



The Upper and Middle Kennebec River offers uncrowded fishing and spectacular scenery

Fly Fishing Maine's Kennebec River

by
Jack Gagnon

Photos courtesy of Kennebec River Outfitters.

As spring in Virginia leans toward summer, fly fishing for trout is curtailed by reduced flows and warming waters. Some Virginia anglers start fishing for smallmouth bass; others head to the coast to fish for stripers and bluefish. But if you still want to fly fish for trout, you'll probably be making travel plans. So what's your pleasure?

A float trip on a remote stretch of

river, with eagles soaring overhead, while native brook trout rise to a caddis hatch? How about wild, acrobatic rainbows, with the occasional salmon and brook trout added to the mix? Or maybe you'd prefer a few miles of easy wading, where brown trout grow fat on a cornucopia of aquatic forage.

Can't decide? You don't have to. These are just some of the fly fishing

options if you head north to Maine's Kennebec River. The lower Kennebec's urban surroundings and accessibility make it one of the most heavily fished waters in Maine. But the middle and upper Kennebec, from The Forks down to Madison, offers blue ribbon fishing without crowds, in rugged, unspoiled surroundings. When mayfly hatches in the mid-Atlantic states are already fading into



Early season mayflies: Rear - *Epeorus pleuralis* Dun (Quill Gordon) - A “classic” early season hatch on the Kennebec River. Center - *Baetis vagans* Dun (Blue Winged Olive) - Hatches of different “olives” occur from early season through fall on the Kennebec. Lower Left - *Epeorus pleuralis* Spinner (Quill Gordon). Photo by Dennis LaBare.

Ephemerella subvaria Dun (Hendrickson) - The Hendrickson is a major spring hatch. Both the emergence of the duns and the spinner fall trigger a frenzy of surface feeding. Photo by Dennis LaBare.



memory, the Kennebec River is, literally, just heating up. Memorial Day weekend signals the beginning of heavy insect emergences and first-rate fly fishing.

Early stoneflies and Quill Gordons are followed by hatches of Hendricksons and March Browns. In late June, the Hexagenia hatch begins, and it continues into August. Maine’s “Hex” is

the biggest mayfly in the United States; it brings large, usually wary fish to the surface. Summer also brings a continuous succession of caddis hatches, more stoneflies, and the emergence of Ephoron Leukon, the prolific “White Fly.”

Do you like streamer fishing? Fish in the Kennebec dine on minnows, sculpins and dace that are found the entire

length of the river. If you enjoy nymph fishing, dense populations of stonefly nymphs and hellgrammites complement the profusion of caddis and mayflies. It’s not surprising that the Kennebec produces trout with exceptional growth rates.

The central hub of fly fishing activity on the middle and upper river is Kennebec River Outfitters (www.kennebecriveroutfitters.com) on Lakewood Road (Route 201) in Madison, Maine (207- 474-2500). The owner, Bob Mallard, is a consummate fly fishing professional and an outspoken advocate of progressive fishing management. Bob backs up his opinions with detailed research; he is a frequent guest on Maine’s outdoor talk shows. The fact that he’s fished all over the country but chose to set up shop in Madison Maine is testimony to the quality of the fishing.

Kennebec River Outfitters rivals any operation you’ll find in Sun Valley or West Yellowstone. Along with expert advice, they can supply anything you need on the river, from the right flies to a good cigar. Their specialty is helping visitors get into the best fishing available during their stay.

In addition to guided wade and float trips on the main river, they can put you in a canoe or float tube on a number of remote, wild brook trout ponds in the area. They also guide on the nearby Dead River, pursuing wild brook trout, rainbows and landlocked salmon in flows that vary from fast riffles to a pond-like setting. If you prefer to go it alone, they can tell you what areas are fishing well and what’s hatching.

The Kennebec River is too diverse a fishery to fully describe on these few pages. What I can tell you is this: Whatever flyfishing method you favor, whatever water type you prefer, you can find it using Madison, Maine as a starting point.

Twenty miles north of Madison, in Bingham, is the Wyman Dam tailwater. It is one of the few, and arguably one of the



Brown trout on the Kennebec feed on an abundance of aquatic fauna. They have exceptional growth rates.

finest wild rainbow trout fisheries in the northeast. Floating this section of river is advised. Wading can be dangerous due to frequent and unpredictable dam releases, as well as the slippery bottom.

If you're in the mood for a physical challenge, the upper stretches of the Kennebec Gorge offer miles of hike-in wade fishing for wild landlocked salmon and brook trout. This hike is on rough

trails and steep grades; it is "extreme" trout fishing and not recommended for the casual angler or a person with health issues. On the other end of the spectrum, anyone can explore the numerous feeder streams and small rivers flowing into the Kennebec and the upper Dead River. It's not easy fishing, but they all hold trout.

The name Kennebec comes from the Abnakis *Quinne bequi*, meaning "long and still." You could travel a long way, in many directions, and still not find the quality of fishing you'll find here.

Directions

The Madison Maine area is serviced by the Portland Airport, two hours away, and Bangor International Airport, one hour away. From Portland, take I-95 north- from Bangor take I-95 south- to exit 133, Route 201 North (Skowhegan-Jackman). Note that the entire middle Kennebec can be reached from Route 201.

A typical Kennebec River float trip includes floating and wading.



Accommodations

There are numerous choices for accommodations and dining in the area. The towns of The Forks, Bingham, Solon and Skowhegan are all a reasonable drive from Madison and close to the Kennebec River. Out-of-state visitors are the “bread and butter” of these businesses. They will be happy to answer any question you might have. Using a web search engine with “Maine lodging” will offer many options. This is only a partial list:

The Forks:

Inn by the River
www.innbytheriver.com
Full service B&B
Route 201 - HCR 63 Box 24
West Forks, ME 04985
Toll Free: 1- 866-663-2181
Fax: 207-663-2207

Solon:

The Evergreens Campground and Restaurant and Cabins

“On the banks of the Kennebec River”
Route 201A
Solon, ME 04979
Joe & Lorena Albuit
207-643-2324
info@evergreencampground.com

Breezy Acres Camps
www.breezyacrescamps.com
PO Box 414
Solon, ME 04979
207-643-2920
Dale & Edie Dunlap
info@breezyacrescamps.com

Skowhegan:

The Belmont Motel
www.belmontmotel.com
Full service, free wireless high-speed internet access available in all rooms.
1-800-235-6669

Breezy Acres Motel
www.skowhegan.com/breezy
13-unit motel features a picnic area, 9-hole mini-golf, trout pond and paddle boating.
315 Waterville Rd.
Skowhegan, ME 04976
207- 474-2703

Towne Motel
www.townemotel.com
Close to shops, restaurants and the State Fairgrounds. 25 rooms and seven kitchenettes.
172 Madison Avenue
Skowhegan, ME 04976
207-474-5151

Jack Gagnon is a part-time editor and monthly columnist for the *Northwoods Sporting Journal* in West Enfield, Maine. He has written for *Trout*, *American Angler* and *Fly Fisherman* magazines. His poetry has appeared in *Gray’s Sporting Journal*.

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