



The Alaskan Fly Fishing Guide's
SECRET
HANDBOOK

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Whether you live in Alaska or are coming up for a fishing trip, it is always good to cover your bases. What do you need? What don't you need? If only you had an Alaskan guide buddy who could steer you in the right direction.

Well now you do. We have pulled together a bunch of great advice from guides who have years of experience all over the state of Alaska. From Southeast to the Kenai and Bristol Bay and on up to the Arctic they have guided it all. What follows is their hard earned knowledge and experience from years on the water.

9 things that will make you a successful angler in Alaska



1. **EMBRACE THE BEAD** - Beads catch more trout than Glo Bugs, are less damaging to the fish, and mimic an infinite number of egg sizes and colors. Look under the How To section of the website for more articles and videos on beads.
2. **DON'T PINCH PENNIES ON THE IMPORTANT STUFF** - If dinner and drinks in Anchorage cost more than your reel, you need to look at your priorities. There are lots of smart ways to save money, cutting corners on your gear isn't one of them.
3. **FISH BARBLESS** - If you are trout or Dolly fishing, it goes without saying that you should always pinch your barbs. If you are salmon fishing you should still pinch your barbs. Barbless flies go into the fish easier (provided you make a good hook set), come out of the fish easier, and perhaps even more important come out of you easier if you make an errant cast!
4. **YOUR WADING JACKET IS YOUR VEST** - You don't need a vest. Those big pockets on the front of your wading jacket are for your fly boxes. The little pockets: split shot, tippet, leaders. Put a retractor with a nipper on your jacket and/or shoulder strap of your waders, clamp on a pair of hemostats and you are set to go with one less bulky piece of equipment to deal with.
5. **FISH DEEP** - Because 9 times out of 10 that is where the fish are. Especially the big ones. Carry three sizes of split shot with you: BB, B and 3/0. You can mix and match the different sizes and cover just about any nymphing situation.. Have a spare spool with a medium fast or fast sink tip line on it, too.
6. **TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT** - Just because it is spawning season and everyone is fishing beads doesn't mean you can't swing a big black sculpin. Don't be afraid to buck the trend. It's fun and you just might catch a big fish.
7. **THE SIZE & COLOR OF YOUR BEAD MATTERS** - Being able to mimic the egg in the water is key. If a bead is off just slightly in size or color fish may very well reject it. This holds especially true on hard fished waters of the Kenai, Matsu and Bristol Bay. Fish in these areas see all manner of beads every day. A little R&D and a good selection can save the day.
8. **MONOFILAMENT vs. FLUOROCARBON: KNOW WHEN TO USE THEM** - In Alaska, standard monofilament leaders will get it done in many situations. A 9 foot 4X Trout Leader works great for dry fly fishing. A 9 foot 12lb Salmon Leader is ideal for silvers, chums and pinks. And 5-6 foot leaders are just the ticket off of a sink tip. So when do you need fluorocarbon? We think it works best in nymphing situations such as

beading for trout or dead drifting for steelhead. Fluoro sinks better than mono which helps get your offering down where it belongs, fluoro is generally stiffer which helps beads stay just off the bottom and stand out among all the natural eggs rolling along. Best of all, it is virtually invisible. So when that slab of a rainbow is in front of you or you just spotted a mega steelhead, you'll have the best shot at hooking them up.

9. **FIGHT FISH HARD** - Whether you are fishing salmon or trout, fight them hard and get them in quickly. You should be fishing stout leaders, so after the first run you can really drop your rod and put the wood to them. Turn the fish' head in the opposite direction they want to go and they will tire quickly. Trout and char as well as salmon can be released before they are exhausted. And if you are keeping a salmon for the grill the quicker you land them the less chance there is for something to go wrong.

12 things you absolutely need on an Alaskan fishing trip:

1. **BUG SPRAY WITH DEET.** It doesn't have to be 100% deet, but somewhere in the neighborhood of 20%-30% will effectively keep most biting critters at bay. A head net is a good option if you are going to be out for an extended period.
2. **THE BEST BREATHABLE RAIN JACKET YOU CAN AFFORD.** You might get lucky and it might be sunny for a whole week. But more likely you will get some rain. And Alaska doesn't get rain showers so much as steady, hard, continuous rain that can last for days. Good quality comes at a price (the price is directly proportional to how long you will stay dry) but you'll be glad you sprang for a good jacket when you are warm and dry no matter what the conditions.
3. **SALMON/STEELHEAD LEADERS AND MAXIMA.** When you chase salmon leave the trout leaders at home. You need thicker leader material to turn over big salmon flies and tough abrasion-resistant tippet to keep you hooked up. Maxima Ultragreen Tippet may not be new and sexy, but there is nothing better out there.
4. **QUALITY POLARIZED SUNGLASSES.** Go with a brown/copper/amber lens color. You'll see more fish and be able to wear your glasses even on an overcast day. The higher the quality the finer the lens and the more fish you will see.

