

# LECTU

LITTLE ELKHART CHAPTER TROUT UNLIMITED

## TROUT LINES



### President's Message

By Mike Beachy

Late spring fishing is a good time on the Little Elkhart River. This year in particular has been stellar. The opening day of trout season at the end of April had the river running at about average summer level and pretty clear. Soon after it started to rain and it hasn't quit until early June. May was high and off color to full blown muddy. The river has been so high that any little rain takes it out of its banks. All the fields around the flowage were freshly plowed in preparation for spring planting made the river turn turbid in a heartbeat.

Under muddy high water available to have any fishing. That said there of time when the river trout could find flies. evident that the Little believe the State stocked high mortality they stocked due to the cover their inability to see. This who want plenty of fish in trout expeditions.



there is no magic trick resemblance of a good trout were some micro windows began to clear enough the During these times it is Elkhart is full of trout. I rainbows have escaped the normally receive when first of high muddy water and is good news for all of us the river for this summer's

Rainbows seem to be like every overhanging holding a rainbow. The river system for more than six weeks. Their color still have them looking like hatchery trout but their behavior has improved drastically. They are not as ignorant as they were upon stocking and have wised up pretty quickly. They are very aggressive and hit a fly like a ton of bricks. It seems like every time I get a nice one on I think "This has to be a holdover rainbow from last year's stocking" but as it turns out they are this year's fish. They are just aggressive and are willing to blast a hanging streamer under cover.

everywhere now. It seems bush and submerged log is rainbows have been in the

Browns too have started to come around. Browns kind of get messed up for a couple weeks after the State deposits all those hatchery rainbows into the river. They do not know what to do with the helter-skelter of trout swimming all over the place straight from the hatchery. After six weeks the order has seemed to return to some resemblance of balance. With this the browns are starting to act like normal again.

All the high water should make for good fishing on into July if not all summer. Along with the good trout fishing should be a bumper crop of mosquitoes. There is a lot of standing water still in the floodplain of the river that has not seeped into the ground. Clouds of tadpoles seem to be everywhere in these mini-swamps. I hope they eat mosquito larvae.

## Summer Work Days

Every summer LECTU does habitat improvement projects on the Little Elkhart River. These projects have ranged from cleaning up trash that accumulates during times of high water to full scale permitted projects to prevent bank erosion with installation of current deflectors.

In 2016 we worked almost exclusively on the meadow in the middle of the catch and release section. This section was problematic because it had an accumulation of sand and lacked in trout cover. The wide sweeping curves had banks that were worn and abraded. The banks breaking down because of erosion, causes the river to stay wide and shallow. Our work consisted of bank stabilization utilizing log retainer walls on the outside of the curves and deflectors to direct the flow towards the outside of the curve. This increase the depth and flow against the bank yet avoid the bank erosion experienced in the past. The river is constricted and deeper moving the sand off the underlying gravel and re-depositing it on the inside of the curve. Posts and logs were anchored to the bottom to hold the deposited sand. The end result is a river channel that is skinny and deep and the river bank is reinforced so the property owner does not have further erosion. The property owner is happy and so are the trout.



There are several places in the river where ash trees that have been killed by way of the Emerald Ash Borer, are falling over or breaking off the tree tops and creating some large log jams. Initially these jams actually help the habitat by creating a deep run or hole, accelerating the flow and provide overhead cover. In the long run these jog jams can accumulate more and more debris. The jam then becomes too tight and the flow starts to back up while the water flow attempts to find a way through. Often the river cuts around the jam rather than through it. This creates bank erosion, widening the river around the jam rather than through it or under it. In order to constrict the river and leave as much overhead cover as possible the log jam must be secured with cabled to the bank and to the individual logs in the jam so that opening a hole in the middle doesn't allow the entire jam to break apart and float downstream causing the same thing all over again. We call this a log jam rearrangement. We usually do not attack every logjam in the river. We will wait and watch to see if the jam is going to be a problem prior to addressing it.

