



FLY FISHING ETIQUETTE

A BASIC OUTLINE OF ETIQUETTE RULES TO HELP
THE WADE & FLOAT FISHING ANGLER



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Long before fly fishing, proper etiquette and respect for another's space existed. Although the practice of etiquette is questionable at times, distinct and desirable behaviors are supposed to separate the human race from all other animal species. Therefore, we often need to remind ourselves of proper behaviors while fishing.

These basic rules are intended to help anglers understand how to make their fishing experiences, on or near the water, more enjoyable for themselves and others.

ETIQUETTE ON AND OFF THE RIVER

Know the specific state and local fishing regulations for the waters you fish.

Fish barbless hooks —

do yourself, your friends, and the fish a favor, pinch down all barbs.

Be mindful of your manners and language, particularly around youngsters —

they learn from example.

When water temperature rises significantly —

stop fishing and thus eliminate stressing fish.

If asked to critique another, do it in a positive manner, don't criticize the flies or techniques of others. **Offer advice only if asked**, and ask only if you're willing to listen.

Talking to another angler is acceptable, and quite proper.

Not talking to another angler is acceptable, and quite proper.

ETIQUETTE ON THE RIVER

If you spot someone on or near a section of water, that section of water is theirs until they move on — even if they stay for the day.

This respected use belongs to anyone fishing or not. And, as much as it hurts not to fish there, stay out unless you have their permission to enter their domain.

Examples:

- *An angler just studying the water*
- *A person or party having a bank-side picnic*
- *A person or party just sitting on the bank enjoying the scenery*
- *Children or adults playing in the water*
- *Bait, spin cast, or flycasting anglers.*

When approaching another angler to find out "how they are doing," "what they have observed," "what flies they may be using" or if it's okay to share the immediate area being fished — use care as not to spook the fish in the area.

Example:

- *Always approach the angler from behind and to the side. When you address another, do so politely, if there is no response, assume your company or access is not welcome, say "thank you," and move on.*



When passing another angler do it with common sense.

Most people don't like to fish where the water has just been beat to a froth by another angler, so leave some unspoiled water between you and the other angler before entering the water. This distance is determined by the ratio of anglers on the water.

Examples:

- *if fishing on water where only one or two anglers are in sight, observe the other anglers few minutes to see how fast they are moving upstream – then give them space to fish for about an hour before you enter the water. This could mean leaving two to three prime fishing spots open before returning to the water. When fishing in areas like Deckers, the Green or the San Juan when it's crowded, moving up-stream one hole or run is totally acceptable.*
- *If on the river bank, swing out upto 20-feet as not to spook any fish upstream from the angler.*
- *Consider crossing the river and proceeding up the other side to another location.*
- *If several anglers exist and are "leap-frogging" back and forth, leave each plenty of room to fish upstream before you enter the water.*

The angler that is traveling up-stream always has the right of way over an angler traveling Down-stream.

Example:

- If an angler wants to retrace their footsteps down-river and sees another down-river, exit the water and go down-river using the bank, staying far enough away to prevent spooking fish.

An angler always has the right of way when they have a fish on.

Example:

- Reel in your line and try to stay out of their way while they fight their

fish. Many times the angler with the fish on is trying very hard to keep out of your space but sometimes circumstances won't allow it. It's totally appropriate to ask the angler with the fish on if they would like you to net the fish for them. Many new friendships have started this way.

Handle fish with care.

The less a fish is handled the better and the greater chance the fish has to survive.

Fish survival hints:

- Make sure your *fishing net's web is wet* before picking up a fish.
- *Wet your hands* before handling any fish!
- Don't *squeeze* a fish's stomach.
- Don't stick your *fingers or any object* into the fish's gills.
- If you can't remove a hook, from a fish, *cut your tippet line* and release the fish before the fish becomes overly stressed.
- *Quickly photograph* a fish and immediately return the fish to water.
- In *warmer water conditions* try photographing fish in a net that's held partially in the water.

Stay off spawning beds and resist fishing to spawning trout.

The spawning process is a major key in our river's future and what you may catch next year, and the next, and the next!

Wade only when necessary, as all aquatic food chains are fragile.

Have fun.

Be a good sport, if the trout gets off before you land it, laugh it off and consider it a "LDR" (*long distance release*), there are plenty more fish where that one came from.

Encourage others.

