

Skagit/ology

Revised 2011

George Cook/Ryan S Petzold

Over 5 years have passed since the introduction of the vaunted Skagit Line. However, despite its effectiveness and popularity, misconception, confusion and lack of overall clarity of the use of Skagit Lines remains. The following is a short but specific conversation regarding the history and usage of the various Skagit lines in the Worldwide spey fishing theater.

History- Beginning in the 1990's many of today's most recognizable spey authorities independently were developing Skagit type lines. Noted casters and anglers such as Ed Ward, Mike Kinney, Scott O'Donnell, Scott Howell, Mike McCune, Jerry French and the legendary Harry Lemire among others were at the forefront of the Skagit revolution. Along the banks of Northwest rivers coupled with late nights in the depths of fly tying rooms of the Pacific Northwest the chop-shop artist and line theologians were hard at work developing what would become today's Skagit Lines. Some would cut and splice their way, others would utilize bumped up WindCutter bodies to perfect the craft. The shorter belly approach was underway. The day had come to maximize the spey rod for winter conditions with large outsized flies. The use of Northwest hybrid and Skagit Casts such as the Snap Tee, Perry Poke, Snap Z and Wombat lent themselves to the shorter belly approach. Today the Skagit line approach is "the" approach to sinking line endeavors worldwide. Be it Kings in Alaska to Sea Run Browns of the Rio Grande from the Umpqua to the Babine and all points in between. The Skagit Line has become the omnipresent tool. Originally developed purely as a sink tip line, the Skagit line also can be an effective full floating line particularly on 12' to 13'9" rods. To be sure the spey caster will endure a greater level of stripping of line to recast (applies to all Skagit lines versus long belly lines) but the reward is a undeniable highly energized long and straight cast.

Types- The original Rio Skagit Line worked from a 27' body that still today serves as the basic Skagit Spey approach. In 2009, the Skagit Short came onboard providing an ideal line for switch rods as well as shorter spey rods in the 12-13' range. These lines are specialized shorter 20' Skagit lines. Often times the Skagit Short serves the ardent spey caster well in strategic tight corridor situations often found in such steelhead haunts as the Oregon Coast, Olympic Peninsula and Vancouver Island. Fall 2009 witnessed the arrival of

the Skagit Flight head: The Skagit Flight redefines the Skagit Line concept with a new focused entry. The Flight comes in 25 grain increments from 350 to 700 grains with one last 50 grain jump to 750. These lines feature a taper that produces outrageous line speed coupled with tight loops. The head features expedient length from 22'-31'. These new lines have you covered whether you are a rank beginner or seasoned expert. It might also be noted that the Cheater concept as an add-on piece is not required nor needed with the new Skagit Flight lines.

Usage- Specific Skagit Line size (grain weight) match-ups come with a degree of variability coupled with angler opinion. Line speed versus load, moderate versus fast action all add up to a witch's brew of variables that must be fleshed out on any given rod regardless of manufacturer. The great casters often find themselves 25 to 100 grains apart on any given rod. In the end the angler must boil it down and get the details. Often, the "bump up weight" theorem coincides with a naked (no cheater) approach. In the end, one must discern the details before going forward. All in all, most spey rods 12' to 15' in length will have as many as three different Skagit Lines that will work. For example, the 7126-4 aka "The Deathstar" can work with a Skagit Flight in 525, 550 and 575. The 525 offers the line speed choice while the 575 offers the max load choice, the 550 most certainly can be used but does seem to fall into a funky middle ground spot. Generally, one will be ideal. To discover this the angler must seek out opinion within the spey community, be it guide, angling buddies, factory rep or retail representative.

Skagit Cheaters- With the demand for shorter belly lines growing in popularity, here is a tool that allows the spey enthusiast the ability to completely dial in their Skagit Line (longer). Essentially the Cheater theory allows the customization of a Skagit Line pursuant to the given length of rod. Generally, spey rods 11-13'8" feet will utilize no cheater "naked", although it should be noted that 13 to 13'9" rods may possibly work well with a 2.5 foot Cheater. Rods 13'9"-16 feet will utilize a 5 foot cheater.

Skagit Short Lines- Ideal for switch rods in the 10'6" to 11'9" range along with application for shorter spey rods in the 12' to 13' range, 8 weight and under. These are specialized shorter 20' Skagit lines. These lines are also perfectly at home on 9 to 10 foot single handed rods in a single hand spey approach. **New 2011;** Skagit Short 575 and 625.

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Building a la carte Skagit Floating Lines- The Skagit line as a floating line is both an effective and elegant match up particularly on 12' to 13'9" spey rods. The a la carte construction for a full floating line works as follows; Skagit Flight 550 as an example (25.5 feet) with a 8/9/10 Skagit Floating Tip or a 10' Floating Medium M.O.W. tip . This format gives you a complete VersiTip approach with your Skagit line. It should be noted that with the new Skagit Flight heads, that based on their "dialed-in" length pursuant to expected (length) rod use that the use of a 5' Cheater is not needed nor desired in the a la carte floating line approach.

No doubt spey casting has more opinion out there than any other sport other than maybe Archery. In this, one thing remains true to form. Sink tip lines in conjunction with intruder type flies get free flight lessons long and straight with the Skagit taper line. Floating line enthusiasts upon acceptance of extra line strip will enjoy the benefit of highly energized long straight casts with dries and summer patterns as well.

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