

the buzz on the flyfishing biz

Angling[®]

TRADE



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20 Great Things Happening in Fly Fishing, Right Now

In an industry that faces a number of clear challenges, sometimes it's important to take stock in the great things that are happening. Not so much to pat ourselves on our backs, rather to understand what might be emulated, appreciated, supported, and expanded going forward.

Written by Kirk Deeter

When me made a call for “great things” input, the response from readers was pretty overwhelming. Of course, there was no shortage of suggestions on how “my new product” is the greatest thing ever to happen in fly fishing. But cutting beyond that, we found a number of reasons to take heart in where we are, and where we are going as an industry... hundreds of great things, in fact.

Here are 20 of the best reasons to feel good about the industry:

1. Orvis Fly Fishing 101

I've heard it over and over: “I want to learn to fly fish; I just don't know where to begin.” Orvis has taken the bull by the horns and implemented a nationwide program, Fly Fishing 101, which gives basic instruction on casting and rigging to anyone who shows a glimmer of interest... for free. Local retailers are essential to the program, and the win-win created by bringing “never-ers” through the door not only benefits Orvis and its retailers, but also the sport as a whole. Of course, there have been schools, and grassroots teaching programs for as long as there have been fly shops, but this national, coordinated campaign (now expanding to “Fly Fishing 201”) is a great thing. How do I know? My



10-year-old son went to a 101 course at the International Sportsmen's Expo in Denver... un-named, and incognito. He was thrilled with the experience, and it lit a spark for him (he's a casting machine now) I've been trying to light for months. (Thanks Tom Evenson.)

2. The Fly Fishing Film Tour

I'm going to admit that, before, I didn't get the mission of “making movies of ourselves fishing, to show to ourselves when we're not fishing.” But I see the light now. The Fly Fishing Film tour is a lot more than “playing to the base,” and a lot more than a reason for hundreds of guys in baseball caps to get together, drink beer, and go “oooooh” when a fish eats a fly or jumps on screen. The compelling reasons: Attendance for the tour was up last year by 43 percent. That includes aficionados, for sure, but also acquaintances. The Tour gave out over \$150,000 worth of gear and trips at the shows (thanks to sponsors like Costa, Sage, Patagonia, Scientific Anglers, and The Outdoor Channel). The Tour raised and donated over \$10,000 for Casting for a Cure, and let conservation groups use venues to spread the word about their missions and causes (at no cost). And the Tour sold the majority of tickets through



local fly shops (shops had discounted tickets), which for some, drove serious traffic at a normally slow time of year.

3. Trout Unlimited

For its size (around 140,000 members), Trout Unlimited is clearly one of the most influential, respected and effective conservation organizations in the United States. Thank goodness, because trout rivers (an environmental foundation that supports the sport of fly fishing) are some of the most sensitive and fragile resources. What is heartening about Trout Unlimited is its ability to bridge political persuasions behind common objectives. Now, TU is focused on more progressive means for recruiting and involving younger members... and fly shops are critical to that effort. As issues like access and clean water are more central to the survival of fly shops, the relationship between retailers and TU, on both the national and local chapter level, will only grow.



4. The Gulf Coast of Louisiana

Many of us have experienced the beauty of the Louisiana marshes... there's simply no denying that Louisiana has one of the most interesting, rewarding, and alluring fisheries—especially for fly fishing—in America. And a little less than one year ago, we were seriously afraid that it would all vanish... wiped out by the BP oil spill catastrophe. Well, while the long term impact of the spill is still to be deter-



mined, the fishing reports right now are incredible (a photo of a 38-pound redfish landed by AT contributor Chris Santella arrived via E-mail this morning). The area is resilient, to say the least. If you haven't yet had a chance to fish the region, do it (whether or not you plan to attend the IFTD trade show in New Orleans in August). If you've been, go back, and appreciate one of the greatest things in fly fishing.

