

Stephan Marais – La Crosse, WI Program: Beginning Musky on the Fly

I have been fishing since I can remember. My grandfather had a sports (fishing and ammunition) shop in South Africa (yes, I do have that accent :-)) and all I remember doing in spare time was fishing. I have been living in La Crosse for the last 25 years. The Mississippi River Pools 6 to 8 are my playgrounds almost every time I get a chance to be on the water. I have caught almost all species of fish here, with the exception of sturgeon.

I had not touched a fly rod until 4 years ago when a friend gave me a few 8wt rods as a gift. I have been fishing for musky for many



years, but never on a fly. The idea of catching the fish of 10,000 casts with a fly rod then became a personal challenge. I started tying flies that first December, based on European pike fly patterns which are border-line size for 8wt rods. At the end of that winter I went to a local tackle shop to show the guy the flies I tied. He told me most of the flies were too big for 8wt. That is when I decided to then get a heavier rod for those flies. I then realized that if I get a 10wt rod then I can also use it for musky. This was before I have even made one cast with a fly rod, not really knowing what to expect.

Because fly fishing in general was new to me, I had many questions about it, especially fly fishing for musky. For the rest of that winter I spent literally hundreds of hours watching videos, reading articles and reading books. When a friend, Chris Coppess, and I finally got out musky fishing the first time that year, I was ready for it. I understood my rods, understood what lines to use where/when, had faith that my leaders and bite guards will hold, and what to expect when you get a fish taking your fly. What made that day even better is that I was lucky enough to get my first musky on a fly (on my first time fly fishing for it). Since I got those two fly rods 4 years ago, I have been fishing exclusively with fly rods. Fly rods I use for my fishing range from 3wt for trout all the way through to 11 and 12wt for musky.

I am not a guide, nor an expert in musky fishing, but I do have a lot of knowledge I can share with people who are interested in hunting a musky on a fly, and have them be comfortable giving it a try.