

MIDWEST **OUTDOORS** December 2024

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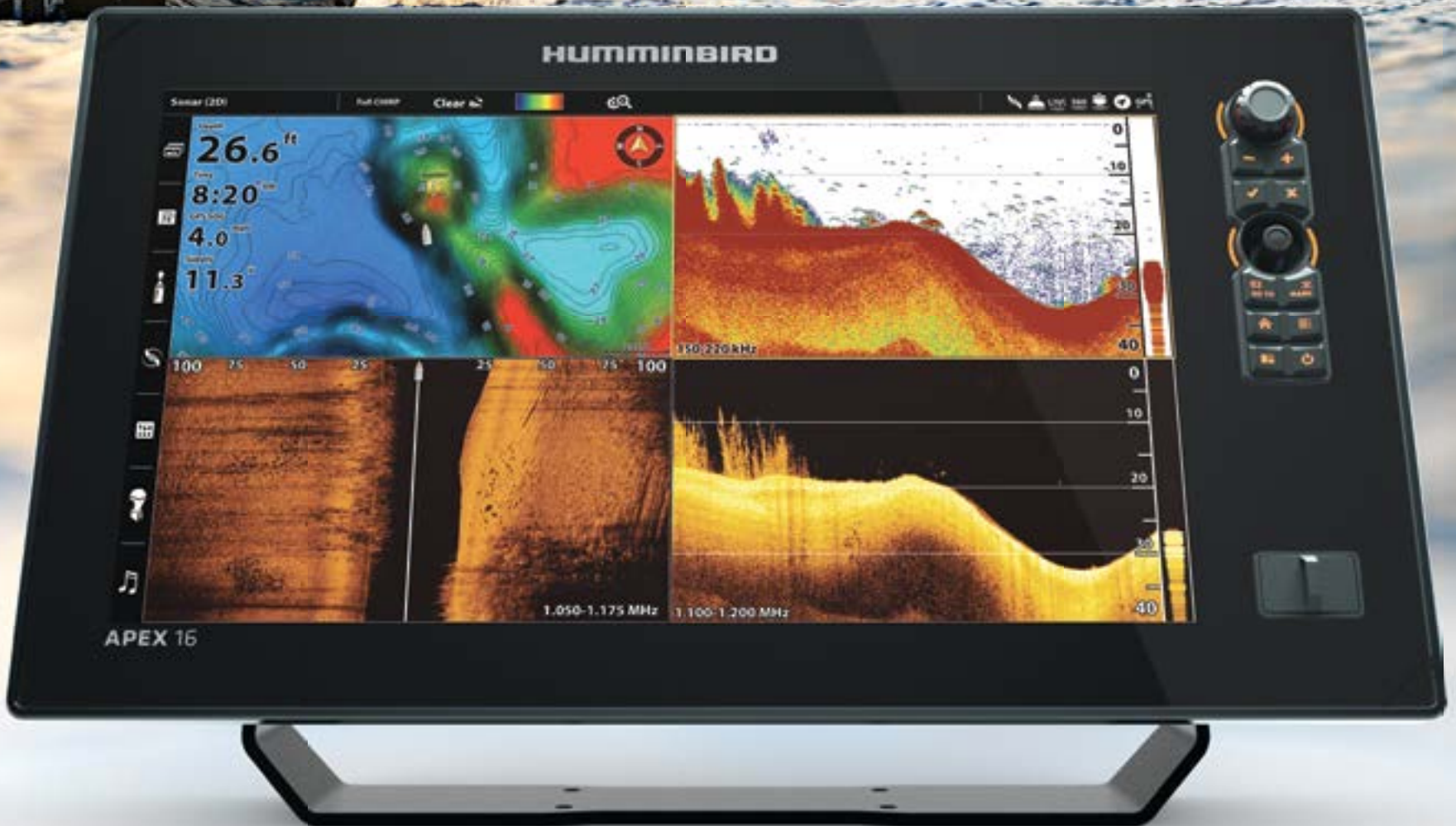
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On the cover

Early, safe ice offers some of the finest fishing of the entire winter season. Keep things simple, lightweight and mobile. Author Mark Martin walks softly, carries a little stick... and not much else. Read all about it on page 15.

Short Shots & Small Catches

Dan Dauw

Jay bird

A Canada Jay is a bird I have never heard of before, until now. I read they are like a food vacuum cleaner as they will eat just about anything. They will even steal snacks from hikers if they're not paying attention.

They belong to the same bird family—Corvidae—as crows and blue jays. They spend a lot of time in Canada and have been found in Minnesota. The bird's body is covered in shades of gray and white. I like to watch birds, but on all the many trips I've taken to Minnesota and Canada I have never seen a Canada Jay. Maybe next trip I'll see one.

Thickness of ice

There are sometimes different opinions on how thick the ice should be when venturing out on the hard water. Most would agree that 3 inches is good for one individual, 5 inches for a group, and if driving on the ice with a car or light truck the ice should be at least 8 inches thick. Keep in mind, we are talking about good, clear blue ice.

Use common sense

To be safe, before walking out on the ice, check the shoreline first. If the ice is gray in color, broken up and/or watery on the shore edges, that may not be a good thing.

Drill first

If you're not sure whether the ice safe, it's a good idea to drill a few holes near the shore and on your way to your favorite haunt. Keep in mind that shallow lakes freeze up faster than deeper lakes. The exposure to the sun, shade and snow cover can affect the ice thickness as well.

Weeds attract sunlight

A weeded area can attract sunlight, which may warm and melt the ice. Even areas with fallen trees or snowdrifts can change the thickness of the ice.

New location

If you're going to ice fish at a new location, see if there are other anglers in the area. That doesn't always mean that's where the good fishing takes place, but it's worth a try. Most ice anglers don't mind others joining in on the fun—or misery!

Life jacket

Whenever I venture on the ice, no matter how thick the ice is, I wear my PFD (personal flotation device). Besides added safety, it also adds a layer of warmth. Mine has pockets, which I really like. Of course, there are the CO2 inflatable type PFDs that are less bulky.

Headlights and deer

We all have heard and maybe used the saying, "Froze like a deer in the headlights." Deer are nocturnal and can see at night. Research seems to suggest that there are four reasons that can cause deer to freeze in a vehicle's headlights. They are: 1) The deer is taking stock of what is happening; 2) the deer is fleeing; 3) the deer is ready to fight; and 4) the deer is playing dead. Deer are not necessarily experiencing all four when caught in the lights. These reasons can apply to other mammals, too.

Twinkle, twinkle little star...

...how I wonder, what you are? That nursery rhyme has been around since 1806. Why do stars twinkle? As the stars' lights, not our sun, travel through layers of moving air, their images change slightly in brightness and position. That is why they seem to twinkle. So, do dreams come true if you recite the rhyme under the stars? Maybe!

Feed the birds

With the official winter season almost here (beginning December 21), it will be more difficult for our feathered friends to find food. Not all birds become "snowbirds" and fly south. Those that choose to stick it out here in the Midwest may welcome our help for food. Suet cakes and sunflower seeds are what we put in our feeders. Do not feed them bread, as there is little healthy value in doing so. If you can keep water from freezing, birds need it as much as we humans do.

Norway maple

This maple tree was brought over to our country from Europe and Asia in 1756 as an ornamental tree. Red maples can survive temperatures down to minus 40 degrees. There are over 120 species of maple trees in the world. Some maple trees in our country are over 300 years old.

It takes roughly 40 gallons of sap to make 1 pound of syrup. Sugar maples are favored by maple sugar makers.

Skunks

Striped skunks were brought into a recent conversation among friends. I have a cousin who lives in Connecticut who was recently sprayed by a skunk when she was going outside. A few years ago, I was walking a path in Ontario when one was heading my way. I didn't move and it wobbled right passed me. They really are a beautiful animal. Unless one feels threatened it won't spray.

When I was growing up, I can remember an ad in *Popular Science* magazine for skunks for sale. They were de-scented and costed \$25.00. They are not seen very much as they are nocturnal.

Christmas humor

Why are Christmas trees always looking to the future? Ans: Because the present is beneath them.

What is a Christmas tree's favorite candy? Ans: Ornaments.

How do Christmas trees get ready for a night out? Ans: They spruce up.

Quote for December

"The true work of art is but a shadow of the divine perfection."

—Michelangelo
MWO

Dan Dauw writes outdoor columns for two local newspapers and *MidWest Outdoors*. He first became a writer while in the U.S. Navy, writing articles for his ship newspaper. He has been an avid hunter and angler for most of his 76 years. Dauw retired from the U.S. Postal Service in 2000.

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Happy Holidays on a River Near You!

by Dave Csanda

The weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and potentially up through New Year's Day, provide much for folks to be thankful for: A bellyful of turkey and trimmings, presents under the tree, and a toast to both the year past and the new one on the way. Despite the cooling temperatures signaling winter's approach, it's a season overflowing with blessings and cheer.

Depending on where you live in the North Country, the lakes, ponds and reservoirs near you will likely freeze at some point during this time frame. Chances are they're in transition from late-open-water to early, walkable ice. But even if the water's too chunky to float your boat or probe on foot, you'll find another feast, bag of goodies and joyful celebration on a river near you.

Flowing water resists freezing until air and water temperatures nose-dive in early winter, meaning that rivers are the last fishable options to form safe ice cover sometime during the holiday hoopla. They provide outstanding fishing for cold-water species like walleyes and sauger migrating toward, and gathering below, dams for the winter season. Nearby backwaters may be beginning to freeze, offering early-ice action for panfish and pike. But out in the main flow of open water, walleyes, sauger and possibly white bass are the undisputed three kings of the late-open-water season.

With the river low and flowing slow due to reduced late-fall precipitation and runoff, these species gather in eddies and along current breaks, typically within the first mile or two below dams. Flooded shoreline cover is scarce due to low water levels, so during the day, you'll find most fish somewhere offshore, such as:

1. In or around the rim of the deep washout hole directly below the dam;
2. Relating to the tips of wing dams or shoreline points brushed by gentle current;
3. Around bridge abutments where eddies and pockets of calmer water form;
4. At junctions of the main river with tributaries or backwaters where two flows intersect, forming a current break along which fish feed;
5. Lying in the troughs of rolling sand dunes that provide calm pockets with current flowing around or over the fish;
6. Tucked in depressions or behind rocks/snags in the deep center of the river basin where fish can duck behind or dip below gentle current passing over their heads.

The key things these spots have in common are their proximity between calmer, resting zones and slow current that washes food (forage) past them, within easy reach. Predators simply make a short dash out into the current, snap up and meal and then immediately shift back out of the flow, repositioning for the next attack.

If you're after white bass, you may see fish occasionally breaking the surface in these areas, driving minnows or baitfish to the surface. Chances are, however, you'll incidentally catch them down deeper, and more bottom-oriented, while vertically



A Holiday Fishing Festivus for the rest of us! Photo: Sam Larsen

fishing for walleyes or sauger, using one of the following techniques:

Jigs—The ultimate, versatile presentation for river walleyes and sauger. Jigs pretied with marabou, feathers, bucktail or synthetic hair can be fished plain; or add a 2 1/2-inch minnow hooked up through the jaw and out the top of the head to sweeten the deal. Plain jigheads have less water resistance than pretied jigs and are perhaps better suited for fishing in faster current. They can be similarly hooked with a minnow; or insert the hook point into the minnow's mouth, run it out through one gill, and lightly insert the barb through the minnow's back (referred to as double hooking). Or forget the livebait altogether and thread on a soft plastic shad or grub body.

Jigs run the gamut from 1/4- to 3/8-ounce heads for typical slow-flow, vertical jigging during winter, to heavier 1/2- to 1-ounce heads for deeper, swifter flows like the Detroit River for walleyes, or for deep sauger holes below massive TVA reservoir dams in the Midsouth. Once again, a live minnow can be added, or simply stick with the soft plastic option, which is easier to fish in swifter flows. Most walleye/sauger anglers favor hi-vis colors like orange, yellow or chartreuse—or forage patterns making use of those colors—for better visibility to the fish in dingy river water.

Vertical jigging is pretty simple: Either pop the jig up a foot off bottom, and let it fall back until your line goes slack; or lift, hold it off bottom, and briefly let it fall to touch bottom before raising it slightly again. The first method is subject to snags; the second less so. Grab the line with your index finger to help detect bites, and watch your line for jumps or twitches that indicate a strike.

Blade baits—Blades like Sonars, Vibes and Rap Vs wobble aggressively on the rise and then sort of just plummet on the drop,

creating a disturbance that draws fish in and triggers strikes. They sometimes snag walleyes around the mouth and head, but they are legitimate vertical jigging lures, not snagging baits. Use a snap to attach them to your line as the baits usually have metal bodies with potentially sharp-edged holes at the attachment points. Trying direct might cut your line.

Jigging Rapalas and similar lures—Once simply considered ice fishing lures, these deadly baits have proven their effectiveness in open water for triggering strikes from walleyes, sauger and many other species. Jig upward, then drop your rod tip to follow the lure back down. Watch for the line to jump on a strike. The lure may just be heavy with a hooked fish on your next lift. Potential downside: They can be bit snaggy around rocky bottoms or wood debris, and you may lose a few during the course of the day.

Jigging spoons—Effective jigging lures in both ice and open water, pop them upward, then follow them back down with the rod tip as they flutter back to bottom. They're not used much in rivers because current tends to sweep them downstream on the flutter. But in eddies or very slow current, they provide another jigging option.

Three-way rigs—Versatile three-ways are used to present livebait on a hook or floating jig, or a wiggling, shallow-running, minnow-imitating-crankbait. Sinker weights range from about 3/4-ounce up to several ounces, depending on the combination of depth, current, and trolling or drifting speed. Lift, hold, and slowly drop back to tap bottom before lifting again to minimize snags. Hovering or anchoring is also legit, allowing your bait or lure to dance or wiggle in place in key, fish-holding spots.

Use a relatively short dropper line (12 to 16 inches) from your three-way swivel down to the sinker to position your lure or

bait slightly above bottom, so 1) the fish can easily see your offering above bottom and 2) to minimize snags. Slightly lighter line on the dropper—say, 8- to 10-pound-test vs. 12 to 15 on your reel—allows you to break off just the sinker when snagged, getting the rest of your setup back for quick and easy re-rigging.

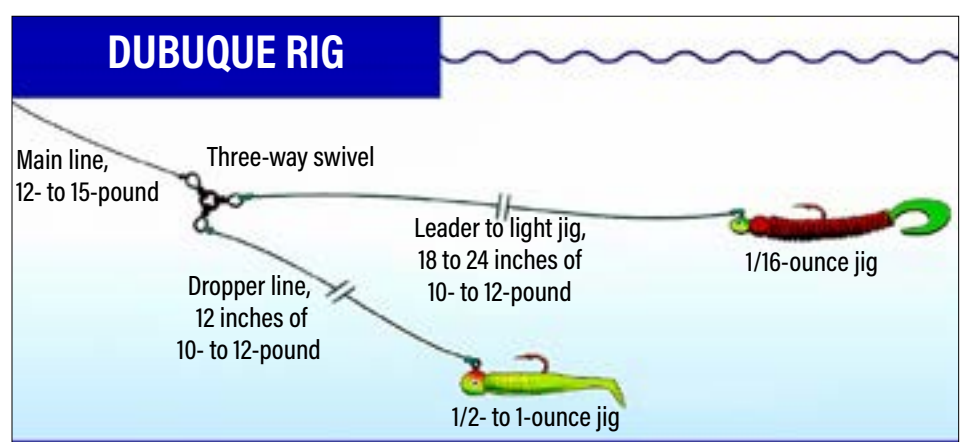
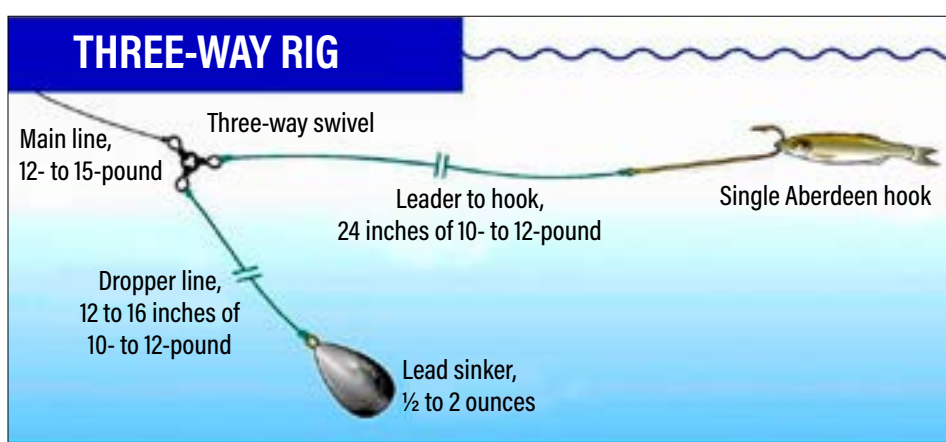
Dubuque rigs—These hybrid setups combine a three-way swivel with a heavy jig on a dropper line, with a short snell up top that leads to a hook, floating jig or small jig tipped with a minnow. It's kind of a one-two punch version of a three-way rig that incorporates two opportunities to hook up rather than one lure/bait and a sinker. Like jigs, they can be vertically jigged in place, drifted down current or slowly pulled upstream while lift-dropping the jig on and off bottom.

Generally, you'll find walleyes shallower than sauger, despite their similar physical appearances. Sauger eyes are more light-sensitive than walleyes', leading them to escape bright light levels by shifting deeper. If both species are present in the same area, expect walleyes to be somewhere from 8 to 18 feet deep, and sauger from perhaps 12 to 25 or 30, during the day. The main, deep washout hole below a dam is often a sauger hotspot for resident fish, while larger walleyes are usually found in spots a bit farther downstream. Mid-sized and "eater" walleyes can be found anywhere in between.

Once again, daytime fishing is generally most productive using vertical presentations; or perhaps longline trolling deep-diving crankbaits or three-way rigs up- or downriver through basins and holes. At dawn and dusk, some fish may move shallower to feed under the cover of darkness and throughout the night. Casting cranks or jigs dressed with soft plastics from shore may also produce walleyes, including large ones, in nearshore eddies, along current breaks or atop shallow rock structures. But for the most part, it's vertical deployment during the daylight hours.

In the end, we have much to be thankful for during this transition season between both calendar years and fishing seasons. And there's no better place for holiday fishing fun than on a river near you. And if you live in or visit the Midsouth where rivers don't freeze during winter, you get to enjoy the festivities all winter long, enjoying a gift that keeps on giving! **MWO**

Dave Csanda has enjoyed 45-plus years in the fishing communications industry at In-Fisherman, Angling Edge and now, as editor of MidWest Outdoors. He is an inductee of both the Minnesota and National Fresh Water Fishing Halls of Fame.



An All-Access Look at Catching Big Smallmouths from my Boat



Smallmouths are typically structure oriented. The author's dual-screen spread illustrates how you should want to fish and position the boat.

by Andrew Ragas

"Andrew, what's your favorite lure of all-time for catching smallmouths?" my readers and customers frequently ask.

"Whatever puts them into the boat for me," is my typical answer.

I know, *so cliché*.

Most teachers, coaches or instructors tend to play favorites to succeed. But I don't. With thousands of lures to pick and choose from within my tackle shop of a boat, they are nothing more than tools for the job. The secrets to catching big smallmouths from inland fisheries revolves around a lot of variables that lures and other material objects will never rival.

Smallmouth secrets

Most anglers play to their strengths. Mine is knowing my subjects. Additionally, I'm also good at identifying the lay of the lake and fish locations. I also pay attention to detail. Strategy-wise, my strength is meticulously working tubes and other jig baits along the bottom and covering water with long-distance casting strategies using paddletails and swimbaits.

With deep apology to the mighty muskie, whom I also have a passion to pursue, the battle with a 5-plus-pound smallmouth is far more exciting to me than any other freshwater gamefish. Its powerful runs, leaping ability, and reluctance to

come anywhere near the boat is why I am obsessively captivated by them.

They also make for better pictures, too.

Monster smallmouths are the fish of legends. Catching them is the ultimate challenge for any bass angler due to the difficulty of their nature, and that only a select few waters are capable of consistently growing them to huge sizes. Bass get trashed by other angler sectors for how unintelligent they are, and their ease of catching when most vulnerable. Little do they know that the biggest fish available in the lake are *far from easy to capture*.

Here's how we do it aboard my boat.

Identify trophy waters

Ideally, you should mostly fish waters that have a good recent history of producing fish achieving 5 pounds. Nowadays, a good number of inland waters throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan are managed exclusively for big fish in mind, having implemented special management regulations to maintain lower population densities. While many more lakes commonly grow numbers of 3- to 4-pounders, very rarely do these action fisheries produce a top-end fish surpassing a 5- to 6-pound weight.

State DNR databases can provide lists and lake survey records of the best trophy bass lakes in their states. Wisconsin and Michigan do a good job of this, publishing their data online.



Hooking up with a monster smallmouth is extraordinary. Land it successfully, and the experience could be life changing.

Waters with public access are managed for different purposes and fishery goals. Trophy smallmouth fisheries are specifically managed under special regulations for big fish and to purposely maintain the lower population densities that are necessary in supporting them.

On these types of lakes on my home waters of Wisconsin, average fish captured are 18 inches and better, but catch rates are far fewer in number. Bass are not the dominant and most abundant gamefish in the lake, like walleyes and other species could be. Their special regulations only exist for maintaining their low number, controlling aquatic invasive species, or helping better maintain populations of the other fish species.

As a result of this management strategy and philosophy, low-density bass waters rarely ever produce numbers, but commonly grow monsters.

Most unique to trophy bass lakes is that, historically, every water I fish has areas that consistently produce big fish. Have the presence of mind that big fish spots exist on every lake. Their locations will be quietly revealed the more frequently you hunt.

Catching big smallmouths has no one-size-fits-all pattern and strategy. Every specific fishery could require a unique bag of tricks. Having identified trophy-capable waters and understanding them is always my first step to catching big fish.



Once captured, have a plan for handling and quickly releasing fish. It is important for the fishery's future to handle these delicate fish quickly, correctly and with care.

Know their nature

Pursuing smallmouths throughout most of Wisconsin, one common characteristic leading to consistency and fishing success is that smallmouths are structure-oriented, a lot like walleyes are. Across most lakes, you can expect smallmouth movements and locations to revolve around the lake's available structure and topography. The more topography a lake has, the better it can be for hosting a good smallmouth fishery.

Commonly, look for fish from 5 to 25 feet deep, depending on the season. Smallmouths adapt well to everything the lake offers them, preferring bottom substrates of rock, sand and boulders. They also favor unique bottom transitions, drop-offs, rock humps, cribs, sandgrass, and other contour-influenced habitats providing them with the comforts of home. On some lakes, they are even weed line oriented like other gamefish species.

Meanwhile, on other waters which offer smallmouths nothing but barren basins and open water, they roam and turn pelagic. The allure of forage species such as ciscoes, smelt, perch and crayfish varieties also draws them to specific areas and shapes their seasonal feeding habits.

As majority of the angling population hammers the near-shore regions of every lake, I predominantly rely on main-lake and offshore structure throughout the year. These fish are less pressured, but I feel more in abundance. They also tend to run larger in size. I depend upon my Lowrance HDS-Live units for finding them, and C-Map Reveal for aiding in my boat's positioning and tracking.

Be mindful that if you can see smallmouths in clear water, *they can see you*. They have amazing vision and sensory

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While the average angler shouldn't need to carry 20 to 30 rods in the boat, you should ideally consider an average of 5 to 10 setups for practical, all-purpose, everyday use.

organs. Their sensors can be of detriment if your fishing relies exclusively on live-imaging and forward-facing sonars. I have seen these fish spook and turn-off because of their high-powered frequencies.

However you fish, be stealthy, and approach them from a distance. I know for certain this is why my boat's long-cast approach and strategy with paddletails and other search lures works so well throughout the year, as we are targeting fish that are *unable to detect us*. When they don't hold to structure, they roam. Your approach with these fish should likewise revolve around these tidbits.

Successful fishing is all about right time, right place. The right time and place to catch the biggest fish of the year for me is in May, late July through early August, and later in the year from mid-September through late October. The spring spawn, summer peak, September feeding, and late-October wintering periods create vulnerabilities for smallmouths. Big fish are most apt to be feeding, schooling or wintering. These periods are also when female bass are at their heaviest weights.

Of course, any time of the year can produce a trophy, too. My boat has captured big fish on random days, in non-peak seasons, and even on days when conditions would tell you otherwise. In my mind, every day can have the potential for a big fish if you're on the right waters!

Trophy smallmouth fishing is unlike anything else in bass fishing. You are casting into the lake's abyss. Unless you are prioritizing the correct waters, most days will not produce a trophy. Some days will only produce a few bites. Others, maybe just one or none altogether. The way I want to fish each day is strenuous and very much like muskie fishing!

The process

Hooking up with a monster smallmouth is extraordinary. Land it successfully, the experience could be life changing.

Hopefully, before you target smallmouths, you have the right equipment.

Many smallmouth anglers mistakenly fish with equipment that is too light and whippy to handle large fish. Light rods are unable to deliver powerful hooksets needed from afar and down deep. Big fish will control you, instead of you controlling them. Wimpy equipment will also exhaust these fish to death. Unless it's brought up slowly from the depths, no bass should ever be played on your line for longer than 30 seconds.

I fish with a diverse arsenal and artillery of St. Croix rods. For most jigging and casting strategies, I equip myself with medium and medium-heavy, fast-action rods. St. Croix manufactures a bass rod for almost every kind of strategy imaginable. The Legend Tournament Bass, Victory and Legend Elite series are my most oft-used rods.

While the average angler shouldn't need to carry 20 to 30 rods in the boat, you should ideally consider an average of 5 to 10 setups for practical, all-purpose, everyday use.

- Swimbaits (casting): Legend Tournament Bass Power Finesse (LTBC73MHXF) or Warhorse (LTBC75MHF). For spinning, seek a similar length and action.



Minimize the time from when the fish is landed to when it swims away. The author strives for a time limit of 20 to 30 seconds. The only 5 to 10 seconds that a big fish should be out of the water is for a photo or quick video. This practice helps assure lively release.

- Crankbaits (casting): Legend Glass (LGC72MM).
- Jigging (spinning): Legend Tournament Bass Versatile (LTBS71MF) or Legend Elite (ES70MHF).
- Finesse (spinning): Victory Finesse (VTS71MF) or Max-Lite Weight (VTS73MLXF).
- Jerkbait (spinning or casting): Victory Light Weight (VTS610MXF) or Mojo Bass Jig-N-Worm (MJC68MHF).
- All-Purpose (wildcard): Victory Max-Finesse (VTS71MHF).

Light lines provide stealth, but they are also too delicate and prone to breakoffs. Most line failure is a result of a poorly tied leader knot. For main lines, I strongly advise 15-to-20-pound Cortland Masterbraid for most jigging and casting applications (black or moss green). Lighter sizes ranging from 5-to-12-pound (high-vis yellow) are suitable for finesse fishing. Additionally, 10-to-15-pound fluorocarbon lines are excellent for crankbaits and jerkbaits, and copolymer lines in same sizes for spinnerbaits and topwaters. For leader knot attachments, I rely on the RP (Royal Polaris) knot, also known as the Albright Double Knot. This is the quickest and cleanest knot to tie; your rod's micro guides will thank you for tying it.

Renewable resources

Once captured, have a plan for handling and quickly releasing fish. I am appalled by the number of anglers who mishandle them, dropping frisky fish to the boat floor, and flopping throughout the boat. It is important

for the fishery's future to handle these delicate fish quickly, correctly and with care.

I use a rubberized Frabill landing net. Its thick, rubber bag is kind to their fins and slime coat. Also, the bag is deep and large enough to use as a boatside holding pen for big bass. Therefore, while the boat is in chaos or we're prepping for a measurement and photos, that fish can remain swimming and breathing in the water without any stress or issue.

During the spawning season, I try to avoid using a net altogether, hand-landing them instead.

Minimize the time from when the fish is landed to when it swims away. I strive for a time limit of 20 to 30 seconds. The only 5 to 10 seconds that a big fish should be out of the water for is for a photo or quick video. This practice helps assure lively release.

The most important aspect of my boat setup and fishing system is having a camera system set up in the boat. When I don't have customers or partners with me, I mount a few self-timer camera and GoPro Hero-10 setups throughout my boat. One camera is mounted atop my steering console, and another attached to the front pedestal seat.

Have the proper release tools. This should consist of pliers, hook cutters, bolt cutters, and a Baker hook extractor tool. Most big smallmouths are hooked cleanly in the jaw, so surgeries are rare. Smaller fish, on the other hand, are notorious for suicidal feeding and gut hooking. There is no solution to this other than maintaining a taut line to detect bites, and setting the hook instantaneously. If by chance a smallmouth has taken a bait deep, or is bleeding, prioritize immediate, boatside release over a photo. Ultimately, you want to avoid a non-releasable situation.

Presently, no other demographic in fishing is growing as exponentially and aggressively as smallmouth fishing. With increased popularity and pressure, angling hours and water traffic, we must police



Successful fishing is all about right time, right place. Of course, any time of the year can produce a trophy, too. Every day can have the potential for a big fish if you're on the right waters. Here's guide customer Scott Nicolette with his personal best 20-incher captured during a downpour.

ourselves to assure our actions aren't negatively impacting the fisheries, and our handling practices don't lead to delayed mortality.

When she's ready to go, be extra delicate. Big smallmouths need more oxygen, and require extra care at times, to fully regain their strength to swim away. There is no appropriate reason for these fish to be livewelled, like some do. When her tail tenses up, you'll know she's ready to burst off.

Big smallmouths in my neck of the woods are repeatedly caught and released. These fish are capable of achieving life spans of 20 to 30 years on some waters. If you need further proof, the same 7-pounder I captured twice in 6 months during the 2018 season was previously captured and aged in a DNR survey. At the time of my capture, she was a 25-plus-year-old specimen. The trophy smallmouth bass we pursue are old and irreplaceable and are the most valuable members of the population. The availability of these big fish is what drives you to my waters!

Take care of the fishery, and it'll take care of you. Fish wisely because these are wise, old fish. **MWO**

Andrew Ragas splits time between the Chicago area and Wisconsin's Northwoods. Based in Minocqua, WI, he specializes in trophy bass fishing and offers guided trips from May thru October. While big bass is the passion, he dabbles in multi-species as well. He may be visited online at www.northwoodsbase.com.

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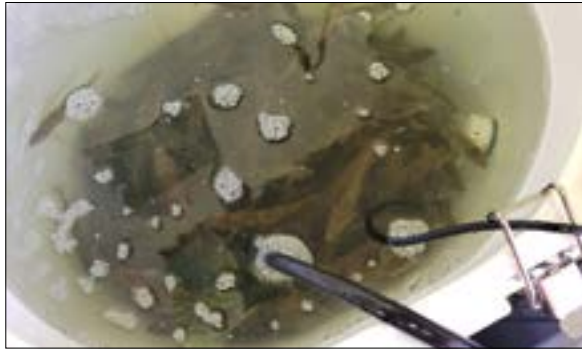
Over the years, I have written articles pertaining to just about all conditions that a river catfish angler might run into throughout their lifetime. 2024 presented us here on the Red River with just about every scenario all in the same season. This meant that having an understanding for all conditions and the ability to adapt to the everchanging conditions was critical to consistency and success.

I have been at this game long enough that I find myself telling people, "Yeah, this year is shaping up like '20?'" Yet every year, something throws a wrench into that statement making it its very own year to remember.

2024 started out just like 2012 and had a near flood in June like 2016. It did the up-and-down thing like 2010, had extended warm weather like 2010 and 2015, finally ending just like 2017. Basically, 2024 will be remembered for all conditions except major flooding and having to shut down early due to lack of water.

2024 started with little to no winter, meaning no runoff. Instead of our usual spring flooding, we had to wait for the ice to melt and start out at a nearly perfect level, although very low for the time of year. This says that catfishing will start out great, and if no water is put into the system, things will slow dramatically as flows decrease.

With no flooding and no high water, the catfish started biting very early water in temperatures of the high 40s. This is very common in lakes but seldom experienced in the river. In the morning, we would start fishing sunny shorelines, and as the day moved on, switch to faster current seams, looking for the active fish. Normally after a flood season, we must fish shallow and out of the current, because the fish are trying to adapt to fast-falling water.



A bait tank full of fresh white suckers. This ended up being the bait of choice all of 2024.



A Red River ramp on May 25 with the dock pulled out in preparation for high water.



The same Red River ramp on May 26 when the water came up over 6 feet in 24 hours. (If you look closely you can see the dock handles sticking out.)

About Memorial Weekend, everything changed, with large amounts of widespread rain. The river literally came up 6 feet overnight, bringing with it grass, trees and anything else loose that it could pick up. The debris was much worse because of no spring



Happy guide customers from early in the 2024 season. Fishing started out hot.

flood, making this the annual cleanout.

The river never did flood, but the fishing changed dramatically. Up over 13 feet in just a few days, the catfish were confused and trying to avoid the large amount of grass in the water. Now we went from fishing the main channel to fishing in the mouths of creeks and drain ditches where cleaner water was running in. The fish were hanging out tight to the main river, or right in the shallow runs of the creeks. We went from using 3 ounces of sinkers to 5 ounces.

Summer floods like this are typically quick, so within ten days, everything was down and back to sort of level. Fishing picked up for a few days before more rain to bring the river back up 5 feet or so, and this continued about every other week. The next six or seven weeks, we fished in water rising 4 or 5 feet and falling 4 or 5 feet the same week.

Just as things settled and you could get back to fishing the middle of the river, the water went up again, sending you back to the banks. One huge adjustment required to catch fish during the high-water and falling-water times was to fish off current and plan to sit 30 to 40 minutes on spots so the fish could find your bait.

Finally, in the end of July, the rains stopped and everything dried out, making for near-perfect catfishing conditions. Anglers could boat and fish wherever they wanted, and the fish looked great because high water has high oxygen and food, making for happy fish.

We did, however, go from one extreme to another. After having the wettest June, we had the driest September, bringing the close of the northern season to very low and dangerous boating conditions.

As you can see, we had to make many adjustments to stay on fish in 2024. Understanding all the conditions and learning how to adjust paid huge dividends to stay consistent. There were some other observations made through the year of unrest as well that can be used in seasons to come.

Bait selection

Catfishing up here dictates three main baits throughout the season: white suckers, goldeye and leopard frogs. Every angler has a comfort bait in these three, and mine is suckers.

With the early spring instead of a long,



The water was high and dirty after coming up over 10 feet in a couple days. You can see the creek opening.

drawn-out winter, minnow ponds fared very well, meaning the bait companies that raise suckers and other minnows had good crops. This meant that getting suckers at the bait shop was as easy as I have seen in over 20 years of catfishing.

Because 2024 started out in a drought, most of the small sloughs and water holes were dry or nearly dry. They did fill up at the end of May with the rains, but it seems that the damage on the frog population was already done. It was clear that there was a lack of leopard frogs, and the fish knew it. While you could catch a fish on a frog, it was clearly not the bait of choice the entire year, because there was just not enough of a hatch to trigger the fish into hunting for them.

Goldeyes were never really the bait of choice. I'm not sure why this was, but even the goldeye faithful said they just did not have the punch that they do other years.

Since white suckers are always my go-to bait, I was very happy with all these developments. I did find that the catfish never really wanted fresh suckers, but instead two- to three-day, or even seven-day dead suckers that were packed on ice. I have been experimenting with this aged bait and writing about it for years, but I have never seen it make so much of a difference. There is much more research on this to be done and there will be more articles about it for sure.

As you can see, 2024 was all over the place as far as catfishing on the Red River. It proved that paying attention to, and learning to adjust to, conditions make a big difference in all aspects of fishing adventures. It all came together in just one year. It was a fine year of learning and catfishing. **MWO**


Captain Brad Durick is a nationally recognized catfish guide, seminar speaker, and author of the books Cracking the Channel Catfish Code and Advanced Catfishing Made Easy. For more information: redrivercatfish.com or facebook.com/braddurickoutdoors.




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Lake Erie Sturgeon Stocking in Second Ohio Stream

Lake Erie once boasted a huge population of lake sturgeon. In fact, early commercial fishermen considered their presence such a nuisance that they were clubbed while they spawned in the shallows of tributary streams and piled onto the shoreline to be burned or fed to hogs.

Dams that blocked upstream migration to their spawning grounds, siltation from eroding soils into the watershed from the clearing of forests, intensive farming and other human impacts affected water quality.

Most of the damage occurred after the draining of the 300,000-acre Great Black Swamp that formerly inundated northwest Ohio and Indiana back to Fort Wayne around the beginning of the 19th century.

But the final nail in the coffin was the realization that their eggs made great caviar and the flesh, when smoked, was a delicacy that commanded a good price. This put pressure on the already dwindling population in the first half of the 20th century. By 1960, sturgeon became so rare that they were only considered to be incidental catches.

After attending meetings called by the Lake Erie Waterkeepers in Toledo and Cleveland, respectively, with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Ohio Division of Wildlife, Toledo Zoo, Toledo MetroParks, Cleveland MetroParks Zoo, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District and the Lake Erie Charter Boat Association, the ball was set into motion to pursue money from the Great Lakes Restoration Fund to rehabilitate the species.

With a population of only about 1 percent of the original numbers remaining in Lake Erie, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service began stocking approximately 3,000 age-0 juvenile sturgeon each October into the Maumee River in 2018.

Except for 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic restricted international border crossing to obtain eggs from sturgeon spawning in Canadian waters of the St. Clair River near Windsor, the Maumee River has been stocked with approximately 3,000 juvenile sturgeon annually.

The expert staff of the Toledo Zoo has been raising half of this number in a streamside trailer, with the rest brought in from the Genoa National Fish Hatchery in Wisconsin.

Each fish released in the Maumee River is equipped with a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag to be able to scan them, similar to those used in pets or a merchandise scanner that identifies an object as it is swiped past a reader.

The fisheries agencies and cooperating commercial fishermen have the scanners available to document the source of any sturgeon captured in their nets. In the case of the Toledo Zoo's fish, people can "adopt" a sturgeon for a donation of \$30 before it is released and be notified if "their" fish is captured, along with its capture location and other available details, such as its size.

Dozens of these fish stocked since 2018 have been recaptured, and some have been identified by their PIT tag number to match the location and year of their stocking.

Other data gleaned from their tag number compares the survival of fish raised in the streamside trailer versus those released directly from hatchery-cultured fish.

The true test will occur when they begin



Amanda Popovich, Ohio Div. of Wildlife. Photo: Ohio DNR

to seek spawning locations once the females become sexually mature in about 20 years. This will require the next generation of fisheries biologists to follow up with in many cases.

As an Endangered Species in Ohio and Ontario, fishermen must immediately release any sturgeon incidentally caught in their jurisdictions.

In Michigan, sturgeon fishing is allowed during an open season, but with no allowable harvest in the Detroit River between Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair. In Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River, a matching fishing season, including a shorter harvest period and size restrictions, are in effect for anglers in Michigan waters, with a limit of 1 sturgeon per year statewide.

Using streamside rearing will help to determine if the fish acquire stronger natal stream fidelity by being raised with river water flowing through their rearing tanks versus fish simply being introduced into the river directly from hatchery trucks.

On October 2, the hatchery brought



Jason Fischer (USFWS), Eric Weimer (Ohio Div of Wildlife), Justin Chiotti (USFWS) and Ryan Trimbath (Cuyahoga Valley National Park). Photo: Ohio DNR

down 60 Lake sturgeon for the first stocking into the Cuyahoga River. Each fish was equipped with both a PIT tag and implanted transmitters that will ping their locations, which hundreds of receivers dispersed throughout the Great Lakes can detect and plot movements.

If all goes well with their survival rates, plans call for 1,500 fish per year to be stocked in the Cuyahoga River for the next 20 years to attempt to establish a spawning population there, too.

This second Lake Erie tributary stream that was selected would have been a waste of money and resources until recently. It used to regularly catch fire from oily sheens and other pollution often seen spread across its surface.

As it turned out, a spectacular fire in 1969 that gained national attention was credited with helping to eventually get the Clean Water Act passed through Congress and signed by President Nixon in 1972. Of course, the river in question is the Cuyahoga, which empties into Lake Erie at Cleveland.

Recent dam removals in the Cuyahoga River and water quality improvements through the work of the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District have led to the return of other pollution-sensitive fish species seen there including steelhead trout, northern pike and walleyes.

A third stream, the Sandusky River, is being evaluated for Lake sturgeon introduction, now that the Ballville Dam,



Sturgeon ready for release. Photo: John Hageman

built in 1913, was removed in 2018, opening an additional 22 miles of this large river to migrating fish after over 100 years.

Already, migratory spawning runs of walleyes, white bass and at least one sturgeon have been reported upstream of the dam's former location since its removal. Water quality improvements have also been documented with respect to lower harmful algal bloom densities forming in the river now that impounded water behind the dam is no longer present. **MWO**

John Hageman, who now authors about 120 articles per year, was the Manager of The Ohio State University's Stone Laboratory Biological Field Station at Put-in-Bay for 25 years, began working on Lake Erie research projects in 1977, ran ice fishing charters for 15 years and enjoys fishing for multiple species,

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Herb's Dilly

When I was a child, I read some magazine articles about how you can take an old kitchen spoon and make a fishing lure out of it. Unbeknownst to my mother, I once took some silver tableware out of the drawer and considered this approach, but never followed through with the plan. Looking back, it was probably a good thing.

This month's lure got its start this way, though, with old silverware spoons. In fact, depending on who you ask, it may just be the story of the very first fishing buzzbait.

Herb's Dilly

In the early to mid-1930s, J.M. Herbert, a jeweler from Shreveport, La., wanted to make a fishing lure unlike anything else on

the market. He began using silver tableware spoons. First, he cut the handles off, then shaped them into his desired form and size. He punched dents in the spoons for eyes and drilled a hole at the tail and nose of each spoon. A bucktail dressed treble hook was added to the tail hole and secured with a



A Herb's Dilly with box.



Herb's Dilly in White with worm trailer added.



Herb's Dilly in Frog pattern, with box.



1940 ad for Herb's Dilly.

small screw.

A small prop was cut and formed from heavy-gauge sheet metal and attached to a wire shaft at the nose of the lure. These were soldered together versus the normal twists most fishing lures have.

The result was a spoon-like bait that was able to produce sound and churn up the surface of the water. Essentially, the creation was the world's first buzzbait.

These early handmade baits are about 1 3/4 inches long and are quite rare. Later, they were machined stamped from brass and chrome plated or painted. Some of these hand-painted eyes and "Herb's Dilly" engraved on the back. These baits were very popular locally and their references are all over the historical papers of Shreveport and neighboring communities. Articles and advertisements included sponsoring and winning fishing and casting contests, being "back in stock" in sporting goods stores and stories about the local jeweler's amazing bait.

Like many early lures that are successful, there is often imitation, especially locally. There is a very similar bait also out of Shreveport, La. patented in 1939 created by Earl Schavey, quite some time after Herb's Dilly first appeared on the scene. You don't see a lot on this bait commercially, but the bait appears so similar to the Herb's Dilly that you have to wonder if they are somehow connected.

Shortly after World War II, the Glen L. Evans Company of Idaho acquired the rights to the Herbert Bait Company and began making their own version of the Herb's Dilly. These Glen Evans models are recognizable by their shallow engravings and a thinner lead. Glen Evans also introduced a smaller version of the Herbs Dilly, and in the 1970s, another version came out that combined the Herbs Dilly with an Evans Spinner style. This model had a "V"ed wire-shaft, bass buzzbait style with a shredded plastic skirt.

After the passing of Glen L. Evans in 1982, the company was sold to Luhr-Jensen. Luhr-Jensen continued to produce all the previous variants of the Herb's Dilly and added another. The new Luhr-Jensen Dilly



1949 ad for Herb's Dilly.

had an in-line buzz spinner blade, rubber tail skirt, and a single hook. Production of the Herb's Dilly began to slow down in the late 90's and eventually would completely stop prior to 2005 when Rapala acquired Luhr-Jensen.

Colors and packaging

There isn't a lot of written information on this lure, and I have yet to find a catalog from the Herbert Bait Company—if indeed one did exist. A wide variety of colors are available on this bait. Most notably the colors of the bucktails.

As Glen Evans took over, things became a little more standardized. As early as 1949, standard bucktail colors began as Black and White, Red and White, and Solid White.

Additional colors of bucktails were added by Glen Evans and then Luhr-Jensen through the years. The other interesting piece of color collecting is the body itself. You can find a variety of painted designs and variations on the Herb's Dilly's, making for a large variety of lures to collect.

Packaging for the Herb's Dilly lures was rather limited. I have yet to see a package from the original Herbert Bait Company. Glen Evans had a variety of boxes and then cards that the lure came on. Once it moved to Luhr-Jensen, the lure came on a variety of cards.

Collectors value

Herb's Dilly lures are a great lure to start a collection or to take fishing. A Herb's Dilly in excellent condition without the packaging sells for anywhere from \$10 to \$20 depending on color and age. With the matching packaging in excellent condition, the price would jump up to anywhere from \$35 to \$50. A used and heavily fished Herb's Dilly without packaging might only cost you around \$5 and end up being one of the best baits in your tacklebox. These baits are sought after by both fishermen and collectors. **MWO**

Keith Bell and his family live in Neenah, Wisconsin but spend a lot of time fishing northern Wisconsin. Keith has been an avid angler and outdoorsman his entire life. His passion for fishing is matched only by his passion for fishing history and preservation. He is the founder and owner of MyBaitShop.com, the world's largest online vintage tackle and history website. You can reach Keith at his website or at keith.bell@mybaitshop.com

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End-of-Season Random Thoughts About Fishing Tackle

Last month's article hopefully put you on some late-fall, early-winter, pre-ice-season bass patterns. Depending on conditions, those techniques and bait suggestions should have you on active bass now, and right up until first ice.

Writing this last article of 2024 in my fishing room, I find my tackle a little less organized after a long open-water season. My box of various tackle components needing attention seems quite full, ranging from: baits with missing hooks; bent this or broken that; reels with issues ranging from much-needed line replacement to major lubing; and some just plain ol' ugly reminders of fishing moments gone bad from throughout the season!

There's a baitcaster which can only be described as cartoonish from a backlash caused from a blind cast after dark. I remember the sound: The whizzing of line going out, and the dull thump of my bait hitting a low-hanging tree limb, followed by what seems like an eternity before I could clamp my thumb down on the highly overspinning spool. Y'all have done it. Don't act like you haven't. Laugh if you must!

In the corner stands a clump of rigged rods desperately needing to become "unrigged." Lining the bottom of my tackle racks is, well, all as I can say is, "What's with me and tackle bags?" I kick off the season completely organized. But it seems that every trip out, I add a couple more baits or packs of hooks, to the point where the zippers can no longer control the contents of these oversized saddlebags. I truly believe that well-maintained gear and tackle organization makes for more successful outings and makes you a more successful and competent angler. But somehow, every end of the open-water season finds my tackle in the same disarray.

I can somewhat attribute this pack-ratting of tackle to my age. And now, finally realizing

that this has become a normal pattern over the years, there's little doubt that any significant change is on the horizon. Just sayin'! But as a PSA (public service announcement) for those new to the sport, don't follow in my ways with this abuse of carrying too much tackle; instead, keep yours minimal and organized on a regular basis.

While my season-end "overall tackle restoration project" has not yet begun, my half-dozen stuffed, carry tackle bags do pique my interest. In my defense, I keep this collection of multiple carry bags packed, ready and dedicated to carry tackle geared for particular species-specific outings. But as mentioned earlier, they seem to have become grotesquely overweight by season's end.

So, just for fun, I decided to unzip these bulging bags to find out what was causing the over-stuffed issues. With each bag, I experienced "ah-ha" moments. I'm not going to bore you with each bag-exposing detail, but in doing so, you discover baits that you forgot you bought. And ones found to be unsuccessful, yet still residing in your bag. Of course, they're tucked away in the very bottom depths of your tackle carrying luggage, clearly out of sight, awaiting their end-of-season liberation from the bowels of your traveling tackle system. This is soon followed by unpacking an unusual supply of beef jerky, and of course your handful of go-to baits; you know: The baits you actually use, which occupy the most-accessible positions within the bag.

As I removed the baits from each bag, I formed piles of the bag's contents, dividing them into baits that, over the season, were a successful, and ones that produced poorly. As I went through each bag, kind of reminiscing over the season, one thing became obvious: My collection of go-to baits or productive baits was incredibly minimal compared to baits that entertained little success over

the last season. Obviously, I must work on thinning out my tackle during the season. But it does generate some thoughts concerning not only my carry tackle, but my stacks of backup tackle as a whole.

As I kick back in my chair, with the remnants from the explosion of my bag-emptying-tackle project strewn across the floor, surrounded by shelves of tackle lining the walls in my fishing cave, I started to ponder, "How much is enough tackle?" Yikes! Where did that thought come from? That question is usually confronted while accompanied with by a very loving spouse. But to think of that on your own—what's that all about?

While obviously having a little fun here, I'm truly thankful and blessed to have all the gear and tackle acquired over the years I've spent angling, from early childhood to where I find myself today. Investments? That depends on your point of view. But I do enjoy every aspect of angling, which includes the tackle necessary to both enjoy my time on the water and be successful in the pursuit of my favorite species.

Getting back to my original thought: When do we reach the point when we can truly say, and believe, that you have enough tackle? That's a tough question to answer, and the theories and thought processes will vary depending on the angler.

First off, in most anglers' defense, baits and tackle are products that need to be renewed, so to speak. Hooks, for example, grow dull or break off on snags; line needs renewing on a constant basis; rods get broken; and reels wear out. So, the need to replace products is an acceptable circumstance that we endure to enjoy this pastime so important to us as anglers.

My point, and thoughts along the line of "enough tackle," are directed toward an angler's need to feel they need to have the latest, greatest tackle as it enters the market to be a successful angler. This, my friends, is far from the truth! The very best and most expensive baits, lines, rods or reels are pointless if an angler lacks the understanding of fish behavioral patterns; how weather affects fish and their resulting movements or locations; and seasonal effects on various species of fish. This list of fishing variables continues ad infinitum, not even touching on the importance of specific tackle choices.

There has never been a time in my fishing history with such an incredible influx of baits and tackle. I love fishing tackle; it's been a borderline illness or addiction for as long as I can recall. I must admit that sometimes, I'm not certain that I'm purchasing baits for their fish-catching attributes, or if I just am blown

away by their design and incredible color patterns!

I get a lot of questions from beginning anglers concerning what baits or tackle can they get by with just to catch a few fish, or to get a fish tugging on the end of their children's rods? After those questions, my thoughts really become centered on what we really need, tackle-wise, to actually "catch a few fish." It seems like a pretty reasonable question. When the time comes to answer one of these anglers, I must be honest and admit that you don't need 56 color variations of a squarebill crankbait, or 70-plus color variations of a plastic worm, to catch the few fish you so humbly asked about.

Years ago, fishing was a rather inexpensive past-time; it's not so much today. Example: I'm staring at a rod-and-reel combo in my rod rack. The rod, reel and high-end braided line sported a price tag surpassing \$500!

Before you give me some grief, this was a specialty rod setup, certainly nowhere near my normal tackle. And it really wasn't a necessity, but just one of those have-to-have extravagant purchases. Honestly, I haven't landed a single fish on it, but it sure does "look pretty!" This purchase was my choice, and I certainly wouldn't try to convince any angler that it was a must for their tackle collection. Yet the tackle industry bombards anglers with "must-have" gear suggestions that rival my one extravagant purchase!

I received a troubling email from a regular reader of my column commenting, "I'd love to fish more, by myself and with my kids, but it's just not affordable anymore." These words are tough to hear. It's certainly not the only time I received similar comments as of late.

Well, heading into a new writing season for this column, I promise to do my part to bring anglers back into the sport of fishing. I can't change the pricing on today's tackle, but I can devote my upcoming articles to keeping my tackle suggestions and ideas with a budget in mind. I promise that there are ways for you to enjoy angling and still be able to provide for a family. I'll do all I can to make sure of that!

Remember, high-end tackle doesn't create a fishing experience; spending time in the outdoors, and spending time with those you care about, creates memories that last a lifetime. There's a new season ahead, and I can't wait to be part of helping folks get the most from their outdoor experiences. **MWO**

Passion for angling drives Dan Brozowski to the water's edge virtually any chance he gets. Although passion cannot be measured, weighed, or recorded, it can be shared. He does this through his writing and while on the water. If you have any questions or comments for Dan, you may contact him at: onthebank@att.net.

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2024 Gift Ideas for Outdoor Enthusiasts

As you may remember, each December, I round up a variety of outdoor products that were initially introduced in one marketing media (fishing, for example), but are diverse enough to be considered for other activities (backpacking, camping, hunting, etc.) as well. If they pique your fancy, learn more about them on the Internet.

Here are a few of those cross-category products that are worth checking out to see if they'd complement or supplement your arsenal of backcountry gear:

Survival Mode Energy Ration Bar. Its name pretty much says it all. It's an emergency energy food, "buttery lemon shortbread" bar that packs 14 micro-nutrients into each 410-calorie piece, potentially providing survival nutrition for up to two days. The bars use sorghum (protein, fiber, antioxidants) and tasted to me like a Lorna Doone cookie!



Tillamook's Tajin Chili/Lime Smoked Jerky is a "tender" beef jerky snack that provides a very tasty, notable dash of spicy flavor for



Tillamook's Tajin Beef Jerky is a pocket-packin' snack with a unique chili/lime flavor unlike most other seasonings. The bottle of Tajin seasoning alone is worthy of all camp kitchens by itself and adds extra value when carried in a survival kit to make most all natural survival foods much more palatable.

your taste buds no matter what the activity. The hot chili/strong lime flavor is unlike anything I've tasted before. As much as the jerky, I highly recommend the Tajin sauce—Tabasco-like but with a lime kick! Besides adding punch to regular fare, a bottle of this sauce in an emergency kit would help you down a variety of "edible" survival foods more agreeably—not only masking any off-natural tastes but adding

a dash of chili and lime to whatever emergency, "edible" critter or plant you are building up the courage to eat.

Two nifty food gear items that will "bowl" you over: First, a **folding bowl from Adotec** that, when snapped together, can serve as a bowl for soups, oatmeal, etc., or opened flat for sandwiches and such. It also makes a convenient dog dish or a catch-all receptacle when stringing up fishing gear in your kayak or canoe. When folded, it's a tight, easy-to-stow packet. They make a handy fold-up funnel, too.

Second, have extra guests at the picnic table? Need a few indestructible table sets for backcountry dining around the campfire? Consider **Sea to Summit's Passage Dinnerware Set (6-piece)**.

Made of glass-reinforced polypropylene, the bowl/cups (with snap-on lid, and utensils) are light, strong and packable. Cool Grip sidewalls allow the user to hold the bowl and cup firmly, even when the contents are hot. Cutlery snaps together for transport. And here's a novel idea they came up with: You can reverse one utensil and click the handles to a second utensil to create a long spoon or spork.



Infinity's X1 5000 lumen flashlight is the most powerful hand-held light I've ever seen! Made of aircraft-grade aluminum, the IPX waterproof flashlight is guaranteed for life to withstand the toughest environments. It produces a full, circular field of light in three widths and brightnesses—powered by either recharging or using the 9-chamber AA battery alternate power insert. It's like having a spotlight in the palm of your hand! (You could literally duct tape the X1 flashlight to the hood of your vehicle for an emergency headlight!).



It's heavy, but very well balanced for hand-held maneuvering. However, it gets extremely hot around the lens area, especially at maximum power. Range of light cast is from 300 lumens/18 hours/40m at low intensity to 5000 lumens/2 hours/180m at the maximum high rechargeable setting. It's an incredibly powerful light source.

The Pro Pad and Capture from Peak Design lets you carry your camera (or binocs) on any strap up to 2.5 inches wide with quick, easy and secure attachment, and equally fast and convenient release. The clip lets you lock into the clip from all four directions and almost acts like a third hand for dealing with the weight of the camera during lens changing.

All parts are weatherproof and resist rust and saltwater; it's lighter weight than earlier

models; has an Aluminum alloy chassis, backplate, quick-release button and stainless-steel locking pin; and the anodized finish increases durability and smoothness.

Attached to my shoulder strap on my pack, I found that the Capture clip allowed me to adjust the weight distribution of the camera to where I hardly felt I was carrying it.

Stowed in a life acket or backpack pocket, **Smith's Lawaia**



Left: Camera Capture clip attached to backpack strap; Right: Pro Pad support for camera Capture attachment to waist belt. Photo: Peak Design



Smith's Lawaia Emergency Release Multi Tool features a knife sharpener, cord/strap cutter and lanyard/carabiner attachment clip. This product is an ideal carry-along pocket tool, especially for a backcountry/kayak angler.

Emergency Release Multi Tool is a "quick-grab" accessory that is always within reach and can be used to quickly sharpen a small blade—or several other tasks, even right in the middle of whatever you are doing (anglers, backpackers, campers).

The **Big Game Hook Sharpener**, housed within the tool, effortlessly revives hooks up to 14/0 with its aggressive diamond groove. Smith's two-stage sharpener has a coarse carbide side for quick fixes in the field and fine ceramic stones for a polished finish. This pocket-sized Emergency Release Tool includes a built-in bottle opener.

I want to introduce the **Sawyer MINI Water Filter** here because it works well with a suggestion below. This mini filter is a lightweight, versatile personal filtration system that fits in

the palm of your hand and has a total field weight of just 2 ounces. The tiny MINI provides 0.1-micron, absolute filtration for clean drinking water on the go, filtering out bacteria, protozoa and microplastics. The MINI filter removes 7 log (99.99999%) of bacteria (like salmonella) as well as other harmful bacteria which causes cholera and E. coli, and 6 log (99.9999%) of protozoa such as giardia and cryptosporidium. The MINI also filters out 100% of microplastics.

The Sawyer MINI can be attached to drinking pouch; use the included straw to drink directly from your water source, connect it to hydration pack tubing or screw it onto standard disposable bottles (see at right).



Both **High Camp Flasks: firelight and torch** are made of 18/8 stainless steel, and each features a magnetic cap that conveniently attaches to the canister's bottom when in use. The 3-piece bar set includes two vacuum-insulated tumblers and a 750-milliliter "bottle." The smaller "torch" offers a regular and wide bottle opening for convenient filling and serving. Primarily designed as a cocktail vessel, the magnetic, "shot-size" cap also attaches nicely to the bottom to turn the "torch" into a futuristic-looking goblet that's perfect for any campfire toast.



Left: High Camp Flasks firelight flask—750-milliliter, all-in-one, three-piece bar set; stainless steel with magnetic tumblers and cap; Right: torch flask is a versatile, 6-ounce, mini thermos-like vessel featuring narrow and wide mouths and a magnetic "shot glass" cap that lets you configure the unit as a wine goblet.

Want a water bottle that folds up when empty? **Cnoc Outdoors** offers their **Vesica collapsible bottle** in a 1-liter/32-ounce size that reduces inward to reduce its size by about two-thirds. It still takes up space in your pack, but not as much. The hard nozzle dome and bottom keep it from reducing smaller.

The flexible sides mean that you can apply pressure to force the liquid out faster (maybe a good thing)? One virtue is that it works perfectly with the Sawyer Mini Filter, giving you a handy, easy-to-stow water purification unit that to carry with you at all times.

Sometimes, being "self-reliant" in the outdoors doesn't necessarily mean that you are dealing with an emergency situation; rather, that you are able to enjoy your experience with whatever you happen to have with you. These items are among those on the market that can make your backcountry experience as pleasant as possible—and in some cases—minimize the effort you may need to mitigate a threatening situation—or raise a toast to its success afterwards! **MWO**



Tom Watson is a former team member of Kodiak Island Search & Rescue, kayak tour operator, and author of "How to Think Like a Survivor: A Guide for Wilderness Emergencies," "Best Tent Camping—Minnesota," "60 Hikes Within 60 Miles Minneapolis and St. Paul" and "Best Minnesota Camper Cabins." (All available on Amazon.) He's a freelance writer and presenter on self-reliance and other outdoor topics. tomoutdoors.com.

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PROTECTING YOUR TRAVEL TRAILER ADVENTURES

Embarking on the open road with your travel trailer is an exciting experience, filled with adventure and the promise of new discoveries. However, ensuring that your journey remains carefree involves more than just planning the perfect route and destination. It involves protecting your travel trailer with insurance customized for you. Here are a few reasons why having insurance for your travel trailer is not just a wise decision, but an essential one.

Peace of mind on the road

Traveling comes with its share of uncertainties, and having insurance for your travel trailer provides you with the peace of mind that you deserve. Whether you're cruising down the highway or parked at a scenic campsite, knowing that your investment is protected can make your travels even more enjoyable.

Protection against the unexpected

Damage to your travel trailer can happen when you least expect it. Comprehensive and collision travel trailer insurance can cover you in case of events that are out of your control, like a tree limb falling on your trailer. Optional Pest Damage ProtectionSM provides coverage for damage from pests such as rats, mice, insects, birds, or other nondomesticated animals.

Coverage for personal belongings

Your travel trailer is not just a mode of transportation; it's your home on wheels. Optional personal effects coverage can help cover the cost of personal belongings inside the trailer, providing financial assistance in case of theft or damage.

When auto insurance isn't enough

Auto insurance generally provides coverage for your travel trailer only when it is connected to your vehicle and may assist in cases where your trailer causes damage to another vehicle.

However, it typically does not provide standalone coverage for repairing or replacing your trailer if it sustains damage or is totaled. You can choose travel trailer insurance options that help cover those expenses and may even offer the benefit of total loss replacement coverage.

When homeowners insurance isn't enough

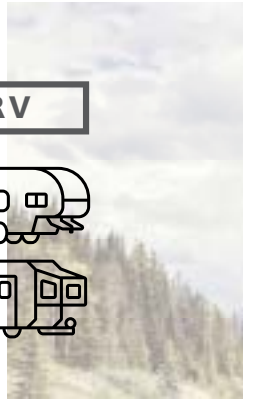
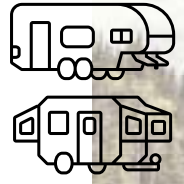
Homeowners insurance may provide some coverage for your belongings, but often has limitations when the trailer is off your property. A customized travel trailer insurance policy can ensure that your trailer and belongings are adequately covered.

Liability protection

Accidents involving your travel trailer can also lead to liability issues. Insurance can provide protection against third-party claims, covering medical expenses or property damage that may arise from an incident involving your trailer.

Insuring your travel trailer is not just a precaution; it's a commitment to a worry-free travel experience. Safeguard your investment, enjoy the journey, and make every moment on the road a memory worth cherishing. Start your adventure with the confidence that comes from knowing your travel trailer is protected against life's unexpected twists and turns.

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Using Under Spins for Ice Fishing

Under spins are well known for their effectiveness with many species of fish, especially crappies, bluegills and other panfish. They are also very good with white and black bass, and when I was fishing Bull Shoals Lake many years ago, carp in the shallow ends of creek arms. The thing you don't hear a lot about is using the very small versions of lures like the Blakemore Panfish and Ice Road Runners.

In this article, we are going to talk about using the smallest members of the Road Runner "under spin" family for ice fishing, and when winters have open water. These are best used for straight-line fishing on the ice and with a float when fishing open water. We'll get to the techniques used for each further along in the article.

First, let's cover color and body selections. The heads are 1/32- and 1/16-ounce sizes. I use 4 colors: Ant (black), Lemon/Chartreuse Glow, Lime Glow and Lemon Pearl Glow. The lures come with tube bodies, which I use 99 percent of the time. If changing to a different style, it would be a solid plastic Custom Jigs and Spins Tutso/Ratso body with a tail.

The selected colors work on a wide range



A 1/16-ounce Lime Glow Panfish Road Runner, with a penny showing the relative size of the lure.

of conditions and fish. I use all colors for ice fishing, with black being my last choice. In open water, my first choice is black, with the possible addition of Booley Wooger, which is a sort of pumpkin seed. Black and Booley Wooger seem to work best on bass in open water, while Lemon Pearl Glow is my backup for crappies and bluegills. For ice, I'll start with Lemon Pearl Glow and change to Lime Glow.



It's an early winter day without ice. Crappies have moved to their winter areas, meaning it is time to use a long rod and float, make long casts, and present the lure at the correct fish-catching depth over a deep brush pile.

I stay with the very small tube body most of the time for a couple of reasons. The tube combines tentacle action and air escaping from the tube; the top reason is for holding scent. I use Kick'n Crappie. With these smaller jigs, either fit the opening of the bottle into the tube and squeeze or dip the tube in scent. The attractant is held and dispersed for a longer time since it goes up inside and held longer. I also use Berkley Crappie/Panfish Nibble baits and combine the Nibbles with the Kick'n Crappie for a double and longer shot of attraction.

A few anglers in the Far North have experimented with Salt Water Shrimp Kick'n Bass and found it to be extremely good. This is not something you'd expect, but this coming season I plan on giving it more of a try. I tried it a couple of times in the past, and it did work. However, my Kick'n Crappie is so effective that I hate to change.

When fishing under spins through the ice, I've found a few techniques that work best. These lures are normally fished with a slow, steady retrieve, but you can't do this in ice conditions. I use several actions: A normal lift-and-fall, allowing the blade to turn on the lift and flutter on the fall; a quick jerk and drop, which flutters the blade on the drop; a rip upward and fall, with the blade turning on the rip, and fluttering on the drop; and a slight jig, which uses the blade as sort of a wave up and down.

Switching from a short ice fishing rod to an 8-foot B'n'M Russ Bailey crappie rod in open water, set the lightweight Road Runner slightly below the fish-holding depth, using a Bett's weighted float. Work it along with a pull and drop, or slow, steady retrieve. If there is a wind, allow it to drift the float along, letting



It was tough fishing in midwinter when the small Road Runner was dropped to or into a deep weed bed. Ripping the lure upward to turn the blade, then letting it fall to allow the blade to flutter, garnered results.

the wave action jig the lure, while using an occasional pull and drop. A pull and drop is as it sounds: You pull the float about three feet, which raised the lure upward, while pulling the lure to make the blade turn; then it is allowed to drop with the blade fluttering as it falls. It also works well fished along the edges of ice. The longer spinning rig and weighted float helps for longer casts and landing fish in sometimes strange conditions with melting and floating ice.

There used to be a Flutter Spoon sold by the late Dave Hess. This lure would use a small, "no spin" blade that would wave up and down with a slow jigging action, much like the under spin with the spinning blade. This same waving action can be found with the under spin, which will produce the same results. It catches a lot of fish when fishing slows way down. It also helps to add a Crappie/Panfish Nibble to the hook to double the effectiveness of the Kick'n Bass products.

During this ice season, give the under spin a try in ice and open water, and see what you can find. **MWO**

Dan Galusha has fished all his life, worked more than 45 years in the outdoor/media industry, and was inducted into the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame as a Legendary Communicator. Direct questions through dansfishtales.com, [facebook.com/dansfishtales](https://www.facebook.com/dansfishtales) and [facebook.com/shootnplink](https://www.facebook.com/shootnplink).

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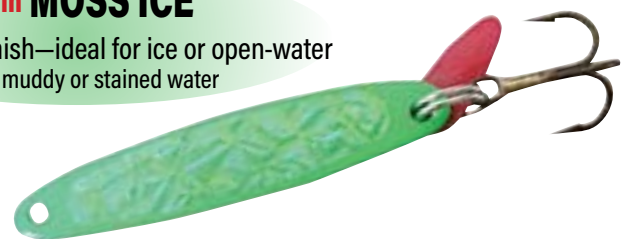
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Tips for First Ice

by Mark Martin

First ice often produces some of the best fishing of the entire hard-water season. It's easy to understand why: The water is the most oxygenated it will be until the ice cover melts, the vegetation is still largely green and holding fish, and the fish haven't settled into the doldrums as they will midwinter. Plus, anglers haven't been fishing for them during the several-week transition to freeze-up. Thus, first ice is the time to get started.

First and foremost, there is one major consideration when fishing first ice: Safety! First ice is thin ice. And thin ice is dangerous. So, all the safety precautions you normally take when ice fishing are more important than ever.

The first rule is: Carry a spud bar. You can carry a hand auger or electric power auger for drilling holes, but you need the spud to check the ice, tapping the surface ahead of you as you walk out. If the spud goes through, back up. That's just the wise way to go. Also, make sure you check your way out and then check your way *back in*. First ice is often uneven, and walking just steps away from a safe path could get you wet.

I'd recommend a float suit. I wear one on first ice. If I happen to fall through, I'll be floating on the surface where I can get myself out or call for someone else to come and help me.

