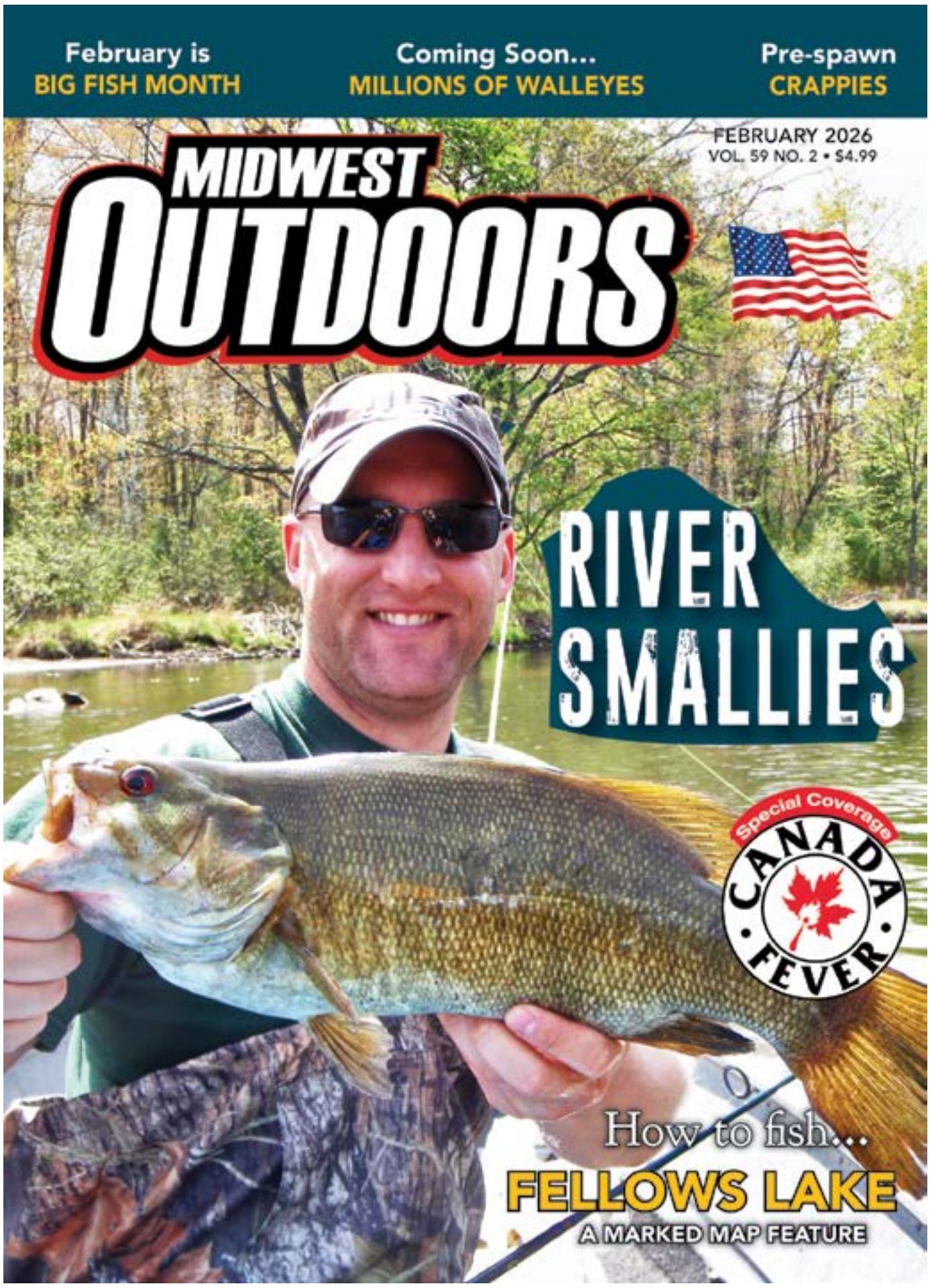
MIDWEST OUTDOORS DIGITAL EDITION

February 2026

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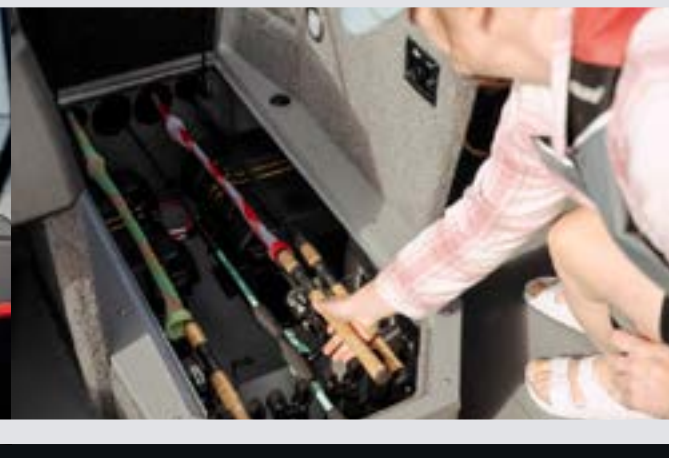
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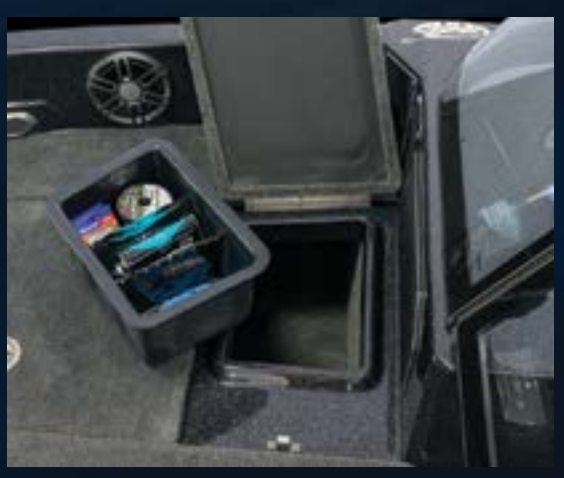
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111 Shore Dr., Burr Ridge, IL 60527
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PUBLISHER Dan Ferris
MAGAZINE EDITOR Dave Csanda
MANAGING EDITOR Dena Gervasi
GENERAL MANAGER/MEDIA DIRECTOR Chuck Gekas

ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER Tina Pelletier

ART DIRECTOR Dena Gervasi
ART PRODUCTION Ann Littleson, Karin Pecoraro
PHOTO & ART EDITOR Wojciech Mietka

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On the cover

As river levels change, smallmouths go with the flow. Adjust your strategies and tactics accordingly. Read all about it on page 8.

Short Shots & Small Catches

Dan Dauw

Fishing on a February day

Do I really want to leave the warm house? I'm 83 and the energy isn't there like it used to be. This month is a challenge for me, as I never do well on the hard water. The fish just seem more lethargic, but maybe, we'll see!

February poem

As I sit here on the ice, I await
a fish to take my bait;
I hope my bobber goes down fast,
Let's hope it's not a small one that just passed;
Okay, there is now a tug on my line,
A big walleye would be just fine;
Oh, great! It's a big sunfish!
Need to catch some more to fill my dish!
(Yeah, I know! Keep my day job!)

What happened?

A month ago, we looked out our back window to see something strange. There was a large area of snow in the yard that looked as if something large had disturbed it. My wife and I took photos. It was really an odd thing to see. I wonder if maybe it was two or more bucks doing battle. Whatever it was, I would have liked to have witnessed it.

One more month

That should do it for the hardwater fishing. Last year, around late March, early April, we really nailed the nice size crappies and 'gills. We hope for a repeat. The question is will Mother Nature give us good health? Golden Years—maybe not so much!

Dog humor

The other day I went to the doctor and said to him, "Doc, I keep thinking I'm a dog."

He said to me, "Lie down on the couch and we'll talk about it."

I said, "No, I'm not allowed on the couch!"

Help wildlife

Now I've said this before, farmers are not in the business of raising pheasants, quail, etc. Beans, corn and maybe some wheat is what it's all about in most cases. I read recently about a farm family in South Dakota that planted corn with a row of cover crops in between. It provides a haven for pheasants and a buffet for deer. Maybe if more farmers could plant just a small amount of corn in addition to their other crops, it would help wildlife.

I can remember years ago, seeing a fair number of road-killed pheasants along highways in eastern Iowa and western Illinois. Today, that is rare. I see a lot more dead deer than pheasants. Here is something I wonder about when I see corn being picked in the fall. Combines today are much more efficient, leaving, I would think, little spoilage on the ground. While that's good for our farmers, how much effect does this have on the wildlife? Of course, ground cover is important, too!

Venison

Venison is a very lean and healthy food. Some hunters will mix ground venison with beef or pork to add some fat. Probably the biggest mistake when cooking venison is overcooking the meat, which makes it tough. I really like bison meat. Where I purchase it, at a place in Cambridge, Ill., the cost is $8.00 a pound.

Driving in a February winter

There is still bad weather ahead, so here are a few reminders for when you're out driving your Rolls Royce. 1) Make sure to keep the windows clean, as well as head and taillights. 2) Tires can get low, so every so often check the tire pressure. 3) A snow shovel, first aid kit and a can of deicer are good items to keep aboard.

Brrr jokes

• Where does a polar bear keep its money? Ans: In a snow bank.

• What do you call a penguin at the North Pole? Ans: Lost. (They are found in Antarctica!)

A piece of plastic

That credit card in your billfold is descended from something first used in our country. In 1970, the Diners Club became the first card that could be used to purchase items at many retailers. The average American now has at least three credit cards.

Wind

For this angler, a little wind is okay, but *just* okay! I wish some of the local TV meteorologists would report on the wind velocity and direction. My fishing buddies and I don't care for a strong wind, nor do we care for a day with no wind at all. I'm talking about soft water fishing. I guess we're spoiled.

Some February dates to remember:

1) Ground Hog Day – Feb 2
2) Lincoln's Birthday – Feb 12
3) Valentine's Day – Feb 14
4) Washington's Birthday – Feb 19
5) Presidents' Day – Feb 19

Humor

I recently stood out in our cow pasture for quite a long time. Finally, my wife yelled out to me, "Why are you standing so long in the pasture?"

I said, "Well, I just read in the newspaper that all you have to do to win the Nobel Prize is to be outstanding in your field."

Quote

The job of a drummer is not so much to make good music, as to drown out the bad.

—*Unknown*

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.

Editor's note: After more than 16 years as a contributing writer, Dan Dauw has made the decision to retire. His columns were first published in MidWest Outoors' Illinois Section in 2009 with "Dan D Outdoors" and later "Outdoors & More." In 2014, he took over the "Short Shots" column, writing more than 125 articles. MidWest Outdoors thanks Dan for the years of contributions shared with readers throughout the Midwest. His passion, knowledge, humor and wit will be greatly missed, and we wish him well!

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What to Do When Crappies Don't Bite



Change up tactics when crappies don't bite. *Photos: Ken McBroom*

by Ken McBroom

There are times when crappies bury up in thick brush or hug a stump extra tight. You can see them on your graph, or you caught them there the day before, so you're pretty sure they're there. Here's what to do when the crappies don't bite.

There are many reasons that crappies don't bite: Barometric pressure, muddy water, cold water when they just don't have to feed all day long. Fish just don't bite all the time, but there are ways to trigger strikes from reluctant crappies. You still won't catch as many as when they are biting well, but catching a few on a day when you were going to catch none is a great day. Check out these options for crappies that don't bite to put more fish in your boat.

Cold front crappies

A cold front will shut down the crappie bite quicker than anything. Wintertime cold fronts affect the crappie bite just like as any other time of year. When the water temps drop just a degree or two, crappies tend to seek cover and tend to have the proverbial lockjaw. During this time, even live bait sometimes won't entice these crappies to bite. But one thing will. The secret ain't that dramatic; it's just your regular old crappie jig. By utilizing a technique with your crappie jig, you can make crappies bite with a reaction strike.

A jig can trigger strikes from reluctant cold front crappies when nothing else will. When crappies cling to thick cover, they're usually not feeding. They use brush to wait out a cold front, or they just are not feeding and want to feel safe while they rest.

One great way to catch a few of these crappies is by lowering a jig into the cover. As one old timer once put it, "Knock on some wood." This old timer, and a couple others, convinced me that this technique worked when crappies don't bite and are buried up in thick cover.

Crappies in brush

The trick to knocking on wood to get crappies in the brush to bite—or react to your presentation—is to lower your jig into the cover with the crappies. A good fish finder will help you stay on top of the cover. When your jig is in the cover, raise it up until you feel it hit a piece of it. When you feel it hit, then lower the jig back down, then quickly bring it back up to the piece of cover you felt before. This will tap your jighead on the piece of cover and create a ticking sound. This will trigger reaction strikes from crappies. I guess that the noise created by the jig drives them crazy and they just want to shut it up.

Color can make a difference, too. Change up the color of your jig to see what the crappies want that day.

I've seen this crappie technique work as deep as 30 feet and as shallow as 2 feet of water. To fish for crappies in the brush that don't bite, you need a jig that will get down to the cover quickly. A 1/8-about jig is perfect jig for this presentation. The marabou tail collapses on the fall and has very little drag during the fall. This, together with the heavy head, will get your jig down quick and straight. The marabou will pulse in the water even when deadsticking the jig after knocking on the wood. This gives your jig just enough action to trigger the reaction you're looking for.

It ain't as easy as it seems

Knocking on wood ain't as easy as it seems. It took a while for me to get proficient at it without getting hung. But those old timers gave me a couple tips for fishing brush for crappies that don't bite. They told me to use a heavier jig. The initial thought is to downsize to a small jig when crappies aren't biting, especially in cold water, but for this technique, you need a heavier jig. The weight helps the jig to drop straight down into the cover. It also helps you feel the brush once there.

The other tip was to use a dull hook point. Crappies get the nickname papermouth for their soft mouth. They are known to rip open and come unhooked. Using a dull hook will still stick a crappie and help keep you from getting hung as much. If you do get hung, the dull point will make it easier to work it loose. Also, the heavier head helps to dislodge your jig hook when it hangs up; just give a little slack and jig the rod tip.

The point here is to not disturb the brush or whatever cover you're fishing. Getting hung and pulling on the cover to break off runs the crappies to another brush pile, ultimately leaving yours all together. The heavy head will also emit a loud knock when you're "knocking on wood." This technique takes practice, but once you master it, you will be able to catch a few crappies, even when they don't want to bite.

Rattling in crappies

Another way to create reaction strikes from crappies that don't bite is adding a rattle on your jig or hook. Even when using live bait, a rattle can sometimes entice lethargic crappies into biting. Rattles that are made specifically for inserting inside tube jigs are a great way to add a rattle to your presentation. Insert the glass rattle inside the soft plastic bait to create a rattle that might get you a few more bites.

Another way is to buy jigheads with the rattle built into the head. Rattles are a great way to get a reaction strike from crappies that don't bite, whether in thick brush or open water. The best way to fish a rattle jig is with a sharp jigging motion, causing the rattle to send out the obnoxious sounds that crappies want to kill. Locate shad and or crappie schools. Ease the jig into the school and sharply snap your jig, or slap the back of your rod handle to impart a shock wave down to your jig, to get their attention.



Knock on wood to catch picky crappies.

Sometimes, you find yourself on the water and crappies will not cooperate. A lot of times, this happens on bluebird days in February when you just can't resist going fishing. Try these tips to get a few bites, stay out there, and enjoy the day with a few fish in the livewell for dinner. ***MWO***

Ken McBroom is an outdoor writer and photographer living on Kentucky Lake. For more information, please visit ramblingangler.com.



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High-Water Versus Low-Water River Smallmouths *PART TWO*



In high water, cast upstream or cross-current, whereas in low water, mostly cast downstream. Note the current in the background, and position your boat face-forward into it.

by Andrew Ragas

I don't know about you, but I favor fishing rivers during high water and moderate-flow events, versus low water and drought-like conditions. Whether the river system is high or low, flows fast or slow, river fisheries offer unique fishing situations to experienced smallmouth anglers.

High-water smallmouth strategies

In high water, I often find myself casting upstream or cross-current, whereas in low water, I mostly cast downstream. During high-water floats, we seldom float for distance, while on low-water floats, smallmouths and their dispersal throughout the system force us to float several miles

When fishing from my river boat (a 1448 jon), I approach spots from both upstream and downstream sides and slip along downriver with the trolling motor. When the current is too strong for Spot-Lock, I toss out a 3-arm river anchor to hold the boat in place. As the bow of the boat faces upstream, I cast upstream and cross-current toward the breaks into each hole, and past the structure being targeted, allowing the river's current to do its work in bringing my lures downstream.

The faster the current and deeper the area, use heavier lure weights to fish effectively fish through it. I rely on tubes, football jigs, hula grubs, and crankbaits are relied.

As water levels recede, casting angles increase, and so will your coverage of the river. Fishing quickly with swim jigs, spinnerbaits, and swimbaits. Then, as levels really drop further, you can eventually target all areas around the boat.

By now, you'll want to ease up on weight and lighten up the presentation. If your lure can hang higher, longer in the strike zone, that will be a plus, too. Fluke minnows, swimming grubs, stick baits, and topwaters in the popper and prop-bait styles become my go-tos.



High-water lures for spring include tubes, football jigs, hula grubs, and crankbaits. The faster the current and deeper the area, use heavier lure weights to better effectively fish through it.



An assortment of low-water baits, for all seasons. Skinny water requires adjusting, using baits with finesse or others that can hang in the strike zone, like a fluke minnow or streamer fly.

In high water, crankbaits in craw patterns are deadly in spring schooling and staging situations. My favorites are Rapala DT-4s and size-5 Crankin Raps, and Bandit 100 Series worked with my St. Croix Legend Glass (LGC72MM). Action can be fiery and fast



Here are some high-water lures for summer through early fall. If high water persists into summer, cut through the current with swim jigs and spinnerbaits, and horizontal lures that can fight the current. We favor lures with a lot of vibration.



The author favors lures with topwater baits for summer smallmouths include walk-the-dog, popper, and prop-styled topwaters from June onward. Rapala's Skitter-V (walk-the-dog), X-Rap Pop (popper) and Skitter Prop (prop bait) are the only three he ever needs.

before fish become conditioned to them. Every current break becomes a casting target until water levels recede.

Bottom baits that include tube jigs ("stupid" rigged), finesse football jigs, craw worms, and creature plastics are irresistible when fish are nearing spawn and confined to current breaks, eddies, and deep pools with rock bottom. You'll also turn to these baits





A big smallmouth caught during low water. Partner Jacob Saylor pulled out his 6-weight fly rod setup and proceeded to catch big smallmouths drifting wooly buggers, Clousers, and other assorted streamers through deeper holes and what little current was able to push them through.

once smallmouths become conditioned to more aggressive lures. Never float a river without a handful of 1/4-ounce Strike King Bitsy Bug Jigs, packages of 5-inch Chompers Hula Grubs, and twin-tail grubs rigged on a 1/4-ounce football head or weedless bullet rig head.

I work all my jig baits with MHF (medium-heavy power, fast action) rated spinning rods at minimum. The 7-foot St. Croix Legend Elite (ES70MHF) gets the nod. I spool this setup with 15-pound Cortland Master Braid and 10-pound leader.

If high water persists into summer, cut through the current with swim jigs and spinnerbaits. Fishing both search lures with 20-pound Cortland Master Braid and 12-pound Cortland fluorocarbon leader is better than with mono or fluorocarbon main lines, because it doesn't stretch. Hooksets will be more powerful with braid as a result.

I fish 3/8-ounce 3G Smallmouth Solutions swim jigs with assorted craw and paddletail trailers. My jig color of choice often revolves around brown and craw-like colors. Make sure the trailer color-coordinates to the jig and skirt color.

Then, 1/2-ounce spinnerbaits with double-willow blades, such as Z-Man's Sling BladeZ, can be fished quickly through deeper holes and current without blowing out. While I favor working spinnerbaits with Colorado or Indiana blades into the calmer near-shore structure and slack water, you'll want the deeper-penetrating, double-willow blades instead. Fish both with a 7-foot 1-inch, MHF rated rod such as St. Croix's Legend Tournament Bass "All-In" (LBTC71MHF) or Avid casting (ASFC70MHF).

Later in the year, the same high-water conditions and spots (deep holes) fish well in September and October. We revert to the same crankbait and bottom bait presentations that produced heavily in spring. Through the river's deepest holes—up here in northern Wisconsin, a deep hole is anywhere from 4 to 8 feet—shallow divers such as rusty crawdad Rapala DT 4s and 6s are best with a medium-steady retrieve. Just as effective, square-bill crankbaits including Rapala Crankin Raps (05) and Bandit 100's generates considerable fish interest.

Cast crankbaits upstream and horizontally through holes. As your lure dives deep into undercurrent benthic zones, and bangs away at the terrain of the hard bottom, you'll potentially catch several fish holed up together.

Low-water smallmouth strategies

Unlike during high water years, low-water-year smallmouths can be roaming anywhere. This can make river systems challenging.

Several springs ago, I floated one of my pools with Jacob Saylor. The river that May was a clear-water, skinny-water situation in which smallmouths were spooking because of low water and high visibility. There was next to no current present in the system.

These conditions reduced the number of available fish to catch. With smallmouths dispersed throughout the river and at random, weightless fluke minnows, swimming grubs, and topwaters launched across mid-river were catching fish from no-man's land.

Saylor, at one point, even pulled out his 6-weight fly rod setup and proceeded to catch big smallmouths drifting wooly buggers, Clousers, and other assorted streamers through the deeper holes and what little current was able to push them through. If we even attempted to target the edges of exposed boulders or log jams, or eddies, the fish weren't to be found. This trip was one of the rare times a weightless streamer on the fly rod outfished all conventional tackle on the river.

Low water like this is not the norm in spring, and if it persists through summer and into fall, you can expect drought-like conditions to establish and *destroy* anticipated fall migrations.

Throughout the summer months, smallmouths disperse throughout the system and will not concentrate again until fall. Some days, you might have to cover miles of water for a respectable catch.

Since you'll have to cover lots of water, throw search baits. I love walk-the-dog, popper, and prop-styled topwaters from June onward. Rapala Skitter-Vs (walk-the-dog), X-Rap Pops (popper) and Skitter Props (prop bait) are the only three I ever need. In the low, current-less, skinny water, mono main lines are just fine. I run low-stretch 12-pound on some MHF casting setups, and 20-pound Cortland Master Braid with mono leader on others.



Fluke minnows are one of the author's personal favorites for low-water fishing in spring and summer. On this river system, copper colors rule.

With either style, cast and let the marginal current aid you with retrieve speed and cadence. Pause a few seconds in between each pop or jerk. The more water being pushed, or greater the commotion, the better fish feedback you'll get. In calmer flows, smallmouths are adept at tracking a topwater or fluke minnow and are ready to slam!

If low water level persists into the fall months, find the deepest downstream holes available, or abort the mission entirely. In truly low-water events and droughts, I'll go further downstream towards the mouths of flowages where pre-wintering smallmouths could be entering into the system, and we'll camp over those regions.



The author says that it doesn't matter to him whether the river is high or low. At the end of the day, he just wants access by boat to catch fish like these.

River water levels and currents control your everyday fishing style, navigation and approach to spots, and strategy. How you react to it in high or low, fast or slow conditions will correlate to your catch rate.

MWO

Andrew Ragas splits time between Chicago and Wisconsin's Northwoods. Based in Minocqua, Wis., he specializes in trophy bass fishing and offers guided trips from May through October. While big bass are his passion, he dabbles in multi-species, as well. He may be visited online at northwoodsbass.com.



Find Busy Bottoms for Midwinter Jumbo Perch

by Brian "Bro" Brosdahl



Run & gun, RAZRing holes until you find a big yellow!

Northern Minnesota offers ice fishing opportunities for a wide variety of species: walleyes, pike, crappies, bluegills, eelpout, whitefish, and even trout. One species that doesn't always get mentioned, but has grown in popularity, is jumbo perch.

As a kid, I remember lakes filled with large perch, mostly targeted by locals but also attracting visitors who discovered untouched schools of these fish. I even recall out-of-state anglers asking why locals would throw perch back when they were so good to eat. Fast forward to today: Perch have earned their place as a Minnesota favorite and a sought-after target species.

Grubs: much ado about nothing

Over the years, I've often heard anglers say that they don't keep perch because they're "full of grubs." They're talking about yellow grubs, a common parasite passed from birds to snails and then to fish. Not all perch eat the same diet, but shallow-water perch on lakes with lots of waterfowl can have a few—or many—grubs. Deeper basin perch, on the other hand, tend to have fewer.

Grubs are easy to spot. Right after the catch, check the fish tail or gills under the chin for yellow egg-shaped lumps. If you see them, release the perch. Don't harvest fish only to throw them away during filleting. Yellow grubs don't stay in the perch permanently; the next time you catch that same fish, it might be completely grub-free.

Many perch seekers know that grubs can be poked or knifed out of the fillet and are completely harmless to human consumption. If they were harmful, I wouldn't have survived decades of eating perch! Some even jokingly call them "extra protein." No worries!

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The perch low

Perch populations crashed to low levels on many lakes about 15 to 18 years ago. During that time, I had to abandon large lakes like Winnie and Leech and start searching for perch on smaller waters ranging from 2,000 to 10,000 acres. Each year, I saw more anglers targeting perch, and we all waited for legendary perch lakes like Winnie, Leech, and Mille Lacs to rebound and once again produce jumbo perch.

Back when the limit was 100 perch, large groups of anglers regularly caught limits, and it seemed like massive schools of 9- to 12-inch perch were unaffected by harvest pressure. Eventually, the lakes crashed to lower perch levels, and the phone rang more often for guide service. That pushed me to keep hunting for jumbo perch, but most lakes could not sustain the angling pressure.

That reality brings me back to the true perch factories: Winnie, Leech, Mille Lacs, and Cass Lake. Not all Minnesota lakes produce jumbo perch. They exist in places like Big Stone Lake and Mississippi River backwaters, but the greatest concentration is in what I call the upside-down triangle of Mille Lacs, Leech, Winnie, and Cass.

As the fishing in smaller lakes changed, the idea of a reliable jumbo perch bite began to fade. Anglers started to wonder if walleye slot limits were playing a role by increasing the number of large walleyes, along with a surge of hammer-handle northern pike. Bigger fish in these waters eat bigger perch.

Large predators can consume large quantities, and from there, the system gets complicated. Years ago, when we caught very few big walleyes, perch populations were massive and resilient. Today, we catch-and-release more big walleyes than small ones—but nature always finds a way.

Successful year classes

I spend winter days targeting a fish that bites during daylight hours on clear glacial lakes. Jumbo perch are an action fish—they think with their stomachs—and they keep the phones ringing. Just when I thought I may have to switch my guide focus to crappies and bluegills, I realized that they are even more fragile fleeting species. I stick with perch.

There isn't a hierarchy of big panfish producing more panfish, but perch replenish themselves through strong year-class recruitment. As I've said for years, *perch are the farmer's corn crop of ice fishing.*

About ten years ago, while guiding for walleyes in summer, I noticed something important. Perch hatches were everywhere on the lake. It didn't matter if I was in 10 feet of water or 30; on my Humminbird, the perch hatch showed up as a 5- to 10-foot-thick layer wherever I stopped. They were so dense that they often registered as bottom. I knew then that winter perch were making a comeback, but that amount of bait doesn't help walleye fishing.

Thanks to several successful year classes, we now have an incredible lineup of perch from multiple age groups. Some large lakes that are known perch factories are producing good numbers, though they don't have the big jumbos we saw 16 to 18 years ago. One reason is the higher number of big walleyes, which limit how many perch reach that size.

That said, the perch population is as strong as it has been in the last 16 years. An influx of rusty crayfish helped after cabbage weeds disappeared about nine years ago. I believe those crayfish proliferated from Cass Lake. Upriver perch were spawning at just 7 to 8 inches, stunted in size and spawning at an early age. Rusty crayfish accelerated growth rates, and combined with massive numbers of young-of-the-year perch, true jumbo perch returned.

Since then, perch have hatched successfully, rebuilding good ol' day populations on Minnesota lakes that historically held perch. Even with more—and larger—walleyes in the system, late springs, fast warmups, and warm summers have boosted perch populations. Today, big jumbos are better than they've been in over a decade.

The main difference now is that many of Minnesota's best jumbo perch lakes are infested with zebra mussels. The ultra-clear water makes perch more efficient foragers, but it also makes them spookier and harder to catch, especially in shallow water. Perch don't have exceptional vision, and while clear water helps them feed, it makes them a hardwater challenge.



Doubled up on a Twitchin' Puppet.

Targeting jumbos in clear water

Two winters ago, I found jumbo perch in shallow water, buried in weeds and along the weed line. Last winter was the complete opposite. On most lakes, perch were deep—much deeper than I would normally fish them in 18 to 28 feet. I found perch hanging in 32 to 38 feet of water, and even beyond 40 feet.

Using my Humminbird Xplore with LakeMaster maps, I highlighted all the deep water and RAZR'd holes about 100 feet apart across the basin. At each hole, I dropped my MEGA Live 2 forward-facing sonar and looked for what I call "busy bottoms." If I found soft mud with baitfish balls and insect life darting around, I fine-tuned my hole placement—and found schools of jumbo perch nearby.

Bro Pro Tip: *For run-and-gun drilling, I wear an AFTCO Reaper hoodie, bibs, and Fish Monkey Yeti gloves. The key is staying warm without sweating.*

In deep water, perch typically hold one to three feet off bottom. When they're slightly suspended, they often race up to smash a Northland Twitchin' Puppet in a perch pattern or glow. If the bite slows after locating fish, unpack, settle in and fish for a while.

At that point, drop a live fathead on a dropshot rig set 18 inches off the bottom. Hook the minnow on a red or glow-white Gamakatsu Octopus-style #6 hook, paired with a 1/4- to 3/8-ounce tungsten cylinder sinker. Use lighter, thinner line like Sunline 5-pound fluorocarbon ice line. It sinks faster and still gives you a fighting chance if you hook a big walleye or an eelpout.

My rod setup is a St. Croix Dead Eye paired with a SEVIIN GS 750 reel. The soft rod tip gives you time to grab the rod and set the hook. Place that combo in an I-Fish Pro tip-up, spacing them about 50 feet out, and jig nearby. The jigged lines bring fish in toward the tip-ups, creating a strong one-two punch.

I've also had excellent success in these depths with Northland Tungsten Buck-Shots and Slim Spoons. Perch patterns, Wonderbread, and gold colors all work well—and they sink fast.

Bro Pro Tip: *Go Light! I use my Humminbird Xplore graphs off my boat while on the ice, mounting the MEGA Live 2 transducer on a Fish Armor Pro Pole attached to a Fish Armor Pro Light Shuttle.*

I power the shuttle with an Amped Outdoors 12-volt, 15-amp-hour battery, keeping the setup lightweight and easy to carry for light hole-hopping and running and gunning. For longer trips that stretch from day into the night, I switch to a second shuttle with a 12-volt, 32-amp-hour battery for extended run time without sacrificing mobility.

The good ol' days are now

Every winter on the ice is different when it comes to targeting jumbo perch. Several factors influence where perch will hold—sometimes changing even within the same season. The biggest factor is food: Baitfish balls made up of young-of-the-year perch, insects, and crayfish. All of these critters dump down to the basin, including crayfish, in midwinter. Crayfish are why it's important to keep your minnow off the bottom: They'll nibble pieces off your bait if it's too close to them.

Anglers must determine if jumbo perch are located in three main areas: food shelf weeds, primary break shelfs and humps, or deep, busy-bottom basins.

Make sure you have a RAZR auger and extra batteries for your power tools; you just might hit a jumbo perch jackpot. ***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.



A 'busy bottom' area produces an aggressive alpha perch on a Tungsten Forage Spoon Perch Pattern and a T-boned fathead minnow.

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1:00 pm **Gregg Thomas** ..... Muskie Movements & Strategies
2:30 pm **Steve Herbeck** ..... Giants from the Bay to the Shield
4:30 pm **Chase Gibson** ..... Battling Water Clarity to Find Success

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Ten Good Reasons to Love Sauger



The author with a nice sauger. Sauger are cousins to the walleye and look similar, but there are noticeable differences. Sauger are browner in color with splotchy markings rather than a consistent golden hue. They have spots on their dorsal fin, no black mark at the base of the dorsal fin, and no white tip on the bottom of their tail (like a walleye).

by Joe Henry

Every winter, thousands of ice anglers make the trek to Lake of the Woods with visions of walleyes dancing in their heads. And why not? This is the Walleye Capital, after all. But there's another fish swimming beneath those holes in the ice that deserves a whole lot more credit than it gets.

Comedian Rodney Dangerfield built his career on the phrase, "I don't get no respect." That's the sauger in a nutshell. This smaller cousin to the walleye fills buckets day after day, keeps rods bent when walleyes won't cooperate, and tastes just as good on the dinner plate. Yet somehow, it rarely gets top billing.

Here are ten good reasons to show the humble sauger a little more love.

1. Sauger save the day

We've all had days when walleyes just won't play along. Maybe they're not in the mood; maybe the weather changed; maybe they're just being stubborn. That's when saugers shine. While you're waiting for walleyes to move through, sauger keep your lines tight and your spirits up. They've saved countless trips from being a bust and preserved many an evening fish fry.

2. There's a lot of them right now—and they're big

Sauger numbers at Lake of the Woods go up and down over the years, but right now, the population is through the roof. Better yet, many of them are big. We're talking 17 to 18 inches, which is a giant for a sauger.

Picture this: You're watching your flasher when that red line appears, or you spot a few fish on your forward-facing sonar, sliding across the mud bottom toward your lure. Your heart starts pounding as you wait for that tap at the end of your rod. That's what sauger fishing is all about.

3. They live where walleyes live

Sauger and walleyes are neighbors. It's common to come off the ice with a mixed bag of both species, usually with a couple jumbo perch thrown in and maybe even an eelpout.

That said, sauger do have their preferences. They tend to hang out in slightly deeper water than walleyes, and they're real bottom huggers. Walleyes use more of the water column and often suspend while chasing baitfish like tulibees. Sauger like to keep their bellies close to the mud.

4. Kids love them

Let's be honest—walleye fishing can test your patience. They cruise in, they cruise out, and sometimes they ignore you completely. Sauger are more forgiving. They bite more consistently and keep the action going, which is exactly what kids need. When you've got young anglers in the fish house, sauger keep the electronics lit up and the bobbers popping. That's how you create lifelong ice anglers.

5. They're different

Most lakes in the Midwest don't have sauger. They prefer river systems and stained water, so unless you fish the right places, you won't catch them. That makes them special.

They look different from walleyes, too. Sauger don't have a white tip on the bottom

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The sheer numbers of saugers in Lake of the Woods really adds to the fishing experience and the number of overall fish anglers catch. Everyone, kids and adults alike, like having action and catching more fish.



Most anglers think about the fish that made Lake of the Woods famous: the walleye. Sauger, however, can play a big part in first filling the bucket, and eventually, filling the fry pan.

of their tail. Instead, they have brown, splotchy skin and spots on their dorsal fin. Walleyes have a black spot at the base of their dorsal fin; saugers don't. Once you learn the differences, you'll never mix them up again.

6. They taste amazing

The firm white meat of a sauger is sought after by anyone who's tried it. Some locals will tell you straight up that they prefer sauger over walleyes because the meat is a touch sweeter. Most folks can't tell the difference once they're breaded and fried. Either way, one thing's certain: They're delicious.

7. You can keep plenty

Lake of the Woods has a strong sauger population, and the regulations reflect it. In winter, you can keep a combined total of six walleyes and sauger per day. Up to four of those can be walleyes. That's enough for a great fish fry and still have some to bring home to the freezer.

8. They bite all winter long

Some lakes lose oxygen late in the season and the fishing shuts down. Not Lake of the Woods. It's big water with plenty of oxygen, and with so many sauger in the system, there are always fish willing to bite. March can be absolutely incredible for both walleyes and sauger as they put on the feedbag before spawning.

9. The season runs into April

For ice anglers who hate to see winter end, Lake of the Woods is a dream come true. The season starts early and ends late. Fish houses can stay out overnight through March 31, and the walleye and sauger season runs through April 14. Depending on the year, resorts are often still putting anglers on fish through the ice until the end of March.

10. They're just plain fun to catch

Sauger fishing is a lot like walleye fishing. They hug the bottom, usually in deeper water. The classic approach works great: Jig your favorite lure tipped with a minnow head in one hole, and run a deadstick in the other with a live minnow suspended six inches off bottom.

Just like walleyes, sauger change their attitude daily. Some days, they'll chase down your jigging lure like it insulted their mother. Other days, they'll cruise in, look at the jigging spoon, and only eat the minnow on the deadstick. That's part of what makes them fun; you never know what you're going to get.

Walleyes get most of the glory at Lake of the Woods, and they deserve it. But sauger play a huge role in what makes ice fishing here so successful. They're fun to catch, are everywhere right now, and they taste fantastic. Even if you're coming up primarily for walleyes, there's a good chance sauger will be a fun and delicious part of your trip. Give them the respect they deserve. ***MWO***

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.







