



by Tom Keer

## Nothing beats hooking a big fish.

It doesn't matter if it's a 26-inch brown, a 30-pound striper, or a 10-pound largemouth; a trophy is a trophy. Nothing ruins a day of fishing more than breaking off your hoss as it runs for cover and hangs up in the weeds. Landing the big one is one difference between a good fisherman and a great fisherman. Losing a good fish is pure misery.

While there is no shortage of weed varieties, fishermen typically encounter two or three classifications. In the sweetwater, anglers find three: free floating, emergent, or submergent. Their names are self-explanatory. Free floaters, like duckweed, live on the surface. Emergents, like water lilies or cattails, have roots in the bottom and extend above the water line. Submergent, like elodea or watercress, live underwater in bunches.

Saltwater anglers find different varieties depending on how far from the equator they are fishing. In close proximity to Parallel 0 you'll find emergent plants, like mangroves, and submergent grasses. As you work your way north, think of the famous California kelp beds. Head toward the Northeast and there are mostly submergent plants like kelp, eel grass, and other varieties of seaweed. You'll also find emergents; bladder wrack is the air-bubble filled weed that, when dried, children pop like bubble wrap.

Don't loathe all aquatic weeds, for many are healthy for the environment. Some

plants offer high levels of nutrients and macrophytes, and serve as a baseline for the foodchain. Good quality baselines beget healthy insect and baitfish populations. Other plants help stabilize streambeds, and others still provide cover for juvenile and spawning fish. The very best plants return oxygen to the water through photosynthesis. There are species, too, that will choke a river or a pond to death.

If you fish enough you'll see lots of plants, and if you hook enough fish you'll inevitably wind up in the weeds. In the event that you get tangled up, there are several techniques angler's use to put more fish in the net. A degree of regionalism comes into play, all based on different fisheries. Keep each of these techniques in the back of your mind, and let the situation dictate which one to use.

## Back It Out

**WESTERN ANGLERS** are accustomed to weed beds in most rivers. A common way they handle fish stuck in weeds is to work the fish toward them. First, wade upstream into a position directly above the trout. Then, start to reel down to the fish until your line and leader is short and your rod is almost straight. A perfectly straight rod easily snaps tippets, so keep a slight bend. After you're in position, slowly walk backward. Slow movement is important and if done right, the trout will swim out towards you.