Always wear ice cleats, either cleated boots or strap-on models, or cleats that go over your boots like old-fashioned rubbers. First ice is often very slick and slippery, especially if it's warm enough for there to be a little melt on top, and there's water on the ice. Ice cleats help keep you from taking a tumble where you could wind up breaking your arm(s)—which would make it almost impossible to get back on your feet; or even worse, crack your head on the ice, which is just about as bad as hitting concrete. People have died because of that. Ice cleats can help save your life.

A pair of ice picks is a must. You can carry them in your pockets; better yet, many are attached to a lanyard that you can drape around your neck and, if you choose, run them right through the sleeves of your parka, like your mother used to do to keep you from losing your mittens when you were little. Then they are right there at your hands if you need them. You should carry them all the time, but especially at first ice (and again at last ice) when the risk of breaking through is greatest. Ice picks provide the purchase you need to climb back on the ice, which is a tough task even when the ice is thick.

I also always carry a rope in a bag. Some kits come as a long length of ropes inside a weighted plastic bag that is only about a foot long and maybe eight inches around. You take one end of the rope out, hang on to it and throw the bag to someone else. That way, if you do break through, you don't have someone else crawling on the ice to get you, winding up with two people in the drink instead of just one. It's a small insurance policy against possible catastrophe.

So, where to start? I usually begin by fishing for panfish—bluegills, crappies and perch—usually off the main body of the lake in cuts or canals. That's where the best ice forms earliest in the shallows. If you've fished for panfish right up to just before ice-up, you know that they often move into those shallow cuts and canals leading up to ice formation. You can often catch limits of fish without having to travel far from the shore, which is a good idea at first ice.

If the ice is good enough to head out deeper—because you've checked it all the way out—then your best place to start is where you last caught them in open water. Wherever you left them before ice-up, they're going to be right there. So, keep your GPS



The author shows off a first-ice bluegill.

handy and go back to where you left them. That's what a GPS is for, and that's why you use it. If you have GPS coordinates, you're ahead of the game. Go from spot to spot, and within a few moves, you're going to be on the fish.

When you find fish, probe the area.

Carry a jig rod, a dead rod and a tip-up. If you're jigging and the fish don't want what you're moving, maybe they'll go after a still presentation.

Always maximize the number of rods you are fishing with (within legal limits). You may find that one presentation is what they want. Offer them as many different techniques as you can to find out what they're going to take. And make use of the structure you're fishing. If you're on a weed line or a drop-off, keep moving further along that structural element until you find fish.

I always recommend banging the bottom with whatever you're using—like a jig, spoon or jigging Rapala. Pounding the bottom often calls fish in to you. The fish see the puffs of sediment or broken weeds and come over to investigate. They may not make a beeline to it; they'll just sort of meander over to you, so do it for at least a few minutes to give them time to get there. You're imitating other fish feeding, and they're going to want to get in on it.

If you're fishing for bluegills, crappies or perch, I recommend boring two holes close enough that you can fish them both at the same time. Having them close together

creates more commotion and attracts more fish to the area. And the fish will see both presentations. If you're using spikes or mousies, they're often available in different colors. Use various colors until you can determine that one is outperforming others.

Good electronics are key. Once you get where you're going, your sonar will tell you where the fish are in the water column. If you have side-finder sonar, you might find out that the fish in the area, but not necessarily right under you. Again, create commotion; it's easier to try to call them in to you than to get up and move 50 feet and start over. It's better to bring them to you than chasing them. If you can't call them in, you can always move.

Just remember, when heading out on first ice, think safety first. If possible, bring a friend. If something should happen, it's always better to have a partner to help you out of a jam. **MWO**

Mark Martin is a professional walleye tournament angler and instructor with the Ice Fishing School/Vacation series. For more information, check out his website at markmartins.net or fishingvacationschool.com.

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First Ice: The Best Ice for Fish and Fisher People

by Ted Takasaki

Ah, first ice—a magical time of the year when fish are still full of energy and eager to bite. And so are we, as we carefully shuffle across the frozen tundra in search of our next big fish. Time to forget about watching fishing shows; the real action is right here... right now! With oxygen levels high enough to keep fish partying like it's 1999, you'll find them actively feeding and ready to bite anything that resembles a meal. But hold on! Safety is crucial especially when the ice is as thin as your uncle's excuse for not attending Thanksgiving dinner.

The buddy system

Let's face it, ice fishing can often be a solitary sport, but no one wants to be the main character in the next "Dumb Ways to Die" video! Always bring a buddy—preferably one who knows how to fish, but if they bring lunch, that's a bonus. Always think safety first! Wear an inflatable lifejacket or flotation suit and make sure to use a spud bar while crossing thin ice.

The best fishing spots: weed edges and structure

As you gear up, remember to target the edges of submerged weed beds to shore. Look for open pockets or lanes where the weeds haven't grown. That's where you'll find crappies, sunfish, walleyes, and perch; think of it as the all-you-can-eat buffet of the fish

world. As the sun sets, crappies and walleyes will venture out like a kid looking for a candy bar. It's often a frenzy of fish action!

When you're walking across early ice, travel light. A 5-gallon bucket can double as a seat and a suitcase for your electronics. Just make sure to keep your rods and tackle stored and handy; no one wants to accidentally hook themselves or their buddy.

The fish toolkit

Now, let's talk about tackle. You don't need to haul an entire garage full of gear, as a small tackle box is usually sufficient. This past season, I stumbled upon some fantastic new lures from Lake Effect Lures. Think tiny, but mighty! Their UV/Glow Tungsten Jigs glow like a disco ball at a Saturday Night party, attracting fish like moths to the glow. And their soft plastics are realistic and action packed!

And don't forget your live bait: small minnows, wax worms and Euro Larvae (a fancy name for maggots). Fish can be picky; one day they might crave minnows, and the next, they're in the mood for wax worms. Talk about being food critics!

Mega Live (Forward Facing Sonar) from Humminbird is an incredible way to *find* fish—the most important factor. One thing I do know: You *absolutely cannot* catch fish where there are *no fish!*

Drill a hole, put the Mega Live transducer down the hole in "forward mode" and scan 360 degrees around you to find fish. Set your range to about 100 feet out. No fish? Move

several hundred feet and repeat. Once you mark some fish, drill several holes spaced out and around.

Jigging: the art of seduction

Once you've located and marked some fish, drill a couple of holes. One hole can be used as a "dead stick" (the rod that just sits there, hoping for a fish to show up), while you use the other hole to show off your jigging skills.

Then, adjust your Mega Live transducer to "down mode" and watch your Helix screen as the fish move in and out. Mega Live turns ice fishing into a real-life videogame. You can watch the fish move around and how they react to your lure, along with the action you impart on it.

Remember, crappies are typically suspended just off bottom at early ice. You'll want to raise your lure just above them. They'll think their food is getting away, and trust me, nothing gets a fish more excited.

Switch it up

If you find yourself staring into the abyss of your fishing hole, wondering where all the fish have gone, it's time for a change. Swap out your lure/bait or switch up your colors. Variety is the spice of life—especially when it comes to convincing fish to bite. And if you're still coming up empty, an underwater camera might help you realize the fish you thought were there are just rocks with good hiding skills.

Move it or lose it

If the action comes to a screeching halt or you aren't marking any fish, don't just sit there! Move along the weeds or structure during the day, but as the sun dips below the horizon, head towards flats and shallow water. Fish like crappies and walleyes can be tough to find, but typically bite the best just as darkness descends.

Final thoughts: safety first!

As thrilling as ice fishing can be, remember to be cautious. Ice thickness can vary, especially near current or springs—so keep your eyes peeled, and never go ice fishing alone... unless you're ready to become a "fishing legend" for all the wrong reasons. Always let someone know your plans, keep some ice spikes around your neck and wear flotation devices; it's always better to be safe than sorry!

So, grab your gear, put on those thermal socks, and embrace the frosty fun of first ice. With a bit of luck, and maybe a little help from your friends, you'll reel in the catch of the day—and perhaps a few fond memories along the way! **MWO**

Ted Takasaki is a National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame professional angler who has been featured in many national outdoor magazines and television shows. Takasaki has appeared in front of thousands of angling enthusiasts.

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TSS Shot and the 410 Bore: An Advanced Ballistics Study

About 18 years ago, I was introduced to a new type of smooth bore shot dubbed TSS.

Even back in those early days of load development, the results were nothing less than outstanding in terms of performance. The major issue confronting handloaders of the day was availability and cost. Today, the cost of TSS is still an issue, but in terms of load offerings over the counter, or by way of a handloaders press, they are almost unlimited.

If one burning issue remains, it is the cost of finished factory load offerings. In some cases, five rounds of TSS 12-gauge ammunition will run as much as \$74.00 per box (down the chamber \$14.80 a round). Why is this the case? It is because almost all the world tungsten—being the core of TSS shot—is in China and controlled by only two separate companies. With almost total control of the market covering .18 density tungsten shot, it is a sellers' market.

You might wonder, "What is tungsten anyway, and why is it so special? Here are the raw facts. Tungsten iron in its pure form is considered the second-heaviest element known on earth in terms of metals, with the first being depleted uranium. For the most part, tungsten iron in a .18 density figure is 56% heavier than lead shot and 22% denser than the well-known Heavy Shot projectiles. Density plus velocity makes for harder hitting shot in any given size.

For this review covering tungsten based 410 smooth bore loads, I will stay with a pellet size in #9 "dust." This very small pellet counts out to just under 200 pellets in a 1/2-ounce load, and again for uniformity, my handloads are all based on a 1/2-ounce payload in a 3- or 2 1/2-inch 410 hull.

In terms of raw striking power, a single pellet in a #9 shot made of tungsten will carry the kinetic energy of a #4 pellet made of pure black lead (See the ballistics tables included here.). Note that the massive increase in pellet count associated with the tungsten load (200 pellets at approximately 1/2-ounce), versus the larger pellet size, #4 lead load, which due to its larger pellet size houses a much lower pellet count. Being tungsten-based material, it allows this very special shot to deliver very hard-hitting energy based on the 410 bore well out to as much as 50 yards. In effect, the 410 bore has been reborn by way of tungsten shot ammunition.

Loading data regarding this review came from two sources. First, simply using the printed data on a pound can of Hodgdon Lil'Gun powder allowed for an easy starting point. Second, with some major assistance from Backridge Ammunition covering pressure testing and pattern work, and in gaining significant quantities of tungsten shot. This project with Backridge also included special loads in sub-sonic variants



Test target: All turkey grade gobblers; number seven of 10 harvested birds in past three years.



TriStar autoloader up for field testing with the 410 bore and tungsten shot.

TABLE A

Detailed Description:
BALLISTICS PRODUCTS DATABASE
BPI TSS-18 Maximum Density Tungsten Shot* Density: 18.2 grams/cc (+/- .2)
*USFWS approved non-toxic

Avg Diam (inches)	TSS Size	Avg Diam (mm)	Avg Grains per pellet	1/2 oz	11/16 oz	3/4 oz	7/8 oz	15/16 oz	1 oz
0.1180	#5	2.99	3.906	56	76	84	98	105	112
0.1105	#6	2.81	3.334	66	89	98	115	123	131
0.0995	#7	2.53	2.434	90	122	135	157	169	180
0.0880	#8	2.24	1.706	128	174	192	224	240	256
0.0780	#9	1.99	1.200	182	248	273	319	342	365
0.0700	#10	1.78	0.882	248	337	372	434	465	496

TABLE B

SHOT DATA, 01-27-2021
Description: #7 1/2 TSS Shot
STANDARD METRO
Pellet Weight (GRS): 2.010 Effective SD: 0.0318
Pellet Diameter, Inches: 0.095 Standard SD: 0.0318

Range Yards	Velocity Feet/Sec	Energy Foot-Lbs	TOF Sec	Drop Ins	Wind Def In/10mph	45 mph Lead Feet
0	1220	6.6	0.0000	0.0	0.0	0.0
10	1052	4.9	0.0275	0.1	0.2	1.8
20	925	3.8	0.0581	0.6	1.2	3.8
30	825	3.0	0.0927	1.5	2.9	6.1
40	745	2.5	0.1311	2.8	5.3	8.7
50	680	2.1	0.1734	4.8	8.3	11.4
60	621	1.7	0.2198	7.6	12.4	14.5

TABLE C

SHOT DATA, 11-13-2020
Description: "TSS" #9
STANDARD METRO
Pellet Weight (GRS): 1.200 Effective SD: 0.0273
Pellet Diameter, Inches: 0.07924 Average

Range Yards	Velocity Feet/Sec	Energy Foot-Lbs	TOF Sec	Drop Ins	Wind Def In/10mph	45mph Lead Feet
0	1220	4.0	0.0000	0.0	0.0	0
10	1028	2.8	0.0279	0.1	0.2	1.8
20	889	2.1	0.0595	0.6	1.4	3.9
30	783	1.6	0.0957	1.5	3.4	6.3
40	701	1.3	0.1364	3.0	6.1	9.0
50	630	1.1	0.1817	5.2	9.9	12.0
60	567	0.9	0.2321	8.3	15.0	15.3

as well as full-house, fast movers. The project came together nicely over a three-year period of testing. In effect, a solid learning curve came together covering high performance 410 bore ammunition when applied in real time field settings, illustrated here in of my performance ballistics tables.

Because the very low shotshell capacity associated with the 410 bore, I stayed with #7 1/2 and #9 shot, so as to product high payload pellet counts and also maintain ultra-high velocity at longer ranges. Subsonic ammunition was developed along the design change for my own Metro Gun Systems TM line of suppression systems in the 410 bore. In effect, even in very small pellet sizes, tungsten iron is so good that it can be driven at low velocity—850 f.p.s, below the speed of sound—and still maintain hard-hitting kinetic energy footprints well out to 50 yards.

Load: Federal 3-inch hull, Federal 209 primer, 8 grains of Lil'Gun, 1/2-ounce black lead in #4 shot, or 1/2-ounce of tungsten #9. (Filler as in Ballistics Products Bismuth shot filler added to fill increased extra space in the hull. The wad type was sent by Backridge, and the containment system was a full length ribbed 410 wad/no brand label.)

Working between 11.5 grains and 7.5 grains, the powder drop figure of 8 grains was settled on as the best option, at least for the time being. In general, a load increase or decrease of 1 grain will change velocity 100 f.p.s. The 410 is a very sensitive, with a high-pressure-producing shotshell due to its straight wall and very small circumference hull makeup (low payload volume capacity).



Thirty-yard performance with 410 tungsten, 1/2 ounce, 170 pellet payload count.

TABLE D

Test Velocity: Chronographed Chronotech
 Model 33 muzzle
 Lil'Gun 8 gr 410 bore 3-inch mag hull.
 MV= 761 f.p.s.
 MV=874
 MV=849
 MV=787
 AVG 818 F.P.S.

TABLE E

Target contact penetration testing tungsten #9 shot. Note black lead #4s. (Meets terminal velocity limits associated with tungsten #9 shot.)

Test #1: 20 yards. Duck breast skin on. Total penetration.

Test #2: 20 yards. Duck breast skin on; 050 thickness poly sheet (simulating breastbone). Total penetration.

Test #3: 20 yards. Turkey neck/head intact. Penetration to spine, no passthrough. Penetration at 30 yards. Chicken breast skin on. Two passthroughs, three stopped midway into breast.

TABLE F

Comparison Ballistics Chart #9 tungsten versus #4 black lead.

#9 Tungsten MV=806 f.p.s. Terminal velocity on target at 30 yards, 608 f.p.s.

#4 Black Lead MV=851 f.p.s. Terminal velocity on target at 30 yards, 604 f.p.s.

Full house 410 load Lil'Gun. Downrange ballistics. First live fired over armored chronograph screens at target range. Secondly normalized by ballistics computer system for overall performance to indicated range limits.

Reference ballistics generated by SHOT Data Systems, New Brighton, Minnesota.

Database real time recorded shot in flight, Ballistics Research & Development.

SHOT data Computer program. Dr. Ed Lowry, ballistics expert consulted and arrived at accuracy figures referenced (development history).

TABLE G

01-06-2018
 DESCRIPTION: #9 high density "tungsten" shot
 STANDARD METRO allowance made for true MV and choke increase.
 Extremely small sample and some approximation involved, but results are indicative. Gun: .410 with 3-inch shell, approximately 15/16-ounce shot.
 Pellet Weight (GRS): ~ 1.22
 Pellet Diameter, Inches.: Nom. 0.080

Range	Velocity f.p.s.	Energy Foot-Lbs.
0	1125	3.4
5	1036	2.9
10	960	2.5
15	894	2.2
20	837	1.9
25	786	1.7
30	742	1.5
35	704	1.3
40	667	1.2
45	632	1.1
50	600	1.0
55	569	0.9
60	540	0.8

Pattern table downrange effect. Downrange pattern results. Testing pure .18 tungsten shot loads for pattern consistency.

Knowing the retained velocity and kinetic energy associated with #9 and related shot based on pure tungsten iron, there is still one element remaining: To learn exactly what is left of a pattern in terms of regulating it at an effective working range.

Test shooting was conducted at 30 through 40 yards. About the only thing I felt lacking was payload in the small 410 3-inch package (1/2 ounce). But with #9 tungsten shot, the load retains about 181 or more chances for a spine/brain nerve shutdown and game-stopping hit. Why

TABLE H

Test #1: 30 yards
 Target: Turkey neck head (standard)
 Number of target contact pellet strikes: 62
 Percent strikes: 35%

Test #2: 40 yards
 Neck head: # strikes 42
 Percent strikes: 24% on head to brain; no pass through

Test #3: Performance of the 410 1/2-ounce #9s in tungsten shot was off the charts. The load was so good that I know it will kill to 50 yards, but patterns would be getting a bit dicey. Subsonic and very effective on decoying turkeys, and even the hold off loner on the edge decoy flock regarding effective range.

hold off at 1/2-ounce payloads? Because this is tungsten, and I wanted to design a hunting load that was affordable, and still very effective on game birds as well as other related targets. In terms of velocity, I was doing all my shooting using suppressed systems and staying with as much stealth as possible (shooting in populated areas).



The author's test guns: Rossi single shot, Mossberg 500 and Browning BPS.



Small 410 loads produce big results afield.

When shot back-to-back against lead #6's, the net result was a non-contest at all. Lead died a quick death downrange with pattern board holes you could throw a brick through, while tungsten #9s clustered right into the primary kill zone in large numbers. The percentage that made contact is small, but the head neck area is not a full 30-inch

story continued on next page

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The author and his Rossi with a morning's tungsten results.

TSS Shot...

...continued from previous page

standard target circle, either. If counted on the standard 40-yard target, both scores would be an easy 100 percent contained with a nasty, high-pellet count, strong, 20-inch central core.

In effect, the small, 1/2-ounce payload of pure tungsten in #9 "dust" is all you need

when hunting gobblers over decoys.

When increasing velocity, and in effect range just moving up by 1/2-grain increments using both 2 1/2- and 3-inch hulls in a mixed brand, due to current shortage of spent hulls at the time of this testing, offered very positive controlled ballistics results. Again, all hand loading was by way of Hodgdon Lil'Gun.



A chronograph is a must when learning about shot performance downrange. You must know how fast you are hitting the target at any given range.

Warm targets

Regardless of how much a researcher or general shooter puts into evaluating loads during development, the final solution always comes down to broken clay targets, pattern board percentages, and the reaction of real-time warm targets to the loads. Even as far back as 2019, I was already gunning a few turkeys here in South Dakota by way of both a spring and fall hunting season. Bird limits were almost as many as you wanted to buy over the counter at the time. As such, I took a bird within a few days of loading up my Browning BPS 401 bore with the illustrated handloads consisting of 1/2-ounce tungsten #9, pushed by 11 grains of Lil'Gun. Wads at the time were generated by Ballistics Products. I also backed up my crimps' small excess space with a ground rubber-like filler sold through this handloading supply company.

At the time, my 410 press was a re-machined 12-gauge RCBS die set and platform, machined into a 410 setup. However, in terms of crimping, I had to result to B cards glued in over my shot column. Later working with Backridge Ammunition, crimps were returned to the folded star systems which were far less trouble to produce.

The very first bird I gunned had come in from my right side and stopped in full strut, offering a head on shot. It was one and done—and this story played out time and time again. In those years, by way of the 410 bore and tungsten pure or based shot, I added no less than 11 birds to my already posted 109 lifetime trophy gobbler count. Without question, the 410 as a decoy turkey gun was more than holding its own in the field. At the time, not only were load velocities varied, but a wide range of shotguns were also taken afield for both gun test product reviews and 410 load testing. Based on used hulls, tungsten shot and Lil'Gun powder, I had a very complete bird harvesting system that is still going strong today with no indication of change in sight.

In covering this subject right up to the 2024 spring turkey season, I have concluded the following: The 410 with tungsten shot loads is an easy winner out to 40 yards, but at its very best, inside 30 yards. Pushing this sub bore gauge offering to extended range is not advised, due to the small payload package being sent down range by the little shotshell. With tungsten shot, this gauge option has moved well beyond the small, pencil-pipe plastic tube that squirrel hunters and barn rat shooters used effectively. For the most part, the 410 shotshell and paired shotguns

has moved right into line as a hunting grade platform.

Stories covering dove during the fall and summer crow hunting put a period on the statement that this stuff works. Selecting detailed crow targets from a slash wood blind on my own place, I waited out targets over old stale bread with bright red wrappers. When I got a bird into the proper range, I sent up a round of #9 tungsten. The end results were just like gunning in turkey camp:



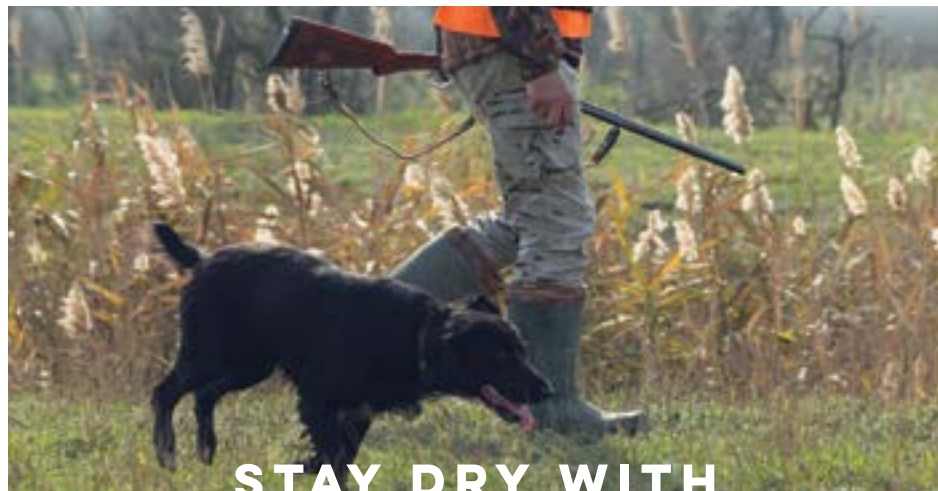
Mossberg 500 and a 410 harvested gobbler. It's a great gun at a great current price.

The performance was outstanding.

Tungsten loads are not cheap, to be sure. But when you roll your own, the price drops like a rock in comparison to factory tungsten shot loads purchased over the counter. Watch tungsten as a product introduction in the future. I have detailed data that is totally classified, currently covering very new projects in ballistics that are totally based on pure tungsten shot ammunition. What I can say at this juncture is that you have not seen anything yet in terms of load development covering this super-heavy, high-performance shot.

Remember, small changes in powder weight will produce major pressure changes in the 410 bore shotshell. The smaller the shotshell size, the more difficult it is to maintain uniform pressure. Stay alert when handloading this or any ammunition. **MWO**

Writing on outdoor subjects for over 40 years, L.P. Brezny has written four books on shotgun and rifle (ballistics and performance). He's an expert at smoothbore, and high-power, ultra-long-range shooting. He's a specialist, producing reviews covering general products used in the outdoors industry.



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TABLE I

Load Data, Hodgdon Powders.

All loads listed here are maximum. Work up to this level with care.

Lil'Gun: Powders

Hull	Wad	Primer	Powder Charge Grains	MV
Federal	Federal 410 SC	209A	12.9	1200 f.p.s.
Remington SP	Remington SP 410	Remington 410	13.0	1200 f.p.s.
Winchester AA	Winchester AAI	Winchester 209	13.5	1200 f.p.s.



Deer Hunting

Dr. Ken Nordberg

Making a Plan to Hunt a Big Buck

The east-west deer trail I had in mind for ground level stand hunting that morning had long been a favorite route of mature bucks that traveled about 1/4 mile east from an enormous hill to drink water at a beaver pond. Along this route, a dominant breeding buck had always made, and regularly renewed, antler rubs and ground scrapes. The only trouble this morning was, a light breeze was blowing from the southeast, forcing me to take a two-mile detour to get to the spot that I tentatively had in mind to sit, without being seen or smelled (via airborne and trail scents) by deer on that trail.

The first half of my hike was made easier by following an old logging trail north well west of that site. About a mile north of our camp, I finally turned east onto the first of the connecting deer trails that formed my main trail (cruise trail) into that area. I'd made the entire length of it easy to follow in darkness by placing fluorescent tacks on trailside tree trunks; they glowed like miniature Christmas tree lights in the beam of my flashlight.

After crossing a saddle on the south end of a high hill, and then a dark valley on the other side, I finally climbed up onto the rocky, spruce-covered prominence, 1/4 mile straight north of my intended stand site. Shortly before crossing an opening south of that prominence, now traveling straight into the wind, my flashlight beam revealed some freshly made, 3-inch-long deer tracks in the snow, obviously made by a mature doe. This revealed deer in this area were currently on the move, making it necessary to continue using the wolf ruse to perfection (walking nonstop with my head pointed straight ahead).

While approaching the far side of that opening, I walked onto a patch of snow about 25 feet in diameter that had been recently trampled by two mature, battling bucks (making 4-inch tracks). This was an exciting, adrenaline-surging discovery. But unfortunately, I had unintentionally tainted it with my fresh trail scents, ruining it as a spot to keep an eye on that morning.

Just ahead, the section of my cruise trail coursed through dense timber toward my intended stand site, now only about 200 yards south. It was covered with fresh tracks made by three walking (unalarmed) deer, all heading south. Walking almost silently now in the fluffy snow, keeping my flashlight beam pointed at the ground about 5 to 10 feet ahead, I also headed south, now feeling certain I would soon see one or both battling bucks on that east-west trail.

About 50 yards short of my destination, however, another patch of thoroughly trampled snow about 25 feet in diameter came into view. Just beyond it was the deer trail that coursed past my intended stand site. Moreover, next to the opposite side of that trail was a 10-foot-long swath of snow covered with clumps of black dirt that had been vigorously pawed. It revealed a large black, ground scrape beneath the 5-foot-high horizontal boughs of a large balsam tree. Some of those boughs were broken and dangling on strips of bark.

These boughs, and that swath of black dirt

on the snow, revealed that the buck that made these deer signs was certainly enraged; likely because it had discovered that both he, and the doe in heat that he was accompanying (later revealed by hoofprints, were being closely followed by another mature buck. That deer had also been attracted by the doe's airborne pheromone, which in this case had to be battled twice in an attempt to drive it away.

Upon recognizing these deer signs and what they meant, characteristically made during the two-week period of breeding in November by an enraged dominant, breeding buck under the above circumstances, I immediately backed away. Moving slowly, I scanned the area on my right, keeping the beam of my flashlight low while searching for a spot to sit on my stool.

About 15 feet away stood the two-foot-wide trunk of a tall quaking aspen. Between it and that scrape and the churned-up patch of snow, was a very dense patch of second-growth aspens (popples) about 4 to 5 feet tall. Seeing no other suitable stand site, I had no choice. That tree trunk would have to be my silhouette-masking backrest, and that patch of young aspens would have to be my blind.

Cautiously, I stepped to the tree trunk, placed my stool silently on the ground in front of it, turned and sat down on it, and turned off my flashlight. In the dark, I pulled on my camo headnet (with a horizontal eye hole) down over my head and neck, placing my camo-blaze-orange cap on top. I then pulled on a pair of dark brown cotton gloves, thus covering all my visible skin. Finally, I laid my rifle across my lap with my right thumb on the tang of its safety, prepared to sit very still for as long as it took.

About 15 minutes later, a narrow band of light began to grow along the eastern horizon. Soon afterward, the black forms of evergreen trees around me began turning green, meaning that first light was sweeping across the forest from east to west. Another fifteen minutes later, red squirrels were churring, and ravens on wuff-wuffing wings were passing overhead while croaking to one another.

Then, as silently as a puff of smoke, a big, 8-point buck stepped onto that ground scrape. It began rubbing the sticky fluid, rich with musk that flowed onto the sides of its head from glands on its scalp, onto overhanging balsam boughs.

When I finally noticed this, wondering how long that buck had been doing this, the only parts of it that I could clearly see was its head and upper neck. That likely meant that the only parts of me it could see were my head and neck, which were being made invisible by my camo headnet.



Immediate decisions to begin stand hunting near certain newly discovered, very fresh deer signs made by older bucks are often very rewarding.

Reminding myself to move very slowly and silently, I eased the tang of my rifle's safety silently forward and began raising my rifle to my shoulder. Finally, I took aim at the center of the buck's white throat patch after it had turned its head toward me. This was perfect, making certain my bullet would hit the buck's spine—my long favorite, very humane, drop-them-in-their-tracks target on a standing deer facing me. At the shot, the

buck instantly dropped from sight onto its ground scrape. **MWO**

Dr. Ken Nordberg has been an avid hunter and angler for over 70 years and an outdoor writer for nearly 40. He has written 800+ outdoor articles, made three decades of contributions to MidWest Outdoors and written 15 outstanding books on deer and bear hunting. In addition, he's a teacher, seminar speaker and blogger and you can find some of his work on YouTube and other social media.

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Dr. Nordberg has written 12 books and nearly 900 outdoor magazine articles about white-tailed deer and whitetail hunting, all based on what 80–90% of five behavioral classes of wild whitetails did under similar circumstances over periods of 10 or more years since the 1960s. He was an early pioneer of tree stand hunting and using buck lures and was first to accurately describe the whitetail rut in his Whitetail Hunters Almanac, 2nd Edition published in 1989.

For earlier Whitetail Hunters Almanacs, other product info, order forms, PayPal, & credit card orders, Canada or other foreign country orders, go to Doc's website.

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Hunting Snowscape Deer

by Bob "Greenie" Grewell

Late-season deer hunting weather is unpredictable. Snow cover can be a decisive issue. During average winter conditions, typically mid-December through late January, deer must adapt to snowy conditions. After gun season, leftover deer recluse for many days. But they must eventually adapt to cold-weather conditions and go on living, transitioning into survival activities. Although weather sometimes becomes extreme and they face survival-of-the-fittest conditions, deer quickly adjust and adapt to adverse weather that we humans might find intolerable.

Hunters' personal comfort tactics cover a wide range. How well you dress is vital, and the ability to warmup increases your odds of success. Winter deer hunters must dress for cold, gusting winds and unexpected snowfall. Clothing must also control a hunter's body temperature, provide moisture release and retain body odors. Gore-Tex, Thinsulate and wool are a few chosen clothing materials. Whether standing motionless for hours, or during stalking/walking movements, body heat must be retained, and perspiration dissipated, for maximum comfort. Importantly, clothing pattern and color should blend with habitat coloration.

Clothing shouldn't release body heat. It should help retain body heat. The more efficiently your clothing design traps body heat, the longer you can say afield. But, regardless of what commercial products you select, no cold-weather clothing suits every person's body design.

Undoubtedly, understanding how whitetails coexist with fickle elements is a major factor for hunters' winter success. When an active storm front approaches, changing barometric precedes storms. It's a fact that a falling barometer pinpoints a shifting weather change. We humans don't have an innate sensory perception that stimulates us to sense atmospheric changes. Deer have a unique ability to feel this swing and will alter their habits accordingly. They often binge feed, even during daylight hours, before tucking into dense cover.

Researchers believe that the worse the impending storm, the thicker cover deer seek for sanctuary. During adverse winter weather, where you choose to hunt is as important as when you hunt. Therefore, now is an ideal time to stand hunt along trails leading into heavy cover.

Deer seemingly have no problem with adjusting to winter and will adapt their behaviors for nourishment and comfort. They are masters at surviving. How they lived during October and November are different than during December and January's snowy, colder days. Bow hunters, especially, should follow suit. Find your own comfort zones and adapt. Become selfish with your comfort during raw winter days. If you remain warm, you'll become a more effective hunter since you can direct your thoughts and energies toward hunting, and not shivering while trying to stay warm. There is no greater hunting downfall than discomfort. You'll fidget, move around, shuffle your feet, and make any movements to stay warm. Plus, if



Hunting prior to a snowstorm can reap trophy results.



Crunchy snow quickly alerts nearby bucks.

you're cold, your lack of concentration will reduce your alertness.

Whitetail habits change significantly during snowy periods. Whenever weather is unusually cruel, deer remain bedded for extended periods. And, they can be in small herds, yarding up and using each other's bodies for warm. They prefer to feed and bed along southern terrains because snow depth is usually lighter and melts quicker. Deer are more active during the daylight hours to take advantage of the sun's warmth, too. That's when we hunt sunny slopes where morning sun provides warmth. Remember this if you're a bow hunter.

During unexpected snow depths, deer favor lying down until the menace subsides, even if it's of two-day duration. Fortunately, the insulating qualities of deer hair and body fat are so efficient that snow can cover them and not melt. Equally, a snow covering provides insulation, giving them added protection from winter elements. No matter how bad the weather, even if we think they aren't frequenting a favored hunting location, they can still be there.

Deer typically prefer to avoid more open landscapes when experiencing fluctuating snow depths and cold winds. That's when hunters should focus more on dense pines and protective valleys, as well as semi-dry, swampy depressions. If deer habitats are adjacent to leftover grain fields from agricultural crop fields, oak tree ridges and fallen masts, all the better.

Cold-weather whitetail hunting can be difficult if you aren't prepared. For a bow hunter, it can also be a psychologically non-

active vigil. Prepare yourself for lonely hours of non-activity from any wildlife that might keep you alert. Fortunately, you can count on less human hunting pressure. But deer have begun to relax after being pursued during the major gun season.

To be a more successful snowy-day deer hunter, think of your comforts. Remember that wind is annoying because it steals body heat, makes hearing a strain, and moves underbrush, which can make it difficult to identify deer movements.

If you're a stand hunter, however, this is a "plus." In your favor, however, frozen ground and hard snowpack will give away deer positions when they walk, especially if they step on patches of ice. Deer become sensitive to landscape features that are uncomfortable to them. This is another reason they don't move much. Perhaps this is why stalking hunters are more successful now because, while deer are bedded, they often curl up like a sleeping dog. Wintering deer don't move as often or as far, especially when they locate protective bedding with food sources.

Whitetail deer will forever be impacted by their environments, specifically weather. There's also no doubt that their senses are capable of extrapolating weather conditions hours before humans realize what's about to happen. Why? Deer possess an innateness that arouses them to feed before the advance of weather changes. Realistically, though, not every deer will react the same before approaching weather changes. Therefore, hunters who realize that deer appear to be programmed to sense impending weather will gain a hunting edge.

Consider that barometric pressure intimately manipulates deer. Humans aren't likely to be as perceptive to atmospheric fluctuations, but deer can sense them. I guess that this is why they are active before falling barometer readings, and why they frequently travel if barometric pressure is rising. Many studies reveal that deer are comfortable with rising barometric pressure, more so than when it's falling. Whitetails will be on-the-go several hours before storm fronts, although they seek hiding niches during severe storms. After a storm passes, deer move leisurely again.

Invisible thermal air currents are important to deer and hunters. Vertical air flows rise during morning as the earth warms, lifting odors upwards. In contrast, they descend during late afternoon as cooling air pushes downward. Therefore, hunt high ground during morning, as air flow rises. Later, focus upon lowlands during late afternoon when thermals descend.

Deer tend to be at ease during sunny days with snow cover. They display perky tendencies, often lying out in the open, even when temperatures hover around



Bucks are easier to see with snowpack.



Scent-trailing does is easier for bucks with a moist snowpack.

freezing. Cold temperatures, barring severe blizzards, have no adverse effect upon whitetails because they are designed to stave-off weather adversities. If they can locate adequate food sources, they can conquer hunger until a storm passes. When the first major winter storm arrives, deer are likely to lay-up for short periods. But, if hunger or mating desires motivate them, they become restless, unless weather is so cruel that it hampers their movements.

Inclement weather typically compels deer to focus upon food sources. Although intense cold often keeps hunters within the shelter of their homes, it can be a productive time to ambush deer searching for food. Try hunting ravines and hillsides that divert chilling wind gusts. Wind-blocking hillsides with adequate cover provide locations where deer feed, or bed down with a degree of protection.

Before any harsh storm, be on stand prior to a front's arrival. Select low-pressure hunted areas along trails leading to and from food sources and bedding niches. Just after storms, deer often travel open landscapes as they search for food sources. Both stand- and still-hunting work well.

Fierce, winter winds cause deer to be spooky, and they are seldom seen unless they are motivated by food, mating or activated by hunting pressure. But a gentle snow is an ideal time to stand-hunt openings along trails and feeding landscapes. But, when bitter cold dominates, hunt lowlands, dips between hardwood ridges and pine thickets. Deer favor wind breaks and stay close to natural cover to conserve energy.

Cold, snowy-weather whitetail hunting can be difficult if you aren't prepared. Counter this by always being prepared, even if there are limited hunters. But you also have some leverage. There is less hunting pressure, because deer have begun to relax after being pursued during the major gun seasons. Besides, a lone hunter dragging a deer across snowpack has an easier job. **MWO**

Bob "Greenie" Grewell has written about and photographed the outdoors for 40 years. He's travelled throughout the U.S., Canada, the Arctic Circle, as well as Germany and Denmark. He has written a book on hunting dogs and contributed articles and photography to others. He currently focuses on deer and turkey articles, and wildlife photography.

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Fishing Bluffs for Winter Crappies

by Tim Huffman

Bluffs are hit-or-miss fishing spots. However, they have the potential to be great fish producers. Check what experts recommend for catching fish from these structures.

Casting

Casting is fun. It allows a fisherman to stay away from the fish to avoid spooking them, and casts can be pinpointed to productive spots.

Crappie tournaments have been won by fishing bluffs. For example, a Crappie USA Classic was won on a deep bluff with a submerged tree that was hung in the bluff at about the 35-foot level. The winners cast, then dropped their jigs straight down the bluff wall to the cover where the fish were holding. Staying a distance from the fish was a key to avoid spooking the fish.

There are several key elements to casting. First, it's important to pinpoint fish with electronics. The next step is cast from a distance to avoid spooking the fish. Step three is to let the bait fall until it gets just over the fish.

Another great option is to cast minnows under a slip-float so the bait will stay at a specific depth in key spots. Use current and wind to your advantage by letting the bait float naturally to the fish.

Rockslides

Tournament fisherman Dan Dannenmueller fishes many lakes and rivers across the country. Bluffs are not his go-to choices, but he finds some of them to be very productive. He says that finding where logs have hung up in the rocks creates high-potential fishing.

"Another place to look," says Dannenmueller, "is where a portion of the bluff has slid down into the water, creating an uneven bottom or ledges. Crappies will get on the down-current side and hold. It might take a few minutes to find them on your electronics, but the ledges and fish should show on sonar."

"I use electronics to find the underwater spots, and I usually fish them vertically. I might spider rig with multiple poles, or vertically jig one pole. Baits can be held still or moved slowly. Fish will be behind rocks and cover to get out of the current. When there is no current at this time of year, they will likely be suspended up in the water column, over structures and ledges created by the slide."

His favorite rig is a double-hook minnow rig, with a single minnow on the top hook and a Road Runner head with a Bobby Garland Itty Bit on bottom.

Something different...spoons

"There are two major reasons for seeking a bluff," says Truman Lake guide and tournament fisherman Barry Morrow (660-723-2667). "The first is to get out of the wind. The second is to target fish holding on a bluff."

"I usually vertically jig cover with a standard long pole and plastic-bodied jig. The jigs are lifelike targets that catch fish. I've used them for decades because they work. However, a spoon is a good bait, and it gives crappies something different to see."

On a trip with him at Truman Lake, it didn't take long for us to catch fish on a spoon. Morrow says, "A spoon will catch fish, so don't be afraid to try a small spoon when you're fishing a bluff. My best tip would be fish it like you would a jig, with subtle movements, not radical. Jigs are good, but spoons deserve more attention than they get."

Vertically jiggling shad balls

Morrow says that keeping presentations simple can produce great results. "I start by



Bluffs can be good choices for winter crappies. Russ Bailey works a deep bluff on an Illinois lake where rockslides and big fallen rocks on the bottom of the lake create great structures for holding deep crappies.

side scanning with my Humminbird," says Barry Morrow. "My home lake has a lot of standing timber, so I begin looking at timber along or near a bluff. I'm looking for shad balls."

Morrow says that crappies will be near or within the balls of shad. The shad are a crappie's dinner bell indicating that it's time to eat. Therefore, find the shad and you'll find the fish, whether fish are directly on the bluff or nearby in timber. Remember, shad are always moving, and so are the fish.

"I usually vertically jig because that's all the timber allows. I use a 1/4- to 1/2-ounce sinker over a 1/16-ounce jig. A small profile bait is important, so I'm often using a Bobby Garland Itty Bit. But remember that a plastic jig of any size can usually be trimmed down to form a small bait. Fish the jig above, below and within the shad balls."

Whitehead's tips for bluffs

"Casting is one of the best ways to fish a bluff," says Brad Whitehead. "I prefer a B'n'M 6-foot Sharpshooter, 6-pound-test line and a 1/16-ounce Crappie Magnet jig. I switch to a 1/8-ounce when there is more current or wind," say Whitehead.

"I prefer to cast parallel to the bluff, letting the jig fall to the strike zone and working it back to the boat. The jig is in the strike zone longer so your odds of catching a fish is greater."

"Cast up-current to present the jig in a more natural way, letting it float downstream to the fish. The jig is harder to control when it's drifting with the current, but it can make a big difference in the number of strikes."

"I use electronics to find trees and logs

that are hung in the rocks down 20 to 40 feet deep. Good electronics will show if fish are on it.

"Wind can be a problem when casting, so I'll switch to vertically jiggling a 1/4-ounce jig. The hook hangs less and can be pulled loose when hung up. Use a jig with a thin wire hook that can be pulled loose when hung. The jig lets fishermen get the bait down into the cover and feel what's happening."

Whitehead's tips, along with the tips from the other experts, provide good guidelines for bluffing crappies. Enjoy the action these often-overlooked structures can produce.

MWO

Tim Huffman has written over 36 years for MidWest Outdoors. His new 2024 book, *Papermouth, Modern Crappie Techniques*, is available in Kindle or paperback from Amazon.

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Ice Fishing Where Your Next Hookset Might Go Viral

by Joe Henry

If you have ever fished Lake of the Woods, the phrase, "You never know what you are going to catch when you fish Lake of the Woods," hits home. Two factors support this statement. First, this body of water regularly produces trophy fish. Second, it has a variety of species you don't see in most midwestern bodies of water. For these reasons, your next hookset could lead to the fish you ice going viral on social media.

Most ice anglers who ice fish Lake of the Woods target walleyes and sauger. It isn't called The Walleye Capital of the World for nothing. Huge numbers of these ever-so-popular fish keep anglers busy. Every time you see a mark on your sonar, a fish sliding in on your forward-facing sonar, or your bobber about to disappear beneath the stained water, could be something special.

Your next hookset could be a trophy

Lake of the Woods has big fish. Walleyes pushing 10 to 13 pounds aren't uncommon. Open-water fishing tournaments this past year typically had a 10-poun-average per walleye for the winning teams. The fishery is arguably at the top of the list for trophy walleye waters, most certainly in the U.S.

A few key factors produce so many trophy walleyes. First, a "big fish gene" definitely runs

throughout the population.

Second, one of the forages that makes walleyes grow big and are plentiful are *tullibees*. A walleye on Lake of the Woods starts focusing its diet on these sought-after forage at about the 25-inch mark. Tullibees help add size to walleyes.

Finally, there is a protected slot limit on the lake and Rainy River for walleyes extending from 19.5 to 28.0 inches, and those fish must be released. Releasing larger, breeding females not only helps to ensure a strong population of walleyes but keeps those big fish around so they have a chance to make it to over 28 inches, considered a trophy.

Pike are another species that grows to massive proportion on Lake of the Woods. Again, the right gene pool, tullibees, millions of walleyes and sauger, and a protected slot limit of 30 to 40 inches make this lake full of pike over 40 inches.

Jumbo perch are another species often caught by walleye anglers, and they grow to over 15 inches. The fish are a deep green with dark bars on their sides and bright orange fins: big, beautiful and delicious.

On the northern portion of the lake, ice anglers fishing out of Northwest Angle resorts often target crappies through the ice. These parts feature good schools of huge black crappies. Each year, the resorts see a couple of fish touch 17 inches. Many fish, however, run 12 to 15 inches. The resorts



Huge fish pique anglers' attention. Lake of the Woods is known for trophy fish. Here, the author is hoisting a 31.5-inch monster walleye.

ICE FISHING The walleye Capital of the World



in this part of the lake offer guides and fish houses in certain areas where crappies hang out during the winter months.

A true rod snapper

I will never forget the time I was ice fishing the golden hour of late afternoon with the sun getting lower in the sky. I saw a big, red mark appear on my flasher. My jigging spoon tipped with a minnow head was in position. Jig, jig, hold. Jig, jig, hold. Drop it in the mud, lift it into the strike zone, shake it and hold. The red mark was still there.

Suddenly, I felt the "tap." I set the hook and, and just like that, my ice rod broke in half!

I quickly handed my reel to a friend and opened the bail, telling him, "Be ready to give me line." Now, it was hand-to-hand combat, and I could really feel the weight of the fish. In fact, I could hardly budge it. Could it be the next state record walleye? Perhaps a giant pike just staying cool and not running? After about 15 minutes of not being able to budge this fish, I had another hunch, and I was right. A sturgeon!

It took an hour and 15 minutes to get this fish through the hole, and it was about 30 pounds. It wasn't what I was targeting, but we are still talking about it to this day.

Two things garner extra attention during the ice fishing season. One is huge, trophy fish. The other is when someone catches something rare, or that most anglers are not used to catching.

Poor man's lobster

On Lake of the Woods, the chance of catching an eelpout, otherwise called burbot, is quite good. This species that has gained notoriety, not only because of its appearance, but how it curls up when you grab it.

Many anglers have also discovered how tasty pout are. The term "poor man's lobster" describes when you cube the meat, boil it in saltwater or 7 UP, and then dip it in melted butter. The texture and taste resemble lobster.

Eelpout are plentiful in Lake of the Woods and also grow big. The last few state records are from this body of water.

Most folks who experience a bout with a pout are unsuspecting walleye anglers during the winter months. Many ice anglers have experienced the sensation of having a big fish on the end of your line, anticipating and hoping it is one of those trophy walleyes, only to be surprised when they see it is a big eelpout.

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Surprises from the islands

Imagine the surprise when an ice angler fights a big fish that makes lightning fast and long runs, and all signs point to a big pike, only to see a big muskie below the ice. It happens a fair amount up at the Angle where muskies like to hang out amongst the 14,552 islands.

It is really a surprise when an angler ice fishing on the main basin, called Big Traverse Bay, hooks into a muskie. They are not common on the south end of the lake, although a few are caught each year.

Another species that shows up on occasion is lake trout. Lake trout normally live in Whitefish Bay which is, give or take by water, about 75 miles away. One of the reasons they show up occasionally in winter is the consistency of the ice-cold water temps.

Lake trout are a very-cold-water fish. In the summer months, deep water is key for consistent cold water. During the winter months, however, the water temperature is consistently cold, even in shallower depths, with a nice layer of ice. This allows some fish to explore a bit.

Another species of fish sometimes makes its way to the south end of the lake from up in Canada: whitefish. Whitefish are sometimes mistaken for tullibees, which look similar but are usually smaller. Whitefish are a very good eating fish with nice, flaky, white meat. They typically run from 2 to 6 pounds and have an overbite, whereas tullibee have an underbite.

An additional fish that could show up on the end of your hook that most folks aren't familiar with are mooneye, which get up to a pound and have big, pale-colored eyes.

Lampreys are often attached to other large fish such as big pike. Most anglers don't actually catch these, but rather, they catch the host fish that the lamprey is attached to and using for nutrition. Again, something very different most haven't experienced.

As the saying goes, "you never know what you are going to catch on Lake of the Woods." It is so true. Whether it is a big, trophy fish of a lifetime, or, a species that isn't so mainstream, one thing is for sure: The next time you set the hook, you and your fish might have the chance to go viral! **MWO**



Last winter, fishing with her dad and brother, 10-year-old Leah Saffert of Rice Lake, Wis. was tip-up fishing during the day in shallower water when she caught this 50-inch muskie. The story went viral, being picked up by various TV, digital and print media outlets, not to mention blowing up social media.

Tournament angler and licensed charter captain Joe Henry fishes and hunts the Midwest. Henry is a media member of AGLOW and writes for numerous publications, creates videos, appears on a variety of outdoor TV and radio shows and is a frequent seminar speaker. Henry is the Executive Director of Lake of the Woods Tourism.

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One thing that gets other angler's attention is fish that aren't very common. Like eelpout, otherwise called burbot. Eelpout are plentiful, delicious and grow big, with the last few state records coming from Lake of the Woods weighing in at over 19 pounds!

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Early-Ice Preparation for a Successful Season

by Brian 'Bro' Brosdahl

Avid anglers are usually excited to chase fish no matter the time of year. Early ice, late ice, ice-out river fishing, spring panfish, opener of walleye season, fall fishing—you name it. The anticipation of setting the hook and catching fish among friends—or even fishing solo—is a breath of fresh air. I certainly enjoy all these seasons, but ice fishing is at the top of my list. An army of anglers share the same passion for hardwater season.

While ice fishing equipment has advanced and makes for comfortable outings, there's something to be said for keeping it simple—especially at early ice.

Your house is your castle

I have a hard house on wheels and several houses with skids and tow bars—but my favorite is an Otter flip-style, insulated portable—and sometimes just a bucket to sit on. While luxury, RV-style wheelhouses with generators provide comfort on the ice for days or even a week, you also need thicker

ice, and probably a plowed road, to move them around. You may choose to clear your own area or use a private access plowed road.

Either way, you're trying to find a parking spot which may be limited—and may or may not be near habitats where fish live. Some end up parking on structure in good areas. Others are in no-man's land. Some get a good spot to catch fish at night and bring portables and machines to move during the day. While the accommodations may be plush for an ice outing, I like the freedom to explore the whole kingdom.

Back to basics

During early ice, I walk on small lakes (and even big lakes) for miles, RAZRing holes with a small Otter utility sled and minimal fishing gear. Some years, the ice freezes slower, so I end up doing more walking to spots and fishing as close as possible. Other years, the ice thickens faster, allowing more machine and vehicle travel.

After all these years, my favorite set-up is a flip-style Otter behind my snowmobile. I know I've mentioned it before, but I set



A nice, early-ice walleye caught on foot.

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Heather up on a good spot in the fish house while I look for a new favorite spot, sitting and fishing on my machine. I mounted my Humminbird Helix 9 graph on a sled with a MEGA Live down-rod transducer in a holder, to look around for fish or use in down mode to see fish activity levels. MEGA Live is hooked up to ethernet, so I can still use a 2D transducer if needed. My Otter Monster Box is on the back of my machine with the essentials organized and snow-free, including:

- Tackle boxes stuffed with Northland Tackle

- St. Croix Custom Ice rod combos with Sunline FC ice line spooled from 1- to 5-pound-test, 8-pound and 10-pound SX1 green braid
- iFishPro tip-ups
- Amped Outdoor 12-volt 32Ah lithium batteries for powering a light and electronics
- Extra Fish Monkey gloves (Yetis and Woolys)
- AFTCO Reaper hoodie
- RAZR augers. The 6-inch bit is on my brushless drill tucked in the attached Otter ice auger shield. The other 8-inch bit is a spare stuffed in the Monster Box.
- Tasty deer sticks and coffee

This is easy to load on and off a light trailer or even in the back of a pickup truck bed. And you can move fast with less gear hanging on the outside. Just drill, search and drop the lure.

In comparison, during open-water season with a boat, you need a dock, a good drop-off and parking for a long trailer. Wind and waves are also big factors on open water. On the ice, wind is less of a deterrent because there are no waves tossing you around. However, ice anglers should watch out for cracks and pressure ridges on extremely windy days.

There are many bodies of water you can only access with a snowmobile; some lakes are only accessible via a snowmobile trail. The good news is that a used utility sled costs less than an electric bike. And the best new super-long track sleds on the market are a small percentage of the cost compared to a new fishing boat.

Bro Pro Tip: Put carbide studs on snowmobile tracks. You will need them if you hit slush pockets in the snow, naturally caused by cracks and ice expansion, drilled holes, and plowed road banks during deeper snowfalls. When a snowmobile track hits a slush pocket, it digs down to the ice and slips on smooth ice. Studs will grip and help pop back up on top. This is a similar reason as to why UTVs and ATVs

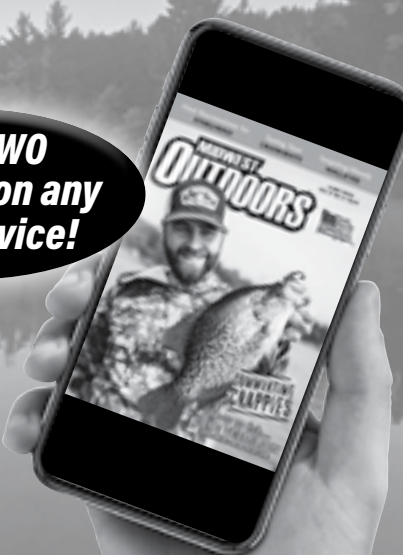
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Deadsticks help cover additional ice and contribute to your daily catch numbers.

on tracks get high-centered and buried in slush pockets; they have no teeth for the slippery ice.

Early-winter fish locations

I am often asked where the fish are and how they're biting, whether I'm at shows or gas stations or on social media. So, I have to know! Past information is valuable only if your past information is from fall fishing. As a basis to start, I go to where I found fish in late fall and use these locations as a template for searching for other schools of fish. Walleyes are fun to catch and often run large in size during early freeze up. With the fall bite continuation, you will see fish on your locator come up to your bait and most will strike.

Location is essential for catching day-biters; if they're under your ice hole, they will bite. This means RAZRing more holes and covering more water—not just shoreline drop-offs, but hard-to-soft bottom transition areas near shore. Rocks and vegetation definitely help. Shoreline-connected points and high spots near the steepest edges on humps and bars are ideal areas for sunset—the "hour of power."

Water depth can be shallower than you think. Even during the day in winter, try 10 feet or less if you are fishing low-traffic areas. If there is any type of traffic, depths in the teens to twenties would be a better choice.

My rods are tied with Northland Tungsten Buck-Shot Rattle Spoons tipped with a minnow head. I also like Tungsten Slim Spoons as my search baits and "hour of power" spoons. They drop fast—one with a loud rattle, the other with a flicker blade. I use a deadstick if I find a spot to hang out for a while with a classic live bait presentation. This means a chunky fathead or rainbow on a red #4 Gamakatsu Octopus hook with one or two split shots. There's no need for heavy line on your deadstick. You will get more bites on 4- to 5-pound Sunline clear fluorocarbon.

Perch on weed edges, and flats on or near walleye areas, are a bonus. On more than half of the lakes in the North Country, crappies and bluegills will hold in the muddy basin—not always super deep—sometimes in the high teens or twenties for depth. Occasionally, crappies will be over 30 feet. Bluegills tend to be creatures of edges, stocking the drop-off bottom edge or holding to the deepest weed growth the lake has to offer.

A small percentage of lakes will hold panfish buried in the weeds in shallower depths from 9 to 20 feet. If the growth is green, they move to the outer weed line at dark, hunting insect life. For both crappies and bluegill, I use a Tungsten Flat Fry Jig with a waxie or maggot, or pre-rigged plastics such as the Broom Bug Tail or Pin Fry which imitate bloodworms and young-of-the-year minnow hatches.



The author traveling light while looking for his new 'favorite ice spot!'

outings, you will need it all and then some; but if you bring less, you can cover water, fish more and catch dinner! If the gear you bring doesn't fit in or on your Otter Monster Box, leave it in the garage. Believe me... I have been guilty of bringing too much stuff, but I like catching fish more than packing and unpacking! **MWO**

Outdoor communicator Brian "Bro" Brosdahl lives in northern Minnesota and is a walleye guide in the Cass Lake, Leech Lake and Lake Winnibigoshish areas. Bro is a four-season fisherman and is especially known for his ice fishing knowledge and skills. For guide inquiries, contact: brosguideservice.com.

Plan ahead and keep it simple

Every day I see anglers bring too much stuff and only use a portion of it. For social

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Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame 2025 Inductees

The International Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame in Hayward, Wisc. will be inducting five individuals—with three from the Midwest featured here—into their 2025 class. This recognition is bestowed upon those who have spent a great share of their lives promoting, educating and sharing their passion for freshwater fishing in a manner that positively impacts the sport for the millions of anglers around the world. There are many who love to fish, but few that can be considered Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Famers.



Daryl Christensen, Wisconsin

Daryl Christensen has been catching fish for the better part of 70 years. For more than 50 of those years, he has been a fishing guide, fishing educator, book author, writer of more than 1,500 articles and one of the nation's top competitive walleye fishermen with several tournament wins and more than 40 top-ten finishes, including victories on the In-Fisherman Professional Walleye Trail.

A multi-species angler, Christensen also has several wins and top-five finishes in bass and muskie tournaments over his long career.

Known as the "Jigmeister" for his expertise in jigging for walleyes, Christensen has given hundreds of seminars at major sport shows and fishing clubs in 20 states and 3 Canadian provinces, as well as clinics on bass, pike, muskies, catfish and panfish. He has been a guest on dozens of television shows, produced videos and has authored books on catching walleyes and sauger in the rivers and lakes of North America.

Although retired from full-time competitive fishing, Christensen still guides part-time and continues to share a lifetime of fishing experiences, expertise and stories about his years as a full-time angler in the fishing industry at various outdoor shows, banquets, and on television shows and podcasts, and at events around the country.



Mike Norris, Illinois

For over 46 years, Mike Norris has been a dedicated outdoors communicator, sharing his knowledge and passion for fishing with people of all ages and genders. His commitment to conservation is inspiring, as

he played a pivotal role in the establishment of catch and release only zones along portions of the Fox River. As the President of Region Four of the United Sportfishing Association of Illinois, he successfully advocated for the interest earned on Illinois fishing licenses to be returned to the general fishing fund, a significant change from its previous allocation into a general revenue account.

From 1994 to 2006, Norris shared his knowledge through 574 weekly outdoor columns for the *Aurora Beacon* and the *Elgin Courier* (Ill.) newspapers. His writing prowess extended to a monthly column for *MidWest Outdoors* magazine and numerous video segments on *MidWest Outdoors* television. His work has also been featured in esteemed publications such as *Badger Sportsman*, *Fishing Facts*, *Heartland Illinois*, *Michigan Fisherman* and *Musky Hunter* magazines. Norris still provides weekly fishing reports for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. He has hosted 624 weekly radio shows featuring guest interviews with the top names in the fishing industry.

From 1986 through 2005, he participated in the Masters Walleye Circuit (MWC) and Professional Walleye Tour (PWT) tournament circuits, achieving four top-ten finishes. He also excelled in the Illinois Walleye Trail with two top-six finishes. Before his pro walleye experience, Mike's angling talent was recognized with five bass tournament wins across various lakes in southern Wisconsin, a testament to his skill and dedication.

In 1995, Mike founded the Walleye Masters Institute, the first-ever instruction school for teaching walleye enthusiasts how to improve their walleye angling skills. Classes were held in Chicago, Ill. and Sioux Falls, So Dak. He partnered with Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Famer Ted Takasaki to help run the schools. Today, Mike continues to be a sought-after seminar speaker who frequently appears at fishing clubs and sports shows throughout the Midwest.

Mike operates a multi-species guide service on lakes in south-central Wisconsin. His guiding business is an extension of his educational platform, as he teaches his clients the subtleties of successful fishing on each guided trip.

Ronald J. Spitler, Michigan

Ronald J. Spitler was a fish biologist for Michigan throughout his career. His efforts to improve fishing not only benefited Michigan but also had an international impact, including Michigan's neighbor to the east, Canada, and all states bordering the Great Lakes including New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin.



Spitler joined the Michigan Fisheries Division in 1966 while finishing his master's degree in Fish Management at the University of Michigan. He spent three years in the Jackson and Plainwell District before being promoted to Southeast Michigan District Fisheries Biologist where he served for 28 years before being promoted to the First Urban Fisheries Biologist for Southeast Michigan, which encompassed Michigan's 4 million residents, 220 lakes and streams, half of Michigan's anglers, and many sport and fishing organizations.

On many occasions, he wrote reports as well as fishing updates for *BassMaster Magazine's* half-million subscribers across the United States and Europe. Due to his extensive background as a fish biologist, he would collaborate with Bruce Shupp, the Bass Anglers Sportsman's Society National Conservation Director, on articles for regarding the nationwide LMBv (Large Mouth Bass Virus) and its effects on bass, and how it would affect fishing in the future. Other articles included information supplied by Spitler, such as the "Spread of Zebra Mussels Across the Great Lakes" article and its effects on Lakes Michigan, Huron, Lake St. Clair, Erie and Ontario, covering both the positive and negative effects of zebra mussels.

For more than seventeen years, Ron was a weekly contributor to the JP McCarthy Radio Show, which had a listening audience of over three million listeners across Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan. His weekly Friday report included information on salmon, walleyes and bass, as well as techniques for success, including where, how, and what to use. **MWO**

The Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame and Museum is the international headquarters for education, recognition and promotion of freshwater sportfishing.

For more information...
freshwater-fishing.org

Tips from our Readers

Dear Tips Editor,

For my glow-in-the-dark lures, jigs and worms, I purchased a flash attachment for a camera at a thrift store. Lots of thrift shops and secondhand stores have them. The flash uses two AA batteries—some other models may require four—and it has a button in the back. Just hold the flash over your lure or jig and hit the button. The bright light will instantly light up your jig! It works great.

Doug Wees
Omaha, Neb.

Dear Tips Editor,

Here are a few tips to keep in mind if you're planning to go ice fishing this season:

- Get a drag sled to carry your equipment and have it in a duffle bag to keep snow off the reels so they don't freeze up.
- If you are fishing a frozen river that is drawn down between two dams, carry two ramps to cross over to drive on the ice.
- The main thought when going ice fishing: If you feel afraid of the situation, don't go!

John Kramer
Sullivan, Ind.

Dear Tips Editor:

I have found a terrific way to clean the cork handle on my fishing rod. I put a small amount of liquid dish detergent in warm water. Using 00 (very fine) steel wool, I dip the steel wool in the soapy water and use it to scrub the cork. I rub the cork until all the

dark areas are gone, then I let it dry. The cork handle looks and feels like new.

Tom Adams
Anderson, Ind.

Dear Tips Editor,

To train a dog for hunting, and make sure it will not be gun-shy, start when it is young by slowly getting it used to less noisy guns, then a little louder. Gradually increase the level of noise that you are exposing the dog to. Never start by firing a noisy gun to see if the dog will be scared. You'll be sorry! Once your dog is gun-shy, it's hard to change it.

Steve Turnis
Dubuque, Iowa

From the 'Tips' archives...

For an effective camo for the face and hands, you need only two inexpensive items: a non-plastic bottle cork and a lighter or match.

Burn one end of the cork, let it cool, then rub the black ash on your face, neck and hands. It washes off easily with soap and water or baby wipes. **MWO**

Readers are invited to submit tips for this column. Length of tip should be less than 150 words. Tips should be helpful ideas to help people enjoy fishing, hunting and camping.

The readers whose tips are selected will receive a fishing product.

Send your tips to: Tips Editor, MidWest Outdoors, 111 Shore Drive, Burr Ridge, IL 60527. Our email address is info@midwestoutdoors.com.

Share your bright idea!

Have you got a favorite fishing, hunting, camping or outdoors tip? Share it with us.

If we decide to use it in our column, we'll send you a useful thank you gift.

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Please be sure to include your name and mailing address where we can send your prize. Prizes will not be sent until/unless your tip is chosen for publication.



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Burt Lake

by Dave Mull with Mark Martin and Andrew Hendrickson

Dave Mull of Kalamazoo, Mich. has spent his career communicating the outdoors experience and runs Inner Viking Media. He enjoys kayak fishing for anything that swims in the lakes and rivers of the Midwest and beyond, and even uses his MirroCraft, from time to time. Available for seminars. Mark Martin hosts Fishing Vacation Schools and can be reached at 231-744-0330. Check out fishingvacationschool.com. Andrew Hendrickson grew up fishing Burt and now guides lakes in northern Michigan and on Saginaw Bay. Contact him at 616-540-1417.



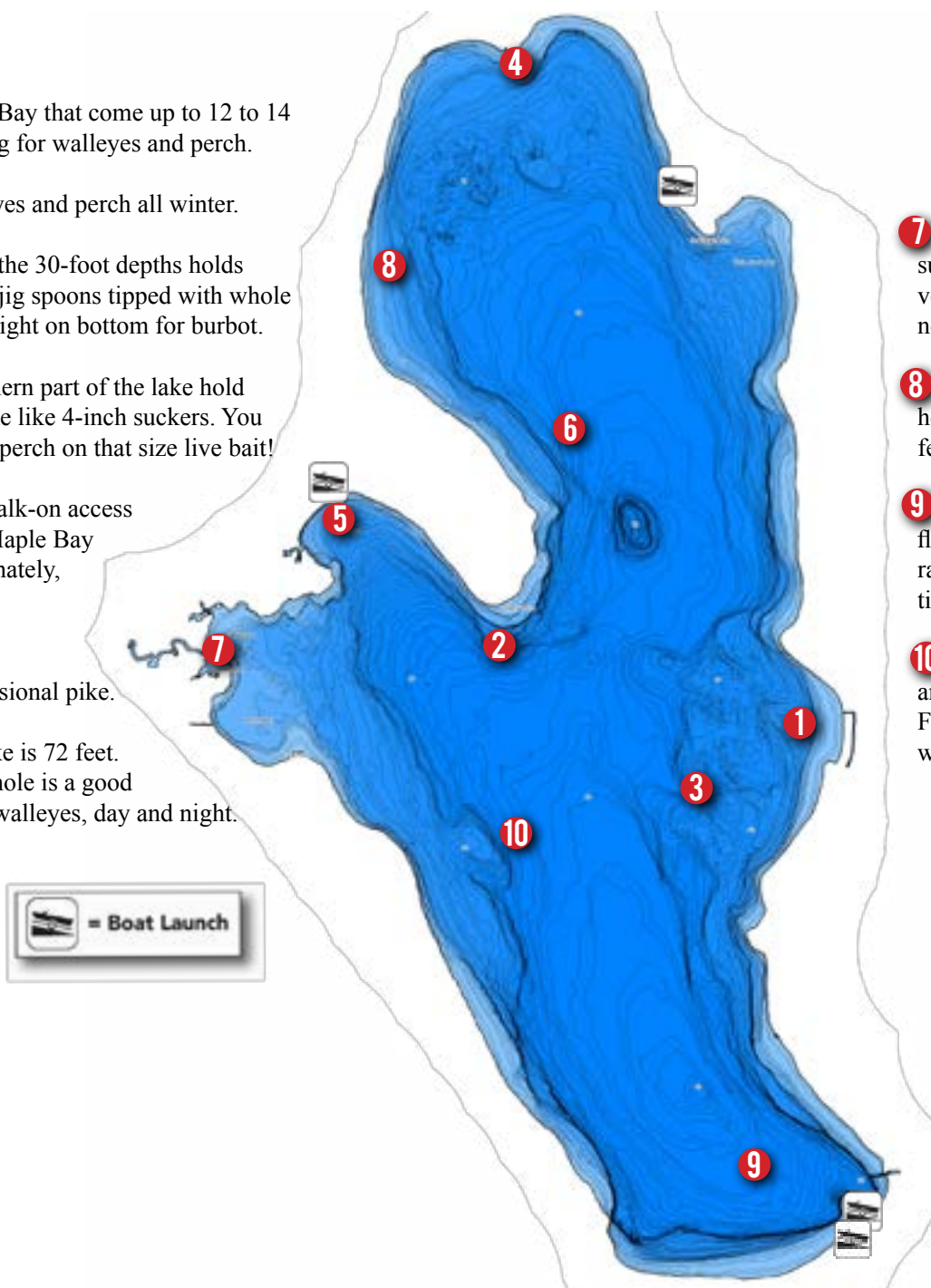
LOCATION: Burt Lake is in Cheboygan County in northern Michigan. Cheboygan and Indian River are the nearest towns.

