

## COUNSELOR GUIDE

### FLY-FISHING MERIT BADGE



#### **The Fly-Fishing Merit Badge**

Fly-fishing is a specialized form of fishing that combines skill and artistry. Because it is so rich with tradition, it is a passion for millions of people. The beauty of the water, the solitude, and the skills that the sport requires have all made fly-fishing very important in the lives of many notable people.

The Fly-Fishing merit badge is a natural connection with Scouting. Initiated in 2002, this merit badge is popular with Scouts who want to improve their fishing skills and take them to the next level. Still, this is not an easy merit badge to earn. It requires work to learn several new counterintuitive skills.

To work with Scouts to counsel a merit badge, you first need to register with the BSA. A potential merit badge counselor must complete the Adult Application form, No. 524-501, and submit it along with the BSA Merit Badge Counselor Information form, No. 34405. See the [Scouting Forms From the National Council](#) page at Scouting.org. Your local Scoutmaster can also help you obtain and fill out these registration forms.

Any qualified individual of good character can be a merit badge counselor. If you are over the age of 18 and have the skills to teach fly-fishing, you can become a merit badge counselor. You should also have the patience and skills to work with Scout-age boys. Merit badge counselors are critical to success of BSA's merit badge program. They offer their time, experience, and knowledge to help guide Scouts in one or more of the merit badge subjects.

The BSA also requires that you complete the online Youth Protection training prior to working with the Scouts. To take the training, go to [www.MyScouting.org](http://www.MyScouting.org) and establish an account using the member number you receive when you register for BSA membership. Note that this program addresses strategies for personal safety for youth as well as adults. Youth Protection includes training for two-deep leadership where an adult is not allowed to interact singly with a Scout. In addition to no one-on-one Scout adult interaction, adult leaders are taught to respect a Scout's privacy and to report potential problems or infractions.

Only an authorized counselor may sign off on the Scout's work toward the merit badge requirements. The *Fly-Fishing* merit badge pamphlet is available for purchase at the local council's Scout shop or at Scoutstuff.org. On Scouting.org, you can find the current requirements for the [Fly-Fishing merit badge](#).

It is important to realize that the merit badge program is based on Scouts learning the skills needed to become competent in the subject merit badge. For the Fly-Fishing merit badge, the Scout does not need to become an expert at casting a fly to earn a merit badge. **It is also important to note that a merit badge counselor is not to change, or deviate in any way, from the established requirements in the *Fly-Fishing* merit badge pamphlet.**

The merit badge counselor will:

- Assist the Scout as he plans the assigned projects and activities to meet the merit badge requirements.
- Coach the Scout through interviews and demonstrations on how to do the required skills of the craft, business, or hobby.
- Follow the requirements of the merit badge, making no deletions or additions, ensuring that the advancement standards are fair and uniform for all Scouts.
- Certify the Scout after determining whether he is qualified for the merit badge.

Once contact has been established with the Scoutmaster or the Scouts, the counselor will develop a program schedule convenient to all. Be aware that the Scouts may arrive at the first session knowing little or nothing about fly-fishing or the equipment used in the sport. The Scout may not have read the merit badge pamphlet or may have an out-of-date copy. Because the requirements have changed slightly over the years, it is the responsibility of the Fly-Fishing merit badge counselor to obtain and follow the most current requirements.

Remember, Scouts may arrive with little or no preparation. Some Scouts may show up to simply earn another merit badge, learn something about fishing, or accompany a pal who wants to earn the badge. Your job as counselor is to bring enthusiasm, knowledge, and skills to each session and transfer those abilities to the Scouts. By the time you are finished, each of your Scouts should be equally enthusiastic about the sport of fly-fishing and be grateful to you for taking the time and effort to teach them how to participate in the sport. Make the time with the Scouts fun and exciting.