Where we will focus our stream habitat work this summer will depend on access, water levels and importance. The more volunteers we have helping the more we can accomplish. The following Saturdays are scheduled as workdays: **July 8, July 22, August 5, August 19 and September 9.** We meet at **Riverbend Park in Middlebury at 8:00 am** then drive to the work site. Generally we conclude our work session by 12:00-1:00. You are always free to come and go as you need.

The work is strenuous but fun. Usually you come away wet, bug bit and satisfied with a job well done. You should wear old waders, gloves that can be worn in the water and an old long sleeve shirt. We have most all the needed equipment but an extra chain saw could help depending on the task. Working on the river is more than just cutting logs and cabling wood. It is a great way to get to know the river and we are always talking about fishing so there is a lot of good information being shared. The camaraderie built among the volunteers is unbeatable. Please consider helping out this year. Contact Mike Beachy for questions at (574)596-4929 or [beach@bnin.net](mailto:beach@bnin.net) otherwise just show up on the designated dates at the Park.

# Summer Trout

by Mike Beachy

I get asked all the time. "I'm going to trout fish the Little Elkhart River this weekend. What should I use?" Fishing the Little Elkhart River during the summer can be a challenge because it seems like everything works to some degree. It's just a game of figuring out what works the best on any given day.

The trout fishing technique I choose depends a lot on the conditions of the river. Generally the river is medium low and clear but it is not unusual to get a monsoon rain that brings the water level up and out of the banks.

When the river is muddy the first thing I go for is streamers. Just like spring and fall there is nothing like streamers to get trout motivated especially big browns. It has been said that the majority of large brown trout are nocturnal feeders. That is why the nighttime mouse fishing can be really good for targeting big brown trout. The large browns feel comfortable at night because during the clear summer water conditions these trout are vulnerable so they come out from cover at night only. Muddy water does the same thing as the cover of darkness and the bigger browns come out of their hiding spots to feed. Under muddy conditions these browns can be found in the shallow flats and can be taken utilizing oversized streamers, heavy rods and stout leaders. If you are hunting trophies this is your best shot. You may not get many but those you do get will most likely be impressive.

When the water is good but clear you can do fairly well on small streamers but you need to be stealthy about it. I usually will lengthen my leader/tippet in order to get the fly away from the fly line that gives the rig away. The streamers I lean toward are smaller Clouser Style streamers no longer than 2 inches but tied on a fairly large hook to give the wide hook gap needed and to keep the hook point near the tip of the tail for short tail hitters. The retrieve is about 10-12 inch strips with a pause after each strip. A "with the current" retrieve is the best imitation for an injured minnow but not all places give you this luxury so I cast them all different directions searching for active fish.

Another good technique for good flows and clear water is to Czech nymph the deeper runs. This takes a lot of practice and a lot of flies. The Little E is full of woody material lodged into the river bottom that will snag your flies. It helps to use jig style tungsten bead nymphs that ride hook up with barbless competition hooks. This technique puts the flies right in the trout's face and the trout like the safety of the dark deep spots. It is surprising how the trout will hold in these areas even when you are fishing really close to them. The more flash the fly has the better especially if you stay with green-olive hues. Approach the run from downstream and wade slow and stealthy. A long rod helps with reaching all areas of the run and controlling the drift.

In the heat of the summer the river can get low and gin clear. This can be the most enjoyable conditions to fish under even though the trout are very spooky. This is when I go into ninja mode and start jig fishing the log jams. I try to stay on the bank as much as possible and use a heavy dense flashy fly twitched in front of the underwater obstructions like a large log. The trout utilize these ambush spots under the logs and shoot out to grab the nymph as it descends into the hole underneath. This is short line fishing and I generally use heavy tippet because the fights are close to

heavy cover so you have to horse the fish out of there immediately if you expect to land them.

