

ROBERT TRAVER FLY-FISHING WRITING AWARD

2026 Contest Rules

The Traver Award will be granted for the winning short work of fiction or non-fiction essay in the English language, not previously published commercially in print or digital media. “Short work” means 3,000 words or less. Previous Traver Award winners may not submit.

To be eligible, the Traver Award stories and essays must demonstrate high literary value in one or more of these categories:

- The joy of fly-fishing: *personal and philosophic experience*
- Ecology: *knowledge and protection of the natural world*
- Humor: *piscatorial friendships and fun on the water*

The submitted work must be in Times New Roman, 12-point font, with 1.5 spacing and normal (1 inch) margins. The entry must have a title at the top, *but no author’s name anywhere in the document.*

The file must be saved and uploaded as a PDF file. No other file format will be accepted. If you need technical help with file formatting and conversion to PDF, please find assistance locally (ask a teenager!). Technical steps may vary by computer program and operating system.

Files created in Microsoft Word can be converted to PDF as follows: click “File”; click “Save As”; click on the down arrow in the box on the right under the file name where it says “Word Document (*.docx)” and then select PDF (*.PDF) as the new file type and click “Save”. The document will be saved to the same folder where you saved the Word file, but as a PDF document with the name given and a .PDF suffix. (Note: simply typing .PDF after the file name does not change it to a PDF type file.)

If you are using Google Docs to write your entry, you *MUST* download the file as a PDF from Google Docs in order to submit it. Any other file type from Google Docs *will not work*. Providing a link to a shared document will not work. We appreciate your attention to these instructions, as too many files fail to come through which creates extra work for our volunteers. To download the file as a PDF, go to File > Download and select the PDF option.

The PDF file must be named with the following convention:

Lastname_Firstname_2026TraverEntry.PDF

For multiple entries, use Lastname_Firstname_2026TraverEntry1.PDF, Lastname_Firstname_2026TraverEntry2.PDF, etc.

All entries must be uploaded through the John D. Voelker Foundation website at www.voelkerfoundation.com/traveraward/ before midnight (Eastern Time) on May 31, 2026.

A writer may submit multiple entries. Each entry must be entered and uploaded separately with an entry fee of \$25 per entry.

When the SUBMIT button beneath the Traver Award entry form is clicked, the PDF file is transmitted and the browser will be immediately directed to a PayPal page for payment. **The entrant need not have a PayPal account**, but may submit payment with a credit card, debit card, or directly from a PayPal account. You will immediately get an email indicating that the PDF file has been submitted and a separate email via PayPal as a receipt for payment.

We will review each entry and confirm qualified entries and payment later by email, but it may take a day or two to check to be sure the entry meets requirements.

Upon receipt of both the PDF file and payment, we save the submitted file and a copy of the file with author's name changed to an entry number in the filename. Entries are later assigned by number for anonymous judging by our panel of volunteer judges.

If you have any questions on these submission instructions, you may email us at traveraward@gmail.com.

See our AI Policy below.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Usage Policy for Robert Traver Award Contest Submissions

All entries submitted to the 2026 Robert Traver Fly-Fishing Writing Award contest must be the original work of the author. Writing contests like this one celebrate human creativity, insight, and voice with an emphasis on multi-layered storytelling, originality, and emotional resonance. While AI-generated work can mimic these to some extent, the use of AI tools conflicts with the spirit of the contest among a global community of anglers, writers and readers.

Most computer programs and apps for writing, such as MS Word or Grammarly, have some type of AI embedded in their basic functions. While the use of AI tools for spelling, grammar correction, and minor editing assistance is permitted, the core writing—including story ideas, narrative voice, style, structure, and word choice—must be entirely the author’s own. Human writing for humans. By submitting their work, entrants certify that their entry was not generated or substantially composed by AI tools. Failure to adhere to this policy may result in disqualification.

Disqualification of a story is **the sole discretion of the contest judges, based on our reading of the story**. We reserve the right to determine if a story sounds or appears to be AI-generated. If so, it will not advance in the contest. If a story is disqualified, the entry fee will not be refunded.

We recognize that it is entirely possible that an AI-generated, or partially generated/assisted, entry could unwittingly be named a finalist or winner. If at any time the contest administrators or judges determine or learn that an entry violated this policy, the entry will be declared disqualified and any prize or recognition will be forfeited.

Ethical and Permissible Use of AI Tools

AI tools can assist writers in refining sentence structure, using alternative phrasing, or even generating ideas for a story, much like friends, instructors or editors can help while reviewing drafts of a story. In fact, we encourage writers to share drafts of their stories and re-write them based on feedback from readers; this is a normal writing process. However, over-reliance on AI (or other help) may dilute an author’s own voice and style, undermining the spirit of a creative writing contest.

Therefore, we encourage transparency. If, in advance of submitting an entry, the author wants to disclose if and how they used AI tools (or human editors) in their writing process, we will accept questions about whether an entry is permissible and issue a determination. Whether an entry is determined to be acceptable after such disclosure **is the sole discretion of the contest administrators and judges**. When in doubt, please do not submit an entry that could violate the spirit of the Award.

We also recognize that AI technology is evolving rapidly, and what seems like a clear policy today might be outdated next year. Therefore, we reserve the right to amend this AI policy at any time. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.