Self Reliance in the Outdoors

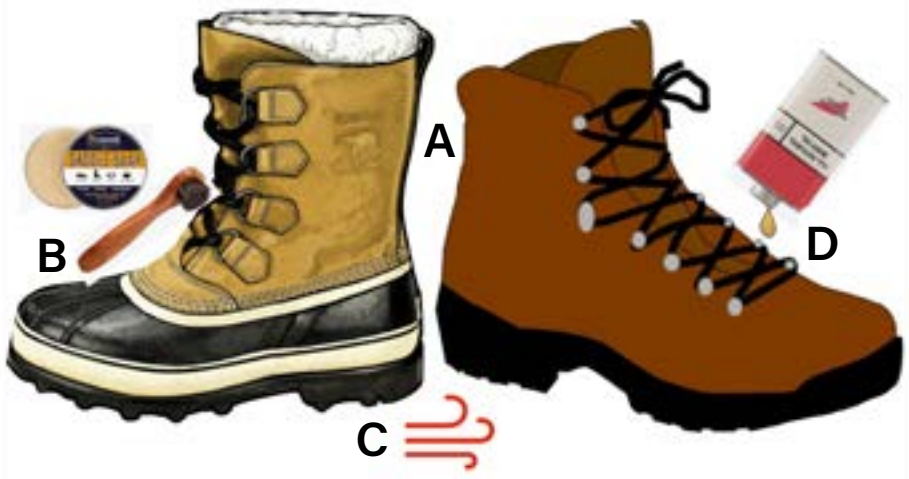
Tom Watson

Winterizing

Whether you are a three-season weekend adventurer or a hardcore, backcountry trekker, winter is a good time to work on gear for the coming season, maintain gear you'll be using throughout the cold months ahead, or even try a DIY project or two. Use those "stay inside" cold, wintry days to take on a few rewarding projects.

Here are a few outdoor-related tasks for your "to-do" list:

Basic Winter Boot Waterproofing

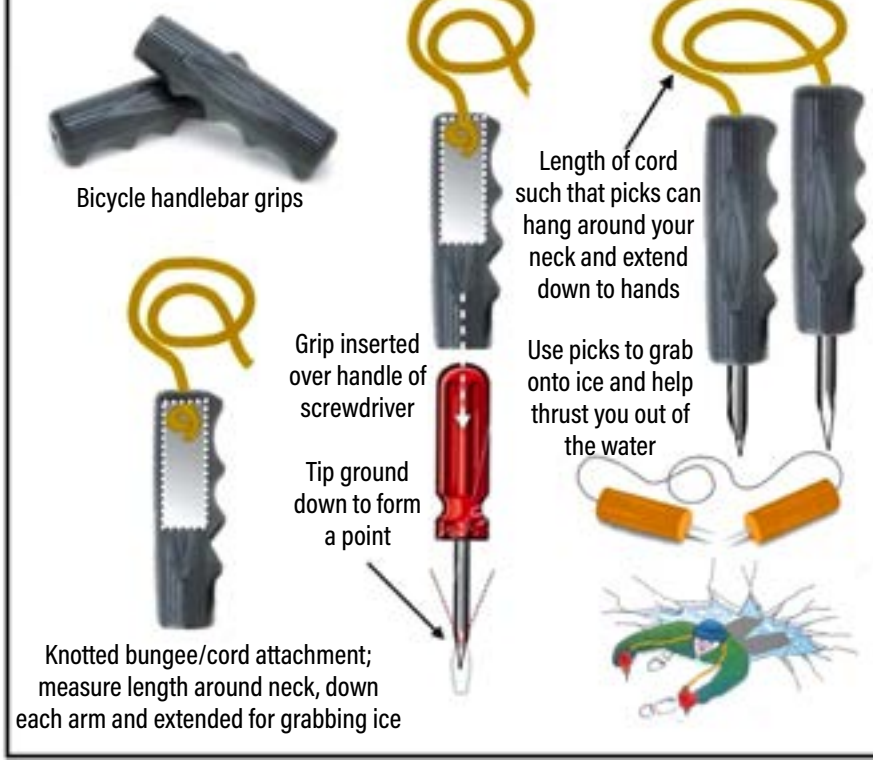


(A) Remove deposits of excess dirt, debris, remove boot laces; (B) Use leather cleaner or soap/water to thoroughly clean boots, making sure to scrub seams and recesses in leather folds (boot tongue area); (C) let dry completely; (D) work boot oil into all surfaces using a brush or fingers; Let boots absorb oil and dry, and check for condition of laces before re-lacing.

Winterize your footwear

Dry, warm feet are the key to a comfortable winter. Footwear has to breath to provide warmth, and to do so it must be clean and treated with appropriate waterproofing. The basic process is to first clean the leather (soap and water is basic cleaning solution); once dry, apply a waterproofing oil or compound. It's important to reach every seam and crease throughout the boot to assure complete protection against moisture seeping in. As part of your periodic waterproofing routine, check for wear and tear on boot laces and the boot itself.

Make Your Own Ice Awls



DIY ice safety gear

You should never venture out onto a frozen body of water without a pair of ice awls (aka ice picks) hung around your neck, poised in position down by your hands for easy access in an ice-breakthrough emergency. Easy to make, these ice grabbers are key to helping in your self-rescue back out onto the ice. Remember, Ice is never 100% safe!

Winter walking aids

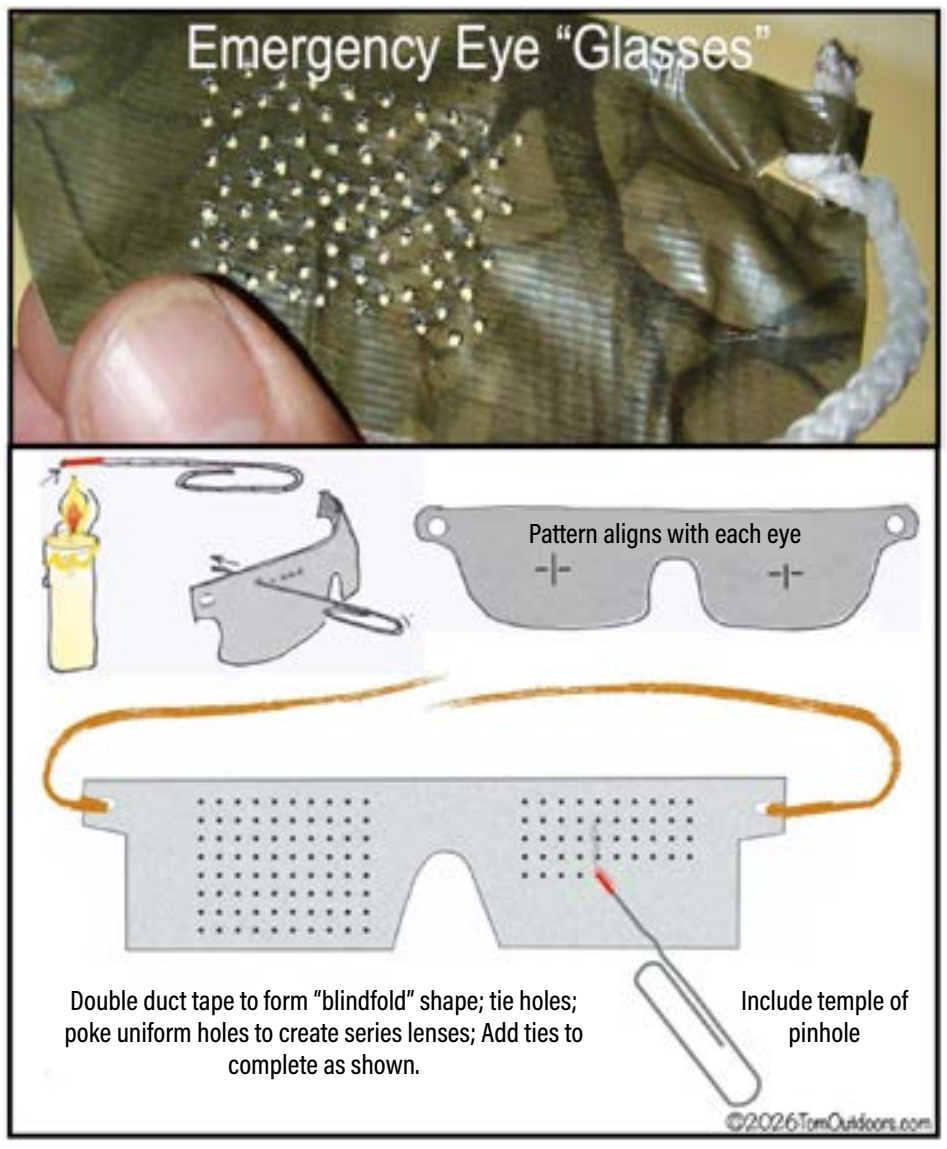
A stout hiking staff can be a real aid when bushwhacking through brushy snow country or by simply providing better balance and support when traveling across an uneven snow field or over ice. Classic diamond willow makes artsy staffs while a simple straight section of birch has worked for me for decades.



The author prefers a good hiking staff when trekking across snow—protected with a coat of spar varnish and a few ice studs embedded in the bottom of the staff to provide better purchase on ice, rocks or most other hazardous surfaces.

I've added gripping power to my 'walking stick' by attaching small, screw-in ice studs to the bottom of my staff. They keep the tip from sliding across the ice or losing purchase on almost any slipper/icy surface. Easy to apply, these studs are good to attach to thick soles of boots for added traction, too.

Emergency Eye "Glasses"



Emergency 'glasses'

I didn't believe this "hack" until I made a working pair myself. Based on the principle of a pinhole camera, each tiny hole works as a miniature lens to bring your less-than-20/20-vision view into focus. It's somewhat like looking through tiny meshed netting, but the correction is more toward the glasses end of clarity than the blurred vision of not having your spectacles. Should you break/lose yours, these duct tape "glasses" can offer you a clearer view of your surroundings.

These are just some of the many winter projects you can work on to keep you at least mentally in tune with the outdoors during the colder periods of winter. You may resign yourself to thinking that you are merely a three-season outdoorsman/woman, but working on a string of projects over winter can give you a full-season mindset and help you hone a few self-reliance skills. You might also find one that might encourage to bundle up and enjoy the outdoors even more.

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.

Crappies: What's My Line?

by Tim Huffman

Experts agree that having the correct fishing line is important for good performance and more bites-per-hour. However, choosing the right line isn't easy, because there are so many options. Here are some guidelines and tips for selecting the right line for enticing bites and landing crappies.

Monofilament and copolymer lines are very similar and constructed from nylon. Monofilament is one strand while copolymer is two strands. A copolymer has the advantage of combining characteristics of two lines into one.

Monofilaments are the simplest and remove much of the confusion of line selection. Their advantages include low cost, availability, stretch, great handling, good casting, limpness, and a range of clear to high-visibility colors. Their disadvantages include shorter lifespan and weaker hooksets due to line stretch. The same basic advantages/disadvantages apply to copolymers.

These lines excel at being *extremely limp.* This makes them easy to use for both novice and expert fishermen. The stretch gives them a shock absorption to aid when fighting a fish, and the limpness allows great bait action.

It doesn't matter which line type you choose; it's important to choose the right pound-test for the type fishing you do. For example, in stained water with wood cover, a 10-pound-test line is appropriate on a long pole. In clear water, a 6-pound-test line, or maybe lighter 4-pound in ultra-clear water, is a good choice because crappies can see the line and they can spook.

A good rule-of-thumb is to pick 8-pound-test for all-around fishing in stained and dingy waters. Select 6-pound-test for clear to slightly stained water. It's possible that a smaller line might result in a few more breakoffs, but it's worth it when you are getting more bites and having more fun.

It's time to go to heavier lines when pulling crankbaits, and when power trolling heavy jigs or crankbaits. The strain of a big bait, weight and the strike on a moving bait requires strength. A 15-pound-test line is a popular choice.

Fluorocarbon line sinks, so it isn't for many crappie presentations, but it's good for single-pole pitching and jigging. Forward-facing sonar (FFS) with a long pole spooled with fluorocarbon is good because the line has little stretch and is nearly invisible in the water. The line sinks, so it helps get baits down quickly. No stretch provides a stronger hookset and the ability to swing a fish into the boat.

Fluorocarbon advantages include a quickly sinking line for deeper presentations; extremely low visibility for fewer spooked fish; low stretch for sensitivity and good hooksets; and abrasion resistance. Disadvantages include cost, but it last longer; knots must be tied with care; fast fall rate isn't good for slow presentations or shallow water; and line can become stiff/brittle in cold weather and water.

Braided line has limpness, sensitivity and power. Crankbait trollers sometimes choose it because its tiny diameter allows baits to go deeper. So, advantages include limpness to allow good bait movement that is good for jigging or casting; no-stretch sensitivity to feel more bites; the line has no memory; it's long-lasting; and offers maximum strength per diameter. Line like 10/2 braid is 10-pound test with the diameter of 2-pound-test monofilament. It sounds like the perfect line, but fishermen dislike a few things. For example, knots can be difficult to tie; the line has no shock absorption so fish can rip off; and the line is expensive.

Method vs. line

In general, monofilament and copolymer lines are the easiest to handle and are affordable. This is the most popular line used in fishing.

For casting a free-fall jig, pick mono or fluoro line.

For casting with a slip-float, choose mono because the line doesn't sink between the rod and float.

Choose monofilament for long-line jig trolling because it is a shock absorber for sudden strikes. Fluorocarbon line is good, too, and provides an advantage in clear water.

Crankbait trollers use all three types of line, but monofilament is the most popular.

Power trolling (long poles out the front, using fast speeds) uses heavy 15- to 20-pound test monofilament or fluoro.

Slow trolling or spider rigging can be done with any type of line, with mono being the easiest to handle.

Tips

- Lighter line results in more bites and more fish.
- High-vis line is good when watching the line for light bites. Experts disagree if the color spooks fish in clear water.
- Does heavier pound-test line result in fewer breakoffs when fighting a big fish or when hung-up in cover? Yes, it does, but if you catch 50-percent fewer fish, is it worth it? No. Stick with the lightest line that's practical for your fishing. Most experts recommend 6-pound-test because it handles great and draws more strikes than heavier line.
- Two things are important when using light monofilament line: First, wet the line before tying a knot for less line friction when cinching a knot. Friction can create heat causing a week spot at the knot. Two, retie line often, especially when catching fish that rub against cover or rocks, or after catching a rough-mouth fish like a catfish. ***MWO***



A loop knot is good for maximum jig action. The high-visibility line helps to see more bites. Choosing the right line and line size for your favorite techniques are important keys for catching more fish.

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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Bassin' from the Bank

Dan Brozowski

Power Fishing Success for Bank Bassers

"Hey, what's your favorite style of bass fishing from the bank?" That's the most-asked question I receive via emails, while walking the banks of my favorite waters, and strolling the aisles of my favorite tackle shops. The answer, without hesitation, is a simple one: *Power fishing!*

Power fishing? Mention power fishing in person, and you get a few cocked heads, like when your dog hears an unusual sound! When explaining power fishing to anyone waiting around long enough to listen, I try my best not to sound like that old fisherman leaning back in an old office chair next to the minnow tank, spinning yarns of fishing outings gone by, engulfed in billowing plumes of white smoke caused by this cantankerous fisherman's continuous puffing on a White Owl cigar. (If you have some grey hairs up top, you know this guy!) Myself, I try to refrain from using phrases like, "Back in my day," or "When I was a kid," when trying to explain the art of power fishing. But in all honesty, I do remember power fishing before it had a label attached to it, as the technique has been around, unnamed, for many years.

So, what is power fishing? I don't know if there is an exact definition of this technique, but basically, you cast and search for active bass in kind of a hyper-speed mode, trying to cover as much water as possible. The term power fishing really began to get thrown around when bass fishing legend Kevin VanDam was tearing up the bass tournament world with incredible success, and his winnings and awards will probably never be duplicated. Kevin's ability to cover water at an incredible pace really brought power fishing into the spotlight. I'm not saying that he developed the technique, but he certainly perfected the art and brought many anglers to use this technique for their style of angling.

As with most things, times change, and angling is certainly not immune. Techniques change, and trends come and go. Power fishing has taken a back seat in the competitive bass fishing world along with many other time-tested go-to tactics, especially shallow and water and "junk" fishing. With the recent introduction of, and angler dependence on, Forward Facing Sonar (FFS), power fishing has all but disappeared. Search baits such as crankbaits, spinnerbaits, and topwaters that once lined the decks of most competitive bass fishing boats have now been replaced with 3-inch jig minnows and 4-inch jig worms, all with the intent of working an offering over the tops of located schools of bass. To me it's reminiscent of "ice fishing" techniques, but applied from the confines of the front deck of a carpeted bass boat. There's no searching the water's surface for bait activity or selecting the next possible target for your follow-up cast; actually, very little overall casting is involved anymore. Instead, angling time is now spent staring at a digital screen, dangling baits overhead to entice a bass into biting. It's all a bit on the dull side for my style of bass fishing, but to each his own; I'm sticking with my old-school techniques.

While power fishing has taken a back seat in the competitive bass fishing world, I believe it is by far the most successful technique for bank fishing bass anglers. Here are some reasons that I believe prove my point.

Certainly, power fishing is not the only technique for bank bassers, yet it is your most advanced system to locate active bass on your waters. The obvious point is that bank anglers lack the ability to locate bass in the waters that lie in front of them due to the absence of electronics such as those available to boating bass anglers. There are a few castable "locating devices;" I've had them, and between trying to watch them on my phone on bright days, and keeping my phone out of my local lake, it's an awkward tool, since it is not mounted on something. Additionally, I've had some reliability issues syncing with my phone. So, for me, they're not worth the headache. What's the alternative: Power fishing, finding active bass the old-school way!

Years ago, we would break down water by using certain baits; we called them *search baits.* Basically, you use various types of baits to work your waters from the surface to the bottom in hopes of locating active fish. These baits covered a whole lot of water in a short time; most of these baits were meant to be cranked at a higher pace. The idea is, once these search baits located fish, you could slow down and change to slower or more deliberate types of lures to work certain areas more thoroughly.

My observations over the last few years indicate that bank anglers are also relying less on power or searching modes, increasingly following tactics preferred by the bass boating public. I'm not denying the effectiveness of many of today's bass rigs and techniques and the use of them for bank anglers. But until you can at least find bass, power fishing, search-type baits should be your main approach. On certain waters, such as very small ponds or small rivers, search baits and power fishing are less critical, as bass are rather concentrated to begin with. In these cases, drop-shotting or casting a wacky rig might prove successful. But in general, larger waters demand a definite process for aggressively locating active bass, and power fishing is the most effective way of achieving this success.

Now, if you've never tried power fishing, you might think, well, all this seems simple enough: Grab some type of bait and become a casting fanatic, churnin' up the water with any old bait! I wish it was that simple!

Successful power fishing with search baits depends on choosing the right type and style of baits for this type of presentation, so let's get into some options.

For this article, I'm going to narrow down my top two go-to baits and a couple of honorable mentions, as well when I'm in my power fishing mode searching for active bass, so let's get crankin'.

1 Crankbaits

I've been a crankbait fanatic since I caught my first bass crankin' with a Rebel Deep Wee R and have been hooked ever since! Crankbaits set the standard for search baits,



Basic power baits. As always, add some of your own.

in my opinion. I use shallow-running or wake baits, squarebills, deep divers, and lipless cranks to cover the water from surface to bottom. If I had to pick one, the squarebill is still my favorite crankbait, as they cover the 2- to 6-foot range, which in most waters is where I find the majority of my active fish. Of course, if you want to probe the depths, switch to a deeper diver until active bass are found. The lipless version is kind of a sleeper crankbait, but is excellent for covering long distances, and you can vary the depth by letting it sink to different depths, then retrieving, without replacing your bait.

#2 Soft Swimbait

Though I hate to admit this, the swimbait has slowly been pushing into the #1 category of search baits for me. Various types of boot, paddle and various swim tails, along with a multitude of sizes, cover just as much water as my crankbaits, yet have the ability to work all depths without changing out the bait. There are quite a few choices in jighead designs and swimbait hook options, allowing the swimbait to work in weedier and snag-infested areas with weedless hooking options. To me, a swimbait is a subtler approach compared to the more aggressive action of a crankbait, so when bass are a little on the non-aggressive side, the quieter, more natural look and sound of the swimbait will draw more strikes.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Spinnerbaits

Spinnerbaits are an awesome search bait as well, especially in waters with schooling baitfish. I believe that their multiple blades give the illusion of fleeing baitfish. They work through very sparse weeds as well and can be run through the depths or burned across the surface.

Vibrating/bladed Jigs

These are a standard in most tackle boxes today, and for good reason: They catch a lot of fish! I don't particularly like to throw them, but they're still a favorite among most bank anglers that I know. I do use them in shallow-water applications and when the water is a bit more stained, as these baits emit an incredible amount of vibration. But they don't work all that well if fouling weeds might be an issue.

Topwaters

Topwaters on the move are excellent search baits. When using them as power bait searching toola, I prefer either a buzzbait or some type of prop bait. Poppers, walk-the-dog, and frog-style baits are great, and I use them often, but mostly in areas where I know that bass are present. I prefer to use a rather slow retrieve on these baits, so they're not so much a search or power fishing choice.

Buzzbaits? Pick your favorites. I like single blades with a trailer, as the trailer can add to the bait buoyancy, helping hold the buzzbait on the surface a bit longer. But if bass are really short-striking the bait, get rid of the trailer.

For prop baits, you can go with a heavier "plopper" sound such as with the Whopper Plopper. But sometimes, a subtler prop like that found on Hedon's Torpedo seems to draw more attention, so you might have to experiment to find the preference of the day for surface-feeding bass.

While power fishing seems to have lost its favor among competitive bass anglers, make it a priority while you're pursuing bass from the bank. Be assured, you're not angling behind the times; you're pursuing bass in its purist form! ***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.mwo@gmail.com.

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Canadian Pike: East vs. West



The wilds of northern Canada epitomize the finest trophy pike fishing on earth. But you don't necessarily need to travel that far north to catch big fish. *Photo: North Haven Resort*



Classic pike lures like spoons, spinnerbaits, straight-shaft spinners, shallow crankbaits, large softbaits and flies produce in virtually all pike environments.

by Dave Csanda

Canada is blessed with hundreds of thousands of natural lakes and rivers hosting gigantic northern pike. Even smaller, remote waters can grow big northerns, given the cool climate, abundance of food, low fishing pressure, and practice of catch-and-release at many far-North wilderness lodges. Pike grow big under such prime conditions, all across the Canadian Shield area stretching from the Minnesota-Ontario border northward, and eastward into Quebec.

Directly west of this area, however, conditions change. The plains areas of lower Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta are mostly devoid of natural lakes. Instead, large prairies reservoirs dot the landscape. These impoundments resemble and function much like those of the Missouri River system in the Dakotas—just on a smaller scale. In the U.S., Lakes Oahe and Sakakawea are famous for producing northern pike exceeding 20 pounds, so it's no surprise that Canadian prairie reservoirs like Last Mountain, Diefenbaker, Tobin, and smaller impoundments also grow pike to mammoth proportions.

North of these locales, where the landform turns from prairie to pine-studded wilderness, big pike are plentiful in natural lakes spanning the vast Shield region, functioning much like similar waters to the east and southeast.

As a result, rocky, Canadian Shield waters fish a bit differently than the reservoirs of the central prairies, although big pike still display characteristic tendencies and behavior. Most of the same fishing principles and essential tackle still apply—just with a bit of a twist, given the differences in habitat.

Classic Shield lake pike behavior

Pike spawn in the back ends of shallow, marshy bays from just before to just after ice-out. Fish tend to feed on ciscoes at the mouths of bays, or suckers in creeks flowing into bays and within bays themselves. If suckers are absent, expect pike to feed on suspended baitfish outside bays, and then shift into the back ends of bays beginning in late morning. As the water warms, more fish cruise into the back ends in depths of about 2 to 6 feet of water.

In the morning, casting a jig/softbait combo, dragging or hopping it before a pike's nose, then pausing, generates strikes from lethargic pike. Fly fishing with large streamers is tough to beat, suspending a near-weightless fly before a pike's eyes to tempt strikes.

As the sun warms the water (from about 11 am onward), pike activity and aggressiveness shifts into high gear. Pike enthusiastically chase down and strike classic lures like wobbling spoons, shallow-running crankbaits, straight-shaft spinners, large softbaits, spinnerbaits, flies and others. Several times per retrieve, pop your lure forward with a twitch of your rod tip, then pause to let the lure flutter, to trigger strikes from following fish. Sunny, calm afternoons produce glorious fishing!

This prime, shallow behavior lasts a month or more, but may begin to dwindle as the water warms further and shallow bays choke in with weeds. Big pike now tend to spend more time in deep weed beds outside of shallow bays, and perhaps rimming the main lake. All of the same lures still apply—just in different types of area than in spring. Find good stands of healthy, green cabbage weeds in 6 to 10 feet of water, and you're on fish.

In warmer lakes lying closer to the U. S. border, summer water temps rising above 70 degrees may cause many of the largest pike to abandon the shallows in favor of cooler, 30- to 40-foot depths, just above the thermocline. Vertically jigging heavy jigs or internally-weighted softbaits can produce really nice fish. Pike have better ability to adjust to rapid depth change than walleyes, and are less stressed when you reel them to the surface and quickly release them to return to the depths.

As the water cools in early fall, pike shift from deeper water to weed beds and rock points at the mouths of bays. Some may even wander into the back ends of bays, but the odds are for structure and cover rimming the basin to draw the most fish. Cast or troll any of the lures mentioned earlier to cover water, locate wolfpacks of aggressive biters, and catch big fish.







Surprisingly large pike are available in prairie reservoirs stretching from the Dakotas up to the middle portions of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. *Photo: Clayton*



Multi-hook deadbait rigs include: (top) a VMC Predator wire rig (Y-shaped) ideal for suspending bait horizontally below a bobber or tip-up, and (bottom) a homemade, straight rig snelled from 80-pound-test fluorocarbon that applies better for casting out and letting your bait settle to bottom. Note the proper hook placements shown (using large softbaits to demonstrate the use of hooking up deadbaits like smelt, ciscoes, alewives, mooneyes, or suckers). Also note that this rig was tied short to display the swivel within the photo. Ideally, the rig should be tied about a foot longer.

Reservoir pike

In early spring, pike move to the back ends of coves—particularly those with an active feeder creek and/or runoff from rain or snowmelt that warms the water. Here, pike spawn, or at least attempt to spawn, on flooded shoreline cover, tumbleweeds blown into the water, or other less-than-classic spawning habitat.

Right away, one opportunity rises that's typically unavailable in wilderness waters: *Road access* to the back ends of reservoir coves often allows you to drive to potential fishing areas, and walk down to the water to fish from shore as the ice begins to break up, even if the rest of the cove is still covered in ice.

Casting all manner of traditional pike lures produces when fish become active on sunny afternoons and glide up into the back ends of coves. Work them from a boat much as you would a back bay on a natural lake.

On cloudy days, however, pike are often less active. Fishing from a stationary position—either from a boat anchored in a key spot, or casting from shore—is often most productive in these conditions. For example, pike may follow a creek channel all the way up into the back of a cove, making even subtle channels a prime location.

Fishing deadbaits from a stationary spot involves waiting for pike to become active, slowly cruise the shallows, and ***come to you.*** This should come as no surprise as pike are both predators and scavengers. At ice-out, numerous winter-killed fish litter the bottom and are easily scarfed up by pike cruising the shallows.

Slip a sinker on your line and tie on a multi-hook "quick-strike" deadbait rig employing either a wire or fluorocarbon leader. Rig it with a dead smelt, cisco, alewife, mooneye or sucker, hooking the head of the bait on the last hook of the rig; insert the other hook in the side of the body or nearer the tail, depending on the size of your bait. Cast it out, let it sit... and wait for the magic to happen.

If you prefer a more aggressive tactic to slowly work a larger area, attach a large bobber above the rig, set to suspend your bait perhaps 3 to 4 feet below the surface. Use multiple casts to cast and then drift your deadbait across a wider swath of territory. Either way, pike will zero in on your bait. Using multiple hooks allows you to set the hook right away, rather than allowing the fish to swallow the hook, and enhances successful catch-and-release.

If pike are past spawning and are lingering more toward the mouths of coves, try casting lures there. If you find a shallow shoreline flat that actually gets shallower as the flat extends toward deeper water, it creates a "shallow bowl" effect, much like a shallow bay, where the water warms and draws pike like crazy in spring. Spinnerbaits, cranks, and large boot-tail plastics dressed on jigheads are the way to go.

The rest of the year, pike are likely to cruise deeper water off shoreline points at the mouths of coves, or in fact wander the reservoir. They become harder to target if there is no shoreline cover like tall weeds or standing trees to draw them, and are likely to be caught incidentally by walleye anglers fishing main-lake structure.

Different sceneries, same strategies and tactics

In the end, pike are pike, no matter where they swim. They simply adjust to local habitats and feed on available baitfish. Once you figure out where they are located throughout the year, cast or troll traditional pike lures to catch them. Even if there are no stunted spruce trees surrounding the lake, no granite outcroppings along shore, and no caribou migrating on the horizon.

While far-North fly-ins epitomize the ultimate Canadian fishing experience, they are unfortunately somewhat expensive and often beyond some folks' budgets. The good news is that lakes and impoundments in southern Canada are mostly drive-to destinations that most anglers can afford to visit. In many cases, you can bring your own boat, tackle, groceries and supplies, and catch big pike at bargain prices. And these days, that's good news for everyone! ***MWO***

Dave Csanda has enjoyed nearly 50 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.





Big Ontario Walleye Bonanza

by Roger Cormier

One of my favorite Canadian trips each summer is the annual *MWO TV* trip to Slippery Winds Wilderness Lodge, just a short floatplane flight out of Fort Frances, Ontario (right across the border from International Falls, Minnesota). We've featured the great multi-species fishing at Slippery Winds many times over the years on the show, a destination that features plenty of big fish and options as far as which lakes you want to fish.

The variety in fishing is a prime attraction almost anywhere in Northwest Ontario. Spectacular action is the best part, so pick your favorites: walleyes, lake trout, crappies, northern pike, smallmouth, largemouth bass, and muskies, although depending on how north in the province you travel, these last three species phase out of the ecosystem.

At Slippery Winds, you can "go six-for-six, for six species on six different lakes." In addition to Yoke Lake, where you can catch walleyes, northern pike, muskellunge, lake trout, and both smallmouth and largemouth bass, there are five connected portage lakes that feature a blend of the six species.



Big walleyes like these are typical of the fish you can catch at Slippery Winds. *Photo: Tim Pumper*



It's too bad that this healthy big walleye was spawned out, or it would have topped 8 pounds! *Photo: Tim Pumper*



Largemouth bass are caught by the dozens in shallow water at some of Slippery Winds' portage lakes. *Photo: Tim Pumper*

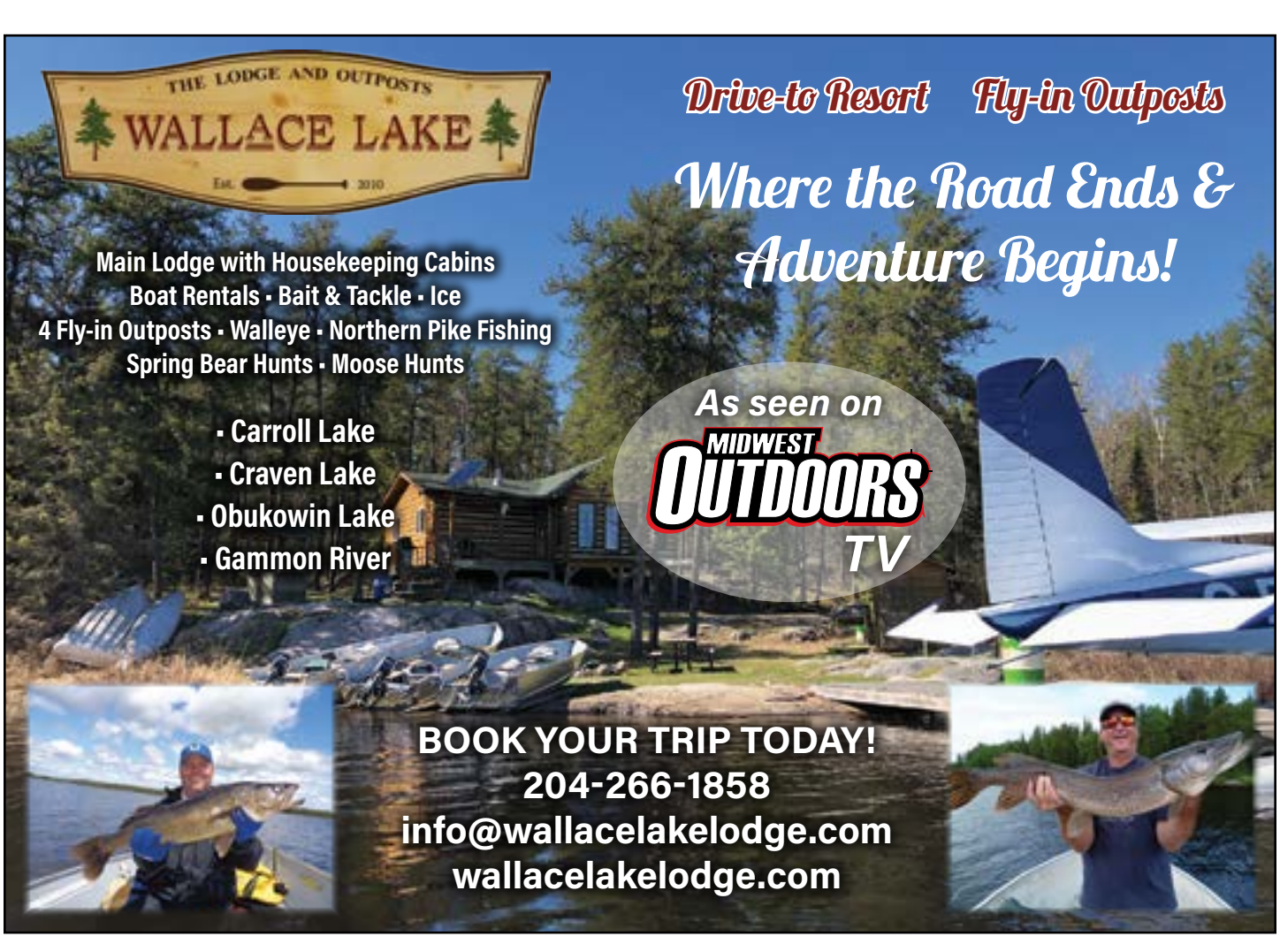
Yoke Lake has developed a reputation as one of Northwest Ontario's best big-walleye lakes. Considering its modest acreage, the average fish measures around 22 inches. It's common to catch multiple 24- to 28-inch fish during a good day on the water.

However, although most guests love catching those big walleyes, it's the multi-species fishing that is the biggest attraction to fishing here. A typical trip involves fishing right out of the lodge on the main lake, but also traversing one or more of the short portages to the adjacent lakes: Crossroute, Bluffpoint, Sullivan, Straw, and Sucan. The lodge keeps a boat cache at each lake, fueled and ready for gusts to use.

While Yoke Lake is home to all six species, the portage lakes have a varied mix of species. In recent years, my most memorable trips have featured a focus on Yoke Lake plus portages to Bluffpoint and Crossroute for incredible numbers of largemouth bass (dozens of hookups for each angler in just a short day's fishing) and lake trout. Of course, bonus walleyes and pike show up in the mix as well. Overall, the variety of fishing makes Slippery Winds such a fun location to visit.

Popular fishing tactics apply. A simple jig-and-minnow presentation for walleyes catches good numbers of fish, and early in







Narrows or neck-down areas like this are current pinch points that congregate hungry walleyes and other predator species. *Photo: Roger Cormier*





The signpost points to great fishing, including Yoke Lake in the background, as seen from the lodge. *Photo: Roger Cormier*

the season when fish still are shallow, it's easy to catch them on jerkbaits as well as small swimbaits and crankbaits. Topwater poppers, Ned rigs, shallow-running cranks, and Texas-rigged worms catch the smallmouths and largemouths, and the spinnerbait bite for largies can be fast and furious. I'll also pack one pike/muskie rod for casting big lures, and bring some of my favorite toothy critter lures on the trip. There are some huge muskies in Yoke Lake, and fish over 50 inches are caught by guests every summer.

Variety in structure makes fishing anywhere in Northwest Ontario a treat: Miles of shoreline to explore by casting or trolling, weed lines, back bays, saddles and neck-down areas between two basins or in between two or more islands, and current areas where creeks and waterfalls inflow into lakes all offer great fishing opportunities.

