

EAST LAKE FLY FISHING

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INTRODUCTION

East Lake at 6,385 foot elevation is my most favored lake in Central Oregon for fly fishing therapy. It is an aesthetically beautiful lake in the midst of an active volcanic caldera. Osprey, eagles, mergansers, kingfishers, deer, and foxes are often seen. Because of the elevation, fishing usually does not start until late May or early June, but does improve quickly with June and July being some of the best fishing of the year. Rainbows, browns, and kokanee are readily available and can be targeted specifically which will be further discussed below. The lake can be fly fished from the shore on the northeast and southwest sides of the lake (see map below) and is best in the morning or evening. However, fishing from a float-tube, pontoon, or other boat is much more effective because you can offer more variety in presentation and cover more water. An ability to move from one side of the lake to another really enhances the chances of finding some feeding fish. It is a big lake at 1,044 acres!

Because of the elevation, care should be taken to monitor the weather conditions which can change quickly. Thunderstorms in summer can be particularly dangerous with 2-3 foot waves appearing in just a few minutes. Often, winds pick up in the afternoon and calm in the evenings which requires changes to your presentation. A rapidly dropping barometer does turn off the bite, however an approaching weak storm may increase the bite until the storm/squall hits.

The purpose of this paper is to provide guidance to those who do not fish East Lake on a regular basis and to facilitate a successful fly fishing day. Some ideas are discussed below (see STILLWATER PRESENTATION TACTICS below), but you can always get more ideas from the many experts in the Central Oregon Flyfisher's (COF) organization. You will probably see COF members and other fly fishers at East Lake and most are willing to share some ideas on current conditions and presentation.

GEAR - RODS

Fly rods in the 3 to 6 weight range are sufficient. However, if you have just one rod, I would recommend a 6 weight. Try out different rod actions (i.e. moderate to fast) to determine your preference. You should carry at least two rods (i.e. one for floating and one for sinking lines) as it takes too much time to switch reels. Most all my rods are 9 feet in length, but lighter ones (e.g. 3-4 wt.) are generally shorter in length. Longer rods are more efficient for Stillwater fishing.

GEAR - LINES

We all want to have the fun of fish readily taking our dry flies. However, there are times where the fish are not in the shallows and/or are not surface feeding. Remember that 80-90 percent of their diet is eaten below the surface. Often in midsummer, the water surface is like glass and the fish have moved to deeper water. Therefore, you must also have a full-sink line to get down 15 to 20 feet (sometime 30-35 feet). Brian Chan (Stillwater guru) typically carries a floating line, plus a type II and a type IV full-sink

line. The type II serves as an intermediate line when necessary and the type IV can also be used for deep water (30 foot) chironomid fishing. Intermediate lines are useful when fish are near the surface, particularly those lines that are clear (camo) and can sink down below the surface at least 1-2 feet.

I generally carry two floating lines (a 3wt and 6wt) and a type V full sink. I prefer a full-sink that does sink quickly and can get to the depths. The floating lines can be used as an intermediate line by adding weight to the dry fly can keep it below the surface. The full-sink line can be used as an intermediate by reducing weight and increasing retrieve speed.

I prefer high quality fly lines as they do perform better and last longer. You should clean them about twice a year. Find a line that matches your rod well to facilitate casting. Fortunately for me, Stillwater fishing does not require the ability to cast around obstacles and mending. If you can cast a floating line 30-40 feet (60 to 70 feet is ideal) in a straight line you are good to go. I do not prefer bright colored floating lines because they can be too visible to the fish under certain circumstances.

GEAR – LEADERS & TIPPET

At East lake I use 3X and 4X leaders for floating lines and a 3X leader for a full-sink line. When fishing with a full-sink I have hooked into a couple of monster fish that broke my lines. Therefore, a 2X might also be considered. For strength, I use a 6wt rod when using the full-sink. I also use fluorocarbon leaders for the full-sink lines. I will use 9 to 12 foot leaders in most cases, even for the full-sink line.

