

Valley Angler

The End of the World as we know it

by Bill Thompson

Lately, it would seem that there has not been a lot of good news coming our way. The economic news has been depressing to say the least. Aside from the disasters in the banking world and the auto industry not many industries have managed to go unscathed. The fly fishing world has been no exception and the industry has taken its lumps in the last few months.

As you might expect the rod manufacturers have been hit hard. Sage and Orvis have been forced lay off workers in their rod building shops. Let's face just about the last thing you need to purchase in a recession is an eight hundred dollar fly rod. Even the import companies are feeling the heat. Companies that once demanded large yearly orders to maintain a dealer ship are begging small shops to take on their lines at greatly reduced entry fees. I spoke sales rep from a reel company the other day who was promoting a new reel. When I asked who much it was to open a dealership he said it was normally a thousand dollars, but at present they would only ask that you buy three reels.

A lot of companies are making major changes to their marketing strategies as well. One of the most shocking renovations announced a few weeks ago was that the Sage rod company would market a rod exclusively for Cabalas. Any shop that has been one of their dealers for any length of time and has maintained the inventories that Sage has required over that time period must be mortified. In my opinion the company sold out their dealers and sold their sole to Cabalas.

In another attempt to keep afloat, in a volatile market, the venerable Mustad Company, perhaps the largest manufacturer of fishing hooks in the world just announced that they were discontinuing their entire line of classic fly tying hooks. Fly tiers will no longer be able to get such old favorites as 94840 dry fly hooks or 9575 streamer hooks and many more standards. For generations all fly tying recipes began with, "Hook: Mustad 9480 or other dry fly hook". If this were not enough the Mustad Company, which has been making hooks in Norway for generations, has started to outsource their manufacturing to Asia. New packages of Mustad hooks are now labeled with the statement that there hooks are made in one or more of the following countries: Norway, China, Singapore, or the Philippines. As you might have guessed quality has declined.

I guess you can't blame them too much. For several years Mustad has faced strong competition from Japanese hook makers. The Japanese hooks are superior; however, they come with a higher price. Mustad countered and came out with their own high quality hooks at a similar price point. This seems to be where the market is going, at least Mustad thinks so, and may well be the reason that the lower priced hooks are being discontinued. The other reason may be is that the Chinese have entered the market with hooks priced at about the same or lower than the Mustad classics. Whatever the reason it may be wise to stock up on your favorite Mustad hooks before it is too late.

Lang's Auction House has also made some drastic changes. For many years Lang's has been the premier auction house for antique tackle collectors. In the past they have always held a spring and a fall auction in Boxborough, Massachusetts. These were three day events; two days for the cataloged live auction and an evening live discovery auction. In addition there was a flea market of fishing collectibles that ran throughout the auction. The event was a major draw for the high rollers of the

antique tackle collectors' world; all of the big names were in attendance. This spring the auction will be run entirely on the Internet. With the exception of the discovery auction there will be no live auction and no preview. The beautiful auction catalogs that Lang's were famous for, and very collectible in their own right, are also a thing of the past. You will have to rely upon the Internet pictures of the items to be auctioned. I understand that there will be a printable version, although a poor substitute for the real thing. I can't imagine bidding on a two thousand dollar bamboo rod with being able to hold it in my hands before buying. One more reason to hate the Internet.

The flea market will also be discontinued. I must admit that it's been years since I have purchased anything at the live auction. However, I almost always found something at the flea market in my budget.

The real sad thing about all this is the loss of the comradeship that was so much a part of the event. Although not a real part of this group it was so much fun to listen in on the conversations and be able to talk to the various vendors. There was so much to learn from these people.

It is a good bet that there will be a lot of other changes as we muddle our way through the next couple of years. I don't know about you, but I need to go fishing soon.

See you on the river.