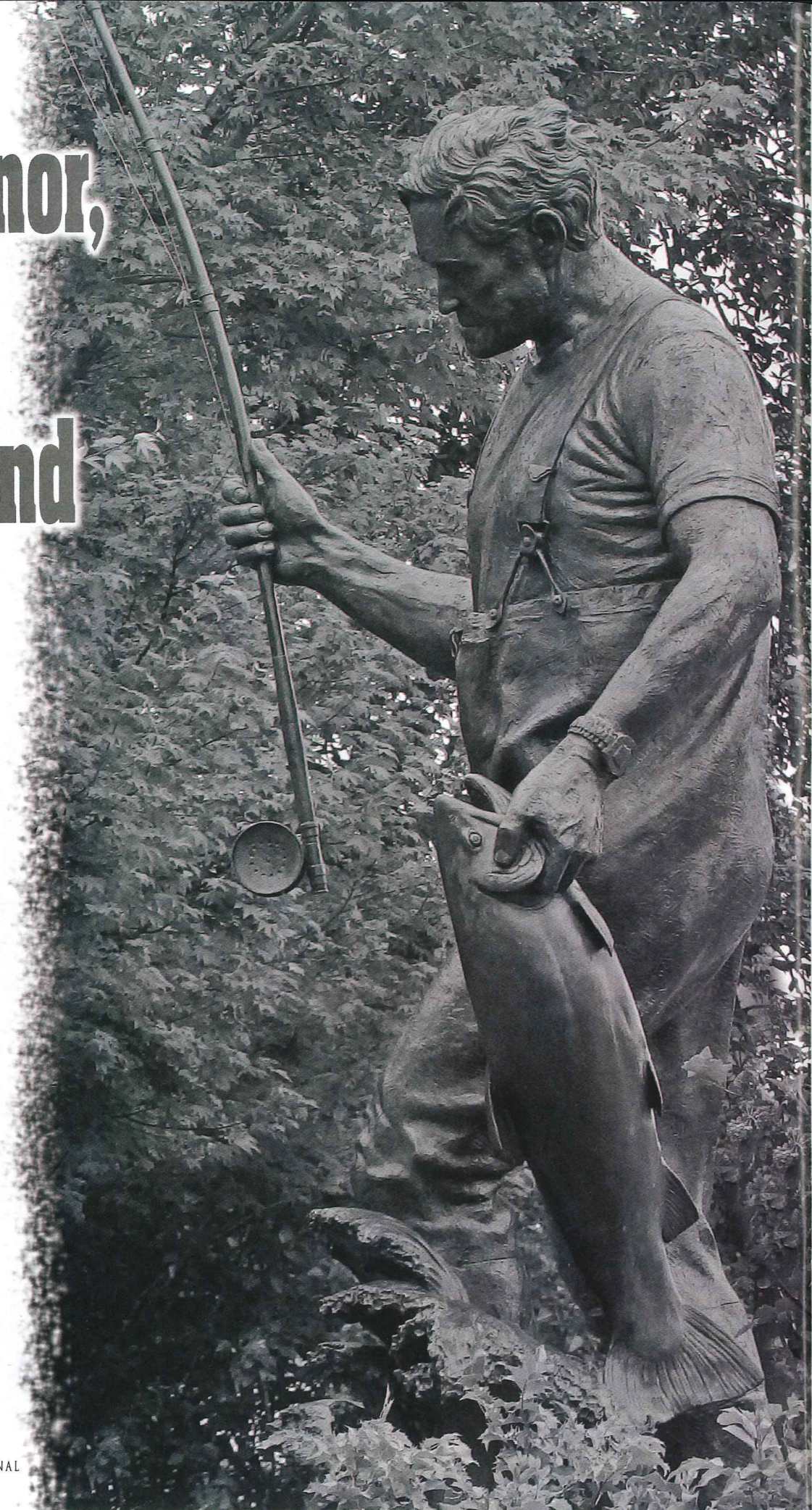


# A Governor, a Fly, a Fish and a Photo

Henry Hughes

Salem, Oregon features a bronze statue of a fly fisherman, Tom McCall, state governor from 1967 to 1975 and one the nation's most passionate pioneering environmentalists. Wearing a tee-shirt and waders, he holds his heavy rod in his right hand, his left arm flexes with the weight of a steelhead.



