

Wingless Wetflies

For Trout Spey

by Steve Bird



Pictured: Sulfur Variant by Steve Bird

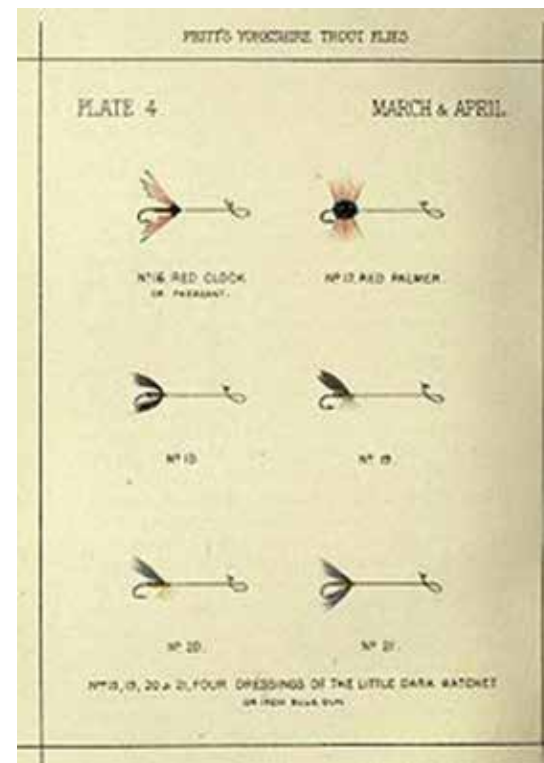
“You must tie your fly, and fish your fly, so the trout can enjoy and appreciate it.”
 ~ James Leisenring

Remember what Grandpa taught us about trout fishing? Well those things are still true, and worthwhile to keep in mind when considering fly designs for Trout Spey.

When you see a Trey Combs or Syd Glasso fly design, you know it is a steelhead fly meant to be swung, but is there a particular style that is recognizable as Trout Spey?

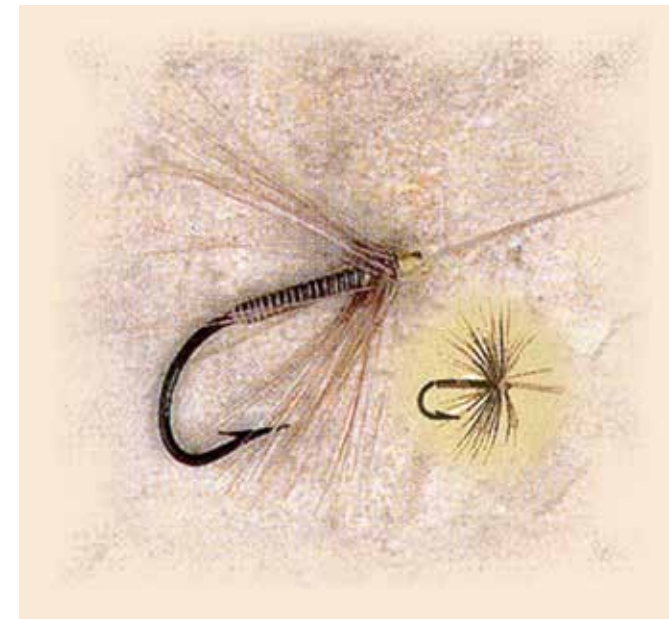
Until fairly recently I’ve seen only a sprinkling of trout flies that I feel are truly defined by Trout Spey. Understandable, as this recently growing branch of our game is early in the process of development. Many come to Trout Spey through steelheading and, currently, most of the baits I see double-hand trouters throwing are decidedly steelhead-centric. Not a bad approach, as most steelhead flies are attractor patterns composed of trigger colors and, in proper sizes, do function as trout lures. Yet, in the Pacific Northwest, being the crucible of fly design that it is, some regional tiers claiming the larger rivers of the Columbia drainage as their home are already on it, producing killing designs that are distinctly Trout Spey.

Function defines form. Most good trout flies began life somewhere as ‘regional’ designs, or as Scot Sadil puts it, “indigenous” designs. These patterns aren’t fanciful, off-the-verse constructs, but refined over time on the water, informed by the method in which the fly is to be fished, local hydrology, geology, food forms, trigger colors and, most importantly, what the trout say. The North Country soft-hackle flies, or ‘spiders’, developed on the freestone streams of Yorkshire and southern Scotland are a good example of a regional style that has traveled well, the simple design frame of the wingless wetfly proving universally effective, fished drifted or swung. The same can be said of the palmered wetfly designs of Ireland,



older relations of the popular Woolly Buzzer patterns. I cite these two design frames because they are well-proved and offer fractal possibilities for effective Trout Spey flies.

