



401 Cranbrook Street
Cranbrook, B.C.
V1C 3R5
1-800-667-2311

stmaryangler@gmail.com

St. Mary Angler Guide Service: Review of the 2025 Fishing Season.

An Overview of the Environmental Conditions for 2025

The Snow Pack:

By early January each year, nearly half of the annual snowpack has typically accumulated in British Columbia. As of January 1, 2025, the snowpack stood at about 90% normal. This was way up from the previous year, so things were looking good. However, by March 1st we were at about 70% of normal and as of April 1, when we usually have all of the snow we are going to see, things had inched up to about 80%.

On May 1st the West Kootenays had about of 70 percent of the normal snow pack and over on the east side it stood at 62%. On average, approximately half the seasonal snowpack melts by June 1st. But in 2025, two thirds had already melted by then and most of it was gone by June 15th. The lower snowpack coupled with warmer than normal temperatures in April and hot weather in late May, sped up the melting significantly. While the expectations of flooding were low, these conditions brought on concern about low flows and higher water temperatures in the summer.

The result of the advanced snowmelt was the rivers tended to clear up and drop quickly. The St. Mary River was ready to fish in the third week of June, earlier than we usually see. The Elk rounded into shape in mid-July, more in line with what we typically see.

The Rain:

The Cranbrook area of the East Kootenays saw no rain in May and June, but a wetter than normal July. The wet July was key to providing good flows and cool water temperatures for the summer as the rain tailed off after that all the way thru October. So, there were no 'Hoot Owl' hours instituted in 2025.

In terms of air temperature in the East Kootenays, it was a little higher than normal May thru August. However, September and October were quite a bit warmer than usual (+5C° and +9C° respectively). The warmer September and October, coupled with lower than average rainfall meant for a very pleasant fall out on the rivers.

Over on the Columbia River in the West Kootenays, the air temperatures were warmer than normal all the way through October. Rainfall was below normal throughout the spring, summer and fall, with things being particularly dry in July thru September. The spring and fall fishing conditions on the Columbia were warmer with less rain than usual making for some excellent fishing conditions.

The Columbia is a "tailwater fishery", located downstream of Keenleyside Dam at the mouth of the Arrow Lakes on the mainstem Columbia. As such the flow conditions are dictated by dam operations rather than the local precipitation. So, we experienced very good fishing conditions on the Columbia in 2025.

East Kootenay Temperature and Rainfall (Stn: 'Cranbrook A'):

Month	May	June	July	August	September	October
Temperature in 2025	19.7 °C (67°F)	24.6°C (76°F)	26.7°C (80°F)	27.8°C (82°F)	25.6°C (78°F)	20.9°C (°70F)
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 2025	0 mm (in.)	0 mm (in.)	56.4 mm (2.2 in.)	15.8 mm (.62 in.)	7.4 mm (.3 in.)	19.4 mm (.76 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 in.)	20.8 mm (.82 in.)

Columbia River Temperature and Rainfall (Temp. from Station Castlegar A, B.C. Rain from Station Castlegar BCHPA DA)

Month	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Temp. in 2025	17.8°C (64°F)	22°C (72°F)	27.2°C (81°F)	30.8°C (87°F)	29.6°C (85°F)	27.1°C (81°F)	13.6°C (56°F)
Average Daily Max. Temp. (1981-2010)	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)
Rainfall in 2025	27.2 mm (1 in.)	32 mm (1.25 in.)	36.8 mm (1.4 in.)	2.6 mm (.1 in.)	1.2 mm (.05 in.)	10.2 mm (.4 in.)	24.7 mm (1 in.)
Average Rainfall (1981-2010)	50.2 mm (1.98 in.)	72.2 mm (2.84)	75.8 mm (2.98)	45.2 mm (1.78)	33.7 mm (1.33)	44.1 mm (1.74)	47.7 mm (1.87)

Spring Rainbow Fishing on the Upper Columbia River in the West Kootenays.

We fish the stretch of the upper Columbia River from just below its confluence with the Kootenay River down to where it crosses the Canada-U.S. Border. This tailwater fishery is about 35 miles long (56 KM). We describe its four distinct sections on our website. The Columbia has plenty of water types for us to choose from. We hit the water in early April and fish through June.

As usual, the Columbia River fished very well for rainbow trout this spring. Our first trips were in mid-April. The fishing was really good producing many nice fish in the 18 to 21-inch class, with the occasional one coming in 22 plus. At the front end of the spring the flows in the Columbia were regulated by the upstream dams to about 35,000 cubic feet per second (950 cubic meters per second). These controlled flows allow the rainbows and whitefish to spawn in the gravels. From this point on the water flows only increase to ensure the redds are not dewatered.

