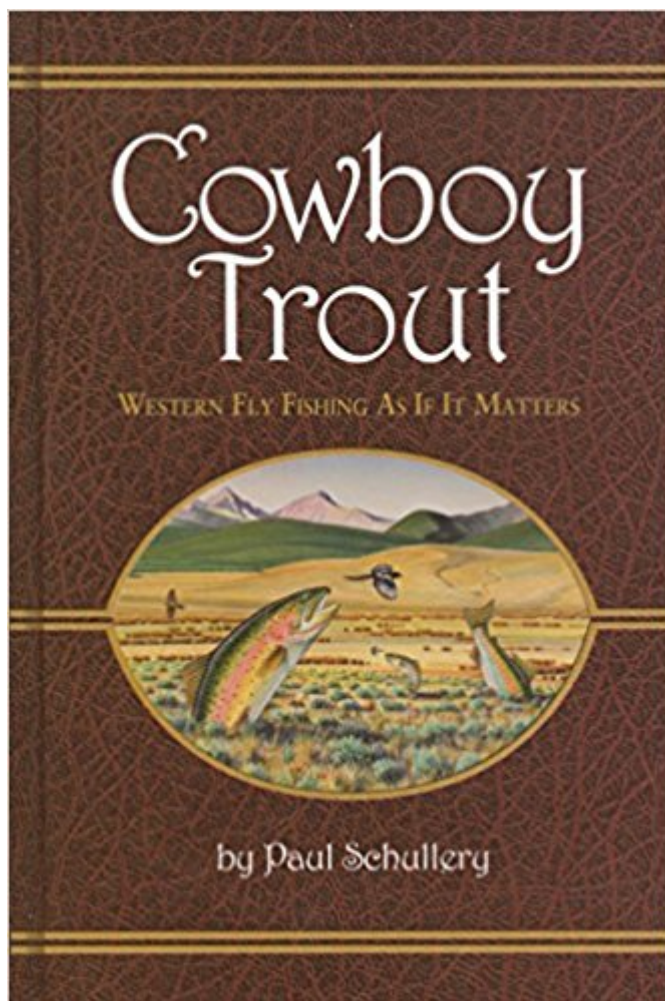


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# Cowboy Trout: Western Fly Fishing As If It Matters



## Synopsis

Fly fishing intersects western history in so many ways that it is surprising that more writers--besides historians--have not sensed its rhetorical and scholarly opportunities. As fly fishing's practitioners grow in economic power, political reach, ecological awareness, and clarity of need, those intersections will only become more compelling. In the fine tradition of angling books that celebrate fly fishing for the way it invites readers into unfettered ecological settings and connects them to the wonder of rivers, Paul Schullery's masterful *Cowboy Trout* raises to a new level of power the old saying that there is more to fishing than the catching of fish. The heightened sense of a wild place--not merely of the water but of a whole landscape--has turned out to be fly fishing's greatest gift to the West and to those who pursue fish in its rugged embrace.

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## Customer Reviews

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Paul Schullery, a former director of The American Museum of Fly Fishing, is the author, co-author, or editor of more than thirty books on natural history, conservation, and sport. His previous

fly-fishing related books include *American Fly Fishing: A History* (1987); *Royal Coachman: The Lore and Legends of Fly Fishing* (1998); and *Shuption's Fancy: A Tale of the Fly Fishing Obsession* (1995). Paul has received numerous awards and honors, including an honorary doctorate of letters from Montana State University, and the Wallace Stegner Award from the University of Colorado Center of the American West. He lives in Bozeman, Montana.

Nice lesson and history of fly fishing in the west, especially around Yellowstone...Was a lot of fun to read while fishing my way through Yellowstone this fall, and the cover photo looks a whole lot like my view from Chico Hot Springs this September. Definitely not of the AK and I go fishing style, more academic. Particularly liked the discussion of *A River Runs Through It* as theology and fishing literature.

Recommended reading for anyone interested in a thoughtful discussion of the history of fly fishing in the western U.S.

In *Cowboy Trout*, Mr. Schullery has created a must read for fly fishing enthusiasts everywhere. While in large part this book is a history of fishing in and around Yellowstone country, it is also a commentary on the transcendent nature of the sport across wide geographies and spanning several centuries. As one who has fished the waters of Southwestern Montana, I can personally attest to the fine job Mr. Schullery does in describing the unique feel of fishing these storied waters. He does an excellent job of recounting the important historical events and introducing the central figures that lead the development of fly fishing in this area. The innovations of regional fly fishing experts is detailed and the necessity of their inventions described. He also includes a fascinating and thought-provoking commentary on *A River Runs Through It*. This book is well researched, thus appealing to the historical scholars amongst the ranks of fly fisherman, but personal enough to entertain anyone with even a fledgling interest in the sport. It is my impression that Mr. Schullery would make for a capable and enlightening fishing companion, the type of whom we should all hope to share our favorite waters.