5. Consumer Shows

I had the opportunity to take part in the International Sportsmen's Expo in Denver, and also travel to The Fly Fishing Show in Somerset, New Jersey.



photo: Barry and Cathy Beck

They're both great, for different reasons. At ISE, it's all about reaching a "crossover" audience of outdoorsy people. And yet, in Denver, fly fishing was literally the nucleus of that show. Watching the kids (and adults) lined up to take a casting lesson from Cathy Beck at the Sage booth, or from Angling Univeristy, or Orvis 101, was reason for pride. The Fly Fishing Show in Somerset was bustling... across all demographics... old, young, serious anglers, and people just sniffing around. I am still awed as I watch Lefty Kreh pack 'em in around the casting pond to impart folksy wisdom the way only he can. Thing is, it isn't one show versus the other... in this market, we need both, working in synergy. It's all good... really.

6. Anglingtrade.com

You might expect me to blow our own horn a little, but forgive me if I insist that this isn't simple self promotion. *Angling Trade* has completely revamped its website, making it more timely, with breaking news and discussions of key issues. In



short, we've made this a real time resource for retailers, and manufacturers, at no cost to users (thanks to the generous ad support from manufacturers). For example, a few weeks ago, we were able to break a story about a theft wave affecting fly shops... we even posted a photo of the suspects, and the feedback/dialogue that followed boosted traffic through the roof (and hopefully preempted more thefts). We've also started a LinkedIn forum specifically for retailers where topics range from the impact of new SKUs on revenue... selling direct... and E-commerce. On top of that, we've launched a monthly E-newsletter. All of this is meant to help retailers improve their businesses. Please, check it out if you haven't yet.

7. The New Rod Revolution

I don't think I've seen as complete a compendium of quality product, across all categories and price ranges, as what exists today. That's perhaps most clear in the rod realm. From Orvis Helios to St. Croix Rio Santo... from the new Hardy Sintrix to the G.Loomis NRX, there is no denying that the R&D push is on. And that's going to equate to two things... more pressures for all manufacturers to develop better product and better value, and more sales opportunity for retailers to reach new and established customers with products that open revenue opportunities. How all this plays out is, as always, TBD. But what we know is that the innovation dynamic is alive and well in fly fishing, and for the savvy, that means great things.

8. The Economy

Will consumers buy product? Well, that depends on the economic climate, and let's not sugar coat-things; for the last few years the worldwide economy sucked. That's not to suggest that things have completely turned around



yet. But there are glimmers of hope. Stock markets are ticking in the right direction. Jobless claims are inching (sluggishly) in the right direction. Consumer attitudes are tilting, bit by bit, toward the bright side, which leads to spending. An informal AT survey of 20 fly shops has indicated that a majority (70%) are seeing some sales improvement. In other words, there's reason for optimism, if only because we, as an industry, may have found a bottom, and the worm may be turning. If you made it this far, you should feel good. And true, while the economy isn't "great," better may be good enough for right now.

9. Philanthropy in the Industry

There are hundreds (if not more) examples of manufacturers doing good things for various causes, from breast cancer research, to a multitude of environmental concerns. But it's especially encouraging to realize just how much of this also happens at the grassroots (retailer) level. One shining example happened over the holidays, when Fishwest Shop in Sandy, Utah, made donations to multiple organizations in the Salt Lake City region. Fishwest donated approximately 1000 Shirts, 2500 pairs of socks, and some jackets and sweaters spilt between the SLC Mission and The Road Home. They also donated 200 pairs of youth-sized wading boots to The Boy Scouts of America. The total donation valued around \$55,000 dollars. With all that's going on in Utah, vis a vis the battle over stream access (HB141) and so forth, it's hard to imagine that the seeds of goodwill planted by the fly fishing community will not make a lasting, if subtle, impact in the region.



