

# Keeping Things Dry

Great for ride-alongs on boats, but even better for packing your gear while on the river, **waterproof backpacks** are must-have items for serious salmon, steelhead anglers.

By PAT HOGLUND, SSJ EDITOR

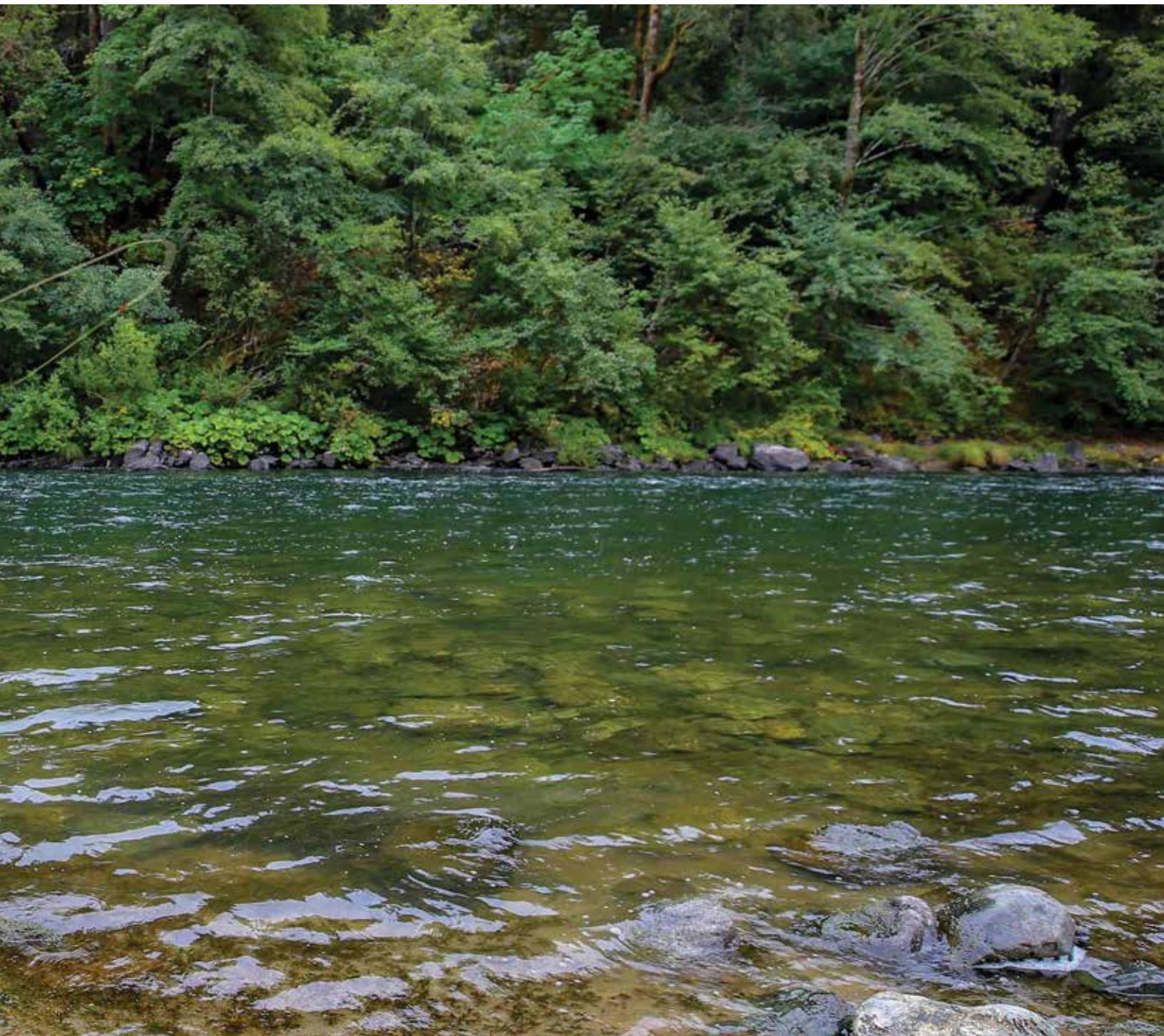
**WADING ACROSS A CHEST-DEEP** section of river in a remote section of Alaska, in the heart of brown bear country, I had my camera, my handgun, my cellphone and a box of flies in my hip pack. While the water threatened to dip over my waders, not once did I fear that anything in my pack would get wet. I was wearing a Sure-Dry Hip Pack from Sagebrush Dry Gear, something that I wear regularly while steelhead fishing.

