Sonoma County, CA
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RRFF member Mike Spurlock ready to release a bright steelhead. Article, Dave Stone, page 2.

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President's Message

By Daniel Powers

What a great time to be part of the RRFF Club! I am delighted to see increased attendance and raffle participation at our general meetings. If you have not attended in person recently, I encourage you to join us. At meetings, you can connect with presenters, ask questions, learn about fly fishing, and perhaps meet your next fishing buddy. Beyond club business, these gatherings strengthen our club community. The RRFF Board and I would love to see you at the next meeting.

With the help of Mike Spurlock, I am pleased to report that we will receive a check for **just over $8,000 from the City of Santa Rosa**, returning funds the city has held for many years. This money will go directly into our **pond liner fund**, which currently totals **$27,223**. These additional funds will bring us closer to completing the long-awaited pond liner project. This milestone reflects the club's long-term planning.

The board also approved a **$2,000 donation to Casting for Recovery** to help sponsor program participants. The organization uses fly fishing to support women affected by breast cancer. We have proudly supported this cause for nearly **20 years**. This donation continues our commitment to giving to nonprofit organizations and reflects the spirit of our sport and our club.

Gregg Wrisley will lead the club's new **Community Outreach initiative**. The goal is to increase our visibility in the community through parades, booths at local events, flyers, and other activities. Gregg is looking for volunteers. If you would like to help,

please contact him directly. Every volunteer makes a difference.

Mike Borba will follow the programs, events, and initiatives of other regional fly-fishing clubs to find ideas that could benefit our club. He is looking for members to help with this effort. If you have connections with other clubs or enjoy exploring new ideas, Mike would love to hear from you.

On a personal note, I am heading to **Brazil over Thanksgiving** to fish for peacock bass on the **Aqua Boa River in the Amazon**. I am excited about this once-in-a-lifetime adventure and counting down the days. At our **December General Meeting**, I plan to share stories, photos, and lessons from the trip in a full presentation. I hope you will join me.

Thank you for everything you do for our club. Your enthusiasm, volunteer work, participation at meetings, and passion for fly fishing keep the RRFF Club thriving. I hope you are all well and look forward to seeing you on the water and at our next meeting.

Daniel Powers, President

Click link to club's 2026 Calendars & Outing Sign-up Sheets.

Club Activities	Nov. '26 Date & Time	Dec. '26 Date & Time
Fly Casting at the Pond	Daylight Savings Ends 11/1 Casting Clinics are held on 1st & 3rd Saturdays 11/7 & 11/21 12 noon to 2:30	Casting Clinic 1st & 3rd Saturdays 12/5 & 12/19 12 noon to 2:30
General Meeting Vets Building	11/11 6:30 –9:00 PM	12/9 6:30 –9:00 PM **Member Outing Presentations**
Board Meetings	11/18 7:00—8:00 PM	12/16 7:00—8:00 PM
TBD Steelhead Day Trips Ed Barich will announce date. Depends on lifting low flow closure.	November through April	December through April
Putah Creek Women's Outing Jenny Tighe	11/21	**X**

RRFF General Meeting
By Mike Borba

Todd Pond of the Grizzly Peak Fly Fishers will speak about fishing the lower Yuba River, a popular destination for our club's winter outings. Todd has spoken to our club before, and his presentations are very informative. We won't be able to share November's presentation on Zoom, so we hope you'll join us at the meeting!

Swinging Flies with 'Big Fish Mike'
Terrace, BC, Canada
By Dave Stone

History: I met Mike Spurlock shortly after joining the Russian River Fly Fishers (RRFF) during early 2021. He served on the RRFF board as webmaster and took on several other volunteer roles, including treasurer. In August 2021, I volunteered to edit the club's monthly newsletter, *The Cast*. The following year, I joined the board. About a year later, I happily stepped down so the then-president could appoint a female club member who wanted to serve on the board.

As a newcomer to fly fishing, I found the editor role ideal for learning about the sport and its casting techniques. Editing experienced club members' accounts of their fishing adventures for *The Cast* deepened my knowledge while helping them share their stories with fellow RRFF members.

I had enjoyed writing my memoir, but editing a newsletter was new to me. My first solo issue of *The Cast*, published in September 2021, featured Mike's cover story, "Back to the Aniak." He recounted taking his grandson Wyatt fly fishing on Alaska's Aniak River. The article offered valuable insights into fishing Alaska's large rivers and landing trophy fish.

