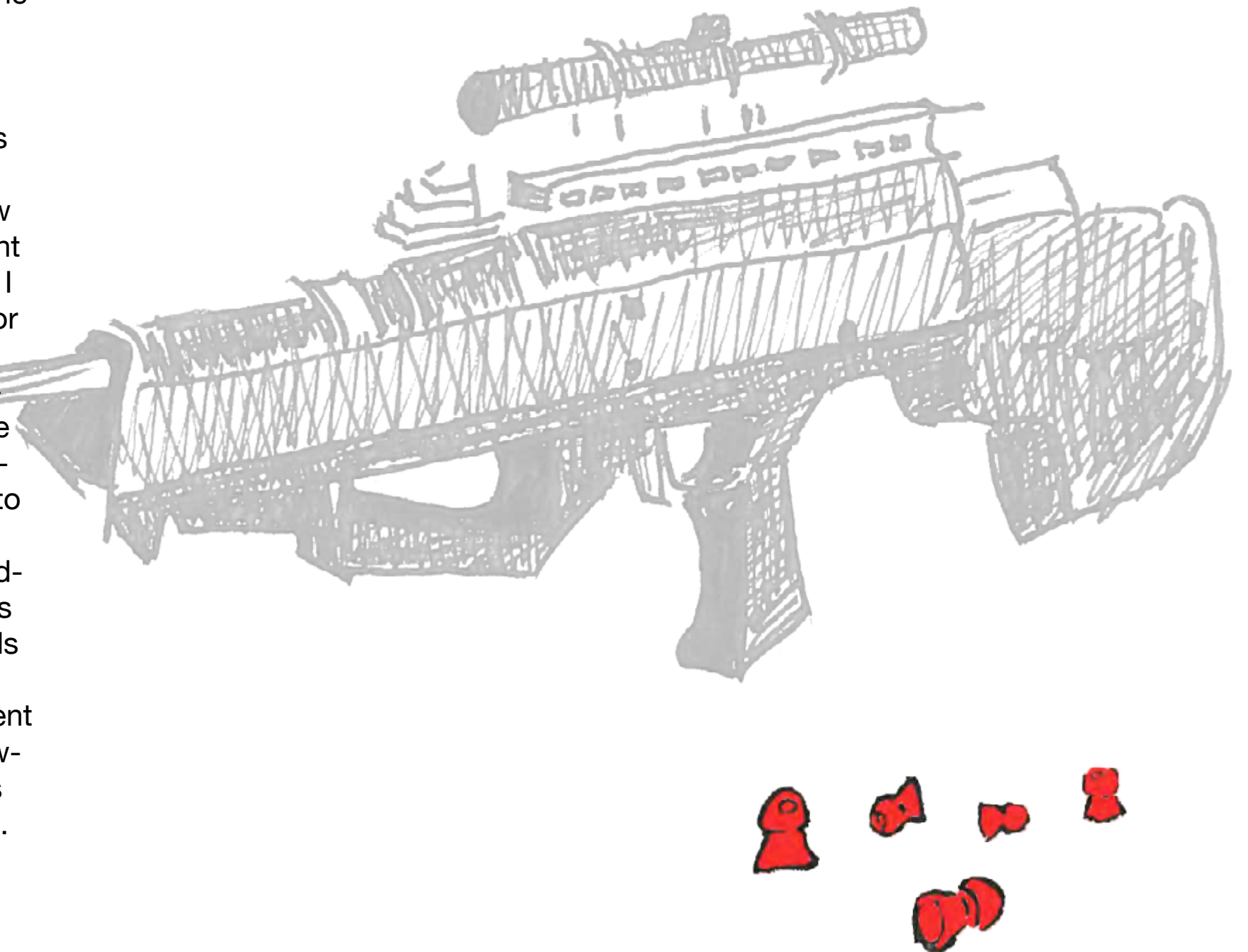
Now, go up that pine up to the very tip-top and you'll see a brown ball of leaves and twigs. Inside that cozy little ball is a happy family of squirrels. Cute, peaceful, docile squirrels. All they want is to sleep, climb, mate, and twitch their tails... and eat my pears. My sweet, succulent pears.

I'm a family man. I have a nine-to-five job. I fish when I can. I also have a mean streak. In elementary school, I used to hide behind a dumpster and wait for the class bully to walk by before I'd jump on him like a spider monkey and push his face into the sidewalk. I don't know why. It just felt good.

So, as I sit at my kitchen table, drinking my coffee and helping my little girl eat her oatmeal, I'm thinking about the stream at the bottom of the hill and how I just want to call in sick so I can spend a few hours catching the wild trout that it holds, when out of the corner of my eye I see movement in the pear tree. It's a squirrel. A squirrel that's eating the blossoms off my pear tree. I try to ignore it, but the spider monkey deep inside of me stirs. The moment passes and I go to work and have a normal day. But on the drive home I find myself thinking about the pear tree and its fruit. And about the squirrels that are eating its fruit. And how they're stealing pears from my family. The next thing I know I'm in the hunting section at Wally World, researching pellet guns on my phone. After talking with an associate (probably named Austin), I've settled on the Sportsman 900 and a round tin of .177 caliber hollow-point pellets. I've

never felt like more of a man as I did the moment that I bought a pellet gun, hollow-point pellets, and organic diapers.

