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## **St. Mary Angler Guide Service: a review of the 2017 fishing season.**

### **Overview of the Conditions.**

Last winter brought us a snowpack across the mountains of S.E. British Columbia that was way above normal, a significant change from the last couple of years. As of May 15th the snowpack in the East Kootenay region, which includes the St. Mary, Elk, Bull and Skookumchuck rivers, was 157% of 'normal'. Over in the West Kootenays, where we fish the upper Columbia River, it was 156% of the long term average. The high snow levels did make us ponder the possibility of some localized flooding come spring. However, a prolonged cool spring meant a delay in the onset of the snow melt season by about two weeks and the freshet did not come all at once. It also left us with a lot of ground water that came in handy later in the summer.

Temperatures across the southern half of British Columbia were 1 to 3 C° below average from December thru March. While most of the winter was pretty dry in the B.C., the snowpack really built up in March right thru into May. Precipitation levels in March were 150-200% of normal for S.E. British Columbia.

While the snowpack in our region was pretty high we didn't see any significant flooding during the spring runoff. That could not be said of the Okanagan Basin to our west, as well as other regions of B.C. to the north that saw a lot of high water and flood damage. By June 15<sup>th</sup> there was still a good amount of snow in the mountains of our region, but the runoff was not creating any problems.

In 2017 we experienced higher than average rainfall during the spring, but much lower than average precipitation during the summer. With the high snow pack and prolonged wet spring we started fishing the St. Mary and Elk rivers a few weeks later than 2016. The below average rainfall persisted from May through September.

In terms of air temperature in the East Kootenays, it was quite a bit warmer from May thru September. It was way hotter than usual in July and August where average daily maximums were 5.8C° and 4C° warmer than normal respectively. Fortunately, all that snow and spring rain really bolstered the groundwater conditions that paid off when things got really hot and dry late in the summer. All our rivers in the East Kootenays possessed good flows throughout the season providing excellent fishing conditions.

Over on the upper Columbia River the air temperature was also above normal from May through October. As the case in the East Kootenays, it was also a lot hotter than usual in July and August where average daily maximums were 5.9C° and 4.8C° warmer than normal

respectively. Rainfall was below usual from May thru September. These hot and dry conditions did not create any water temperature problems in the spring and fall when we fish for the big rainbows. In October we saw only an average amount of rainfall this year so fishing conditions remained very good. As this is a tailwater fishery, high water does not create any problems for us. The upper Columbia River is a robust and resilient piece of water and we experienced excellent fishing conditions throughout the 2017 season.

The fishing season on the upper Columbia started on schedule in mid April. We started the summer fishing season for wild Westslope Cutthroat on the St.Mary River in late June and we were on the Elk by mid July. We got to the Skookumchuck and Bull Rivers by late July. The season lasted almost into October on the St.Mary and Elk rivers. We fished the upper Columbia River with our fly and spey rods into late October.

2017 was a record year in B.C. for acres burned by wildfires in a season at over 1.2 million hectares. While most of the fires were located outside of our region in central B.C. from May thru July, it did come our way in August. We had a number of fires in our region that led to the partial closure to fishing of the St.Mary and Elk rivers. Fortunately for us, as a commercial operator we were granted continued access to the rivers and were able to safely take anglers out on the water to fish during the closure.

### East Kootenay Temperature and Rainfall (Station 'Cranbrook A', B.C.):

Month	May	June	July	August	September	October
Temperature in 2017	20°C (68°F)	23°C (73.4°F)	32°C (90°F)	30°C (86°F)	22°C (72°F)	11°C (52°F)
Average Daily Max. Temperature (1981-2010)	17.9°C (64°F)	21.6°C (71°F)	26.2°C (79°F)	26.0°C (79°F)	19.9°C (68°F)	11.7°C (53°F)
Rainfall in 2017	29 mm (1.1 inch)	26 mm (1 in.)	5 mm (.2 in.)	4 mm (.16 in.)	7 mm (.28 in.)	26 mm (1 in.)
Average Monthly Rainfall (1981-2010)	46.1 mm (1.8 in.)	62.2 mm (2.45 in.)	38.3 mm (1.5 in.)	28 mm (1.1 in.)	31.3 mm (1.23)	20.8 mm (.82)

### Columbia River Temperature and Rainfall (Station Castlegar, B.C.):

Month	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Temperature in 2017 (Average Daily Max.)	14°C (57°F)	22°C (72°F)	26°C (79°F)	34°C (93°F)	33°C (91°F)	25°C (77°F)	13°C (54°F)
Average Daily Max.	15.3°C (60°F)	20°C (68°F)	23.6°C (74.5°F)	28.1°C (83°F)	28.2°C (83°F)	22°C (72°F)	12.9°C (55°F)

Temperature (1981-2010)							
Rainfall in 2017	87 mm (3.4 inches)	57 mm (2.25 in.)	32 mm (1.26 in.)	6 mm (.24 in.)	4 mm (.16 in.)	8 mm (.32 in.)	52 mm (2.1 in.)
Average Rainfall (1981-2010)	59.3 mm (2.33)	70.3 mm (2.77)	72.3 mm (2.84)	48.1 mm (1.89)	30.4 mm (1.2)	42.4 mm (1.67)	49.4 mm (1.94)

### **The Spring Season on the Upper Columbia River in the West Kootenays.**

We fish the 35 mile stretch of the upper Columbia River from the confluence with the Kootenay River down to the Canada-U.S. Border. In 2017 this tailwater fishery provided our anglers with great fishing from mid April into late June. We fish the Columbia in a couple of ways. The first is from our custom built jet boat using dry flies, nymphs or streamers. The boat has plenty of unobstructed fishing space with a wide beam making it both comfortable and stable. We power up to where we want to fish, turn off the motor and row around the big eddies, or through the big runs. The second approach is to get out of the boat and wade in from the wide cobblestone shorelines and big gravel bars. From here we either cast dry flies using standard fly rods, or double handed spey rods.

The rainbow fishing on the Columbia is very productive from April through June. This spring the weather was a mixed bag ranging from snow and rain to sun. In general things were wetter than usual. We took our standard approach to spring fishing using streamers with a sinking line, as well as fly rods set up for nymphing. We carried dry fly rod setups in the event that a hatch popped off during the day. After powering to our destination of choice on the river we would cut the motor and do a controlled drift downstream; fishing along the bank edges and then sliding into the big back eddies of revolving water where we would fish the seams and feed lines. Later in the spring we did more fishing from shore with the spey rods.

Most of the fish landed this spring were in the 17 to 22 inch slot, with the average size increasing as the spring progressed. We also landed a nice assortment rainbows over 23 inches, including one over 26. Catch rates were also good this spring ranging from 10-20 per day depending on the anglers experience level. On April 1 the water flow on the Columbia was low to start with at around 64,000 cubic feet per second (CFS), exposing a good amount of shoreline, rock and cobble piers and big in-river gravel bars. By May 1 the flows were around 80,000 CFS. From May 1 to the end of June flows rose more steadily to around 115,000 CFS on May 15<sup>th</sup> to 150,000 CFS by June 1<sup>st</sup>. The higher flows result in a fuller channel with less exposed gravel bars and cobble shoreline, but bigger eddies. As flows increase through the spring the fish tend to move from along the banks and runs into the big back eddies.

The Columbia remained clear throughout the spring providing excellent fishing conditions. We also experienced the typical robust hatches of caddis, callibaetis and mayflies. When you throw

your line into the Columbia you don't have any idea what size rainbow will take your fly, but you can be assured once it hits it will run and pull hard!

### **Summer Cutthroat Fishing on the St.Mary, Elk, Bull and Skookumchuck Rivers in the East Kootenays.**

The St.Mary River was rounding into form by early July, weeks later than 2016 but more in line with what we usually see. On July 5<sup>th</sup> it was 35C° (95F°), the Stone Fly hatch was working it way up river and we were landing lots of cuts in the 13 to 15 inch slot. By mid July the River had shaped up very nicely and were catching the odd Bull Trout and Cut-bow in addition to loads of Westslope Cutthroats.

