

Sonoma County, California Volume 50, Number 12 December 2023

RRFF member, Daniel Powers and his Lahontan Cutthroat Trout, Pyramid Lake. Photo by Jeff Cratty. Story by Daniel Powers, page 7.

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President's Message By Penelope Gadd-Coster

Happy Holidays to All!

I love this time of the year, but it always seems a little crazy with the holidays stacking up in a row. Happens every year but I still feel the slight tug to get some things done before the year ends.

One of those tugs I sense are donations. I love being able to provide donations through the club for charities and organizations that I hope will make the world better. I'm also very happy and feel gratitude to be part of Russian River Fly Fishers. Last October and November the Board started working to review our

past donations and we continue to investigate whether there were other organizations that should be considered.

The approval process for providing donations involve these steps: 1) a club member needs to sponsor an organization, 2) the RRFF application is filled out <u>click</u> to review the application and historical donation projects, 3) the application is presented to the Board for their review, and 4) upon the Board's approval, there is a presentation to our members by the club member sponsor at one of the RRFF General Meetings.

As part of the Board's review and approval process, we consider how organizations help our local fisheries or

individuals in need, as well as supporting and promoting fly fishing. The organizations that are approved usually have their footprint in Northern California, but we prefer to donate to organizations in Sonoma County. I am happy to report that there are four organizations that were recently approved for donations. Those organizations are:

- 1). The Russian Riverkeepers <u>click</u> was approved for a \$500 donation to help with their annual cleanup of our namesake river.
- 2). Project Healing Waters <u>click</u> was approved for a \$570 donation to help with their local events, SF Chapter.
- 3). Casting for Recovery <u>click</u> was approved for a \$2,000 donation to help with two of their events, Northern California Chapter.
- 4). Trout/Steelhead in the Classroom <u>click</u> was approved for a \$1,500 donation to help with supplies to support Sonoma County teachers and their students.

Other organizations up for consideration:

Reel Recovery <u>click</u>, Mayfly Project <u>click</u> and others will be reviewed. Contact me <u>click</u> if you have any question. Your suggestions are always welcome.

Another Board activity we are working on is bringing back the RRFF Winter Dinner. It will be held at the Veteran's Hall February 17, 2024. More details will follow.

Finally, I want to mention our last RRFF General Meeting of the year. The meeting will be on December 13th. We reserve the last general meeting of each year for club members tell their fly-fishing stories. Stories draw us together, inspire us to fly fish, and help us learn when, where and how to fish specific fisheries that we may not have experienced before. We have a remarkable club of adventurous fly fishers. The last RRFF General Meeting of the year allows me to vicariously live through the storyteller, learn more about our wonderful sport, and hear about places to fish that I may not have been aware of. Also, this event

helps me focus on the importance of supporting conservation efforts that help mitigate negative issues that affect our fisheries and their environment.

Thank you for being the part of our club and I hope you bring your fly-fishing stories!

Penelope

RRFF General Meeting

Wednesday, December 13, 2023, 6:30 PM Lodge Room, SR Vets Memorial Building By Mike Borba

Our program this month will be a combination of member fly-fishing outings. Ed Barich will give a presentation about this year's club outings. Rick Baker and Steve Tubbs have a presentation about tarpon fishing. Mike Spurlock and Dave Stone have a presentation about fishing in Mexico. Also, Joe Hiney will talk to us about the organization Healing Waters, a support group for veterans that uses fly fishing as a form of therapy for Veterans.

PG&E Plan Remove Eel River Dams (Dam removal could begin as soon as 2028) By Charlie Schneider

In a significant development, Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) has recently shared its Initial Draft License Surrender Application and Decommissioning Plan for the Potter Valley Project, which calls for removing both Eel River dams. Dam removal will be an enormous win for salmon and steelhead in the Eel River and for North Coast anglers. The century-old dams obstruct access to nearly 300 miles of crucial headwater spawning and nursery habitat in the Mendocino National Forest

The outdated hydroelectric endeavor consists of two dams – Scott and Cape Horn – situated in the upper mainstem Eel River. The associated powerhouse has been inactive since 2021, and recent seismic studies have required PG&E to store less water in the Lake

Pillsbury reservoir behind Scott Dam to reduce safety risks in the event of an earthquake.