The weeks went by and my blood-lust for squirrels reached its peak. Our house in the woods became a killing ground. I had removed screens from strategic windows for added stealth. The pellet gun was always ready. As one who formerly fly fished and now mostly just ties flies at night dreaming of catching fish, I was finding a lot of uses for squirrel tail. I kept the tails in my shed, hiding the evidence from my wife so she wouldn't think I was a psychopath. I was beginning to have concerns about that, as well. I justified my blood-lust with simple economics for cheap fly tying materials and a love for fresh pears. As the days and weeks went by, I noticed fewer and fewer squirrels, and there was an emptiness inside of me.





Our neighbors invited us up for St. Patty's Day dinner. As my wife, daughter, and I walked up the hill and down the drive to their house I noticed that their two short-haired pointers were playing tug-of-war with what used to be a squirrel. I also noted two more squirrel carcasses at the bottom of the steps leading up to their front door. "That's weird," my wife said. I said nothing. Dinner went well. We had a traditional meal of corned beef, potatoes, cabbage, and Guinness. Over dessert, my neighbor says, "The dogs have been killing a lot of squirrels lately." My wife nods and mentions she saw a few outside on the drive. I take a sip of beer, which almost comes out of my nose as my neighbor says, "It's weird. None of them have

any tails. Must be some disease." At that moment my wife looks at me, and I know that she knows.

I'm not totally sure what the message is here, but I'll try: We all have our lives, and if you're reading this, you're a person who fly fishes, so you'll understand that there aren't enough hours or days to do what you always wanted. So you pass the time doing what you can. For me, I thought about those squirrels eating pears that my daughter could be eating. I thought about the baby squirrels learning to steal from my daughter. And then I thought about how fun it would be to watch my little girl someday catch trout on flies that came from the squirrels that were eating her pears.



We met Knox years ago when he was pulling a stint as the resident Prince of Darkness on the South Holston. Since those nocturnal leanings Knox has come back to the light, married, had a child, and really made something out of his life. It has become a real problem as far as his fishing time is concerned. He doesn't know how, but he hopes to remedy the situation soon.

Artistic talent oozes out of every pore on Zane Porter's scrawny little kid frame. Thankfully, talent is the only oozing present since he got married. Quick with a pencil and slow with a figure eight, Zane has been arting it up for as long as we've known him. He arts good. Check out and contact him to buy his work on his instagram account. @porterflyfishing

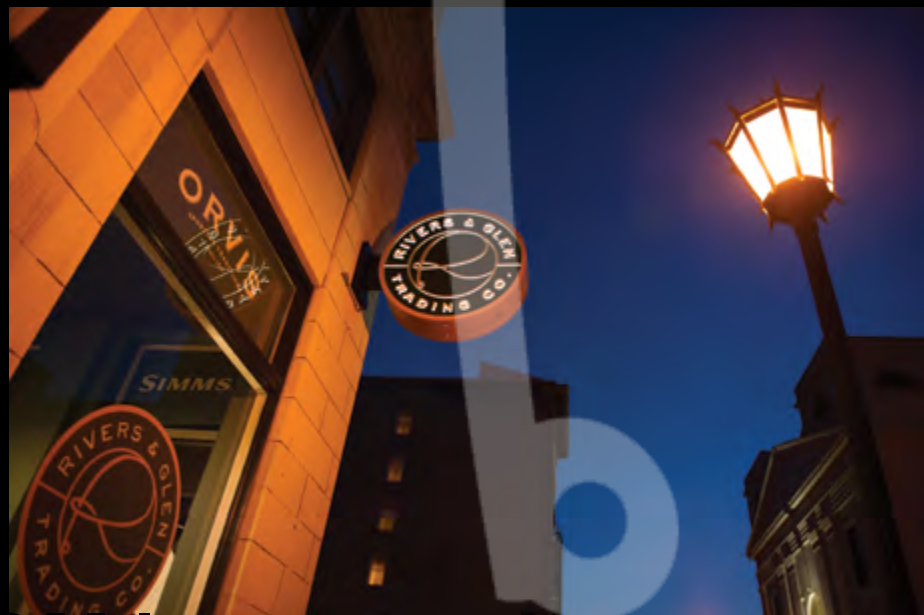


#BFDE



#LFDE







Hot Randy's
AMPHIBIOUS
ASSAULT FROG
(A.A.F.)

Rand Hancy
AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT FROG

Hot Randy here, sports fans. My Amphibious Assault Frog (A.A.F) will catch a bass by the ass, even in the grass. It's got good plop, floats high, and is burning up the end of my line like a dumpster fire on acid. You simple folks just put your faith in your old friend, Hot Randy. I'd never steer you wrong when it comes to bass, ass, panfish or fly tying. WHOOOOOOO!!!!

Material List:

Size #2 Gamakatsu B10S stinger hook
1/2 of a 1" Tarantula EP Brush
5 Crazy legs
1 size medium Cohen's paddle tail
1 size small Double Barrel popper head



1



2



3



4



5



6



Material prep

Go ahead and cut your whole EP brush in half, then cut that piece in half again. You will now have 2 quarter pieces of your EP brush.

