

SOUTHERN OREGON is a big-bodied landscape. The Pacific Ocean crashes at its toes; a sharp spine of volcanic peaks provides backbone; and the high desert adds girth at the torso. River arteries effectively suture the pieces together.

Anadromous salmon and steelhead once steam-rolled more than 250 miles from the Pacific to the upper Klamath Basin to produce the next wave in nature's cycle of life, death, and regeneration. That was before development at the turn of the 20th century sparked a multiplicity of dams on the Klamath. Migratory fish access to the upper Klamath Basin was blocked in 1918 with the completion of PacifiCorp-owned COPCO 1 Dam, located just south of the Oregon-California state line.

Despite the decimation of salmon and steelhead, the upper Klamath's redband rainbows remain under-the-radar residents below both Keno and J.C. Boyle dams.

Native redbands averaging 16 to 18 inches are commonplace in the Klamath's Keno stretch, where heavily weighted stonefly nymphs under strike indicators can produce double-digit catch rates. Directly below J.C. Boyle Dam, the river is classic dry-fly pocketwater in the heart of a steep-and-deep, rattlesnake-country canyon. Together, Keno and J.C. Boyle represent two distinctly different fisheries under one shared banner: the Klamath.

Klamath REDSIDES

GEOFF MUELLER

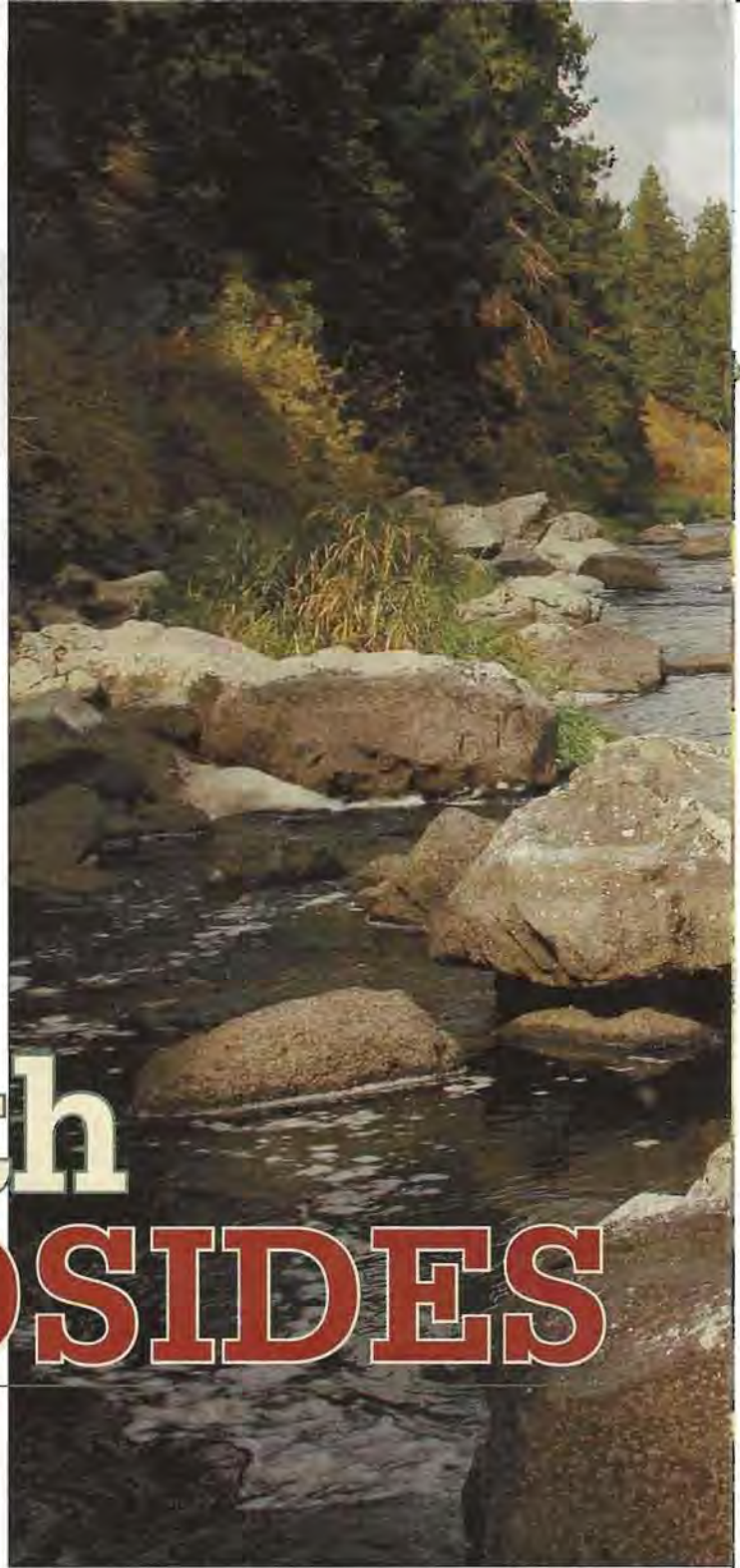
Keno Stretch

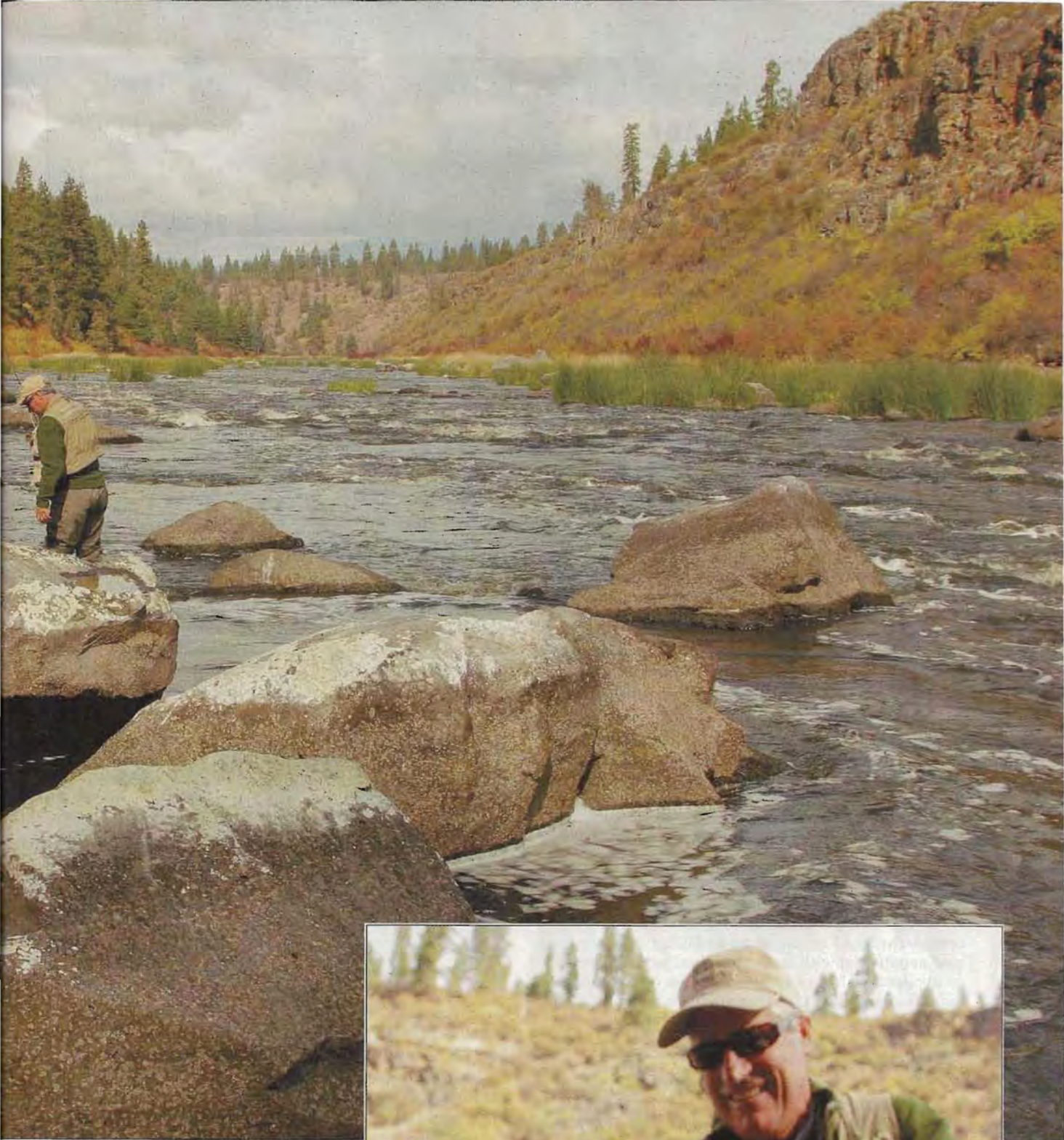
AT FIRST GLANCE, the Klamath's Keno stretch seems an unlikely fly-fishing destination. Its roiling, tobacco-colored waters look more suited for a whitewater adventure and, true to form, dry-fly fishing is *not* dependable throughout its 6.5-mile course. The nymph fishing is a different story.

