

Mark Walinske, Founder, Margo+Lola Fly Fishing School

My connection to fly fishing spans more than fifty years and has evolved from a lifelong passion into a mission to introduce others to the sport. Over the decades I have fished rivers, streams, and lakes in more than twenty states and intentionally seek out new fisheries each year, often hiring local guides to broaden my understanding of different waters, techniques, and regional traditions. I believe that no matter how long someone has been fly fishing, there is always another lesson to learn and another perspective to appreciate.

Long before establishing Margo+Lola Fly Fishing School, I found myself informally introducing friends, family members, coworkers, and acquaintances to fly fishing whenever the opportunity arose. For nearly twenty years, I casually guided first-time anglers simply because I enjoyed sharing the experience and watching others discover the sport. Those outings revealed a consistent pattern: people weren't held back by a lack of ability—they were held back by uncertainty and intimidation. Seeing how a thoughtful, encouraging introduction could transform someone's confidence ultimately inspired the creation of Margo+Lola Fly Fishing School.

That philosophy led me to found Margo+Lola Fly Fishing School in 2021, where I have dedicated myself to making fly fishing approachable for beginners. Since launching the school, I have taught more than 700 people to fly fish, with more than 90 percent being first-time anglers and over 80 percent women. Those experiences have reinforced my belief that success in growing the sport has far less to do with teaching casting techniques than it does with creating confidence, reducing intimidation, and designing a welcoming first experience. My instructional approach emphasizes simplicity, encouragement, and helping people discover that fly fishing is accessible to anyone willing to begin.

Beyond guiding and instruction, I have sought to contribute to the broader fly fishing community through writing, speaking, and mentorship. I have authored three books and numerous essays on fly fishing, appeared on multiple podcasts, and spoken at corporate events about the sport's unique ability to connect people with nature, personal well-being, and lifelong learning. My writing often explores the human side of fly fishing, focusing on the experiences, relationships, and personal growth that occur beyond catching fish.

Throughout my career, I have believed that the greatest measure of success is helping others discover opportunities they may never have experienced otherwise. That



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commitment has led me to donate fly fishing classes, books, equipment, financial support, and the use of my property to healthcare organizations, educational institutions, veterans' groups, and national fly fishing nonprofits. I have also worked with individuals living with PTSD and have supported organizations whose missions align with conservation, outdoor education, and expanding participation in fly fishing.

I have invested significantly in maintaining a professional, safe, and welcoming learning environment by continually updating equipment, maintaining comprehensive business insurance, and keeping current with CPR certification. I have also mentored several guides as they launched or expanded their own guiding businesses, believing that strengthening the next generation of instructors ultimately strengthens the future of the sport itself.

My unofficial relationship with Orvis has been particularly rewarding because of our shared belief that fly fishing should be welcoming, inclusive, and accessible. I have collaborated with Orvis on educational initiatives and remain especially passionate about helping attract more women, beginners, and families into the sport. I believe the future of fly fishing depends not simply on serving experienced anglers, but on thoughtfully designing experiences that inspire new participants to take their very first cast.

Today, after more than five decades on the water, I remain as enthusiastic about fly fishing as ever. While I continue to enjoy pursuing fish in new places, I find even greater satisfaction in watching someone catch their first fish, overcome their initial uncertainty, or discover a lifelong passion they never imagined they would have. For me, the true reward of fly fishing has never been measured by the number of fish caught, but by the number of people whose lives have been enriched through the experience.