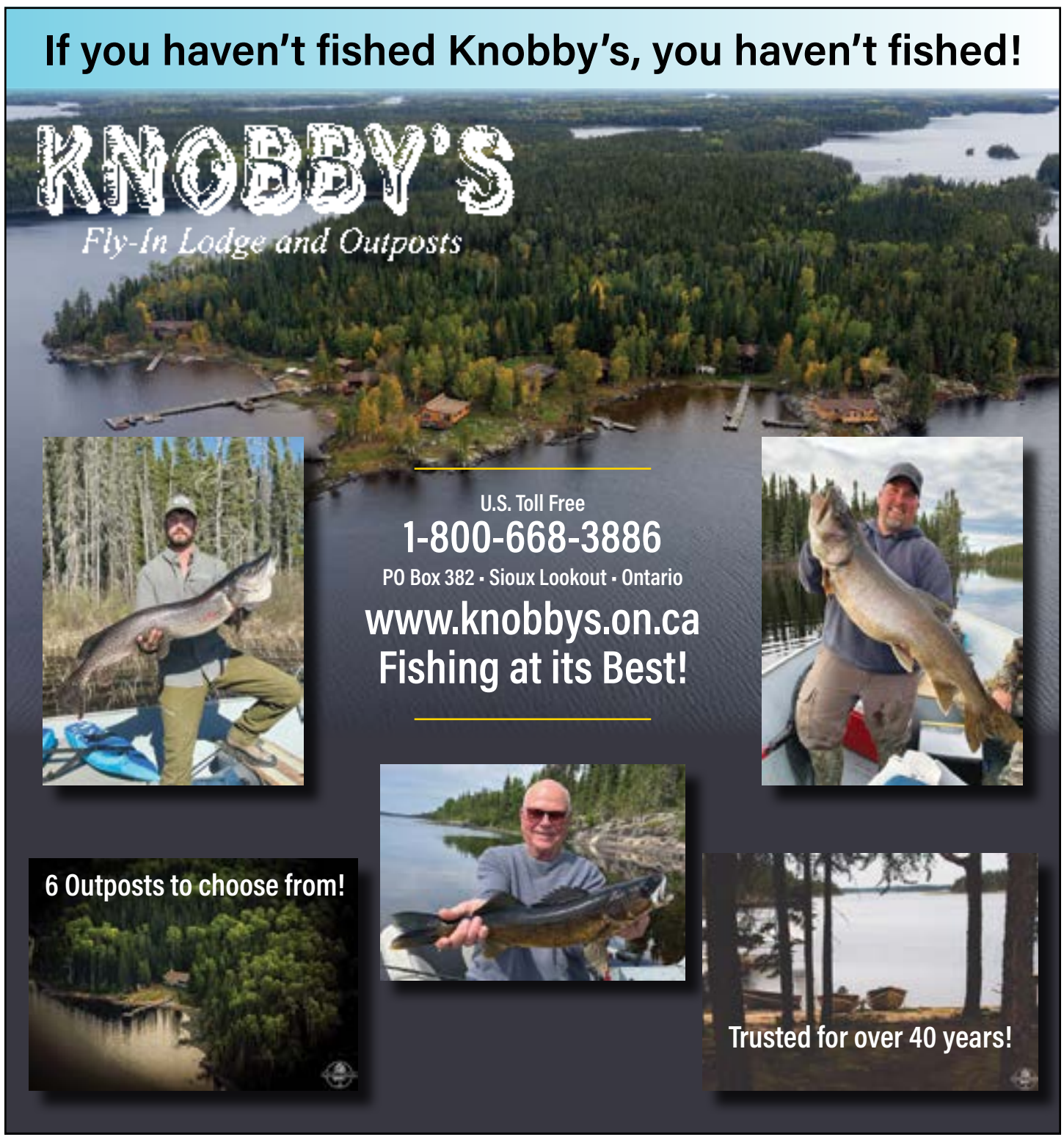
Yoke Lake is essentially three distinct basins: a northern basin with good rock structure but primarily shallow water including some back bays with downed timber that attract lots of bass; a connecting river to a deep, central basin with lake trout holes of 100-plus feet, but also plenty of shallow reefs and shorelines where you catch walleyes and bass; and a northwest basin with some hotspot rockpiles and narrows areas that produce good numbers of walleyes, pike, and the occasional muskie.

During trips to Slippery Winds in the last three years, I found that "jerk-trolling" produced some of my best walleyes of the trip. This is a fun and easy way to fish, and ideal for covering water just like longline trolling—but generally more productive than simply tossing a crankbait off the transom and trolling along. With a jerkbait tied on (I'm partial to Deep Mavriks or Shadow Rap Deeps from Rapala), you can impart so much more action to a lure than the subtle action of a trolled crankbait. The erratic, darting action of a jerkbait triggers way more strikes.

Three years ago, it proved to be the winning pattern in the shallow river over the tops of emerging vegetation. Two years ago, it produced the biggest walleyes of the trip when employed over a 35-foot basin, enticing deep, suspended walleyes in the clear water to rise up 15 or more feet to take the lure, and even triggered a nice muskie to bite. Last year, jerk trolling through saddles and neck-down areas produced fish. It's clear that jerk trolling catches fish in a variety of scenarios.

The variety in fishing is a prime reason to fish in Canada. If that sounds like a great Ontario fishing trip to you, check out Slippery Winds Wilderness Lodge! **MWO**

MidWest Outdoors staffer Roger Cormier is an avid photographer and writer and has been contributing content to MWO magazine and television since 1992. He calls Minnesota home, but ventures far and wide to enjoy the outdoors and share his experiences.



Northwest Territories

Slaying Dragons in the Land of Little Sticks

by John Cleveland

I have heard a lot of fish stories over the years, and with few exceptions, most are simply wishful thinking and tall tales. But every so often, I've found a tale worth telling.

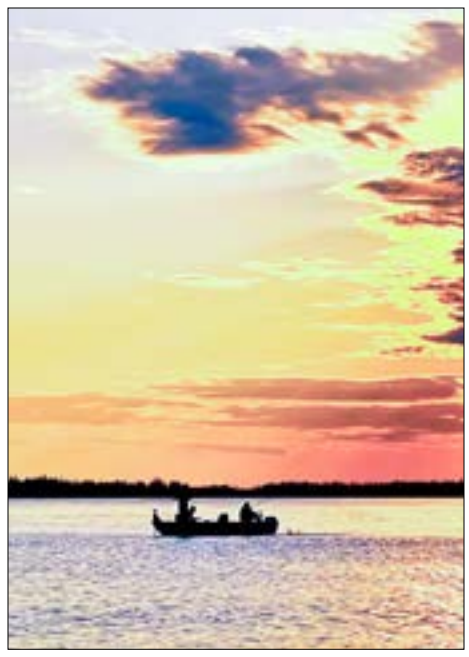
"As I stand on the front deck of Brabant Lodge overlooking the Mackenzie River in the Northwest Territories, an ethereal essence of adventure radiates from every element of my view. I watch in awe as a vast magic carpet of water flows before me with curly white tendrils of fog floating into the soft, buttery light of the Arctic sky. I sense the powerful rumble of the river's massive force as it plows like a liquified glacier on its 1,000-mile journey north to the Arctic Ocean." This is a journal entry I made on my first morning at the lodge.

Peter Fox, the owner of the lodge located 123 miles southwest of Yellowknife on the Mackenzie River in the Northwest Territories, had invited my good friend Patrick Walsh, editor-in-chief of Outdoor Canada magazine, and myself to his lodge this past July to fish for northern pike, walleyes, and grayling. The lodge was originally built in 1967 and purchased by Peter and his family in 2023. The Mackenzie River is the second-largest drainage in North America and one of the most prolific pike fisheries in the sub-Arctic, also known as the land of little sticks.

The Cessna Caravan's floats touched down on the river at 11 am and taxied up to the dock in front of the lodge. We were enthusiastically greeted by Peter's staff, then headed up to the main lodge for an orientation and lunch. Peter mentioned during orientation that if any of us don't catch at least one 40-inch pike (known as a dragon), we would get a free visit to the lodge next year. An interesting offer, but honestly none of us wanted to be that guy.



A river dragon.



Boat at sunset.

We headed to our assigned cabins which are handsomely appointed log structures tucked into the surrounding forest overlooking the river, with wood-burning stoves, full bath and comfortable queen size beds.

A great start

Our first couple of days were an absolute blast as we hooked well over a a hundred pike while guided by Luca Decola in one of the lodge's 18-foot Lund Alaskan boats with 50 hp Honda four-stroke engine and Garmin trolling motor with "Spot-Lock." Luca was very knowledgeable about the river, the pike, and how to best present our flies to them.

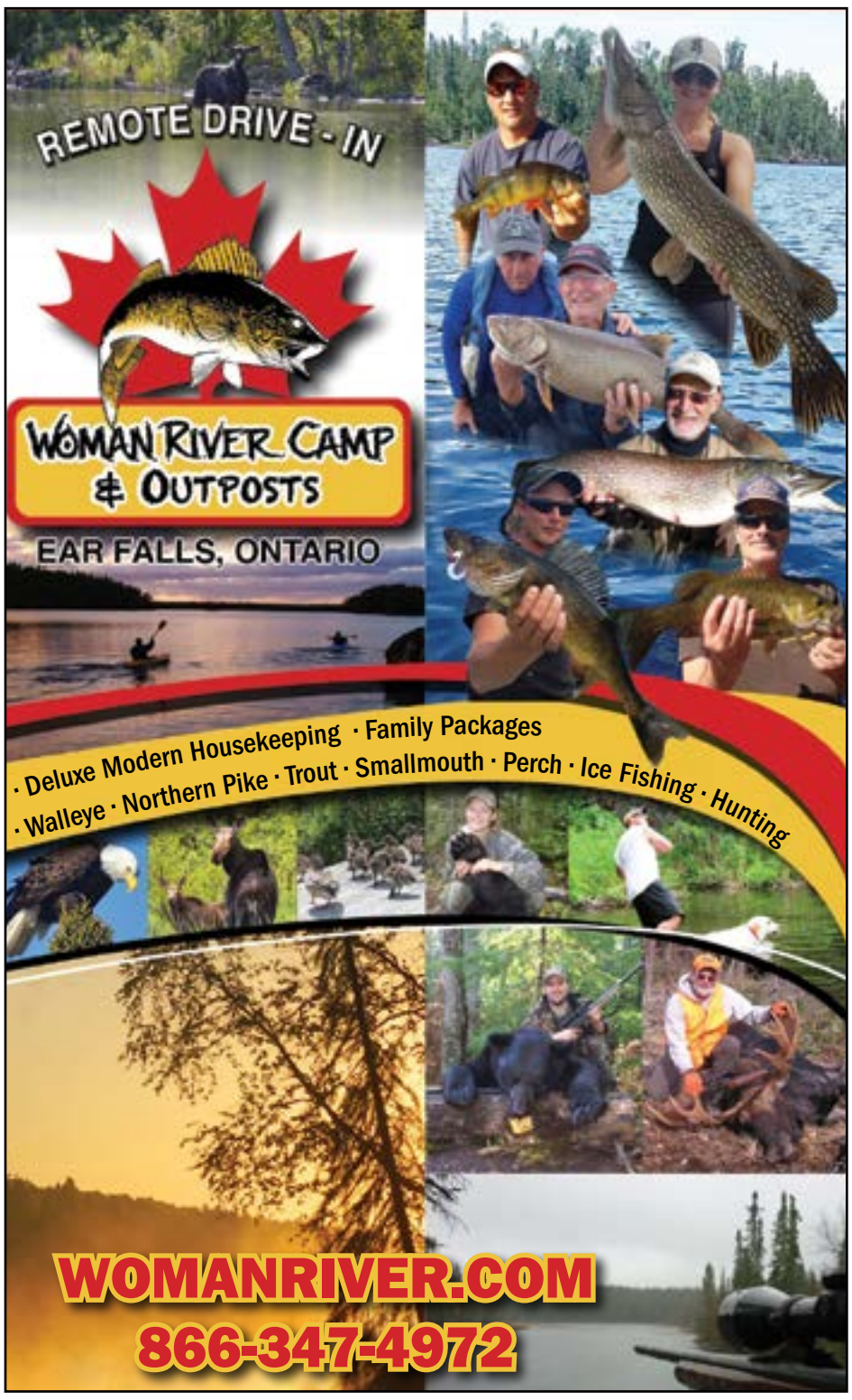
River dragons

On day three, we were hoping to connect with one of the monster river dragons for which the Mackenzie is known. As we stepped into the boat, Luca told us that he was taking us to a hot spot for big pike. He throttled the 50 hp Honda down to idle and "Spot-Locked" the boat just off a rocky point where two bald eagles were soaring overhead in the morning thermals, then told us to get to work.

On his second cast, Patrick set the hook on a huge river dragon measuring 45.9 inches. He was using a big flash fly that looked like a meteor streaking through the water before the pike smashed it. Moments later, I had a 42-inch pike in the net on a red-and-white Buford fly tied by my friends at Central Lake Fly Company.

Every pike we caught had a bulging belly full of baitfish, and broad, powerful shoulders indicating an excellent forage base—likely the reason there are so many big pike in the

story continued on page 24





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Big pike on a topwater frog fly.



A fly-caught walleye.



Frog fly.

Northwest Territories

...continued from page 22

Mackenzie. By midafternoon, we had landed several more dragons over 40 inches and dozens of powerful, 8- to 15-pound pike, all within a short radius of where we had begun that morning.

Flipped off by a serpent

In late afternoon, I launched a yellow-and-red Murdich minnow fly toward a dark shadow swimming like a giant serpent across a sandy flat, 40 feet from the boat. There was a bright flash as the pike inhaled my fly, then it took off like a Volkswagen stung by a bee. The next 10 minutes were a chaotic mix of skill and luck as I tried to outmaneuver one of the largest pike I have hooked in many years. Finally, when it was within a few feet of the net, it looked me straight in the eye, opened its mouth, spit the fly into the sky, then flipped me off with its tail as it sauntered off into the current.

Each night as we gathered for an excellent, chef-prepared meal and complimentary cocktails, the banter quickly turned to the quantities of trophy pike that that were being caught. It was truly amazing how many fish over 40 inches were being brought to the nets each day. The largest for the week turned out to be a 48-inch dragon caught by a first-time guest at the lodge.

Topwater pike

It was a wet, windy and cold morning as we headed out to Beaver Lake (a miles-wide section of the river) to explore the massive matrix of lush weed beds located there. The difficulty of casting large pike flies in strong winds can't be overstated, and after an hour of pounding big flies into the gusting winds, we decided to leave and try more protected waters.

Luca slipped the boat into a sheltered bay with dozens of long, dark shadows laying on the bottom, and we immediately began casting topwater frog flies at them. There is something primal about a topwater bite when a pike crushes your fly on the surface. The adrenaline rush was exhilarating as three or four pike would swarm toward the fly like a pack of wolves, often shooting into the sky like a missile when attacking the fly.

By the end of the day, we were cold, wet, and thankful for a spectacular day on the river. When we opened the cabin door, the push of warm air, and sound of kindling crackling in the wood stove, was a welcome surprise. Peter had anticipated us needing a warm, dry cabin after soaking ourselves in the drizzle and fired up the stove before we came off the river. Nice touch!

Taking a break from the beast

After several days of nonstop pike action, casting flies the size of a red squirrel, we were ready to take a break and try our hand at fishing for grayling with our diminutive, 5-weight fly rods. Arctic grayling are one of my favorite fish. They can only live in wild places with clear, cold water, and the Mackenzie River offers all those things.

After dinner, Luca took us to a spot 5 minutes from the lodge and set up a drift through a long run, using Prince nymphs suspended by floats, and we hooked a couple of these scrappy unicorns on each pass through the run. The biggest challenge with grayling is getting a photo of one resting in your hand, and I think we had as much fun attempting to get a photo as catching them. They are without a doubt the slipperiest fish on the planet. We laughed so hard that evening that we almost ran out of breath, as grayling were squirming and squirting out of our hands on almost every photo attempt.

The 'In between'

A steady downpour began shortly after we arrived at a beat called "The In Between." Luca said that we should have good opportunities for both pike and walleyea here. There was a steady current where he "Spot-Locked" the boat 30 yards from shore.

We began by casting toward shore on



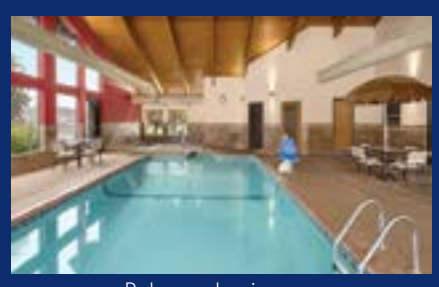
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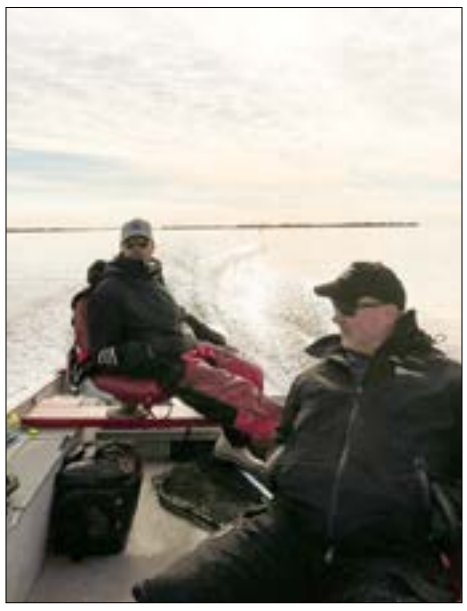
Guest cabin at the lodge.



Guide Luca and Patrick with a dragon.



Author John Cleveland with a trophy pike.



The Mackenzie River is a vast body of moving water.

the right side of the boat and hooked dozens of pike. Patrick landed several over 40 inches despite the periodic squalls that sent raindrops bouncing off the surface of the river like buckshot. Luca suggested that I cast my fly on the left side of the boat if I wanted to catch a walleye, which I did, and sure enough connected with a fat, feisty walleye every few casts. By the end of the day, we had caught dozens of large pike including several dragons, and a dozen spunky walleyes on the fly.

On our last evening at the lodge, as everyone sat enjoying another exceptional meal, the conversation turned to the incredible fishing the group had experienced. I asked everyone to estimate how many pike over 40 inches they had landed this past week. The total came to over 150 pike over 40 inches caught by eight anglers in seven days!

The Mackenzie River is a big-fish factory, like no other I have fished. The largest northern pike caught at the lodge to date is a 53 1/2-inch monster, and Peter told us that four to five pike over 50 inches are landed each season. There are no other lodges on the river, so the only people you will see fishing are the same ones you are having breakfast and dinner with each day.

The staff at the lodge ia dedicated to making you feel like you are part of the family. Their enthusiasm for taking care of their guests is evident in their attention to detail. This commitment to excellence reflects Peter Fox walking the talk and believing in his staff. It's a wonderful place to connect with trophy northern pike and enjoy the serenity of one of the truly wild places left on the planet.

As the week came to an end, I stood on the dock after dinner, listening to a pair of loons singing a duet of enchanting ballads to the wind, appreciating just how fortunate I felt to have shared an incredible week in the land of little sticks with my good friend Patrick. ***MWO***

John Cleveland is an award-winning outdoor writer with a passion for chasing big fish in wild places with both fly and conventional tackle. Email: grouseman52@gmail.com.

For more information...
brabantlodge.com





Back to Canada



A quick pic adjacent an inukshuk at Saskatchewan's Points North Landing Airport.



The author's trophy pike and largest ever—a 43-inch monster!



The author and his dad in front of their Wilderness Family cabin.

by Logan Ladowski

Ten years. That is how long it had been since I let myself escape into the tranquility of northern Canada. The last trip was with my father while I was in high school. That trip left me with lasting memories that I cherish today: Action-packed fishing locations, boat rides out to fishing spots, delicious shore lunches on secluded shorelines, and relaxing dinners full of stories and conversations. Memories I longed to make more of.

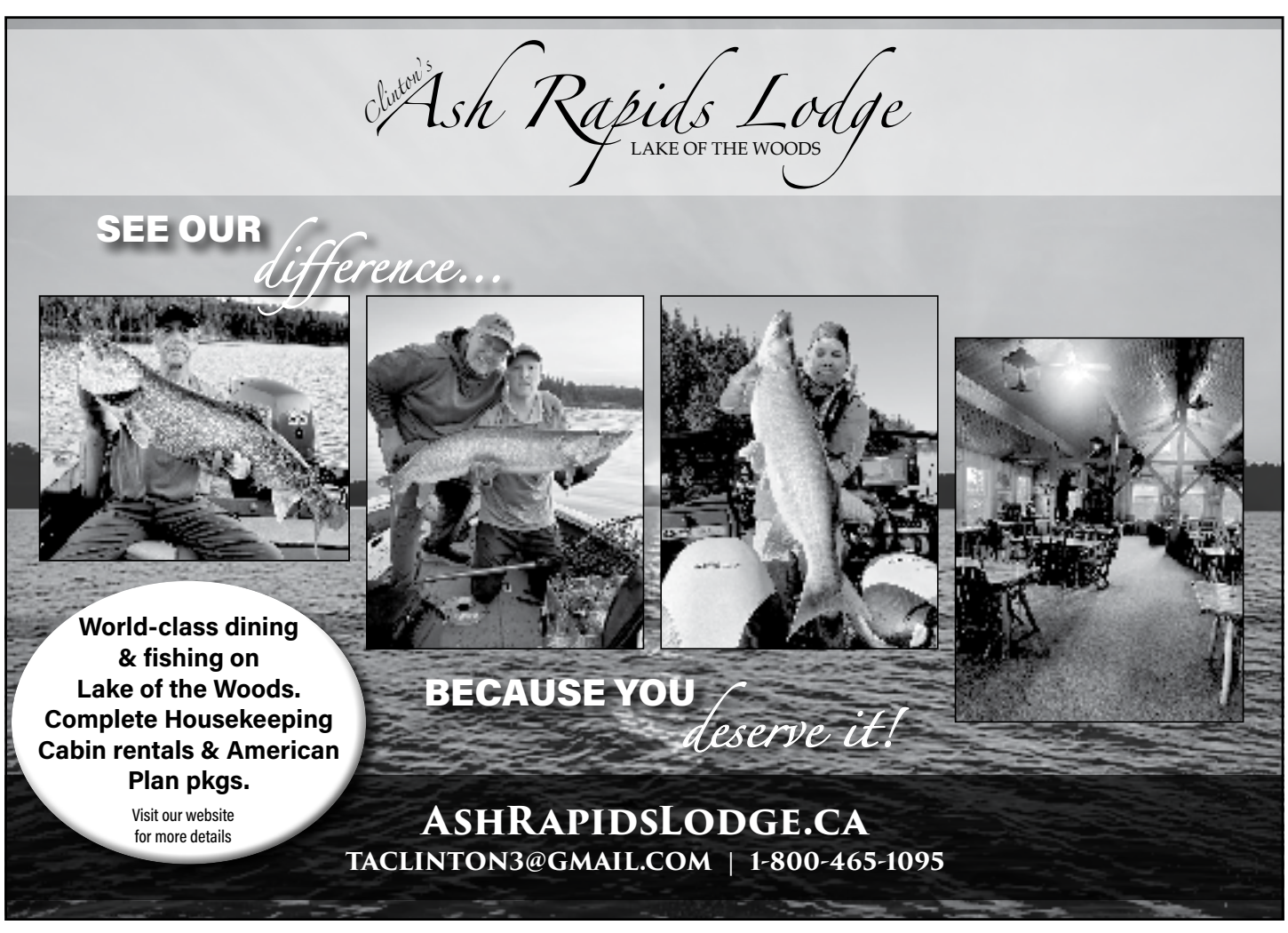
This time, I was out of college and working in the "real world." Life was moving at a bullet train pace. So when my father asked me if I would be interested in joining him for another trip to Canada, I thought he was crazy for thinking he had to ask. The interest is always there; the time is not always as readily available. However, it had been too long, and I was ready to drop a line in cool, Canadian waters. So, we decided on a week when we could clear our schedules, and the date was set.

I was unsure what to expect in the weeks preceding the trip. My last trip was amazing. I had loved the time with my father, the fishing was off the charts, the food was delicious, and the landscapes were unforgettable. Canada was this amazing place I escaped to with family and grew tighter and stronger relationships. Would my experiences be the same now that I am grown? They say that distance makes a heart grow fonder. Perhaps I had built up the idea of a Canadian fishing trip too high in my mind, and this trip did not have a shot at being better, or even as memorable, as the last.

Any worries about this trip not living up to the standard I had in my head were pushed to the back of my mind during the days of travel. I was back on an adventure with my dad, and I was loving every second. The overnight stay in Saskatoon, the small shuttle-like plane that took us to Points North Landing, the ride to the lodge: All things that could be looked upon as bothersome travel was instead viewed as part of the exciting journey. Not to mention, I got to take a picture by an Inukshuk at Points North with my dad (I was looking forward to that).

Once I stepped foot onto the Wilderness Family Outfitters (WFO) grounds in northern Saskatchewan, though, any worries about this trip were not only swept from the front of my mind, but they were also eradicated entirely. The grounds were incredibly well kept and wonderfully landscaped. The main lodge was homey and welcoming. Our cabin was comfortable with a view of a shimmering bay, encased in pine trees. This was going to be an outstanding vacation. Throughout the following days, my expectations were all met and surpassed by the lodge's fishing, food, and family.

I have fished quite a bit in my life, and most of that fishing has been done in Wisconsin. I had my ideas of what a "keeper" fish was and what a "good fight" was. So, when my dad reeled in a northern pike on the first day larger than 27 inches and sent it back on its way without a second thought, I was perplexed. I would have taken a picture with that fish and framed it—perhaps even given it a name. That fish would have made





The Wilderness Family Outfitters dock and flotilla.

the leaderboard on any of my past fishing trips in Wisconsin, and I would have been ecstatic about it. The only explanation I had in my mind is that he has gone on hundreds of fishing trips, and perhaps a large fish wasn't as exciting anymore.

On the other hand, while catching my first fish of the trip around 27 inches, I wanted it landed and I wanted a picture with it. It was a nice fish! Turns out, that length was on the small side for Saskatchewan's Wollaston Lake. My perspective quickly proceeded to change throughout the days of fishing. I caught more pike over 30 inches on this trip than I had in the previous 27 years of my life. Pretty soon, a quick release (not even boating it) for a fish in the 20s was not upsetting and instead was expected. I wanted to get another fish on the line as fast as possible, which for Wollaston Lake, that was more-than-likely the next cast. As long as a

story continued on next page



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Ladowski with guide and new friend, Brendon at the end of the trip.

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Back to Canada

...continued from previous page

"small" 25-incher was on my hook, I couldn't cast my lure back out in hopes of a bigger one.

The daily action at Wilderness Family Outfitters was incredible. Pulling in all those monstrous fish was hard work. So, after a day of "working" on the water, coming back to the lodge for a refreshing shower and a prepared dinner was rewarding. Mrs. Jacobs made dinner every night and each night was delicious. Meals ranged from soup to salad, and pork chops to lasagna. Each night was a new meal, and each meal was as delicious as the last.

The family of Wilderness Family Outfitters sure did their part in making this trip as fantastic as it was. They made my dad and I feel like we were at home, and that we were part of the WFO family. We all ate together at the long table in the main cabin and talked about our daily ventures. It was time to unwind and we all got to talk about the stories of the day: The multiple occurrences of "doubles" where my dad and I caught fish at the same time, or the wildlife sightings, or the time a trophy northern surprised (and scared) me when it attacked my lure within two feet of the boat as I was pulling the lure out of the water. They had board games on the shelf, but they were never needed. The lodge family, my dad, and I had no trouble filling the evenings with conversations and laughter before heading to bed and repeating the process the next day.

I had an image of what a trip to Canada could be—and should be. Wilderness Family Outfitters took that image and built it up to an even grander standard. I was incredibly saddened to leave the lodge behind, but incredibly grateful for the memories I will now cherish for the rest of my life. It felt like a movie as I was sitting in the hammock on the shoreline of the lodge, reminiscing over the past couple of days with our guide, Brendon. I felt like I was ending a chapter of my life. It sounds exaggerated, for sure, but that week felt like an adventure of a lifetime and something that impactful shouldn't be looked upon lightly.

I am glad that I made time during my hectic schedule. I am grateful that my dad invited me on another adventure. So, as the scene ended and the credits started rolling on this voyage, I could not help but hope that there would be a note at the end confirming that a sequel would occur in the near future.

For more information on Wilderness Family Outfitters, visit WildernessFamilyOutfitters.com, and for information on Saskatchewan Canada, visit FishSask.com. ***MWO***

The Business of Professional Angling

by Don Gasaway

Every year, great local tournament anglers try to make it in the pros. Some succeed and some do not. Why?

There is a difference between a guy who can catch fish, and one who becomes a successful professional. Both need to be able to catch fish, but the pro has something more that sets him apart from the rest.

In interviewing professional anglers over the past 10 years in walleye, bass, and crappie circuits, some things just make them different. Most of us can catch fish to one degree or another. We are usually self-taught. The pros study the sport, their quarry, and the ins and outs of the business of professional fishing.

We can all learn by studying the pros and perhaps accelerate our learning curve.

Professionals are students of the sport and approach it as a business. They study markets as well as their quarry.

A tournament professional begins by taking a good, hard look at his fishing. Like other professional athletes, they need to examine their overall career in the sport. How do they measure up with those at the same level, and against those more accomplished than them? No matter how good you are, there will always be anglers more successful. The pro examines what they are doing and how they do it. He takes notes and reviews them often. He sets goals and reviews them regularly.

Successful professional anglers use motivational tools borrowed from other professions. They visualize how and where they are going to catch fish. One pro had photos of his wife and son all over his boat. If he was opening a hatch to get some tackle bait, he might find a photo of his young son. He maintains that it helps him to remember what he is doing out there and how important it is to do it well.



Many highly successful local anglers consider turning pro. Some do, and go on to wealth and riches. Others try and fail. The road to professional angling success is often a rocky one.

One of the staples of the professional fishing business is *marketing.* This is more than just writing a letter to a tackle manufacturer and receiving sponsorship money. Pros have had to turn to non-recreation sponsors and other companies traditionally outside of the business of fishing. The number of anglers has increased and expenses have increased. There is not enough sponsorship money available in the boat and tackle businesses these days to meet the needs of all the anglers trying to make it on the pro tours.

Modern pros meet with potential sponsors, equipped with professionally prepared proposals and market plans. Many have video, power point and other electronic presentations. Their proposal includes not only who the angler is, but also what he can do for the company. They make use of power demographics and statistics. The pro offers his time and exposure in exchange for the paid support of a sponsor.

At a tournament, the pro uses visualization in preparation for the weekend's (or week's) activities. He knows how much time he can use to meet with the public and represent his sponsor's customer base. He prepares a game plan for the fishing part of the tournament.

Such preparation includes more than pre-fishing a lake. In involves research, organization, and equipment maintenance. The Internet has become a tool for modern anglers. It is possible to pull up articles about the lake and past tournaments. Topographical maps are downloadable from the net. Local fish and wildlife departments have websites that contain biological information.

Pros will know which area(s) he plans to fish first and what will be next. He may go for numbers first, and then cull later with larger fish. If the first holes do not produce, he will have an alternative plan to change patterns or tackle. He might even have alternative fishing holes in his trick bag.

When the tournament weigh-in arrives, the real pro will change into clean clothes so that his sponsor's logos are on display for the media in the best condition possible. While waiting, he might wipe down the boat and clean it up so that photos taken in the boat and the manufacturer's products are on display in their best light.

You do not have to go through all of this to enjoy a tournament. But, if you are hoping to make a career out of fishing, it is something to think about. Tournament fishing has become big business. Tournament fishing is the number one recreational pastime for many of our 60 million anglers. Today there are more than 12,000 tournaments held each year.

With big purses and paybacks awarded well down the finishing list, it is possible to make a good living at professional fishing without winning any tournaments. *Sponsorship money* is the key to financial success. Winning the sponsorship challenge takes work and perseverance. **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.

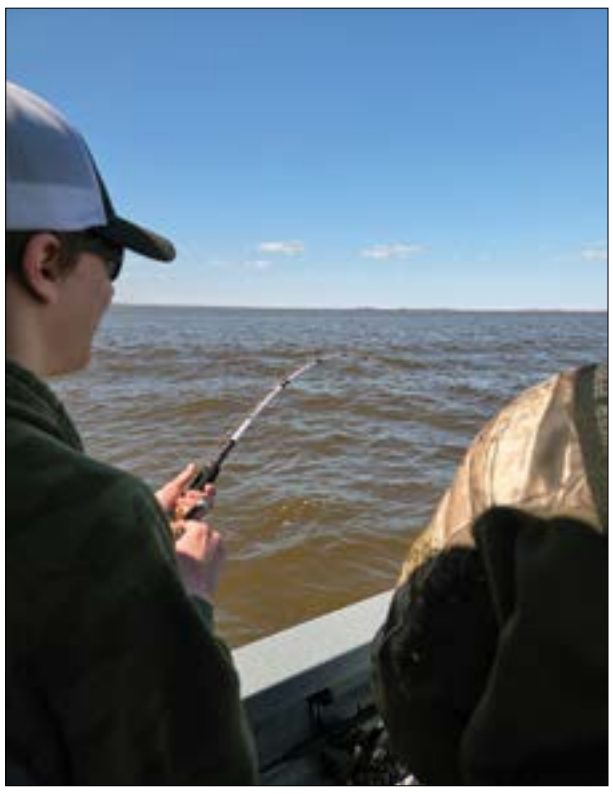


Does Your Catfish Rod Really Matter?


Braden Durick holds the 65-inch sturgeon he caught on a rod meant for 3- to 20-pound catfish.


A guide customer fights a catfish on the perfectly matched rod.

For many years, I have read and followed various boards and groups on the internet. One thing that has remained consistent from the very beginning, to social media today, is that many catfish anglers still think that having one or two stout rods for catfish is the best bet. Truth be told, to be very effective at catfishing and have more fun, catfish rods should not be one-size-fits-all if you are in an area where many species or size structure of catfish reside.


Braden Durick fights a 65-inch sturgeon on a 7-foot MH catfish rod.

Tools for the job

A catfish rod is the most important tool for the job of catching catfish. Sure, one really heavy rod can get the job done, but is that rod always doing justice to the fight of the fish and your enjoyment.

When questioned further on the one-size-fits-all rod, many anglers will say that they know a lunker catfish is lurking in the depths and that they must be ready should it show itself. A perfect example of this is a lake somewhere in the Midwest where channel cats averaging two to three pounds are the norm, although you might catch a 30- or even 40-pound flathead once in your lifetime.

Do the math here. Are you willing to drag hundreds of small cats in with no fight or enjoyment should you catch that once-in-a-lifetime catfish?

Even here on the Red River, where channel cats get big, I see many anglers running stout. Medium-heavy or even heavy rods should they catch that ever-elusive 30-pounder. I have yet to see that 30-pounder, by the way and I fish every day, just to say how rare it really is.

Using the proper rod, rigged correctly, is critical for the job—and much more enjoyable. When rigged properly, it will have enough backbone to bring in Mr. Wonderful should he grace you.

Here on the Red, I like to use a 7-foot, medium-heavy rod, or in the case of some brands, a medium. I rig it with a solid reel and good-quality line of at least 25-pound test. The other key here is, I keep the drag set properly, so the rod takes the brunt of the pressure, but the drag will go should the fish require.

Speaking of drag on the reel: If the rod is too heavy, when you do get a better fish on, it will pull drag, rather than letting the rod bend and do the work. That shortens the life of your reels.

After more than 20 years, and testing literally dozens of different rods, this is what I have come up with. The ideal rod has a soft tip to detect light pickups, but also allows a fish to take the bait without feeling the rod, allowing a circle hook to set. (That is also a key for another article).

Here's a perfect example of having a quality rod for the job that can handle a huge fish. In the spring of 2025, my son and I were fishing the Rainy River for sturgeon. We tend to use lighter-tipped rods to feel the light sturgeon bites. This time, we tried the rods that I guide catfish with and average 3- to 20-pound catfish. My son caught and easily landed a 65-inch sturgeon estimated at about 70 pounds on the same rig.

If you fish a body of water that consistently has flatheads into the 30-pound-plus range, *now* you have to upgrade to a heavier rod, so you have the fast-pulling backbone to fight the big guy. This is a perfect example of using a medium-heavy or heavy rod to match the need for the body of water you are fishing.

The same can be said for lakes or rivers where you will be catching 20- to 30-pound blue cats, with the rare shot at a 60-pound giant.

Matching the time of year

I told you at the beginning that I have found the right rods for how I fish, and what I fish for, most of the time where I fish. Over the years, I have found that even a 7-foot rod with a fairly soft tip is sometimes *too heavy* for the conditions.

There are times in early spring when the catfish just quite aren't in the mood to pull a rod down, and all you get is bouncing rods and frustration. The same can happen in late fall when the water is below 55 degrees.

One solution I found is to downsize even more to a medium or medium-heavy bass/walleye rod with a soft tip. I have found that the best rod for this is the old reliable Ugly Stik (the black one), known as the GX2 these days. This rod is soft enough to detect the bites and set the hooks, and with the colder water making the fish slower, has all the pulling power needed to haul in a big fish.

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Easton Marley fights a big catfish on the Dock Runner. This little rod became a hit.



Rob Horken of East Grand Forks, MN fights a 20-pound-plus channel cat. The right rod for the job makes the fight easier and more enjoyable.

The Dock Runner

Here's an example of a very fun day on the water with a cool/inexpensive little rod. I am not condoning the exclusive use of this rod, but for mid-range sized fish it is an absolute blast to fight fish on. It is also a great option to keep in the car for a quick-stop-to-fish situation.

A few years back, I read a post from another angler who moved to Florida regarding these little rods that people fished with, called the Dock Runner. I knew that I had heard of it and did some research to find out it was from Ugly Stik.

I bought one of these 36-inch rods for $20.00. I did upgrade the reel to one a little bigger and thought it would be fun to try to catch a catfish on it and see if these things were for real.

I took it out fishing alone, or with my son, Braden, for the test. We rigged the Dock Runner like we would any catfish rig. The first big fish caught on it was when Braden landed a 17-pound channel cat. The little rod fought the fish like a champ; however, it was more difficult due to the lack of length. A few days later, I landed a 15-pound channel cat on it.

I kept the Dock Runner in the boat in 2025. It was meant to be a joke for a long-time customer, but over the summer, it became a hit to throw out as "an extra rod." It fought numerous catfish from three to 19 pounds and was the talk of the boat all summer long. It made grown men giggle like little kids.

These stories of the Dock Runner should prove the point that you do not need an overly heavy, stiff rod to catch average catfish.

Finding a catfish rod that will catch fish and reel them in is not very hard. There are many choices on the market and they all will do the job. Fishing is supposed to be fun, and matching the proper rod to the job will make your day more entertaining and fight the fish properly, neither towing it through the water at warp speed or making it fight forever to the net.

Understand what you are fishing for, and what rod will do the job best for the conditions. ***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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Fewer Numbers of Trophy Walleyes Present, but Millions Coming Soon

On November 30, when the two 2025 walleye derbies ended on Lake Erie—the Fall Brawl and Walleye Slam—the lightest fish in contest history topped the leader boards, without any breaking the 12-pound mark.

Winners over the years have ranged from a 12.30-pound, 31.35-inch specimen caught off Huron by Ed Hatten, Jr. last year, to one weighing 14.97 pounds measuring 31.5 inches caught near Cleveland by Mathhew Branigan in 2017.

The top-placing and winning fish are often taken late in the contests, but very strong winds limited full participation as the contest was winding down this fall.

The winner of both contests, who received a fully rigged fishing boat from each, was Jay Gullet, of Williard, Ohio for his 11.59-pound (official Fall Brawl weight)/11.64-pound (official Walleye Slam weight), 29.5-inch fish caught on November 20. He, like many other anglers, signed up for both contests for this very reason.

