

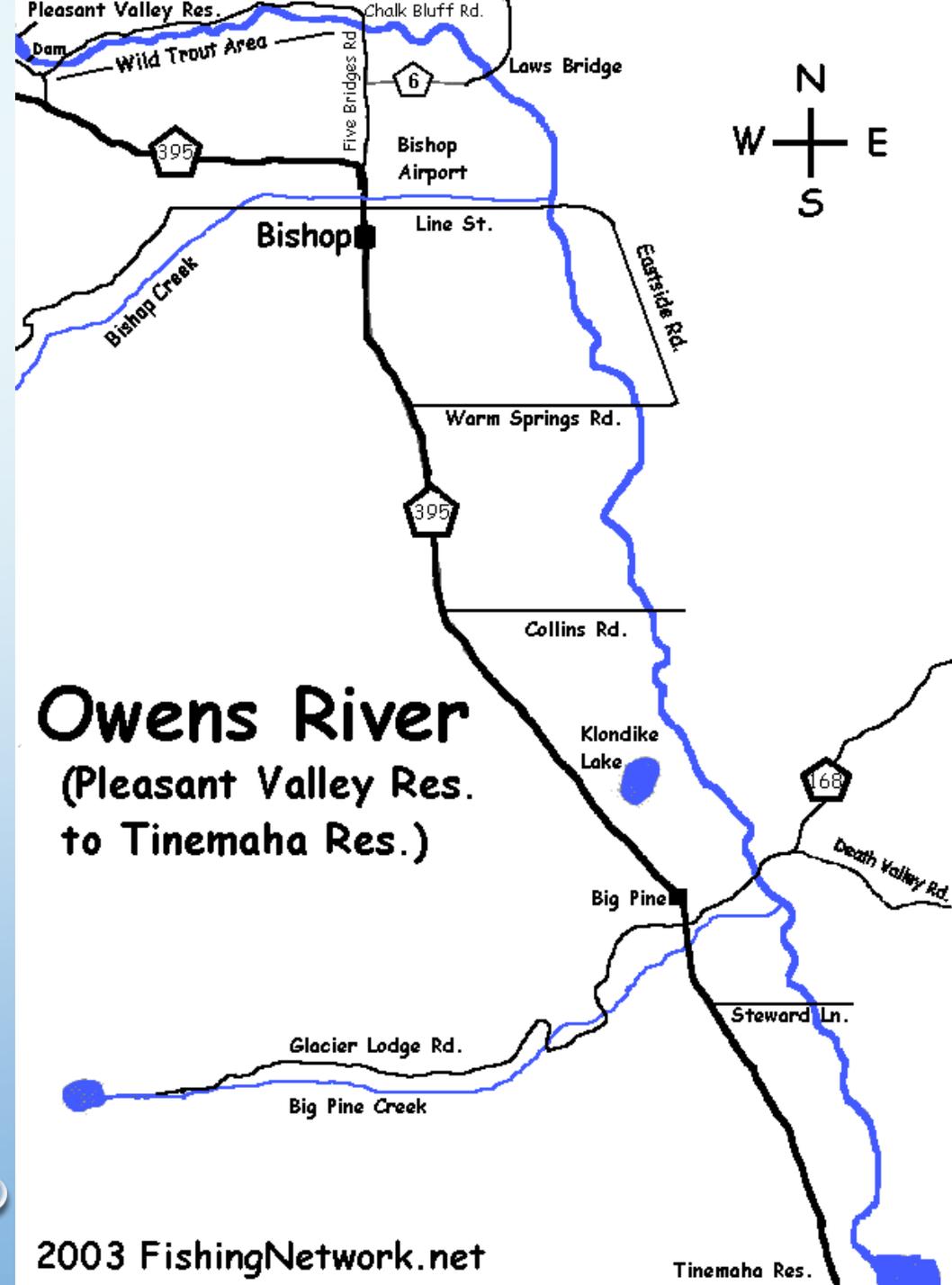
WINTERTIME TECHNIQUES AND TACTICS
FOR HOOKING TROUT IN THE LOWER
OWENS RIVER IN BISHOP, CALIFORNIA

WITH CHRIS LEONARD,
MAMMOTH HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER
AND FLY FISHING GUIDE

Why fish the Lower Owens during winter?