The Elk River was shaping up nicely by mid July, again more in line with what we usually see. On our first trip out in mid July it was in the high 20's C° (mid 80's F°), the water was clear and the flows were dropping nicely as we landed about 20 cutthroat in the 14 to 17 inch class. We also pursued a nice sized Bull Trout we spotted trailing a cutthroat. It hit the fly hard, fought well, but popped off at the net! It was a great float to start to the 2017 season on the Elk.

By late July the weather was hot with clear skies as the St.Mary, Elk and Bull rivers were coming into their summer groove. The rivers were crystal clear, had good flows and were loaded with cutthroats. We were now fishing all sections of the St.Mary and Elk. We were also seeing the first signs of the wildfires from central B.C. as the smoke was starting to move into our region. On a trip to the St.Mary on August 2<sup>nd</sup> we could see the grasshoppers were now everywhere and the Stone fly hatch was pretty well done. The anglers were experiencing good catch rates of cutthroat trout from the morning right through into the afternoon. The fishing over on the Elk was equally productive.

In August we started to see the effects of the dry summer as we had received very little rain since the beginning of June. On top of that it was turning out to be abnormally hot in August as well as July. The lack of rain and elevated temperatures meant we started seeing wild fires in our region of the Province. By early August we were fishing the Bull and making trips back into the Skookumchuck Canyon, as well as our daily floats on the St.Mary and Elk. On our August 21<sup>st</sup> float to the Elk we hit the water early to avoid the heat. We were rewarded with a good catch of cutties in the 14 to 16 slot as well as one that was around 18 inches in length. By now grasshoppers were everywhere along the banks, with the odd hatch of caddis and midges popping off. All that early season precipitation meant the flows in our rivers stayed up giving the fish lots of cool water even though it was very hot and dry.

By early September the wildfires were creating problems for anglers in our region. The Government decided to close access to the backcountry for 30 days, or until a change in the weather brought sustained moisture. Fortunately for us, they made exemptions on some of the rivers we fish. On the Elk River anglers were allowed to access the river to fish, or float from

boat launches and private properties. On the St. Mary River guided anglers could access the river only through private properties. As we use drift boats and have secured private launching points for years now, our anglers could still get out on the water to fish.

At the same time the Elk and St. Mary rivers continued to fish very well. With less angler pressure as the result of Government closure we were seeing good catch rates of cuts in the 14 to 15 inch range. By mid month the restricted access was dropped as temperatures were cooling and we were seeing a little rain. We even had quite a bit of snow fall on the tops of the Rockies. We were also seeing more hatches of October Caddis, Blue Winged Olives and Green Drakes on the St. Mary and Elk rivers. The water levels in the rivers were getting into their September lows and we were landing a good number of cut-bows to go with the cutthroats. We were now starting to think about moving back over to the upper Columbia River to fish for the big rainbows.

All our East Kootenays rivers fished very well thru September as the water flows stood up and the fish continued to feed. As is always the case, there was much less angling pressure in September which left the rivers pretty well exclusively to us.

### **Fall Fishing for Big Rainbows on the Upper Columbia River.**

In late September we headed back over to the Columbia River in search of the big rainbows. We packed up our customized jet boat that was designed specifically for the Columbia and hit the road for the month of October. The jet gets us around quickly on the water while the drift boat design elements allows us to row it so we can hover in the choice water.

The weather this year on the Columbia was its normal warm and dry. On our September 30<sup>th</sup> float the river was running clear at about 70,000 cubic feet per second (CFS). The weather was warm and clear, peaking at a comfortable 70°F (20°C). Within the first 15 minutes on the water we hooked into a nice, chunky rainbow; around 20 inches in length. This fish took off and ran us into the backing before we pulled over along the shore and landed this big guy. The rainbows fed well over the summer and were in very good shape and beautifully colored.

During this trip the guys landed 15 rainbow trout each. All were really good sized, between 18 to 23 inches. The fish were mainly taken on streamers, with only a few midges. October Caddis and Blue Winged Olives were hatching on the day.

We spent most of the day floating along the bank edges. On occasion we would bank the boat and the anglers would get out to cast their spey rods. Certain runs on the Columbia are very conducive to spey fishing.

On our subsequent October trips we continued to fish mostly streamers, casting dry flies during the October Caddis and Blue Winged Olive hatches. We used the Spey rods for fishing on the wide exposed cobble shorelines. After early October the water flows in Columbia where turned

down to about 35,000 CFS from the upstream dams. This opened up a lot more gravel bars and cobble shoreline and the river took on a more intimate feel. We continued to catch 15 to 20 rainbows per trip in the 18-24 inch range. The odd bigger fish at 25 plus was also hocked up. The fall colours on the wide expansive valley of the Columbia were beautiful. It was a great month of October fishing to close off the 2017 season.

### **Annual Hosted Trip to Christmas Island**

In February of 2017 we hosted our annual fishing trip to the Republic of Kiribati, also known as Christmas Island. Christmas is a giant coral atoll located 1,300 miles south of the Hawaiian Islands, 100 miles north of the Equator. As the host, we made all the arrangements booking our group of 16 into the "Villages", a local lodge. The Villages features 8 air-condition double twin bed bungalows with private baths, comfortably accommodating our group. All our meals were prepared by local chefs and served onsite in the dining room.

Each day the head guide scheduled our daily fishing venue according to the tide and sun position. In the morning each group would leave the beach in their assigned skiff with their personal guide and boatman. Each angler had their own guide, so it is one on one, which is great for all fishers regardless of their level of skill.

On Christmas Island we fish for Bonefish and Giant Trevally (G.T.s). The guide carries your 12 weight rod while you fish for bonefish just in case a GT is sighted in your area. We use 8 weight rods for the bones. For those fishers who needed it, we put together a gear package with custom tied flies.

Our group caught between 10-30 bonefish a day with chances to catch GT's. We also caught different reef fish occasionally when we would go further out. Bonefish average 2-6 pounds, but several fish over 8 pounds were caught during the week. Many GT's were caught as well with the average size in the 5 to 8 pound range. That said, some of the guys were targeting the big GT's. The largest bonefish landed was 9 pounds while the biggest GT came in at around a whopping 50 pounds!

We are taking a group to Christmas Island again this February 21 to 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018. We still have 3 spots open so give us a call if you are interested in coming along. You will have a great time.

So there you have it, another year of great fishing with the St.Mary Angler is history. Thanks again to all those anglers we accompanied out on the water this year.

As always, we greatly appreciated the patronage of our guide service and the fly shop in Cranbrook, B.C. We wish everyone a healthy and enjoyable Holiday Season. We hope to see you in the shop, or out on the river again next year.

We will be attending tradeshow in Washington, Oregon and Colorado in the New Year. We are now booking people into the 2018 and 2019 seasons. If you have an interest in coming along with us to Christmas Island, or wish to book a trip to any of the rivers we float in B.C., feel free to give us a call to discuss details.

Feel free to contact us anytime via our email or at 1-800-667-2311. We are always eager to talk about the fishing and be sure to follow us at the Facebook link below.

Take care,

*Kelly & Karen*

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PS To find out which tradeshow we will be attending in early 2018, go to <http://www.stmaryangler.com/tradeshows.html> for dates, locations and to contact us for will call tickets if you will be attending. To learn more about the rivers we fish check out <http://www.stmaryangler.com/riverft.html>.

### **Report #19 (October 20, 2017): The weather is holding and the Columbia River continues to produce nice rainbows!**

As we move towards the end of the season, the weather has remained quite good for this time of year with only the occasional rainy day. Down in the valley where the Columbia River flows the temperature has stayed quite nice. You just need your rain gear and few layers of clothing for those certain days and you will be fine.

On today's trip on the Columbia River we fished from the Gyro Park boat ramp at the City of Trail, upriver towards Genelle. The weather was kind of crazy as we had some snow the previous night up high, but this morning it was sky-blue and sunny.

The early morning temperature was 42°F (5°C) with things warming up to around 55°F (13°C) midday. It turned out to be a decent day on the water; crisp and clear. You just have to dress in layers so you start off warm, then as it heats up you just remove some gear to stay comfortable.