After floating through the first set of Class III/IV rapids, you assess your inventory—camera, sunglasses, rod; check, check, check—and watch as the river divides into distinct slots and channels; perfect for drifting a nymph-and-indicator setup. And when your

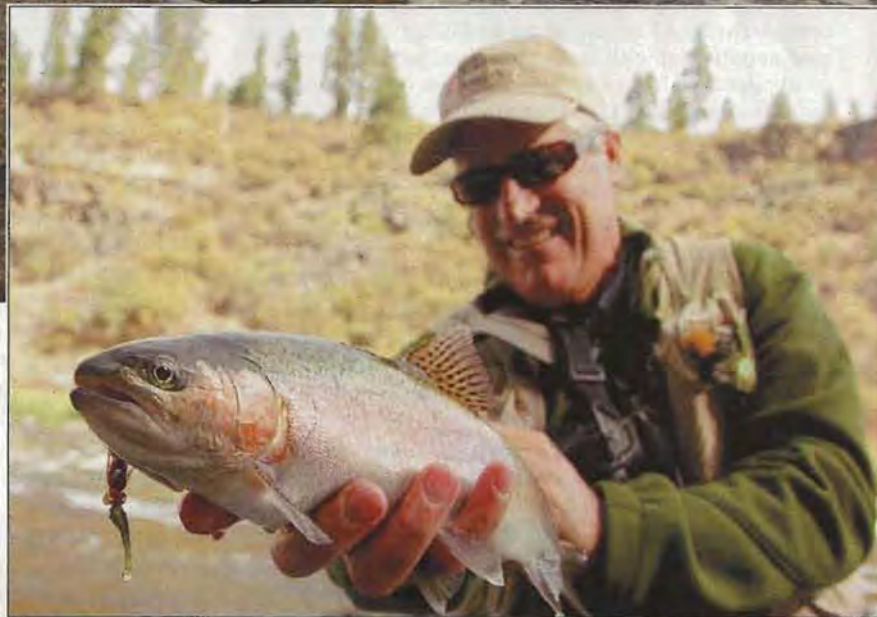
indicator dips south, you'll typically find a large trout pulling hard from the other end.

This rapid-riffle-pool scenario recycles itself throughout the Keno stretch—from Keno Dam to the takeout above J.C. Boyle Reservoir. Depending on flows from the dam, wading anglers are mostly restricted to fishing from the banks. Floating the Keno is the best way to get at the trout. Skill at the oars and whitewater-capable inflatable rafts allow you to maneuver, anchor, and pick your way through the cherry water—the slower slots, seams, and buckets where fish seek refuge and forage for food.





*Fishing for powerful
native rainbows
in Oregon's upper
Klamath River*



TODD OSTENSON PHOTOS

Brian O'Keefe (above) shakes fins with a slab rainbow taken from the Keno stretch of the upper Klamath River. Wading the Keno section (main) can be treacherous.

Dams: Gone in 2020?

The Klamath River was once the third largest producer of salmon and steelhead in the U.S., behind the Columbia and Sacramento rivers. Today, anadromous fish cannot pass California's Iron Gate Dam, one of four Klamath River dams operated by PacifiCorp. (Warren Buffett's MidAmerican Energy Holdings Company purchased PacifiCorp for \$9.2 billion in March 2006.)