I became hooked on editing and reading RRFF members' articles and reports about fishing destinations in the United States and abroad. I quickly picked up many tips on where to fly fish and why. Did that knowledge make me a better fly caster? Not yet.

Regular practice at the casting pond improved my fly-fishing skills more than anything else. Senior RRFF members and mentors, including Steve Tubbs, Jeff Cratty, and Don Shaw, encouraged me. Their mantra was simple: *"The more you practice, the better fly caster you will become."* That practice made me a better caster, while club members' stories and

reports helped me find promising places to fish. I still experience setbacks as I learn the sport's many intricacies. Mastering fly fishing is a lifelong pursuit, and practice is the engine that brings fish to the net. What about luck? Well, there's that, too.

Over time, I became intrigued by Spey casting, a technique designed for wide, fast-moving rivers. It is typically performed with a two-handed fly rod, often called a Spey rod, that is usually 12.5 feet or longer. Unlike other fly-casting techniques, Spey casting requires no back cast because the fly never travels behind the caster. I liked the concept of setting the anchor—the fly—at least one rod length away on either side of by body, depending on the type of Spey cast, thereby eliminating the need for a back cast.

After taking two of Mike's RRFF-sanctioned Spey casting clinics on the Russian River, I quickly realized that becoming proficient would take many hours, if not years, of practice. I continue to refine my technique.

The Trip: Mike suggested we travel together to Terrace, British Columbia, during September and October 2026 to fly fish the Skeena River and its tributaries for steelhead and other anadromous fish.

Mike had not fished those waters since the early 2000s and was eager to return. He also wanted to visit Yellow Cedar Lodge (YCL), a beautiful post-and-beam lodge built with yellow cedar. Nicolas Dean Outdoors, Inc. (NDOI) had recently acquired it. Mike knew the owners and guides and was familiar with the rivers and fishery. The decision was easy: I was eager to go, too. Tap link.

We arrived at Terrace Airport on a late Sunday afternoon and headed to Yellow Cedar Lodge. Chad Black, the General Manager, greeted us warmly at the airport. The reunion was festive because he and Mike had not seen each other in a long time. Chad then drove us to the lodge, about 20 minutes away from the airport. When we arrived, it was clear that the guides and staff had missed Mike and held him in high regard.

The next day, our first guide, Scotty, picked us up at the lodge for a day of fishing on the upper Kalum River, where his home stood on the left bank. At his boat launch, we unloaded our fishing gear from the truck. Scotty launched his jet boat from its trailer, and we climbed aboard and headed upriver. Rain fell that morning and grew heavier by midmorning, but our waterproof hooded jackets and waders kept us dry and comfortable. Neither we nor the other six anglers staying at YCL caught a fish that day. The second day was different.

On the second day, we fished the lower Kalum River, where Mike landed his first steelhead while wading and Spey casting on river right. He stood thigh-deep about 30 yards upriver from me. I was fishing the edge of a gravel island called *Stumbles* on river right. Suddenly, a fish wildly thrashed a few yards in front of me. Not realizing Mike had hooked it, I considered reeling in my line and casting toward that fish, but at that moment our guide Alex sprinted past me toward Mike, carrying his large landing net. At that moment, I realized the fish was on Mike's line, I reeled in, set down my rod, moved closer, and took a video of Mike fighting the powerful steelhead.

During our remaining outings on the tributaries, Mike had more success with steelhead than I did. Over our six days of fishing, I hooked two steelhead but landed neither; each slipped off the barbless hook. Losing them was disappointing, but the brief fights were exhilarating. *Those types of encounters keep me*

coming back for the thousand casts it can take to land a steelhead

The beautiful Kasiks River Valley reminded me of Yosemite Valley—just as beautiful and fewer people. Our guide Sky Richard provided Mike and me with single-handed fly rods that helped us land coho salmon from his motorized skiff. I landed two coho that day.

Dave and a Kasiks River Coho.

Mike, however, landed five steelhead over the six days of fishing, along with coho salmon and rainbow trout. He fished with patience and composure, and his two-handed Snap-T and Double Spey casts were mesmerizing to watch. With each cast, his fly and floating line unfurled smoothly toward the seams between the river's swift current and the shore, where steelhead rested out of the main fast flowing river. His casts produced no harsh splashes or tangles. Watching him cast and land aggressive steelhead was a pleasure.

