The Conservationist

PPTU.org

Potomac-Patuxent Chapter Trout Unlimited

Sep 2025 • Published monthly except June, July, August and December

"Fishing Trips and Fish Stories"

Guest Speakers: PPTU Members

Sep 17th, 2025

It's been a long, hot summer. Time to catch up with friends old and new. Many of us vacationed this summer to exciting locations. As we get together for the first time in several months, the time has arrived for us to channel our inner child and show our friends and family of PPTU members what we've been up to all summer. Tall tales and photos will vary from close to home trips to wonders outside the state lines. Several members have great trip information to share with others in search of relaxation, sightseeing, and the occasional trophy fish. Come on by, put your feet up, relax, and imagine yourself in the waders of your fellow PPTU members. Grab some popcorn and a cool drink, ask questions, or just relive some of the fascinating places our members will be sharing.

– Scott Cernich

Sep 17th Chapter Meeting

Laurel Volunteer Fire Department

7588 Van Dusen Road, Laurel, MD 20707

Time and Day: 7:00 PM, Third Wednesday of the month except June, July, August and December

Online Chapter Meeting Link

Visit our website: PPTU.org

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Contact Us:

mail@pptu.org

Presidents' Column - Craig VanderKolk

This column essentially begins the new year for PPTU, since most of our activities over the summer are on vacation like many of us. We do have 3 new Board members in addition to the continuing members, Bob Bokulic, Tom Brosnan, Ron Briggs and Ray Miller. Please join me in welcoming Sean Beck, Doug Johncox and Ethan Miller. We appreciate their willingness to step forward and help lead our chapter.

While many formal activities have been on hold, I hope everyone got out to fish this summer. I was fortunate enough to spend a few days in Florida fishing but not catching, Tarpon. It was exhilarating to see almost a hundred 75 to 150lb fish swimming around you. Joe Taylor and I had some good shots and couple of takes, but never hooked one. We will continue to work on our techniques and casting to hopefully make it happen. I also spent a day on the Gunpowder and the Savage River. Both trips were slow but beautiful and I managed not to get skunked on these two trips. Finally, I visited the birthplace of Trout Unlimited in Grayling Michigan and fished the AuSable and the Manistee rivers. We were shooting for the Hex hatch but partially hit the Brown Drake hatch and overall successful. It was a memorable trip and highly recommend it to anyone looking to fish dry flies to large trout.

On the trip to the AuSable, we took out time to visit the now closed fish hatchery. It's a story of a hatchery that tried to fix the problems of a river that was damaged by human activities (loss of native Grayling due to logging) and organizations trying to make money from natural resources (commercial fish farming). Fortunately, the AuSable TU chapter and other organizations were able to ultimately close down the hatchery and preserve the Hollowed Waters of the AuSable.

A group of our own PPTU members has been working this past spring and summer to better understand the current stream health of the Patuxent below Brighton Dam. Thanks to a gift from a friend of Bob Bokulic, Mr. Mitch MacLeod, we have purchased a state of the art, Dissolved Oxygen meter. Gathering this data will help us work with the DNR and the management of the dam (WSSC) to continue to appropriately manage this fishery that so many in this area enjoy. Relationships with hatcheries is a complex issue for PPTU and the other Maryland chapters. While our cold water streams and TU priority waters initiatives are most important, we do have a role in advising the DNR on placing hatchery fish. This is for the enjoyment of anglers around the state and I think it helps raise awareness of trout habitat and conservation.

This brings me to some goals for the coming year for PPTU - Recognition and Participation. I'd like us to help others recognize and understand the work we do as a chapter and create some interest. If more of our members participate in our activities, we will inspire excitement and get other people involved. The two goals work hand in hand to expand our mission of preserving cold water fisheries and trout, through conservation and volunteer work.

If anyone wants to get involved and learn more of what we do, please reach out to me or the members of the board. I look forward to seeing you on one of our outings or upcoming meetings.

Craig VanderKolk
President, PPTU

PPTU Mentor Program Beginners & Beyond

PPTU provides one-on-one streamside fly fishing instruction to PPTU members. Participants must show commitment by having waders or hip boots, a rod and reel outfit, and leader. Discussions will include equipment, knots, casting, flies, dry fly and nymphing techniques, entomology, reading water, conservation, etc. all on nearby streams. Instruction will be tailored to individual needs. Members who have not made an **Annual Supporting Contribution (ASC)** will be asked to contribute $20.