We are also going to cut our Cohen's paddle tail in half. We are going to be using the fatter side for this size frog. Save the other half if you want to tie smaller frog patterns with size 4 hooks and small double barrel popper heads.

Pull off 5 rubber legs, keeping the edges intact. Stretch the legs out and visualize where your knots will go (typically a quarter of the way in from each end). Tie in simple overhand knots with all of the legs, and then snip off outside ends.

Step 1 - Insert the hook into the vice.

Step 2 - Retrieve a large piece of Cohen's paddle tail.

Step 3 - Pierce the paddle tail with the hook point in the center of the cut side, about a 1/3 of the way down.

Step 4 - Take the hook out of the vice and slide it up the hook. Tie down. The point will be above the barb.

Step 5 - Tie in the first piece of EP brush above hook barb and palmer it up the hook shank.

Step 6 & 7 - Retrieve the prepped legs and tie in at the middle making the legs fold back. Make sure they are centered.

7



8



Step 8 - Tie in the last piece of the EP brush and palmer it up the hook shank.

Step 9 - Rotate the vice and comb out the EP brush, parting it in the middle.

Step 10 - Fold the piece of Cohen's paddle tail forward creating the belly and tie down. Trim as cleanly as possible.

9



10

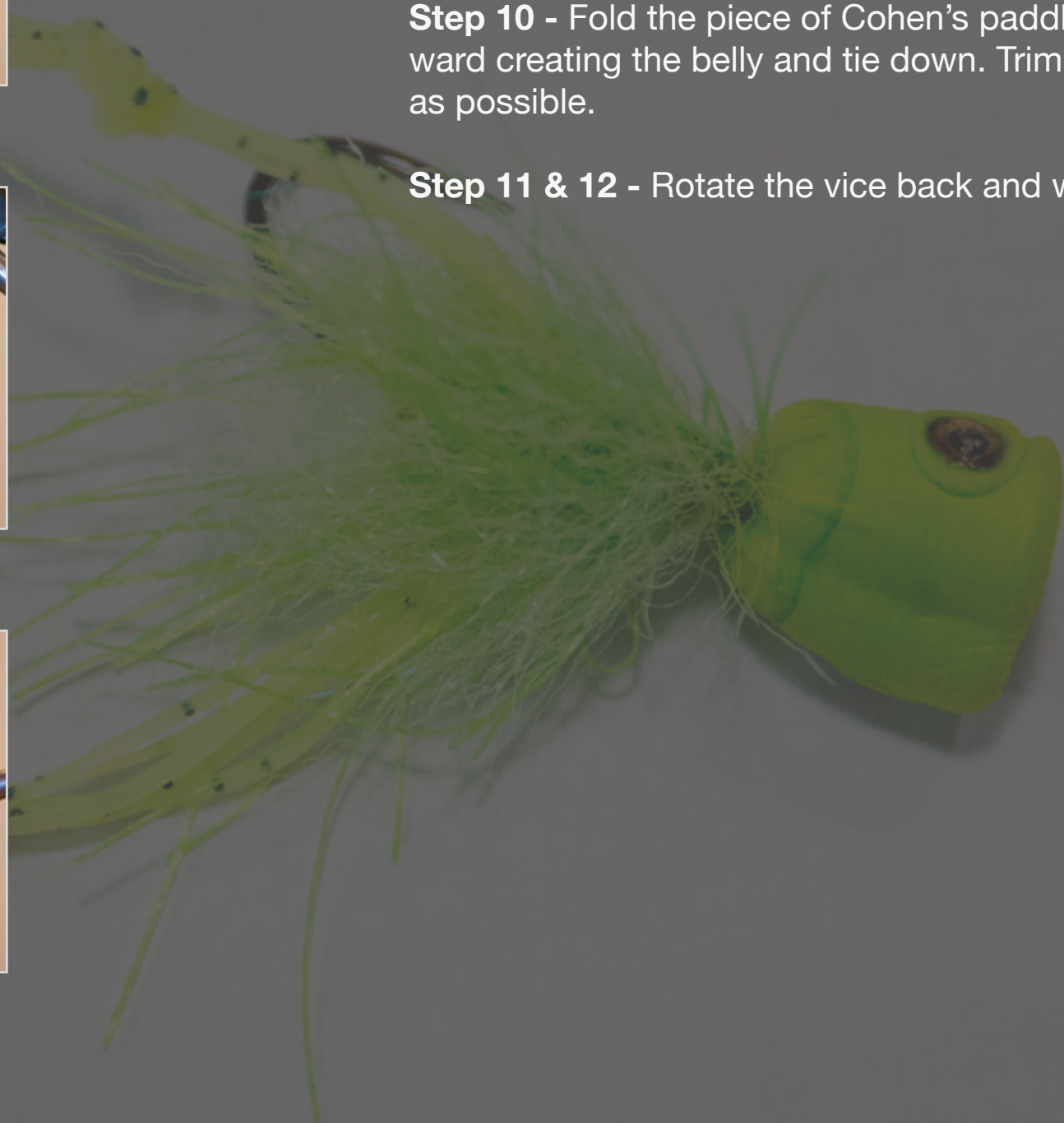


Step 11 & 12 - Rotate the vice back and whip finish.

