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Salmon & Steelhead Backup Gear

Knowing what to backup will keep you in the fish and weight off your back

Timothy Kuserets

Three-fourths of the way to the water and you think about the last fishing trip. You got a great phone call on your cell and you found out that you just got a promotion, but you had to leave the water to get to the office to seal the deal. You were so happy about the good news that you decide to share the good fortune by sharing the last of your Slinkies and you give them to the other anglers. Now that everything is going great, you're heading back to the river to hookup with some steelhead and salmon when it suddenly hits you. You forgot to make extra slinkies and you're just about to the water, and the river is ripe with boulders. Sure, you've got plenty of pencil lead, but that's for gravel to large rocks, not boulders that will snag them for sure. Slinking down in the seat you put the pedal to the metal and race to the launch hoping that you remembered the backup to your setups. Opening your trunk you begin to go through all the gear and your heart soars as you see the backup slinkies you forgot about, because you packed them over six months ago, and this type of emergency is the reason why. If you're going to fish for the big boys you have to have the backups to ensure that whatever happens between you and the fish is the only reason you either get the catch or lose it, not because you forgot something along the way. Ensuring the backup means that half the success of the day has already been assured. Knowing what to backup will keep you in the fish and weight off your back no matter what happens.

There have been times where I eventually forgot, lost, or gave away gear that literally meant the difference between getting fish and not getting anything at all. It was the birth of all those mistakes that got me to thinking about backups and convinced me that something should be done about it. The problem with backing up your gear is really about what you have to backup that will stay with your vehicle from that gear essential to pack in a vest, and it all comes down to weight, tools, and how far to the water you're going.

When we talk about backup gear the first thing to consider is the weight. How heavy is the gear going to weigh, and how critical is it to a disaster that could come up? If the gear is heavy you have to decide how important it is for you to take to the water. Most of the time that I backup stuff that weighs a lot, I simply leave it with the car, or take it out on the boat with me. If you're going to be wading, walking, or hiking, you're better off leaving it with the vehicle. The trip to the car trunk is a whole lot shorter than driving all the way home due to forgetting your waders. Sounds funny doesn't it? Losing your waders is something that can really happen, so says the voice of experience. Take the time to consider lead weight, waders, fishing line, and extra reels before heading out and you'll be better off. The next thing to consider is tools.

Every Angler should have backup tools that are taken to the water. Reels can break down, Rods can break, Nets can develop holes and when any of them happen, you'll know that the tools you've taken along are worth their weight in gold. Backup tools can be stored out of the way, and for the most part, can be stored in the back of a fishing vest. The back pockets of most vests are huge, mostly to accommodate caught fish, however, tools fit nicely in the bottom of it. The lighter side of any disasters that could happen is that you'll probably have to stop and fix whatever the problem is along side of the bank anyway, so getting the gear out is nothing. Even boaters

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normally will have to beach just to fix most problems since the primary need of field repair is stability. If the boat is waffling back and forth you can't fix the problem, especially if it involves a rod or reel. The most common backup tools to take are Pliers, Screwdrivers (standard and phillips), Matches, Baggies, Glue, and flashlights. These tools will keep you fishing when other anglers are forced to head home. After all is said and done, the final component is about the distance you intend to go.

Disasters on the water can come in all forms and one of them can be the actual distance between where you want to fish from where you park the truck. There are some trails that take me down the side of rivers for seven miles or more. It really depends on what kind of fishing I'm doing, or whether or not I'm on recon, to check out a new system. The matter of backup gear is about how good the fishing is versus how heavy the gear will actually weigh me down. I'm not talking about your standard fishing gear needed to get fish on the hook, I'm simply talking about things that make a fisherman feel confident that if something goes wrong that he or she is ready for it. The value of the gear should always be based on how good the fishing is, and if you don't know then the gear should mean almost nothing to you. However, if the honey-hole you're trying to get to is sick with fish then you'll want to take as much backup as you can handle. When I know the fishing has the potential of being really good, I tolerate the extra burden and load up on "all" the gear that could keep me from fishing; like losing a reel, breaking the tip of a rod, losing all the line on the spool, and losing so much of my terminal gear that I'm forced to dip into the extra weights and swivels. Remember, the only time to pack it all on is when the fishing has the "Potential" of getting you a large amount of fish. It's up to each angler to figure out what that actually means, but it all comes down to taking that extra gear into the field with us. While it is true that boaters have the luxury of taking lots of gear all the time, many of the same problems and considerations remain the same.



For the first half of the day I kept losing fish. Who would have thought that fishing for trout that I would be hooking into monsters like this one. With all my backup gear in the back of my vest, I got out some heavier fishing line and landed this lunker after a half-hour long battle. On this day, if I hadn't taken the backup with me I might not have gotten any fish at all.

Backup gear can keep you hitting into fish the entire day, sunup to sundown. Years ago, before I started applying the backup system, there were times that I actually had to leave water that were so full of fish that if you took them out the level of the river or lake would fall, and I'm not joking around. It's happened to me before, and eventually, it could happen again. Hopefully, I'll head my own advice and keep all the extra gear

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I'll ever need within arms reach rather than two-hundred miles. Every angler worth his salt knows all the pains described here, and they have learned to take the time to consider the pros and cons of taking that extra gear. To the novice angler I say "take the time to learn from others mistakes, so you don't have to feel the pangs of leaving awesome fishing holes early". Just remember that it comes down to three simple things: Weight, Tools, and Distance from your vehicle to the fishing hole and half the success of the day is assured. I guarantee it.