- In July 2008, PacifiCorp withdrew its relicensing permit application with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to operate its four Klamath River dams (J.C. Boyle, COPCO 1 and 2, and Iron Gate). With no long-term FERC license, the dams operate on a temporary permit.
- Late last year, the Klamath Basin Restoration Group (including the U.S. Department of the Interior, some Klamath area tribes, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Fish and Game, Trout Unlimited, American Rivers, and more) released the proposed Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA). Missing from the agreement was a dam removal commitment from PacifiCorp; included was more than \$300 million for fisheries restoration, \$117 million for scientific research and monitoring, and \$45 million for reducing irrigation demand above Upper Klamath Lake.
- Despite these figures, opponents of the agreement, such as Oregon Wild's Steve Pedery, argue that concessions for agricultural/irrigation stakeholders plague most of the salmon recovery provisions, making the KBRA a "sweetheart deal" for agribusiness. [For more on Pedery's view, see "Forum" on page 12. THE EDITOR.]
- In November 2008, an agreement in principle was struck between officials from the U.S. Department of the Interior, California and Oregon, and PacifiCorp, to remove the four Klamath dams by 2020. PacifiCorp is now negotiating with local, state, and federal government agencies; Native American tribes; conservation organizations; and other Klamath River agricultural stakeholders regarding dam removal, wetlands restoration, flow remediation, and plans to help reintroduce salmon and steelhead to their natal Klamath River headwaters.
- Recent estimates put dam removal at approximately \$450 million. In Feb. 2009, the Oregon Senate passed state legislation SB 76 to help fund the effort. It involves an approximately \$1.50 monthly surcharge on PacifiCorp customers' power bills, and is currently making its way through the Oregon Legislature for final approval.
- According to the agreement signed last December, PacifiCorp would pay the first \$180 million of the removal costs. Another precondition of dam removal is \$1 billion from the federal government to fund the larger KBRA settlement. California is also slated to pay \$250 million for dam removal, but it has yet to pass legislation to that effect. 🐟



The Keno stretch opens on October 1 and closes on June 15 to protect the rainbows from the stress of catch-and-release in higher summer water temperatures. In fall, the area fishes best with streamers delivered on heavy (6-7 inches per second) sinking-tip lines. Leaders tapered to 1X or 2X are necessary for fighting big 'bows in the Keno's unforgiving fast water. Use side pressure and power from the rod butt to turn the trout out of fast currents and into your net.

Productive fall and winter streamers include Muddler Minnows, Kiwi Muddlers, and Zonkers (#2-8) in olive, pearl, and natural/pearl; black leeches; Woolly Buggers; and an assortment of crayfish patterns. In addition to good crayfish populations, the river and reservoir hold healthy numbers of sculpins and tui chubs. The chubs migrate upstream from the Boyle impoundment to spawn, and the young-of-the-year are available to hungry trout throughout the fall. Muddlers and Zonkers provide accurate imitations of these Klamath River staples.

Depending on weather, late April and May usher in the season's first mayfly and caddis emergences. The two predominant hatches during this period are caddis (#10-14), and *Baetis* mayflies (#14-18). Carry an assortment of size 10 to 16 attractor nymphs such as Morrish's Pickpockets in bright olive and golden brown, Beadhead Bird's Nests, King Princes, Prince Nymphs, Flashback Hare's Ears, Lightning Bugs, and Flashback Pheasant Tails. For caddis use size 12 to 14 Morrish's Hotwire Caddis, Peeking Caddis, Beadhead Caddis Pupa, Zug Bug, Go2 Caddis, and any Czech-style caddis larva imitations.

Because of the Keno's stained, ultrafast water, dry-fly action is limited. Don't come looking for a meditative, spring creek experience. You won't find it. Instead, you'll do well to master the intricacies of reading the water and nailing drag-free drifts.

When warmer weather peaks before the mid-June closing, Salmonflies and Golden Stones provide the season's best fly fishing. Trout eating big bugs on top is still a rare occurrence. Instead, the fish key on large

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progresses toward winter. Nor'easters can trigger stagnant fish to move, while a return to warm, summerlike weather slows things down. In general, the fish are always moving. They may stall in an area until the food supply is gone, but then they're off again.

Seek out large bait schools near shore as the most reliable method for finding a blitz. Eventually the blues will find it, too. Remember that both bait and blues are southbound. This helps you track the action from where you found it last.

Wide-open ocean beaches, rocky points and headlands, jetties, and inlets are all prime coastal features that migrating blues use effectively to trap and hold bait schools.

Flashy, synthetic #2-2/0 patterns that mimic the bait in size and profile generally work well. Lefty's Deceivers, Clouser Minnows, and epoxy minnows are simple and effective flies, as are brightly colored poppers and Crease Flies for surface fishing.

