

Free State Fly Fishers History: 1971-Present

1971-1974

In the summer of 1971, three members of the Maryland Fly Anglers (MFA), a Baltimore Fly Fishing Club, started a MFA Annapolis Chapter. The three MFA members were Elwood B. Rough (Woody), Robert J. Campbell (Joe) and Joseph R. DeMeo (Joe). The first meeting of MFA Annapolis was held at Woody's home in Hillsmere. Then, for several months, meetings were held at the Department of Transportation Building on Chinquapin Round Road, Parole.

In January 1972 there were 26 members and these members were designated as Charter members. Also in early 1972, MFA Annapolis moved its meeting location to the Hillsmere Elementary School, Arundel-On-The-Bay Road, Annapolis. The Chapter-parent club relationship continued until March 1973 when, at the direction of the parent organization, Maryland Fly Anglers of Annapolis, Inc. came into existence.

Then in mid-1974, the parent club decided they could not handle the responsibility of a charter-type organization. This resulted in the separation of the two entities. During the remainder of 1974, a contest was held for a new name and a logo and new articles of incorporation were drafted. On December 1st, 1974 the Free State Fly Fishers, Inc. was formally established.

During the period 1971 – 1974, trout fishing was the primary focus. Friday morning outings to Deer Creek at Rocks State Park in Harford County, MD were held each spring and fall along with several outings for hickory shad during their spawning runs. Weekend outings were periodically scheduled for local trout streams, limestone trout streams in Pennsylvania and trout streams in Western Maryland. Fly casting was also of great interest. World-renowned Lefty Kreh of Cockeysville, MD gave club members several fly casting demonstrations at the Annapolis Waterworks Park located at 260 Defense Highway in Parole. Also during this time, prominent speakers were invited to make presentations such as Poul Jorgenson, a prominent fly tier, Lefty Kreh, Keith Walters, Author on Chesapeake Bay Striper Fishing, and various local guides and fly fishing shop owners.

CHARTER MEMBERS

Charles E. Allen, Hyattsville, Md.
Thomas C. Hopkins, Edgewater, MD.
James E. Britton, Annapolis, Md.
Charles E. Campbell, Annapolis, Md.
Robert J. Campbell, Annapolis, Md.
Joseph R. DeMeo, Bowie, Md.
Charles E. Fogle, Baltimore, Md.
Joe Freeman, Rockville, Md.
J. Cabriel, Annapolis, Md.
Wayne W. Grant, Pasadena, Md.
Jay Hall, Laurel, Md.
Howard G. Hayman, Jr., Annapolis, Md.
Bruce Henry, Annapolis, Md.

Patrick Hogan, Baltimore, Md.
James T. Allison, Annapolis, Md.
John R. Longwell, Annapolis, Md.
Bruce C. Marshall, Severna Park, Md.
Harry A. Matelski, Md.
Anthony A. Pascal, Severna Park, Md.
Elwood B. Rough, Annapolis, Md.
Robert J. Ruck, Arnold, Md.
Leroy Scriba, Severn, Md.
Thomas F. Sessions, Annapolis, Md.
James E. Smith, Bowie, Md.
Charles S. Snead, Annapolis, Md.
Charles L. Wastl, Annapolis, Md.

1975-1984

Free State Fly Fishers, Inc. (FSFF) continued many of the activities that were begun by the previous organization including significantly expanding the fishing horizon beyond trout fishing. When FSFF was established there were 26 Charter members. Membership increased to 29 during 1977 and membership increased to 44 during 1984. Examples of club activities during the period 1975 – 1984 include:

- Club members supported the Isaak Walton League Association Children's Fishing Tournament, the Sportsman Show at the Annapolis Armory, the National Hunting and Fishing Day sponsored by the Maryland Park Service, the Children's Fishing Derby, and supported the Maryland Cold Water Coalition at the Tawes State Office Building in Annapolis.
- Club members provided local water information to Mr. A. Brand who was writing a book on trout fishing throughout the country.
- Club had speakers at some monthly meetings such as: Ernie Wiessenborn (Fishing in the Great Northwest), Ed (Outdoor Editor for the Baltimore News American) and Susan Dentry (Fly Fishing for Atlantic Salmon), Boyd Pfeiffer (Rod Building), Tom Hopkins (Trip Along China's Coastline), Cortland Lines Representatives Tom Cooney, Wayne Grauer, and Walter Knapp (Talk about proper lines, practical knots, and casting demonstration held at the Annapolis Waterworks),
- Proposed changes to the Club's By-Laws finalized in March 1982 and voted on at the April 1982 meeting. Changes were made to Article II Membership, Article IV Meetings of the Membership, Article VIII Dues, and Article X Amendment to By-Laws. Proposed By-Law changes approved by the membership.
- Club established a library for member use; and had FSFF patches, belt buckles and key ring fobs made for purchase by members.
- Club outings to Big Hunting Creek, Morgan Run, Yellow Breeches (PA), Central PA, Gunpowder, Falling Springs (PA), Western Maryland, Deer Creek, Potomac River, Clarks Creek, Juniata River, and the Susquehanna River.
- Some monthly club meetings held at the Annapolis Waterworks with emphasis on fly casting by Lefty Kreh and catching bluegills.
- Periodic Club Fly of the Month with material list and illustrated tying procedure.
- Annual Club picnics, Christmas Parties, and Club auctions.