Considering the financial and liability challenges associated with owning the facilities, PG&E has made the decision to divest from the venture, and will remove the dams, though the specific approach is still under consideration.

Dam removal is increasingly acknowledged as a positive intervention, allowing rivers to revert to their natural flow patterns and facilitating essential processes like sediment transport, crucial for maintaining robust river ecosystems that support salmon and steelhead. While further studies are required to ensure the proper execution of dam removal and subsequent restoration, assessments suggest that the sediment behind Scott Dam is uncontaminated and can be managed to expedite the facility's removal. Impacts to salmon and steelhead need more study, but it is generally agreed upon that the brief sediment impacts caused by dam removal will be far outweighed by the benefits of providing migratory access to the headwaters.

In their plan, PG&E presents two options for removing Scott Dam and three for the smaller Cape Horn dam. The potential reconfiguration of the diversion at Cape Horn Dam is being explored by a regional group aiming to strike a deal to maintain some diversion of Eel River water into the Russian River. PG&E incorporates elements of this revised framework proposal in their plan, although many terms for a new diversion facility that would support limited water diversion into the Russian River are yet to be negotiated. These negotiations include aligning diversions with the objective of restoring the Eel River ecosystem and fisheries to self-sustaining, harvestable populations.

Advocates of the proposal include the original three entities that sought permission from PG&E in October to take over the diversion: Mendocino Inland Water and Power Commission, Round Valley Indian Tribes, and Sonoma Water. They are now joined by the

California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Trout, Humboldt County, and Trout Unlimited. Importantly, the proposal has been updated to commit to not impeding dam removal while a potential diversion deal and funding are being secured.

On the Russian River side, impacts to fisheries are difficult to understand currently as there is limited information about how the water balance will change, though Sonoma Water and the Army Corps are required to provide minimum instream flow for fish through dam releases at Lake Mendocino. The agreement that sets those flows — called a Biological Opinion, is currently being re-evaluated and will likely need to be updated based on whether a diversion continues. Additionally, Russian River fisheries are heavily supplemented with hatchery stocking; this is not expected to change regardless of the diversion.

PG&E's preliminary plan is open for public comment until December 22, with an additional opportunity for the public to provide input on the final draft in the summer of 2024. For more information on how to comment, please visit www.freetheeel.org.

For those interested in more information and to access the complete document, we recommend this <u>blog post</u> by CalTrout

Editor's Note—Charlie Schneider is Russian River Fly Fishers' volunteer Conservation Advisor. I interviewed Charlie, so our club members could get to know him a little bit better (numbered and italicized questions below). I plan to follow progress in The Cast of Charlie's work, CalTrout, and all the other organizations that will eventually remove Eel Rivers' Scott and Cape Horn Dams which is an important and monumental project. Interview:

1) What is your current job and what is your role with the removal of the Eel River dams?

"I am the Lost Coast Project Manager for California Trout, a non-profit watershed restoration organization. I am our lead project manager on the Eel River dams issue."

2) Why and when did you get involved with CalTrout?

"I started with CalTrout a little over a year ago, in part because of what a great organization they are and in part because I felt like I could make a difference on several issues in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties on the rivers I care about."

3) What is the most important thing you can tell RRFF members about the current project(s) you are working on?

"That there really is hope for the fish we care about. Fishing has been really tough the last several years and I won't mince words in saying that salmon and steelhead populations are in really bad shape. But I do still feel like we are on the right trajectory in a number of watersheds on the North Coast. The Klamath dams are coming down, the Eel is next. My colleagues at CalTrout and other restoration organizations are doing bigger and better work every year. People have fundamentally changed how many watersheds work over the last 100 years and we know so much more now about how to fix them than we ever have."

4) What has been the highlight of your experience working for CalTrout?

"PG&E agreeing that it's time to remove the Eel River dams is definitely it. We have an enormous opportunity to bring the headwaters of this amazing river back to life, including potentially the southernmost run of summer steelhead, and we have a dam owner agreeing to do it. There is a lot of work to do to recover fish populations in the Eel, but dam removal is easily the biggest single action. The area above the dams is almost 300 square miles. Removing the dams will be like creating another Gualala sized watershed for salmon and steelhead."

To reach Charlie click for your questions.

