

PHOTO BY JOHN JURACEK

Golden Stoneflies early in the season when the flows are up a bit. From then until fall, Stimulators do yeoman's work on the river. As fall arrives, streamers and big stonefly nymphs take center stage. Yellow, white, or olive streamers are ideal from September through the close of the season in early November. For fishing near Sheepeater Cliffs or any of the tributaries of the Gardner, small attractors, caddisfly patterns, and smaller stimulators will all produce. On these smaller waters, including Indian and Lava Creeks, you might end up with a brookie or two.

The entire Gardner River is within Yellowstone, so park regulations apply. Anglers can get more information and pick up the best fly patterns at area fly shops: Park's Fly Shop (Gardiner), (406) 848-7314, www.parksflyshop.com; North Fork Anglers (Cody), (307) 527-7274, www.northforkanglers.com; and the shops in West Yellowstone, Montana, and Jackson, Wyoming. Early and late in the season, you can usually get a campsite at Mammoth Campground, but come summer, when the park is at its busiest, you may not be so lucky. Lodging options include Yellowstone Valley Lodge, (406) 333-4787, www.yellowstonevalleylodge.com, or a rental cabin at Yellowstone House, (406) 586-1922, www.yellowstonehouse.com.



Stafford Lake, CA By Don Vachini

During the late 1890s, a pair of pioneer families established dairy farms along the headwaters of northern Marin County's Novato Creek. Nestled amid oak and bay woodlands and coursing through a verdant valley blessed with fertile soils, this pleasant locale became known as the Valley of No Regrets. In 1955, an earthen dam across the creek inundated portions of these nutrient-rich ranchlands. The resultant 245-acre reservoir, named after Charles Stafford, a popular local veterinarian and water board member, became the primary water source for the rapidly expanding town of Novato. In 1960, water diverted via the Coyote water pipeline further bolstered its stores.

Today, thanks to ample food and little angling pressure, largemouth bass and blue-



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

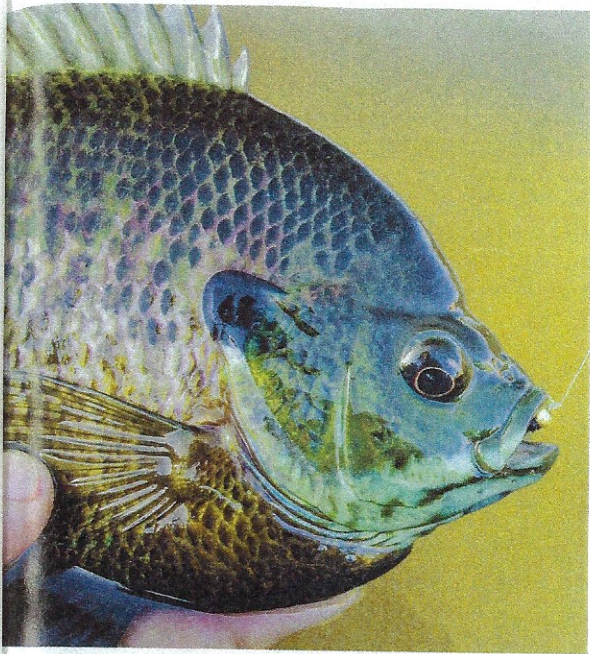
gills thrive in the reservoir. Bass typically range from 1 to 3 pounds and can reach 5 pounds; bluegills often approach palm-size proportions.

Although bucolic views of surrounding pasturelands and dairy cattle reflect the area's rich agricultural heritage, anglers pursuing Stafford's spiny-rayed residents are faced with a glaring handicap. The North Marin Water District (NMWD) strictly forbids boats, float tubes, or even wading, basically creating a fringe fishery. In addition, roughly half of the lake's shoreline is off-limits to the public, including the dam and the entire southern, tule-infested bank bordering the Indian Valley Golf Course. North shore access is available from the confines of 139-acre Stafford Lake Park.

During the 1980s, the lake was drained for dam repairs. As part of a volunteer group that installed "brick and brush" habitat, I was able to closely scrutinize its exposed topography. Armed with this structural intelligence, I continue to draw strikes, retrieving parallel to familiar shoreline contours and around the edges of surface and submerged weedbeds, or fan casting off the points of sloping coves facing the reservoir's island.

Extremely lethargic during winter, bass and panfish invade the shallows as springtime water temperatures near 60 degrees. Now within easy range of anglers, both species become highly aggressive as they protect spawning beds in water between 2 and 3 feet deep. Whether worked through the water column or among soft cover, effective flies for bass include size 8 and 10 beadhead nymphs, meaty Woolly Buggers, cricke

patterns, and streamers in white, purple, or green. However, my odds-on favorite is an orange crayfish imitation twitched ever so slowly on the bottom. Presented during low-light hours, top-water bugs—frogs, rubberlegs patterns, and poppers—can draw explosive rises. Pugnacious panfish viciously attack scaled-down, size 12 and 14, minnow-imitating beadheads dropped near their nests or near brushy cover.



From U.S. Highway 101 in Novato, take the San Marin Drive exit west to Novato Boulevard. Turn right and drive west 3 miles to the paved parking area. There is a day-use fee, and the park closes at 5 p.m. For more information, contact Stafford Lake Regional Park, (415) 897-0618, www.marincounty.org/depts/pk/divisions/parks/stafford-lake, or the NMWD, (415) 897-4133. Access impediments definitely give Stafford's fish the upper hand. However, persistent visitors seeking a return to basic angling shouldn't have any regrets in this flooded valley.

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Northwest Fly Tyer & Fly Fishing Expo Slated for March

By Sherry Steele

The 29th annual Northwest Fly Tyer & Fly Fishing Expo will be held March 10 and 11 at the Linn County Expo Center in Albany, Oregon. Sponsored by the Oregon Council of the International Federation of Fly Fishers (IFFF), the event features 200 demonstration fly tiers, as well as nearly 100 different classes on casting, tying, and fishing. More than 50 exhibitors sell all manner of fly-fishing-related products. John Shewey's Spawning Purple is the signature fly for 2017; Shewey, one of the many demonstration tiers at the expo and the editor in chief of *Northwest Fly Fishing*, created the fly in the 1980s, basing the design loosely on David McNeese's hairwing Spawning Purple (the story of the fly's genesis and how it came to carry the same name as its forebearer is told in Shewey's recent book, *Classic Steelhead Flies*). The Northwest Fly Tyer & Fly Fishing Expo generates revenue to fund two scholarships for Oregon State University students, conservation projects, and IFFF club grants. For more information about the event, visit www.nwexpo.com.



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