

GPFF - Deer Creek, 5-7 May 2023 (Fri-Sun) - Fishmaster, Brad Gee, bgeeandalee@yahoo.com
(Updated 11/27/2023).

RENDEZVOUS AND CAMPING

Friday night, Potato Patch Campground (N40.18794° W121.53303°), 35 mi. NE of Chico on CA-32. **Since the campsites cannot be reserved, there is a chance we will need to make a last-minute change. Check for a note at the Fee Payment Station describing site number or alternate camping plan.** The campground is located in the Lassen National Forest, Almanor Ranger District, Chester CA, 530-258-2141. About 3.6 hrs from Berkeley. Most simply, drive to Chico and turn east onto CA-32. To avoid Sacramento traffic, take I-80E to I-505N to I-5N to Exit 607 a little north of Williams, then Bayliss Blue Gum Rd east 10 mi to CA-45 in Jacinto. Go north for 3.3 mi to County-32/Old Ferry Rd, 4 mi (crossing the Sacramento River) to River Rd. Turn north. After 5 mi, the name changes to Chico River Rd. Continue into Chico, where you will cross CA-32 (also called Walnut St). Turn right and follow CA-32 through Chico to the campground. Or, if this seems too complex, just continue on I-5N to Orland and turn east on CA-32, and take a little longer to get to Chico. Continue 40 mi to the (Red) Deer Creek Bridge, and another 2 mi to the Campground. Elev. 3400'. Potluck Saturday after dark. **GPFF strongly encourages carpooling. Email rich@ski.org to coordinate rides.** For people who would rather not camp, there are motels 30 minutes east in Chester on the north shore of Lake Almanor.

MAPS, BOOKS, ETC

Steve Schalla has a [fishing map](#) of Upper Deer and Mill Creeks, and another for the [wild-trout sections](#). Here is a link to the [Google Map](#). There is a chapter entitled "The Feather River Country" in "[Flyfisher's Guide to Northern California](#)", Seth Norman, Wilderness Adventures Press, which describes the small Upper North Fork branches that flow into Lake Almanor, as well as the famous, and very difficult meadow spring Yellow Creek that enters the North Fork below the lake.

REPORTS AND ONLINE GUIDES

Call FishFirst in Chico (530-343-8300) for up-to-the-minute fishing info.

Steve Schalla (link above has a short textual fishing guide) - This early in the season, he recommends trying to fish in the warmest part of the day, and generally deep with small mayfly nymphs and beadheads.

WATERS AND FLOWS

Click to see flows for [Deer Creek](#) where the creek enters the Central Valley at Vina and for [Mill Creek](#) at the bottom of the canyon. The 15 year average maximum (winter) cfs flows are 700 and 550, respectively, and for the end of May, 300 and 400. Since neither creek is dammed, after a rain, they undergo natural, exponential-like, runoff patterns, which due to the size and detail of these drainages, come down to their previous levels after about 3 days.

Deer Creek - Mostly pocket water interspersed with pools, except for the meadow sections near the top. The creek is partially spring fed, so holds up relatively well in dry years.

Below Upper Falls (1.5 mi above the Potato Patch Campground) - In December 2017 a new fish ladder was completed that by-passes the Lower Falls. Anadromous fish are now able to reach the base of the Upper Falls. **Consequently, in principle, you need a steelhead card to fish this part of the river (see Regulations section at the end of this document).** With a card, you can keep 2 trout or steelhead a day, 4 total in possession. Barbless hooks only, but note fishing is prohibited within 250' of the falls. Lots of direct access from CA-32 which runs along the stream from Red Bridge. The reach below the bridge is accessible from a well maintained trail starting at the north end of the bridge. Alternatively, you can fish this water below the bridge by driving west towards Chico. Just as the road stops climbing out of the Deer Creek Basin it makes a long sweeping left turn, at the end of which the passing lane ends. Right there is a turnoff onto a dirt logging road marked with the letter "K" on a tree on the north side of Highway 32. Follow that road back down into the basin, first NW, then NE. You will eventually come to a small bridge crossing Deer Creek. Park and fish up or down stream. There are primitive campsites located here too.