McCall loved steelhead but it took him years to catch one on the fly. It wasn't until his trips to the North Umpqua River in his mid-fifties as governor, where he met an influential group of angler-conservationists, the Steamboaters, that he got hooked. The group included Steamboat Inn owner, Frank Moore; lawyer and photographer, Dan Callaghan; filmmaker, Hal Riney, and a young guide, Dale Greenley. The ever-convivial McCall enjoyed drinking, telling stories and singing around the inn's massive sugar-pine table, but he also took the fishing seriously. On a late summer afternoon in 1973, McCall, 6'5" with bad knees, was helped over the slick rocks into the Kitchen Pool below the steep basalt cliffs of the Umpqua National Forest. Using a 9-weight Russ Peak fiberglass rod and stripping long-bellied Golden Ashaway line from a Hardy Perfect, he cast one of Callaghan's Greenbutt Skunks, famous to the river. The Steamboaters despised heavily weighted flies, and Callaghan gave advice on how to mend the flighty Skunk, its black body and white calf tail wings swinging through a dark cut in the clear river. McCall eventually hooked a good fish that ran and jumped in the evening light.

Looking at the capital city's bronze statue of the fly fishing governor, there seems to be a ponderous weight in his step, there is certainly a pensive expression on his face, as if much depends on his work and decisions. Engraved in the statue's stone base are a few of McCall's major legislative achievements, including Oregon's pioneering 1973 Land Use Bill that effectively controlled suburban and urban sprawl; the 1967 Beach Bill that guaranteed public access to a coastline once posted and fenced off; and the 1971 Bottle Bill, the nation's first deposit law that dramatically reduced litter and blazed the trail for recycling.

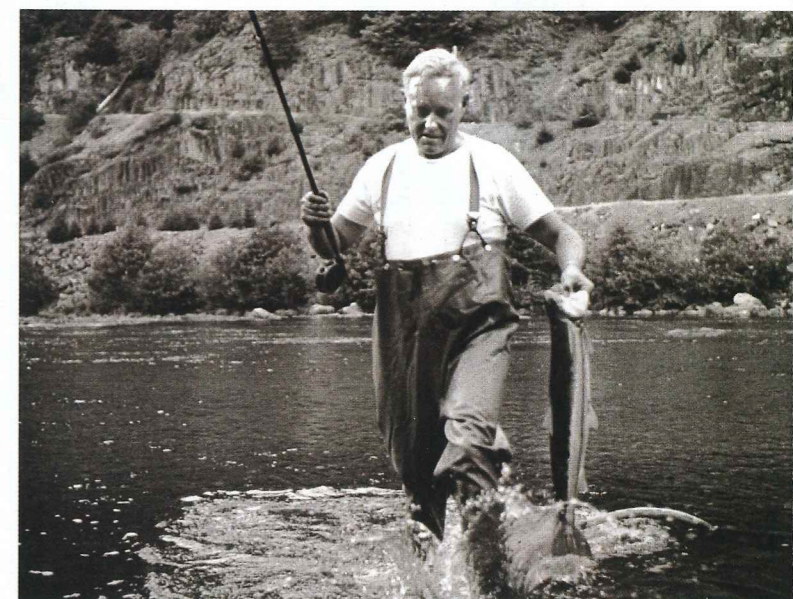
McCall was born in Massachusetts and raised on a ranch in Prineville, Oregon, along the Crooked River where fly fishing was part of his early life. "You might even say he was born to fish," says his son, Tad McCall. Shortly after Tom McCall's birth in 1913, his maternal grandfather, Thomas Lawson, presented the child with a small split bamboo Montague fly and bait combo. Housed in a handsome cylindrical leather case with a cloth rod bag—"Tommy" stitched in red—the rod is missing sections and badly worn from hands and time, but the engraved inscription, "from Grandpa," survives as a great reminder of generational affections and traditions connected to angling. "Fly fishing was an art my father taught me, and we became very close through fishing," Tad reminisced. He admitted his father was not the most elegant caster, but his height helped him, and "he eventually found his rhythm." One day fishing Central Oregon's Metolius River when no one was catching, Tad remembered his father's simple technique: "He approached the bank very softly and just dropped his fly over the ledge. No cast necessary. And he caught a beautiful trout."

The healthy, trout-filled Metolius may be considered part of Tom McCall's legacy in supporting river-saving projects across the state. He spoke often about his early connections with fishing and conservation. As a young newspaperman in Moscow, Idaho, in the late 1930s, he fished and wrote about the North Clearwater and St. Joe, alarmed even then by the threats of mining, though his fly fishing grandfather made a fortune as a copper baron. Throughout his career in print and broadcast journalism, McCall made environmentalism a major theme. In 1962, he wrote and narrated a groundbreaking television documentary, "Pollution in Paradise," which exposed the horrible contamination of rivers and its toll on fish. The film, radical for its time, called out specific culprits, particularly Northwest pulp and paper mills, and had a massive impact on legislation to control industrial and municipal effluents dumped into rivers. "Pollution in Paradise," released just a couple months after Rachel

Facing page: Rip Caswell's 2009 bronze statue of Governor Tom McCall in Riverfront Park, Salem, Oregon. Richard Bunse photo



The actual Green Butt Skunk deployed successfully by Governor McCall in 1973, and saved by Dale Greenley.