SIZE/DEPTH: 17,120 acres with a maximum depth of 72 feet.

DOMINANT SPECIES: One of Michigan's best open-water smallmouth lakes where winter anglers can catch walleyes, perch, burbot, rainbow trout, brown trout and pike.

Ice was short-lived or non-existent on most of Burt Lake last winter, which was a first for this big, deep, clear lake. Be extremely careful this season, especially around the inflowing and outflowing rivers. For the latest fishing reports and ice conditions, contact Pat & Gary's in Indian River at 231-238-2878.

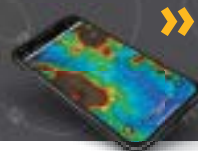
- 1 Look for reefs in Sturgeon Bay that come up to 12 to 14 feet deep and set tip-ups or jig for walleyes and perch.
- 2 Colonial Point holds walleyes and perch all winter.
- 3 The drop from 20 feet into the 30-foot depths holds burbot and walleyes. Slowly jig spoons tipped with whole or pieces of minnow slowly right on bottom for burbot.
- 4 Lots of contours at the northern part of the lake hold walleyes, perch and pike. Pike like 4-inch suckers. You might even catch some giant perch on that size live bait!
- 5 Maple Bay has excellent walk-on access for machine-less anglers at Maple Bay State Campground. (Unfortunately, the campground is closed to camping in winter.) Maple Bay is a good area to encounter perch and the occasional pike.
- 6 The deepest point in the lake is 72 feet. The 40-foot rim around this hole is a good place for daytime perch and walleyes, day and night.



- 7 The mouth of the Crooked River and surrounding Bullhead Bay have the best vegetation in the lake, providing good fishing for northerns and all other species present.
- 8 This area of varied bottom contours and humps holds perch and walleyes. Fish shallower than 28 feet.
- 9 Fish the shallows where the Sturgeon River flows to nearby Mullet Lake for brown and rainbow trout. Try Jigging Rapalas, spoons and tip-ups with shiners.
- 10 Look for a piece of anvil-shaped structure and find perch on flats in 40 feet and deeper. Fish right on top of the anvil at night for walleyes and burbot.



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What Do Jiggling, Drop Speed, Pounding and Deadsticking Have to Do with Ice Fishing?



This giant bluegill fell victim to an old-school Demon spoon.



Jacek Gawlinski is a master pounder with his tiny ice rod.

and attraction. While the Demon comes in five sizes for all species of fish, you just can't beat jigging a size 8 Wonderglow Demon tipped with a few waxies for giant crappies.

Drop speed

Drop speed is a technical term used to *overcomplicate* the process of ice jig selection. Basically, if Sir Issac Newton was an ice fisherman, he would be all over it. Drop speed is the time it takes for your lure to drop a specific distance. According to Sir Issac, the ce fisherman, "The force that pulls your jig to bottom is the same force that keeps the moon in orbit around the earth, or $F = G * ((m \text{ sub } 1 * m \text{ sub } 2) / r^2)$." In other words, a heavier



Chekai got a nice crappie on his deadstick rod.

by Walt Matan

There are numerous ways to catch fish through the ice. Once you find what works best for that exact moment, you are fishing for whatever species you are after. Then *bingo*, you've solved the fish puzzle *for one day*, because tomorrow, that puzzle might change.

I can't tell you how many times I thought I had it figured out before I got to the lake. I'll have a plan, a spot, a species that I'm after. But when I got there, everything I believed would happen, *didn't*.

I'd get to my spot, and someone was on it. Sometimes, that didn't matter much; there were so many anglers fishing an area that it was a free-for-all, so I had to adapt to the crowd. Other times, driving out on the ATV or truck, I just couldn't park next to some anglers all set up in an area and risk messing up their fishing by moving in and disturbing the solitude.

Adapting is key. You must be ready for all types of situations and species to have a

successful day. I go ice fishing to catch fish. Here are some fine presentations that I use, and you can, too!

Jiggling one up

Everyone knows how to jig, but do they know how to *jiggle*? My late father Poppee was a jigging master. His ice rod was always dancing. He would jiggle on the up... and jiggle on the down. Somewhere in between, he would set the hook!

Not all rods are created equally for jigging. Too stiff a rod and you're just jigging; too soft of a rod and you're floating or fluttering. Sometimes, though, jigging or floating is better than jigging; it's not an exact science.

Every ice lure ever made can be jigged, but some work better than others. A lure like a Custom Jigs & Spins (CJS) Demon creates a symphony when jigging. You can jiggle it, slowly raise your rod and then jiggle it back, Poppee Style. You can tip it with a few spikes, waxworms or a plastic body for added action



Poppee jigged up a pumpkinseed back in the day.

lure falls faster in water than a lighter lure... even in murky water.

According to master jig designer, Cousin Chekai, *fast is good*. "In my country, Lepoglava Croatia, there is much more fisherman than ice. You must fish fast before a larger fisherman take your spot. And when you're talking dropping speeds, Chekai agree with Mr. Fig Newton: If you want to get to hungry fish more fast, you better using tungsten."

That being said, Custom Jigs & Spins offers many original effective designs in both lead and tungsten to cover all the speeds. (Custom Jigs & Spins offers 1,946 different ice jig options!) Case in point, the new Puki is a tungsten version of the Demon, the Wolfinkee is the tungsten Ratfinkee, the Glazba is the tungsten Diamond jig, the Tutso is the tungsten Ratso, and the Chekai is the tungsten 'Gill Pill.

It's a good idea to have several rods rigged with both tungsten as well as lead ice jigs to determine whether the fish want a slower or quicker drop speed... unless you are fishing in Lepoglava, of course!

Pounding

Pounding is speed jigging with a heavier lure. Tungsten lures are great for pounding. Also, using a stiffer rod and tight lining to the lure is more effective than using a spring bobber on the end of your rod.

The tungsten Majmun is an excellent choice for pounding. It has a round head, an ultra-sharp hook that rides at a 30-degree angle and an excellent paint scheme. Because the hook shank is a little longer than most other jigs, you can load it up with spikes (I like the red ones).

St. Croix's Rods 28-inch Croix Tungsten Tamer is perfect for pounding tungsten. Its extra fast tip is ideal for pounding and bouncing Majmuns and other tungsten ice jigs. The key to effective pounding is a tight line and a constant rapid pounding motion as you raise and lower the rod tip. You don't want the fish to come in and stare...you want to aggravate them into striking.

story continued on next page

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Junk Food and Fishing Go Hand-in-Hand...er...Mouth

Except for teenage boys, no other group eats as much junk food and snacks as fishermen.

You're running late to your fishing spot, so you just stop at the first convenience store or fast-food spot to grab something to eat. Or you're sitting in a boat and don't want to devote a lot of time to eating; there are fish waiting to be caught. Then there is the drive home. It has been a long day; suddenly, you are hungry and need something to eat, so you stop at a convenience store. We aren't talking fine dining here. It is just something to fill your stomach and keep you going.

I first noticed this junk food phenomenon when I started learning to fish for bass while living in Alabama. Most of my fishing buddies were southern good old boys, and their concept of lunch was a couple cans of Vienna sausage and a sleeve of saltine crackers. Taking along a can of sardines was considered fancy dining.

However, as I look back to fishing as a boy with my father, I recognize the tendency to gravitate to junk food even then. While fishing, we generally had a pack of Fig Newtons to munch on throughout the day, and on the way home, we normally stopped at a gas station and got a Mounds bar. The Fig Newtons and Mounds bar seemed to be just what we needed.

Drive-ins and fast-food restaurants are made for fishermen in a hurry. I have been known to drag my boat and trailer

through the drive-in lanes so I can get back on the road again enroute to whatever lake I am going to. This can be a bit tricky, and I have recognized that some drive-throughs are easier to navigate than others, and sometimes, not possible at all. When I am faced with that dilemma, I just drive on until I find a more friendly drive-through.

One of my favorites fast food meals is a double cheeseburger with just onions. As a kid, I once worked at a fast-food place, and it became my preferred burger option. I usually order two to go, and lately have been throwing in an apple pie for a more balanced combo. Then it is back on the road, racing toward the lake, digging into the bag and dragging the burgers out, tossing the wrappers in the back seat while eating. It might not be the most relaxed dining experience, but I'm on the way to the lake and time on the water is being wasted.

Once I was meeting a buddy on a lake. It was getting close to noon, and I was running late when I realized I hadn't had lunch. I pulled into a drive-in and saw they had chili dogs, so I bought three. As I was driving

down the road and attempting to not get chili sauce all over the front of my vehicle, I began to realize as, halfway through the second chili dog, that perhaps this wasn't one of my better decisions. Later that afternoon, those chunks of chili dogs floating around my digestive system were like little torpedoes going off inside me. Indigestion is a byproduct of eating drive-in food too fast while racing to a lake to go fishing.

Beef jerky, trail mix and peanuts are all good snack options while fishing. Fishing can make a person powerfully hungry, and when you are concerned with being hungry, you could miss a couple strikes—so it is always a good idea to have a selection of snacks. And if the fish aren't hitting, it can get boring, so snack food is a good fill in. Also, if you are fishing with grandkids, snacks can keep the natives from getting too restless.

Driving home after a day of fishing is another junk/snack food opportunity. For years, I got used to stopping at the first convenience store I passed and getting a couple candy bars and a soda for the ride home. This came to a halt once I got older and developed blood sugar issues. I must admit that I don't miss the soda that much, but I do miss the candy bars. I have stopped eating chocolate for the most part, but I look at any candy with nuts in it as a good option. My current favorite is Payday bars. The Bass Queen takes some exception to this, so I eat only one candy bar now instead of two.

One of my other favorites drive-home snacks is corn dogs. Recently, my fishing buddy and I were coming home from a fishing trip and I was experiencing a case of the hungries, so we stopped at a convenience store. Convenience stores have changed the entire concept of gas stations from the ones I remember as a kid. I am amazed at how much food is sold today in gas stations.

This fishing buddy is the same one I was racing off to meet the day of the chili dog experience. I told him I was going for either a candy bar or corn dog and offered to get him one, too. He declined my offer for reasons unclear to me. Once inside, I decided to forgo the candy bar and got the corn dog instead.

As I got back in the car, I told him I had decided on the corn dog because it was the healthy option.

"Corn dogs are healthy?" He asked.

"Certainly," I told him.

He gave me an incredulous look.

"What more could you ask for?" I explained. "You have protein in the meat and carbohydrates in the breading. It's like health food."

Fishermen have a unique appreciation for junk food, snacks, fast-food places and drive-ins. They fuel many fishing trips. What is health food to fishermen is probably never health food to anyone else. Besides, it is just hard to beat a good corn dog. **MWO**

Mike Yurk grew up in Oshkosh, Wis., where he first started writing about the outdoors. A retired Army officer, he is now a full-time, freelance outdoor writer. He has written more than 1000 articles for outdoor publications and published 12 books on outdoor sports. He lives in northwestern Wisconsin where he has found some of the best bass fishing in the country.

What Does Jigging... ...continued from previous page

Deadsticking

There is a lot more to deadsticking that meets the eye. And if you want to meet a lot of walleyes, crappies and perch, then you better add deadsticking to your arsenal, because sometimes, deadsticking is the only way to fill a bucket!

I like a soft rod for deadsticking that will bend all the way down to the ice hole as my rod sits in a holder attached to my bucket. I fish a lot in Wisconsin where you can use three lines, so I jig with one and set two deadsticks in holders on buckets.

A dorsal-hooked minnow will attract crappies, perch, walleyes and more! I'll use a size 6 or a size 4 Demon and set it 6 to 12 inches of bottom. If it's windy (putting a bend in your line between the rod tip and the ice), or I'm fishing water deeper than 10 feet, I'll use one of the new tungsten Puki Spoons set the same way.

A lot of guys use tip-ups, automatic hook setters, etc. I prefer the deadstick. There is something about watching a rod bend, a reel screaming and a fat perch or walleye on the end of the line!

Give jigging, pounding and deadsticking a try on your next ice fishing trip... and check your drop speed! **MWO**

Walt Matan has been a writer and television host for MidWest Outdoors for more than 30 years. An avid ice and open-water fisherman, he currently lives in the Quad Cities on the shores of the Mississippi River. He is the chief lure designer for Custom Jigs & Spins and B Fish N Tackle, customjigs.com. Follow/like Custom Jigs & Spins, B-fish-N Tackle, Walleye College and Walt Matan on Facebook.



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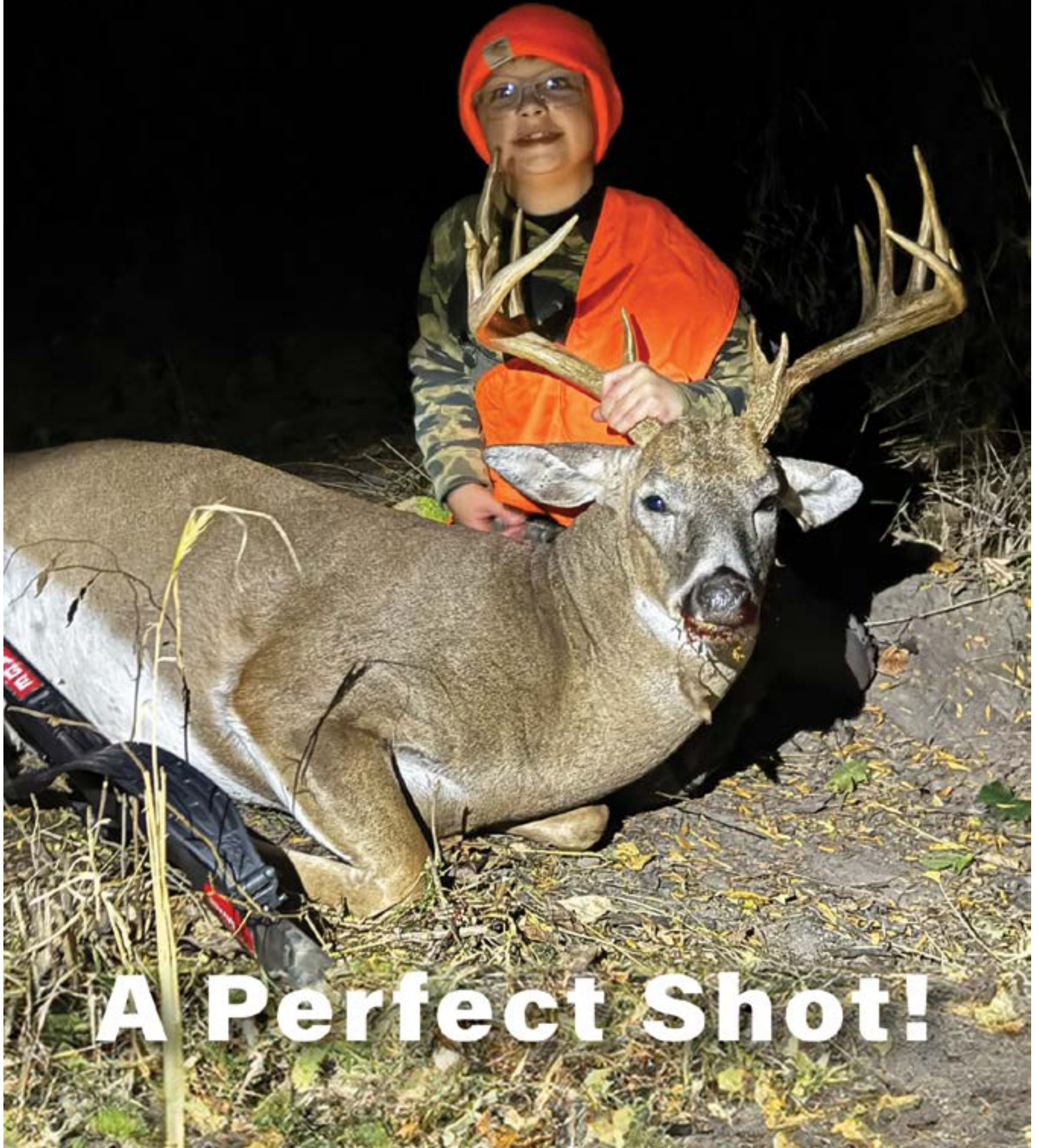
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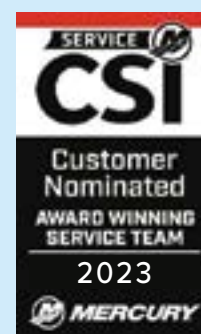
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It's Time to Check Your Tackle

by Don Gasaway

An old TV commercial for a well-known donut shop featured a guy saying, "It's time to make the doughnuts."

Winter is a time to inventory, test, modify and purchase tackle for your upcoming spring fishing. Doing it now makes more time available for using that tackle on the water.

A few professional anglers offer ideas for your consideration.

Mike Auten of Benton, Kent, offers this bit of advice. "I do not have a special bait that I need, but rather I have a go-to pattern," says Auten. He thinks that most pros have a go-to pattern that caters to their strengths, rather than a specific lure. Some lures inspire confidence under certain situations. In frustrating situations, anglers often turn to a familiar pattern and bait to hammer out something.

For Auten, it is crankbaits and spinnerbaits. His tackle boxes contain a sufficient supply to meet his needs. Mike believes that you must be able to use what will get the job done. So, he also carries other tackle as backup.

Brooks Rogers, another professional angler, is careful to not over-modify his baits. "You hear a lot of guys doing a lot of modifications," explains Rogers. "I usually upgrade to better-quality hooks on most of my treble-hook-type lures." Sometimes, he is busy changing blades or skirts on spinnerbaits. He does more spinnerbait modification than anything else.

Rogers finds that as he fishes during the year, things start to get jumbled and cluttered in his tackle storage. He sorts his tackle according to pre-spawn tackle, spawn tackle,



The market is resplendent with tackle boxes in a variety of price ranges for storage at home or in the boat. Photo: Don Gasaway

summer tackle, etc., and just changes it as the season go along. He is the first to admit that all anglers accumulate so much tackle that we simply must eliminate some of it as the season progresses.

When it comes to line, Rogers stays basic. He uses 12-pound line with Texas-rigged baits and 15-pound with plastic baits. Twelve-pound line works best in summer when the water is clear and with deep-diving crankbaits. With Rat-L-Trap lures, he moves to 15-pound line. He switches to braided line in heavy grass and weeds. Rogers listens to the word at weigh-ins and to word of mouth as to which line others use. Then he brings home that information and experiments.

Because Brooks likes to catch bass any way possible except ultra-light, he uses a lot of tackle. He prefers spinnerbaits, deep or shallow—it does not matter. If limited to only one lure, that is probably what he would choose. Brooks will also use jigs, Texas-rigged worms and topwater baits as necessary.

Bassmaster Classic Winner and BASS Angler of the Year Jay Yelas also likes spinnerbaits, but he will catch bass on whatever he has on board. However, if Jay can catch them on a spinnerbait, it would be best. He maintains that no other lure requires the casting accuracy of a spinnerbait. In shallow water with

visible cover, a good, accurate caster catches twice as many fish as a sloppy caster.

Yelas likes the challenge of putting a spinnerbait right where he wants it with a nice, quiet, accurate presentation. He also enjoys the strike on a spinnerbait. "Sometimes, they hit it really hard," Jays says with a grin.

As for colors, Yelas prefers chartreuse and white in early spring before the fish spawn. Sometimes he goes with bright chartreuse and white. If the water is clear, he prefers a softer version.

Later in spring, when the shad come up to spawn, Yelas goes to a white or shad-colored skirt. When fishing for smallmouths, he uses a chartreuse skirt with chartreuse blades.

If the water is clear and there is a bright sky, Jay likes black because it just has a more natural look in clear water. A bright-colored skirt really fans out and the fish will not hit it because it does not look natural. Black looks a lot more natural in high light levels,

according to Jay.

As for modifying baits, Yelas takes a Berkley Classic Jig and trims out some of the weed guard. If fishing sparse cover, Jay trims out up to half of the weed guard. He trims it where the weed guard meets the jighead, using a scissors. Sometimes, he also trims some of the skirt. Preferring a shorter jig skirt in clear and warm water, he opts for a longer skirt in cold, dirty water.

Sometimes, Yelas changes the hooks on his crankbaits. Most crankbaits come with pretty good hooks but, he prefers Mustad treble hooks.

At times, he puts a trailer hook on a spinnerbait or buzzbait. There he uses a 2/0 Mustad trailer hook.

Occasionally, Jay will dip some of his worms and power lizards in chartreuse just for a little color enhancement. As for line, he uses Tri-Max for flipping, pitching spinnerbaits, casting and topwater lures. For long casts in heavy cover, he sticks to Fireline in 20-pound size. For finesse fishing with a spinning rod, he will go down to 6- or 8-pound-test Vanish for drop -shotting, split -shotting, small tubes or a jighead worm.

Tackle is a fisherman's personal choice. It is important to use techniques and tackle that you have confidence. These three professional anglers have given you a start. Consider their recommendations when doing some shopping this winter at upcoming sport shows. **MWO**

Don Gasaway is a freelance outdoor writer from Marion, Ill. who has written more than 1,000 magazine articles. Find him on Facebook at: facebook.com/donsjournal. Comments and reviews are welcome.

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It's a Great Time for Fishing!

I'm pretty sure we'll still have open water (no ice) in December. We'd have to have some pretty cold weather to drop the water temperature that much. By then, most anglers out will be trying for crappies; most other species will have slowed down as the water gets colder. It all depends on what kind of weather we have between when I'm writing this and December. The water's still pretty warm for this time of year.

The crappie fishing has already picked up and will continue to improve as the water gets colder. Some years, whites have still been biting in December, back in shallow water in some of the creeks.

December is a great month to get out on the lake; you just have to dress for the weather. The pleasure boaters are gone, bugs are gone, and you don't have to smear yucky sunscreen all over. You do still need it on your face, ears, neck and hands, though. You'll have enough clothes on to protect the rest of you.

Like I said last month, we fish much like we do the rest of the year: We use jigs—usually tube jigs on a 1/16-ounce lead head—and fish around some type of cover:

Mostly wood, like fallen trees, brush piles and beaver huts. But sometimes, stumps or standing timber, and sometimes rocks, like the riprap around the bridges.

They might be good on one type of cover one day, and something else the next. Every day can be different; small changes in the weather, like sun or clouds, wind direction change (due to barometric changes), a warm/cold front, etc., can change their mood and actions. Each day, you may have to look for them (that's the "fishing" part). Sure, you can try what worked for you the last time you were out, but if that doesn't work, try something else. Lake Shelbyville is large enough that water temperatures, clarity and patterns can be different in different areas of the lake. This time of year, water temperature differences can make a big difference in how the fish are reacting.

Different areas of the lake "turn over" at different times because of local water temperatures. For those who don't know what that means, as the surface water starts to cool faster than the water below it, at a certain point, the warmer water from below will rise



A nice late-fall crappie from Lake Shelbyville.

to the surface, often bringing moss and debris up with it from the bottom. This stirs up the water, makes it murkier and usually affects the fish. Fishing may not be as good in these areas for a few days until the water "calms" back down. But not all areas of the lake will have this at the same time. If you encounter this, you may just want to try another area. Sometimes it affects the fishing; sometimes, not!

Anyway, no matter what's going on, if you're not catching fish—or not good quality

fish—before you give up, move to a different area. In each area, try different techniques, colors, depths, etc., until you find what's working in that area. It only takes one good spot to fill your livewell, so keep looking for it! **MWO**

Lifelong angler Mary Satterfield is a retired professional bass angler. She has held titles of National and World Champion and Angler of the Year. She's run the multi-species Eagle Creek Guide Service on Lake Shelbyville since 1989. She may be contacted at: 217-827-0179.

RIVERSIDE FISHING CLUB

Chicago's Fishing Club! Since 1968



2024 MEETING SCHEDULE

Jan 11	Feb 8	Mar 14	Apr 27
May 9	Jun 13	July 11	Aug 8
Sep 12	Oct 10	Nov 14	Dec 12

Christmas Club Party is Members Only December 12
Join the RFC - in January for Seminars and Fishing Fun



Join Riverside Fishing Club January 2025
Chad Novak with the RFC First Place Big Bass in the 2024 Big Fish contest.

Your All-Species Fishing Club

Join us in January! Our December meeting is our Annual Christmas Party and is for members only. In January, we will feature live, in-person meetings where you can learn how to catch more fish. Guests are welcome with NO RESERVATION REQUIRED. Simply show up at the door. Moose Lodge #424 - 3625 S Harlem Ave Berwyn, IL 60402 - easy access off of I-290 or I-55 close by, stop in! Our club will help you to find fish, learn about fish and catch more fish. We feature local experts, guides and speakers who will teach you the ins-and-outs of fishing equipment and multi-species fishing. We have great speakers and topics coming up- join us for a couple nights of fishing information, adventure and fun.

Guest Special in January Just \$5

Come out and experience a fishing seminar, socialize and meet new fishing friends at the closest multi-species fishing club to Chicago. We are located in Berwyn and our meetings are the 2nd Thursday of the month at 6:30 pm. No reservation required as we have a big hall. Expect to see the area's best speakers, guides and fishing seminar hosts such as Midwest Outdoors Magazine anglers, In-Fisherman hosts, regional expert fishing guides who will share their fishing secrets, show you diagrams and introduce you to local waters.

RiversideFishingClub.com

Riverside Fishing Club Meets 2nd Thursday of the month at Moose Lodge #424 - 3625 S. Harlem Ave. Berwyn, IL 60402

Fishing Club Means Tips, Friends

Guests welcome \$5 at the door, Check our website: RiversideFishingClub.com guests are welcome with no reservation - find us on Facebook for more on our speakers and topics. We feature everything fishing-related along with great fishing social outings. Come visit with us at meetings and you can:

- Meet New Fishing Friends
- Learn Fishing for New Fishermen (kids, women, friends & families)
- **Learn to Catch More Fish!**
- Learn About Fish Species
- **Meet Local Fishing Guides**
- Get area lake & river information
- Go on trips with new friends
- Meet a new fishing partner
- Most of our club does NOT own a boat and either rents a boat or goes with friends
- Fish Multi-Species - we like all fish
- Support Kid's Fishing
- Support Veterans Fishing

2025 RFC Fishing Tackle Sale Mar. 22

Save this date - **March 22nd, 2025** the biggest Fishing Tackle Sale closest to Chicago, 8 am - Noon in Berwyn, IL. Our event is held at the Berwyn Moose Lodge #424, Harlem avenue. Come get deals on fishing tackle, new, used and outdoor gear for camping and hunting. 61 tables of unbelievable sale items will be available to stock up for the season. The RFC Fishing Tackle Sale & Swap Meet was the biggest ever in club history! If you are interested in exhibiting, reserving an area, reserving tables or sponsoring the 2025 show event - visit our website to reserve your spots. You request a vendor table to sign up at RiversideFishingClub.com/swap/ get your table now, few tables are available. Use the on-line form today. **Contact Johnny Wilkins 630.235.2162, text or leave a message to request a table now.**

The Board meets in Westmont at Papa Passero's- all members are welcome at board meetings.

PRESIDENT: Tony Novak, 708-447-8087 or tnovak2416@aol.com

COMMUNICATIONS: Johnny Wilkins, 630-235-2162 or johnny@chicagofishingschool.com



Another year has nearly come to an end. Looking back on the year's highs and lows, all in all, it was a pretty good one. To date, no records were broken, but some fish came awfully close. As we close out 2024, we can look forward with optimism that more good fishing and memories will be made in the upcoming year.

Late-season trolling was very good in Wisconsin for returning Chinook and coho out of Milwaukee. Silver King Charters has been having good success in 90 to 150 feet of water from the filtration plant to the weather buoy, with a few steelhead and brown trout mixed in.

Fish have been hitting Moonshine Spoons on wire Dipseys run 150 to 200 feet back in 250 to 400 feet of water. Best colors have been (Wonder Bread) and (Happy Meal). Flashers and flies like the Eddie Fly have been working in (Silver) and (Little Boy Blue) on downriggers. Look for this fishing to continue into this month as long as boats are able to get out.

Jigging has also been good by the North Gap and the river mouth with heavy, slab jigging spoons like Kastmaster and Hopkins spoons. Good brown trout and lake trout jigging should be occurring right now, conditions permitting.

In Racine, things have slowed down somewhat but, fish are still being caught after dark in the harbor on K-O Wobblers (Glo), Rat-L-Traps and skein spawn.

Across the Illinois line, lake trout have been hitting out of North Point in 180 to 200 feet of water and on bottom around the reefs. They are late spawners, and their spawning activity should run well into December. Some silver Chinook have been hitting in 60 to 120 feet along the Hill.

Chicago has seen some late-returning Chinook along with a few coho and steelhead mixed in at DuSable, 31st Street and 63rd Street. They have been hitting spoons, crankbaits and spawn sacs. Phosphorescent (Glow in the Dark) Little Cleos and Kastmasters (Blue/Silver) and (Green/Silver) are still taking a few fish. The Montrose Horseshoe has still been giving up a few sheepshead (freshwater drum) and northern pike.

In downtown Chicago, the River Walk on the Chicago River has been providing good fishing for nice smallmouth and smaller largemouth bass, big crappies and some perch. Look for this fishing to remain good into the winter as long as the weather holds out.

If you are so inclined, snagging is still open for the rest of the month. It will close on New Year's as the clock strikes twelve.

Snagging is allowed for Chinook and coho salmon only. Anything else must be thrown back immediately. No snagging is allowed in non-designated areas or within 200 feet of a moored boat.

Areas where snagging is permitted include the Waukegan Harbor (in the north harbor



Joe Reynoso of Thornton, Ill. with a fall steelhead.

basin only), the Winnetka Power Plant discharge, the Lincoln Park Lagoon south of Fullerton Avenue, and at Jackson Park inner and outer harbors.

If you need good fertilizer for your garden or rose bushes, now is the time to get it. I doubt that many of these fish will be fit for the table, but they will put up a good fight.

With shore fishermen in mind, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources is introducing a new strain of brown trout.

For the past twenty years, the DNR has stocked the Plymouth Rock strain. The eggs were reared at the Jacob Wolf Hatchery and the fish were released as 5- to 6-inch fingerlings in July.

This year, the Crawford strain was stocked into the "Big Lake." These fish were obtained from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Federal hatchery system. They were reared at the Jake Wolf Hatchery. They were stocked in May at eleven locations along the Illinois shoreline.

This earlier stocking was made possible because Crawford strain browns spawn earlier and have a faster growth rate than the Plymouth Rock strain. Hopefully, the earlier stocking combined with the faster growth rates will result in better survival rates which will translate to better returns to Illinois anglers.

This year's stocking numbers saw some changes due to a poor survival of Chinook and coho eggs and fry at the Jake Wolf Hatchery. Increased numbers of Skamania steelhead, Arlee strain rainbows and brown trout were stocked this year to help pick up the slack.

According to a DNR spokesman, steelhead stocking is usually done in mid-September but was delayed this year due to warm water temperatures in the harbors. While the steelhead and brown trout numbers were increased, the coho and Chinook numbers were lowered due to the problems in the hatchery.

A complete list of the Illinois DNR's annual targets and the actual stocking numbers is as follows:

Species	Annual Target	2024 Stocking
Coho Salmon	300,000	87,890
Chinook Salmon	210,000	100,877
Skamania Steelhead	75,000	150,000
Arlee Rainbow Trout	60,000	295,000
Brown Trout	110,000	126,578
Lake Trout*	120,000	120,000

*Provided by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

There isn't much to report over in Indiana. The Chinook run on the "Big Lake" is nearing an end but fishing in the tributaries has been taking off.

Salmon fishing on Trail Creek, Salt Creek and the East Branch of the Little Calumet River has slowed, but steelhead have been doing really well on spawn sacs, skein and in-line spinners.

December outlook

Look for good lake trout action on the reefs outside the Port of Indiana, trolling thin silver-plated spoons like Williams Thinfish behind attractors like the old Bill Carr Flops or Yakima Spin-N-Glos behind 00 dodgers (Silver Plated) or (White).

Look for big perch to be schooling on the clay flats in about 55 feet of water straight off the Gary Light. Drifting big fathead minnows or baby roaches is the way to go with Chuck Weiss Glo-Flies, lasting as long as Mother Nature cooperates.

With Christmas right around the corner, many of our readers will have extra days off from work or have accumulated vacation or sick days to use up. This will be a good time to load up the freezer with some fine-eating perch, which should be abundant in Calumet Harbor, the Calumet River and the old United States Steel slips.

It's also time for last-minute Christmas shopping for a gift for Lake Michigan anglers in your life. Rather than fighting the crowds in packed stores, think about giving them a gift subscription to *MidWest Outdoors*. It's a gift that will keep on giving throughout the coming year.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish our *MidWest Outdoors* readers and their families a blessed Christmas and a fish-filled New Year with the wind always at your back.

MWO

With his "Lake Michigan Corner" and various other articles in MidWest Outdoors, Mike Ratter has been writing for MWO for nearly 35 years. His writing has also been published in various other publications throughout the Midwest. He is a consultant and field tester for various manufacturers, seminar speaker and current (and long-time) member of OWAA and AGLow.

THE LAKE GENEVA FISHING CLUB IS DEDICATED TO PROMOTING SPORT FISHING FOR ALL SPECIES ON GENEVA LAKE. WE ALSO ENCOURAGE KIDS AND FAMILIES TO FISH TOGETHER. THE CLUB HAS OUTINGS THROUGHOUT THE OPEN WATER SEASON, INCLUDING A "LEARN THE LAKE OUTING" FOR THOSE NOT FAMILIAR WITH GENEVA. WE FEATURE SPEAKERS THAT INCLUDE VETERAN MEMBERS, POPULAR FISHING GUIDES, ELECTRONICS EXPERTS, OR OTHER INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS.

NO DECEMBER MEETING

PLEASE CHECK WEBSITE FOR 2025 MEETING DETAILS

LAKEGENEVAFISHINGCLUB.COM

ANNUAL FISHING CONTEST PHOTOS

WE CAN HELP YOU LEARN TO CATCH FISH ON GENEVA & DELAVAN LAKES

PLEASE SEE US AT OUR BOOTH - 901

CHICAGOLAND FISHING EXPO

JANUARY 23RD - 26TH

Illinois Club Meetings are on the 2nd Wednesdays

Poplar Creek Bowl Banquet Entrance 2354 W Higgins Rd Hoffman Estates, IL 60192	Guests Are Always Welcomed Guest Fee \$5.00 Food & Beverage Available For Purchase @ 5:00 PM
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When this angler wasn't old

Let's see how many of these things you older guys and gals remember from the past. As for fishing and hunting, remember those tin minnow buckets? They had a smaller insert bucket with holes that you could put in the water. Good for that use, but the minnows didn't last too long if kept in just the solid part. As years went on, Styrofoam and electric aerators helped keep the little guys happy for a longer time. I remember fishing for carp using River Runts. It's no wonder they didn't work. Handmade doughballs mixed with peanut butter and/or cheese did do the trick. I used a lot of Cortland line on my Langley, South Bend, and Shakespeare reels.

One time when I was age 11 or 12, I told a kid behind me to look out, as I was going to cast. I had a large sinker and hook on my line. The kid had not moved and when I whipped the bait out, I tore some of his ear off. Fortunately, there was a fire station very close to the pond and they took him to the hospital. It happened at Riverside Pond in Moline.

We used to ride our bikes down to Sylvan Island on the Mississippi River, across from the Rock Island Arsenal. Back then there were two sewage pipes that dumped waste into the river. Yuk!

Hunting in the good old days! I had a single shot .410. It was a dandy little gun.

Bagged a lot of quail (no longer around), rabbits and squirrels. I would start hunting at the border between Moline and Rock Island, Ill. Back then, it was all farmland and woods. Today, it's all businesses and housing additions. I used to go as far as the Rock River and back. There was lots of game to hunt.

Here are some more experiences some of you might relate to. I grew up in Moline, Ill., and the Quad Cities were my stomping grounds. There were lots of movie theaters. In Moline alone there were five or more of them. A ticket was usually 25 cents and 10 cents for popcorn. We kids loved Saturdays because the theaters showed black and white serials. My favorite was, "Rocket Man."

I don't remember seeing trolleys, but I do remember seeing the tracks. My dad disliked it when driving over them.

Flying kites was a lot of fun and very popular. I had a few that ended up in telephone wires.

We got our first black & white TV in the early '50s. It was big and the screen was about 14 inches. It seemed like we were always having to put new tubes in the thing.

I got a Mo-Ped motorbike at age 15. It had a top speed of about 32 m.p.h. One time, I got hit by a 1953 Buick in Rock Island. Nothing serious and it was my fault. The guy that hit me took off.

Remember parking meters? I guess they are still around. I went through so many

parking tickets. When I was working, I would forget to "feed the meters!" They were eventually done away with. These were all things from when I wasn't old.

American white pelicans

Growing up near the Mississippi River, I don't ever remember seeing pelicans on the Rock or Mississippi rivers. My best guess is that all changed about 50 years ago, give or take. They must have changed their flyway course, as they are abundant, especially below the lock and dams. Pelicans, like seagulls and eagles, catch fish that are stunned coming out of the rollers.

They can weigh up to 30 pounds and can have a wingspan of 9 feet. When high in the sky, they don't make noise like Canada geese. They are beautiful when the sun reflects off them, with their striking white feathers and black wingtips.

Some years ago, a buddy and I were fishing Reelfoot Lake when we saw a pelican splashing and in distress. We boated over to the big bird and it had a trotline hook and a bullhead in its pouch. Fortunately, my buddy had a knife in his tackle box and was able to cut the line. The bird was very tired and slowly swam away.

While they spend winter along the coast from Texas to Florida, I've seen a few stick around for the winter. I just figure they didn't get the memo.

Ice fishing

I certainly can't speak for your last year's ice fishing haunts, but last winter was so up and down as far as safe ice in our Quad Cities area. I remember twice in February that a buddy and I fished on a lake that had lots of open water. Happily, we casted from the shore and had good results of nice size crappies. Both days we didn't even need

a coat. We'll see how this December and beyond works out!

Fishing puns

- Oh, my cod, that was a big one!
- I thought I told a funny fish joke, but I floundered.
- I went fishing just for the halibut.
- It's o-fish-al, I'm addicted to fishing.
- I whale always love fishing!

Humor

- I am allergic to peanuts. It's so bad that I can't even read Charlie Brown in the funnies!
- One time I remember our daughter said I didn't give her enough privacy. At least that's what she wrote in her diary.

Christmas humor

- How does the snow globe feel this year? A little shaken.
- I knew a man who stole an Advent calendar. He got 25 days!
- What do you call an obnoxious reindeer? Rude-olph
- What do you get if you eat Christmas decorations? Tinsillitis
- What did the psychic say before Christmas? I feel a presents near.

Quote of the month

Civilization is a constant quest for nonviolent means of solving conflicts, it is a common quest for peace.

—Max Alcott
MWO

Dan Dauw writes outdoor columns for two local newspapers and MidWest Outdoors. He first became a writer while in the U.S. Navy, writing articles for his ship newspaper. He has been an avid hunter and angler for most of his 76 years. Dauw retired from the U.S. Postal Service in 2000.

Our Story...

Founded in 1969, Walleyes Unlimited USA is now recognized as one of the top multi-species fishing clubs in the country and has been educating anglers for over 50 years. In May of 2007 Walleyes Unlimited USA was honored to be inducted into "The Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame."

Although our main interest is on walleyes, our membership includes some of the top local anglers for smallmouth, largemouth, northern pike, muskie, panfish, salmon and other great lakes fish.

Learn more at walleyesunlimitedusa.org or our Facebook page.

Illinois Meeting – Note Date Change

Wednesday, December 18th | 6:00 PM

Violetta Talley – Bass Tournament Angler

Topic: *DEEP WATER BASS FISHING TACTICS*

AND AN INTRODUCTION TO LIVE SONAR

Talley is a professional tournament angler excelling in both the sport and the business of fishing. She has had a passion for fishing since she was three years old and is currently a tournament bass angler and outdoor enthusiast currently competing in the Midwest bass tournament circuits. She is also a professional photographer, graphic designer, structural designer, and owner/operator of a successful business that caters to several markets, including the fishing industry.

Violetta is sponsored by companies such as Grandt Rods, Daiwa, Skeeter, Yamaha, Lowrance, Missile Baits, Lake County Watersports, among others. She is currently growing her social media channels in the fishing and outdoor markets. Through her seminars Violet strives to inspire and influence all anglers from women, to youth, to adults... on all novice and professional levels. She has been a regular and popular speaker at both the Chicagoland, Fishing, Travel & Outdoor Expo as well as the Indianapolis Boat, Sport & Travel Show giving seminars on many topics of interest to veterans as well as beginning anglers.

Talley's presentation should help our club members improve their fishing success on many of the Club Lakes "pressured" waters we fish, e.g., Geneva, Delavan, Fox Chain O'Lakes, Pewaukee, etc. Learn more about her at fireandearthphoto.com and her other social media accounts – Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

Wisconsin Meeting

Tuesday, January 28th 6:00 PM

Chase Parsons –

Next Bite TV & NWT Angler

Topic: *BIG WATER WALLEYES*

2025 Special Events

Saturday, January 18th

Annual Ice Fishing Jamboree

& Super Meat Raffles

The Topsy Turtle Patio and Grill

S90 W13970 Boxhorn Dr.

Muskego, WI 53150

Fishing Contest 5:00 AM - 12 PM | Meat Raffles 11:30 AM - 5:00 PM

For complete details go to:

walleyesunlimitedusa.org/wumedia/documents/jamboree-raffle_flyer.pdf

Thursday – Sunday, January 23 – 26

Chicagoland Fishing Expo | Booth 906

Schaumburg Convention Center | Schaumburg, IL 60173

Join us at Wisconsin meetings on the last Tuesday of the following months –
 Jan. | Mar. | May | July (Alt. Location) | Sept. | Nov.
 Hideaway Pub & Eatery | 9643 S 76th St. | Franklin, WI 53132

Join us at Illinois meetings on the last Wednesday of the following months –
 Feb. | April | June | Aug. (Alt. Location) | Oct. | Dec.
 American Legion | 749 Milwaukee Ave. | Gurnee, IL 60031

Santa's Hints on Fishing Gear



The Ugly Stik crew had a successful morning putting the new GX2s to the test.



Jolly Ol' Saint Nick and his elves have a huge, but fun, task ahead of them to pick out just the right item for the outdoors person on their list. Hints do help: For example, couldn't most anglers use a collapsible bait bucket?

by Capt. Lee Haasch

It was an outstanding fall morning as we eased the Grand Illusion 3 away from the dock. Despite the slight cloud cover, it wouldn't be long before the wispy clouds will begin to paint the eastern sky with crimson colors of the fall sunrise. We powered offshore about 2 miles before slowing to start setting lines.

Trevor already had one Yellow Bird hooked up and going out by the time I grabbed my diver rod and began setting. Immediately, my diver rod pounded to the water, drag screaming. "Fish on! Mike, this one's yours," I hollered as I handed the bouncing rod to Mike. Seconds later, Trevor shouted, "Here we go. Downrigger!" as he

grabbed the 7-foot, medium-light action rod. tripped the release and reeled like crazy. "It's on the slider. There it is!" he exclaimed, as he gave the rod a solid pull upwards.

"Here's yours, Chris," he shouted as he handed the pumping rod off. Just like that, the sky barely was showing orange streaks of light on the horizon, and our first double coming in.

Fast-forward to early December, with boats put away, hunting seasons winding down and Christmas just around the corner. Looking for Christmas gift ideas? Here are a couple to consider.

I have been fishing with Ugly Stik rods since they came out in the 1970s. The new GX2s are a big improvement over the original versions introduced 10 years ago, which featured iconic, clear tips and their signature, tough Ugly Tech build. The new models have Ugly Tuff guides with a PVD coating to reduce line fray. The rods come with a rubberized EVA handle for better grip, a brand-new reel seat for added sensitivity, and a 10-year warranty.

If big-water trolling is your thing, ask for the medium-light, one-piece, 7'6" casting version. I use these rods to pull planer boards or as diver rods all day long. Whether you fancy trolling for king salmon, muskies or elusive walleyes, this rod works for all. For downriggers, I prefer the 7-foot, medium-light GX2 and love how you can steer the largest kings right to the net.

For inland anglers who fancy casting for panfish orb bass, or drifting rivers for walleyes or trout, how about an Ugly Stik GX2 spinning combo? It offers better balance for lighter feel, and even lady anglers will appreciate the stylish matching wraps and reel colors. From panfish to walleyes to trout and salmon, this is a powerful, multi-species

combo. You special person will remember when Santa delivered this fish catcher every time they land a big one. Ugly Stik GX2 is the next generation of Ugly Stik that combines the heritage and tradition of the original while maintaining the strength and durability Ugly Stiks are known for. Ugly Stik GX2 rods offer better balance for lighter feel, improved components, and eye catching cosmetics for a more modern look. Ugly Stik GX2 is the next generation of Ugly Stik that combines the heritage and tradition of the original while maintaining the strength and durability Ugly Stiks are known for. Ugly Stik GX2 rods offer better balance for lighter feel, improved components, and eye catching cosmetics for a more modern look.

Speaking of innovations for the multi-species fisherman, Frabill has come up with probably the most innovative piece of fishing equipment yet. How about the perfect Christmas gift for the panfish or walleye fisherman in your life? The Frabill Collapsible Bait Bucket is sure to turn their heads of panfish and walleye anglers. It comes complete with a built-in, battery-operated aerator. Carrying handles clip to the base for added support, and when folded, it is the same size as Plano 3700 stowaway. Yes, it will store right in your tackle bag with your other 3700 tackle boxes.

The aerator runs on 2 AA batteries, has a 10-inch hose with air stone, and is completely self-contained. This is a real game changer for traveling fishermen. This one is totally Santa approved and easy to wrap!

If your special angler dreams of fishing like the pros and trolling for trophy king salmon, they'll need to spread their lines out to cover more water. Yellow Bird planer boards are just the ticket to run more lines and get those baits into the fish zones wide from the boat. Yellow Bird planer boards come in 4 sizes and are my planers of choice. And they make a great stocking stuffer idea!

If your fisherman needs a tackle bag to hold a collapsible cooler, round out your gift order with an Ugly Stik 3700 Tackle Bag. This stylish bag holds 4 size 3700 boxes (or 3 and a collapsible bait bucket) and has many pockets for extra gear and tools. This



A good tackle bag helps organize new lures and tools.

is a must-have for all anglers to be organized. Rumor is that even Santa has a couple of these.

Has that special someone been really good this year? Maybe the new Fish Hawk Lithium Pro System could find its way under the tree with your special angler's name on it. Lure presentation is everything when trolling big water, accounting for currents and finding thermal breaks. The Fish Hawk is one of my most-counted-on pieces of electronics, day-in and day-out. The all-new lithium, rechargeable probe is 40 percent smaller and runs 50 hours on a single charge. Knowing the speed and water temperature *at your lures* is a game changer for trolling anglers.

Still not sure what to get family members for Christmas? How about a fishing or hunting vacation trip? The Midwest is loaded with lodges, resorts and charter operators that can make for a memorable vacation for you and your family. Throughout this magazine, you will find many places to book an exciting vacation that features fishing, hunting or just relaxing. And a gift subscription to *MidWest Outdoors* makes a nice stocking stuffer!

Tip of the month

Since it is Christmas time, this month's tip is about a couple stocking stuffers. Good Ol' Saint Nick would be happy to fill his bag of goodies with these products and stuff them into stocking all over the Midwest and beyond. A good fillet knife is perfect gift. As a big-water angler, I prefer the Ugly Stik 9-inch Flex Knife, but for smaller species, try the Ugly Stik 7-inch Tapered Knife.

What tackle box is complete without a good scissors? Ugly Stik Marine Shears is tops in the department with an Ugly Tuff grip, stainless steel blades, and it even scales fish! This tool needs to find a way in everyone's stocking and into their tackle bag.

MWO

Capt. Lee Haasch is a charter captain out of Algoma, Wis., with more than 45 years of Great Lakes angling and guiding experience. Haasch has been instructing anglers for over 30 years with education seminars and timely freelance articles.



Run your lures in the fish zones out to the sides of your boat with Yellow Bird planer boards. And they make great stocking stuffers!

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Deep currents are present in many big-water trolling situations. Dial in your trolling speed *at your baits* using Fish Hawk electronics.



The Outdoor Connection

Chauncey Niziol

November was a little weird. It started out pretty mild and then Mother Nature decided to mess with us again, and again, and again.

We had short sleeves and short pants on till way into November, but I know this is Chicago, and many of us wear winter jackets and short pants all winter. But I think we're going to see a little ice in early December this year, but maybe not safe ice.

I was out on the Illinois River and only saw one other boat cause the river was a little low. But we had a great time on white bass and sauger. You should see the same action on the Kankakee; just dress a little warmer while on a boat; You'll get the whole river to yourself and catch fish before ice locks out the ramps.

If you are a sportsman with a family, December can be the most difficult 30 days of the year to get through. We think about the holidays, the economy, buying gifts for our loved ones and maybe even picking up something special for your hunting and fishing buddies. My suggestion would be buying a subscription to *MidWest Outdoors* (go to midwestoutdoors.com and click on subscribe) and get your favorite fishing and hunting buddies a subscription. Then plan out what days you're going to be going sport shows in January.

You may even want to get a young sportsman in your home their own subscription to *Midwest Outdoors* for a Christmas Gift this year. I bought one for each of my grandkids. They call me the fun Grandpa and they enjoy it all year long. You can even talk about the articles they read.

As we know, fishes' metabolisms really slow this time of year, but they still eat. We just have need to be in the right place at the right time—and plan it that way.

Snagging for coho and chinook salmon on Lake Michigan remains open until Dec. 31, but no one I know tries this late in the year.

Lake Michigan, Waukegan/Winthrop Harbor

Try minnows and spawn sacs in any locations where you can see some current. Water coming out of a pipe is warmer than the lake and should draw in fish. I like to use minnows close to the bottom to pick up brown trout. But you can only do this if the lake is open and safe. If we get early ice in mid-December, look for Winthrop Harbor ice fishermen to be taking perch, bluegills, northern pike and trout. Waxworms and shiners are preferred baits over artificials.

Lake Michigan, Chicago

If we don't have an east wind, the water on the north side of Navy Pier stays open most of the winter and is where most anglers fish. Perch can be taken on crappie rigs dressed with minnows or pieces of squid tentacles on a white or chartreuse Mini Mite worked vertically. Many small fish are hooked, but a few jumbos can also be taken. Further south in the city, perch are active in the Calumet River near the bridges, and also near discharge pipes along the shoreline. Don't forget about the old US Steel Shipping Channel around 87th Street on the lake for cold-weather perch. But it can be on and off; you just have to check or listen to my show, *Chauncey's Great Outdoors*, on ESPN Radio AM 1000, 6 to 7 am central time. If you want to make it easy, subscribe in the

podcast section on espnchicago.com or on Chaunceysgreatoutdoors.com for free.

Chicago River

If you can put a boat in the river, work water discharges from the buildings along the river. The water is much warmer, and you would not believe what you can catch from these locations. You can even use artificial jigs and other warm-weather baits, but I would use live bait first.

Cook County Forest Preserves

Thin ice has begun to form on most lakes when it gets cold enough, but it can be gone by noon. The Forest Preserve District does not monitor ice thickness. It recommends that there be four inches of solid ice before you venture out on the following lakes: Arrowhead, Axehead, Beck, Belleau, Big Bend, Bode Lake South, Busse-Main, Busse-South, Maple, Powderhorn, Saganashkee Slough, Sag Quarry East, Sag Quarry West, Tampier and Turtle head. All other lakes are closed to ice fishing. If you do get out, look for fish on the edges of green weeds and go with small baits and small hooks. If you drop your hook to the bottom and drag it a little, you should hook some type of plant growth. If the growth is green, stay there; if it's brown or other than green, move to another spot. The other color means it's taking oxygen from the water in that location. No oxygen, no fish—it's that simple in ice fishing.

Chain O' Lakes

Everyone is waiting for first ice on the Chain. Backwater ice anglers go out on ice thinner than I would ever think of going out on. But they can find hungry fish in these conditions. Bluegills and crappies can be active on Marie and the south end of Channel. Ice jigs dressed with waxworms or spikes are best. The walleye bite is still so-so but is best early and late in the day. Jig with an ice rod or using a tip-up is during this time

of the year. But if the water stays open, get a bucket of minnows and have fun from shore or boat!

Kankakee River

I'm expecting the river to be still low and clear during December, with more shoreline ice and ice in the backwaters forming as it gets colder. Walleye anglers on the Illinois side are trying east of Momence and below the Kankakee and Wilmington dams. Go with a minnow, Wack 'em and Stack 'em jig (<https://wackemandstackemcustombaits.com/>) Northern pike seem to hang around the state line and Aroma Park Area. A large minnow or spinner is your best choice for a good fish. Crappies are normally found at mouths of ditches or bayous, using pinkie jigs or minnows; work the lures slower than you normally do.

Fox River

The secret in fishing the Fox in the winter is also to fish the warm water outflows from pipes that are dumping water from storm drains or water treatment plants. Small walleyes are hitting minnows on a single hook with a split shot set 18 inches above the hook, just outside of these current areas. Smallmouth bass will slam a hook and minnow. Check out the discharge area below Montgomery, where the water is warmer and clear, so fish will be drawn to it.

Shabbona

When this lake ices up, the anglers really turn out in bigger numbers to try for bluegills, walleyes and crappies near the trees.

Illinois River

Only a few sauger are taken near Peru and Henry at this time of year, but fishing pressure is very light. Work a jig and minnow along the bottom.

Sauger are taken in the deeper cuts of the river on a jig and minnow. Peru, Starved Rock, Henry and Hennepin ramps are all open throughout the year unless we get into a real hard freeze. **MWO**

Chauncey Niziol has been part of the outdoor world since he was four. For more than 30 years, he has communicated his love of the outdoors through MidWest Outdoors magazine and television shows, appearances on other programs, and his own radio program on ESPN Radio AM 1000. He is also a member of the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame. Check out his website, Chaunceysgreatoutdoors.com, or [Facebook/chaunceysgreatoutdoors](https://www.facebook.com/chaunceysgreatoutdoors) to watch his weekly video fishing reports.

NATIVE AMERICAN PROVERB

I leave you with this Native American Proverb from the Apensuie Majawatt:

On Christmas, we celebrate the birth of a child in a manger.

Remember that he was born first to the animals in the stable, while the wild ones stood outside looking in; then the guests came.

This Christmas, please remember all the creatures

of the world because they were the first to see and honor

the love of a child born in a manger.

To my outdoor friends and family, I wish you and your family a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Kwanzaa and a healthy and Happy New Year!

Remember, we don't own the woods, the forest, the fish we catch and the ducks we hunt. We are only borrowing them from our children's children. Take care of the great outdoors; it's the only one we have, and the only one they will ever have.

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Meat Hunters

The title of this story "Meat Hunters" is a throwback to the old days of deer hunting. When I was boy and learning this sport in the early '60s, there was not nearly the level of importance placed on antler size as there is today. Back then, meat was much more desirable than a rack for the wall... or the record book.

In fact, I can remember the gentlemen who taught me this sport—my father Glen Roux and my great uncle Harlan "Buster" Hanson—saying that they would much rather take a doe than a buck for taste's sake. My dad's most repeated saying during deer season was, "If I kill a big buck, it is because it was the only deer I had a shot at." They were prototypical "meat hunters."

I credit four names for changing the overall face of deer hunting from meat to antlers. Pope & Young and Boone & Crockett have forever made meat hunters the "lower class" of folks in the modern deer woods. Because I grew up eating lots of venison, as did my kids, we are still meat hunters at heart. We always get all the "anterless permits" we can.

Now, don't get me wrong. I have *several* very big bucks on the wall and am always looking for the next one. But I not only love eating the meat; I fully understand deer conservation/management. I know that harvesting female deer whenever possible increases the chances of seeing big bucks. So, when it comes to shooting does to get bigger bucks, the means most definitely justifies the ends.

All that being said, last month, my middle stepson Spencer called and said he was coming home from college for the weekend and wanted to go bowhunting. This would be his only opportunity to bowhunt before gun season. I told him that I would have everything ready for his arrival and for our weekend of deer hunting.

Spencer had classes on Friday afternoon and would not get home until the middle of



Caleb knows that shooting female deer does two important things: It accomplishes herd management and puts prime quality meat in the freezer. Photos: Mike Roux

the evening. I readied all his gear and headed for my #2 stand about 3 pm. I was saving my #1 for Spencer on Saturday. By 3:45, I was set.

I had not been in the stand more than 30 minutes when two does came sneaking in from the west. I slowly and quietly took my bow off its hanger and clicked my release onto the bow's string. I was standing and ready.

As I watched these two approaching at about 50 yards, a noise caught my attention. I turned my head to see another doe running toward my stand from the east. She was coming right down the trail my stand covered. I slowly turned and drew as I made the move. She stopped at exactly the right spot. I anchored and shot through her heart at a mere 10 steps. She did not go 15 yards.

When Spencer got home, the first thing he saw was a hanging deer. He was pumped and could not wait for his turn. We talked that night at length. I explained that the



Spencer also fully understands the need to shoot does.

standing corn on our deer hunting farm was a huge handicap. He decided, as had I, that any deer was a good deer under those conditions. We decided that we were certainly going to be meat hunters that weekend.

Spencer asked which stand he should hunt to have the best chance at a shot. I told him the best place I knew of was my #1 stand, but that it was 30 yards from standing corn. He said he would love to hunt there but did not know where the stand was. I made a phone call and got Spencer not only a guide, but a cameraman as well. My son Caleb had been filming me at this stand and knew exactly where it was. Caleb and Spencer were going bowhunting the next day.

For more reasons that I can recount, Spencer opted not to hunt on Saturday morning. I was not in a stand that morning, either. It happened to be opening day of duck season and I was in a duck blind with good friend John Caldwell.

I was not going to hunt that afternoon. I was going with my wife Nancy to a family function out of town. Nancy and I left the house at the same time Spencer and Caleb left for their evening hunt. Nancy and I had about a 50-minute drive while the boys only had about a 20-minute trip to their stands.

We had not been at the gathering more than 15 minutes when my phone rang. I told Nancy, "It's Spencer. They must be having trouble with the four-wheeler." I answered and Spencer said, "I'm done." I said, "What do you mean you're done?" "I killed a doe 20 minutes after we got here," he said. "We are headed to John's house with the deer."

That night, we celebrated two archery kills in two days. The meat hunters had done their job. Spencer and Caleb could not

have been happier. I was tickled for Spencer because he had such a limited amount time and was still able to get his deer.

We all went to church the next morning and gave much thanks for the gifts of venison that God had given us that weekend. Spencer left to go back to school right after lunch and Nancy was going to clean his bedroom and wash his bedclothes. "I guess I will go to my stand 'til dark," I more or less asked. "That's fine," she said, and in a matter of minutes I was off.

I had no sooner gotten there and settled in when running deer caught my attention. I was up and had the release on the string long before I saw the deer. It appeared to be a small doe and she was running right at me. I came to full draw and bleated with my voice when she got close. The second she stopped, I shot at less than 10 yards. The arrow made that satisfying *thump* as it hit the deer's chest and passed through. The deer whirled and ran out sight, crashing within hearing range.

I waited a half-hour and then recovered a nice-sized button buck. I was little disappointed that it was a young buck, but in the long run, I was meat hunting. I called Spencer and told him that I got another one. He could not believe it. Three archery deer taken in three days. I told him, "It may not be a record, but it's a pretty good average." Needless to say, we have plenty of venison in the freezer. **MWO**

Mike Roux is an award-winning outdoor writer and a former Illinois Outdoor Writer of the Year. Roux is also a renowned speaker available to sportsmen's groups as well as youth and church groups. For regular and constant outdoor content, check him out at mikeroux.com or like and follow Mike Roux Outdoor Enterprises on Facebook.



Mississippi Valley Sportsmen, Inc.

Merry Christmas!

Remember to join us at our annual fundraising banquet the first Saturday in March!

We are a Quad Cities sportsmen's club. Our main objectives and goals of the organization are as follows:

To promote conservation, preservation, management, habitat development and other activities related to youth development and good sportsmanship.

We host a fun Shoot in the summer that gives us a chance to get together and have some outdoor fun and establish bragging rights for the year.

We will also participate in other activities as available. All monies raised are kept and utilized locally.

We are currently accepting new committee members to help organize our events and provide input on the direction of the Group.

If you have an interest in joining this great organization, please contact **Rob Cain** at rcain@citiesig.com or call **563-340-4918** to learn more on how you can get involved.

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Late-season ducks

With only a few weeks remaining in the 2024 duck hunting season, you would think that all the ducks have moved on south to warmer, friendlier climes. And most of them have—but not all. Every winter, small flocks of hardy quackers—mostly big, fluffy mallards—holdout until deep snow covers all available food sources. This usually doesn't happen during the first two weeks of December, and while small ponds, sloughs, shallow lakes and sheet water have frozen up, late-season ducks can find enough open water to keep them around.

Rivers are still flowing, but the shallow, protected backwaters that birds prefer are often ice covered. The secret hot spots will be any small creeks or drainage ditches where there is just enough current to keep them open. These small waters invite jump shooting, a tactic that will produce a duck or two, but require a lot of slogging through muddy fields to enjoy maybe 30 seconds of action. The trick is to slip into some cover next to the open water while the birds are out feeding, take your birds as they return, and the get out of Dodge as quickly as possible. And don't return for four or five days to avoid spooking the flock away. If you can scout up two or three of these secluded hidey holes, you can rotate through them two or three times during the waning days of the season, and maybe put more big ducks in your freezer than you did during the warmer days.

Late season geese

Tune-in next month!

The Feds ban hunting/shooting

The Bureau of Land Management issued a final rule on its proposed management plan for Bears Ears National Monument, 1.3 million acres of public land in southern Utah, which includes an outright prohibition on recreational shooting of any kind for any purpose. Bears Ears, like all national monuments, are generally open to recreational shooting by the public. And for many in the western United States, public lands such as these provide the *only* opportunity for such activities.

"No surprise here. BLM told everyone many months ago that the agency's preferred alternative was to ban recreational shooting altogether," said Dr. Todd Adkins, Senior Vice President at the Sportsmen's Alliance. "The notice and comment process proved meaningless, so we must turn to the courts to keep public land truly public."

The Sportsmen's Alliance is pulling together a coalition of organizations and individuals to challenge the BLM rule in federal court. Many organizations fight to protect America's outdoor enthusiasts, including recreational shooters, and the Sportsmen's Alliance is actively engaged with many of these groups to find the right pathway forward. "Federal statutes require BLM to have considered a different approach than an outright ban," said Michael Jean, Litigation Counsel for the Sportsmen's Alliance. "Whether by oversight or with clear intent, we cannot stand by as our members and supporters are thrown off public land in violation of existing law, and we won't."

The best fishing season ever

Winter has arrived, ending the open-water fishing season on Lake Michigan. I have been a sport fisherman, tournament fisherman, charter boat operator and close observer of the Big Lake's fishery for over fifty years, and I can

unequivocally say that the 2024 season was, without doubt, the best I have ever seen. From start to finish, trollers brought in amazing catches of all species. And as the season wound down last fall, significant catches of immature coho and Chinook salmon, as well as trophy-sized lake trout, were indicative of another eye-popping season coming up next year. Whether on a private boat, or one of Illinois' fleet of excellent charter boats, be sure to get in on this fabulous action next summer. **MWO**

Jerry Pabst has been writing about the outdoors for over 40 years. He captained a Lake Michigan charter boat for 25 years and was inducted into the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame. He has hunted waterfowl in all North American flyways, pursued upland game extensively, and trains his own dogs.



Our Readers Write



Weston H., 11 years old, took his very first deer, a 14-point buck, during the Illinois youth season in LaSalle County. He made a perfect shot out of Grandpa's box blind!

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chsn.com

The Burbot Season is Here



The author's lone encounter with a burbot. It looks a little different in daylight compared to at night. Photo: Bill Takacs

by Bill Takacs

There is no specific season for burbot—just a general time frame when fish are in shallower water to feed and spawn. This movement from deeper waters happens from January to March, well before ice-out in most areas of their range. They are found in larger lakes and streams across the northern portions of North America, Europe, Asia and including the Great Lakes.

You may not know this freshwater fish of the cod family by this name, as they are also called eelpout, Iota, lawyer, mud shark, ling cod, snakehead, cusk or spineless catfish.

Description

The burbot is a long fish that looks like a cross between a catfish and eel. It also has a unique fin structure. A long, soft dorsal fin stretches down the back and stops just shy of its circular tail. The anal fin does the same. The head is flat and broad, and the jaws are set with numerous teeth. They have a single chin barbel and two tube-like projections coming from their nostrils. Their scales are extremely small, and their skin feels like a slippery eel.

The burbot's main colors can be anything from olive or tan to dark brown or black, mottled with darker or yellow blotches. Color varies depending upon time of year and depth of the fish.

First encounter

My one and only encounter (thus far) with this fish occurred in the late '80s on a lake in central Minnesota. One evening, after dark, my fishing partner and I decided to do some casting for walleyes from one of the resort's piers. There was a nice cabbage weed bed within easy casting distance and we were both throwing Original Floating Rapalas.

When my partner hooked a fish, we assumed that it was a walleye; but to our surprise, when we shined our flashlight in the landing net, we were both speechless. Looking at this thing with small beady eyes,

a long body and a bad habit of wrapping its body around your arm, we found the whole experience a little unnerving at the time, and neither of us knew for certain what it was. I suspected that it was an eel or a burbot, but had only seen photos of burbot before. We placed the fish in the live box so that we could view it in the daylight, take a few pictures and then release it. I have never caught, nor even seen another one, since that experience.

Behavior and locations

Burbot movement to shallower water from their summer, deep-water homes in Lake Michigan makes them more available to anglers during the winter months, when they are more active at night.

For most of the year, they inhabit deeper, cooler water, often on soft-bottom areas of clear and clean natural lakes and rivers. In southern Lake Michigan, burbot have been caught in 30 to 60 feet of water, and as shallow as 20 to 30 feet on offshore reefs and near harbors and breakwalls when spawning.

Shallow flats that hold large schools of baitfish can be productive during the day. At night, look for shallow bars, humps or breaklines adjacent to deep water to attract fish.

Fishing patterns and presentation

A combination of above-normal air temperatures the last couple winters, favorable wind direction and velocity, and the lack of ice covering the waters of Indiana and Illinois, enabled boat anglers to access Lake Michigan during the cold-water months. It is safe to say that the vast majority of the burbot caught at this time have been caught incidentally by anglers fishing for perch.

Burbot are almost exclusively eaters of small fish, although they will eat insects, small invertebrates and crayfish when available. Perch rigs are very effective, baited with fathead minnows, golden roaches or shiners, and have accounted for most burbot catches. Regular jigs with cut bait also work.

Burbot are not shy about hitting artificial



Anthony Burke's 14-pound, 3.6-ounce state record. Photo: Indiana DNR

baits, either, as long as they are fished close to or on the bottom. Jiggging spoons in glow finishes and blade baits like the old Heddon Sonar also take their share. Bang the bottom with these baits to stir up bottom content to attract attention. Berkley PowerBait minnows and curly-tailed grubs are other productive options.

Conversations with fishery biologists from Indiana and Illinois revealed a couple other options. Ben Dickinson, Lake Michigan Fisheries Research Biologist for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, stated that he has heard some fishermen have had good luck with plastic swimbaits. Will Stacy-Duffy, an Illinois Lake Michigan Program Fisheries Biologist, mentioned another bait that most of us would not think of using: fish eggs.

As far as equipment goes, the same spinning rod and reel that you would use for walleyes will do fine. A dependable size #2000 or #2500 Abu-Garcia spinning reel filled with 8- or 10-pound-test monofilament line, and a medium-action rod, should handle any size burbot you might hook.

State records

The Illinois record for burbot currently stands at 11 pounds, 12.5 ounces, caught from the Cook County waters of Lake Michigan on December 7, 2020.

Unfortunately, neither the Illinois fishing regulations publication nor their website list the fisherman who holds the record.

On January 6th of this year, a new Indiana record for burbot was set by Anthony Burke of Cedar Lake with a 14-pound, 3.6-ounce fish from Lake Michigan. The record has been broken three times in the last 13 months! The previous record was 11.4 pounds, caught in January 2023.