Coming in second place in the Fall Brawl was Michael Higinbotham, who won the second, fully rigged fishing boat for landing an 11.46-pound fish that was 31.0 inches long. He did not sign up for the Walleye Slam and missed out on also collecting its second-place prize of $50,000.

Instead, Bradly Wissel, who on November 4 caught the longest fish that was entered into both contests, a 31.5-incher weighing 11.42 pounds, earned him the $50,000 second place award and the third-place cash prize of $55,000 in the Fall Brawl.



Jay Gullet, the Lake Erie 2025 Fall Brawl and Walleye Slam winner, with his 11.64-pound fish. *Photo: Fall Brawl*

Another 31.5-inch walleye was caught by Joe Mazur on November 7, but it only weighed 10.38 pounds

The current age structure of Lake Erie's walleyes is loaded with younger fish now that the monster hatch of 2003 that provided several successive years of teenaged fish has finally aged out of the system.

Lake Erie walleyes reach 15 to 19 inches by their second year but it takes at least 9 years to reach the 30-inch mark, according to Ohio Division of Wildlife inner ear bone (otolith) growth ring observations. Growth to 32 inches long was seen in fish aged from 13 to 15 with one fish determined to be 24 years old.

Following 2003, walleye spawning was much less successful, producing several poor year classes from 2004 through 2014.

Whenever recruitment levels are low, the odds of consistently finding teenaged fish that have grown to over 30 inches become less likely.

2015 was the first above-average hatch since 2003, which has led to a bump in fish that are now reaching trophy size at 11 years of age.

Then, a streak of above-average hatches occurred in 8 of the last 11 years, including good ones in 2020 and 2022 and exceptional hatches in 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2023.

At the October Ohio Wildlife Council meeting, Lake Erie fisheries biologists announced a preliminary observation of Ohio's 2025 walleye trawl numbers as "Exceptional."

On December 15, the combined Ohio/Ontario 2025 Western Basin walleye and yellow perch hatch results were released. It cited Western Basin findings of 128 walleyes per hectare (hectare = approx. 2.5 acres), well above the average of 57/hectare, ranking it the sixth largest walleye hatch of the past 38 years.

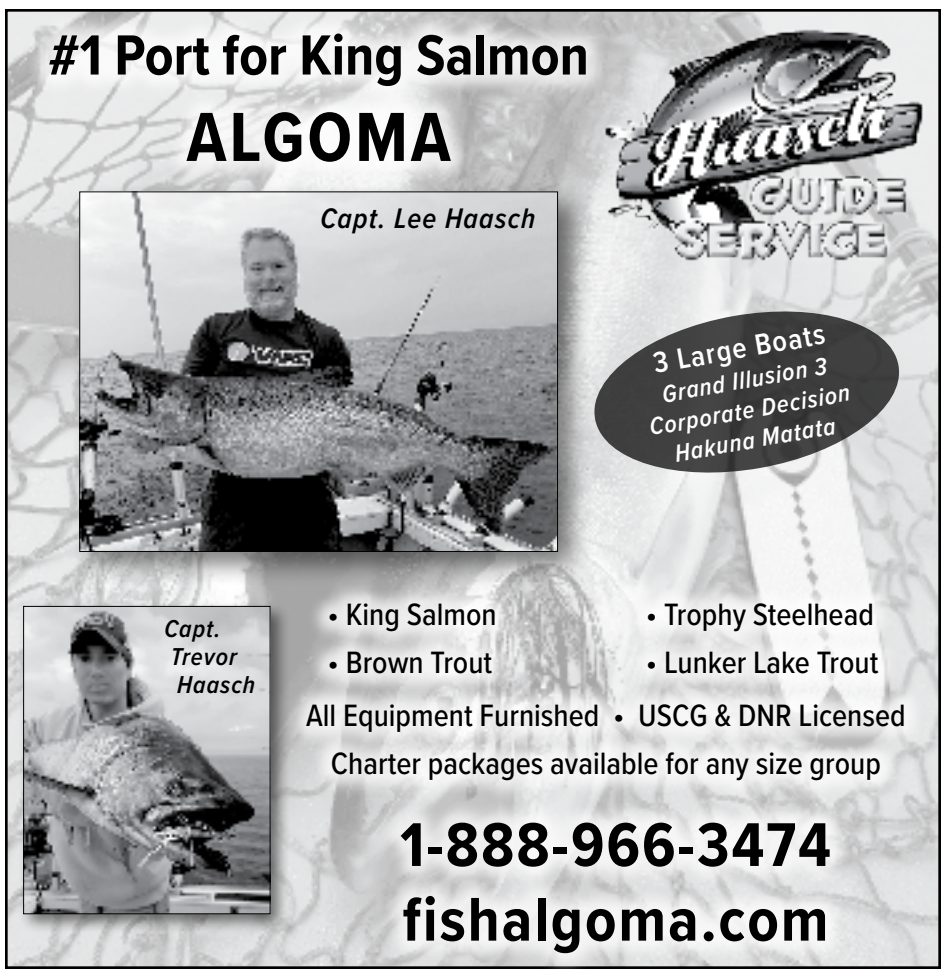
The reasons to fully explain what causes poor to excellent hatches are not known with certainty, but several theories have been offered by Ohio's fisheries biologists.

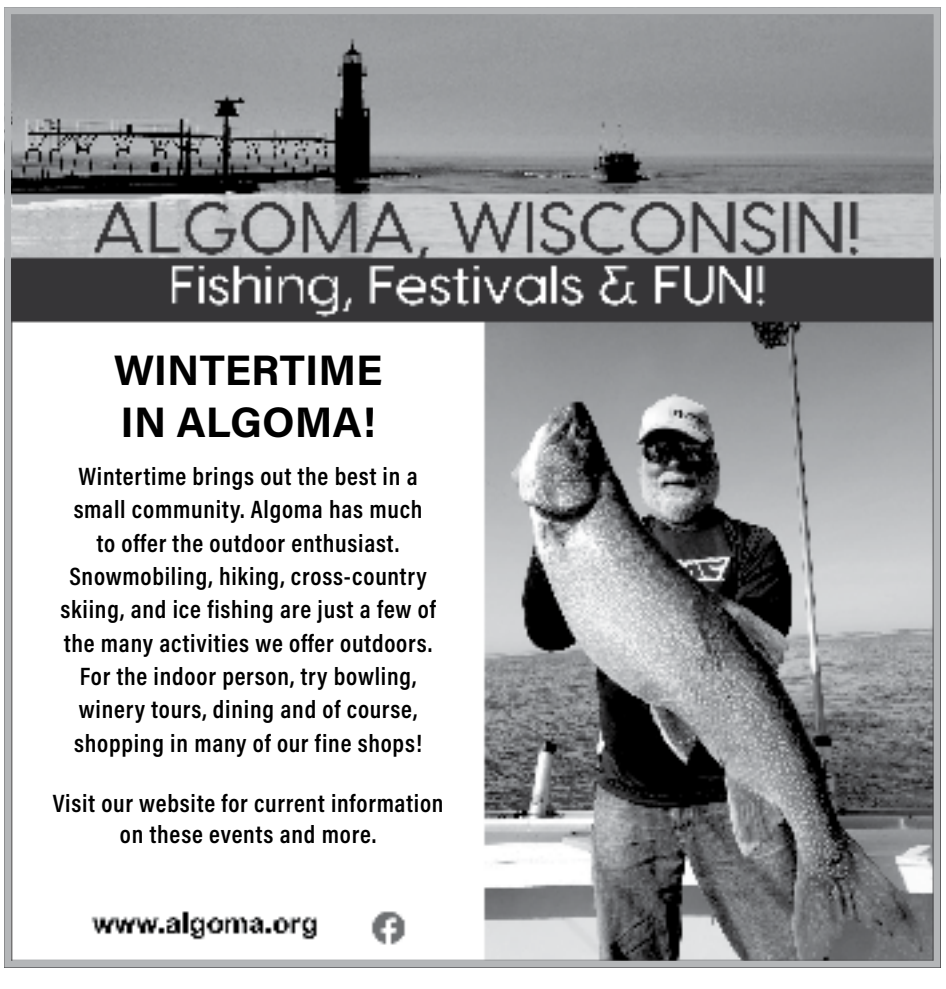

Fall walleyes can run big without being contenders for the annual derbies. *Photo: Capt. Eric Hirzel, Erie Gold Sportfishing*

One of the theories to explain the recent high numbers of good years is that high water levels made the depths of more of the Western Basin limestone reefs ideal for deposition, incubation, survival, and hatching.

Although a fraction of Lake Erie's walleyes migrate into tributary streams to spawn, an estimated 90 percent of spawning takes place on the extensive reef complex near Camp Perry and the Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Station.

In addition to walleyes spawning on the rocky substrate, many deposit their eggs on dredge spoil humps just outside the shipping channel and on sandbar spits in both Maumee and Sandusky Bays.









Spring is the time to find trophy walleyes concentrated near the Western Lake Erie reefs. *Photo: John Hageman*



Capt. Mark Cahlik admiring a trophy walleye taken on his Dead Eye crankbait. *Photo: John Hageman*

Catch rates every year since 2017 rival or even top those from the famous 1980s and are being called "the good old days of walleye fishing" by Ohio's fisheries managers.

Knowledgeable anglers should be drooling over the prospects that are on their way in the coming decade as steady growth combined with high numbers will provide both good numbers and size.

This should now begin occurring as the 2015 year-class is 11 years old and the hatches from 2018 on start piling up, thanks to Ohio's conservative management that leads to harvest levels that ensures great catch rates despite occasional poor hatches.

Meanwhile, selective anglers can expect to be able to keep year-round, 6-fish limits of 22- to 27-inch walleyes that test the capacity of their coolers.

I love the thick "backstraps" that these jumbo walleyes provide when cut into walleye "nuggets," and the silver-dollar-size cheeks are a big bonus when fish chowder is on the menu.

Be sure to plan annual trips to west, central or eastern Lake Erie, the Walleye Capital of the World, depending on which month is chosen, but heed the marine forecasts.

This big body of water can often get angry enough during any time of the year to keep even the most skilled skippers on shore, or wishing they had waited for winds to subside.

MWO

John Hageman authors about 120 articles per year. He 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.

On the negative side, recent milder winters that limit the number of days for the eggs to fully mature in the female walleyes before they are deposited are known to impact their size and health.

The occurrence of strong storms while the eggs are incubating can also be blamed for losses of fertilized eggs from currents when scoured off the reefs, or smothered with silt which can lead to suffocation or disease.

However, the most accepted explanation for years when there is a catastrophic failure in recruitment of fry to young-of-the-year fingerlings is from poor timing of plankton blooms.

Quagga mussels are increasingly being recognized as the cause of reduced algal densities and subsequent declines in zooplankton availability that affects the aquatic food chain, and has been cited for the lower numbers of prey availability for whitefish and other sport fish species.

Yellow perch in the Central Basin of Lake Erie are another presumed victim of this effect caused by the invasive species.

Even though the Western Basin continues to be overfertilized from agricultural nutrient inputs, they do not reach further east in high enough concentrations to trigger enough algal productivity to offset consumption by mussels.

Tips from our Readers



Dear Tips Editor:

With hard water here, I want to show you how I recycle a broken spinning rod. A medium or medium-light, 6-foot, 6-inch or longer rod will work the best. I use are a coping saw, a fine, small round file, side cutters (if any line guides are in the way), and epoxy. I try to make either an ice fishing pole or a kiddie pole, depending on what I have to work with.

The first thing I do is make a smooth cut about 1 1/2 to 2 inches above where the break was. Then, I cut away the portion left connected to the handle. Make a cut flush with the handle.

Now, I see if the freshly cut, good section will squeeze into the handle. If not, I trim the rod and file the inside of the handle. When ready, put a little epoxy around the rod and twist in about 2 to 3 inches make sure the line guides match with the reel seat. Allow the glue to dry overnight before using the rod.

Rick Evitt
North Aurora, Ill.

Dear Tips Editor:

When ice fishing, use the lightest lures to get the biggest fish. Tip tiny jigs with waxworms or mousie grubs (red-tailed maggots).

Steve Turnis
Dubuque, Iowa

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.







The New Adamson Impact 12-Gauge Autoloader out of Turkey




Well-done wood-to-metal fit. Clean controls with heavy chrome.

As sold through SAT Imports LLC in Scottsdale, Ariz., the new Adamson autoloader is a cast-off in terms of its basic design features. This shotgun takes on the look and feel of several American-built products, as well as additional upper-end, smooth-bore systems that, like this Turkish-built creation, come to us from across the pond.

The Adamson Impact was designed and built in a state-of-the-art factory in Turkey. Looking the gun over, it is obvious to me that someone was paying a whole lot of attention to what a number of other manufactures were offering the shooting public by way of autoloading shotguns.

Starting from the fore-end back, the gun takes on a very slim look and feel just ahead of the receiver. The fine-grained Turkish walnut and cleanly checkered pattern is almost an exact copy of a Benelli SBE's forward furniture. I match the receiver to a Browning Gold or Winchester SX3.

Control surfaces are well fitted, and extreme care has been taken to polish them clean, with no sharp edges. The bolt release button is right-side-forward and is large enough to function even with heavy, cold-weather gloves. A Benelli-like, auto-feed system is installed with the exact same control used on the Italian imported shotgun. A cross-bolt button safety is located just behind the trigger guard in, again, a right-hand operating configuration.

The raised, brightly polished side panels on the receiver carry a deep, old, Colt-style Royal bluing. The upper and lower ends of the receiver are dull-blued for reflection reduction when the gun is mounted in the firing position. For the most part, surface finishing is very good, with few design surface features that are exclusive to the guns brand name.

The butt stock is very well fitted to the receiver metal and retains some distinctive, sweeping line cuts that run from the receiver to the recoil pad. This wood pattern is unique to the brand, and I must say very creative and pleasant to look at when nothing is flying.

The end cap on the fore-end and butt stock retain sling swivels which are common on many shotguns built across the pond. This means a whole lot when I have to carry a bag of decoys, and my shotgun, to a stream bank location or lakefront marsh area. When field testing the shotgun, again, those features stood out as real and effective assists to me as a hunter.


Early fieldwork on ranch varmints via the Impact 12-gauge.

In another area of basic receiver construction, the gun is very much like Remington's 1100.

However, the bolt is heavy, chrome-plated, carries some major mass regarding size, and is pushed buy a valve gas system not unlike many others in use today. In this area, the snags can surface in that good looks only go so far. The key question here is, simply, "Can the gun shoot?"


MIGRA field loads were used for the most part across the board during field testing applications.

Field test application

Test shooting started on a trip to South Dakota's brand-new, state-of-the-art range system, including computer application targets to 1200 yards, on the 4000-acre shooting center located near Rapid City So. Dak. Much of my future testing will include this amazing, sportsmen-funded shooting center.

From a 100-yard rifle zero bench on a no-charge section of the range, I proceeded to run a basic function test using MIGRA, and Federal heavy game loads. The high-performance loads would see field applications on a local ranch that I was doing some pest and predator control work on at the time. In general, I do not like fake test setups, and as such, much preferred real-world scenarios. When undertaken in this way. more than one gun has not made the grade.

Shooting MIGRA 2 ¾-inch, 4/6 duplex style loads in lead shot at a payload weight of 1 1/4 ounce, the gun was being prepped for pheasant and grouse hunting on the South Dakota open prairie, as well as some general varmint reduction work n a local cattle ranch. However, even the best-made plans can at times go astray.

Shooting MIGRA field loads about halfway across the function test, the butt stock worked loose from the receiver anchor point. In terms of function, the gun had been running like a top, and everything regarding the test was coming up in clover. There were no feed issues, and general controls set up very much like the copy of the Benelli system of magazine cut off control and elevator feed had performed nicely. However, with the loose butt stock and a fear of damaging it, as in cracking the nickel-featured walnut wood due to recoil, I ended the live fire sequence at that point of the testing. Lacking an extended tool and even time allotted, the gun went silent for the remainder of the review.

However, by getting some of the previous field time with the Impact 12-gauge, being that it was called up for previously indicated work against troublesome raccoons, I had been able to gain some real-time information regarding the shotgun's performance level.

What the loose butt stock did do was generate a new issue, being where to go and what to do regarding warranty coverage on these imported shotguns? The test gun came to me lacking any paperwork whatsoever. I also did not get very far trying to line up someone who could answer these questions. Therefore, buying any imported firearm that is not backed by American brand names, like those offed by Mossberg, for example (Silver Reserve), will require some research through your dealer, or import agency handling the retail level of the indicated gun.

Where the general price of an autoloading shot gun with an American brand label running close to or at $1,000 or more, the Turkish-built Impact is selling for about 1/4th of that figure. What I am getting


Butt stock wood was very nice and the added sweep to the stock fit in very nicely.

at here is, doing some legwork or firing up a computer could save the buyer one pile of hard-earned money. That stated, however, at the time of this review, American government regulating tariffs could factor into any price regarding products coming across the pond.

Limited pattern work indicated that the shotgun patterned true to point with some slight amount of built-in elevation. At no time did the system fail; however, in normal testing, I do run a great variety of ammunition through test guns. This test, therefore, has been based on standard-pressure field loads versus a change to target-grade, lower-pressure products. With a heavy return spring and an overbuilt, massive bolt assembly, I tend to think the gun is best used with field grade hunting loads.

Without question, this shotgun is heavy at 7 1/2 pounds dry weight (empty).

Built from all-steel construction materials right down to the vent rib, the package carry some mass. It would seem as though Turkey's gun builders have as yet not moved over toward as much carbon fiber and alloy metals as the western world, as well as some of European countries, have of late.

As such, by way of pure steel construction, I observed no issues with the shotgun's function whatsoever. The vent rib is sturdy, nicely made, and uses a red bead at the muzzle. The shotgun comes with five, Beretta-style, forward threaded choke tubes giving the hunter/shooter a wide range of options regarding payload control downrange.

Even though heavy, the gun points well, but I feel is best applied to waterfowl hunting or other static gunning events. However, it could be my age showing up just a bit here; as a young man, I carried a double 10-gauge Richland far and wide.

With service or repair points located, I tend to believe this shotgun is a good buy in terms of what kind of cash the shooter needs to lay down on the gun counter.

At a time when a dollar is not going as far as it once did, taking a hard look at this autoloader is not the worst idea shooters could come up with of late. ***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 smooth bore, and high-power, ultra-long-range shooting. He's a specialist, producing reviews covering general products used in the outdoors industry.

Introduction to Wild Turkeys

by Bob "Greenie" Grewell



Hens nurture poults without gobbler involvement.



Turkeys eventually adjust to winter weather.

Why was I focused on turkeys during late February? A close-knit flock that I was observing would soon split up. It wouldn't be long before hens and toms would have different objectives because their internal breeding intentions were on hold, but would soon thereafter inspire their intent of renewing their species. Why would their activities change? When would their habits change?

Don't be discouraged if you aren't seeing turkeys early, because the weather will ercertainly improve lat. Food sources increase, too. And turkey mating urges will intensify. Birds become more active, more visual. You'll begin to see an increase of turkey tracks, droppings, feed-mark scratching, sudden glimpses of several birds, and individuals feeding across larger areas.

Then, get ready! When you hear those familiar yelps, clucks, and spine-tingling "gobbles" echo across the landscape, you can be certain that rambunctious turkeys are back in action. Until then, it's never too early to evaluate your 2026 hunting options, because it's simply a matter of weeks before we will be able to tease an elusive gobbler into shooting range.

Understanding winter turkey activities explains why they appear to be reclusive. Every wildlife species adjusts their needs to survive weather cruelties and predator confrontations. Any turkey's main goal is to stay alive. Therefore, their disappearing acts are subsidized by their innate survival senses. Challenges such as a heavy snowpack can force them to linger within dense habitats for days, much like whitetails "yard up." Thus, they are more reliant upon flocking into larger groups. It's not uncommon for 20 turkeys to gang-up in secure flocks within dense timber.

Wintering turkeys display a split-personality from their easy-going spring attitudes. But hunger can be a crucial motivator during the "pounding" wind, rain, snow, ice and cold. That's why birds favor roost sites along the sides of ravines and steep valleys, especially if the trees are adjacent to food and water sources, which helps expose edible invertebrates and plants.

Turkeys usually winter in private locations if habitat features haven't been altered by commercial development, logging, or human intrusions; birds will continue to frequent the same parcels of land each spring because they are comfortable. If you've hunted specific lands previously, you'll have a better idea of where birds will hangout. Now's the time to carry binoculars so you can scan distant landscapes for birds without disturbing their activities.

Birds travel little throughout the weather-restrictive winter months, especially since mating desires haven't united both sexes. Turkeys can be more difficult to find because they are seldom vocal. Yelps, clucks, purrs, and even subtle gobbling are restrained to inner-flock social communications. Their limited appearances can cause us to believe that there are fewer numbers. So, where have they been? Why haven't we seen many turkeys? Obviously, Nature withholds many secrets from us.

If you anticipate tagging a wild turkey gobbler this spring, it's important to know what makes him tick. The most flagrant errors that hunters fail to understand are the personalities of spring gobbler behaviors. A gobbler's intentions become more focused during mating. And, they behave differently than at any other time of the year. If a hunter has optimum chances of tagging a spring gobbler, they must distinguish between hen and tom activities. Before you enter the woods for a spring turkey hunt, get to know what a gobbler is doing before and during their breeding cycle, because gobblers act and react differently than hens.

Before turkeys shift to spring activities, they prefer forest landscapes and limit their usage of open fields. Woodland-structured windbreaks protect birds as they aggressively scratch for pine seeds, acorns, berries, and just about any green foliage that's available. Their fat reserves are vital. Also, snow-covered landscapes help turkeys spot predator threats quicker. Turkeys seek the companionship of other birds throughout winter. Except for during the intense weeks of breeding, they favor company. If there is one logical reason turkeys go on their own, it's to develop a social pecking order. It's every bird for itself.

The most exciting trait with spring gobblers is when they gobble and strut. These visual and vocal actions make hunters' blood boil! A summer and winter tom shows little interest towards breeding because hens aren't breed-ready. Then, when hens begin to open their breeding door, toms gobble to attract hens. Typically, they expect hens to come to them.

So, when we call to a spring gobbler, we're trying to make him do the opposite of what he's genetically programmed to do. He might stand in the middle of an open pasture strutting and gobbling at your calls. He wants you to go to him. Not every tom will react this way. But an interested tom believes he's the boss and likes to control hens. Turkeys certainly don't react the same every day. So, be patient. because toms can undermine your intentions before hunting season.

Wild turkeys are considered loafers throughout the year. They feed, dust, socialize, and roost in trees every night. Unless they are pressured by human hunters and predators, they live a somewhat relaxed life. But a short time before and during spring mating, their lives become topsy-turvy! Normal, daily routines are fine-tuned to accommodate the intricacies of social mating intensity.

When a mate-ready hen approaches a tom and teases him with soft vocals and body rubs, she submits and crouches into a breeding posture. But not all hens perform the same. Gobblers often learn that they must go to a hen. Toms are usually patient and tolerate a hen's evasiveness. Mimicking hunters can capitalize and coax a tom into a slow approach, close enough for a shot. Therefore, hunters must learn as much as they can about the mechanics of spring turkey breeding behaviors.

Hens can be the leverage that hunters need to tag a tom during spring because they definitely set the pace of action. Their conduct inspires toms. Fickle hens often circle and tease a tom as he gobbles and struts. A gobbler will try every trick he can conjure to position a hen into a breeding posture. But, if a hen is not ready to breed, a tom might fade away and look for other hens. This is why hunters must focus constantly on hen activities during the spring breeding cycle.

Wild turkeys are tenacious birds that often face daily unpredictability. Turkey objectives now aren't mating; it's survival, finding food and safe, protective roost trees. It's often difficult to find turkeys before spring breeding interactions because they prefer to flock in numbers. Why not? Many sets of eyes provide more chances of survival because each bird uses less energy and to be alerted of hungry predators.

Turkeys are opportunistic feeders with diverse diets. Turkeys often go to great lengths to forage on diverse food sources during adverse weather, especially when they feed across sun drenched hillsides, where green foliage begins growing earlier. But if snow covers the woodland floor, it's easier to spot turkey tracks and rake-marked scratching where they search for loose nuts, vegetations, insects and worms. During extreme weather, if you locate an abundant food source, you'll see turkeys frequently. What an inspiring sight for any turkey hunter!

Spring gobbler activities frequently change, as well as their locations. They are intent upon one purpose: breeding as many hens as possible. Dominant spring gobblers are breeding machines. They pursue their roles with zest and intention. Gobblers aren't selective of hens and will mate with any hen that accepts their advances. They often cover hundreds of acres of landscapes searching for breed-ready hens. They will fight with interloping males, feed, rest, and travel like vagabonds as they look for and gobble to attract hens. Logic tells us that if a gobbler has hens available, he has no reason to move on. But, if he can't find hens, a gobbler can become more susceptible.

Be a pre-planner before spring turkey season. Survey previous and new hunting areas. If you hunt public acreage, choose several locations so you can switch hunting spots if you encounter other hunters, or if gobbler responses become sporadic. Those are additional reasons to scout before spring opener. ***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.



Turkeys frequently battle for social hierarchy.



Before hunting season, toms often mingle together.



Rocket Shot

Many action type targets aren't set up for BBs, since they have a higher chance of ricochets, especially with metal targets. These types of targets are mainly used for pellet air guns, or 22 firearms. However, one that works great with BBs is the Daisy Rocket Shot.

The Rocket Shot is that it is two targets in one. This makes it possible to use it by one or two people, depending on the types of air guns being used. Before getting into that, let's back up and talk about the actual unit and what it does.

Through the use of a heavy spring, the unit fires beverage cans into the air. You push the can down into the launch cylinder and lock the spring into place with the bright yellow, 3-inch paddle target, which is the triggering device.

Target number one is the yellow paddle. When shot, it releases the spring that then throws the can about 10 feet into the air to be used as a flying target. The idea is to shoot the paddle and then shoot the can before it hits the ground.

Guns of no more than 350 fps velocity are recommended for use with the Rocket Shot.


This was a direct hit on the can as it reached its maximum height before falling.



The Daisy Rocket Shot target system.

This is another reason that it is great for BB guns.

If only one person is shooting, I recommend a CO_2 semi-auto. In fact, I found the Umarex Beretta to work great at anywhere from 7 to 10 yards, which can vary if the can it thrown away from the shooter. The can will not always fly in the same direction, but so far, I've never had it throw it towards the shooter. It normally goes away from the shooter, or to one side or the other.

With two people shooting, you can use guns like the Daisy Red Ryder or Umarex Marlin Lever Action where one person shoots the paddle, and the other person has a single shot to hit the can. Of course, you can also use the semi-auto as previously mentioned.

The two-people way can turn into a nice competition by taking turns at firing at the paddle and can. You can also have competition with shooters taking turns as described for one shooter. This is more of a challenge since you have to concentrate on shooting both targets and reacting quickly


The Umarex Beretta semi-auto C02 BB pistol is great for shooting the Rocket Shot.

enough to go up and shoot the can.

As for how to shoot the can, there is a bit of a trick. Each person has to develop his or her own style of shooting. I like to wait until the can is to the peak of its launch, and then fire two rounds towards the bottom of the can. There are times when both rounds will hit, but normally it hits as the can starts to fall and runs into the round that has been fired. I will sometimes fire 3 rounds—at the peak, as it falls, and last as it heads towards the ground.


The bright yellow paddle is shot, releasing the spring and launching the can into the air.

Canadian airgunner Doc MacKay said that at first, he is going to cheat a bit and try his Rocket Shot with a fully automatic BB gun. I did that with the Umarex M1A1 Thompson, and it worked great. I fired a short burst at the trigger target, and a longer one that kept the can in the air for a second.

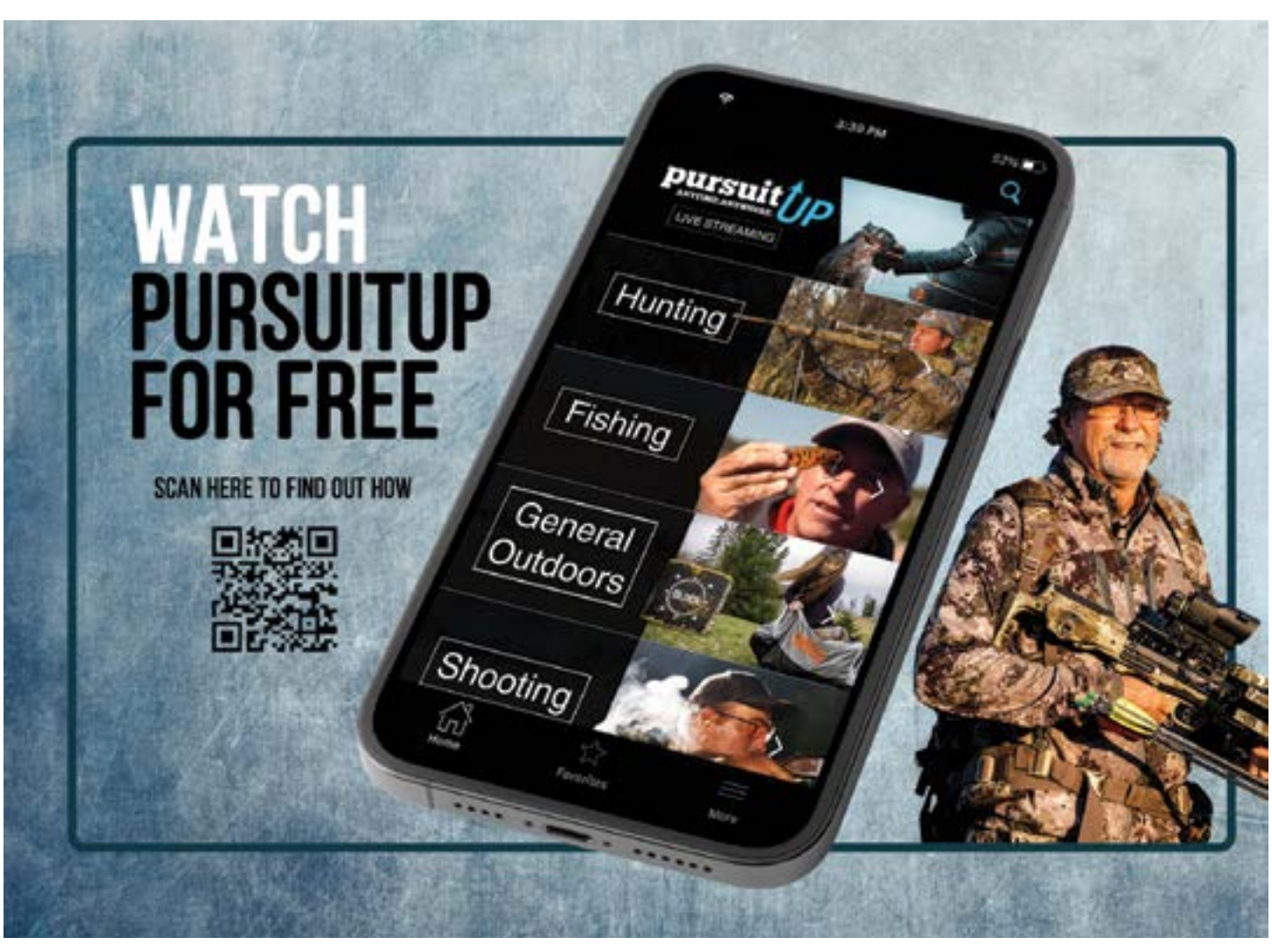
Some safety items should be brought up. First, it was already mentioned that it is not recommended to exceed the 350 fps velocity. Next, never look directly over the can as it is being pushed down and loaded, as the triggering mechanism, if not caught properly, could go off by itself and hit you in the face. Lastly, when setting up the target system, make sure that the background is clear of people, animals and anything that could be damaged by a stray round. This is not like shooting at a stationary target where a backstop takes care of anything being fired at the target. This is why I use mine at my Cedar Oaks wooded shooting range.

The Rocket Shot target system is portable and can easily fit into a range bag. It breaks down, using a threaded, two-piece ground rod which screws together to measure around 2 feet. However, you push the rod into the ground about 8 to 10 inches. I have encountered one problem with the screw fitting as it can loosen quickly when hitting the paddle, which allows the unit to turn and makes it necessary to reset it. A good remedy is to use some plumber's Teflon tape on the threads to snug it up.

If you would like to see the Rocket Shot in use, go to this link at the *Dan's Fish 'N' Tales/ Shoot 'N' Plink* You Tube channel https://youtu.be/vN17desdZX4. Look around the channel to find the video where it is being shot with the Umarex M1A1.

Anyone wanting to have something different for an air gun target should check out Daisy's Rocket Shot. You will have a stationary and moving target all in one package. It is a lot of fun, and with a little practice, you will be knocking cans out of the sky in no time. ***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 dansfishntales.com, facebook.com/dansfishntales and facebook.com/shootnplink.



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It's Big-Fish Month: Are You Up to the Challenge?

by Walt Matan

By now, most "Up North" winter anglers have remembered how to catch fish through the ice. It takes a few trips to figure out how to operate your in-line reel, pick the right lures for the species you're fishing for, get those ice fishing muscles back in shape, and, of course, you have to break some stuff.

I don't know about you, but I have a lot of equipment: Hundreds of jigs and spoons, dozens of rods, tents and sleds of every shape and style, flashers, locators, GPS, LiveScope, augers and more augers—all packed into my overloaded pickup truck—plus an ATV and trailer. I have the extended cab Chevy Colorado with room for four… but if you want to go ice fishing with me, you have to follow behind in your own vehicle, because my truck is full!

They say that all this modern gear makes ice fishing easier. Whoever "they" are who say these things do a lot more talking than fishing. Ice fishing is hard. Stuff is heavy. The ice is slippery, and it's cold. But all that being said, it's still my favorite time of the year. Once I wake up, grab some coffee, and the morning arthritis, bursitis and every other kind of "itis" pain subsides, I'm heading out fishing.

Are you up to the challenge?

You gotta get out there early to beat the crowds. By February, I'm focusing on deeper, clearer lakes that didn't develop safe ice as quickly as shallower ones. I'm looking for weed edges where hungry fish hang out. I'm after any fish that are hungry—panfish to gamefish, it doesn't matter. Just give me the big ones!



Be prepared with a Slender Spoon when a big bass arrives.

I have two arms, so I fish with two poles, with two different presentations; sometimes for the same species, and other times, one for gamefish and one for panfish. I'll bring along at least a dozen rods, all rigged up and ready for anything. I love big bluegills, dream about monster crappies, and can't wait for a giant bass or pike to grab a spoon!

A 1/8-ounce Slender Spoon with a minnow head or three big waxworms is a big fish magnet. I've caught my biggest crappie, bass and pike on this lure. But that's not all. This lure can also be used to *attract* bluegill and perch schools right up under your tent. They see it, are drawn to it, and then when they get too close, they realize it's maybe a little too big for them. That's when you jerk it out and drop down a smaller Slender Spoon or a little tungsten Chekai. The party is on!



It's big fish-month. Let's go!

I started fishing this way a few years ago when I was too lazy to move and chase schools of panfish that come and go and move around up under the ice. A lot of times, they leave when a predator arrives, so now I try to catch that big fish, too. Most good fishermen move around and drill a lot of holes. But when I find a good-looking spot and have pulled a few quality fish out, I'm not ready to move until I've exhausted every fish in the area. By exhausted, I mean that I like to give them a little exercise, take a photo or quick video, and let them go.

Speed fishing is important. You not only need to be able to pack up your gear and move quickly, but you need to be able to fish fast. Have several rods rigged and ready to drop down—quick—to make a change. When you first get to a spot, the fish will





A big porkpie on a little tungsten jig.

be aggressive. You'll be able to catch them on larger lures and more aggressive jigging motions to get them fired up. *Catching fish always attracts more fish!*

But as the action slows, you'll need to get smaller, tungsten Chekais, Glazbas, Majmuns from Custom Jigs & Spins, in 3mm sizes with #16 or #14 hooks that will still get down quick. A shredded waxworm or a few red spikes round off this deadly presentation.

Match your ice rod to the species you are after and the lure you are fishing with. St. Croix has several models for different species in different price points. For panfish, I like their Legend series with Super Finesse Springs. You can also purchase these springs separately and add them to your favorite rod; they work excellently and don't freeze up like a pen spring.



Aggressive crappies suck in a Demon Jigging spoon like a morning donut.

For gamefish, you can't go wrong with the Mojo series like a MJI32M, which is good for 90 percent of my fishing for walleyes, bass and pike, using Slender Spoons and Demon Jigging spoons; or their MJI36MH for trophy fish, like pike or lake trout. I'll put 5-pound Power Pro line with a small swivel to a 14-pound Trilene leader with a snap, to facilitate quick lure changes.

Finally, don't be the guy who snaps his line when the big one finally hits. Check your line, check your hook, check your drag, and check your screws holding your reel together. I've had all the bad stuff happen. Reels freeze, fall off the pole, and line tangles that get reeled up on the spool nut or behind the spool. It's a kick in the gut when you try to handline in a 36-inch pike on 3-pound test, just because your reel handle falls off and goes down the hole… but it can be done with a little luck and patience! ***MWO***



February is prime time for bonus big pike, too!

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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How to Catch Early-Spring Crappies on Percy Priest Lake


A beautiful spring day on Percy Priest Reservoir.

Early-spring crappie fishing on Percy Priest is one of the most reliable, and totally misunderstood, fisheries in Middle Tennessee. Every year in early February, anglers rush to the banks to catch their limit—and unfortunately leave empty-handed, because they are a few weeks early. Pre-spawn crappies follow a predictable temperature-driven, water temperature—not air temperature—pattern. If you understand where they stage, and what triggers the move to the banks, you'll know how to catch them.


Long poles spread trolled lures to either side of the boat.