Father and Son Fly-Fishing Trip By Mark Shelton

The conversation came up on a cold, snowy day during duck hunting season last year. "We need to find something new to do together in the summer/fall months," I said to Dad. I knew he had been interested in taking up fly fishing with a friend from Alabama but had not yet purchased equipment or taken the steps to learn more. "What about fly fishing?" Dad asked in response. I paused and gave it some thought. I had been fishing since I was very young. Mostly using worms and a cane pole in those hot, humid summers growing up in Mississippi. I learned to love catching fish. Later, I became obsessed with casting spinner bait for bass, crappie and trout on lakes and streams. But fly fishing? That seemed like a sport more suited for folks with way more patience than I had at those early ages. But now at 56 years old I thought, "Maybe Dad is on to something here."

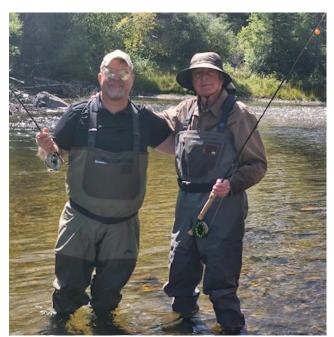
In April, I visited Sportsman's Warehouse in Rohnert Park, and met an expert on all things fly fishing, named Jeff. Jeff not only helped outfit me for fly fishing with Dad but told me about this organization called Russian River Fly Fishers who met near Bennet Valley Golf Course and practiced casting.

"It was all about enjoying the beauty of the mountains and time with Dad."

For the next three months, I spent many Thursday evenings learning from the mentors at the casting pond in preparation for the possibility of a fly-fishing trip with Dad to Colorado and Wyoming.

Meanwhile, Dad was getting outfitted by St. Peter's Fly Shop in Fort Collins, CO, in anticipation of our trip. We decided to go in late September of this year, while the Aspen were turning gold, and the elk were bugling. St. Peter's Fly Shop provided the guide for us to learn on the Cache le Poudre River, located just west of Fort

Collins, CO. This was a challenging scenic and natural river that was best fished with the help of someone who knew it. Especially for a couple of newbies like us!



Mark Shelton and his dad.

I flew from San Francisco to Denver and Dad picked me up in his trusty Suburban for a short drive up to Fort Collins. After spending most of a day trying on new waders and checking gear, we left Fort Collins and started driving northwest to the river.

Questions were popping up in my mind. "Would I remember all the things I practiced this past summer? Are we going to catch fish? What about bears?" I looked over at Dad and suddenly felt that calm that came with his years of wisdom and experience. It was all about enjoying the beauty of the mountains and time with Dad. Catching fish with good technique would be a bonus.

I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the river. We hiked down the side of the mountain to the river floor and waded out into the cold, clear water. Our guide spent time explaining the unique nature of the area and how these fish behaved. I looked around and soaked it all in. There was Dad casting upstream from me as our guide gave me tips. Soon, I had landed my

first Rainbow on a fly line! As Dad took pictures, I couldn't help but think of how perfect this day was. My memories of all the years flooded back to a time when he and I would fish together when I was a boy. Now, at ages of 56 and 81, we were still fishing and spending time together. I couldn't help but feel a profound sense of gratitude.

After several days of successful fly fishing on the Cache le Poudre, we packed up the old Suburban and headed north to the North Platte River, near Saratoga, Wyoming. This leg of the father/son fly fishing journey would be a float trip.

Upon arriving in Saratoga, we checked into our hotel and looked around. Spotting the fly-fishing guiding service, we made note of the breakfast diner located next door for an early morning meal. The next morning dawned clear and crisp. The trees were shedding their golden leaves along the banks of the North Platte River as we made our way to the launch site. The next several hours were pure bliss. Dad was in the back of the boat, guide in the middle, and I was seated in front. As we floated the turns and twists of the river, our guide would point out wildlife or a special pool to fish. We caught and released over 30 trout, a number I would have never believed if you had told me ahead of time. The temperatures were perfect and even the wind, which normally howls in Wyoming, was mostly calm.

That evening, after a successful day of fly fishing, we had dinner at an amazing Italian Restaurant and of course ordered the fish. Many will understand when I say that these times of bonding and laughter over a good meal while on a fishing trip can be the best part. I consider myself lucky it was with my dad.

