

Rod Building 101

by Catch Cormier

Date: Saturday, December 12

Time: 8:30am – 1:00pm

Place: LDWF Waddill Education Center

If you're interested in building a fly rod, our club's next rod building session is scheduled for December 12. Beginners and experts are welcome to attend. Please RSVP Catch (225) 751-6848 or email catch@laflyfish.com if you plan to attend. There is no cost, however you must be a paid member. Also, if you are a first time rod builder, you will need a few items to get started:

- a rod blank. More on that later.
- rod components: reel seat, cork grip, guides, tip top, winding check, rod thread, and if saltwater, a fighting butt.
- sharp scissors
- xacto knife or single-edge razor
- small (3/8 inch) flat or triangular file
- round file or cork grip reamers to enlarge hole in grip
- hemostat or vise to hold guides while filing
- reading or magnifying glasses for anyone over 35!
- tape measure
- tack cloth
- brushes for applying epoxy and preserver

The club will have on hand various epoxies, cleaning agents, abrasives, paper towels, mixing cups, masking tape, aluminum foil, color preserver, and other items as needed.

Although a rod can be built without them, there are two other items the first time builder may find necessary - a rod building stand and a rod drying turner. The rod stand can be purchased, or handmade using 2x6 pine, a few wood screws and odds and ends. Since it's not a requirement to have a rod stand at the session, we suggest holding off until you've seen what veteran builders are using. You may find a purchased stand or a homemade stand that works best for you.

The rod finishing turner does just that - it turns the rod at slow revolutions (6-20 per minute) and allows the flex coat to distribute evenly to a glass finish. Since flex coat takes from 6 to 8 hours to dry, turning by hand is not a good option. All you need for this is a barbecue rotisserie motor that you can mount on your rod stand. Another option - and quieter - is the Cabelas turning motor..

There are several good resources on rod building on the web. Simply Google those up. Then you can know what to prepare for. This isn't a class where the instructor knows all... we encourage members to come prepared to offer new tips and ideas if they learn of any. Before jumping into rod building, consider the pros and cons. Building a rod can save you money over buying a finished rod, but it costs your time and patience. And with so many companies offering budget-conscious rods with warranties, the savings can be very narrow depending on the model. Also, the setup costs for rod building may require that you build at least two rods to come out ahead.

There are two very good reasons – other than cost savings – to build a fly rod. First, you can have the type of rod you want, the way you want it. While rod makers have cut back on product lines to cut costs, blank makers have filled the gaps. For example, the 8 ft 6 in, 6 weight, 4 piece – my favorite all around rod – as a finished rod is nearly extinct. But there are several blanks available. I use it not only on western rivers, but for kayak/canoe fishing the mangroves in south Florida. The second reason is that, nothing is more fulfilling than catching a fish on a fly you tied and on a rod you built!

Selecting a blank

Many of our club sponsors sell blanks, including discounts and blems at a reduced cost. Cabelas offers their own brand blanks and outfits at a very reasonable price. Uptown Angler and Bowie Outfitters can get TFO blanks which are now available. If you're looking for the best bargain in blanks, check with fellow club member Frank Genusa. Those looking for a dependable line of blanks that offer moderate action, should check with Jon King of JJ King Fly Fishing (blanks list attached). Many members have built off Jon's blanks because their action is so hard to find in today's manufactured rods.

Before you select a blank or components, think about what type of fishing you will do with this rod. If you think the rod will be put in jeopardy (big fish, rough conditions, wading tough streams) then you will want a blank that has a warranty. More than ever, the affordable costs and increasing quality of pack rod blanks make them a strong consideration. If you travel to fish, definitely build 4- piece. First, it's easier to carry around and store. Second, thanks to rod engineering, today's 4-piece rods are only slightly heavier than 2-piece. And finally, look at modulus. Typically, but not always, higher generations of graphite are faster and lighter, yet more expensive and less forgiving in their casting than lower modulus graphites.

Rod Building Cross-Reference

COMPONENTS	MATERIALS	TOOLS
rod blank	denatured alcohol, epoxy rod finish kit e.g, FlexCoat	tape measure
reel seat	30-min epoxy glue, eg, RodBuilders Glue	X-acto knife
grip	same as reel seat	round file or tapered reamer
winding check	sliver of masking tape	thread burnisher
hook keeper	slivers of masking tape	
snake guides	china pen or white gel-pen, slivers of masking tape, rod wrapping thread	finishing brush or rat file, vise or pliers to hold guides, thread tensioning device (winder)
tip-top	tip-top glue	lighter
rod bag & tube	rod wrapping thread	marking pen, PVC pipe and caps (optional)
		rod drying motor

Rod Building Resources on the Web

<http://www.mudhole.com/Rod-Building-101>

It offers some of the best rod building videos on the web, albeit casting/spinning rods. But many of the applications/procedures apply.

<http://perspicaciouswords.blogspot.com/>

Look for the fly rod building steps on the right side of his blog. I found this one practical, unlike some that ramble on for pages with no real descriptions.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93BXwDUFFbw>

A series of YOUTUBE videos on building a custom fly rod. A bit lengthy - about 10 minutes each.

<http://www.hookhack.com/images/RBDEX1.pdf>

Obviously, Hook and Hackle is a leader in rod building sales and this instruction makes it simple!