Staging

Early spring on Percy Priest typically means late February through March, depending on weather. Water temperatures usually range from the mid 40s to low 50s, and crappies are in transition mode. They are leaving their deep, winter basins but are not yet committed to shallow spawning cover. This means that the fish will move into the creek arms, but stay in 9 to 12 feet of water, more or less adjacent to the creek channel. All crappies do not move at the same time; they move in stages. When seeking out staging areas, you don't need a boat, but it's darn sure helpful—especially with a depth finder and mapping.

During this period, fish stage in areas where they have fast access to deeper water while being close to nearby cover. They also seek out water that's slightly warmer than the main lake. Fish are feeding and waiting on a stable warming trend before they move into the shallow haunts of the spawn.

When starting to look for fish, focus on creek arms versus the main lake. Stewart's, Hurricane, and Mill creeks are my favorite pre-spawn areas. Crappies push into these areas because they warm faster and tend to hold abundant baitfish. It's best to ignore the very back and very front of the creek at this point in the year. Instead, look for secondary points in mid-stream.

Look for creek channel bends that are adjacent to a flat, and points that have brush close to deeper water. All these areas act as staging zones. Crappies may move in and out of these zones as unstable spring temperatures rise and fall. Today, they may be on a brush pile in 10 feet of water; then, a cold front may push them into 15 to 20 feet, or vice versa. Pay as much attention to the weather as the water to be successful with staging crappies.

Percy Priest is full of manmade structure—some placed by the TWRA and other placed by anglers. In early spring, crappies tend to suspend above the structures. Look for structure on south-facing and wind-protected banks.

Fishing methods

Early spring may bring the fish closer to shore, but they are still cold and have a tendency to be a bit lethargic. The key is using slow, if not still, presentations. Bites will be much subtler than during the actual spawn.

Trolling is a deadly technique at this time of year, if you can keep your boat around .7 to .9 mph. Slow-trolling jigs over suspended fish will almost always get you bit. Percy Priest also has big hybrid striped bass that will also hammer a jig at this time of year. A 5-pound hybrid bass in a crappie trolling setup is like a circus and rodeo at the same time.

Jig colors vary this time of year; however, Charlie Brewer's Slider seems to be a great soft plastic for trolling. We tend to fish 1/32- and 1/16-ounce jig heads in early spring. The more common 1/8-ounce heads just run too deep when slow trolling.

When setting up a trolling rig, we use three rods on each side of the boat. Over time, we learned that placing a 12-foot, 8-foot, and a 6-foot rod on each side of the boat are the best options to cover water adequately. Given that all rods are ultra-light action, a good-quality, 4- to 6-pound monofilament line excels.


Springtime is crappie time.

Vertical jig presentations are also productive. Just keep the jig slightly above the structure. Less movement is best. Suspending the jig under a slip bobber, like minnow fishing, seems to be the better choice for pre-spawn fish. Bear in mind that depth control is paramount as fish feed "up" much more often than down. When using this method, we like an 8-foot, ultra-light rod. Since vertical fishing keeps you, and the boat, near the fish, I tend to use a fluorocarbon line in the 4-pound-test range.

Timing matters

Chasing-early spring crappies is as much about when you fish as where. There's no need to be on the water at daybreak, unless you're trying to get a parking spot at the ramp before all the adult-onset anglers arrive. Let the sunshine on the water and rocks warm things for a few hours. I seldom arrive before 10 am on a nice day. Any earlier is a waste of time. The sun warms the water and that makes the baitfish active, which will bring the crappies. On cold mornings, patience becomes your best friend as it takes longer for the fish to start feeding. The old saying is that, "There is never a bad day to go fishing." However, fishing after 2 to 3 days of stable, and warmer, weather will be much more productive. It's best to avoid hard cold fronts in early spring. These push the crappies back into their deep-water haunts and makes them much tougher to locate and catch.

Boat control

Boat control is critical in early spring, even more so than bait or color selection. Being able to hold just off cover, and the ability to move less than 1 mph, are key in the search for a livewell of crappies.

Early-spring crappie fishing on Percy Priest Lake is about anticipation, not reaction. The fish are there, moving predictably and feeding selectively. If you focus on creek arms, target staging areas with nearby depth, slow your presentation, and fish during warming periods, you can have some of the most consistent crappie action of the year. Often, you won't even have to fish in a crowd at this time of year.

Percy Priest rewards anglers who fish deliberately. When winter is still hanging on and spring is just beginning to whisper, the crappies are already waiting, stacked on brush, watching for an easy meal, and ready for those who know where to look. ***MWO***

Troy Basso is a freelance outdoor writer, photographer, podcast host and fishing guide from Tennessee. He may be reached though his website at troybassooutdoors.com.



THE LAKEMASTER® DOWNLOAD HUMMINBIRD®

Fellows Lake

by Don Gasaway

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.



LOCATION: Greene County, Missouri. Four miles north of Springfield on US Highway 65, 1/2-mile west on state Route AA, and then north on County Road 197. There is a boat launch on the north end of the lake.

SIZE/DEPTH: 860 acres, 22 miles of shoreline, 80 feet maximum depth, 20 feet average depth. Bait and tackle are available on the lake and at a tackle shop on Highway 65.

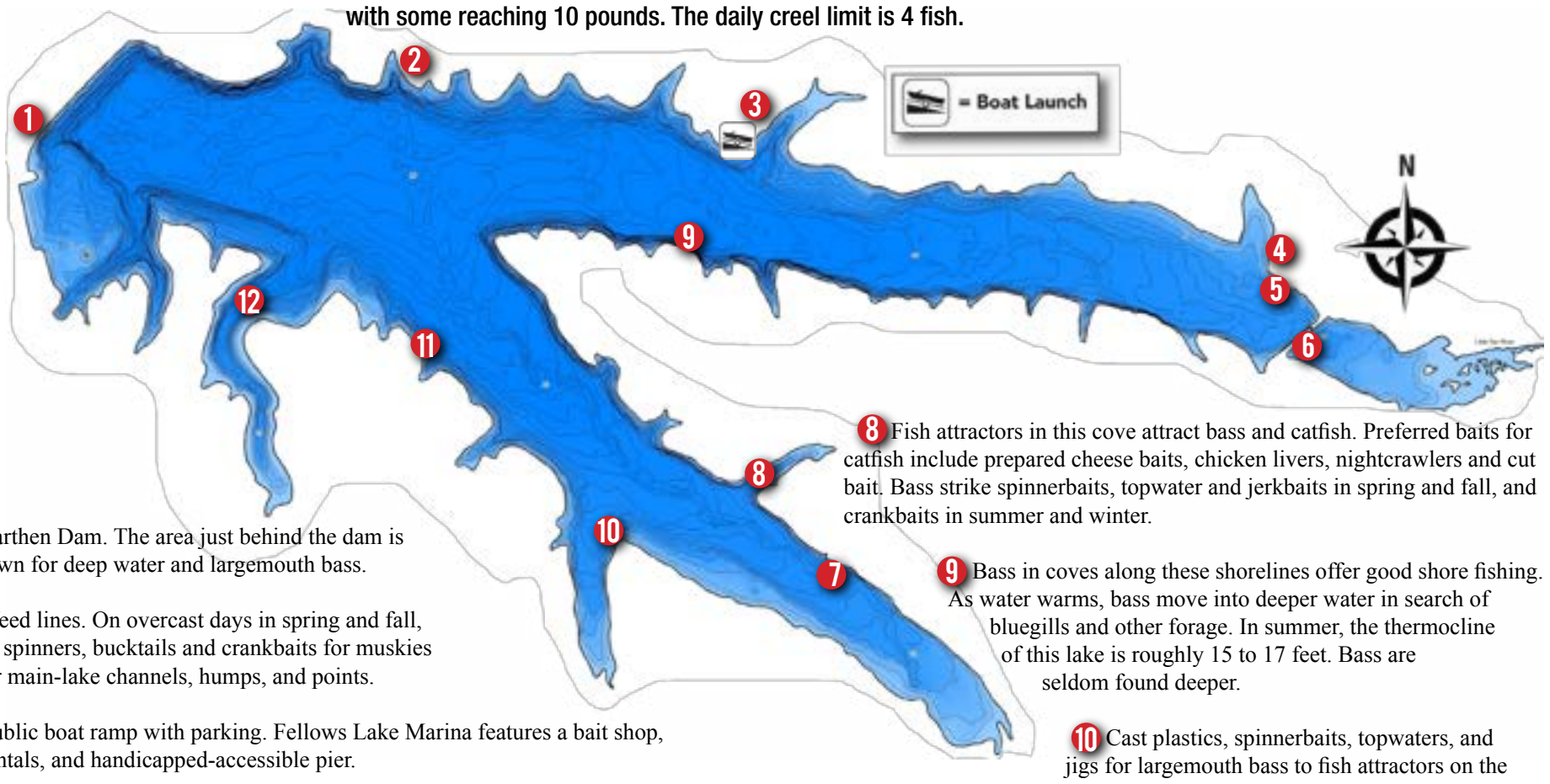
Impounded in 1955 on the Little Sac River, Fellows Lake is the main source of water for Springfield, MO. Enveloped by lush woodlands and rolling hills, it provides an escape to soak up scenic beauty. Fishing is available year-round. Protection of some areas preserves fragile ecosystems.

City Utilities of Springfield and the Missouri Department of Conservation manage the lake cooperatively to maintain facilities, stock fish, and provide both shoreline and boating services. Much of shore fishing is available within casting distance of wooden fish attractors. Officials maintain extensive wooden fish attractors along the entire shoreline.

There is a 40-horsepower outboard motor limit. A required annual sticker is available from Springfield City Utilities. Boat rentals are available at the Fellows Lake Marina. Personal Flotation devices (PFD) are required.

DOMINANT SPECIES: There is a 12-to-15-inch slot limit on largemouth bass. About 1/3 of the largemouths are greater than the 15-inch length; many largemouth bass run 4 to 6 pounds. There is a daily creel limit of 6 fish. Annual bluegill stockings provide basic forage.

Annual stocking programs provide channel catfish throughout the lake. The average size of fish is 1 to 5 pounds with some reaching 10 pounds. The daily creel limit is 4 fish.



1 Earthen Dam. The area just behind the dam is known for deep water and largemouth bass.

2 Weed lines. On overcast days in spring and fall, cast spinners, bucktails and crankbaits for muskies near main-lake channels, humps, and points.

3 Public boat ramp with parking. Fellows Lake Marina features a bait shop, boat rentals, and handicapped-accessible pier.

4 Fishing Pier with handicap access. Cast soft plastics to fish attractors.

5 Fish attractors including cedar trees. Spinnerbaits, crankbaits, jigs, and Texas-rigged plastic worms are effective for bass.

6 Bass in grass near bridge. Milfoil in the upper end of the lake grows from the shoreline out to a depth of about 14 feet and provides excellent fish habitat. Considerable patches of vegetation provide good areas for largemouth bass.

7 Patches of aquatic vegetation include wooden fish attractor structures that provide good bass fishing. With bluegills in this end of the lake, muskies prowl the area early in the morning and late in the afternoon in search of food.

8 Fish attractors in this cove attract bass and catfish. Preferred baits for catfish include prepared cheese baits, chicken livers, nightcrawlers and cut bait. Bass strike spinnerbaits, topwater and jerkbaits in spring and fall, and crankbaits in summer and winter.

9 Bass in coves along these shorelines offer good shore fishing. As water warms, bass move into deeper water in search of bluegills and other forage. In summer, the thermocline of this lake is roughly 15 to 17 feet. Bass are seldom found deeper.

10 Cast plastics, spinnerbaits, topwaters, and jigs for largemouth bass to fish attractors on the point at the entrance to the cove.

11 Fish attractors here and around the entire lake are composed primarily of hardwood with some pine mixed in. All are of natural materials. High water floods nearby timber as well. A map showing the location of fish attractors is available online from the MDC. Channel catfish seem to move up out main river channels to feed along the edges.

12 Bluegills in grass attract feeding muskies. Look for bass in this cove on hot, summer days.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Lake Office, 4200 E. Farm Road 66, Springfield, MO 65803, (417)840-2965; Fellows Lake Marina, (555)123-4567; Fellows Lake Bait Shop, (417) 840-2965; local tackle shop (555) 234-5678.





Paul Bunyan Dodger



Green Transparent Dodger with box.

The Northwoods of Minnesota and Wisconsin inspire tales of Paul Bunyan—the famous lumberjack folk hero who helped clear the woods with his large axe—and his faithful blue ox companion Babe. Dig into an old tackle box, though, and Paul Bunyan takes on a different meaning: the Paul Bunyan Bait Company.

The Paul Bunyan Bait Company originated in 1939 in Minneapolis, Minn. They were a very popular fishing lure manufacturer and distributor through the 1960s, creating a large range of fishing lures and products. A lot of these baits are still in use today, and many are in collectors' displays. One of the more famous ones is the Dodger.

The Paul Bunyan Dodger

The Paul Bunyan Dodger was made starting around 1938. It measures 4 inches in length and lists at 5/8-ounce. The lure is made of Tenite (early plastic) and is a slim, slightly concave shape with a metal diving lip on the front and two treble hooks. Besides the distinct shape of the lure, the Dodger



1940 ad for new Paul Bunyan Dodger.

came with two variations of eyes, one being a silver, flat disc and the other rhinestone eyes. In 1939, they added "transparent" colors and called these versions Transparent Dodgers. In fact, after 1939, the Dodger name is used always interchangeably with Transparent Dodger, no matter the color.

The bottom of each lure has a rib pattern which, in the case of the transparent colors, shows through the lure. One variation appearing on the back of some lures are the words, "PAUL BUNYAN DODGER" in raised letters. It was advertised as "Darts, wobbles, dodges and dives with the action of a crippled minnow. Irresistible to all game fish, for all game fish for minnows—



Brookland Dodger picture from 1950 catalog.



Size comparison of Transparent versus Artful Dodger.

particularly one that acts injured! Transparent Tenite, ribs and spine give a skeleton-like appearance."

The Transparent Dodger proved a big success for the Paul Bunyan Bait Company. They would make this bait up until 1963. Soon after they launched, though, they spun off another iteration of the bait, the Artful Dodger.

The Artful Dodger was made for fly fishing and was 1 1/4 inches in length and weighed 1/25 ounce. It was introduced in 1941 and was made through 1961, proving quite successful in its own right.

Paul Bunyan briefly made a third model called the Brookland Dodger (you will commonly see this called Brooklyn Dodger). From its introduction in the 1950 catalog:

"A Paul Bunyan original with a new design and new scope in a unique, deceptive lure. Has a specially designed rear winged fin assembly finished in 14-K. gold plate. The new, unusual action gives this tantalizing lure an irresistible appeal to game fish. Must be seen in action to be fully appreciated."

Essentially, this looks like a Dodger with side wings. It was quite an experiment for its time. Unfortunately, it didn't catch on with fishermen, as the lure only lasted from 1950-1953. This lure is by far the rarest and most collectible of the three.

The Paul Bunyan Bait Company was purchased by Prescott Spinner Company in 1966.

Colors and packaging

The paper catalog lists six colors with catalog numbers as follows: 900C - Clear Transparent, 900R - Ruby Transparent, 900A - Amber Transparent, 900G - Green Transparent, 900WR - White Opaque with Red Head, 900B – Black. A seventh known color has emerged from collectors. It is Solid Yellow Body and has a black face and black ribs on the belly.

The Artful Dodger came in the same colors as the Transparent Dodger except for the Solid Yellow Body. There are two shades of green as well, one much darker than the other. This is probably more of a production change more than an intentional color change.

The colors for the Brookland Dodger are the same as the Transparent Dodger.

Given the length of time the Dodgers were available, there were a variety of packaging options. They range from cardboard boxes including plastic film tops to plastic tubes, and customer purchases without a package from display cards in bait shops.

Collectors value

Paul Bunyan Dodgers, Transparent and Artful, in excellent condition without the box/packaging would be worth anywhere from $10 to $20 depending on the color. With the matching box in excellent condition, the price would jump up to anywhere from $25 to $50. The Brookland Dodger in excellent condition runs from $40 to $60 without the box/packaging, and up to $100 or more with the box/packaging, as they are scarce and tough to find. These lures make very colorful and nice displays. ***MWO***

Keith Bell and his family live in Neenah, Wisc. 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.



Transparent Dodger in Amber with box and paper.

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On the Bank

Dan Brozowski

Want To Catch Fish or Collect Tackle?

I was asked this question many moons ago after a Chicagoland Bank Anglers (CBA) event at Busse Lake. After the tournament, many of us hung around to get a few more hours with rod and reel in hand—more of a social time after competition—but nevertheless memorable time spent with fellow bank anglers. At the time, I was chief steward of these events, so I had to watch over the proceedings, talk to curious non-competing anglers, and weigh fish at times, so I had to leave my tackle in my truck until after the event. After the horn blast bringing an end to competition, followed by the weigh-in and awards ceremony, I couldn't wait to dash to my truck to grab all my rods and tackle bag for some personal time on the water!

As I hauled my gear back to the water, I saw a friend to the CBA working his magic along the banks. I approached and asked if I could join the stretch of bank he was working. He invited me in; I'd fished with him before on a few occasions and always walked away a more enriched angler, so I was pumped to spend a little time with him. The angler on the bank was the late Chuck Thompson.



The author says that he can catch more fish using this basic setup than with all his other tackle combined.

Trying to find a short and concise way to describe or introduce Chuck is insanely difficult. He was a Chicagoland angler, a world class ice angler, conservationist, an incredible angling instructor. If you knew him, you "know." If you didn't, let's just say that after a couple hours alongside him on the ice or sharing a bank, you would glean incredible angling knowledge.

I dropped my gear bankside, relieving my hand clenching all I could carry: A couple of long, collapsible poles; a couple of float rods; a couple ultra-light jig rods; and my 48-pound carry bag that barely allowed enough blood to pumped to my brain when slung across my shoulder, ready to tackle whatever the banks of Busse had to offer! I remember Chuck slowly turning, looking at me trying to regain my breath, then looking at my pile of gear, then looking back into my eyes, and saying with a quiet voice, "So Dan, you're traveling light today?" Ah, with those few words, I knew that I was about to learn something! And I most certainly did!

Chuck knelt down in the grass, looked through my rods, grabbed my favorite jig rod, set it to one side, then without asking, went into my tackle bag and grabbed a pocket-sized box with a variety of 1/32-ounce jigs and some ice jigs. He laid that alongside my rod, located my container of maggots, and as he stood up, quietly suggested that I return the remaining tackle back to my truck so we could get to some actual fishing rather than toting gear around the lake!

I "packmuled" the tackle back to my truck. As I returned, Chuck was into my jig box, selecting and then tying on a plain jig head—no paint—which he dressed with a single maggot. Without saying anything, he handed me my rod, nodded his head toward the water, and off we went.

As Chuck made his first cast, he explained how he was finding large bluegills in the area we were fishing, and was connecting on almost every cast with this jig and maggot rig. He was spot on. I was looking at his gear, trying to figure out his setup, which was some type of old, short fly rod he had rigged up to toss out his presentation—a single maggot on a tiny fly hook. With me not having a fly rod, he chose for me to use the lightest setup I had, with me and casting a 1/32-ounce jig tipped with the maggot. He put me on fish, though certainly not the nonstop action he was experiencing, but I still had a blast with this ridiculously simple rig.

I picked apart his brain with rapid fire fishing questions, because my opportunity to fish with Chuck was rare. I think he just wanted to fish, but was a gracious fishing instructor and bank partner. As we wrapped for the afternoon and stopped by my truck, I lowered my tailgate to lay my rod, mini box and maggots in the bed, still asking questions. He laid down his shoulder bag, which if I remember correctly looked like some type of old beat-up military surplus bag, and a rather overly worn type of flyfishing rig.

As we chatted for a few minutes, I dragged my carry bag that held 4 or 5 Plano 3700 clear boxes to the edge of the gate, right next to his carry bag. He smiled and said that mine looked "pretty," loaded with an enormous

story continued on next pagr

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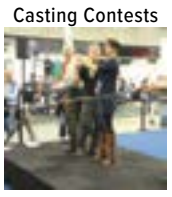
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We're Still Fishing Open Water

For February, I could just about rewrite my January article. Everything depends on the weather, and who knows what it's going to do?

We had some frigid weather the first half of December, but then around Christmas, we had temperatures in the 60s. Most of the lake had at least skim ice on it—and then it thawed out. We fished the day after Christmas and did pretty well. We fished yesterday and did good. We were throwing jigs under bobbers, set about 6 feet deep, around standing trees. We seemed to do better in water 10 to 20 feet deep than we did in less than 10 feet. The water temperature was 37 degrees. We encountered some protected areas that still had ice, but we're supposed to have 4 days in the 50s then some rain, so that'll melt.

We could have these conditions all winter. If the lake freezes and the ice doesn't get too thick, it doesn't take much to thaw it out. Lots of times, we have cold-enough temperatures to freeze it, but the wind helps keep it open.

As I'm writing, the lake is just a couple of inches above winter pool and they're still letting out quite a bit of water. The Corps is planning a major dredging project on the north end of the lake that started last year, but, so far, they've been preparing areas south of Sullivan Beach to hold what they dredge out of the lake. I assume they'll start on the actual dredging this year, so I don't know if they'll be lowering the lake more than usual. Every winter, they try to lower it 6 feet below normal summer pool to allow for spring rains.

I think most of the dredging will be done upstream from the Rt. 32 bridge by Sullivan Marina and probably some downstream from the bridge. Besides helping the lake, it'll make it easier for large boats to get to Sullivan Marina on the north end of the lake.

I saw on Facebook that the Corps closed the 'Bo' Woods boat ramp 'til further notice due to "unsafe" conditions. With the lake so low, all the ramps have moss on them at the bottom and can be slick, so be careful. We didn't have any trouble yesterday at Eagle Creek, but we do have 4-wheel drive. Also, all the docks have been removed from the ramps for the winter, so it's not as convenient to launch and reload, especially if you're alone.

As for fishing, the fish are biting and will continue to, even if the lake freezes. If it freezes solid enough to ice-fish, quite a few areas on the lake are good for ice-fishing, with some not too far from parking areas. As I said last month, there are other options besides ice fishing, with the best being fishing below the dam.

If the lake doesn't freeze, it's good to get out on decent days. It was pretty nice out there yesterday if you were dressed for it. We had on coveralls and wore gloves when we were moving from place to place.

Some of the hits we had were very subtle, and others very aggressive. It was fun, but you really had to keep your eyes on the bobber. It's just good to be able to get out this time of year and get some fresh air. Last time we were out, we saw four bald eagles. We didn't see any yesterday because I didn't spend much time looking up or around; I had to keep my eye on that bobber! ***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 multispecies Eagle Creek Guide Service on Lake Shelbyville since 1989. She may be contacted at: 217-827-0179.


Another cold-water crappie from Lake Shelbyville.

On the Bank

...continued from previous page

supply of various bank-angling-specific tackle. We talked tackle for a bit, my half-dozen rods laid across the tailgate, and my bag looking like it threw up clear tackle boxes. Next to it all lay the simplest and most unimpressive gathering of gear (his). Yet it was the tackle of choice of one of the most admired anglers I've ever had the opportunity to spend time with.

With the money I had spent for my gear next to Chuck's, it was almost embarrassing to see how his gear had outperformed mine with the day's success on the bank. Of course, Chuck's knowledge of fish behavior and skill level were "next level" back then compared to mine. As we were ready to part, he laid down my showpiece, 12-foot float rod and slid a clear box he was inspecting back into my bag. He picked up his tattered canvas bag and stumpy fly rod, shook my hand, and looking one more time at my gear, with a pat on the shoulder, he spoke those words in this article's title: "You have to decide, do you want to catch fish or collect tackle?"

I still remember those few opportunities I had to fish alongside Chuck. I'll have to tell you someday about my first encounter with him and my overloaded ice sled. While some might say that Chuck's comment about fishing and tackle collecting had a negative undertone, I can assure you that it did not; it was a heartfelt teaching moment that I'll always appreciate. Not that I've always adhered to his advice, because if you saw my tackle room today, no truer words have been said to me concerning fishing!

This story was filled with reminiscing on my part, but my intentions are the same as Chuck's were: Helping others to become better anglers!

Today's anglers find themselves in a bit of a predicament. Most bank anglers are always trying to become better, more advanced anglers today, but it seems that we are being convinced that becoming a more advanced angler comes with a cost: not a cost of time spent training or gaining knowledge and experience on the water, but with tackle purchases to guarantee you success. Friends, this simply is not true.

We are at a precipice in angling today, with an enormous amount of tackle available. Plus, the bombardment of social media with so-called "experts" promoting (and getting paid to convince us) that some type of newest, latest, greatest, bait or gear will assure guaranteed success on the water. But this simply isn't true. Success comes through knowledge; knowledge is built through experience and time invested on the water, and with knowledge gained and shared with/by other anglers. Yes, there are some individuals on social media who do a great service by educating anglers. Then again, there are those who just lack the practical experience to be giving out advice for advancing learning anglers, focusing on their number of "likes" and tackle endorsements, rather than helping to build an advanced fishing community.

Now, I'm not badmouthing fishing tackle; by my own admission, I'm huge tackle collector, but it's mostly tackle that I can use under certain circumstances. Is it always a necessity? Absolutely not! But here's one piece of knowledge I have picked up over the years: Purchase and use tackle the same way you would choose tools out of a tool box. One bait cannot cover all your fishing circumstances, just as no one tool will cover all jobs you need to complete.

Knowledge is power, and knowledge in angling is no exception. I know that not all anglers have unlimited time to spend on the water. With this column, maybe I can give you a few shortcuts that might fit into your fishing adventures and help enhance success for yourself and family members. But rest assured that I have no hidden sponsors or agendas while trying to promote more advanced angling from the bank.

I hope that one day, someone will look back, and like my time spent with Chuck Thompson, will remember a tip that I shared through this column, or along some stretch of shoreline. There's certainly no greater gift than passing forward at least some of the knowledge that another angler took the time to share with you! ***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.mwo@gmail.com.



Tinley Park Fishing Expo Returns February 13–15, 2026

The Tinley Park Fishing, Travel & Outdoor Expo returns to the Tinley Park Convention Center February 13 to 15, 2026, delivering three full days of fishing and outdoor excitement for anglers of all ages. The 2026 show will feature a refreshed floor plan that fills the entire state-of-the-art convention center, located just 30 miles south of downtown Chicago and offering ample free parking.

Attendees can explore exhibits from across the Midwest, including vacation resorts, fishing guides and charters, tackle retailers, manufacturers, and fishing clubs representing multiple states. Whether you fish locally or travel for your adventures, the Expo brings together the people, gear, and destinations that define the Midwest fishing scene.

Education and hands-on experiences remain a cornerstone of the show. The popular Hawg Trough returns alongside a full slate of expert-led fishing seminars, casting and outdoor demonstrations, and interactive fish simulators that let anglers test their skills. Raffles, prizes, and giveaways will be offered throughout the weekend. Show sponsors include *MidWest Outdoors* Magazine and Television.



World's Tallest Fisherman.

Anglers looking to sharpen their skills can take advantage of comprehensive "Learn to Fish" sessions held in seminar rooms and at the Hawg Trough. Chicago's Fishing Show will feature nationally recognized speakers, including Fishing Hall of Fame inductees Mike Norris and Mike Mladenik, along with top regional guides. Seminar topics will cover bass, muskie, perch, trout, crappie, panfish, salmon, and walleye, as well as boating safety and fishing electronics. Presenters include respected regional experts Johnny Wilkins, Ken "Husker" O'Malley, Jim O'Neil, Pat Harrison, and Jeffrey Bailey of the U.S. Coast Guard.

The Expo is designed as a family-friendly event. Kids will enjoy the popular Kids Corner featuring face painting, balloon artists, sketch portraits, a children's trout pond, and photo opportunities with the World's Tallest Fisherman.

Admission remains affordable for families: $10 for adults, $8 for seniors and veterans, and $5 for children ages 7 to 14. Children 6 and under are free. Three-day passes are available for $20 for adults and $14 for seniors and veterans. Group discounts are offered for parties of 10 or more, and parking is free. ***MWO***

For more information...
For advance tickets and additional information, visit **tinleyfishexpo.com.**

Shallow-Water Ice Fishing

by Don Gasaway

Although northern climes offer abundant ice fishing locations on various rivers and lakes, there is something special about fishing backwater shallows and farm ponds. The main species of these waters are bluegills and yellow perch.

Finding fish through ice can be difficult, but there are ways to do it. The most obvious is to know the body of water and what depth the fish prefer. Discussions with anglers or at a local bait shop often lead to that information. It also helps to know the habits of the fish. Bluegills and yellow perch are often in the top foot or two, or the bottom foot or two, of the water columns. Usually, it is the latter.

A portable fish locator or other electronics indicate if fish are present, and at what depth. This is important, since fish tend to stay in their comfort level. Fish typically look for food at eye level or a little above, so knowing where they are will help you in placement of your lure or bait. As both species tend to school up in winter, do not just look for a fish or two. Find where there is a crowd of fish present.

It is a good idea to drill several holes and try them all. The actual drilling process is very simple, although blades on the auger should be sharp. Evaluate the type of area and bottom structure. Water mixed with sand before it freezes, or a very shallow area where the drill may break through and hit a sand bottom, can dull blades quickly. If one hole is not producing, move to the next one. Fish move, but generally not far.

In the location is not familiar to you and you do not have electronics to aid you, try drilling multiple pilot homes. First try to locate an area with cover. An area with good routes to deep water or from it is good. During colder weather and low-light conditions, begin deeper and fish tighter to cover. With high light and warmer conditions, fish shallower and, if possible, find weeds. Drop-offs, weed beds and any other submerged structure will attract fish.

Drill a pilot hole and lower some kind of line to measure the depth. A weight placed on a fishing line works well. Once the bottom is determined, adjust the bait so that it is 4 to 12 inches off the bottom, at least to start.

Drill four holes on an angle to, or parallel to, the slope of the bottom. Each hole will have a different depth. If a certain hole starts to outproduce the others, move to that depth and drill more holes. Then each hole will probably produce about the same.

Today's angler should be mobile, and that is especially true in pond fishing. Many use snowmobiles and pull a portable fish house or shelter with a supply of tackle. You need an auger (power or manual) to drill holes. And a skimmer to clean out the shaved ice that falls into the hole. A small portable heater or lantern aids in keeping warm.



Late winter is a great time to get out on small ponds with a cooler for a seat and an ice fishing rod and reel. As the water warms in the sunlight, fish become more active and the milder weather is more comfortable for fishing.
Photo: Don Gasaway

As for poles, there are numerous good, short ice fishing rigs on the market. They are usually about 2 to 2 1/2 feet in length and many have small spinning reels attached. Others will have ice fishing reels holding about 25 yards of 4- to 6-pound line. Many ice anglers use tip-ups in addition to jigging rigs. Tip-ups hold your bait or lure at a certain depth. The reel turns from the tug of a fish and releases a signal flag. When the flag flies, it is time to grasp the line with your hands and take in the fish.

Hooks are usually number 8 or 10 size for panfish. Small tear-drop jigs in a variety of colors are also good. Bait for bluegills and perch is usually grubs, wigglers, and waxworms. Small minnows hooked through the back can swim freely. A small bobber will keep the minnow or other bait at a precise depth.

Twitch the bait and then let it set motionless. The movement attracts the attention of the fish, which will strike when it is still.

Do not overdo the action. If fish are reluctant to hang on to the bait, try using a fish attractant. Attractants are at their best in cold water.

Finally, the best time to go ice fishing is anytime you can. But, when the ice thickens and the action slows during midwinter, try to key on warming trends, abrupt weather changes, and low-light periods. Night is a good time for effective ice fishing. ***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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Enjoying the Des Plaines River Trail

by Kevin Harmon

Soaking in the tranquility of the Des Plaines River Trail near O'Hare Airport in Chicago, you might forget that you are steps away from a busy series of roadways. At the same time, the faint sounds of distant cars and trucks may also lead you to forget that you are amidst an oasis of sorts.

It's not the kind of outdoor experience you'd expect to find nestled within a major metropolitan area like Chicago. Sure, there are some interesting forest preserves in Cook and the surrounding counties, but most of them are off the beaten path.

The unassuming Des Plaines River flows south through Kenosha County, Wisconsin as a simple, unassuming stream before transforming into a river of significance as it travels through metro Chicago, en route to meeting the Kankakee River in rural Grundy County. Completed in 2015, its namesake recreational, multi-use trail extends over sixty miles, to the north almost to the Wisconsin border, and to the south through most of Lake County and part of Cook County in northeast Illinois.

The Des Plaines River—great for fishing, leisurely floating and paddlesports—is where I introduced my son and nephew to kayak fishing. It's part of the navigational route from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. It meanders through several suburbs along the western edge of Chicago's city limits before turning southwest past Lockport and the Illinois and Michigan Canal. After merging with the Kankakee River to form the Illinois River, the water flows west across the state to join the Mississippi River near Grafton, approximately 25 miles northwest of downtown St. Louis. There is just as much fun to be had on the trail as the river. In a perfect outdoor-focused adventure, and you can experience both in the same outing.

To the north, the trail meets the river in Lake County not far from Great America Theme Park and the towns of Wadsworth and Beach Park. Hugging the river for a good portion of its path, the trail provides hikers, runners and cyclists a rural and rugged experience within an urban backdrop. The trail is similar to what you find in forested areas in southern Wisconsin and southwest Michigan.

As one of the longest trails in the Cook and Lake County Forest preserve districts, the surface of the Des Plaines River Trail switches between a root-covered and rocky dirt pathway, to smooth asphalt and crushed limestone. It's a perfect track for recreational and serious mountain biking, although not overly challenging in terms of elevation. The northern section is flat and shaded, and you will encounter cool visuals from wildflowers and cattails, to possums, skunks and beavers lining the river next to the trail. In summer, the mature tree canopy grows so full that the sun has a hard time reaching the forest floor.

Depending on where you are on the trail, you can vacillate from crowded, urban recreation spots to extremely rural and unspoiled locations. You can gently exercise in relative solitude or go at it like you are training for a serious competition.

The middle section of the trail going through the Thatcher Woods Forest Preserve area near Maywood gets crowded during spring and summer but is a great place for speed biking. It's also a good spot for some shallow river fishing.

As the trail moves closer to the city, first-time users will probably think there's no way this scenic, wilderness-like trail sits so close to the traffic surrounding O'Hare Airport. However, it's common along that stretch of the trail to encounter deer munching wildflowers lining the path. They may even come up to you when you are hiking if you don't spook them. Nothing is cooler than urban animals!

In the northern stretches, in addition to sighting deer, bobcats and coyotes, you'll encounter oak, hickory and maple woodlands. There are many places to camp along the trail. The fact that the trail meanders so close to the river adds to its beauty and peacefulness.

The trail stitches together a dozen different forest preserves from its northern end in Wadsworth at Van Patten Woods to its southern terminus in River Grove's Sunset Bridge Meadow. The southern edge is narrow, has less traffic, and more animals running across the path, particularly during the early morning and early evening hours—especially during the summer months. And if this isn't enough mileage for you, the Des Plaines River Trail also connects with the North Branch Trail and Green Bay Trail.

For those in Chicago not wanting to venture too far away, or those wanting to combine their silent sport with the city's entertainment scene, the Catherine Chevalier Woods near the Cumberland CTA Blue Line Stop is a good place for an introduction to the trail. This section closest to the Blue Line stop is a popular place to do speed work on the flat portion of the trail near the airport, not only for its convenient location, but also for its sift-dirt trails allowing for low-impact running, hiking and cycling. You'll encounter people of all ages and athletic abilities on the trail, which makes for interesting bonding as well as people watching. You need a good mountain bike for this type of terrain, or perhaps a hybrid bike.

Other city folks using the train applaud that you can put your bike on the CTA, except for weekday rush hours between 7 to 9 a.m., and 4 to 6 p.m. To get to the trail, you can take the CTA Blue Line towards O'Hare and get off at the Cumberland stop. Exit onto the north ramp to get to the intersection of Cumberland Avenue and Higgins Road. Head west on Higgins for about half a mile to South Dee Road. Be aware that this portion, from South Dee Road going south, is perhaps the busiest part of the trail during the warm-weather months. The metro Kenosha line has several stops close to the northern portion of the trail.

Another cool component of using the Des Plaines River Trail is that you are likely to see local high school teams engaging in pre-season cardiovascular training alongside senior-citizen couples powerwalking. People along the trail, particularly the portion by the airport, agree that the trail provides a great way to get an outdoor fix without having to venture too far away.

There are plenty of spots along the trail to stop during a long bike ride, or to even have a picnic with your significant other, and it's also a great place for birdwatching. Nature photography is big all along the course. People have encountered whitetail deer in the same proximity as hawks, herons, bluebirds and cardinals. During summer, wildflowers provide another scenic backdrop.

If you are tired of overcrowded forest preserves and desire green spaces, sometimes in relative obscurity, check out the Des Plaines River Trail. Like having your cake and eating it, too, this trail offers the best of the big city and silent sports worlds. ***MWO***

Kevin Harmon, a Chicago native, is a former newspaper reporter. He has written about the outdoors for several publications. He is the author of the kayak fishing memoir, Reflections Along the Des Plaines River.



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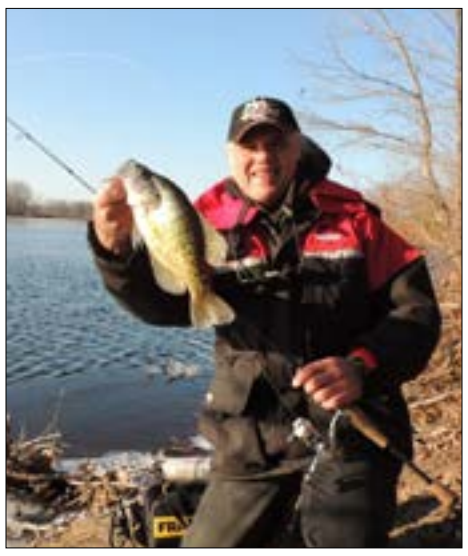
Leaving Ice

A time of the year that many ice anglers hate to see arrive takes place when the ice is leaving the shore. The timing of this has changed through the years, and has generally become earlier, or more frequent, during the winter season. It is a time when there is not enough open water to launch a boat, but the ice is too unsafe, unless you have a desire to have someone cashing in your life insurance policy. However, good fishing can still be found from shore.