5. **A WATERPROOF BACKPACK.** If you are going to carry spare layers, gloves, a snack and your camera, they need to stay dry. A day pack constructed of waterproof material with a roll top or waterproof zipper will keep your gear dry even on the wettest days.
6. **WADERS THAT DON'T LEAK.** If yours are getting old, have some pin holes, are almost due to be replaced....don't wait until after your trip! Alaska will test your gear to the limit and if your waders are on the edge at the start they will be totally worthless by the end. Your time fishing is precious. Make sure the memories are of good times and fish and not wet clothes and misery.
7. **SEVERAL GOOD HATS** - Your favorite ball cap for keeping the sun out of your eyes and cutting the glare off the water, a fleece stocking cap for cool nights or rainy days (this can be worn over the ball cap, too), and a spare ball cap in case your first one gets soaked or blows off and disappears.
8. **A HEAD LAMP** - Even though you are in the land of the midnight sun, it gets dusky or downright dark at 1 am. You'll be glad you have one as you zig zag back to your cabin from the bar or need to know whether that noise outside your tent is a brown bear or a ground squirrel.
9. **A SPARE ROD** - Common on. It's Alaska and these are big fish. Even if you do everything right there is a good chance that during a week of fishing you are going to break your rod.
10. **A BUFF** - Yep, those goofy neck warmer looking things will save your bacon in all kinds of situations. Pull it up to stave off a brutal fall wind, keep those nasty biting critters off or even to defend against the sun's rays.
11. **EAR PLUGS** - Unless you are going by yourself, it is guaranteed one of your tent or cabin mates will snore like godzilla. Pop in the ear plugs and you are off to lala land.
12. **THE DOLLY LLAMA** - The fly, not the spiritual leader. Dolly Llamas catch everything and you should have a box full of them.

Finally, what do you do when the fishing gets tough and you aren't catching? An Alaskan guide weighs in with his tips.



Five Alaskan Guide Secrets: What to Do When the Fishing Gets Tough.

Everybody, sooner or later, has one of those days on the water. You know the ones: fish seemingly all around, but none of them want to bite. After a day of frustrated flailing with your lucky fly, on your favorite hole of your favorite river, you just can't believe that you didn't catch anything. After all that work and no fish to show, you think "those fish just didn't want to bite" or "it must have been the wind", or something along those lines. Then you feel a little sorry for the guides that have to fish on days like this...just think if you had to get skunked as a job...man, what would that be like?

The truth is, most guides have a bag of tricks for days when the fishing seems a little slow. Guides don't get to pick the kind of days on which they take clients out, so learning tips and techniques to consistently get folks into fish is an absolute necessity. The tips and tricks discussed here are a glimpse into the playbook of the Alaskan Guide, but you can use them to your advantage on your home waters, wherever they may be.

TIP #1: CHANGE COLORS

As rudimentary as it may seem, changing colors to suit conditions is often the key to success. It is always a good idea to have a full palette of colors and hues in your fly box to take advantage of situations beyond your control. Some color and contrast tips include:

- Bright Day, Bright Fly; Dark Day, Dark Fly
- Dark Flies in Muddy water
- Light Flies in Glacial water
- Fluorescent Flies in Tannic water

Sometimes a color change is all that is required to get you back into the fish, but sometimes, you have to do even more.

TIP #2: CHANGE SIZES

Some days size matters. It can mean the difference between non-stop action and no bites at all. Especially during calm days with high sun and bright blue sky, fish are affected by the size of the offering drifting into their view. By going small and sparse on sunny days, and conversely, big and gaudy on high-water days, the diligent angler can often coax bites out of seemingly barren pools. The wellstocked fly box will include several size selections of each profile fly. Don't be shy about changing your offering, just make sure to give each different size a fair shake and let the fish have a good look at it.

TIP #3: CHANGE LEVELS

Every fly angler dreams about days where you throw any old thing into a hole and hook piles of huge fish, but those days are few and far between. Most of the time, fish need to be targeted on a specific level of the water column to consistently provide results. The prepared angler will have either a multi-tip fly line system with several choices of sink tip, or fish a floating line and carry multiple varieties of split shot to deliver his offering at the proper depth. Some thoughts to keep in mind:

- On sunny days, fish closer to the bottom
- In rivers, fish often hold below current layers
- In lakes, fish often hold below temperature breaks
- Work from top to bottom, not bottom to top

Some days, the fish just don't want to move far, and on those days changing levels is often the ticket to success.

TIP #4: CHANGE LOCATION

Just like in the real estate business, in fishing, location is everything. Run-timing for anadromous fish like salmon and steelhead can play a large part in your fishing success, and the ability to find these fish is often what sets the dedicated angler apart from the rest of the crowd. When fishing still water, one end of the lake will often produce more fish than the other...why is that? Many times, the wind direction or sun intensity will answer that. Fish tend to congregate in areas of increased feeding opportunity, so it is only natural that if the feed is being blown to one side of the lake, the fish will follow. If the sun is heating one side of the lake for a longer duration, chances are you will find fish there in the spring and fall, and the opposite side during the heat of summer. Some other things to consider:

- Fish closer to estuaries on high tides
- On rivers, fish the lower end of the river at the start of the season and then fish higher up as the season progresses.
- In lakes, look for areas where fish congregate like points and drop-offs.

TIP #5: CHANGE ATTITUDE

One of the fundamental things that guides understand is the old axiom "Some days the fish win." While these days may be few and far between for the dedicated professional, they still can and do occur. Fish are independent, dynamic organisms, and some days no amount of tricks can bring one to hand. When this happens, the only thing an angler can do is tip their hat to their quarry. After all, how much fun would it be if you caught all the fish you wanted, every time? Most rivers and lakes that we fish on are surrounded by some of the finest natural scenery in the world, so the next time you have a slow day fishing, remember to look up, take it all in, and appreciate it with the same respect we give our finny friends.

So the next time you are out on the water and things aren't going so well, remember these 5 tips to fishing when the going gets tough. They just might make the difference

For more tips, techniques and ideas, visit the HOW TO section of www.alaskaflyfishinggoods.com



About Alaska Fly Fishing Goods

Alaska Fly Fishing Goods is located in Juneau, Alaska. We have the flies, tackle and information you need to catch every species of fish in Alaska. For the past 15 years we have been guiding, running a fly shop, and fishing every chance we get.

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