For tippet, I generally use the next lower size (e.g. 3X leader with a 4X tippet). I do not believe tippet size is a critical factor early in the year. However, I may go down 2 sizes in tippet later in the year when fish have become more experienced.

GEAR – REELS

Match the reel size to your rod. I prefer large arbor reels so I can quickly get back the line the fish has taken out. Since, the reel primarily holds the line and backing, I have never bought an expensive reel (over \$125). I do insist on a disc drag though. I have palmed the reels and have lost a few big fish because I am not that proficient. I either use the drag with all the line to the reel or strip in the line keeping a drag with my fingers. The latter approach requires keeping the loose line off the dog, out of the oar locks or from under foot.

GEAR – FLIES

Almost all the time, above and below the surface, I use a dropper 20-28 inches below the upper fly. This gives me more opportunity for a hookup. Often, the upper fly is an attractant and the lower fly is the real meal. One of my 'go to' floating line setups is a size 12 yellow stimulator on top and a size 16-18 Griffith's gnat below. This works well in all the Central Oregon lakes.

Callibaetis (CAB) are the most common bug with big hatches in summer months. Early in the year they are more grey/tan color (size 12) and seem to get more brown and a little smaller (size 14) in late summer. They can be fished all year with success. You must carry an assortment of CAB duns,

emergers, cripples, nymphs, and spinners. My 'go to' during a CAB hatch is a dun on top and an emerger on the bottom. I do not use spinners much, unless I see them on the water (e.g. mornings in midsummer) and fish are clearly taking them. CAB nymphs should be used often and can also be used as a dropper from a floating line or fished like a chironomid.

In the evenings and sometimes during the day, there are hatches of black caddis (sizes 14-16) in beach areas. Keep your eyes open to what is going on around you. In midsummer, an ant hatch may provide opportunity (particularly on the West and North shores) and ants can always be tried without a hatch going on. Damsel hatches are minimal at East Lake but nymphs will sometimes be effective.

COF fly tyers have created some unique patterns that can provide that extra sparkle (see the COF CDs). Subtle differences in the fly can make or break your hookup count. Most recently, I have had some success using UV dubbing and crystal chenille. I always want some shiny flash in the fly (holographic preferred), particularly for the sunny days.

The following are a list of flies considered necessary for all Central Oregon lakes:

DRY FLIES (generally size 12 – 20)