11



12



13



Step 13 - Insert Double Barrel Head. I heat up a bodkin with a lighter to make it easier to put a hole through the double barrel head. Coat the thread with glue of choice and slide on.

14

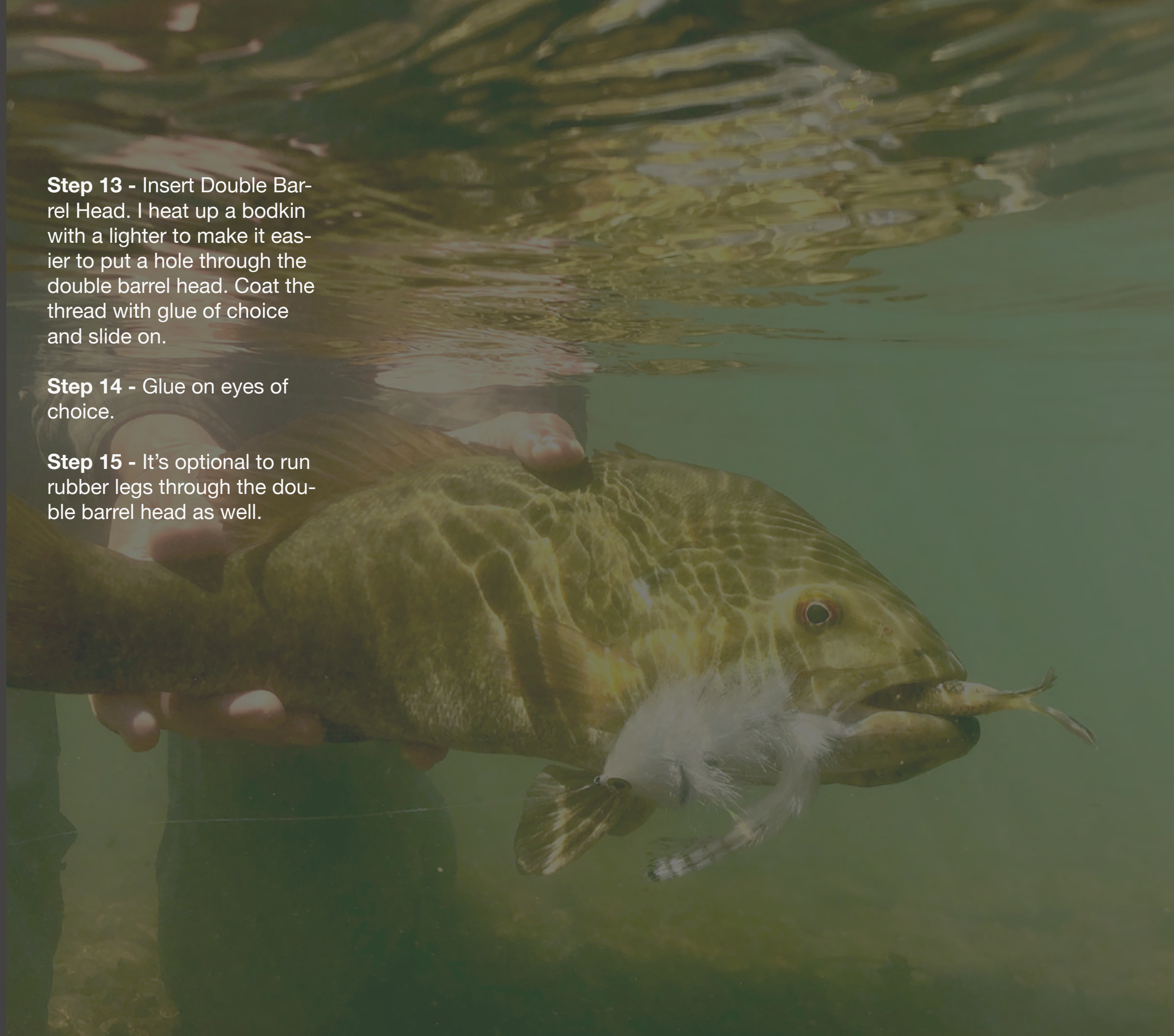


Step 14 - Glue on eyes of choice.

15



Step 15 - It's optional to run rubber legs through the double barrel head as well.





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Carp Cup
Revisited

2012-2019



Looking back, mistakes were made, tears were shed, but despite it all good times were most definitely had. What began as an idea stolen from Denver nearly a decade ago, capped off its eighth year at the end of July. The **3 Rivers Carp Cup** has become somewhat of a fixture at the end of summer, with anglers converging on Knoxville from around the region and, at times, as far away as California and Vermont.