Sky Richard, one of Mike's first NDOI guide decades earlier, told me he had nicknamed him "Big Fish Mike." The name suited him—a large, framed photograph on the lodge's dining room wall showed the two of them holding a hefty Chinook just above the river's surface taking both sets of hands to hold that behemoth in place for q quick photograph.

Near the Skeena River and its tributaries, the lodge was an ideal base for catch-and-release fly fishing for anadromous species. The chefs—especially the husband-and-wife team of Mark and Amanda—along with the wonderful women servers and bartenders, provided excellent service and were also skilled fly fishers. All meals were included and delicious, from early breakfasts and packed lunches to dinners. A wide selection of wines complemented the meals, and spirits were also available. *We plan to return.*

Framed photograph of Mike and Sky holding Mike's Chinook gracing the walls of YCL dining room.

Casting for Recovery

By Paul Matzen

CfR Women Participants.

Casting for Recovery (CfR) held its retreat October 16–18, 2026, at Circle 7 Ranch on the Fall River. Participants arrived Friday afternoon, and CfR staff welcomed them with planned activities. On Saturday morning, the women practiced casting while seated

in chairs on the lawn to prepare for fishing from boats. Seated casting is more difficult, but with three people in each boat, CfR Participants must remain seated for safety.

CfR River Helpers.

On Sunday morning, the women met their River Helpers, had breakfast, and boarded the boats for several hours of fishing. Some hooked fish, and several landed them. All boats returned at noon, and CfR Participants joined their River Helpers for lunch. As I looked around, I saw smiles and felt the excitement as the women shared stories about their time on the water.

Gregg and two CfR Participants giving him a thank you hug.

After lunch, three CfR Participants won fly rods and reels in a raffle, giving them equipment to continue their fly-fishing journeys. Three RRFF members represented the club at this retreat: Leafa Fiore, Gregg Wrisley, and me. Leafa has helped at these retreats for so many years that I have lost count. This year, she helped the catering staff prepare breakfasts and lunches. Gregg, who has volunteered for several years, again brought his boat and helped two women learn the art of fly fishing. I thank Leafa and Gregg for returning this year, and all the River Helpers for making these retreats work.

When the weather does not cooperate, the River Helpers adapt to changes in fishing times. I also thank the RRFF Board and members for their continued support of Casting for Recovery, and the CfR staff for their tireless work organizing the retreats. The next retreat will be held in April at Indian Creek Lodge on the Trinity River. Thanks to everyone who makes these retreats possible.

Brothers Fishing Together

By Mike Spurlock

On Friday, October 23, I fished Putah Creek with my brother Bill.

Bill lives on Cantelow Road, about 15 minutes from Putah Creek, but had never fished it. He had recently taken an interest in fly fishing and begun practicing his casting. A few days earlier, we had fished a friend's pond near his home and caught eight to ten bluegills. I suggested fishing Putah and hired a guide, Richard Loft who I had used years before because I had not fished the creek in five to ten years.

On Friday, Bill and I arrived at Monticello Dam on Lake Berryessa and waited for Richard. With agricultural demand declining, flows had recently dropped from 300 to 100 cubic feet per second (cfs). Below us, we could see water flowing from the dam into Putah

Creek. The lower flow rate would make wading easier and provide access to areas inaccessible in summer.

While we waited, I recalled childhood trips to Putah Creek with Bill and our mother. She would bring us from Dixon to swim and play in stretches of the creek now underwater. The dam was built between 1953 and 1957. Mom attended UC Davis from 1938 to 1942, when she was one of only about 20 female students, and became familiar with that section of the creek.

Richard arrived around 8:30 A.M. We put on our waders and drove to find a fishing access point. Three cars were already parked at the bridge, so we continued to the next site.

Site 2 was empty, so we parked, grabbed our rods, and hiked down to the water. Richard spent much of the time teaching Bill. We used a two-nymph rig with a strike indicator, split shot, and 4X tippet—a challenging setup for someone whose practice had been limited to casting a single fly on a pond. We cast to every spot within reach for an hour or two without any sign of fish. Perhaps that explained why no one else was fishing there. Time to move on.

Bill Spurlock and guide with two anglers upstream. Site 4.

Next, we went to Site 4. Two cars were already parked there—not a promising sign—but we decided to try it anyway. At the creek, we saw two anglers upstream on the opposite bank and two more several hundred feet downstream, so we started where we were. We tried several flies, and Bill hooked a fish. It stayed on for only about 10 seconds, but hey, success! A few fish occasionally rose to midges or tiny mayflies. We had a rig set up for dry fly fishing, and I tried it for a while. I thought I had a few strikes, but the fish may have been taking midges I could not see. I don't think our flies matched the hatch; a wider selection might have helped. After several more hours, we moved on to one last spot.

