



# TECH BULLETIN

## MONTANA

# UPPER YELLOWSTONE RIVER

Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team.

Roger Neufeldt, LJ Fishing Research Team

*“A float trip from Emigrant to Livingston on the upper Yellowstone River provides the angler with solitude, fantastic scenery and, best of all, some outstanding trout fishing opportunities. Once you’ve experienced it, you’ll find it at the top of your list of those waters deserving a return trip.”*

Rainbow, brown and cutthroat trout, uncrowded miles of productive water with excellent boat and bank access...an angler’s dream and an apt description of the Yellowstone River from Emigrant to Livingston.

Although popular with fly fishermen, this stretch of river offers the spinner or spoon angler some excellent opportunities, as the Luhr Jensen Fishing Team found on several occasions. This Tech Bulletin details the fishing techniques, lure sizes and colors, trout holding areas and other information the team discovered which will help you have an enjoyable and successful trip on the Upper Yellowstone.

Numerous public fishing and road access sites are scattered along the Yellowstone from Emigrant to Livingston, with U.S. Highway 89 following the west bank and State Highway 540 running parallel to the east bank.

Several bridges span the river between these highways, offering access as well as campgrounds and parks. Because of these access sites, anglers fishing from the bank can cover a good portion of the river but, due to shoreline moss and vegetation, a float trip will provide the absolute best chances for fishing success.

The LJ Fishing team found two extremely productive floats with a standard drift boat, each of which covers about 10 miles of fishy water. The first float runs from Emigrant Bridge downstream to Pine Creek Bridge with the second float starting at Pine Creek and ending at the boat ramp in Livingston (see map).

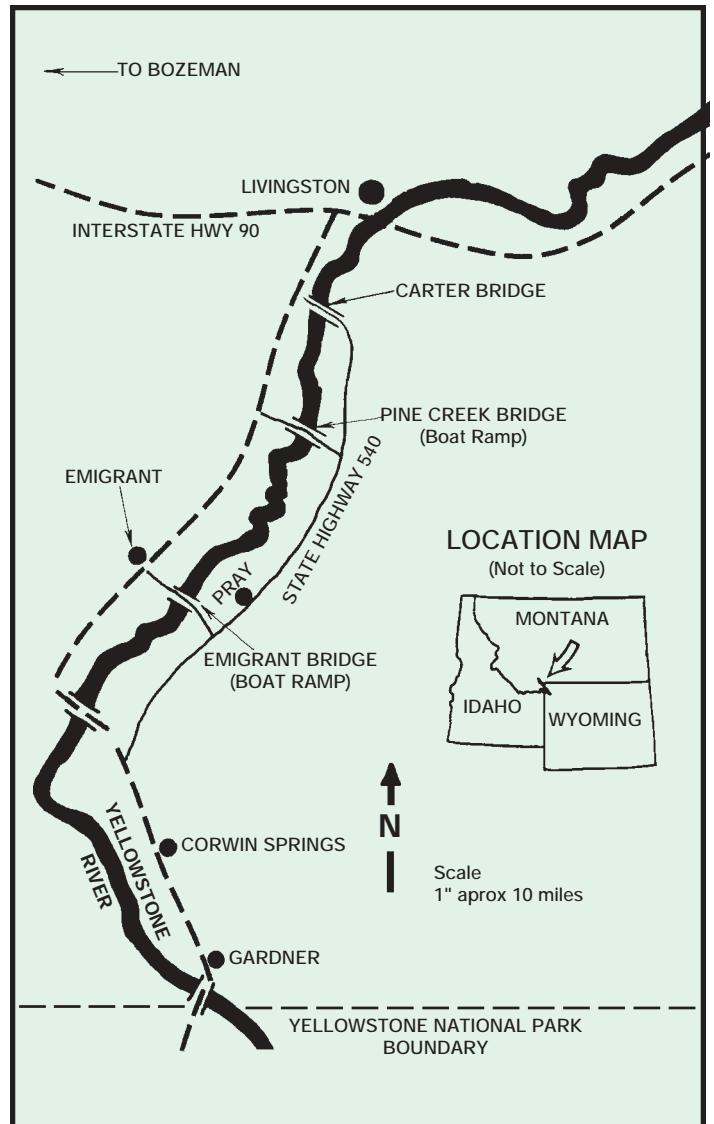
A boat provides you with the ability to cover miles of water and hit many of the spots bank anglers can’t reach but, more importantly, it allows the spoon and spinner angler to cast toward the banks of the river and retrieve lures into open water, away from shoreline vegetation.

Water from Emigrant to Livingston is not technical and anglers with some experience in drifting moving water will find standard boats in the 12- to 16-foot class adequate for these floats, under normal water conditions.

Note: the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks classifies the Yellowstone from Emigrant to Pine Creek as a “Special Limit Area” with only artificial flies or lures allowed. There is a limit of five rainbow and/or brown trout with four fish under 13 inches and one over 22 inches allowed in the daily bag limit. Trout between 13 and 22 inches must be released unharmed. Cutthroat trout are protected in this section of the river and only catch-and-release fishing is allowed.