The water levels have come up a bit lately to around 35,000 cubic feet per second (1,000 CMS), which can change the feeding patterns of the fish somewhat. In response one just has to focus the effort along the bank edges and in the eddies where you see the fish feeding. Fishing from our jet boat is so nice as we can cruise from one run to another. If we like a particular spot we stop to drift, row and fish. At this time of year the River level allows us to stop along any nice gravel bar, get out and fish along the bank edges. Sometimes the fish move in close and it is fun using a switch or spey rod for these conditions. The Columbia River is so huge that it makes it easy to get in that practice time with a spey rod if you are so inclined.

During this day we fished from the boat and from the shore. The anglers switched from throwing streamers, to nymphing, to casting dry flies when the feeding fish presented themselves. This River allows you to experience all aspects of the art of fly fishing. Theoretically we should all be striving to be good at every type of fly fishing as one progresses through this sport and the Columbia is a place that allows you to use all three.

So how did it fish? The anglers caught and released many rainbows in the 18-24 inch range today. These rainbows have beautiful red stripes down the side and are big and healthy. One rainbow was quite large so we had to pull the boat over to the bank edge to land it. This trout was a nice 25 inch 5 to 6 pound rainbow, a beautiful fish. These rainbows can pull so hard and take you into the backing in one burst, one run. All you can do is let them run and then slowly pull them in whenever they give you a chance!

The flies that were working on this day included the following. Streamers: Kelly's Super Streamer and Pat's Rubber Legs. Nymphs: the Pickle, regular Prince Nymph, Purple Prince, Hare's Ear and Lightening Bug. Dry flies: October Caddis, regular Stimulator and the B.W.O. (when the fish were on the surface). In the fall we sometimes get caddis coming off and small midges or B.W.O.'s hatching, depending on the weather.



The fall colors are now amazing and it is such a beautiful time of year to be outdoors. The wonderful fresh, cool mornings warming up to a nice temperature by mid afternoon is an awesome time of year to be out on the Columbia. It looks like there is going to be a few more nice days in the forecast so we will be getting in a few more days on the River.

### **Around Our Region:**

The lakes in Region 4 are still fishing quite well. The fish are feeding and bulking up for the winter season. On lakes such as White Swan, White Tail and Premier, the rainbows have been feeding on black, green and pumpkin leeches this time of year. Local anglers have also been using the micro leech and the balanced leech on some of these lakes with good success. Depending on the weather, damsels fished on the surface, can also work very well at this time of year.

The Kootenay River is also fishing quite well. The bull trout have moved out of the small streams and are back in the mainstem of the Kootenay. During the last few weeks anglers have been doing quite well with some of the bull trout streamers we sell here at the shop.

In terms of the Elk and St. Mary rivers they also can fish well at this time of year, again depending on the weather. It is a much smaller window for dry fly fishing during the day, but why not get out there and give it a try. So while the weather is still holding pretty well, fishing is still good and you have many options in Region 4 to choose from.

### **2018 Bookings:**

We are now taking bookings for next season. If you know your dates give us a call and we can get you into the book. We do not take the 50% deposit till January 2018. It seems every year people are calling earlier and earlier to book, so call soon if you already know when you want to come in 2018.

Take care

**Kelly and Karen**

## **St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us 1-800-667-2311 to book your fishing trip for 2018.

### **Report #18 (October 4, 2017): The big Columbia rainbows are out there!**

October has started off very nicely with beautiful fall weather; cool mornings heating up to afternoon highs in the mid 60's °F (17-19)°C. The skies are clear and crisp, the trees are turning color, it is a wonderful time of year to be out and fishing!

The guys decided they wanted to fish the section of the Columbia River from Genelle up towards the City of Castlegar. So we put the jet boat in the water and powered upriver to get to the many different areas on this beautiful stretch of water. The Columbia has such big water that it is a must to use a powered boat to get to the prime spots. But once out on the River, fishing from shore in the fall is definitely doable as the rainbows start to move back along the bank edges. This is when using a spey rod, or a single-handed rod from shore, will catch you some very nice fish!

The early morning started out a little slow, but things picked up by mid morning then continued to fish very well until dark. The anglers landed around 15-18 fish in the 18-24 inch range. These big rainbows have been feeding well over the summer months on the Columbia's huge summer caddis hatches. It is crazy how many caddis hatch on this River, it is like being out in a snowstorm!

The mode of fishing chosen today by our guests was to use a streamer rod along the bank edges, and nymphing a bit in the runs. As always it is nice to have the rods all set up in advance so you can choose what rod technique is working the best at certain times of the day. This way your fishing time is maximized when out on the water.

In terms of the hatches, small midges were emerging along with a few October Caddis and the odd Blue Winged Olive. The flies that were producing best were the Purple and regular Prince Nymph, Hares Ears, the Pickle and the Super Streamer. Occasionally the fellows tried a dry fly. If the rainbows were coming to the surface to feed they would try a BWO, or October Caddis. The guys choose to stay out almost

until dark. The days are definitely getting shorter, but they still wanted to get a full 8 hours on the water.

The weather looks like it is going to change over the Canadian Thanksgiving weekend, but that is okay, we can use a little rain.

Hope to see you out on the water while we still can get out there before the snows flies.

Take care,

**Kelly and Karen**  
**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us 1-800-667-2311 to discuss fall fishing on the Columbia River.

### **Report #17 (September 30, 2017): Roll on Columbia!**

The float trips are coming to an end on the St. Mary and Elk Rivers, but the Columbia River is calling our name. So we are off to the Columbia River to chase some big October rainbows.

The Columbia River is such big water that we use our jet boat. This custom built boat allows us to power up and down the River to get the best spots. Once we are at the places we wish to fish, the design of this boat allows us to row along the bank edges or hold in the big eddies.

When fishing on the Columbia we usually meet everyone for breakfast at the Prestige Hotel in Rossland, early in the morning. After we are powered up we head down into the valley to fish the Columbia. Today we decided to float on the lower section of the River below Trail to the international boundary.

The fall weather was absolutely beautiful today with temperatures starting around 40°F (5°C) and reaching a nice and comfortable 70°F (20°C). Clear skies and no wind, just a gorgeous day on the water!

The guys had all their rods strung up and ready to go; a streamer rod, dry fly rod and one for nymphing. At this time of year the fish are moving back along the bank edges so throwing streamers is a good call. Sometimes we run into a pool or big eddy where the fish are still feeding on the surface, so that is when we break out the dry fly rods.

Within the first 15 minutes on the water today we hooked into a nice, chunky rainbow; around 20 inches in length. This fish took off and ran us into the backing before we pulled over along the shore and landed this big guy. The rainbows have been feeding well over the summer and are now in very good shape and beautifully colored.

During the day the guys landed 15 rainbow trout each. All were really good sized, between 18 to 23 inches. The fish were mainly taken on streamers, with only a few midges. October Caddis and Blue Winged Olives were hatching on this day. We spent most of the day floating along the bank edges. On occasion we would bank the boat and the anglers would get out to cast their spey rods. Certain runs on the Columbia are very conducive to spey fishing. It is an awesome place to spey fish because when you catch one of these rainbows it feels so cool.

The flies that were working best on the day were the Super Streamer and the Pickle (green and brown, sized 12-14). When there is a hatch on, orange October Caddis, sized 8-12 can work well. BWO patterns can be extremely effective if they are hatching. The only problem with using them is keeping these big guys on the line! We still have the whole month of October to fish on the Columbia... a great month to fish this River. It really is our favorite time of year to get out fishing the rivers of Kootenays.

If you have a few days to fish this October, give us a call and we will try to fit you in!

Tight Lines,

**Kelly**  
**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us 1-800-667-2311 to discuss fishing on the Columbia this fall!

## **Report #16 (September 18, 2017): As fall appears, the St.Mary River is still fishing great!**

Most of the backcountry is now open again with only areas where fires are still burning remaining closed. With this in mind, most of the rivers and lakes in our region are now accessible for fishing once more.

The weather has been cooperating nicely this last week as we are seeing cooler temperatures and some much needed rain. It was a very warm and dry summer and the recent cooler, wet weather is greatly appreciated.