Contact us by e-mail: mentor@pptu.org

Summer Fly Fishing - PPTU

Summer fly fishing involves adjusting tactics to match low water, high sun, and changes in trout feeding habits, focusing on early mornings, late evenings, and shaded areas. Focus on dry flies or large terrestrial patterns like hoppers, or use nymphs and streamers in deeper water. Adjust your approach to match the life cycle of insects, using nymphs first, then emergers, and finally dry flies as the day warms and insects begin to hatch or fall onto the water.

When and Where to Fish

Early mornings and late evenings: Trout are more active during these cooler parts of the day, but always check local conditions and guide advice.

Shaded areas: Look for deeper pools and shaded sections, especially near structures like fallen trees or large boulders, where water tends to be cooler.

Faster-flowing water: Trout seek oxygen and food in areas with decent flow, so focus on the fastest parts of riffles, especially during low-water periods.

Flies to Use

Dry Flies: Use large, high-floating foam patterns like the Chubby Chernobyl to support droppers and catch aggressive takes. Also, consider patterns that mimic big bugs like grasshoppers, beetles, and ants.

Terrestrial Patterns: Terrestrials like ants, beetles, and grasshoppers are excellent choices in the summer months.

Nymphs and Streamers: Fish nymphs and streamers in deeper, cooler water.

Emergers: Fish these in the late morning as insects move from the bottom to the surface to hatch.

Fish for Other Species

Bass & Panfishs: Give the trout a rest and find a local pond or warm water stream to fish. FYI – Columbia, MD is full of ponds holding fish. (I found one that you would walk by and never know its even there!) Some of the same summer rules and flies apply. These fish will surprise you with their gusto to take a dry fly and give you a nice fight. Worse case, you can get some practice casting in and prep yourself for the Fall trout season.

Nylon vs Flourocarbon - Cheeky Fishing

There is a lot of confusion out there about when you "should" fish nylon tippet or fluorocarbon tippet. The truth is, either will work in almost any situation, BUT there are slight advantages to fishing one over the other at certain times.

We have laid out a few attributes of each below, but remember, presentation is the most important thing. It is very rare that a fish will spook because it "saw your tippet", it is far more likely that a fish did not eat your fly because of the way it was presented.

Nylon

- Most affordable option
- Breaks down over time in nature
- More stretch than Fluoro
- Less dense than Fluoro - better for fishing dry flies
- More reliable knot strength than Flouro
- Susceptible to UV and damage over time

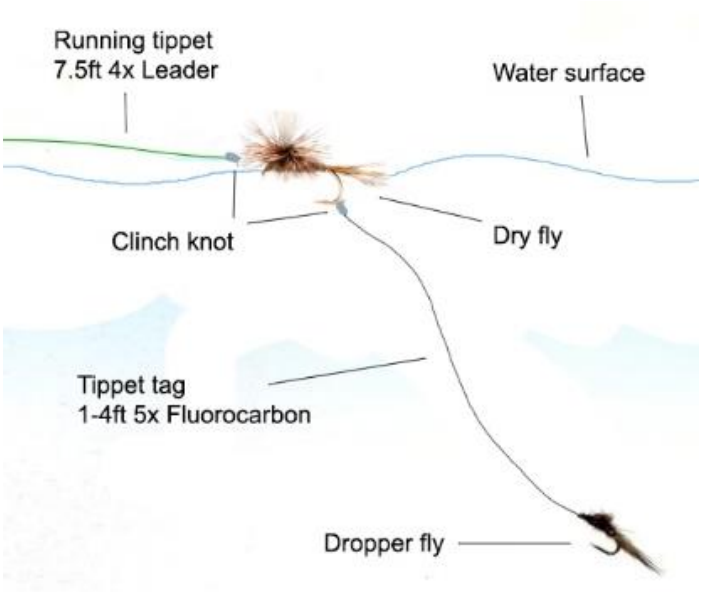
Flourocarbon

- More abrasion resistant than Nylon
- Higher density than Nylon; good for subsurface presentations
- Does not break down in nature for a VERY long time
- Less stretch than Nylon
- Better strength to diameter ratio

Dry/Dropper for Euronymphing - Scott Cernich

Yes, you absolutely can and should occasionally use a dry dropper rig with a Euro nymphing rod and mono leader to catch trout, especially for wary fish in close-to-mid-range stretches of water. This technique combines the presentation advantages of a tight-line Euro leader with the versatility of a dry/dropper setup, allowing you to cover the entire water column, manage difficult drifts, and more effectively detect strikes from rising or subsurface fish.