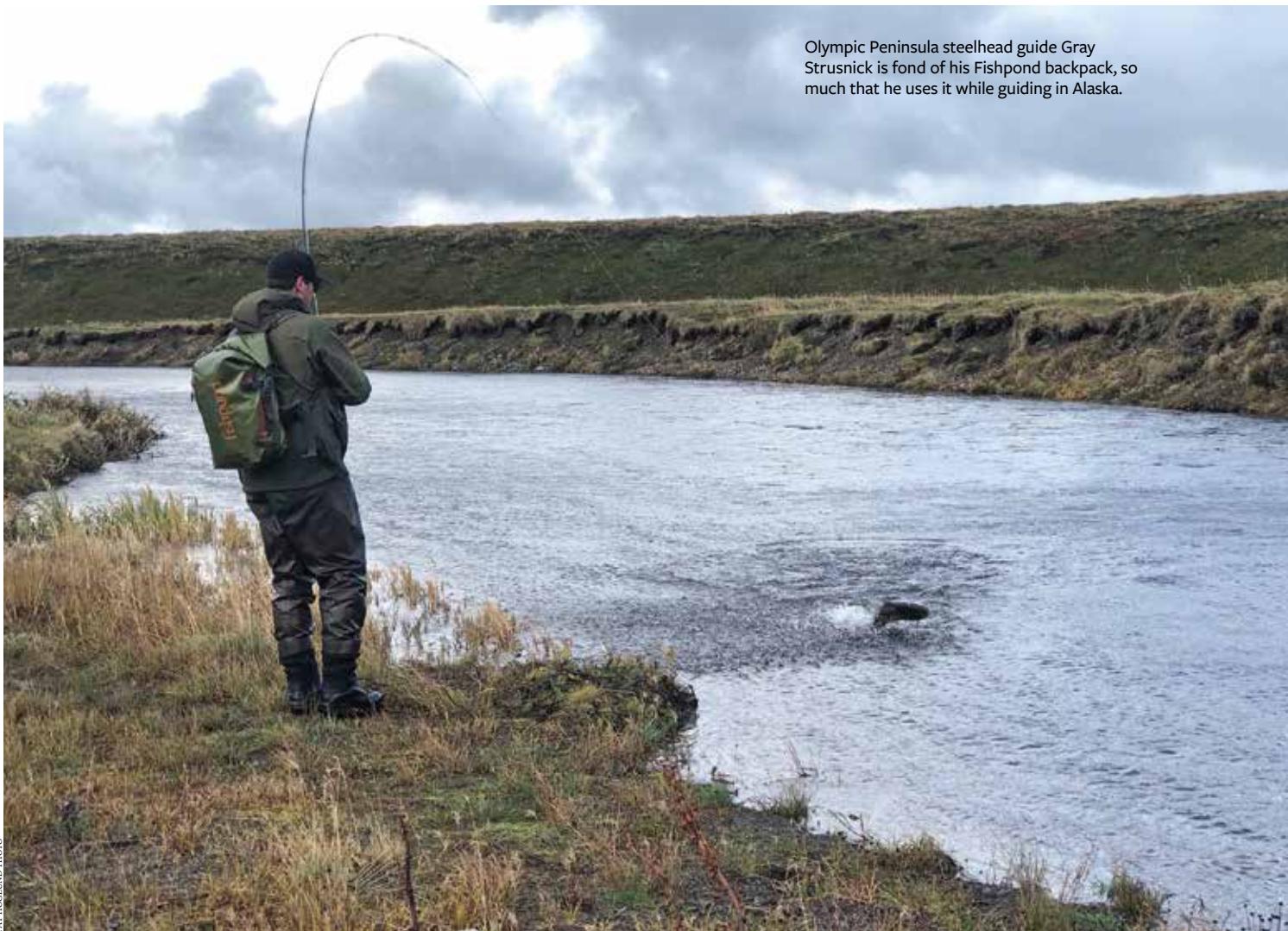
While it wasn't a backpack, it had all the great attributes that you should look for when you're shopping for one. It is waterproof, has great zippers, large zipper pulls, the seams are welded to ensure it doesn't leak, has exterior and interior pockets, and the hip belt cinches nicely to ride above my hips.