The St. Mary River has been fishing very well of late. Due to a fire, part of the River had been closed down due to access restrictions. So after the reopening we decided to float the lower section of the St. Mary from the St. Eugene Mission down to Fort Steele. No one had been on this section for 15 days so we were keen to see if the layoff would benefit the fishing.

With the cooler temperatures, 43°F (6°C) to start off and warming up to a high of 60°F (15°C), we are now seeing more hatches of Blue Winged Olives and Green Drakes.

The water conditions are the normal for this time of year... low. While the deep holes remain, there are sections of the St.Mary where we have to get out and pull the boat over the rocks.

We dry fly fished most of the day. A couple of times when the rain came in and the temperature dropped we put on a nymph, but for the most part we used dries. During the float I positioned the boat so the anglers could cast along the bank edges, behind rocks and along structures to get a good drift. If the angler could put the fly in those sections and get it to float naturally long enough so the fish could find it, that was when the big guys would come up to play.

The lower section of the St.Mary fished well and the guys landed many cutthroats in the 13 to 16 inch slot. They also landed many cut-bows ranging from 16-20 inches,

some really nice fish. The cuts continue to feed well and are becoming quite chunky. The red slash on the cutthroat is very prominent now. We just love those brilliant orange colors!

The flies working well today were the Purple Haze, Blue Winged Olive and Fat Alberts (Black and Tan), sizes 12-16.

As we floated down the bottom leg of the Mary towards the Kootenay River, we rounded a corner to see a big five point Elk standing on shore.... bugeling! After the Elk saw us, a heard of twenty or more came out of the bush and crossed the River right in front of the boat. I guess with the back country being closed for a while the Elk are pretty comfortable out in the open now.

The bull trout have finished spawning and are now moving back downstream into the Kootenay River after spawning high in the tributary streams. This means the bull trout fishing can be very good at the mouths of the small streams where they enter the Kootenay, including the Bull and Skookumchuck rivers.

The cooler fall temperatures means that the fishing in our area lakes will start to pick up soon. The fish will want to feed as much as possible before lakes freeze over so I encourage you to get out to Whiteswan, Whitetail and Premier lakes this fall. There has been an abrupt change in the weather from a week or so ago as the Rockies have quite a bit of snow on them now! We went from fires and hot weather to snow in a matter of just a couple of weeks. It has been a crazy summer for weather.

Now that things are cooling off in the East Kootenays we are heading over to the Columbia River to finish out the season chasing the big rainbows. We have clients booked till mid October, but may be able to fit in a couple of you if you want to come up and give it a shot.

We will post a fishing report from the Columbia River next week.

Tight Lines

**Kelly**

## **St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us 1-800-667-2311 to discuss available days on the Columbia this fall.

### **Report #15 (September 6, 2017): The rivers continue to produce well as we roll into fall.**

The end of August has come and the beginning of September is upon us. Wow, it is amazing just how fast the summer has gone by. This summer has been an exceptionally warm and dry one and it looks like it is going to stay this way well into September. The many wild fires across the Province of B.C. have contributed to the smoky skies in our area. Some days the smoke is limited while on other days it just settles in, so it is hit or miss.

Recently the Ministry of Forests decided to close access into the backcountry for 30 days, or until a change in the weather brings some sustained moisture. Fortunately for us, they made exemptions on some of the rivers we fish. On the Elk River anglers are allowed to access the river to fish, or float from boat launches and private properties from Sparwood down to Elko. On the St. Mary River guided anglers may access the river only through private properties, so access to the river is very limited now.

The water conditions on the St. Mary and the Elk rivers are normal for this time of year. There is still a lot of groundwater moving into the rivers from all that snow pack last winter and the abundant rainfall we saw in April and May.

The guys floated the St. Mary River a number of times this past week and the action has remained steady and the catches quite good. Dry patterns such as Purple Haze, Fat Alberts, Swisher Caddis, Hoppers and ant patterns are still pulling fish up to feed, regardless of the amount of smoke in the sky.

The average size cutthroat being landed is in the 14-15 inch slot, with the occasional cut-bow being caught as well. Hopefully, we will get some rain in the future which will bring on the BWO and Green Drakes hatches.

The Elk River has been fishing very good as well. The fish are still feeding well as they know that fall and winter have appeared on the horizon.

In mid September we will be heading over to the Columbia River to chase the big rainbows. The fall fishing for rainbows gives us a chance to shake things up a bit. On the Columbia we never know what size of fish will take the fly so we look forward to some big fish and good days of fishing ahead this fall.

If you have any questions about our rivers feel free to call the shop for up to date information or to book a fall trip on the mighty Columbia.

Take care,

**Karen and Kelly**  
**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us 1-800-667-2311 to book a fall float today.

### **Report #14 (August 21, 2017): The Elk River is in peak summer form!**

Today we decided to float the Elk River from Morrissey down to the village of Elko. It is one of the lower sections of the River. When the wind is blowing we try very hard to avoid this section as it can be crazy hard to row down river when the wind is blowing hard up river! But today the wind was not a problem.

During our float the weather was very nice with temperatures starting at around 52°F (12°C) and climbing to a high of 83°F (28°C) by late afternoon. We have been having beautiful clear blue sky days; it is absolute eye candy to look towards the Rockies when in Fernie!

We have been doing our best to get out and onto the water early. With an early start in the day the fishing can be quite good. Today it started out well, only slowing down on the dries for a short while in the early afternoon. Then it picked up as the afternoon progressed. When the fishing slows down for the cutthroats on dries, it is usually a sign to pull over and eat lunch. When the fish are not eating that is when you get a chance to do so.



The Elk River water conditions are normal for this time of year as the levels are holding up nicely. We are lucky we had such a wet spring, as it seems to be sustaining us through this hot dry summer.

Today the bulk of our fishing effort was dry fly fishing. We would argue that the rivers of southeastern B.C. provide some of the finest dry fly fishing in North America and our clients travel a long way to fish them. It is always surprising to see fish rising to the surface as people are throwing streamers and nymphs on these spectacular dry fly fisheries. But hey, to each to their own ... fly-fishing is fly fishing right?

On this float the guys caught and released over 25 fish each. Some of the cutthroats landed were very chunky; obviously they have been eating well as they are very strong. Once they are hooked these cuts take a healthy first run, then the rest is up to the angler.

Today we fished behind rocks, along the bank edges, in nice pocket water and thru the nice flowing runs. Everywhere we looked we knew the fish could be holding in the prime water and if we got a good drift over them long enough for the fish to find the fly... then it was fish on!

The biggest fish landed was a nice 18-inch cutthroat that pulled out line and fought extremely hard. The food on the Elk included a few hoppers along the bank edges, as well as some caddis and midge hatches. The guys tried many different patterns in order to determine the best fly and did not stop changing things up till they found the one the cuts liked. By the end of the day the foam patch on the boat was covered with flies--always a sign of a good day. It was a really good day today.

The flies that worked included the Purple Haze, Caddis, B.W.O. and Green Drakes; all sized 14-18. As summer cruises along the Elk River tends to see quite a bit of angler traffic. So if you can fish small patterns and 5X or 6X tippet it will increase your chance of success significantly.

From the "wildlife sighted file" we saw a coyote chasing a baby elk across the Elk River. The young elk got separated from its mother and was chased into the River... and we think it got away. Nature in action, we never know what we are going to see out on the Elk, but the fishing is always pretty good!

Hope to see you on the water this season.

Tight lines,

**Kelly**  
**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us 1-800-667-2311 to book a summer or fall float today.

### **Report #13 (August 16, 2017): The St.Mary River is fishing great!**

The fishing in the St. Mary River is on! The dry fly fishing has been amazing lately as the trout are eagerly up and feeding aggressively.

Today we experienced slightly lower temperatures as the morning started off at 52°F (11°C), but eventually built to a high of 83°F (28°C). Later in the afternoon the clouds rolled in and we received some much-needed rain, which I am sure made both the fish and us quite happy. The smoke from wildfires had been lingering in the air the last few days, but the rain has cleared it away.

The water conditions on the St. Mary are very good for this time of year. The cool water temperature is holding nicely. The River level is above what it had been at this time of year over the last few seasons. So we are pleased to say that the St.Mary River is in excellent shape!