Burke's record was caught between 50 and 60 feet of water out of Portage, Ind. on a homemade perch rig with a 2-inch soft plastic minnow.


Burbot are celebrated every year at the Eelpout Ice Fishing Festival in Walker, Minn. on Leech Lake. Besides the festivities and prizes awarded, this event also highlights the fact that burbot are delicious. Their flesh is firm and white, and when boiled and served with butter, it is known as "Poor Man's Lobster" to some folks.

I would like to thank Ben Dickinson and Will Stack-Duffy for their valuable input on fish locations and baits used in their waters.

MWO

Bill Takacs of Hammond, Ind., has been writing for MidWest Outdoors regularly since 1975, and has been published in several state, regional, and national publications. He fishes for virtually every freshwater fish from panfish to muskies, with the exceptions of sturgeon and alligator gar.

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Tinley Park Fishing Expo Returns to Tinley Park Convention Center January 10th

The Tinley Park Fishing, Travel & Outdoor Expo is back for three exciting days, now scheduled for January 10, 11, and 12. This year, the event will feature a refreshed layout that nearly fills the entire state-of-the-art Tinley Park Convention Center. Located just 30 miles south of downtown Chicago, the convention center is known for its sleek, modern design and ample free parking.

Visitors will have the chance to meet exhibitors from across the Midwest, showcasing everything you need for fishing and outdoor adventures. Exhibitors will include vacation resorts, fishing guides, charters, tackle shops, manufacturers, and fishing clubs from multiple states.

Beyond the diverse array of exhibitors, the Expo will offer fishing seminars, casting and outdoor demonstrations, interactive fish simulators to test your skills, and plenty of raffles, prizes, and giveaways. Show sponsors

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include MidWest Outdoors Magazine & Television.

This is a family-friendly event, so be sure to bring the kids along! At the Expo, don't

miss the *Kids Corner*, where young visitors can enjoy face painting, balloon artists, sketch portraits, and more. There's also a kids' trout pond, the World's Tallest Fisherman, and

daily live performances by "Elvis" for even more family fun and entertainment.

The Expo remains an affordable outing for the whole family. Admission is just \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and veterans, and \$5 for children ages 7 to 14. Kids 6 and under get in free. For even greater savings, three-day passes are available for \$20 for adults and \$14 for seniors and veterans.

There are also discounted ticket prices for groups of 10 or more: Adults \$9 each (save 10%); Vets & Seniors: \$6 each (save 25%); Young Anglers (14 & under) \$4 each (save 20%). Kids 6 & under are free. Parking is free and there is plenty of it.

For advanced ticket sales go to tinleyfishexpo.com/advance-ticket-sales

Or visit tinleyfishexpo.com for more information. **MWO**

From Cooling to Colder

by Phil Trager

The Illinois River has been low much of this year. It has also been warmer than usual. Both factors may be involved in delaying seasonal movements of sauger and walleyes. In fall, fish activity seems to pick up somewhere in the vicinity of 65-degree water temperatures. Areas from the rapids and downstream see more active fish than in the much warmer water of summer. Of course, cooler nights and shorter hours of sunlight are integral parts of the cooling process.

Cold water from 48 to about 35 degrees invites many sauger from the Fox River and other haunts within the Illinois to deep areas with shallower water nearby. In the upper Peoria pool, sauger school up in 17 feet or less water near the I-39 bridge and just downstream from Shippingsport during this early, pre-wintertime. The water near Mertel's cranes also has similar depth. Both sections have deeper water nearby, extending as deep as 25 feet in the "Snag Hole" as well as around the corner to the boat club and nearby loading docks. Areas near and upstream of Henry see fish coming out of Lake Senachwine to the channel edges and moving inflows of water as well.

December typically sees declining temperatures as the month goes on. On rare occasions, ice has formed as early as December 5 with a dramatic shift in weather patterns. As of this writing, daytime temperatures are still in the 70s and 80s.

Nights continue to get cooler, with 30s and possible frost predicted for the third week in October. Water temps are still in the upper 60s and normal schooling of white bass just prior to sauger schooling is beginning. Low water is not giving off "current signals" in the usual locations.

Water in the Marseilles rapids has been slowly rising as the gates are open to maintain water level for barges as needed. It, too, has been low, and casting below riffles has been incredibly difficult. Retrieve 1/8-ounce jigs and twister tails or hair jigs much quicker in the very slow current. A 1/8-ounce jig is already smaller than usual, as the current usually requires a 1/4-ounce or more. Lighter blade baits are needed in low, slow water. Shallow-running crankbaits such as Plus 1 series lures and floating Rapalas produce, too.

Thanksgiving is about the latest it has taken for whites and sauger to show up. Fishermen keep checking customary

locations, looking for action. When the action begins, the fish are often in 17 feet or less. They may hold in 8 to 9 feet, not far from 18 feet. The shallow water near ADM is also worth fishing, primarily on weekends, as barge traffic is busy during the week.

Cooling temps drive fish deeper

Water temps dropping below 35 degrees usually drives fish deeper than 18 feet. Water temps give an indication which locations to fish on a given day.

The transition to deep water entails a switch from 1/2-ounce sinkers on a three-way rig to 1 1/2- or even 2-ouncers. In the Mississippi River where current can be much quicker, as much as 3 to 5 ounces are preferred. Likewise, a shift from medium-action rods to medium-heavy or even heavy rods accommodate the change in sinker weight. Seven- or 8-foot rods help present heavier weights. Braided line with 10- to

12-pound mono leaders works well with floating jig combinations. Adjust jig size on Dubuque rigs as well.

Close to nature

Winter fishing can be fun when dressed for the conditions. After launching the boat and walking from the parked vehicle back to the boat, the cold air begins to settle in. It's the right time to add the final layer of warm clothing as the body senses cold air and the heart pumps to bring warmth to your extremities. Then jump in the boat to troll floating jigs, pull crankbaits on leadcore or vertically jig various depths in relative comfort. **MWO**

Phil Trager is an avid Illinois River angler who enjoys as many as 300 days on the water. Along with the help of local experts, Trager has created maps of the Illinois River from Marseilles to Henry.

Fishing Adventures in Waders

by Bob Jensen

Some friends and I gathered recently, and the talk turned to fishing. We spoke about different fishing trips that we had been on lately, lures that had been productive (and some that had not been productive), and a variety of other topics geared toward fishing. Not catching, just fishing.

The conversation eventually turned to our early years of fishing. Most of the members of our group had spent a significant portion of their younger years fishing while wading. It was agreed that wading added a little or a lot of excitement to our fishing. The excitement wasn't all from catching fish, and it was determined that many of these exciting events were best not shared with parents.

One group member shared that there is quicksand along Iowa rivers. Others agreed, but none had encountered any that was more than waist deep.

Another member had discovered that if you're walking through a pasture along the river and there's a herd of cows and a protective bull, the bull will quit chasing you when you jump in the river. It's impressive how fast a normally slow guy can run in a pair of chest waders when a bull is chasing him. Try to find a not-real-deep spot in the river to jump into.

At some point in our wading careers, we had to decide if hip waders or chest waders



A jig/plastic bait combo is the way to go when wading.

were the better option. We all went the chest wader route. Chest waders let us get into more areas of the river. Most of us learned the hard way that chest waders were the same as four-wheel drive pickups. They allowed you to get in trouble in places that were harder to get out of. We learned that with four-wheel drive trucks, you get stuck in two-wheel drive and back up in four-wheel drive. You don't want to get stuck in two-wheel and then keep going forward in four-wheel. You're probably going to get even more stuck.

With chest waders, you go as deep as you can with hip waders, then go back. Continuing into deeper water was and still is a bad idea. Several in our group had gotten into swifter, deeper water with chest waders than was advisable. That's another happening that wasn't shared with parents for a while.

We agreed that it's very important to know about the ownership of the property where you'll be fishing. Most of our wading adventures were and still are on private property, and the owners of that property

understandably want to know who's out there. Things were much simpler back in the day. If property ownership changed, we knew about it. Not always so today. Get permission from the person who can legally give permission to be on the desired property.

Everyone agreed that a jig with a plastic tail was the best bait choice. Not because the fish liked it better, but because it was much safer to use. Crankbaits have more hooks, and as a couple of us learned, getting one of those hooks in your hand while unhooking a fish when you're a half-mile from the vehicle does not make for a pleasant outing. Especially when the fish is still attached to the bait that's stuck in your hand.

The rivers have aged, as have the anglers who waded them. The rivers have eroded, reducing fish habitat and fish populations. Our group of anglers no longer has the energy needed to wade up and down the river. However, our group enjoyed reliving those days when wading was an adventure that we're glad we experienced, and somewhat surprised that we survived. **MWO**

Bob Jensen's 45-year career in the fishing and outdoor industry includes producing and hosting award-winning television and radio shows, co-authoring five best-selling books, writing a weekly syndicated outdoor column and numerous feature articles, and presenting fishing seminars at various outdoor events.

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On the Bank

Dan Brozowski

Spincast: A Venerable Reel for All Ages

Fellow bank anglers, you've asked for it! Over time, I have received numerous emails asking questions concerning the use of spincast reels in today's increasingly advanced tackle world. And while it's been a long time coming, I have done extensive on-the-water research concerning these age-old, fish-catching machines to determine, at least in my opinion, if these reels are still applicable in today's angling situations.

Spincast reels need little introduction. I can't think of a single angler I've shared time with who didn't catch one of their very first fish, no matter what the species, without the use of a spincast reel—short of a few cane pole aficionados. But that's a different story for another time!

While certainly a staple back in my early days of fishing, the spincast reel dates back even beyond my first cast into the watery depths of the unknown. I'm certainly no tackle historian, but as far as I know, the earliest spincast creations graced the tackle shelves sometime in the late 1940s. My first rod and reel in hand began sometime in the mid 1960s. These early spincast reels were still in production and in normal use for those early days spent developing my angling prowess. I remember the trunk of our old Ford Galaxie 500 carrying a variety of rod and reel combos, with spincast reels from Zebco, Johnson and Pflueger comprising the reel choices of my early days.

Okay, enough of my meandering down memory lane. First off, let's examine the basic mechanics of the spincast reel. In my opinion, it's kind of a crossbreed between spinning reels and baitcasters. A simple push button feature allows you to make a cast—similar to a baitcaster—with the line coming off the spool like a spinning reel; there's no need for thumbing your spool, therefore eliminating those frustrating backlashes. Gear ratios are on the low end, which we'll discuss in a moment. Spincasters do have drag systems, usually controlled with a turning dial somewhere on the body. Line capacities are sufficient for most species depending on the size of the reel. We'll discuss line types in a moment.

The spincast reel is normally labeled as a "beginner" or "kids" type piece of tackle. While I agree that their simplicity makes them a great choice for inexperienced anglers, don't sell these reels short of their ability to bring in some notable catches. Labeling the spincaster as a kid's reel does have much validity. I've worked with countless kids' events over the years, and the spincaster has been the predominant star of most of these events, allowing even those who had never cast a rod to become somewhat proficient after minimal tutoring.

So, with the basics of the spincaster behind us, and their importance into the beginning steps of a new angler regardless of age, we can address the real crux of the spincast conundrum that formed the basis of most of the emails I received: Do spincasters have a place for more advanced or experienced anglers with all of today's technology? My opinion in a few minutes!

We'll dive into the spincaster with a

pros and cons perspective; that way, you as the angler can decide which of the reels weaknesses and benefits fit your angling needs. For my research, I used spincast reels from my own collection, picked up a few new models to try, and borrowed a couple others from fellow anglers. Now, I'm not getting into brand comparison, nor hyping one manufacturer over another, although most of my collection consists of the old standard in spincast reels, and probably the most recognized: the Zebco Spincast Reel. I did try out a few other brands, and most of them had similar success, including Daiwa, Pflueger and Kast King, but we'll stick with the generalities common to most spincast reels.

Let's get casting! Which brings us to the first point: castability of the spincast reel. As you've probably already aware, it is certainly the simplest of reels for mastering the ability to cast a bait. There are no settings to tune in, such as those on a baitcaster; no thumbing of the reel spool; and no bail to flip open or closed, such as on a spinning reel. Hold down the push button, aim at your target and let fly. With a bit of practice, accuracy will follow. Some of you might already be sold! But let's hit on a few more topics before you order a couple.

The next couple of topics cause some anglers to choose other types of reels for their styles of fishing:

First up, and perhaps most critical, concerns gear ratio. Spincast reels run on the rather low side of gear ratios: Without detailing all the specs, let's say that they're somewhere in the 3.5 or 4.0:1 gear ratio, which today is extremely low. I think the Zebco Bullet Series runs up around the 5.1:1 range, with the ProFISHiency Sniper at 6.5:1, which are the highest gear ratios I could find. While some might not be too worried about gear ratio, it does affect certain types of lure performance: Notably the ability to pick up line quickly, such as before a hookset, or when a running fish comes towards an angler, rather than running away.

The spincast can handle most baits effectively. Just be aware that if retrieve speed is an absolute necessity and line pickup is critical, a spincaster might not be your best choice for those particular applications. Slower-moving baits, or jigs and bottom plastics, work well with a spincaster. Live bait presentations are awesome rigs for the spincaster, and some reels have bait clicker functions that are great for bottom angling with stationary rod holders.

The next factor is drag control. I'll admit that early spincast reels were a little suspect when it came to smooth drag performance. But today's reels seem to have upgraded this former fault with spincast reels. When



Not your childhood spincasters. Rather, upgraded models for today's anglers.

properly set, consistent drag pressure can be achieved.

Honestly, most of my fish-fighting pressure comes from proper play with my rod action, so no matter how advanced the reel, the most my fish handling is performed with the rod action. Admittedly, you might occasionally tangle with a large species, which I did with a respectable channel cat while testing these reels. The drag on the Zebco that I was using performed flawlessly. Large catfish, carp, stripers, pike or muskies might test these drags, but for the most part, I believe they will hold up okay.

Here's where there becomes a bit of a sticking point for me: With most of the spincast reels I researched, line choice was a factor. Spincasters, by nature, work best with monofilament lines, with most being pre-spooled with mono at the factory. A few claim to be designed for use with braided lines, but even with those, the braid I used seemed to have a few issues. This was probably due to my braids being a bit less slick than others, which could be the issue.

From what I hear, another issue is that using braids regularly on some reels with plastic pickup pins can cut grooves into the pins, causing issues. The ones that I used had ceramic or stainless pickup pins, so that wasn't the issue. I did note poor castability; once again, slicker coated braids could possibly solve that issue. Beyond the braid concerns, varying line size with monos works well with all the reels I tested, ranging from ultralight lines to heavy-duty monos for bigger species.

One important aspect of today's spincast reel is *affordability*. Whether the reel's purpose is to introduce a kid to fishing, or just a way to get out and enjoy a day fishing without taking a second mortgage on your home to purchase necessary tackle, I believe the spincast reel has more pros than cons when it comes to being able to enjoy a day on the water.

In the end, spincast reels won't replace my use of spinning and baitcasting options. But in all honesty, while using them during my research fishing, I never felt under-gunned, no matter which species I was pursuing. These modern day spincasters held up and performed as flawlessly as any reel triple the cost, under pretty much every test that I threw at them. So, if you're considering a spincast reel, just reread the pros and cons section above to make sure they fit into your styles of angling.

My very best and favorite angling memories of all time were those spent with my dad and brothers, with my trusty green Johnson Century in one hand and a silver Zebco 33 in the other. This next season, remember that time spent on the water creates lifelong memories, *not* the dollars spent on expensive gear! **MWO**

Passion for angling drives Dan Brozowski to the water's edge virtually any chance he gets. Although passion cannot be measured, weighed, or recorded, it can be shared. He does this through his writing and while on the water. If you have any questions or comments for Dan, you may contact him at: onthebank@att.net.

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The Best Big-Bass Baits

by AJ Hauser

Want to start an argument? Claim that something—and I mean *anything*—is “the best!”

Star Trek or Star Wars? Comedy or drama? Steak or salad? Shoes or sandals? Chess or checkers?

Any one of these can start a fistfight! But, if you *really* want to grind some gears, tell another angler that some sort of fishing bait is “the best” for bass... and then hold on. You’re about to be on the receiving end of a category 5 verbal assault unlike anything you’ve ever experienced!

Fishermen are passionate, and that’s good! We’ve all heard, “If you wanna catch big fish, you gotta use a big bait!” Is it true? Sometimes. But everything has a season, and everything has a place. You can’t use a hammer for every job, and if you try to force it, you’ll just end up with holes in the wall.

While many of us could make the case for bait X being the best, I wanted to share what worked for me in 2024. This year, I was able to connect with more weight than ever before, and even catch my new personal bests for both largemouth and smallmouth bass.

Remember, your best may be very different than my best. But I think these five are all worth some serious consideration if you fish in the Midwest.

Fish #5

Coming in at #5, we have this healthy largemouth bass (18 inches/3.5 pounds) that I caught in late April. I typically start my season fishing from the bank, seeking out smaller bodies of water. Anything from a pond to maybe 10 acres or so, without too much depth. The reason? These smaller bodies of water tend to warm faster in spring, and they are also simple to fish. Look for shallow areas and walk the bank, working your presentations at a 45-degree angle, as if you were cutting slices of pie with your line.

If there are some active bass in the area, they will probably be closer to shore, near food and warmth. Climbing water temperatures during this time of year can spike activity. Even better, it’s not uncommon for the bite to turn on during the middle of the day; when the sun is high in the sky, it warms both your skin and the water.

Personally, I fish slower in April. I’m not going to tie on a topwater and burn it along (although some guys do) and I’m not going to tie on a crankbait and fight with the muck (although some guys do). I will, however, spend a fair amount of time fishing with what landed this fish: a weightless Texas Rig with a 3/0 Trokar Pro-V Worm Hook and a Cabin Creek (now Georgia Lure) Oval Sinkin’ Worm. The low-profile hook moves through cover easily, and the weighted plastic is slightly “smashed,” giving it a bit of a glide and shimmy as it sinks. If you use braid to a fluorocarbon leader like me, it’s heavy



The author’s personal best largemouth bass, caught on an Ocho & Mustad Ultra Lock EWG after an extremely frustrating morning.



This hefty 4-pound largemouth bass slammed a topwater toad after paddling miles and miles through the duckweed in a kayak.

enough to sink without any added weight, and it makes for a super-effective, early-spring presentation. Cast, sink, drag, repeat.

Fish #4

Next on the list we have fish #4, a nice, fat smallmouth bass (18 inches/3.25 pounds) that I caught much later in the year. It was August 24, and it was hot, as are most summers. Like all anglers, I’ve struggled with “the dog days.” One of my favorite ways to fish is wading creeks. Unfortunately, as the summer months heat up, all the creeks nearby that connect to larger rivers empty out. The bass leave, hopefully to return next spring for a few months, but by August, they’re gone. Fortunately, this year, I found a very long river that bottoms out around 8 feet, and it winds so much that I’m able to wade along the shallower side without issue.

This allows me to cast to the opposite (deeper) side, paying special attention to drop-offs, holes, fallen timber and riprap shorelines. Smallmouths set up in these areas, and my biggest river smallmouth came on an extremely hot day, right in the middle of the afternoon. The bait? A Strike King Rage Craw on a 3/0 Trokar EWG with a 1/8-ounce bullet weight, pegged with a bobber stop. The weight was heavy enough to stop the bait when it hit the bottom, but the current could still carry it slightly on the fall. It was more natural than a straight up-and-down movement that a heavier sinker would generate. Other presentations worked as well, even active ones. But you’d better believe that next year when it gets warm, I’ll be wading many, many miles, looking for big smallmouth bass with this bait.

Fish #3

Topwater is always fun, and some cool modifications helped me land fish #3, this big largemouth bass (19 inches/4 pounds) after paddling many miles in my cheap, little, squeaky kayak. By June, much of the duckweed and thick, sticky muck that would sit on top of the water (especially in the canals and fertile, shallow lakes) had arrived. However, while it was thick enough to provide to- quality overhead cover, it wasn’t as thick as it was going to get. At times, this stuff can become almost unfishable (notice that I said “almost”).

But in June, I’ve found that you get the best of both worlds. This month in the Midwest, you simply *must* be on the water. The bass feel secure, are usually ready to eat, and there are enough clearings, alleys and holes that you can pull quality fish from

thick cover without the use of a forklift.

This healthy specimen smacked a Z-Man GOAT Toad on a 5/0 Mustad Grip-Pin EWG hook. Rather standard for the most part, is straight 40-pound braid, no leader, and heavy spinning gear. But two modifications that made a big difference in my overall catch on this day. First, I placed a floating, foam bullet right in front of my knot, pegged in place with a bobber stop. This helped the bait move over and through the thick gunk with minimal snags. Second, I injected a small glass rattle on either side of the body of the bait. Z-Man makes a tool (the Rattle-Snaker) for pushing into super-stretchy ElaZtech baits, allowing you to deposit a small glass rattle. By doing this, I was able to work my GOAT Toad like a traditional frog and shake it, making noise with the rattles through the muck. When I came off into a clearing, I could burn it like a buzzbait. Both generated strikes. This is a killer option at the right time, and a ton of fun!

Fish #2

During the summer months, it’s not uncommon to see water temps well into the 80s, even in Wisconsin. Sometimes you might feel like the big girls are slowing down, but you can still get ‘em.

Downsizing helped me land fish #2, my personal best smallmouth bass (20 inches/4 pounds) while fishing with my dad. I remember that it was very early, and already hot, on a July 12th morning. We were fishing up near Minocqua on a crystal-clear lake with extremely high visibility, awesome, tall weeds, underwater points and humps. It was a big lake with lots of quality cover and structure. Artificials had worked a bit. We’d caught a few bass on jigworms and Ned Rigs, and some even grabbed my jerkbait—but the bites were far and few between. After some mediocre days, it was time to try something else.

I remember watching an *In-Fisherman* segment years ago where Dan Sura confidently stated that when the bite is



The trolling motor has no chance here. And without a push pole, the emergency paddle will just have to do.



The author’s best smallmouth bass to date, caught on a super-light combo with a Slo-Poke Jig & leech in crystal-clear water.

tough, “You can’t beat meat.” It stuck with me, probably because it rhymes. Also, because it’s true. I bet he was fishing for walleyes, but smallmouth bass love leeches. Dad and I bought a half-pound and went to work.

I also made another big change, and by big, I mean small. I switched to a medium-light, fast action spinning setup spooled with 4-pound Seaguar Invizx fluorocarbon. This is the lightest rig I own. As a muck-bashing Midwest bass fisherman, heavy braid and stout rods are in my comfort zone. Still, conditions (and the fish) dictate what will work; our preferences don’t matter.

I tied on a black, 1/16-ounce Bait Rigs Slo-Poke Jig and grabbed a leech. As we trolled over a huge underwater stump sitting on a rocky point, I felt the slightest “tap-tap-tap” and set the hook. Remember, I said the water was incredibly clear. When I looked down, I could see the biggest smallmouth any of us have ever seen on this lake thrashing about near that stump 12 feet below us—while I held onto the lightest combo in my arsenal. Talk about intense! After a few heart-pounding moments, she came aboard for a quick picture, and was then successfully released. Hopefully we’ll reconnect next year.

Fish #1

Last, but not least, was my all-time personal best largemouth bass (20.25 inches/5.25 pounds) that came during my all-time most productive month fishing in the Midwest. It was May 23, and already surprisingly hot. I was on a new-to-me massive shallow lake that sees a lot of fishing pressure. The pads were thick and had muck between the gaps, so let me tell you—navigating my little jon boat through all the cover was tough.

I remember that I had fished for about 4 hours and managed to scrape up a single, small bite. I was tired. Itchy. Grumpy. Hungry. Sweaty. Stinky. Covered in bugs and questioning my sanity as I struggled to move the vessel with my emergency paddle. The gunk had already eaten my small trolling motor for breakfast. I had started to make movements back to the ramp, but hadn’t quite yet decided to admit defeat...

I was exhausted and needed to take another break to rest my arms. Well... kinda. Casting is still considered resting... right? Sure. I tossed a Strike King Ocho (5-inch stickbait with flat sides, salt & scent) on a weightless Texas Rig with a 4/0 Mustad Ultra Lock EWG up into the shallows, and finally the line twitched. I don’t remember much of what happened next, but I do remember that beast rolling up and out of the thick, sticky green cover, and my eyes dang near jumping out of my head. She was clearly huge—bigger than anything I had ever caught before. Girthy, and strong. “Please God, oh please,

story continued on next page

ICF Welcomes Seven New Inductees to Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame

The Illinois Conservation Foundation (ICF) Board of Directors today announced the selections of Angela Funk, Henry Eilers, Jeremiah Haas, Matt Mullady, Rich McElligott, Terry Wunderle and Thomas Foss for induction into the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame.

The formal inductions will occur during the annual ICF Gala to be held in the spring of 2025.

"It's an honor to welcome these individuals into the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame and to recognize their outstanding commitment to the outdoors and nature," said Natalie Phelps Finnie, chair of the ICF Board of Directors and director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. "They've done incredible work to promote conservation and outdoor spaces, and Illinois is a better place because each of them."

Since 2002, the ICF has recognized Illinoisans for their significant contributions and unparalleled dedication to the preservation, promotion, enhancement and support of natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities with induction into the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame. The 2024 finalists include the following individuals:

Angela Funk, Armington

Angela Funk's dedication to Illinois' natural areas and her enthusiasm for connecting people with nature have left a lasting impact on the environment and the communities she has served. With a degree in environmental biology and more than 35 years of experience, she has played a pivotal role in environmental education, land stewardship and conservation.

Her leadership at Douglas-Hart Nature Center and later at Sugar Grove Nature Center, where she served as the first director, fostered a strong corps of volunteers and an ever-increasing number of participants in public programs. Her passion for nature mirrors that of Helen Douglas-Hart, as noted in a 2000 article that called her hiring a turning point for the Douglas-Hart Nature Center.

Funk's approach to leadership, always "people first," has earned her widespread respect. She takes time to personally connect with volunteers and participants, making each person feel valued in their roles. Her thoughtful, hands-on approach encourages long-term engagement, as evidenced by the many who return year after year to take part in her programs.

Funk's move to the Friends of the Sangamon Valley Land Trust in 2023 further highlighted her ongoing commitment to conservation. Her career has contributed

to the protection of more than 1,000 acres of land, ensuring safe habitats for wildlife and bringing thousands of people closer to nature. Her influence spans environmental education, land stewardship and community engagement, leaving an enduring legacy of conservation across Illinois.

Henry Eilers, Litchfield

Henry Eilers, who celebrated his 90th birthday this year, has dedicated his life to environmental stewardship and conservation.

With an extensive knowledge of native plants and botany, he has been instrumental in the restoration and preservation of several sites in Montgomery County, including the Route 66 Prairie and H and B Bremer Wildlife Sanctuary, which are thriving conservation and pollinator areas. As the founder and longtime steward of the 260-acre Shoal Creek Conservation Area near Lake Lou Yeager, he has established programs such as interpretive trails, bluebird and butterfly monitoring, invasive species removal and prescribed burns.

Through his business, volunteer work, writing, photography, social media presence and public speaking, Eilers has educated countless people on the importance of conservation and the rewards of diligent environmental efforts. His engaging social media posts, accompanied by hundreds of photographs, help promote preservation efforts and inspire the public to get involved.

The Shoal Creek Conservation Area, along with the Route 66 Prairie and H and B Bremer Wildlife Sanctuary, are now popular tourist destinations, attracting hundreds of visitors annually. These sites host educational and entertaining events including owl prowls, bird banding, Earth Day celebrations and student visits.

These achievements are a testament to Eilers' lifelong passion for conservation, inspiring the many volunteers who work alongside him and the countless individuals who have been touched by his incredible work.

Jeremiah Haas, Cordova

Jeremiah Haas, an aquatic biologist at the Constellation Quad Cities Clean Energy Center, has dedicated his career to the management and operation of the Quad Cities Fish Hatchery. Under his leadership, the hatchery has successfully stocked more than 9 million game fish into the Mississippi River and various state lakes in Illinois and Iowa, significantly contributing to the region's aquatic biodiversity.

In 2023, he spearheaded the

implementation of a cutting-edge recirculating aquaculture system that not only improved the hatchery's efficiency but also minimized environmental impact by reducing water usage and eliminating the need for herbicides.

Beyond his professional duties, Haas is deeply committed to educating the public about conservation. He regularly sponsors tours of the hatchery, engages with local communities, collaborates on innovative projects to enhance natural habitats, and he also writes articles for a variety of publications promoting fishing and outdoor recreation. His dedication to preserving Illinois' natural resources and fostering outdoor recreational opportunities makes him a deserving inductee into the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame.

Matt Mullady, Kankakee

A lifelong outdoorsman from Kankakee, Matt Mullady has shared his deep passion for the outdoors with countless others, particularly through his expertise on the Kankakee River. His love for nature, especially the river, is palpable, and he has spent decades guiding fishing trips, teaching "leave no trace" principles, and promoting catch-and-release fishing.

Beyond his personal adventures, Mullady has dedicated himself to educating and inspiring others. He has led seminars across Illinois and neighboring states, often donating his speaker fees to support youth programs. His commitment extends to organizing youth hunting programs, advocating for conservation as a long-time member of the Kankakee Valley Park District board and serving as a valuable resource for local and regional media on outdoor topics.

Mullady's impact on the community, from guiding newcomers on the river to training young hunters, has instilled a lasting appreciation for the outdoors in all who have had the privilege to learn from him.

Rich McElligott, Lee

For more than 30 years, Rich McElligott has been a cornerstone of the Shabbona Lake community, driving numerous conservation efforts as president of the Shabbona Lake Sportsman's Club. His standout project, "Rockfest," involved placing more than 100 tons of crushed concrete in the lake to enhance fish habitats, showcasing his hands-on approach and dedication to improving the local ecosystem.

McElligott's tireless work in habitat restoration, youth fishing leagues and fly-

fishing education has significantly benefited northern Illinois' natural resources and outdoor enthusiasts. His leadership and commitment to conservation make him a well-deserved member of the Hall of Fame.

Terry Wunderle, Mason City

Terry Wunderle's remarkable career spans more than 45 years, during which he has made significant contributions to outdoor sports and education. His achievements include winning Illinois' first Sportsman of the Year Award in 1991, where he competed in a range of events including archery and duck calling.

In May 2024, Wunderle was honored with the Lifetime Coaching Award by the Archery Hall of Fame, recognizing his lifelong dedication to archery. He has introduced hundreds of youths to the sport, leading them to win more than 350 national and world championships and set more than 450 records. His coaching has also supported five Olympians, including his son, Vic, a three-time Olympian and medalist.

Wunderle has conducted more than 100 instructional archery schools across the United States and Canada and has provided guidance to archers worldwide. His book, *Archery: Think and Shoot Like a Champion*, along with more than 700 educational articles, has had a global impact. Additionally, he has achieved numerous competitive accolades, including multiple International Bowhunting Organization (IBO) and National Field Archery Association (NFAA) championships.

Thomas Foss, Wonder Lake

Thomas Foss has spent decades working with children and adults, focusing on preservation, conservation, and environmental education. His extensive volunteer efforts include composting, garbage clean-up, recycling, tree planting, buckthorn eradication, turtle rescues and wildlife restoration.

Foss is passionate about teaching sustainable practices and has enriched countless lives with his knowledge of Native American cultures and their harmony with nature. His mission to bring the natural world to people of all ages through education and recreation is evident in his engaging programs, from knot tying and tree climbing to fishing and outdoor skills. His ability to make learning enjoyable and relatable has had a profound impact on many, inspiring a new generation of environmental stewards.

MWO

The Best Big-Bass Baits

...continued from previous page

please, please I hope I got a good hook—oh man, oh man, oh man."

The weight of the fish, combined with all the pads and muck that she picked up along the way, was substantial. I grabbed my net with one hand, and with the baitcaster in my other hand, I lifted hard. The rod was completely doubled, and I scooped under the bass... and she jumped out! *Gah!* I couldn't believe it! "No, no, no, no... Rookie mistake!" *Schwoop!* Fortunately, my second attempt was successful, and in a single moment, all the frustration simply became undeniably worth it.

That's fishing. It's heartbreak, it's boring, it's confusing, it's tough, it's challenging, and it's absolutely without a doubt, completely worth it.

So, whether you prefer to fish right on the bank, wading through creeks and rivers, paddling a kayak or poking around in a jon boat—the fish are out there. You don't need a \$75,000 bass boat to find them. In fact, I'd argue that you have a better chance of finding a big, 'ol, unbothered bass if you keep it simple and go where other anglers can't. Grab a few of the baits mentioned here and give 'em a shot. They'll be in heavy rotation for me throughout another season fishing in the Midwest. **MWO**

AJ Hauser is a fisherman, angling educator, and website designer/consultant from Ottawa, Illinois. To watch project videos, bait reviews, rigging tips and in-the-field escapades, visit TheMinimalistFisherman.com or contact A.J. at aj@theminimalistfisherman.com.



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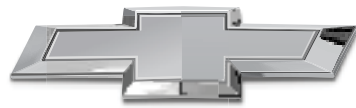
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Illinois Sportsman's Calendar

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FISHING CLUB INFORMATION

• **The Arlington Anglers** is a multi-species fishing club focused on education, fun, and camaraderie. All skill levels are welcome. We meet at Poplar Creek Banquets 2354 W. Higgins Rd. in Hoffman Estates the third Tuesday of the month at 6:30. Meetings feature expert speakers, fishing reports, door prizes, and raffles. Non-member fee \$8. Club activities include a variety of fishing outings, community outreach events, a picnic, and year end banquet. Family membership is \$40. For more info: visit arlingtonanglers.com or call President Chris Popp at 630-337-4520.

• **Anglers Unlimited of Lake County, Ill.** meets the first Wednesday of every month at the American Legion Hall, 111 E. Main St., Round Lake, Ill, at 7:30 p.m. We are a bass fishing club. Annual dues are only \$35. For more info: contact Club President Patrick Burke, 224-805-1578, or visit anglers-unlimited.com and check out our tournament schedule.

• **Bent Rods Bass Club Tournaments** are for guys or gals that love bass fishing and want to have fun in laid back, low-pressure tournaments. We allow any size boat, canoe, kayak or float tube, but we limit the propulsion to electric trolling motors, rowing or flippers. We also use a catch photo release system, so no livewell needed. For more info: bentrods.org.

• **Blackhawk Bassmasters:** We are an Illinois BASS Nation club based out of Northbrook, Ill. We fish Illinois and Wisconsin waters. Each year we send a club team to the IL BASS Nation State Team Qualifier as the first step towards a chance at the Bassmaster Classic. For info: contact us at blackhawkbassmasters@gmail.com.

• **The Chicagoland Muskie Hunters** meet the second Tuesday of each month at North Branch Pizza & Burger Company located at 4520 W. Lake Street in Glenview, IL. Meetings begin at 7:30 p.m., and feature seminars by top guides, member fishing reports, conservation/stocking reports, and much more. Admission is free, and all are welcome. For more info: contact Jim Cejna at (630) 370-5509, or email membership@chicagolandmuskiehunters.org, or visit chicagolandmuskiehunters.org, facebook.com/chicagolandmuskiehunters.

• **The DesPlaines Lunkebusters Fishing Club** meets the second Tuesday months at the Des Plaines Public Library, 1501 Ellinwood St., Des Plaines, Illinois at 7 p.m. The club features monthly speakers and numerous local outings. Guests are free, so come check us out. Annual dues are \$25. For more info: Jeff Berg (630) 629-5681 or John Flannery (630) 690-0382.

• **The DuPage Rivers Fly Tyers (DRIFT)** meets almost every Tuesday night, September through May, at 7 p.m. at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn. Guests are always welcome. For more info: visit driftorg.com.

• **Fish Tales Fishing Club** meetings are held on the 3rd Thursday of the month at the Worth Township Offices, 11601 S. Pulaski Rd., Alsip, Ill., at 7 p.m. Guest fee is \$5, which is applicable to the annual membership fee of \$50. We are a non-competitive multi-species fishing club. For more info: visit fishtalesfishingclub.com.

• **Fox River Valley Hunting Retriever Club (FRVHRC)**, located in the N.W. Chicagoland area. FRVHRC is a family oriented organization founded by hunting enthusiasts. Meetings are the 2nd Wednesday of the month and regular training sessions are scheduled. For more info: Joe Scarpy 708-341-2576 or Joe@HuntEmUp.com.

• **Fox Valley Anglers** is a multi-species social fishing club where all skills levels are welcome. Our monthly club meetings starts at 7 p.m. on the 4th Tuesday of every month at Tap House Grill, 3341 W. Main St, St. Charles, IL. Anglers can come at 6 p.m. to have dinner, drinks and social before the meeting starts. Our meetings will have a premium speaker for an hour to discuss about the upcoming fishing season. Afterwards we do door prizes, discuss fishing reports, raffles, tournaments, fishing outings, volunteer community events, annual banquet and much more. Non-member meeting fee is \$5 which can be applied to your annual membership of \$46 or family membership of \$81. For more info visit foxvalleyanglers.com call/text President Patrick Combs at 630-865-6213.

• **The Fox River Valley Chapter of Muskies Inc.**, meet at 7 p.m., the 3rd Wednesday of the month (except June - August) at Chandlers Chophouse, Schaumburg CC, 401 N. Roselle Rd, Schaumburg, IL. For more info: Pres. Dan Koniewicz, 847/682-9238, dskdll@comcast.net.

• **Greater Chicago Bassmasters of the Chicagoland Area** is a teaching and learning club that focuses on having fun bass fishing. We are a B.A.S.S. affiliated club. For more info: greaterchicagobass.com.

• **The Lake Geneva Fishing Club** — holds regular meetings the second Wednesday of February - June and September - November at Poplar Creek Bowl in the Barrington Square Shopping Center, 2534 W Higgins Rd., Hoffman Estates, IL 60169, (847) 310-3227. Meetings begin at 6 p.m. with food and beverage available for purchase at 5:15 p.m. July and August meetings are held in conjunction with weekday fishing outings which will be announced on our website. **There is NO scheduled December meeting.** Please check our website lakegenevafishingclub.com for any updates. The cost for the 2023 membership is \$50, Family membership (member, spouse & children under 16) is available for \$70. Either membership option also includes a 1 year subscription to *MidWest Outdoors Magazine*. For more info: contact Bob Clark at 847-274-8247, email info@lakegenevafishingclub.com or visit lakegenevafishingclub.com.

• **The Lake Shelbyville Muskie Club** meets periodically at 5:30 p.m., on various dates and locations, followed by a short break and the general session, which starts at 7 p.m. Food and beverages can be purchased. LSMC will be all-muskie with all of its speakers, activities. For more info: Bob Kerans 217-414-0093.

• **The Liberty Fishing Club** meets at 7:30 p.m. on the third Tuesday of the month at the Libertyville Township Center, 359 Merrill Ct., Libertyville, Ill. Guests are always welcome at no charge. Our dues are \$50 annual. We fish all species. For more info: libertyvillefishclub.com.

• **Maple Bass Masters of the Chicagoland Area**—We are an Illinois/National bass Federation club. Club meetings are held on the last Tuesday of every month at Papa Passero's Pizza at 6326 S. Cass Ave., Westmont, Ill. For more info: call Joe Browning at 773-531-6841, maplebassmasters.com

• **Midwest Musky Club (MMC)**—monthly meetings are held on the 1st Thursday of the month at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free to the public. Meet at Village Sportsman's Club, 5201 W. 115th Street, Alsip IL 60803. For more info: facebook.com/MidwestMuskyClub, or midwestmuskyclub.com.

• **The Naperville Rod & Reel Club**—a multi-species fishing club which concentrates on local fishing for day trips and weekends, meets on the third Tuesday of each month, at 7 p.m., in the Naperville Municipal Center, 400 S. Eagle Street, Naperville, Ill. For more info: call Cindy Bickle at 630-205 6554.

• **Northwest Towns Sportsmen's Club**—meets the first Tuesday of every month from September through May in the American Legion Hall, 515 Main St., Wauconda, IL. NWTSC is a social organization, formed and participated in by sportsmen with common interests in hunting, shooting, fishing, and boat related activities. For more info: contact Don Haug at doca42@ameritech.net or 847-494-5132.

• **The Oak Brook Trout Unlimited Chapter** meetings are at 7 p.m. on the third Wednesday of every month at the Oak Brook Park District Recreation Center near 31st Street and Jorie Blvd. Guest are always welcome to attend. For more info: visit obtu.org or contact Stan at 708-606-4148.

• **"Oswegoland Fishin' Fools"** a multi-species club for anglers with or without boats. Frequent outings, topical seminars and Family Memberships available. We meet the 1st Monday of each month at the Oswego Police Department, 3355 Woolley Road, Oswego, IL. For more info: visit fishinfolks.org or call Danny Cossich at 815-735-0425.

• **Prairie State Bassmasters** — We are a B.A.S.S. affiliated club that holds our meetings at Bass Pro Shops in Bolingbrook, Ill., the first Monday of each month. Come experience tournament bass fishing and learn. We offer boater, non-boater competition and have sent a Bass Nation national contender from Illinois to the National Championship three years in a row, as well as had the 2014 Individual State Champion and the 2015 IBN Team Champion hail from our club. Tournaments are held in Illinois and Wisconsin (within 250 miles of Bollingbrook). For more info: see us on Facebook, or prairiestatebassmasters.com.

• **Quad County Hawg Hunters Chapter of Muskies Inc.**—We meet the second Thursday of every month 7 p.m. at the Plano American Legion 510 E. Dearborn St. Plano, Ill. We occasionally have a speaker with raffle prize and door prize. Anyone is welcome. For more info: Duane 815-286-7170, illinoismuskieclub.com.

• **Riverside Fishing Club**—multi-species and family club, meets on the second Thursday of the month at the Berwyn Moose Lodge #424, 3625 S. Harlem Avenue, Berwyn, IL 60402, at 6:45 p.m. Guests are welcome

for a \$5 fee, which can be applied to a membership. Annual membership is \$60 for single, or \$85 for family. For more info: contact Leonard Catalano, Membership Director, email: lcattx310@yahoo.com or contact Tony Novak, President, email: tnovak2416@aol.com or call: 708-447-8087 or visit riversidefishingclub.com.

• **Rock Island Conservation Club** meets on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at the RICC Clubhouse in Milan, Ill. Our dues are \$50 a year for seniors 65 and over, and \$65 for family membership under 65 years old. The club has over 100 acres for camping and fishing. There are 110 acres and 80 acres of water for fishing, kayaking, and canoeing. RICC is one of the managing clubs of the Quad City Conservation Alliance. For more info: visit riccnews.com or Facebook.

• **Rock Valley Anglers of Illinois**—multi-species fishing club, meets the second Wednesday of the month at the Hoffman House, 7550 E. State St. in Rockford, Ill. Meetings start at 6:30 p.m. Membership is \$40. For more info: contact Joe Caruana, jac3311@gmail.com, rockvalleyanglers.com.

• **Salmon Unlimited** meets at the TWood Bar & Grill, 1051 N Wood Dale Rd., Wood Dale, IL 60191, the second Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. Guests are always welcome to attend. Membership is \$35 per year. For more info: call the S.U. office at 773-736-5757, salmonunlimitedinc.com.

• **Sandwich Sportsman's Club.** Fishing, trap shooting, camping, pistol and archery ranges. Open trap shoots Thursdays 6-9 p.m., \$4 for members and \$5 for nonmembers and open archery shoots Mondays 7-8 p.m., \$4 with your equipment, \$5 to use theirs. Meetings at the club, 4th Sunday of the month at 4 p.m., 1104 Hartman Trail, Sandwich, Ill. For more info: sandwichsportsmansclub.com.

• **Senior Rods Fishing/Outdoor Club**—A multi-species 50+ club for men and women, through the Woodridge Park District. Meetings held monthly. No membership/guest fees. The club calendar includes: activities, educational speakers, fishing outings and discussion topics. For more info: contact Al at 630-968-7748, or email alg14895@sbcglobal.net.

SPORTS SHOWS

November 30 - December 1

Central Illinois Gun Collectors New Berlin Gun Show at Sangamon County Fairgrounds, 316 West Birch Street, New Berlin, IL 62670. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Admission \$5, children under 12 free. Vendor tables: \$25 ea. in advance, \$30 ea. day of show. For info: Central Illinois Gun Collector's Association, Patrick Keen, oldcarbines@gmail.com, cigca.net.

November 30 - December 1

Sauk Trail Gun Show at Bureau County Fairgrounds, 811 W Peru Street, Princeton, IL 61356. Hours: Saturday 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$5, children 15 and under free. Vendor tables \$30 ea. For info: Sauk Trail Gun Collectors, Dan Fritz, (309) 689-1934, princetongunshow@yahoo.com, danzel_1@yahoo.com, bureaucountyfair.com/calendar.

December 7-8

Chillicothe Sportsmen's Club Gun & Knife Show at Chillicothe Sportsmen's Club House, 21228 N Yankee Ln., Chillicothe, IL 61523. Hours: Saturday 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$3. Vendor tables \$10 ea. For info: Chillicothe Sportsmen's Club, Al Sansom, (309) 231-3196; or Steve Risinger, (309) 208-1010; or Dan and Pamm Monaghan, (779) 239-9665, chillisportsmen.org.

December 14-15

Kankakee Gun & Sportsman's Show at Kankakee County Fairgrounds, 213 W 4000S Rd., Kankakee, IL 60901. Hours: Saturday 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., Sunday 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Admission \$12, children 12 and under free w/paid adult. Vendor tables \$35 ea. For info: M & J Sportsmans Group, Mike, (630) 254-0221, info@mjsportsmansgroupllc.com, or Julia, (630) 363-3131, mjsportsmansgroupllc.com.

December 21-22

Crown Point Gun Show at Lake County

EDUCATION

• For DNR Hunter Safety Education courses call (800) 832-2599 (The TDD is (800) 526-0844).

For the most up-to-date info go to:

MidWestOutdoors.com/events

FREE LISTING

To list your event in the MWO Sportsman's Calendar, email info to: info@midwestoutdoors.com, Subject line: "Illinois Calendar Listing." Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for publication.

THE LAKEMASTER® DOWNLOAD

Highland Silver Lake by Don Gasaway

Don Gasaway is a veteran freelance outdoor writer from Marion, Ill. He may also be found at: facebook.com/#1/DonGasawayWriter and facebook.com/WanderingAngler. Comments are welcome.

LOCATION: Madison County, Ill., 36 miles east of St. Louis, Mo. via I-70 W. The lake is northwest of Highland on Route 143.

SIZE/DEPTH: 550 surface acres, 17.4 miles of shoreline, 22 feet maximum depth. The water quality poor due to suspended particulates.

Built between 1960 and '62 by damming Silver Creek, it is a water supply for the city of Highland, which owns it today. IDNR manages the fishery through a cooperative agreement with the city. The shoreline is a mixture of rock, woody structure, and aquatic plants. There is limited bank fishing, mainly at the boat ramp areas. The Park contains picnic pavilions, restrooms, hiking trails, and an 18-hole disc golf course.

Both fishing and boating activities are available; swimming, wading and water skiing are not. There is a 50 hp motor limit. Motorized watercraft require a city sticker permit available at Highland City Hall between 7:00 am and 5:30 pm. On weekends and holidays, permits are available at the Highland Police Department. Restaurants, fast food, fuel and overnight facilities are available in Highland.

DOMINANT SPECIES: White crappies, largemouth bass and catfish. The main forage is gizzard shad.

The white crappie fishery is excellent and popular with winter anglers. There are strong numbers of fish of good size; many exceed 10 inches in length. Locals fish jigs/minnow combinations.

Channel catfish tend to be 15 to 27 inches in length and weigh over 2.5 pounds, with a 6-fish daily limit. Catfish anglers prefer dip bait (cheese bait, stink baits.)

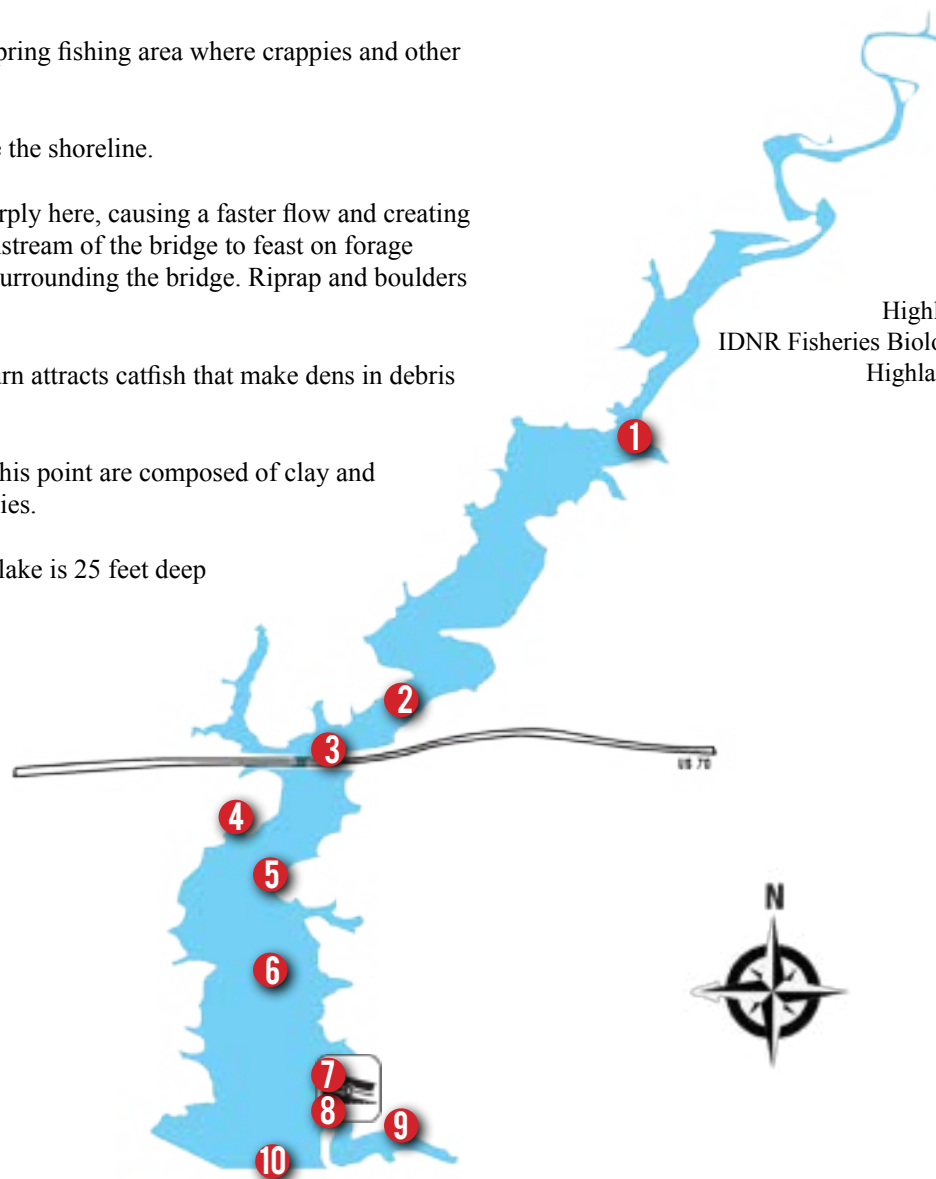
Largemouth Bass: The quality of bass sampled offsets limited bass numbers, bolstered by annual supplemental stocking from the state hatchery system and a newly constructed rearing pond.



- 1 One of the shallower areas, this is a popular spring fishing area where crappies and other panfish nest.
- 2 The water here is 10 to 20 feet deep. Bass like the shoreline.
- 3 U.S. 70 bridge. The water depth increases sharply here, causing a faster flow and creating underwater ledges. Bass and catfish move downstream of the bridge to feast on forage washing through. Fish gather in warmer water surrounding the bridge. Riprap and boulders along shore also attract bass and crappies.
- 4 This area collects woody structure which in turn attracts catfish that make dens in debris and root wads.
- 5 The shorelines on both sides of the lake near this point are composed of clay and emergent vegetation that attracts bass and crappies.
- 6 From here down to the dam, the center of the lake is 25 feet deep—the deepest water in the lake.
- 7 Silver Lake Marina.
- 8 Two-lane concrete boat ramp.

- 9 Silver Lake Park surrounds old Silver Lake, an adjacent small lake.
- 10 The dam, spillway and State Route 143.

Additional information:
 Highland Parks, 618-651-1386;
 IDNR Fisheries Biologist Eric Ratcliff, 618-931-4217;
 Highland City Hall 618-654-6829.



Highland Silver Lake provides a good opportunity to create your own lake map using Humminbird electronics with LakeMaster's AutoChart Live feature and save it to a LakeMaster AutoChart Zeroline map card.



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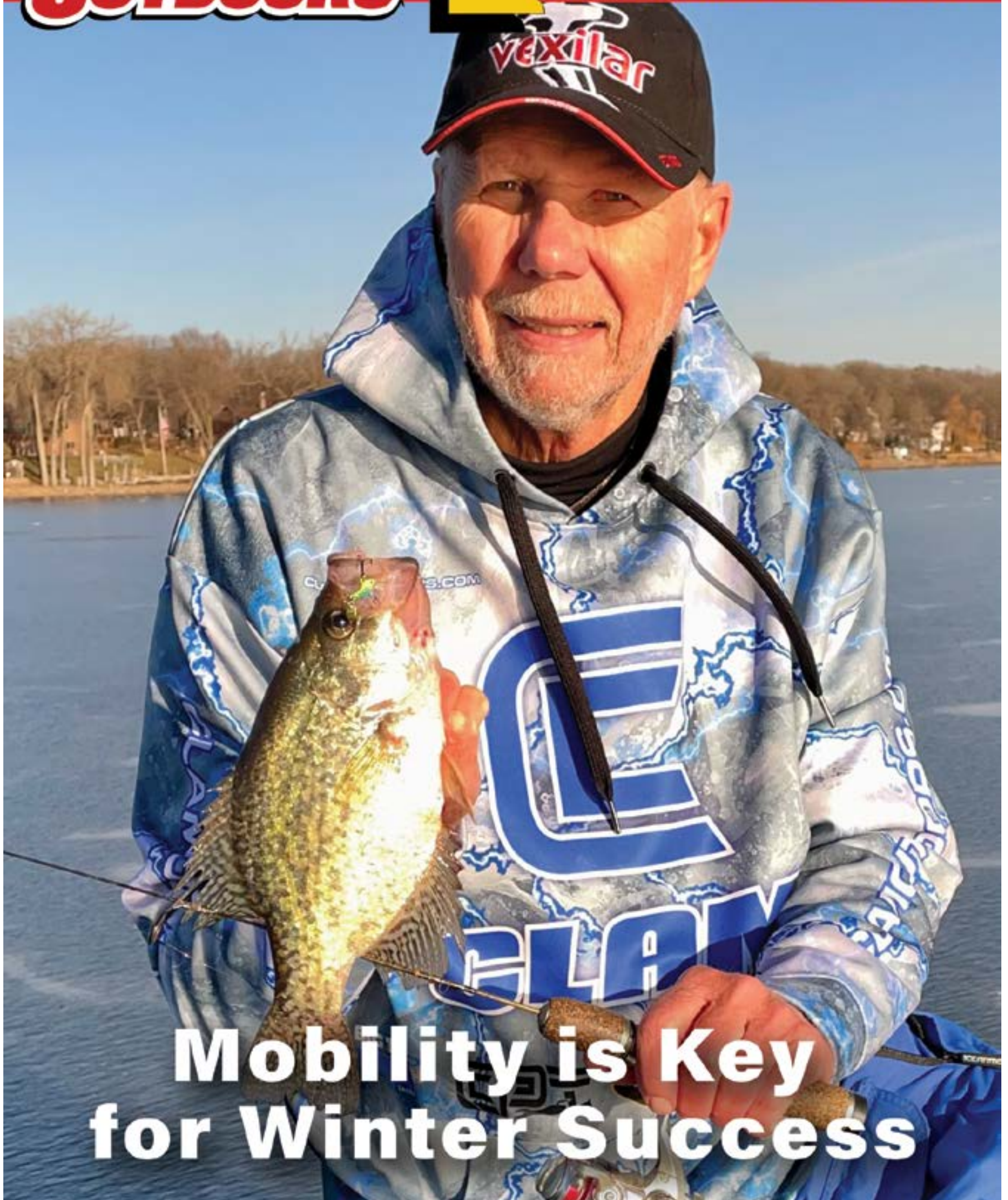
December 2024

**MIDWEST
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MINNESOTA
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Section Two



**Mobility is Key
for Winter Success**

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Mobility Is Key for Winter Success



When ice conditions don't allow vehicle traffic, use other options.



ATVs can be rigged to carry all necessary gear.



Being mobile on the ice helps you locate roaming fish.

by Jerry Carlson

I watched intently as the small SUV worked its way across the ice. The road that it was on led to only one place. That one place was the deep basin I was targeting for suspended crappies.

Eventually, the vehicle pulled off onto a clear patch of ice 50 yards from me. A young couple emerged, surveyed the area around them and soon proceeded to drill several holes through the ice.

Once this was accomplished, they unloaded a hub unit, heater, Vexilars and fishing rods—and disappeared inside. That was the last I saw of them.

Obviously, this young couple was new to the ice fishing world. They had all the gear they needed to be successful but lacked the

willingness to take the time to look for fish before settling down for the day. They could have been mobile but chose not to be.

As I picked up my sonar and checked the holes around me to see which direction the roaming crappies had moved, I couldn't help but think about the importance of mobility when working fish on the ice.

Lots of factors help anglers be successful in the hard water season, but in my opinion, the ability to be mobile is one of the most important. I can think of very few times in my fishing career when I have been able to drill a hole, sit in one spot and catch all the fish I wanted.

If I was not a daytime angler, I might find this to be different. During the low-light and evening hours, crappies do cycle through a deep basin and can be caught in one spot by

waiting them out. But waiting them out is not in my DNA.

Last winter, members of the Ice Team met on Lake Osakis for a day of fishing. It was a brutal day with bitter winds and very cold temperatures. Still, quite a crowd showed up.

Due to the poor ice conditions, driving vehicles onto the lake was impossible. However, everyone who showed up had a method of transportation that allowed them to be mobile. Some of the four wheelers and snowmobiles were quite impressively set up.

Once the initial rendezvous was done, anglers scattered around the basin to look for fish. It was a classic example of ice fishing mobility.

Mobility does not have to come in the form of a decked-out ATV. There are lots of times when my legs and a small sled have created the mobility factor. The key component is understanding the need to look for fish if they are not where you are fishing.

Moving around is not always easy during the winter months, but staying someplace that does not have fish is a waste

of time. Planning mobility into your fishing excursion is essential. Traveling light with as little equipment as possible helps with this process.

Lots of factors come into play during a successful winter outing. For many, having the ability to be mobile and look for fish is at the top of the list. **MWO**

Jerry Carlson began his writing career in 1987 and covers both hunting and fishing topics. He currently writes for numerous media outlets and does radio work with WJON AM in St. Cloud, Minn. He has authored a book called Details for Locating and Catching Fish.

Why Snowmobiling is so Great in Minnesota

by Scott J. Wakefield *Editor, Minnesota Snowmobiling magazine*

Minnesota is a snowmobile mecca for those who want to the flexibility to snowmobile long distances on our border-to-border connected trail system, and to ride a series of short loops while staying close to your destination. Starting December 1st of every year, your options for enjoyment are practically endless, with 22,000 miles of groomed, white ribbons of snow for your riding pleasure.

Well-groomed trails are available because of the hard work of local MnUSA clubs, signing up landowners, brushing trails, prepping them for the season, and marking them with safe and responsible trail signage. Once the snow comes, they groom the trails on a routine schedule for your pleasure and enjoyment.

Safety is always a concern in Minnesota; if you were born after 12/31/1976, you're required to have a Snowmobile Safety Permit on your person while driving. Snowmobile Safety Permits are administered by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, with classes administered by volunteer MnUSA club members—over 1,000 strong throughout the state—either in a traditional classroom setting or online. Both require a physical, driving course passing grade to legally use the trail system. We have trained over 485,000 individuals thru this program since 1969.

There are destinations galore for your convenience. Visit the Arrowhead section of Minnesota for scenic views of Lake Superior. Ride trails close to the homes of Polaris and Arctic Cat in the western portion of the Minnesota prairies. Central Minnesota, around the Brainerd Lakes area and Whitefish Chain of Lakes, makes for some of the state's best lake riding and other winter sports opportunities. And don't forget southern Minnesota, home to open fields and ditch riding, to the rolling hills and valleys of the Whitewater State Park area.

Everywhere you go, you will most likely enjoy plentiful amounts of snow, as we average 65-plus inches a year. Last snowmobile season, we broke many individual cities' snowfall records dating back to the 1800s.



Who are these Minnesota Snowmobilers? There are 219,639 and counting registered snowmobilers in Minnesota, averaging 54 years of age. Their first snowmobile purchased used 71% of the time, as opposed to being purchased new at 29%. 77% belong to an Association or club. 82% of snowmobilers have 2 sleds. 47% have 3. So, snowmobiles are like potato chips: You just can't have just one!

The numbers are even, as to how many trailer their snowmobiles to ride as opposed to riding from home. 85% are male and 15% are female, although the number of female riders continues to climb. What else do snowmobilers partake in for sport? 59% ATV riding, 57% boating, 51% fishing, 48% camping, 43% hunting and a balance of other outdoor recreation activities.

\$862 billion in consumer spending is attributed to snowmobiling nationwide, with \$4.5 million related American jobs. \$68 billion in federal taxes are generated, with \$60 billion in state and local tax revenues specifically in Minnesota. Those numbers are attributed to program paid user fees and state gas tax, which added up to \$14.6 million in Minnesota alone. And Minnesota snowmobilers know how to give back: over \$2.2 million was raised for charities in Minnesota for the year 2022-2023.

Snowmobiling in Minnesota is a ritual, much like hunting and fishing. Its legacy and promotion of fun, safe, family-oriented winter activity will endure for generations to come. So come enjoy snowmobiling in Minnesota, and let the smiles begin!

Support dedicated local clubs who volunteer their time & effort by becoming a member of MnUSA!

To learn more: www.mnsnowmobiler.org or call 866-811-7669



Photo: Wayne Davis/ISMA

Chasing Minnesota Waterfalls



Ilgen Falls is located in Tettegouche State Park in Minnesota's Lake County. This is a 40-foot waterfall located half a mile upstream of High Falls on the Baptism River. It's easy to miss because there is only a sign that says 'State Park.' You need a State Park pass. It's a very easy short walk.



High Falls at Tettegouche State Park is a longer hike with a clear trail. There are no handrails on the steps to the waterfalls. Folks swim at these falls. There are other smaller falls down some stairs on this trail.

have all the good boots and you are dressed properly... *don't* risk your life walking out on the edges of these falls to get the perfect photo. **MWO**

Len Harris lives in the heart of the Wisconsin driftless area. He fishes for anything that has fins. His first love is small stream trout fishing, with northern pike fishing a close second. Harris writes for many local papers and has written two books that are available on Amazon.



Yes, another High Falls, this one located in Grand Portage State Park. A State Park pass is required. It is an easy, paved walk to multiple viewing platforms. You can see Canada on the other side.

by Len Harris

We have been to Minnesota's North Shore numerous times to chase waterfalls. These are some of our favorites.

We have purchased two books on waterfalls. I recommend cross-referencing the books and mixing in the internet for current directions to these beautiful works of Mother Nature and Father Time.

We had a couple strikeouts during our last adventure. One was a road closed, and another was two books saying it was an easy trail—and it was not. I would recommend not going during peak foliage change. The

masses were two-fold this last week. The gas stations were full, and the restaurants were packed.

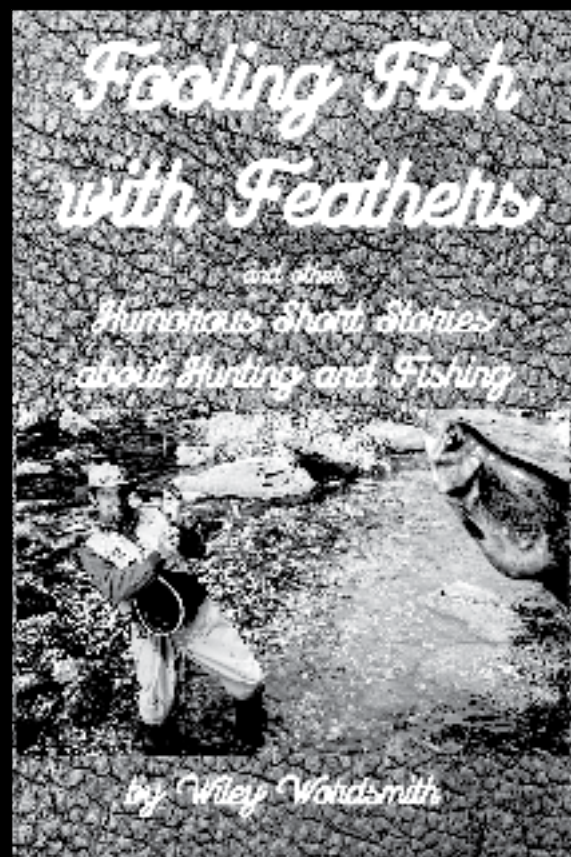
Always stay together. Note the position of the sun when you exit the vehicle in relation to your walk. Also figure out where you are at using the waterways. If the sun is behind clouds and you have not made a plan... it is easy to get lost.

Some state parks have hunting seasons in progress. Be sure to check for that and wear appropriate-colored clothing. I was astounded at the people in shorts and flip flops on the trail. Visualize crawling on slippery rocks with flip flops. Even if you



Gooseberry Falls at the State Park is about 13 miles from Two Harbors, Minn. It is a popular park and I recommend not going on a weekend.

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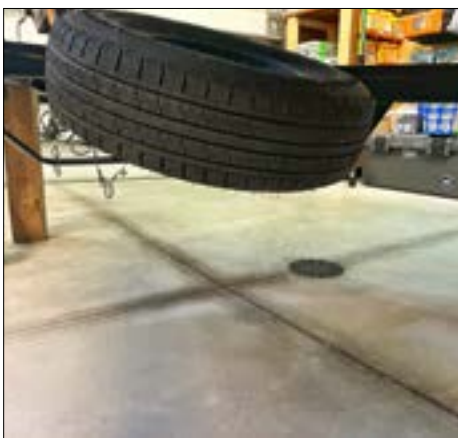
by Glenn Walker

Getting your boat out of, or back into, your garage with the least amount of hassle allows you to get out fishing quicker; and when done, get the boat stored away without a headache. Plus, the ability and luxury of keeping all your fishing tackle and boating equipment in one spot, directly next to your boat, makes preparing for your next fishing trip easy.

The length of your garage is obviously the number one thing to consider. Know the length of your boat when it is *on* the trailer, and if it has a swing away tongue or not. Knowing this length helps you know exactly how deep your garage must be; and if you'll have to swing the trailer tongue to be able to close the garage door. When we built our house, I laid out the garage so I could back my boat in and leave my truck connected (somewhat of a pipe dream when living in the suburbs). If you can accomplish this, *do it*. If not, at least leave enough space at the back end so you don't need to trim your motor down to fit in the garage; and at the front end, so you can easily walk around the boat to get work done.

If possible, have a tall enough garage, and garage doors, so you don't need to trim your motor down to get the boat in the garage; likewise, for your shallow water anchors. I have 9-foot-tall garage doors, so I can take my boat in and out of the garage without having to worry about my Raptors striking the top of the garage door frame.

Exactly where you park your boat in the garage depends on the layout of your garage, and taking into consideration if it is a one-, two-, three-, or even better, four-car garage. Our garage has an 18-foot-wide garage door. My boat sits on the outside of the stall next to the wall (so it can be next to the pegboard and shelves), and my truck is next to it. This way, when I go fishing, I can open one garage door, pull my truck out, hook the boat up and go. I also have plenty of space on either side of the trailer when backing it in, so I don't



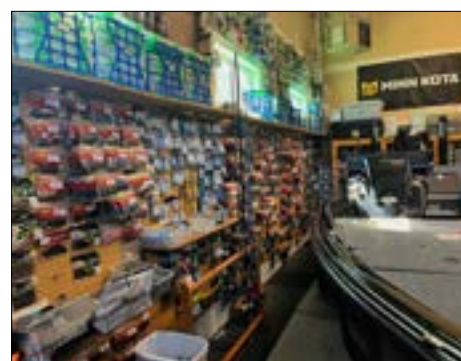
Install a floor drain below your boat to keep your garage floor dry.