It is recommended that you bring all fly tying supplies and fly rods. Relying on the Scouts to bring their equipment is a mistake. If they have it at all, Scouts may bring such a diversity of equipment that by the time you straighten it out, you will lose the attention of the other Scouts.

Remember, to earn the fly-fishing merit badge, Scouts do not have to become experts in the sport. Your job is to bring them along to a level of competence that allows them to successfully catch a fish with a fly and have fun doing so. Keep your instruction in simple modules and keep your program moving to prevent boredom and distractions.

## Requirements

Each requirement will be addressed individually with tips offered to help you become oriented to the tasks required of each Scout. The *Fly-Fishing* merit badge pamphlet, available at all BSA Scout shops, will discuss each of the points in the requirements so the counselor is encouraged to read it thoroughly before interacting with Scouts. The latest requirements are also listed in the annual *Boy Scout Requirements* publication, No. 33216. Preparation, flexibility, and a great attitude are the keys to success.

### **1. Do the following:**

**a. Explain to your counselor the most likely hazards you may encounter while participating in fly-fishing activities and what you should do to anticipate, help prevent, mitigate, and respond to these hazards. Name and explain five safety practices you should always follow while fly-fishing.**

**b. Discuss the prevention of and treatment for health concerns that could occur while fly-fishing, including cuts and scratches, puncture wounds, insect bites, hypothermia, dehydration, heat exhaustion, heatstroke, and sunburn.**

**c. Explain how to remove a hook that has lodged in your arm.**

First, remember that this is not a first-aid course. The Scout is not learning to become a doctor but is being cautioned to be prepared for some of the accidents that might occur while fishing. The counselor should lead a discussion on injuries that could happen on any typical fly-fishing expedition. The Scouts will already know something about first aid for wounds, broken bones, hypothermia, and heat exhaustion. The counselor's role is to draw out information from the Scout. If multiple Scouts are earning the badge, the discussion becomes easier as each Scout will contribute a different perspective. Watch for Scouts who might be exceptionally quiet and draw them into the conversation with specific questions.

Above all, caution that hooks are sharp and that they can cause puncture wounds. Also, an errant weighted hook that is blown into the back of the head on the forward part of a cast can really sting. When casting, the angler must always be cautious of individuals behind them and also be aware of the wind direction to reduce being struck by a windblown hook. When possible, have the wind come from the direction of your non-casting arm. Still, sooner or later a hook will impale an angler and it need not disrupt an otherwise great fishing experience.

There are two first-aid techniques for removing hooks. Most anglers are familiar with the "push the hook through" procedure where the barbed section is cut off and the remaining shank portion is withdrawn from the entrance hole. Like just about everything, it has its advantages and disadvantages. Although this technique is simple and relatively

straightforward, you will need a wire-cutting tool capable of cutting the embedded hook. Moreover, you will create a second puncture wound when you push the hook point up through the skin to expose the barb prior to cutting the hook.

The second hook removal technique, “snap-pull,” also has its limitations. Be aware that earlier editions of the *Fly-Fishing* merit badge pamphlet may show an incorrect graphic depicting the string pull point occurring near the center of the hook shaft. The correct string pull point is at the hook bend. This technique shouldn’t be used where there is underlying soft tissue like an earlobe.

Bring an orange to the session, and use it to demonstrate both hook removal techniques. Note that ice applied to the area might serve as a field expedient anesthetic.

Nevertheless, Scouts should be cautioned to use these techniques only if they feel comfortable doing so. As with any wound, there may be exposure to blood, which also may be a concern. When in doubt, the Scout could immobilize the hook using tape or a bandage and get the patient to an appropriate medical facility.

Some of the safety practices to follow when fly-fishing include:

- Bring a first-aid kit.
- Take precautions to prevent heat reactions, dehydration, or hypothermia.
- Wear sunscreen.
- Limit physical activity.
- Wear eye protection (e.g., sunglasses) and a hat.
- Slipping, falling into underwater holes, being swept downriver by flowing water, lightning and storms, and vulnerability to large wild animals are additional concerns. The farther out you go, the risks increase—so be prepared!
- Write a trip plan and leave it with someone.

