

# **SPEY CASTING 101**

*A collection of articles, diagrams  
and charts designed to help the  
novice Two-Handed caster!*

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*Thank you — John Van Derhoof*

*With the exception of the AFFTA Spey Line Weight Standards all Articles and Diagrams are written and prepared by John Van Derhoof (author) and, as such, are his opinions, beliefs and understandings of Two-Handed and Single-Handed Spey Style casting.*

# CLEARING UP SPEY LINE & SYSTEM CONFUSION

## SPEY LINES

Spey line designations are **NOT** the same as single hand lines. There is about a two, three or four line size difference between Spey and single-hand lines so a 7-weight Spey Line is roughly equivalent to a 9 or 10-weight Single-Hand line. Why? Well with all the fly line that is on the water as an anchor, you need more weight in the air to load the rod. All Spey rods, including Switch rods conform to AFFTA Spey Line Standards and not AFFTA Single-Hand Standards. AFFTA Spey Line Standards separate Spey Lines into 4 categories: Heads, Short-Belly Lines, Mid-Belly Lines and Long-Belly Lines. Here are some category and line comparisons.

**Heads:** Lines 30'–50' (in reality, lines in this category can be as short as 11') in total length and include popular types like Scandi (short for Scandinavian) and Skagit (names after a river in Washington). Popular Scandi lines are: Airflo Compact Scandi and Rage, Nextcast Fall Favorite 45 and Rio AFS and Scandi. Popular Skagit lines are: Airflo Compact Skagit and Skagit Switch and Rio Skagit Max and Skagit Short. Systems are ideal for small to medium sized rivers.

**Short-Belly:** Lines have a head length of 50'–60' and the total line length ranges from 120'–150'. Popular lines are: Airflo Delta, Nextcast Fall Favorite 45 or Winter Authority 45 and Rio Uni-Spey (the older Windcutter). Systems are ideal for small to medium sized rivers.

**Mid-Belly:** Lines have a head length of 60'–70' and the total line length ranges from 120'–150'. Popular lines are: Airflo Delta Long (no longer being made), Rio Power Spey and the Ballistic Vector series of lines. Systems are ideal for small to medium sized rivers.

**Long-Belly:** Lines have a head length longer than 70' and the total line length ranges from 120'–160'. Popular lines are: CND's GPS series, Nextcast Fall Favorite 70 or Winter Authority 70 and Carron Jetstream 75, 85 and 95. Systems are ideal for medium to large sized rivers. Also included in this category are Double Taper lines.

## SPEY CASTING SYSTEMS

**FULL LENGTH LINES** are the traditional and classic method of delivering a fly to a salmon or steelhead. They are ideally suited for making longer casts and presentations for “swinging” flies generally to depths up to 2–3 feet on moderate to large rivers. Many modern **FULL LENGTH LINES** have a detachable tip so that the angler can interchange between floating and various densities of sinking tips extending the range of the system to greater fishing depths as necessary. An advantage over **HEAD** systems is not having to retrieve virtually the entire line to make the next presentation; you only have to retrieve to the end of the head. Because the head lengths are so much longer they are much more difficult to properly load the rod and cast on narrower rivers and streams or where there are obstructions to the backcast like trees and vertical river banks/cliffs. Leaders should be at least the length of the rod to help better set the anchor.

**SCANDI LINES** are a very popular system for the small to moderate rivers which are indicative of northern Europe (Scandinavia) and western America and Canada. They are shooting heads and are typically 40 feet or less and shorter heads have become very popular as of late. They are very easy to cast when properly balanced with the rod and require shorter backcasts than full length lines which make them perfect for the tight conditions in Scandinavia where they were developed and in our own Pacific Northwest. **SCANDI LINES** are ideal for wading dry flies and for “swinging” flies generally to depths up to 2–3 feet but, by using various densities of sinking leaders and tips, one can extend their fishing depth. Primary disadvantages of this line is that it needs to be paired with a shooting line (monofilament or floating/sinking thin diameter fly line) and the line needs to be retrieved all the way back to the head prior to the next cast. Think of it this way, if you are fishing at 80 feet you will have to retrieve all the way back to 30 feet before casting again. Leaders should be at least the length of the rod to help better set the anchor.

**SKAGIT LINES** are a fairly new and very popular method for delivering flies of almost any weight on very heavily weighted sinking tips. This allows the angler to fish at depths that were once almost impossible to reach. Developed on the small to moderate rivers of the Pacific Northwest (and named after the Skagit River) this is a very effective system to fish with and has become pervasive in its use with guides and anglers in a very short time. The current crop of **SKAGIT LINES** are short (11–28 feet in length) very large diameter and very aggressive in their turnover. They are specifically designed easily pull 15 feet of T-14 (210 grains) out of the water and deliver it to 90 feet or more. They can be used with lighter sinking tips of course and one can even install a floating tip if need be however, this is not a replacement for a **SCANDI LINE**. Like the **SCANDI LINE** the primary disadvantages of this line is that it needs to be paired with a shooting line (monofilament or floating/sinking thin diameter fly line) and the line needs to be retrieved all the way back to the head prior to the next cast. One other disadvantage is the angler's choice of casts are more limited when using heavy sinking tips but this would also be true of any of the line systems available.

**A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS;** if an angler was fishing small to moderate sized rivers, the ideal system to work with would be both the Scandi Line and Skagit Line systems in tandem. Because these are fairly short head systems, one is easily removed from a spool and replaced by the other. The angler with two lines, one on the reel and one in their vest or on a spare spool, can fish dry or wading flies and inside of 5 minutes switch lines and fish as deep as they wish. This combination is truly ideal for most salmon and steelhead situations.

The most important and sometimes the most difficult thing an angler needs to do before they go fishing (besides learning how to cast!!!!) is to match the rod with the proper weight fly line. Full Length Lines are usually designated by fly fishing's typical numbering system—put a 7 weight line on a 7 weight rod. But, before you buy it, try it and save yourself some anguish as not all 7 weight lines are the same.

Scandi and Skagit Lines are also designated by the line weight numbering system but also (and more practical) are designated by grain weights and depending on the maker run in 25 or 30 grain increments. It is sad to say that most stores do a very poor job at helping someone select the proper line leaving these good people to two options. One, buy the rod but not the line and cast other people's lines to find the perfect match. Two, go to Tim Rajeff's website, [rajeffsports.com](http://rajeffsports.com) or to Rio's website, [rioproducts.com](http://rioproducts.com) as both have a wonderful chart of most of today's popular Spey rods paired with both the Airflo lines he represents and Rio's fine products.

No go out, cast, fish and have some fun...

## AFFTA Approved Spey Line Weight Standards

LINE WT.	INCREMENT	Shooting Heads	Short Bellys	Medium Bellys	Long Bellys
		H	S	M	L
		30'-50'	50'-60'	60'-70	'70' plus
		40'	55'	65'	80'
GRAINS/GRAMS	GRAINS/GRAMS	GRAINS/GRAMS	GRAINS/GRAMS		
<b>6</b>		<b>250 / 16.2</b>	<b>420 / 27.3</b>	<b>460 / 29.9</b>	<b>600 / 39</b>
	<b>50</b>				
<b>7</b>		<b>300 / 19.5</b>	<b>470 / 30.5</b>	<b>510 / 33.1</b>	<b>650 / 42.2</b>
	<b>60</b>				
<b>8</b>		<b>360 / 23.4</b>	<b>530 / 34.4</b>	<b>570 / 37.0</b>	<b>710 / 46.1</b>
	<b>70</b>				
<b>9</b>		<b>430 / 27.9</b>	<b>600 / 39.0</b>	<b>640 / 41.6</b>	<b>780 / 50.6</b>
	<b>80</b>				
<b>10</b>		<b>510 / 33.1</b>	<b>680 / 44.2</b>	<b>720 / 46.8</b>	<b>860 / 55.8</b>
	<b>90</b>				
<b>11</b>		<b>600 / 39.0</b>	<b>770 / 50.0</b>	<b>810 / 52.6</b>	<b>950 / 61.7</b>
	<b>100</b>				
<b>12</b>		<b>700 / 45.5</b>	<b>870 / 56.5</b>	<b>910 / 59.1</b>	<b>1050 / 68.2</b>

Head length to include the head and back taper to the holding line and/or running line

## AFFTA Approved Fly Line Weight Specifications

LINE WEIGHT	LOW	TAPERS		LINE WEIGHT	LOW	TAPERS	
		TARGET	HIGH			TARGET	HIGH
	WEIGHT IN GRAINS				WEIGHT IN GRAMS		
<b>1</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>3.90</b>	<b>4.30</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4.80</b>	<b>5.20</b>	<b>5.60</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6.10</b>	<b>6.50</b>	<b>6.90</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7.40</b>	<b>7.80</b>	<b>8.20</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8.70</b>	<b>9.10</b>	<b>9.50</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9.90</b>	<b>10.40</b>	<b>10.90</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11.50</b>	<b>12.00</b>	<b>12.50</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13.10</b>	<b>13.60</b>	<b>14.10</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14.90</b>	<b>15.55</b>	<b>16.20</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17.50</b>	<b>18.15</b>	<b>18.80</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20.60</b>	<b>21.40</b>	<b>22.20</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23.80</b>	<b>24.60</b>	<b>25.40</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>28.20</b>	<b>29.20</b>	<b>30.20</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>515</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>31.10</b>	<b>32.40</b>	<b>33.70</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>34.30</b>	<b>35.60</b>	<b>36.90</b>

Weight is for first 30' of line minus level tip

# THE SIX BASIC SPEY CASTS (AND WHEN TO USE THEM...)

The first thing that you will learn very quickly in Spey or Two-Handed casting is that there are as many different ways to execute a cast as there are people to teach it and perform it. While the same could be said of single-handed casting the problem is not as complex—fewer different casts to make. Sure there are different single-hand casts but, with the exception of the Roll Cast, they are all pretty similar to the standard overhead cast and how many different ones do you actually use? So, that being said, let's move onto Spey casting and discuss the Six Basic casts used on a regular basis.

Spey casting came about when it was discovered that casting with single-hand rods on rivers with lots of trees, cliffs or other deterrents to the long backcast needed for a long forward cast made casting and fishing problematic. Oh, and they didn't have shooting heads back then—they came much, much later—like the 1950s! However, inventive 19<sup>th</sup> century anglers did learn that by using longer rods, two hands and the modified Roll Casts we now call Spey casting, they could cast long distances with short backcasts. They also learned that they could even change directions from hanging straight down river in the current to fishing in one or two relatively simple moves.

Every cast used in Spey casting has a distinct purpose based on three parameters. They are as follows: 1) Learning to cast; 2) Tackle choice; 3) Safety (the most important).

The Six Basic casts of Spey Casting are the Roll Cast, Switch Cast, Single Spey, Double Spey, Snake Roll and Snap C (or T). There are countless other casts, pseudo-casts and variations of these six that are being used in the two-handed world right now but, these six are the basics. Of these six one, the Roll Cast, is used as the finish to all of the other five. Complicated? It's not as bad as it sounds but it makes a really important point—if you can't perform the Roll Cast properly, then the rest of your casts will suffer. In fact, the remaining five casts are, in essence, modified Roll Casts.

All six of these casts can be broken down into two types. First are the Sustained Anchor Casts where the line and anchor stays on the water for an extended period of time. These casts are also usually Two Part casts meaning there is a distinct, initial set up maneuver followed by the forward cast. Kiss & Go casts are those where, as the name implies, the line and anchor are on the water for brief period. This is important to understand early on because, depending on the tackle you are using as well as you're casting abilities, these styles will determine what specific cast you can make when you are out fishing. Here are the Sustained Anchor Casts: the Roll Cast, Double Spey and Snap-C or T. The Kiss & Go Casts are: the Switch Cast, Single Spey and Snake Roll. Now let's look at which casts to use and when.

I stated earlier that Learning to cast was a distinct parameter to base your choice of casts on. By this I would have you understand that for the purpose of learning how to Spey cast there are certain casts that you can perform to make you more proficient. Of the Six Basic Casts there are two, the Roll Cast and the Switch Cast, that are ideally suited for learning the basics of Spey casting. As I said, the Roll Cast is the finish to all of the rest so it is obviously a cast that needs to be mastered during the Learning process. While not as important, the Switch Cast is what many people associate with learning how to Spey Cast. I disagree with this notion and don't teach the cast to my students until much later. In fact I teach the Single Spey long before the Switch Cast. Many people feel the Single Spey is *the* most difficult of all the casts to learn—I thoroughly disagree. Though I tend not to teach it, in fact the Switch Cast is a good tool to learn timing with but it is NOT a cast generally used in fishing because there is no change of direction associated with it.

Your Tackle choice can also affect which cast you are going to use. A novice Spey caster with limited casting skills who has chosen (or had a guide select it for them!) to use a short, aggressive shooting head with a heavy sinking tip and a heavy fly (like a Skagit system) will probably be limited to Sustained Anchor casts; the Double Spey and the Snap-C or T. These are ideal casts for easily pulling the heavy sinking components out of the water and delivering the fly to fish 60', 70', 80' or more away. Yes, the Kiss and Go casts can be used with a sinking system but the timing of the cast becomes much more critical and frankly, the Sustained Anchor casts are much easier to manage for the expert as well. Kiss & Go casts are well suited for traditional full length line systems or shorter Scandi systems where the fly is not overly heavy and delivered with a floating or very lightly sinking leader. Kiss & Go casts are also ideal for fishing conditions where the river is small and the fish easily spooked and a delicate presentation is necessary.

The last and most important part of determining which cast you use is your own personal safety as well as those around you. The determining factors in this are the wind, the WIND and the WIND! The fly lines we use in Spey casting are generally quite large in diameter and when they are caught by the wind they act more like a sail than a fly line. Your casting anchor always needs to be on the downwind side of your body to avoid unnecessary body piercings. You must always be cognizant of which direction the wind is blowing before you make a cast. We separate four of our Six Basic Casts into Downstream Casts and Upstream Casts. Two of these casts—the Double Spey and the Snake Roll—are Downstream Anchor casts. The other two—the Single Spey and the Snap-C or T—are, you guessed it, Upstream Anchor casts. These four casts are either Downstream Anchor or Upstream Anchor Casts regardless of what side of the river you are on. Also note that for each wind direction there is one Sustained Anchor and one Kiss & Go cast to accompany that direction.

The second thing everyone who is starting out in Spey casting must understand is that they will need to learn how to cast over their dominant and opposite shoulder. It's not an option; it is mandatory. If you are right-handed and on River Left (see the definition below) with a 10-20 mph downstream wind, you are going to have to use either a Double Spey or a Snake Roll unless you want to risk seriously hurting yourself. Using an Upstream Anchor cast in this circumstance will place that fly line in the air between you and the wind and believe me, it hurts removing a size #4 hook whether it has a de-barbed or not. I have even had my ear raked open plus a week long saber scar on my cheek by a sinking tip flying out of the water at high speed so there is more out there other than the fly that can hurt you.

My intent is certainly not to scare anyone but to simply let you know that there are certain practices that need to be learned and understood before you take this fantastic form of fly fishing out to river for a test drive. Spey casting can be used for salmon and steelhead or other anadromous trout, trout, smallmouth and a host of other fish species. It can also be very effectively adapted to single-hand fly casting giving you, the angler, more options the next time you go fishing.

## **TERMS AND DEFINITIONS:**

Anchor	That portion of the fly line and leader or tip on the water during a cast that serves to help load the rod due to the line's surface tension.
Anchor Point	The portion of the line on the water where the line connects to the leader or sinking tip.
D-Loop	That portion of the line that is aerialized between the anchor and the rod tip during the cast.
Downstream Casts	Those casts necessary to place the anchor on the downstream and downwind side of your body: the Double Spey and the Snake Roll.
Kiss & Go Casts	Those Spey casts where the line and anchor briefly touch or "Kiss" the water before the final forward cast and delivery of the fly (Switch Cast, Single Spey and Snake Roll).
Load	The bending of the rod that results from the aerialized weight and speed of the fly line.
River Left	When you are standing on the left bank of the river as you look downstream.
River Right	When you are standing on the right bank of a river as you look downstream.
Scandi Line	A fishing system using 25' to 40' shooting heads with a shooting line and generally fishing with lighter flies and on top of or higher in the water column (0' to 4').
Skagit Line	A fishing system using 18' to 30' aggressively tapered shooting heads with shooting lines combined usually with sinking tips and generally much deeper in the water column (2' to 8').
Sustained Anchor Casts	Those Spey casts where the line and anchor are on the water for an extended period of time before the final forward cast and fly delivery (Roll Cast, Double Spey and Snap-C or T).
Traditional Line	A full length (100' to 160') weight forward or double taper fly line and generally fishing with lighter flies and on top of or higher in the water column (0' to 4').
Two-Part Cast	A Spey cast comprised of two distinct and separate parts as in a Double Spey or a Snap-C or T.
Upstream Casts	Those casts necessary to place the anchor on the upstream and upwind side of your body: the Single Spey and the Snap-C or T.

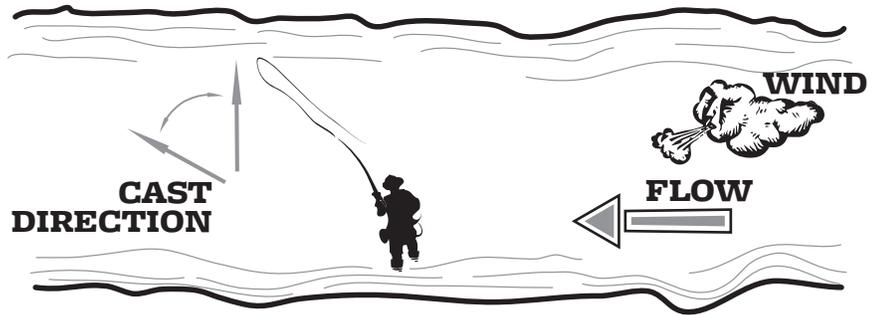
# SPEY CASTS (AND WHEN TO MAKE THEM)

**NOTE:** River Left or River Right is determined by which side of the river you are on while facing downstream

## RIVER LEFT

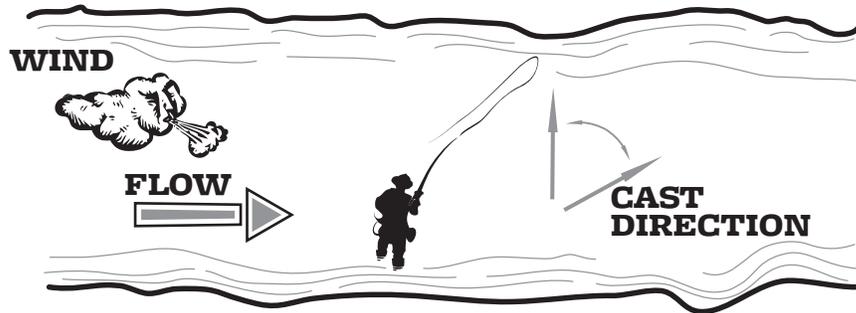
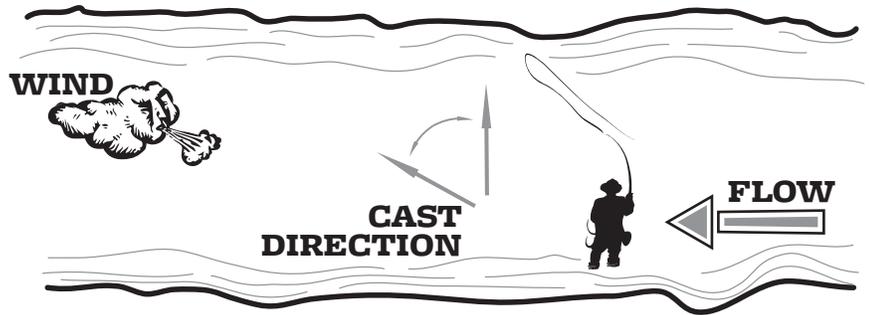
**SITUATION:** River Left  
Downstream Wind

**CASTS:** Left-Hand Snake Roll  
Left-Hand Double Spey



**SITUATION:** River Left  
Upstream Wind

**CASTS:** Right-Hand Single Spey  
Right-Hand Snap 'C'



## RIVER RIGHT

**SITUATION:** River Right  
Downstream Wind

**CASTS:** Right-Hand Snake Roll  
Right-Hand Double Spey



**SITUATION:** River Right  
Upstream Wind

**CASTS:** Left-Hand Single Spey  
Left-Hand Snap 'C'

# To Switch or Spey?

The world of fly fishing has been rapidly changing with the popularity of Spey rods. Rods have become much better designed and there is a tremendous variety of lengths and styles that have become available to purchase and fish. Also, the assortment of fly lines to choose from for these rods have been dramatically expanded and improved and, once understood, will prove to be a remarkably diverse set of tools for an angler to use.

Now, with all of this to consider, we now throw Switch rods into the mix. These rods are rapidly gaining in popularity but little is really understood by those considering buying one, new owners and users and, to a great degree, the people in the shops that are selling them. So what are Switch rods and what is their relevance as a fly fishing tool?

## **TWO-HANDED RODS**

Before we get too far let's get one thing understood; the name "*Spey*" rod is not one that is universally accepted. Maybe here in the U.S. it is but certainly not in the rest of the world. In the U.K. they are almost always called either two-handed or salmon rods. The term Spey refers to the river Spey in Scotland where this form of rod and casting technique is oftentimes alluded to having been developed. However, there is no clear substantiation to that claim and there are plenty of "*competing*" rivers that will quickly dispute and argue against that assertion. So, for our purposes, we will refer to Spey rods as Two-Handed rods or Two-Handers.

Two-Handed rods, not surprisingly, are intended to be used with two hands and, with a couple of exceptions, utilize a series of modified dynamic Roll Casts such as the Single Spey, Double Spey, Snake Roll and Snap C (or Snap T) which are four of the basic casts. These rods are also used in the surf for overhead casting to reach out and touch species like striped bass and bluefish on the East Coast and many other species here on the West Coast. Spey style casts are not usually used in the surf because the surge of the surf makes casting impractical and often unsafe. All Two-Handed rods have advantages and disadvantages and, as you will find out, so do Switch rods. For the steelhead and salmon angler, these long rods (12'-16'+) can mend and control line beautifully and make easy work of a 70' to 90'+ cast in the hands of a reasonably skilled user—much easier and with much less effort in fact than single-hand casting. Oh, and learning how to make these casts is a lot of fun to boot!

Disadvantages: the rods and reels can be heavy while fishing all day long, the longer rods actually give the fish a greater leverage and advantage making the fight a bit tougher on you, landing a fish can be a lot more difficult and learning how to make the casts, while fun, can also be difficult! Now, on to Switch Rods...

## **SWITCH RODS**

As its name implies, a Switch rod is a rod intended to allow the caster to "*switch*" back and forth between single-hand casting and two-handed casting. The reality of this is quite different however. Anyone who has tried to cast an 11' seven weight Switch rod for more than 10 minutes with one hand will know what I mean—it gets real heavy, real fast. There is another reason that you will learn about when we discuss fly lines. One exception to this would be a 10'-6" 3-weight Switch rod that, depending on how stiff it is, might be paired with a 5, 6 or 7-weight weight forward single hand fly line, a properly balanced reel and used as a long line European style nymph rod.

First of all a Switch rod is a Two-Handed rod that is less than 12' in length. No more and no less... Line weights can run from 3 to 9 (there might be some 10-weights out there) but please, please, please understand this: Switch rods are Two-Handed rods and therefore share the same line weight designations from AFFTA (American Fly Fishing Trade Association) as Two-Handers and not Single-Hand rods. Do not expect to buy a 5-weight Switch rod and put your 5-weight Rio Gold weight forward trout line on it and expect it to perform properly—it won't as it would be way too light! A typical 7-weight Switch rod (or Two-Handed rod) handles a line that averages between 450 to 550 grains in weight while a typical Single-Hand 7-weight rod uses a line that weighs about 175 to 225 grains. Think about it, that's half the weight of the Two-Handed line.

So let's consider why you would want a Switch rod. Many people look at a Switch rod as an avenue into learning how to learn two-handed casting and to fish for steelhead or salmon. Others will want to make longer casts in the surf and others have seen their friends catch trout with the new generation of light line Switch rods available. Switch rods offer better line control for mending line than Single-Hand rods but not better than longer Two-Handed rods. For mending longer is better. Switch rods, because they are shorter, do fight a fish a bit more efficiently than their longer cousins but not as well as a Single-Hand rod. Because Switch rods are shorter they are therefore lighter and this will make them less fatiguing as the day wears on while fishing. In fact, they are light enough that you can—for very brief periods of time—cast them single handed if you desire.

First, consider what kind of fishing you plan on using it for: salmon/steelhead, surf, trout or all of the above. If it's all of those you will probably want (more likely *NEED*) two rods—you don't fish for a 15 inch trout with the same rod you will use on a 75 pound tarpon. Look at Switch rod line weights like this: 3-weight to 5-weight Switch rods are great for trout fishing; 5-weight

to 7-weight for small steelhead and salmon (to 12 pounds +/-) and light to medium surf fishing; 7-weight to 8-weight for large steelhead and salmon (to 20 pounds plus) and larger surf species like striped bass (to 30 pounds); and finally 9-weight rods and above can be used for king salmon and striped bass (under 50 pounds). If I were going to make a recommendation on which rod to purchase my answer would be that for trout fishing get a Switch rod that is 10'-6" to 11'-0" in length for a 4-weight. For steelhead and salmon fishing or surf fishing get an 11'-0" to 11'-6" rod for a 7 weight.

## **SWITCH ROD LINES**

With a Switch rod selected now it is time to get a line or lines. One thing will become clear right away and that is that a line selected for overhead casting a Switch Rod will be considerably lighter than a line chosen for Spey style casts. Why? Because when you cast a line overhead, the entire fly line is aerialized and loading the rod while Spey casts only have about one half the fly line in the air loading the rod while the rest is anchored on the water and therefore needs a much heavier line. For example, a 420 grain Scandi line on a 6-weight Switch rod of mine is great for Spey casting but, for the same rod, I might use a 270- 320 grain line for overhead casting. So with all of that in mind, there are dozens of options available and it can get very complicated. So let's take a look at what's available make your choice (or choices) a bit easier...

Let's start with steelhead and salmon lines. In the old days full length fly lines were the way to go with 50', 60', 70' and longer heads but, because Switch rods are short, they can't easily handle these lines with long heads. Nowadays Scandi and Skagit lines dominate the rivers with both Two-Handers and Switch rods. Both of these are shooting head systems that are very versatile and beginners find them easier to use than full length lines. Simply described, Scandi heads are about 25' to 36' in length, can easily handle lightly weighted flies and light sinking leaders and can fish from right on top of the water with a dry or waking fly or swing a wet fly to a depth of about 4'. Skagit heads are short (18'-25'), robust heads designed lift heavy flies or heavy sinking leaders out of the water and deliver them to the fish and can easily fish down to about 9' or 10'. In my opinion it is wise to have both types of heads but no you don't need another reel or spool! Because these lines are attached to a shooting/running line via a loop to loop connection, you can easily change out one line for another in a couple of minutes and, because they are short, they can easily be coiled up with minimal or no twist in the line and put in a shirt pocket.

Surf fishing will depend on the amount of actual "surf" there is or what species you plan on catching. If you are going to go down to a bay or even inside a local breakwater where the surf is minimal to nonexistent, then leave your Switch rod at home. Stick to your Single-Hand rod, a weight forward floating fly line and a clear intermediate leader. If you are chasing corbina or surf perch in the foam and 6" of water, a Single-Hand rod can make precise and gentle presentations. You can't do that with a Switch rod—they hit like a brick! However, if you are in heavy surf and need to get a fly down you might try a Teeny T-300 or T-400 integrated line depending what weight and flex you Switch rod is. Personally, I use a 32' of T11 (level tungsten line that weighs 11 grains per foot—I'll let you do the math) attached to an Intermediate shooting line on my 11' 6-weight Switch Rod. It's a cheap line, sinks like a stone and, with a little practice, you can easily cast 80 or 90 feet with it.

Finally let's think about what line to use for trout fishing with your Switch rod. After some practical experience I have recently come to the conclusion that a full length integrated fly line with a short head is best. Here's why... If you happen to fish the Green River in Utah and step into the river before making your first cast you have made a mistake. Fish in that river are often lying within inches of the bank. Having a line with a short (18' to 24') head length means that you can start casting, loading the rod and fishing at shorter distances. Look at it this way, you have an 11' foot rod and should be using about a 10' leader minimum and that means that your first cast, with NO fly line out, will be 20'. Put out half of the head of your fly line and you are now casting 30'. On the Green River you have just cast beyond and spooked dozens of fish and that's on your first cast!

Another reason for using fully integrated lines for trout fishing is that they will go through the guides more smoothly than a shooting head looped to a shooting line. With bigger fish you would be using stronger tippet so that loop to loop connection bouncing through or hanging in the guides is not an issue other than being annoying. However, if you're using a 3-weight Switch rod swinging soft hackles on 4x or 5x tippet, that connection hanging in the guides could easily mean a broken tippet and lost fish. Lines that I have found to work really well for trout Switch rods are the AirFlo Switch/Streamer line, the Rio Switch Chucker and the Wulff Ambush lines. You should note that the Wulff lines are actually single hand lines (up to 14-weight) but they do list their grain weights and even have some "half-weight" sizes that can be perfectly dialed in to a Switch rod.

One final note about Switch rods is price. Yes, you can spend almost \$1000 for a rod from one of the top of the line manufacturers but, there are some incredibly good rods out there for much less. In fact, I will even go out on a limb and say there are several rods available right now that are equal in performance to the expensive high end rods and many of these cost less than \$300.

I hope this article has given you an insight into the world of Switch rods and how they relate to their longer cousins, Two-Handed rods. They are great fun to fish with once you have figured out how you intend to use them and I'm hoping this will help get you on your way.

# Why Single-Hand Spey? *Maybe Not what You Think...*

I can offer several wonderful reasons why and when one should use a single-hand rod or to use a two-handed rod but the primary reason is simply a matter of application. Fishing a dry to specific fish needs accuracy and delicacy—go single-hand. Repetitive medium to long casts swinging flies—then a two-hander may be your best bet. Fishing to a bonefish on the flats—long quiet presentations with precision; think single-hand. Throwing a lot of weight, needing to get deep or no back cast room—two-handed rods are probably the best way to go.

There are dozens of differing ways to use a single-hand rod. I have mentioned a just few here but have left the use of Spey style casting unmentioned. Unabashedly I will say that I can only think of one reason why I would fish with a single-hand rod all day long using only Spey style casts: *“that I had broken all of my two-handed rods and single-hand was all I had left!”* So, why single-hand Spey? What *if* we morph Spey style casting with a single-hand rod—what are the benefits? They are out there but not necessarily in the way you may think... Here are some of my thoughts:

- ❖ Single-hand Spey shows its value while casting dry flies allowing you to make quick changes of direction then add a few false casts to gently and accurately present your fly to rising fish.
- ❖ Casting streamers in tight quarters where you need to pull heavy sinking leaders or flies from the depths and deliver them to the river bank.
- ❖ Swinging soft-hackled flies while going from downstream dangle to re-presenting out into the current in a single, safe move.
- ❖ Casting from beneath a canopy of trees in current and your line starting in a downstream position.
- ❖ Making casts with minimal back cast (this doesn't work well for dry fly fishing; you can't false cast to dry the fly and it will constantly be sinking regardless of the floatant you use!).

One thing that anyone should look into when planning to spend a lot of time using Spey style casts is the rod that you will be using. Since **ALL** Spey style casts finish with a Roll Cast, your rod flex needs to make you Roll Cast better! Be forewarned, fast actioned rods do not Roll Cast well—period. They require perfect timing so over-lining a fast rod is imperative for good results. A Medium or Medium-Fast actioned rod is, in my opinion, a better choice.

Fly line design is also crucial and a good line for Roll Casting is one with a longer front head (35'–45') and a long “thick to thin” taper towards the front (15'–20'). As your line rolls across the surface it loses energy, one that decreases in diameter and weight from back to front has less mass to turn over and are more efficient. Lines designed for beginning fly casters that actually increase in diameter from back to the front of the line are not. They are meant to *KICK* over an aerialized line on a less than perfect effort but will stall when Roll Casting due to the increasing diameter and weight. I used to think double taper lines Roll Cast well but have found the opposite true. Their continuous level diameter is a liability which also causes the line to stall. One of my favorite fishing lines, the Rio Gold, is actually a poor Roll Caster for the same reason—a too long level belly section and a very short (6') front taper. The Rio Grand—a classic beginner's line—is even worse. Be sure to look at the manufacturer's taper diagrams before you buy a line for Roll Casting! One Rio fly line that does Roll Cast very well is their Single-Hand Spey line. It's very nice for Spey casting but a very short back taper means its not as delicate overhead casting while combining both techniques—I would term it *“clunky”*. Another good line for this from Rio is their Trout LT (Light Touch) and while a bit on the light side it still Roll Casts nicely. Sadly, the Rio LT looks like it's on the way out of the Rio lineup.

My current favorite *“all around”* lines are the AirFlo Sixth Sense and its “Ridge” line counterparts the AirFlo River & Stream and their new Stillwater. All utilize the classic AirFlo Delta taper—same as their classic Spey line—they Roll Cast like a dream and are great overhead line as well. The AirFlo 40+ is another excellent line for single-hand Spey casting but is about one-half size heavy and a too short back taper for delicate overhead and dry fly casting. Another line that Roll Casts and overhead casts very well is that old Wulff Triangle taper. The Wulff Ambush line Roll Casts well but beware, it is very heavy for its given line weight (185 gr. for a 4 wt.—a standard AFFTA 4 wt. is 120 gr.—185 gr. is actually a 7 wt.—yikes!). The Scientific Anglers VPT also does a great job of Roll Casting but sadly, it's been canned from their lineup... Finally, there are some excellent short Skagit heads that are intended for single-hand and switch rods that are great for fishing with heavy sink tips and streamers. In particular, check out the AirFlo Scout.

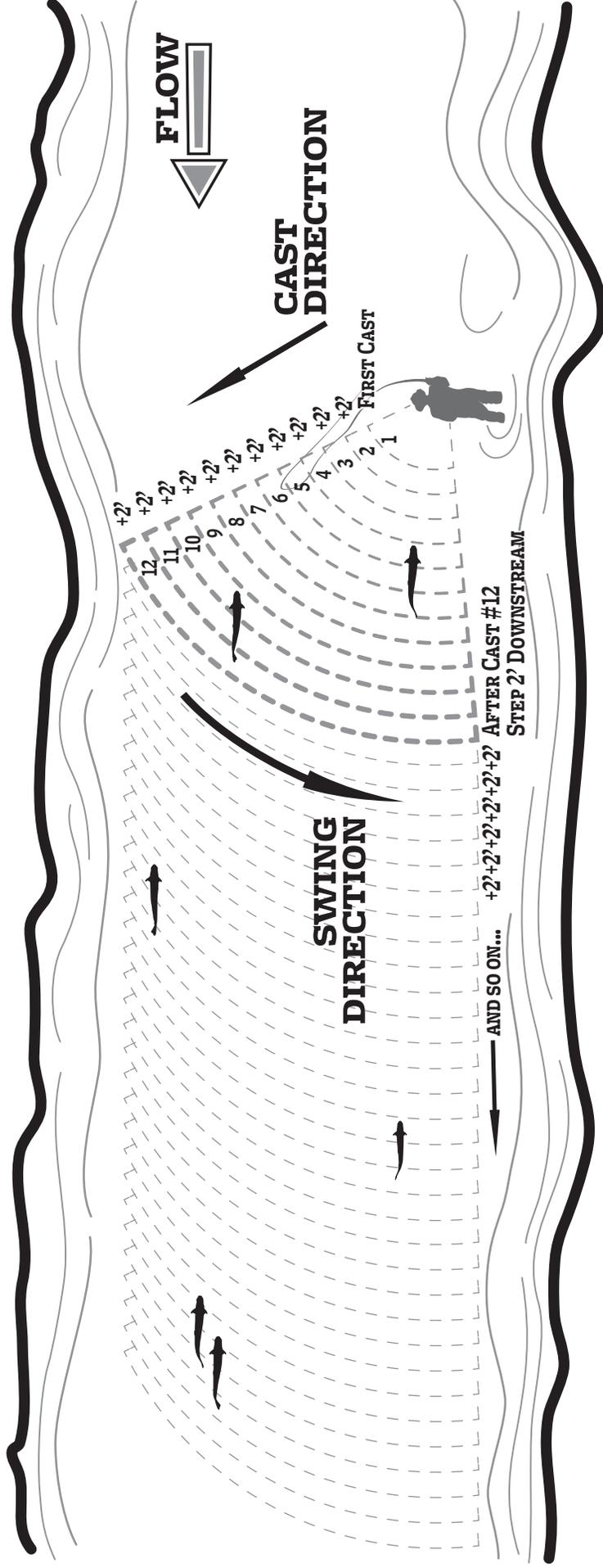
## **GENERAL ROD & LINE RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- ❖ If you are planning on using Spey style casts while fishing a dry fly, use your normal dry fly outfit and line—usually a 9' rod for a 4, 5 or 6 weight line. A medium-fast action rod is, to my way of thinking, ideal and matches well with lines that Roll Cast well.
- ❖ If you plan to be throwing regular fly lines with sinking leaders/tips consider using one line weight more than normal. The extra weight helps to load the rod more and pull the sinking component from the water.
- ❖ If you want to fish with a heavy sinking tip integrated fly lines don't bother—it doesn't work! These lines are essentially level throughout their length and there is not enough mass in the floating back end to pull the sinking part out of the water or Roll Cast.
- ❖ Going to fish a nymph with a single fly rig use one line weight heavier. Fishing nymphs with a multiple fly rig use one line weight heavier and practice **a lot** before you go so you can be smooth or you will certainly be untangling your rig all day long! Not sure how practical this one is!
- ❖ There are several short Skagit heads designed for single-hand rods to deliver heavy sinking tips and fish streamers. Some are what I claim as “stupid short” and poor performers but, the AirFlo Scout is superior to all of them with a slightly longer length and excellent casting and flight qualities. These lines are all just heads and require that a running line be attached between the head and your backing.

I hope this gives you a good starting point as you step out and try single-hand Spey casting. Setting up the right outfit and learning proper techniques can absolutely improve your casting and fishing success. Remember, the **ONLY** way you will master all of this is to get out and practice.

# SWINGING A SPEY CAST

## A BASIC APPROACH TO EASILY COVER AN ENTIRE RUN FISHING SINGLE-HANDED OR TWO-HANDED ROD



### HOW TO COVER A RUN:

1. Before entering the river assess the wind conditions so that you know which casts you will be using once in the water (Double Spey or Snake Roll for Downstream wind and Snap C (or T) or Single Spey for Upstream wind). Now, safely wade into the river and set yourself in a good solid position that will allow you to make those casts comfortably and safely. Read the water to determine potential holding areas but, don't overlook a potential holding spot for a fish just because it is close to you.
2. Make your first cast using only enough line to create that cast (no extra off the reel), mend if necessary and retrieve the fly by stripping it in a few feet. This is very important as many times the fish will follow and only strike if your fly appears to try to escape.
3. Pull 2 feet of line off the reel and repeat Step 2. Continue to cast an additional 2 feet of line on each successive cast. As the casts become longer and longer or if the water that you are presenting your fly through looks "fishier", consider making two, three or more casts at that same distance to make sure that you have covered that portion of the river thoroughly.
4. For the scenario described above we will assume that Cast #12 is longest cast you can make and still be able to properly fish the run. For your next cast, carefully step 2 feet Downstream (one shoulder width step) making sure that you have a stable and comfortable position to cast from. Repeat the same distance cast made in Cast #12 as many times as necessary (one to four times usually) to fish that water. Then, take an additional 2 foot step Downstream and repeat the cast and continue doing this for the rest of the run.