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**OUR REGION**

by William Shannon

# The Worthy Adversary

*Fly Fishing in our Region*

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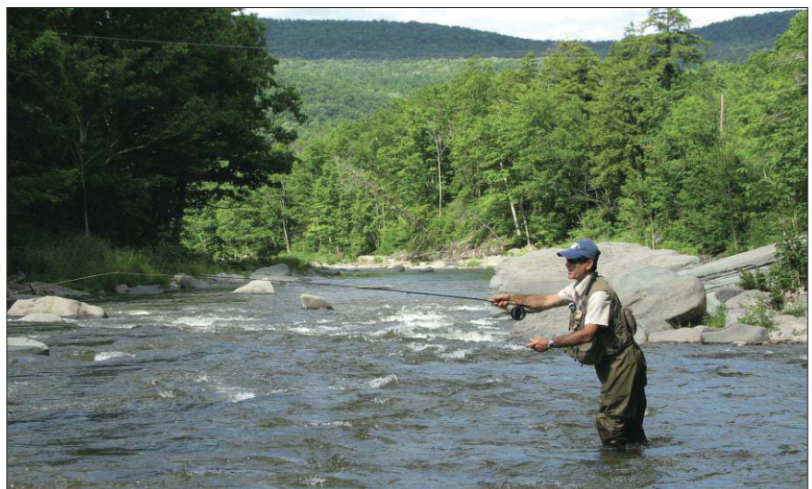
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An angler casts his line into a stream in the Catskills. Photo courtesy of Hunter Mountain

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The sport is as majestic as the scenery: An angler's fly rod darting back and forth smoothly, the line dancing to the water's edge. After a rough winter, it's that time of year again.

Our region, rife with beautiful streams and rivers, also happens to be quite full of opportunities to join in on what's been called the contemplative person's recreation.

Fly fishing can be a meditative experience, poetic in its grace—once you get the hang of it, at least. In the beginning, grace may well be elusive.

Harry Desmond, owner and guide for Berkshire Rivers Fly Fishing, based in Lee, fell in love with the sport while he was living in the west working at Yellowstone National Park. But, he says, fly fishing in the northeast was his true education. Why? Because, he says, with more anglers chasing them, many fish here become smarter and tougher to catch than the fish in Big Sky Country.

Trout are chief among the species of fish for which anglers have a deep appreciation.

As the mountain snow melts and the rivers start to warm this month, fly fishermen will don waders and step back into the water for another year playing what amounts to an intricate chess game with what Desmond calls "a worthy adversary."

As various species of bugs and flies start to hatch in spring, wild trout awaken from their winter lull and start feasting. But they have a keen eye for unnatural movements. As the different hatches occur, anglers try to keep up with trout by choosing the best fly for the moment. As Desmond says, "You're at the mercy of what Mother Nature does with the bugs." Though most people's vision of fly fishing involves an angler using a dry fly, casting the fly continuously to briefly touch the water's surface, Desmond estimates that 85 percent of the time wet flies, like nymphs, which are designed to sink below the surface, are what brings results.

Many fly fishermen spend winters fighting cabin fever by tying their own flies and dreaming of spring. State departments of conservation also choose spring to stock new trout into the streams and rivers of our region.

It's not hard to pick up the basics of fly fishing. Using a guide service is a great way to wade confidently into unknown waters.

Desmond's company is in its fifth year. He says a lot of his clients are visitors to the area, coming from all over the country. "They're looking for an adventure in the Berkshires," he said. Desmond takes clients on wading and floating trips. For one



Harry Desmond, of Berkshire Rivers Fly Fishing, displays a brown trout. Photo courtesy of Berkshire Rivers Fly Fishing

person, a wading trip costs \$250; for two, it's \$350. A floating trip is \$350 for one; \$450 for two. (More pricing and information can be found at [www.berkshireriversflyfishing.com](http://www.berkshireriversflyfishing.com).)

He caters trips to guests' schedules and the outings run anywhere from four hours to eight hours. Though Desmond is based in Berkshire County, he also sometimes takes clients to southern Vermont and northern Litchfield County in Connecticut. He focuses on about 10 regional streams and rivers. Some of his clients are pure beginners and some are expert fly fishermen looking for trophy fish—for the experience of the pursuit and a picture (Desmond's operation is catch-and-release).

Desmond, a native of the Berkshires, said fly fishing in the northeast is on par with the west. Two of the things that make the Berkshires, in particular, a great place to fly fish, he said, are the serene natural beauty and the area's diversity of culture.

"You can be in the middle of nowhere on a river catching trophy trout and then an hour later you can be sipping wine and listening to the Boston Pops at Tanglewood," Desmond said. "The whole diversity of the area makes it awesome."

There is that philosophical side of the sport that adds to its appeal as well.

Desmond says part of the point is to allow his clients to "leave behind the daily grind and realize you're coexisting with the natural world...A lot of times when we're out I ask my clients what's on their mind and they look at me and say 'nothing.' And I say, 'Exactly. That's what it's all about.' That's the beauty of the sport."

Another operation in Berkshire County is Allure Outfitters, based in Pittsfield. They offer half-day and full-day wading and floating trips. More information can be found at [www.allure-outfitters.net](http://www.allure-outfitters.net).

In Litchfield County, Housatonic Anglers also offers a variety of wading and drift boat trips. For pricing and more information, visit [www.housatonicanglers.com](http://www.housatonicanglers.com).

Over in New York, Columbia County has a variety of Hudson River tributaries that are well-stocked. For information on streams in Columbia County



Casting a line in the Berkshires. Photo courtesy of Berkshire Rivers Fly Fishing

that receive stocks of trout this spring, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/23329.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/23329.html).

Farther west, in the Catskills, the Willowemoc Creek and Beaverkill River have legendary status in the fly fishing world. In the late 1800s in the Catskills fly fishing itself was greatly popularized—many would say modern fly fishing was born there. The Catskill Fly Fishing Center & Museum in Roscoe makes for an excellent trip—and you can count yourself as living history if you wade into the waters.

Also in the Catskills, the Schoharie Creek is a stocked trout stream that provides beautiful backdrops in which to get lost. Featuring guided trips and fly fishing lessons on the Schoharie Creek and the Esopus Creek, the Hunter Mountain Fly Fishing School is a great potential asset to beginners. For more information on the school and the packages offered, visit [www.huntermtn.com](http://www.huntermtn.com) (see summer activities).

Best of luck angling and happy spring. 🍷



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