- Air temps tend to be very comfortable
- Easy access
- Give the fish a rest at other fisheries
- Flows are usually mellow enough to wade
- Technically challenging fishing
- There's a lot of space to spread out
- Best burger anywhere is at Burger Barn

The Lower Owens River runs parallel to US 395. My favorite section to fish is the “Wild Trout Section” which is directly below Pleasant Valley Reservoir. This is north of Bishop.



What's it look like in the winter?



Streamside vegetation is much easier to access than tromping through the snow at higher elevations. The river has a more springtime like character all winter.



Streamsideside
vegetation snakes the
river, providing cover
and shade for angler
and fish. It is a
healthy river system.





The “Wild Trout Section” is famous for holding beautiful wild born trout.

There are some really beautiful wild brown trout in this section of the Lower Owens River.



And some
healthy, wild
born
rainbows, too.





This is generally what the Lower Owens River looks like from above. It snakes through the valley with a lot of bends and deep pockets. You can fish one bend or stretch for a bit then jump up to the next section. There is a lot of river to fish.



Fish like to stack up in the ripples where the water is deep enough. You can easily sight fish for them.





I bring my four-legged friends with me a lot. They are trained to mind their manners on the water. Check for ticks when you get back to where you are staying!



Well... Bruin is
a lab after all.



Runs like this one are money! The ripples you see at the front drop down into a deep bucket. The trout stack up in the buckets in this river. I would also work the section just next to the riverside vegetation. The trout love to hide under the banks near the vegetation. I would probably nymph fish this or run a dry-dropper. Show the fish the food! This is also a safe place to cross the river. Taking a staff is a good idea.



It pays to get into the water and wade around a bit to find a stretch that is generally challenging to otherwise get to. Remember, if it was tough for you to find the hole, those trout haven't seen as many anglers. You might need to bush-whack.



I take a few rods with me. I like to run streamers through and across the deeper buckets and under the undercut banks. Some of these fish are found “off the beaten path” as just stated. You can tactically fish a river several different ways. Just think outside the box, and be safe and smart.

On several occasions, I've been visited by unexpected friends.





This stretch found right at the parking lot with the large cottonwood tree can be very rewarding! It is very technical and stacked with fish.



A Pale Morning Dun is my favorite dry fly to fish on the glassy water where the trout are actively feeding. I tend to see impressive PMD hatches during the winter. Be stealth! 6X tippet, & mind the perfect drift!

Now, I'm sharing all of my secrets of success with you. But, that's why you chose to be here today.

Dress
your
flies!



Proper presentation of flies usually leads to this. Just ask the dogs.