Many fall bluefish baits are large, so heavier gear in the 9- to 11-weight category is best. Heavy rods throw big flies more easily in the brisk fall breeze, and are capable of handling 12- to 16-pound autumn blues. Bluefish of that size push 10-weight gear to the limit, and powerful 100-yard runs are not unusual. After that initial run, expect some energetic, tail-walking jumps, peppered with violent head shaking, which can throw the hook or sever a weakened tippet.

Floating lines are ideal for blitz fishing. But use an intermediate line when blues blitz anchovies from below, or to keep your fly underneath or on the edges of a dense anchovy bait ball.

Blitz presentations are not challenging. Cast the fly in front of the fish, and bring it to life with a slow, steady strip retrieve. Simply allowing the fly, particularly one with red or orange in it, to dead-drift or twitch in the high-energy melee often gets more attention than a healthier-looking retrieve.

I put red or orange feathers or fibers in a lot of my blitz flies—I call them wound feathers. An incapacitated baitfish adrift in the mix is an easy target when the bait is thick and purely imitative flies are going unnoticed.



ALAN CAOLO has been an avid saltwater angler for more than 40 years.

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nymphs, and 10- to 20-fish days are possible when fishing the right rigs.

Darren Roe, of ROE Outfitters (the only licensed commercial outfitter on the Keno stretch), recommends using large, 1-inch-diameter, Waters West Quick Release indicators above a 3-foot leader tapered to 1X. He attaches a heavily weighted Golden Stone or Salmonfly nymph as the point fly and drops a size 12 to 16 mayfly or caddis nymph off the hook bend with 12 to 16 inches of 3X tippet.

Use fast-action, 9- or 9½-foot, 5- or 6-weight rods for the Keno, and expect tough fights with large rainbows in fast water. With 1X to 3X tippets, use heavy scud-style hooks to avoid straightened metal and lost fish.

Good boat positioning and a deft hand for your anchor drops are required for floating the river. Roe says you should anchor adjacent (slightly upstream or downstream) to distinct slots and seams. Work this water with up-and-across casts followed by an upstream mend to remove slack from your drift and allow your flies to reach bottom. At the drift's midway point, throw in a second upstream mend and continue to stack-mend line as your flies move through the run.

Due to the Klamath's speed, turbulence, and color in the Keno stretch, its big rainbows are relatively unwary. You'll catch fish anywhere from 6 feet to 40 feet out from the boat. Longer casts are not essential, but line control, drag-free drifts, and solid hooksets are. Cover each run thoroughly, starting in close and working your way progressively across the river before moving downstream.

Roe floats the river in 13-foot AIRE rafts with sturdy aluminum fishing frames—good for the Keno's gnarly rapids, drop-offs, and rocky, boat-eating obstacles.

Roe warns against personal pontoon boats. "Personally, I don't think a pontoon boat is appropriate on the Klamath," he says. "I've seen a lot of pontoons flip in much calmer waters."

Oar failure is another consideration. Be sure to use appropriate oars—carbon fiber or similar—to pull strongly in the Klamath's powerful water. Rookie oarsmen should not attempt this float. Unless you're familiar with the water, get out and scout the rapids before you drop in. There's a daunting 5- to 10-foot chute just above the takeout. If you err here,

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you're going into the drink. Always wear a PFD.