We have been starting our days nice and early during this run of hot summer weather. The anglers are fishing dry flies right from the start of the float and the fish are hungry and up and feeding as soon as the sun's rays hit the water. The fish are on most of the day; with only the occasional slow down in dry fly feeding in the early afternoon and sometimes near the end of the drift. When things slow for the dries we can go over to the "dark side" and nymph for the cutthroats. However, most of the time one can persist with dries and get them to come up for a dry once again.

Our destination today was to float the lower section of the St. Mary River from the St. Eugene Mission down to the pullout at Fort Steele. During the float the guys fished behind rocks and logs along the bank edges and in the big pools. They also got out of the boat a few times to hike up some of the small back channels searching for the big one. On the day they landed around 40 cutthroats between the two of them with many in the 13-15 inch range. They did land a couple of feisty cut-bows in the 17-18 inch range as well. These natural hybrids are a lot of fun, as they love to jump out of the water and take big runs. All the fish landed were very strong and healthy and it is obvious they have been gorging themselves during this summer season of bounty.

Earlier in the season the stones were hatching, but right now the hatches are exclusively small midges. In response the fish are happily feeding on size 12-14 Purple Haze, B-52 Ants and black and tan Fat Alberts. Caddis and H&L Variants sized 14-16, as well as big Chubby Chernobyls and Grasshoppers sized 12-14, are also on their menu.

We had a particularly rare and cool wildlife sighting on this day on the lower St. Mary. At one point during the float we saw a wolverine swim across the river... never have seen that before! We also saw eagles and ospreys in their nests high up above the River... watching us.

The summer is cruising along, but the fishing is crazy fun and the rivers are all fishing very well now!

Come on up and give it a cast!

Tight lines,

**Kelly**  
**St. Mary Angler**

PS Call us 1-800-667-2311 to discuss available days, what is working and to book a float today.

**Report #12 (August 2, 2017): The St. Mary River is in its summer groove.**

We are now entering the heart of summer and the rivers are holding their water levels and in great fishing shape. Today we floated the Canyon Section on the St. Mary River. With the hot weather the guides are getting everyone out on the water nice and early. The clients meet up with their guide around 7:45 a.m. and by the time the rods are rigged up and the boats are ready to shove off, it is around 9.00 a.m. This early start works well because as soon as the sun hits the water the fish are up and feeding actively on the surface.

The weather once again was beautiful with temps reaching a high of 88°F (31°C). Today we saw the effects of some of the forest fires from the central part of B.C. as it was a bit smokey. There are a couple fires in our area, but nothing close to structures or houses.

The fishing was pretty good in the morning as the anglers landed 20 fish between the two of them before lunch. All these cutthroat were hooked on the surface by dry fly fishing. The fishers were aided by the guide positioning the boat along structures and floating close to the bank edges to get the guys in close to the feeding fish. The anglers also got out of the boat on occasion to walk up the back channels to fish for cutthroat trout in the nice holding water.

In the afternoon they caught a nice rainbow-cutthroat cross that was a good 18 inches. These cut-bows really like to jump putting up a great fight. The angler sure enjoyed hauling this one in.

On the day the anglers landed around 35 fish between the two of them and probably hooked many more that they shook the hook and let off! We made sure the guys used a stronger tippet so the fish could be landed quickly allowing the fish to get back in the water as soon as possible.

In terms of insect life on the River, the grasshoppers are just starting to show themselves along the bank edges and we are still seeing a few stones on the River as well. The artificials used by the anglers included; Chubby Chernobyls, Fat Alberts and Grasshopper patterns (sizes 10 to 14). They also fished Caddis patterns, Purple Haze and Stimulators (sizes 12 to 14).

**Fishing Tip:**

When fishing foam patterns, the approach is simple. You cast the fly and quickly put a good mend on it so it doesn't drag. Then you give it a shake to make it move from time to time. The cutthroats will not even look at the pattern unless you shake it; something to remember.

The rivers of southeastern B.C. are all fishing great now. Just remember to check the regulations before you head out into the backcountry to ensure you are in the right place with the right gear.

Hope to see you up here this season.

Tight lines,

**Kelly**  
**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us 1-800-667-2311 to book a float today.

### **Report #11 (July 29, 2017): The Bull River is looking and fishing great!**

It was another beautiful summer day in the East Kootenays today, perfect weather to head up to the Bull River and fish the lower section. So we headed out early in the day in order to get up there while it was still cool out. Once we arrived to our destination the guys put together their 4 and 5 weight rods. The scenery up on the Bull is amazing and the cutthroats love very hot days as it makes them more active in the colder water. So we were all set for some great fishing action.

The weather was clear and warm with temperatures reaching a high of 88°F (31°C). The wind picked up a bit later in the afternoon, which seems to be the norm this summer.

The Bull River is in great shape now with a few new pools and runs formed up after the high snow pack and big runoff this spring. The water remains quite cool, but

because it is a high mountain stream in combination with all that spring rain it is in perfect condition for this time of year!

Floating down the Bull River is quite exciting as you are always picking up your line and casting behind rocks and along structures. This River is fast moving so the guide is always on the oars moving around obstacles or slowing the boat down so you can get a good drift on your fly through the runs.

The anglers fished mostly from the boat in areas that are hard to get to from shore. This River is a little more difficult to fish by walk and wade, so the boat is a real bonus!

The anglers caught quite a few fish in the 12 to 14 inch range, around 15 to 20 cutthroat each. They did get a couple of nice 16 inch cutthroats out of one of the deep holes and the fish put up a good fight.

The colors of these wild Westslope cutthroats are so vibrant, and it is only enhanced by the cold water. They sport that bright orange strip along the jaw line. They do seem to mimic the color of water they are in depending on the river, very interesting. In terms of the insect activity, small midges were hatching but nothing else really of significance. The most effective flies were the H&L Variants, Purple Haze, foam beetles, Chubby Chernobyls (Brown and Purple), caddis and Royal Wulffs (sizes 12, 14 and sometimes 16).

On this float we observed an abundance and wide variety of bird life which is so beautiful given the context. The Bull River is one of those places where the great fishing matches the incredible scenery!

All our rivers (St.Mary, Elk, Bull, etc.) are holding their levels now as we enter the prime summer fishing season.

We hope to see you on the water this summer, or at the very least in the shop!

Tight lines,

**Kelly**

## **St.Mary Angler**

PS You can reach us at 1-800-667-2311 to get any of your questions about our river floats answered.

### **Report #10 (July 18, 2017): The Elk River has rounded into form!**

Today we decided it was a good day to head over and fish one of the lower sections of the Elk River. So we met up with our eager clients at the fly shop, set up their rods for dry fly fishing and hit the road to the Elk. A 4 or 5 weight rod is perfect for fishing cutthroats as one can have a good fight while really feeling the fish on the end of the line. That said, we brought along a little heavier rod setup just in case a big bull trout was spotted along the way.

Once at the Elk we worked quickly to slide the boat over the bank into the water just ahead of all the other drift boats! We started by fishing along the bank on the opposite side of the River.

The weather was absolutely beautiful today starting off cool in the morning then warming up to a toasty 84°F (29°C). We observed a few scattered clouds floating around and a little wind picked up in the afternoon, but overall we had very nice conditions.

The anglers started out fishing big flies; mainly stone patterns. When we saw some fish coming up to take a swat at the fly, we dropped anchor and changed the bugs to smaller patterns to entice them back up again.

The fishing started off very good as the guys hooked up some really nice sized cutthroats on the surface in the 14-17 inch slot. These fish looked quite chunky and very healthy which was nice to see.

We did have a big bull trout chase one of our hooked up cuts. So the angler changed over to the bull trout rod and managed to get the Bull on the line. But after a good fight it got close to the net and popped off! It was a really nice looking bull trout, which made the whole experience so exciting even with the escape!

During the float the guys landed about 20 cutthroats each to go along with the hookup of the big bull trout. The fishing throughout the day was steady, only slowing down slightly in the early afternoon. The slow down made for an opportune time to stop and break for our shore lunch.

In term of the hatches, we saw nothing but some very small midges. The larger patterns used on the day included big stoneflies, Stimulators and Chubby Chernobyls. The smaller patterns included Parachute Adams, Purple Haze, Royal Wulffs, Trudes, H&L Variants and some Caddis patterns.

