

WINNING THE BATTLE WITH WIND

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Battling the Wind

When I first started saltwater fly fishing, I dreaded wind and the mayhem it would cause. My line got blown off the deck, it got caught on my reel or my arm, and when I attempted to shoot it I was lucky if the fish was downwind so I could reach it. Wind would make it almost impossible to function; it didn't really allow me any enjoyment in my fishing, and then there was the abuse from intolerant guides. Many years later, after finding patient teachers, some of whom were guides or champion casters, and then after hundreds of hours of on-the-water experience, there are few windy situations I can't overcome with common sense and technique. The first problem to eliminate is tangles or blown line. If you're wading, a stripping basket helps shelter the line from the wind so you don't have to carry loops in-hand. If you're on the bow of a flats skiff, I recommend keeping the line in the cockpit, not on the deck. Some skiffs do have a vertical lip on the edge of the casting platform to prevent line from blowing out of the boat, but that won't prevent the wind from tangling the line or causing it to slide under your foot. Poling after flats species or motoring after schools of breaking fish sometimes lets the operator turn the boat in a favorable angle in relation to the wind for the caster. But sometimes fish just appear, not permitting you to do this; often they are going away and only give you one shot, and that shot is often at a bad angle. I'd like to discuss remedies for winds from all four quadrants. And then I'll discuss tackle choices that will help you get your fly where you want it to be.

1 into the Wind

First, a headwind is difficult because it reduces casting distance. The initial thing to optimize is the tightness of the loop on your forward cast. The rod arc and the way you stop the rod determine loop size. When you're trying to optimize distance with a floating line, a loop of two to three feet between the top and bottom of the line's "legs" is the object. The rod arc is the change in angle of the rod butt between the forward and back rod stops. This determines how much rotation there is at the rod tip. If there's too much angle, the loop will be too big, but, if the angle's too small, a tailing loop will be produced. When you cast into an appreciable wind, aim low into the wind on the forward cast and throw your backcast high. This way the wind won't catch the underside of the loop and stall it on the forward cast. As noted, you can use the wind to your advantage if you're using a floating line by using a larger loop downwind (i.e., on your backcast) and letting the wind carry it like a sail. This isn't as significant with thinner and less-wind-resistant high-density sinking lines. For floating lines, you will need to increase your line speed to overcome the wind's influence. To do this, you will need to increase your stroke speed and hauling speed, but, using more speed can lead to a fault known as a tailing loop unless you also increase your stroke length. So, if you see your casting loop look like a sideways "s," instead of a sideways "u", increase the distance between your backward rod stop and your forward rod stop, and remember to accelerate the rod smoothly.

2 Casting down Wind

Casting downwind is a mixed blessing. Wind assists your forward cast but it also slows down your backcast. In this case, aim your backcast low and your forward cast high. If you're using a high-density line just make the tightest loops you can in both directions.

3 Wind From Your Casting-arm side

The next direction I'd like to discuss is wind coming from the same side as your casting shoulder. Any side-wind presents a challenge to accuracy, so you'll have to compensate by aiming a little in the upwind direction. The main issues here are fly collision and personal safety. If the wind is not blowing too hard, use more of a sidearm cast. This separates you from the fly by nearly the length of the rod. Also, the closer the fly travels above the water (which a sidearm cast facilitates) the less likely it is to hit you. If the wind is really strong, blowing maybe 15-plus mph, you can use an off-shoulder cast, which puts the path of the line, leader, and fly downwind of your body parts. With a straight wrist, this puts your rod-tip well outside the opposite

shoulder. If the wind

is really howling on your casting side, you'll get better distance by turning your back on the wind and presenting with your backcast rather than by using an off-shoulder cast but for most, presenting with the backcast is not as accurate as the off-shoulder cast. In the northeast us, the backcast-presentation cast is called the barnegat bay cast, after the NJ bay of the same name, where the predominant wind along the shore is on the casting side of righties.

4 Wind From Your line-hand side


Lastly, there is the problem of wind that blows toward your line hand. In this case, cast normally but bear in mind the issue of losing accuracy because of drift. Here, it would be a side wind left or right, depending on which whether you are a righty or a lefty. Compensate by aiming proportionately upwind and you should be on target. Once you've learned to make these casts and know when to use them, also be prepared to make the best tackle choices to help you beat the wind.

5 Tackle

When it's windy, i like to use stiffer-action rods to help keep my loops as tight as possible. That does mean owning medium- stiff and very-stiff rods in the same weight. softer rods are usually lighter in physical weight. The super-stiff rods are usually moderately heavier, and, of course, those outfits are harder to hold all day. but would you rather cast a seven-weight or a 10-weight in the wind? The important thing is not to just put a heavier line on your standard outfit, because if it's mismatched, you won't be able cast a tight loop with it and carry as much line. When I have the choice, i'll also use an intermediate line instead of a floating line because the intermediate has a thinner diameter and less resistance. you might even select less-wind-resistant flies on windy days to make life easier. I've had some of my most memorable days fishing stripers, bones, and permit in high winds since they couldn't see me, or the boat, as easily. bottom line: don't let a little wind get in your way.

By

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