On the Yellowstone from Pine Creek Bridge downstream, the regs specify a five-fish limit for rainbow, brown and cutthroat trout with only one fish over 18 inches allowed in the daily limit. There is no restriction on bait for this section.

Although not covered in the Fishing Team’s floats, the river downstream from the Park Boundary to Emigrant Bridge also is



classed as a “Special Limit Area,” with catch-and-release only for cutthroat and a five-fish limit for rainbow and brown trout per day. Only one trout 18 inches or longer may be taken in a limit. Bait fishing is legal in this stretch.

Because specific regulations may change from season to season, be sure to check the most recent regulations booklet before fishing these waters.

## LURES / TECHNIQUES

Research Team float trips produced a majority of trout strikes by casting to shoreline pockets, stretches of water between back eddies and fast current, the bottoms of riffles and tail-out sections of holes and slots (see diagram). It proved extremely important to keep a spinner or spoon always in motion using constant retrieval.

In the bottoms of riffles of shallower tail-out sections, best success occurred when the lure was cast, allowed to settle for a brief moment and then retrieved at a fast pace. When casting into deeper holes, best action came with a 2- to 5-second wait after the cast, and then a slow retrieve.

Most larger browns were found holding tight to cover along the banks with rainbow and cutthroat more prone to inhabit tail-out areas of holes and deeper main channel waters. Casting to pockets near

vegetation close to the shoreline was found to be necessary for regularly outwitting browns.

Following is a list of lures, sizes and finishes the LJ research Team found productive for Upper Yellowstone River trout:

**SPINNERS:** *Bang Tails*® in sizes 003, 004 and 005 in *Brass*, *Black Nickel* and *Grasshopper* finishes. *Shysters*® in 1/16-, 1/8- and 1/4-oz. sizes in *White/Black Dot*, *Black/Yellow Dot* and *Grasshopper* finishes.

**SPOONS:** *Krocodiles*® in 3/16- and 3/8-oz. sizes in *Hammered Brass*, *Hammered Brass/Fire Stripe*, *Green Mackerel*, *Brass Bikini*, *Frog* and *Green Scale* finishes. *Super Dupers*® in size 506 in *Brass/Red Head* and *Brass/Gold Prism-Lite*® finishes.

All of these lures produced trout strikes on a regular basis throughout the twenty miles of river from Emigrant to Livingston. Here are some additional tips on fishing spoons and spinners:

- In learning and mastering hardware casting techniques, the most important aspect is to become completely familiar with the feel and action of individual lures under a variety of water conditions. A clear water lake or pond, or a quiet, deep hole in a river are excellent spots in which to study the action of a particular lure and will help you get the feel of the lure under different retrieve speeds, as well as allow you to observe what the lure is doing underwater.

A hardware angler who knows the lure's vibrating or wobbling action by heart can, by watching his or her rod tip, determine the necessary speed of retrieve and whether or not a lure is working properly. Many anglers have come upon these discoveries by trial and error over a number of fishing trips. The simplest way, and one much less time consuming, is to pick out a spot such as the ones suggested above where you can unhurriedly observe the lure's action.

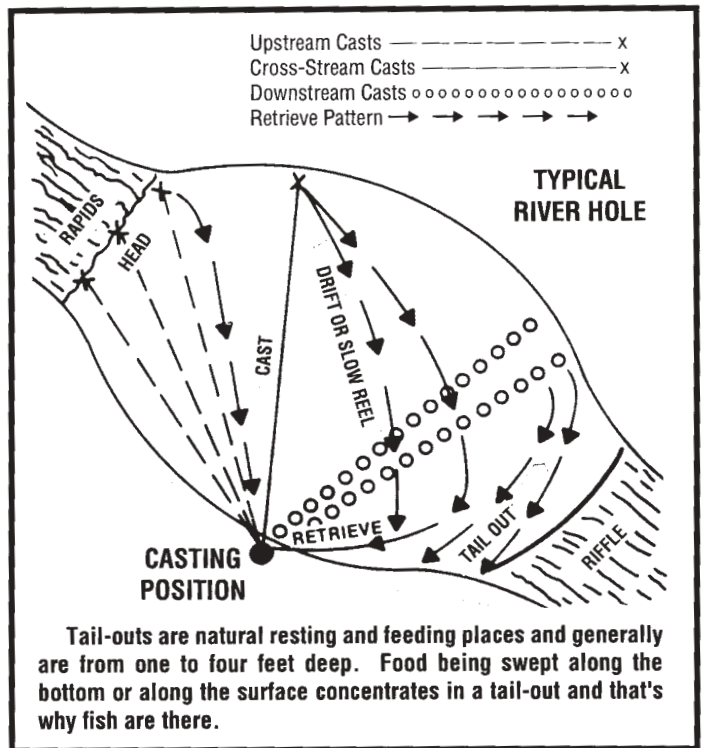
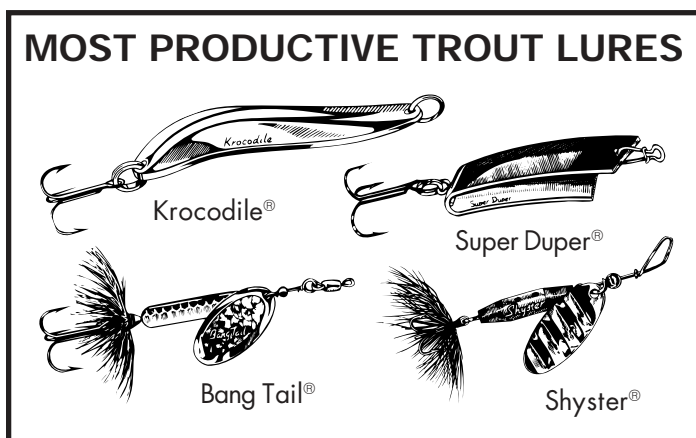
Start by making a short cast and then begin a slow, steady retrieve, constantly keeping your eyes on your rod tip. A vibrating tip means the spoon or spinner is working. As the lure approaches you, observe what it is doing underwater and couple that observation with the rod tip vibrations and the "feel" you are getting.