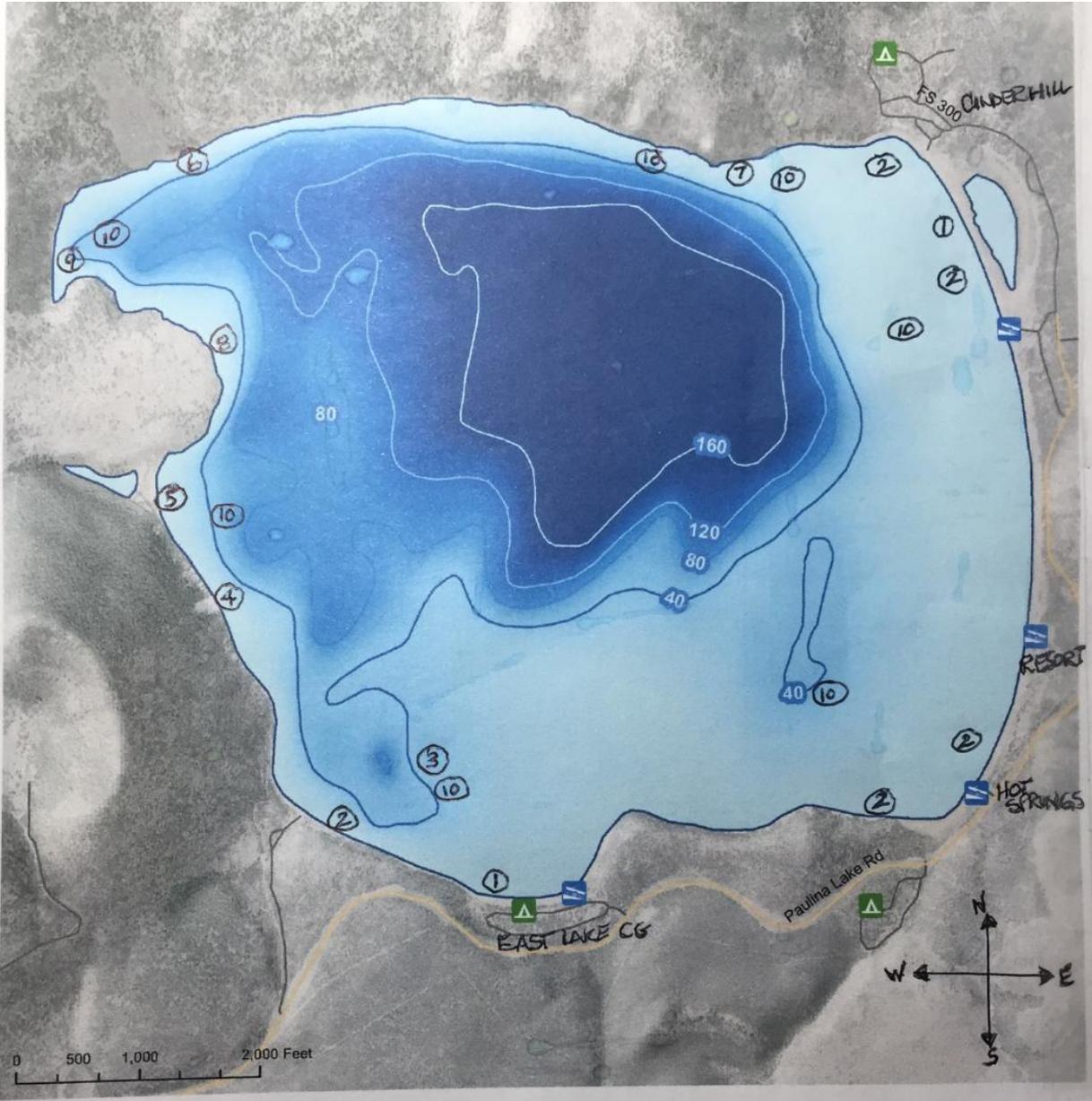
- CABs (as discussed above)
- Griffith's or other black gnats
- Elk hair caddis or stimulator
- Purple haze
- Parachute and plain Adams (both long & short bodies)
- March brown
- Blue winged olive dun
- Midge duns (also palomino midge) and pupae at dusk
- Yellow sallie or light Cahill
- Black ants & beetles

WET FLIES (generally size 8 for buggers to size 18 for nymphs)

- Wooly buggers (multi colored, dark green with sparkle, or a little red)
- Leeches (black, brown or purple, also East Lake sparkle, Rickard's, and gold mohair leech)
- Lightening bug, zugbug, Tellico nymph, pheasant tail, prince nymph
- CAB nymphs, hare's ear, or soft hackle
- Chironomids (red, black, silver-chromie, blue, green) (raccoon)
- Green scud in the fall
- Water boatmen

EAST LAKE MAP

The following is a map which has been marked to identify key areas and facilitate discussion of various presentation techniques:



- ① SHALLOWS
- ② WEED BEDS
- ③ MOUND OR HUMP
- ④ WHITE SLIDE
- ⑤ WHITE SAND BEACH

- ⑥ RED SLIDE
- ⑦ CLIFFS
- ⑧ ROCKY POINT
- ⑨ NW BAY
- ⑩ DEEP WATER CHIRONOMIDS 20'+

- (1) The shallows or littoral zones extend around the lake but are most prominent on the East and South sides of the lake. Watch these areas for rising fish, particularly early morning before the CAB hatch begins. These areas can be fished from the shore. When the fish are looking for food in the shallows, you will see rises very close to the shore. This can happen anywhere on the lake (i.e. a pocket hatch) so keep your eyes open. Casting to the shoreline is one of the most productive techniques. That said, you should not ignore the water all around you. Work the shore, but also cast 360 degrees to cover all directions. The 360 degree approach should always be used before moving to the next spot. I have sometimes caught some big fish in the deeper water, although there was not many rises or other activity very evident. In midsummer with little wind and strong sun, the fish will move out of the shallows, so do not waste time if they are not there.
- (2) The major weed beds are in the Southwest, Southeast and Northwest corners. There are always fish (mostly browns and rainbows) in or near the weed beds. I will first try some dry flies, even if I see little activity. In addition, using a full-sink line between the weed beds, particularly on the Northwest side (Cinderhill), can be productive. Some of the biggest fish will come to the surface on the deeper side of the weed beds, particularly in the evening. When dry flies are not working, fish deep on the outside of the weed beds with a full-sink line (buggers and nymphs) or with chironomids (generally 8-15 feet deep).
- (3) The mound or hump is a basalt formation that rises up to 10-12 feet from/below the surface. The map marking may not be accurate but was intended to be on the Southeast side of the mound as a key fishing spot. Sometimes you can see the mound or find it quickly with your anchor. Using a GPS marker would be helpful. The waters around it are generally about 18-25 feet deep. This is a great place to fish. Big browns often hang out on the North side, and rainbows mostly hang out on the East, South, and North sides. In early summer, on top of the mound is a good place to fish chironomids. To the East of the mound is a very productive area for kokanee (try a lightening bug or other shiny/colorful nymph down 15-20 feet) until late July when the water warms. Kokanee will then move to deeper waters (35 to 45 feet) near the white slide and white sand beach.
- (4) The white slide has some deep water close to shore. This is a very productive area with some big fish (16-20 inch) feeding in the shallows and some bigger fish (over 20 inch) coming up from the deeper waters. Dry fly fishing is best near the shoreline in the morning and mid-day, and all over as the sun gets off the water in the evening. In the evenings, the area between the white slide and white sand beach is often where the fish first come to the shoreline to feed. When fishing is slow during the day, this is an area to consider using deep water (25-35 feet deep) chironomids.
- (5) The white sand beach is a good place to take a break and enjoy the beautiful scenery. In the evening, many fish will come in to the shoreline looking for food. Black caddis hatches are common in evenings. I have noticed in August that there are grasshoppers behind the beach. Tossing out a grasshopper or stimulator can be very productive. Quite often there are fish cruising the surface in the deeper water – watch for rises and consider using a buggger/CAB nymph. In most mid to late summer evenings (after sun gets off the water) you can catch

kokanee on dry flies. This is also a very productive area for deep water chironomid fishing in midsummer heat.