Again, the counselor might lead a discussion to draw out these points and encourage the Scouts to add to or embellish each point on the above list.

**2. Demonstrate how to match a fly rod, line, and leader to get a balanced system. Discuss several types of fly lines, and explain how and when each would be used. Review with your counselor how to care for this equipment.**

The counselor might bring several different weight fly rods to demonstrate the differences in gear. For example, a 5-weight rod might be compared with an 8- or 9-weight rod. Similarly, bringing several weights and types of fly line might be useful in explaining how and when each might be used. Be sure to show the thickness difference in the front part of a weight-forward fly line as compared to the running part of the line. Explain that it is the heavy part of the weight-forward line that helps propel the almost weightless fly to its fishy destination on the water. Explain also the letter/number designation manufacturers use to describe fly lines and how they may match up to the rod and fish size being sought.

All of these items may be left conveniently on display for Scouts to inspect further during breaks in the session.

Caring for the equipment includes washing or rinsing with clean freshwater after use and allowing it to dry thoroughly. Oiling or lubricating the reel and cleaning the fly line with a dressing every once in a while can increase its useful life. Never store your equipment in a hot car as the heat helps destroy the plastics in fly line. Similarly, insect repellants and some sunscreens have components that ruin fly lines.

### **3. Demonstrate how to tie proper knots to prepare a fly rod for fishing:**

**a. Tie a backing to a fly reel spool using the arbor knot.**

**b. Attach backing to fly line using the nail knot.**

**c. Attach a leader to fly line using the needle knot, nail knot, or a loop-to-loop connection.**

**d. Add a tippet to a leader using a loop-to-loop connection or blood knot.**

**e. Tie a fly onto the terminal end of the leader using the improved clinch knot.**

Each of the knots is described fully in the *Fly-Fishing* merit badge pamphlet. It may be helpful to bring in 36- to 48-inch lengths of backing, fly line, and leader to demonstrate each knot and have the Scouts put together a complete set up measuring approximately 10 feet. While serving as a measure of accomplishment for this requirement, it should be retained by the Scout for future reference. It would be even better to get your hands on some knot-tying pamphlets to hand to Scouts for later review. Many tackle shops, websites, and angling manufacturers provide them free of charge.

Although the counselor might have considerable experience in “better” knots, only the knots outlined in the requirements should be used. If a Scout asks for a better knot, note that you will demonstrate it afterward. Introduction of additional information during this difficult session will only serve to confuse the Scouts.

It will also be helpful if you rehearse exactly what you plan to do beforehand. If you seem confused and have to refer to a booklet for a given knot, the Scouts may quickly lose interest and will be difficult to bring them back to task.

Having the Scouts pair off and encouraging them to work together to tie the appropriate knots has worked well. Just ensure that you are there to help them through it. Knots are tough and your help is critical. Perhaps a skilled assistant or two will make the process flow better.

**4. Explain how and when each of the following types of flies is used: dry flies, wet flies, nymphs, streamers, bass bugs, poppers, and saltwater flies. Tell what each one imitates. Tie at least two types of the flies mentioned in this requirement.**

The counselor might bring in several of these different types of flies to demonstrate and facilitate a discussion on this requirement. If flowing water is available, such as in a kitchen tap, a streamer fly held through its eye with a bodkin brings home the point of a small fish swimming in water. Again, mark the flies as to type and leave them displayed on a table for later examination. This requirement can be a great opportunity to build excitement as the Scouts begin to see it all come together. Be enthusiastic and the Scouts will usually react similarly!

If possible, the counselor should bring pedestal vises. They are easy to use for both left- and right-handers and have the advantage of being easily passed back to an instructor for corrections. Meanwhile, the instructor is not painfully bending over the student as would happen if the vises were clamped to the table. To reduce distractions, have all of the materials for one fly available at each station and remove any tools that will not be used. Pay attention to set up in an area with good lighting.

