

The Upper Sacramento River

By Bill Carnazzo

The "Upper" Sacramento River, or Upper Sac, as most anglers refer to it, is that part of the Sacramento River that is above Shasta Lake and below Siskiyou Lake. This stretch of the river is approximately 30 miles in length. The headwaters are above Siskiyou Lake, originating in the Trinity Divide area, west of Mt. Shasta City.

The three small forks of the Sacramento—the north, south, and middle forks—are trapped in Siskiyou Lake, which is formed by the Box Canyon Dam. While it is a common misconception that Mt. Shasta is the source of this river, there appears to be a connection in the form of lava tubes that some scientists believe deliver the ice-cold water that cascades down Mossbrae Falls, one mile above Dunsmuir.



Fishing on the Upper Sacramento River



Bill Carnazzo landing one on the Upper Sacramento River

The town of Dunsmuir, where I have my home, is generally considered the focal point for fly fishers visiting the area. The fact that there are three fly shops in tiny Dunsmuir tells the story. There are a number of good restaurants in town, including Seng Thong's; the Cornerstone Cafe; Maddlena's; and the Railroad Park restaurant. There are also good restaurants in Mt. Shasta City. Lodging in both towns is abundant. Campers can stay at the Castle Crags State Park, Simms Flat campground, or at Railroad Park's campground in Dunsmuir.

The DFG regulations for the river are, at best, a hodgepodge of rules that some believe make no biological sense, and are based on political considerations. Irrespective of who is right on that controversy, the regulations vary by location along the river. From Box Canyon down to Scarlett Way in the north part of Dunsmuir, there is a zero limit with angling limited to artificial lures with a single barbless hook. From Scarlett Way down to the Sweetbrier Bridge, the normal five fish limit applies, and all forms of angling are allowed. From Sweetbrier south, the river is designated as a wild trout stream with angling limited to artificial lures with a single barbless hook. Strangely, two fish can be taken in this wild trout section.

For more information, visit the [Ted Fay Fly Shop](#) on Dunsmuir Avenue or give them call them at 530-235-2906



The scenic Upper Sacramento River in fall

For many anglers, the decision as to where to fish is made based on which I-5 off ramp is taken. This is less true in and above Dunsmuir, where for example an understanding of local roads is needed to find the famous Cantara Loop area, and to locate the many good fishing spots within the town of Dunsmuir itself.

The off-ramps frequented most by fly fishers are (going south from Dunsmuir) Soda Creek, Castella, Sweetbrier, Conant Road, Flume Creek, Simms,

Gibson, Pollard Flat, Lamoine, and Delta (where there is good access to McCardle Flat and other productive areas). Farther south, the river is difficult to access and fish. In between these off ramps, there are many good spots, such as Shotgun Creek between Simms and Gibson. For convenience, I divide the river into the upper portion, which in my view ends at Soda Creek; the middle river, ending at Simms; and the lower river, ending at Delta. The river increases in volume as it moves south, due to the input received from numerous creeks. Here is a good access summary:

Upper Sacramento River Access

1. Ney Springs Creek
2. Cantara
3. Prospect Avenue
4. Scarlett Way Bridge
5. Dunsmuir City Park
6. I-5 Pool
7. Financial Avenue
8. Soda Creek
9. Castle Crags St. Park
10. Lower Sweetbrier
11. Conant
12. Sims
13. Gibson
14. Pollard Flat
15. Lamoine
16. McCardle Flat
17. Dog Creek

