

FLY FISHING WEST HARBOR POND

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On the south end West Harbor Pond near the fish ladder, my summer pal Terry's family owned the property where the old rope swing hung from an oak tree branch. The big kids used to propel themselves from the high cliff and fly into the water below with an impressive splash. Being only 5th and 6th graders at the West Harbor Grammar School on Lake View Road, later to be the Lion's Club, one of Terry's and my approved adventures was riding our bicycles from McKown Point to the causeway with spinning rods, bobbers, and a few worms. It was our understanding that West Harbor Pond bass were extremely, smart, wily, and hard to catch even with a big gob of worms on the hook. Watching that bobber suddenly zip under was an exhilarating experience and we were addicted. This was 1955-56. There were few homes on the pond, the Oak Grove Hotel was in its prime, the siphon was working, there was little traffic on the road, and the pond was pristine. Kids were able to design their own adventures and standing on the causeway waiting for "the big one" to bite was ours. From biking to the causeway with



worms, our fishing progressed to driving over and casting lures and spoons from the shoreline or canoes, then eventually to love the complexities of fly fishing.

West Harbor is primarily a bass pond and an excellent place to learn to fly fish because the chances of catching are so good. Bass are a hardy feisty fish that can tolerate higher temperatures and less pristine waters than trout. They are strong, often acrobatic fighters. When harvested in the cold water of early spring their fillets are particularly delicious. White Perch are the second most common fish caught, not nearly as prevalent as bass but very desirable table fare. Yellow Perch and the rare rainbow trout can be lucked into as well.

For bass gear, a 5- or 6-weight 9-foot fly rod with floating or sink tip line to a 4-weight leader and tippet is a popular choice. There is a good chance of hooking a very large bass and lighter gear limits odds of a successful landing. While bringing in a medium-size largemouth to a canoe, it isn't uncommon to look down and see what appears to resemble a small submarine underneath studying what all the commotion is about. Bass are curious when there is activity taking place, and the biggies will frequently rise from below to check it out. The question still is how to catch them.

Popular theory is that fish consume 80% of their meals underwater, give or take. Fly choice should reflect this notion, and flies that mimic natural prey will usually prove productive. Bass consume smaller fish, leeches, grass hoppers, beetles, and other insects, as well as frogs and mice. Woolly Buggers in black, olive, and white; bead head semi-seal gold leeches; and bunny leeches in similar colors are always go-to flies and go deep if weighted with a bead or cone head. Clouser Minnows are effective weighted flies and also useful for going deep around structures. The upside hook enables them to be more snag resistant and able to bounce over the bottom.



Olive Bead Head Woolly Bugger	Various colored Clouser Minnows	Gold Bead Head Simi-seal Leech
Black Woolly Bugger		Mickey Finn
White Bunny Leach		Black Nose Dace streamers

Traditional streamers like the Mickey Finn or Black Nose Dace work well, resemble bait fish, and can be used either as minnow imitations or in bright colors as attractors.

In warm weather, when the hoppers are out it, is a treat to cast under overhanging branches with a floating grass hopper, beetle, or other large dry flies. A very deadly and entertaining fly in summer is the fly rod popper, which, with a few light twitches, can generate tremendous hits around shoreline weeds and lily pads.

Getting visible top water hits is the ultimate thrill of fly fishing. Getting those same flies untangled from the overhanging branches and shoreline vegetation is the inevitable and unfortunate drawback to this exciting pursuit. Leave your ego in the parking lot, calm down, paddle or walk over and rescue that fly if possible. Always best to have several spares since dry

flies eventually waterlog, losing their buoyancy and effectiveness, even when the trees happen to be treating you well.

We release most of our fish and often crimp down the barb to make the flies easier to remove without unduly injuring the bass. Treble hooks, commonly found on spinning lures and gear, are harder to remove and injure fish more often than single fly hooks, barbless or not. They are also more difficult to remove from the woven net webbing of a landing net. Today, synthetic netting is said to be easier on the fish and also more impervious to hook damage and is highly recommended, as is a hemostat or fishing needle nose pliers.

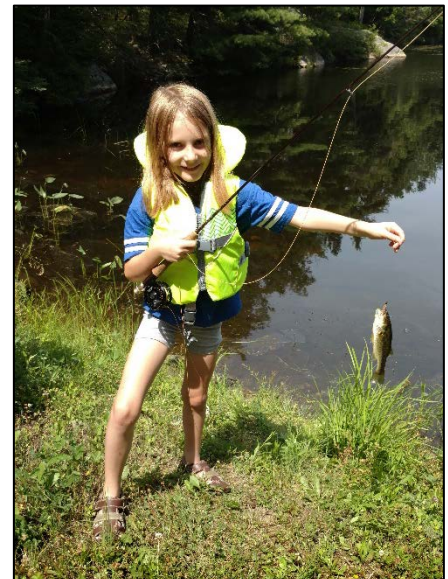
I've found West Harbor Pond an ideal location to introduce youngsters to fishing because they are actually catching fish and, with their shorter attention spans, avoiding boredom. There



are loads of small kid-sized bass along the shore to provide a kid-size fight. After some lawn casting practice, both roll and traditional casting, with a short 7' fly rod and piece of yarn for a fly, granddaughter Margo, age 6, was able to cast from a float and later from a grassy spot to land small bass.

She was very

excited but was initially hesitant about touching the fish which I netted, unhooked, photographed, and released for her. Now at 9 she is a fairly good fly caster and she and her younger sister both love fishing of all types. They have progressed to netting bass and perch for each other and for



us, which can be very entertaining to watch and much superior to seeing them sitting at home twiddling iPads and computer mice.

Fishing is full of surprises, one of the things that keeps my interest. I learn something every time I fish, whether it is tips from other anglers, finding out what fly works and when, becoming educated about ecology and the environment, or discovering that a bony old bass that has an odor when landed is a very sweet fillet in the fry pan. And just when you think you know a water body, you discover there is more that you don't. My biggest surprise on West Harbor Pond was spring fishing for frying pan bass with my pal Dennis. We had both released a few and kept a couple when I got another one on. It didn't fight the same as the others, and it was heavy, strange. As it came to the net, we were shocked to see a large, colorful rainbow trout. It measured 19 and a half inches . . . but being a fisherman I usually round up, call it 20 inches, fewer words. Did this gorgeous trout we chose to release actually live in WHP all its life? Did it somehow come down from Knickerbocker Lake in the spring ice melt? Barry and I have caught 20" rainbows in Knickerbocker. Was it a sea run rainbow that had gone out and returned through the fishway? These types of surprises and questions illustrate the importance of insuring the Pond's future well-being and also its relationship with adjoining water bodies.

Maintaining the functional siphon to reduce muck and salt water intrusion levels, maintaining good lakefront sewage disposal systems, and working to bring West Harbor Pond back to a clean oxygenated level where trout as well as the bass, perch, sunfish, elvers, alewives and other pond residents will be able to thrive is an important undertaking. Enhancing the environmental, scenic, and recreational characteristics of West Harbor Pond will ensure that remains an important and valuable regional asset as Boothbay Harbor continues its progress and development.