Why use a dry dropper with a Euro rig?



Improved Presentation: The long, non-weighted Euro leader allows for delicate, dead-drift presentations that are more natural than traditional setups, especially in challenging conditions.

Wider Water Column Coverage: The dry fly acts as a strike indicator, allowing you to fish a nymph at a slightly different depth, effectively covering both shallow and deeper water.

Better Strike Detection: A fish rising to the dry fly and then eating the nymph is a common scenario, making it easy to detect takes that might otherwise be missed.

Versatility in Different Conditions: The technique excels in flat water where you can't get close enough without spooking fish, on windy days to help manage drifts, or when fishing upstream.

More Forgiveness for Missed Takes: If a fish misses your dry fly, the nymph underneath offers another chance to get the fly to the same fish.

Vidoes for Euro Nymphing with a Dry/Dropper:

Euro Nymphing Tactics: George Daniel

Euro Nymphing Tactics: Devin Olsen

Euro Nymphing Tactics: Josh Miller

"There is certainly something in angling that tends to produce a serenity of the mind."

~ Washington Irving

If you spot poaching please call or text:

Maryland Wildlife Crime Stoppers
At 443-433-4112

Add this number to your cell phone contact list!

How to Knot Pheasant Tail Legs - Tim Flagler

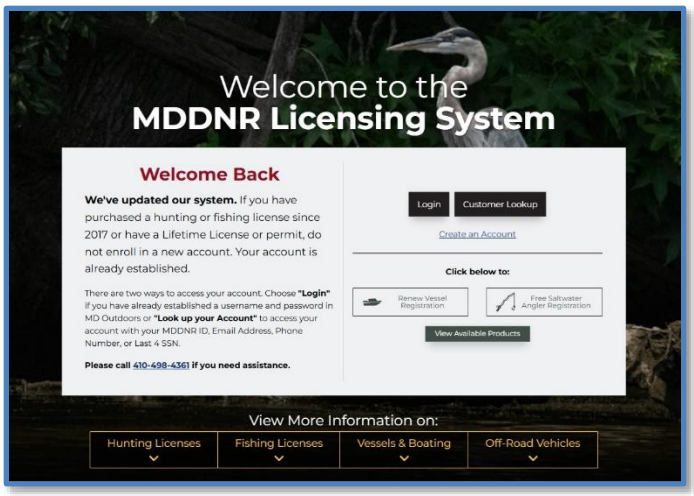
Tim digs into his bag of fly tying tips and tricks to show us with detailed instructions how to produce knotted pheasant tail fiber legs.

Watch Video Here

MD Outdoors – New Licensing System - MD DNR

Maryland DNR is excited to announce the launch of our new licensing system – MD Outdoors! We have partnered with Brandt Information Services to bring Maryland an industry-leading product that will make purchasing licenses easier than ever.

MD Outdoors is replacing the COMPASS system to offer products for all outdoor activities that DNR manages, including Maryland hunting and fishing licenses and associated stamps and permits, boat and off-road vehicle renewal registration, and other services that will be available in one convenient location.



The new online system is designed to streamline the process of renewing licenses and permits as well as make it easier and simpler for new and returning customers.

To log-in to the new site, visit the MD Outdoors homepage and follow the steps below:

- After navigating to the site, you will see the screen to the right.
- If you have purchased a hunting or fishing license since 2017, use the customer lookup button to find your account.
- You will be presented with 4 Identification options: MD DNR ID, Last 4 digits of your Social Security Number, Email Address, or Phone Number. Make a selection and fill out the entire form.
- After submitting the form:
  - If no account is found, you will be prompted to "enroll now"
  - If an account is found, you will be prompted to set a password and log-in

Please call 410-498-4361 if you need assistance.