Avoid having the Scouts touch lead wire. Rather, use brass or tungsten beads to add weight to a fly. If you are going to tie a bead-headed fly, have the bead on the hook and insert it into the vise beforehand. This ensures that the vise is adjusted and that you don't have to either waste a lot of time chasing beads that fall off the tying table or removing the bead and inserting the hook point into the proper hole. You can demonstrate how to insert the hook point into the small hole on the bead. Another tip is to have a model of the fly that you will be tying at each station. Having a model fly in front of a Scout gives him a target of what he is trying to tie.

Further, have plenty of extra bobbins threaded and all ready to go. New fly tiers are noted for putting too much pressure on the thread or nicking the thread along the hook point. You don't want to waste your time rethreading bobbins during your session. The moment you do, the other students will be fiddling with something. By the way, try to use 6/0 or heavier thread. The stronger thread will help reduce breakage.

As you begin your fly-tying session, you might demonstrate how to tie the fly and explain the steps as you proceed. Go slowly enough for the Scouts to see what you are doing but not so slow that you lose their attention.

Probably the best first fly is the Bead-headed Woolly Worm. It teaches basic fly-tying skills, and it is simple and large enough yet is an effective fly to catch all sorts of fish. One benefit of this fly is the fact that the tail length is not an issue. When the fly is complete, simply cut the "tail" to the desired length (about the distance of the hook gap) and it is ready for fishing. Teach the "critical pinch" technique to tie the fly component on top of the hook shank. Scouts will need to know that technique before they can tie other much smaller patterns.

To get started, remind the Scouts that you want everyone to stay at the same point in the fly-tying process. If Scouts go at their own pace, results could vary dramatically. Keeping Scouts in the same step allows you to inspect their work and correct it if necessary before proceeding to the next step. Following this procedure, every Scout will end up with a “fishable” fly.

Do not teach how to use a whip finisher. This is an advanced finishing-off technique and teaching how to use it will consume an inordinate amount of time. Rather, get some cheap ballpoint pens. When you disassemble the pen into its components, you will have several “half hitch” tools, one of which will readily go over the bead. The pen bore can still be used to take notes!

Be prepared for the “oh wow” moment. As you are completing the fly and the Scout is palmering the hackle forward toward the eye, the feather’s bristles will splay outward much like a caterpillar’s legs. Since few Scouts ever have visualized a feather this way before, they often greet the moment with an “oh wow”!

Several other simple fly patterns might be used as the second fly. For example, the Mickey Finn streamer, San Juan Worm (when time is really short), and a Bead-headed Pheasant Tail Nymph are all effective choices. If time permits, try to introduce a fly pattern that is not too complicated or small in size and will have a high likelihood to catch a fish in your area.

While Scouts may choose to stick their fly proudly into their hat, packing foam peanuts make a good way for them to store safely their completed flies until they are ready to fish them.

If you are going to be teaching your program over several weeks, you may assign homework and allow the Scouts to take their vises home to work on additional flies. Give them the appropriate materials. While charging Scouts for simple materials is not out of the question, the counselor should refrain from assessing fees if at all possible. Note that some Scouts may not be able to afford an extra fee and even the suggestion might turn a few—who may be on the fence—off. Generally, the few fly-tying supplies are so cheap that visits to the local tackle shop and millenary store can limit your costs to \$5 to \$10 for the fly-tying needs of your Scouts. Perhaps your local fly-fishing club will even acquire vises and lend them to you, and provide other needed equipment and materials for your sessions. Who knows, there may even be a few volunteers to come along and help you out.