- (6) The red slide on the Northwest side of the lake has little shallows. The deeper water has rocky formations and downed timber that provide good trout habitat. Working the shoreline can produce fish, but chironomids (and balanced leeches) are generally more productive. Using a full-sink line and fishing 15-20 feet deep can also be productive. CAB hatches can occur in pockets, but are not as prolific as hatches where there is more vegetation.
- (7) The cliffs are prominent on the Northeast of the lake. There are some CAB hatches (particularly on the East side of the cliffs) and sometimes during midsummer afternoons the CAB duns get cooked by the hot rocks and fall into the water for the waiting fish. The deeper water is an excellent place for a full-sink line or deep water chironomid fishing. In the mornings and evenings, fish move in and out along the cliffs toward the weed beds in the Northeast corner. Depending on conditions, fish may be close to the shoreline, but in most cases they will be 20-60 feet from the shoreline when moving in or out. Watch for rises. There may be few rises, but fish are moving, so try some dries even just a few casts. Often I will use a full-sink line then switch back to a floating line to find the moving fish.
- (8) The rocky point area on the Western shore often has browns hanging out close to the shore. These fish are easily spooked so use some stealth and cast to the shore line. There are fish off the point at the 8-15 foot depth which you can get to with a full-sink line or chironomids. For some years this was an area to catch atlantic salmon, however, there may not be any left.
- (9) The Northwest corner has a shallow bay that always has a few fish in it. Sometimes there is a hatch (CABs or ants), and there is a fair amount of surface activity, though not quite as prolific as the weed bed and shallow areas. The North side of this bay does have downed trees and rock formations which are good trout cover. Shallow chironomid fishing can be good here.
- (10) There are a couple of areas where deep water chironomid fishing (20-35 feet) can be productive when fish are staying down, especially in August. There are a variety of techniques for this (google Chan and/or Rowley). Find what is most comfortable for you and develop your skill. I use a full-sink line and fish primarily directly under the boat. The depth will obscure the boat shadow and does not seem to affect the bite. A strike indicator is not necessary with this method. I cannot explain why, however, I have caught many fish by dropping a chironomid to the bottom of the lake. This is not natural movement, but does seem to get fish excited and they will go into the muck to get it. Try this at other lakes too.

STILLWATER PRESENTATION TACTICS

During the day fishing, I keep count of the number of hits, hookups, and boated fish. These numbers can give you information as to how well things are working. For example, a low ratio of hookups to hits may indicate a problem with setting the hook or indicate fish refusals. In addition, paying attention to what is going on around can provide useful information (e.g. What are local guides doing? Are the osprey finding fish in the shallows? And, of course, hatches & rises). If you are not getting hits, then you

need to change your presentation, which may be as simple as speed of the retrieve or length of the pause.

The following are some of the key Stillwater techniques for maximizing the fish headcount:

LINE CONTROL

Keeping a tight line without slack is critical. My fly rod is pointed at the fly and the tip may be in the water. This helps significantly in setting the hook. Along with this, hold the fly line in your other hand and SLOWLY retrieve and/or keep a tight line. When a fish hits, do not lift your rod. Instead, set the hook by pulling the line 6-8 inches. If no hookup, let the fly stay where it is or pull in another 2 inches to maintain a tight line. You will be surprised how many times (sometimes 2 or 3 times) the fish will come back and grab the fly. If you have given a hefty yank on the fly rod you probably have lost this second opportunity. This is not easy to learn, and I still yank the fly away when I am overly excited or when not paying close attention.

If fishing below the surface, give your line/fly the time to sink. Use a count to ensure you hit various depths and find where the fish are. You may need weighted flies or even some lead weight to get down to 20 feet or more.

Try to vary your steady retrieve (trolling) direction, rather than going in a straight line. Wide circles or 45-90 degree turns while trolling will vary your depth and ultimately cover more water. I often do this just to find where the fish are.

RETRIEVE AND PAUSE

Vary your retrieval speed! At East Lake, there are many who only use a very fast retrieve with long pulls. Often this works well when the fish are up, particularly for rainbows and kokanee who like the chase. Even if it is working reasonably well, try a different retrieve. The PAUSE is really the key. Let the fly drop a couple of feet or 6-10 feet and slow the retrieve. Many times the dropping fly (more the better) attracts fish attention (e.g. the fish grab a wooly bugger while it is sinking - before the retrieve). When the depth allows, I will let the fly go to the bottom as the fish seem to key on anything near the bottom and go into the muck to get it. This is even more productive when using a chironomid (or other fly) that the fish have not recently seen. Something new piques their opportunistic urges.