Design or redo your garage to be your man cave or fishing garage and enjoy the organization of all your fishing tackle.



Heavy-duty wide, deep, tall shelves near your boat allow you to store a lot of tackle and boating accessories.



The author keeps his tackle trays on the shelf above his pegboard, providing easy access to items that go in and out of the boat based on the next day's fishing trip.

have to worry about hitting anything.

If you are building a new house and laying out the garage, or building a dedicated boat shop, talk to your contractor about adding a laundry tub with a hot and cold hose spigot. A deep laundry tub comes in handy to wash gear, wash your hands after a day on the water, or if you work on the trailer and are greasy. The hose spigots come in handy to spray down your boat or flush out your livewells. If you work on your outboard, you can put muffs on the hose and fire your engine up in your garage.

Another thing to consider is electrical outlets; you can *never* have too many for plugging in your phone, charging drill batteries, and most importantly, plugging in your onboard battery charger. I had a dedicated outlet installed directly behind where my Mercury Pro XS is, which is the closest point to the cord to my Minn Kota Precision Series Battery Charger. This dedicated outlet ensures that other electrical items will not trip the breaker and prevent my batteries from getting a full charge.

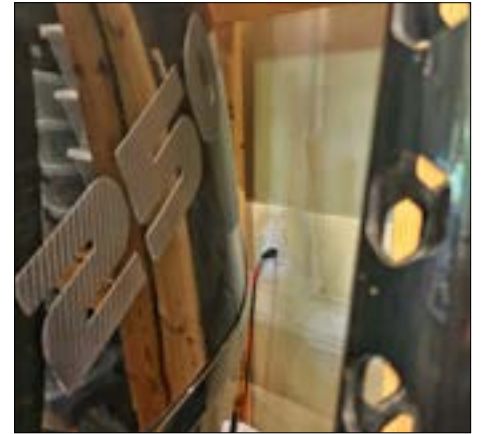
Putting a floor drain in the garage floor is an absolute must; this will help keep water from pooling on your garage floor as it drips off your boat and trailer after a day on the

water. Floor drains also allow you to spray down the floor and squeegee it into the drain to keep your fishing shop clean.

Being able to organize your packaged baits, soft plastics and terminal tackle ensures that you know where they are to quickly restock your tackle boxes or pack for an upcoming fishing trip or tournament. The wall next to my boat is covered with pegboard. I can hang most of my packaged baits, soft plastics and terminal tackle, and have it all organized, within reach while sitting in my boat.

As you think about your fishing garage, consider not just the tackle you have now, but also the tackle in your boat. Also anticipate future fishing tackle. You need shelves for the tackle you keep in plastic cases; the same goes for tubs or totes to hold extra bags of sorts plastics, or bins with random items or accessories for your boat. We constructed shelves out of 2x4s and OSB board behind the boat where I keep bins of soft plastics, packaged baits and boat accessories. A shelf above my pegboard holds my filled tackle trays within easy reach when I'm in my boat rigging rods and putting tackle in the boat.

Also, you *must* have a place to keep your fishing rods out of the way, untangled and protected from being stepped on or broken. I mounted racks on the wall where I can put backup rods, and rods that I don't use on a regular basis. Next to my boat, I have a free-standing rod rack where I keep the rods I use



Install a dedicated outlet to plug in your onboard battery charger.



Establish a system so you know where to back up your trailer.

throughout the season. They are within easy reach for rigging and putting into my rod box, and vice versa. I can easily pull rods I'm not using out of the boat and put them back on the rack. I always store my rods with a Rod Glove on them, so they are further protected and ready to go right into the rod locker.

Two items to make your fishing garage complete, although not a necessity, are a TV and refrigerator. A TV is obviously nice during the fall and winter months; as you work on tackle, turn on your favorite sporting event to keep you entertained. Having a fridge next to your boat allows you to quickly grab ice or freezer packs from the freezer to fill your boat cooler or cooler in your truck. I also keep all my energy drinks, protein shakes and water in the fridge and can easily put them in the boat for the day.

As we get into the offseason winter months, *now* is the time to work on or create your fishing garage or boat shed. If you have an existing spot in your garage or shed where you keep your boat and fishing tackle, implement some of these ideas. And if you want to really create a dream fishing man cave or boat shop, take these ideas, plus some of your own, to your contractor and get your dream started. **MWO**

Glenn Walker has been fishing Minnesota and Mississippi River tournaments for more than 15 years, spreading his passion and knowledge of the sport via articles and videos. For more information, check out glennwalkerfishing.com or on Facebook @GlennWalkerFishing.



Fishermen with lots of extra fishing tackle need a system to hang and organize it, like a wall covered with pegboard.

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You Don't Have to Break the Bank to Ice Fish in the Upper Midwest



An electric auger, a sonar/GPS unit, and an ultralight ice rod with an inline reel will put panfish on the ice for you.

by Troy Smutka

Ice fishing has come a long way since my dad and grandpa first took my brother and me out on the ice. We sat outside on a bucket, handlining a jig with a crappie minnow from a "jiggle stick" with no reel, down a hole we drilled with a 6-inch hand auger. Nowadays, the modern ice angler has every piece of technology that an angler in a boat has at their disposal.

The two biggest revolutions in ice fishing, in my opinion, were flasher sonar for sitting on the ice, and the flip-over portable ice shelter, aka the Fish Trap.

Today, ice anglers can fish from camper-sized wheelhouses with 360-degree live sonar and underwater cameras, using species-specific rod and reel combinations, to chase any species that lives in their lake. Not everyone has tens of thousands of dollars to spend on ice fishing equipment, however, or simply is not willing to spend that much to bring some fish through the ice.

Clients, both ice fishing and open-water fishing, regularly ask me for tips to get into either or both sports without having to make huge financial investments. Following are suggestions and recommendations, from the perspective of a Minnesota fishing guide, on ice fishing gear that will make you portable, comfortable and successful, without having to take out a second mortgage. These opinions are based on years of experience but are by no means the only "right answer" to ice fishing gear inquiries.

I like to be mobile, or at least semi-mobile, when ice fishing. I like to be able to get up in the morning and decide last-minute which lake, and spots on the lake, I am going to fish. It also means that I can move from spot to spot without too much noise, effort or time commitment.

I fish and guide out of portable ice shelters. Clam basically set the market for portable ice shelters, and I love their product line. I have a flip-over portable, the Fish Trap Voyageur Ice Team Edition, for taking out one or two clients, or just a day of fishing with my son and/or dad. This tent-like shelter built on top of a sled pulls nicely behind a walking angler, snowmobile or ATV, and fits into a standard 6 1/2-foot pickup bed. It is light, portable, holds all my gear when being pulled, sets up in seconds, and when set up keeps the wind out and keeps anglers very warm. A small propane heater is all that is needed on cold days, and on calm, sunny days, we often must turn the heater off to prevent getting too warm.

All kinds of add-on accessories are available. The one I would recommend most for a Fish Trap is the LED light bar across the top that runs for hours and hours off a small, 12-volt battery like the ones used for ice fishing electronics. Also, definitely get the thermal material for cold, windy days. It

adds a bit of cost but is worth it for warmth and greatly reducing condensation and water dripping on you while fishing on cold days.

My second Clam shelter is the X-600 Thermal Ice Team Edition. This is a six-sided hub shelter with room to fish 4 to 5 anglers quite comfortably. Hub shelters pop up and down, kind of like a pop-tent. My Clam hub shelter comes with a carry bag, and fits easily in my pickup, or in a sled pulled behind a snowmobile, ATV or angler on foot. It is light, sets up quickly, has tons of room, and with the thermal material is ridiculously warm inside, even on cold days. It has two doors and six windows, and is high enough for even tall people (I am 6-foot-3) to stand straight up in.

Again, lots of accessories are available. I recommend the LED hub shelter light which attaches to the top hub and illuminates the entire shelter nicely for hours and hours, running off a small 12-volt battery. You can even get a removable floor and put cots in these shelters for overnight fishing. An anchor system comes with these shelters for windy days.

I switched to electric augers several years ago and will never go back to gas. Strikemaster's Lithium-Ion series of electric augers are absolutely amazing. They are reasonably-priced, the batteries last forever, and you can drill holes inside a shelter without fuming it up like when running a gas auger. Strikemaster makes different models with different-sized batteries and auger sizes from 6 to 10 inches so you can match your auger to the amount of ice you are fishing on, the species of fish you are after, and how heavy you want, depending on if you are heading out with people or horsepower. The Lazer blades are incredibly sharp and can be replaced.

Ice fishing electronics are critical to success. Several companies make great ice fishing flasher sonar units in many price ranges, but I opt for a unit that combines flasher sonar, regular display sonar, and mapping GPS all in one: the Humminbird Helix Ice 7. This unit is relatively expensive, but it gets me to the spots and shows me the fish and how they are reacting to my bait. Don't skimp on your ice fishing sonar; this is the most important piece of equipment for making you successful in your ice fishing. The GPS feature can also be critical in getting you back to point A on a large lake in the dark.

In addition to regular sonar, you can invest in a live imaging sonar set up for ice fishing, and an underwater camera system as well. The camera is especially helpful keeping your children interested when the bite gets slow.

I do a lot of ice fishing for panfish: sunfish, crappies and perch. I like to use an ultralight ice rod from 24 to 28 inches long for panfish, like the St. Croix Legend Black Ice rods. I pair these with an inline ice reel—specifically



The Clam Fish Trap portable shelter allowed the author and Nate Smutka to chase roaming schools of perch under the ice.

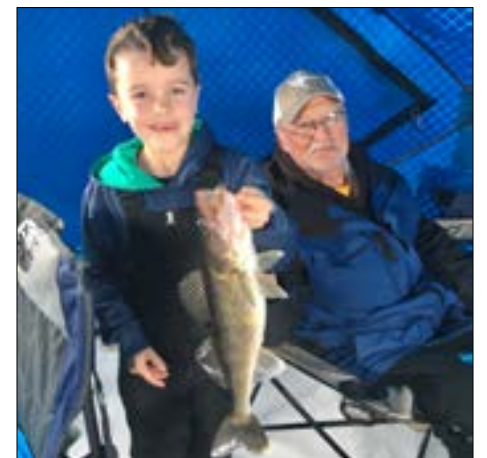
the Fish 13 Descent reel—spooled with 2-pound-test fluorocarbon line. This rod has a strike indicator built in to show the subtlest of bites, is sensitive enough to keep feel with tiny jigs, but also has enough backbone to bring in the occasional bonus pike, bass or walleye.

The inline ice reel allows me to use fluorocarbon tied directly to the jig, but without the line twist associated with a spinning reel. This line twist leads to a jig spinning for quite a while after being lowered down a hole. Watching this on an underwater camera has shown that the spinning spooks many panfish. The light fluorocarbon is nearly invisible in the clear water associated with ice fishing, fooling even the most finicky of cold-water panfish.

For walleyes through the ice, I still like St. Croix ice spinning rods like the Mojo Ice, in a medium power and 28- to 34-inch length. I pair these with a spinning reel spooled with superline like Berkley Fireline Ice, spliced to a leader of fluorocarbon with a small barrel swivel. This rig will handle larger baits and larger fish.

For tip-ups, I like the I-Fish Pro system so I can use a rod and reel to fight fish rather than hand-lining in a nice walleye or pike. The I-Fish Pro can be set up with large baits for walleyes and pike but can also be rigged to trigger the flag and set the hook on a panfish taking a smaller bait.

You don't have to go into debt to ice fish in the upper Midwest. I started out fishing outside with my gear consisting of an auger, a flasher sonar, and a couple of



A hub shelter allowed Parker and Nate Smutka to be warm and comfortable while chasing Minnesota walleyes.

ice rod-reel combos. I proceeded to add a few pieces of equipment each year, and now can fish successfully and in comfort without an obscene amount of money invested. I am super warm, comfortable, mobile and successful with my reasonable financial investment. Check out some of this equipment, whether you are a beginning ice angler or experienced veteran. **MWO**

Troy Smutka is a central Minnesota fishing guide (Great Day on the Water Guide Service) and a walleye tournament angler. Troy is also a member of the Lund Boats and Mercury Outboards Pro Teams, as well as the Clam Outdoors, St. Croix Rods, Pure Fishing, Rapala, Amped Outdoors, and Dakota Decoys Guide Teams. Troy also posts fishing and hunting reports at FishingMN.com and hosts and produces "Fishing and Hunting the North Country" on YouTube.

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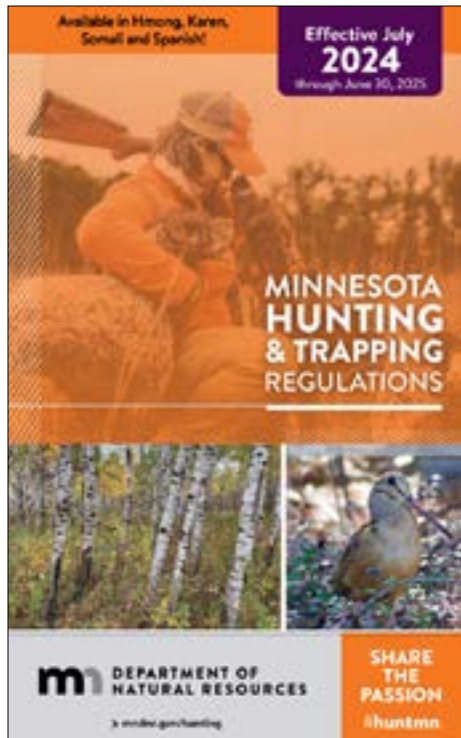
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Minnesota DNR Updates



the same day, you may enter these hunts as separate observations. In addition to deer, we are interested in observations of wild turkey, black bear, coyote, bobcat, gray wolf, fisher, gray fox, and badger.

DNR urges safety around cold water

As the nights grow cooler, the water temperature in lakes and rivers across the state has started dropping as well. Whether you're hunting, fishing, or paddling, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources offers this reminder to anyone still using the water: Your safety is your responsibility. Even for strong swimmers, unexpected falls into the cold water this time of year can turn tragic quickly. Considering there are fewer people on the water to help in the case of an emergency, it is vital people take steps to ensure their own safety.

"This time of year, the water is particularly unforgiving," said Capt. Adam Block, DNR boating law administrator. "Unfortunately, we have seen a number of people on the water either not wearing life jackets, or not even having them along. If there's one thing you can do to ensure you make it home safely at the end of your trip, it's wearing a lifejacket."

While more boating related accidents occur during the busy summer season, a higher percentage of cold-water incidents are fatal. In addition to wearing a life jacket (foam is better than inflatable during the cold-water season), other steps people can take to stay safe include:

- Distribute weight evenly across the watercraft.
- Abide by manufacturer's weight limits.
- Tell someone on shore where you're going and when you plan to return, and carry a communications device.
- Keep an eye on the weather.

For more information, including how to survive a fall into cold water, visit the Minnesota DNR's cold water safety webpage.

Stamp contest winners chosen

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has chosen winners for the



Minnesota pheasant and turkey stamp contests.

Vernon Center artist Al Steinberg won the Minnesota pheasant stamp contest with an acrylic painting of a ring-necked pheasant. The winner was selected on Oct. 3 from nine eligible submissions. Second place was Stephen Hamrick of Lakeville and third place was Dean Kegler of Alborn. The winning artwork will be featured on the 2025 pheasant stamp.

Bemidji artist Sam Larsen won the Minnesota turkey stamp contest with an acrylic painting of a wild turkey. The winner was selected on Oct. 3 from seven eligible submissions. Second place was Al Steinberg of Vernon Center and third place was Thomas Lofquist of Lester Prairie. The winning artwork will be featured on the 2026 turkey stamp.

The pheasant stamp and turkey stamp can be purchased in combination with hunting licenses or as collectables. Visit the Minnesota DNR stamp webpage for more information about habitat stamps and contest guidelines.

Invasive species in Minnesota waters

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has confirmed the presence of zebra mussels in:

- Rice Lake, located partially in Maple Grove, Hennepin County
- Bass Lake near Annandale, Wright County
- Cedar Lake near Upsala, Morrison County
- Ann Lake near Orrock, Sherburne County
- Toad Lake near Osage, in Becker County
- Potato Lake near Park Rapids, Hubbard County

- Marion Lake near Richville, Otter Tail County
- Clear Lake near Forest Lake, Washington County

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has also confirmed the presence of the invasive algae starry stonewort in Rush Lake, near the town of Crosslake in Crow Wing County. Rush Lake is part of the Lower Whitefish Chain of Lakes. Starry stonewort had not previously been confirmed in the Whitefish Chain of Lakes. The DNR is working with the Whitefish Area Property Owners Association and Crow Wing County to determine immediate response steps. Starry stonewort has now been confirmed in 31 water bodies in Minnesota. It was first confirmed in Minnesota in 2015.

Starry stonewort is usually identified by the star-shaped white bulbils for which it is named. These bulbils typically become visible in late summer.

Starry stonewort can form dense mats, which can interfere with recreational uses of a lake and compete with native plants. It is most likely spread when fragments have not been properly cleaned from trailered boats, personal watercraft, docks, boat lifts, anchors or other water-related equipment.

Starry stonewort has never been eradicated from any U.S. lake or river, but treatment or careful removal can help reduce the risk of spread and relieve associated nuisance impacts on water-related recreational activities. Early detection is key to effective management.

Contact a Minnesota DNR aquatic invasive species if you think you have found zebra mussels or any other invasive species that was not already known to be in the water body. More information is available on the aquatic invasive species page of the DNR website. **MWO**

2024 hunting regulations available

Hunting regulations for 2024 are now available on the hunting pages of the DNR website, dnr.state.mn.us. The current version of the regulations booklet and deer permit area map also are available for download. Regulations translated into Hmong, Karen, Somali and Spanish will be available this fall.

Log your deer and wildlife sightings

The online log for the DNR's deer hunter wildlife observation survey allows you to share your daily observations of deer and help broaden our knowledge about other animals you see in the field. You also can report specific information about any deer harvested.

As log entries are compiled, we'll share the results annually and use them to compare what hunters see to population estimates that are the DNR's baseline for managing wildlife. We encourage you to complete this log each day you're in the field hunting. The log is mobile device friendly. All you need is an internet connection to log your sightings at Mndnrqualtrics.com thru Dec 31.

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Our Readers Write



Fishing a spinnerbait off a dock in Eden Prairie, Minn. A 65-degree, cloudy day, with not a lot of wind. Awesome catch!

Skyler Raymond

Winter Shallow-Water Basics

by Josh Hagemeister

Throughout my 34 years of guiding, I've noticed one thing that typical anglers ignore on both open and frozen water: shallow fishing opportunities. Why? I'm not sure. My guess is that it can be a little trickier to fish shallow-water areas full of weeds. My advice is to change your mid-winter fishing "rut" from "deep holes" to "shallow weeds."

Baby fish need cover to hide to survive. Baby fish need food and oxygen. So, baby fish use shallow weeds as a nursery until they grow large enough to transition into main-lake areas, deeper water etc. Big fish eat baby fish. Sounds simple right? It is. And that's why shallow weeds are loaded with fish all year long—including now, under the ice and snow.

Shallow weeds provide a ton of things not found in deep-water areas, such as cover, multiple varieties of food, and oxygen. What depth ranges? It can vary from lake to lake and region to region, but basically, I'd say the 5- to 12-foot range is a safe bet. Try to find weed beds near deep water (20-feet-plus). I find my most productive weed beds while fishing during the open-water season; it saves a ton of time poking around on the ice.

Finding fish in shallow-water weeds can be a little more challenging when the surface is frozen—even with electronics. Underwater cameras can really shine in this case because the proof is on the screen. Otherwise, if you're using a flasher through the ice, just keep it on the ice a lot longer and focus on the screen until one of marks "moves;" that's a fish, not a weed. Then drill a hole and try catch it. The beauty of the



A nice mess of crappies found in 5 feet of water.

shallow-water weed bite is that it can last all day, and many times is the best during high sun! Even under bright light, charge your glow baits just like you would in low-light conditions!

The edges of weed beds are important. This is another reason to "map" the weed bed's perimeter shape during summer, with your "map chip" recording and saving your boat trail while "tracing" the shape of the weed bed from a boat. Simply use the same unit or chip to navigate back to the weed bed under the frozen surface. I mount my Humminbird Helix 10 on my four-wheeler,

and then into the truck; regardless, I always have it with me.

Even though the edges are great spots to start, *always* fish the centers of any weed bed as well—especially if there is a known thin spot or hole in the center of the weed bed.

I attack a weed bed with a two-punch approach. One rod has a small jigging spoon like a JB Lures "Big Bad Bo" or a Northland Tackle Forage Minnow (small enough for big panfish, but big enough for pike, walleye, or bass). The other has some kind of panfish-sized lure like a Northland Tackle Gill Getter or a JB Lures DUB'LD tungsten.

Either bait is tipped with a waxie or a spike, or the head of a crappie minnow, for added scent.

I start with the jiggin' spoon to catch the biggest, most aggressive fish first—and to also attract additional fish. After the initial flurry of aggressive fish, I drop down the tiny stuff and fish more traditionally. I stay in the hole until the fish are gone or it takes too long to catch a "watcher." As Al Lindner says: "Never leave biting fish." Everyone has their own definition of what "biting fish" are; I know what mine is and I stick to it.

You can typically take advantage of the



The author with a beautiful sunfish caught in shallow weeds.

shallow-water weed bite all winter long. Pay attention to the condition of the weeds on the body of water you are fishing. It's possible, especially in years of deep snow, that by the end of February, the weeds may officially die and force the fish out to deeper water or to a neighboring weed bed that is still alive. Even so, they don't all move on the same day on the same schedule. But once they're gone, it's time to move and find them again. **MWO**

Captain Josh Hagemeister owns and operates Minnesota Fishing Guide Service. He has been in the fishing industry as a professional fishing guide going on 32 years, starting back in the days when he worked for In-Fisherman's Camp Fish. He contributes to several outdoor publications, fishing reports and social media sites. Minnesota Fishing Guide Service, 320-291-0708; email josh@minnesotaguideservice.com; www.minnesotaguideservice.com, www.minnesotaicefishhouse.com.

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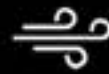


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Big Stone Lake: Minnesota's/South Dakota's border-water Gem!

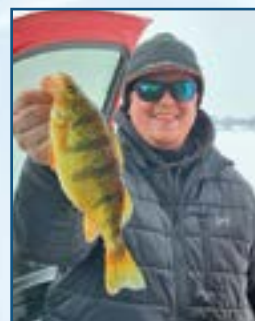


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Dakota Corner

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Updates



Free fish sticks

As you fish in South Dakota State Parks this fall, submit your fishing-related photos to win fish stickers! The more parks you fish, the more stickers you get. Submit fishing adventures from 20 parks and be entered for a grand prize fishing package!

Get the details and submit photos: gfp.sd.gov/fish2024/

gfp.sd.gov/fish2024

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaJCSdDrTaw>

Two boat ramps see improvements

Two major boat ramp replacements took place this fall at Lake Thompson Recreation Area and North Point Recreation Area.



The first project is a complete boat ramp replacement for the main ramp at Lake Thompson Recreation Area near De Smet.

The second project is a complete boat ramp replacement for the main ramp at North Point Recreation Area near Pickstown.

Complete information regarding boat ramps and accesses across the state can be found on the Public Water Access Map, experience.arcgis.com.

rentals, as well as life jacket checkouts," said state parks director Jeff VanMeeteren. "We also have overnight options for everyone with campsites, camping cabins, and modern lodging open year-round."

If water recreation isn't for you, South Dakota state parks also offer a variety of outdoor activities including hiking, biking, disc golf, fishing, archery, and birdwatching.

Entrance licenses can be purchased online at campsd.com, at local state park offices, or by calling 1.800.710.2267.



State park entrance license available

The 2025 annual park entrance license for South Dakota's state parks and recreation areas is available for purchase.

The 2025 park entrance license is valid from Oct. 1, 2024, through May 16, 2026. The license is required for entrance into designated state parks, recreation areas, and lakeside use areas, although it does not cover camping costs or additional fees.

"South Dakota state parks offer many recreational opportunities, and in 2025, we are highlighting water recreation. Many parks offer kayak, canoe, and paddleboard

Avoid vehicle fires

Pausing or parking a car or truck in tall grass or over shrubs can start fires. This not only may damage your vehicle but may also start a quickly moving fire. Do not park where vegetation is touching the underside of your vehicle.

Also be sure that all vehicles and tires are in excellent working order; safety chains or other trailer equipment must not drag or dangle; these can get hot or create sparks causing wildfires. #OneLessSpark.

Funding available for trails

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) announced today that the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) 2024 grant application is now open. The grants are available for trail projects sponsored by municipalities, counties, state parks, federal land management agencies, or tribal governments.

The grant provides up to 80% reimbursement for approved trail projects. Eligible projects include construction of new public trails, rehabilitation of existing public trails, development of trail-related facilities, and educational programs that relate to recreational trails.

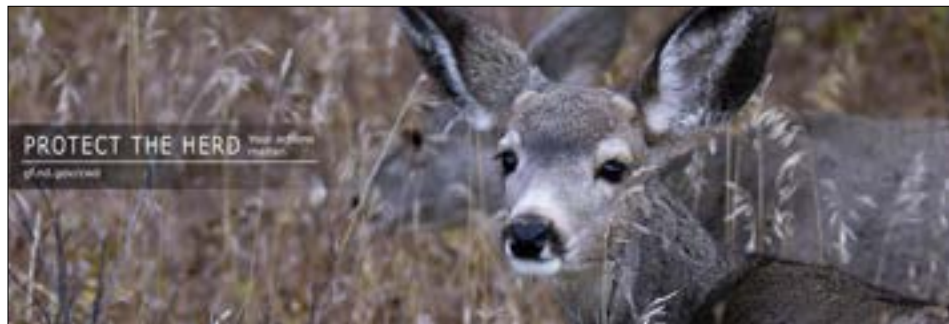
RTP funds come to the state through the Federal Highway Administration and are apportioned to states by Congress to fund both motorized and non-motorized public recreation trail projects. The amount of funds available is based upon the number of recreational vehicles licensed in each state.

Application packets are available online at the Game, Fish and Parks website, gfp.sd.gov. The application deadline is Friday, April 5, 2024.

For more information, contact Grants Coordinator Randy Kittle at 605.773.5490 or by e-mail at randy.kittle@state.sd.us. **MWO**

Dakota Corner

North Dakota Game and Fish Updates



Some hunters can seek refunds

The North Dakota State Game and Fish Department is allowing hunters with whitetail or "any" deer gun licenses in several units in western North Dakota the option of turning those licenses in for refunds.

Casey Anderson, wildlife chief, said the decision is based on scattered reports of white-tailed deer mortality caused by epizootic hemorrhagic disease that began in late August.

Hunters with antlered whitetail, antlerless whitetail, any antlered and any antlerless licenses, are eligible for refunds in units 3D1, 3D2, 3E1, 4B, 4C, and 4D. Hunters who return their licenses will have their bonus points restored, if applicable, to the same number of points prior to the 2024 deer gun lottery.

"Compared to previous years, this outbreak appears mild and less extensive," Anderson said. "However, it's possible that some hunters could notice an impact in localized areas."

Department staff will continue to monitor reports to determine if licenses in additional units should become eligible for refunds due to the EHD outbreak. Hunters and landowners should report any dead deer along with photos, if possible, to the department through the online wildlife mortality reporting system, at gf.nd.gov/mortality-report.

Before deciding to turn in a license, Anderson urges license holders to make local contacts to find out the extent of mortality in their hunting unit.

"Most areas within these units have not been heavily affected and a good deer harvest is still needed," he said. "But a little scouting and a phone call or two will help to make an informed decision."

License holders who qualify and want a refund must mail their tag, along with a note requesting a refund due to EHD, to the Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office no later than Nov. 8. Envelopes postmarked Nov. 8 will be accepted.

EHD, a naturally occurring virus that is spread by a biting midge, is often fatal to infected white-tailed deer, while mule deer do not usually die from the disease. Hunters do not have to worry about handling or

consuming meat from infected deer because the virus that causes EHD is not known to cause disease in humans. In addition, the first series of hard frosts typically kills the midge that transmits the EHD virus and will slow or halt the spread of the disease.

Test deer for CWD

North Dakota Game and Fish Department will continue its Hunter-Harvested Surveillance program during the 2024 hunting season by sampling deer for chronic wasting disease from select units in the northeastern portion of the state.

Samples will be tested from deer taken from units 1, 2C, 2D, 2E, 2F1, 2K1, 2K2, 2L, 3A4 and 3B2. Outside of this area, hunters can still have their animal tested by taking it to a Game and Fish district office, deer head collection site or by using a self-sampling kit.

CWD is a slow-moving brain disease of deer, moose and elk that can cause population-level impacts under high infection rates.

Hunters are encouraged to drop off heads of adult or yearling deer at collection locations listed on the department's website at gf.nd.gov. Fawns and head-shot deer cannot be tested. Hunters wishing to keep the heads can bring them to a Game and Fish district office during business hours to have them sampled.

Self-sampling kits are available for hunters who wish to have their deer tested but are unable to drop the head at a collection site. The do-it-yourself kit allows hunters to remove the lymph nodes and ship them to the department's wildlife health lab for testing.

Results can be expected within four weeks and will be sent to your Game and Fish My Account inbox.

Hunters should note that carcass disposal requirements apply statewide. The entire carcass can be transported outside of the gun unit where it was harvested. If transported out of the gun unit, the carcass waste (material left after processing) must be disposed of via landfill or waste management provider. This requirement does not apply to heads dropped at CWD collection sites, or lymph nodes submitted for CWD surveillance. More information on CWD is available at the Game and Fish website.



Order 2025 OUTDOORS calendars

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is taking orders for its *North Dakota OUTDOORS* calendar, the source for all hunting season and application dates for 2025. Along with color photographs of North Dakota's wildlife and outstanding scenery, it also includes sunrise-sunset times and moon phases.

Calendars must be ordered online by visiting the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.

The calendar is *North Dakota OUTDOORS* magazine's December issue, so current subscribers will automatically receive it in the mail.

Fort Totten record bullhead

Daniel Wegener's bullhead caught Sept. 27 broke a state record for the species that's been in the books for more than 35 years. The Fort Totten angler reeled in his 4-pound, 9-ounce bullhead from Devils Lake. The previous record of 4 pounds, 1 ounce was established in 1988 by Riley Zavada, a Wolford angler who was also fishing Devils Lake.

Permit required

A permit is required before taking possession of a dead deer. Only shed antlers can be possessed without a permit.

Permits are free and available from North Dakota Game and Fish Department game wardens and local law enforcement offices.

In addition, hunters should properly dispose of dead deer. Carcass waste cannot be left on public property, including roadways, ditches or wildlife management areas.

If transported outside of its respective gun unit, carcass waste must be disposed of

via landfill or waste management provider. This requirement does not apply to heads dropped off at chronic wasting disease collection sites, or lymph nodes submitted for CWD surveillance.

Salmon spawn completed

Fisheries crews completed their annual salmon spawning operation on Lake Sakakawea, collecting 1.9 million eggs.

Russ Kinzler, North Dakota Game and Fish Department Missouri River System fisheries supervisor, said the 2024 spawn was almost perfect with lots of fish and great weather.

"The numbers of fish in the spawn this year were amazing to see, and we saw a noticeable increase in the size of our salmon compared to last year," Kinzler said. "In addition to collecting enough eggs for our needs, we were able to help South Dakota by collecting over 715,000 eggs for their salmon program."

Kinzler said the eggs should be enough to stock the 350,000 smolts planned for Lake Sakakawea in 2025.

The average size of female salmon was 5.8 pounds, more than a pound larger than last year. The largest salmon was 9.7 pounds.

Chinook salmon begin their spawning run in October. Since salmon cannot naturally reproduce in North Dakota, Game and Fish personnel capture the fish and transport them to Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery where they are relieved of their eggs.

Once the eggs hatch, young salmon spend about six months in the hatchery before being stocked in Lake Sakakawea.

MWO

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USCG PHOTO BY PA3 LOUIS HERBERT



An Unforgettable Encounter with Wolves

A half-hour before sunrise that morning, I was seated on my backpacked stool on the upwind side of a current favorite whitetail browse area in Minnesota's Arrowhead Region near the Ontario border. I was waiting for an unseen dominant breeding buck accompanying a doe in heat to quit feeding, and to head downwind toward my youngest daughter, Katie, who was seated in a hollow stump. I was using my widely spreading airborne scents to force those deer to head in her direction, rather than upwind after feeding, as usual. In a word, I was using our newly created "gentle nudge," stand hunting method.

Meanwhile, I was watching (glimpsing) a yearling doe feeding about 75 yards west of where I sat. I began hearing the dead yellow grass in a patch about 15 feet in diameter behind me begin to rustle. Carefully turning my head to discover what was causing that rustling—and expecting to see a deer—I was shocked to discover that I was very near six enormous wolves. All their bodies were covered with black, grizzled fur, and their legs and muzzles were covered with tawny fur (apparently, all closely related).

Strangely, all were slowly randomly wandering this way and that on that patch of grass, with their tails slowly wagging and sniffing the ground, as if searching for something. All the while they were doing this, it appeared they had no idea I was very near, because not once did any of them look my way.

Then thinking about parts of moose leg bones that my wife Jene and I had recently found, which had been crushed by wolf teeth, I immediately stood up to show those wolves that I was there, and that I was much taller than them. Having no effect, I then pushed the tang on my rifle's safety quickly forward, making a metallic click.

Still having no effect, and noting the wolves were steadily drawing nearer, I tried

a soft, short growl. All six of those wolves then immediately halted and stared up at me with their spooky, yellow eyes. After about three seconds, they resumed their random wandering and sniffing, but now slowly moving away to my right.

After they disappeared, I sat down, took a deep breath and began thinking about what had just happened. It seemed absurd that those six, big wolves, capable of killing a horse-sized moose, would actually

begin moving away after I growled at them. This made me realize that these ancestors of all our pet dogs are not altogether like our pets, which can be taught to do almost anything, and made to do something—or not do something—by merely using our voices to control them. These wild wolves did not require prior

training. I therefore concluded that they have a mentality far greater than that of pet dogs, and probably almost all other wild animals in this forest as well. But this isn't the end of the tale.

A few minutes later, I began hearing pounding hoofbeats and snapping branches becoming louder, west of where I sat. When I stood up and turned to better see what was causing this commotion, I spotted the yearling doe racing flat out (not making high leaps) toward me, with a buckskin-colored wolf about 15 feet behind it. When the deer then spotted me and began veering to its right, away from me, the dense brush on my left exploded with *considerably more than* six wolves, all howling and barking. At that moment, I felt as if I was being attacked, but they all immediately swept past me to join the buckskin-colored wolf pursuing the deer.

About ten minutes later, a long string of silent wolves with tongues hanging out (twelve of them) filed past about thirty yards away, heading west toward the north-south deer trail where this attempted wolf hunt began (revealed by their tracks in snow).

At this point, I realized that my

Still having no effect, and noting the wolves were steadily drawing nearer, I tried a soft, short growl.

Introducing Dr. Ken Nordberg's all new **Whitetail Hunters Almanac, 10th Edition** Ushering in a New Age of Fair-Chase, Mature-Buck-Effective Whitetail Hunting



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Dr. Nordberg has written 12 books and nearly 900 outdoor magazine articles about white-tailed deer and whitetail hunting, all based on what 80–90% of five behavioral classes of wild whitetails did under similar circumstances over periods of 10 or more years since the 1960s. He was an early pioneer of tree stand hunting and using buck lures and was first to accurately describe the whitetail rut in his Whitetail Hunters Almanac, 2nd Edition published in 1989.

For earlier Whitetail Hunters Almanacs, other product info, order forms, PayPal, & credit card orders, Canada or other foreign country orders, go to Doc's website.

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unexpected presence at this site had ruined the chance for that large number of hidden wolves waiting in ambush to close in on all sides of that yearling doe the moment it dashed into their midst. They'd been using a clever hunting method that I had never seen or heard of before that enables wolves to catch adult-sized deer that can normally outrun them, aided by being able to leap over objects 8 feet tall and 25 feet across, which pursuing wolves cannot leap over.

Obviously, I had ruined this wolfpack's chance to take the one adult-sized deer a pack needs to eat per week to survive a winter. That's only about one deer in four square miles in their exclusive, one-hundred-plus-square-mile hunting area. This was also why this large wolfpack was not (then) having a significant impact on our buck hunting.

The deer/wolf situation is quite different in much of Minnesota's Arrowhead Region today (2024) where I first observed wolves using this clever hunting method (1996). Over much of this region today, deer numbers are now down to about three per square-mile, and wolves there are starving to death. It's Mother Nature's ruthless, age-old means of resolving extreme inevitable imbalances of predators (wolves) to primary prey (white-tailed deer). It has been happening periodically in this region since the Ice Age ended more than ten



Many starving wolves in the author's Arrowhead Region deer/wolf study area are emaciated loners like this one.

thousand years ago, despite interference by Americans knowing little about Arrowhead Region wolves using Federal Courts and the Endangered Species Act to protect these overabundant deer-, moose- and domestic-livestock-eating predators since 2014.

Around 9:30 a.m. Katie fired once, taking a trophy-class 10-pointer. **MWO**

Dr. Ken Nordberg has been an avid hunter and angler for over 70 years and an outdoor writer for nearly 40. He has written 800+ outdoor articles,

made three decades of contributions to MidWest Outdoors and written 15 outstanding books on deer and bear hunting. In addition, he's a teacher, seminar speaker and blogger and you can find some of his work on YouTube and other social media.



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MINNESOTA Sportsman's Calendar

For the most up-to-date info: MidWestOutdoors.com/events

To list your event in the MWO Sportsman's Calendar, email info to: info@midwestoutdoors.com – Subject line: "Minnesota Calendar Listing." Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for publication.

MONTHLY ACTIVITIES/CLUBS

>Dakota County Gun Club meets the second Wednesday of each month at the Rosemount Community Center on Hwy. 3 at 7:00pm. Membership open to all. For more info: 952-985-3248.
 >Fishers of Men Fishing Club meets the first Thursday of each month at the Lutheran Church of the Master, 1200 69th Ave. N., Brooklyn Center at 7:00pm. For more info: John @ 612-670-0707 or fishersofmenclub.org.
 >FM Walleyes Unlimited meets the third Thursday of each month at the Double Wood, Fargo, ND @ 7:00pm. For more info: 701-271-0577 or CMaloy8739@aol.com.
 >GEM Fishing Club meets the third Tuesday of the month at Emmanuel Christian Center, 7777 University Ave. (Rm. 220) in Fridley, MN. For more info: 952-882-1711.
 >The Minnesota Valley In-Fisherman Club meets the fourth Tuesday of each month at the Apple Valley American Legion at 7:00pm. For more info: Gary @ 952-423-3662 or 763-268-3621.
 >Muskie Inc., North Metro Chapter, meets the third Tuesday of every month at Jack's Restaurant, 201 Lowry Ave. NE, Minneapolis.
 >Muskie Inc., Twin Cities Chapter, meets the second Tuesday of every month at the

Knights of Columbus Hall, 1114 W. 79th St. in Bloomington at 7:00pm. Public welcome.
 >Muskie Inc, Lake Superior Chapter, meets the second Tuesday of each month at the Incline Station in Duluth. For more info: Tom @ 218-525-7500.
 >Red River Riders ATV Club meets the 3rd Wednesday of each month at the Wild Rice Bar & Grill at 7:00pm. For more info: redriverridersatv.org
 >Trout Unlimited, Twin Cities Chapter meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at the Woodlake Nature Center, 735 Lakeshore Dr., in Richfield at 7:00pm. For more info: 952-474-1694.
 >Women Anglers of Minnesota (WAM) meet the second Monday of each month at Elks 44 Club, 2975 Brookdale Dr, Brooklyn Park, MN, at 7:30pm. Public is welcome. For more info: 612-339-1322 or WomanAnglers@aol.com.
 >Women for Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife (WFHW) meet the second Monday of each month at the Sawmill Inn in Brainerd, MN at 7:00pm. For more info: Peggy @ 218-764-3372 or Kim @ 218-963-7539.
 >Walleye Searchers of MN meet the 1st Monday of each month at Elks Lodge in Rochester, MN. For more info: walleyesearchers.org.

FM Walleyes Fall Classic
 Contact: Barry Chouinard 218-790-4762
fmwalleyes.com
 \$280 per team
 Big Cormorant Lake

MUSKIES
Frank Schneider, Jr. Memorial Tournament
 Twin Cities Chapter of Muskie, Inc.
 Contact: Denise Olson 612-804-4687
twincitiesmuskieinc.org
 \$100 per person
 21 Walker/Bemidji/Cass Lake/
 Longville/Big Winni Area Lakes

George Wahl Memorial Tournament
 Twin Cities Chapter of Muskie, Inc.
 Contact: Denise Olson 612-804-4687
twincitiesmuskieinc.org
 \$50 per person/\$100 per family
 12 Twin Cities Metro Lakes

NORTHERN PIKE
Zippel Bay Ice Out Northern Tournament
 Contact: Deanna 218-783-6235
 \$60 per team
 Zippel Bay, Lake of the Woods

CATFISH
Catfish Capital Tournament
 Contact: 701-739-5808 or 701-520-1219
 \$300 per entrant

MULTI-SPECIES TOURNAMENTS
MN Kayak Fishing Association

Contact: 612-669-5759
mnkayakfishingassociation.org

ICE FISHING
2025 32nd Annual Ice Fishing Extravaganza
 Contact: icefishing.org 1-800-950-9461
Feb 1: Gull Lake

2025 71st United Northern Sportsmen's Club Tournament
 Contact: 218-721-4843
 Island Lake

2025 27th Annual Am. Legion Ice Fishing Derby
 Contact: 218-732-3360
 Fish Hook Lake

2025 Justin Morneau Ice Fishing Classic
 Contact: 320-676-3227 or hunterspointresort.com
 Mille Lacs Lake

2025 21st Annual Ducks Unlimited Ice Fishing Tournament
 Contact: Greg Erickson 218-678-2116 or fishingforducks.org
Feb 22: Mille Lacs Lake

2025 Hunter's Point Perch & Pout Tournament
 Contact: 320-676-3227 or hunterspointresort.com
 Mille Lacs Lake

TOURNAMENTS

BASS TOURNAMENTS

Champions Tour
classicbass.com
 \$1000 entry

Frankie's Pro Team Tournament
 Contact: Frankie Dusenka 651-257-6334
 \$1000 per team
frankies.net
 North/South Center and Green Lakes

International Falls Bass Championship
 Contact: 1-800-FALLS-MN
 \$500 per team
ifallsbass.com
 Rainy Lake/Rainy River, MN

WALLEYE TOURNAMENTS
2024 Cabela's Masters Walleye Circuit (MWC)
 Contact: 1-877-893-7947
masterswalleyecircuit.com
 Team Format--\$650 (plus memberships)
 2025 Championship (for 2024 Qualifiers)

Cabela's National Walleye Tour (NWT)
 Contact: 1-612-424-0708
nationalwalleyetour.com
 Pro Angler--\$1750 (plus membership)
 Co-Angler--\$500 (plus membership)
 Mississippi River, Red Wing, MN
Championship

Minnesota Tournament Trail
 Contact: Mike & Renee Holt @ 320-679-2825
mntournamenttrail.com
 \$220 per team (1-day events) \$260/2-day events
 * = Denotes 50-Boat Field

Lake Pepin Open Walleye Classic
 Contact: walleyesearchers.org
 \$200 per team
 Lake Pepin/Pool 4

FM Walleyes Spring Classic
 Contact: Barry Chouinard 218-790-4762
fmwalleyes.com

\$300 per team
 Pelican Lake

ALS Walleye Tournament
 Contact: Sandy Judge 888-672-0484
sandy@alsmn.org
 \$250 - \$500+ per team
 Virtual Tournament

Leech Lake Walleye Tournament
 Contact: Jim Tuller 218-675-6176
leechlakewalleyetournament.com
 \$350 per team
 Leech Lake

Hunter's Point Walleye Shootout
 Contact: 320-676-3227
hunterspointresort.com
 \$250 per team
 Mille Lacs Lake

Knights of Columbus Walleye Tournament
 Contact: 218-556-3651
 \$480 per team
 Lake Bemidji

Osakis Walleye Tournament
 Contact: Mike @ 320-859-4781
 \$325 per team
 Lake Osakis

Devils Lake Invitational Tournament
 Contact: 701-662-4903
devilslakend.com
 \$275 per team
 Devils Lake, ND

GRAHA Walleye Shootout (Grand Rapids)
 Contact: grahawalleyeshootout.com
 \$400 per team
 Pokegama Lake

Hunter's Point Couples Tournament
 Contact: 320-676-3227
hunterspointresort.com
 \$250 per team
 Mille Lacs Lake

DNR DATES

DNR Information Line: Toll-free 1-888-MINNDNR dnr.state.mn.us

Sep 1 – Nov 26: Mourning Dove Season
Sep 21 – Dec 4: Sharp-Tailed Grouse Season
Sep 14 – Dec 31: Archery Deer Hunting Season
Sep 14, 2024 – Jan 1, 2025: Ruffed & Spruce Grouse Season
Sep 14, 2024 – Feb 28, 2025: Rabbit & Squirrel Season
Sep 21, 2024 – Jan 1, 2025: Hungarian Partridge Season
Sep 14 – Oct 27: Fall Turkey Season
Oct 12, 2024 – Jan 1, 2025: Pheasant Season
Oct 19, 2024 – Mar 15, 2025: Gray & Red

Fox Season
Oct 19, 2024 – Mar 15, 2025: Raccoon & Opossum Season
Oct 19, 2024 – Mar 16, 2025: Badger Season (North Zone)
Oct 26, 2024 – Mar 16, 2025: Badger Season (South Zone)
Nov 9-24: Firearms Deer Season A
Nov 9 – Dec 1: Firearms Deer Season B
Nov 30 – Dec 15: Muzzleloader Deer Season
Dec 14, 2024 – Jan 19, 2025: Bobcat Season (North of I-94 & Hwy 10)
Dec 15, 2024 – Jan 15, 2025: Corw Season (Winter)

2024 SPORTS SHOWS

Dec 6-8: 31st Annual St. Paul Ice Fishing Show. St. Paul RiverCentre. stpaulicefishingshow.com.
Dec 13-15: Arrowhead Ice Fishing and

Winter Show, Duluth Entertainment Convention Center, Duluth, MN, Shamrock Productions, shamrockprod.com, (952) 431-9630, mniceshow.com.

2025 SPORTS SHOWS

Jan 17-19: Minnesota Resort, Lodge & Outdoor Show. Canterbury Park, Shakopee, MN. cenaiko.com
Jan 23-26: Minneapolis Boat Show. Mpls. Convention Center. minneapolisboatshow.com
Jan 24-26: Red River Valley Boat & Marine Products Show. FargoDome. cenaiko.com
Feb 7-9: St. Cloud Sportsmen's Boat,

Camping, & Vacation Show. St. Cloud River's Edge. cenaiko.com
Mar 6-9: Red River Valley Boat, Camping, & Vacation Show. FargoDome. cenaiko.com
Mar 13-16: Sioux Empire Boat, Camping, & Vacation Show. Sioux Falls Arena & Convention Center. cenaiko.com.
Mar 13-16: Northwest Sportshow. Mpls. Convention Center

ARCHERY

>Bow Benders Archery Club
 For more info: Rick @ 507-931-4603
 >Broken Arrow Archery Club
 For more info: 507-248-3230
 >Chilakoot Bowhunters
 For more info: Scott @ 763-

439-2462
 or Rob @ 763-430-9945
 >Christian Bowhunters of America
 For more info: Gordy @ 320-679-5767
 >Rapids Archery Club
 For more info: Dan Ericson @ 763-427-0808
 >Rochester Archery Club

For more info: 507-280-6282
 >Twin Arrows 3D Archery Range
 For more info: 320-679-3986
 >Wolf Track Archery Club
 For more info: 763-780-3965 or 763-784-6084

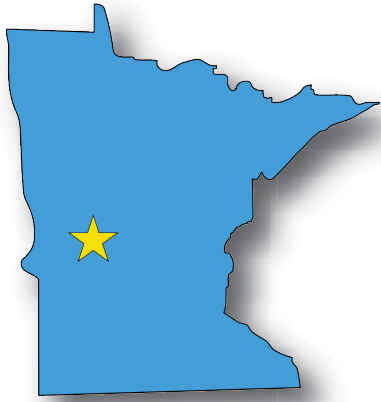
SEMINARS

Laurentian Environmental Center Family/Service Programs. For more info: 1-888-749-1288

THE LAKEMASTER® DOWNLOAD

Reno Lake

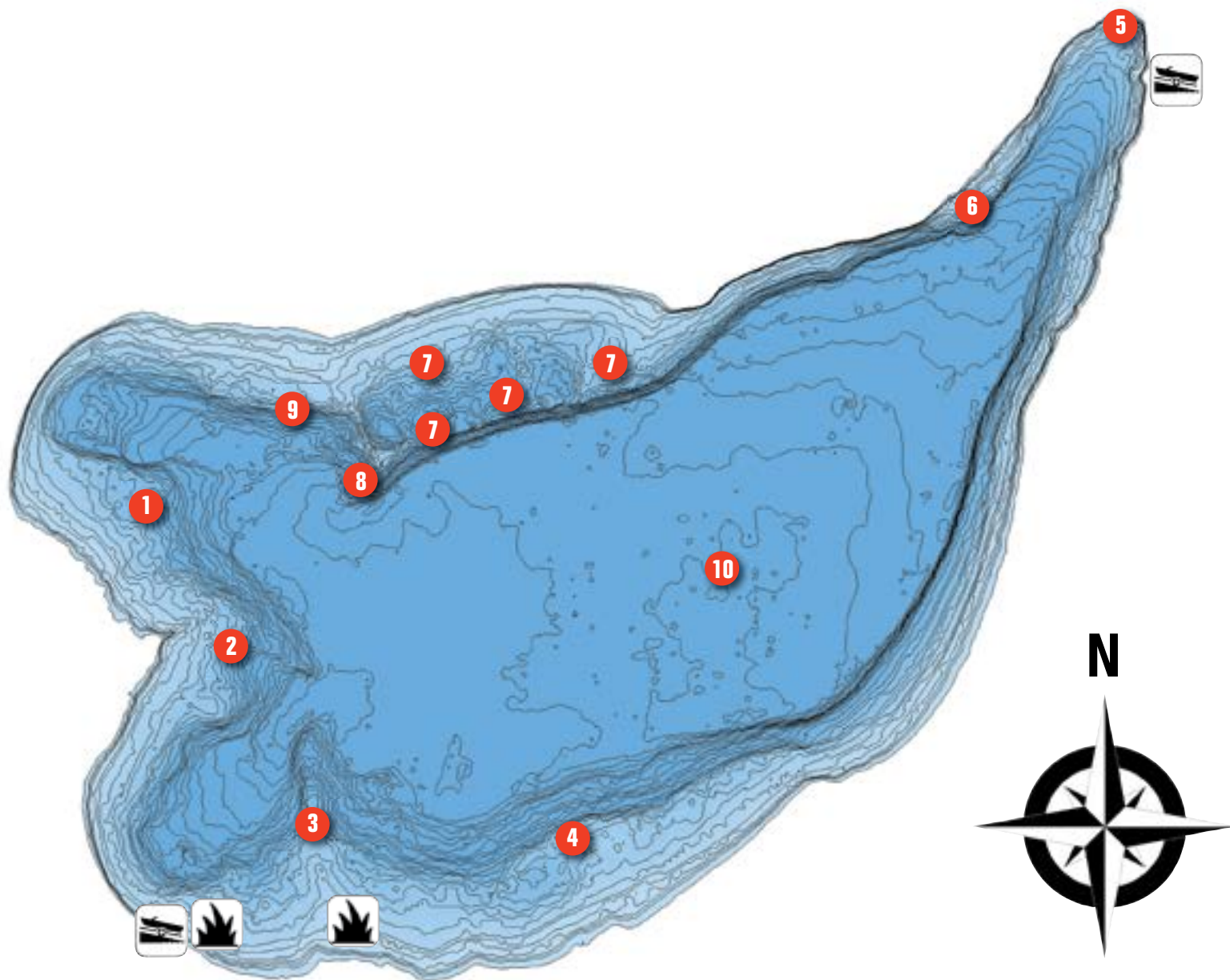
by MWO Field Staff



LOCATION: Western Minnesota between the towns of Glenwood and Alexandria in Pope County.

SIZE/DEPTH: Reno Lake is a 3,793-acre, moderately clear natural lake connected to Maple Lake. It has an agricultural watershed, and is subject to summer algae blooms. The lake has a maximum depth of 23 feet, and is best known as a good walleye fishery with an abundant population of yellow perch forage. Walleyes, largemouths and pike grow to good-to-large size. Winter fishing is excellent. Two concrete boat ramps are available in the northeast and southwest portions of the lake.

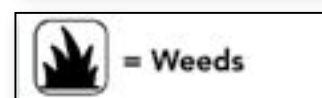
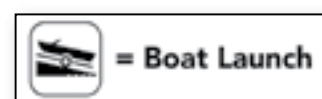
SPECIES: Black crappies, bluegills, green sunfish, hybrid sunfish, largemouth bass, northern pike, pumpkinseeds, rock bass, smallmouth bass, walleyes. Also present are black bullheads, brown bullheads, yellow bullheads, yellow perch, bowfins (dogfish), common carp, shorthead redhorses, white suckers, blackchin shiners, blacknose shiners, bluntnose minnows, common shiners, golden shiners, Iowa darters, Johnny darters, logperch, mimic shiners, spottail shiners, tadpole madtoms. Zebra mussels are also present.



- 1 Try the general point area for pike, perch, walleyes and largemouth bass.
- 2 Fish the two steep-breaking points for walleyes, perch and smallmouth bass.
- 3 Another good spot for walleyes, perch and smallmouth bass.
- 4 Fish the subtle point with moderately deep water on the backside for walleyes and pike.

- 5 Check the back of the bay for largemouth bass and bluegills.
- 6 Check the subtle points on both sides of the bay entrance for multiple species.
- 7 The entire area is a complex structure of points and turns around a modestly deep hole. Fish the edges for largemouth bass, pike and bluegills, and the basin of the hole for crappies.

- 8 Fish the tip of the steep point for walleyes and perch.
- 9 Fish the corner of the steep dropoff for pike.
- 10 Look for crappies roaming the deepest portion of the basin in winter.





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December 2024

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Section Two



Winter on the Wall

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THE STUMP SEQUOIA ICE

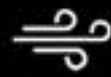


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Santa's Hints on Fishing Gear



The Ugly Stik crew had a successful morning putting the new GX2s to the test.



Jolly Ol' Saint Nick and his elves have a huge, but fun, task ahead of them to pick out just the right item for the outdoors person on their list. Hints do help: For example, couldn't most anglers use a collapsible bait bucket?

by Capt. Lee Haasch

It was an outstanding fall morning as we eased the Grand Illusion 3 away from the dock. Despite the slight cloud cover, it wouldn't be long before the wispy clouds will begin to paint the eastern sky with crimson colors of the fall sunrise. We powered offshore about 2 miles before slowing to start setting lines.

Trevor already had one Yellow Bird hooked up and going out by the time I grabbed my diver rod and began setting. Immediately, my diver rod pounded to the water, drag screaming. "Fish on! Mike, this one's yours," I hollered as I handed the bouncing rod to Mike. Seconds later, Trevor shouted, "Here we go. Downrigger!" as he

grabbed the 7-foot, medium-light action rod. tripped the release and reeled like crazy. "It's on the slider. There it is!" he exclaimed, as he gave the rod a solid pull upwards.

"Here's yours, Chris," he shouted as he handed the pumping rod off. Just like that, the sky barely was showing orange streaks of light on the horizon, and our first double coming in.

Fast-forward to early December, with boats put away, hunting seasons winding down and Christmas just around the corner. Looking for Christmas gift ideas? Here are a couple to consider.

I have been fishing with Ugly Stik rods since they came out in the 1970s. The new GX2s are a big improvement over the original versions introduced 10 years ago, which featured iconic, clear tips and their signature, tough Ugly Tech build. The new models have Ugly Tuff guides with a PVD coating to reduce line fray. The rods come with a rubberized EVA handle for better grip, a brand-new reel seat for added sensitivity, and a 10-year warranty.

If big-water trolling is your thing, ask for the medium-light, one-piece, 7'6" casting version. I use these rods to pull planer boards or as diver rods all day long. Whether you fancy trolling for king salmon, muskies or elusive walleyes, this rod works for all. For downriggers, I prefer the 7-foot, medium-light GX2 and love how you can steer the largest kings right to the net.

For inland anglers who fancy casting for panfish orb bass, or drifting rivers for walleyes or trout, how about an Ugly Stik GX2 spinning combo? It offers better balance for lighter feel, and even lady anglers will appreciate the stylish matching wraps and reel colors. From panfish to walleyes to trout

and salmon, this is a powerful, multi-species combo. You special person will remember when Santa delivered this fish catcher every time they land a big one. Ugly Stik GX2 is the next generation of Ugly Stik that combines the heritage and tradition of the original while maintaining the strength and durability Ugly Stiks are known for. Ugly Stik GX2 rods offer better balance for lighter feel, improved components, and eye catching cosmetics for a more modern look. Ugly Stik GX2 is the next generation of Ugly Stik that combines the heritage and tradition of the original while maintaining the strength and durability Ugly Stiks are known for. Ugly Stik GX2 rods offer better balance for lighter feel, improved components, and eye catching cosmetics for a more modern look.

Speaking of innovations for the multi-species fisherman, Frabill has come up with probably the most innovative piece of fishing equipment yet. How about the perfect Christmas gift for the panfish or walleye fisherman in your life? The Frabill Collapsible Bait Bucket is sure to turn their heads of panfish and walleye anglers. It comes complete with a built-in, battery-operated aerator. Carrying handles clip to the base for added support, and when folded, it is the same size as Plano 3700 stowaway. Yes, it will store right in your tackle bag with your other 3700 tackle boxes.

The aerator runs on 2 AA batteries, has a 10-inch hose with air stone, and is completely self-contained. This is a real game changer for traveling fishermen. This one is totally Santa approved and easy to wrap!

If your special angler dreams of fishing like the pros and trolling for trophy king salmon, they'll need to spread their lines out to cover more water. Yellow Bird planer boards are just the ticket to run more lines and get those baits into the fish zones wide from the boat. Yellow Bird planer boards come in 4 sizes and are my planers of choice. And they make a great stocking stuffer idea!

If your fisherman needs a tackle bag to hold a collapsible cooler, round out your gift order with an Ugly Stik 3700 Tackle Bag. This stylish bag holds 4 size 3700 boxes (or 3 and a collapsible bait bucket) and has



A good tackle bag helps organize new lures and tools.

many pockets for extra gear and tools. This is a must-have for all anglers to be organized. Rumor is that even Santa has a couple of these.

Has that special someone been really good this year? Maybe the new Fish Hawk Lithium Pro System could find its way under the tree with your special angler's name on it. Lure presentation is everything when trolling big water, accounting for currents and finding thermal breaks. The Fish Hawk is one of my most-counted-on pieces of electronics, day-in and day-out. The all-new lithium, rechargeable probe is 40 percent smaller and runs 50 hours on a single charge. Knowing the speed and water temperature *at your lures* is a game changer for trolling anglers.

Still not sure what to get family members for Christmas? How about a fishing or hunting vacation trip? The Midwest is loaded with lodges, resorts and charter operators that can make for a memorable vacation for you and your family. Throughout this magazine, you will find many places to book an exciting vacation that features fishing, hunting or just relaxing. And a gift subscription to *MidWest Outdoors* makes a nice stocking stuffer!

Tip of the month

Since it is Christmas time, this month's tip is about a couple stocking stuffers. Good Ol' Saint Nick would be happy to fill his bag of goodies with these products and stuff them into stocking all over the Midwest and beyond. A good fillet knife is perfect gift. As a big-water angler, I prefer the Ugly Stik 9-inch Flex Knife, but for smaller species, try the Ugly Stik 7-inch Tapered Knife.

What tackle box is complete without a good scissors? Ugly Stik Marine Shears is tops in the department with an Ugly Tuff grip, stainless steel blades, and it even scales fish! This tool needs to find a way in everyone's stocking and into their tackle bag.

MWO

Capt. Lee Haasch is a charter captain out of Algoma, Wis., with more than 45 years of Great Lakes angling and guiding experience. Haasch has been instructing anglers for over 30 years with education seminars and timely freelance articles.



Run your lures in the fish zones out to the sides of your boat with Yellow Bird planer boards. And they make great stocking stuffers!

Share your bright idea!

Have you got a favorite fishing, hunting, camping or outdoors tip? Share it with us. If we decide to use it in our column, we'll send you a useful thank you gift.

Email your tips to: info@midwestoutdoors.com

or mail to:
 Tips Editor at MidWest Outdoors
 111 Shore Drive, Burr Ridge, IL 60527

Please be sure to include your name and mailing address where we can send your prize. Prizes will not be sent until/unless your tip is chosen for publication.



Deep currents are present in many big-water trolling situations. Dial in your trolling speed at your baits using Fish Hawk electronics.

Tips for Winter Storage of Your Boat

by Don Gasaway

A survey done by BoatUS marine insurance found that most damage done to boats in storage is by four-legged vandals rather than two-legged ones.

Bass boats are likely damaged by critters during the off-season. This is probably due to putting them away uncleaned. Carpet, livewells and upholstery hold smells from the many fish landed. This smells like lunch to a hungry raccoon, squirrel or mouse.

Boat owners keep most bass boats in backyards or other locations that are attractive to critters. Once the four-legged vandals get on board, they find that fabrics used in upholstery, lifejackets and seat foam make excellent bedding. They are inclined to just set up housekeeping for the winter until evicted by the owner in spring.

Squirrels will use fiberglass as chewing material which they need to maintain their dental health.

What can you do about this?

Begin by reading the storage facility contract if you are storing it off your own property. Different contracts may apply to specific types of storage such as outdoor, indoor or boats stored on a rack.

Give the vessel a thorough cleaning before putting it in storage. Take it to one of those spray car wash places or give it a pressure wash at home. Take all your gear out and remove the drain plug. Spray the boat inside and out. By the time you get home, most of the water will have blown off the boat and you can replace the plug.

Place all removed gear in a warmer, dry storage area. The family garage is a good location, but so are rental storage places. This includes batteries, trolling motors, PFDs, emergency gear, outboard motors, removable fuel tanks, etc. It protects them not only from the elements but also from theft.

During storage, make frequent visits to the boat to evict any critter than has taken up housekeeping. There are commercial



Your boat may have to sit out in some beastly weather this year. By preparing it, you may save it from damage that will have to be repaired next spring. Photo: pexels.com

repellants available. You can make your own by placing a large jar of ammonia in the boat. Just punch holes in the top of the jar to let the scent come out. Mothballs also make a good repellent.

When visiting your boat, park away from any boats parked on jackstands. Do not adjust jackstands and never tie off to a jackstand. If storing your boat in the water, bring a friend with you so, if you slip on an icy

dock, there is someone to help if needed.

If all else fails, try one of those low-voltage electric pet fences that you can get at a pet store.

No matter how careful you have been, the gelcoat finish of most bass boats gets nicks and scratches. Lee Robertson, Event Support Manager for Skeeter Boats, has some tips for repairing the damage prior to winter storage. "As far

as fiberglass, I like to have it real clean," he maintains. "I use products that most people probably won't use." He uses a Meguiar's product called Quik Wax. It is easier to apply and does not turn white when you get it on the rub rail or some of the rubber parts on the boat.


Wax is good because it is a protector and helps protect against UV damage.

Gelcoat is much like it has been for the past 20 or 30 years, other than some changes in chemicals and some added chemicals to help UV resistance. It is the outer layer of a fiberglass boat that gives it the shine and color. Gelcoat is a hard resin that is more durable than just paint. It will last quite a long time and you can refinish it as the need arises.

You can buff it out. Remove small scratches and imperfections with a good compound for buffing, and sand with a very fine grade of sandpaper. Careful: You can do that up to the point where you clear off the top of the metal flake. When you get to that point, you're basically into the paint. Getting through the flake requires refinishing the boat unless you want to go have it clear coated.

With a little care and hard work, you can put that boat away this fall, confident it will be looking good in spring. It will also save you time in spring when the fish are waiting for you to catch them. **MWO**


Don Gasaway is a freelance outdoor writer from Marion, Ill. who has written more than 1,000 magazine articles. Find him on Facebook at: facebook.com/donsjournal. Comments and reviews are welcome




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Winter on the Wall

Lake Michigan piers offer December fishing opportunities

by Marc Wisniewski

December is one of those weird months for fishermen here in Wisconsin. The inland lakes may have just crusted over enough that you can't put your boat or kayak in anymore. And over the last few years, we haven't had decent ice till January. So, what's left?

Well, here in Wisconsin, none of us are too far from a slice of Lake Michigan. Unless we have an unusual cold snap, Lake Michigan is wide open for business in December. So, if you are done deer hunting, waiting for ice and want to wet a line, this could be your best option.

Some of you are already savvy at Lake Michigan and are coming off a stretch of fall salmon fishing in one of the harbors from Kenosha up to Door County. Most of that is over by December. There may still be a spawning coho finding its way up the river yet, or a post-spawn brown finding its way back to the lake. But, for the most part, spawning runs are coming to an end. The harbors that recently were full of spawning fish may now hold just a few browns that aren't too interested in eating, and a few zombie salmon that are in the final chapter of their 4-year lifespan.

December is the time to put the harbor to your back and get back out on the breakwalls to fish those main-lake, non-spawning fish again.

These outer breakwall fish are not driven by any spawning right now. They are living the good life for the winter in the main expanses of Lake Michigan, eating alewives, smelt, shiners and gobies. The near-shore waters are cold and clear and the right temperature for all the cold-water species.



December is the time to venture away from the spawning fish in harbors and get back into clean, lake-dwelling trout and salmon.

One of the most epic battles I ever had in my 50 years of Lake Michigan shore fishing was an 18-pound, three-year-old Chinook salmon that I hooked up with of Milwaukee's McKinley breakwall in early December. I've caught many much larger kings in my life, but this three-year-old, in 40-degree water on light tackle, was probably the toughest and longest fight of my life, lasting nearly 40 minutes.

I was out there geared for typical December browns: A 9-foot medium rod, with a 2500 size reel loaded with 8-pound mono. I was lifting and dropping a 1/2-ounce

K.O. Wobbler when it locked up. Within a few seconds, I knew it wasn't the normal, 3- to 5-pound browns that I was geared for. Line was burning off the reel. I was into the backing very quickly and now starting to worry about getting spooled.

As I feared getting to the end of "my rope," I cupped the spool to add pressure. This got the fish to stop running outward, but it started to track back to shore. Over the next 15 minutes, the fish proceeded to head inland, and I picked up my net and followed her for 500 yards down the length of the breakwall. During all this, thankfully, there wasn't another soul on the wall. As the fish started to now sense that it had gotten itself into shallow water, it headed back out... another 500-yard walk back out to where I started.

By now, I was getting my line back, but I still hadn't seen this fish in over a half-hour. But I was gaining line, and the runs were short, 10- to 20-foot bursts. In the gin-clear December waters, I finally saw this magnificent, chrome-bodied, three-year-old monster and slid the net under her. I've landed spawning kings over 30 pounds in 10 minutes, but this fish was at full strength, in perfect water conditions.

Let's get back on track and to the basics of December pier fishing. First, safety. Do not venture on a breakwall covered with ice or during a storm with onshore winds. Breakwalls are built to shed water back into the lake, and if they are icy, they could shed you into the lake as well.

The thought on tackle is to keep it light. Eight- to 9-foot rods with a 2500 to 3000 size reel, loaded with 8-pound mono, is the perfect December pier combo. Use what you have for rods and reels, but I recommend staying with 8-pound clear line. Braid with a long mono leader may be ok on warmer days, but braid will freeze and become a mess on colder December mornings. Your guides may build up with ice if the temps are in the 20s or teens, but mono will not freeze like braid.

It's surprising, but because the breakwalls are 6 to 8 feet off the water, a lot of the water from the line sheds off before it gets to the rod tip. I've gone to 6-pound mono in specific situations where I want longer casts with lighter lures, but there is little margin for error when fighting fish on 6-pound. Eight-pound, clear mono seems to be the sweet spot in line.

Knowing what you are after from the breakwalls in December will help you make lure selections. An 18-pound king, or an occasional big lake trout, is always a possibility, but not the norm. The norm is browns in the 3- to 8-pound range and an occasional steelhead staging for a winter run.