This is when I pull out the 8-foot-long B'n'M Russ Bailey "The Difference" and 7.5-foot Godwin's Crappie Cast spinning outfits. The reason for the 7.5 and 8, and not 10 feet or longer, is because there are times that I'm casting from a shore with trees and/or brush, and have to make a clear sidearm or short, overhead lob or pitch cast.

The lures and baits are still the same as used through the ice under a float, since when ice fishing, I normally fish "straight-line" without a float.

Usually, the northern areas of the lake start clearing out first. The northwest corner is the best. Because of air pockets and heat collected by rocks, riprap areas also clear fast. I prefer finding one of these riprap areas, especially if there is some brush out from it. In any case, target areas in which fish were being caught through the ice, as they will still be around those holding spots.


With ice in the middle and along the edges of the lake, and still wearing a Vexilar Cold Weather Gear parka, the author caught this nice crappie while pitching a jig with a Crappie Nibble under a Betts' rattling float to a brush pile not too far from shore.


Using a 7-foot Shakespeare Agility ultra-light rod, Jim Nordquist caught some nice crappies with an Ice Road Runner as ice was leaving the lake.

Fish generally hit very light. Using a sensitive float and balancing it to the most sensitive setting is very important. I use a Thill Shy Bite or Mini Stealth, and weight it with splitshot so that only the very tip of red is exposed above the surface. This allows the detection of the slightest lift or pull-down bites. Some bites, especially with crappies, may be only a slight sidewise movement.

When weighting the line, place most of the weight near the bottom of the float. This, of course, will be for fixed floats, and not slip styles. By placing the weight in this location, it permits the small jig to have a slower fall.

I will also use a Betts' weighted float for when I want to make longer casts, or when there is wind.

As mentioned earlier, this is still a time when ice fishing techniques work. Try keeping the bait in a small area and pick or rock the float up and down. The strike will often come on the fall back, which is the reason the aforementioned weighting technique is best.


A sunbaked northwest corner of a lake often has open water while the center of the lake still has ice.


Using an 8-foot B'n'M Russ Bailey rod to cast a black Custom Jigs & Spins Tutso ice jig with Panfish Nibble, and drift it under a float, caught this crappie along the edge of a sheet of ice.

The long rods are a vital part of the system. They reach outward to the edge of the ice, or the line can be pulled out to the full length of the rod, and then swung to a further spot. As the ice goes out further, you can also cast, which is the reason for the Betts' weighted float or even the Thill float if there is not a lot of wind.

With more open water, the float can be drifted. If there is enough wind, wave action can do the jigging. At this time, the strike is often seen as a stop-and-hold, movement in a different direction, or a slow downward pull, which can sometimes be confused with a hangup.

For line, I use 10- to 15-pound test, green braid or Nanofil. The green color and thin diameter make the line less visible to the fish, while the strength allows the small jigs, with thin-wire hooks, to be pulled free from most snags.

Again, the baits and lures are the same used during the ice season, with the possibility of slightly stepping up the size. My favorites are the number 10 and 8 Custom Jigs & Spins Tungsten Wolfinkee and Tutso (black, lime glow and white), and Ice Road Runner (used for the lift-and-drop, or with more open water, a slow, constant retrieve with occasional pauses).

Use waxworms and Panfish/Crappie Nibbles for tipping these jigs. I also like adding an application of Kick'n Crappie. With the Ice Road Runner, I sometimes use this with only the Kick'n Crappie, or without anything.

This period of time can change from year to year, according to how the weather reacts, and can sometimes occur more than once in a season. However, no matter when the "ice leaves," or how many times it does during the season, the methods remain the same. ***MWO***


Fishing between bad ice and the shore with an orange Tutso under a float, caught some crappie for Brandon Rogalla.


Drifting a Tutso jig tipped with a Panfish Nibble under a weighted float, along the edge of deteriorating ice helped catch this nice bass and a couple of others.

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 dansfishntales.com, facebook.com/dansfishntales and facebook.com/shootnplink.


With snow still on the ground, and ice leaving the lake, the wind helped drift a float with an ice jig tipped with a Crappie Nibble to catch a few nice crappies.

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Cold-Weather Comfort on the Illinois River

by Phil Trager

Temperatures down to about 15 degrees are both stimulating and invigorating in a number of ways. First of all, "snuggled warm" comes to mind. Like while hooking up the boat, heading to the ramp and launching. Dressing warm with a neck gaiter and head covering make sense.

Cold signals to the body to constrict blood vessels to conserve heat. The heart speeds up to maintain circulation through the narrower passages. The key here is "conserving heat." As adding the last layer of warm clothing—maybe a vest or long jacket—the heat the body is conserving is trapped within the layers of clothing. What a great feeling to be 98.6 degrees with 15 degrees all around in the outside air! Such is the "snuggle" of a sauger fisherman on the Illinois River in January and all cold days throughout the year.

Boats meander to the upstream edges of deep-water haunts. The trolling motor is placed into the water and jigs are lowered to bottom; descent to 15 to 25 feet of water begins. The bail is open to let out line and maintain bottom contact as the jig "swims" with each lift.

Often, setting the jig back to bottom is "interrupted" by a wonderful thump. A hungry sauger has let his presence be known. Hits are sometimes so hard that setting the hook is a "no brainer". Simply raise the rod and the hook is set. Cold-water sauger, when really active and feeding, can produce unmistakable hits to alert an angler.

Some days, however, sauger may hit in a sluggish way, wherein the hit feels just like weight being dragged along. A slight lift of the tip of the rod may get a positive response, communicating the moment to set the hook. Add a stinger hook to the jig in the event of short strikes: a sauger hitting the tail only of the minnow. A stinger hook in a size #10, #12 or even a number #14 treble hook, all the way to tiny size #18, can make the difference between hooking fish or not.

Stinger hooks can affect the action and presentation of your bait, however. The idea is to keep the bait as natural as possible; often, the smaller the treble, the more natural it can appear. At times, the stinger hook is just allowed to be swing freely near the bottom of the bait. Short strikers do not hit solid near the neck, head and front of the dorsal fin. Rather, a short strike is just near the rear of the bait.

At times, a lead head jig presentation is just too fast for sauger to hit. If there are no or few strikes, pull floating jigs on three-way swivel rigs instead.

This presentation begins at the downstream edge of the deep water being fished. Trolling upstream, speed is controlled to allow sauger a longer look at the offering.

Many options are included in the "offering." Floating jigs include soft, elongated models like a Phelps floater (comes in 3 sizes). The smallest goes best with the coldest water much of the time. Some floaters are round and hard, made of more solid material like cork or styrofoam. These, too, can be just right at times when baited with a minnow.

Most floaters require having the hook inserted from the top of the mouth down through the bottom lip of the minnow. VMC has created an exception to this, as the minnow is hooked in normal fashion, from the bottom up through the top of the lip. In-line floaters are options. Your line goes through the floating jig and a hook is tied to the end. A short-shank walleye hook usually works well.

Speaking of tying a hook on separately, another option is to add just a bead or two, creating a subtler yet colorful presentation. Sometimes, just the hook is present.

Moving *slowly* is the primary advantage of trolling upstream. Start out just fast enough to quarter the current. Move the boat up the slopes of depth, then back down the slope, all the while heading (inching) upstream. Fish lay on the slopes looking for food to wash nearby. This slow presentation gives an opportunity to fish all the depths of the slopes and covers a lot of water.

Finally, trolling crankbaits, using leadcore line as a sinker, is very effective at times. If there is a lot of grass in the water from rain runoff, however, it can be difficult to run them without fouling your lures. Crankbaits include Rapala Shad Raps, Berkely similar version to the Shad Rap, and Salmo has a few that produce from time to time. Fire Tiger, shad silver/black, and white are typical colors. Purple, too, has its place often in the coldest of water.

Weather permitting, winter fishing still takes place, and often, the water is not crowded with a lot of boats. If weather is discouraging, there may be a nearby fishing/boat/outdoors show to catch up on new innovations, refresh old, standby equipment, or explore resorts with the possibility of a vacation sometime in the year.

Winter does not leave fishermen out in the cold with nothing to do. "Snuggling," be it in the boat or perched in front of a roaring TV, watching fishing shows, makes winter go by faster. ***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.

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Chicago Area Tackle Sale

Located in Berwyn at Moose Lodge #424 on Harlem avenue, March 21st will be a date you need to save for the RFC Tackle Sale. With 63 tables filled with bass lures, walleye, salmon, muskie and pike baits are all on sale. New, used and vintage tackle vendors will have items at up to 80% off retail for you to fill your tackle box in time for this year's fishing season. Rods, reels, weights, boat batteries and even some hunting gear. See you March 21st 8 am - Noon. $5 at the door.

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- Support Veterans Fishing

Riverside Fishing Club meets in Berwyn, IL a near West Suburb. Join us at the Moose Lodge #424 in Berwyn - 3625 S. Harlem Ave Berwyn, IL 60402. We feature local fishing information and outings along with trips that we go on every once in a while. You can join in with us or our network of fishing excursions. We are not a competitive club and this atmosphere suits those new to fishing and those with experience just as well. If you are brand new, you will find a great place to start having more fishing, catching many more fish and going on great adventures even close to home!

Feel free to contact Johnny Wilkins 630.235.2162 or just join us at our next meeting (see the schedule above) text or leave a message 24-7. Also contact Tony at 708.447.8087. Tony is very passionate and helpful to new members. Email Adam Bielawski - membership director about joining Riverside Fishing Club: photobra@gmail.com. We hope to see you at our next meeting as a guest. Introduce yourself and we will walk you around if you want to get comfortable. Couples, families and kids welcome at every meeting. We have several families that attend**.**

Fishing Seminars

We Update Our Speakers & Topics to cover multi-species fishing and the local scene. Here are some seminars recently covered *(visit our website seminar listings)***.**

- **Smallmouth & Largemouth Bass**
- **Forest Preserves Bluegill & Crappie**
- **Salmon & Trout Fishing**
- **Lake Michigan Charters & Boat Upkeep**
- **Fox River & Illinois River Fishing**
- **Ice Fishing for New & Casual Anglers**
- **Live Bait Fishing - Shore Fishing**
- **Walleyes, Pike & Muskie Fishing Tips**
- **Braidwood, Shabbona, Heidecke, Lasalle**

February 2 For 1

Crappie Professor Jim Kopjo AND Hycee Cabael talks Lakefront trout, perch and salmon, a speaker double-header! Learn crappie tactics and Lake Michigan tips, tricks. Visit: **riversidefishingclub.com/** guests, families are welcome without reservations and you can pay at the door $5. Bring cash for fishing raffle and 50/50.

RiversideFishingClub.com

Moose Lodge #424 - 3625 S. Harlem Ave. Berwyn, IL 60402

The Board meets in person at Papa Passero's in Westmont- all are welcome at board meetings.
PRES:Tony Novak, 708-447-8087 tnovak2416@aol.com JOIN: Adam Bielawski - photobra@gmail.com.
COMMUNICATIONS: Johnny Wilkins, 630-235-2162 or Johnny@chicagofishingschool.com

Does Color Really Matter?

by Blake Tollefson

With every passing season, new rods, reels, electronics, and accessories hit the market. A quick visit to local fishing shops—large or small—can prove to be an overwhelming process for even the most experienced anglers. With so many options to choose from, how do you decide?

When it comes to tackle selection, the process can be even more onerous. The choices are essentially endless—not to mention, new options hit the market every year. Every angler has their favorite bait—you know, the one that's always tied on; the one that gives them the most confidence. For some anglers, that confidence lies in the bait's profile, and for others, it's related to the action. Color combination also gets a lot of emphasis from some anglers, while other fishermen are less concerned.

Despite what certain anglers might think, color does matter—at least a little. Not in the sense that fish won't eat something, or will eat something simply because of its color, but more in terms of how effectively the lure can be noticed in specific circumstances. Factors like water clarity, weather conditions, and time of day all impact how effective a certain color may be. Options like glow, UV, realistic, or bright and gaudy excel in some scenarios and are less effective in others. Here are some rules of thumb to help you choose the right bait for the right situation.



Non-natural colors like Wonderbread are more unconventional options that work well.

Natural options

For as long as anglers have been fishing, they've been creating lures that closely resemble the actual things that fish are feeding on. There's no better example of this than fly fishermen. As an angling group, they spend the most time emulating the food that fish are eating.

Ice fishermen aren't all that different. Over the last decade or so, a variety of manufacturers have designed lures to imitate invertebrates, insects, and minnows that fish species target during the winter months. Such lures are often developed to mimic the size, shape, and color of said food sources.

Realistic-patterned lures are excellent choices for a number of situations, which is the main reason you hear the term "match the hatch" so frequently in fishing conversations. That being said, they often perform best in situations where fish can see what they're feeding on. For example, in clear-water environments or daytime angling. Many fish species feed based on sight, so giving them something that replicates their natural food source is a smart decision.

Non-natural options

While many non-natural colors share some similarity to natural prey (i.e. orange, chartreuse, etc.), a number of unconventional color patterns really don't look like anything. Take Wonderbread, for example. It's a staple in the ice tackle industry, but it certainly doesn't emulate anything natural. These bright, gaudy, and rather unconventional combinations may look rather ridiculous at times, but they can certainly catch their fair share of fish.



Natural options are perfect for emulating things that fish actually feed on.

These choices are often touted for their ability to catch more fishermen than fish. There's a little bit of truth to that, but in all fairness, these options have situations in which they excel.

Non-natural options can perform well in similar instances to realistic lures; however, their abilities stand out in stained or murky water scenarios really shine. Bright, unique colors add attraction and can aid in calling fish in from a distance.

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.

Wednesday February 11th 6:00 PM

Todd Berg – Former LGFC Club Member and Friends of the R. D. Pike Building

Topic: Majestic Lake Trout- From the Bayfield Fish Hatchery to Geneva Lake



Former club member and Geneva fishing guide, Todd Berg is a founding member and actively involved and leads with "Friends of The R.D. Pike Building" not-for-profit organization. This organization is involved with the support of upgrading and enhancement of this historic hatchery. He will be giving a presentation on the fish, the numbers, their habits, and the history of the iconic 128-year-old building that raises them. We'll also learn about efforts to preserve and restore the facility that makes this all possible. This will be a different and incredibly fun evening blending fisheries and history! To learn more about this project go to facebook.com/61560586291844/about/?_rdr.

Our members and guests will be able to learn more about this majestic species and the opportunity to learn valuable angling advice from Todd to increase their success in catching this most exciting fish.

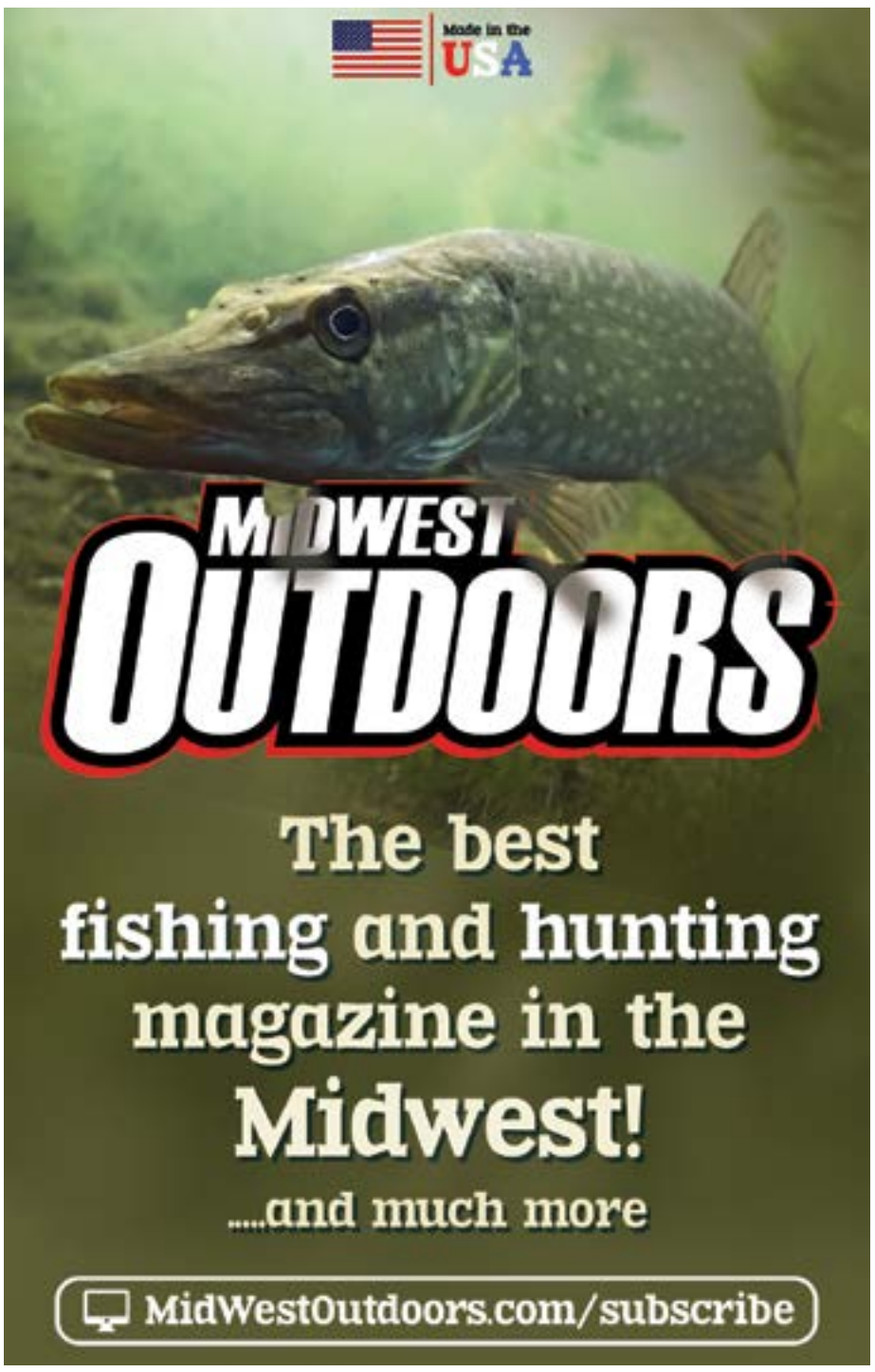
Wednesday March 11th 6:00 PM

Jim O'Neil – MidWest Outdoors TV & Magazine

Looking Below The Surface for Huge Bass and More

Illinois Club Meetings are on the 2nd Wednesdays, February - November

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





UV and glow colors perform well in specific situations, like dawn and dusk.



Lure color matters, just as to an extant confidence matters.

Glow options

Glow-based lures have long been staples for anglers across the Ice Belt. Like the name suggests, these lures have the capability of glowing. A simple charge from a light source like a flashlight, or actual glow charger, allows them to glow for a set period of time. Depending on the lure, finish and light intensity, these lures can glow from anywhere from a few minutes to 30 minutes or more.

Technically speaking, glow lures fall into the category of non-natural lures. However, some key differences place them in a category of their own. While they often come in the same overall color schemes as other non-realistic lures, their ability to glow makes them better choices for specific situations.

Lowlight conditions like dusk, dawn, and throughout the night, are where glow options truly shine. When there's little to no light below the surface, glow-based lures contrast well against a dark backdrop—making it easy for aquatic predators to find.

UV options

UV-based lure options are a newer addition to the ice fishing market. While they're often confused with glow lures, as the two terms are used interchangeably, they function in different ways. As mentioned above, glow lures require an external light source in order to emit light, whereas UV-based options actually reflect ultraviolet light—the key word being *ultraviolet.*

Similar to glow lures, most UV options share a similar color palette to those in the non-natural category. The differences lie in the science behind the overall finish on the lure. With the ability to reflect light, UV coatings can help lures stand out, especially in specific circumstances. Such options are hardly beneficial in situations involving adequate light (i.e, high sun) but can be a difference maker when light is less available. Take cloudy days and other lowlight conditions, for example.

A piece of advice: Rely on the correct lighting source. A number of manufacturers have developed UV flashlights and chargers which can enhance the capabilities of such lures.

Whether you believe it or not, lure color matters—at least to an extent. While a particular color likely won't lead to magical results, certain conditions and circumstances call for specific color schemes. Understanding which scenarios call for which options, coupled with some level of confidence, can lead to more promising results on the ice. ***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.

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."

By sharing information, Walleyes Unlimited members learn the latest techniques and methods and locations for a variety of species. Although our main interest is in walleyes, our membership includes some of the top local anglers for *smallmouth, largemouth, northern pike, muskie, panfish, salmon, and other Great Lakes fish*. Whether you are a novice or hard-core fanatic, our meetings and membership can increase your skill and knowledge for most freshwater species of fish. Guests are welcome at meetings for only a $5.00 Guest Fee.

Learn more at walleyesunlimitedusa.org or our Facebook page.

Illinois Meeting

Wednesday, February 25th at 6:00 PM

Chase Parsons – Next Bite TV & NWT Angler

Hot Walleye Topics for 2026



As a professional walleye tournament angler, Chase Parsons has made an impressive imprint on the fishing industry. Throughout his long career, Chase has been involved with many national television and commercial spots for several powerful fishing companies. He works extensively with sponsors in many aspects of the fishing industry, including product development and seminar/video promotions. Chase is one of the co-hosts of the popular The Next Bite TV show. He also fishes the most popular walleye tournaments, the Bass Pros Shops/Cabela's National Walleyes Tour as well as other tournaments when time allows.

He has enjoyed tremendous success since the inception of the NWT tournaments. Chase has been the champion of several individual tournaments, and he's been a season-ending championship qualifier of well over a dozen of those events.

Parsons has long-term experience with tournament fishing, his TV show, and working with his sponsors on the development and improvement of their products. This allows him to be current and in the forefront of products and techniques to catch walleyes wherever they swim. We are fortunate to have him speak at this meeting as we prepare for the 2026 walleye season and our first outing of the year.

Join us at *Wisconsin* meetings on the last *Tuesday* of the following months –

Jan. | Mar. | (Alt Date) June 2nd | July (Alt. Location) | Sept. | Nov.

Hideaway Pub & Eatery | 9643 S 76th St. | Franklin, WI 53132

Wisconsin Meeting

Wednesday, March 24th at 6:00 PM

TJ Andres – Tournament Bass Angler

Sturgeon Bay Spring Smallmouth



TJ Andres is deeply committed to the education and support of fellow anglers, driven by a passion to share his extensive knowledge. His sponsors in the fishing industry include Mercury Marine, Nitro Boats, St. Croix Rods and Sevin Reels, Bass Boat Technologies, D&R Sports Center Trokar, and Seaguar Fishing Line.

Andres has enjoyed success in several bass tournament series including Anglers Choice - Geneva Lake and State-Line BassCasters as well as other tours. During the Anglers Choice 2023 season, Andres secured multiple top three finishes showcasing his prowess in the competitive fishing scene. Notably, he clinched a win in both the 2022 & 2023 Lake Geneva events, and he qualified for the prestigious Anglers Choice Championship four of the last five years.

When Andres is not fishing tournaments or guiding locally, he enjoys fishing the Great Lakes. TJ will be speaking about fishing Sturgeon Bay and surrounding area for spring smallmouth. He will be offering advice on learning how to locate fish during this time of year when the wind direction can change by the day and water temps can move 10 degrees form day to day. He will focus on the tackle and techniques to catch trophy smallmouth during the early spring. Learn more about TJ at PBbomb.com or facebook.com/PaintballExplosion/.

Join us at *Illinois* meetings on the last *Wednesday* of the following months–

Feb. | April | June | Aug. (Alt. Location) | Oct. | Dec. (Tues. 30th)

American Legion | 749 Milwaukee Ave. | Gurnee, IL 60031



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Channels 370 and 371 (SD)

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Lake Michigan Corner

Mike Ratter

With the holiday season behind us, it's time to focus our thoughts on 2026 and the upcoming fishing season along the shores of Lake Michigan. The whims of Mother Nature will have a lot to say about what to expect this year.

We are now in the "winter doldrums" of fishing on the southern end of the "Big Lake." Things started like gangbusters early with boats taking limits of lake trout and brown trout trolling in Milwaukee Harbor in Wisconsin.

An early-winter arctic cold snap, however, put a quick stop to that. However, temperatures around the zero-degree mark created ice-up conditions in the harbor. A few anglers who have been venturing out from shore have been drilling holes in the ice and having some success jigging spoons like Hopkins Spoon, Acme Kastmaster, Williams Ridgeback and Mepps Syclops, but so far, it's been risky.

As quick as the arctic freeze had descended on the lake, the conditions did an abrupt change; a series of warm spells hit and everything changed. Predicting future weather on the Great Lakes is all but impossible!

I've seen past winters where pretty much the entire month of December was locked in sub-zero temperatures. Come January, the temperatures rose and didn't go below zero for the rest of the winter.

In Racine, there has been some spotty fishing for rainbows and brown trout on the Root River's lower reaches. The fish have been taking spawn sacs, skein spawn and small, Rooster Tail spinners.



The author with a limit of winter trout.

Down the lake past the Illinois state line in the North Point Winthrop Harbor area, a few lake trout been have taken by boats able to get out. But the fishing will be impossible to predict until the weather makes up its mind on what it wants to do. Anglers planning to fish out of North Point Winthrop Harbor this spring will find the fate of this popular marina in question. Operations at this popular area for Illinois Boaters and Charter Boats is presently a big question mark.

The operator has recently indicated it is ending its contract with the IDNR. This has left anglers, boaters, charter boat captains and village officials in a quandary about what the next step will be.

The IDNR's failure to issue a timely request for proposal is said to be what is being blamed for the problem. The concerned parties will have to come up with a solution pretty quick if the facility is expected to reopen in spring. More on this situation when information becomes available.

In downtown Chicago, good catches of perch are being taken at Navy Pier, including quite a few limits. Perch have been hitting waxworms and spikes on Bait Rigs Tackle Slo-Poke jigs in the 1/32- and 1/64-ounce sizes, set up with a drop sinker on the bottom. They are also hitting minnows—fatheads, rosy reds, and baby roaches—plus redworms, nightcrawler pieces and shrimp.

Some days, perch hit best on jig-and-drop method, while on other days dead sticking works best. Methods and best baits can change from day to day or even hour to hour, so it pays to have a good selection on hand.

Fishing Diversey, Montrose, Belmont and Burnham harbors can also put some limits in the cooler; the same baits that produce at Navy Pier will also take good fish here.

Fishing in the harbors, just like off Navy Pier, depends on the weather and wind conditions. A warm spell can produce smooth sailing with no ice, and you can fish any method you want. A cold snap, however, will bring in the ice off the lake if there is any out there.

If the ice is in, you will need heavy weight to bust a hole through the ice. Usually, a downrigger cannonball and a length of medium rope like nylon chalk line, commonly used on trolleys, will do the trick. You'll also need a length of pipe or conduit to keep ice away from the spot you cleared out.

In harbors, the same method will work as well if the ice is thin enough to bust through; you can fish from the dock. If not, you will need an auger to drill some holes, along with a variety of ice fishing rods. Some anglers even set out tip-ups baited with golden roaches or chubs for a chance at the ever-increasing population of northerns, and now some walleyes are starting to appear.

When perch fishing during the winter months, bring along a good-quality landing net. You might figure, "Why do I need one for perch?" Well, you don't... but you can never tell when a big brown trout, steelhead or lake trout (make sure you have your Lake Michigan trout and salmon stamp) or a whitefish, northern, walleye or burbot might decide to hit. Unless you have a landing net, you can kiss them goodbye.

The South-Side slips on the Calumet River and at 87th street are still producing big catches, but a word to the wise: Many anglers have been sorting their buckets, throwing the smaller ones on the ice or shore, and keeping the bigger ones until they reach their limit. This is illegal—and a waste of our resources. The game warden will be coming around and watching for this activity.

Littering is another problem. It's just a matter of time until the data centers move in and take over. If we want to keep these areas open for fishing, clean up your mess! Take your garbage home with you. This shouldn't be too much to ask. Don't ruin it for everyone! We've already lost too many shore fishing spots.

If you'd rather wait for spring before fishing, there are still a few sports shows left to let you get out and shake the cabin fever:

• January 29-February 1—All-Canada Show at Kane County Fairgrounds, 525 Randall Road, St. Charles, Ill.

• February 13-15—Tinley Park Fishing, Travel and Outdoors Expo at Tinley Park Convention Center, Tinley Park, Ill., tinleyfishexpo.com.

• March 1-3—Northwest Indiana Fishing and Outdoors Expo, 2450 Lincoln St, Highland, Ind., 46322, nwioutdoorexpo.com.

• March 6-8, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Sports Show, State Fair Park, West Allis, Wis.

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.





More pumas in Michigan

Nine months after two cougar kittens were documented in the Upper Peninsula, a new trail camera photo indicates that the elusive animals are still alive and living with their mother. A newly verified photo shows an adult cougar with two juvenile cougars that appear to be about a year old, according to Brian Roell, the DNR's large carnivore specialist. Michigan is home to very few cougars, and genetic testing has confirmed the existence of only adult males. The new photo suggests one of the first instances of cougar reproduction to take place outside the cougars' core area in the Western states. The sex of the kittens is unknown.

North Point Marina has problems

And, they are *big* problems. The harbor is in serious disrepair, immediate need of dredging, 2/3 of its slips are empty, it is losing money, and the current management company has walked away from it. None of these serious concerns have been addressed. This sounds ominously similar to IDNR's fiasco at the IDNR's Rend Lake Resort that shut down about five years ago, due to mismanagement, dirty, aging buildings, and the mysterious disappearance of a substantial amount of income tax withholding money. The resort never reopened, and one has to wonder about the future of the marina. Things that make boat owners think about Waukegan's old harbor, or even Kenosha's newly and nicely upgraded facility.

Salmon eggs? Michigan's got 'em

"We experienced another strong run of wild Chinook salmon this season," said Aaron Switzer, DNR fish production manager. "The run at the Little Manistee was robust enough to provide for all of Michigan's egg needs. We were also able to provide eggs to Indiana and Illinois, state-owned fish hatcheries. Once hatched, reared and stocked, these Chinook salmon support and enhance the Lake Michigan salmon fishery."

Coho salmon eggs were collected at the Platte River State Fish Hatchery Weir from Oct. 16 through Oct. 28. "We collected nearly 6 million coho salmon eggs at the Platte River weir. This includes approximately 3 million eggs for Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin," said Switzer. "All four states work together cooperatively each year to ensure that Lake Michigan continues to receive Pacific salmon to supplement the fishery." Fish on!

New Lake Michigan walleye record

When Charter Captain Ernesto Amparan took his brother, Leo Garza, out fishing as a birthday present, the plan was to motor over to Chicago's Navy Pier and jig for lake trout. That plan was working fine until Leo set the hook into something that didn't act like a trout. In fact, it turned out to be a walleye, and a darned big one. It was so big—14.30 pounds, 28.5 inches long, with a 19-inch girth—that it shattered the Illinois Lake Michigan record by over 7 pounds, and just missed the state record of 15.05 pounds. Well, while the brothers didn't plan on it, they proved the old adage, "I'd rather be lucky than good".

Decrease in waterfowl hunters

This report from Delta Waterfowl tells it all. "The number of North American waterfowl hunters peaked in the 1970s, with 505,681 Canadian hunters in 1978 and 2.02 million U.S. hunters in 1970-1971. According to the Migratory Bird Hunting Activity and Harvest Report issued annually by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1.26 million people actively hunted ducks and geese in the United States during the 2024-2025 season—a 2.5 percent decrease from the 2023-2024 season." We need to recruit more hunters.

Avian flu strikes geese in Iowa

H5 avian influenza has been confirmed in Canada geese at Green Valley Lake and at Lake of Three Fires, state wildlife officials announced on Thursday. Staff with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) collected dead geese for testing at Iowa State University's Veterinary Diagnostic Lab. How long the outbreak will last is uncertain. As the rain and mild weather open up additional feeding and roosting locations, waterfowl will disperse, which should reduce opportunities for transmission. ***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.







A trivia quiz

Let's start off with a little fishing trivia to see how much you know about one of our favorite sports, Fishing! The answers can be found at the end of this article.

1. The bluegill is a member of the sunfish family. True or False?
2. The fly rod is the first choice among pro-bass tournament anglers. True or False?
3. Waxies are rarely used when ice fishing. True or False?
4. Wind from the east, fish bite best. True or False?
5. When fishing for muskies, it's best to use 4- or 6-pound test line. True or False?
6. Minnows are a good live bait when fishing for crappies. True or False?
7. Walleyes are members of the bass family. True or False?
8. Name one type of catfish in the Mississippi River. Example: flathead.
9. Gars are not found in the Rock River. True or False?
10. What is another name for a dogfish?
11. Flathead catfish prefer live bait. True or False?
12. What test line is best to use while ice fishing for bluegills, 4- or 10-pound test?
13. Northern pike will bite on both top and deep running lures. True or False?
14. Carp are not found in European waters. True or False?
15. Rainbow trout are stocked in some northern Iowa and Illinois waters. True or False?
16. When is an auger used when fishing? Ice fishing or bow fishing?
17. If you use a stringer to hold your fish in the water, do not hook the fish in the gills. True or False?
18. Another name for a nightcrawler is a dew worm. True or False?
19. A circle hook is good to use when fishing for catfish. True or False?
20. Another name for a bobber is a star, castle or float?
21. Channel catfish like the following: stink bait, minnows, liver or worms?
22. The Green River in Illinois is noted for its smallmouth bass fishing. True or False?
23. What is a "Dardevle?" Fishing line, an oar, or a spoon lure?
24. A spincast reel is usually mounted on top of the rod handle. True or False?
25. When fishing for sunfish or bullheads, a long shank hook is good to extract the hook from the fish's mouth. True or False?

Communication

A few months ago, I read an interesting article in the Iowa Farmer Today about communication or the lack of. The article by Dr. Val Farmer (yes, that's his real last name) mentions that when communicating and understanding, it is important to listening to the other person. He goes on to say that research has shown that body language is believed 55 percent of the time, tone of voice is believed 35 percent of the time and content only 8 percent when there is a discrepancy between the non-verbal and verbal communication. There is something to be said concerning body language when you are speaking visually to a person. I know for myself, I sometimes just block out information from the speaker because it just is not interesting. It's rude on my part, but it happens sometimes.

Weather and ice fishing

- South and west winds are good for ice fishing.
- Stable conditions are also good for ice fishing.
- Panfish bite better on cloudy days than on bright, sunny days.
- Heavy snowstorms can cause panfish to hide in cover and go in deeper water.
- Pay attention to the barometer. Some experts believe fishing can be better with the rise and/or fall of barometric pressure.

Iwo Jima, February 1945

During WWII, this Japanese island was important to Japan for communication, plus it had three runways. The island is about 800 miles from the mainland of Japan. For 70 days, the island was bombed by the Army Air Force and three days by Navy shelling. About 23,000 Japanese soldiers occupied the island.

On February 19, 1945, the U.S. Marines hit the beach head. They paid a horrible price. More that 6,800 U.S. servicemen died and 19,000 were wounded. On February 25, they raised the American flag on top of Mount Suribachi, but the fighting had just begun.

Feed the birds

As I type this, we have a tad over 10 inches of the white stuff covering the frozen ground. It makes it tough for not just birds, but other wildlife, too! We feed the birds and it's been a chore keeping up with filling the bird feeders. They love the suet cakes, but they aren't cheap.

Humor

How do you find a spider on the Internet? Check out its website.

If you think gas and electric bills are expensive, have you seen chimneys? They are through the roof.

Quote

"If you want to avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing!"

—Unknown

Answers to quiz

(1) True. (2) False. (3) False (4) False (5) False. For muskie fishing, typically a heavy braided line in the 65- to 80-pound range is used. (6) True (7) False (8) Channel or blue catfish. (9) False (10) Bowfin. (11) True. (12) 4-pound. (13) True. (14) False. (15) True. (16) Ice fishing. (17) True. (18) True. (19) True. (20) Float. (21) All four. (22) True. (23) Spoon lure. (24) True. (25) True.

MWO

Author's note: Because of health reasons, this issue will be my last for both my "Short Shots" and my "Outdoors & More" columns. I very much enjoyed the ride and wish to extend a sincere "Thank You" to MidWest Outdoors. I will still be writing "Dan D Outdoors" columns for my local paper in Geneseo, Ill.

Editor's note: After more than 16 years as a contributing writer, Dan Dauw has made the decision to retire. His columns were first published in MidWest Outoors' Illinois Section in 2009 with "Dan D Outdoors" and later "Outdoors & More." In 2014, he took over the "Short Shots" column, writing more than 125 articles. MidWest Outdoors thanks Dan for the years of contributions shared with readers throughout the Midwest. His passion, knowledge, humor and wit will be greatly missed, and we wish him well!

Fishing Cold, Open Water in Winter

by Don Gasaway

The air is cold, damp with lake mist. Fishing in winter can be difficult, but worth the effort.

Col d-weather anglers may have to fish a variety of locations. Fish do not necessarily congregate in a single type of location or habitat. Fish located in a single area may or may not be of a specific species. What is usually a crappie location may prove to attract a school of bass.

Bass patterns vary in cold water. Nevertheless, the techniques are much the same, only slower. Although you can catch bass on crankbaits and spinnerbaits, it is a good idea to downsize your lures for winter fishing. You might even want to try jigging spoons or small jigs.

In cold water, fish suck bait in gently and leave only the sensation of a "tic" on the line. They are just not as aggressive as they might be when the water temperature is above 55 degrees.