In the early part of the season the rainbows like to hold along the bank edges and we fish them accordingly. As the flows of the River increase to accommodate the freshet, the corresponding related habitats change and the fish head into the big eddies that form to hold and feed. We start the season fishing bank edges and runs, then move into the big eddies as the fish move over.

We fish the Columbia into the beginning of June. On our June 5th trip we fished the River from Castlegar down to Trail. It was a beautiful day with temperatures peaking at 26C° (79F°). The water flow had recently risen and was holding at 2,590 cubic meters per second, which equates to 91,500 cubic feet per second. In short, very big water! The focus of our attention was now the eddies, big rotating chunks of water. At this time of year, the River is almost like a links golf course with short runs between these big expanses of spinning water.

Our weapons of choice were streamers on wet lines and nymphs on dry lines...all rods strung in advance. The clients had a very nice day landing 10-15 fish each, anywhere from 16-20 inches. The rainbows were very powerful, jumping repeatedly and pulling hard! The result, a group of very happy fisherman!

The fishing on the Columbia this spring was again consistently very good. While the conditions can be fluid in the spring as the freshet comes on, they are manageable in our rowable jet boat. The anglers had good catch rates and the average sized fish was in the 16-20 inch slot. Bigger fish over 20 are out there and some are always landed in the spring. The Columbia River gives us so many options to explore and we take full advantage of its 35 miles of water.

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

With the lower than normal snowpack this year and warm spring weather, the St.Mary River rounded into form very early in 2025. It was fishable when it opened on June 15th and we had our first guided trip on June 20th. Having the rivers ready on opening day used to be out of the question as it was only fishable after the first week of July. But things have changed and we seem to be getting out up to three weeks earlier than what was traditionally the case! The Elk River was not ready to go that early this season as we did our first trip on July 20th. The new climate pattern dictates that the St.Mary is our 'go to' river through June and July, then the Elk River comes on stream for us. The higher elevation streams; including the Bull and Skookumchuck rivers were running high on opening day and came on line in mid-July.

While the season started early, warm and very dry in May and June we were a little concerned about summer water temperatures. Fortunately, we got some quality rain events in July that cooled things off and provided enough base flow to allay those concerns. So, no Hoot Owl Hours in 2025!

By mid-July we had done numerous trips on the St. Mary River as we waited for the Elk and Bull rivers to clear up and settle down. On July 15th we floated the Mary's headwaters from the lake down to Mathew Creek with the goal of only casting dry flies on the day. On the upper St.Mary we hook mostly cutthroats, with very few rainbows or cut-bows in the mix. When the sun pierces the water column up there, the fish get really active and come to feed on the surface.

It clouded over for part of the day so we were forced to switch to nymphs. So much for good intentions! We continued to toss the nymphs until one cutthroat pounded an indicator and we knew it was time to go back to the dries. The fish were all in the 14 to 16-inch range and beautifully coloured. On the day the anglers caught and released about 15 fish each. They had a lot more fish on the lines, but that's the way it is some days!

As we moved into August the fishing remained very good on all the rivers. What really stood out for us was the weather in the Kootenays this summer. Most days saw the clouds rolling in late afternoon with some rain, somewhere. Whether it came to Cranbrook, Fernie or back over in Kimberley, it happened with great regularity. The mornings were cool with the afternoon temperatures reaching the high 20's C° (mid 80's F°) some days. It was absolutely the nicest summer we have had for a long time. The measured rainfall really kept the summer temperatures moderate which was a real benefit to fish and fisher alike. We felt lucky to get it given our smallish snowpack and early spring freshet.

On August 16th we were up on the Bull River for a day of dry fly fishing and beautiful scenery. The Bull is loaded with so many fish willing to come to the surface for a dry fly.

On the upper portion above the dam, there are only wild Westslope Cutthroats, so that was our destination.

The Bull River was in great shape after lots of rain. The water levels were good for this time of year. As soon as the boat hit the water and the lines went out the fish were hitting. It was nonstop action all morning.

With the average sized cutty caught between 12-14 inches it was very exciting. The anglers landed around 25 fish each including a nice 16-inch cutthroat in one of the runs. The Bull River has such beautiful scenery so the key to a 'complete Bull day' is to remember to look up and check out the surroundings on occasion! It's absolutely amazing to see, bonafide eye candy!

