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## CATCH AND RELEASE: FLY-FISHING MUSEUM DEFENDS REELING IN DICK CHENEY

**By Ted Williams**

High Country News, January 2009

**On the last day of 2008**, a little bird told me that the venerable American Museum of Fly Fishing in Manchester, Vt., a beacon for the nation's fly-fishers and a keeper of their rich tradition, had landed Vice President Dick Cheney as the guest of honor and speaker at its spring 2009 meeting. So I posted the news on a blog I run for Fly Rod & Reel magazine.

Within hours, the museum was shoveling out from a blizzard of nasty-grams. For two weeks it kept mum. Then it hatched a form letter (at this writing under review by the vice president's staff) in which it offers lengthy and incomprehensible excuses for inviting Cheney, while likening him to Jimmy Carter and Franklin Roosevelt. It then implores Cheney's critics to "continue to support the museum and its mission." I will certainly do so, and to prove it, I have redrafted the form letter for the museum, at no charge:

"Dear [name]: We need to generate revenue, so we searched hard and long for a guest of honor who would fill the room at our spring meeting. Finally, we hit upon Dick Cheney, arguably the most dangerous enemy of fish in our generation. What's more, Mr. Cheney, who angles for trout in Wyoming in one of the rivers he hasn't ruined with gas and oil extraction (which happens to run through his ranch) is an accomplished and safe fly caster. In fact, he hasn't wounded even one of his fishing companions.

"We completely understand that applying green lipstick to this arch environmental villain, aptly dubbed 'Darth Vader' in fish and wildlife conservation circles, is outright whoring. But that's the genius of our plan. This kind of prostitution is legal and no less lucrative than the standard, unlawful variety.

"And please recall, from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, the enormous crowds the King and the Duke were able to draw to their 'Royal Nonesuch' performances, in which the King painted himself and pranced around the stage naked and on all fours, while the Duke collected the money at the door. Sure, they eventually got themselves tarred and feathered and run out of town, but their first few gigs generated an avalanche of revenue. We're only planning one.

"Please recall also our mission statement: 'The American Museum of Fly Fishing promotes an understanding of and appreciation for the history, traditions, and practitioners, past and present, of the sport of fly fishing.' You cannot deny that a major part of that history and those traditions is the systematic destruction of rivers by special interests and the politicians who front for them. Can there be a better choice than traditional practitioner Dick Cheney—the man who gave the West the biggest fish kill it has ever seen when he attempted to wean Klamath River Chinook salmon from water, who trashed the Endangered Species Act, who virtually canceled the Clean Air and Clean Water acts, who suppressed science, who ruined the lives of dedicated resource professionals, and who ran Christine Todd Whitman out of the Environmental Protection Agency?

"So tight is the prose of *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* that these papers have been able to fit entire stories into just their headlines, i.e.: 'Dick Cheney's Last-Gasp Fight Against Clean Air' and 'Dick Cheney Battles Laura Bush over Protecting Pacific Ocean.'

"You can't believe the publicity we have generated by our decision to make the Veep our honoree. We even netted a comment from book publisher and author Nick Lyons, the unofficial dean of American fly fishers: 'As a longtime member and supporter of the American Museum of Fly Fishing, I am appalled that the museum would honor such a dreadful, dangerous man. He is the enemy of just about everything I value.'

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"And no less a fishing icon than Joel Vance, past president of the Outdoor Writers Association of America, offers this in his column for Outdoor Guide: 'If the fly fishing museum goes ahead with its plan to slobber over Dick Cheney, then I will boycott it. I would have gladly paid \$5 admission to see the exhibits, but not if one of them is the 'Dick Cheney Drill, Baby, Drill exhibit.'

"Finally, despite his lamentable crudeness, we'll quote our pro bono publicist, Ted Williams, who uses the vulgar term for that invasive alga, *Didymosphenia geminata*, now smothering fish habitat across North America: 'Thanks for the memories, Dick. We're gonna miss you like rock snot.'"

*Ted Williams is a contributor to Writers on the Range, a service of High Country News (hcn.org). He is the conservation editor for Fly Rod & Reel magazine.*