



MICHIGAN  
**OUT-OF-DOORS**

APRIL 2006

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# Outwit (and Outwait) Springtime Gobblers

**Fly-Fishing  
Best Shared**

**Specialty  
Fishing Reels**

**ALSO:**

- **Timber-to-Trout Legacy**
- **Water:** A Word for Life



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April 2006

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our  
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In the photo by Mark Werner, a mature gobble displays in the spring. In this issue, writer Tracy Breen shares ideas on how to locate and outwit a wild turkey, Wendy Pham describes her dream hunt with her husband, and regular columnists Ed Sutton and Tom Nelson add insights into taking silent toms with gun and bow.

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BY KAREN GILES-SMITH  
Photos by Mitch Smith



**A Woolly Bugger, the first fly the author tied, when wet looks like a leech, a gourmet meal for smallmouth bass, trout, perch, and sunfish.**

**F**ly-fishing may seem synonymous with solitude, but if you ask a fly-fisherman if he'd rather spend the day in waders with the woman in his life or go it alone, chances are he'll say, "I'll take the woman."

Marlene Osborn, a women's fly-fishing instructor says, "My husband and I love to fly-fish together. When we do, other fly-fishermen look at us a little enviously." Apparently, many men are whiling away quality couple time just wishing their women would go fishing.

Maybe men know what they're up against. Seriously, aside from spending time with her man, why would a woman want to wear waders (not very flattering), jump into cold water (not very comfortable), and fling flies around her head?

There must be good reason, because more and more women are taking up the rod.

An estimated 25 percent of fly anglers are women, mirroring the national trend for all types of recreational fishing, Rori Coward, managing director of the American Fly Fishing Trade Association, reports.

Women are discovering the unexpected pleasures and benefits of fly-fishing and, in the early morning hours, they're trading a nice warm bed for the cold, cold water—and loving it.

Jean Stout, a retired stream ecologist and new fly-fishing convert, is hooked on fly fishing for several reasons. "Fly-fishing gets you out into beautiful country where it's peaceful and still," she said. "I think fly-fishing is also an art. Both of these things make it psychologically calming."

Something else about fly-fishing makes Stout happy: People who fly-fish gain an appreciation for rivers and streams if they didn't already

# More women discover and share pleasures and benefits of fly-fishing.

**This brown trout has some growing up to do. Back into the Boardman it goes.**

have it, which means they're more likely to help protect the habitat.

Women who have written and have been quoted in articles and books about fly-fishing explain that they feel centered and focused when in or on the water. It's hard to be in a hurry when you're up to you-know-what in

water with a mind of its own! They say that concentrating on the task at hand amidst the peaceful and picturesque surroundings leaves no room for stress or worry. The

sights, sounds, smells, and sensations suspend them in the present so that they experience each moment to the fullest.

"I see and hear the most unbelievable things," said Osborn, who fishes on the Manistee, Little Manistee, Au Sable, Muskegon, Rogue, and Jordan (her favorite). "There are birds on the rivers I don't see anywhere else. I've seen fawns, blue herons, otter...it's otherworldly."

For those who aren't impressed by nature, another benefit of fly-fishing would interest any woman: Wading upstream tones the thighs. Yes, fly-fishing offers something for everyone. What's more, there's no need to make up fish stories because, for most women, it's not even about the fish.

Practically anyone who wants to can learn to fly-fish—regardless of age, body type, or fitness level. (Legend has it—and many historians believe—that fly-fishing was invented by a woman, a

nun by the name of Dame Juliana Berners, who in 1486 wrote what may be the first work about fly-fishing ever published.

Fly-fishing doesn't take brute strength. In fact, a light touch and a carefully executed, fluid motion are required for casting. Some say that's why women are usually better at fly-fishing than men—women have a knack for subtlety and are more precise and patient.

Although perfecting the cast takes some practice, a lot of practice is not necessary before giving

asm. Then again, some women prefer to fish when the mood strikes, either by themselves or with the companionship of friends. Fly-fishing is handy that way; it can be picked up where it was left off, even after being away from it for a long time.

A great way to test the waters is to take a beginner's fly-fishing class. Many women have enjoyed the relaxed and supportive atmosphere in classes reserved for women. To figure out if she would even like fly-fishing, Stout took a fly-fishing class for women last



**Learning to fly—on the Boardman River. It takes some patience and concentration the first time out, but casting soon becomes second-nature.**

it a go. After learning the basics, beginners can take it from there in any way they like. Learning the details, like which fly works best when, comes with experience.

Some women find that fly-fishing is their passion—they even start to dream about it. They know which fish are biting, where they're hanging out, what stage of the insect their feeding on, and how to tie flies that match that insect—on the spot.