Cold-weather fishing requires warm clothing, and it is a good idea to take along an extra clothing just in case yours get wet. A snowsuit, hand warmers, ski mask and rubberized gloves are a good idea. It does not hurt to have a thermos of hot coffee, hot chocolate, or soup.

It is important to use care around cold-water situations. Wet rocks or a dock can have ice on them and cause you to fall into the water or otherwise injure yourself. When launching a boat, take care that both boat trailer and tow vehicle can get back up the ramp. Ice on ramp can be a problem.

Getting back to fishing patterns, current in a body of water increases oxygen content and fish will relate to it. Generally, fish will be in the 12- to 20-foot-deep range. In larger impoundments without warm water discharges, the warmer water will be in the deeper section closest to the dam.

The main part of a lake often provides a desirable combination of structure and current for winter fishing. Fish tend to be just out of the current near structure. Forage fish are there seeking small plankton that flow with the current. Bass hang around areas close to stumps, beneath undercuts, rocks, or just on a sharp breakline.

Runoff increases river flow and signals a feeding frenzy in predator fish. For some reason, the larger fish are the first to react. Often, you will have to fish hard, and for a long time, to get bites. However, the fish that bite will be the larger ones.


Cold, open water requires fishing with warm clothing, and sometimes results in bigger fish. *Photo: Don Gasaway*

Disruptions such as sudden noises on shore or in the water make the fish shut down. Sunlight also seems to influence fishing action. The brighter the day, the closer to the bottom fish seem to be located.

Weedy areas, or those with dark bottoms, warm sooner and are likely to harbor fish. Weeds and dark, muddy bottoms absorb the heat available on a sunny day and hold it longer.

Cold-water lures fall into two categories: jigs, and deep-diving crankbaits. Rods should be very sensitive and the line very light test. The bite will be just a tic; therefore, the need for light line. One-piece rods are also more sensitive than a two-piece.

Fish lures slowly. They need to get down to or near the bottom. Crankbaits should slowly bounce along the bottom, kicking up small clouds of mud. A loose-wobbling crankbait that disturbs the silt on a branch or stump is more likely to attract attention than one that just passes quickly over it. Because baitfish are just as slow reacting as larger fish, crankbaits need to move in slow motion. The idea is to make the crankbait imitate the action of the baitfish; that is, to dart, slow down, shimmy in one spot, and then move off.

Remember that your lure is going to have to be right in front of a larger fish's nose for it to react. Long retrieves are necessary to get the crankbait down to the strike zone of a fish sitting on the bottom.

Jig fishing is easier. A 1/16- or 1/32-ounce jig fished right below the boat works well. With a fish locator, you can park the boat right on top of the fish and bounce a jig right in front of their noses. Thoroughly cover the fishing zone with the jig. The fish will not be more than a foot off the bottom. You can do well with just about any type of jig or jigging spoon if it does not weigh more than an ounce.

Fish jigs slowly and right up against any structure available.

In the case of both the jig and crankbait, pay close attention for the tic of the bite and set the hook quickly. Fish will not hold the lure for long. Any variation in the action of the line calls for a quick hookset. This is a game of total concentration.

Water clarity is an issue. With runoff, the water becomes muddy. Siltation gives visual evidence of current. Where clear water abuts muddy water, there will be a visible difference in water color. The change in water temperature there further attracts gamefish and forage.

Gamefish like to hold on the edge of the muddy water, concealed from forage fish. The silt attracts forage fish as it presents a new source of food.

Cold-weather fishing means sluggish fish that bite lightly. However, it often means big fish. Be safe, fish slowly and you too might tie into a lunker bass. ***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.



Well, we made it through January sport show season, and Mother Nature made sure we did not know what to do with cold, warm, thunderstorms, snow, etc.

But it was great seeing you at the shows and I hope you continue listening to Chauncey's Great Outdoors on ESPN AM 1000 on Saturday morning from 6 to 7 a.m., or listen to the podcast on ESPNChicago.com. Subscribe for free at the podcast button on Chaunceysgreatoutdoors.com.

In December, we iced up on many lakes and lost it and in January. Mr. Freeze went wild and helped out *big time* in northern Illinois and Wisconsin.

Some of the sport shows are over, but we have a few left to go this month, the Tinley Park Outdoor Show is on February 13, 14 and 15. Smart anglers will renew their subscriptions to *MidWest Outdoors* at the show and get a free gift in doing so.

Next month, the Illinois Deer Classic and Illinois Fishing Show, which is a combined show on March 20, 21, and 22, will bring you best of both worlds in one show. We will keep you posted on that show on Chauncey's Great Outdoors on Am-1000 and our Facebook page Chauncey's Great Outdoors when we get closer.

But what we really need to talk to you about is how and where are we going to find fish this month.

Remember, the fish's metabolism has really, really slowed down. They still eat; you just must be in the right place at the right time and plan it that way. Unless you're looking for northern pike, then all bets are off. They are really hungry all winter and when the ice comes off the lakes and ponds.

Lake Michigan (Waukegan/Winthrop Harbor)

Open water—if any—and cold-weather fishing can be great! Many anglers just don't come out of hiding until the weather warms up, but I know many other anglers who catch some high-quality fish this time of year through open, cold water.

We have had verified reports of good-sized northern pike coming from the harbors north of Chicago. Live bait *always* works better.

Lake Michigan (Chicago)

Light fishing pressure is normally found in in February along most of the lakefront, but the perch spot all winter was the slip at 87th street, and at times it's a real hot spot. This is an old shipping channel. It was hit hard in November and December and a lot of fish were taken. Most of the slip is on private property, but if anglers are nice and don't leave trash, we will be able to use it. I have also taken perch in Belmont, Burnham Harbor and Montrose harbors along with a few diehard anglers.

In most areas, perch and a few brown trout will hit on minnows worked within a foot of the bottom. The best action seems to be late afternoon to dark. If the water is open at Navy Pier, a minnow or a small piece of squid can take a lot of perch. Throw all the small ones back; you will catch larger ones if you keep trying. That squid trick really does work, and you'll be surprised how long they last on your hook.

Remember to always check the ice for thickness in the harbors and don't ever just walk out, even if there are already others on the ice. Pier Passes for anglers fishing in the Chicago harbors can be obtained from Park Bait, Bridgeport Bait and Tackle, and Fishtech in Morton Grove. The pier passes allow legal access to select piers at Jackson Park, Burnham, DuSable, Diversey, Belmont and Montrose harbors.

Chicago parking passes

Park Bait, Bridgeport Bait and Tackle and Fishtech in Morton Grove are now selling parking passes. Email fishing@chicagoparkdistrict.com with questions. Chicago Park District parking passes are for the anglers' parking lots at DuSable and Burnham harbors.

Navy Pier angling

The north side of Navy Pier is open for anglers. Discounted parking for anglers is available, beginning at 5 am; you must be out by 10 am. For the discount, go to https://navypier.org/plan-your-visit/getting-here-and-parking/fisherman-discount-pass/ to prepay for discounted tickets.

Cook County Forest Preserves

Ice fishing is permitted on designated district lakes on a "Fish at Your Own Risk" basis. Ice conditions are not monitored by the district. Ice fishermen should check ice thickness before going out on any frozen body of water. A minimum of four inches of solid ice over the entire lake is recommended before individuals attempt ice fishing. Ice fishing hours are 8am to sunset 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, Turtlehead.** Remember to check the ice for safe thickness.

Let's look at a few bodies of water in the forest preserve. **Axehead:** With more fishing pressure on the lake, you will find slightly better numbers being taken closer to the bottom. **Powderhorn:** Northern pike and bass will look at a large golden roach. Bluegills are slow, but if you find green weeds, you could find a few bull bluegills. **Busse:** When the temperature drops, more people come out and find small crappies and bluegills near weeds in 5 to 6 feet of water.

Du Page Forest Preserve

If we have February ice, it's generally fair to good on most lakes, but always check it. **Deep Quarry:** Some crappies are taken, but always be prepared for a surprise fish. **Mallard:** Worms and minnows are the best baits for crappies and bass. **Blackwell** has light fishing pressure until 2 pm, then more anglers come out from after work until dusk.

Chain O' Lakes

Ice conditions on the Chain are normally better than on many other lakes in our area. On **Channel Lake**, anglers drill holes and fishing the open areas in the weed beds for good-sized bluegills. Better action is in the afternoon into the evening with minnows, waxworms and bright-colored ice jigs. Stripers on **Mineola** can be active on small baits in the afternoon. Walleyes and bluegills like the south end of **Pistakee Bay** and **Marie**. **Long Lake:** Bluegills are most active on minnows and waxworms. **Loon Lake**: Northern pike chase bluegills in the greenest weeds and hit a golden roach on a tip-up if we have ice, or using a bobber in open water later in the month.

Kankakee River

If the area ice is gone, it will be hard to even walk through the mud to get close to the river. Remember, fish are very spooky in shallow water like this.

Fox River

The river is at a winter level now. The secret to fishing the Fox in the winter is to fish warmwater outflows from pipes that are dumping water from storm drains or water treatment plants. Small walleyes may hit minnows on a single hook with a splitshot fished just outside of the current. Let the bait sit.

Shabbona

Fish cribs along the shoreline hold bluegills and crappies in open water or through the ice.

NATIVE AMERICAN PROVERB

I leave you with this Native American Proverb from my friend Apensuie Majawatt about winter and spring:

No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn.

We will see Mother Earth push up her green plants and flowers, as she does every year, to feel the warmth of the sun.

Each of us must find out for himself or herself what their gift is, so that they can use it in their life.

Remember we don't own the woods, the rain, the forest or the fish we catch. 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 have.

Bangs Lake

Crappies hold close to the bottom. Fish are taken in 12 to 15 feet of water on live bait. If you don't know if you had a bite, set the hook. Crappies have a very delicate bite this time of year. I recommend using one of those very sensitive fishing rods.

Lake County Forest Preserves

At **Independence Grove**, ice fishing is permitted if we have ice in the south bay. At **Lakewood Forest Preserve,** ice fishing is permitted on **Banana Lake** only. At **Van Patten Woods,** ice fishing is available on any part of **Sterling Lake** when conditions allow. If there is no ice, open-water fishing with small minnows could be great!

Always fish with a friend for fun and safety. Take your friends and family out, and maybe I will see you in the great outdoors of Illinois. ***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 to watch his weekly video fishing reports.



Lessons on Electric Knife Blades



Electric knives are great, but their blades don't stay sharp forever.



Electric knife replacement blades come in various sizes and shapes.

by Mike Schoonveld

I had a daunting task ahead of me. A few friends and I were headed out for a day of walleye fishing, along with even more friends on two other boats. All of us were expecting the captains/guides to put us on fish during the trip and to clean, or arrange for the fish to be cleaned, at day's end.

The first assumption was right. Limit catches were made by all, and the walleyes caught were huge by any standard. Wow, what a day!

At the end of the day, we returned to the marina and found that the fish cleaning station was closed and the guy usually at the station cleaning walleyes for a fee was nowhere to be found.

"No problem," I said. "I brought my fish cleaning tools, and there's a picnic table out back of where we are staying that we can use. Anyone else bring their fish cleaning kit?"

Nope. Once I learned that, I cut a deal with them. "I'll fillet the fish. You guys clean up the fish cleaning area, then rinse and package the fillets."

By the time I was done with my part, I was glad that I had a spare battery for my rechargeable electric knife. I was also glad that I'd switched to a "power tool" a few years ago for cleaning some of the fish I catch. I used to think electric knives were for people who didn't know how to sharpen a fillet knife. That's probably right, but experience taught me that, just as carpenters work more efficiently with power tools, for some fish-cleaning chores, a power-knife is more efficient.

I have plenty of experience—and I was getting more. I was the designated "fish butcher" the second day of the trip as well.

But that taught me another life lesson a few days later.

I learned how hard on the sharpness of the serrated blades of an electric knife that filleting multiple dozens of walleyes could be. It makes sense. Fillet knives are made to cut fish meat, and if they are only cutting meat, their sharpness will last a long time. It's possible to cut through the rib bones of most fish with a regular fillet knife, but doing so quickly dulls them. Touching them up with a hone or sharpening steel after every two or three fish can keep them sharp.

That can't be done with the serrated blades on electric fillet knives. Eventually, those blades get dull.

I researched the possibility of sharpening dull, serrated blades by interviewing knife sharpening experts as well as the makers of knife sharpening tools. I learned that the steel used to make electric knife blades is extra hard and requires special tools and equipment to sharpen when they are manufactured. Resharpening to "like new" can't be done by hand using sharpening stones or files. Extra-hard steel or not, by the end of my walleye filleting sessions, the strong motor on my Rapala R12 rechargeable knife was doing more of the work than the sharp blades.

The next time I used my electric knife was closer to home, when a large lake trout was caught. The walleye-dulled blades sliced easily through the trout's skin and down to the spine, but when I rotated the knife 90 degrees to cut through the ribs, towards the tail, it wouldn't cut through the "large gauge wires" of which laker ribs are seemingly made. No way, no how!

When I remembered the workout I'd given these blades, not only on walleyes at that last outing, but other fish, on other days previously, it was easy to deduce that the blades were just plain dull.

I finished the lake trout that day by switching the 7.5-inch blade to the 6-inch blade that came with my R12 kit. This blade set is just as stout and sharp—just shorter for filleting smaller fish. Not quite the perfect tool for the job, but it worked.

Later, I shopped for a replacement set of blades for my power-knife. I found that Rapala (as do most other electric knife makers) offers several other sizes and styles of blades that fit their handles, beyond the one or two that come with each knife. Most are longer or shorter, but some are thinner and/or more flexible for filleting various sizes of fish, or various species.

I ordered a couple more of the 7.5-inch blades (my favorite) and a collection of the other sizes. I want to be prepared for the next time I'm put in the role of "fish butcher" whenever that happens, or whatever kind of fish are on the chopping block. ***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.

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ILLINOIS ANGLERS: Visit the DNR website dnr.illinois.gov. Get up-to-date Illinois fishing reports, learn where to buy a license, locate places to fish, relevant regulations, pinpoint boat access sites, discover campground areas, find handicapped-accessible sites, and renew watercraft and snowmobile licenses.

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 Lunkerbusters Fishing Club** meets the second Tuesday most 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 3nd 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, dskdlk@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. **The February 11 meeting** speaker is Todd Berg – Former LGFC Club Member and Friends of the R. D. Pike Building. Topic: Majestic Lake Trout- From the Bayfield Fish Hatchery to Geneva Lake. Booth 901. Please check our website lakegenevafisihingclub.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 (except June, July and August) at the Oak Brook Recreation Center, Central Park West building near 31st Street and Jorie Blvd. In Oak Brook, Illinois. For more information please visit www.obtu.org. or contact Stan at 312-953-6759.

▪ **"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 fishinfools.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 Cedardell Golf Club, 14264 Hale St., Plano, IL. 60545. We occasionally have a speaker with raffle prize and door prize. Anyone is welcome. For more info: Duane 815-761-5182, illinoismuskieclub.com.

▪ **Riverside Fishing Club**—a multi-species family-oriented fishing club. RFC 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 information visit riversidefishingclub.com or our Facebook Group Page. Please contact club president Tony Novak, email: tnovak2416@aol.com or call: 708-447-8087. Membership information contact Adam Bielawski at 630-460-1140 or photobra@gmail.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., 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 Woodrige 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.

▪ **South Side Muskie Hawks** meet the third Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. at The Village Sportsman's Club, 5201 W. 115th St., Alsip, IL 60803. Guests welcome. $8 door charge, $10 for non-members. For more info: call John Daley, President, 773-704-3401 or Jack Frost at 815-483-6081, southsidemuskiehawks.org.

▪ **South of the Border Chapter No. 14 Muskies, Inc.** meets the 3rd Wednesday of the month 4 times per year. Meetings are held at the Antioch Moose Lodge at 7:30 p.m. Meetings are in January, April, and September with guest speakers to be determined and a December meeting that is our annual Christmas Party and lure exchange. SOB has fishing outings the 3rd Wednesday during the months of May, June, July, and August. We launch at Musky Tales, Antioch at 4:45 and fish until dark. For more info: contact Frank Walter at 847-689-2133 or fawalter@gmail.com.

▪ **The Villa Park Fishing Club** meets on the first Wednesday of each month (except July and August) at 7:30 p.m. at the North Terrace Pond Clubhouse on Westmont and Terrace. Guests are welcome to attend for $3 per meeting. Annual membership dues are $30 per family. Membership is now open to all interested individuals. For more info: call Marty at 630-932-1923.

▪ **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 Post 771, 749 Milwaukee Ave., Gurnee, IL 60031. The **Illinois February 25 meeting** speaker is Chase Parsons of *Next Bite TV & NWT Angler*; Topic: Hot Walleye Topics for 2026. For info: call Bob Clark at 847-274-8247. Please check our website walleyesunlimitedusa.org for updates.

EVENTS

February 14
NICC 66th Annual Ice Fishing Derby at Turtle Beach Marina, on Channel Lake, 42273 N. Woodbine Av., Antioch, IL. Hours: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.; meet raffle at 11 a.m. For info: www.mynicc.org.

SPORTS SHOWS

January 28 - February 1
Chicago Boat Show, at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center, Rosemont, IL. Hours: Wednesday 2 - 8 p.m., Thursday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Friday 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For info: NMMA, Jeff Marquard, jmarquard@nmma.org, chicagoboatshow.com.

January 31 - February 1
Southern Illinois Boat and Fishing Show at The Pavilion, 1602 Sioux Drive, Marion, IL 62959. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. - 6 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.-3 p.m. For info: visitsi.com.

February 7-8
Bloomington Gun & Knife Show at Interstate Center, 1106 Interstate Dr., Bloomington, IL. Hours: Saturday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. For info: pcshows.net.

February 12-15
QCCA Fishing, Hunting and Outdoor Adventure Show, at the QCCA Expo Center, 2621 4th Ave., Rock Island, Ill. Show Hours: Thursday 4 – 8 p.m., Friday: 10 a.m. – 7 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. For info: Quad City Conservation Alliance, Inc., info@qccaexpocenter.com, qccaexpocenter.com.

February 12-15
Chicago RV and Camping Show, at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Ctr., 5555 N. River Road, Rosemont, IL. Show Hours: Thursday Noon – 8 p.m., Friday 10 a.m. – 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. – 8 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. For info: RVE, Inc., chicagorvshow.com.

February 13-15
Tinley Park Fishing, Travel & Outdoor Expo, Tinley Park Convention Center, Tinley Park, IL. Show Hours: Friday Noon to 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. For info: tinleyfishexpo.com.

February 20-22
QCCA RV and Camping Show, at the QCCA Expo Center, 2621 4th Ave., Rock Island, Ill. Show Hours: Friday 10 a.m. – 7 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. – 7 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. For info: Quad City Conservation Alliance, Inc., info@qccaexpocenter.com, qccaexpocenter.com.

February 27 – March 1
The Boat Show in Springfield, at the Illinois State Fairgrounds, Richard Orr Building, 801 E. Sangamon Ave., Springfield, IL 62702. Show hours: Friday 2 p.m. – 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. – 7 p.m., and Sunday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. For info: JLS Marine, Inc., jlsmarine.com, jeff@jlsmarine.com, theboatshowinspringfield.com.

March 28-29
Belleville Gun & Knife Show at Belle-Clair Fairgrounds, 200 S Belt E, Belleville, IL 62220. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. For info: Pope Creek Shows, Mark Craft, candcreloading@gmail.com, pcshows.net, or facebook.com/popecreekshowsltd.

March 28-29
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. For info: bureaucountyfair.com/calendar.

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.

Stocking a Tackle Box for Beginner Bass Anglers



by Glenn Walker

Some fishermen start off their fishing journey fishing for bass. Others started fishing for panfish when they were kids. While some may have been a walleye angler, or pursued muskies, they now want to switch over and chase largemouths and smallmouths. Whatever the scenario, properly stocking a tackle box with the right lures for new bass fishermen is important. You want to make sure that your family member or friend who is getting into the sport of bass fishing has the right lures to help them catch bass.

I have gone through and identified seven bass fishing lures that should be in a beginner bass fisherman's tackle box, as they will work across the country, on any lake or river with bass, from shore or in a boat.



A wacky-rigged Yamamoto Senko. *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

Soft plastic stickbait

Lure: *Senko (4- and 5-inch)*

Details: The soft plastic stickbait, AKA Senko, is an extremely effective piece of soft plastic to put in front of bass and just have it sit there. You can rig a Senko in several ways: Wacky, Neko, or Texas style. The last, the Texas-rig, works well when fishing around vegetation, or when you want to keep your bait from getting hung up on the cover you are fishing. The other two rigging methods, wacky or Neko, are very similar.

I rig a number 2 Lazer TroKar Pro V Finesse hook through the center of the bait. This allows the Senko to sink to the bottom, with each end of the bait pulsating ever so slightly with the twitch of your rod tip.

The difference with a Neko rig is that I'll insert a small, tungsten nail weight into one end of the bait, so this effective bait can get down to the depths where offshore bass live. These baits can be fished around any form of cover, and the slower you fish 'em, the more bites you'll get!

Jig

Lure: *Arkie Style Jig (3/8- and 1/2-ounce)*

Details: No other lure that a bass eats



A ball-headed Buckeye Lures G-Man Ballin' Out Jig.

is more versatile than a jig. Anytime of the year, on any lake or river, around any form of fish-holding cover, a rubber-skirted jig can be fished in a variety of ways to catch bass. You can flip or pitch a jig around stumps, laydowns, boat docks or around vegetation, as a jig allows you to put the bait tight to the cover where bass are positioned.

Carry an assortment of 3/8- and 1/2-ounce jigs that you can fish from shallow to deeper water. Different jig weights also allow you to show the bass a jig falling at different rates, which may be the difference in getting a bite or not. You can also cast a jig and drag it around offshore structure such as rock piles, brush piles, or offshore flats where bass are roaming.



A Tungsten ChatterBait Elite EVO with a Yamamoto Slim Zako trailer. *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

Vibrating jig

Lure: *3/8-ounce JackHammer or Tungsten ChatterBait Elite EVO with a Yamamoto Slim Zako trailer*

Details: Since the early 2000s, the ChatterBait has become a staple for bass fisherman across the country, as it can be fished all season long. You can fish a vibrating jig in shallow water around all forms of cover, including vegetation, wood, rock and boat docks. It's action and strong vibration gets the bass's attention, and it can be brought through fish-holding cover and not instantly get hung up. The options for a soft plastic trailer are almost endless, but the important thing to remember is that you do not want action from your plastic trailer to overpower or counteract the already powerful action of the blade on a vibrating jig.



An all-around good spinnerbait choice.

Spinnerbait

Lure: 3/8-ounce Tandem Willowleaf

Details: Long ago, spinnerbaits were staple items for any bass fisherman, and they still work today! The ability to cast out and reel in a spinnerbait makes it a great choice for beginning anglers. What makes spinnerbaits so effective is the ability to alter your retrieve based on the depth of water you are fishing and the activity level of the bass.

In spring, you can very slow (called slow rolling) using a single-Colorado-blade spinnerbait that puts out a lot of vibration and get a bass' attention, even when the water is cold. When the water gets warmer and the bass feed on baitfish during summer or fall, it is more common to use a spinnerbait that has a double willowleaf blade setup, or a tandem willowleaf/Colorado blade arrangement, as these spinnerbait blade configurations emit more flash.



The deadly Heddon Super Spook for walk-the-dog retrieves.

Topwaters

Lure: *Heddon Super Spook and Rebel Pop-R*

Details: As the year progresses and water temperatures creep close to and then rise above 60 degrees, bass are actively feeding, and I'll always have a topwater rigged up and ready to go. Topwater baits work well around and adjacent to shallow water cover like emergent vegetation and laydowns, along with working the lure over offshore structure like weed lines and underwater points.

The soft, side-to-side cadence of the Spook is attractive to a bass, both when they are chasing bait and want something splashing over their heads, while also still being able to get their attention when they are not wanting to chase a fishing lure very far.

The Rebel Pop-R is a great topwater plug choice when you need to make pinpoint casts to a target. After popping the bait, let it sit motionless next to fish-holding cover.

Texas rig

Lure: Yamamoto Flappin' Hog or Big Bite Baits Craw Tube

Details: From flipping or pitching shallow-water cover, to casting and dragging a bait along an offshore weed line, a Texas-rigged soft plastic bait is versatile and effective for catching bass in and adjacent vegetation and brush.

Fishing a Texas rig allows you to slow down and catch sluggish bass and is a staple technique any time of the year. You'll want to stock a tackle box with an assortment of tungsten weights, ranging in size from 1/8- all the way up to 1 ounce, but if I had to pick a few key sizes, I would suggest 1/4-, 3/8- and 1/2-ounce. It is important to always use the smallest size possible, as this will give your soft plastic bait the most natural action in the water.

The same goes for hooks; you want an assortment of hook styles, including some



A Texas-rigged Yamamoto Baits Flappin' Hog. *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

extra-wide-gaps, traditional worm hooks, and flippin' hooks. Hook size depends on the size of the soft plastic you are using, so having 3/0, 4/0 and 5/0 hooks is important.

Topwater frog

Lure: *Northland Fishing Tackle Reed-Runner Frog*

Details: Anytime there is vegetation in the water, chances are that at some point during the fishing season, it may become dense enough that you won't be able to get a fishing lure through it. This is when a topwater frog is a great lure choice as you can work the bait on the surface that now has a canopy of vegetation that the bass will hide under. Some areas that I'll use this technique are over and around lily pads or matted hydrilla, eel grass, or milfoil.

Now is a great time to look at getting someone who is interested in bass fishing there first assortment of bass fishing tackle. It will get them ready for their first fishing trip, and it will give you an excuse to look at and buy some fishing tackle. ***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.



Topwater frogs catch bass where other lures can't go! *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

THE **LAKEMASTER®** DOWNLOAD HUMMINBIRD®

Decatur Lake

by Don Gasaway

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.



LOCATION: Macon County, Illinois

SIZE/DEPTH: 2,800 acres with 30 miles of shoreline, 22 feet maximum depth, 7.9 feet average depth. The reservoir lies on the south edge of Decatur, Ill. on the Sangamon River. Constructed in 1920-22 as a water source for the city, it became the focus of mid-Illinois recreation. It sits atop relatively flat prairie and is vulnerable to deposits of silt from surrounding farm fields.

A city boat registration is required. Permits are available at Lake Patrol Office in Nelson Park along with lake maps. There are 5 public boat ramps in Nelson Park, Faries Park, The Sportsman's Club, on Lost Bridge, and Country Club Roads. There are no lodging or camping facilities on the lake. The IDNR Website lists 7 fish attractors in the southern end of the lake.

DOMINANT SPECIES: Decatur offers excellent fishing for both black and white crappies with many over 10 inches up to 14 inches plus and 1.3 pounds. White bass are abundant with a great growth rate and fish routinely over 2 pounds. Walleye fishing is excellent for fish exceeding 14 inches and weighing over 2 pounds. Thousands of 1-to-3-inch fingerlings were stocked during 2023-2024.

1. Boat ramp at Country Club Road.

2. Fish Attractor. Fish for walleyes to the north along the riprap between Basin 1 and Basin 2. A minnow or jig and minnow are your best bets.

3. Lost Ridge Road boat ramp.

4. Sportsman's Park Boat Ramp and handicapped-accessible pier.

5. Fish attractor.

6. There is a fish attractor in the back of this bay. Crappie fishing is good at the mouth of the bay using brightly colored tube jigs or a 1-inch piece of nightcrawler on a small circle hook.

7. Fisherman's Wharf Park has a fish attractor nearby. Beware of dangerous water near the dam.

8. Basin 1 is a large, deep-water area near Nelson Park. It is a good area for walleyes and a variety of other species. Walleyes like jig/minnow combos, jerkbaits, and crankbaits. Crappies are available along riprap and other shoreline areas.

9. Nelson Park Office. Boat permits are available as well as maps of the lake.



10. Nelson Park boat ramp and handicapped-accessible pier. There are fish attractors to the north and south of the bay entrance.

11. Basin 2 is another deep-water area where walleyes are found. There is also ample shore fishing, and boat fishing for crappies and white bass. Jig/minnows are popular baits. Shore fishing for crappies is better north of the bridge, on the west shoreline. Crappies like tube jigs in bright colors. White bass fishing is good at the north end of basin just north of the Route 36 bridge. The best lure is a bright silver blade bait like a Cicada or tailspinner like a Little George.

12. Faries Park boat ramps.

Additional information: IDNR Fisheries Biologist Jim Garavaglia, 217-345-2420

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February 2026

MINNESOTA
NORTH DAKOTA AND SOUTH DAKOTA

Section Two



Last-Chance Walleyes

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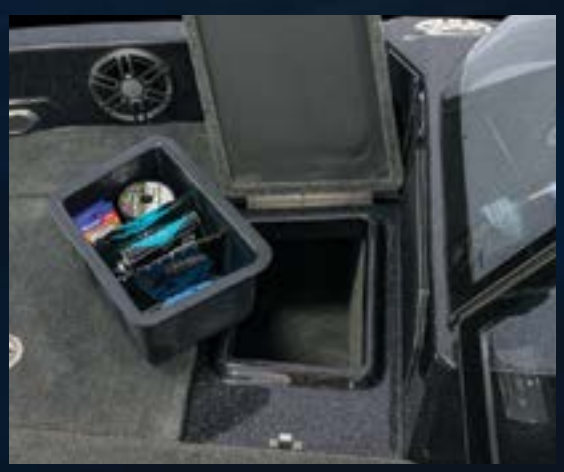
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LODGING

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Big Stone Lake State Park	(320) 839-3663	www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_park/big_stone_lake
Cozy Cottage	(605) 212-3883	226 McCloud St., ortonville/julainr@gmail.com
Econo Lodge Hotel & Suites	(320) 839-2414	www.econolodgeortonville.com
Idle Spurs Inn	(320) 839-2558	Find us on Facebook
Lagoona Beach Cabin	(320) 760-6109	Find us on Facebook
Lake Road Lodge LLC	(320) 808-7143	Find us on Facebook
Lakeshore RV Park	(800) 936-7386	Find us on Facebook
Little Mill Road Rental	(320) 305-0324	280 County Road 15
Odessa Lodge	(605) 237-3976	paulsentreeservice@gmail.com
Ortonville Rustling Elms Resort	(320) 839-3845	www.rustlingelmsresort.com
Thompson's Rentals	(320) 760-7927	www.lakewoodsupperclub.com

SOUTH DAKOTA

Big Stone Legion Campground	(605) 862-8310	
North End Lodge	(612) 868-2922	www.northendlodge.com
Camping 109 RV Park	(605) 862-7650	www.campnative.com
Schmidt's Landing	(605) 432-6911	www.schmidtslanding.com

RESTAURANTS / BARS

Berkner Pizza	(320) 839-3660	205 Second St. NW, Ortonville
Big Stone American Legion Post	(605) 862-8310	14521 485th Ave., Big Stone City
Big Stone Liquor Store	(605) 862-8166	457 Main St., Big Stone City
Club 7-75	(320) 273-2339	66844 State Hwy 7, Odessa
Dairy Queen	(320) 839-3605	833 US Hwy 12, Ortonville
Headwater's Grill & Bar	(320) 839-2270	17 Second St. NW, Ortonville
Headquarters Bar	(320) 748-7358	317 Studdart Ave., Graceville
Lakewood Supper Club	(320) 839-9972	1073 Lakeshore Dr., Ortonville
Lingonberry's Pastry/Coffee Shop	(320) 305-6232	124 2nd St. NW, Ortonville
Mac Daddy's	(605) 541-0541	551 Main St., Big Stone City
Melts Ice Cream Shoppe	(320) 760-4475	469 Main Street, Big Stone City
Moose Lodge #407	(320) 839-2904	240 NW 2nd St., Ortonville
Ortonville Liquors	(320) 839-3139	786 US Highway 75, Ortonville
Sly's Bar & Grill	(605) 432-4421	1012 South Dakota State Hwy. 15 Millbank, SD
Subway	(320) 839-9996	701 Second St., Suite 3, Ortonville
The Lakes One Stop	(605) 541-0100	
VFW	(320) 839-3954	333 2nd St. SE, Ortonville

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Big Stone Lake: Minnesota's/South Dakota's border-water Gem!

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Last-Chance Walleyes



Be ready once the sun starts to set.



Using a 'hut' is helpful on the colder or windy days.



Midwinter calls for down-sizing to smaller spoons.

by Steve Mattson

Here in Minnesota, we don't get to target the king of freshwater all year long. Walleye season closes on inland lakes the last Sunday in February. This gives the state fish a chance to have a little reprieve before the annual spawning rituals. Canadian border lakes such as Rainy Lake and famed walleye factory Lake of the Woods remain open until April 14. This gives anglers plenty of extra ice fishing time if willing to venture north for a fishing trip.

To be honest, February walleyes are not super easy to catch. Anglers also deal with the "doldrums of winter" and can lack motivation due to less exposure to sunlight. Walleyes do not feed as aggressively as they did during the early season. This makes it extremely important to put everything in your favor if you want to taste some level of success.

To up your odds of catching mister walleye, it is important to go to one of the many walleye factories in the state. Do a little research to pick out the lakes with a decent population of walleyes. Use the available resources, such as Minnesota DNR lake surveys or apps such as ONX Fish. Lakes such as Lake of the Woods, Rainy, Mille Lacs, Upper Red Lake, Lake Winnibigoshish and Leech are well-known walleye lakes, for good reason. However, there are also a lot of medium-sized lakes spread throughout the state that have great numbers of walleyes. A little homework can go a long way to unlocking some gems and tip the odds in your favor.

Even in early-ice season when walleyes are more prone to bite, it is still important to prioritize low-light conditions. In mid-winter, it is absolutely critical to target walleyes at sunrise and at sunset. It's not a complete waste of time to be out during the daytime hours, but it's pretty close. Snowy days, or days with a pressure drop, can also help with the bite, but focus on sunrise and sunset.

Pull out all the stops when you are out there. In Minnesota, you can legally use two lines while ice fishing. So, make sure to maximize your opportunity; the more options that you have below the ice, the better. There are a lot of ways to do this.

One is to have a deadstick setup close by, using a bobber setup. That way, you can use your jigging rod in one hole and while keeping an eye on the bobber setup in another. If you want to spread out a little more, opt for a tip-up setup a further distance away while you use your jigging setup in another hole.

Better yet, use a one of the tip-up setups that utilize a rod and reel, such as a Finicky Fooler. This allows you to have a flag to indicate a bite, and then be able to set the hook and fight the fish on a rod and reel.

The 13 Fishing BaitStriker rod and reel combination was created for this type of fishing. The unique reel allows you to basically freespool a spinning reel while the line is still engaged on the reel. A fish can take the bait, pull line off, and then the angler just switches a lever to set the hook and reel it in. This takes deadsticking to whole new level with a clever new reel.

Whatever method you choose and use in midwinter, be sure to downsize. It's not uncommon to catch walleyes on panfish-sized jigs and offerings during this time. Be sure to use smaller-profile spoons, such as the VMC Bull spoon. This compact profile helps you get to where you need and offers a nice presentation for finicky walleyes. Be sure to use smaller minnows on the deadstick setup as well. Smaller chubs or fatheads are the best choices, but don't be afraid to even use crappie minnows. Remember, super-easy fishing tactics produce. You just want to be able to entice a bite or two, so smaller offerings help tip the odds.

Don't neglect to go out in midwinter. Just plan on tipping the odds in your favor to ice a few more walleye before the spring thaw. Put in a little more time during daily prime times and be a hero at the dinner table once again. ***MWO***

Steve Mattson has been writing articles for MidWest Outdoors since 2001. He is a driven angler, guide and sponsored tournament pro who has won both bass and panfish tournaments and placed in walleye and pike events. He resides in northern Minnesota and enjoys helping others catch more fish. For more info: mattsonangling.com and @mattsonangling.



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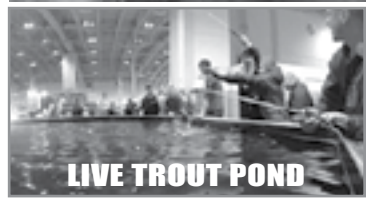
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Go Deep and Dark for Midwinter, Thick-Ice Crappies

by Troy Smutka



This night ice crappie grabbed a minnow suspended under a slip-float.

"I am seeing fish already," my son said as I entered our Clam hub shelter with the last of our equipment. "Got one," he said a few seconds later, before I could even get my jig down to the fish lighting up my Humminbird. By the time I finally got my jig 22 feet down to the soft bottom, Parker was tossing a 10-inch crappie into a bucket. "Fresh crappie for dinner tomorrow," I smiled.

January and February can be downright cold in the Midwest. The lakes have enough ice to drive vehicles on, and fish-house villages mark many of the offshore reefs and humps on lakes. During this time, panfish leave the shallow bays and the dying, decaying weeds for deep-water basin areas. During the cold-weather, mid-winter period, these deep, soft-bottom basin areas have abundant insect larvae activity, and therefore are teaming with schools of panfish. Fishing these basin areas near shallower reefs and humps dotted with shelters can produce good mid-winter action for bluegills, crappies, and/or perch, depending on the species available in the lake. Fishing for crappies can be especially good at and after dark.

Modern ice fishing electronics make you a better fisherman all winter, but they can be outright critical to success during the mid-winter, deep-water night bite. A GPS mapping unit can greatly shorten the time required to find basin areas near offshore reefs and humps. A good flasher is invaluable in finding the water depth you are looking for, and for spotting fish. Turning up the gain can also show panfish food (bloodworms, midges, etc.) rising up from the soft bottom in basin areas. This especially happens after dark, and crappies will be in these areas, taking advantage of the easy meal.



The author with a big ice crappie at night.