Above Falls - Stocker fish, lots of bait anglers, especially near the Elam Campground. Further upstream the creek runs through a meadow, which is private but public access is provided at a couple of locations. There are long riffles at the lower end of the meadow that are rewarding to fish. The flat meadow sections are challenging. From the highway bridge at the upper end of the meadow (below the junction with CA-36), you can fish the North Fork of Deer Creek, and Gurnsey Creek (which, for a way, runs along CA-36), or the Main Fork itself.

Small tributaries - many enter the main stem and may be fishable.

Mill Creek - Fed by snow melt from Mt. Lassen, rather than springs. When the flow is good this is prime water, both above (meadow) and below (freestone) the town of Mill Creek on Hwy 172 (gotten to via CA-36/89). The reach

from the Hole In The Wall Campground west of town, downstream till the creek drops into the canyon, is particularly accessible and attractive. Regs the same as Deer Creek below the Upper Falls.

North Fork of the Feather above Lake Almanor, as well as all Almenor tributaries. **This water is closed from Nov. 16 until the Saturday preceding Memorial Day, so not relevant to this trip**, but when it is open, offers some good small stream fishing.

In Chester, CA-36 to the lake - Nice riffles, often with big fish moving up from the lake. Fish early and late in the day. You can walk the old railroad right-of-way, now a bike path, to the trestle bridge and fish, especially downstream, from there.

Upstream of CA-36, and its tributaries, Rice, Warner, Benner, and Last Chance Creeks - Accessed from Feather River Drive in Chester. Sections of lava bedrock with deep holes and riffles.

Post-trip Notes

Deer Creek flows, as measured at Vina in the Central Valley were 165 cfs and Mill Creek, also measured where the creek exits its canyon averaged about 220 cfs. It is interesting to note from the flow graphs that Deer Creek, which is mostly spring fed, had very little diurnal flow variation, while Mill Creek, which gets its water from the slopes of Mt Lassen showed 20-30 cfs change over the course of a day.

At these flows, Deer Creek in the Potato Patch area was very wadable, with numerous places to cross. The water was quite clear with a hint of green and was not very cold. Never the less, on the first day, we got no action (dries or nymphs) until 1:30 pm. By the 2nd day, with a bit warmer weather, the action started by 11 am. Once started, the fish took dries until late evening.

Mill Creek was another story. The water was very cloudy (visibility perhap 1-2 feet). From Hole in the Ground CG we were only able to fish the pocket water downstream about 1/4 mi, and it didn't seem worth while to try to cross at the first rock wall on river right. We got 1 fish on a Red John.

HATCHES & SPECIALS

Steve Schalla's [Western Sierra Hatch Chart](#) shows BWO's, Salmonflies, Green Sedges, and possibly March Browns, Spotted Sedges, and Golden Stones.

BLUE-WINGED OLIVE (*Baetis*, swimmer mayfly, 3-12mm). In almost all trout streams, but especially in cold, unpolluted, alkaline waters. They inhabit almost every microhabitat in the stream except for silt beds; gravel and vegetation are especially suitable. Near constant availability, both as fast-swimming nymphs (**Pheasant Tail Nymph**) and as surface emergers (PTN as dropper, **Quigley Cripple, parachute dun, in olive, with blue-gray wings**). During emergence, nymphs may drift just under the surface for a while before breaking through. They have trouble escaping their shucks in the film, taking a long time and often becoming stuck in the process. Those which do escape may ride the water for quite a distance before taking flight. Dismal weather invites the best hatches of *Baetis* mayflies; look for them on overcast, rainy days, as long as the water temperature is above 40°F. Timing the return of these mayflies as spinners after they hatch is difficult; some may come back within a few hours, while others take a few days. *Baetis* females are among the only mayflies to lay their eggs underwater. The females land near the water after mating and crawl down to lay rows of eggs on the downstream side of rocks, sticks, and other objects. They may slip loose during the process or let go after they finish, and wet fly imitations (**dun winged, olive Soft-hackle**) are effective during this time.

SALMON FLY (*Pteronarcys*, **30-60mm!**). Riffles and bouldered areas of medium to large streams with moderate to fast currents. Naturals are all black with white tufty gills along the sides of the body. When the water warms in the spring, mature nymphs migrate toward shore, where they crawl out at night and emerge as adults. During migration, fish the banks with slow, shoreward swings (**Gold-Ribbed Hare's Ear, light AP Nymphs, Riffle Dragon Stone, Bird's Stonefly Nymph, Kaufmann's Golden Stone**). Adults mate in stream-side vegetation. They become available again when they clumsily fall into the stream from overhanging foliage, as they wriggle on the surface during oviposition, and when spent (**huge Stimulator, Warren's Salmonfly, black above, orange below**).