This trip reminded me just how special the scenery on the Elk River can be. The beautiful Rocky Mountains with the scenic Elk River running through its low lands is something to experience.

The rivers in our region of southeastern B.C. are all in good shape and fishing well now. Everyday the water levels drop slightly which changes where you fish a bit, but that is what makes it exciting.

Come on up and check out for yourself just how amazing our slice of the B.C. is!

Tight lines,

**Kelly**  
**St.Mary Angler**

PS You can call us at 1-800-667-2311 if you have any questions about our rivers.

**Report #9 (July 15, 2017): The St.Mary River is producing lots of cutthroats as the River rounds into form!**

Early July fishing on the St. Mary River has been outstanding. The River has definitely shaped up nicely and the level has been dropping daily. The cutthroats have been moving along the bank edges up into their summer feeding stations, moving in and out of the back channels as they work their way upstream.



Today we fished the section of the St. Mary from the Kimberley Golf Course down to the St. Eugene Mission takeout, aka "The Pump-house Run". The weather was absolutely beautiful with temperatures starting at of 60°F (15°C) in the morning rising to 92°F (33°C) by late afternoon. Not a cloud in the sky and only the occasional light breeze, excellent conditions for sure.

The anglers rigged up their dry fly rods and started out fishing from shore until the trucks were moved and the guides were ready to push off the rafts to commence the float. One of the guys caught a nice 19 inch cut-bow right at the put-in, a great start to the day for sure!

We floated and fished along the bank edges, casting into the nicely formed pockets of water along the way. We pulled over a few times in the morning and fished up some of the channels using dry flies. On the day, the anglers landed 20-25 cutthroats each, as well as some nice size cut-bows. The cuts were all in the 12-15 inch slot. Some of the cut-bows were as big as the 19 incher caught right off the get go! The fish are all very chunky already as there is lots of feed in the St. Mary.

In one of the deep holes a small cutthroat was hooked, then we watched in anticipation as a big bull trout chased it to the surface. So we dropped anchor, switched to a bull trout rod and pattern, and managed to hook the bull! It turned out to be a nice 25 incher! A nice sized bull for sure, or as the locals call them, a nice sized "chicken". This bull certainly was not like the really big ones landed on occasion, but a lot of fun nonetheless!

So there was lots of casting throughout the day, with plenty of mending to allow the fly to float naturally down the river. The hatches coming off included big stone patterns and a few small midges. The flies that were most effective included the Orange and Yellow Stimulators, Purple Haze, Red and Black Fat Alberts, UV Parachute Adams and Chubby Chernobyls. For the streamers the Dalai Lama and Kiwi Zuddlers worked well.

As we floated downstream we were able to catch a glimpse of an eagle and an osprey up in their nests, along with a couple mule deer along the water's edge. As

usual, we only saw a few anglers along the banks in this section of the St.Mary. It was a good day to be out enjoying the great outdoors.

### **Forest Fire Update:**

You may have heard that we have been experiencing a lot of fires up here in British Columbia. I am happy to say that our Kootenay region has been quite lucky with no big fires to report, only a few small ones well away from any of our communities. So I can also say that there is no smoke in the air on our float trips so far this summer. Come and check us out as we still have a few boats available this summer on the St. Mary and the Elk Rivers.

Tight lines,

**Kelly**  
**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book a float on one of our rivers this summer.

### **Report #8 (July 5, 2017): The season is in full go mode now!**

The temperatures for this month have been very hot with the gauge reaching highs of 97°F (36°C). We had a near perfect spring in terms of the runoff as it was measured and prolonged with no flooding. The spring nights were quite cool and the day temps were consistent making for a nice even run-off in southeastern B.C. People have been chomping at the bit to get out and fish our streams and rivers. We have already done quite a few trips and are now in full throttle now!

The section of the St. Mary we floated today was the lower River from the St.Eugene Mission down to historic Fort Steele. The St.Mary River is now experiencing normal conditions as it is completely clear and dropping nicely. The weather today reached a high of 95°F (35°C). With all the spring moisture and recent heat we are seeing quite a few mosquitoes in some areas. But with this heat, they will soon be gone as the land dries out!

We started our float by working our way along the bank edges and behind big rocks, trying to fool the fish into taking the dry fly. With the River still moving a little fast, one has to have good line control to keep the bug floating naturally long enough for the cutthroat to see it... and take it. We also got out of the boat a few times to walk up the back channels where some cutthroat are still feeding and caught some pretty nice fish! While we fished mostly dries on this float, when we got to a few deep holes, we tried some streamers for bull trout.

The fishing has been steadily getting better everyday this season. Stoneflies are now emerging and the hatch is working its way up the River. The stone hatch came off throughout the day and in the afternoon we saw some big brown caddis flies hatching. So we fished big stone patterns; Orange and Yellow Stimulators and Stim Chew Toys, Tan, Brown and Purple Chubby Chernobyls and Fat Alberts. They all created good action.

On this day out the anglers caught and released 25 cutthroats between them. They were really nice looking fish both in terms of size and girth. The average fish landed was in the 13 to 15 inch slot. One lucky angler landed a nice 16 inch cut-bow which jumped and ran with force. It was so much fun watch!

We saw lots of wildlife action today as osprey and eagles regularly flew overhead, especially on the lower part of the St.Mary where there are quite a few nests. We also saw a small white tail deer run off through the bush as we floated close. This day provided us with very good conditions and the anglers experienced a wonderful day on the St.Mary River.

The rivers are all in good shape now and fishing very well. The Bull and Skookumchuck remain a little high to fish, but are dropping every day with this heat. They should be ready to fish soon.

Come on up and check us out!

Tight lines,

**Kelly**  
**St.Mary Angler**

PS We have a full assortment of flies and accessories at our shop in Cranbrook for you. Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book a day float on one of our rivers this summer.

### **Report #7 (June 26, 2017): Guides day on the St.Mary River!**

The day started early as the guides gathered on the banks of the St.Mary, coffee in hand, ready to do 2017's first float of the Mary. The day was absolutely beautiful with temperatures reaching an afternoon high of 86°F (30°C). Not a cloud in the sky and no wind, perfect for the first day out.

So after the shuttles were put in place, we launched the boats at the Pump House at around 10 a.m. We floated all the way down to the Kootenay River. This is way more water than we cover on a regular float because we wanted to see as much water as possible on the first trip out.

With 6 boats on the water, all spread out, we headed down the St.Mary checking out how the River had been changed by the spring run-off. The St.Mary now has about 5 to 6 feet of water visibility. It was running high in sections and moving fast as well. So the River was clear and fast just what we needed to cover this distance of water on our first day out.

The fishing was slow in the morning with the anglers in our boat catching 4-5 cutthroat trout each. This slower level of activity was expected, as the water is still pretty cold.

A couple of the other boats were throwing streamers and nymphing. They were rewarded with a few nice fish. Our boat stayed true to the dry fly as we wanted to test different stone patterns and other dry fly patterns we came across this winter. During the morning we did not see any hatches. There were no swallows or birds flying above the water surface eating insects.

At lunch we pulled over and had a nice shore lunch with everyone. It was very enjoyable to be on the shore of this beautiful River, under a clear blue sky, talking nothing but ... fishing!

After lunch we got back into the boats just in time to see the stoneflies hatching. The fishing picked up throughout the afternoon and all the boats were landing nice fish. The size of the fish landed was between 12 and 15 inches. In addition, we hooked two nice big 17-inch cutbows at the same time! A double hookup on the first day out ... you got to love it.

As we floated, testing the runs and riffles for the presence of cutthroat, we also took time to enjoy the beautiful scenery. At one point we saw a Cow Elk. We thought she looked a little nervous as we floated by, her calf in the distance. We also saw a couple whitetail deer down close the Kootenay River.

In terms of the look of the River, the runoff did change things quite a bit on the lower section of the St.Mary. So it was nice to see new water in advance of taking clients out on floats.