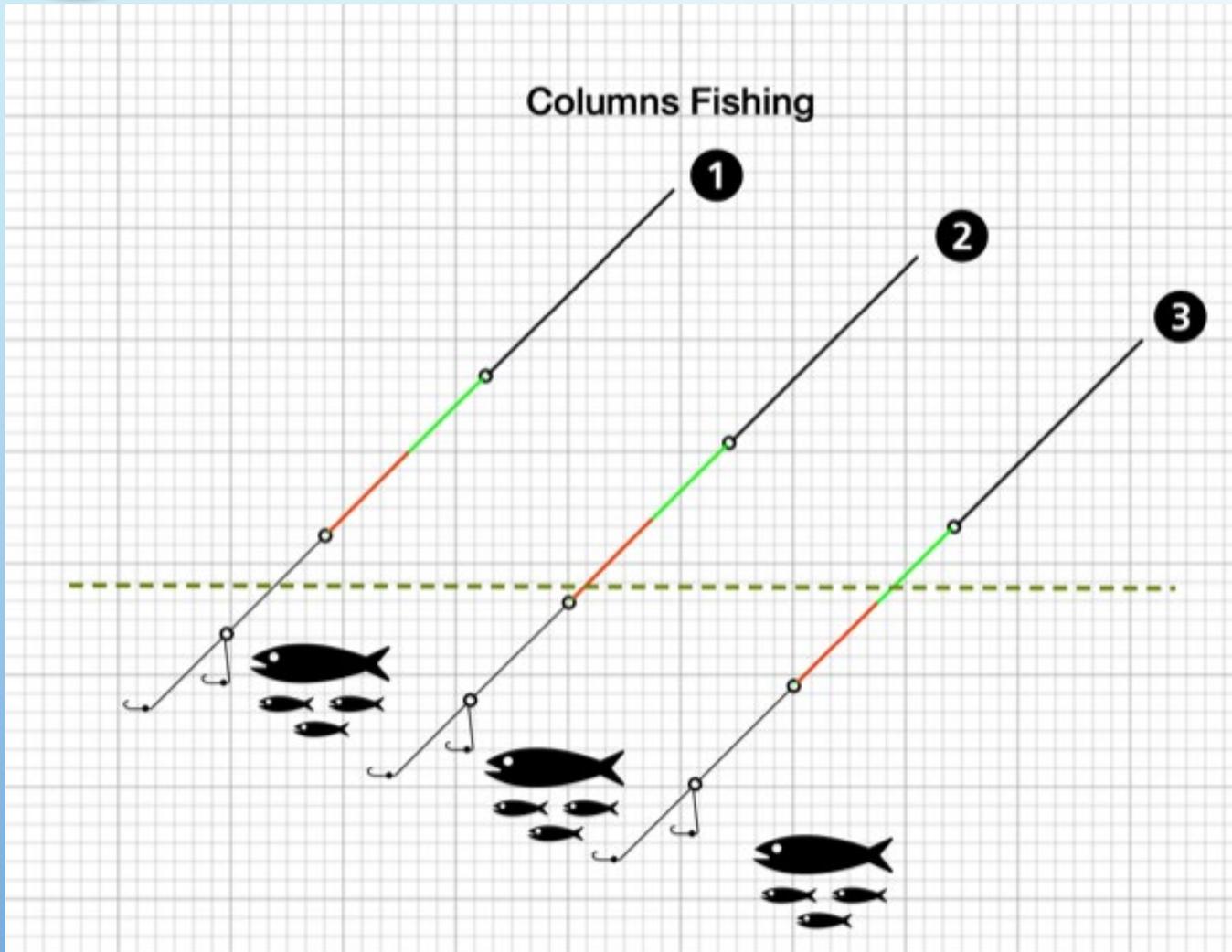




It's a great river to nymph fish with a 3 to 5 weight 8'6' or 9' foot rod. Managing your slack in the water is always important. Some times you want it, other times you don't.