In the early years, we thought it prudent to allow anglers to fish lake restaurants and marinas. Dock fishing requires a different skill set than flats fishing so rules were somewhat fluid, dependent on the conditions and always intended to throw anglers a curveball. Adapting to the conditions and the rules can be make or break. What remained consistent through it all was that the best five fish (measured in inches) wins either the Individual or Team Divisions, and the biggest fish gets you crowned the Carp King. So conceivably, a solid flats angler could compete with the boozy marina anglers on any given day if conditions were ripe.







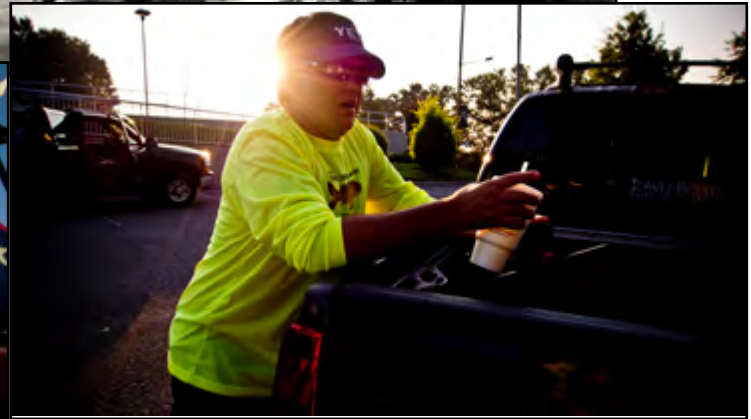
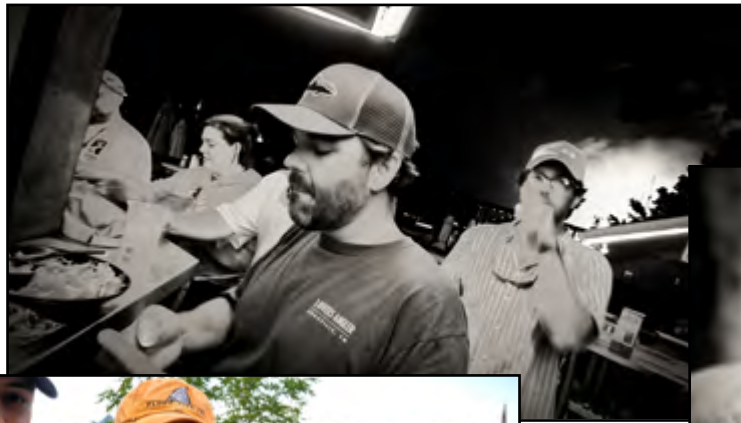
Biggest fish nearly always come off of one of the flats on either the French Broad or Holston rivers where a steady diet of crayfish and hellgrammites produce shovelhead behemoths well in excess of three feet. The rivers are both tailwaters, and while flows are predictable even in high water years, the river flats can become unrecognizable, obscured by the rush of 18,000 cfs (thus the need to extend the boundaries of the tournament to Fort Loudon Dam and the extent of the entire reservoirs).

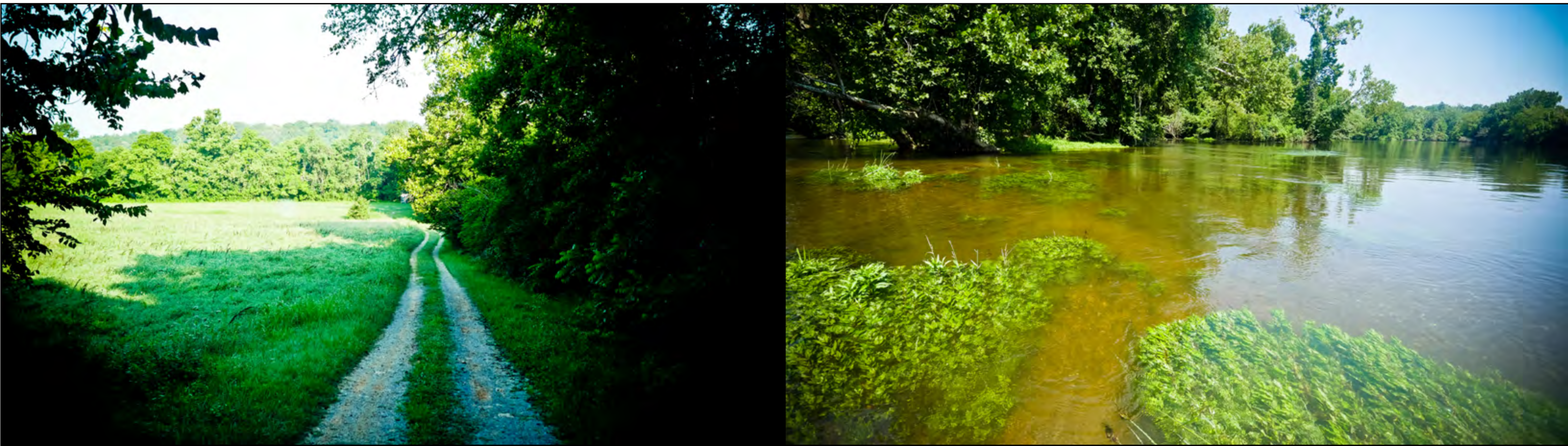
The first year was marred by high water conditions and marina fish won the day with Calhoun's Restaurant receiving the bulk of the pressure. Some anglers cried foul, so in the subsequent year, both Calhoun's restaurants were strictly off limits. This ultimately lead to the Duncan Boat dock incident of 2013. Duncan Boat Dock, a fixture in West Knoxville, was originally constructed on the Duncan family farm when the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) raised the waters on Fort Loudon in 1944. Old Man Duncan (or Ben) started managing the marina in 1974. Also around that time, Ben began keeping a mess of pet carp beneath his recliner on the dock. It was common knowledge that you could feed the carp, but you sure couldn't mess with them and certainly couldn't fish for them.