Around 1 p.m., we returned to the bridge site. We walked to the bottom of the run and fished for about two hours. Once again, it was just casting practice: several fish rose, but none took our flies.

Mike's Putah Creek Rainbow.

We decided to call it a day and headed back to our car. Along the way, the guide spotted a rising fish just above the riffle and suggested one of us try for it. Bill was done fishing, so I gave it a try. We waded across the creek and walked about 30 feet upstream to a spot just below the upper riffle. I made several casts to cover the water. On what I had decided would be my last cast, a beautiful rainbow took the tiny lower fly and stayed hooked. The fish put up a strong fight, and I took my time tiring it out. Finally, Richard netted it.

The rainbow was plump and vividly colored. It had taken a small WD40, the bottom fly on the rig. It was probably the most beautiful rainbow I have ever caught.

The next time my brother and I fish Putah Creek on our own, we will research the fishing conditions more thoroughly, arrive early, and bring a full selection of flies and two rods: one for subsurface and one for dry-fly fishing.

How I Lost Two Rods in One Trip

By Gregg Wrisley

As Summer ended, I realized that many outings were all lining up back-to-back over one month this Fall. My adventure started in late October when I headed for the Eastern Sierra with Ed Barich. We had a good time fishing the lakes and streams around Mammoth, CA (see Ed's article in last month's Cast).

Bishop Pass—Aspen Color.

The $400 Fish - On our last day together, Ed and I fished Gull Lake in our float tubes. I trolled a Wooly Bugger around the lake using my 5-weight rod w/out much luck. So, I rigged my 4-weight rod, with a couple of nymphs under an indicator, but that wasn't getting any action either. Fish started rising around me and as I was rerigging my 5wt for a dry fly, I left the indicator rig out in the water. Suddenly my 4-weight rod and reel shot out of my float tube! I watched helplessly and my rod moved rapidly away while slowly sinking. Judging by the speed, a big fish must have taken the fly. As I berated myself, I paddled around to look for it but couldn't see the bottom through the murky water. A few minutes later an 18" trout on my other rod offered a consolation prize for my carelessness.

Reel Recovery - I said goodbye to Ed and headed for Bridgeport (home of the most expensive gas in the country) where Reel Recovery was holding their Fall retreat for men with cancer. Tap on link.

Participants and fishing buddies came from across California and Nevada. Each "Participant" was paired with a "Fishing Buddy" for the two-day program which devoted more than half of its time to fly fishing. All equipment was provided, and every participant caught fish, including many who had never fished before. The experience was deeply moving for participants and buddies alike.

Reel Recovery Trout landed on Robinson Creek.

Many buddies were former participants who said Reel Recovery had made a significant difference in their lives. Focusing on fishing offered relief from everything else they were dealing with. A couple of pairs also encountered a bear while fishing the creek. It wandered down the opposite bank, entered the stream, and began grabbing fish. Then it spotted two gear anglers' stringers. Apparently, it appreciated having lunch on a string and ate every fish!

The next morning, I fished Robinson Creek, catching and releasing many nice-sized fish while stripping a Woolly Bugger.

Fly Fishing without a Reel - The following day, I attended a two-day seminar in Bishop that combined instruction and practice in Tenkara fishing. Tenkara uses a long, telescoping fly rod without a reel. Its tip is about as thin as a mechanical pencil lead, making even a 6-inch fish fun to catch. Yet the same rod can handle fish up to 20 inches. I met a guy who fishes for large striped bass with his Tenkara rod! Another highlight was meeting people from across California who enjoy the same style of fishing, and learning what their fly-fishing clubs are doing. After the seminar, I drove up Bishop Pass Road for some high Sierra Tenkara fishing. The real catch, though, was the incredible beauty of the aspens turning gold, orange, and red along the road as it climbed to almost 10,000 feet. That evening, a wonderful sunset complemented the scenery as I drove north on Highway 395.

Continuing up beautiful Hwy 395 the next day, I arrived at my brother's in Mt Shasta. We spent the next few days hanging out and fishing. In Lake Shasta, we found bass busting schools of shad. Quite a few fish were caught on top with poppers. Next up was the:

RRFF Lewiston Lake Outing - It was wonderful to see everyone and as always, the food was great and I had the pleasure of fishing with Penelope and Glen on Friday and Saturday. After a few more days with my brother, I headed for the Fall River where Casting for Recovery was holding a retreat.

