

Valley Angler

Got Your License Mister?

By Bill Thompson

No doubt that the hottest selling item at the North Country Angler, outside of free advice, is a New Hampshire fishing license. There are not many places in the Valley that sell fishing licenses anymore. I would guess that not too long ago there were dozens of places where you could get a hunting and fishing license. I think that there are only four places presently in the valley that sell them. There is probably good reason for this. A retailer doesn't make much on a license; just a dollar and you have to go through a lot of red tape to be a dealer. The biggest drawback is the time it takes to fill one out. Time is money and the time spent filling out licenses is time spent with little return. Of course selling fishing licenses is something that goes with the territory if you own a fly shop.

The up side to selling licenses is that you do get to meet a lot of nice people. On a busy day you can go through a book of licenses (25 licenses) before you know it. The biggest day for license sales is Monday. As you might guess we sell more non-resident licenses than resident. Monday seems to be the day when those visiting the valley begin to get their act together. They have checked into the motel the night before had dinner out and now are ready to settle down and have some fun and to a lot of them that means go fishing. The most asked question is how much for how long. I go home some times repeating over and over in my mind, "one day for fifteen dollars, three days for twenty-eight and seven days for thirty-five". I don't think that we have ever had a year where we have sold licenses to residents from all fifty states, but we must come close. We have sold licenses to people from as far away as Hawaii and California. We also have a lot of visitors from foreign countries. Most come from Canada and Great Britain, the most unusual was a gentleman from Russia last year.

The most common complaint comes from non-residents that own property in New Hampshire. They pretty much all say the same thing, "I pay property taxes here I should be able to get a resident license". We usually quote the original owner of the shop, Dick Surette, "You can only vote in one state and you can only get a resident fishing license in one state, he always used to say. Sometimes they ramble on a bit, but we are used to it so we turn a deaf ear and keep writing.

When filling out a license you are required to ask a few personal questions: color of hair, age and how much do you weigh. For some reason or another these questions always seem to bring out the humorist in most people. When it comes to the ladies I just let them fill in the boxes themselves. Janet once had a kid with orange and green hair. I have often wondered if anybody at Fish & Game ever read that. I just fill out the box marked sex myself without asking. I got tired of hearing, "often". You are required to put the person's driver's license on the form. This came about after "911". I was told that by filling in the driver's license number we are helping to fight the war on terrorism. I am not sure if this is true, but it makes a good story. I think the real reason is that they have proof positive of state of residence.

If you are a New Hampshire resident you can get a free hunting and fishing license when you turn 68. It is amazing how many people come in to get one that has never had a fishing license in their life. I always get a kick out of it when I give one out to some guy that was unaware of the law. There is something about getting something for nothing that makes your day.

Occasionally we will have someone that thinks that they are above the law. We will quote them the price of a license and they balk at the thought of shelling out a few dollars to go fishing. They will generally ask what the penalty is for not having one. I honestly don't know the answer, but I do know that they can seize your gear. Every so often one of these guys will decide to risk it and will leave without a license. I guess it isn't my problem, but I always take it kinda personal and do a slow burn. This is bad enough, but occasionally we will have a local that will brag about never having a license in all the years that they have been fishing. You can bet my face turns red when I hear this. Thirty-five bucks is a small price to pay for all the entertainment that a fishing license will buy you in a season. Consider how much you pay to enjoy a movie these days.

I must admit that the chances of getting caught are slim. Most people I know and myself included have rarely if ever been asked to show their license. In fact I have been asked only once in over twenty-five years of fishing in New Hampshire. I was guiding and even though I knew I had my license I had forgotten to ask my client if they had theirs. Fortunately Janet had and they did indeed have one. A few years ago I was at First Bridge with my son. We had just finished an evening of fishing the river and were setting on the tail gate of my truck taking our waders off. There was a Fish and Game Officer there checking licenses of the two or three other fishermen that were doing the same thing we were. My son had just turned 16 and had just purchased his first fishing license with his own money. The officer checked everyone in the parking lot and then got in his truck and began to drive out. When he drove by us both Andy and I had our licenses in hand waiting to be checked. The officer simply drove on by and gave us a wave. I know that Andy was very disappointed.

Last year there was a fellow that came into the shop asking to purchase a license. It seems that he had just been stopped by a Fish & Game officer and did not have a license. The desk clerk at the hotel that he was staying at had told him that it was OK to fish the Saco without one. The officer was a good guy and cut him some slack. He told him to come up to us and get one and then leave it with the hotel clerk and he would follow up the next day. The guy asked me what the penalty was? I told him that there was a fine and that he could lose his tackle. The guy said he didn't much mind losing his rod do to the fact that it was his kid's Snoopy outfit.

There does seem to be a general lack of knowledge about fishing licenses. This past week I had two calls from the Chamber of Commerce information booths, both North Conway and Conway. Neither one of the people manning the booths knew where one could get a fishing license in town. One of the guys who had asked showed up at the shop and expressed his disbelief that a local information booth in an area with such great

fishing would not know where to get a license. I told him that I couldn't agree more.

Last night as I was driving home I spotted our local Conservation Officer by First Bridge. He was busily writing out a ticket to some guy. So the next time someone in a green uniform comes out of the bushes behind you and asks, "Got your license mister?" you best be ready.

See you on the river