## **5. Demonstrate the ability to cast a fly 30 feet consistently and accurately using overhead and roll cast techniques.**

Make the following point: Casting is merely a way of delivering a fly to a location where a fish is likely to be. Your role as counselor of the Fly-Fishing merit badge is not to make a Scout capable of becoming a fly-casting expert. Just get Scouts to be able to make a reasonable cast—one that the fly line unfurls in a straight line out in front of the angler. If

the Scout can get a yarn “fly” to land inside a 4-foot diameter Hula Hoop after several tries on a calm day that should be sufficient.

Think about it, the best fly anglers will catch most of their fish within 30 feet. Also, the refraction index of light is different in water and air. Due to the laws of physics, a fish is unlikely to see a Scout if he is standing about 35 feet away. So although the fish may not see him, the Scout should be aware that sounds do travel. Fish can go into a protective behavior not wanting to eat anything, much less the fly, if it hears or senses any untoward sounds.

If possible, bring enough rods for each Scout. One instructor can handle teaching four to six to Scouts reasonably well. Initially keep them all in the same sequence. By doing so, one Scout who gets it can help his fellow Scout learn the timing and stroke. Emphasize that what you are looking for are a few good casts and not a whole bunch of marginal presentations. Flailing the water will result in a bunch of tired arms. Have the Scouts celebrate a well-made cast!

Remind the Scouts that fly rods are knot-tying machines. When they get a tangle, the Scouts need to stop and get it untied. Fly rods are not whips and the action is not whip-like. Rather they serve as transducers, where energy flows from your arm to the rod, to the line, back to the rod, and finally back to the line as they deliver the fly to the intended locations. The fly will go in the direction of the rod tip during the forward delivery stroke.

Have your fly lines marked at 30 feet. Make a black permanent mark about one inch in length all around the line 30 feet back from where you would attach the leader. If possible, up weight the fly line by one weight over the designated rod weight. The added weight will help them feel the “tick” on the rear stroke of the fly line when making a traditional back cast. You don’t need to use tapered leaders and can easily get by with a 5- to 6-foot section of 15# mono with a small tuft of yarn tied in at the terminal end to simulate a fly. Have the Scouts use some form of eye protection (glasses and sunglasses are OK) and wear a hat. Have about 10- to 12-foot separation between casting lanes and try to have the wind coming over their non-casting shoulder or perhaps from the rear. Asking a Scout to cast into a 20 knot wind is just not fair!

While there are many roads leading to Rome, a simple tried and true technique of casting instruction involves asking the Scout to remember only four things. Demonstrate each step before anyone else picks up a rod.

1. The thumb is placed on top of the grip. This is because the thumb is the strongest finger and can apply the most pressure during the forward part of the cast.
2. **Remember:** The stopping point of the rod tip is always at 1 o’clock.

With (1) and (2), the Scout will be able to do a roll cast. Simply have them draw the rod tip slowly to the 1 o’clock rod tip stopping position. Before anyone casts, have them all

check where the rod tip is. Check where the reel is pointed (it should be in the direction of where you want the fly to go). Check the thumb placement (directly behind the rod grip and in the same plane where you want the fly to go). Check that the rod is in the 1 o'clock position. Have the rod lean away from the Scout and check that there is a D-shaped barrel in the fly line. With all the Scouts on the same page, have them make a forward roll cast stroke by putting hammer-like pressure and movement using their thumb. It may take a few repetitive sequences to get them all making a roll cast, but with patience and a bit of peer pressure they all seem to get it quick enough. For roll casting, you might start with only 20 feet of a weight-forward fly line beyond the rod tip. This will give them more control. Remember, if they are using a typical 9-foot fly rod with a 9-foot tapered leader, casting 20 feet of fly line in a roll cast actually delivers the fly outward to about 38 feet!

