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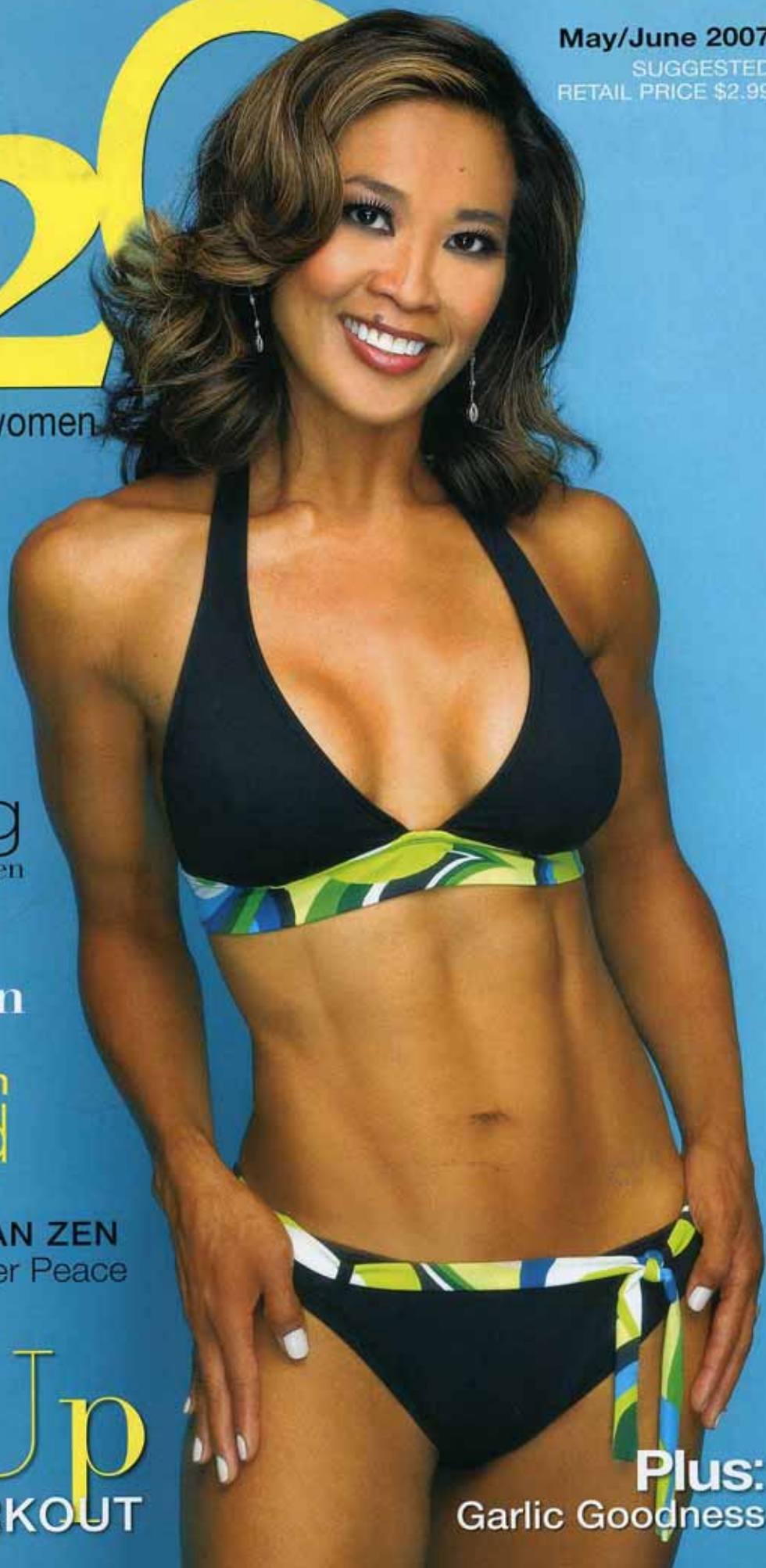
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