Time to Let Go of The Fear of Wading By Catherine Miller

What I have learned is how easy it is to be fearful of something I do not understand. Clearly, that was my experience when I thought about river wading. Thanks

to the extraordinary October 10, 2023, Women's Wading Safety Clinic on the Russian River presented by Mike Spurlock, Jeff Cratty, and Gregg Wrisley, my fear of wading has been dispelled.



Mike and Gregg wait for Jeff to untangle himself from his fishing net so they could start the RRFF Women's Wading Clinic.

This was the first clinic of its type. The RRFF Wade Safe Agenda was designed after the Diablo Valley Fly Fishers Wading Safety document. The agenda was meticulously designed, and the clinic was presented by the instructors in a thorough and sequential manner. RRFF Women's Group members Angela, Maria, Rosa, Shawna, Pam, Jody, Linnette (and her husband Glenn) and Catherine met with the instructors at Del Rio Regional Park at 8 am. We were greeted with a beautiful warm day on the Russian River. The sun was shining brightly and reflecting on the rippling river with currents of varying intensity. The clinic progressed through safe wading topics, equipment orientation, wading practice on the land and then in the water. We crossed the river and climbed out on the far side. The instructors guided us every step of the way. The clinic was followed by lunch at Healdsburger and a short visit to the mouth of Dry Creek. At lunch, the participants were presented with a wading safety card and a whistle. Everyone had a wonderful time and expressed huge appreciation for all they had learned from participating in this clinic.

We eagerly anticipate that the Wading Safety Clinic will become a yearly outing for all new members that want to participate.

RRFF Women's Program Monthly Update By Catherine Miller

Hello RRFF Women,

It was fantastic to see so many of you at November's RRFF General Meeting. The general meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month at the Santa Rosa Veterans Hall. Members gather at 6:30 p.m. for a 7 p.m. meeting start. The meetings include RRFF updates, fishing stories, a raffle, and a guest speaker(s).



Maria de la Fuente left the meeting with a huge smile on her face after having won waders as a raffle prize. The monthly raffle consists of excellent quality fly-fishing gear. You won't want to miss the December 13 meeting. Our own club members will give three different presentations. Ed Barich, RRFF Outing Coordinator, will show pictures of club outings, Rick Baker and Steve Tubbs will share photos of fly fishing for Tarpon in Florida, and Mike Spurlock and Dave Stone will share photos of their fishing trip to Mexico. It promises to be a delightful meeting!

Our festive holiday luncheon will be held at Brewster's in Petaluma, on Saturday December 16, beginning at 11:30 am. We had great fun sharing our fishing experiences and getting to know each other better during our previous luncheon.

Mike Spurlock is offering a Russian River Spey Clinic on Saturday, December 9. A great group of members has

already signed up, and additional members can still be accommodated. If you never have Spey cast, it would be best to contact Mike click and he will give you a 1–2-hour lesson at the pond arranged at a convenient time before the clinic. He has rods, but you will need waders as you will be wading in the casting pond. You can wear your wading boots if they don't have metal studs attached to the boot's soles. The studs might damage the pond's rubber liner. The Spey cast is a beautiful, graceful cast. If you are interested, go to Russian River Fly Fishers' Club Calendar, and Trip Signups click for additional details about the clinic.

With the following goals in mind, the Women's Program looks forward to continued growth and integration into Russian River Fly Fishers:

- 1) Expanded awareness of the mentoring opportunities for established club outings such as the Yuba River, Pyramid Lake, Webber Lake. Gratefully, RRFF members Mike Spurlock, Don Shaw, Jeff Cratty and Gregg Wrisley have been and will continue to be an Outing Mentoring Team for the women's program. The women's program has been supported in a variety of different ways by many members. RRFF President, Penelope Gadd-Coster's encouragement and support is always appreciated. RRFF members who are interested in mentoring the women's program are encouraged to contact an Outing Mentoring Team member.
- 2) Creating a schedule of day trips, weekend outings, and clinics for women of all ability levels while coordinating these activities with existing outings.
- 3) Implementing Fly Fisher's International (FFI) Fly Casting Skills Development program. This program will begin in the new year and is open to women choosing to pursue the improvement of their skills. During the casting clinics, Maria and Angela will transfer your signed-off skill proficiency to a Foundation or Bronze Level Grid Score Sheet. This is being offered to sequentially improve your fly-casting skills. Skill development will enhance your ability to participate in and enjoy club outings. As a reminder, the casting

clinics are held the first and third Saturdays of each month from noon to 2:30 pm.