Git 'Em Outta The

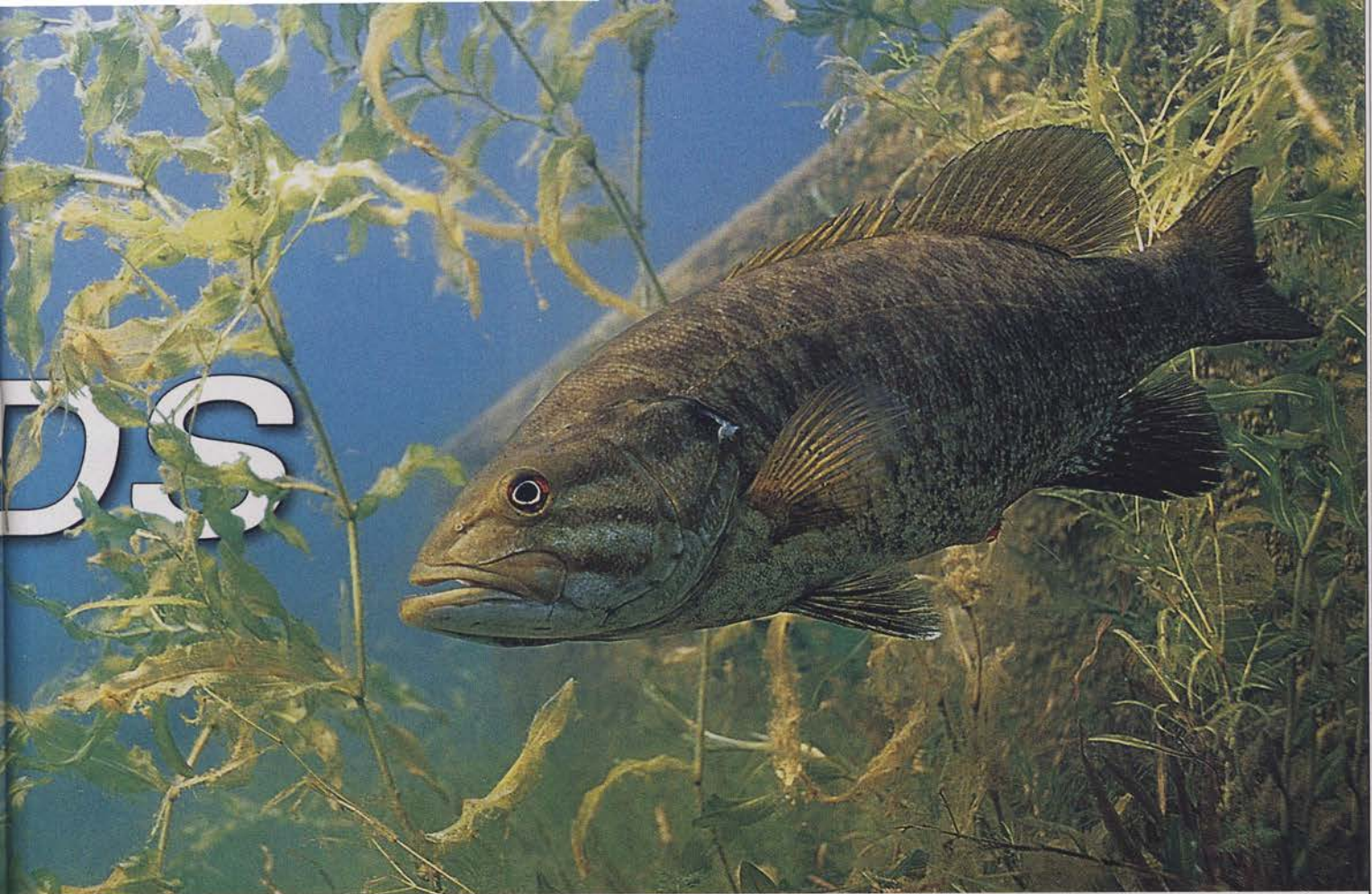
# WEEEDS

## Dive For It

**IN THE EAST** it's common to find weeds interspersed with submerged branches and blow downs. The combination makes it tough to extricate a fish from his new home. A standard technique is to keep pressure on your fish while pushing your rod tip into the water. The trick is to get the rod tip, and therefore your line, below the fish so that when it swims out the line will move freely. This technique is also used on saltwater fish that swim into kelp beds.

## Strum For It

**STRIPER FISHERMEN** oftentimes encounter a big bass that runs into long strands of submergent kelp. Typically, the fish gets under the weeds and sulks or rubs your leader against the rocks or sand on the bottom to break you off. One technique calls for anglers to lean back on their rod and to create a tight line. Then, pluck the line like a guitar. After several seconds or so the fish gets irritated and generally swims out through the other side of the kelp bed. Drop your rod tip into the water so the line is under the kelp and slowly walk down current until your line is free. More often than not it's the weight of the weeds that breaks off the fish. It'll work for other fish as well, such as largemouth bass, pike or trout.



## Ease Up On It

**OTHER TIMES**, to get the fish out of the weeds you'll need to lay off the pressure. When fish feel an angler's tension, they naturally resist. If they feel secure in a weed bed, they'll do everything they can to remain there. Strategically soften your tugs, and gradually let the fish calm down. In many instances, the fish will swim out the other side of the weeds. Or, you can gently increase the pressure and lead the fish out the other side. Once the fish is free of the weeds, your line will need some help. Depending on the type of weed, either raise your line free above the tangle (free floating and some emergent) or drop your tip into the water (submergent) and pull your line under the weed.

## Remove The Salad

**BE WARY OF WEEDS** on your leader. They create unwanted drag and can create tangles. Sometimes, the weight will stretch and collapse a leader. Other times, the weed can catch on other debris, like blowdown branches or roots. Occasionally the tangle pulls the weed off the leader, but oftentimes it creates a break off. Salad on your leader is not your friend.

## Dial It Up A Notch

**RE-RIGGING YOUR TIPPET** also will help you work weedy areas. When fishing the

sweetwater adjacent to weed beds, increase the break strength of your tippet. If you're fishing big flies, or if the species isn't that selective, go up to a higher break strength monofilament. For selective feeders, switch to fluorocarbon for a increased strength at a thinner diameter. For saltwater fish, a shock tippet gives extra break strength and keeps fish from sawing off your fly.

## Stay Out Of The Weeds

**THE EASIEST WAY** to get a fish out of the weeds is to keep him from hanging up in the first place. The old football adage, "Where the head goes, the body follows" is also true of fighting a fish. After your hook set, get control over the fish. Anglers do that directly or indirectly.

A direct way is to use your rod and exert pressure accordingly. A rod held high overhead lifts the fish's head and brings it toward the surface. Moving your rod to one side changes the angle of pressure and will redirect your fish. When your quarry swims toward an area that runs foul, change the direct pressure. Avoid bouncing your rod tip and you'll keep from popping your tippet. Also, ditch the repeated directional changes. It looks dramatic, but if the fight goes long enough you're likely to wear a hole in the fish's mouth and pull the fly free.

An indirect way to get your fish to cooperate is by adjusting your angling position,

as in salmon fishing. Chose one of three spots: above the fish, even with the fish, and below the fish. When you're above the fish you're moving the beast into the current, and it will fight you and the current simultaneously. When you're either even with or downstream from your behemoth, you're moving it away from its natural position of facing into the current.

Another indirect method saltwater anglers use is to drop the rod tip close to the water's surface, thereby keeping all of the line on the water. The fish not only fights the rod pressure, but also the drag created by the surface tension of the line on the water. Too much tension can pop a light or frayed tippet, so apply deliberately.

When you see a good fish working, take a moment to scope out your area and get the lay of the land. Spend a moment planning your fight. Think in terms of free floating, emergent or submergent plants, and orient your technique around their characteristics. Strategic techniques help to negotiate a trophy fish around the plants in the water and ultimately put more fish on the bank. Every good entrance has an even better exit, and savvy techniques around weeds will keep him from turning into the one that got away.

*Fly Fish America*

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