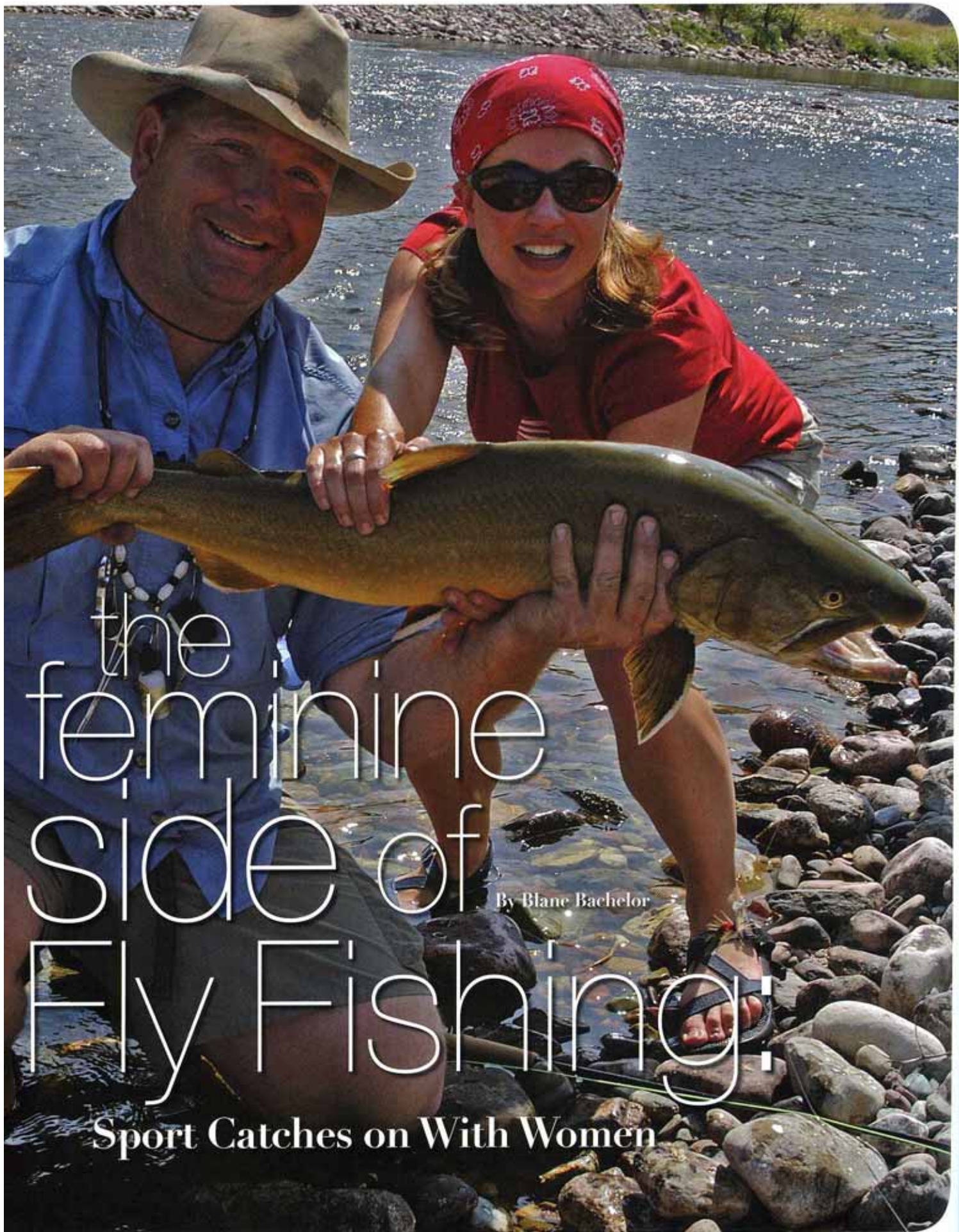
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the
feminine
side of
Fly Fishing!

