

Editor's Note: This article was originally written to partially fulfill the requirements of the Fall 2004 Intermediate Fly-fishing & Tying offered at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The piece is edited and reprinted with the author's permission.

By John Napolski

The water I have chosen for my "fish story" is the Talachulitna River. The river is located north west of Anchorage in the Susitna River Drainage. The river can be found in Unit 4 of the Susitna Drainage regulations. Depending on what end you start at determines the method of getting there. If you start at the north end, you can enter the river with a boat from the Skwentna River. If you choose to enter the river too far from the Skwentna, you can be dropped off by float plane.

Depending on the time of year, the river is mainly clear. During the spring months and high temperature days, the days the river will cloud from runoff. In the prime fishing months the river is usually low enough that you can wade into it. There are sections that are too rough and deep for this, but finding the shallower spots is not hard. The river bottom is primarily rocky.

The four main species of fish found there are king salmon, rainbow trout / steelhead, Dolly Varden and arctic grayling. The kings are found in the summer months mainly, starting around the end of May up until the late fall. The trout and grayling are found year around.

Tackle requirements depend on for what you are fishing. For grayling and smaller trout, rods as small as 4-weight are ideal. A good 9 or 10-weight rod is needed for the kings that are running through. Reels should have a good drag if you use a drag reel because the current is strong in areas and the fish are not small by any stretch of the imagination. Leaders should be of the non-sinking type unless you don't mind losing flies. The swift current will take the sinking leader to the bottom quickly and embed your fly in the rocks.

Local favorites for flies are numerous. I had success with mainly the Elk Hair Caddis and Griffith's Gnats for the grayling and rainbows when I wanted to use dry flies. Prince Nymphs and Egg-Sucking Leeches worked well for the wet stuff. These patterns are great during the summer months. But in the late summer, fall and early spring, egg patterns and flesh flies work well. For kings, I mainly found success with pink Baker Busters and bright leeches in pink, orange or lime green.

The fishing is excellent on this river. Its one major advantage is that it is not fished as hard as other rivers in the state. Due to its remoteness, it is pretty expensive to get there and there is no road-side access. The grayling were all in the 18"-20" range, the trout were huge, and the kings were well worth the money for our plane ride. The size range was quite varied, but all of them were respectable.

At the time of the writing of this article, the state fishing regulations were as follows for the Talachulitna River drainage and all waters within a 3/4-mile radius of its confluence with the Skwentna River

- Only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure is allowed year around
- Open season for rainbow/steelhead is year around, but NO RETENTION is allowed.

- Kings over 20 inches—only 1 per day and 2 in possession from January 1 to July 13.
- Kings under 20 inches—10 per day and 10 in possession
- Arctic Grayling—2 per day and 2 in possession

This river is a lot of fun, but it can be expensive for some people. For a self-guided fully-outfitted trip with a float plane drop-off and pickup, you are looking at about \$780 per person for a 5-7 day float. If you want a guide-supported trip, the price runs about \$1,200, and for the fully-guided adventure, \$2,100 will cover everything.