CF NAZGREN PHOTO

What makes a good backpack? For starters it should be **waterproof**, including the zippers, wear comfortably, and have as many bells and whistles as possible.





PAT HOGLUND PHOTO

It only makes sense that you want to keep dry anything you place in your pack. I think that's something we can all agree on. So, it stands to reason that you want a backpack that's waterproof. Or pretty damn close. It should be noted, there's a difference between water resistant packs, and waterproof packs. Having used backpacks on many of my fishing trips, I've found that there are certain things that separate a really good backpack from one that's just OK.

#### Size Matters

Yeah, it's the age-old joke, but with so many things size is extremely relevant when it comes to choosing a backpack. I've used packs that are too big, and ones that are too small. With larger backpacks, I end up bringing too much stuff. Aside from having a pack that's too heavy, what

ends up usually happening is whatever goes in first, is what I need first. I have to rifle through the pack to get it out. As Frank McCourt would say, it's a pain in the arse. I've also used backpacks that are nothing more than a sling pack with shoulder straps. You're better off with a hip pack. In a perfect, First-World situation, the ideal-sized backpack runs between 1,200 and 1,500 cubic inches. Of course, that's what I like. That gives me enough room to pack a lunch, a water bottle, a camera, my phone, a rain jacket and miscellaneous tackle items. That's not to say what I like is right because as you'll find in this review, the size of packs run the gamut.

#### Weight

If you're going to get down to the finer details, then weight is something to con-

Olympic Peninsula steelhead guide Gray Strusnick is fond of his Fishpond backpack, so much that he uses it while guiding in Alaska.

sider. Chances are good that you'll want to cram as much stuff as possible in your pack. It's human nature. Keep the overall weight of your pack in mind before deciding to make a purchase. Fishing with a lighter backpack to begin with means less weight when you're walking the riverbank. Over time, a few ounces will make a difference.

#### Material

Every one of the packs in the review is made from thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU) coated nylon, which is the same material used in rubber rafts. It's extremely abrasion resistant and waterproof. The weight of the fabric is usually stated by the manufacturer and the higher the denier number, the thicker material used which translates to a stronger material. Where a pack might run into leaking



### Sagebrush Dry Goods Day Tripper

Full disclosure, I'm a big fan of Sagebrush Dry Goods packs. I personally own the large backpack and the hip pack. Both have been on countless fishing trips with me, and not once have the contents ever been compromised. The Day Tripper pack is perfectly sized at 1,250 cubic inches. It's large enough to carry most everything I want, and it's small enough that I don't over pack.

Made from 400 denier PTU coated nylon, the seams are welded using radio frequency hot air technology. The Day Tripper is fully submersible, and 100 percent waterproof. It is built with TIZIP® zippers that don't leak. They're easy to zip open and closed thanks to the large zipper pulls and a grab point on each end. I like the water bottle holder on the front and it comes with a rod holder. There is a small hanging pocket on the inside, which is holds a cell phone. It also comes with a rugged grab handle on top, which is nice when you want to grab it and go.

The double shoulder strap and lumbar back support gives it good marks for comfort and wearability. If you want a hip belt, you might consider their large backpack. I have it, and swear by it.

Comfort	★★★★
Construction	★★★★★
Accessories	★★★★
Ease of Use	★★★★+
Price	★★★★
Overall	★★★★+

**DIMENSION** 11"W, 18"H, 7"D  
**SIZE** 20L, 1,250 cubic inches  
**WEIGHT** 1 lb, 14 oz  
**MSRP** \$245  
[sagebrushdry.com](http://sagebrushdry.com)



### Filson Dry Backpack

Using the roll top enclosure system, the opening is large enough to access the entire pack without a hassle. There are three buckles that keep the main compartment snug and secured, which helps ensure that the main compartment stays water tight (it does). The pack is made from polyurethane-coated 840-denier nylon, which means it's about as abrasion resistant as you'll find. You can expect this to last a long time. Constructed using welded seams, your gear dry will stay dry whether you're in a torrential rainstorm or if your pack falls into the water. It's comfortable to wear thanks to foam padded shoulder straps and high-density foam back panel. It also comes with a sternum strap for a snug fit.