Examples:

- Recognize the talents of others when fishing.
- Promote these simple rules of fly fishing etiquette.



ETIQUETTE OFF THE RIVER

Don't enter the water on a small river or stream directly across from another angler.

Stay on visible paths and trails.

Example:

- Shortcuts kill delicate vegetation, encourage future erosion and silting which endanger the life of fish and destroy aquatic life!

Report poaching or any other violations.

Don't litter.

Examples:

- Taking along a plastic bag so you can collect and take out trash left by others. Dispose the bag of trash properly.
- Dedicate a small vest pocket to hold the monofilament line you cut off as birds often get tangled in the line and die!

**No trespassing means just that —
“NO TRESPASSING”**

Examples:

- Obtain permission or don't fish
- When granted permission —
 - treat the owners land as if it were your own
 - close all gates behind you
 - do not litter.



ETIQUETTE FLOAT FISHING

Even drift boat and raft anglers can't get away from the crowds; but by following a few simple rules, your drifting experience can still be a pleasant one.

AT THE BOAT RAMP —



Wait patiently while staging for your turn to unload.

Don't stage in a roadway lane that blocks the entry or exit of other vehicles and trailers from the ramp. While waiting, undo the trailer or boat straps and covers, load your gear and have a cup of coffee.

Offer help to others that are unloading.

They may not accept your offer, but this helpful attitude is a great way to start the day off.

Once it's your turn to put-in, do it as quickly as possible.

The boat ramp is no place to practice backing a trailer.

After getting your boat in the water move it away from the ramp. If you need to tie up or anchor your craft and wait for a party member, move your craft upstream of the ramp and thus out of the way of other craft using the ramp.

Don't position your boat too close to another boat - treat other people's boats like gold.

Once your boat is in the water, immediately pull your vehicle and trailer out and head for the parking lot.

Make sure your parked vehicle and trailer conform to other parked vehicles - out of the way for future users.

At the end of the float when you are back at the boat ramp, practice the same etiquette in reverse order.

Move your craft down-stream from the ramp — out of the way of other craft approaching or using the ramp. Wait, and only move upstream to the ramp once your trailer is on the ramp.

If you have rented a boat or raft and are not responsible for loading and taking the craft out of the water, always move the craft down-stream from the ramp then tie or anchor the craft, out of the way of ramp users.



When you start your float, space yourself evenly from other boats.

Slow down if you're getting too close to another boat or speed up to put a little space between the boats that may be behind you.

As you float, give waders a wide berth.

Leave plenty of room for them to fish. As possible, float on the opposite side of the river and limit your oar use as you pass an angler. Resist making a cast into a hot spot just upstream from them.

If a wader is casting to the middle of the river, it's acceptable to pass behind them (the angler and the bank). As you approach the wader, please inform the angler of your intentions and thus not alarming them.

If a boat or raft is occupying a known hot spot but no one is fishing, never assume you can slam into the spot.

Always ask if they are staying or moving on. Often they may say "come on in" as they are leaving, while others will say "no" and may even be securing the spot

for another set of anglers coming down the river. If so, move on, avoid a confrontation.

As a floater, it's your responsibility to know the specific float craft requirements and the location of private and public boundaries.

Laws regarding boat requirements, i.e., an extra oar or flotation vests, and even floater's rights differ from state to state. Obtain and study the specific river rules long before you put in.

Don't leave any trash on the river, pack it up and carry it out.

Take extra trash bags with you.

Demonstrate how everyone can share the river.

Examples:

- Don't Boat Race - put in late and rows downstream as hard as they can, slam on the brakes, and pull in front of the lead boats for a hole.
- Guides and destination anglers should help ease competitive situations in which rowers might find themselves. Instead of pushing for the hot spots and getting to get to them at all costs, share the river.
- Latecomers should float behind those in front of them, instead of turning to aggressive naval maneuvers to secure lead positions.
- Float fish and drift in tranquility, taking what success the day handed out to you.
- If someone else has command of a hot spot, use your skills to find other fish in other places. This is the mark of a real angler.
- You don't need 5,000 fish per mile; you only need one at a time.
- Enjoy the river and don't compete for its limited resources.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES FOR FLY FISHING ETIQUETTE:

- *Flyfisher's Guide to Colorado*
BY MARTY BARTHOLOMEW
- *Drift Boat Strategies & Drift Boat Fly Fishing*
BY NEAL STREEKS