Since this float, we have started guiding on the St.Mary the past few days and clients are catching Bull Trout along with Westslope Cutthroat Trout. The St.Mary River is coming down and the fish are starting to come to the surface more readily. Of course Bull Trout are caught on streamers; Dolly Llamas, Kiwi Muddlers all white in color are the flies of choice for these big fish.

For cutthroats, big Stone Flies have been working well. Stimi Chew Toys and Fat Albert's (Red or Black) are producing nicely.

So the 2017 season has started and we hope to see you on the water this year! We are expecting the fishing to be awesome.

Tight lines,

**Kelly**  
**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss what our rivers and streams have to offer. Drop into our fully stocked fly shop if you are in the area.

## **Report #6 (June 18, 2017): The Columbia River continues to fish well!**

We decided to take a quick trip over to the Columbia River to see if the early spring fishing techniques we use on the River are still effective later in June. So today's trip was a kind of Columbia River late spring 'test fishery'.

After we closed the Fly Shop in Cranbrook on Saturday evening, we drove over to Rossland and spent the night. We rose early on Sunday morning, had a very nice breakfast at the Prestige Inn and then headed down the big hill to the Columbia River.

The Columbia River is still running pretty good now at about 130,000 CFS (cubic feet per second). The nice thing is that there is now very little debris in the River apart from the odd log. So you still have to keep your eyes open for logs, but the surface of the River is pretty well clear now.

We launched the jet boat at the City of Trail boat launch and then powered up river to a stretch of back eddies we know well. The weather was very nice with temperatures reaching 70°F (20°C). The morning was beautiful with clear blue skies, but by mid afternoon we saw the dark clouds move in and provide us with a bit of weather!

Immediately after anchoring up in the first eddy we were into fish. The day continued to produce well as Karen and I had 3 doubles going at various times. We had fish on quite steady throughout the day.

The rainbows caught and released were all in the 19 to 22 inch slot... and let me tell you, they pulled hard. It does not really matter the size of the rainbows caught in the Columbia as they are all strong and fight like crazy.

Today we concentrated on nymphing the eddies. When the River is high like now the fish tend to stay in the eddies so that is where your efforts will be best rewarded. The trout feed on all the food that gets concentrated in the big revolving swirls, it basically provides the fish with a smorgasbord of different food; terrestrial, emerging, etc.!

We fished in many different eddies throughout the day, only breaking for a shore lunch at around 1:00 p.m. Later in the afternoon, around 3 to 4 p.m. the weather moved in and the barometric pressure dropped making the fish less active. But after it rained a bit the fish were back into a feeding frenzy again. We just had to put the fly in the right spot and wait for the fish to find it. We decided to call it a day at around 5 p.m. It was a great day to fish and get some good casts in. Overall the Columbia is fishing as good now as it was earlier in the spring!

There was a small hatch of Pale Morning Duns around noon, but the fish did not seem interested in feeding on them much. They wanted the food in the water column and seemed to feed contently just below the surface.

The flies that worked well on this trip included Kelly's Super Streamer, Purple Prince Nymphs, Hare's Ear Nymphs, Lightening Bugs and Regular Prince Nymphs (sizes 12-16).

Because the past winter was quite harsh in our part of the world, we are now seeing female deer giving birth, which is quite late. In term of birds we are seeing the normal amount of bird life, which includes the eagles protecting their nests!

### **River Roundup:**

Apart from this brief jaunt over to the Columbia we are now back in the East Kootenays as we start guiding on the St. Mary River next week. The level of the St. Mary River is dropping daily and it already has 3 to 4 feet of visibility. We are doing our annual 'guide float' this coming Sunday, it should fish awesome!

The St. Mary River is usually the first of our East Kootenay rivers to clear up in the spring. This is due to its sizable headwater lake which catches a lot the dirt and fine materials and acts a big natural buffer for the river.

The Elk River is also dropping, but is still quite dirty. We will let you know when it is in shape to fish. All the small streams that flow both into the Mary and Elk have cleared up and look good.

The Bull and Skookumchuck rivers are still quite high and difficult to fish at this time, but give it a week or two and they will come around.

The free stone rivers of the East Kootenays are about to open for the summer. Come on up and check us out. Call us at 1-800-667-2311 as we have a lot of information on the rivers and streams to tell you about.

Tight lines,

**Kelly  
St.Mary Angler**

PS Drop into our fully stocked fly shop if you are in the area. Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book a float trip for this summer.

### **Report #5 (June 6, 2017): Premier Lake has the fish and the scenery!**

Today the weather looked great so a bunch of us decided to head up to Premier Lake to try our luck with the rainbows. Premier is a 40-minute drive north of the Cranbrook/Kimberley area. It is a beautiful lake nestled in the mountains with spectacular views and an abundance of wildlife. Today the temperature reached a wonderfully warm 75°F (24°C) to compliment the beautiful setting.

As everyone in our party was using pontoon boats, we decided to put in at the Rod and Gun Club. The Club is located on a road that leads down from the main gravel road to the campground. This launching spot is mid-lake so once you have your pontoon boat in the water you can either paddle across the lake, or stay on this side and work the nice bays and drop off ledges.

Premier Lake is about 5 km long and is very fishable from a pontoon boat. It is situated within a B.C. Provincial Park which also has a few smaller lakes (Yankee and Canuck lakes) that you can hike into and fish by float tube. The hike is not that onerous, but remember to pack accordingly as you are still in the backcountry.



We got on the water early this morning and headed across the Lake from the launch area. There are a couple nice drop-off ledges over there so we positioned the pontoon boats, anchored up and started to fish.

We fished in about 12-15 feet of water using a strike indicator, swivels and an assortment of Chironomids. We also hung micro leeches and balanced leeches under an indicator when the Chironomids were not hatching much. After we caught the first fish we used a stomach pump inserted into the throat to see what they were feeding on. At this time of year everything is hatching; chironomids, may flies and callibaetis in addition to scuds, shrimp and leeches. When any of them are hatching their respective artificials will work well. Our fish's stomach was full of small black Chironomids, May Flies and small Scuds... stuffed full.

The fishing started off slow, but steady. By early afternoon the fishing picked up and we caught and release a dozen to 15 fish each by the time we got off the water round 6 pm.

The rainbow in Premier Lake are not huge, a nice 15-17 inches on average and beautifully coloured. We also caught a couple Brook Trout, which went into the pan for dinner!

The dominant hatch on the day was the Chironomids; certain times during the day they were very noticeable. The flies that were working best were the Red Butt Chironomid, Rick's Prom Midge, the Chromie, Black Chironomid with a red rib, as well as balanced leeches, micro black leeches and some varieties of May flies. While out on the water we saw two loons cruising around looking for fish, plus an osprey up in it's nest.

All our rivers open Thursday June 15th. The snow pack is 105% of normal for this time of year and is melting off the mountains in our area at a nice rate. It is all up to the weather though. If we get huge rains it will keep the rivers muddy till the end of June. So we will keep you posted on the conditions of all our rivers!

Tight Lines

**Kelly**

## **St.Mary Angler**

PS Feel free to drop into our fly shop in Cranbrook to chat about the lake fishing or check us out on face book for the latest news and conditions.

### **Report #4 (May 27, 2017): White Swan Lake is fishing very well!**

In the last week the weather has turned warm and the lake fishing has been very productive in the East Kootenay region of Southeastern B.C. The popular White Swan Lake has been fishing particularly well. Even the small lake just before White Swan, known locally as "Moose Lake", has been terrific.

Once arriving at White Swan Lake people choose to fish either at Pack Rat Point, or go to the other end to fish from Home Basin. Either choice is good, but I have heard that Pack Rat Point is fishing great.

The weather was absolutely gorgeous today with temperatures reaching 73°F (23°C) with only light winds making for very nice conditions. Today we fished White Swan a couple of different ways. The first was to use chironomids in 10-15 feet of water; the second was to hang a balanced leech or a micro black leech over a drop off ledge. Both techniques worked quite well on this trip. We also saw some anglers trolling along the drop off ledges with big Black or Green Leeches, Doc Spratleys, Half Backs and Full Backs.