Another good way to take trout under low clear conditions is casting a dry fly on a long light leader/tippet. I fish a dry with an upstream and across cast and fish them everywhere there is some flow. This includes not only the deeper runs but also the shallow log strewn flats where normally you would not think to fish in low clear water. The trout use these logs as cover and it is surprising how many trout will hold in these tiny pockets. My favorite dry fly is something with deer or elk hair and rubber legs like a Madame X, Tarantula or Elk Hair Rubber Caddis. There is a lot of caddis that hatch in the summer and lot of terrestrials on the banks and these flies double for each. Foam flies are nice too if you can find them with a short large hook. Because the takes are visual this can be very exciting. Don't rule out soft hackles and hopper-dropper rigs for these shallow hiders either. Keep quiet, wade slow and listen for feeding trout.

The time of day becomes paramount in the summer time. Early mornings and late evening are the best time to be on water. That is when the most bugs are hatching and the trout the most active as well. Mid-day sun is not conducive to good trout fishing and the trout are not as active as they are at first light or low light conditions. Shade also is almost as important good bottom cover. I have seen nice trout laying out on the sand in the middle of summer provided they are in the shade. trout has eyes but no eyelids and their pupils do not constrict like ours. They do not like the bright sun.



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Summer fly fishing can be a very good time to be on the Little Elkhart River but please be aware of the water temperature. Trout in general and especially the rainbow trout have a difficult time reviving in the summer time. The water temperatures can get warm this time of year and warmer water cannot hold oxygen very well. If a trout is overplayed it may not be able to recover and will die. Please carry a thermometer and refrain from fishing if the water temperature approaches 70 degrees. Bug spray and a good pair of polarized sunglasses are a must. Wear a hat with a dark under bill in order to spot trout. Sight fishing trout is one of the most rewarding ways to fish and this is the time of year to do that. Look for shadows of the trout on the bottom or movement of a tail or feeding trout. It is like mushroom

hunting, once you start to see them you will see them everywhere you just need to train yourself to start looking.

## Spring Outing Report

The Annual Spring Outing held Saturday May 6th was a big success. We had around 80-90 members attend despite a gloomy morning. It threatened to rain but held off and turned out to be a nice day by late morning.

To recap the event- Andy Kitson and Mike Beachy gave instructions and in stream demonstrations on different fishing techniques especially for the Little Elkhart River. Charlie Ray was on hand to give fly casting instruction and Court Walker served as judge running the fly casting competition. Keith Loutenhiser served as tour guide giving the stream access tour. Will Winans guide and owner of Big River Fly Fishing presented the featured program on fly fishing smallmouth bass on the Kankakee River and demonstrated some of his favorite smallmouth bass flies. Bill and Penny Myers and crew served up a cookout luncheon. Bob Hagin and Steve Mack provided a nice array of prizes for the fundraising portion. Many LECTU volunteers assisted in multifunctional capacities as greeters, ticket sales, setting up and tearing down. All in all the event went smooth and it is our hopes that everyone had a good time and came away with all questions answered and a feeling of being included in the chapter.



This year the Adopt-A-Trout grand prize of an Orvis Helios 2 rod and the Mirage fly reel was won by Tim Pote from South Bend. The second prize of a Dave Prichard custom built bamboo fly rod went to Phil Mussallem from Fort Wayne.



Next years event is scheduled for Saturday May 5th 2018. It will be a very good program that you will not want to miss. Our plans are to bring in a "big name" speaker. Details are not complete but we are going to have the entire Outing surrounding our guest. Watch for details later this fall.



# San Juan Worm, America's Gift to Fly Fishing

by Mike Beachy

Many years ago, I started fly fishing in Colorado. My guide buddy had me using a San Juan worm as an attractor fly in a three-fly nymph rig. The theory was that this was a large fly that would garner the trout's attention and in doing so they would then see the tiny nymphs that were the target flies. The San Juan worm would also take some trout since worms are in the rivers and an easy high protein food source. I carried that information with me and started to utilize San Juan worms in the Little Elkhart River with good success.