The Second Rod - On Thursday, I hired a guide to fish the river so I could better help the retreat participants catch fish. The Fall River is technical fishing for fish that see a lot of pressure. It was a beautiful day, and we caught a few fish. But as we packed up, the guide closed his truck's tailgate on my 5-weight rod. Ouch! At least I still had the reel and line this time.

Casting for Recovery - Casting for Recovery puts on two retreats a year for women with breast cancer. Circle 7 Ranch graciously hosted CFR participants and "River Helpers". The Helpers had use of a house and boats on Friday and Saturday to get better acquainted with what was working for catching fish. What a deal – Circle 7 is located smack in the middle of the best fishing on the Fall River! I enjoyed hanging out and sharing information with the other helpers. As at the Reel Recovery retreat, I met wonderful people and learned what other clubs were doing and how they were doing it. On Sunday, we spent a few hours fishing with the courageous participants. Many caught fish, but that was secondary to the privilege of sharing time on the water with them. The River Helpers are just one part of the staff that runs this three-day program. Paul Matzen and Leafa Fiore are two of many people in our Club that have helped to make this wonderful program happen for years. CfR is one of a few programs that our Club supports financially. Tap on link.

Fall River Trout landed at Gregg's Boat.

I highly recommend volunteering with either one of these cancer programs. It is an incredibly rewarding experience to work with these brave people. Even with the loss of two rods, it was a great way to spend a month fishing and helping others.

Support Our Local Fly-Fishing Businesses!

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RRFF Obituaries & In Memoriam
To place an obituary notice, send info to Dave Stone, Editor

Russian River Fly Fishers on Facebook

Please click join us online to enjoy:

- **Updates on RRFF Events**
- **Local Flyfishing Information**
- **Flyfishing Instructional Videos**
- **Flyfishing Travel Videos**
- **Conservation Updates**
- **Fly Fishing Industry Updates**
- **Flyfishing Non-Profit & Charity Information**
- **Fishing Reports**
- **Flyfishing Photography & Inspiration**

Our Facebook community has over 1,232 followers and provides links to various vendor and fly-fishing related sites at both local and national levels.

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.

https://www.rrflyfisher.org/board-of-directors--coordinators.html

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: **Daniel Powers**

Vice President: **Mike Samuelson**

Secretary: **Michael Bluto**

Treasurer: **Tracie Koenig**

Webmaster, Membership, Assistant Treasurer (Square): **Mike Spurlock**

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Raffle Coordinator, Education: **Gregg Wrisley**

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Steelhead in the Classroom: **Karl Joost**

Fly Tying at General Meetings: **Lee Soares**

Conservation Advisor, Cal Trout Connectivity Manager: **Charlie Schneider**

Conservation Advisor, Steelhead in the Classroom: **Tom Greer**

Women's North Sonoma County Outreach: **Leafa Fiore**

Fly Rod Building: **Rick Baker**

Casting Instruction, Casting for Recovery: **Paul Matzen**

Russian River Fly Fishers Membership Application

(if possible, we prefer that you use the on-line application on our website where you can also pay online: https://www.rrflyfisher.org/membership-application--payment.html

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 you hear about us? _____ *Referred by? _____

*Address _____ *City/State/Zip_____

*Preferred Phone: Home_____ **or** Cell_____ *E-mail_____

Occupation_____ *Signature_____

* I'm applying as a new member. Circle (Yes / No). I'm renewing my existing membership. Circle (Yes / No).

*Check the box below that is applicable:

☐ Single membership - $60 annual dues
☐ Junior membership - $30 annual dues (age 16-18 or live >75 miles from Santa Rosa)
☐ Gold membership - $1,000 (one-time)
☐ Family Membership - $65 annual dues. List family members: _____

☐ Membership includes a woman who would like to be contacted by our RRFF Women's Group:

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

The club would like to help you meet your fly-fishing needs. How many years have you been fly fishing? _____

Check any areas you want help with:

☐ I would like help learning or improving my fly-fishing cast.
☐ I would like advice on fishing equipment.
☐ I would like a lesson in tying knots.
☐ I would 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 areas 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:

RUSSIAN RIVER FLY FISHERS, C/O MIKE SPURLOCK, 20 SAN DOMINGO WAY, NOVATO , CA 94945