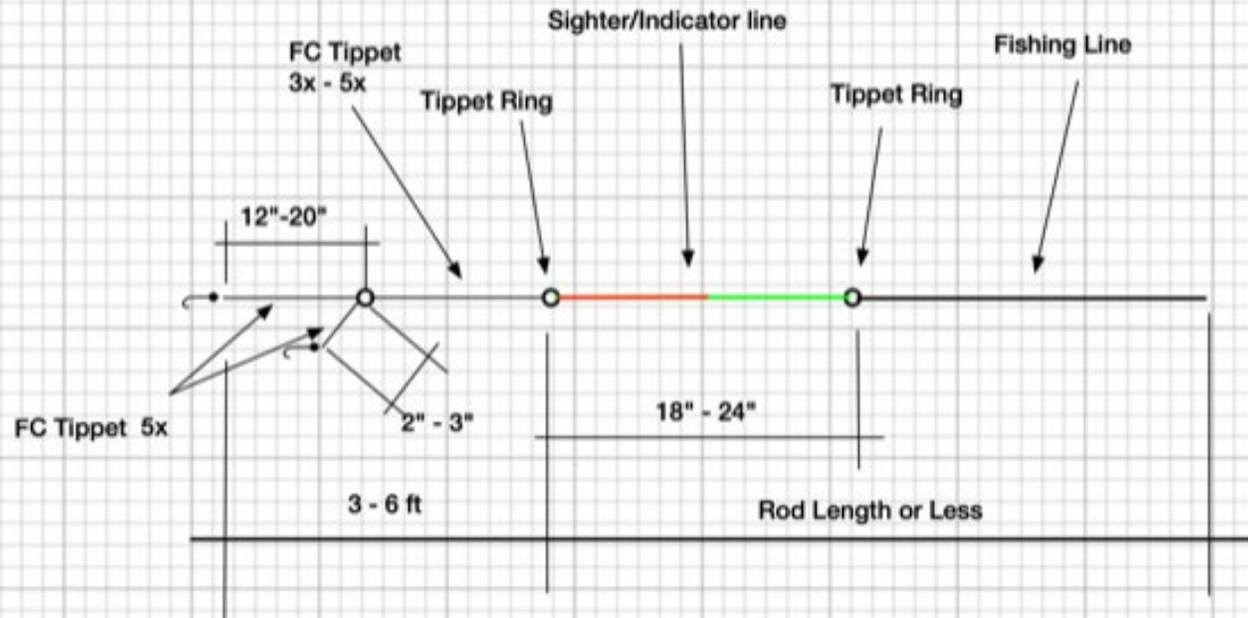


For those wanting a real challenge, high-stick nymphing (“indicatorless” or “tight-line nymphing”) can also produce rewards. It is a great river for high-stick fishing. I prefer a 10’ 3 or 4 weight rod for this technique.



High-stick nymphing is the most productive kind of nymph fishing since you can easily move throughout the water column.

Picture Credit: Luong Tam



There are several ways to rig without an indicator. This system is how Luong Tam rigs his tenkara rods when fishing without an indicator.

Just don't hook
this guy when
you're working
the water.





He'd probably be more interested in chasing these guys anyways... there's a lot of bird life in the valley near the river.



It's a really fun
river to tenkara
fish.

This is a great river to learn to tenkara fish, or improve your tenkara skills.





I don't exclusively fish Western rods or only tenkara rods. I fish both. I like to mix it up, and both have their appropriate applications. Do what's going to work for you.



Look for changes in the water. Don't get "tunnel vision" on that one trout driving you crazy. Mix it up a bit, and try fishing different parts of one given run.



Take a kid fishing. Or, someone who wants to learn how to fly fish for the first time. The Lower Owens has plenty of “user friendly” fishing holes. Just look for the slower moving buckets with room to cleanly back cast.



Nothing beats local knowledge. You can always hire a guide. I hire guides when I fish new waters. I want to know where the trout live, and I want to learn something new.



Proper casting takes good instruction followed up by disciplined practice and application.



Every now
and then, you
gotta make
that tight shot.
If I'm standing
by the log,
can I feed the
fish under the
overhang and
twigs?



It helps to be observant of everything going on around you. Analyze the river.



My favorite wet fly
to fish on the Lower
Owens River in
winter is a Green
Rock Worm.



There are a few variations to tying a Green Rock Worm. I wouldn't overthink the fly as long as it is rigged correctly.

Just as important as fly selection is split shot size selection and placement of shot and fly. Fish don't eat what fish don't see! Be sure to think about where you want your fly to drift in the water column before fishing.





The fish in the Lower Owens River REALLY like this fly!!!



Any trout in the world
will eat a size-18
Pheasant Tail out of the
river. This holds true of
the Lower Owens River.

My favorite streamer pattern for the Lower Owens River is an egg-sucking leech. Just like shot selection is important when fishing wet flies, consider the appropriate sinking head fly line for stripping streamers. You don't need much for the winter months.



There can be some strong caddis hatches during the end of winter. Tent Wings and Elk Hairs are my favorites. Sizes 16 or 18.



