

However, the fishing on the Little Ku more than makes up for the nerve-wracking number of bears. We caught about a dozen rainbows apiece, and most of them were in the 5-pound range—big, heavy-shouldered fish, without any of the lip scars from previous hookings that mark the trout in more heavily fished waters.

As on many Alaskan rivers, timing is everything. These are highly migratory trout, even by the standards of Bristol Bay. In the early season, they stack up near the mouth, feeding on the outgoing sockeye fry. The lower section of the river also provides good early- to midseason dry-fly fishing and nymphing. The best way to fish the lower end of the river is to land at the mouth and walk up a tundra ridge along the west side. You can also land on a small pothole lake a couple of miles upstream.

By August, the trout have started to move upstream in anticipation of the upcoming egg feast. The sockeyes in Bristol Bay streams stagger their spawning period—genetic protection against erupting volcanoes and other sudden disasters. The spawning period can vary by several weeks in rivers just a few miles apart. The trout are tuned into the timetable, following the salmon and moving from river to river. On the early September day we fished the Little Ku, the trout were already starting to drop back downstream. However, it would be at least a week before the first rainbows even showed up in Battle Creek, at the upper end of the lake. Some of them would be the same trout that we had fished over.

The Little Ku, as evidenced by the lack of fishing pressure, is not on the agenda of most anglers visiting Bristol Bay. This was only my second trip in 30 years. But if the opportunity presents itself, and you don't mind a day of high adrenaline, jump on it: fishing the Little Ku is an experience you won't forget.

Sagehen Creek, CA By Don Vachini

With cascading water gurgling a pleasant sonata and the forest canopy shading me, a shaft of sunlight glimmered off the colorful 8-inch brook trout I was releasing. I was lost in tranquility on Tahoe National Forest's tiny Sagehen Creek, home to three species of wild trout, yet little known to anglers.

This intimate, northern Sierra Nevada creek inauspiciously heads amid Jeffrey and ponderosa pines between the eastern slope of Carpenter Ridge and the Sagehen Hills. Several springs combine with seasonal snowmelt to breathe life into this 10- to 15-foot-wide ribbon, which forms one of the arms of Stampede Reservoir, itself created by a dam on the Little Truckee River.

Rainbow, brook, and brown trout were all introduced during the late 1870s, replacing the indigenous Lahontan cutthroat trout, and regular plantings continued until they were ceased in 1951. By then, self-sustaining populations had already become established, completely outcompeting the native cuts.

During the late 1940s, a University of California, Berkeley Research Station was established to study the aquatic ecosystem of this creek, which was considered highly representative of the east-side Sierra. In 1949, the on-site Sagehen Creek Field Station (which provides year-round occupancy for researchers) began monitoring flow rates, stream temperatures, and water quality. Today, this 10-mile-long waterway continues to be one of the most studied in the Sierra while supporting a healthy, albeit underused, fishery.

Benefiting from cold water, the creek's solidly built 8- to 11-inch trout feast on stable and sturdy insect hatches, along with native Lahontan speckled dace, Lahontan reddsides, Tahoe suckers, and Tahoe sculpins. Predominantly browns and rainbows dwell in its lower sections, with brookies dominant throughout the icier upper courses.

On my visit last June, escaping 2 miles upstream from the roadway, I embraced the pristine setting, alive with wildflowers and vibrant flows. Sagehen's diminutive browns and brookies, wriggling in the morning sun, created a

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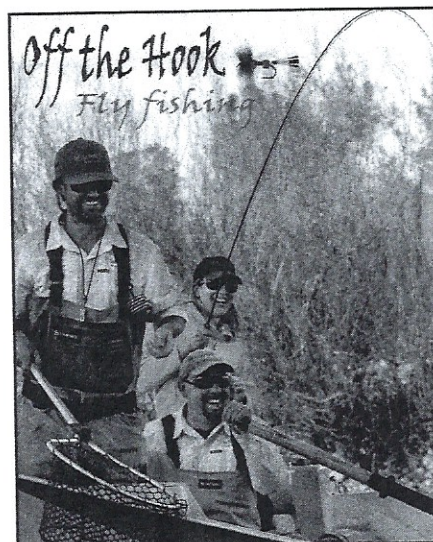


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perfect harmony with the willow-, aspen-, and cottonwood-lined creek. I employed hit-and-run tactics, making only a few drifts before moving on to another likely trout lair. While Sagehen demands a quiet, low-profile approach, I found my 7-foot, 3-weight system, a floating line, and 7X tippet perfect for picking pockets, skirting logjams, or exploring eddies with gentle, short-line presentations, high-stick drifts, and roll casts. Basic attractor dries—Parachute Adams, Renegade, Elk Hair Caddis—work well at first and last light, when the trout feed enthusiastically. Subsurface staples include olive caddisfly and Little Yellow Stonefly nymphs, Zebra Midges, and terrestrial patterns.