The size is great for day trips from the lodge, or if you're going to hump it deep into steelhead country. The accessories are limited, but still well thought out. It has two pockets (external and internal) and it's equipped with plastic clips on each shoulder strap that allow

you to attach various items. It comes with a rugged grab handle on top which is a nice feature.

Comfort	★★★★★
Construction	★★★★★
Accessories	★★★★
Ease of Use	★★★★+
Price	★★★★+
Overall	★★★★

**DIMENSION** 20"W, 12.5"H, 6.5"D

**SIZE** 28L, 1,708 cubic inches

**WEIGHT** 2 lbs, 2 oz

**MSRP** \$175

[filson.com](http://filson.com)



### Patagonia Stormfront Pack

Patagonia's Stormfront Pack is rock-solid and planned well. The pack is built with 11.7 ounce, 800-denier nylon with a single-side TPU coating and DWR finish, which makes it one of the stoutest packs in the review. I like that this pack is pliable and tough at the same time.

It wears extremely well thanks to the adjustable shoulder straps, the hip belt and sternum strap. The back panel is made from high density foam that gives you added comfort and stability. When it's loaded with all your essentials it rides comfortably on your back and doesn't move around thanks to the strapping system. The hip belt is removable should you find the need. The main compartment seals tight using a TIZIP® Zipper.

From an accessory standpoint, it comes with two web loop straps for a rod tube (that are removable), a web loop attachment system on both shoulder straps, and an exterior and internal pocket. The

external pocket is non-waterproof for items that you want to keep close. It's also compatible with Patagonia's convertible vest (sold separately).

The Stormfront is sized at 1,831 cubic inches. It's large enough to over pack, but small enough to keep your load manageable. I've used similar packs from Patagonia and they're as good as anything available. This one is no different.

Comfort	★★★★+
Construction	★★★★★
Accessories	★★★★
Ease of Use	★★★★
Price	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★+

**DIMENSION** 21"W, 12"H, 9"D

**SIZE** 30L, 1,831 cubic inches

**WEIGHT** 1 lb, 13 oz

**MSRP** \$299

[patagonia.com](http://patagonia.com)

issues is how the seams are formed. But as you'll read, that is no longer an issue.

### **Construction**

Because sewing two pieces of fabric together punctures the material with needles, you'd be hard-pressed to find a company that that sews their bags anymore. At least those companies that manufacturer waterproof backpacks. Those holes have to be sealed, and over time the sealant deteriorates. All of the backpacks in this review are either welded together using radio frequency welding, or hot air wedge welding. It should be noted that today's fishing waders are constructed using the same principles. Radio frequency welding bonds materials together using electromagnetic energy where a welding machine creates an electric field that moves polar molecules in the material to create heat. The heat causes the molecules to bond together and the final weld is sealed using pressure. Hot air welding uses heat, speed and pressure to weld thermoplastics together where the hot air welders blow compressed air at extremely high temperatures (1,000-1,350 degrees F) to weld the two pieces of material together. Both technologies are extremely effective and considered the industry standard.

### **Accessories**

You might think having a few extra bells and whistles on your pack isn't that big of a deal. I would argue otherwise. I like having rod tube holders, D-rings, outside pockets to keep items handy, and inside pockets that help keep some of the more important items close at hand and dry. As long as they don't interfere with the pack itself, I like having extra bells and whistles.

### **Closure**

There are two types of bags used in the construction of backpacks: those that close using a roll top system, or those that close with zippers.

The roll top system is straight forward. Each time you roll the top of bag closed, it creates a seal upon the previous roll. The roll top uses a buckle system to securely close or clamp down the top ensuring the main compartment stays closed. Zippers, meanwhile, potentially present a major challenge in keeping your equipment dry. It wasn't too long



### **Simms Dry Creek Z Fishing Backpack**

Like most things Simms, the Dry Creek Z Fishing Backpack is rock-solid. Arguably one of the better ones available in this review, it is built with 500 denier TPU-coated nylon fabric, and each seam is welded ensuring anything you place in your pack will stay dry. The pack opens and closes using TIZIP® zippers, which makes accessing anything inside the pack easy.