I've also roped in a lot of trout on a trusty BWO pattern. Less is more. Don't over-think it.



www.kittredgesports.com

Kittredge Sports in Mammoth Lakes has a healthy fly selection. During the winter months, the shop however operates as a ski outfitter only.





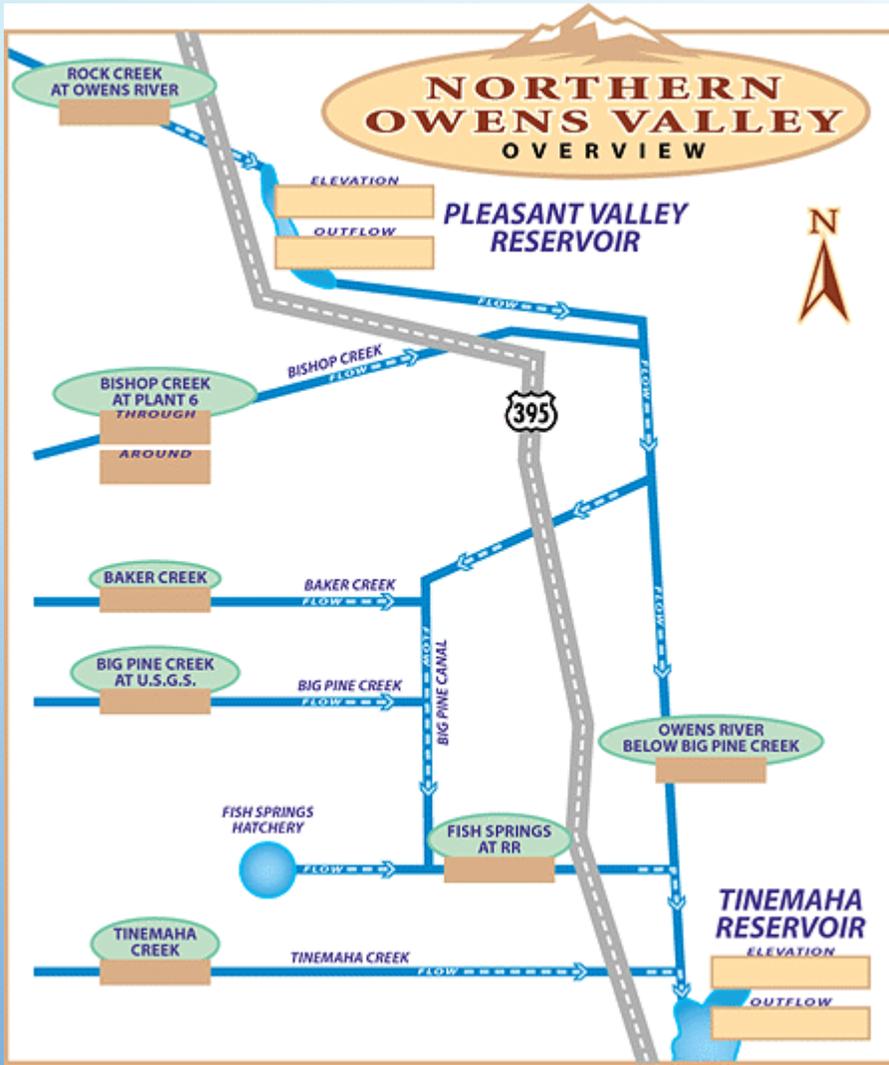
**It's just a
pretty fishery
filled with
pretty fish.**

Typical Wild Trout Section brown trout.





I prefer the river when it is flowing right around 150cfs to 180cfs. It can be treacherous when flows increase above this. Winter flows generally hold low until around April when air temps also rise. I fish the Lower Owens opposite the traditional season.



Access www.ladwp.com for a real time report of cfs flows. You want to find the “L.A. Aqueduct Conditions Report.” Look at this before you get on the road. Anything over 300cfs becomes dangerous to wade. 150cfs is just perfect.

