

# Angling Rhetoric

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RCD MRP Proposal, by Cory Willard  
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## Overview

*“[S]ense of place’ as a political force, a cultural allegiance, a way of daily life, a combative alternative to the industrial juggernaut that treats watersheds, people, soil, and forest as liquid inventory, strikes me as being as necessary to human beings as water or soil itself” (Duncan 52).*

For this project I intend to employ an interdisciplinary and ecocritical approach to interpreting cultural engagements with place, specifically, how the act of fly fishing through literature, film, and environmental rhetoric can be shown to embody a very real place connectedness and a certain performative and physical environmental ethic. I believe there remains an ongoing and overlapping conversation that stresses attention to inseparable connections between texts and places, environments, and ecologies related to fly fishing and environmental stewardship. Using a combination of literature, film, and rhetorical theory—combined with my own narrative scholarship and experience—I will put forth a critical analysis that is immersed and aware of the relationships between place and the fly fishing community.

To the fly fisher, the stream can very much represent the altar of a secular worship as the ecological web of relationships on the planet invites seeing and participating with the world in a sort of cyclical religiosity. In my own life and through a previous ecocritical study on fly fishing film, it became apparent to me that the act of fly fishing and the work of fly fishing communities—with their various engagements with land, waterways, and artistry—stand as an example of an embodied place connectedness that promotes ecological awareness, activism, and even a bond with the sacred. I think the ever growing body of fly fishing texts, both writing and film, opens an important dialogue regarding what this place connectedness means from a critically rhetorical perspective as well as what it means in terms of the physical embodiment of the environment and our place in it. I believe that fly fishing literature and the fast growing genre of fly fishing film are becoming an important expression in the growing ecocritical field by offering

viewers an imaginative, but tangible conduit for environmental education, action, and place connectedness.

I know that personally my love of fly fishing and the connection to the natural world it gives me has opened up my own ability to care about and do what little I can for endangered places that, for me, are only a dream. Engagements like signing petitions to protect Bristol Bay in Alaska from the proposed Pebble Mine that seeks to threaten the world's largest sockeye salmon fishery are small acts, but nevertheless part of a fight to protect not just the existence of these fish, but the livelihood of many that make their living from fishing and also the very culture and way of life of numerous indigenous groups. From an environmental standpoint, anything we can do, any voice we can lend, to the preservation of natural places is essential. Ultimately, even though fly fishing has not been extensively studied in a critical capacity, I argue that fly fishing texts are important members of ecocritical genre and that the act of fly fishing itself is an embodied and rhetorical one that fosters place attachments and ecological awareness.

Making use of several ecocritical and bioregional scholars such as Lawrence Buell, Richard White, William Cronon, Jim Dodge, etc.; cultural geographers like Yi-Fu Tuan and David Harvey; fly fishing authors such as David James Duncan, John Gierach, Roderick Haig-Brown, and Raymond Carver; fly fishing films like *Eastern Rises*, *Low & Clear*, and *DamNation*; as well as studies in rhetorical theory and environmental rhetoric I believe I can very convincingly weave a synthesis of support that can help to illuminate the significance of fly fishing and its textual representations as a very important part of environmental and rhetorical discourse.

## Schedule and grading

The essay will be loosely split into four interconnected sections:

- 1) Fly Fishing Film: This section will focus on the position of fly fishing film as a genre of ecocinema and its importance as an expression of an environmental ethic.
- 2) Fly Fishing Literature: This section will involve a literary and ecocritical analysis of writing about fly fishing as well as discussion of its rhetorical purpose.
- 3) Environmental Rhetoric: This section will illustrate the strong connection between fly fishing film and literature and the principles of environmental rhetoric and stewardship.
- 4) The Act of Fly Fishing: This will be the most challenging section to write. It will focus on the act of fly fishing itself as having foundation principles that lead to an environmental ethic as well as bodies of knowledge that inevitable result in place

connectedness. Ultimately, the claim is to be made that the act itself is a sort of embodied and performative rhetoric.

I will meet weekly with my supervisor, submitting drafts of my chapters every three weeks.

**First complete draft due 31 July**

**Approved final draft due 15 August.**

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