When using a floating line, many fly fishers will strip it in to prepare for another cast and rip the line from the water 20-30 feet away. This habit loses opportunity.... Slowly bring the fly to the boat and let it hang for 2 seconds, then take the line out of the water (the 'hang' method per Chan/Rowley). You will catch more fish and not scare them by ripping the line out of the water. Catching a fish right next to the boat is extra exciting as you often see them coming.

When fishing Stillwater, I make a poor cast too frequently. I see others do the same and rip the line out of the water and cast back to the same spot. This probably scares any fish with 6-8 feet of the fly. Do not waste any cast. The more the fly is in the water the greater the probability of success. Instead of taking the line right back; take up the slack to the fly, wait for a few seconds, then retrieve slowly to the 'hang'.

Next cast should be at least 6-8 feet from the last cast, unless there is a feeding frenzy at the previous spot. Again, watch for rises!

FLOATANT

Using too much floatant is an easy habit to acquire. Do not load the floatant up – minimize what you need for the circumstances. Most often I will not initially use floatant, but gradually add floatant to meet the current conditions. For example, while using a stimulator and Griffith's gnat combo, I will not initially add any floatant as the flies float pretty well by themselves. They may start to sink after a few seconds which is GREAT. Why? Retrieving a fly 2-6 inches under the surface with short pulls and varied pauses (and twitches) is overall the most productive technique I have found. If the fly starts to sink more than you want, you can get some drying by using a few short false casts. If the drying is not sufficient, add floatant sparingly.

THE FILM OR MENISCUS

The film or meniscus is the upper layer of the water's surface. This is a barrier to the nymphs and pupae that want to hatch on the surface. A well-known fly fisherman once wrote that the breakthrough effort is like a human trying to get out from under 3 feet of loose dirt. The fish see the nymphs wiggling under the surface and feed voraciously. The serious entomologists would say that a CAB cannot be an emerger because it does not have a pupal stage. My experience is that a CAB emerger or chironomid (normally as a dropper) fished right under the film is highly productive. I am not sure as to what point the CAB nymph starts to break out of the shuck, but it would seem logical that this could start as they are trying to break through the film. A little movement of your fly makes it more noticeable to the fish. If you can get the fly breaking in and out of the film, hang on.... It should also be noted that warmer water makes breaking the film a little easier for the baby bugs.

One trick I use when there are CAB spinners being taken, is to use a heavier fly on top that will sink and use floatant to keep the dropper (spinner) on the surface. If you can get roughly a 45 degree angle in the line (from drowned dropper to the spinner), you can tickle the line to create concentric circles around the spinner. It is not easy to get this 'balance' but if attained can be highly productive, especially in the mornings when the lake surface is covered in spinners. The resulting wiggle of the spinner stands out.

PICKING A SPOT TO FISH

Keep your eyes open! In most mornings I will fish the shallows, however, if I observe fish activity elsewhere (e.g. a CAB hatch) I may go there first. After identifying where I want to fish, I try to use some stealth to get into position and not get too close (at least 30 feet away). I target the spot initially, then work my casts 360 degrees around me to fully cover the water. I may not use as many casts to the deeper water, but I will always cover it to see if there are fish there. In other words, once at the spot I do not move around much other than to rotate for casting in different directions. When done with that spot, I will process what I have learned and quietly move to the next spot.

A very productive tactic is to fish the shoreline (or in other lakes the reeds). Generally, I am slowly moving along the shoreline but often stationary for a short while when working a particularly productive spot. As I work the shoreline, I will cast very close to the water's edge and retrieve outward. Obviously, I will cast to any rising fish. Even if there are no rises in the deeper water, try a few casts (360 degree technique).

WIND DRIFTING

Wind drifting is a relaxing fishing method and often used by the East Lake guides. Use a wind sock or sea anchor to slow the drift speed. Most often I will use a full-sink line, but will also use an intermediate line at the same time when I can. A floating line can be used when wind drifting if the fly stays below the surface. I will switch lines until I find what works. Keeping the rod tip pointed at the fly, let out 60 to 90 feet of line. Most often, I will hold the rod and constantly give the line twitches and short pulls to get the fly flashing and bouncing. Denny Rickards says wind drifting is "ineffective and a waste of time." I could not disagree more and do enjoy fishing this way.

