

making short casts can hook a trout or two in nearly every current seam. The fish also hang behind boulders and congregate in the rare pools. Most measure 10 inches or less, but last summer I spotted an olive-backed rainbow in an eddy that would better that measurement by half.

What the trout lack in size, they offset in zest. Forget matching a hatch. Plop any bushy dry fly in a trout corridor and you'll likely entice a strike. Fishing is good from the Custer National Forest boundary, west of Red Lodge, to the Number 1 trailhead. It helps to wander away from the road if you prefer angling in peace, though.

To reach the West Fork Rock Creek, turn east onto West Fork Road (Ski Run Road) at the south end of Red Lodge. After a couple of miles, veer left (west) where the road bends sharply toward the Red Lodge Mountain Resort ski area. Need help? Rocky Fork Outfitters and Guide Service, (406) 445-2598, www.rockyforkoutfittersguide.com, has an accommodating local guide service.

Highland Springs Reservoir, CA By Don Vachini

I proudly watched as my grandson's fly line softly caressed Highland Springs Reservoir's glassy surface; his fly slowly began to sink, but before I could truly admire his casting skills, we were both momentarily distracted by the raucous *whaaacka-whaaacka-whaaacka* call notes from a colony of frenetic acorn woodpeckers. Seconds after pinpointing the taunting noisemakers, Domenic's leader tightened and he was firmly attached to a feisty, palm-size bluegill.

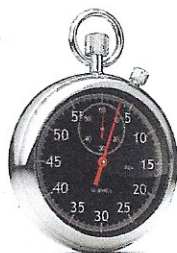
Distractions aside and now totally refocused, we managed to complete our two-hour session on this reservoir, which was formed by a dam on Highland Creek during the early 1960s and is tucked in the foothills of Lake County's Mayacamas Mountains. With plenty of coves along its irregular shoreline and rimmed by oak and digger pine forest, this peaceful, 164-acre impoundment is separated from massive Clear Lake to the east by hulking Mount Konocti. Indeed, Highland Springs offers a perfect alternative, with far less pressure and plenty

of largemouth bass and bluegills, along with bullhead and catfish.

Most of the bass are less than 12 inches long, but they reach more than 3 pounds. With the bluegill population kept in proper check by predation, these feisty sunfish generally attain pleasant size and feed aggres-



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI



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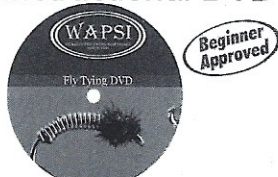
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Northwest FLY FISHING

sively. The best time is usually early spring, when water temperatures reach 55 to 60 degrees and both bass and bluegills are spawning and alert—sometime between mid-April and early May. This timing presents excellent opportunities for shoreline anglers to work near nests or wade up against reeds.

After the spawn, fishy habitat usually translates to tules and partially submerged weedbeds close to shore, and such structure becomes a prime place to target. As aquatic growth increases with the coming of summer, fishing the deeper waters along the dam can prove more productive. From mid- to late summer, predator ambush points switch to lakeside fringes of weeds, drop-offs, and inlet cove channels. While wading becomes a bit more tedious, a float tube greatly increases chances of efficiently (and safely) reaching these deep-water targets.

A floating line is fine for fishing water up to about 5 feet deep, but an intermediate line is better for deeper areas. As bass fry leave the nest, both predator bass and bluegills target the tiny, just-hatched offspring. With these bite-size morsels on the menu, small, dark-colored beadhead nymphs are solid choices for spring action. In fact, on our trip last April, Domenic was slow-stripping a size 10 beadhead Flashback Pheasant Tail along a patch of vegetation when a 2-plus-pound largemouth whacked the nymph. And before long, two other like-size bass took the fly.

Later in the season, a size 8 and 10 Rubberlegs, hopper, popper, or frog pattern plopped alongside cover during low light conditions can create an irresistible surface disruption, often generating explosive strikes. By fall, fish scatter and the weed-choked surface can make fly casting an effort in futility.

Gas-powered boats are not allowed and there is no paved boat launch. Picnic and day-use facilities are available. From a little northwest of the town of Kelseyville on California State Route 29, go south on Highland Springs Road, continue a few miles, then veer onto the signed roadway. The reservoir sits amid the Highland Springs Recreation Area, a rugged and diverse 3,200-acre property with plenty of steep, brushy terrain. Less than a mile away is 60-acre Adobe Creek Reservoir, another warm-water fishery. The County of Lake website, www.co.lake.ca.us, and Highland Springs Trails Volunteers, www.highlandstrailsvolunteers.com, can provide additional information.

When you visit, don't expect huge fish. However, you should experience solitude, fairly consistent action, and some rowdy acorn woodpeckers.

Lower Alkali Creek, WY By John Wood

Tracking my fly, I saw the golden form dart from beneath an undercut bank. The instant it disappeared into the darting shadow I gently set the hook and was into another trout, this one a brown of 12 inches, average for Alkali Creek. Just 100 yards into a 2-mile stretch of fishing, I had already landed all species present in this seasonally fishable little stream.

Alkali Creek quietly cuts through sugar beet and sunflower farmland just north of the town of Ralston, Wyoming, between Cody and Powell on US Highway 14A. Much of the charm of this little stream is that it is for the most part overlooked. The majority of visitors pass it by with no thought of fishing, focusing instead on the larger bodies of water nearby. In fact, at first glance it holds little appeal. The first time I pulled into the parking area I almost turned and left. I'm glad I didn't, and I now make it a point to ply the water here at least twice a year.

Being in the midst of farmland, Alkali Creek suffers from discolored water during irrigation season. Though trout can be caught during the summer months, conditions are tough. For this reason I confine the majority of my efforts here to fall through early spring, when irrigation canals are empty.

In the fall look for an influx of spawning browns to begin entering the creek as soon as air temperatures start to dip into the 30s. This usually occurs