What Osborn loves most about fly-fishing is tricking the fish into believing the fly is real. "That's the sport," she said with enthusi-

spring.

Stout's husband and son are avid fly-fishermen, so she thought it might be nice to join them on their excursions. But first, she wanted to learn about it on her own terms. "When I read about the fly-fishing class for women, I was intrigued," she said. "I wanted to start out with the right technique. It was a wonderful class. I liked that there weren't too many people—there was a lot of interaction."

In Michigan, there are plenty of hands-on learning experiences for women in a variety of formats.

# Common Concerns

- **New kid on the rock:** Some people may feel self-conscious starting out, especially if everyone else on the water looks like they know what they're doing. Remember: even expert fly-fishers had to start somewhere. Relax and have fun!
- **Water safety:** Knowing how to swim isn't a requirement, but having basic swimming skills is a good safety measure and makes people feel more comfortable in and around the water. Most communities offer beginner's swimming lessons for adults. Safety and comfort can also be increased by wearing close-fitting neoprene waders and using a walking/wading stick.
- **Fish empathy:** For those who would rather live and let live, catch-and-release is an option. On some trout waters at certain times, it's required by law. The fish is handled carefully, the hook is removed as gently as possible, and the fish is returned to the water alive.
- **If a river doesn't run through it:** Fly-fishing is possible wherever fish live—on lakes, rivers, streams, or ponds. Ponds are a great choice for casting practice. City and county parks often have ponds where catch-and-release fishing is allowed.
- **Cost containment:** Consider borrowing or renting equipment. The cost of fly-fishing equipment varies, depending on brand and bells-and-whistles, but it's possible to buy the basics for about \$200.
- **Finding your way:** Some people are leery of getting lost in the woods. Help is at hand: the Michigan DNR's Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) program offers a Map and Compass course. Lynn Marla, the BOW coordinator, says that many women have taken advantage of this course. Visit [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr) or contact her at [marlal@michigan.gov](mailto:marlal@michigan.gov) for more information.

“  
*My husband and I love to fly-fish together. When we do, other fly-fishermen look at us a little enviously.*”  
”

~Marlene Osborn

Through the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) program, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources offers weekend Women's Fly-Fishing Workshops (beginning fly-fishing May 1-3 and intermediate May 16-18) on the Au Sable River in Grayling (visit [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr) or send an e-mail to Lynn Marla at [www.marlal@michigan.gov](mailto:www.marlal@michigan.gov) to be added to the BOW mailing list).

M. Chance Flyfishing Specialties in Okemos offers a variety of fly-fishing and fly-tying classes, including a day-long Fly-Fishing Workshop for Women Only that includes instruction, casting practice, and fly-tying ([www.mchanceflyfishing.com](http://www.mchanceflyfishing.com)).

The Flygirls of Michigan, founded in 1996 to provide fly-fishing opportunities for women, offers workshops, classes, and regularly schedules fly-fishing outings ([www.flygirls.ws](http://www.flygirls.ws)).

Other resources for those considering fly-fishing are videos, books, and catalogs. Osborn, who taught herself to fly-fish by looking through fly-fishing catalogs, recommends the Orvis Fly-Fishing School video (VHS, 1999). Another highly-rated video, which is more inspirational in nature, is *Women & Fly Fishing: An Introduction* (VHS, 1999). Osborn also recommends reading (and then keeping in a fly-fishing vest pocket for quick reference) *The Complete Pocket Guide to Fly Fishing* by Fowler and Breuker (1997). "It's a ten dollar book worth a hundred," she said.

The myths about fly-fishing are that it's a man's sport, it's difficult, and it's costly. Fly-fishing

is none of those things. But it is a fantastic way to experience the beauty of Michigan—and it's so much more. As with other meaningful experiences, it's often better when shared.

Be prepared—it's easy to get hooked, as Osborn did 13 years ago. "I don't smoke or drink or chase wild men—not even in moderation," she said with a grin. "Fly-fishing is my one addiction." ■

## How Men Can Help (Husband-tested and author-approved)

Some tips for men who are tired of wishing their ladies would go fishing:

• Don't put on the pressure—it will only backfire. She needs to be willing to learn. Gauge her interest level by asking easy-going questions like, "Have you ever thought about fly-fishing?"

• Ask her if she'd like to join you on a short fly-fishing trip or a weekend at a fishing lodge. She may get tired of sitting on the rocks and decide to give it a go.

• Suggest that she take a beginning fly-fishing class for women with a friend or relative. (Some classes accommodate mother-daughter pairs by allowing children aged 12 and up to participate.) Try making the suggestion in an off-hand way, such as: "I heard that the local fly-fishing shop is offering a beginner's fly-fishing class for women. That might be a fun thing for you and Lisa to do together." Then give her time to mull it over.