As Trout Spey develops the classic styles will refine toward designs intended specifically for landlocked trout. We are seeing some elegant baits coming from the vises of Columbia Basin tiers like Tom McCoy and Jeff Cottrell. Tom is a Methow River man and range ecologist who moonlights as a pro staffer for Bruce & Walker and test pilot for their Trout Spey program. Jeff is a Klickitat River man and pro staffer for CF Burkheimer, who spends half his year beside the American Reach of the Upper Columbia heading up the Evening Hatch guide operation at Black Bear Lodge. Jeff is a signature designer for Rainey’s Flies and veteran of many seasons guiding for sea-run brown trout on the Rio Grande in Tierra del Fuego (where smallish wingless wetflies are often baits of choice). Along with my own, Tom and Jeff kindly share some of their Trout Spey designs with us here. When I first saw Tom and Jeff’s flies I was excited because, working separately, we’d all come to a similar conclusion regarding designs for general usage.



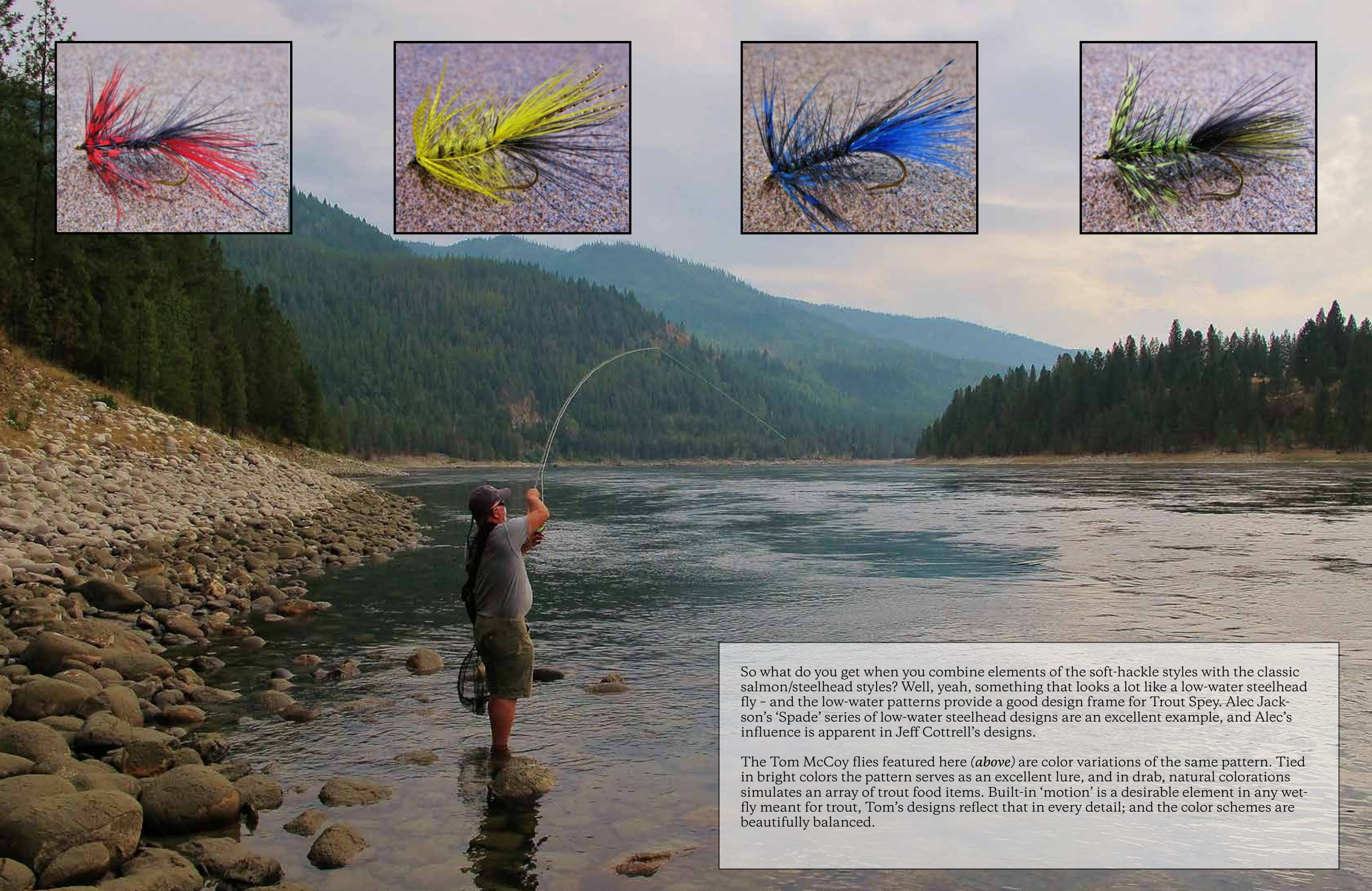
Old School Roots:

Facing Page: A plate from Pritt, Yorkshire Flies.

Above: Left- Jenny Spinner from Pritt, Yorkshire Flies; Right- Partridge & Orange, an ancient favorite North Country spider, tied by the author;

Below: Olive Chieftan tied by the author. Woolly Buzzer roots?





So what do you get when you combine elements of the soft-hackle styles with the classic salmon/steelhead styles? Well, yeah, something that looks a lot like a low-water steelhead fly - and the low-water patterns provide a good design frame for Trout Spey. Alec Jackson's 'Spade' series of low-water steelhead designs are an excellent example, and Alec's influence is apparent in Jeff Cottrell's designs.

The Tom McCoy flies featured here (*above*) are color variations of the same pattern. Tied in bright colors the pattern serves as an excellent lure, and in drab, natural colorations simulates an array of trout food items. Built-in 'motion' is a desirable element in any wet-fly meant for trout, Tom's designs reflect that in every detail; and the color schemes are beautifully balanced.



Above: Jeff Cottrell prepares to launch.

Facing Page: 1. Gold Butt Spade; 2. Black & Pearl Spade; 3. Mallard & Hare's Ear 4. Wood Duck & Green Buzzer; 5. Black & White Spade; 6. Alec Jackson Spade tied by Jeff Cottrell; 7. Dark Spade; 8. Orange & Gold Spider.

The Upper Columbia flies are two main types: Attractors (lures) composed of trigger colors; and simulators meant to resemble real food. Some straddle the line.

Generally, attractors dressed on #4 through #10 hooks get the most play. Yes, there's space in the box for a four-inch long Double Bunny or Intruder, and there may be occasions to use them but, day-in, day-out, on most water, attractor flies about the size of a Dick Nite spoon will bring more takes. There is good reason for the popularity of those small trout spoons. Keep in mind that most of what is in any trout's belly is well under two inches in length, usually. There have always been wee attractor-style spiders used for trout. However, in the UC Trout Spey designs we see the frame expanded both in hook size, and the creative potential a larger hook size presents. Not exactly a new concept in soft-hackle flies for trout, the venerable Carey Special is an example of a big one that's been in service for a long time. Most often, the UC soft-hackle attractor patterns are tied on a #6 or #8 TMC 200R or a low-water steelhead hook. In any case we want a straight or up-eye hook for best tracking.

Trout Spey patterns of Jeff Cottrell





Above: The author's original patterns (clockwise from top left): October Sedge , TS Hares Ear, Rootbeer Spade, Dee Spider



Unlike sea-runs, trout are eating, so patterns resembling food items assume more importance in trouting than in steelheading. Simulator patterns in larger sizes fish for sculpin, minnows, crayfish, dragonflies and stoneflies. Drake mayfly hatches present an opportunity to swing big softies simulating both the emerger and drowned adult phases. The parade of seasonal sedges provide the most sport, and imitations of these are tied in #6 (October Caddis) down to #12. For smaller flies, #8 - #12, a straight-eye, wide-gape wetfly hook like the old Mustad 3366-BR works well. Personally, I don't tie smaller than #12 for Trout Spey. I want some iron there. If I need a smaller bug I simply tie smaller on the #12 hook. Trout see what they want to see. (Smaller than that I'll probably pick up the single-hand 3wt).

To ensure good surface penetration, tracking and hooking, the bodies of UC trout flies do not crowd the hook, ending adjacent to or just ahead of the hook point. Generally, a short thorax of dubbing is built to flare the hackle collar and create profile and body mass. Materials are chosen for motion and translucency. The examples shown here are presented without dressings (forgive me), the purpose in this is not to present rote patterns but rather to provide useful design frames. These flies represent what three designers who live beside great Trout Spey water are tying and fishing.