We look forward to your participation in these RRFF activities,

Catherine Miller, Coordinator Maria de la Fuente, Angela Zahra Assistant Coordinators RRFF Women's Program

Pyramid Lake Report 2023 By Daniel Powers

It all started a few years ago when I received a phone call from Jeff Cratty, RRFF Board Member and representative of the New Member Mentoring Program while I was hiking out of the Sierra on a backpack hunting trip.

The conversation went something like this on my cell phone:

"Hello this is Daniel," I answered.

"Hi, this is Jeff Cratty from Russian River Fly Fishers," Jeff responded. "I wanted to give you a call to let you know about the club."

I said, "Jeff thanks for calling. I'm probably going to lose cell service as I'm currently hiking out of the mountains from a hunting trip...." Then my phone cutout.

It wouldn't be until almost half year later that I met Jeff in person at the RRFF Lake Davis fishing outing. I showed up to that outing. I hadn't met any of the club members before the Davis Lake outing, but I felt it would be in my best interest to get involved with this club and put myself out there if I wanted to build friendships and learn from those club members how to improve as a fly fisher. So, I offered to cook dinner one night at Davis Lake. I served up duck burgers to the group and we all broke bread together. We all had a good time eating, joking, and talking about fishing.

Jeff and I started to build a connection from that initial phone call and when I showed up to Davis Lake. There was something special that connected between us and since then, we have been fishing partners at outings ever since. Those first positive experiences led us to enjoy additional fishing adventures together outside of the club outings. That friendship took us to Pyramid Lake November 17-18, 2023. We talked about going in November and our work and family schedules happened to align for that weekend. The planning came together when Jeff secured Cabin #1 at Pyramid Lake. He brought all the food. All I did was drive. We were on our way.

If you know Jeff, he is an early riser and said, "Let's leave at 3 am." My response was, "I don't set my alarm for fishing before 4 am, and I'll be at your house at 4:15." At 4:30 am, we were on the road to Pyramid. The first stop, apart from gas, was a little coffee shop in Truckee called *Wild Cherries Coffee House* for breakfast bagels. The coffee house also has a bakery. The bakery goods are made fresh daily. I highly recommend that establishment if you're in the Truckee area.



Daniel and Jeff (background) fishing the shores of Pyramid Lake.

After that stop we went straight to Pyramid with hopes of landing giant Lahontan Cutthroats. We were fishing by 10:30 am.

The outside temperature was roughly 45 degrees with calm winds until 1:30 pm. Then the winds picked up to

about 20+ mph and the waves on the lake reached 2-feet.

We had a lot of casting practice on Day 1 with zero fish caught and zero bites. Rough day but we kept at it.

Saturday called for a storm and a storm we got. The morning was in the 20's and the wind was already blowing. It only got worse as the day went on. The winds created 4-foot swells and then it started to rain. To be honest, it was enjoyable because we were out fishing together, laughing, learning, and working on my dance moves. Luckily for everyone, Jeff didn't video my fish dance. For hours I danced to country music singer Cody Jinks and Jeff and I continued to practice our casting until I hooked into one.

In conclusion even though the catching wasn't ideal, it didn't matter because fishing isn't always as much about catching as it is about bonding and creating long term friendships. Until next time...

Editor's Note: Let's call it A Blast from the Past. What did The Cast look like and what was its focus 20-years ago? Click to view the set of twelve 2003 Cast issues of on our website. Who was our president and what was the president's message in the January 2003 Cast issue? Then scroll down through the Cast issues and locate the new RRFF president' message of July 2003. What was her message and who was the first women president of RRFF? Email the name of our first women president click, I'd like to know.

Important Notice Spey Clinic on the Russian River Saturday December 9, 2023

We plan to have a clinic on the water, weather and river conditions permitting. See the signup sheet on the calendar page. Click to sign up. We will plan to grab some breakfast in Guerneville and find a nice place on the river to do some casting, maybe check out a couple of river spots if conditions are right. Stay tuned for specific time, location, and conditions.