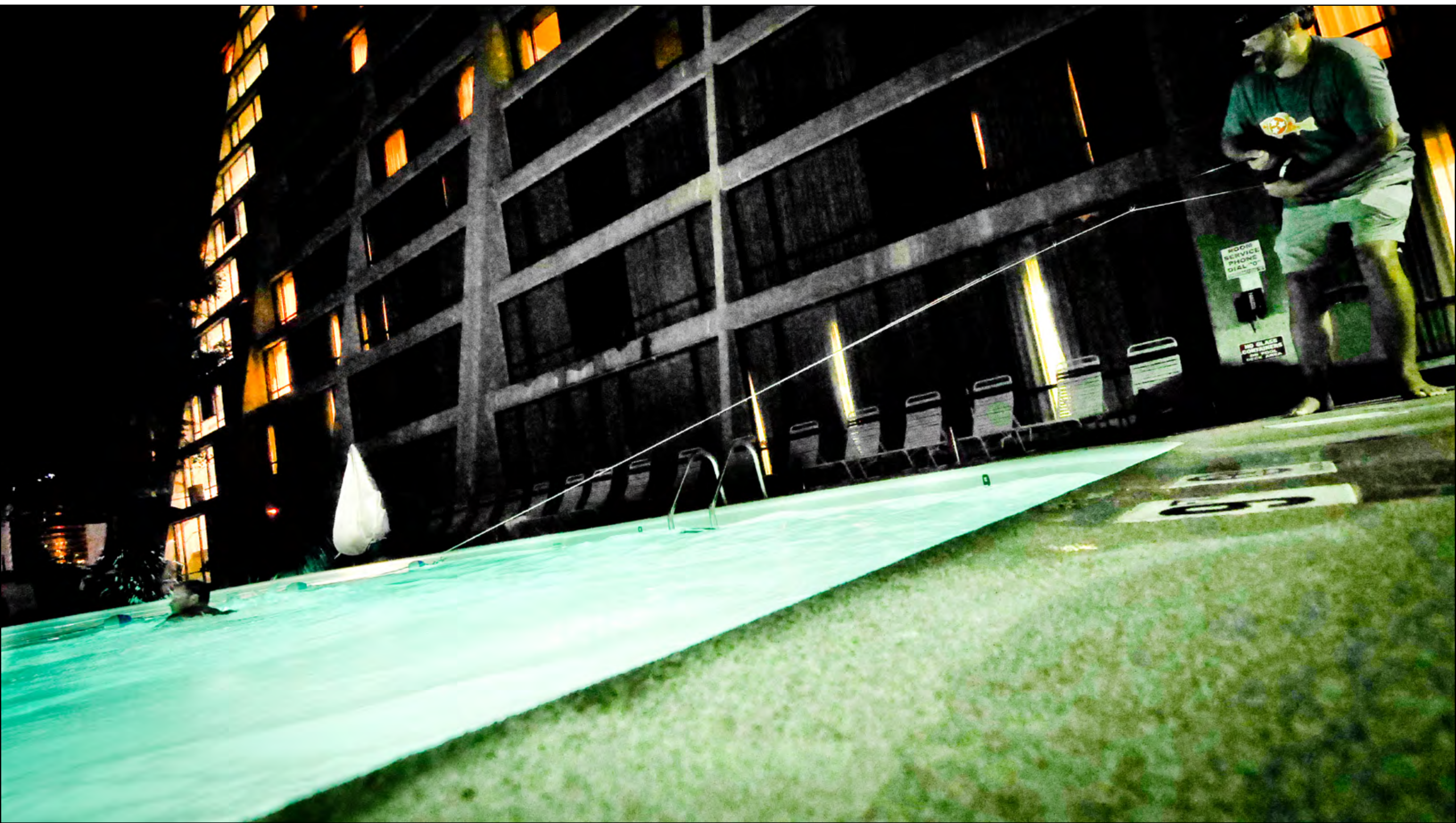




Early in the morning of the 2012 Carp Cup, with jon boats and drift boats circling the dock hoping for a stray pet fish to make it far enough away from Ben's perch for a cast, a single boat pulled directly into the dock and disembarked in order to have a word with Ben. Suffice it to say, bullshit walks and money talks and Ben Duncan was nobody's fool. Brent Golden and Jeff Keith greased Old Man Duncan's palm and cruised to victory in the Cup at the end of the day. Technically, they were within the rules of the tournament that year as nothing had been stated about bribes or otherwise. So incensed was one angler that he took to the interwebs and drew diagrams on satellite images bemoaning the tactic and ultimately the Cup. I thought the tactic was brilliant. Nonetheless, in the following year (which was a good water year), all marinas and all restaurants were strictly forbidden and with clear, low water on the rivers, big fish were landed and good anglers were crowned. Just as it was intended.