3. In preparing for the making the traditional back cast, the Scout will have to learn two more steps. Fortunately, he already knows the third: The stopping point of the rod tip is always at 1 o'clock. Have about 30 feet of fly line laid out straight before them. The black mark on the line should help orient them. You should have already demonstrated that Scouts need to bring the rod tip upward vigorously and have it stop dead at the 1 o'clock position. Explain that with the rod tip lowered and in the same plane as the line before them, they initiate a lift slowly but with increasing vigor. They have to put enough energy into the cast to get the fly line in the air. At this point the energy is in the rod as it flexes. When the rod reaches the 1 o'clock position, the rod is stopped dead. Now, the energy in the rod is transferred to the line, propelling it rearward. A tip for younger Scouts is to allow the Scout to bring the non-casting hand to the butt of the fly rod providing additional lifting energy to get the line into the air and flowing backward. Should you encounter a Scout in a wheelchair, sit on the ground next to him and make the cast from the lowered position. It is the same motion you would make when casting from a canoe seat.

4. With the rod dead stopped at the 1 o'clock position, and as the fly line unfurls rearward, the Scout is encouraged to get into stance similar to baseball batting stance to watch the line unfurl rearward. Forward pressure is provided by the thumb only at the moment when the fly reaches its most rearward position and before the fly line starts to sag downward. Usually if a cast fails to develop, the Scout has brought the rod tip beyond the 1 o'clock position or is not waiting long enough for the fly to reach its full rearward position. Demonstrate that you can make a great cast by merely watching the rearward unfurling process. A good forecast is made possible by a good rearward cast.

You will see double pumps where the Scout stops the tip at 1 o'clock and then just before the cast brings the rod tip further backward, wanting to hit a "home run." Further, you may have to devise all sorts of techniques to prevent them from going beyond the 1 o'clock position. Watch for a Scout doing it correctly and bring attention to him. You may even wish to pair up that Scout with another who needs help. Scouting is based on teaching skills from one Scout to another so this is very consistent with a Scout's development.

**6. Go to a suitable fishing location and observe what fish may be eating both above and beneath the water's surface. Explain the importance of matching the hatch.**

A great advantage of fly angling is that when an angler finds out what the fish are eating and can use a fly that mimics the prey organism in size, shape, color, silhouette, and behavior, he or she is likely to catch a lot of fish. This merit badge requirement introduces the Scout to basic predator-prey relationships. The Scout must use observational skills to see small animals and appreciate that predators rely on these critters for survival. Using this knowledge and their own creativity, they can tie flies that closely mimic and suggest to the fish that their fly is the natural or real thing. Essentially, this is the game of fly-fishing—to find out what the fish may be feeding upon and to tie on just the right fly, cast it to a place where a fish is likely to be, and make it behave as a natural fly. All to provoke a strike! You are not waiting for a fish to bite; you are making the fish bite. Often this process is not easy, especially when you go to a new fishing location. But when the mystery is solved, a great day of catching follows.

**7. Do the Following:**

**a. Explain the importance of practicing Leave No Trace techniques. Discuss the positive effects of Leave No Trace on fly-fishing resources.**

**b. Discuss the meaning and importance of catch and release. Describe how to properly release a fish safely to the water.**

Leave No Trace should be integrated in every element of fly-fishing. For example, it should be taught as part of fly tying (picking up the mess from all clipped materials) and in knot tying by collecting all tag clippings and put them in a place where they can be disposed of properly.

If a fish is kept for dinner, all entrails should be buried or disposed of according to procedures outlined by fishery managers. Some managers want the carcass to be cut up and thrown back into the water as a way of replenishing nutrients for future generations of fish.

Introduce the concept of “biological Leave No Trace.” Scouts should be reminded that invasive species not native to the water body being fished can be a much bigger problem. Inadvertent transfer of invasive species can be a real and long term problem. For example, New Zealand mud snails and *Didymosphenia geminata* (a diatomic form of aquatic algae) can be transferred by hitching a ride on common felt boot bottoms. While paper and plastics may last for one to five years before degrading, invasive biological organisms may last forever! Scouts should be aware of invasive organisms and cautioned to wash or sterilize their equipment before going from one water body to another.