1985-1990

By 1985, Free State Fly Fishers, Inc. (FSFF) members numbered about 50 with the club continuing to meet in the library at Hillsmere Elementary School in Annapolis. The club continued to bring in regionally and nationally recognized fly fishing speakers for its monthly meetings including Lefty Kreh, Bob Clouser, A. K. Best, Ed Jawarowski, Jack Dennis, C. Boyd Phieffer, and Joe Bruce.

And by this time in the club's history, there were already some well-established traditions:

- The club's motto, "fellowship through fly fishing", really defined how the club operated and focused its sponsored activities.
- The club welcomed members with all level of fly fishing experiences, supporting interests in catching a wide diversity of fish species by fly fishing small mountain streams to the coastal ocean.
- The club hosted an annual holiday party, a tradition started in the 1970s and still continues through today.
- Emphasis placed on sharing fly fishing related experiences through club sponsored fly tying sessions, beginner fly fishing classes, and member-led outings.

1991-Present

By the early 1990s the increasing number of club members was out growing the Hillsmere Elementary School library meeting location. The club was fortunate enough to learn about the opportunity for much larger meeting space at the Davidsonville Family Recreation Center. A former Nike Missile site, the Anne Arundel County owned property had a variety of buildings made available to non-profit organizations like Free State Fly Fishers at no cost.

Starting in 1993, the club was able to host the club's Wednesday night meetings in Ford Hall, a large meeting space complete with kitchen facilities. In addition, the club was given access to its own separate clubhouse which members invested a lot of time and energy in renovating into a facility which met the club's needs. The clubhouse was used for hosting fly tying sessions as well as fly fishing classes.

Due to the growth of another organization at Davidsonville Family Recreation Center which was sharing the use of Ford Hall for their activities, the Davidsonville Dance Club took over use of Ford Hall, forcing the club to move its monthly club meetings to the clubhouse by the late 1990s.

At the same time, the club was experiencing its highest membership levels, approaching 200. A key reason for the growth in membership was due to the array of club sponsored meetings, activities and events.

- A club newsletter with very informative articles written by club members mailed monthly to all club members.
- The club sponsored the annual Dave Davies Dinner, named after a long term club member and former club president, as a fundraiser for support conservation efforts with the dinner highlighted by a regionally or nationally recognized speaker.
- Active, hands-on conservation programs directed towards Thomas Point Parks, South Branch Patapsco River, and Annapolis Waterworks as well as annual fish passage clean-ups on the Patapsco River dams.

- Hosting a winter time, day long fly fishing beginners class taught by club members, addressing all facets of fly fishing from gear selection to stream insect identification to fly tying to fly casting.
- Club sponsored outings scheduled monthly from April through October to a wide array of local and regional locations, with outings to Deer Creek for the spring shad runs to the June float trip down the South Fork of the Shenandoah River to wading the Potomac River at Brunswick at the end of July for the white fly hatch and smallmouth bass being long held traditional outings sponsored by the club.

And as Free State Fly Fishers continued to evolve over the next two decades, the quality and quantity of club sponsored meetings, events, activities and outings increased as well.

- The club's annual Holiday Party raffle became legendary with many fly rods, reels, vises, fly boxes, books and more won by club members as well as the stories and fellowship among the members and their spouses.
- The monthly club member led fly tying sessions the first Monday of each month were not enough so the club added open fly tying sessions on the rest of the Saturday mornings during the winter months providing more opportunities for club members to get together and tie flies.
- The club's website as well as its Facebook page along with a group email system became the means of sharing information on upcoming club sponsored meetings, fly tying sessions, events and activities
- Club sponsored outings were scheduled for all 12 months during the year, with over 30 outings hosted including overnight outings as well as outings located beyond the mid-Atlantic region.
- Monthly Saturday hands-on sessions were scheduled at the clubhouse in response to club members asks for more opportunity for direct learning about more aspects of fly fishing and fly tying.
- The club sponsored tables at local and regional fly fishing shows to expose more current and new fly fishers to the club and everything it had to offer them.
- The club sponsored May outing and picnic to Trap Pond in Delaware is entering its third decade as a club tradition targeting the bluegill spawning season and a delicious lunch.
- The clubhouse evolved as well providing more technologies to improve meeting presentations as well as the fly tying and hands-on session experiences.
- Improving club operations was a priority from setting up 16 different club coordinator positions to updating the club's 1975 by-laws in 2019 to establishing a liability release for signature by all members to formalizing the club's leadership team.

The Club has been in existence since 1971 as the Annapolis Chapter of the Maryland Fly Anglers and officially as Free State Fly Fishers since 1974. This would not have been possible if not for the many members who worked tirelessly over the years to make the club successful.