Check the weather before making the journey! It can get very windy in the valley. We see snow at times also. I prefer to collect weather information at www.noaa.gov.

The screenshot shows the NOAA website for Bishop Airport CA. The page features the NOAA logo, the title "Your National Weather Service forecast", and the location "Bishop Airport CA". There is a search bar for "City, ST" or zip code, and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Email. The forecast is for "Point Forecast: Bishop Airport CA" with coordinates 37.36°N 118.39°W and an elevation of 4199 ft. The forecast is valid from 2pm PDT Oct 18, 2018 to 6pm PDT Oct 24, 2018. The "Forecast at a Glance" section shows a 7-day forecast with icons and temperatures. The "Detailed 7-day Forecast" and "Current Conditions" sections are also visible.

This Afternoon	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
Sunny	Clear	Sunny	Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
Hi 74 °F	Lo 40 °F	Hi 74 °F	Lo 42 °F	Hi 69 °F	Lo 42 °F	Hi 71 °F	Lo 43 °F	Hi 70 °F

Most winter days are beautiful!



The river is a great place to
fish all morning...

... or just pull up a
place to take a nap.





It also makes for a fun afternoon after a morning of skiing. These two hit Mammoth Mountain the same morning this fish was hooked.



The best days of my life is skiing knee-deep powder on the backside of Mammoth Mountain until the crowds come around 10:30 in the morning...



... then I drive down US 395 about 45-minutes and rope in fish on a fly rod all afternoon wearing waders and a long-sleeved tee shirt. True story.





The river can be wide open several winter days with not another angler in sight.



There are some really beautiful stretches to fish.

Look for a safe place to cross, and work the deeper buckets close

to the roadside bank. Remember the adage “foam is home.”





Be mindful of the full-time residents. They are not always kind. Just give them space... and watch where you walk!



This is a typical
late winter
afternoon on the
Lower Owens
River...

... just you and a few thousand of these guys.



Still plenty of space
even if you come
across other fly
anglers.





Accessing the river from Brockman Lane can also take you to some rather calm waters to fish.

The Lower Owens has attracted anglers from all over the world... like Shimpei from Japan.





We celebrated the catch
at Holy Smoke Texas Style
Barbeque!



There's a lot of this
in the heart of
winter on the
Lower Owens
River!

Some of the most beautiful sunsets in the world can be found here in the wintertime.





All this awaits you on the Lower Owens River.



Just find the time to make the trip.



Every February, I host an annual clean up on the Lower Owens River. Every year, it is scheduled for the Saturday following Super Bowl Sunday. We will meet at the bridge in the Pleasant Valley Campground at 8AM. Makes for a good excuse to make the trip to the river.

The more people helping, the cleaner we can make the fishery.





Always interesting what you find when cleaning up a river.



Breakfast and lunch is provided the day of the clean up, and we have some tenkara casting games.



It's a good time and good way to give back.



There are a lot of lodging options found throughout Bishop - to fit any budget. Most places to stay are quite affordable. I book my rooms when traveling on www.hotels.com.



Yamatani on Main Street is a great place to gather for dinner after a day on the river.





Thai Thai Restaurant found at the Bishop Airport is a local favorite.

Great Basin Bakery found on the southern part of town is one of the state's best bakeries.





Burger Barn on West Line Street makes the best burger in the world. They bake their own buns and use locally grown produce. The lemonade and shakes are made from scratch.