**Catch and release** is a valuable fishery management tool that allows a fish to be caught and enjoyed by more than one angler. Scouting's founder, Lord Baden-Powell, was an early advocate of catch and release.

Various factors will determine if a released fish lives or dies, but the most important factor is the location where the fish is hooked. A fish hooked in the gills or throat has a much lower survival rate than a jaw-hooked fish. Fish caught with artificial lures and flies generally survive better because the hooks are not often deeply swallowed. A fish profusely bleeding will have a great chance of dying within 24 hours of release and may be better served if taken and used for food if it is legal to do so.

While using barbless hooks does not significantly increase fish survival, their use can often ease the trauma of release by reducing handling time. Using wet hands and minimally handling a fish are always good practices. Get the fish back into the water as quickly as possible. A good rule of thumb might be to hold your breath while the fish is out of the water. When you have to breathe, so does the fish!

Ingesting a hook too deeply may call for cutting your line and releasing the fish with the imbedded hook. With a bit of luck, the fish may soon expel the hook allowing the wound to heal naturally.

Minimize the fighting duration on a fish. If you expect to catch larger fish, use a rod that is appropriately weighted. A lightweight rod used to catch a large fish will almost certainly extend the time to subdue the fish. Longer playing times contribute to fatigue and stress and make that fish more vulnerable to larger predators upon release.

Higher water temperatures hold less oxygen and can contribute to increased fishing mortality. Cold-water species like trout are especially vulnerable. Sometimes when the water is too warm, it may be better to fish for warm water species that can recover more quickly. In the same vein, in mid-summer it may be better to fish early in the morning when the water temperature is cooler rather than fishing in the afternoon when water temperature is the highest.

Keeping the fish pointed into the water flow will help oxygenated water flow across its gills with minimal additional effort by the fish. Holding the fish gently underwater until it swims away on its own improves its chances of survival. Larger fish generally need a longer recovery period.

**8. Obtain and review a copy of the regulations affecting game fishing where you live or where you plan to fish. Explain why they were adopted and what is accomplished by following them.**

Fishing regulations are scientifically based and were developed over time to ensure that a fishery is managed consistent with long-term conservation goals. Fishery managers are constantly monitoring fish populations and making recommendations to fishery administrators based on their findings.

By following the law, anglers ensure that there will be fish to catch in future years. Elements in the regulations that follow management principles include season dates to protect spawning, size limits to protect smaller fish, slot limits to protect the larger

spawning fish, and trophy limits to restrict the number of larger fish taken. In some cases, certain species may be caught but need to be released immediately. Again, these rules were not made to hassle the angler but to ensure that the fish are protected until they have had time to become reestablished.

**9. Discuss what good outdoor sportsmanlike behavior is and how it relates to fishermen. Tell how the Outdoor Code of the Boy Scouts of America relates to a fishing enthusiast, including the aspects of littering, trespassing, courteous behavior, and obeying fishing regulations.**

The Outdoor Code of the BSA teaches cleanliness in the outdoors to ensure that future generations have the same habitats to enjoy. Care with campfires, consideration of others, respect of private property, the use of low-impact camping and hiking methods, and the use and promotion of good conservation practices in the field all contribute to this goal.

Following the Outdoor Code, a fly-angling Scout abides by conservation laws, asks for permission to use or cross someone's property, collects and carries out all trash and litter, and exhibits courteous behavior to others who may be using the same area.

Generally anglers fishing upstream have the right-of-way and an angler fishing downstream should get out of the river and pass quietly downstream of the angler heading up river. Angling etiquette is important and a fly angler needs to learn to be a respectful member of this age-old fraternity.

**10. Catch at least one fish and identify it. If regulations and health regulations allow, clean and cook a fish you have caught. Otherwise, acquire a fish and cook it.**

This requirement is what it is all about. The Scout tests his ability to match wits with a fish and to fool that fish into believing that the bait or lure being offered is something worthy of being eaten. It is the moment of truth—that time when the focus is between the angler and the fish. Can the angler deliver the selected fly to an area likely to hold a fish? Can the angler provoke a strike? Can the angler use good line-control techniques to set the hook?