Dale Greenley's famous photo of Tom McCall on the North Umpqua in 1973. The photo, long attributed to Dan Callaghan, appeared on the cover of McCall's 1977 autobiography and served as the model for the commemorative bronze statue in Salem's Riverfront Park.

Carson's *Silent Spring*, raised national consciousness on the dire crises facing American rivers. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist, Tom Friesen, explains that "McCall's accomplishments are held in esteem worldwide as a model of large river restoration," and "the Willamette today supports robust fisheries that contribute to Oregon's economy and quality of life." McCall, a Republican, sought a balance between prosperity and a healthy environment, and he expressed extraordinary sensitivity to human-fish connections. The McCall family loved watching salmon and steelhead swimming up Mill Creek through downtown Salem and the state capital. "The condition of our runs of Chinook and coho salmon and the mighty ocean going rainbow trout—the steelhead—says a lot about our priorities as a people," he wrote in his 1977 autobiography, *Tom McCall: Maverick*.

McCall's connections to angler-conservationists like fly fishing legend, Frank Moore, not only paid off in heaping hospitality on the North Umpqua, but the governor heard firsthand about the threats of dam building, unrestricted logging, and road construction that lead to fluctuating water levels and deadly siltification. In 1969 McCall appointed Moore to Oregon's Fish and Wildlife Commission—over the years several Steamboaters have held seats on the commission. Moore did a great deal for fly fishing, lobbying for wild preserves on the Deschutes and Williamson Rivers, and a 31-mile fly-only section of the North Umpqua. "At first I was against 'fly only' water," Moore told me. "I thought it would keep out the very young and the very old." Frank, 93, still fishes a bit; and he recalls taking his five-year-old son out on the river to fly fish. "I put Frank Jr. on my shoulders and walked the river casting. The boy learned to cast, and he landed his first steelhead, on my shoulders. It changed my mind."



Governor McCall and his prized steelhead beside the 26-year-old Dale Greenley. Dan Callaghan photo

The North Umpqua is famous for its summer steelhead but fishing had been slow that warm week of the governor's visit in 1973. Dale Greenley was sent to the Kitchen Pool to secure a spot, and when the sun went off the river, the governor took his place and began casting. When he hooked up, people cheered. "Thank goodness it didn't leave the pool, because I don't know how McCall would've chased it," Greenley said, remembering the moment and the governor's knees. Using Dan Callaghan's Nikon, Greenley took a photo of a jaw-clenching McCall battling

the steelhead "The fish fought like crazy and then just died," Greenley explained. "The governor was so sad. He wanted to model catch-and-release, but what could you do?" McCall lifted his summer steelhead, an eight-pound hen, and carefully waded back to the bank when Dale Greenley snapped another image with his friend's camera—a now famous photo that has long been attributed to Callaghan. "I took the photo that became the statue," Greenley told me. "But I didn't want to take anything away from Dan. He was a respected photographer and he was friends with the governor. I was just a young ghillie who liked taking pictures." McCall chose this image for the cover of his autobiography, and when he was dying of prostate cancer in 1982, he shared with a close associate, Norma Paulus, that if ever a statue were made in his honor, he wanted that same photo to be the model.

That wish was realized in 2006, when renowned sculptor, Rip Caswell, accepted the commission and began research that included fly fishing for winter steelhead. Caswell, an avid angler, had caught many steelhead in his home state of Washington, but never on the fly. He put in a few days of casting on Oregon's Sandy River. "I never felt a fish, but I slipped and felt that icy water in my waders," Caswell told me in a phone interview. "I definitely immersed myself in that project." Caswell studied McCall's gear down to the fly used that day on the North Umpqua (Greenley kept the actual Greenbutt Skunk plucked from the mouth of McCall's steelhead). Caswell completed sketches and used a model posed in McCall's rubber-coated fabric waders. After constructing clay models, the final nine-foot, 1,000 pound bronze statue was cast in an Enterprise foundry in 2008, and trucked across the state, making stops at schools where children patted the massive metal steelhead blushed with an oxidized red patina. The statue now stands in Salem's Riverfront Park, once



Tom McCall's first outfit, a Montague fly and baitcasting combo presented by his grandfather in 1913. Courtesy of Tad McCall

the sight of a Boise Cascade paper mill and not far from the giant acid ball, where wood chips were once dissolved into pulp. The acid ball has been transformed into a bright sculpture called the Eco-Earth Globe. A site of such profound transformation befits the statue of McCall just a few feet from the Willamette River he worked so hard to save, where one can find good smallmouth bass fishing in the taylor of nearby Pringle Creek, and where an average of 47,000 salmon and 20,000 steelhead head upriver every year. "If the salmon and steelhead are running, then as far as I am concerned, God knows that all is well in His world," McCall was quoted in a 1976 U.S. Senate report on Land Resource Planning. "The health of the environment is good if the salmon and steelhead are around. It is that simple."

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