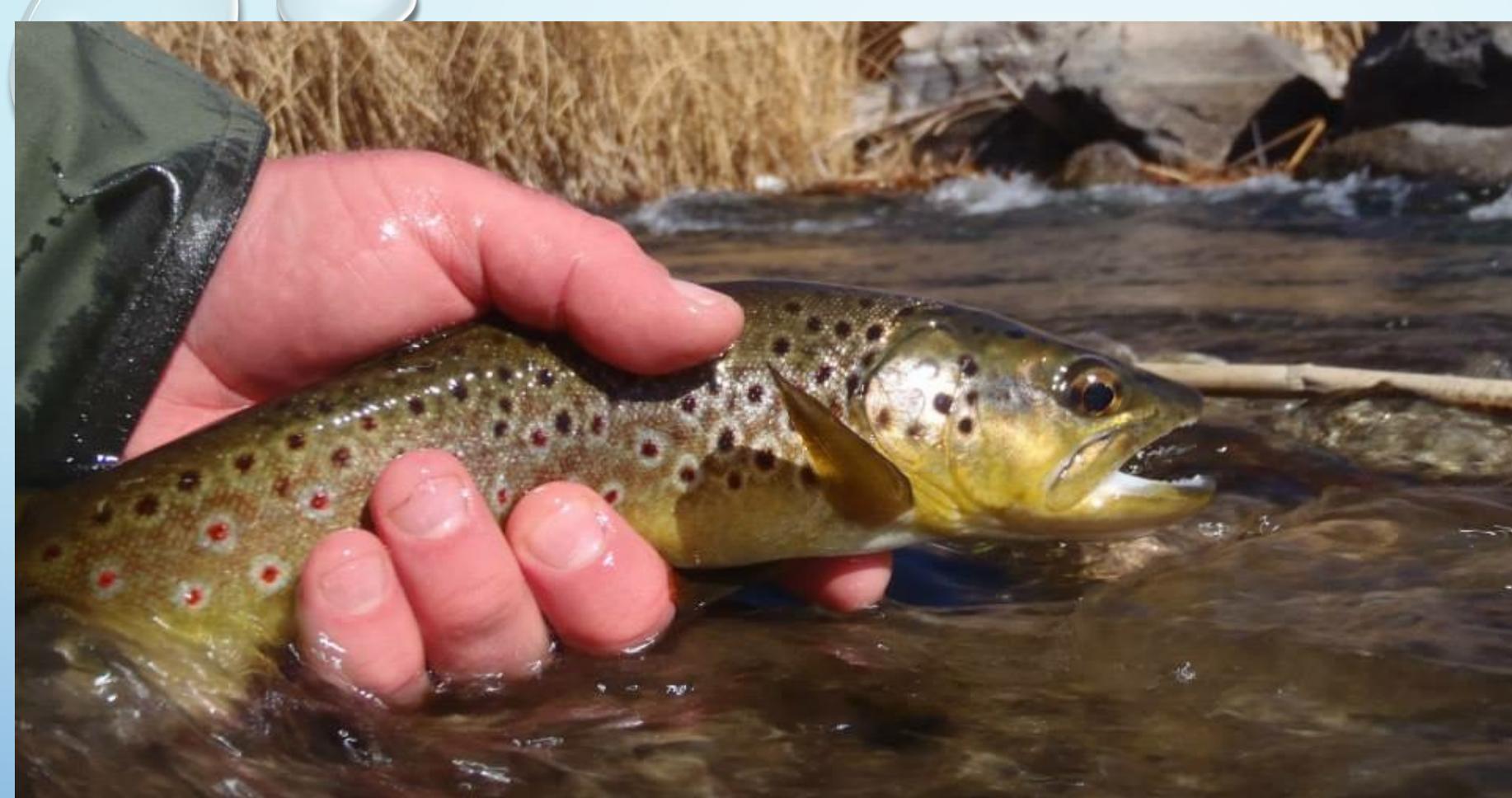
If you are staying at a place with a kitchen, Manor Mart just down the street from Burger Barn has the best selection of food.



Main Street in Bishop is really cool!

Bishop has several great coffee shops, fly shops, art galleries, and other independently owned stores.





I've said it before and I'll say it again, "The best thing about living in Mammoth is its proximity to Bishop!"

Thank you for attending today.
I can be reached at 818.288.3271.
I guide through Kittredge Sports.
Available weekends and holidays
during the school year, and all of
summer. Please feel free to reach out to
me anytime. I hope to see you on the
h2o.

Chris Leonard.

