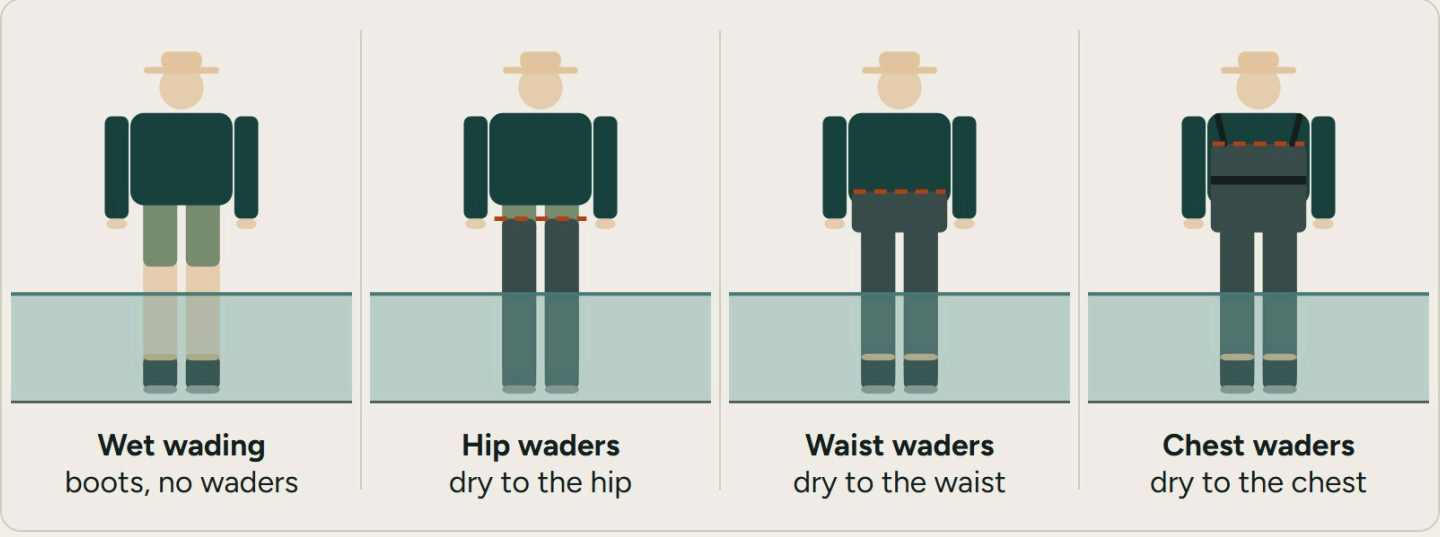
DO I NEED WADERS, AND WHAT KIND?

Not to start. Waders can wait until you know your water; until then, fish from the bank, or wet wade in wading boots or wet wading shoes. When you buy waders, choose the height, the material and what is on the feet. Check the sole rules before you buy boots: felt soles are banned in some states and parks.



The same angler at one water level. Each kind keeps you dry up to its top (dashed line). Dry is not the same as safe to wade that deep. Drawn, not to scale. Illustration: Fly Findr

CHOOSE, IN THIS ORDER

Start	Question 2 says waders can wait until you know your water; until then, fish from the bank, or wet wade in wading boots or wet wading shoes.
Height	Hip, waist or chest. Each keeps you dry up to its top. Dry is not the same as safe to wade that deep.
Material	Breathable fabric or neoprene. No study in Fly Findr's research compared them. Follow your wader's care label.
Feet	Stockingfoot: a neoprene sock inside separate boots, so you choose the sole. Bootfoot: boots built on.
Sole	Felt is banned statewide in Alaska and Rhode Island (fresh water) and Maryland and South Dakota (all state waters; Maryland's also covers the bank within five feet), and in places including 22 named Missouri trout waters, Yellowstone and Glacier (rules checked Nov 13, 2026). Rubber was legal on every water in the boots guide. Check your state agency, or the park or tribe's own rules, before a trip.
Fit	Try boots on over your wader feet. Brands size differently; between sizes, Simms says go up.

ON THE WATER

Wading staff	Adds a third point of contact on water that pushes hard, whatever is on your feet.
Spawning gravel	Rainbow and cutthroat trout spawn in spring, brown trout in autumn into early winter. Step around bare, clean gravel then. In a test on artificial nests, wading twice a day through development killed up to 96% of eggs and fry in the gravel; a single wading just before hatching, up to 43%.
Clean, drain, dry	Before the next river. Or freeze, or use a listed disinfectant. Colorado's 140 °F hot-water step is hotter than Simms allows for its waders.

What the evidence doesn't show. No study in Fly Findr's research measured wading safety (how deep or fast water is safe, or whether a belt or staff prevents falls) or compared breathable and neoprene waders, and no published study of felt against rubber grip on wet river rock was found. No prices: Fly Findr does not track them.

flyfindr.co/learn/do-i-need-waders

The full guide, the felt rules by state and park, boot fit, and the studies behind each point.

Sources: see the guide.

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