

Catch a day of fun along the Poudre River

Good waters can be found in the middle of town

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Thanksgiving dinner is past and if you're like me, you've enjoyed a day of overeating, a few days of leftovers, watched lots of football and generally enjoyed being a couch potato. As a result, I'm a long way from working off those extra calories.

Thinking about it, I realize that the onset of colder weather has greatly increased my desire to stay close to the fire. However, when air temperatures get up to 40 or higher, the urge to fish also is strong. This leads me to seek out open-water opportunities throughout the winter season. While tailwaters offer year-round fishing, most require travel to the high country where it is often bitter cold. So when possible, I opt for closer opportunities.

With its extensive trail system through Fort Collins, the Poudre River provides ready access to much of the river from Harmony Road to the northwest beyond Shields Street. While not a world class fishery, it does offer a reasonable shot at trout on the western side of town and the more easterly waters sport a decent carp fishery, with a chance at bass and sunfish.

Between Harmony and Prospect roads, the river passes through Arapaho Bend Natural Area, the Environmental Learning Center and Cottonwood Hollow Natural Area. Per the Fort Collins Natural Area website, fishing is not permitted anywhere at Cottonwood Hollow, and the last time I visited Arapaho Bend the river area was closed to protect raptor nesting sites. Before fishing these areas, be sure to check with the managing agencies.

East of Lemay Avenue, a diversion dam greatly reduces the flow and as a result the quality of the fishery is reduced. The best trout fishing starts around Lemay Avenue through town past Shields Street to the Sterling Natural Area where the trail leaves the river, skirting private property. It returns to the river near Overland Trail at Butterfly Woods Natural Area and travels on to Lions Park where there is limited fishing access. The final urban section with ready access is Watson State Wildlife

Area just north of Bellvue.

While there are no special regulations on the river in town and all methods produce, I prefer fly fishing. The primary food sources for trout in rivers are aquatic insects. Fly patterns are excellent imitations. All tactics that work on other trout streams have potential to work on the Poudre. Just remember, water flows are low and the waters are cold this time of year, so concentrate your efforts on the deeper sections with good current.

I like to fish a brace of nymphs (wet flies). My point fly is weighted, such as a Copper John, and right now the second fly is often a midge. If there's surface action, I'll use a pair of dry flies, the upper being an indicator fly, such as a humpy, and a midge pattern for the point. That way I can follow the drift, as my eyesight is such that keeping track of midges is problematic. My third technique is to fish a wet fly below an indicator fly or strike indicator. It's ideal for the slow, deep sections.

If the sun's shining and it's mild out, consider grabbing a rod and fish our urban waters. It's close, easy and you might even catch a fish or two. Even if the fishing is slow, the wildlife viewing is likely to be good. I often see deer, fox, squirrels, rabbits, raccoons and a variety of birds, so carrying a camera is a good idea. And the best part is the walk. There's something delightful about walking streamside with a fly rod in hand through heavily wooded areas, even if they are in the middle of town.

Dave Coulson is an avid Fort Collins fly fisher. He

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