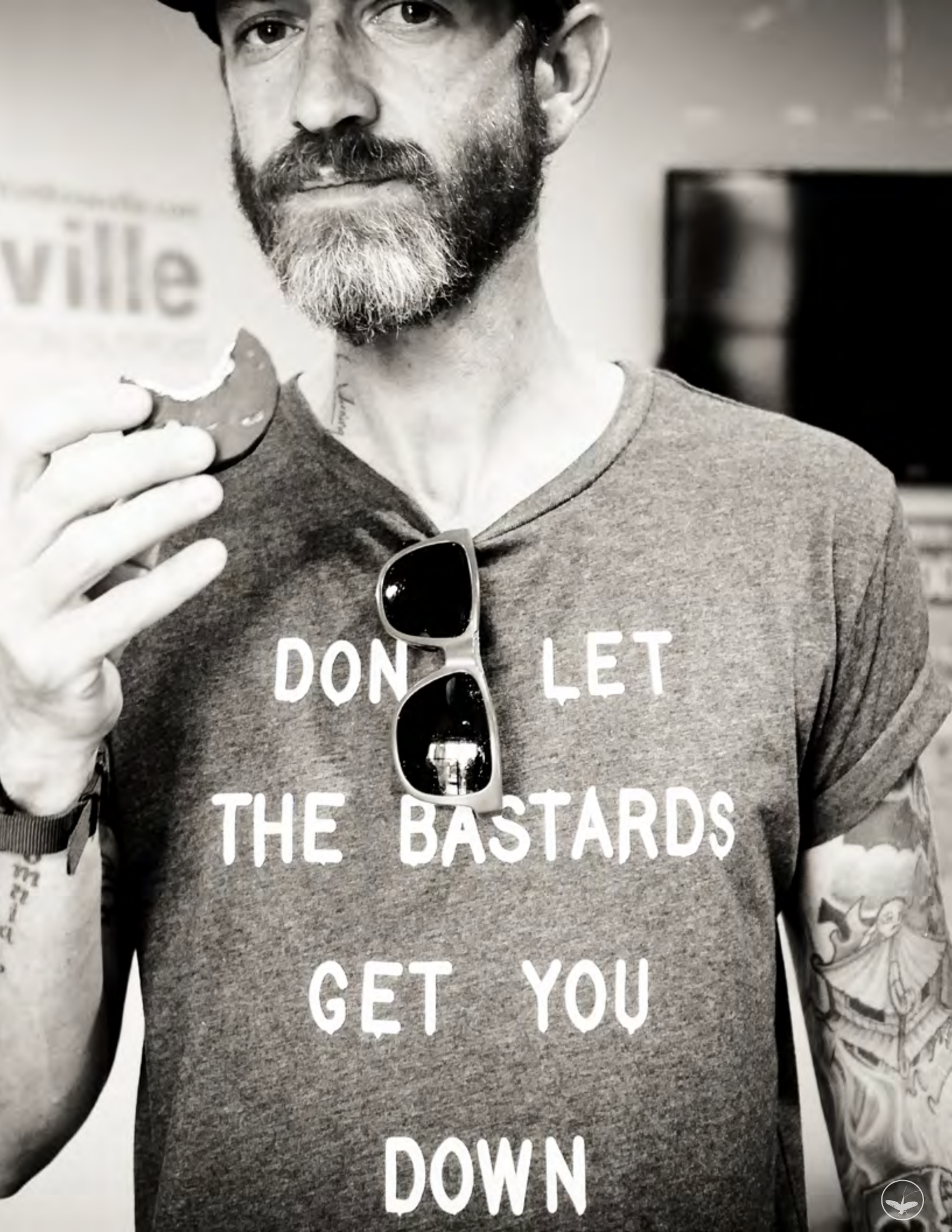






In the end, there have been good water years and bad water years. I survived the divorce years, the Battle of the Interns and Von Beardly. Big fish have been brought to hand and general silliness has reigned supreme. The Cup has been mimicked, flat knocked off, and still endures. Ultimately though, what the Cup has fostered is a grand sense of community that extends well beyond the confines of the waters we fish. As social media and the industry's misuse of it have evolved, there are times when it feels like one of the few genuine things that still exists.





