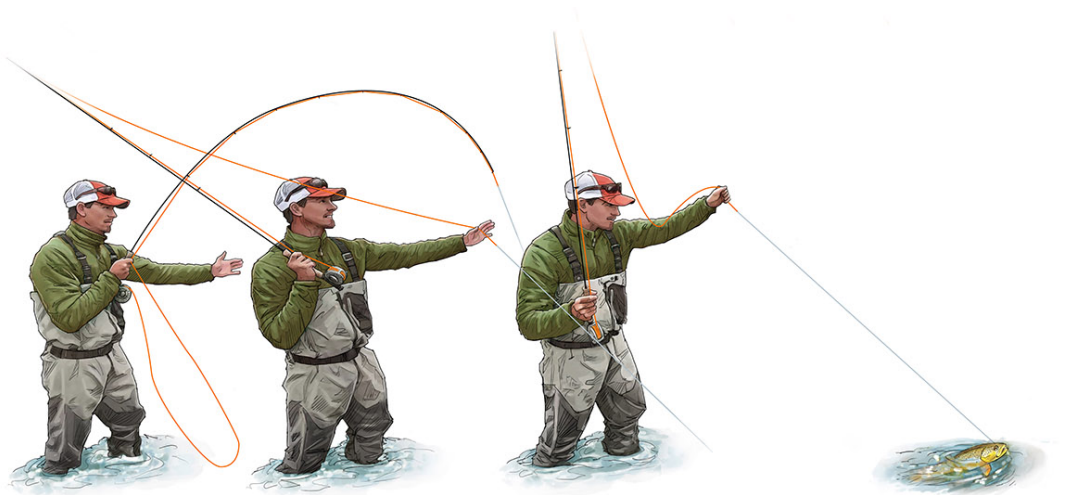


The Slip-and-Grab Fish Landing Technique



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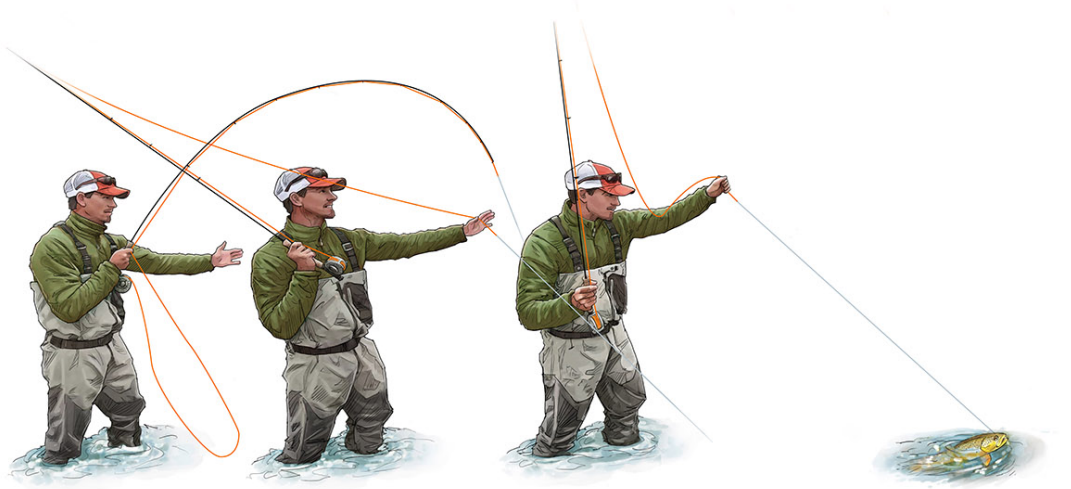
By Ross Purnell, Editor

We've all been there . . . you have the best trout of the day hooked up, but you don't have a net. Maybe it's in your drift boat, maybe your buddy took it upriver, or maybe you just don't own one. (Nets are easy to handle in a boat, but they are a major hassle if you've got any amount of hiking and bush-whacking to do.)

In any event, you are by yourself, you've got a big trout but no net, so how do you land the fish?

First, don't consider "beaching" the fish in a shallow rocky or sandy area. It works sometimes in the right water with the right fisherman, but in general, it's extremely hard on fish as they thrash in the shallow water, often knocking their heads.

The goal should be to bring the fish close in slower, knee-deep water and grab the trout or steelhead by the tail or gently under the belly. To lever the trout close, however, too many people raise the rod high overhead, or even pull the rod backward over their shoulder to bring the fish close enough to grab. This rod position makes me shudder whenever I see it, as even a moderate amount of tension at a bad rod angle has snapped thousands of rods.



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To land a large fish, don't drag it onto a rocky beach, and don't raise the rod high into the "danger zone" (as shown here) while under pressure. Thousands of rods break this way. Grace Smith photo

When I fished in Alaska in August and September 2014 at Big Ku Lodge and at Royal Wolf Lodge, I quickly learned how to land large trout safely—without beaching them and without breaking the rod—as the lodges' owner Chris Branham does not allow his guests or guides to use nets. He feels that nets are hard on the fish as they remove protective slime.

I call the technique the slip and grab, and once you've got it mastered, you'll find it's a quick and easy way to bring big trout to hand.

1) Once you've got the trout exhausted and about a rod-length away from you, you'll need to pinch the line under the index finger of your rod hand and strip about 10 feet of slack line from the reel. (I know, you just reeled that line on there while fighting the fish, but you'll need this slack to save the rod and land that fish.)

Photo Gallery

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2) Quickly raise the rod high to the "breaking position" but you won't break your rod because you'll instead allow the slack line to slip under your index finger, taking all the pressure off the rod tip. The quick combination of pulling the rod high and slipping the line will cause the tip of the fly line or the leader butt to slap you in the chest.

3) Grab the line or leader with your opposite hand and carefully hand-line the fish toward you until you can tail it or support it under the belly to remove the fly.

When you've got the trophy of the day hooked up, it takes some courage to let that slack line slip through your fingers and take the bend out of your rod, but I did this on hundreds of large trout in a two-week period, using exclusively barbless hooks, and I didn't lose a single fish during the slip-and-grab process.

I lost many trout of course, and quite a few right at the end when I was hand-lining the trout, but I never broke a rod, and the trout were released with as little harm as possible.

Thanks to Ryan Davey of [Primal Angler](#) for shooting this short video on an extremely remote Alaskan trout stream.



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