Paul Schullery's *Cowboy Trout: Western Fly Fishing as if it Matters* is not another fishing story about the big one hanging on the wall or the even bigger one that got away. Rather, this collection of essays explores how fly-fishing shaped the attitudes, identity, and culture of the West, especially in Montana and the Greater Yellowstone region. Fly-fishing was not a new sport when it arrived in the

West in the mid-nineteenth century, but since then, according to Schullery, a distinctive western style has emerged. *Cowboy Trout* demonstrates how westerners made fly-fishing their own without abandoning angling's traditions. The first essay examines our ideas of "sport," comparing modern catch-and-release fishing with the seventeenth-century practice of tying a pike to a goose (both alive and both very unhappy) for the entertainment of English noblemen. Two essays describe the fishing in early-day Yellowstone National Park--from the time visitors fished to avoid the threat of starvation to the time when the visitors themselves became a threat to Yellowstone's fisheries. Another essay, titled "A River Runs Through It as Folklore and History," features Schullery's somewhat controversial reactions to Norman Maclean's fly-fishing classic. The essay "Dark Stones and Devil Scratchers" describes the evolution of the artificial salmonfly. This giant, orange-bodied flying bug hatches in early summer out of western rivers and causes a trout feeding frenzy, yet because the salmonfly was unknown in the East, early anglers had to imitate the bug using traditional patterns tied on big hooks. But fly tiers in western Montana began crafting their own imitations, like the "Bunyan Bug" with its hand-carved and -painted wood body (made popular by Maclean's *A River Runs Through It* after its original popularity among Montana anglers), the "Mite" series of woven hair flies developed by a Missoula wigmaker, or the "Black Creeper" tied to imitate the aquatic salmonfly nymph. Today, some of these flies can still be found in flyshops alongside more recent attempts to imitate the same bug. The newer flies often combine natural materials with the latest in fly-tying technology, like rubber, foam, and shiny plastic, yet the classics still seem to catch fish just fine. In this and other essays, Schullery's extensive research and witty writing style convey the tales, tricks, tackle, and techniques of legendary western fisherman like George Grant and Warren Gillette. This history helps today's fisherman connect to local traditions whether he is floating past the rain-spattered rocks from the basement of time that line the Big Blackfoot, stripping a streamer along the undercut banks of the Big Hole, or tossing a salmonfly imitation behind the pier at Varney Bridge on the Madison. *Cowboy Trout's* message that fly-fishing has influenced western identity as much as westerners have influenced fly-fishing satisfies those seeking a greater role than mere sport for fly-fishing or those who need justification for the disproportionately large amount of their life spent fishing. But if this latter group shares Schullery's great love of fly-fishing, they should need no justification.

I picked up *Cowboy Trout* after my first fly-fishing lesson this summer. This book is easy to read like a well-told fishing story. If you're looking for help on honing your casting technique, say, or finding the best holes on the Yellowstone, this book will not help you. It looks at western fly-fishing history

and traditions--and author Paul Schullery is not afraid to poke fun, albeit gently. Topics range from fly tying to "A River Runs Through It." Final verdict: a delightful collection of fly-fishing lore that I plan to give to every fisherman I know this Christmas.

Enhanced with 30 illustrations, a bibliography and an index, *Cowboy Trout: Western Fly Fishing As If It Matters* by Paul Schullery (former director of the American Museum of Fly Fishing) is a 288-page book that is basically devoted to answering the question posed by the author in his introduction: "Can fly fishing make you a Western?". Schullery writes with an articulate flair about flying fishing in western culture; fly fishing in the Yellowstone country in 1870; fly fishing in the Yellowstone country in the 20th century, fly fishing rivers in folklore and history, fly fishing as sport and to put food on the table; spiritual aspects of fly fishing; demystifying some "sacred cows" of fly fishing, and how the life lessons of fly fishing have historically reached far beyond casting a line in a pond, stream, lake or river. *Cowboy Trout* should be considered "must" reading for anyone who ever threw in a line off the back of their boat, waded hip deep in a stream, or just sat on a river bank and waited for a nibble.

Schullery's review of the historical development of fly fishing in the West and the unique contribution of Westerners is a valuable and needed contribution to literature. It is well written and adds to the body of knowledge about Western fly fishing. Up until the past few decades, most writing has been about Eastern fly fishing.

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