The fish we landed and released today were many, all in the 17-19 inch range, with a few over 20 inches! All the fish gave us a good fight as they jumped and pulled hard. The big rainbows have obviously wintered well and are now feeding vigorously. The dominant hatch coming off White Swan today was Chironomids. It was a beautiful day to be out and fishing on this gorgeous lake.

When you drive up to White Swan Lake just a remember that you are on an active logging road so be sure to stay on your side and take your time. It is a beautiful drive up into this area. You may also be interested to know that there is a hot springs along the Lussier River that is very nice. After fishing you can enjoy a nice soak in the hot springs!

All the lakes in our region have been fishing quite well recently.

If you need information on any of the lakes in the East Kootenays give us a call at the St. Mary Angler and we will keep you updated and informed!  
Make sure you review the new fishing regulations before you head out on the water.

Tight Lines

**Kelly  
St.Mary Angler**

PS Feel free to drop into our fly shop in Cranbrook to talk about the lake fishing and check out our extensive assortment of wet and dry flies.

### **Report #3 (May 22, 2017): The Columbia River is rockin' on this Victoria Day weekend!**

The Columbia River has been fishing so well that on our day off today we decided to do a reconnaissance trip to the lower section of the River. You know, get out on the water and explore some less frequented holes, eddies and runs.

For first time in what seems like ages, this long weekend was absolutely beautiful with temperatures reaching a high of 82°F (28°C). It has been such a cool spring that it was awesome to feel hot weather again! The temperature of the River water was around 52°F (11°C). So while the water remains very cold for us, the fish are not deterred as they have been very hungry and active!

With the regulation of the upstream dams, the water levels of the Columbia River are now on the rise. Today the flow of the water was around 130,000 cubic feet per second. With the levels and water flows this high, boaters have to be very careful because we are now seeing more debris and logs on the water. This stuff can come at you very fast when you are out on the water navigating the boat and trying to fish at the same time. Be careful to “keep your head on swivel”, always looking for stuff on the water and ALWAYS wear a life jacket. Remind the passengers to keep an eye

open as well since more eyes on the water reduces the risk of encountering any debris.

We are now finding the rainbows have moved away from the runs and are now in the big and small back eddies looking for food to eat. It also looks like the spawning period in the main river is coming to an end and the rainbows just seem to be focused on eating now. That said, a few days ago we had a report of over a couple of dozen of good sized rainbows seen spawning in one of the tributary streams.

Today our destination was some of the smaller eddies on the lowest stretch of the Columbia River from the City of Trail down to the Canadian/U.S. border. There seems to be fish feeding in every eddy now. We caught and released many bright chrome, chunky rainbows throughout the day all in the 18 to 21 inch slot. We were not able to entice any big guys to come out and play, but the ones we caught were tough fighters. We had a great day out on the River.

We found that when the fish hit, they hammered the fly hard and once hooked jumped many times before being landed. All the rainbows were very healthy and strong. We mostly used the standard nymphing technique on this day; with an indicator. Our approach was to cast out into the eddy and give the indicator a tug once in awhile to imitate the nymph moving in the water. It is a pretty straightforward and effective approach.

In terms of the hatches, the whole afternoon was one large Caddis hatch. But, as it would go, the fish were keying on the nymphs rather than the dry flies! The flies that were working for us were the Purple Prince Nymphs, regular Prince Nymphs, Lightening Bugs, Pheasant Tails and the Pickle pattern (Sizes 14-18). We could not resist trying some dry fly patterns as we were hoping the fish would be feeding on the black ant hatch that usually comes this time of year. So we tied on a few different ant patterns (sizes 14-16), but had little success as they were obviously feeding below the surface.

While out on the Columbia today we saw two eagles fighting high up in the air; quite a show. The bears have now emerged and are roaming around as we saw a two year old juvenile with its mother as we headed back to Rossland after fishing.

With the recent increase in temperatures and the onset of the higher stream flows, summer is becoming more than just a hint... perhaps its here?

We hope to see you up on the rivers and streams of southeastern B.C. this season!

Take care.

**Kelly  
St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to book a float trip, or just drop into the shop if you are in the area.

## **Report #2 (May 11, 2017): The Lakes and Columbia River**

### **The Lakes:**

Fishing on the lakes is now in full swing in the East Kootenay Region of Southeastern B.C. They are all open and most have turned over. Lots of people are out camping; enjoying the fishing and great outdoors. The daily temperatures have been fairly cool, but there have been a few warm days where the hatches on some of the lakes have been huge! Chironomids are now the dominant hatch, however, we did see a small ant hatch recently. When the weather warms up we will see more flying ant hatches which will eventually be huge as well. The fish gorge themselves on ants and then seem to take a few days off to digest them!

The anglers are having good success on the lakes using leeches, balanced leeches and an assortment of chironomids. The chironomids include; Snow cones, Chromies, Prom Midges, in black, green and grey.

Just a reminder that when you are fishing chironomids you should check out the lake and find out where the fish are cruising before you start to cast. Once you find where the fish are, anchor your boat on a drop-off ledge, measure the depth of the water and then build your leader-tippet to the length you require. Some fishers build their leaders up to 20-22 feet in length. Long leaders like these can be very hard to cast,

so if that is the case for you, try to find the fish in 12-15 feet of depth, which calls for a leader that is much easier to cast.

Once you have built your leader, attach it to your fly line. Then add your indicator to fly line above the joint with the leader. Then add a swivel down at the end of the leader to act as your weight. Finally, tie on about 18 inches of line to the swivel and attach your chironomid to the end.

Remember to anchor up and with the wind to your back cast out over the drop off ledge. You need to have confidence in the fly you are using and the only way to get better at this technique is to get out and practice as much as you can.

When you are in Cranbrook, feel free to drop by our Fly Shop. In the shop we will show you what flies are working on each of our lakes and you can examine the chironomid rig we are using and ask questions about the setup.

Kootenay River:

The Kootenay River has come up quite a bit lately with the rain and runoff and is now the colour of chocolate milk.

The Columbia River:

The last week on the Columbia has been a mix bag in terms of the weather. We have experienced some intense rain, but the last couple days were beautiful as it was sunny and warm with temperatures reaching a lovely 73°F (23°C). Today we were on the top end of this reach of the Columbia River near Castlegar. We drifted down stream into a complex of back eddies; some were small and others were huge masses of swirling water.

Where we launched our boat is a section of the Columbia that is closed at this time of year to fishing to protect the spawning rainbows. As we drifted through on our way to the fishable waters we could see the rainbows building their redds, as well as a few huge sturgeon cruising the flats for eggs and whatever else they could siphon up through their mouths. Some of the sturgeon are quite large, which makes it a crazy/cool trip to spy them through the clear water as we hover by. Always

remember to check the regulations before you head out fishing on any of the local rivers or lakes to make sure you are following the rules!

On this particular day, the Kootenay River, which joins the Columbia River at the top end of the section we fish, was dark brown. This meant that some of the eddies we usually fish on one side of the Columbia were not fishable. So we fished some smaller eddies and did quite well hooking a number of fish. Even though the Kootenay was delivering a lot of sediment, the Columbia River was still very clear and fishable.

We mostly fished with nymphs, occasionally throwing a streamer. The fishing was quite good throughout the day as each angler landed and released about 10 rainbows. The biggest fish caught in one of the bigger eddies was a good 25 inches. We enjoyed seeing this big rainbow do a series of jumps and make a long run before breaking off during the fight. Man, these rainbows can get big in this River, and when you hookup you just never know what you may have!

Again the hatches on the Columbia were few and far between, with only a few small midges and mayflies on the day. We did get to see a good amount of bird life including eagles and ospreys flying about their nest feeding on the fish from the River.

In terms of the flies used today, the patterns that worked were definitely bigger than the ones last week. Size 10-12 Prince Nymphs were a good call. Also the Super Streamer pulled in a few fish during the day. The rainbow's did not show any interest with any of the small midges... it seemed they wanted a bigger meal!

With the recent increase in temperatures and the onset of the freshet, summer is just around the corner. We hope to see you up here this season!

Take care and enjoy the emerging spring and summer.

**Kelly**  
**St.Mary Angler**

PS Call us at 1-800-667-2311 to discuss any of the rivers you are interested in fishing with us this summer. We are booking trips on all our rivers now.