As we rolled into September the weather remained nice and the water levels were at seasonal norms. By this time the kokanee had already started to move into the St. Mary River to spawn. On the 5th we floated the lower portion of the Mary putting in at the Mission heading down to Fort Steele. By now the River was skinny, but our Moravia and Slipstream rafts were up to the task and there was no pulling or pushing by the guides! On this day the dry fly action was happening as the guys caught a mixture of cut-bow hybrids and Westslope cutthroats – about 20 fish each.

The Elk and St. Mary rivers continued to fish well into October. While the mornings were just above freezing and frost covered the windshields, it did not deter our clients! With the foliage turning various shades of yellow and orange we hit the water on October 1. Yes, the River was low, but floatable and until the sun was high enough overhead to pierce deep into the water, they nymphed. Once the cuts started to bang the indicator, they switched over to dry flies. On the day they caught 15-20 cuts each in the 14 to 17-inch range and vibrantly coloured. At one point they landed a fish using a mouse pattern... so much fun!

While we were still guiding on the Elk and St. Mary river thru September and into October, we were already taking clients out on the Columbia River to start the fall season thru to the end of October.

Fall Fishing for Big Rainbows on the Upper Columbia River.

By the second week of September, we were back over on the upper Columbia River chasing big rainbows. At this time the early signs of fall were showing in the cool mornings, but the days were still quite lovely reaching highs of 20's C° (70's F°). The Columbia River was still holding a lot of water, running at about 1,850 cubic meters per second (65,000 cubic feet per second), so the flow conditions were great.

On September 15th we put our rowable jet boat in at the Gyro Park boat launch in Trail and powered upstream from there to above Mary's Rock. The fish had been eating loads of caddis all summer and were now in prime condition and good sized!

Once far enough upriver, we shut the engine and let the boat control drift down some runs, throwing the lines along the bank edges. Once we hit a suitably big back eddy, we started to row into position and looked for feeding trout and went on from there. The day started off a bit tough, but as it warmed up the fish were happy and began to feed on flies.

In terms of the hatches there were some small midges and Blue Winged Olives coming off, but not too many.

On the day, the anglers caught and released 8 to 10 fish each, in the 16 to 18-inch class. There was one exception where a very nice 22-inch rainbow took the angler into his backing before being landed. A crazy good fight with lots of jumps out of the water and deep dives! It was a tough fish to handle and the angler was shocked at how hard the fish fought!

The weather this fall has been absolutely beautiful with bright blue skies accompanied by very cool mornings. The average daily high was up 6°C (11°F) from the long-term average... making for some lovely days on the water! We fished into mid-October with the weather holding and the Columbia's rainbows accommodating our enthusiastic anglers all the way along!

Hosted Trips:

Argentina

In February 2025 we hosted a group of anglers to the Patagonia region of Argentina. Our goal was to flyfish for rainbows, browns and brook trout. Patagonia is said to be reminiscent of Montana a century ago. Our group of eight stayed at Casa De Campo, a venue operated by the SET flyfishing group.

Casa provided an excellent base for fishing the area's numerous spring creeks, freestone creeks and the Alumine and Quillen Rivers. These waters provided great sight fishing opportunities for big browns, rainbows and brook trout. The lack of fishing pressure in this part of the world means the fish are not spooked at all making them easy to catch! We hooked a lot of really nice trout including a couple of browns pushing 24+! The lodge was comfortable and cozy and the homecooked meals were paired with local wines which were amazing.

Our next hosted trip is to Christmas Island from January 20th to 27th, 2026. We have 16 anglers signed up and ready to go! It should be fun. We are also heading to Argentina for a couple of trips in 2027. One is for Golden Dorado in the Ysoro marshes and Ibera wetlands. The second hosted trip is to fish the Limay River.

Let us know if you are interested in coming along to any of these destinations in the future and we will fit you into an upcoming trip.

So, there you have it, 2025 is in the books! It was a great year in terms of the fishing and the weather! We had a successful year on both the guiding side, as well as in the fly shop.

Our success is only possible with the patronage and support of our loyal anglers, both local and far away! We thank you very much for all for your support.

We hope 2026 will continue where 2025 left off! We are attending tradeshow in Aurora Colorado, Bellevue Washington, and Pleasanton California, in early 2026. Check our website for the details. Call us for tickets if you are in any of these locations. If you are local, feel free to drop by the fly shop for a chat. If you are in the U.S. and beyond, call us at 1-800-667-2311 or contact us via our website or Facebook, to discuss a booking for next year.

We would like to wish everyone safe travels and good health in 2026.

Take care,

Kelly & Karen

Kelly and Karen Laatsch
St.Mary Angler Fly Shop
401 Cranbrook St. N
Cranbrook, B.C. CANADA
V1C 3R5

stmaryangler@gmail.com

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