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10. Fly Blogs

With the blog boom came a lot of paranoid old school magazine and newspaper writers who felt the guy tapping out fly prophecies from a laptop spelled the end of mainstream media. It didn't. In fact, it made it better. There's something to be said for easy accessibility of information... for forums where commentary (good and bad) can be exchanged and argued... and for the mindset shift that makes the computer keyboard less of a pulpit, and more of a megaphone. I check in often with Michael Gracie, and Buster Wants to Fish, and Fishing Jones, and others, not only as a magazine editor (I want to know the pulse of the market), but as an angler (I want to be entertained and informed). If anything, the magazine guy is now more accountable, because there are legions of E-critics out there. That's fine. Up your game, or get out of the way. In the end, fly fishing consumers, among the thirstiest for information and discussion, win.

11. Project Permit

To address data shortcomings specific to the permit species, the Bonefish Tarpon Trust (BTT) and Costa Sunglasses are initiating a multi-year Permit Research Program in Florida. BTT plans to work



with sponsors, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, anglers and guides

on this multi-year effort. In coordination with the BTT, Costa has dedicated four years of funding to support a state-wide tagging program for permit. In 2010, Costa made available 6,000 tags for the Permit Tagging Project. The Permit Tagging Project is a statewide effort encouraging anglers and guides to tag

permit. The catch and recapture data will finally inform permit movements in Florida waters, and provide managers with new data that might be applied to management zones. For example: Are the permit that spawn on artificial reefs off southwest Florida the same permit that inhabit the Florida Keys, or do they come from elsewhere; are the permit of Florida a single large population, or are permit populations regional? BTT and Costa plan for this project to be just the beginning of a major, sustained effort.

12. Sili Legs, Z-Ion, and Foam

Even if you're a fur and feather fly tying purist, there's no denying that the advent of synthetic materials have triggered a fly innovation boom. Bugs that float higher, ride cleaner, last longer, and add

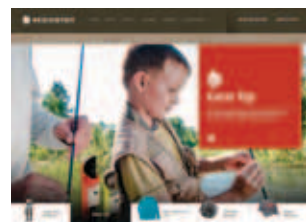


just enough shimmy or sparkle now comprise a good percentage of what

most anglers carry in their fly boxes. I am continuously amazed by the sales power a comprehensive section of a fly shop, dedicated to the latest and greatest in fly tying materials, can offer. Moreover, ingenuity is never a bad thing when stacked neatly in the fly bins. Now... the issue of keeping hackle feathers in stock, with the new fashion craze of saddle hackle hair extensions... well that's another story altogether (check the Currents section of this issue and look for a feature in June).

13. Redington's Reach

Far Bank's Redington brand is making a concerted effort to not only introduce people to the sport through their product line (kids' fly fishing outfits, affordable gear for all ages, apparel that works



as crossover pieces for multiple activities), but it is also focused on marketing

to people outside the fly fishing industry space. A study done within the outdoor industry showed that 88% of outdoor enthusiasts are interested in finding a new outdoor activity to engage in, and Redington believes that fly fishing can be and should be that activity. As such, Redington's just-revamped website (redington.com) introduced a section dedicated to the new fly angler to make the sport more approachable, fun and easy. The company's kids' outfits come with everything needed to get on the water including games and targets on the box to practice at home. And Redington also launched an array of affordable women's apparel that emphasizes functionality for fishing and beyond.

14. Patagonia's Conservation Support

The numbers speak volumes: Patagonia has been giving environmental grants to



non-profit grassroots organizations since 1985, and to

date has given out \$38 million in grants and in-kind donations to environmental causes. Within the water, fish and marine-related realm, Patagonia has given over \$5 million to 332 varied groups working to protect the species and places it designs fly fishing product for. Additional support for fish-related advocacy efforts lies in Patagonia's backing of the World Trout Initiative. World Trout was spawned by Patagonia founder/owner Yvon Chouinard and artist/activist James Prosek in 2005. World Trout gave \$155,000 this past year (\$420,760 since its inception) to 13 varied groups working worldwide on behalf of native fish.

