wake up later than I would like. It’s Saturday, and I shuffle over to my bedroom window. Rain drizzles down the panes. It’s gray outside — the kind of low gray that somehow takes most of the motivation and energy right out of me. I open the front door and I’m met with a brisk, wet breeze. I slam the door shut in winter frustration. Wasn’t it just 90°F and sunny, lake paddling weather? How quickly things can shift. There’s a whole day ahead of me and I have two choices: one, flop back in bed and snuggle in for hours of Netflix and maybe do one of the five house chores that I have on my list; or two, take a deep breath, throw on some layers, get out there, and accept the gray.

Not every trip outdoors is perfect. I’ve been on day hikes where I reach the top of the peak only to be met with a view of purgatory fog. I’ve also been on rides where the wind just about knocks me over multiple times and I’m soaked with rain squishing down through my socks. On these types of adventures, I often use a recipe to transport me to another, warmer destination. We have so many great flavors at our fingertips in the grocery store, and it’s a great opportunity to celebrate all the outdoors has to offer and have a flavorful, warm recipe to complement. Think about transporting to Jamaica with a jerk recipe, heading to Japan with some elevated trail ramen, or traveling to northern Italy with a hearty risotto and homemade pesto.

On this Saturday, I chose to set out into the thick mist and heathered sky. The day called for something warm and hearty, so I chose to make a pot of trail cioppino. While the rain and fog reminded me that I was in the Pacific Northwest, the stew made next to Diablo Lake in North Cascades National Park took me right back to a hammock on a coastal Italian rooftop. Cioppino is a classic Italian dish that may be new to you. It’s a seafood stew with a thick tomato sauce as its base, often featured on fine dining menus. You might be thinking that it would be hard to make this on the road or on the trail. I’m not suggesting you include a side of salmon in your saddlebags, but there are many packable seafood options that are low in weight and volume and are pretty bulletproof. Tinned muscles, packaged tuna, smoked salmon, and more are perfect for this recipe. You can choose your own seafood adventure and combine them with a tube of tomato paste and a few dry seasonings. Simmer for a few minutes in your camp pot and you have an elevated meal that is sure to bring some light to those dark winter days. Make sure you serve it with some crusty, toasted local bread!

Check out more great recipes at outdoorcats.com or follow me on YouTube: Chef Corso. Cheers!