***FYI** – I tested out the new system and found it to be both quick and fairly easy to use. It only took me seconds to look up my MD account. Note: I didn't notice a prompt, but the system did make me re-enter my user name and password for my account.*

– Bob O'Donnell

MD Outdoors Link

One Fly Contest – Sep 20th! - Ron Kerrick & Lou Reichel

The PPTU One Fly Contest will be held on Saturday, September 20th. Please meet early, by 7:45 AM, so there is enough time to register the fly before the start time of 8:00 AM. You must register your fly with the Outings Coordinator. The Coordinator will need the name of your fly and size of the hook. Once the fly is registered and photographed, you're off to your favorite spot.

The contest ends at 12:00 PM. You must return to the Bunker Hill (south) parking area, no later than 12:20 PM to register your catch (report the number and total inches of trout caught) with the Outing Coordinator.

Meeting Area: Bunker Hill, south parking lot.

If you have any questions or missed the email notice with extra details, please email us at: outings@pptu.org

In Praise of Parachutes - Jay Sheppard

Certainly, paratroopers and flight crews who needed to get to earth safely without their aircraft love parachutes. I use parachute dry flies almost exclusively to imitate mayflies floating on the water. But I want to describe a series of important casts that dry fly anglers need to know: the parachute, stall or pile casts.

As we work a stream, we find trout feeding in a back eddy along the side. Fast water lies between us and the eddy or still water. We often see a counter current running upstream right against the far bank. If we use a normal cast to drop our offering in the eddy, it gets maybe 2 seconds of dead drift before the fast water drags the fly out of the target zone. Simply, the leader and tippet had only a foot or so of slack at most. With the fly line laying in the fast water, even after a good mend, the fly will be ripped out right in front of an already wary trout. It has previously seen many other flies suddenly appear and then get dragged downstream in a matter of a few seconds.

What we must have is the fly land only a couple feet beyond the tip of the fly line and maybe a few curls in the latter to further delay the inevitable. I use two differing techniques to obtain all that slack. I am not sure which technique is the best; I might even alternate between them to see if I get better results.

The easiest cast is to aim very high above the target with more line and leader needed for a direct cast. The aim is at least 10' above the target, maybe 15'. The line, leader and fly reach the end and simply collapse in a heap over the target zone. If all went well, the fly is only a foot or two from the tip of the fly line and the latter has large amounts of slack, too. Control is tough if there is a little breeze.

The other cast is made by creating a larger loop in the forward cast and not giving it the full energy needed to extend it the full distance. As the forward cast unrolls, it basically runs out of steam. The end of the line does not complete the cast. The leader and fly barely get beyond the tip of the line.

Both casting techniques take some practice to master. Even after years, I will do a practice cast or two at a nearby target to ensure I have the right amount of line. If you get off a good cast, you can be rewarded with maybe 10 or even 20 sec with a dead drifted dry fly. One can gain a couple more seconds by casting quartering downstream across the moving water. Most times I employ these casts from directly opposite the eddy. I may remember to incorporate a reach cast to lay the falling line upstream of my position; again As a side note, this is another reason I use tippets of 30–40" for most dry fly presentations; more slack for more dead drift time.

Give these casts a try. You may reach some trout that others have been unable to reach with a well-presented dry fly. Tight lines!

Annual Supporting Contribution (ASC) - Jay Sheppard

September starts our Chapter's annual cycle and now is the time to consider making your Annual Supporting Contribution (ASC). As a Chapter, we are not allowed to require chapter dues or fees for membership. Along with other fund-raising events, we therefore ask for a $20 ASC each September to sustain the chapter's administration costs, educational programs, and community service projects including:

- Trout in the Classroom program that teaches primary & middle schoolers the importance of cold water fisheries to our environment.

- Support of the Project Healing Waters program at Ft. Meade and Walter Reed that provides recreational activities to wounded warriors.
- Free copies of the Conservationist for local fly shops, State agencies and other conservation organizations.
- Conservation projects that restore trout habitats in rivers & streams across Maryland.
- Support water quality monitoring on local trout waters

You can pay the ASC in several ways:

- Go to pptu.org and use our PayPal portal: Donate Now
- Mail a check payable to PPTU to our PO Box (see last page).
- At the next chapter meeting by cash or check.

Your contributions are most appreciated!

Share Your Fishing Vacation! - Scott Cernich

Our September meeting will be your opportunity to share with the chapter what you did on your summer (fishing) vacation.