Out of all the backpacks tested, this is undeniably the most comfortable pack. The cushioned shoulder straps are ergonomically designed to fit your shoulders, and each strap has a tunnel lifter which helps cinch the pack above your hips. The small hip belt that helps keep the pack above your hips and there is a sternum strap to keep it snug against your chest. The hip belt can be folded and tucked away when not in use.

There's an exterior pocket, plus interior mesh pockets. It comes with two removable rod straps, and a D-ring on the front of the pack. It has multiple lash points to attach items, an integrated net scabbard on the back, and a magnetic docking station on the shoulder

straps for small pliers or hemostats. It's the most expensive pack reviewed, but you'll have a hard time finding a more complete backpack.

Comfort	★★★★+
Construction	★★★★
Accessories	★★★★+
Ease of Use	★★★★
Price	★★★+
Overall	★★★★

**DIMENSION** 19"W, 7"H, 9"D

**SIZE** 29L, 1,770 cubic inches

**WEIGHT** 1 lb, 12 oz

**MSRP** \$319.95

[simmsfishing.com](http://simmsfishing.com)

ago that bags and packs used antiquated zippers that were prone to leaking. With the invention of zippers like those from TIZIP® has changed that. Using pressure resistance, TIZIP® zipper's plastic teeth interlock creating a water tight seal. Every coil half is embedded and secured in a plastic profile; when the zipper is closed, the sealing lips above and below the coil compress creating the perfect seal.

#### **Zipper Pulls**

There is nothing worse than zippers that are hard to open and close. Often you'll be wearing gloves, or your hands will be cold, and fumbling with small zippers makes it that much more difficult to access the contents of your pack. I personally like large zipper pulls that are easy to grab.

#### **Comfort, Wearability**

While it could be argued that having a completely waterproof backpack is of the utmost importance, I would say that comfort is priority one. I have been on long treks while steelhead fishing, and a lot can be said for having a pack that fits well. Hip belts and shoulder straps will ultimately determine whether a backpack properly fits. As a general rule, you'll want the backpack to ride above your hips. A hip belt makes this possible. If it doesn't have a hip belt, make sure the shoulder straps are adjustable.

#### **Review**

After I received each pack, I loaded it with items that I almost always take with me (rain jacket, camera, cell phone, two small tackle boxes, water bottle, and a lunch). I had room for more gear, but tried not to over pack. I put the pack on and tested it for comfort and gave it my best score. All the seams were inspected, I took an inventory of the accessories, and then looked at how easy it was to access the main compartment and pockets. Finally, I took price into account. As with so many reviews, a lot of time you're comparing apples to apples. That is especially true with this review. I would have no qualms fishing with any of these packs. They all are well made and each one has different qualities that may attract your attention. Ultimately it will come down to personal preference. But I'm confident that whatever pack you decide on, it will hold up well to years of use and abuse. **ssj**



#### **Fishpond Thunderhead Submersible Backpack**

Much like the prettiest girl in high school that sat home on prom night, Fishpond's Thunderhead backpack is aching to be asked out. Do yourself a favor, and take this backpack on your next fishing trip. You won't be sorry.

Made from 1680-denier TPU-coated nylon, each seam is welded, and like several of the packs in this review, it is built hell-stout and can withstand a beating. The main compartment is accessed using a TIZIP® zipper which includes large, coated webbing pull tabs for easy opening. There's a front pocket to keep your items easily accessible and the water-resistant zipper keeps them dry. The pull handle makes it easy to zip open and shut. The hip belt is removable. It has an easy-to-grab top handle.

It wears nicely thanks to foam-padded shoulder straps,

a hip belt, a sternum strap and a back-panel cushion. There are plenty of places to attach extra items thanks to daisy chain straps, and D-rings on each shoulder strap and the front. It also comes with a gear strap that can be used as a rod holder.

The pack is large enough to pack a lot of gear and there are two interior pockets to help keep important items close by.

Comfort	★★★★
Construction	★★★★
Accessories	★★★★
Ease of Use	★★★★
Price	★★★+
Overall	★★★★+

**DIMENSION** 21" W, 12" H, 9" D

**SIZE** 27L, 1,648 cubic inches

**WEIGHT** 2 lb, 8 oz

**MSRP** \$299.95

[fishpondusa.com](http://fishpondusa.com)