By Blane Bachelor

Sport Catches on With Women

Rod in hand,

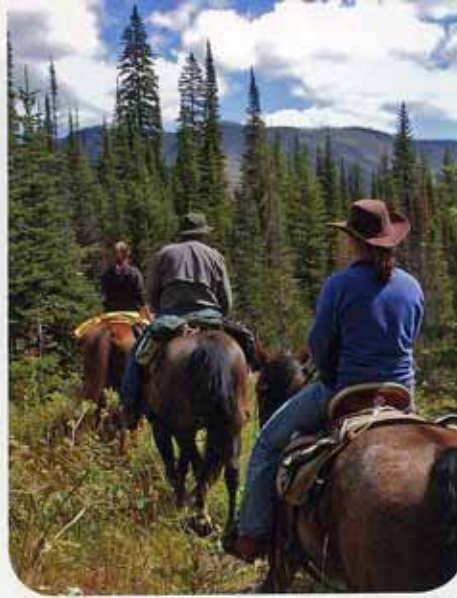
I'm standing on the shore of the crystal clear Flathead River in northwestern Montana, trying to catch my first fish in about 20 years. It's been that long since my grandfather, brother and I whiled away hot Florida afternoons on the dock near our summer condo, snagging a few puny bait fish in the canal.

It's a completely different scenario here in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, a 1.5 million, federally protected expanse of nature's finest offerings: majestic mountains, wide meadows, clear lakes. Rivers in "The Bob," as it's known locally, boast a seemingly endless supply of eager cutthroat and bull trout that make fly fishing enthusiasts giddy with excitement. As the rookie among a group of experienced fishermen, however, I'm giddy because I've finally managed to execute a respectable cast. My guide, John Way of Paws Up Outfitters, has done an excellent job demonstrating the basics of casting, but it's clear I have light years to go before my technique will look anything like the graceful, sweeping loops that my travel companions arc way across the river.

I cast, wait a few seconds, recast, wait, and recast again, trying to be patient but reeling with anticipation. After I feel the "strike" of a fish on the neon green line, I "strip" by pulling in excess line with my left hand and, lo and behold, begin to pull in a small trout. Squealing with delight, I realize that, like the fish quivering on the end of my line, I'm hooked.

I'm not alone in my newly discovered excitement about fly fishing. According to the Adventure Travel Trade Association, the sport's popularity among women has soared in recent years: between 2003 and 2004, women jumped from 26 to 34 percent of its total participants. The sport has been on the rise in general within the last decade,





Not only will the Paws Up Outfitters team teach you how to fly fish, they'll also pitch your tent, cook your meals and carry your gear. Specializing in luxury camping, Paws Up Outfitters describes its trips through the backcountry as "Roughing It Redefined." Standard trips include fly fishing, big game hunting and pack trips, but you can also specialize your itinerary. Cap off your trip by pampering yourself at the award-winning Paws Up Resort, a 37,000-acre luxury resort nestled in Montana's magnificent wilderness just outside Missoula.

More information:

Rates at Paws Up Resort start at \$395 through the summer; a two-night stay is required for all reservations. Visit www.pawsup.com for rate information on outfitted trips, or call **1-800-473-0601**

especially after the success of the 1992 movie *A River Runs Through It*, which was filmed in this area of Montana. But women seem to have a natural affinity for the sport, Way tells me the evening I arrive for our seven-night trip, during which we will camp and fish our way down the Flathead River.

"I've seen women out-fish their husbands all the time," Way comments over pizza and beer at a local watering hole in Missoula, the charming college town I flew into a few hours earlier. "Men always try to power through it, and women are much more gentle with their casting. They're more patient, too, and that's a key part of fly fishing."

After spending the night in the Paws Up Resort just outside Missoula, where high-end lodges feature a heavenly combination of rustic charm and high-end luxury, our quest for trout begins. But we won't see them for a while. First, we must horseback deep into The Bob before we begin the rafting portion of our trip.

It's worth the wait – and the aches and pains in store for a rookie rider who's just logged nearly 30 miles on horseback. The early morning sun sparkles off the clear water of the river as we push off in two rafts, rods in hand, ready to – as Jim Casada, one of the experienced outdoorsmen I'm traveling with, puts it so bluntly – "Rip some lips!" Amidst some of the most gorgeous scenery I've ever seen – the rainbow coloring of the rocks in the river bed, the backdrop of jagged mountains, the rich green forest stretching

into eternity – I pull in 10 trout over the course of the day, including one that measures between 16 and 18 inches. My companions congratulate me as if I'm being inducted into a sort of fishing fraternity. I can almost feel my chest puff with pride – and I can't wait to tell my friends and family about the trout I caught that was "THIS big!!!"

Every fish we catch is immediately released back into the water. By law, you're only allowed to keep three fish per person per day. But these aren't "good eating" trout anyway, as I'm quickly informed when I ask about tasting our catch. Instead, the Paws Up team has delectable meals waiting for us at camp when we come in for the day: buffalo fajitas one night, steaks another. One morning I awake to the smell of French toast with fresh strawberries and caramelized pecans. The next time I go camping, hot dogs and baked beans will undoubtedly pale in comparison.

I'm also getting spoiled by how ripe the Flathead River is with fish – and how eager my companions are to help me catch them. I'm lucky to be rafting with five experienced fishermen, who constantly offer tips and tricks for reeling in the river's bountiful offerings. "Let that dog hunt," says Way, and by now I know he means to let the trout have a chance to strike at the fly before I whip it out of the water and recast. "Straight up and down," advises Steve Hawkins, another guide, when I get sloppy with my arm motion. I adjust and cast a smooth loop of line into a dark pool behind some rocks; just seconds later, I've snagged a fish nearly a foot long.

By the end of our second floating day, I've caught 23 cutthroat trout. Following a layover day of relaxing around the camp, we're back on the river for our last full day of fishing, and I wonder if I can double my previous day's number. By lunchtime, I've caught nearly 30 fish; by the time we pull the rafts onto the shore at sunset, I've caught 50 – yes, 50! – trout, more than anyone else that day.

My grandfather would have been proud.