The baitfish around are juvenile alewives, lake shiners, some smelt and a few gobies that haven't moved offshore yet. Also, unless

a storm has roiled up the waters, this will be some of the clearest water you will encounter. Lures should be small, subtle and natural colors.

Let's start with metal. Small spoons like 1/4-ounce Cleos, #0 Mepps Syclops, 1/2-ounce K.O. Wobblers and 3/8-ounce Kastmasters are solid choices. Stick with simple silver or gold. A sleeper spoon for cold water is the Acme Sidewinder. It's been around a long time but never got super popular. If you know, you know. It falls like a leaf from a tree. They can't resist it.

Jigging spoons can be awesome because they can be fished deep. There are a ton of jigging spoons out there now. Some of the slow-fall and JDM stuff is amazing. That said, they are expensive, and you will lose some. I'd lean toward more economical things like Luhr-Jensen Crippled Herring or the Cotton Cordell CC or little Mickey spoon. Kastmasters can also be used as a jigging spoon.

On the topic of deep, blade baits are great December breakwall lures. Again, there are now hundreds of blade baits out there, but stick with some of the economical ones like Zip Lures or Wolfs Big Dudes. The same suggestions apply: Stick with plain silver, plain gold, or pearl white.

Plastics have become an integral part of Lake Michigan fishing, and this is no exception. The 2 1/2- to 2.75-inch paddle tail swim baits on a 1/4- to 3/8-ounce head are killers from the piers for these December fish. Baitfish colors or pearl white are proven for browns. Tube jigs in pearl white are also deadly in the exact same sizes. I'm a huge proponent of tubes for Lake Michigan trout. Another staple for pier casters is a Gulp minnow on a dart head jig.

Crankbaits and minnow baits also have a place in this fishery as long as they are subtle and castable. Shad Raps and Flicker Shads are very good, but you need the wind at your back to get any distance. Deep Junior ThunderSticks are incredible as well, but also have a distance handicap. Rapala DT-8s and 10s cast well and have proven themselves for me. Another classic still available are Rapala Fat Rap #5s. They are compact, cast well, and have that tight, subtle action that these trout see in their native baitfish.

For minnow baits, ThunderSticks, X-Raps and Shadow Raps are readily available and hard to beat. Pull them, stop and go, slash them, Browns love a minnow bait. Remember that these winter trout are cold-water fish. Even if the water is 36 degrees, they are active and will chase down a bait.

As with any fishing, first light and last light are always best. That said, at this time of the year, you can catch fish all day long. In fact, they will often move shallower as the day goes on if the sun is warming the shallows.

There are major breakwall opportunities from Kenosha up to Sturgeon Bay, and even Oconto on the bay side. These piers will get you out to 25 to 30 feet of water and give you a shot at these wintering fish.

If you are stuck between a rock and a hard place this month, where your inland lakes are crusted over but there is not enough ice to walk on, consider Lake Michigan. But it's time to look away from all the spawning fish in the harbors, and to look back to the lake for the non-spawners, or maybe even post spawners that are eating again. This fishery could get you through December, or you may try it all winter as the weather allows. In most areas, you could have a pier all to yourself. And you may see me out on that pier! **MWO**

Marc Wisniewski is an avid Wisconsin angler specializing in Lake Michigan shore and inshore fishing. He also chases bass, pike, and muskies anywhere he can. He has built custom rods for 35 years and makes lures from wood, lead and soft plastics. Wisniewski has been writing fishing articles for more than 30 years.

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Old Books Bring Back Great Memories

by Mike Yurk

As I get older—especially since I reached Social Security years—I have been recapturing some of my youth. I find old rods and reels and fishing baits (many I could never afford back in the day with my weekly grass cutting jobs) and use them again.

From young on, I have always been a big reader. Reading was a major part of my boyhood and still is today as an adult. Some of the books I read in those early years influenced me to become a writer. I wanted to write stories like that, too.

In the last few years, I have been looking for some of the books I remember so well from my youth, not only for the story itself, but also for the memories. Here are some of them:

Trap-Lines North by Stephen W. Meader. When I was in seventh grade, I found this book in my middle school library. It was written sometime in the 1930s. It was a true story, following a young man from Ontario who took over his father's trap-line. The father broke his leg just before the winter trapping season, and as trapping was a major part of the family's yearly income, it was imperative to continue the trap-line that winter. The book starts with the young trapper getting ready for the season and then throughout the winter. There is even a bit of drama and mystery about a wolf at the end of the book.

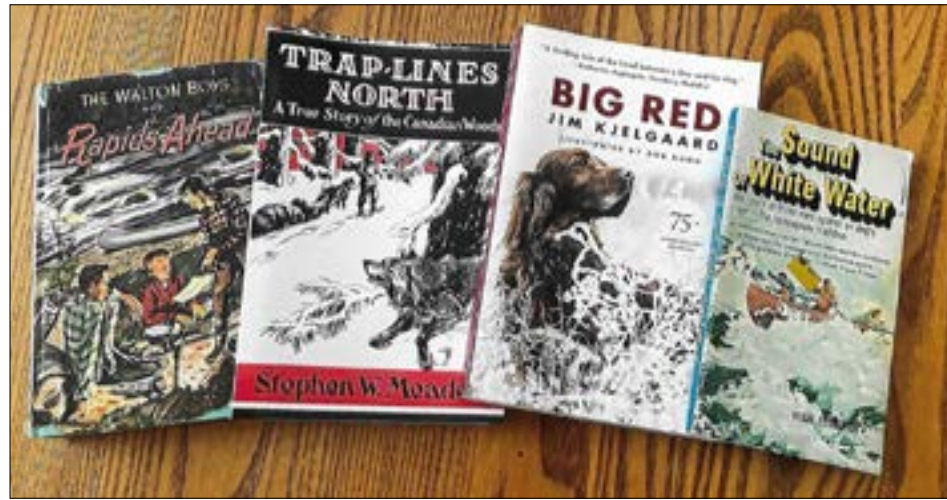
I loved the book, and a few months later when I went back to the library to check it out again, I found that someone had stolen it. I thought about the book often over the years and recently went to find it. I couldn't remember the author, but Google helped me out and I found that the book had been republished as a paperback. I ordered it immediately, and it was fitting that I read the book again over a week during the winter. Although it had been half a century or more since I originally read it, I found it to still be a great read.

The Walton Boys and Rapids Ahead by Hal Burton. I bought the book when I was a kid. Later, when I left home, I gave it away and it disappeared. It is a story of three young brothers on a summer canoeing adventure. A villainous father and son are following them to extract some revenge from encounters during a previous adventure of the three brothers. The brothers fish for trout as they are going downriver, using Mikey Finn streamers. About that time, I was getting into fly fishing, and one of the first flies I bought was a Mickey Finn.

As well as I remembered the story, I couldn't recall the name of the book of the author, so it was tougher to find. Generally, if you just mention the basic plot on Google, it will recognize it. It didn't happen this time, however. I started looking for the book in junk shops and used bookstores where they usually have a section for old teen books from the 1950s and '60s.

As much as I searched through them, I couldn't find it until one afternoon when my wife and I stopped at the antique/junk store in Red Wing, Minn. I seemed attracted to this shelf of books—and there it was. I had been looking for it for years. It was published by Whiteman Publishing Company in Racine, Wis., specializing in publishing young teen adventure and mystery books from the 1940s through the 1980s. I bought it, went home and read it that weekend. The fishing, canoeing and camping scenes were still exciting, and it took me back to being twelve years old again.

Big Red by Jim Kjelgaard—one of the classics of young reader's outdoor books. It is a timeless story of a boy and a dog and their adventures in the wild mountains where he and his father live, hunting, fishing and trapping. Big Red was a champion Irish Setter



show dog, owned by a wealthy landowner. The hero is a young 17-year-old named Danny whom the landowner entrusts with Big Red. The book follows Big Red's training as a bird dog and Danny and Big Red's adventures together, which culminate in hunting a rogue bear terrorizing the county.

Jim Kjelgaard was a prolific writer in the mid-1940s until his death in 1959. Several more of his books were published after he passed away. For many of the years he was writing, he lived in Milwaukee, Wis. I loved all his outdoor books, but he also wrote a lot of historical fiction for young readers. *Big Red*, first published in 1945, is perhaps his best known and most popular book. Walt Disney made a movie of it in 1962. Recently, *Big Red* was republished as a 75th anniversary edition. Although it has been half a century since I last read it, the book still is an exciting adventure with great characters in a great outdoor setting.

The Sound of White Water by Hugh Fosburgh. First published in the mid-1950s, this is a thrilling adventure story of three men canoeing a large wilderness river. Two of the

men are longtime buddies, and the third man is a new addition to this annual canoe trip. There are great scenes of canoeing, fishing and camping throughout the book, as well as the powerful testament to three men bonding and depending on each other as they battle the river and the wilderness. Surviving a deadly rapid at the end of the book is an exciting conclusion to the story.

I originally read this book many years ago in the late 1960s and loved it. Some twenty years later, I came across a large bin of used paperback books in a K-mart store and found a copy of it. I bought and have carried it around ever since. Recently, I thought I lost the book, but found it again after tearing through several boxes of books; since then, I put the book in my library. I had to reread it again, and the story is just as exciting as it was when I first read it.

The Big Two-Hearted River by Ernest Hemingway. Although not a book, it is one of Ernest Hemingway's greatest short stories. It follows Nick Adams, an autobiographical character, on a solo trout fishing/camping trip in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. For

fishermen, especially trout fishermen, it is a must read.

The story is divided into two parts. Part 1 follows Nick as he gets off a train, hikes to the Big Two-Hearted River and sets up camp. Part 2 is the next day when Nick goes trout fishing and catches two big fish.

There is more to the story, as Nick, like Hemingway, was wounded in the First World War and took a fishing trip to Upper Michigan to recuperate both in body and spirit. Regardless of that, it can be read simply as a fishing adventure. I first read it as a young teenager, and today it is my favorite Hemingway short story; and as only Hemingway can, puts you right in the trout stream with the water rushing around your legs, feeling the first tug as a fish hits the bait. It has meant so much to me that I usually read it once every winter.

It was first published in 1925 in Hemingway's *In Our Time*, his first collection of short stories. It has recently been published as a small, hard cover centennial edition with a lengthy explanatory forward by John Maclean, the son of Norman Maclean, the author of *A River Runs Through It*.

All these books were influencers for me. I caught the bug to write from an early age, in part, because of these stories. But just as importantly, they are still, after half a century and reaching senior citizen status, great stories bringing back wonderful memories.

MWO

Mike Yurk grew up in Oshkosh, Wis., where he first started writing about the outdoors. A retired Army officer, he is now a full-time, freelance outdoor writer. He has written more than 1000 articles for outdoor publications and published 12 books on outdoor sports. He lives in northwestern Wisconsin where he has found some of the best bass fishing in the country.

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Planning an Ice Fishing Trip



The right mix of research, lodging and packing can lead to a successful trip.

by Blake Tollefson

After back-to-back, less-than-ideal ice seasons, anglers are champing at the bit to get back on the ice. Subpar conditions the past few years led to an extreme lack of ice time, in addition to modified plans and canceled trips.

Destination angling is a large part of the ice fishing experience. For many, it serves as their only real fishing time throughout the season. Trips are a perfect opportunity to spend time with friends and family, as well as to enjoy new experiences.

If a trip is the plans for this winter, there are numerous factors to consider.

Location

The first step in planning a successful fishing trip is picking a location. Anglers in the Midwest are fortunate because high-quality destinations are in abundance. As a result, narrowing it down can take some time and effort.

Species-specific

The path of least resistance starts with a decision regarding target species. If you want to fish for walleyes, then you should probably pick a location known to house a lot of walleyes: Think lakes like Red Lake, Lake of the Woods and Lake Winnibigoshish. If you want more variety, then look for an area that offers just that. Regions like Minnesota's Ottertail County and Wisconsin's Vilas County have a seemingly endless list of lakes with opportunities for species of all types.

Travel time

Another consideration for picking a location is distance. For some, travel time is far from a concern; but for others, it's a real sticking point. Figure out how far

you're willing to travel and go from there. Depending on where you live, that might mean a few options, or it might mean many.

Tools

There's a ton of ways to find information on fishing destinations including social media, search engines and word of mouth. Department of Natural Resources web sites or local community web sites can also help narrow down some of the specifics.

When it comes to the actual fishing, the all-new onX Fish app may be one the best resources. Although it's a relatively new release, it has already proven itself for anglers across the Midwest. The app is literally packed to the gills with all the information anglers need to find a fishing location.

The most beneficial aspect? The app's extensive lake database. Employ the search tool to sort by species, lake size and accessibility, or simply just browse the map. The comprehensive database includes detailed data summarized by species, abundance and size. With filters for "trophy potential" and "keeper potential," the decision-making process becomes increasingly easier.

Details on size, depth and water clarity are included for each lake, as well as direct links to fishing regulations. Like other onX apps, the "Fish" app comes standard with landowner data so you can verify property lines in the field.



Lodging options are in abundance.

Lodging

While the destination is important, lodging is a substantial aspect as well. Obviously, if you intend to fish an area, you want to ensure there are adequate accommodations. Thankfully, in this modern area, there are tons of options at the ready.

Resorts

Perhaps the most obvious choice for lodging on a fishing trip is a resort. Most premier fishing destinations are home to resorts and lodges, many of which tailor their operations specifically to anglers. Amenities like fish cleaning shacks and direct access to the lake can certainly sweeten the pot. Additionally, many of these establishments have kitchens and common areas in each unit which are great for handling meals and camaraderie time.



The onX Fish app is a great tool for picking a location.

These options are also great if you have a bigger group. Most resorts and lodges have at least a few cabins that can handle large numbers of people.

Hotels

Another option for lodging is a hotel. While they're definitely less fitted to groups of fishermen, they can still be a good choice. Hotels, and motels, are found in both rural and urban communities, so no matter where you plan to stay, there's probably an option or two.

If you have a small group or you're only worried about having a place to rest your head, then this may be the best option. Additionally, the lack of a full kitchen is probably far from a concern for groups that plan to eat out for most meals.

Short-term rentals

In recent years, the explosion of the short-term rental industry has increased options immensely. Services like VRBO and Airbnb allow home- and cabin owners the ability to rent out their properties on a short-term basis. For the angler who wants something with all the accommodations, this is a fantastic option. Short-term rentals give users the ability to find lodging in areas where other options might be sparse.

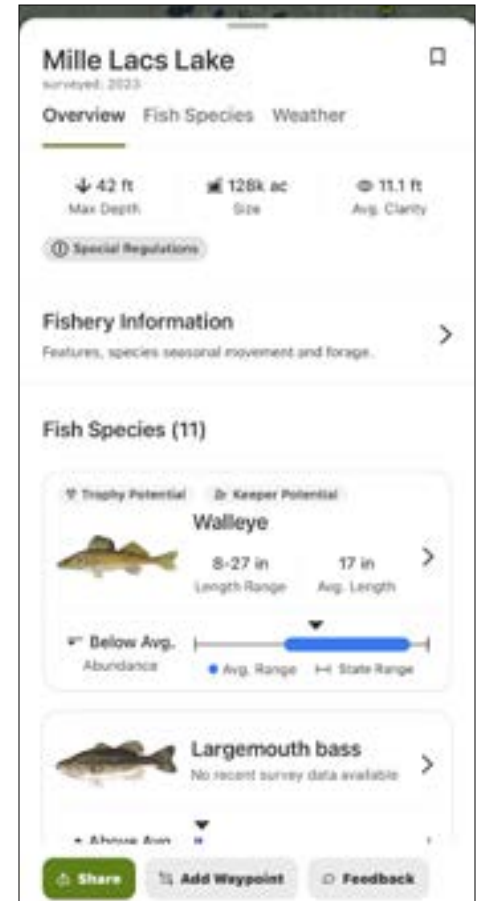
VRBO and Airbnb-based options allow anglers to query based on exactly what accommodations they want. Number of bedrooms and bathrooms, high-speed internet access, kitchen space and many others are all filterable. Maybe you want a sauna or a game room. Depending on the area, you can probably find some of those more exclusive offerings.

Sleeper shacks

The most unique lodging options in the bunch are permanent ice houses. These are great places to stay, especially if you want to maximize your time on the ice.

The sleeper shack experience bears a lot of similarities to camping in an RV. In most instances, amenities are limited to a series of bunk beds, a small cooking setup, and maybe a television. The overall experience is a little more rugged than the others, as running water is not a likely addition.

Ice rentals are better suited for smaller groups, unless you want to rent several shacks. Large parties may want to look at other options. If you've never spent a night on the ice, it's an experience worth having.



Gear

Having the right gear is key to a successful ice fishing trip. Packing is a task of its own. It's like packing for a typical vacation, but with a lot of added gear. The best piece of advice: Make a list and check it twice.

Requirements for an ice fishing trip are largely contingent on the location and type of lodging. For instance, the necessities for a stay in a sleeper shack can vary greatly from one in a short-term rental. Determine which amenities are included in your lodging and which ones aren't, and then plan your list accordingly. Major factors to consider include sleeping arrangements and meal planning, both of which are dictated by what your lodging has to offer.

Since you're fishing, you'll obviously want your fishing gear. A simple list includes rods, reels, tackle, electronics, augers, heaters and shacks. Some more unconventional items include extension cords and power strips, extra batteries of all kinds, and a boot dryer.

While they aren't a necessity, an extra pair of boots, spare gloves, and extra electronics can sure make a difference if you run into the unexpected.

Ice fishing trips are a great way to enjoy the outdoors. They're the perfect excuse to spend time with family and friends and maybe even develop a new tradition. Adequate research, the right lodging, and proper packing will ensure that you have an enjoyable experience. **MWO**

Blake Tollefson is a fisherman and outdoor writer from Wisconsin. He spends more than 150 days a year on the water targeting a variety of species, including panfish, walleye, trout, and smallmouth bass. He works with several fishing companies, including St. Croix Rods and Eurotackle. Email him at blake.tollefson@gmail.com.



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Fishing Adventures in Waders

by Bob Jensen

Some friends and I gathered recently, and the talk turned to fishing. We spoke about different fishing trips that we had been on lately, lures that had been productive (and some that had not been productive), and a variety of other topics geared toward fishing. Not catching, just fishing.

The conversation eventually turned to our early years of fishing. Most of the members of our group had spent a significant portion of their younger years fishing while wading. It was agreed that wading added a little or a lot of excitement to our fishing. The excitement wasn't all from catching fish, and it was determined that many of these exciting events were best not shared with parents.

One group member shared that there is quicksand along Iowa rivers. Others agreed, but none had encountered any that was more than waist deep.

Another member had discovered that if you're walking through a pasture along the river and there's a herd of cows and a protective bull, the bull will quit chasing you when you jump in the river. It's impressive how fast a normally slow guy can run in a pair of chest waders when a bull is chasing him. Try to find a not-real-deep spot in the river to jump into.

At some point in our wading careers, we had to decide if hip waders or chest waders were the better option. We all went the chest wader route. Chest waders let us get into more areas of the river. Most of us learned the hard way that chest waders were the same as four-wheel drive pickups. They allowed you to get in trouble in places that were harder to



A jig/plastic bait combo is the way to go when wading.

get out of. We learned that with four-wheel drive trucks, you get stuck in two-wheel drive and back up in four-wheel drive. You don't want to get stuck in two-wheel and then keep going forward in four-wheel. You're probably going to get even more stuck.

With chest waders, you go as deep as you can with hip waders, then go back. Continuing into deeper water was and still is a bad idea. Several in our group had gotten into swifter, deeper water with chest waders than was advisable. That's another happening that wasn't shared with parents for a while.

We agreed that it's very important to know about the ownership of the property where you'll be fishing. Most of our wading adventures were and still are on private property, and the owners of that property understandably want to know who's out there. Things were much simpler back in the day. If property ownership changed, we knew

about it. Not always so today. Get permission from the person who can legally give permission to be on the desired property.

Everyone agreed that a jig with a plastic tail was the best bait choice. Not because the fish liked it better, but because it was much

safer to use. Crankbaits have more hooks, and as a couple of us learned, getting one of those hooks in your hand while unhooking a fish when you're a half-mile from the vehicle does not make for a pleasant outing. Especially when the fish is still attached to the bait that's stuck in your hand.

The rivers have aged, as have the anglers who waded them. The rivers have eroded, reducing fish habitat and fish populations. Our group of anglers no longer has the energy needed to wade up and down the river. However, our group enjoyed reliving those days when wading was an adventure that we're glad we experienced, and somewhat surprised that we survived.

MWO


Bob Jensen's 45-year career in the fishing and outdoor industry includes producing and hosting award-winning television and radio shows, co-authoring five best-selling books, writing a weekly syndicated outdoor column and numerous feature articles, and presenting fishing seminars at various outdoor events.

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Illinois Meeting – Note Date Change
Wednesday, December 18th | 6:00 PM
Violetta Talley – Bass Tournament Angler
Topic: DEEP WATER BASS FISHING TACTICS
AND AN INTRODUCTION TO LIVE SONAR

Talley is a professional tournament angler excelling in both the sport and the business of fishing. She has had a passion for fishing since she was three years old and is currently a tournament bass angler and outdoor enthusiast currently competing in the Midwest bass tournament circuits. She is also a professional photographer, graphic designer, structural designer, and owner/operator of a successful business that caters to several markets, including the fishing industry.

Violetta is sponsored by companies such as Grandt Rods, Daiwa, Skeeter, Yamaha, Lowrance, Missile Baits, Lake County Watersports, among others. She is currently growing her social media channels in the fishing and outdoor markets. Through her seminars Violet strives to inspire and influence all anglers from women, to youth, to adults... on all novice and professional levels. She has been a regular and popular speaker at both the Chicagoland, Fishing, Travel & Outdoor Expo as well as the Indianapolis Boat, Sport & Travel Show giving seminars on many topics of interest to veterans as well as beginning anglers.

Talley's presentation should help our club members improve their fishing success on many of the Club Lakes "pressured" waters we fish, e.g., Geneva, Delavan, Fox Chain O'Lakes, Pewaukee, etc. Learn more about her at fireandearthphoto.com and her other social media accounts – Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.



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Chase Parsons –
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Topic: BIG WATER WALLEYES



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Give the Fishing Gift that Keeps on Giving: Jigs

by Tom Luba

A few weeks ago, I was perusing the fishing bait racks of a major outdoor supplier. As I looked, I overheard two ladies on the other side of the aisle discussing the coming of the big dude in red. I think they had been talking before I arrived.

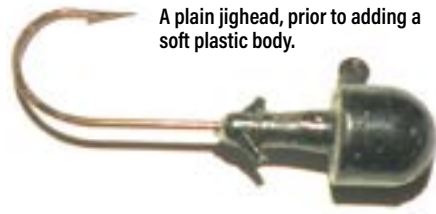
"Well," said lady Number One, "What kind of baits are you looking at for Jim this Christmas? I remember you got him a reel last year."

"That's it," said Number Two. "He returned the reel for a smaller size. He fishes for almost all species. But I don't know what's what. There are so many choices."

"And I know," said Number One, "so little time."

"To eliminate some choices," she continued, "do you know a type?"

"I did hear him talk about fishing jigs for walleyes and bass. Crappies, too. But getting several of them at retail can get quite expensive. And I don't know the right ones."



A plain jighead, prior to adding a soft plastic body.

"That is certainly a hint," said Number One. "So, let's get moving,"

I thought about making some suggestions, because I fish a lot of jigs, too. But by the time I turned the corner, they had disappeared; my guess was that they blended in perfectly with everything on the racks of outdoor clothing in the next department over. Men's and women's.

It may be tough to pick out a gift for people who have a lot of tackle. But then again, maybe it isn't.

I know how I started fishing jigs, so maybe the perfect gift is one that your significant angler can use to make their own. One mold could cover several species. That way, he/she can make the size and number of what they want. And then control key variables, like color and pattern.

I started pouring with a basic, round head mold, which is really the best place to start. Manufactured by Do-it Molds in Denver, Iowa (do-itmolds.com), it covers a bunch of sizes from 1/32- to 1/2-ounce. The nice thing is that you can mold however many you need of a size. For instance, spring walleyes that have migrated toward river dams to spawn may require 1/2-ounce. And you may require a number, as rivers have no shortage of snags. A 1/32-ounce size works for crappies, because you can find them in shallow weeds to spawn, and suspended



Marabou, deer hair, Flashabou and craft fur tied on round-head jigs.

over deeper water after they are done. (That may require a slightly heavier weight, like 1/16-ounce). But no significant snags to grab your wallet.

This kind of mold uses different size hooks for each head. It might be easier just to get all the sizes and make all the options just to have some of everything for other possibilities. You'll also need accessories for making them. Like soft lead, a small pot for melting and pouring lead, plus paint, a jig vise, body material, thread, a tying bobbin and a small scissors, if jig bodies are to be tied.



A small melting pot is a great starter—and maybe all you need.



Four different patterns of the Canadian Jig Fly.

For instance, fishing for river smallmouth bass may require deer hair bodies. And they like black. A 1/8-ounce head can be worked across bottom pretty well. But you will lose some; it's the nature of the game.

For walleyes, you might want to vertically jig a 1/2-ounce chartreuse jig straight up off bottom. Material like marabou or craft fur may fit the bill. Most jigs fare better with a minnow trailer. Live bait may allow fishing a plain head, painted or unpainted. If that's the case, you may not even need to actually tie a material body on the jig. Plain heads or fluorescent orange painted heads tipped with a minnow are all that might be needed.

I've caught a lot of fish on body-less jig heads. Pretty much every species at one time or another. That is one way to save money. Then decide if full bodies are the next step. If so, buy materials for bodies after the jigs are created. Just match the bait size and jig weight to the appropriate species and depth.

A few other aspects of jig making might be fun. Go shopping for color, like paint

story continued on next page



Jig molds are identified by head style and weight range. Round heads are a good place to start pouring. More molds than ever before are available nowadays.

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'Just when the leaves start to turn' is an excellent time to chase monsters.



The author returns to the same hole when the outdoor temperature stays 50 degrees for a couple days.

by Len Harris

I have no formal training on trout or any fish. I have been fishing for over a half of a century for Driftless brown trout. Sixty-two years to be exact. I caught my first monster at age five and have been chasing monsters since then.

I have turned many of my fishing friends on to their personal best browns. I take at least 20 assists on tips on where to go to score that mythical 20-incher.

I have felt my friends' pain on at least five occasions when they lost browns in the 25 to 30-inch range. I have netted eight browns for friends over 26 inches, and one friend I have netted three over 30 inches for him and two

more over 27 inches.

I destroyed my 36 years of logbooks about four years ago. I have caught so many big browns through the years that they run together. I thought that much information in the wrong hands could be detrimental to my trout population.

Most of the monsters were caught in bigger water. Most are below non-designated trout water in low-traffic areas. Most have springs in proximity.

I am not saying that all bigs come from big water, however. There are plenty of nightmares in streams that can be stepped across in most places. I no longer chase trout on the weekends due to spot stealers.

My knees are bad, and my trips have

become shorter and less frequent. Just recently, I returned to the same hole where I caught an above-average female brown four years prior. I have been back twice a year since then. I like to dream about how big she could be. I get fired up as I approach her home. I am only disappointed for a short while after she does not hit. I typically wonder why she did not do the dance with me. Did she die of old age? Is she too smart now to hit again? These are the questions that keep me coming back. "Where did she go?"

I decided to consult some folks with the skills to answer my questions. I have been talking via emails to the most reputable trout expert in Wisconsin. He has won awards and has a doctorate in Fisheries Science. He works for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. His name is Dr. Matt Mitro. He has done studies with other DNR professionals on browns and aging.

I asked my two favorite WDNR employees how long a Wisconsin driftless area brown lived. I told them I knew the info was an educated guess, and who better to make the educated guess? Below is the information I gleaned from Dr. Matt Mitro, Fisheries Research Scientist, and Kirk Olson, Fisheries Biologist. They talked on emails and collectively helped with the story.

Dr. Mitro's input


Dr. Mitro says, "Wisconsin small-stream trout can live to 9 to 10 years old, with the rare brown that can live another 1 to 3 years



This non-designated waterway has been good to the author, but it becomes impassable by the end of May.

longer. The average is 4 to 6 years."

The best example Matt has is of a brown trout caught/shocked repeatedly over several years. The brown trout he first caught and tagged with a color implant tag was in spring of 2011. They do not tag young-of-year trout, so this fish was a minimum of 1 year old. The second time he caught it, two years later in 2013, he gave it a second tag. He then caught that fish eight more times through 2018. The last time they caught it, it was 21.1 inches long, 3.7 pounds, and had to be a minimum of 8 years old. Matt would guess it probably was tagged as a 1-year-old in 2011 given that it was 10.4 inches in 2013. The tagged brown was shocked in a heavily fished stream. Matt's data collection has documented

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This oddly marked female warranted *eight* return trips in different seasons to attempt to catch it again.

these lengths and weights:

"The longest fish was a 22-inch male brown trout. I don't have a weight for it. The heaviest was a 3.75-pound male brown trout that was 21 inches long.

"The largest female brown trout was 21.25 inches and weighed 3.3 pounds.

"If I had to guess on age, I'd say all these were in the 8- to 10-year-old range. I've seen much smaller fish in that age range, too (based on tag-recapture).

"Browns that get bigger have access to rivers to put the feed bag on.

Kirk Olson's input

Oldest age

"Matt's done a lot more ageing than my crew, so I'll defer to him. Age 10-12 feels about right for the max age of large browns in streams around here. Last time my crew aged trout was on a very small stream in Vernon County. Our oldest brown trout, based on otolith cross-sections, was approximately 6 years old, and only 11.2 inches. It wasn't the largest fish in our sample; we caught several larger fish (up to 14.9 inches), but we aged them between 3 and 5. Otolith cross-section is a stone in brown's head that is the best way to get ages."

Average growth?

"My crew has been tagging and recapturing fish at our annually surveyed trend sites since 2021. In that time, we've recaptured 385 tagged brown trout that give us a decent picture of what growth looks like in those six streams.

"Growth rate is highly dependent on trout size. Growth is rapid in the early years of a trout's life and, generally, growth declines as the fish reaches maturity and gets larger. For

example, brown trout that we initially marked between 6 to 9 inches grew an average of 2.2 inches a year, while those 9 inches and larger grew an average of 1.0 inch a year.

"The two largest fish that we've marked were 16.5 and 17.2 inches at marking. The 16.5-incher grew to 16.7 in a year and the 17.2-incher grew to 17.7 in a year.

"Stream also plays a role; we see quite a bit of variation among the six streams where we tag fish. Growth can also vary quite a bit among individual fish of similar size in the same stream. For example, we've seen growth of 9-inch brown trout in Vernon County vary from 1.8 to 4.0 inches in a year."

Fewer large browns?

"I haven't seen a decline in larger brown trout based on our more recent data or my general observations from the past 7 years. Looking at our trend data from 2008 to 2024 on six streams, maximum lengths haven't declined over time."

Growth rates vary from stream to stream. There are many factors when it comes to growing an old trout. *Old* does not always equate to *big*. An overpopulated stream will grow some big browns. Both Matt and Kirk have shocked monsters from populated creeks that have high traffic. Overfishing can cause fewer fish and fewer big ones. Heredity has some impact. Colder water in streams slows down growth rates.

Brown trout can spawn repeatedly in consecutive years, but not all do. It is possible that an older trout may spawn one year and then not the next, for whatever reason.

In general, the larger the female trout, the more eggs it can produce. There is certainly variability among individuals, but as size goes up, egg production goes up.



This tank of a female was never seen again, despite many return attempts.

Both Matt, Kirk and I agree that big brown trout are still out there and are *not* on a downward trend.

Thank you, Matt and Kirk, for helping me and for the fine work you do for our resources. **MWO**

Len Harris lives in the heart of the Wisconsin driftless area. He fishes for anything that has fins. His first love is small stream trout fishing, with northern pike fishing a close second. Harris writes for many local papers and has written two books that are available on Amazon.

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WISCONSIN Sportsman's Calendar

SPORTSMEN CLUBS

The Lake Geneva Fishing Club— holds regular meetings the second Wednesday of February – June and September – November at Poplar Creek Bowl in the Barrington Square Shopping Center, 2534 W Higgins Rd., Hoffman Estates, IL 60169, (847) 310-3227. Meetings begin at 6 p.m. with food and beverage available for purchase at 5:15 p.m. July and August meetings are held in conjunction with weekday fishing outings which will be announced on our website. **There is NO scheduled December meeting.** Please check our website lakegenevafishingclub.com for any updates. The cost for the 2023 membership is \$50. Family membership (member, spouse & children under 16) is available for \$70. Either membership option also includes a 1 year subscription to *MidWest Outdoors Magazine*. For information contact Bob Clark at 847-274-8247, email info@lakegenevafishingclub.com or visit lakegenevafishingclub.com.

Wisconsin Fishing Club, Ltd.— Meetings are held on the 2nd and 4th Mondays during the months of Jan., Feb., March, May, Sept., and Oct.; and on the 2nd Mondays during June, July, August (summer schedule), November and December, and on the 4th Monday in April. The 2nd Monday in April are the DNR hearings and we prefer our members attend the DNR meetings. Meetings starting at 7 p.m., with speakers at 8 p.m. Location of meetings: Grainger's Pub & Grill, 3500 West Howard Ave. (Loomis Rd. & Howard Ave.) Milwaukee, WI. Contact: Izzy Sorce, President, (414)550-0699, or at funlovnteachers@gmail.com. Guests and other fishing club members are always welcome. For info: wisconsinfishingclub.com.

Mishicot Sportsmen's Club—The Club meets on the very first Wednesday of each month at 8 p.m. Clubhouse is at 13804 Jamba Creek Road, Mishicot, WI 54228. Everyone is welcome to join. Club was founded in 1946

and is a unit of the Manitowoc County Fish & Game Prot. Assn., founded in 1907. Contact Roger Vander Logt 920-323-4882, roger@VLoutdoormedia.com.

Okauchee Fishing Club—a multi-species fishing club that fishes all over Wisconsin. We meet on the first and third Tuesday of every month from 7 – 9:30 p.m. at the New Berlin Ale House, 16000 West Cleveland Ave. New Berlin WI 53151. Our formal meeting is the first Tuesday and features great speakers, and a raffle. The cost for non-members is \$5. The third Tuesday, our shorter "informational meeting," features round table discussion with members and mini seminars by members, 20-30 minutes. Both meetings include "Fish Talk," where members share recent fishing experiences. We plan 12-14 outings a year and ongoing contests as well as an annual club tournament. We also have an annual picnic and awards banquet. Contact Jim Kophamel, club president at jkophamel@wi.rr.com or (414) 350-1011 for membership information or go to ofcfish.com.

Walleyes Unlimited USA—One of the top multi-species fishing clubs in the country. We fish for pike, muskie, large and smallmouth bass and of course walleye. We have one meeting per month alternating between Wisconsin and Illinois at 6 p.m. In Wisconsin we meet on the last Tuesday of the month at Hideaway Pub & Eatery, 9643 S. 76th St., Franklin, WI 53132. In Illinois we meet the last Wednesday of the month at Gurnee American Legion, 749 Milwaukee Ave., Gurnee, IL 60031. The **Illinois, Wednesday, December 18** meeting speaker will be Violetta Talley, Bass Tournament Angler, Topic: Deep Water Bass Fishing Tactics and an Introduction to Forward Facing Sonar. For info call Bob Clark at 847-274-8247. Please check our website walleyesunlimitedusa.org for updates.

EVENTS

Now - December 8

Ruffed Grouse season Zone B.

Now - December 10

Duck hunting season Open Water Zone.

Now - December 11

Bobwhite Quail season statewide.

Now - December 16

Regular Goose hunting season Northern Zone.

Now - January 5

Pheasant season statewide.

Now - January 5

Deer Archery and Crossbow Season (Note: no bucks may be harvested during the antlerless-only hunts of Dec. 24 - Jan. 1).

Now - January 5

Hungarian Partridge season statewide (Closed in Clark, Marathon

and Taylor Counties).
Non-profit conservation organizations, women in the outdoors, fishing, and shooting clubs, share the word about your upcoming events and tournament information in MidWest Outdoors.

and Taylor Counties).

Now - January 5

Ruffed Grouse season Zone A.

Now - January 5

Turkey hunting season Zones 1-5.

Now - February 28

Cottontail Rabbit season.

Now - February 28

Squirrel (Gray & Fox) season.

Now - March 26

Crow season statewide.

Dec. 1 - Jan 9

Regular Goose hunting season in Southern Zone and Mississippi River Zones.

December 3

Okauchee Fishing Club Annual Rummage Sale at the New Berlin V.F.W. Hall, 17980 Beloit Rd., New Berlin, WI. Hours: 7-9:30 p.m. Free admission. Eight-foot vendor tables available at \$10 ea. Sale includes an offering of both open water and ice fishing tackle and equipment. Includes a like new Minn Kota trolling motor,

Humminbird equipment, like new pro level rain suit, high-quality used fishing rods and reels, fishing nets, all types of freshwater lures, marine battery & case, muskie lures, like new plastics and much, much more—all at rummage sale prices. For more info visit our O.F.C. Facebook page or contact Don at 262-717-5449 or LMTadpole17@gmail.com.

December 2-11

Deer muzzleloader season.

December 11

Kids Fishing Days at Lynx Lake Resort, 10683 County Hwy. B, from 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Bait and mentors are provided. Lunch and prizes too! For info: Presque Isle Chamber & Lions Club, 715-686-2910, chamber@presqueisle.com.

December 12-15

Four-day Deer Antlerless-only hunt.

December 24- January 1

Antlerless-only Holiday Hunt (Open only in select farmland counties. See regulations).

SPORTS SHOWS

December 6-8

Jefferson Gun Show at Jefferson County Fair Park, 503 North Jackson Avenue, Jefferson, WI 53549. Hours: Friday 3 - 8:30 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$8. Vendor tables \$40 ea. For info: Marv Kraus Promotions, Marv Kraus, (563) 608-4401, or Andrew Kraus, (563) 608-2045, kraus.andrew.ak@gmail.com, marvkrauspromotions.net.

December 6-8

Oshkosh Gun Show at Oshkosh Sunnyview Expo Gun Show, 500 East County Road Y, Oshkosh, WI 54901. Hours: Friday 3 - 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$8, children 14 and under free. Vendor tables \$45 ea. For info: Bob and Rocco's Gun Shows, Bob Pucci, (608) 752-6677, ronmartinsemail@yahoo.com, Ron Martin, (715) 381-7991, bobandrocco.com.

December 13-14

Hillsboro Gun, Ammo & Accessory Show at Hillsboro Firemen's Community Center, 203 Mill Street, Hillsboro, WI 54634. Hours: Friday 3 - 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission \$5 good for both days. Vendor tables \$30 ea. For info: Gun Buyer Gun Shows, B.J. Keating, (608) 548-4867, keating84@ymail.com

December 13-15

The Wisconsin Ice Fishing Expo, EAA Grounds, 3000 Pobereznay Rd., Oshkosh, WI 54902. Expo hours: Friday 1 - 7 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. - 7 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Admission: \$10 for adults; \$8 for military, vets & first responders; kids 12 and under are free. Parking is \$5 with a free shuttle provided. For info: Bast-Durbin Advertising, Don Kirby (920) 413-0133, dkirby@bastdurbin.com, icefishexpo.com.

December 13-15

Waukesha Expo Forum Gun Show at Waukesha County Expo Center, 1000 Northview Road, Waukesha, WI 53188. Hours: Friday 3 - 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$8, children 14 and under free. Vendor tables \$45 ea. For info: Rocco's Gun Shows, Bob Pucci, (608) 752-6677, ronmartinsemail@yahoo.com, or Ron Martin, (715) 381-7991, bobandrocco.com.

December 20-21

Muscoda Gun, Ammo & Accessory Show at St. Johns Catholic Church Parish Hall, 116 West Beech Street, Muscoda, WI 53573. Hours: Friday 3 - 8 p.m. Saturday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission \$5 good for both days. Vendor tables \$35 ea. For info: Gun Buyer Gun Shows, B.J.

Keating, (608) 548-4867, keating84@ymail.com.

January 3-4

New Lisbon Gun Show at American Legion Post 110, 110 Welch Prairie Road / Hwy 80, New Lisbon, WI 53950. Hours: Friday 3 - 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission \$5 good for both days. Vendor tables \$30 ea. For info: Gun Buyer Gun Shows, B.J. Keating, (608) 548-4867, keating84@ymail.com.

January 17-19

All-Canada Show Milwaukee at the Brookfield Conference Center, 325 South Moorland Rd., Brookfield WI 53005. Show Hours: Friday 3 - 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. Admission: adults \$12, weekend pass \$15; children 17 and under free; Free Vets on Sunday. For info: allcanada.com, info@allcanada.com, Steve Cegielski (920) 362-0966, steve@allcanada.com or Scot Pautz, (920) 621-7874, scott@allcanada.com.

January 17-19 and 22-26

Milwaukee Boat Show, Wisconsin Expo Center at State Fair Park, 8200 W Greenfield, West Allis, WI 53214. Show Hours: Friday, January 17, 12 - 8 p.m.; Saturday, January 18, 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Sunday, January 19, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Wednesday, January 22, 1 p.m. - 8 p.m.; Thursday, January 23, 1 - 8 p.m.; Friday, January 24, 12 - 8 p.m.; Saturday, January 25, 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Sunday, January 26, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Admission: adults \$12, children (6-14) \$5. For info: ShowSpan, Inc., John Loeks, (616) 447-2860, showspan.com, events@showspan.com.

January 23-26

All-Canada Show Green Bay at the Radisson/Oneida Casino, Green Bay, WI. Show hours: Thursday, 5-9 p.m., Friday 3-8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. Admission: adults \$12, weekend pass \$15; children 17 and under free; Free Vets on Sunday. For info: All Canada Show, Steve Cegielski, allcanada.com, steve@allcanada.com, (920) 362-0966 or Scott Pautz, scott@allcanada.com, (920) 621-7874.

January 24-26

Wausau/Rothschild Gun Show at Old Patriot Center, 10101 Market St., Rothschild, WI 54474. Hours: Friday 3 - 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$8, children 14 and under free. Vendor tables \$45 ea. For info: Bob and Rocco's Gun Shows, Bob Pucci, (608) 752-6677, ronmartinsemail@yahoo.com, Ron Martin, (715) 381-7991, bobandrocco.com.

For the most up-to-date info go to:

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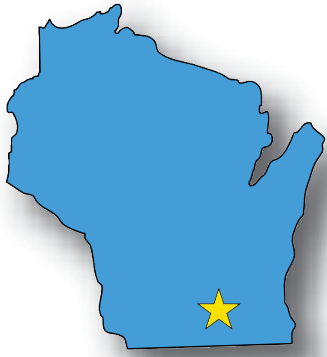
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THE LAKEMASTER® DOWNLOAD



Lake Koshkonong

By MWO Staff

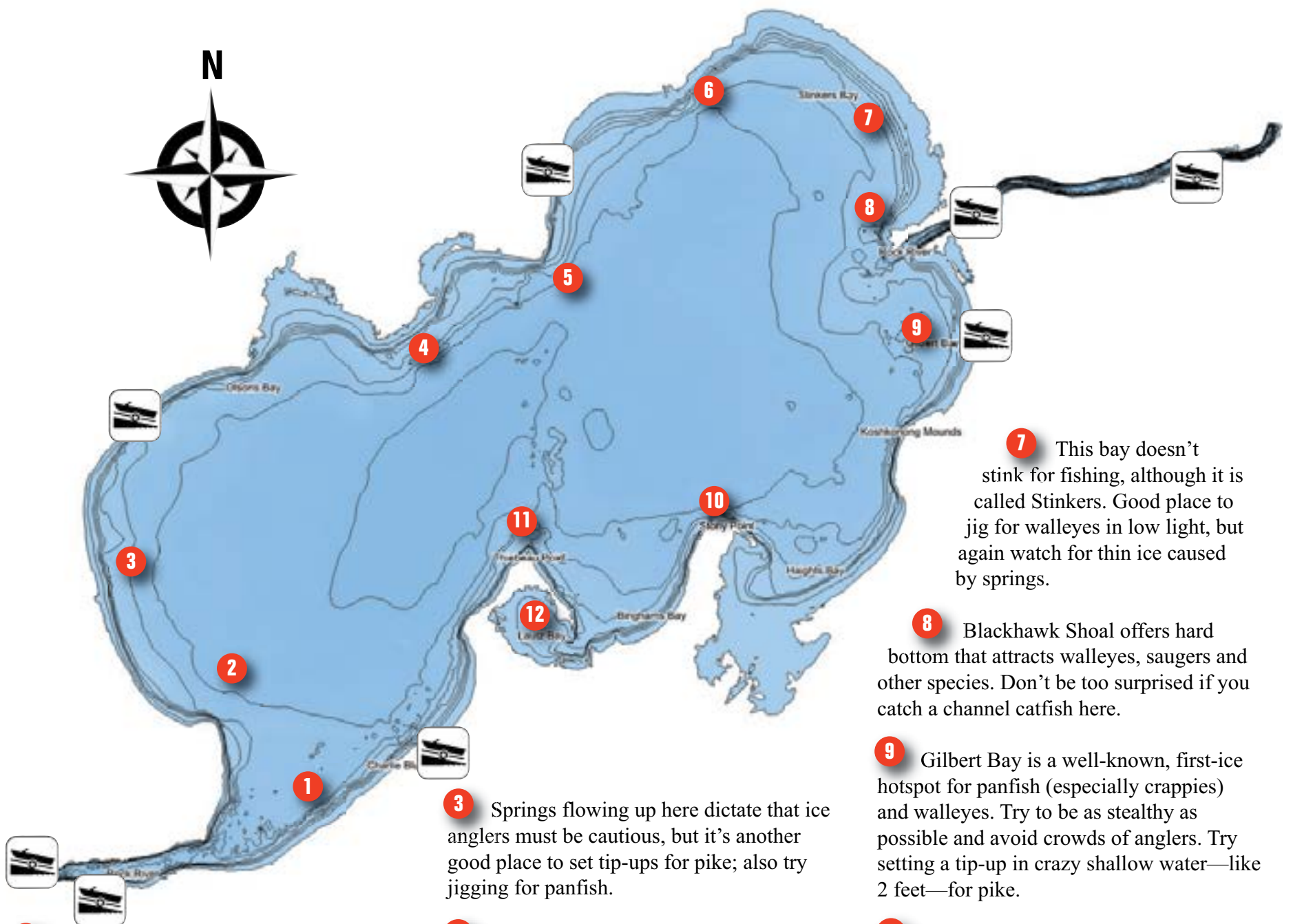


LOCATION: South-central Wisconsin, less than 40 miles southeast of Madison.

SIZE/DEPTH: A sprawling 10,595 acres, Lake Koshkonong is shallow, with most depths 5 feet or less, and the deepest areas just 7 feet deep.

SPECIES: Walleyes, bluegills, crappies, northern pike, white bass, channel cats, muskies, largemouth and smallmouth bass, saugers.

Lake Koshkonong should be approached with caution during the ice season, as it has creeks and underwater springs that can make ice unsafe in some places. The whole lake is shallow, and a big key to finding fish is pinpointing places where the bottom changes from marl to sand and rockier areas.



7 This bay doesn't stink for fishing, although it is called Stinkers. Good place to jig for walleyes in low light, but again watch for thin ice caused by springs.

8 Blackhawk Shoal offers hard bottom that attracts walleyes, saugers and other species. Don't be too surprised if you catch a channel catfish here.

9 Gilbert Bay is a well-known, first-ice hotspot for panfish (especially crappies) and walleyes. Try to be as stealthy as possible and avoid crowds of anglers. Try setting a tip-up in crazy shallow water—like 2 feet—for pike.

10 Crappies, white bass and bluegills bite close to shore off Stony Point. Head due north from here, checking electronics for hard bottom and you'll find it—and hopefully walleyes and saugers.

11 Gravelly bottom here extending off the end of Thiebeau Point hosts roving bands of saugers and walleyes throughout the winter.

12 Lautz Bay can be especially good at early- and extremely late-ice for bluegills and crappies. The occasional northern roams in here, too.

1 Find the sandy flat here in 4 to 5 feet of water and set up for walleyes with dead-sticked, live minnows. Best action is usually at dawn and dusk.

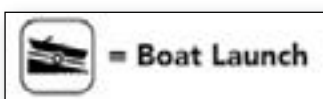
2 This area is a high-percentage sand flat for setting tip-ups with live suckers for northerns. Ice anglers can jig up white bass, bluegills, crappies and the occasional walleye here, too.

3 Springs flowing up here dictate that ice anglers must be cautious, but it's another good place to set tip-ups for pike; also try jiggling for panfish.

4 A popular place for targeting crappies with live minnows, it can also produce walleyes and the occasional pike.

5 Caracajou Point is good for both crappies and walleyes and has been the scene of occasional white bass mayhem. Live minnows do the trick for all three species.

6 A good spot for northern pike whether watching tip-ups or dead-sticking a large minnow or smallish sucker.



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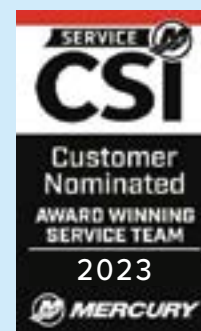
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The Burbot Season is Here



The author's lone encounter with a burbot. It looks a little different in daylight compared to at night. Photo: Bill Takacs

by Bill Takacs

There is no specific season for burbot—just a general time frame when fish are in shallower water to feed and spawn. This movement from deeper waters happens from January to March, well before ice-out in most areas of their range. They are found in larger lakes and streams across the northern portions of North America, Europe, Asia and including the Great Lakes.

You may not know this freshwater fish of the cod family by this name, as they are also called eelpout, lota, lawyer, mud shark, ling cod, snakehead, cusk or spineless catfish.

Description

The burbot is a long fish that looks like a cross between a catfish and eel. It also has a unique fin structure. A long, soft dorsal fin stretches down the back and stops just shy of its circular tail. The anal fin does the same. The head is flat and broad, and the jaws are set with numerous teeth. They have a single chin barbel and two tube-like projections coming from their nostrils. Their scales are extremely small, and their skin feels like a slippery eel.

The burbot's main colors can be anything from olive or tan to dark brown or black, mottled with darker or yellow blotches. Color varies depending upon time of year and depth of the fish.

First encounter

My one and only encounter (thus far) with this fish occurred in the late '80s on a lake in central Minnesota. One evening, after dark, my fishing partner and I decided to do some casting for walleyes from one of the resort's piers. There was a nice cabbage weed bed within easy casting distance and we were both throwing Original Floating Rapalas.

When my partner hooked a fish, we assumed that it was a walleye; but to our surprise, when we shined our flashlight in the landing net, we were both speechless. Looking at this thing with small beady eyes, a long body and a bad habit of wrapping its body around your arm, we found the whole experience a little unnerving at the time, and neither of us knew for certain what it was. I suspected that it was an eel or a burbot, but had only seen photos of burbot before. We placed the fish in the live box so that we could view it in the daylight, take a few pictures and then release it. I have never caught, nor even seen another one, since that experience.

Behavior and locations

Burbot movement to shallower water from their summer, deep-water homes in Lake Michigan makes them more available to anglers during the winter months, when they are more active at night.

For most of the year, they inhabit deeper, cooler water, often on soft-bottom areas of clear and clean natural lakes and rivers. In southern Lake Michigan, burbot have been caught in 30 to 60 feet of water, and as shallow as 20 to 30 feet on offshore reefs and near harbors and breakwalls when spawning.

Shallow flats that hold large schools of baitfish can be productive during the day.

At night, look for shallow bars, humps or breaklines adjacent to deep water to attract fish.

Fishing patterns and presentation

A combination of above-normal air temperatures the last couple winters, favorable wind direction and velocity, and the lack of ice covering the waters of Indiana and Illinois, enabled boat anglers to access Lake Michigan during the cold-water months. It is safe to say that the vast majority of the burbot caught at this time have been caught incidentally by anglers fishing for perch.

Burbot are almost exclusively eaters of small fish, although they will eat insects, small invertebrates and crayfish when available. Perch rigs are very effective, baited with fathead minnows, golden roaches or shiners, and have accounted for most burbot catches. Regular jigs with cut bait also work.

Burbot are not shy about hitting artificial baits, either, as long as they are fished close to or on the bottom. Jiggging spoons in glow finishes and blade baits like the old Heddon Sonar also take their share. Bang the bottom with these baits to stir up bottom content to attract attention. Berkley PowerBait minnows



Anthony Burke's 14-pound, 3.6-ounce state record. Photo: Indiana DNR

and curly-tailed grubs are other productive options.

Conversations with fishery biologists from Indiana and Illinois revealed a couple other options. Ben Dickinson, Lake Michigan Fisheries Research Biologist for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, stated that he has heard some fishermen have had good luck with plastic swimbaits. Will Stacy-Duffy, an Illinois Lake Michigan Program Fisheries Biologist, mentioned another bait that most of us would not think of using: fish eggs.

As far as equipment goes, the same spinning rod and reel that you would use for walleyes will do fine. A dependable size #2000 or #2500 Abu-Garcia spinning reel filled with 8- or 10-pound-test monofilament line, and a medium-action rod, should handle any size burbot you might hook.

State records

The Illinois record for burbot currently stands at 11 pounds, 12.5 ounces, caught

from the Cook County waters of Lake Michigan on December 7, 2020. Unfortunately, neither the Illinois fishing regulations publication nor their website list the fisherman who holds the record.

On January 6th of this year, a new Indiana record for burbot was set by Anthony Burke of Cedar Lake with a 14-pound, 3.6-ounce fish from Lake Michigan. The record has been broken three times in the last 13 months! The previous record was 11.4

pounds, caught in January

2023. Burke's record was caught between 50 and 60 feet of water out of Portage, Ind. on a homemade perch rig with a 2-inch soft plastic minnow.

Burbot are celebrated every year at the Eelpout Ice Fishing Festival in Walker, Minn. on Leech Lake. Besides the festivities and prizes awarded, this event also highlights the fact that burbot are delicious. Their flesh is firm and white, and when boiled and served with butter, it is known as "Poor Man's Lobster" to some folks.

I would like to thank Ben Dickinson and Will Stack-Duffy for their valuable input on fish locations and baits used in their waters.

MWO

Bill Takacs of Hammond, Ind., has been writing for MidWest Outdoors regularly since 1975, and has been published in several state, regional, and national publications. He fishes for virtually every freshwater fish from panfish to muskies, with the exceptions of sturgeon and alligator gar.

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Southern Indiana's Mysterious, Special Time for Hard Water

by Ken Mitchell

Most of you reading this issue about ice fishing probably have experience with this unusual, special time that happens in southern Indiana as early as Thanksgiving and as late as Valentine's Day. I have introduced several friends to hard-water angling, and they have all been fascinated with the experience; although the popping of the ice while it continues to freeze is a little unnerving to the newbies. If you don't want to wait for safe ice, try fishing from docks, even if you have to kick or spud a hole in thin ice.

I can't really speak to the ice fishing available in northern Indiana, but if the weather is anything like it has been in the past few years, you may not want to put your boat up this winter. But if waiting and watching the weather for a chance to slide her across skim ice, hoping you can get it back on the trailer over a newly icy ramp doesn't sound attractive, there are other options, like driving north if southern Indiana doesn't get the necessary chill. But if it does freeze this winter, here are some tips.

First, start on small ponds that you know from experience have a good population of chunky panfish. My good friend Tom Stierwalt and I once headed for Green-Sullivan State Forest close to Linton one winter day to try our luck. There was a pit I had always wanted to fish because, well, it just looked fishy. We both had ice drills, so we started cutting holes. To say we got skunked is an understatement! When we finally gave up, the pond's surface looked like Swiss cheese. I never tried that pond again after not even a nibble! One time as enough. So, if you get safe ice, try wherever you *know* there are fish!

Second, fish small. Ponds freeze up quicker than nearby larger lakes. To begin, cut a hole just a step or two away from the bank. If it only takes 3 or 4 cranks to get through, back carefully to the bank and try elsewhere, or go home and watch a ballgame on TV!

Third, never go alone! Twice, I have nearly lost good friends who went out alone! They both broke through, and had they not been former athletes, I feel they would have drowned.

Last year it was Chad Smith. His wife saw him break through from their lake house window and raced down to their dock to throw him a rope! It was too short, and Chad yelled at her not to come out on the ice. She



Jim Cain and bass that wondered into school of ice panfish.

watched helplessly as he finally crawled onto the unbroken ice. It was a scary time for both. Chad said he almost drowned as his wife watched helplessly. So, fish with a partner.

Equipment starts with a lifejacket. It will help keep you warm, and if you have to use it once, it's worth way more than you paid for it. Ice picks worn around your neck provide a good grip for both hands to help pull you out if you break through.

Dress in layers, warmer than you think necessary. You can always take some off if you don't need them, but you can't put them on if you don't bring them!

Disposable hand and foot warmers are great additions to gloves and boots. So are ice cleats worn over your boots to ensure safe footing. A fall on dry, clean ice is as bad as hitting cement.

Thick ice and a dull auger can have you sweating before you drop a line in the water. I replace the blades on mine every year. Some guys sharpen them, but that's not part of my skill set.

An ice sled is really valuable for hauling your auger, tackle and gear. Everything you need for ice fishing should easily fit in a small, lightweight sled that slide effortlessly across the ice and snow when pulled behind you.

Ice scoops are handy for clearing slush out of your holes. I usually start with two, as I invariably drop one through a hole over a long season.

I prefer using Mousies for bait, with bee moth larvae a second choice. Golden grubs



Tim Adams working school of winter bluegills.

work, but don't stay on the hook well.

Ice fishermen are usually gregarious, so if you see someone catching fish, you might ask if you can drill a few holes nearby. Most anglers are open to that, and fish seem to respond to lots of baits in the water.

I recall one winter when my brother-in-law Tim Adams and I were fishing in a Green-Sullivan pit, and because IU and Purdue had a basketball game that afternoon, I brought a portable radio with us. Game time was 4:00, so I tuned in and we continued to fish as the game was played. Pretty soon, I noticed other fishermen cutting holes within earshot. Some wore black and gold, while others, like us, sported red and white. There was lots of yelling while everyone fished, and when the game ended right about dark, the Purdue fans (black and gold clad) thanked us for sharing the game (Purdue won). The IU fans just grumbled as they packed up. It was not a good year for IU basketball, even with a coach named Bob Knight!

Use the smallest stick bobbers you can find, and the tiniest jigs. I don't really think it matters as to the color of the jigs, but pink, white and yellow seem to do the job. You'll also need a clip-on depth finder to set and suspend your baited jig just above the bottom. Then clip the depth finder to a convenient place on your outer clothes, like a pocket flap, so you can reset as needed.

If the fish stop biting, or never start, you may need to raise your bait off the bottom some, as panfish tend to stratify as evening goes on. I have caught them 4 to 5 feet below



The author tests the ice and smartly waits for more.

the ice, and I suspect the fish were moving shallow as bugs hatched and rose from the bottom.

As I grow older, I seldom clean fish anymore. I can usually find a son, grandson or neighbor boy who will do it for a few bucks, depending on the size of the catch and the need for some green!

Placing my feet close to my electric fireplace while I root for my Hoosiers is a great way to spend my evening, and I sure enjoy those fresh fillets during the broadcast. I believe that panfish caught through ice taste better than those caught in open water, even if there are enough to freeze in Zip-lock bags (in meal-sized amounts) for later.

Better safe than sorry

Always test the ice right next to the bank to make sure it's thick enough to go out. I started out onto Griffy Lake one day and I saw several guys fishing. Then I saw that they were only about 30 feet away from open water. I went elsewhere.

On another occasion, my brother-in-law Tim Adams and I started out on Lake Lenape in Shakamak State Park. There were already guys fishing out on the middle of the lake. We yelled, "How thick is the ice?" One of the guys yelled back, "Inch to an inch and a half!" We left, went to the docks and caught a mess of fish. A mess of fish is not work the risk, even if there is something magical about pulling fat bluegills from the ice next to your feet. **MWO**

Ken Mitchell's outdoor experience includes fishing, hunting, camping, hunting mushrooms, bass tournament competitions and speaking to outdoor groups. He taught high school botany, zoology and advanced biology. Ken has worked as a seasonal naturalist and directed a youth conservation corp. He has written in outdoor publications and as a columnist with weekly contributions called "Woods and Waters." K Mitchell2598@gmail.com.



Another year has nearly come to an end. Looking back on the year's highs and lows, all in all, it was a pretty good one. To date, no records were broken, but some fish came awfully close. As we close out 2024, we can look forward with optimism that more good fishing and memories will be made in the upcoming year.

Late-season trolling was very good in Wisconsin for returning Chinook and coho out of Milwaukee. Silver King Charters has been having good success in 90 to 150 feet of water from the filtration plant to the weather buoy, with a few steelhead and brown trout mixed in.

Fish have been hitting Moonshine Spoons on wire Dipseys run 150 to 200 feet back in 250 to 400 feet of water. Best colors have been (Wonder Bread) and (Happy Meal). Flashers and flies like the Eddie Fly have been working in (Silver) and (Little Boy Blue) on downriggers. Look for this fishing to continue into this month as long as boats are able to get out.

Jigging has also been good by the North Gap and the river mouth with heavy, slab jigging spoons like Kastmaster and Hopkins spoons. Good brown trout and lake trout jigging should be occurring right now, conditions permitting.

In Racine, things have slowed down somewhat but, fish are still being caught after dark in the harbor on K-O Wobblers (Glo), Rat-L-Traps and skein spawn.

Across the Illinois line, lake trout have been hitting out of North Point in 180 to 200 feet of water and on bottom around the reefs. They are late spawners, and their spawning activity should run well into December. Some silver Chinook have been hitting in 60 to 120 feet along the Hill.

Chicago has seen some late-returning Chinook along with a few coho and steelhead mixed in at DuSable, 31st Street and 63rd Street. They have been hitting spoons, crankbaits and spawn sacs. Phosphorescent (Glow in the Dark) Little Cleos and Kastmasters (Blue/Silver) and (Green/Silver) are still taking a few fish. The Montrose Horseshoe has still been giving up a few sheepshead (freshwater drum) and northern pike.

In downtown Chicago, the River Walk on the Chicago River has been providing good fishing for nice smallmouth and smaller largemouth bass, big crappies and some perch. Look for this fishing to remain good into the winter as long as the weather holds out.

If you are so inclined, snagging is still open for the rest of the month. It will close on New Year's as the clock strikes twelve.

Snagging is allowed for Chinook and coho salmon only. Anything else must be thrown back immediately. No snagging is allowed in non-designated areas or within 200 feet of a moored boat.

Areas where snagging is permitted include the Waukegan Harbor (in the north harbor basin only), the Winnetka Power Plant discharge, the Lincoln Park Lagoon south of Fullerton Avenue, and at Jackson Park inner and outer harbors.

If you need good fertilizer for your garden or rose bushes, now is the time to get it. I doubt that many of these fish will be fit for the table, but they will put up a good fight.

With shore fishermen in mind, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources is introducing a new strain of brown trout.

For the past twenty years, the DNR has stocked the Plymouth Rock strain. The eggs were reared at the Jacob Wolf Hatchery and the fish were released as 5- to 6-inch fingerlings in July.

This year, the Crawford strain was stocked into the "Big Lake." These fish were obtained from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Federal hatchery system. They were reared at the Jake Wolf Hatchery. They were stocked in May at eleven locations along the Illinois shoreline.

This earlier stocking was made possible because Crawford strain browns spawn earlier and have a faster growth rate than the Plymouth Rock strain. Hopefully, the earlier stocking combined with the faster growth rates will result in better survival rates which will translate to better returns to Illinois anglers.

This year's stocking numbers saw some changes due to a poor survival of Chinook and coho eggs and fry at the Jake Wolf Hatchery. Increased numbers of Skamania steelhead, Arlee strain rainbows and brown trout were stocked this year to help pick up the slack.

According to a DNR spokesman, steelhead stocking is usually done in mid-September but was delayed this year due to warm water temperatures in the harbors. While the steelhead and brown trout numbers were increased, the coho and Chinook numbers were lowered due to the problems in the hatchery.

A complete list of the Illinois DNR's annual targets and the actual stocking numbers is as follows:

Species	Annual Target	2024 Stocking
Coho Salmon	300,000	87,890
Chinook Salmon	210,000	100,877
Skamania Steelhead	75,000	150,000
Arlee Rainbow Trout	60,000	295,000
Brown Trout	110,000	126,578
Lake Trout*	120,000	120,000

*Provided by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

There isn't much to report over in Indiana. The Chinook run on the "Big Lake" is nearing an end but fishing in the tributaries has been taking off.

Salmon fishing on Trail Creek, Salt Creek and the East Branch of the Little Calumet River has slowed, but steelhead have been doing really well on spawn sacs, skein and in-line spinners.

December outlook

Look for good lake trout action on the reefs outside the Port of Indiana, trolling thin silver-plated spoons like Williams Thinfish behind attractors like the old Bill Carr Flops or Yakima Spin-N-Glos behind 00 dodgers (Silver Plated) or (White).

Look for big perch to be schooling on the clay flats in about 55 feet of water straight off the



Joe Reynoso of Thornton, Ill. with a fall steelhead.

Gary Light. Drifting big fathead minnows or baby roaches is the way to go with Chuck Weiss Glo-Flies, lasting as long as Mother Nature cooperates.

With Christmas right around the corner, many of our readers will have extra days off from work or have accumulated vacation or sick days to use up. This will be a good time to load up the freezer with some fine-eating perch, which should be abundant in Calumet Harbor, the Calumet River and the old United States Steel slips.

It's also time for last-minute Christmas shopping for a gift for Lake Michigan anglers in your life. Rather than fighting the crowds in packed stores, think about giving them a gift subscription to *MidWest Outdoors*. It's a gift that will keep on giving throughout the coming year.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish our *MidWest Outdoors* readers and their families a Blessed Christmas and a fish-filled New Year with the wind always at your back.

MWO

With his "Lake Michigan Corner" and various other articles in MidWest Outdoors, Mike Ratter has been writing for MWO for nearly 35 years. His writing has also been published in various other publications throughout the Midwest. He is a consultant and field tester for various manufacturers, seminar speaker and current (and long-time) member of OWAA and AGLOW.

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Finding rare and secretive species

Many of the small animals in Indiana listed as "state endangered" or "species of special concern" have elusive habits or low populations, making them difficult to find. Recently, DNR mammologists and Purdue-Fort Wayne researchers came together with a new survey technique helping to collect the critical data.

By installing cameras in conjunction with a small fencing system working as a gateway, researchers can capture photos of the animals entering the fencing. The photos are compiled and provide data about distribution, population and habits of elusive species. Thanks to generous donations to the Indiana Nongame Wildlife Fund, a team of three researchers has already set up 100 of the stations across Indiana this summer. Data has already provided important updates to species distribution for Franklin's ground squirrels and least weasels.

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) is a naturally occurring viral disease commonly seen in the Indiana deer herd. Each year, typically in late summer, Indiana DNR receives reports of deer displaying signs of EHD throughout the state.

This year, DNR confirmed a significant EHD outbreak beginning in the northern region of the Hoosier State. In some years, EHD can affect a larger-than-normal portion of the deer herd and becomes widespread across a county. In these instances, DNR lowers the County Bonus Antlerless Quotas (CBAQs) in the impacted counties to offset the effect of the counties' EHD outbreak on the deer herd in the specific region.

EHD is transmitted by biting midges, also known as sand gnats or "no-see-ums." Deer infected with EHD may display unusual behaviors such as lethargy, excessive salivation or disorientation. EHD also causes fever in deer, which can cause deer to seek water. As a result, many deer dying from EHD are found in or near open-water sources like ponds and rivers. Anyone who finds a deer showing signs of EHD or dead in water is asked to report it at on.IN.gov/sickwildlife.

Due to the number of reported deer mortalities and extent of EHD in the region, DNR has lowered the County Bonus Antlerless Quotas (CBAQs) in Wabash, Porter and Allen counties, from two bonus antlerless deer to one, to help offset the effects of EHD on the deer herd in the region.

During winter, DNR biologists will fully evaluate the effects of EHD and will propose changes to bag limits as required. Hunters can stay informed about CBAQ changes at on.IN.gov/EHD-quotas.

Indiana deer hunter safety tips

With the deer reduction zone hunting season underway and the statewide archery deer season starting on October 1, Indiana Conservation Officers remind hunters to stay safe. More than 300,000 people are expected to participate in some form of deer hunting in Indiana during the various deer hunting seasons running through January 31, 2025, and the overwhelming majority will do so safely.