MARCH BROWN (*Rhithrogena*, clinger mayfly, **8-12mm**, other species smaller). Nymphs live among the rocks in riffles and runs and are rarely caught in the drift. Emergence takes place underwater, on bottom for most species. Thus, there is little point imitating the nymph. However, you do want to imitate the emerging dun (**March Brown Soft-Hackle**) and the drifting dun (**March Brown Parachute**). It is sometimes worthwhile to go after the spinner (**Trusty Rusty**).

GOLDEN STONE (*Calineuria*, **25-40mm**). Rocky riffles and runs of small to large streams with moderate to fast currents. Naturals are yellow with dark brown vermiculations. When the water warms in the spring, mature nymphs migrate toward shore, where they crawl out at night and emerge as adults. During migration, fish the banks with slow, shoreward swings (**black AP Nymphs, Kaufmann's Black Stone, big Rubberlegs Nymph**). Adults mate in stream-side vegetation. They become available again when they wriggle on the surface during oviposition, and when spent (**yellow, poss. peacock Stimulator, Madame X**).

GREEN SEDGE (*Rhyacophila*, free-living caddis, **8-16mm**, *R. grandis* **30mm**). Fast riffles in cold free-stone streams. Pherates emerge PM sporadically from riffles or slow water below by swimming quickly up to emerge on the surface (**olive Sparkle Pupa, soft hackle, EC Caddis**). Adults oviposit PM in riffles or runs by diving or crawling below the surface (**olive Deer Hair Caddis, dark Diving Caddis, Missing Link**). When they're done, they let go and dead-drift, floating slowly to the surface.

SPOTTED SEDGE (*Hydropsyche*, net-spinning caddis, **10-15mm**, also LITTLE SISTER SEDGE, *Cheumatopsyche*, **a bit smaller**, but otherwise very similar). Shallow, moderate to fast riffles and runs in most trout streams, large populations in plankton-rich waters. Pherates emerge late PM *en masse* (**yellow, tan, brown Sparkle Caddis, EC Caddis**). Before emerging, *Hydropsychidae* pherates drift along the bottom or just under the surface, sometimes for hours. They then take unusually long to struggle out through the film. Adults oviposit late PM on the bottom in riffles or runs by diving, or possibly on the surface by dipping (**olive Deer Hair Caddis, Lead Wing Coachman, Missing Link**).

RESIDENT BUGS (If no hatch-related fishing is working, you can try imitating residents, or just exciting the trout.)

The large stoneflies have multi-year life cycles, so their nymphs will always be in waters where they hatch. If the hatch is coming soon, there will be big nymphs (**black, yellow Rubber Legs**).

Tiny fish in tiny streams eat anything and will always come to the surface, so dead-drift the standard dries (**Elk-Hair Caddis, Royal Coachman, Trude, etc., Parachute or Catskill Adams**).

On bigger water, keep the classical subsurface searching patterns in mind (**Prince, Zug Bug, Bird's Nest, and Pheasant Tail nymphs, olive**, dead-drifted under an indicator, **black Wooley Buggers**, swung).

REGULATIONS

Note by Rich: The regs are literally complex, but, putting everything together, they boil down to the following:

Deer Creek downstream from 250' below the Falls, and Mill Creek, **open regular season only**, artificial lures with barbless hooks may be used, 2 hatchery trout or hatchery steelhead each day, 4 total in possession. **You should have and fill out a Steelhead Card**; otherwise you might have to try and convince a ranger that you weren't really targeting that 16" rainbow you just caught and photographed, you were really only fishing for its 15.5" buddy. There is no fishing at all on Deer Creek from the Upper Falls to 250' below. **There is no Brook Trout bonus in these Special Regulation waters.**

All other waters, no gear restrictions, 5 trout per day, 10 in possession, plus a special bonus of up to 10 Brook Trout per day less than 10" long.

Deer and Mill Creeks are in Tehama county.

