

The Healing Powers of Fly Fishing



Photo | Kyle Johnson

MOST FLY FISHERMAN readers are already familiar with the outstanding charitable organizations Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing and Casting for Recovery (CfR). One uses fly fishing to assist in the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled veterans and active military personnel. The other uses fly fishing to provide physical and emotional therapy for breast cancer survivors.

They were two great organizations operating in parallel but separate universes until both groups recognized that there were disabled veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or from physical disabilities such as amputation, and also have been diagnosed with breast cancer.

Recognizing an opportunity to serve disabled veterans who are fighting battles on two fronts, the groups have developed a fly-fishing retreat for 14 women that will take place at Harman's Luxury Cabins in West Virginia, April 21-23, on the headwaters of the Potomac River. According to CfR executive director Whitney Milhoan, the participants will spend the weekend supporting each other, gaining valuable knowledge to help them move forward, and finding relief in the therapeutic benefits of fly fishing.

"There's always a deep bonding that goes on between the women at our fly-fishing retreats," says Milhoan. "But I anticipate that these women will help each other and bond with each other at a much deeper level because of their similar military backgrounds, and because of what they are going through with breast cancer. They have two shared experiences."

Milhoan says that after the over-stimulation of military service, and during their lengthy breast cancer rehabilitation, many of these veterans feel an empty loneliness.

"My hope, and my anticipation is that sharing time on the water with these other veterans, and hooking a trout on a beautiful mountain stream will fill a void for many of these women. Fly fishing can be a beautiful catalyst for healing."

I don't often use this column to ask for donations, but at the same time I don't often come across a cause that impacts us in so many meaningful ways. We all have loved ones who have been diagnosed with breast cancer, and we all owe a debt of gratitude to our veterans, especially those that have been disabled in the course of their service. Let's get them together for a weekend away from their troubles, in a place where they are safe and can share their experiences. Let's get them fly fishing.

The weekend event is free for the women who attend, and Harman's Luxury Cabins (wvlogcabins.com) is donating all the accommodations for 14 female veterans and the nine staff members who will assist them, but these ladies need the support of the fly-fishing community to make it happen. A donation of \$20 provides all of the flies needed for one woman's retreat, \$50 sponsors meals for one woman for one day, \$100 provides fly fishing gear and equipment for one woman, and \$500 pays for the medical education and emotional support resources for one woman. To help sponsor these veterans and breast cancer survivors, visit donate.castingforrecovery.org. In the comments section, specify that you'd like your donation to be used exclusively for the veteran's retreat April 21-23, 2017. 🐟

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