

# CrossCurrents

Montana's Premier Fly Fishing & Orvis Stores

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Established 1994

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## INTRODUCTION TO FLY FISHING SCHOOL

### Stream Etiquette

It used to be that most new fisherman were gradually introduced to the sport of fly fishing by a family member or friend who had a fishing background, and various rules of behavior would be acquired over time and adhered to as a matter of course. Nowadays, we welcome many adult newcomers to the sport with no tradition to rely on for guidance so streamside misunderstandings can easily arise.

The rules of streamside behavior are few and easily observed. Mostly they revolve around common sense, courtesy and consideration of others sharing the stream.

A section of water belongs to the first fisherman fishing it. It is inconsiderate to crowd him/her and just "how close" an approach is permissible is an obvious variable.

A slow moving or stationary fisherman has every right to remain just where he is. If you are moving, leave the water and walk around him, being certain not to disturb his fishing or the water he might be working. In a similar vein, a fisherman may be resting a pool or planning his next move. It is still his water, and you should not jump in without his permission.

A fisherman working in an upstream direction has the right of way over someone coming downstream. Wading upstream against the current forces you to move slowly, cover less water and you are approaching the fish from behind. The fisherman working in a downstream direction covers more river quickly, and has the potential to disturb more water, i.e. careless wading could send silt or debris washing downstream to alarm fish someone is working over.

Many streams flow through private property. Recognize access across that land is a privilege, not a right. Respect private property. If unsure about access, ask the landowner politely. On ranch properties, don't trample crops, disturb livestock, or leave gates open. Leave no litter at streamside. In fact, get in the habit of picking up discarded monofilament, cans and other trash, and carry them out to be discarded

properly. [Montana has a wonderful Stream Access Law that allows the public to access rivers and streams if the individual(s) remain within the *ordinary high water mark*. Montana is the only Western state in the nation with such a law. It is under constant attack in the courts by some selfish landowners - mostly out-of-state, absentee landowners - who want their own private trout stream. Please support organization that actively defend this law, like Trout Unlimited, and do nothing to give the stream access foes ammunition for their cases. Basically do what was mentioned earlier in this paragraph.]

Recognize that skilled anglers and/or heavy fishing pressure with excessively liberal limits can greatly reduce the available fish populations in any stream unless voluntary restraint is practiced. **A legal limit is not a quota**, let your fishing motto be - "limit your kill, don't kill your limit." Orvis and CrossCurrents encourages a catch and release philosophy of angling, allowing fish to mature, reproduce, and live to challenge other anglers in the future. [Remember, Montana is unique in that we have not stocked any river or stream with hatchery fish since the late 1960's. We rely solely on wild trout to produce more wild trout. So the fish in the river today have the awesome responsibility of perpetuating the species. Therefore, it should be our awesome responsibility to protect those wild trout and their habitats so they have the best chance to make lots of strong, healthy fish in future! A few years ago we outlawed the hunting of big game animals on "game farms" in Montana with the understanding that there is a difference between wild animals and "domesticated" versions of those animals. We have a fair chase ethic with hunting wild animals - we too should have a fair chase ethic with fishing for *wild* trout.]

Multiple recreational uses of streams are common. We may share the resource with tubes, canoes, drift boats, rafts and other float crafts. It is the responsibility of the floater to recognize that the wade angler has established a position before the boat floated into view. The floater should try to pass behind the angler. If the space doesn't permit this, the floater should float by quietly and with minimum disturbance. [Polite communication by both the rower and wader is always a help in this circumstance, thereby avoiding many of the contentious issues that surround the hotly debated "Row vs. Wade" on our rivers!]

In summary, behave on the stream towards other anglers, as you would like them to behave towards you. Welcome to the wonderful world of fly fishing and have fun!