Statewide Trout Regulations

5.85. TROUT.

As used in this section, daily bag and possession limits, unless otherwise noted, mean the total number of trout in combination, including but not limited to rainbow, golden, brown, and cutthroat.

(a) General Statewide Regulations:

(1) All inland lakes and reservoirs; and ponds entirely on private lands, except those listed in Section 7.50(b), are open to fishing all year with a five-trout daily bag limit, and 10 trout possession limit.

(2) All inland streams, rivers, and canals, except those listed in Section 7.50(b), are open to fishing from the last Sat. in Apr. through Nov. 15, with a five trout daily bag limit, and ten trout possession limit, with no gear restrictions. From Nov. 16 through the Fri. preceding the last Sat. in Apr., a zero trout bag limit applies, and only artificial lures with barbless hooks may be used. In waters where the bag limit for trout is zero, trout must be released unharmed, and should not be removed from the water.

(3) Exceptions:

(A) All waters in Section 7.50(b), Alphabetical List of Trout Waters with Special Fishing Regulations, are those having regulations different from the General Statewide Regulations for trout.

(B) Brook Trout bag and possession limits may be taken in addition to the statewide trout daily bag and possession limits. See Section 5.84.

5.84. BROOK TROUT.

(a) Open season: All year.

(b) Limit: Ten.

(c) Size limit: Less than 10 inches total length.

(d) Brook Trout bag limits may be taken in addition to the statewide trout daily bag and possession limits specified in Section 5.85.

(1) Exceptions:

(A) Red Lake in Alpine Co.

(B) All waters in Section 7.50(b), Alphabetical List of Trout Waters with Special Fishing Regulations.

7.00(b) Sierra District Rules

(2) Anadromous waters of Tehama and Shasta counties not listed in the Special Regulations. (Section 7.40). (See subsections (b)(80) of Section 7.40, regarding the Sacramento River.)

Last Saturday in Apr. through Nov. 15. Only artificial lures and barbless hooks may be used.

2 hatchery trout or hatchery steelhead* 4 hatchery trout or hatchery steelhead* in possession. Closed to the take of salmon.

5.88 Steelhead Fishing Report and Restoration Card

Anglers must have a nontransferable Steelhead Fishing Report and Restoration Card issued by the department in their possession while fishing for steelhead trout in anadromous waters. For purposes of this regulation, a steelhead trout is defined as any rainbow trout greater than 16 inches in length found in anadromous waters. Anglers must record, with a ball-point pen, the month, day, location fished, number of steelhead caught and kept, and number of steelhead caught and released. Month, day and location must be recorded **EVEN IF NO STEELHEAD WERE CAUGHT**.

Special Regulations (There are now two separate alphabetical listings, 7.40(b) for anadromous waters and 7.50(b) for all other waters)

(750(b)(3)) **Almanor Lake tributaries** (Lassen, Plumas and Shasta cos.) upstream to the first lake.

Saturday preceding Memorial Day through Nov. 15. 5 per day 10 in possession.

(740(b)(35)) **Deer Creek** (Tehama Co.).

(A) From 250 feet below Upper Deer Creek Falls and fishway (located 1.5 miles upstream from Potato Patch Campground) downstream 31 miles to U.S. Geological Survey gauging station cable crossing at mouth of Deer Creek Canyon (see Section 2.35 for closure at Upper Deer Creek Falls).

Last Saturday in Apr. through Nov. 15. Only artificial lures with barbless hooks may be used. 2 hatchery trout or hatchery steelhead**, 4 hatchery trout or hatchery steelhead** in possession.

(740(b)(64)) **Mill Creek** (Tehama Co.).

(A) From the Lassen National Park boundary downstream to the U.S. Geological Survey gauging station cable crossing at the mouth of Mill Creek Canyon.

Last Saturday in Apr. through Nov. 15. Only artificial lures with barbless hooks may be used. 2 hatchery trout or hatchery steelhead**, 4 hatchery trout or hatchery steelhead** in possession.

* Wild Chinook salmon are those not showing a healed adipose fin clip and not showing a healed left ventral fin clip.

** Hatchery trout or steelhead in anadromous waters are those showing a healed adipose fin clip (adipose fin is absent). Unless otherwise provided, all other trout and steelhead must be immediately released. Wild trout or steelhead are those not showing a healed adipose fin clip (adipose fin is present).