15. The Campaign to Stop Pebble Mine (And the Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska)

As most AT readers know, the Bristol Bay region of Alaska (the world's most prolific wild salmon fishery) faces the threat of a potential gold and copper pit mine operation—The Pebble Mine—in the headwaters of this highly sensitive

watershed. The fly fishing industry, along with hunting interests, native American tribes, and other conservation organizations have spearheaded an effort to protect the region from the mine. The fact that fly fishing interests



have come together, and played a leading role in the effort to protect Bristol Bay is great news, in and of itself. But in early February, the coalition received more encouraging news... the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is planning an assessment of the Bristol Bay watershed to better understand how future large-scale development projects may affect water quality and Bristol Bay's salmon fishery. Great news indeed.

16. The Center for Aquatic Nuisance Species/Clean Angling Coalition



This organization has helped create a standard message that the fly fishing industry and community can stand behind, and ultimately helps protect the industry and our fishing. The group is supported by various entities, from manufacturers to the Federation of Fly Fishers, to individuals. In the context of whirling disease, take stock in how far we've collectively come since the mid-1990s. As reported on Midcurrent.com February 17, "While the disease dramatically changed fish populations in some Western waters, about half of all infected trout populations remained disease-free -- enough to ensure survival." That's great news, but in the context of mud snails, didymo, and a number of other threats, the fight is far from over. See stopans.org to learn more and get involved.

17. Simms Ice Out/Orvis Guide Rendezvous

I have long been on record for saying this, and I will always believe it: "The

sun rises and sets on the fly fishing industry in North America where the working fly guides say it does." Guides are the



pulse of the industry. The gatekeepers and opinion shapers on everything from new product to new techniques for catching fish. The industry, as whole, must do more to ensure standards for guides, and then do as much as possible to help those guides be successful. The Simms Ice-Out event I attended last year, and the Orvis Guide Rendezvous I have also been part of in years past, do an awful lot to enhance the camaraderie among working guides, and give them the latest on gear, etc., which ultimately helps them on the river. The more guides talk with each other, that's indeed a great thing.

18. Midcurrent.com

If you haven't noticed, Marshall Cutchin's **MidCurrent**. Midcurrent.com is methodically carving out a niche as the indispensable nerve center for fly fishing information. Looking for a light human interest piece on a person or place from a small weekly newspaper? You'll find it there. Looking for a comprehensive, fair gear review? You'll find it in the annual Midcurrent Fly Fishing Gear guide. How to? Check. Ask questions? Got it. Much to my chagrin, I even get scooped from time to time on breaking business news by Marshall (and it really pisses me off). But I can't argue, because everything at Midcurrent is free. Moreover, I think it's good, no great, for fly fishing.

19. Embrace-A-Stream

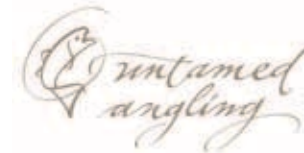
Embrace-A-Stream (EAS) is a matching grant program administered by the national office of Trout Unlimited (TU) that awards funds to TU chapters and councils for coldwater fisheries conservation. Since its inception in 1975, EAS



has funded over 962 individual projects for a total of more than \$3.8 million in direct cash grants. Local TU Chapters and Councils contributed an additional \$12.5 million in cash and in-kind services to EAS funded projects for a total investment of more than \$16 million. Partners include the national Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Costa del Mar Sunglasses, and the FishAmerica Foundation. In 2010, the average grant award was \$5,200. Projects were located in 16 states and included many worthy projects such as native fish passage in Wyoming and Idaho and brook trout restoration in Tennessee and New York.

20. Untamed Angling

Based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Untamed Angling has created several small South American fly fishing lodges that cater to anglers willing to go a step beyond the norm. I had an opportunity to explore the Bolivian jungle with Untamed before they established the now wildly popular



Tsimane lodge, which features arguably the best golden dorado fishing

experience in the world. I can tell you that the boys from Untamed Angling are far from finished with their mission... now expanding the Bolivian operation, even exploring new options in northern Patagonia and southern Brazil. The thing about fishing in South America is that it either blows your mind with something completely unfamiliar to the average gringo (dorado), or it shows you a glimpse of how pure a fly fishing theater can be (northern Patagonia). Stay tuned to rumblings you hear from Untamed Angling and the travel companies they work with... they're opening doors on adventure in a way that nobody else is. 