KNOTS

You must learn to tie 4-5 different knots consistently. Discipline is critical! Otherwise you will lose a few fish. For example, always use 3 or more twists (e.g. triple surgeon's knot), wet the knot before cinching, tighten all ends, pinch the knot tight with your fingernails and tighten the ends again. Many of the experts use loop knots for the flies to enhance fly movement.

Be sure to check your tippet for knots and abrasions, as the weak spot may break.

CHANGING THE PRESENTATION AND TACTICS

If you are not getting action, you need to change your presentation. I will generally start with minor changes in fly movement like twitches, short pulls (1-2 inches), etc. At this time, I will also consider how my fly is floating on or under the film. If still no hits, I will vary my retrieval speed (and direction) to a greater degree and use longer pauses. Still no success, I will then consider changing the fly. Sometimes a subtle change (e.g. longer body parachute adams) can make all the difference. If there is no obvious hatch going on, I will often go to an attractor (e.g. stimulator, elk hair caddis or royal wulff). The fish are always feeding to some degree and they are opportunistic. Therefore, something they have not seen recently can turn them on.

Quite often, I will switch back and forth from the floating line to the full-sink to find the fish. This provides a much greater change in tactics and potential for a hookup. Using both at each fishing spot will increase your chance of success.

Ultimately, if no success at a given spot, I catalogue what I have learned there and move to a different spot.

CHIRONOMIDS

I always watch for the perfect chironomid conditions where there is a light wind and small waves of 2-4 inches. If conditions are conducive, I will try the chironomids at varying levels. I start with the bottom chironomid about 6-12 inches from the lake bottom and proceed to raise the depth about 2 feet until I find where the fish may be. Sometimes I am fishing only 2 feet down from the surface in the shallows. I use corkies as a strike indicator because they are much easier to cast. Keep a tight line by slowly retrieving the line with very little or no wake. The tension provides for a quicker hookup and allows you to look at other things besides the strike indicator.

One productive technique is to use a CAB dun or stimulator as the top fly (indicator) and use a chironomid as a dropper (20-24 inches below) . I do not use the popular 'white bead heads' for this purpose but will use them at greater depths.

Remember to also try dropping the chironomid to the bottom without a strike indicator and retrieving to the surface with jerky short pulls (maximize the wiggle) to about 2 feet in depth change. Pause about 10-15 seconds at each 2 foot depth change.

Consider using balanced leeches or CAB nymphs(particularly with UV) fished like a chironomid.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

We all know that water temperature can be critical and trout like it between 48 and 65 degrees. Monitor the water temperature and consider where the thermocline layer might be. Note that most mayflies also need water at least 50 degrees to hatch. Midges can hatch at lower temperatures and should always be considered to imitate. Sometime the water temperature is below 50 degrees and fishing is marginal. Then the sun comes out and fishing can improve significantly. On bright sunny days in midsummer, you may have to use the full sink line to get down to where the fish are. In late summer, this can be 30 to 40 feet down.

East Lake (and most other Central Oregon lakes) does get an algae bloom in late summer. The fish do not like to be in it but are often near it and especially under it when the algae is layered.

Spring and fall turnover does damper the fishing. The impact of turnover is more pronounced in smaller lakes. At East Lake, there will still be fish feeding to some degree in the deeper water or in the weed beds. You will have to move around to find them and do not spend much time at a spot if there is no action.

I do try to avoid fishing when a cold front is moving in, because the fish will move into deeper water to adjust their bladder pressure and they become relatively lethargic. This said, late fall (September & October) can be great fishing (particularly for browns) when high pressure is in.

TIGHT LINES!