

Valley Angler To Weight Or Not To Weight by Bill Thompson

It is common knowledge that fly fishermen thrive on controversy. I have said it before and it is still true. Fly fishermen are a society of curmudgeons and each and every one of us desire to be the head one. I have often thought that the state of New Hampshire should have an honorary position of “Curmudgeon Laureate”. If our legislature ever decides to create the position I am willing to lay odds that who ever gets the job will be a fly fisherman.

I have a friend who is a potential candidate. We talk on the phone quite frequently and the other day we got on the subject of the “true definition of fly fishing”. The state defines fly fishing as: “Fishing by trolling or casting with only fly rod, fly reel and fly line combination with an artificial fly attached, and does not include the use of spinning, spin cast, and casting rods and reels and lead core line”. A fly is defined as: “A hook dressed with feathers, hair, thread, tinsel or any similar material to which no spinner, spoon or similar device is added”. My friend would eliminate the use of weighted lines of any kind and weighted flies as well on fly fishing only water.

At one time my friends’ proposal was the law in New Hampshire. I am no expert on Maine fishing laws, but I do believe that the same was true there as well. Maine, in addition, does not consider trolling as fly fishing.

For whatever reason the law was changed in New Hampshire to allow weighted lines and flies I can not say. One logical explanation might be pressure from the fly fishing industry to allow these means of angling in order to open up the sales of products that lend themselves to fishing deep.

When my friend made his proposal I immediately replied, “You will never get that passed”. My reaction may have been prompted by the large number of sinking and sink tip fly lines I have on my shelves not to mention the numerous weighed flies setting in my fly bins. My friend did acknowledge that he would probably have to be elected dictator for life in order to get the law passed.

The banning of weighted lines and flies does sound a bit preposterous to today’s anglers, but it was at one time thought of as sin to add weight. Not that long ago

sinking fly lines were unheard of. The invention of plastic coated fly lines changed all that and today we have dozens of choices when it comes to picking out fly lines. In addition to sinking lines there are sinking leaders and liquid or paste like products guaranteed to sink your fly.

I would guess that the weighting of flies is an idea that has been around since the first fly was cast upon the water. The idea of weighed flies being morally unacceptable may have come from salmon anglers. Atlantic salmon anglers have always been opposed to adding weight to their flies. This, however, does not stop them from using heavy hooks, some of which have two points, (called doubles), which they refer to as “irons”.

My friends’ proposal is not without merit. If the purpose of having fly fishing only areas is to preserve pressured water or fragile fisheries then the elimination of weighted gear would indeed place an additional restraint on anglers. A skillful fly fisherman armed with an arsenal of different sink rate weighted lines can be just as deadly as any spin fisherman. Regulated to only floating lines and flies the fly fisherman is severely limited. From a strictly conservation point of view this could be a good thing.

From the point of view of someone engaged in the selling of fly tackle it may not be a popular idea. However, as my friend points out, fly anglers would still be able to use weighted gear outside of fly fishing only waters.

I must admit that the idea is food for thought. The likelihood of this ever becoming law is, however, slim to none. Considering the prevailing attitude by Fish and Game officials that Fly Fishing Only waters are not effective as conservation measures, it is unlikely that placing added restrictions would ever be considered. As far as the fly tackle industry coming out in opposition to any such proposal, it is doubtful they have sufficient lobbying power to effectively influence the outcome of any effort to in act such a law.

In the end the issue will be one of those things that fly fishermen love to argue about along with hundreds of other issues. Let’s face it its just one more thing that helps us get through the winter.

See you on the river.