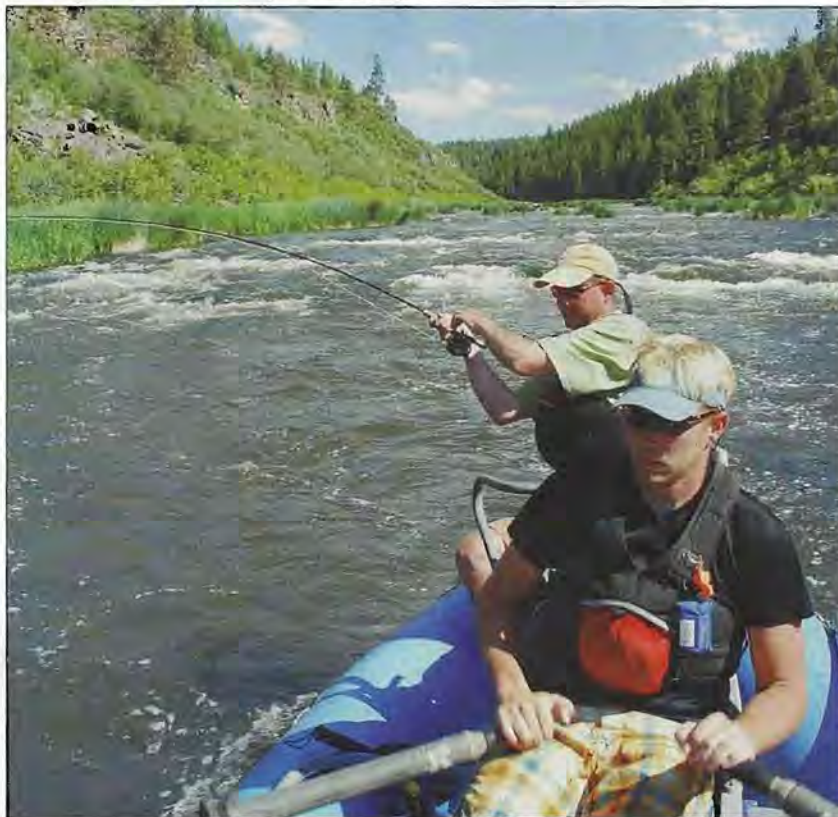
Flows. In the fall, flows from Keno Dam range from 650 to 900 cubic feet per second (cfs). These levels are ideal for swinging streamers on sinking-tip lines. By November, flows usually drop to between 300 and 350 cfs—too low to float, but walk-and-wade nymph and streamer fishing can be good in places where trout stack up in deeper lies.

Depending on winter snowpack, flows vary throughout the spring months. The best flows for avoiding rocks are around 1,300 cfs. Flows more than 1,700 cfs are too high and fast for productive fishing; at 1,300 cfs the Keno reveals its fishy slots and pockets. For the latest Keno flows, see <http://www.wkcc.org/levels/?f=8s3>.

Most of the Keno stretch is abutted by private property, but public access is permitted just downstream of Keno Dam, and there is limited wade fishing, depending on water flows. Because walk-in canyon access is difficult, you'll find little pressure through most of the year.

Directions. From Oregon 66,

Darren Roe (below, with fish on) floats the Klamath's Keno stretch with whitewater ready 13-foot inflatable AIRE rafts. Unless you're familiar with the water, get out and scout the gnarlier rapids before dropping in.



Other Waters

The Klamath River runs approximately 250 miles from its Upper Klamath Lake headwaters to its Pacific Ocean outlet near Klamath, California. Upper Klamath Lake is fed primarily by the Williamson River and its tributaries, including the Sprague River, which stretches into south-central Oregon west of the Cascades.

The world-class Williamson can be divided into two sections: its walk-and-wade, spring creek upper waters, and the wide-open lower reaches near Chiloquin, where drift boats and *Hexagenia* hatches rule. The upper river is mostly a dry-fly game, famous for its springtime Black Drake hatch. When the Hex mayflies aren't hatching, use streamers on the lower river for steelhead-size rainbows that run from Upper Klamath Lake.

The Sprague River is a tributary of the Williamson. It offers good spring fishing for native redband rainbows as well as larger browns in its North and South forks. The Sycan River is another small, cobblestone-bottomed beauty with small rainbows, brookies, and the occasional brown. Good fishing is available above Sycan Marsh and you'll find rustic camping at Pike's Crossing.

Upper Klamath Lake is one of North America's best stillwater fisheries for trophy trout.

follow signs to Keno Recreation Area. Or, heading west from Keno on Oregon 66, cross the river and veer left on Riveredge Road. At approximately 1 mile, turn left again onto Klamath River Road, which leads to the put-in just below Keno Dam. Find wade access by hiking into the canyon directly off Oregon 66, following the river east of Keno toward J.C. Boyle Reservoir. There are several pull-offs along the power lines here, but a

steep scramble down into the canyon means a grueling hike out. These unmaintained trails can be tough: Use common sense and caution.

Bottom Line

KLAMATH DAM REMOVAL and water management issues generate most of the attention in the press, but two distinct and thriving resident rainbow trout fisheries continue to shine. The dams must be removed to restore the river's historic anadromous fisheries. Meanwhile, the upper Klamath River still provides excellent fishing. Go get it.

GEOFF MUELLER is the managing editor of FLY FISHERMAN.

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