Prior to that date, if you have never spey cast before and want to check it out or if you need a warmup before the clinic, contact me to see if we can arrange a personal 1 to 2-hour lesson at the pond with up to 1-2 people. I am not certified but I have been spey casting for 20+ years and have taken some classes. It is better if we do it at a time different from the normal pond sessions so we can wader up and get into the pond water and not get in the way of those casting with their single-handed rods. Mike Spurlock

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Calendar of Events

The RRFF Winter Fly Casting Clinics began on Saturday, November 18, from noon until 2:30 p.m. Our casting clinics will now be held on the first and third Saturday of each month (weather permitting).

We are OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!

Beginners are welcome...

We are planning RRFF outings for our 2024 seasons. To view the signup sheets for those RRFF Fly-fishing outings click below.

Click here for a complete list of upcoming RRFF fly-fishing outings for 2024

How to Contact Board of Directors & Coordinators

If you want to contact one or more of the Board of Directors and/or Coordinators below, then click on this link, which will bring you to our website.

Click here.

The names of our Board of Directors and Coordinators will appear. You may click on a name and leave a message for any person below and our website will send it to their personal email address, and they will respond to your message.



RRFF Board of Directors

President: Penelope Gadd-Coster

Vice President & Outings Coordinator: Ed Barich

Secretary: Brendan Galten

Treasurer, Membership: Spencer Bader

Webmaster: Mike Spurlock

Casting Instruction Chairman, Facebook: Steve Tubbs

Casting Instruction: Don Shaw

Membership Badges & Pond Steward: Doug Mackay

Raffle Coordinator: Gregg Wrisley

New Member Mentoring, Casting Instruction: Jeff Cratty

Steelhead in the Classroom: Karl Joost

Member at Large: **Tim Reuling**Program Chair: **Mike Borba**

Member at Large: Daniel Powers

Women's Fly-Fishers' Program: Catherine Miller

Coordinators

Fly Tying: Lee Soares

Casting Instruction: Binky Castleberry

Conservation Advisors: Charlie Schneider & Tom Greer

Women's North Sonoma County Outreach: Leafa Fiore

Fly Rod Building: Rick Baker

The Cast Newsletter Editor: Dave Stone

Russian River Fly Fishers

c/o Spencer Bader 3310 Conifer Drive Santa Rosa, CA 95404



Russian River Fly Fishers Membership Application

I acknowledge in this agreement, and fully understand, that it is a release of liability. I further acknowledge that I am waiving any right that I may have to bring legal action or to assert a claim against Russian River Fly Fishers (RRFF) for its negligence.

This agreement is valid for all RRFF sanctioned events, (fishing outings, picnics, dinner fund raisers, meetings, pond casting clinics, etc.) some of which are open to the public and all of which are covered by RRFF insurance.

As a club member you are approved to participate in certain covered events which are not available to non-members: fishing outings and training for fly-casting certification.

Note: private activities arranged by club members (not sponsored or approved by the club) are not sanctioned and will not be covered by RRFF insurance.

I have read this statement and agree to its terms as a condition of my membership in the Russian River Fly Fishers.

*Indicates required field.		
*Name	_*Date*How did y	ou hear about us? Referred by?
*Address	*City/State/Zip	
*Preferred Phone: Home	or Cell	*E-mail
Occupation	*Signature	
*Circle a (Yes or No): I'm applying as a new member Yes / No or I'm renewing my existing membership: Yes / No		
Single membership - \$50 annual dues Junior membership (live >75 miles from Santa Rosa or age 16-18 - \$25 annual dues.)		
Gold membership - \$1,000 (one-time) Family Membership - \$55 annual dues—List family members:		
The club would like to help you meet your needs. How many years have you been fly fishing?		
Circle any areas you want help with: I would li	ike help learning or improvin	g my cast. I would like advice on fishing equipment.
I would like a lesson in tying knots I would l	like a lesson in tying flies	I would like to have an experienced member mentor me
on local waters or on a club outing. Any other ar	eas not mentioned above?	
*How are you planning to pay?		

Note: Dues paid by a new member joining the RRFF after March 1st of any year will cover the balance of that year and the membership dues for the following fiscal year. The RRFF fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th. IF YOU PREFER, YOU MAY JOIN OR RENEW ONLINE at www.rrflyfisher.org. OR NEW MEMBERS, MAY MAIL THIS APPLICATION TO: