The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School

Warm Waters Program Overview

Youth Fly Fishing Curriculum - Ages 6-17 - Inspired by the Methods of Joe Humphreys

"The secret of life is having something exciting to look forward to. And fly fishing is that - you're going fishing."

- Joe Humphreys

Program Overview

"The basic fundamentals, refined to perfection, are your most advanced techniques."

- Bill Koll, National Champion • Coaching philosophy passed to Joe Humphreys

About This Program

The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School - Warm Waters Edition brings Joe Humphreys' philosophy, mentorship model, and 90 years of wisdom to youth across the country who live near bass ponds, farm lakes, warm rivers, and urban waterways rather than cold trout streams.

Designed for states where trout water is limited or unavailable, the Warm Waters Edition covers three species tiers - panfish, bass, and carp - progressing from the most beginner-friendly fish on the planet to one of the most challenging. The curriculum can run independently or alongside the Trout Edition at the same camp.

Everything that makes The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School work - Joe's stories, the Look Up philosophy, the conservation ethic, the George Harvey legacy, Bill Koll's coaching philosophy - carries unchanged into warm water. Because those things were never really about trout. They were always about learning to pay attention.

Joe Humphreys - The Man Behind Both Programs

Joe Humphreys is 97 years old and was still teaching fifth graders the week before this program guide was written. He has taught youth fishing for approximately 30 consecutive years. When he is asked about his greatest legacy, he does not mention the Pennsylvania fly-caught record brown trout he holds, or the 36,000 students George Harvey taught and the thousands more Joe has reached. He talks about the kids.

Adrian - A Six-Year-Old's Lesson

Joe was on the stream with a group of fifth graders. A first-grade boy named Adrian had joined the class with his father. After the casting session, Adrian told Joe exactly what he would need to do to catch a fish: use a Woolly Bugger, fish it down and across, fish it slow.

Joe went to the stream with all the children behind him. He missed a fish. He told the children he would fish on through, then come back for it.

He came back. He was about to make the cast. Adrian reached up and grabbed his hand.

"This time, set the hook."

“Here’s a six-year-old, a first grader, telling the old man: this time, set the hook,” Joe says. “I never forgot that. I thought that was so clever, so humorous.”

This is why the program exists. Children see things clearly. The job of an instructor is to put them somewhere they can see.

The Warm Water Thread - Joe’s Father and the Susquehanna Bass

Joe Humphreys grew up catching trout on Spring Creek. But the first fisherman in his family cast into warm water.

Joe’s father grew up on a farm in Curwensville, Pennsylvania. When heavy rains made fieldwork impossible, he would cut a long bamboo rod, string it, put a grasshopper on the hook, and walk to the bridge over the West Branch of the Susquehanna. There were schools of bass and other fish. He caught two or three bass on grasshoppers. That was the only fishing he ever did - until his son handed him a fly rod on Spring Creek, and Joe’s father became addicted too.

Every angler comes from somewhere. Some come from trout streams. Some come from warm water bridges with grasshoppers. The Joe Humphreys’ Fly Fishing Stream School Warm Waters Edition honors both origins - and Joe Humphreys carries both in his blood.

The Boy with the Broken Leader

Joe first met George Harvey - the man who would shape his entire career - as a boy on the Sawmill Stretch of Spring Creek. His fly had come apart and he couldn’t fix it. A stranger pointed upstream: “That gentleman up there - that’s George Harvey. He might help you.”

George was in the middle of a sulfur hatch. Catching fish after fish. He stopped. Fixed the fly. Sent the boy back to the stream.

Later, when George had retired from Penn State and spent a full year preparing Joe to take over his program - fishing together day and night - Joe understood what that small act of generosity had set in motion. George Harvey had taught 36,000 students at Penn State. Joe extended that legacy for 19 years, turning away over 100 students per section because the classes were so oversubscribed.

That is the program. A more experienced angler stopping, turning to a younger one, and saying: let me show you. It works for trout. It works for bass. It works for carp.

How the Penn State Program Began - And What It Means for This One

The Penn State fly fishing tradition - now named the Joe Humphreys Fly Fishing Program - began in the 1930s when George Harvey met the Dean of Agriculture on the first day of trout season. He showed him his catch. The Dean asked to learn. Harvey taught him to tie flies on a bank of Spring Creek, and the first class was born.

Joe took over from Harvey in 1970. At his peak, he was running five oversubscribed sections and still making room for seniors who had waited four years to get in. He secured $23,000 in grants from Alcoa and Exxon to keep the program alive. He later brought in George Daniel, a future world-champion angler, and mentored him starting at age 16 in his own backyard.

An anonymous donor has contributed a quarter of a million dollars to endow the program in perpetuity - ensuring that Joe’s approach to teaching fly fishing will continue long after any single generation.

The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School - Warm Waters Edition is built on that same belief. The knowledge must be passed down. The cast matters less than the moment of transmission.

The Look Up Philosophy

"Look up. Live the moment. The fish will still be there. The heron landing on that rock - that moment will not."

- Joe Humphreys

The Look Up moment is the philosophical core of The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School - both editions. At some point during every session, every day of camp, every clinic, instructors ask students to put down their rods and simply observe. What does the water tell you? What is moving? What bird just landed? What did the wind just do?

Joe spent 90 years learning that the moments he remembers most are not the fish he caught - they are what he noticed on the way to catching them. A farm pond in Alabama offers exactly as much to observe as Spring Creek in Pennsylvania. The Look Up moment is not about trout. It is about attention.

Bill Koll's Coaching Philosophy - The Curriculum's Spine

When Joe arrived at Penn State, he spent two years as an assistant wrestling coach under Bill Koll - a man who had wrestled for Iowa State Teachers College with a record of 72 wins and 0 defeats, never taken down, never ridden for a minute, a three-time national champion.

Koll's coaching philosophy became Joe's teaching philosophy, for wrestling and for fly fishing:

"The basic fundamentals, refined to perfection, are your most advanced techniques."

In fly fishing, this means: the cast that catches the most fish is not a complicated one. It is a short, tight loop, executed with precision. In warm water fishing, it means: the cast that catches a tailing carp is the same simple cast - applied with absolute focus. Every tier of the Warm Waters curriculum returns to this principle.

The Three Species Tiers

The Warm Waters Edition progresses through three species, each building on the previous tier. The ages below are recommended entry points, not age locks - a 9-year-old who is ready fishes for bass. The natural arc from panfish to bass to carp mirrors the progression from first contact to mastery that Joe teaches in every context. Rods: ages 6-10 fish the same 3-4 wt loaner kits as the Trout track; older tiers use 5-6 wt loaners. Spacing on every bank and dock: two rod lengths between casters.

Safety and staffing, every format: PFDs required for all Minnow-tier students (ages 6-10) and any non-swimmer whenever they are in or beside the water, on docks, banks over deep water, or in boats. Eye protection on every student. 1 instructor per 5 students, never exceeded; minimum two cleared adults on site at every session; Youth Helpers never count toward the ratio.

TIER 1 • PANFISH

Ages: 6-10 (all beginners)

Species: Bluegill, sunfish, crappie

Where: Farm ponds, urban lakes, dock fishing, reservoirs, quiet backwaters

Key flies: Woolly Bugger #10-12, Elk Hair Caddis #12, Foam Beetle #10

Why it works: Panfish are almost impossible not to catch. Every beginner needs a first fish - the one that changes everything. Panfish provide it reliably, repeatedly, and joyfully. They build the muscle memory and the love of the sport before technique demands become serious.

TIER 2 • BASS

Ages: 11-13 (intermediate)

Species: Largemouth bass, smallmouth bass

Where: Rivers, reservoirs, lily pad flats, rocky banks, dock structure, wood cover

Key flies: Poppers #4-6, Clouser Minnow #2-6, Crawfish patterns #4, Woolly Bugger #4

The predator mindset: Bass require you to think like a hunter - reading structure, understanding cover, placing the fly where a fish is holding rather than where the water looks pretty. This is Joe's 'read the water' lesson translated into warm water terms.

TIER 3 • CARP (optional advanced target)

Ages: 14-17 (advanced)

Species: Common carp (fly rod, sight fishing)

Where: Warm rivers, tailwaters, shallow gravel flats, urban lakes - spot-and-stalk

Key flies: San Juan Worm #8-10, Backstabber #6-8, Carp Clouser #6, Crayfish patterns #6

An optional advanced target, and the most demanding sight fishing most anglers will meet. Carp require extreme patience, precise presentation, and the ability to read a fish's body language from 30 feet away. Bill Koll's quote is never more true than on a carp flat: the cast that catches is the simplest cast, executed with absolute precision.

Conservation - The Same Story, Every Water

The Spring Creek conservation narrative that anchors the Trout Edition carries directly into the Warm Waters Edition. Joe and a handful of friends formed the Spring Creek chapter of Trout Unlimited, borrowed a jackhammer, broke through a concrete dam, and with a donated pipe diverted the Thompson Spring around a polluted duck pond - saving the cold water that fed Spring Creek. The fish came back. The Green Drake hatch returned.

That fight is happening on every waterway in America. Farm ponds silted by erosion. Urban lakes choked by storm runoff. River corridors paved into housing developments. The fish change. The threat does not.

The Bio-Indicator Parallel

In cold water, the presence of brook trout tells you the stream is healthy. In warm water, damselfly nymphs, dragonfly nymphs, and midge larvae tell the story in ponds and lakes, and

hellgrammites (dobsonfly larvae) in rivers: the sensitive ones cannot survive in degraded, low-oxygen water, and midges and leeches take over when the water goes bad. Stoneflies are cold-water bugs; do not expect them in a pond. Their presence is a report card. Every Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School session begins with a bio-indicator survey: students turn over rocks, record what they find, and make a judgment about the health of the water before they ever cast.

Program Formats

The Warm Waters Edition runs in its own four formats and may be offered independently, paired with the Trout Edition, or run as a full dual-track camp.

Format	Duration	Species Focus	Best For
1-Hour Clinic	1 hour	Panfish introduction	School events, community outreach, first exposure
Weekend Retreat	2 days	Panfish + Bass	Scouting groups, church camps, summer programs
5-Day Summer Camp	5 days	All three species tiers (panfish → bass → carp)	Full curriculum arc, dedicated fly fishing camps
School & Classroom Integration	10-15 sessions (in development)	Panfish + Bass	PE, science, after-school programs

Harvey Leader training is shared with the Trout Edition and is not a student format.

What Stays the Same

Instructors trained in the Trout Edition will find the Warm Waters Edition immediately familiar. The session structure, the Look Up ritual, the conservation discussion, the Joe Humphreys stories, and the instructor philosophy are shared across both editions.

Joe Humphreys' biography and mentorship narrative - identical in both editions

The Look Up ritual - required in every session, both editions

The Spring Creek conservation story - anchor for both editions

The George Harvey mentorship arc - central to both editions

Bill Koll's coaching philosophy - the pedagogical spine of both editions

The Adrian 'set the hook' story - used in the youth engagement section of both

All 28 Joe Humphreys video scripts (22 Trout Track, 6 Warm Waters) - applicable to both editions

Project Healing Waters / therapeutic value content - shared