To bring a Scout to this point, the counselor should teach a Scout how to get line control (retrieve slack line and be ready to pinch the fly line to the rod grip) after a cast is made. Sometimes a strike will occur just as the fly hits the water so a Scout has to be ready. Getting line control has to be automatic and the Scout will need to practice the skill.

The counselor needs to differentiate how to fish dry flies by raising the rod tip ("tip set") to set the hook versus using a wet fly where you "strip set" the hook by stripping the line with the non-casting hand.

Although the requirement no longer requires a Scout to kill a fish, he should not be made to feel guilty in killing a fish if it is legal to do so and he plans to use it for food. This is consistent with Lord Baden-Powell's observation that a "tenderfoot who starved on the

bank of a river full of fish would look very silly yet it might happen to one who had never learned to catch a fish.”

Still, there is a concern that some areas conveniently available to Scouts might have catch-and-release restrictions making it unlawful to retain a fish for food. Similarly, some states have imposed restrictions on eating certain fish and it would also be wrong to encourage anyone to eat a fish that might make them ill. To address both concerns, a Scout is given credit for releasing his fish and then acquiring one from another angler or perhaps from a fish market. That fish is then cleaned and cooked.

So what constitutes a “catch”? The requirement states that the fish must be caught and identified. It doesn’t make any distinction between a fish 3 inches long and one 3 feet long. A fish can be 3 grams or 300 pounds! Any fish counts. Does the fish have to be landed? As long as the Scout can identify the type of fish (i.e., common name) after it has been impaled onto his hook, then that is a catch—even if it flips off before he is able to bring it to the net. Some call this an “early” release. If the Scout delivers his fly to an area where a fish is likely to be, he makes the fly behave in a way that the fish believed it to be a natural prey, he sets the hook when the fish struck and he identifies it, then all of the elements of the requirement have been fulfilled. Now all he has to do is acquire a fish and clean and cook it.

## **Resources**

### **Scouting Resources**

*Boy Scout Requirements*, No. 33216; *Boy Scout Handbook*, No. 34554; *Fieldbook*; and the following merit badge pamphlets: *Fishing*, No. 35820; *Fly-Fishing*, No. 35824; *Camping*, No. 35866; *Cooking*, No. 35879; *Environmental Science*, No. 35892; *First Aid*, No. 35897; *Fish and Wildlife Management*, No. 35898; and *Soil and Water Conservation*, No. 35952.

### **Books**

Alley, Robert H. *40 Best Trout Flies*. Frank Amato Publications, 1996.

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## **Periodicals**

[\*Fly Fish America\*](#) magazine

[\*Fly Fishing and Fly Tying\*](#) magazine

[\*Fly Fisherman\*](#) magazine

## **Organizations and Websites**

### **American Museum of Fly Fishing**

P.O. Box 42

4104 Main St.

Manchester, VT 05254

Telephone: 802-362-3300

Website: <http://www.amff.com>

### **Federation of Fly Fishers (FFF)**

5237 US Highway 89 S. Ste. 11

Livingston, MT 59047

Telephone: 406-222-9369

Website: <http://www.fedflyfishers.org>

### **International Game Fish Association**

300 Gulf Stream Way

Dania, FL 33004

Telephone: 954-927-2628

Website: <http://www.igfa.org>

### **Leave No Trace**

P.O. Box 997

1830 17th St., Suite 100

Boulder, CO 80304

Toll-free telephone: 800-332-4100

Website: <http://www.lnt.org>

### **Trout Unlimited**

1300 N. 17th St., Suite 500

Arlington, VA 22209

Toll-free telephone: 800-834-2419

Website: <http://www.tu.org>

### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

Main Interior

1849 C St., NW

Washington, DC 20240

Website: <http://www.fws.gov>