When injuries occur, the most common are from accidents involving hunting from tree stands and elevated platforms. To avoid such injuries, hunters should follow the safety tips listed below when hunting from an elevated position.

Before the hunt:

- Read and understand the tree stand manufacturer's instructions.
- Check tree stands and equipment for wear; fatigue; and cracks or loose nuts and bolts, paying particularly close attention to parts made of materials other than metal.
- Pack and plan to use equipment specifically designed for hunting.
- Practice trees stand use and setup at ground level.
- Learn how to properly wear your full-body safety harness.

During the hunt:

- Wear your full-body safety harness.
- Use boots with nonslip soles.
- Use a tree stand safety rope.
- Make sure to attach your harness to the tree before leaving the ground, and that it remains attached to the tree until you return to the ground.
- Maintain three points of contact during ascent and descent.
- Use a haul line to raise and lower firearms, bows and other hunting gear.
- Make sure firearms are unloaded, the action is open, and safety is on before attaching them to the haul line.

When doing any kind of hunting, remember to do the following to stay safe:

- Carry a cellphone and flashlight.
- Make a plan before you hunt.
- Tell someone your plan, including where you will be hunting and when you plan to return.
- Stick to your plan.
- Identify game before pointing a firearm.
- Know your target and what is beyond it.

Changes to deer rehabilitation

The Indiana Natural Resources Commission has opened its first public comment period for proposed changes on deer rehabilitation in (CWD) Positive Areas. The proposed changes would require sick, injured or orphaned white-tailed deer found in a CWD Positive Area to be given only to a permitted wildlife rehabilitator within the area, or to a rehabilitator within the county where the deer was found. Changes are also proposed for permitted wildlife rehabilitators to release deer obtained from a CWD Positive Area only within the area.

Currently, the CWD Positive Area includes LaGrange, Steuben, Noble and DeKalb counties; learn more at on.IN.gov/CWD.

Earlier this year, a provisional rule was approved establishing the provisions for no more than 180 days, and it expires Jan. 5, 2025. Therefore, the NRC is requesting input on the proposed permanent rule changes.

Public comments can be submitted at <https://www.IN.gov/nrc/rules/rulemaking-docket/> by clicking on "Submit Comments Here" under the Chronic Wasting Disease Rule Amendment. Comments may also be mailed to: Natural Resources Commission, Indiana Government Center North, 100 North Senate Ave., Room N103, Indianapolis, IN 46204

The deadline for submitting public comments is November 12, 2024. A public hearing will also be held on Nov. 12, 2024, between 5-7 p.m. ET, at the Northeast Regional DNR office located at 1353 Governor's Drive in Columbia City, IN 46725. Interested members of the public can attend in person or online anytime during the timeframe.

The public hearing will also be webcast on the NRC's rulemaking docket website at <https://www.IN.gov/nrc/rules/rulemaking-docket/> during the time of the public hearing,

and comments can be made as well through the online webcast. Sign up for updates online at on.IN.gov/dfw-rule-changes.

For questions related to wildlife rehabilitators, contact Linnea Petercheff, Permit Supervisor, at lpetercheff@dnr.IN.gov or 317-233-6527.

Interurban Trail Extension opens

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the city of Bluffton celebrated the opening of the Interurban Trail extension and Lancaster Park.

The 1.06-mile asphalt multi-use trail was constructed by the city of Bluffton with help from a \$404,035 Next Level Trails (NLT) grant.

"The extension of the Interurban Trail and the construction of Bluffton's new Lancaster Park provide more than just new green spaces for Hoosiers to get out and enjoy," said Dan Bortner, DNR director. "Having connections and places like this to come together within a community help bring together and foster the kind of quality of life people crave. DNR is proud to support the important projects in Bluffton."

The new trail extends the existing Interurban Trail north from its current terminus at Monroe Street. The extension follows State Road 1, ending south of Jackson Street. With completion of the newest extension, the total length of the Interurban Trail is now more than 3 miles, connecting the Wabash River to Lancaster Park.

The trail is a segment of the larger 81-mile Poka-Bache Trail project which will eventually connect Ouabache State Park to Pokagon State Park.

Monon Trail extension opens

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the town of Sheridan celebrated the completion of phase 1 of the Monon Trail extension in northern Hamilton County. The asphalt multi-use trail was constructed by the town of Sheridan with help from a \$2,089,850 Next Level Trails grant.

"The Monon Trail is a shining example of the immense value we gain when folks work together to build trails," said Dan Bortner, DNR director. "This iconic central Indiana trail runs more than 26 miles through multiple counties and communities, which requires collaboration to make possible. We're proud to come alongside so many Hoosiers who use the Monon Trail daily to support this trail extension with Next Level Trails funding support."

The new trail extends 0.75 miles north from the existing Monon Trail at State Road 47. The trail follows the historic railroad corridor north into the town center of Sheridan to 2nd Street.

Construction of Phase 1 included a new trailhead with parking at Ohio Street. To the south, the existing Monon Trail extends more than 26 miles and travels through Westfield, Carmel, and Broad Ripple, ultimately terminating at 10th Street in downtown Indianapolis. Phase 2 will begin in 2025, extending the trail 1.1 miles north to the Hamilton/Boone County line, completing the trail within Hamilton County.

"This is an exciting time for the Sheridan community. We are thrilled to bring the Monon Trail to downtown Sheridan and to offer parking options for trail and downtown visitors at the new trail head," said Silas DeVaney, Sheridan Town Council president. "Next year's trail extension project will deliver the Monon to the Hamilton County boundary, and we are happy to pass the torch of extending this iconic park to Boone County. We would not have been able to accomplish this project without the Next Level Trails program."

MyPath Riverfront Trail opens

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Owen County Community Foundation opened the recently completed MyPath Riverfront Trail, which was funded with support by Next Level Trails (NLT). The 0.88-mile asphalt, multi-use trail was constructed by the foundation with help from a \$639,483 NLT grant.

"Trails are important for both the wellbeing of Hoosiers and our communities," said Dan Bortner, DNR director. "Next Level Trails has taken that philosophy literally to the next level, making connections with more than 100 new trail miles throughout the state. It's exciting to see this new trail section open for all to enjoy in Owen County."

The project improves 0.88 miles of the previously natural-surface trail along the White River, connecting Pottersville Road to River Road south of Spencer. It links users to a lowlands reforestation project and pollinator garden, and establishes a new trailhead on the river's west fork featuring an 80-foot ADA-accessible bridge over Elliston Creek.

"The community is excited to enjoy the first multi-use trail in the county. We are happy for the partnerships that have built this new, beautiful trail along the White River," said Janet Rummel, the foundation's president and CEO.

The \$180 million program is administered by the DNR and facilitates critical trail connections within and between Hoosier communities.

Including the MyPath Riverfront Trail, 36 of the 89 NLT projects are complete, totaling more than 102 miles of trail built since the program's inception. Several projects are under construction, with many more slated to break ground during the next year.

More information about the NLT can be found at on.IN.gov/NextLevelTrails.

Markland Dam restricted areas

Indiana Conservation Officers want to remind the public to take safety precautions and follow all posted directions while boating or being near dams along the Ohio River, including the Markland Dam near Vevay, Ind.

The Markland Dam is a popular recreational spot offering many opportunities for anglers and boaters to enjoy the area's natural resources. However, boaters must be aware of the inherent dangers of the dam and comply with all directions on buoys and signs located upstream and downstream of the structure.

Among the warnings are the "keep out" buoys, placed upstream of the dam to indicate areas where boats are prohibited from entering.

The buoys and signs warn of the unpredictable water conditions creating a boil line similar to a low-head dam. These conditions can significantly hinder a boat's maneuverability and could cause it to capsize. The dam could also be opened at any time, adding additional hazards to the area.

Conservation Officers are patrolling the area to ensure laws are being followed and people are taking all precautions to enjoy the area safely.

Hudson Lake dredging

Public access to Hudson Lake in LaPorte County may be disrupted from mid-to late October through the end of the year due to a dredging project aimed at improving boating access. The work is funded by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Lake and River Enhancement Program (LARE) and the Hudson Lake Conservation Association.

During the project, sediment will be hydraulically pumped from the access channel and a navigation channel between the lake's east and west basins to an upland area on the northwest end of the lake. This may result in temporary blockage or restrictions near the sites because of dredging equipment or piping being on the lake.

More information on the LARE program and the current projects is at lare.dnr.IN.gov. More information on public access sites is at on.IN.gov/adopt-a-ramp. **MWO**

Jack Spaulding is an outdoor columnist living in his hometown of Moscow, Ind. with his wife, Chris. From childhood, the smallmouth bass-infested Big Flat Rock River and the surrounding hardwood forest has been his playground. He has written Spaulding Outdoors for MidWest Outdoors since 1986. Email to jacksaulding1971@outlook.com. The Best of Spaulding Outdoors and his latest, The Coon Hunter and the Kid are available from Amazon.com.



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Sportsmen Can Turn in A Poacher

by Tom Berg

Fall is here and Indiana's sportsmen and women are already in the woods and fields, pursuing their favorite game animals. Deer hunters, upland bird hunters, rabbit hunters, waterfowlers and trappers are afield now that their chosen seasons are open. Fishermen are busy, too, since many fish species are still feeding heavily in preparation for winter. Crappies, bluegills, catfish and bass are all very active. Cooler water is enticing brown trout to enter Lake Michigan's harbors once again, and steelhead trout are active in northern Indiana's creeks and tributaries.

It's a magical time of year, especially for ethical outdoorsmen. The vast majority of sportsmen take great care to practice their sport lawfully and ethically. They purchase their sporting licenses, tags and stamps and are careful to obey the laws. They observe legal season dates and pay attention to bag limits and size limits. They are careful to use legal weapons and ammunition as well.

Unfortunately, there are always some people who refuse to play by the rules. They go fishing or hunting without a license or they kill animals out of season. Some shoot game over bait or even fire weapons from the road. These unethical people are not hunters or fishermen; they are poachers. In general, poaching means the illegal taking, killing or processing of fish, game or nongame wildlife. A poacher is a thief who steals wildlife that belongs to each Indiana citizen. Poachers rob licensed, ethical hunters, anglers and trappers of the recreational opportunities they purchased through license fees.

Luckily, outdoorsmen and ordinary



Poachers have been known to illegally take waterfowl like these beautiful wood ducks. Please report any illegal hunting activity you witness. Photos: Tom Berg



Whitetail deer like this young buck and doe are often the target of poachers.

citizens alike can help in the fight against poachers. Anyone who is out enjoying time in the woods, fields or waters may see firsthand when illegal activities are taking place. It is easy to get involved, too, by calling Indiana's TIP hotline to report hunting, fishing, trapping and pollution violations.

TIP stands for "Turn In a Poacher or Polluter," and the TIP hotline number is 1-800-TIP-IDNR (1-800-847-4367). Dispatchers are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. An officer will take your call and the report will be promptly investigated. You may also go online and file a complaint on the DNR website at: in.gov/dnr/lawenfor/2745.htm. It's as easy as that, and all reports are confidential.

For example, back in April of this year in Lake County, two men were charged with

multiple wildlife crimes related to poaching whitetail deer. The successful investigation began in late 2023 with a call to the TIP hotline from concerned citizens. The two poachers were charged with illegal taking of deer, hunting with the aid of a motorized conveyance, providing false information to a deer check station, failing to check in deer, hunting deer without a license, hunting deer by the aid of bait, unlawful taking of a federally protected species, unlawfully placing surveillance cameras on private property, and hindering a conservation officer. The calls to the TIP hotline were instrumental in catching the poachers and putting a stop to their illegal activities.

Another example occurred in September in Vermillion County, but this time the

crime was not about hunting or fishing laws. Instead, it concerned the illegal taking of wild ginseng from a private landowner. Indiana Conservation Officer Kenton Crews was able to interview the suspects and subsequently seized the stolen ginseng, which was returned to the landowner. Besides stealing the ginseng, these poachers were trying to harvest the ginseng during a closed season.

As these examples show, the TIP hotline is extremely important for protecting Indiana's fish and wildlife, for everything from big game like deer all the way down to inconspicuous plants like wild ginseng. Concerned sportsmen and citizens can help fight poaching by calling the TIP hotline to report wildlife violations like these when they see them. If violations are taking place on your own property, trail cameras can provide excellent footage of poachers or trespassers, too.

Getting involved is easy, and anyone can do it. If you see a poacher or polluter in action,

story continued on next page

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Helpful Tactics for Tagging a Pressured, Late-Season Buck



Even mature bucks can be caught in the wide open when they find a doe in estrous. Beguiled bucks seem to overlook guns popping or their need for sustenance.

by Vikki L. Trout

It's no secret: Most deer are harvested during the first two or three days of the firearm season, if not on opening day. Hunters fully realize this and flock to their favorite woods in hopes of tagging their buck prior to the detrimental effects of hunting pressure. Older, wiser bucks seem to vanish into thin air once the guns start going off.

So, how do we remedy this annual phenomenon? First, realize that while deer change their habits, they do not vanish! Here are several options that may help you bring home the trophy of your dreams.



The cooling-off period causes bucks to resume normal rutting activities. Sometimes, the second rut goes completely unnoticed—unless you are diligently out there.

Prime time

In my opinion, a mature buck does not become completely nocturnal, even under extensive pressure. Arriving at stand well before daylight and staying until shooting time ends is one key to success. Bucks may go into hiding and not move much during the daylight hours, but if the primary or secondary rut is on, they will take chances. And while a post-rut buck spends a lot of time resting and recovering from breeding, he will get up to feed because of all the body fat he's lost. He knows he must prepare for winter.

Avoid master trails

Master trails are frequently traveled by does and are easy to spot. They are nearly carved into the ground, providing less cover than what a buck prefers. If the peak rut is on, a buck may be sighted on a primary trail; but

following the peak, you are better off seeking a secondary trail.

Secondary trails typically connect to master trails, are not visible for long distances, and probably won't look as appealing to you. Unless you are very observant, a secondary trail may go unnoticed. Many secondary trails are in the thickest cover in an area and close to bedding areas—providing secure travel for a pressured buck.

Hot scrapes only

Although pressured bucks may move only during the early morning and late evening shooting hours, visiting a scrape may be the last thing they do before bedding, and the first thing after leaving a bed (assuming the scrape is in an ideal location and the



Mature bucks head for the thickest cover they can find once the guns start going off and the number of hunters increases dramatically.

breeding is close to peak level).

Finding early scrapes prior to the opener tends to excite all of us because that is proof a buck is in the area. However, only the hottest scrapes are likely to be visited by bucks during hunting hours. For this reason, avoid scrapes along the fringes of master trails and look for those along secondary trails. If you find an active scrape in an area of good cover, it will probably offer the best opportunity once bucks become nervous.

Bucks like it thick

Three years ago, a friend helped me build a thicket that became quite a sanctuary for bucks. We also dug a waterhole on the edge of the sanctuary. I have taken two nice bucks from the stand that I placed between the waterhole and my food plot. While I have witnessed various bucks (many with small antlers, but some 3 1/2-year-old bucks) cutting through the sanctuary on a regular basis, patience has paid off over the last two years; I was fortunate enough to fill my tags with mature bucks. It just makes sense that bucks are quite content when they can move through an area that conceals them. And, I might mention, they love to browse on the honeysuckle and autumn olive on the way to the food plot because of the seclusion provided by these crops.

Secluded foods

As mentioned previously, bucks have to eat—even high-strung bucks. Better yet, so must does and fawns. When a buck must eat, or if he hopes to pick up the trail of an estrous doe, he will visit the most secure food sources. They prefer to find food sources that are tucked out of the way and in the densest cover.

The calming factor

Despite all the hunting pressure at the beginning of the season, a calming period may arrive that will get mature bucks up and moving (providing the gun season lasts for more than just a few days). Seasons that last for a couple of weeks usually see a drastic drop in hunting pressure toward the end. As

the woods grow quiet, deer are more likely to return to their normal, preseason movement patterns, and stressed-out bucks may take the opportunity to feed. If your hunting time is limited, you may very well want to consider waiting until the last two or three days of the gun season, taking advantage of this calming factor.

It would be great if we never had to be concerned with pursuing a super-wary buck, but hunting pressured bucks brings out the best in all of us. Luck pays a major factor in tagging a dandy the first couple of days of the season, due to the number of hunters afield, moving deer in many directions. Once that hysteria diminishes, you must hunt hard and have very few errors! **MWO**

Vikki Trout is a full-time freelance outdoor writer and photographer. She attributes her success as hunter, writer and photographer to her late husband John Trout, Jr., who encouraged her to hunt and to join him as full-time writer many years before he went home to Jesus.

Sportsmen Can Turn in A Poacher

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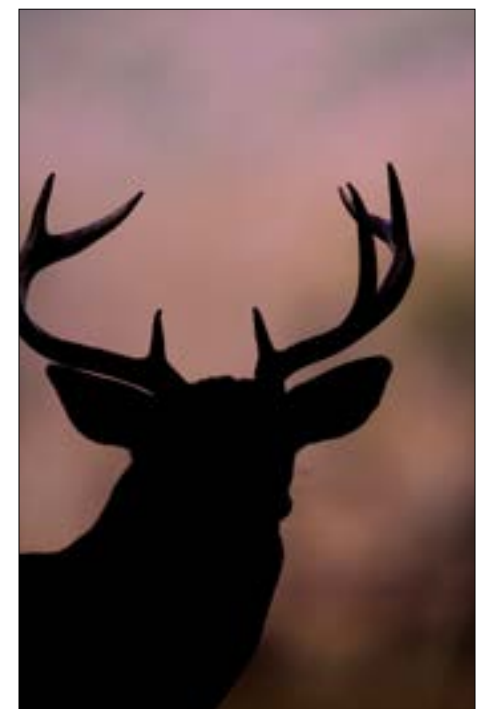
call the TIP hotline mentioned above and talk to a law enforcement officer. Officers take all reports very seriously and all complaints will be promptly investigated.

If you decide to call in your report on the TIP hotline, rest assured that you may remain anonymous if you wish. It is not necessary to give your name, and no one who provides information is required to testify in court. Also, under the TIP program, cash rewards are offered for information leading to the arrest of fish, wildlife or environmental law violators.

Sportsmen and sportswomen can also make a voluntary contribution to the TIP program to help support the cause. Go to www.tip.IN.gov to learn more. You may also mail your donation to: Turn in a Poacher, Inc., 402 W. Washington St., Room W255D, Indianapolis, IN 46204. All donations go directly to assisting Indiana DNR Law Enforcement with catching poachers and polluters in our state.

Don't let poachers get away with committing wildlife crimes. If landowners and true outdoorsmen are apathetic or "look the other way" when they see poachers in action, the future of Indiana's wildlife populations will be at risk. Poachers steal from each of us and we should take it personally. Indiana's dedicated conservation officers are on the job, and they are ready and willing to work together with ethical sportsmen and concerned citizens to help put an end to poaching. Our valuable natural resources are worth the effort, so pick up the phone and call TIP. **MWO**

A lifelong outdoorsman and award-winning outdoor writer and photographer, Tom Berg has been the Executive Director/Treasurer of the Hoosier Outdoor Writers group in Indiana since 2004. When he is not writing, he would rather be outside fishing, hunting, trapping or birding than doing just about anything else.



Hunting pressure will cause bucks to move during the nighttime hours. But if you are in the right place at the right time when they move to or from their bedding area, you may very well intercept them.

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ONGOING EVENTS

Friday nights

Blythe's Lady's View Elite—Women's Only League is a women's shooting group dedicated to learning and practicing defensive shooting skills. We meet weekly on Fridays from 6-8 p.m., at Blythe's Sport Shop in Valparaiso, Ind. The events are centered around structured drills that help you set goals and develop your skills. Hours: 6 to 8 p.m., at Blythe's Sport Shop, 2810 Calumet Ave., Valparaiso, IN 46383. For info: 219-476-0026, Co-ed classes register at: mwtraininggroup.com, Women only classes register at ladysview.com, or visit blythesgungear.com.

Tuesday nights

Blythe's Sport Shop Tuesday League—

Shooting league meets every Tuesday from 6-8 p.m. Each week offers a different set of drills which are provided by an instructor. At Blythe's Sport Shop, 2810 Calumet Ave., Valparaiso, IN 46383. For information: Amanda Kalman, amanda@blythesguns.com, 219-476-0026, or visit blythesgungear.com.

Tuesday nights

Open Fly Tying Seminar from 6:30 - 9 p.m., every Tuesday at the Bass Pro Shop in Portage. Come spend time with local fly fishermen/women at the seminar room on the 2nd floor behind the camo department. The open fly tying format is an excellent opportunity to trade secrets with and learn from the professionals! For further information call 219-787-6800.

SPORTS SHOWS

December 7-8

NWTF Clay County Gun and Knife Show at Clay County Fair Grounds, 6650 N St Rd 59, Brazil, IN 47834. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. Admission \$5, children 12 and under free. Vendor tables \$20 ea. For info: Wabash Valley Limbangers, Stacey Weil, (812) 894-3332, sweil188178109@aol.com, Bob Weil, (812) 251-7349.

December 7-8

Lafayette Gun Show at Tippecanoe County Fairgrounds, 1010 Teal Rd., Lafayette, IN 47905. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$6, children 12 and under free, Law Enforcement (with badge) free. Vendor tables \$45 ea. For info: Central Indiana Gun Shows, Brandy Sifford, (765) 969-2536, cigshows@gmail.com, (765) 993-8942, centralindianagunshows.com.

December 7-8

Marengo Arms & Blade Show at Crawford County 4-H Park, 1095 IN-66, Marengo, IN 47140. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$6, children under 12 free. For info: Straight Shooters Enterprises, George Smith, (812) 498-3833, straightshootersenterprises@yahoo.com, straightshootersenterprises.com.

December 7-8

Tipton Gun & Knife Show at Tipton County Fairgrounds, 4-H Building, 1200 South Main Street, Tipton, IN 46072. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$6, children under 12 free with paying adult. Vendor tables \$45 ea. For info: Tipton Gun Shows LLC, Pat Comer, (317) 379-3341, comersguns@yahoo.com.

December 14-15

Madison Arms & Blade Show at Indiana National Guard, 1533 Clifty Dr., Madison, IN 47250. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$6, children under 12 free. For info: Straight Shooters Enterprises, George Smith, (812) 498-3833,

straightshootersenterprises@yahoo.com, straightshootersenterprises.com.

December 21-22

Stateline Gun Show at Stateline Gun Show, 18864 County Rd. 13, Pioneer, OH 43554. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$5, children under 10 free. Vendor tables \$25 ea. For info: D&K Enterprises, Duane Votaw, (419) 630-6289, duanevotaw@frontier.com, statelinegunshow.com.

December 21-22

Crown Point Gun Show at Lake County Fairgrounds, 889 S. Court Street, Crown Point, IN 46307. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$6, children 12 and under free. Vendor tables \$50 ea. For info: Central Indiana Gun Shows, (765) 855-3836, cigshows@gmail.com, or (765) 993-8942, centralindianagunshows.com.

December 21-22

Greensburg Arms & Blade Show at Knights of Columbus, 1308 W Main St., Greensburg, IN 47240. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Straight Shooters Enterprises, George Smith, (812) 498-3833, straightshootersenterprises@yahoo.com, straightshootersenterprises.com.

January 8-10

ATA Trade Show **Trade Only**, at the Indianapolis Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN. Show hours: Wednesday 8:30 a.m. - 6 p.m., Thursday 8:30 a.m. - 6 p.m., Friday 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m. For info: Archery Trade Association, (866) 266-2776, archerytrade.org, registration@archerytrade.org.

January 24-26

Michiana Boat & Sports Show at the South Bend Century Center, South Bend, IN. Show Hours: Friday 2 - 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. - 8 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Admission: adults \$10, kids 12 & under free. For info: Indiana Boat Shows. LLC, michianaboatshow.com, boatshop.com.

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Cisco Fishing can be Easy... or Not



A Grand Traverse Bay 'Plan B' cisco.

by Mike Schoonveld

Just when I thought I had it figured out, I found out there's more to catching ciscoes at Grand Traverse Bay than I thought!

It reminds me of the time an acquaintance told me, "I took a charter on Lake Michigan once. The fishing was easy. We left the harbor, the captain and mate set some lines and our group caught fish all morning."

He looked puzzled when I said, "Did you ever stop to think that maybe the captain knew what he was doing and was very good at it?"

Chances are, when anyone makes fishing look easy, they are probably very good at what they are doing. There's a reason for the old adage: "Ten percent of the fishermen catch 90 percent of the fish."

Before my latest trip to Grand Traverse Bay, I'd been cisco fishing exactly twice. Each time, there seemed to be plenty of fish, and they seemed willing to bite—easy fishing.

The first time was a few years earlier when a friend and I headed to the bay on a very impromptu trip. We only had a few hours to fish and not much more info than to, "Head south from the boat launch, look for a dock on shore with three flag poles, and fish in 100 feet of water out from the dock."

In the short time we had to fish, we caught a handful of ciscoes and a whitefish. I didn't think I'd become an accomplished cisco angler, but I did learn that the fish were sporty fighters and they were quite tasty on the table.

A year later, a different friend and I were at a writer's meeting in Gaylord and used the opportunity to schedule a cisco fishing outing with Capt. Bob Hinds, operator of Central Coast Angling charters. He made it look easy. We left the boat ramp and motored out into the bay. Hinds quickly spotted a school of fish on his sonar and spot locked over them. We dropped our jigging spoons into the school and hooked up almost instantly. Repeat, repeat, repeat, and in short order, we were back at the launch site with our limits.

I realized it was more than just luck as I watched what the captain was doing, and how he used his electronics to locate and stay on the fish. I noted the lures we were using and asked plenty of questions. I was confident that I'd be able to go back on my

own and catch some ciscoes without relying on blind luck or a professional captain.

Some friends and I planned a two-day excursion in early November and showed up late morning full of optimism. Our optimism waned quickly that first day and my confidence was in the tank after a couple hours. We were fishing the same general area I'd fished with Capt. Hinds; we had similar electronics, similar tackle and jigs—but the fish weren't behaving as expected. There were no big schools of suspended fish like we'd targeted on my previous trips.

Experienced captains always have a plan when they hit the water, but they are quick to realize when that plan isn't working. More importantly, they can quickly adapt and move on to an alternate plan if needed.

We had a Plan A, and we tried several variations to see if we could get the plan jump started. With just a couple hours left on day one, we scrapped Plan A and switched to trolling tactics.

The boat was set up for trolling and we had some trolling gear along. Would our Plan B pay off? Immediate success seemed to say yes.

As soon as we set our two downriggers and started putting out our planer boards, bingo!

One of the downrigger rods started bouncing. I grabbed it and caught a cisco. "Now we are on 'em," I thought. But when it was time to head in, we still had one cisco in the livewell.

We continued trolling on day two, working to refine our Plan B. We tried spoons, spinners and small plugs, eventually finding small silver or predominantly silver spoons got the most hits. As we narrowed down our lure choices, dialed in the trolling speed and zeroed in on the most productive depths, our success improved.

The result wasn't the easy limits we'd hoped for, but we ended the trip more confident than we started. How confident? When I go back next year, I'll make it look easy. I hope! **MWO**

A passion for hunting, fishing, trapping and an outdoor lifestyle has been true north on Mike Schoonveld's compass his whole life. One of the Midwest's most prolific outdoor communicators, scores of his columns have been published in the pages of MidWest Outdoors since 1987.

Living an 'Outdoor Life'

by John Bennett

I have fished, hunted and gathered from the land for nearly 70 years. And I've enjoyed it more than my feeble words could ever express. Sometimes, I wonder how all of this came about. Certainly, my father and my Uncle Dale... my best fishin' buddy ever... taught me to shoot, fish and respect wild creatures and the lands and water that they inhabited. I wonder if I would have felt the desire to do this without their guiding hands.

Maybe the instinct to kill, catch and eat the wild critters is inborn in all of us; yet maybe of a stronger imperative in some, and a repressed imperative in others. Perhaps situational awareness plays a role. I was born into a rural, agricultural setting where birds, fish and wild animals were ever present. They offered me, and many other farm kids, the opportunity to partake of the richness of nature's bounty. I partook... and partook... and still am partaking.

I suspect that there was a hand in all this that few recognize: a Divine hand. In Genesis 1:26, God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing..." So, there was the first indication that the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea were there for us to harvest and consume for our daily sustenance.

In Genesis 27:3-4, we find Isaac saying to his son Esau: "Now therefore take I pray thee thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field and take me some venison; and make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may, that my soul may bless thee before I die."

There are many other passages in the Good Book that refer to hunting and fishing and living off the bounties of nature. Yes, wild creatures were put on this earth for us to gather and consume. I do not consider myself

to be a modern version of the hunter-gatherer civilizations of the past. But I enjoy the hunt. Notice that I did not say that I enjoy the kill. Hunting to me is a pleasurable experience, and I try to make each trip to the field or mountain a learning experience as well.

If one has hunted or fished, then killing becomes an option. There has been more than one incident when I have passed up a shot, or gently released a big fish for reasons that may be difficult for anyone else to comprehend. Let's just say that I had my reasons and I believed that they were good ones.

When the Lord created the beasts, birds and fishes and gave us dominion over them, he also gave mankind a sense of responsibility to manage these resources to the best of his/her ability. This is why we keep enough bluegills, walleyes, perch, etc., for a meal and release the rest. This is why we don't poach on someone else's land or take more squirrels, deer, geese, ducks or any other wild creature than the law allows. I like to call this sense of responsibility *conscience*; that still, small voice that tells us when to stop!

Living an outdoor life has been so enjoyable for me that, once again, it is beyond my ability to express it. While it is not for everyone, we all can do our part by keeping "wild areas" clean and healthy. Do you like to walk in the woods, or stroll through a city park? Do you enjoy a boat ride or a canoe/kayak adventure on a river? Then, as an individual, you can do your part by supporting clean air, water, and environmental initiatives when you have the opportunity. The outdoors is there for all of us to enjoy, and we must be good stewards of what the Lord provides. **MWO**

John Bennett is a retired history teacher, historical re-enactor, father and grandfather. As a four-season outdoorsman, his passion is waterfowl hunting and fishing for smallmouth bass. He lives in Ohio and spends quite a bit of time in his primitive log cabin, which he built.

MICHIGAN Sportsman's Calendar



ONGOING EVENTS

Weekly

Bay City Recreation Area—Arrows Away from 9 - 12 noon. Join the DNR for a weekly archery program offered at state parks throughout Michigan. The experienced, friendly instructors will give you step-by-step archery instruction. You'll learn basic archery safety, terminology, and get lots of shooting time. All equipment provided and most sites have equipment for most ages and abilities. For more information contact the Saginaw Bay Visitor Center at 989-667-0717, or visit michigan.gov/dnr/education/public/learn-archery for days and locations.

Monthly

Hands-on Fly-fishing free clinic! The second Wednesday of every month from 6:30-8:30 p.m. All levels—from beginning to advanced. All materials provided! Preregistration required, please call the Fly Shop at 248-209-4200.

Monthly

Adult Beginning Fly-fishing at the Bass Pro Shops in Auburn Hills, Detroit, the first Wednesday of every month from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Free! No equipment necessary, Preregistration required.

Bimonthly

Trap shooting, Individual Tournaments 200 targets the 1st and 3rd Sundays at 12 noon, at Twin Lakes Sportsmen's Club events. For more info call 773-792-3457 or 262-279-3503.

Thursday nights

Hand Gun Night every Thursday from 6-10 p.m., at Four Square Conservation Club and Sportsman's Association, 6777 Cline Road. For more info call 810-327-6859 or foursquaresportsman.com.

Sundays

Shooting 5 Stand and Trap, every Sunday 10 a.m. - 2 p.m., at Big Bear Sportsman's Club. For more info call Dave Somset, 231-362-3103.

SPORT SHOWS

November 30 - December 1

Novi Gun & Knife Show at Suburban Collection Showplace, Novi, MI 48374. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$10, active military and seniors \$1 off. For info: Sport Shows Promotions, (517) 393-7243, sportshows@gmail.com, migunshow.com.

December 14-15, January 11 & Feb. 8-9

Huron Gun Collector Show at Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds, 5055 Ann Arbor-Saline Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48103. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$5, members \$3, children 12 and under free. Vendor tables \$40 ea., electric for the weekend \$10. For info: Huron Gun Collectors, Mark Brown, (517) 546-4710, huronguncollectors@yahoo.com, huronguncollectors.com.

December 14-15

Kalamazoo Gun & Knife Show at Kalamazoo Fairgrounds, 2900 Lake St., Kalamazoo, MI 49048. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$8, children 12 and under free, active military and seniors \$1 off. For info: Sport Shows Promotions, (313) 643-5533, sportshows@gmail.com, migunshow.com.

December 21-22

Stateline Gun Show at Stateline Gun Show, 18864 County Rd. 13, Pioneer, OH 43554. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$5, children 10 and under free. Vendor tables \$25 ea. For info: D&K Enterprises, Duane Votaw, (419) 630-6289, duanevotaw@frontier.com, statelinegunshow.com.

December 27-29

Lansing/Mason Gun & Knife Show at Ingham County Fairgrounds, 700 E Ash St., Mason, MI 48854. Hours: Friday 2 - 7 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$8, active/non-active military and seniors \$1 off; children 12 and under free. For info: Sport Shows Promotions, (313) 643-5533, sportshows@gmail.com, migunshow.com.

January 9-12

Ultimate Detroit Fishing Show at the Suburban Collection Showplace, 46100 Grand River, Novi, MI 48347. Show Hours: Thursday 1 - 8 p.m., Friday 12 - 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. - 8 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Tickets: adults \$12, children (6-14) \$5. For info: Showspan, John Loeks (616) 447-2860, events@showspan.com.

January 16-19

Grand Rapids Camper, Travel & RV Show, at DeVos Place, 303 Monroe Ave NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Show hours: Thursday 3 - 9 p.m., Friday 12 - 9 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. - 9 p.m., Sunday, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Tickets: adults \$12, children (6-14) \$5, multi-day adult ticket (online only) \$18. For info: Show Span, John Loeks, (616) 447-2860, events@showspan.com, showspan.com.

January 25-26

Flint Gun & Knife Show at Dort Federal Event Center, 3501 Lapeer Rd., Flint, MI 48503. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$8, children 12 and under free. Vendor tables \$60 ea. For info: Sport Shows Promotions, (313) 643-5533, sportshows@gmail.com, migunshow.com.

January 29 - February 2

59th Detroit Camper and RV Show at the Suburban Collection Showplace, Novi, Mich. For info: marvac.org, michiganrvandcampgrounds.org.

February 1-8

Detroit Boat Show at Huntington Place, 1 Washington Blvd., Detroit, MI 48226. Show hours: Saturdays 11 a.m. - 8 p.m., Sundays & Monday 11 a.m. - 6 p.m., Tuesday - Friday 2 - 8 p.m. Admission: adults \$14; children 12 & under free with an adult; free admission (for 1) for all active military, police and firefighters. The Detroit Boat Show only accepts US currency. For info: MBIA, (734) 261-0123, Fax (734) 261-0880, boatmichigan@mbia.org, mbia.org or boatmichigan.org.

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Building the Ultimate Fishing Garage/Boat Shed



Design or redo your garage to be your man cave or fishing garage and enjoy the organization of all your fishing tackle.

by Glenn Walker

Getting your boat out of, or back into, your garage with the least amount of hassle allows you to get out fishing quicker; and when done, get the boat stored away without a headache. Plus, the ability and luxury of keeping all your fishing tackle and boating equipment in one spot, directly next to your boat, makes preparing for your next fishing trip easy.

The length of your garage is obviously the number one thing to consider. Know the length of your boat when it is *on* the trailer, and if it has a swing away tongue or not. Knowing this length helps you know exactly how deep your garage must be; and if you'll have to swing the trailer tongue to be able to close the garage door. When we built our house, I laid out the garage so I could back my boat in and leave my truck connected

(somewhat of a pipe dream when living in the suburbs). If you can accomplish this, *do it*. If not, at least leave enough space at the back end so you don't need to trim your motor down to fit in the garage; and at the front end, so you can easily walk around the boat to get work done.

If possible, have a tall enough garage, and garage doors, so you don't need to trim your motor down to get the boat in the garage; likewise, for your shallow water anchors. I have 9-foot-tall garage doors, so I can take my boat in and out of the garage without having to worry about my Raptors striking the top of the garage door frame.

Exactly where you park your boat in the garage depends on the layout of your garage, and taking into consideration if it is a one-, two-, three-, or even better, four-car garage. Our garage has an 18-foot-wide garage door. My boat sits on the outside of the stall next

to the wall (so it can be next to the pegboard and shelves), and my truck is next to it. This way, when I go fishing, I can open one garage door, pull my truck out, hook the boat up and go. I also have plenty of space on either side of the trailer when backing it in, so I don't have to worry about hitting anything.

If you are building a new house and laying out the garage, or building a dedicated boat shop, talk to your contractor about adding a laundry tub with a hot and cold hose spigot. A deep laundry tub comes in handy to wash gear, wash your hands after a day on the water, or if you work on the trailer and are greasy. The hose spigots come in handy to spray down your boat or flush out your livewells. If you work on your outboard, you can put muffs on the hose and fire your engine up in your garage.

Another thing to consider is electrical outlets; you can *never* have too many for plugging in your phone, charging drill batteries, and most importantly, plugging in your onboard battery charger. I had a dedicated outlet installed directly behind where my Mercury Pro XS is, which is the closest point to the cord to my Minn Kota Precision Series Battery Charger. This dedicated outlet ensures that other electrical items will not trip the breaker and prevent my batteries from getting a full charge.

Putting a floor drain in the garage floor is an absolute must; this will help keep water from pooling on your garage floor as it drips off your boat and trailer after a day on the water. Floor drains also allow you to spray down the floor and squeegee it into the drain to keep your fishing shop clean.

Being able to organize your packaged baits, soft plastics and terminal tackle ensures that you know where they are to quickly restock your tackle boxes or pack for an upcoming fishing trip or tournament. The wall next to my boat is covered with pegboard. I can hang most of my packaged baits, soft plastics and terminal tackle, and have it all organized, within reach while sitting in my boat.

As you think about your fishing garage, consider not just the tackle you have now, but also the tackle in your boat. Also anticipate future fishing tackle. You need shelves for the tackle you keep in plastic cases; the same goes for tubs or totes to hold extra bags of sorts plastics, or bins with random items or accessories for your boat. We constructed shelves out of 2x4s and OSB board behind the boat where I keep bins of soft plastics, packaged baits and boat accessories. A shelf above my pegboard holds my filled tackle trays within easy reach when I'm in my boat



Install a dedicated outlet to plug in your onboard battery charger.



Establish a system so you know where to back up your trailer.

rigging rods and putting tackle in the boat.

Also, you *must have* a place to keep your fishing rods out of the way, untangled and protected from being stepped on or broken. I mounted racks on the wall where I can put backup rods, and rods that I don't use on a regular basis. Next to my boat, I have a free-standing rod rack where I keep the rods I use throughout the season. They are within easy reach for rigging and putting into my rod box, and vice versa. I can easily pull rods I'm not using out of the boat and put them back on the rack. I always store my rods with a Rod Glove on them, so they are further protected and ready to go right into the rod locker.

Two items to make your fishing garage complete, although not a necessity, are a TV and refrigerator. A TV is obviously nice during the fall and winter months; as you work on tackle, turn on your favorite sporting event to keep you entertained. Having a fridge next to your boat allows you to quickly grab ice or freezer packs from the freezer to fill your boat cooler or cooler in your truck. I also keep all my energy drinks, protein shakes and water in the fridge and can easily put them in the boat for the day.

As we get into the offseason winter months, *now* is the time to work on or create your fishing garage or boat shed. If you have an existing spot in your garage or shed where you keep your boat and fishing tackle, implement some of these ideas. And if you want to really create a dream fishing man cave or boat shop, take these ideas, plus some of your own, to your contractor and get your *dream* started. **MWO**

Glenn Walker has been fishing Minnesota and Mississippi River tournaments for more than 15 years, spreading his passion and knowledge of the sport via articles and videos. For more information, check out glennwalkerfishing.com or on Facebook @GlennWalkerFishing.



Fishermen with lots of extra fishing tackle need a system to hang and organize it, like a wall covered with pegboard.



Install a floor drain below your boat to keep your garage floor dry.



The author keeps his tackle trays on the shelf above his pegboard, providing easy access to items that go in and out of the boat based on the next day's fishing trip.



Heavy-duty wide, deep, tall shelves near your boat allow you to store a lot of tackle and boating accessories.



Angling on the Down Low

Dave Mull

Forward-Facing Sonar is Amazing, but Will it Result in Lower Creel Limits?

Forward-facing sonar is controversial because it helps catch so many fish. I experienced it firsthand for the first time in September, and I'm pretty sure that the pro crappie angler and I would not have caught 29 keeper crappies in about two hours without it.

Forward-facing sonar (FFS) is the cutting edge of fishing electronics. Garmin offers LiveScope, Lowrance has Active Target and Humminbird features MEGA Live Imaging. The technology shoots sonar to the side of the boat, showing fish location in real time. On the screen, you not only can watch a fish as it swims, but also watch your lure and how the fish reacts to it.

Some say FFS makes fishing too easy. Some major bass circuits have had teenage rookies win big contests using FFS. Some national bass tournament trails have established rules limiting its use. One series of muskie tournaments has banned its use altogether.

FFS exploded on the fishing scene about four years ago, and anglers who target all sorts of species have added it to bass boats, walleye boats and even kayaks. Serious crappie anglers have also paid big bucks to add FFS.

In September, I attended "Fish Camp," a junket of content providers, bloggers and writers with guides, tackle makers and pro anglers on central Missouri's Lake of the Ozarks. It was put together by Big Mike Jones, a promoter and roving reporter for *Redneck Adventures*, a streaming outdoors show. I was lucky enough to fish with three different crappie anglers: one from Mississippi, one from Oklahoma and one from Missouri over the course of two days.

The three guys all had Garmin LiveScope units that helped find individual crappies and schools of crappies in front of and to the sides of their boats.

Charlie Bunting, a pro crappie angler since 1997, has amassed an incredible resume of victories, including top titles in three of the four main crappie tours. Retired from the phone company, he spends a lot of time pursuing crappies on Missouri's Lake Truman.

Charlie was familiar with Lake of the Ozarks, having won a few crappie tournaments on the lake. He was new to our section of the 54,000-acre reservoir and had spent time before Fish Camp began, scoping

the many floating docks in our arm of the lake.

"Scoping" means he aimed the transducer on his trolling motor under docks to see if crappies were hanging out there. Some docks had big schools; other docks were void of fish. We started a short idle away from Fish Camp headquarters at Lake Breeze Resort, where Charlie had found a big school of crappies under a particular floating dock complex. We spent just a few minutes there as the LiveScope display revealed that the fish were gone.

So, we made a 12-mile run up the lake to other docks where Charlie had seen fish. And big schools of crappies were still hanging around two of the floating docks.

I'd heard plenty about forward-facing sonar (FFS), but I'd never been aboard a boat that had it. Watching Garmin LiveScope at work is basically like looking at a two-dimensional, monochrome aquarium. You can watch actual fish shapes swim around on the screen. You can see your lure sinking down to the fish level and you can watch fish swim up and eat it—or swim up and shy away. The screen also shows you how far away the fish are from the boat. When crappies are stacked amidst floating docks, you can easily drop a lure or bait right on their noses.

And that pretty much sums up our presentation.

Charlie gave me a 14-foot-long baitcasting rod from B'n'M Poles. Already tied on was a small, long-shank hook with a 1/4-ounce bullet sinker pegged about a foot above it with a neoprene bobber stop. While Charlie cast a small, colorful jig without additional bait towards the school, I baited with a live fathead minnow and dunked it straight below the rod tip. We both caught crappie after crappie, releasing many that were short of Lake of the Ozarks' 9-inch size limit.

On the sonar display, I could see the fish, but had a hard time seeing my bait and sinker.

"You're just above them," Charlie would say. "Lower it a couple feet." Or, "You are right in the middle of the school. Raise your bait a little bit."

I would do as instructed, and before long, the rod tip would dip, and I'd swing a crappie into the boat. They had to be 9 inches to keep on Lake of the Ozarks, and some had to be measured. Others were obviously

keepers—a few were 12 inches and bigger. We also landed lots of smaller fish that we quickly released.

When I fished the day before with Oklahoma's Anthony Owens, I could see my jig much more clearly on his LiveScope screen—I think because we got closer to the fish.

Anthony and I fished the same kinds of floating docks in a different part of the lake. He had a couple of 7-foot rods designed specifically for "shooting," which



Pro crappie angler Charlie Bunting shows a keeper crappie caught with the assistance of forward-facing sonar.

means grabbing the jig by its head, pulling to bend the short rod, and letting go of the jig and, milliseconds later, letting go of the line from the spinning reel. The rod springing straight flings the jig forward and, ideally, under the dock.

I need a lot more practice. Most of my "shots" ended with the jig plunking into the water well in front of the docks with a loud splash, not coming close to getting underneath.

So, we just dropped the jigs pretty much straight down, right next to docks where the LiveScope showed us fish. And we caught lots of them. "You have to slowly lift the jig to get bites," Anthony instructed. "If you pause it, they'll just swim back down."

The screen showed that he knew what he was talking about. It was amazing to see a crappie blob merge with the jig and then feel the bite. It occurred to me that we don't really feel the bite in most cases, but rather the fish turning back to go rejoin the rest of the school.

"Look at that gar!" Anthony exclaimed as a long fish mark swam around the school of crappies.

It was amazing to watch.

I also fished with Jason Clements and his wife Renee, who traveled from Mississippi to join the Fish Camp. Jason had a "tournament" approach to crappies, spurning the docks that were loaded with mostly smaller fish, and hunting for individual, larger fish around brush piles.

While Charlie had had 10-pound test K9 brand fluorocarbon, and Anthony had spooled the shooter rods with 6-pound, the Clements' 14-foot rods had baitcast reels filled with 20-pound test.

"I just kept them rigged how we use them in Mississippi," Jason explained, noting that most of their crappie lakes have stained water with very low visibility. They also fish a lot of snaggy brush piles where heavy fluorocarbon allows them to pull jigs free without breaking off, saving valuable tournament time.

Like Charlie, Jason had rigged a bullet weight above the unbaited jig, held in place top and bottom with neoprene bobber stops. The weight got the jig down quickly and helped hold it in front of fish.

As soon as we began fishing, he spotted a blob that, from its shape and how it was acting, he identified as a crappie. He dropped his jig down and immediately pulled a fat 12-incher into the boat. We didn't catch a lot of fish, but the average size was indeed bigger than the fish hanging under docks. Clements ties up his own jigs, taking a kit with him to

tournament venues. He buys bulk numbers of unpainted, tungsten heads, painting and adorning the jigs with colorful materials. Both his jig head and his bullet weight are made of tungsten, which he said shows up on FFS more clearly than softer lead does.

Amazing is an overused adjective, but that's the word I keep using for this technology. Right now, complete setups of FFS cost more than \$1,500 new. If competition amongst the electronics company brings the price down to where everyday anglers can add it to their boats, lots more fish will get caught—at least for a while. All three of the anglers I fished with said that crappies are already getting conditioned to hearing the louder clicks from the side-facing transducers and sometimes shy away from baits. Bass anglers say the same about their targets.

So, I doubt that states will be lowering creel limits because of FFS.

What I can say for sure is that FFS tech can help you catch more fish, and catching makes fishing more fun. I look forward to adding an FFS unit I can transfer between a kayak and my 17-foot fishing boat by next season. **MWO**

Dave Mull of Kalamazoo, Mich. has spent his career communicating the outdoors experience and runs Inner Viking Media. He enjoys kayak fishing for anything that swims in the lakes and rivers of the Midwest and beyond, and even uses his MirroCraft, from time to time. Available for seminars.



Crappie tournament pros Renee and Jason Clements hunt individual fish with forward-facing sonar.



Oklahoma guide Anthony Owens dabbles a jig in front of a school of crappies hanging under a Lake of the Ozarks dock while watching how the fish react to his lure.

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Iowa-Missouri Sportsman's Calendar

EVENTS

December 7

Tri-County Bass Club Tournament at Lake of the Ozarks, LORA Marina, from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Tri-County Bass Club, 573-762-2668.

December 7

Just Fish Team Trail Championship at Lake of the Ozarks, PB #2, from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: 314-537-0822.

December 14, January 11, 25 & 28

Bassing Bob Winter Bass Challenge at Lake of the Ozarks, Alhonna Resort, from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. For info: Bassing Bob Winter Bass Challenge, 314-650-6812.

December 15

Joe Bass Team Trail at Lake of the Ozarks, Alhonna Resort, from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. For info: 314-220-7196.

December 28

Midwest Outdoor Experience Tournament at Lake of the Ozarks, Coffman Beach Access, from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. For info: 636-432-2064.

January 12

Mid-Iowa Anglers Open Ice Tournament

Series at Badger Creek Lake, Badger Crk, Van Meter, IA, 50261. Hours: 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. For info: Mid-Iowa Anglers, (515) 229-2574, Ahoisington83@gmail.com.

January 26

Mid-Iowa Anglers Open Ice Tournament Series at Twelve Mile Lake, Creston, IA. Hours: 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. For info: Mid-Iowa Anglers, (515) 229-2574, Ahoisington83@gmail.com.

January 26

Frozen Feathers Fishing Contest, Ducks Unlimited Ice Fishing Derby at McIntosh Wildlife Area, McIntosh Rd., Ventura, IA, 50482. Hours: 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. For info: Ducks Unlimited, (641) 530-9836, bleclair@ducks.org, www.ducks.org.

Jan. 31, Feb. 1, 7 and 8

Monona County Fair 5th Annual Fishing Tournament at Peters Park, Rodney, IA, 51051. Hours: Jan. 31 5 to 11:30 p.m., Feb. 1 12 a.m. to 7 p.m., Feb. 7 5 to 11:30 p.m., Feb. 8 12 a.m. to 7 p.m. For info: Monona County Fair, (712) 880-2493, goslar93@hotmail.com.

SPORTS SHOWS

December 6-8

Clarke County Fairgrounds Gun Show at Clarke County Fairgrounds, 2070 W. McLane St., Osceola, IA 50213. Hours: Friday 4 - 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$8, children 12 and under free, law enforcement, firefighters, EMT, paramedic and military active or vets \$2 off. Vendor tables \$25 ea. For info: Midwest Event Promotions, James Chapline, (515) 230-8272, midwesteventpromotions@gmail.com.

December 6-8

The Big St Charles County Gun Show at Steel Shop Athletic Center, 49 Lawrence St., St. Charles, MO 63301. Hours: Friday 4 - 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$14, children 12 and under free; good all weekend. Vendor tables: \$60 ea., 2-3 tables \$55 ea., 4-5 tables \$50 ea., 6-plus tables \$45 ea. For info: BK Promotions, Brandon Kelley, (610) 486-7469, gunshows@bkpromotions.us, director@bkpromotions.us, bkpromotions.us.

December 6-8

Cape's Original Gun Show at Cape Girardeau Arena Park, Arena Building, 410 Kiwanis Dr., Cape Girardeau, MO 63701. Hours: Friday 4 - 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$10 good all weekend, children 12 and under free. Vendor tables \$45 ea. day of show, \$40 ea. in advance. For info: Semo Gun Shows, Jerry Barker, (573) 233-6035, semogunshows@yahoo.com, or Brad, (573) 450-0513.

December 7-8

Pioneer Sportsman's Show at Jackson County Central Middle School, 703 Mill Rd. E., Lakefield, MN 56150. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$5, children under 15 free with adult. Vendor tables \$25 ea. For info: Jackson County Sheriff's Reserve, Nathan Peterson, (605) 261-4330, pioneergunshow@gmail.com, facebook.com/JCSOReserve.

December 13-14

VFW Gun and Knife Show at Veterans of Foreign Wars, 418 VFW Dr., Mammoth Spring, AR 72554. Hours: Friday 5-9 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission \$6 for both days, children 12 and under free. Vendor tables \$25 ea. For info: George D. Hayes Foundation, Bob Wood, (870) 856-3781, wood_216@yahoo.com, (870) 847-0766.

December 21-22

R.K. Kansas City Gun Show at KCI-Expo Center, 11730 N Ambassador Dr., Kansas City, MO 64153. Hours: Saturday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$14, children \$6; VIP tickets \$16.50, children \$8.50. Vendor tables \$86 ea., prepaid \$76 ea., non-gun tables \$100 ea., electricity \$125. For info: R.K. Shows Inc., (417) 567-2002, rkshows@yousq.net, rkshows.com.

January 24-26

Iowa Boat, RV and Vacation Show at the UNI-Dome, 2501 Hudson Rd, Cedar Falls, IA 50613. Hours: Friday 3 - 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission \$7 plus fees (prices increase day of show), children 12 and under free. For info: Events, Inc., (317) 716-2684, info@events-inc.com, boatrvandvansportshows.com.

January 24-25

Warsaw Gun & Knife Show at American Legion #217, 32739 Wildcat Dr., Warsaw, MO 65355. Hours: Friday 12 to 6 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission \$7, children under 12 free. Vendor tables \$40 ea., two tables \$75. For info: Warsaw American Legion Shooting Sports, George Boddy, (660) 223-2082, gboddy67@gmail.com.

January 17-19

Clive Gun Show at Horizon Events Center, 2100 NW 100th St., Clive, IA 50325. Hours: Friday 4 - 9 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$10. Vendor tables \$50 ea. For info: Marv Kraus Promotions, Marv Kraus, (563) 608-4401, Andrew Kraus, (563) 608-2045, kraus.andrew.ak@gmail.com, marvkrauspromotions.net.

Iowa DNR Updates

Fall fishing for Iowa's prized trout

Fishing Iowa's trout streams is a unique way to enjoy the cool fall weather and marvel at the amazing colors of Iowa's prize trout. Male brown and brook trout display their brightest, most vibrant spawning colors this time of year.

Iowa boasts some of the most beautiful and plentiful trout streams in the Midwest. A true angler's paradise, Northeast Iowa is dotted with hundreds of miles of trout streams. From easily accessible streams in state or county parks, to those found in Iowa's most wild and remote natural spaces, there are plenty of places to catch rainbow, brown and brook trout.

Although a little late for peak fall colors, the bluffs, valleys and rock outcroppings offer spectacular views. View some of the best bluffs in Northeast Iowa, starting with the narrow valley of Paint Creek, west of Harpers Ferry. Several overlooks give excellent views of the stream from above.

Look for trout behind larger boulders and under rock ledges. Let your lure or bait drift around the boulders and just in front of the ledges.

Catch stream-reared brown trout up to 18 inches and 10- to 12-inch stocked rainbow trout in the Maquoketa River. Several public access points connect to miles of river in Clayton and Delaware counties. Find rainbow trout in pools and runs while brown trout will be near wood habitat.

The best chance to catch all three trout species in one trip is at North Cedar Creek, southwest of McGregor. For anglers willing to hike, the remote Wildlife Management Area provides access to more than 1.5 miles of coldwater stream.

Learn to "read" a stream, to identify habitats that offer food and cover. Trout are not randomly scattered in a stream. They locate themselves along the edge of the current flow near protective cover. The stream current carries food to the trout while it waits.

Trout try to bulk up in the fall for winter and are always hungry. Brown and brook trout lay their eggs in nests called redds in October and November. The eggs stay in these areas of cleaned gravel on the stream bottom until they hatch in late winter or early spring. Be careful where you walk to avoid stepping in or directly above these nests.

When using spin fishing gear, it's best to fish on overcast and gray days. Trout are less wary of lures at this time. If fly fishing, target midday on sunny and bright days. In cooler fall temperatures, bright warm days can stimulate an insect hatch. Dry flies can still be productive, but the insect hatches become more sporadic and less intense than in the summer so nymphs may be a better option.

Northeast Iowa draws thousands of anglers from across the Midwest to its coldwater streams and excellent trout fishing. Iowa's trout season is open all year. Iowa's trout streams are too. About 80 coldwater trout streams await anglers in ten northeast Iowa counties.

Anglers need a valid fishing license and pay the trout fee to fish for or possess trout. The daily limit is five trout per licensed angler with a possession limit of ten.

Learn more about Iowa's trout streams, including maps and amenities, and tips and tricks to catch trout on the Iowa DNR's website at www.iowadnr.gov/trout.

Zebra mussels in Saylorville Lake

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has recently confirmed zebra mussels in Saylorville Lake, after concerned boat owners contacted the DNR while removing their boats from Saylorville for the winter.

Staff with the Iowa DNR confirmed

the presence of zebra mussels on multiple boats in the Saylorville Marina area and will conduct additional monitoring around Saylorville Lake next summer to determine the abundance and distribution of zebra mussels.

"The zebra mussels probably arrived on or in a boat that had picked up them up from an infested water body," said Kim Bogenschutz, the DNR's Aquatic Invasive Species Program coordinator.

This discovery also serves as a reminder for all boat and lake property owners to check their boats, docks, and lifts for zebra mussels before storing for the winter. To date, zebra mussels have been found in 18 Iowa lakes and nine rivers, mostly downstream of infested lakes, including the Mississippi, Missouri, and Big Sioux rivers.

Zebra mussels look like small, D-shaped clams that have alternating light and dark bands. Most are less than one inch long. They are filter feeders that can form dense clusters as they attach to hard underwater surfaces. In the case of large infestations, they may interfere with aquatic food chains, kill native mussels, clog water intakes, increase algae blooms, and cover beaches with dead shells. Currently there is no effective treatment to control zebra mussels once they have infested a lake.

"Young zebra mussels are microscopic and can be unintentionally transported with water in live wells, bilges, ballast or bait buckets," she said. "That's why draining all water is a critical step in preventing the spread of zebra mussels."

Adult zebra mussels can attach to boats, trailers and aquatic vegetation. Boaters and anglers can help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species to new water bodies by cleaning, draining and drying their boats and equipment after each time on the water.

- Clean any plants, animals, or mud from your boat and equipment before you leave a waterbody.
- Drain water from all equipment (motor, live well, bilge, transom well, bait bucket) before you leave a waterbody.
- Dry anything that comes into contact with water (boats, trailers, equipment, boots, clothing, dogs). Before you move to another waterbody either: Spray your boat and trailer with hot or high-pressure water; or dry your boat and equipment for at least five days.
- Never release plants, fish or animals into a water body unless they came out of that waterbody and always empty unwanted bait in the trash.

It is illegal to possess or transport aquatic invasive species or to transport any aquatic plants on water-related equipment in Iowa. Iowa law also requires boaters to drain all water from boats and equipment before they leave a water access and to keep drain plugs removed or opened during transport. It is also illegal to introduce any live fish or plants, except for hooked bait, into public waters.

Learn more about aquatic invasive species, including a list of infested waters in the current *Iowa Fishing Regulations* or at www.iowadnr.gov/ais. **MWO**

ATTENTION Ice Fishermen!



We will accept ice fishing tips thru December!

We're looking for some ice fishing tips to pass along to our readers. Length of tip should be less than 150 words. Readers whose tips are selected will receive a useful thank you gift.

email to: info@midwestoutdoors.com

For the most up-to-date info go to:

MidWestOutdoors.com/events

Free listing for your event!

To list your event in the MWO Sportsman's Calendar, email info to: info@midwestoutdoors.com — Subject line: "Iowa/Missouri Calendar Listing."

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for publication.

How to Get the Most Out of Attending Sport Shows



Sport shows attract not only anglers and hunters, but also boaters, campers and quad runners. Maximize your time there and benefit from the many special deals. Photo: Don Gasaway

by Don Gasaway

Going to an outdoor show is always a hoot. It is a chance to see what anglers from all over are buying. It brings up visions of upcoming trip opportunities, and it is a learning experience.

Advance preparation is the key to maximizing knowledge from a boat show. A game plan allows you to learn with a minimum of exhaustion. Begin on the internet. Most exhibitors have web pages. So, too, do the sponsors of the show itself.

Most shows are composed of thousands of square feet of products, places to go, and other bits of knowledge. Covering the entire show and still being able to focus on your favorite aspect of outdoor recreation takes effort. Some shows are so large that you feel the need of a GPS just to get around.

Once you select a show, check the ads that appear in newspapers, magazines, on radio and television for specific information as to where and when the show is coming to town. Look for products and seminars of interest. If you're planning to make purchases, make a list of the items you are seeking.

Make two lists: one that you must buy, and second, things that you would like to examine. Perhaps you will buy something from the second list, or maybe you just want to see it. List exhibitors new to shows you have attended in the past.

Weekday traffic is lightest and exhibitors can spend more time with you. Arrive early to allow maximum time to spend getting the information you seek.

If you are with a group, plan to meet at a specific time and location. You may want to see different things. Kids do not want to spend the same amount of time at a booth as an adult. Wives typically want to see different things than do husbands.

Once at the show, take time to look over the program you usually receive as you enter. It often has a floor plan and list of exhibitors. Use a pen or highlighter to mark

the exhibits and seminars of major interest. Make check marks beside the names of exhibitors who might stock the things you want to purchase.

Make note of the time and location of seminars you want to attend. Some shows announce the seminars as they are taking place, while some do not. Be alert to the fact that crowd noise sometimes blocks out announcements. Have a watch or cellphone so you do not miss your favorite speaker. Make note on the program of any last-minute substitute seminar speakers or exhibits. Look for such late changes at the entrance to the show or at the seminar area.

Take a recorder to seminars. Most speakers have no problem with your recording their speech, but it is important to ask permission first. Take notes in a spiral notebook. You might even have some questions that you hope the speaker will answer, prepared in advance. If he/she does not cover the subject, ask during the Q & A, which is usually a part of any seminar.

Pay attention and avoid side conversations with your companions. If you are intensely interested in the subject, sit near the front so that you can concentrate. If you are only passively interested, sit in the back or on an aisle. If you decide to leave during the presentation, you will disturb only a minimum number of other people.

Wear comfortable shoes. You will spend most of your time walking on concrete. Hiking boots or a new pair of athletic shoes are a good idea as they provide support and cushioning for the feet. Older athletic shoes are not a good idea as they lack the support necessary to cushion your feet. They are like walking barefoot and can lead to foot problems as well as fatigue.

If the outside weather is cold, you need to do something with your coat. Carrying it is a nuisance. If the show provides a coat check service, it is worth the cost. If not, perhaps you might want to leave it in your vehicle. A third alternative is to put it in a backpack.

Backpacks are also a good place for brochures that you pick up at the show. You can acquire a considerable number of them visiting all the booths. Although the weight of a brochure is not much, the weight of many brochures adds up. If you do not remember to bring your backpack, look for a booth that is passing out plastic "shopping bags." Look around at the other people carrying bags and check for reinforced handles. They are the ones you want.

Take frequent breaks and examine what you accumulate. Sometimes, it is stuff that you do not really want. Stop for a soft drink and a hot dog while culling your materials. After reading a brochure, if you still

have some questions, go back to their booth and get answers. It is easier than calling or writing from home later.

Finally, check your notes. Did you miss anything that you had intended to see?

Attendance at sports shows is a great opportunity to gain maximum benefits with minimal investment. **MWO**

Don Gasaway is a freelance outdoor writer from Marion, Ill. who has written more than 1,000 magazine articles. Find him on Facebook at: facebook.com/donsjournal. Comments and reviews are welcome



Mississippi Valley Sportsmen, Inc.

Merry Christmas!

Remember to join us at our annual fundraising banquet the first Saturday in March!

We are a Quad Cities sportsmen's club. Our main objectives and goals of the organization are as follows:

To promote conservation, preservation, management, habitat development and other activities related to youth development and good sportsmanship.

We host a fun Shoot in the summer that gives us a chance to get together and have some outdoor fun and establish bragging rights for the year.

We will also participate in other activities as available.

All monies raised are kept and utilized locally.

We are currently accepting new committee members to help organize our events and provide input on the direction of the Group.

If you have an interest in joining this great organization, please contact **Rob Cain** at rcain@citiesig.com or call **563-340-4918** to learn more on how you can get involved.

Chairman
Rob Cain

Treasurer
Rob Cain

Secretary
Otto Nobis

Iowa Board
Adam Baetke
Barry Dolan
Stan Ericson
Mitch Johnson

Illinois Board
Steve Dalton
Darrell Day
Terry Leigh
John Massarolo

All above persons have volunteered to serve.



Forward-Facing Sonar is Amazing, but Will it Result in Lower Creel Limits?

Forward-facing sonar is controversial because it helps catch so many fish. I experienced it firsthand for the first time in September, and I'm pretty sure that the pro crappie angler and I would not have caught 29 keeper crappies in about two hours without it.

Forward-facing sonar (FFS) is the cutting edge of fishing electronics. Garmin offers LiveScope, Lowrance has Active Target and Humminbird features MEGA Live Imaging. The technology shoots sonar to the side of the boat, showing fish location in real time. On the screen, you not only can watch a fish as it swims, but also watch your lure and how the fish reacts to it.

Some say FFS makes fishing too easy. Some major bass circuits have had teenage rookies win big contests using FFS. Some national bass tournament trails have established rules limiting its use. One series of muskie tournaments has banned its use altogether.

FFS exploded on the fishing scene about four years ago, and anglers who target all sorts of species have added it to bass boats, walleye boats and even kayaks. Serious crappie anglers have also paid big bucks to add FFS.

In September, I attended "Fish Camp," a junket of content providers, bloggers and writers with guides, tackle makers and pro anglers on central Missouri's Lake of the Ozarks. It was put together by Big Mike Jones, a promoter and roving reporter for *Redneck Adventures*, a streaming outdoors show. I was lucky enough to fish with three different crappie anglers: one from Mississippi, one from Oklahoma and one from Missouri over the course of two days.

The three guys all had Garmin LiveScope units that helped find individual crappies and schools of crappies in front of and to the sides of their boats.

Charlie Bunting, a pro crappie angler since 1997, has amassed an incredible resume of victories, including top titles in three of the four main crappie tours. Retired from the phone company, he spends a lot of time pursuing crappies on Missouri's Lake Truman.

Charlie was familiar with Lake of the Ozarks, having won a few crappie tournaments on the lake. He was new to our section of the 54,000-acre reservoir and had spent time before Fish Camp began, scoping

the many floating docks in our arm of the lake.

"Scoping" means he aimed the transducer on his trolling motor under docks to see if crappies were hanging out there. Some docks had big schools; other docks were void of fish. We started a short idle away from Fish Camp headquarters at Lake Breeze Resort, where Charlie had found a big school of crappies under a particular floating dock complex. We spent just a few minutes there as the LiveScope display revealed that the fish were gone.

So, we made a 12-mile run up the lake to other docks where Charlie had seen fish. And big schools of crappies were still hanging around two of the floating docks.

I'd heard plenty about forward-facing sonar (FFS), but I'd never been aboard a boat that had it. Watching Garmin LiveScope at work is basically like looking at a two-dimensional, monochrome aquarium. You can watch actual fish shapes swim around on the screen. You can see your lure sinking down to the fish level and you can watch fish swim up and eat it—or swim up and shy away. The screen also shows you how far away the fish are from the boat. When crappies are stacked amidst floating docks, you can easily drop a lure or bait right on their noses.

And that pretty much sums up our presentation.

Charlie gave me a 14-foot-long baitcasting rod from B'n'M Poles. Already tied on was a small, long-shank hook with a 1/4-ounce bullet sinker pegged about a foot above it with a neoprene bobber stop. While Charlie cast a small, colorful jig without additional bait towards the school, I baited with a live fathead minnow and dunked it straight below the rod tip. We both caught crappie after crappie, releasing many that were short of Lake of the Ozarks' 9-inch size limit.

On the sonar display, I could see the fish, but had a hard time seeing my bait and sinker.

"You're just above them," Charlie would say. "Lower it a couple feet." Or, "You are right in the middle of the school. Raise your bait a little bit."

I would do as instructed, and before long, the rod tip would dip, and I'd swing a crappie into the boat. They had to be 9 inches to keep on Lake of the Ozarks, and some had to be measured. Others were obviously keepers—a few were 12 inches and bigger. We also landed lots of smaller fish that we quickly released.

When I fished the day before with Oklahoma's Anthony Owens, I could see my jig much more clearly on his LiveScope screen—I think because we got closer to the fish.

Anthony and I fished the same kinds of floating docks in a different part of the lake. He had a couple of 7-foot rods designed specifically for "shooting," which



Pro crappie angler Charlie Bunting shows a keeper crappie caught with the assistance of forward-facing sonar.

means grabbing the jig by its head, pulling to bend the short rod, and letting go of the jig and, milliseconds later, letting go of the line from the spinning reel. The rod springing straight flings the jig forward and, ideally, under the dock.