**Hook:** Any basic nymph hook  
**Thread:** Thread to match color of chenille  
**Flash:** Strand of flashabou contrasting color to chenille  
**Bead:** Glass or metal  
**Body:** Micro chenille



About a year later I was acting as a guide for a local club that was putting on a beginner's trout fishing class on the Little E. I had the newbie's using San Juan worms because they were easy to use and they work and they were doing pretty well. One of the guys who headed up the class told me in no uncertain terms that I was supposed to be using "real" flies and teaching the students the "proper" way to catch trout.

I really wasn't that experienced at the art of fly fishing at that point in my fly fishing career and I kind of felt like I was doing something wrong or cheating.

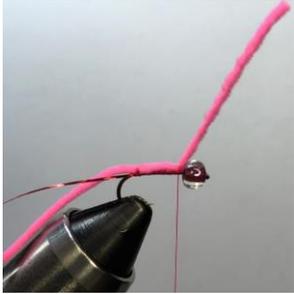
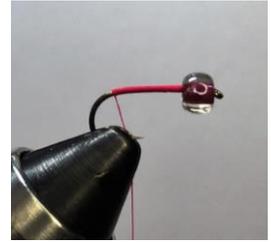
I continued to use worm flies but didn't talk about it all that much because of guilt. I guess that some fly-fishing purists look down their noses at San Juan worm fishermen.

This past summer I was fishing the Blue River in Colorado. My buddy and I were rigging up in the parking area when a couple of cars pulled in loaded with guys. They were speaking a foreign language as they starting to rig up when one approached me to ask how the river was fishing. They turned out to be the national fly fishing team from Finland and they were there to pre-fish this section of river prior to the world fly fishing competition. After some interesting exchange of information, the Finish guy points to my rod and says that the bright pink San Juan worm I had on was "America's gift to fly fishing". He explained that although it is not a fly he could use in competition he uses them a lot in Finland to catch grayling. I figured if these guys can see the value in a worm fly it must be legitimate.

Worms are almost always in the Little Elkhart River system. Earthworms are constantly getting washed into the river and as a bait fishermen originally, I know trout eat them. There are sand worms, midge larvae and caddis all worm like creatures living in the river. The Little E also has leeches and chestnut lamprey that in the early stages of life is essentially a worm. If trout fishermen are supposed to "match the hatch" I don't see any reason why a worm is any less of a food source imitation than a grasshopper or mayfly nymph.

The San Juan worm is an easy tie. Basically, chenille tied on a hook. This version is dressed up some and has been a good go to fly on the Little E. The glass bead is included for a little sink to the fly and gives the fly a little bulk in the middle kind of like the band on a night crawler. The flashabou adds a little sparkle for flash. I have found that the hot pink is a really good color in stained water or high water situations.

Step 1) Place glass bead onto hook up to eye. Start thread behind bead and lay down a good thread base to the bend of the hook.



Step 2) Tie in a single strand of flashabou at thread stop. Situate a 3-inch piece of ultra-chenille so that there is the same amount off each end of the hook. Tie in chenille with three or four wraps one on top of the other at the back. Lift chenille and wrap thread forward to right behind the bead tie down again with four tight wraps.

Step 3) Apply a thin coat of Zap-A-Gap on thread between tie off points then spiral wrap the flashabou forward over chenille. Tie down flashabou and tie off thread and cut thread.



Step 4) Insert a wire bobbin threader through glass bead and insert just the tip of the chenille in wire. Pull chenille through glass bead. Sometimes this is tight and the bobbin threader can strip off fluff on chenille so only insert the tip.

Step 5) Push bead back over the chenille to gain space behind hook eye and restart thread. Lay down thread base behind eye then tie off and cut thread. The chenille is not bound down. Place some drops of Zap-A-Gap on thread and push the bead back forward against eye. Glue will hold bead in place.



Step 6) Trim chenille length to a tiny bit longer than desired length then burn/melt the tips of the chenille with a flame. This fuses the chenille. Be careful to not light the chenille on fire.



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