Excepting some hefty fall-run browns and spring-run rainbows entering from Stampede Reservoir, few resident trout in the creek approach 14 inches. Three Octobers ago, I walked downstream near the reservoir, hoping for first crack at some early entrants. Here, along a deep and narrow stretch guarded by a willow sweeper, a dark form darted out from an undercut to snatch my beadhead nymph. Soon after, 13 inches of solid girth adorned with flaming red dots filled my palm. Indeed, this handsome brown was an obvious elder statesman of this sector of stream.

From Interstate 80 in Truckee, take State Route 89 north for 8 miles to where Sagehen Creek runs under the road. To reach the US Forest Service campground, continue driving another mile on SR 89, turn left, and follow Forest Service Road 11 for 4 miles. Below SR 89, general regulations guide the creek. From the bridge upstream to the gauging station at the east boundary of the Sagehen Creek Field Station, artificial lures with barbless hooks and zero-limit regulations are in effect. From the stream gauging station upstream to where the creek splits is closed to all fishing. For information, contact Mountain Hardware and Sports in Truckee, (530) 587-4844, www.mountainhardwareandsports.com.

Festival Honoring Norman Maclean Slated for July 10–13

To honor and celebrate the heritage of renowned author Norman Maclean, Alpine Artisans, a 23-year-old Seeley Lake, Montana-based arts organization, is hosting the inaugural In the Footsteps of Norman Maclean Festival on the weekend of July 10–13, 2015. Held in Seeley Lake and on the Blackfoot River, the festival will highlight those who remember Maclean's life in Seeley Lake; those who worked with him on *Young Men and Fire*; and writers and scholars who have reviewed, analyzed, and appreciate his works. Scheduled guests include the forest ranger who walked Mann Gulch with him during Maclean's investigation there; Maclean's students at the University of Chicago; his son, author and reporter John Maclean; and more. Events include tours of the actual fishing holes described in *A River Runs Through It*, and attendees can learn about successful conservation efforts on the Blackfoot River.

Festival events will be held on the Blackfoot at the Double Arrow Resort and at nearby Camp Paxson on Seeley Lake. Camp Paxson was the site of the nation's first smoke-jumper training center and will host the Sunday focus on *Young Men and Fire* and the heritage of smoke-jumping in Montana. Saturday's events center on Norman Maclean's writings and the film *A River Runs Through It*. Monday's events include a writers' workshop and a tour of Mann Gulch, the scene of the tragic wildfire documented in *Young Men and Fire*. More program details are available at www.macleannotsteps.com.

This effort originated in the Open Book Club program of Alpine Artisans, which has hosted 55 noted writers in its author series at the Grizzly Claw Trading Company. Local historical and conservation organizations—including the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Big Blackfoot Riverkeeper, Clearwater Resource Council, Seeley Lake Community Foundation, and Seeley Lake Historical Society—are partnering with Alpine Artisans to make this event a success.

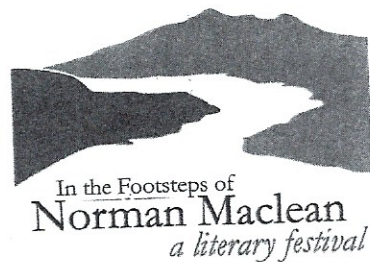


PHOTO BY DANNY PALMERLEE

Western River Conservancy Expands Efforts on Oregon's John Day River

By Danny Palmerlee

Oregon's John Day River is cherished like few other rivers. Its native steelhead run is one of the healthiest in the Pacific Northwest, and its chinook salmon continue to hang on, despite declining populations throughout the Columbia Basin. But the river is at risk. Warming water, degraded spawning and rearing habitat, reduced stream shading, and seasonal water withdrawals all threaten the John Day's native fish.