I need a lot more practice. Most of my "shots" ended with the jig plunking into the water well in front of the docks with a loud splash, not coming close to getting underneath.

So, we just dropped the jigs pretty much straight down, right next to docks where the LiveScope showed us fish. And we caught lots of them. "You have to slowly lift the jig to get bites," Anthony instructed. "If you pause it, they'll just swim back down."

The screen showed that he knew what he was talking about. It was amazing to see a crappie blob merge with the jig and then feel the bite. It occurred to me that we don't really feel the bite in most cases, but rather the fish turning back to go rejoin the rest of the school.

"Look at that gar!" Anthony exclaimed as a long fish mark swam around the school of crappies.

It was amazing to watch.

I also fished with Jason Clements and his wife Renee, who traveled from Mississippi to join the Fish Camp. Jason had a "tournament" approach to crappies, spurning the docks that were loaded with mostly smaller fish, and hunting for individual, larger fish around brush piles.

While Charlie had had 10-pound test K9 brand fluorocarbon, and Anthony had spooled the shooter rods with 6-pound, the Clements' 14-foot rods had baitcast reels filled with 20-pound test.

"I just kept them rigged how we use them in Mississippi," Jason explained, noting that most of their crappie lakes have stained water with very low visibility. They also fish a lot of snaggy brush piles where heavy fluorocarbon allows them to pull jigs free without breaking off, saving valuable tournament time.

Like Charlie, Jason had rigged a bullet weight above the unbaited jig, held in place top and bottom with neoprene bobber stops. The weight got the jig down quickly and helped hold it in front of fish.

As soon as we began fishing, he spotted a blob that, from its shape and how it was acting, he identified as a crappie. He dropped his jig down and immediately pulled a fat 12-incher into the boat. We didn't catch a lot of fish, but the average size was indeed bigger than the fish hanging under docks. Clements ties up his own jigs, taking a kit with him to

tournament venues. He buys bulk numbers of unpainted, tungsten heads, painting and adorning the jigs with colorful materials. Both his jig head and his bullet weight are made of tungsten, which he said shows up on FFS more clearly than softer lead does.

Amazing is an overused adjective, but that's the word I keep using for this technology. Right now, complete setups of FFS cost more than \$1,500 new. If competition amongst the electronics company brings the price down to where everyday anglers can add it to their boats, lots more fish will get caught—at least for a while. All three of the anglers I fished with said that crappies are already getting conditioned to hearing the louder clicks from the side-facing transducers and sometimes shy away from baits. Bass anglers say the same about their targets.

So, I doubt that states will be lowering creel limits because of FFS.

What I can say for sure is that FFS tech can help you catch more fish, and catching makes fishing more fun. I look forward to adding an FFS unit I can transfer between a kayak and my 17-foot fishing boat by next season. **MWO**

Dave Mull of Kalamazoo, Mich. has spent his career communicating the outdoors experience and runs Inner Viking Media. He enjoys kayak fishing for anything that swims in the lakes and rivers of the Midwest and beyond, and even uses his MirroCraft, from time to time. Available for seminars.



Crappie tournament pros Renee and Jason Clements hunt individual fish with forward-facing sonar.



Oklahoma guide Anthony Owens dabbles a jig in front of a school of crappies hanging under a Lake of the Ozarks dock while watching how the fish react to his lure.



Deer Hunting a New Farm

Many things give me pleasure in my life. My wife, kids and grandkids top that list. My faith in the Lord is right at the top, too. Then come the rest of our family and my outdoor career. Getting to share my outdoor activities with family and friends is also extremely gratifying.

This past deer season was one of those very special times.

I have tried very hard in my outdoor career to make sure my boys, my dad and even my good friends had plenty of chances to hunt and fish with me. Besides my own boys, Roger Lewis from Park Hills, Missouri has shared the most time with me out of doors. I always try to include Rog in whatever I have going at the time. Last year, we teamed up again to hunt a new property.

This 260-acre honey hole is located on a small creek and has just a bit more tillable acres than timber. This is a great mix since about 20 percent of the tillable portion is in alfalfa and the rest in corn. When this farm became available to me, I immediately thought of Roger. It had been quite a few years since Roger and I had gotten to deer hunt together. He was in automatically.

Roger asked if we could include his son-in-law Mike Hamski. I really like Mike and adding him to the mix would be a pleasure. Mike and Rog planned a trip up here last summer to scout and post our new ground. The corn was still in, but we got a feel for the property and put "No Hunting" signs up in all the right places. This was a great-looking farm and we all fell in love with it.

After the corn came out, I took my son Caleb with me to help get a stand put up. We picked a great spot that covered a hot creek crossing and about 40 acres of cut corn. Caleb was sorry he could not get to hunt with

us the whole season, but did ask if he could film my hunt on opening day since he was free then. We agreed that he would come with me, and Mike and Roger would go to the spots they picked-out during the scouting trip.

I called Roger to see if he and Mike would have time to come and scout again since the corn was out. They had no time, but Roger asked if I thought we had room for him to bring his oldest son, Steven. I have known this kid since he was about 10 years old. It would be great to have him in the group. And we did have plenty of good spots to put him.

Steven was just coming off ankle surgery so he would not be very mobile. I told him I would get to the farm and build him a blind out of bales of straw so he would not have to walk. He and his dad were both tickled.

The first shots of the day came from north of our farm. It was not long before a nice doe stepped out into the cornfield to my north. I place the crosshairs of my scope on her chest and fired. I had already ranged the north fence at 200 yards. She was a half-dozen rows south of the fence and she dropped like a bag of hammers.

Not long after, I heard Steven shoot. He texted me that he had killed a big doe. I returned the message with my news. Then we heard Roger shoot. Roger does not text, so we were not sure of his success. About an hour later, Steven shot again and killed another doe, filling his bonus tag. It was an hour earlier than we had agreed to meet for lunch, but I had three deer to retrieve. I got my four-wheeler and started that process.

Roger, too, had killed a big doe, so we had four deer down on opening morning on our new farm. We were ecstatic. We had a quick bite to eat and headed back out to our same



The author was very proud to take this old buck whose few remaining teeth were worn smooth. Photo: Caleb Roux

stand sites. Unbelievably, Mike Hamski had not seen a deer that morning. We were sure that would change before sunset.

I had been watching the creek crossing intently for a couple of hours. I was sure that deer would be coming out of the timber to the fields in the evening to feed. At about 3:30, I glanced back into the cornfield and saw a big deer stalking the decoy. I woke up my cameraman as I got the buck in my binoculars. It was an 8-pointer and a really big deer. The buck's rack was nice but not overly impressive. I was definitely looking for something bigger as far as a rack goes. However, as I studied the deer closely, I noticed his sway back and pot belly. I also noticed his gray muzzle and aged the deer to be at least 6 1/2 years old. He was a buck that needed to be taken.

I double checked with Caleb to make sure he was recording. When I got the "thumbs up" from him, I found the buck's huge chest in my scope. The shot was near perfect, and he did not run 25 yards.

So, the scouting and stand placement done before the season really paid off on opening day. Roger, Mike, Steven and I, along with cameraman Caleb had a great time and will be very anxious to hunt together again as soon as possible. **MWO**

Mike Roux is an award-winning outdoor writer and a former Illinois Outdoor Writer of the Year. Roux is also a renowned speaker available to sportsmen's groups as well as youth and church groups. For regular and constant outdoor content, check him out at mikeroux.com or like and follow Mike Roux Outdoor Enterprises on Facebook.

Trapping: a Much-Maligned Management Tool

by Don Gasaway

Modern trappers work hard to dispel the myth and misinformation about their art. Contrary to the profile put forward by animal rights people, the modern trapper is a lover of the outdoors, not a despoiler of it. They also love the skill required to outwit their quarry on its own turf.

A trapper is probably the most knowledgeable naturalist in the wild. He knows his woods and its occupants.

Surveys done in big cities find the public is not so anti-trapping once they learn trapping does not endanger species and that seasons regulate harvest numbers. It's people who know little about the outdoors and wildlife management quickly to condemn trapping. They seem to fall prey to the misinformation put forth by animal rights activists.

Trappers, not unlike hunters, must play attention to their gear, tools, clothing and scents to outwit the animals they seek. They must scout their prospective trap line area for signs of animal activity. Then there's the matter of gaining permission to trap the area, rather than trespass. Pre-trapping season consists of trap maintenance, securing scents to cover human smells, and reading all the regulations that the state imposes upon trappers.

Animals in the wild often fall victim to predation, fighting, accident, starvation and disease. Trapping is a substitute for some of this natural mortality and provides humans with use of some excess animals.

Trapping provides an income for thousands of outdoors people and women. It can be supplemental income for youngsters in school. Fur sales add millions of dollars to the economy.

Trappers also help property owners avoid damage to their land. Trapping is an efficient method of controlling furbearers who have become a nuisance. Oversize populations of furbearers can cause severe damage to vegetation. A marsh can become unproductive for other forms of wildlife. Trappers help control animal populations.

Much is made of the holding of an animal in a "leg hold" trap. Death by the lingering torment of disease from overcrowded populations is harsher than a day-long detention in a leg hold trap. Trappers check their sets daily.

All animals die whether we harvest them or not. Death occurs whether we see it or not. Do we choose a form of death that provides a harvest and helps stabilize the population? Alternatively, do we leave it to nature to provide one of the natural deaths of starvation, disease, predation, accident or fighting? Do we enjoy an economic and

recreational benefit, or not?

Fur prices rise and fall each year. Furs such as muskrat, red fox and raccoon see prices fluctuate the most. The result interest among novice trappers goes up and down, too. Many experienced trappers are making plans for longer or shorter trap lines as well.

Early settlers were trappers. Trapping is

a part of our heritage. Today, it remains an essential tool for wildlife management. **MWO**

Don Gasaway is a freelance outdoor writer from Marion, Ill. who has written more than 1,000 magazine articles. Find him on Facebook at: facebook.com/donsjournal. Comments and reviews are welcome.

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Building the Ultimate Fishing Garage/Boat Shed



Design or redo your garage to be your man cave or fishing garage and enjoy the organization of all your fishing tackle.

by Glenn Walker

Getting your boat out of, or back into, your garage with the least amount of hassle allows you to get out fishing quicker; and when done, get the boat stored away without a headache. Plus, the ability and luxury of keeping all your fishing tackle and boating equipment in one spot, directly next to your boat, makes preparing for your next fishing trip easy.

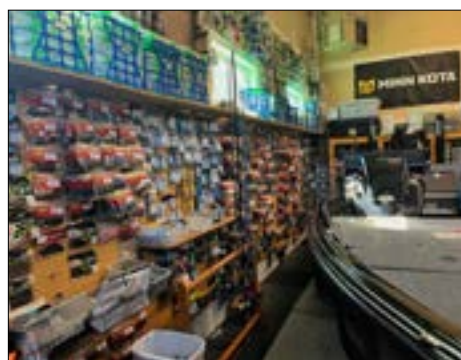
The length of your garage is obviously the number one thing to consider. Know the length of your boat when it is on the trailer, and if it has a swing away tongue or not. Knowing this length helps you know exactly



Install a floor drain below your boat to keep your garage floor dry.

how deep your garage must be; and if you'll have to swing the trailer tongue to be able to close the garage door. When we built our house, I laid out the garage so I could back my boat in and leave my truck connected (somewhat of a pipe dream when living in the suburbs). If you can accomplish this, *do it*. If not, at least leave enough space at the back end so you don't need to trim your motor down to fit in the garage; and at the front end, so you can easily walk around the boat to get work done.

If possible, have a tall enough garage, and garage doors, so you don't need to trim your motor down to get the boat in the garage; likewise, for your shallow water anchors. I have 9-foot-tall garage doors, so I can take my



The author keeps his tackle trays on the shelf above his pegboard, providing easy access to items that go in and out of the boat based on the next day's fishing trip.



Heavy-duty wide, deep, tall shelves near your boat allow you to store a lot of tackle and boating accessories.

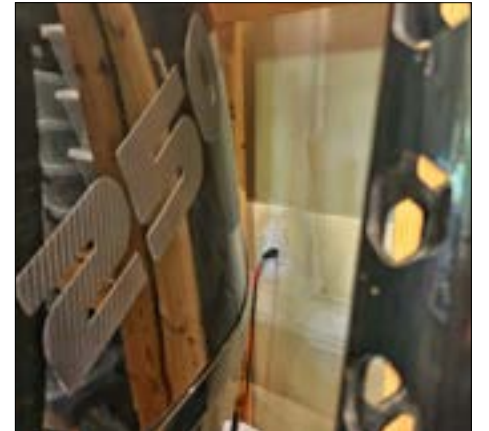
boat in and out of the garage without having to worry about my Raptors striking the top of the garage door frame.

Exactly where you park your boat in the garage depends on the layout of your garage, and taking into consideration if it is a one-, two-, three-, or even better, four-car garage. Our garage has an 18-foot-wide garage door. My boat sits on the outside of the stall next to the wall (so it can be next to the pegboard and shelves), and my truck is next to it. This way, when I go fishing, I can open one garage door, pull my truck out, hook the boat up and go. I also have plenty of space on either side of the trailer when backing it in, so I don't have to worry about hitting anything.

If you are building a new house and laying out the garage, or building a dedicated boat shop, talk to your contractor about adding a laundry tub with a hot and cold hose spigot. A deep laundry tub comes in handy to wash gear, wash your hands after a day on the water, or if you work on the trailer and are greasy. The hose spigots come in handy to spray down your boat or flush out your livewells. If you work on your outboard, you can put muffs on the hose and fire your engine up in your garage.

Another thing to consider is electrical outlets; you can *never* have too many for plugging in your phone, charging drill batteries, and most importantly, plugging in your onboard battery charger. I had a dedicated outlet installed directly behind where my Mercury Pro XS is, which is the closest point to the cord to my Minn Kota Precision Series Battery Charger. This dedicated outlet ensures that other electrical items will not trip the breaker and prevent my batteries from getting a full charge.

Putting a floor drain in the garage floor is an absolute must; this will help keep water from pooling on your garage floor as it drips off your boat and trailer after a day on the water. Floor drains also allow you to spray down the floor and squeegee it into the drain to keep your fishing



Install a dedicated outlet to plug in your onboard battery charger.



Establish a system so you know where to back up your trailer.

shop clean.

Being able to organize your packaged baits, soft plastics and terminal tackle ensures that you know where they are to quickly restock your tackle boxes or pack for an upcoming fishing trip or tournament. The wall next to my boat is covered with pegboard. I can hang most of my packaged baits, soft plastics and terminal tackle, and have it all organized, within reach while sitting in my boat.

As you think about your fishing garage, consider not just the tackle you have now, but also the tackle in your boat. Also anticipate future fishing tackle. You need shelves for the tackle you keep in plastic cases; the same goes for tubs or totes to hold extra bags of sorts plastics, or bins with random items or accessories for your boat. We constructed shelves out of 2x4s and OSB board behind the boat where I keep bins of soft plastics, packaged baits and boat accessories. A shelf above my pegboard holds my filled tackle trays within easy reach when I'm in my boat rigging rods and putting tackle in the boat.

Also, you *must have* a place to keep your fishing rods out of the way, untangled and protected from being stepped on or broken. I mounted racks on the wall where I can put backup rods, and rods that I don't use on a regular basis. Next to my boat, I have a free-standing rod rack where I keep the rods I use throughout the season. They are within easy

story continued on next page



Fishermen with lots of extra fishing tackle need a system to hang and organize it, like a wall covered with pegboard.

Fishing Adventures in Waders

by Bob Jensen

Some friends and I gathered recently, and the talk turned to fishing. We spoke about different fishing trips that we had been on lately, lures that had been productive (and some that had not been productive), and a variety of other topics geared toward fishing. Not catching, just fishing.

The conversation eventually turned to our early years of fishing. Most of the members of our group had spent a significant portion of their younger years fishing while wading. It was agreed that wading added a little or a lot of excitement to our fishing. The excitement wasn't all from catching fish, and it was determined that many of these exciting events were best not shared with parents.

One group member shared that there is quicksand along Iowa rivers. Others agreed, but none had encountered any that was more than waist deep.

Another member had discovered that if you're walking through a pasture along the river and there's a herd of cows and a protective bull, the bull will quit chasing you when you jump in the river. It's impressive how fast a normally slow guy can run in a pair of chest waders when a bull is chasing him. Try to find a not-real-deep spot in the river to jump into.

At some point in our wading careers, we had to decide if hip waders or chest waders were the better option. We all went the chest wader route. Chest waders let us get into more areas of the river. Most of us learned the

hard way that chest waders were the same as four-wheel drive pickups. They allowed you to get in trouble in places that were harder to get out of. We learned that with four-wheel drive trucks, you get stuck in two-wheel drive and back up in four-wheel drive.

You don't want to get stuck in two-wheel and then keep going forward in four-wheel. You're probably going to get even more stuck.

With chest waders, you go as deep as you can with hip waders, then go back. Continuing into deeper water was and still is a bad idea. Several in our group had gotten into swifter, deeper water with chest waders than was advisable. That's another happening that wasn't shared with parents for a while.

We agreed that it's very important to know about the ownership of the property where you'll be fishing. Most of our wading adventures were and still are on private property, and the owners of that property understandably want to know who's out there. Things were much simpler back in the day. If property ownership changed, we knew about it. Not always so today. Get permission from the person who can legally give permission to be on the desired property.

Everyone agreed that a jig with a plastic tail was the best bait choice. Not because the fish liked it better, but because it was much safer to use. Crankbaits have more hooks, and



A jig/plastic bait combo is the way to go when wading.

as a couple of us learned, getting one of those hooks in your hand while unhooking a fish when you're a half-mile from the vehicle does not make for a pleasant outing. Especially when the fish is still attached to the bait that's stuck in your hand.

The rivers have aged, as have the anglers who waded them. The rivers have eroded, reducing fish habitat and fish populations. Our group of anglers no longer has the energy needed to wade up and down the river. However, our group enjoyed reliving those days when wading was an adventure that we're glad we experienced, and somewhat surprised that we survived.

MWO

Bob Jensen's 45-year career in the fishing and outdoor industry includes producing and hosting award-winning television and radio shows, co-authoring five best-selling books, writing a weekly syndicated outdoor column and numerous feature articles, and presenting fishing seminars at various outdoor events.

Building the Ultimate Fishing Garage...

...continued from previous page

reach for rigging and putting into my rod box, and vice versa. I can easily pull rods I'm not using out of the boat and put them back on the rack. I always store my rods with a Rod Glove on them, so they are further protected and ready to go right into the rod locker.

Two items to make your fishing garage complete, although not a necessity, are a TV and refrigerator. A TV is obviously nice during the fall and winter months; as you work on tackle, turn on your favorite sporting event to keep you entertained. Having a fridge next to your boat allows you to quickly grab ice or freezer packs from the freezer to fill your boat cooler or cooler in your truck. I also keep all my energy drinks, protein shakes and water in the fridge and can easily put

them in the boat for the day.

As we get into the offseason winter months, *now* is the time to work on or create your fishing garage or boat shed. If you have an existing spot in your garage or shed where you keep your boat and fishing tackle, implement some of these ideas. And if you want to really create a dream fishing man cave or boat shop, take these ideas, plus some of your own, to your contractor and get your dream started. **MWO**

Glenn Walker has been fishing Minnesota and Mississippi River tournaments for more than 15 years, spreading his passion and knowledge of the sport via articles and videos. For more information, check out glennwalkerfishing.com or on Facebook @GlennWalkerFishing.

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Missouri Microfishing Adventure



Tyler Goodale scans the rocky bottom for elusive darters. Photos: Tom Berg

by Tom Berg

Microfishing is fun! What is microfishing? Well, it's exactly what it sounds like: Fishing with micro-sized tackle while pursuing micro-sized or very small fish. We are talking about tiny fish like minnows, shiners, darters, dace, sculpins and a host of other obscure fish that most people have never heard of and probably never seen.

Why would anyone target tiny fish on a hook and line? It's a valid question. I couldn't understand it when my brother Mike first told me about microfishing several years ago. Catching minnows? Are you crazy? It took me a while to give it a try, but now I'm hooked (pun intended)!

Believe it or not, microfishing is a growing sport, and there are numerous reasons for pursuing tiny fish. One big reason is Life Listing. Many anglers keep a list of all the different fish species they have caught on hook and line throughout their lives. It is their Life List for fishing. Microfishing allows the opportunity for adding dozens or hundreds of new fish species to your Life List. It is great fun!

Another reason is to gain an appreciation for the incredible biodiversity of the native fish species in our lakes, rivers and small creeks. Your local lake is not just inhabited by bass and bluegills. There are probably several species of minnows or shiners there, for example, occupying their own little niche in the lake's ecosystem, preying on tiny organisms and becoming prey for larger species like bass. The food web in any given body of water is complex and incredibly interconnected.

Part of the appreciation of tiny native fish is their beauty. Many native shiners and darters are incredibly colorful and beautiful. Have you ever seen a native fish from the Midwest that is bright red, orange and blue? Some sunfish meet this description, but few others do. Many native darters sport these incredible colors every spring during their spawning runs.

Now, on to my recent Missouri microfishing adventure! I met my friend Tyler Goodale earlier this year near Poplar Bluff, Missouri for a fun day of microfishing.

Tyler lives in the area and is an expert at finding, catching and identifying myriad native fish species in the local waterways. He is also an excellent microfishing guide (573-714-8040).

Tyler took me to one of his favorite local creeks in the Current River drainage in search of darters. This particular creek was only 6 to 8 inches deep and 4 or 5 feet across. The water was crystal clear, and the bottom was composed of small rocks and pebbles. I didn't see any fish activity at first, but then Tyler pointed to a small group of rocks in the middle of the creek and told me there was a Current Darter sitting right at the edge of the rocks.

I saw it and was amazed at how camouflaged it was against the rocks. I lowered a tiny microhook baited with a minuscule piece of redworm to within a few inches of the fish. As soon as I moved it closer, the fish spotted it and rushed over to eat it. I set the hook, lifted it out of the water and took a close look. Wow! The colors were amazing! His body was a dull golden color, with bright blue vertical stripes from gills to tail. His fins were a beautiful blue color, too, and his dorsal fins featured horizontal blue and orange stripes. There were bright blue and orange markings on his cheeks, too.

After some photos, I safely released it. This spot was unlikely to have other darters nearby, so we hopped back in the car and headed to another waterway. The next spot was a small section of McKenzie Creek, which is in Missouri's Black River drainage. This creek was wider than the last spot, but not much deeper. We stopped at a small bridge spanning the creek and looked down into the clear water.

Small fish were everywhere! I was in search of more colorful darters, and Tyler quickly pointed out a brightly colored male Brook Darter below. I dropped my baited hook near him, but before he could react, a black-spotted topminnow jumped on it. I caught and released him and tried again for the darter. Again, a non-target species grabbed the bait. This was a common creek chub, and he was very drab compared to the darters I was pursuing.

Finally, I got the bait down to the brook



The current darter has striking blue stripes.



The beautiful brook darter is unforgettable with its red, orange and blue colors. Photo: Tom Berg



Northern studfish have interesting yellow stripes. Photo: Tom Berg



The aptly named bleeding shiner is fairly large for a 'micro' species. Photo: Tom Berg

darter and he inhaled it. I pulled him up and marveled at his bright colors! His body was a dull tan color, but he had bright orange-red stripes running vertically down near his tail. His belly was bright orange, and his fins were a combination of blue and red. He was absolutely stunning! After a quick photo, he was released, too. One of the most amazing things about these beautiful fish is that most people have never seen them or even heard of them!

We decided to move upstream to search for other species, and we stopped right near another bridge. Tyler said this creek has a good population of a species called Bleeding Shiners, and that they are very cool-looking fish, too. As soon as he told me that they often congregate beneath this bridge, I made short cast to the open water there. One cast was all it took, as a shiner grabbed my bait and I set the hook.

The bleeding shiner had a white belly, and a black back and sides, and most of his fins were bright red. His mouth was also red, and he had a conspicuous red stripe on each cheek. The red markings looked like blood; thus the name bleeding shiner. He was quite handsome, and we quickly released him, too.

Before leaving this spot, I made a couple more casts, and soon had another new species for my Life List flopping around at

my feet. This was a Northern Studfish, and I had never seen anything quite like it. He had bluish-silvery sides, with distinct yellow lines running horizontally from head to tail. A very beautiful fish!

There were more fish still to catch that day, but those tales will have to wait for another day.

Tyler Goodale is a wealth of knowledge concerning just about all the freshwater fish species swimming around in Missouri's waterways. He can not only identify all of them but knows exactly where to find most of them throughout the year. Although he usually limits his microfishing charters to the warmer-weather months of April through October, he also guides clients for larger fish like walleyes, bass, sturgeon and others during the colder months of the year. Contact him by phone or text (573-714-8040) or via email (etheostoma83@gmail.com) to get more info or book your own trip. **MWO**

A lifelong outdoorsman and award-winning outdoor writer and photographer, Tom Berg has been the Executive Director/Treasurer of the Hoosier Outdoor Writers group in Indiana since 2004. When he is not writing, he would rather be outside fishing, hunting, trapping or birding than doing just about anything else.



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Advanced Slip-Bobber Fishing Tips

by Ken McBroom

I've been using a slip-bobber for many years. Like all things fishing, time passes, and with it comes new and better techniques. Slip-bobber fishing is no exception. The single most aggravating aspect to using a slip-bobber is getting the line to slide through your bobber. Thankfully, with the popularity of slip-bobber fishing, companies are finally listening to hardcore crappie anglers about designs to make them work better and catch more crappies.

As an outdoor writer, I'm fortunate to not just meet some of the best crappie anglers in the country, but also fish with them. At a recent Brushpile Fishing Academy on Green River Lake, I met Chris Kleva, owner of Stan's Slip Bobbers. Chris has developed the perfect slip-bobber for serious crappie anglers. With metal inserts in each end of the bobber, the line slips through effortlessly, eliminating the frustration of the line not getting pulled through the bobber. The insert also has a small-enough hole so that the bobber stop doesn't require a bead that often keeps your line from sliding freely. Stan's Slip Bobbers has a balsa wood model that floats well and allows for a heavier weight.

I was excited to fish with Stan's new bobber at the Brushpile Academy and spent a day fishing with Kent Driscoll, slip-bobber fisherman extraordinaire, and B'n'M Fishing Pro Staff manager. Even after many years fishing with slip-bobbers, we all learned a lot on this trip.

There are several different ways to rig a slip-bobber, but when fishing deep water, there are a few things to consider. Getting your bait down 20 feet and deeper requires a heavy sinker. If you try to fish with your normal shallow-water setup—using a small slit-shot—your bait can drift off target before it gets to the desired depth. Also, the line will struggle to glide through the bobber the deeper you fish. A 1/4-ounce sinker is best suited for deep water slip-bobber fishing.

Over the years, I have used a split shot when slip-bobber fishing. These split-shot sinkers have worked, but I learned a new way to rig with a slip sinker. A slip sinker has three distinct advantages; the one that I like most is that they won't harm your line like a split-shot. When crimping a split-shot onto your line, you will inevitably weaken your line at that spot. This is especially true when using light line that is vital when fishing clear water. By sliding a sliding sinker up your line, you eliminate this weak spot. A sliding sinker can be a barrel sinker or a bullet weight, often used when fishing a plastic worm for bass.

Another great slip-bobber angler who I learned a lot from is Corey Thomas. Corey is known for big crappies; he calls them "Mondo Crappies." Corey makes his living guiding on Dale Hollow Lake. He has perfected slip-bobber fishing in clear water. Corey explained how he fishes sometimes 30 feet and deeper using a bobber, and how important light line is to get more bites. Corey uses a rubber bobber stop beneath his sliding tungsten sinker, but not on top. This allows the sinker to slide up. Corey explained that this lets a crappie swim up with your bait without all the weight of the sinker pulling



Madalyn Roberts learning advanced slip-bobber fishing with B'n'M Pro Kent Driscoll. Photo: Ken McBroom

against it, which can make it spit out your bait.

When fishing this way, the bobber will only rise in the water. This can be difficult to detect until you catch a few yourself. Stan's Slip Bobbers even added a contrasting black mark around their bobbers to help with detecting these subtle bites. The black painted ring around the bobber rises when a crappie swims up, and this helps to see this type of bite. Corey told us that black crappies are notorious for swimming up. These big black crappies are Corey's favorite Mondos to catch and he has been perfecting his slip-bobber rig for years.

Another technique is what Kent Driscoll uses, but he may use Corey's method in the future when the bite is so light that any pressure felt by the crappie will make it drop your bait. Kent pegs his sliding sinker either by wrapping the line through the sinker several times to hold it, or by using a rubber bobber stop below and above the sinker. This can help keep your sinker from sliding up on your line during the cast as well, potentially fouling your rig which prevents it from pulling your line through the bobber.

When you rig your sliding sinker to be stationary, you will have a more pronounced visual indication of a swim-up bite. When a crappie takes your presentation and swims up with it, even slightly, the bobber will lay over on its side. After a few crappies are caught this way, you will begin to set the hook when you see your bobber tilt ever-so-slightly. As my dad told me as a kid fishing, "Son, those fish don't have any hands. Set the hook as soon as you see a bite because you know it's in their mouth."

If you use forward-facing sonar like Livescope, you can watch your bait sink into your target area. This is a very effective way to fish brush and other crappie-holding cover. When you locate a brush pile, you can see how deep it is and how far it lies from your



Madalyn Roberts with a deep-water crappie. The smile says it all. Photo: Madalyn Roberts



Rodney Yoder with a Green River crappie fishing deep with a Stan's Slip Bobber. Photo: Ken McBroom

boat. Cast past the spot 10 or 15 feet. This allows for any drift from the wind. Normally, you will be casting into the wind when anchored, so cast past the brush and let the wind push your bobber into position. With Livescope, you can see this clearly.

So much media is focusing on forward-facing sonar these days, but I was using slip-bobbers in deep water long before Livescope was available. You can locate brush with regular sonar and set your bobber stop at the depth you need to keep your bait just above the fish. Kent uses a marker to mark different lengths on his rod so he can adjust depth quickly. Sometimes, you must get your bait into the brush and set your bobber stop deeper. You might get hung up some, but sometimes, those crappies will not leave their brush pile.

When marking brush with sonar, remember that there is a slight lag in the image. When you see the brush on your screen, the brush is slightly behind you. This can vary; shallow brush does not create much lag, but with deep brush, it could be 5 to 10 feet behind you when you see it on screen. Newer models are much faster than they used to be, and chirp technology is the fastest return. But even then, throw your marker a

few feet back and you will find those crappies quicker when you decide to fish the area.

There are so many new ways to catch crappies with a slip-bobber, and fishing in deep water is only one. Get some of Stan's Slip Bobbers and use these tips and techniques to increase your crappie catches this winter. Remember that fishing is fun, so have fun with it and learn your own techniques. I promise that you can extend your crappie-catching season because slip-bobbers aren't just for springtime anymore.

MWO

Ken McBroom is an outdoor writer and photographer and from Lynchburg, Tennessee, now residing on Kentucky Lake in Kentucky. For more information, please visit ramblingangler.com.



Stan's Pro Model balsa wood slip-bobber and bobber stops. Photo: Ken McBroom



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Maximize Your Sport Show Dollars



Sport shows attract not only anglers and hunters, but also boaters, campers and quad runners. Maximize the time and dollars you spend there. Photo: Don Gasaway

by Don Gasaway

Going to an outdoor show is always a hoot. It is a chance to see what anglers from all over are buying. It brings up visions of upcoming trip opportunities, and it is a learning experience.

Advance preparation is the key to maximizing knowledge from a boat show. A game plan allows you to learn with a minimum of exhaustion. Begin on the internet. Most exhibitors have web pages. So, too, do the sponsors of the show itself.

Most shows are composed of thousands of square feet of products, places to go, and other bits of knowledge. Covering the entire show and still being able to focus on your favorite aspect of outdoor recreation takes effort. Some shows are so large that you feel the need of a GPS just to get around.

Once you select a show, check the ads that appear in newspapers, magazines, on radio and television for specific information as to where and when the show is coming to town. Look for products and seminars of interest. If you're planning to make purchases, make a list of the items you are seeking.

Make two lists: one that you must buy, and second, things that you would like to examine. Perhaps you will buy something from the second list, or maybe you just want to see it. List exhibitors new to shows you have attended in the past.

Weekday traffic is lightest and exhibitors can spend more time with you. Arrive early to allow maximum time to spend getting the information you seek.

If you are with a group, plan to meet at a specific time and location. You may want to spend the same amount of time at a booth as an adult. Wives typically want to see different things than do husbands.

Once at the show, take time to look over the program you usually receive as you enter. It often has a floor plan and list of exhibitors. Use a pen or highlighter to mark

the exhibits and seminars of major interest. Make check marks beside the names of exhibitors who might stock the things you want to purchase.

Make note of the time and location of seminars you want to attend. Some shows announce the seminars as they are taking place, while some do not. Be alert to the fact that crowd noise sometimes blocks out announcements. Have a watch or cellphone so you do not miss your favorite speaker. Make note on the program of any last-minute substitute seminar speakers or exhibits. Look for such late changes at the entrance to the show or at the seminar area.

Take a recorder to seminars. Most speakers have no problem with your recording their speech, but it is important to ask permission first. Take notes in a spiral notebook. You might even have some questions that you hope the speaker will answer, prepared in advance. If he/she does not cover the subject, ask during the Q & A, which is usually a part of any seminar.

Pay attention and avoid side conversations with your companions. If you are intensely interested in the subject, sit near the front so that you can concentrate. If you are only passively interested, sit in the back or on an aisle. If you decide to leave during the presentation, you will disturb only a minimum number of other people.

Wear comfortable shoes. You will spend most of your time walking on concrete. Hiking boots or a new pair of athletic shoes are a good idea as they provide support and cushioning for the feet. Older athletic shoes are not a good idea as they lack the support necessary to cushion your feet. They are like walking barefoot and can lead to foot problems as well as fatigue.

If the outside weather is cold, you need to do something with your coat. Carrying it is a nuisance. If the show provides a coat check service, it is worth the cost. If not, perhaps you might want to leave it in your vehicle. A third alternative is to put it in a backpack.

Backpacks are also a good place for brochures that you pick up at the show. You can acquire a considerable number of them visiting all the booths. Although the weight of a brochure is not much, the weight of many brochures adds up. If you do not remember to bring your backpack, look for a booth that is passing out plastic "shopping bags." Look around at the other people carrying bags and check for reinforced handles. They are the ones you want.

Take frequent breaks and examine what you accumulate. Sometimes, it is stuff that you do not really want. Stop for a soft drink and a hot dog while culling your

materials. After reading a brochure, if you still have some questions, go back to their booth and get answers. It is easier than calling or writing from home later.

Finally, check your notes. Did you miss anything that you had intended to see?

Attendance at sports shows is a great opportunity to gain maximum benefits with minimal investment. **MWO**

Don Gasaway is a freelance outdoor writer from Marion, Ill. who has written more than 1,000 magazine articles. Find him on Facebook at: facebook.com/donsjournal. Comments and reviews are welcome

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Building the Ultimate Fishing Garage/Boat Shed



Design or redo your garage to be your man cave or fishing garage and enjoy the organization of all your fishing tackle.

by Glenn Walker

Getting your boat out of, or back into, your garage with the least amount of hassle allows you to get out fishing quicker; and when done, get the boat stored away without a headache. Plus, the ability and luxury of keeping all your fishing tackle and boating equipment in one spot, directly next to your boat, makes preparing for your next fishing trip easy.

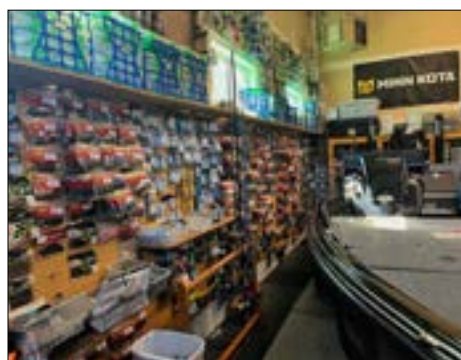
The length of your garage is obviously the number one thing to consider. Know the length of your boat when it is on the trailer, and if it has a swing away tongue or not. Knowing this length helps you know exactly



Install a floor drain below your boat to keep your garage floor dry.

how deep your garage must be; and if you'll have to swing the trailer tongue to be able to close the garage door. When we built our house, I laid out the garage so I could back my boat in and leave my truck connected (somewhat of a pipe dream when living in the suburbs). If you can accomplish this, *do it*. If not, at least leave enough space at the back end so you don't need to trim your motor down to fit in the garage; and at the front end, so you can easily walk around the boat to get work done.

If possible, have a tall enough garage, and garage doors, so you don't need to trim your motor down to get the boat in the garage; likewise, for your shallow water anchors. I have 9-foot-tall garage doors, so I can take my



The author keeps his tackle trays on the shelf above his pegboard, providing easy access to items that go in and out of the boat based on the next day's fishing trip.



Heavy-duty wide, deep, tall shelves near your boat allow you to store a lot of tackle and boating accessories.

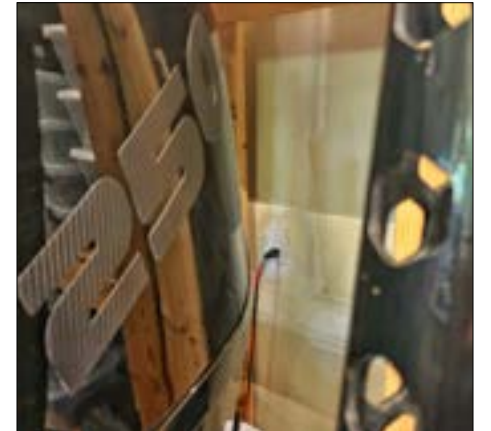
boat in and out of the garage without having to worry about my Raptors striking the top of the garage door frame.

Exactly where you park your boat in the garage depends on the layout of your garage, and taking into consideration if it is a one-, two-, three-, or even better, four-car garage. Our garage has an 18-foot-wide garage door. My boat sits on the outside of the stall next to the wall (so it can be next to the pegboard and shelves), and my truck is next to it. This way, when I go fishing, I can open one garage door, pull my truck out, hook the boat up and go. I also have plenty of space on either side of the trailer when backing it in, so I don't have to worry about hitting anything.

If you are building a new house and laying out the garage, or building a dedicated boat shop, talk to your contractor about adding a laundry tub with a hot and cold hose spigot. A deep laundry tub comes in handy to wash gear, wash your hands after a day on the water, or if you work on the trailer and are greasy. The hose spigots come in handy to spray down your boat or flush out your livewells. If you work on your outboard, you can put muffs on the hose and fire your engine up in your garage.

Another thing to consider is electrical outlets; you can *never* have too many for plugging in your phone, charging drill batteries, and most importantly, plugging in your onboard battery charger. I had a dedicated outlet installed directly behind where my Mercury Pro XS is, which is the closest point to the cord to my Minn Kota Precision Series Battery Charger. This dedicated outlet ensures that other electrical items will not trip the breaker and prevent my batteries from getting a full charge.

Putting a floor drain in the garage floor is an absolute must; this will help keep water from pooling on your garage floor as it drips off your boat and trailer after a day on the water. Floor drains also allow you to spray down the floor and squeegee it into the drain to keep your fishing



Install a dedicated outlet to plug in your onboard battery charger.



Establish a system so you know where to back up your trailer.

shop clean.

Being able to organize your packaged baits, soft plastics and terminal tackle ensures that you know where they are to quickly restock your tackle boxes or pack for an upcoming fishing trip or tournament. The wall next to my boat is covered with pegboard. I can hang most of my packaged baits, soft plastics and terminal tackle, and have it all organized, within reach while sitting in my boat.

As you think about your fishing garage, consider not just the tackle you have now, but also the tackle in your boat. Also anticipate future fishing tackle. You need shelves for the tackle you keep in plastic cases; the same goes for tubs or totes to hold extra bags of sorts plastics, or bins with random items or accessories for your boat. We constructed shelves out of 2x4s and OSB board behind the boat where I keep bins of soft plastics, packaged baits and boat accessories. A shelf above my pegboard holds my filled tackle trays within easy reach when I'm in my boat rigging rods and putting tackle in the boat.

Also, you *must have* a place to keep your fishing rods out of the way, untangled and protected from being stepped on or broken. I mounted racks on the wall where I can put backup rods, and rods that I don't use on a regular basis. Next to my boat, I have a free-standing rod rack where I keep the rods I use throughout the season. They are within easy

story continued on next page



Fishermen with lots of extra fishing tackle need a system to hang and organize it, like a wall covered with pegboard.

Fishing Adventures in Waders

by Bob Jensen

Some friends and I gathered recently, and the talk turned to fishing. We spoke about different fishing trips that we had been on lately, lures that had been productive (and some that had not been productive), and a variety of other topics geared toward fishing. Not catching, just fishing.

The conversation eventually turned to our early years of fishing. Most of the members of our group had spent a significant portion of their younger years fishing while wading. It was agreed that wading added a little or a lot of excitement to our fishing. The excitement wasn't all from catching fish, and it was determined that many of these exciting events were best not shared with parents.

One group member shared that there is quicksand along Iowa rivers. Others agreed, but none had encountered any that was more than waist deep.

Another member had discovered that if you're walking through a pasture along the river and there's a herd of cows and a protective bull, the bull will quit chasing you when you jump in the river. It's impressive how fast a normally slow guy can run in a pair of chest waders when a bull is chasing him. Try to find a not-real-deep spot in the river to jump into.

At some point in our wading careers, we had to decide if hip waders or chest waders were the better option. We all went the chest wader route. Chest waders let us get into more areas of the river. Most of us learned the

hard way that chest waders were the same as four-wheel drive pickups. They allowed you to get in trouble in places that were harder to get out of. We learned that with four-wheel drive trucks, you get stuck in two-wheel drive and back up in four-wheel drive. You don't want to get stuck in two-wheel and then keep going forward in four-wheel. You're probably going to get even more stuck.

With chest waders, you go as deep as you can with hip waders, then go back. Continuing into deeper water was and still is a bad idea. Several in our group had gotten into swifter, deeper water with chest waders than was advisable. That's another happening that wasn't shared with parents for a while.

We agreed that it's very important to know about the ownership of the property where you'll be fishing. Most of our wading adventures were and still are on private property, and the owners of that property understandably want to know who's out there. Things were much simpler back in the day. If property ownership changed, we knew about it. Not always so today. Get permission from the person who can legally give permission to be on the desired property.

Everyone agreed that a jig with a plastic tail was the best bait choice. Not because the fish liked it better, but because it was much



A jig/plastic bait combo is the way to go when wading.

safer to use. Crankbaits have more hooks, and as a couple of us learned, getting one of those hooks in your hand while unhooking a fish when you're a half-mile from the vehicle does not make for a pleasant outing. Especially when the fish is still attached to the bait that's stuck in your hand.

The rivers have aged, as have the anglers who waded them. The rivers have eroded, reducing fish habitat and fish populations. Our group of anglers no longer has the energy needed to wade up and down the river. However, our group enjoyed reliving those days when wading was an adventure that we're glad we experienced, and somewhat surprised that we survived.

MWO

Bob Jensen's 45-year career in the fishing and outdoor industry includes producing and hosting award-winning television and radio shows, co-authoring five best-selling books, writing a weekly syndicated outdoor column and numerous feature articles, and presenting fishing seminars at various outdoor events.

Building The Ultimate Fishing Garage...

...continued from previous page

reach for rigging and putting into my rod box, and vice versa. I can easily pull rods I'm not using out of the boat and put them back on the rack. I always store my rods with a Rod Glove on them, so they are further protected and ready to go right into the rod locker.

Two items to make your fishing garage complete, although not a necessity, are a TV and refrigerator. A TV is obviously nice during the fall and winter months; as you work on tackle, turn on your favorite sporting event to keep you entertained. Having a fridge next to your boat allows you to quickly grab ice or freezer packs from the freezer to fill your boat cooler or cooler in your truck. I also keep all my energy drinks, protein shakes and water in the fridge and can easily put

them in the boat for the day.

As we get into the offseason winter months, *now* is the time to work on or create your fishing garage or boat shed. If you have an existing spot in your garage or shed where you keep your boat and fishing tackle, implement some of these ideas. And if you want to really create a dream fishing man cave or boat shop, take these ideas, plus some of your own, to your contractor and get your dream started. **MWO**

Glenn Walker has been fishing Minnesota and Mississippi River tournaments for more than 15 years, spreading his passion and knowledge of the sport via articles and videos. For more information, check out glennwalkerfishing.com or on Facebook @GlennWalkerFishing.

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No Signal? No Battery? Be Glad You Have a Paper Map

by Doug Thalacker

If you have never been lost, then stop reading and go on to the next article. Or if you have complete and utter faith in all your electronic gadgets, go watch a ball game. However, if your truck keeps moving on its own, or if you have ever misplaced your cabin, then the information presented here might be of interest.

At some point, your batteries will run down, or you will be out of cell tower range, and all you will be left with is a blank screen. ArcGIS and USGS have good on-line maps, and mapping apps such as onXmaps and HuntStand are great, but they are still limited to screen size, battery life and signal strength. Now don't get me wrong; I think this technology that puts the world in your pocket is nice, but it has certain limitations; the biggest of which is that you cannot see the big picture. You may know where you are, but that doesn't do you much good without knowing where you want to go, and what's in between. And that is where having studied a map comes in handy.

The first step to prevent getting misplaced (real men never get lost) occurs before you take your first step in the woods. Study a map of the area you want to explore; the more detail it provides, the better. I use USGS (U. S. Geological Survey) maps in the 7.5 minute series, which have a scale of 1:24,000. Large-scale (1:10,000) maps give you detail, but you lose the big picture. Smaller scale maps (1:64,000) give you less detail but you a better overview of the entire area.

I also like USGS maps because it is easy to find the map for the areas surrounding my current map. Each map has a name, which is found in the upper righthand corner. This name is usually taken from a city, town or other prominent feature of that area. Along the border of the map are the names of the eight maps that adjoin any particular map. Most map stores will have a USGS state-by-state index to these maps, or you can go on-line to the USGS store and order directly. I always order two: One to keep at home, and

the other to cut up into manageable sizes.

Reading a map is relatively easy. Water and swamps are in blue; forested areas are in green; white is everything from woodlots to farm fields.

The unique and truly useful thing about topo maps is that they show relief or the shape of the land. The brown lines are called contour lines. Each line represents a specific elevation above sea level. Change in elevation from one line to the next is determined by the contour interval which is shown in the bottom center of the map.

The number means that, from one line to the next, there is a change in elevation indicated by that number. For example, if the contour interval is 10, it means that you would go up or down ten feet if you walked from one line to the next. The important thing to remember is that the closer the lines, the steeper the slope; and the further apart the lines, the flatter the landscape. Concentric rings are hills; concentric rings with dashes are depressions.

The other important thing found on topo maps, especially if you are forced to use a compass, is the magnetic declination. Magnetic declination is the difference between True North, which is where Santa Claus lives, and Magnetic North, which is where your compass points. Magnetic North wanders around over millennia and right now is near Bathurst Island, in the Queen Elizabeth Islands, west of Greenland. This difference is important to know about, especially when it is 10 or 15 degrees, since a map is based on True North while your compass is pointing someplace else. The small arrows in the lower left corner tell you how much you need to adjust your compass, and in which direction. In most cases, this difference is of little importance. But if you are hiking a goodly distance, it becomes more meaningful.

As you are sitting at your kitchen table dreaming about your exploration? You want to do one of two things.

First, make a "box" of the area you are going to explore. Find four landmarks—high points if possible—for each of the corners,

with one of the corners being your starting point. These corners should be in the cardinal directions (N,S,E,W) if possible. If you have a GPS unit you can enter the latitude/longitude of these points. When you are hiking as long as you stay within this arbitrary box you will know where your starting point is. Another way is to find one really big landmark in the center of your area and note its direction from your starting point. Also, make note of any straight-line features such as roads, powerlines or a line of hills that might serve as boundary markers. You still need your landmarks since a road runs in two directions, and you want to make sure you walk the short way back.

The second thing is to make a general plan of your hike. Visualize where you plan to be at noon, and which side of the ridge or lake or swamp you are going to hike along. You will realize you are misplaced sooner if you kind of know where you should be. It also helps if you have a good idea of your walking pace and how long it will take you to get back from the furthest corner of your box. I make it a habit to set my watch for a starting back time. I get really engrossed in exploring, and far too often I have spent time wandering around the woods in the dark. It is also a good idea to write out your general plan (area and time expected to be back) and leave it in your vehicle, so that if you get injured, any rescuers will have an easier time getting to you.

Now that you are ready to hike, there are a couple of different methods you can use. The obvious, and the one most likely to get you misplaced, is the random method, i.e. to just start walking. 'Tain't nothing wrong with this, and it is the most enjoyable way to explore. The problem is, we get so caught up in looking for game sign, or whatever, that we don't keep track of where we went and how we got there. As you hike along, make sure that you note specific landmarks and look back at them often so that you can recognize them if coming from the opposite direction.

Even with a GPS unit, you should always carry a magnetic compass and refer to it often. Trust me; Earth's magnetic field will not fail in the next 50 to 100,000 years. Consult your compass on a regular basis, and each time and make a mental calculation of the straight-line direction back to your starting point. Also make note that your corners are still in the general directions that they should be.

Another method of exploration is the incremental or nested circle approach. Using this method, you make a series of ever-larger circles that bring you back to your starting point each time. The advantage of this method is that you can get to know an area in great detail. The downside is that it takes a long time. This method is good if you are going to use that particular area many times.

So, some hours pass, you need to start back, and you realize that your GPS screen is growing dim, and there are no bars on the power indicator. What do you do?

Well, the first thing is to just sit down and take five. If you have been using your eyes and compass, and if you have stayed inside your box and you did your kitchen table homework you should be able to visually put (match) map features to actual features and determine which way is home. For a variety of reasons—legs with slightly different lengths that send you in a big circle; or rocks, trees and other nefarious obstacles that always seem to be in your direct path—you really just can't walk in a straight line. Even with a compass, the only sure way to walk a straight line is to line up at least two objects, preferably three, and when you get to the first one line up two or three more. Even this method doesn't always work if you have lots of obstacles such as swamps and ponds, hills and valleys in your way. Not to worry; as long

as lakes and hills stay where your map says they should be, you will make it back.

If you don't trust your compass, or worse, you don't have one, you can find North in a variety of ways (although knowing where North is doesn't do you much good if you don't know which way you want to go.) First of all, do not trust any method of finding north that involves biological or meteorological methods; moss doesn't always and only grow on the north sides of trees; spiders put their webs where they can, not in any particular direction or side of a tree; and the wind doesn't always come from the west. For most of human history, the only surefire way of finding direction without a compass is astronomically, using the sun, moon and stars.

In early morning and late afternoon, it is easy to tell direction from the rising or setting sun. Even on cloudy days, you can tell east or west by what part of the sky gets lighter first or darker last. However, during midday, even though in the northern hemisphere the sun is always to the south, it is more difficult to discern. Often, you do not have the time to wait for the sun to make any appreciable motion to the west. So the "20-minute stick method" is the quickest way to get you on your way.

Find a clear area and poke a long stick of any shape, as long as it has a single sharp tip, in the ground. Put a small pebble or mark at the tip of its shadow. Wait for ten minutes and put another mark at the tip of its shadow. While you are waiting you can be studying your map and the surrounding land for landmarks and possible routes. After another ten minutes, place a third mark. Since the sun moves east to west, these three marks will make a rough line that runs approximately west (first mark) to east (third mark).

If you have an analog watch—you know, those old ones with two hands that go tic-toc—you can also use it as a way to find north. Hold it horizontal. Align it so that the sun is halfway between the hour hand and the 12. The six will point approximately to the north.

Even though you don't want to be wandering around at night, it is helpful to know how to find direction from the stars and moon. If it's a clear night, you can find the North Star/Polaris by using the Big Dipper. The two stars of the ladle, opposite the handle, point to Polaris. Spread the fingers of your hand as wide as you can, line up the two pointer stars behind your thumb and little finger, and your little finger will just about be on Polaris.

The moon is also a reliable compass. During a crescent moon, a "line" drawn across the tips points towards Polaris. When you see a waxing crescent moon (right side lit), the sun is to the west. Under a waning crescent moon (left side is lit), the sun is to the east. Even during a full moon, the dark maria (large, dark, lava-filled plains visible on the moon) form a crescent that points north; also, the sun is opposite the moon. When you find north, make a direction arrow of sticks or stones that point that way. In the morning, even if it is foggy or cloudy, you will have a starting direction.

Finding your way home is often (sometimes, more often than we admit) a satisfying challenge. The difference between being misplaced and really being lost is staying very aware of your surroundings, and the sky, and training your memory to pay attention even if you don't. **MWO**

Doug Thalacker has a Masters of Environment Science from UW-SP and taught high school environmental science and earth science. He has outdoor/wilderness training through Outward Bound and American Red Cross. He has a lifetime of enjoying any activity that involves fields, woods or waters.

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Tips for Winter Storage of Your Boat

by Don Gasaway

A survey done by BoatUS marine insurance found that most damage done to boats in storage is by four-legged vandals rather than two-legged ones.

Bass boats are likely damaged by critters during the off-season. This is probably due to putting them away uncleaned. Carpet, livewells and upholstery hold smells from the many fish landed. This smells like lunch to a hungry raccoon, squirrel or mouse.

Boat owners keep most bass boats in backyards or other locations that are attractive to critters. Once the four-legged vandals get on board, they find that fabrics used in upholstery, lifejackets and seat foam make excellent bedding. They are inclined to just set up housekeeping for the winter until evicted by the owner in spring.

Squirrels will use fiberglass as chewing material which they need to maintain their dental health.

What can you do about this?

Begin by reading the storage facility contract if you are storing it off your own property. Different contracts may apply to specific types of storage such as outdoor, indoor or boats stored on a rack.

Give the vessel a thorough cleaning before putting it in storage. Take it to one of those spray car wash places or give it a pressure wash at home. Take all your gear out and remove the drain plug. Spray the boat inside and out. By the time you get home, most of the water will have blown off the boat and you can replace the plug.

Place all removed gear in a warmer, dry storage area. The family garage is a good location, but so are rental storage places. This includes batteries, trolling motors, PFDs, emergency gear, outboard motors, removable fuel tanks, etc. It protects them not only from the elements but also from theft.

During storage make frequent visits to the boat to evict any critter than has taken up housekeeping. There are commercial repellants available. You can make your own by placing a large jar of ammonia in the boat. Just punch holes in the top of the jar to let the scent come out. Mothballs also make a good repellant.

When visiting your boat, park away from any boats parked on jackstands. Do not adjust jackstands and never tie off to a jackstand. If storing your boat in the water, bring a friend with you so, if you slip on an icy dock, there is someone to help if needed.



Your boat may have to sit out in some beastly weather this year. By preparing it, you may save it from damage that will have to be repaired next spring. Photo: pexels.com

If all else fails, try one of those low-voltage electric pet fences that you can get at a pet store.

No matter how careful you have been, the gelcoat finish of most bass boats gets nicks and scratches. Lee Robertson, Event Support Manager for Skeeter Boats, has some tips for repairing the damage prior to winter storage. "As far as fiberglass, I like to have it real clean," he maintains. "I use products that most people probably won't use." He uses a Meguiar's product called Quik Wax. It is easier to apply and does not turn white when you get it on the rub rail or some of the rubber parts on the boat.

Wax is good because it is a protector and helps protect against UV damage.

Gelcoat is much like it has been for the past 20 or 30 years, other than some changes in chemicals and some added chemicals to help UV resistance. It is the outer layer of a fiberglass boat that gives it the shine and color. Gelcoat is a hard resin that is more durable than just paint. It will last quite a long time and you can refinish it as the need arises.

You can buff it out. Remove small scratches and imperfections with a good compound for buffing, and sand with a very fine grade of sandpaper. Careful: You can do that up to the point where you clear off the top of the metal flake. When you get to that point, you're basically into the paint. Getting through the flake requires refinishing the boat unless you want to go have it clear coated.

With a little care and hard work, you can put that boat away this fall, confident it will be looking good in spring. It will also save you time in spring when the fish are waiting for you to catch them. **MWO**

Don Gasaway is a freelance outdoor writer from Marion, Ill. who has written more than 1,000 magazine articles. Find him on Facebook at: facebook.com/donsjournal. Comments and reviews are welcome



Events

November 30-December 1

Ferguson's Great Outdoors Marine Championship by the Great Outdoors Marine, at Lake Cumberland, Conley Bottom Resort Ramp from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. both days. For info: Chase Sansom, chasesansomfishing@gmail.com, 681-888-1250, thegreatoutdoorsmarinetournaments.com.

December 7

NTBA Flag Division Bass Tournament by the Anglers Outpost & Marine at Rough River Lake, State Park Marina Ramp. Hours: 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Chris O' Brien, crownroyalbass@yahoo.com, 270-445-0924.

December 7

KSP Foundation/Bradley Roy Bass Open by the Kentucky State Police Foundation, Inc., at Lake Cumberland, Burnside Island State Park Ramp. Hours: 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Hank Patton, hank@kspfoundation.org, 859-358-0903, kspfoundation.org.

December 8

G. Loomis Owner's Tournament by Shimano/G. Loomis at Lake Cumberland, Burnside Island State Park Ramp. Hours:

7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Each team member must purchase a G. Loomis rod from local KY dealer for entry. For info: Drew Sadler, sadler_drew@yahoo.com, 859-314-7034, gloomis.com.

December 14

Advanced Waterfowl Hunting Workshop at the Nashville Gun Club, 1100 County Hospital Rd., Nashville, TN 37218, from 1 to 4 p.m. \$35 per participant. Take your next step towards becoming a seasoned waterfowl hunter this season. During this three-hour workshop, you will get to practice the skills needed to be successful in the field. These include skills such as setting a decoy spread, using a variety of calls, and shooting from a duck blind. This workshop is ideal for any new waterfowl hunter wishing to take their skills to the next level. For info: Taylor Fox tfox@tnwf.org, (615) 353-1133, license.gooutdoorstennessee.com/Event.

December 14

Murray State Bass Trail at Kentucky Lake, KY Dam Marina and State Park Ramp, from 6:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Will Gordon, wgordon4@murraystate.edu, 217-416-7132.

Sports Shows

December 7-8

R.K. Knoxville Gun Show at Knoxville Expo Center, 5441 Clinton Hwy, Knoxville, TN 37912. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission \$14, children \$5; VIP \$16.50, children \$7.50. Vendor tables \$81 ea., prepaid \$71 ea., non-gun tables \$100, electricity \$75. For info: R.K. Shows Tennessee, (417) 567-2002, rkshows@yousq.net, rkshows.com/events/category/tennessee.

December 7-8

Great American Manchester Gun Show at Coffee County Fairgrounds, 99 Lakeview Dr., Manchester, TN 37355. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$10, children 12 and under free. Vendor tables \$60 ea., non-gun tables \$100 ea. For info: Great American Promotions, Robert Chiple, (865) 453-0074, mwmarketing@aol.com, greatamericanpromotionsllc.com.

December 14-15

R.K. Lebanon Gun Show at Farm Bureau Expo Center, 945 E. Baddour Pkwy., Lebanon, TN 37087. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission \$14, children \$4; VIP Tickets \$16.50, children \$6.50. Vendor tables \$81 ea., prepaid \$71 ea. non gun tables \$100 ea., electricity \$75. For info: R.K. Shows Tennessee, (417) 567-2002, rkshows@yousq.net, rkshows.com/events/category/tennessee.

December 21-22

Tennessee Classic Sportsman's Gun & Knife Show at White County Fairgrounds Agriculture Building, 565 Hale St., Sparta,

TN 38583. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$7, children 12 and under free w/adult. Vendor tables \$40 ea. for both days. For info: Tennessee Classic Sportsman's Gun and Knife Show, Donnie Daniels, (931) 205-0176, ddaniels@frontiernet.net, tncsgunandknifeshow.net.

January 22-26

Louisville Boat, RV & Sportshow at the Kentucky Exposition Center, Louisville, KY. Show Hours: Wednesday 5 - 9 p.m., Thursday 12 - 9 p.m., Friday 12 - 9 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. - 9 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Admission: adult (13 & Up) \$12 online, \$14 at the event site; children 12 and younger free; Wednesday, January 24 - \$5 after 5 p.m. and \$6 parking; Thursday, January 25 - \$5 after 5 p.m. and \$6 parking; Thursday, January 25 ONLY - active military/veteran are free. For info: NMMA, (502) 753-1441, info@louisvilleboatshow.com, louisvilleboatshow.com.

January 23-26

East Tennessee Fishing Show & Expo, Knoxville Expo and Grand Events Center, 5441 Clinton Hwy., Knoxville, TN 37912. For info: Shelia Bunch, (865) 801-1863, shelia@easttnfishingshow.com, easttnfishingshow.com.

January 31 - February 2

Tennessee Boat & Fishing Expo, Farm Bureau Exposition Center, Lebanon, TN, Expo South-TNBF, 901-867-7007, tnboatexpo.com, vendor@tnboatexpo.com.

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Angling on the Down Low

Dave Mull

Forward-Facing Sonar is Amazing, but Will it Result in Lower Creel Limits?

Forward-facing sonar is controversial because it helps catch so many fish. I experienced it firsthand for the first time in September, and I'm pretty sure that the pro crappie angler and I would not have caught 29 keeper crappies in about two hours without it.

Forward-facing sonar (FFS) is the cutting edge of fishing electronics. Garmin offers LiveScope, Lowrance has Active Target and Humminbird features MEGA Live Imaging. The technology shoots sonar to the side of the boat, showing fish location in real time. On the screen, you not only can watch a fish as it swims, but also watch your lure and how the fish reacts to it.

Some say FFS makes fishing too easy. Some major bass circuits have had teenage rookies win big contests using FFS. Some national bass tournament trails have established rules limiting its use. One series of muskie tournaments has banned its use altogether.

FFS exploded on the fishing scene about four years ago, and anglers who target all sorts of species have added it to bass boats, walleye boats and even kayaks. Serious crappie anglers have also paid big bucks to add FFS.

In September, I attended "Fish Camp," a junket of content providers, bloggers and writers with guides, tackle makers and pro anglers on central Missouri's Lake of the Ozarks. It was put together by Big Mike Jones, a promoter and roving reporter for *Redneck Adventures*, a streaming outdoors show. I was lucky enough to fish with three different crappie anglers: one from Mississippi, one from Oklahoma and one from Missouri over the course of two days.

The three guys all had Garmin LiveScope units that helped find individual crappies and schools of crappies in front of and to the sides of their boats.

Charlie Bunting, a pro crappie angler since 1997, has amassed an incredible resume of victories, including top titles in three of the four main crappie tours. Retired from the phone company, he spends a lot of time pursuing crappies on Missouri's Lake Truman.

Charlie was familiar with Lake of the Ozarks, having won a few crappie tournaments on the lake. He was new to our section of the 54,000-acre reservoir and had spent time before Fish Camp began, scoping

the many floating docks in our arm of the lake.

"Scoping" means he aimed the transducer on his trolling motor under docks to see if crappies were hanging out there. Some docks had big schools; other docks were void of fish. We started a short idle away from Fish Camp headquarters at Lake Breeze Resort, where Charlie had found a big school of crappies under a particular floating dock complex. We spent just a few minutes there as the LiveScope display revealed that the fish were gone.

So, we made a 12-mile run up the lake to other docks where Charlie had seen fish. And big schools of crappies were still hanging around two of the floating docks.

I'd heard plenty about forward-facing sonar (FFS), but I'd never been aboard a boat that had it. Watching Garmin LiveScope at work is basically like looking at a two-dimensional, monochrome aquarium. You can watch actual fish shapes swim around on the screen. You can see your lure sinking down to the fish level and you can watch fish swim up and eat it—or swim up and shy away. The screen also shows you how far away the fish are from the boat. When crappies are stacked amidst floating docks, you can easily drop a lure or bait right on their noses.

And that pretty much sums up our presentation.

Charlie gave me a 14-foot-long baitcasting rod from B'n'M Poles. Already tied on was a small, long-shank hook with a 1/4-ounce bullet sinker pegged about a foot above it with a neoprene bobber stop. While Charlie cast a small, colorful jig without additional bait towards the school, I baited with a live fathead minnow and dunked it straight below the rod tip. We both caught crappie after crappie, releasing many that were short of Lake of the Ozarks' 9-inch size limit.

On the sonar display, I could see the fish, but had a hard time seeing my bait and sinker.

"You're just above them," Charlie would say. "Lower it a couple feet." Or, "You are right in the middle of the school. Raise your bait a little bit."

I would do as instructed, and before long, the rod tip would dip, and I'd swing a crappie into the boat. They had to be 9 inches to keep on Lake of the Ozarks, and some had to be measured. Others were obviously keepers—a few were 12 inches and bigger. We also landed lots of smaller fish that we quickly released.

When I fished the day before with Oklahoma's Anthony Owens, I could see my jig much more clearly on his LiveScope screen—I think because we got closer to the fish.

Anthony and I fished the same kinds of floating docks in a different part of the lake. He had a couple of 7-foot rods designed specifically for "shooting," which



Pro crappie angler Charlie Bunting shows a keeper crappie caught with the assistance of forward-facing sonar.

means grabbing the jig by its head, pulling to bend the short rod, and letting go of the jig and, milliseconds later, letting go of the line from the spinning reel. The rod springing straight flings the jig forward and, ideally, under the dock.

I need a lot more practice. Most of my "shots" ended with the jig plunking into the water well in front of the docks with a loud splash, not coming close to getting underneath.

So, we just dropped the jigs pretty much straight down, right next to docks where the LiveScope showed us fish. And we caught lots of them. "You have to slowly lift the jig to get bites," Anthony instructed. "If you pause it, they'll just swim back down."

The screen showed that he knew what he was talking about. It was amazing to see a crappie blob merge with the jig and then feel the bite. It occurred to me that we don't really feel the bite in most cases, but rather the fish turning back to go rejoin the rest of the school.

"Look at that gar!" Anthony exclaimed as a long fish mark swam around the school of crappies.

It was amazing to watch.

I also fished with Jason Clements and his wife Renee, who traveled from Mississippi to join the Fish Camp. Jason had a "tournament" approach to crappies, spurning the docks that were loaded with mostly smaller fish, and hunting for individual, larger fish around brush piles.

While Charlie had had 10-pound test K9 brand fluorocarbon, and Anthony had spooled the shooter rods with 6-pound, the Clements' 14-foot rods had baitcast reels filled with 20-pound test.

"I just kept them rigged how we use them in Mississippi," Jason explained, noting that most of their crappie lakes have stained water with very low visibility. They also fish a lot of snaggy brush piles where heavy fluorocarbon allows them to pull jigs free without breaking off, saving valuable tournament time.

Like Charlie, Jason had rigged a bullet weight above the unbaited jig, held in place top and bottom with neoprene bobber stops. The weight got the jig down quickly and helped hold it in front of fish.

As soon as we began fishing, he spotted a blob that, from its shape and how it was acting, he identified as a crappie. He dropped his jig down and immediately pulled a fat 12-incher into the boat. We didn't catch a lot of fish, but the average size was indeed bigger than the fish hanging under docks. Clements ties up his own jigs, taking a kit with him to

tournament venues. He buys bulk numbers of unpainted, tungsten heads, painting and adorning the jigs with colorful materials. Both his jig head and his bullet weight are made of tungsten, which he said shows up on FFS more clearly than softer lead does.

Amazing is an overused adjective, but that's the word I keep using for this technology. Right now, complete setups of FFS cost more than \$1,500 new. If competition amongst the electronics company brings the price down to where everyday anglers can add it to their boats, lots more fish will get caught—at least for a while. All three of the anglers I fished with said that crappies are already getting conditioned to hearing the louder clicks from the side-facing transducers and sometimes shy away from baits. Bass anglers say the same about their targets.

So, I doubt that states will be lowering creel limits because of FFS.

What I can say for sure is that FFS tech can help you catch more fish, and catching makes fishing more fun. I look forward to adding an FFS unit I can transfer between a kayak and my 17-foot fishing boat by next season. **MWO**

Dave Mull of Kalamazoo, Mich. has spent his career communicating the outdoors experience and runs Inner Viking Media. He enjoys kayak fishing for anything that swims in the lakes and rivers of the Midwest and beyond, and even uses his MirroCraft, from time to time. Available for seminars.



Crappie tournament pros Renee and Jason Clements hunt individual fish with forward-facing sonar.



Oklahoma guide Anthony Owens dabbles a jig in front of a school of crappies hanging under a Lake of the Ozarks dock while watching how the fish react to his lure.