Please let me know if you're interested in sharing. We prefer to keep presentations to around 10 minutes or so. Photos or slides are appreciated. Send me an email if you are interested - smcernich@gmail.com

Keys to a Good Hookset - MidCurrent

Are you hooking fish only to find them getting off? Getting the fish to eat your fly is an achievement unto itself, as it means that you've picked the right pattern and presented it well. But losing fish consistently is incredibly frustrating. Chances are that your problem is a result of poor hook sets. There are three components of a hook set—timing, the angle of the set, and force used by the angler—and messing up any one of them can result in a poor connection and a lost fish.

Timing: Be Quick on the Stick

Trout often suck in a nymph and spit it out almost instantly if it doesn't feel right. Many new anglers are surprised how often they miss fish simply because they weren't ready to set the hook in time. Staying alert and confident is half the battle, so you need to expect a strike on every drift. If you let your guard down, allow your mind wander, or start admiring the scenery, you may miss your chance. Always be ready to set the hook—it's a hand–eye coordination game, and the more attentive you are, the more trout you'll catch.

Ideally, you should set the hook at the first sign of a take. This requires keeping your focus and trusting your instincts. If your indicator pauses or wobbles weirdly or goes under, don't second-guess and think, "Hmm, it's probably just the bottom." As guides often tell their clients, "Hook sets are free." If there's no fish on the end of the line when you set, you can either fish out the drift or cast again. You have little to lose by setting—aside from possibly snagging or ruining your drift—and everything to gain if it is indeed a trout.

If you point your rod upward while high-sticking, you make it more difficult to set the hook quickly.
Photo: Charles Hildick-Smith

It's important to remember that, even if you execute with perfect timing, you won't hook every fish. Trout eats can be incredibly quick, and there will be some strikes you simply can't react to quickly enough or even see. But by consistently setting the hook fast on any movement or hesitation of your indicator, you will hook far more fish than if you delay or only react to the obvious dips.

That said, there are things you can do to ensure that you drive the hook into the trout's jaw as quickly as possible. First, minimize the amount of slack line on the water. If your hook-setting motion has to pick up a bunch of slack before you come tight to the fly, you're giving the fish a few extra milliseconds to spit the nymph. Try to maintain connection to the fly or flies—this is the basis of tightline nymphing—as much as you can.

Similarly, if you are high-stick nymphing or reaching over conflicting currents, hold your rod parallel to the water, rather than at a 45-degree angle. This avoids a big sag of slack line between your rod tip and the water, and it keeps your rod tip low. If you hold the rod at a 45-degree angle, you end up moving the rod tip through most of the hook-setting arc before you ever make contact with the fly.

Angle: The Downstream Sweep Set

When you're nymphing under an indicator, there's usually going to be some slack on the water—for instance when you've made a mend to counteract the effects of competing currents—which, as noted above, can make setting the hook difficult. If you simply raise your rod tip, you're picking up the slack first. Depending on how much slack you have between you and your fly, you might never even put any tension on the fly itself this way. No tension on the fly usually means no hookup. That's why you need to use a downstream sweep set.

The sweep set uses the water tension on the line to create immediate tension that drives the hook point home. You're not trying to pick up the slack; instead you're counting on the tension along the line to transfer energy down to the fly. Think about how the current pushing on your line makes your fly swing at the end of a drift. It's the same principle at work in the sweep set.

To make a sweep set, sweep your rod horizontally toward the bank behind you, keeping the rod parallel to the water's surface. At the same time, haul the line with your non-rod-hand. Always sweep to your downstream side. Otherwise, you'll drag the line across your body, where it can get snagged by your vest, jacket or any tools you have hanging from them. Once the fish is hooked, you can raise your rod and start stripping like a madman to establish a more direct connection to the fish.

Check out this video by Drew Ross of Looknfishy, you can see what this looks like in real time.

Because most of us have been taught to raise our rod tip straight upward to set the hook—think of the classic Orvis logo—employing the sweep set requires concentration and discipline. Make a mental note at the end of every cast to remind yourself how you're going to move the rod tip if you get a strike. Eventually, this motion will become second-nature.

Setting the hook into the fish's mouth and against the full weight of the fish will drastically increase your rate of catch. The downstream set is much more efficient because the line remains in the same plane, and all the motion is in one dimension. With a tight line between you and the fly, setting the hook isn't much more than a bit of a quick wrist action. Your hook set will be so much faster, too, not allowing the fish to spit out the fly.

