

Switch Rods

By Will Turek

Switch rods are longer than single hand rods and shorter and smaller in scale than two-hand rods. They provide anglers with the benefits of a longer rod and the leverage of using two hands with the scale to match the smaller to medium sized rivers throughout the Great Lakes region. They are designed to cast overhead *and* handle the torsion of change of direction casts (spey casts) made with one or two hands on the rod.

Switch rods are 10.5 to 11.5 ft long. They have a slightly longer top grip than a single hand rod and a bottom grip which is either fixed (part of the rod) or removable. The bottom grip allows the caster to instantly switch from casting with one hand to two hands. It also doubles as an extended fighting butt. Using two-hands on the rod allows the caster to accelerate the rod tip and load the rod deep into the blank for casting extra distance, larger flies or sink tips and casting into the wind. It also allows the caster to make "real" two-handed spey casts.

Today, all of the major U.S. and European manufacturers offer at least a half dozen switch rod models. Selecting an appropriate rod to match the size river, fishing techniques, and target species in the Midwest has never been easier.

Switch Rod Selection For the Great Lakes Region and Beyond			
<i>Fishery</i>	<i>Rod Length</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Line Weight</i>
Small size rivers	10.5 ft switch	Trout, Smallmouth	4 - 6 wt
Medium size rivers	10.5 - 11.5 ft switch	Steelhead, Lake-run Brown Trout	7 - 8 wt
Large size rivers, Saltwater	11.5 ft switch	Steelhead, Salmon, Stripers	8 - 10 wt

Selecting a Line

For single hand overhead, roll, and spey casting a standard WF floating line works fine. The most versatile type of taper is a long belly WF floating line one to two line weights heavier than the rod weight. Single hand shooting heads are also excellent for overhead casting long distances with one or two hands.

While standard single hand lines perform OK for most applications on a switch rod, they can be very limiting for two-handed spey casting, especially with sinking tips and larger, heavier flies. For two-hand spey casting, a thick diameter short head length spey line works best. There are several companies that make short/compact Skagit or Scandi shooting heads that work very well for this application. Select the line wt based on the recommended grain wt for your rod. The recommended grain wt. can be found on the butt section of the rod or the manufacturer's website.

When using a Skagit or Scandi spey line it's important to maintain the correct ratio of head length to rod length. The general formula to determine the correct ratio is 3:1. The head length should be 3x the length of the rod.

For example: An 11 foot rod multiplied by 3 = 33 feet. A 23 ft Skagit head + 10 ft tip = 33 ft. NOTE: Not all combinations of head lengths + tip will work out to a perfect 3:1 ratio. As long as the head is within a couple of feet it will be fine.

Line Selection For Spey Casting the Great Lakes Region		
<i># Hands Used</i>	<i>Techniques</i>	<i>Recommended Line</i>
Single Hand 10.5 -11.5 ft.	Indicator nymphing, stripping streamers with sinking leaders, casting off the beach	Single hand WF long belly Single hand Shooting head
Two-Handed 10.5-11.5 ft.	Stripping or swinging streamers with heavy sink tips and large flies	Skagit or Scandi shooting head

Reels

Choosing the correct size and weight reel to match to a switch rod is important. Large arbor reels that are too light will not be able to properly balance the rod when casting heavier Skagit or Scandi spey lines with two hands. Also, take into consideration that an 8wt spey line is heavier than a single hand 8wt line and therefore will have a larger diameter and take up more space on a spool. A sealed drag is a nice feature as well. It will stop the drag from icing up and free spooling when fishing in the winter.

Leader Material and Sink Tips

Tapered leaders are best for indicator nymphing. A short length of level tippet material is sufficient for sinking lines and sink tips.

For streamer fishing or swinging flies, carry a selection of various lengths and sink rate sink tips organized in a sinking tip wallet. This will allow you to select the appropriate tip to match the depth and speed of the water. And to switch tips quickly throughout the day for different parts of the river or as water conditions change.

Switch rods can easily handle 7.5 to 15 ft sink tips. *Remember: the key is to make sure you maintain the head length to rod length ratio.* Using 7.5 ft tapered sinking leaders attached to the end of a tapered floating tip casts effortlessly. However, when using heavier tungsten sink tips (T8-T17) detaching the floating tip and attaching the sink tip directly to the end of the Skagit or Scandi head works best.

Typical Assortment of Tips for Great Lakes Region
7.5 ft tapered sinking leaders – floating, intermediate, 3.9, 5.6, 7.0
T8 custom tips - 10 ft
T11 custom tips - 10 ft
T14 custom tips - 10 ft

For more information on Switch rods, spey casting, and swung fly steelhead trips contact:

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