- A spoon should swim and wobble from side to side. A spinner should have a constantly revolving blade. If your spoon is spinning, you are reeling too fast and should slow down the retrieve. If the blade on your spinner is not constantly revolving, you are reeling too slowly and should speed up the retrieve.

- Hardware should not be bounced along the bottom like drift tackle. Although some anglers catch fish this way by accident, it does not allow the lure to obtain the fish-enticing action needed, besides the fact it often will result in an unwanted snag and loss of the lure.

- All attachment devices for spoons, including those you may attach yourself, should have a rounded end which makes contact with the eye of the spoon so the lure can swing freely from side to side. Sharp pointed or V-shaped snaps or snap swivels can destroy the action of most spoons.

- Weighted casting spinners such as the *Bang Tail*® and *Shyster*® produce a completely different pattern of underwater vibrations than spoons, as the blades on these revolve around a fixed shaft. If a line attachment device, such as a barrel swivel, is not already on the spinner, you will need to attach a snap swivel to the eye of the spinner. *Bang Tails*® and *Shysters*® do not require additional swivels as they feature a keel-type wire shaft which helps prevent the lure from revolving and causing line twist. Your line may be tied directly to the eyelet on these spinners, if you choose.



- All spinners produce sonic vibrations underwater. Some spinners produce more of these vibrations than others, depending upon the shape of the blade and how the blade is attached to the shaft. The Tiger Tail® spinner, because of the fact that the blade revolves directly on the shaft, produces maximum frequency sonic vibrations.

- Do EVERYTHING possible to PREVENT a lure from running at a constant speed and in a straight line. Twitch the rod tip every few seconds, speed up and then slow down the retrieve, stop the lure dead in the water and then start it up again, reel extremely fast for a few seconds, and so on. The more variety in speed and action you impart to the lure, the better your chances of enticing a strike.

- Sharp hooks are critical in all fishing situations. Hooks on spinners and spoons must be super sharp to ensure their effectiveness. Many fish are lost simply because the angler didn't take the few seconds necessary to obtain a sharp hook point. Small files have proved to be the absolute best sharpening tool for fish hooks and Luhr Jensen's *Sharp Hook File*™ produces needle-sharp points in seconds. Place the file parallel to the hook point and, with gentle one-way strokes, remove a small amount of metal from at least two sides of the point, resulting in both a needle-sharp point and knife-like cutting edge.

To obtain a copy of our *Hook Sharpening Tech Sheet #8822-565*, send a business size self-addressed, stamped envelope to Luhr Jensen Hook Sharpening Tech Sheet, P.O. Box 297, Hood River, OR 97031, Attn: Customer Service.

Fish often are more aggressive in tail-out areas than in the middle of a hole because they have to be fast to catch meals being swept by. Downstream casting is accomplished by casting your lure across and downstream at about a 45-degree angle and then allowing the current to sweep the lure across the tail-out. What you want to accomplish here is to cast your lure short at first and then make progressively longer casts, allowing the current to sweep the lure across a new path in the tail-out every time until you've covered it thoroughly.

A suggestion for downstream casting is to carry along heavier spoons or spinners as these will sink deeper with the least amount of current resistance.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Anglers wishing additional Yellowstone River information are encouraged to talk with sport shop personnel in the area. Guided float trips can be arranged through most shops or through Wilderness Outfitters at (406) 222-6933.

Further information on fishing techniques can be obtained through detailed Tech Reports produced by Luhr Jensen & Sons which are available free at most fishing tackle dealers.

### CHECK RULES & REGS

Because rules, regulations and conditions can change from time to time, it is recommend that you check them out before heading out.