When you've set the hook well, you have a much better chance of bringing the fish to the net.
Photo: Charles Hildick-Smith

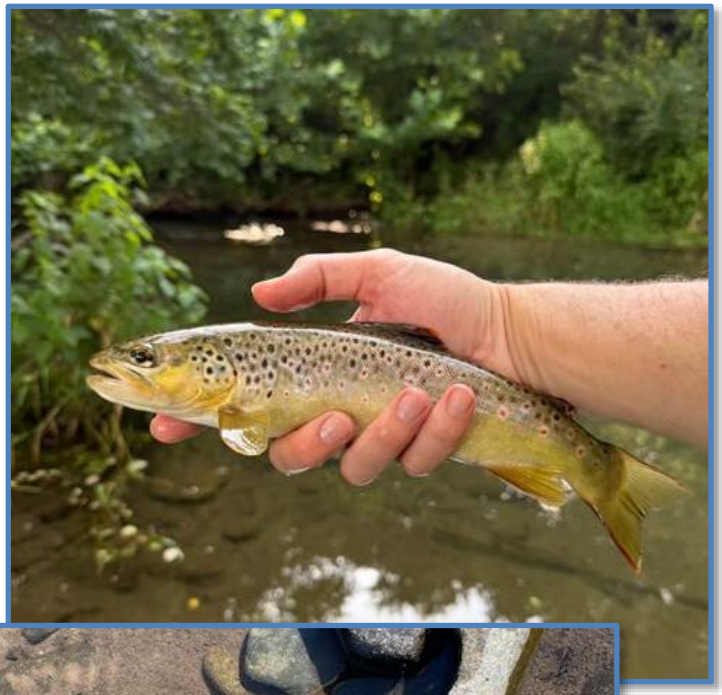
Force: Gentle but Firm

The final piece of the puzzle is figuring out how much force you need to set the hook. Remember that a trout is not a tarpon and does not have a bony mouth, so there's no need to rear back and slam that hook home. If you set too hard, you risk pulling a small hook right out of the fish's mouth or creating a large hole, which makes the hook less likely to hold.

Another advantage of the downstream sweep set is that you won't need nearly as much force. When you set straight upward, you have to lift your line off the water, which requires a whole lot more motion and energy than a quick downstream set. If there's no fish at the end, you often end up launching your fly into a tree behind you.

Members Catch
- Bob O'Donnell

Time to start fishing in earnest and uploading those photos to our list server. These are just a few of the photos from recent trips. You should hear some of the stories at our upcoming meeting on the 17th!



Contributions & Questions Welcome!

Send your contributions, article suggestions or fly fishing questions to the Editor in an email or as an MS Word.doc attachment. The deadline for submissions is typically the twelfth (12th) day of the month prior to the month of publication.

Editor: Bob O'Donnell
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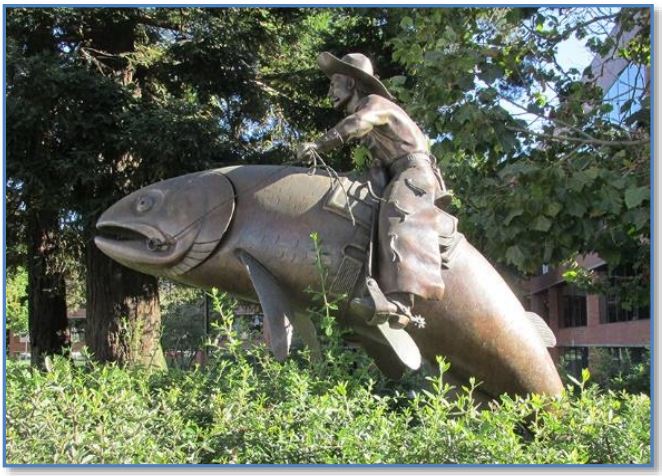

Blue-Winged Olive

As the weather shifts to the Fall, we'll get cooler overcast days and with that, hatches of Blue-Winged Olives. This pattern is fairly easy to tie and you should have a few in your box.

P.S. – If you don't have the exact materials, use something in your fly tying stash that is similar. Optionally, ask your friends – they probably have more material than they'll ever use in a life time! Typically, they're also happy to share.

Blue-Winged Olive

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POTOMAC-PATUXENT CHAPTER

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