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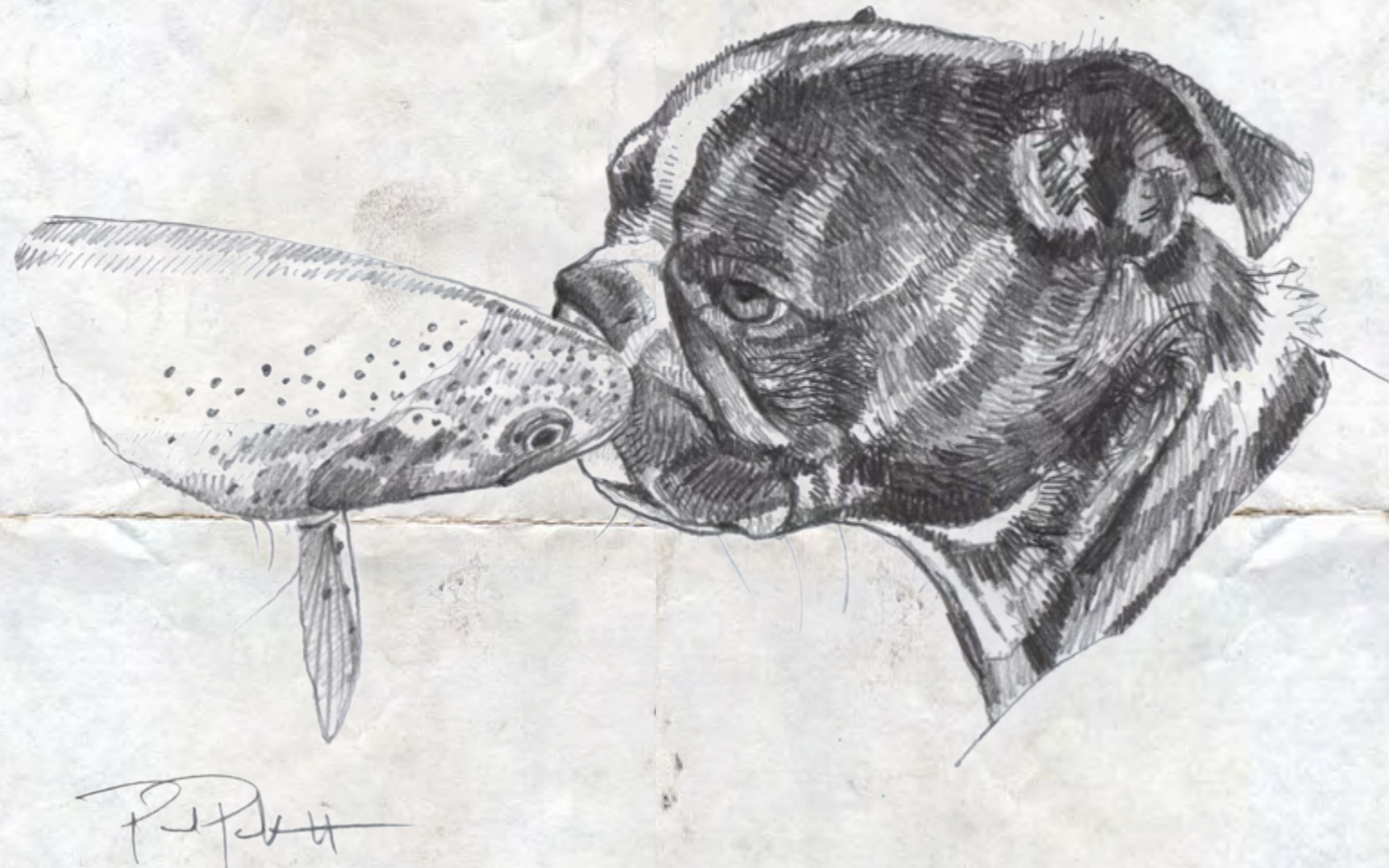




The Back Page Journal

with Paul Puckett and Mike Benson

I'm a flatlander now, a beach dweller, marsh rat... Have been for 15 years now. But through these salt-encrusted veins flows the DNA of a certified hillbilly. My family were some of the first to settle in Western North Carolina, and have lived off the land there, farming, moonshining, and just generally raising hell since day one. In my early years, I grew up running around mountain trails, and later, covering hundreds of miles every year, fly rod in hand, chasing mountain trout. I moved through the mountains with ease, and skill. But then, and especially now, I can't for the life of me understand why people would intentionally go walking around for no damn reason. They call it "hiking." But really it's just aimlessly wandering around the woods. What do they do? Why are they there? To look at trees? Birds, maybe? I'm never more uncomfortable in the backcountry than when I walk up on a campsite with no fishing rods or equipment visible. That shit is suspicious. I'd rather walk up to a working still, unarmed, and unannounced than to come into a clearing with two dudes sitting in camp chairs beside a tent.



At least I know what the shiners are doing there, and how they are likely to react. What in the eternal fuck are the two tent freaks up to? Who just sits around the woods for no damn reason? How do you interact with a creature that is so far outside your own understanding? And somehow, while participating in the most bafflingly pointless activity I can think of, they have the audacity to look at me and my fly rod like they don't understand what I'm doing! Look here Millennial muir, your camped near a river, this is a fishing rod, my intentions are crystal clear, I'm here for a reason. One day, I'm probably gonna crack and just blurt out to these wide-eyed stump-squatting weirdos, "What the fuck are you doing here?!" And while I'm sure I'll get some response, I doubt it will make this situation any clearer to me. The only reason to walk that far into the woods, expend that level of effort, and sweat that much is if there is a trout stream at the end of the trail. Period. All other activities should be viewed with the utmost suspicion. Remember kids, if you see something, say something. And "hiking" is dumb.