I will not head out on the ice without my Humminbird Helix Ice 7s which give me GPS and ice flasher capability. These units are reliable and user-friendly, and are critical for the thick-ice, night crappie bite. Crappies are often moving around basin areas near shallower reefs and points at night, and a good flasher will help you know when they are swimming through, as well as at what depth. Crappies feeding at night on larvae rising up from the bottom can be found at all depths, from right near the bottom to just a few feet below the ice, twenty feet above the bottom. My Helix Ice 7 keeps me in the know for where to set my bait to get bit.



Parker Smutka jigged up this February nighttime crappie.

For this type of fishing, I use an ultralight rod with a strike indicator (spring bobber) for my jigging to feel and see strikes. This setup allows fish to inhale a bait before the rod loads up. I like to use a 24- to 28-inch St. Croix Legend Black Ice rod spooled with a Fish 13 Descent inline ice reel for finicky, night crappies. This combo, spooled with 2-pound-test Berkley Vanish Fluorocarbon, is super sensitive, allowing you to feel the most subtle bites. The inline reel allows me to use the fluorocarbon, which is nearly invisible in the water, tied directly to the jig, with no spinning from line twist that you get with a spinning reel.

There is no magic jig or color; you have to experiment each day. I always have a couple of different-colored horizontal jigs and vertical jigs rigged up on rods when I go mid-winter crappie fishing. For horizontal presentations, I like a VMC Tungsten Tubby, a VMC Roach Jig, and a Custom Jigs & Spins Gill Pill. The Lindy Frostee Jig is a





The author's Clam Fish Trap Voyageur Ice Team Edition keeps anglers warm and portable on cold February nights.

good vertical presentation, as is a tiny Lindy Frostee Spoon. I tip these with a waxworm or two to three red spikes most of the time, although if you find the fish to be super-aggressive, you could substitute a 1- to 2-inch soft plastic. Experiment until you find the combination the fish will hit.

It is usually best to move the jig to attract fish, and then stop moving the bait when a fish approaches. If this causes the fish to move in and take the bait, keep doing the same thing. If the fish turns and swims away when you stop moving your bait, then keep moving it and see if that makes the fish bite.

Watch your flasher and move your jig to just above where you see a fish. If the fish is reluctant to bite, try moving the jig up a bit. If the fish follows it up but doesn't bite, move it up some more. As long as the fish follows your bait, you can keep moving it up until the fish bites... or disappears.

In addition to the rods that my partner(s) and I are holding and jigging with, I always put down a second line for each angler—we can use two lines per person ice fishing in Minnesota—with a crappie minnow hooked on a small, vertical jig under a slip-float. I use an ultralight or light-action rod for this, again paired with an inline reel and spooled with either 2- or 4-pound test fluorocarbon.

I start out with this set three feet above bottom. As crappies start showing up, I try to observe what depth seems to have the most frequent appearances of fish, and move the minnow under a float to that depth. The action that a struggling crappie minnow imparts often attracts fish to your area, even if finicky fish won't bite it. If there are crappies around, and they are somewhat active, you will catch some on this second line.

You will pop an occasional walleye or northern on this rig as well. We have had periods at night where a large school of active crappies swims through and we have bobbers going down the hole while we are bringing up fish on our jigging rods. This is one of the most fun fishing experiences of the season.

I would be remiss if I didn't address jig and plastic color. For fishing in the dark, I like bright colors like chartreuse and orange, but my favorite to start with is glow white, I have a charging tazer light on my lanyard and recharge the glow on my jig every time I bring it up with a fish or to check the bait. This can really help improve a night bite. As far as soft plastics color, I like to match my live bait and use white or red most of the time. A 1-inch Berkley Gulp Fish Fry is my favorite soft plastic to jig with through the ice,

For cold, February evenings, I like to set up my Clam hub shelter or Fish Trap and get a propane heater or two going to keep things comfortable. A headlight for each angler is a good idea, especially for unhooking fish, baiting up, or retying jigs with super-thin and transparent fluorocarbon line. I add on a hub shelter light to the top hub of my Clam and a light bar on the center bar of my Fish Trap. These LED lights give off amazing light, connect to any regular or lithium-ion electronics battery, and draw a ridiculously low amount from those batteries. Check out Clam Outdoors website for these essential accessories for night fishing.



A good flasher, Like the Humminbird ICE 55, is essential for seeing when and what depth night roaming crappies swim through.

Equipment is rounded off by my StrikeMaster Lithium Ion 40V auger. I can drill an amazing number of holes with this auger on a single battery charge, and can drill them quietly. I can also set up the shelter in cold conditions and go inside to drill the holes without filling the hub up with gas and oil fumes.

Get out on the ice during the cold temps of February. Use your vehicle if there is enough ice, or your ATV to get your shelter out to GPS coordinates you have fished previously, or use the GPS map to find deep basin areas adjacent to a shallower reef or point. Set up a comfortable chair, fire up the propane heater, and watch your electronics for when and where the crappies swim through. Most of all, enjoy the peace of a cold, quiet night out on the middle of your favorite lake. Give it a try this February; you won't regret it. ***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 You Tube.







Notes from the Dockside

Mike Yurk

The Bass Queen's Chili

It was cold; really cold. Temperatures hovered the high 20s with a strong, frigid wind blasting down the Mississippi River. Lines froze in the guides of our spinning rods, and on the way back to the landing, spray froze to the front of the boat.

Despite the temperatures and wind, we had several sauger in the livewell. The forecast for the next several days didn't look good. The weather was supposed to get worse, so this was probably the last fishing trip of the late-fall season.

We got the boat back on the trailer and noticed ice on the landing. Pulling out of the parking area of the landing, I had the heater on high in The Boat Hauler. Half an hour later, we were just beginning to thaw out.

I called The Bass Queen to tell her that we were on the way home. After questioning our sanity, sitting in a boat in such cold weather, she told me she had a pot of chili on the stove for dinner. I instantly felt myself getting warmer. On a cold day, nothing beats a bowl of chili. It is meaty and spicy and hot, both in temperature and taste. It just takes the cold away.

When I was in the Army, I commanded a basic training company, and we had a battalion sergeant major whose military specialty was a cook who had spent several years in Texas. Every quarter or so, he organized a battalion chili cookoff competition for all the non-commissioned officers of the battalion. Officers were invited as guests to sample the chilis. There was lots of beer and lots of chili. A winning combination.

The sergeant major reveled to me that real chili can only have meat, spices and tomatoes. Being a cook and living in Texas, I figured that he knew chili. Beans, rice or pasta are major taboos in chili, according to him. If he says chili can only have meat, spices and tomatoes that is good enough for me.

I did a little research on chili. There are several different stories about the origin of chili, but they all seemed to suggest that chili originated somewhere in or around Texas, sometime in the late 1700s to early 1800s. Although some beef probably made it into the chili pot then, it seemed that venison was the meat most often found in chili in those days.

The Bass Queen makes great chili, and I think my old sergeant major would be most impressed. She would never use beans or rice or pasta in her chili, either. The Bass Queen's chili makes for a fairly robust pot of chili, and if you want a smaller batch, just proportionally reduce the recipe.

She begins her chili with four pounds of ground meat. Hamburger is the traditional choice. However, The Bass Queen does not eat beef, so she substitutes ground turkey, and lately has been using ground bison. Ground venison is also a good choice and can be mixed with other ground meats.

White pepper and garlic powder.

Three onions cut into quarters. (Although my sergeant major never mentioned onions, I think he would tolerate them.)

Two 28-ounce cans of whole, peeled tomatoes.

Six tablespoons chili powder.

Four teaspoons salt.

Four teaspoons sugar.

Four tablespoons Worcestershire sauce.

One and a half packets of taco seasoning. (If you are feeling especially bold, throw in both packets of taco seasoning.)

Brown the meat and add onions, breaking up the onions while frying. Add three or four shakes of ground white pepper and garlic powder. Drain off any grease if there is any, and dump the ground meat and onions in a big pot.

Next, dump in the tomatoes. Drain the juice into the pot, and while adding the tomatoes, cut them into quarters. Add all the other ingredients.

Place the pot on the stove on low heat for at least a couple hours. The longer it cooks, the better it will be. Anytime during the cooking process, if it looks like the chili maybe a bit too thick, use six to eight ounces of Bloody Mary mix to thin it out. Bloody Mary mix is a perfect addition to chili since it is a spicy, tomato-based liquid. By the way, if you haven't already, this is a good time to mix yourself a Bloody Mary.

Chili can be served just the way it is. Many people have crackers to go with it. If you want to be fancy, add chopped onions, shredded cheddar cheese and sour cream on top of chili.

Obviously, if you follow this recipe, you will have lots of leftover chili unless you are making it for a large group. The Bass Queen packages leftover chili in plastic freezer bags and freezes it. That way, whenever it is cold out and you want a good, warmer-up dinner after sitting in a deer stand, standing on the ice, or sitting in a boat during cold weather, just pull out a bag or two of chili and heat it up. You can never go wrong with that.

Bon appétit! ***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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2:30 pm **Steve Herbeck**..... Giants from the Bay to the Shield
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Stocking a Tackle Box for Beginner Bass Anglers



by Glenn Walker

Some fishermen start off their fishing journey fishing for bass. Others started fishing for panfish when they were kids. While some may have been a walleye angler, or pursued muskies, they now want to switch over and chase largemouths and smallmouths. Whatever the scenario, properly stocking a tackle box with the right lures for new bass fishermen is important. You want to make sure that your family member or friend who is getting into the sport of bass fishing has the right lures to help them catch bass.

I have gone through and identified seven bass fishing lures that should be in a beginner bass fisherman's tackle box, as they will work across the country, on any lake or river with bass, from shore or in a boat.



A wacky-rigged Yamamoto Senko. *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

Soft plastic stickbait

Lure: *Senko (4- and 5-inch)*

Details: The soft plastic stickbait, AKA Senko, is an extremely effective piece of soft plastic to put in front of bass and just have it sit there. You can rig a Senko in several ways: Wacky, Neko, or Texas style. The last, the Texas-rig, works well when fishing around vegetation, or when you want to keep your bait from getting hung up on the cover you are fishing. The other two rigging methods, wacky or Neko, are very similar.

I rig a number 2 Lazer TroKar Pro V Finesse hook through the center of the bait. This allows the Senko to sink to the bottom, with each end of the bait pulsating ever so slightly with the twitch of your rod tip.

The difference with a Neko rig is that I'll insert a small, tungsten nail weight into one end of the bait, so this effective bait can get down to the depths where offshore bass live. These baits can be fished around any form of cover, and the slower you fish 'em, the more bites you'll get!

Jig

Lure: *Arkie Style Jig (3/8- and 1/2-ounce)*

Details: No other lure that a bass eats



A ball-headed Buckeye Lures G-Man Ballin' Out Jig.

is more versatile than a jig. Anytime of the year, on any lake or river, around any form of fish-holding cover, a rubber-skirted jig can be fished in a variety of ways to catch bass. You can flip or pitch a jig around stumps, laydowns, boat docks or around vegetation, as a jig allows you to put the bait tight to the cover where bass are positioned.

Carry an assortment of 3/8- and 1/2-ounce jigs that you can fish from shallow to deeper water. Different jig weights also allow you to show the bass a jig falling at different rates, which may be the difference in getting a bite or not. You can also cast a jig and drag it around offshore structure such as rock piles, brush piles, or offshore flats where bass are roaming.



A Tungsten ChatterBait Elite EVO with a Yamamoto Slim Zako trailer. *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

Vibrating Jig

Lure: *3/8-ounce JackHammer or Tungsten ChatterBait Elite EVO with a Yamamoto Slim Zako trailer*

Details: Since the early 2000s, the ChatterBait has become a staple for bass fisherman across the country, as it can be fished all season long. You can fish a vibrating jig in shallow water around all forms of cover, including vegetation, wood, rock and boat docks. It's action and strong vibration gets the bass's attention, and it can be brought through fish-holding cover and not instantly get hung up. The options for a soft plastic trailer are almost endless, but the important thing to remember is that you do not want action from your plastic trailer to overpower or counteract the already powerful action of the blade on a vibrating jig.



An all-around good spinnerbait choice.

Spinnerbait

Lure: 3/8-ounce Tandem Willowleaf

Details: Long ago, spinnerbaits were staple items for any bass fisherman, and they still work today! The ability to cast out and reel in a spinnerbait makes it a great choice for beginning anglers. What makes spinnerbaits so effective is the ability to alter your retrieve based on the depth of water you are fishing and the activity level of the bass.

In spring, you can very slow (called slow rolling) using a single-Colorado-blade spinnerbait that puts out a lot of vibration and get a bass' attention, even when the water is cold. When the water gets warmer and the bass feed on baitfish during summer or fall, it is more common to use a spinnerbait that has a double willowleaf blade setup, or a tandem willowleaf/Colorado blade arrangement, as these spinnerbait blade configurations emit more flash.



The deadly Heddon Super Spook for walk-the-dog retrieves.

Topwaters

Lure: *Heddon Super Spook and Rebel Pop-R*

Details: As the year progresses and water temperatures creep close to and then rise above 60 degrees, bass are actively feeding, and I'll always have a topwater rigged up and ready to go. Topwater baits work well around and adjacent to shallow water cover like emergent vegetation and laydowns, along with working the lure over offshore structure like weed lines and underwater points.

The soft, side-to-side cadence of the Spook is attractive to a bass, both when they are chasing bait and want something splashing over their heads, while also still being able to get their attention when they are not wanting to chase a fishing lure very far.

The Rebel Pop-R is a great topwater plug choice when you need to make pinpoint casts to a target. After popping the bait, let it sit motionless next to fish-holding cover.

Texas rig

Lure: Yamamoto Flappin' Hog or Big Bite Baits Craw Tube

Details: From flipping or pitching shallow-water cover, to casting and dragging a bait along an offshore weed line, a Texas-rigged soft plastic bait is versatile and effective for catching bass in and adjacent vegetation and brush.

Fishing a Texas rig allows you to slow down and catch sluggish bass and is a staple technique any time of the year. You'll want to stock a tackle box with an assortment of tungsten weights, ranging in size from 1/8- all the way up to 1 ounce, but if I had to pick a few key sizes, I would suggest 1/4-, 3/8- and 1/2-ounce. It is important to always use the smallest size possible, as this will give your soft plastic bait the most natural action in the water.

The same goes for hooks; you want an assortment of hook styles, including some



A Texas-rigged Yamamoto Baits Flappin' Hog. *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

extra-wide-gaps, traditional worm hooks, and flippin' hooks. Hook size depends on the size of the soft plastic you are using, so having 3/0, 4/0 and 5/0 hooks is important.

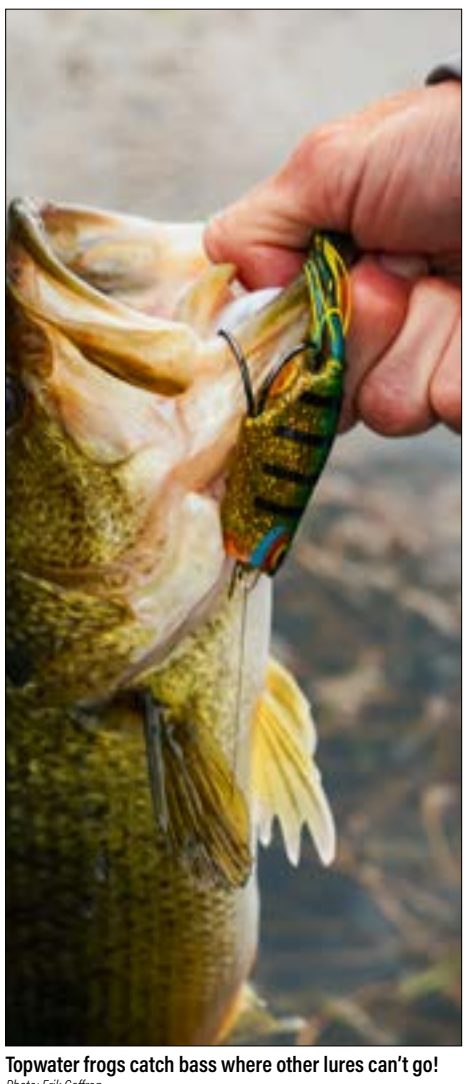
Topwater Frog

Lure: *Northland Fishing Tackle Reed-Runner Frog*

Details: Anytime there is vegetation in the water, chances are that at some point during the fishing season, it may become dense enough that you won't be able to get a fishing lure through it. This is when a topwater frog is a great lure choice as you can work the bait on the surface that now has a canopy of vegetation that the bass will hide under. Some areas that I'll use this technique are over and around lily pads or matted hydrilla, eel grass, or milfoil.

Now is a great time to look at getting someone who is interested in bass fishing there first assortment of bass fishing tackle. It will get them ready for their first fishing trip, and it will give you an excuse to look at and buy some fishing tackle. ***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.



Topwater frogs catch bass where other lures can't go! *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

Does Color Really Matter?

by Blake Tollefson



Non-natural colors, like Wonderbread, are more unconventional options that work well.



Natural options are perfect for emulating things that fish actually feed on.

With every passing season, new rods, reels, electronics, and accessories hit the market. A quick visit to local fishing shops—large or small—can prove to be an overwhelming process for even the most experienced anglers. With so many options to choose from, how do you decide?

When it comes to tackle selection, the process can be even more onerous. The choices are essentially endless—not to mention, new options hit the market every year. Every angler has their favorite bait—you know, the one that's always tied on; the one that gives them the most confidence. For some anglers, that confidence lies in the bait's profile, and for others, it's related to the action. Color combination also gets a lot of emphasis from some anglers, while other fishermen are less concerned.

Despite what certain anglers might think, color does matter—at least a little. Not in the sense that fish won't eat something, or will eat something simply because of its color, but more in terms of how effectively the lure can be noticed in specific circumstances. Factors like water clarity, weather conditions, and time of day all impact how effective a certain color may be. Options like glow, UV, realistic, or bright and gaudy excel in some scenarios and are less effective in others. Here are some rules of thumb to help you choose the right bait for the right situation.

Natural options

For as long as anglers have been fishing, they've been creating lures that closely resemble the actual things that fish are feeding on. There's no better example of this than fly fishermen. As an angling group, they spend the most time emulating the food that fish are eating.

Ice fishermen aren't all that different. Over the last decade or so, a variety of manufacturers have designed lures to imitate invertebrates, insects, and minnows that fish species target during the winter months. Such lures are often developed to mimic the size, shape, and color of said food sources.

Realistic-patterned lures are excellent choices for a number of situations, which is the main reason you hear the term "match the hatch" so frequently in fishing conversations. That being said, they often perform best in situations where fish can see what they're feeding on. For example, in clear-water environments or daytime angling. Many fish species feed based on sight, so giving them something that replicates their natural food source is a smart decision.

Non-natural options

While many non-natural colors share some similarity to natural prey (i.e. orange, chartreuse, etc.), a number of unconventional color patterns really don't look like anything. Take Wonderbread, for example. It's a staple in the ice tackle industry, but it certainly doesn't emulate anything natural. These bright, gaudy, and rather unconventional combinations may look rather ridiculous at times, but they can certainly catch their fair share of fish.

These choices are often touted for their ability to catch more fishermen than fish.







UV and glow colors perform well in specific situations, like dawn and dusk.

There's a little bit of truth to that, but in all fairness, these options have situations in which they excel.

Non-natural options can perform well in similar instances to realistic lures; however, their abilities stand out in stained or murky water scenarios really shine. Bright, unique colors add attraction and can aid in calling fish in from a distance.

Glow options

Glow-based lures have long been staples for anglers across the Ice Belt. Like the name suggests, these lures have the capability of glowing. A simple charge from a light source like a flashlight, or actual glow charger, allows them to glow for a set period of time. Depending on the lure, finish and light intensity, these lures can glow from anywhere from a few minutes to 30 minutes or more.

Technically speaking, glow lures fall into the category of non-natural lures. However, some key differences place them in a category of their own. While they often come in the same overall color schemes as other non-realistic lures, their ability to glow makes them better choices for specific situations.

Lowlight conditions like dusk, dawn, and throughout the night, are where glow options truly shine. When there's little to no light below the surface, glow-based lures contrast well against a dark backdrop—making it easy for aquatic predators to find.

UV options

UV-based lure options are a newer addition to the ice fishing market. While they're often confused with glow lures, as the two terms are used interchangeably, they function in different ways. As mentioned above, glow lures require an external light source in order to emit light, whereas UV-based options actually reflect ultraviolet light—the key word being *ultraviolet.*

Similar to glow lures, most UV options share a similar color palette to those in the non-natural category. The differences lie in the science behind the overall finish on the lure. With the ability to reflect light, UV coatings can help lures stand out, especially in specific circumstances. Such options are hardly beneficial in situations involving adequate light (i.e, high sun) but can be a difference maker when light is less available. Take cloudy days and other lowlight conditions, for example.

A piece of advice: Rely on the correct lighting source. A number of manufacturers have developed UV flashlights and chargers which can enhance the capabilities of such lures.



Lure color matters, just as confidence matters, to an extent.

Whether you believe it or not, lure color matters—at least to an extent. While a particular color likely won't lead to magical results, certain conditions and circumstances call for specific color schemes. Understanding which scenarios call for which options, coupled with some level of confidence, can lead to more promising results on the ice. ***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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South Dakota Game and Fish Updates



Habitat Conservation License Plate

The Habitat Conservation Plate is available for all South Dakota Residents and serves as a valid license plate on standard vehicles. Thes plates are available at all county courthouses and serve as another option when selecting license plates for your vehicles.

• The Habitat Conservation Plate is entirely voluntary and functions similar to an Organizational Plate.

• Habitat Conservation Plates will be free if current plates have expired; $10 if they have not.

• Purchasing the habitat decal is voluntary; plates are legal without the decals.

• A set of decals costs $50. There is no limit on the number of sets purchased.

• You can purchase habitat decals at Go Outdoors South Dakota or your local GFP office.

• There are four decal options: deer, pheasant, meadowlark, and pasque flower.

• No verification of residency, nor Habitat Conservation Plate, are required to purchase a decal set.

• All proceeds from sale of habitat emblems will support conservation in South Dakota.

• Unapproved decals cannot be placed on the plate, nor can the habitat decals be placed on traditional Organizational Plates.



Giving thanks

There is much to be thankful for this season and now is a great time to reflect on what's already been a great hunting season.

Submit a thank you note to those landowners whose participation in a public hunting access program positively impacted your hunting experience through the Public Hunting Land Comment Recorder.

Hunting South Dakota wouldn't be the same without the thousands of private landowners who participate in one of our public access programs (Walk-in Areas, CHAPs, CREPs, and COOPs). Let them know how grateful we all are! South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) staff will collect these thank you messages and share them with the landowners who have partnered with GFP to open their land to public hunting access.

The Public Hunting Land Comment Recorder can also be used to submit other comments regarding private lands leased for hunting access, state-owned or managed game production areas, parks and recreation areas, and landlocked pieces of public lands. We encourage your input about these hunting opportunities so we can continually improve them for sportsmen and women.

To provide the most beneficial information, use the interactive map to zoom in/out and pan to the specific property you would like to comment on. Each comment will be reviewed by GFP staff. No other individuals will be able to view these comments. Be sure to enter either an email address or phone number, or both in case we need to get back to you or need further information.

Submit a thank-you: http://sdgfp.maps.arcgis.com/.../Crowdsourc.../index.html...

MWO





Dakota Corner

North Dakota Game & Fish Updates



Fish house regulations

Any fish house left unoccupied on North Dakota waters must be made of materials that allow it to float. In addition, fish houses do not require a license.

Other fish house regulations include:

• Occupied structures do not require identification. However, any unoccupied fish house must have an equipment registration number issued by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, or the owner's name, and either an address or telephone number, displayed on its outside in readily distinguishable characters at least 3 inches high.

• Fish houses may not be placed closer than 50 feet in any direction to another house without consent of the occupant of the other fish house.

• Beginning March 15, unoccupied fish houses must be off the ice by midnight each day.

2026-28 watercraft registrations

North Dakota watercraft owners should note that 2026 is the first year of a new three-year registration period.

The price to register motorboats under 16 feet in length in North Dakota, and all canoes, is $30; motorboats from 16 feet to less than 20 feet in length is $45; and motorboats at least 20 feet in length is $60. Fees are prorated.

In addition, a $15 aquatic nuisance species fee will be required with each watercraft registration.

New watercraft owners can attach the required documentation, such as the bill of sale or proof of taxes paid, with the online purchase, or send in the required documentation via standard mail. A 10-day temporary permit will be issued to allow for processing and delivery of registration and decals. For timely processing, Game and Fish encourages watercraft owners to submit attachments online. For more information, go to gf.nd.gov/watercraft/registration.

HuntLink

HuntLink is a new, voluntary program designed to help North Dakota landowners easily connect with hunters and trappers. The program offers a simple way to allow managed access for antlerless deer, coyotes, turkeys, and other species. For landowners experiencing wildlife depredation or looking for additional management tools, HuntLink can help.

Landowners can enroll through their North Dakota Game and Fish My Account page and may remove their listing at any time once they've connected with enough participants.

Hunters can view landowner requests across the state through the *HuntLink Map,* but must contact landowners directly to obtain permission before hunting or trapping. ***MWO***

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Shallow-Water Ice Fishing

by Don Gasaway

Although northern climes offer abundant ice fishing locations on various rivers and lakes, there is something special about fishing backwater shallows and farm ponds. The main species of these waters are bluegills and yellow perch.

Finding fish through ice can be difficult, but there are ways to do it. The most obvious is to know the body of water and what depth the fish prefer. Discussions with anglers or at a local bait shop often lead to that information. It also helps to know the habits of the fish. Bluegills and yellow perch are often in the top foot or two, or the bottom foot or two, of the water columns. Usually, it is the latter.

A portable fish locator or other electronics indicate if fish are present, and at what depth. This is important, since fish tend to stay in their comfort level. Fish typically look for food at eye level or a little above, so knowing where they are will help you in placement of your lure or bait. As both species tend to school up in winter, do not just look for a fish or two. Find where there is a crowd of fish present.

It is a good idea to drill several holes and try them all. The actual drilling process is very simple, although blades on the auger should be sharp. Evaluate the type of area and bottom structure. Water mixed with sand before it freezes, or a very shallow area where the drill may break through and hit a sand bottom, can dull blades quickly. If one hole is not producing, move to the next one. Fish move, but generally not far.

In the location is not familiar to you and you do not have electronics to aid you, try drilling multiple pilot homes. First try to locate an area with cover. An area with good routes to deep water or from it is good. During colder weather and low-light conditions, begin deeper and fish tighter to cover. With high light and warmer conditions, fish shallower and, if possible, find weeds. Drop-offs, weed beds and any other submerged structure will attract fish.



Late winter is a great time to get out on small ponds with a cooler for a seat and an ice fishing rod and reel. As the water warms in the sunlight, fish become more active and the milder weather is more comfortable for fishing.
Photo: Don Gasaway

Drill a pilot hole and lower some kind of line to measure the depth. A weight placed on a fishing line works well. Once the bottom is determined, adjust the bait so that it is 4 to 12 inches off the bottom, at least to start.

Drill four holes on an angle to, or parallel to, the slope of the bottom. Each hole will have a different depth. If a certain hole starts to outproduce the others, move to that depth and drill more holes. Then each hole will probably produce about the same.

Today's angler should be mobile, and that is especially true in pond fishing. Many use snowmobiles and pull a portable fish house or shelter with a supply of tackle. You need an auger (power or manual) to drill holes. And a skimmer to clean out the shaved ice that falls into the hole. A small portable heater or lantern aids in keeping warm.

As for poles, there are numerous good, short ice fishing rigs on the market. They are usually about 2 to 2 1/2 feet in length and many have small spinning reels attached. Others will have ice fishing reels holding about 25 yards of 4- to 6-pound line. Many ice anglers use tip-ups in addition to jigging rigs. Tip-ups hold your bait or lure at a certain depth. The reel turns from the tug of a fish and releases a signal flag. When the flag flies, it is time to grasp the line with your hands and take in the fish.

Hooks are usually number 8 or 10 size for panfish. Small tear-drop jigs in a variety of colors are also good. Bait for bluegills and perch is usually grubs, wigglers, and waxworms. Small minnows hooked through the back can swim freely. A small bobber will keep the minnow or other bait at a precise depth.

Twitch the bait and then let it set motionless. The movement attracts the attention of the fish, which will strike when it is still.

Do not overdo the action. If fish are reluctant to hang on to the bait, try using a fish attractant. Attractants are at their best in cold water.

Finally, the best time to go ice fishing is anytime you can. But, when the ice thickens and the action slows during midwinter, try to key on warming trends, abrupt weather changes, and low-light periods. Night is a good time for effective ice fishing. **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.



Minnesota DNR Updates

A candlelight walk, snowshoe or ski

Each winter, candlelight events inspire people to get outdoors and explore Minnesota state parks and trails at night. Depending on the event location and snow cover, visitors can hike, snowshoe or cross-country ski along a luminary-lit trail.

"Candlelight events are visitor favorites every year and celebrate the beauty of Minnesota in winter," said Ann Pierce, Parks and Trails Division director with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Candlelight trail events are suitable for all ages. In some locations, visitors can rent snowshoes and cross-country skis at the ranger station or visitor center. Call the state park in advance to confirm the availability of equipment.

This winter, the DNR has 20 candlelight events planned at 17 locations between Jan. 1 and Feb. 28:

- Afton State Park: Feb. 7
- Glacial Lakes State Park: Feb. 14
- Gooseberry Falls State Park: Feb. 14
- Itasca State Park: Feb. 14
- Lake Bemidji State Park: Feb. 14
- Wild River State Park: Feb. 14
- Big Bog State Recreation Area: Feb. 21
- Lake Carlos State Park: Feb. 28

For full event details, visit the DNR's candlelight hike webpage (mndnr.gov/candlelight).

Get a vehicle permit online

While candlelight events are free, visitors need a vehicle permit to enter Minnesota state parks and recreation areas. The DNR recommends buying permits in advance on the DNR state parks vehicle permit webpage (mndnr.gov/permit). The cost is $7 per day or $35 for a year-round permit.

Certain candlelight events allow cross-country skiing, and skiers ages 16 and older will need a Great Minnesota Ski Pass. Ski passes can be purchased on the DNR's ski pass webpage (mndnr.gov/skipass) or in person at the state park.

In the case of severe weather, check visitor alerts on the individual state park or trail webpages or call the park office for event updates.

Off-highway vehicle master plans

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has finalized strategic master plans



Photo: ExploreMinnesota.com

for each of the three primary categories of off-highway vehicle recreation: all-terrain vehicles, off-road vehicles and off-highway motorcycles.

The plans communicate the background and trends of OHV recreation, share information about statewide OHV trail management and strategic planning, and provide guidance regarding future trail maintenance and development practices. The plans also highlight conditions that are suitable for future trail development. Additionally, safety and responsible riding are core considerations throughout the plans, including guidance on education, design, signage and enforcement. The DNR also developed an overview document that ties the three individual plans together.

Each plan incorporates input from a wide range of groups, individuals and other levels of government received during plan development and after the draft plans were shared for review. Feedback during a 60-day comment period helped the DNR refine the plans to reflect statewide priorities, local perspectives, and the interests and concerns of people who engage in both motorized and non-motorized uses of public lands. The plans and overview document are available on the OHV strategic master plans webpage on the DNR website (mndnr.gov/input/mgmtplans/ohv/plans/ohv-strategic-master-plans.html). For questions or to request a printed copy, contact Molly Lou Pintok at mollylou.pintok@state.mn.us or 651-259-5095. ***MWO***

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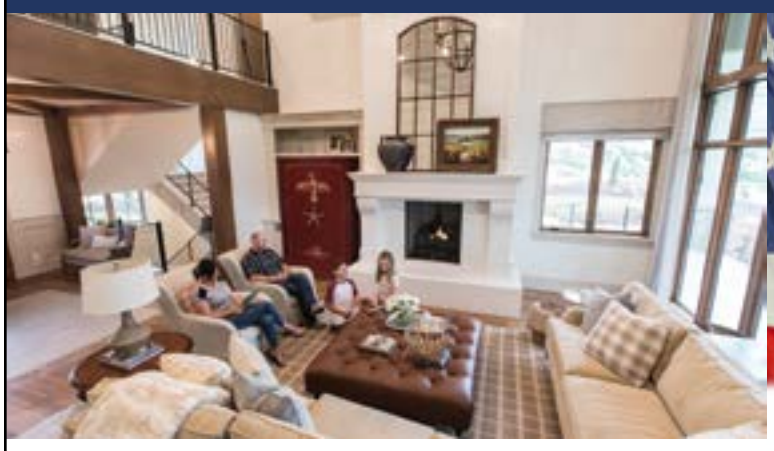
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NEW LOCATION!

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

>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 @ 7:0 0pm. 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.

>Muskies Inc., North Metro Chapter, meets the third Tuesday of every month at Jack's Restaurant, 201 Lowry Ave. NE, Minneapolis.

>Muskies 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.

>Muskies 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.

TOURNAMENTS

BASS TOURNAMENTS

Champions Tour
classicbass.com
$1000 entry
May 12: Lake Mille Lacs
Jun 9: Big Stone Lake
Jun 23: Gull Lake
Jul 21: Lake Pokegama
Championship
Aug 18: Location TBA

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
Aug 27-29: Rainy Lake, MN

WALLEYE TOURNAMENTS

2026 Cabela's Masters Walleye Circuit (MWC)
Contact: 1-877-893-7947
masterswalleyecircuit.com
Team Format--$650 (plus memberships)
Mar 20-21: Illinois River, Spring Valley, IL
May 8-9: Mississippi River, Red Wng, MN
Jun 5-6: Lake Winnebago, Oshkosh, WI
Jul 23-24: St. Mary's River, Sault Ste Marie, MI
Aug 21-22: Bitter Lake, Webster, SD
Sep 18-19: Cass Lake, MN
2026 Championship (for 2025 Qualifiers)
Oct 1-3: Devils Lake, ND

Cabela's National Walleye Tour (NWT)
Contact: 1-612-424-0708
nationalwalleyetour.com
Pro Angler--$1750 (plus membership)
Co-Angler--$500 (plus membership)
Apr 9-10: Lake Erie, Monroe, MI
May 20-21: Lake Oahe, Mobridge, SD
Jun 18-19: Bay de Noc, Gladstone, MI
Jul 30-31: Bay of Green Bay, Oconto, WI
Championship
Aug 27-29: Lake Sakakawea, Garrison, ND

Minnesota Tournament Trail
Contact: james Stevenson @ 320-761-4723
mntournamenttrail.com
$220 per team (1-day events) $260/2-day events
**Denotes two-day event
May 2-3**: Big Stone Lake
May 16/17: Lake Mille Lacs
May 30/31: St. Louis River/Lake Superior
Jun 27/27: Lake Winnibigoshish
Jul 11/12: Leech Lake
Aug 8-9: Lake of the Woods

Lake Pepin Open Walleye Classic
Contact: walleyesearchers.org
$200 per team
Lake Pepin/Pool 4

FM Walleyes Spring Classic
fmwalleyes.com
$300 per team
Pelican Lake

Leech Lake Walleye Tournament
Contact: Jim Tuller 218-675-6176
leechlakewalleyetournament.com
$450 per team
May 29-30: Leech Lake

Hunter's Point Walleye Shootout
Contact: 320-676-3227
hunterspointresort.com
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
Jun 26: 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
Mille Lacs Lake

FM Walleyes Fall Classic
fmwalleyes.com
$280 per team
Sep 19-20: Big Cormorant Lake

MUSKIES

Frank Schneider, Jr. Memorial Tournament
Twin Cities Chapter of Muskies, Inc.
twincitiesmuskiesinc.org
$100 per person
21 Walker/Bemidji/Cass Lake/Longville/Big Winni Area Lakes

George Wahl Memorial Tournament
Twin Cities Chapter of Muskies, Inc.
twincitiesmuskiesinc.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
mnkayakfishingassociation.org

ICE FISHING

2026 33rd Annual Ice Fishing Extravaganza
Contact: icefishing.org 1-800-950-9461

2026 72nd United Northern Sportsmen's Club Tournament
Contact: 218-721-4843
Island Lake

2026 28th Annual Am. Legion Ice Fishing Derby
Contact: 218-732-3360
Fish Hook Lake

2026 22nd Annual Ducks Unlimited Ice Fishing Tournament
Contact: Greg Erickson 218-678-2116 or fishingforducks.org
Feb 21: Mille Lacs Lake

2026 SPORTS SHOWS

Feb 6-8: St. Cloud Sportsmen's Boat, Camping, & Vacation Show. St. Cloud River's Edge, St. Cloud, MN. For more info: cenaiko.com.

Feb 19-22: Duluth Sports Show, Duluth Entertainment & Convention Center, Duluth, MN, For more information: shamrockprod.com, duluthsportshow.com.

Feb 27 – Mar 1: George's Minnesota Muskie Expo, Canterbury Park, Shakopee, MN. For more information: mnmuskieexpo@gmail.com, mn-muskieexpo.com.

Mar 5-8: Red River Sportsmen's Boat, Camping, & Vacation Show. FargoDome, Fargo, ND. For more info: cenaiko.com

Mar 5-8: Northwest Sportshow. Mpls. Convention Center. For more info: northwestsportshow.com.

Mar 12-15: Sioux Falls Sportsmen's Boat, Camping, & Vacation Show. Sioux Falls Arena & Convention Center, Sioux Falls, SD. For more info: cenaiko.com.

Mar 13-15: Great Waters Fly Fishing Expo, Hamline University, St. Paul, MN. For info: info@greatwatersflyexpo.com, facebook.com/gwflyfishingexpo, greatwatersflyexpo.com.

DNR DATES

DNR Information Line: Toll-free 1-888-MINNDNR dnr.state.mn.us

May 10, 2025 – Feb 22, 2026: Walleye/Sauger/Northern Pike Season

May 10, 2025 – Feb 22, 2026: Largemouth & Smallmouth Bass Season (NE Zone only)

May 24, 2025 – Feb 22, 2026: Largemouth Bass Season

May 24, 2025 – Feb 22, 2026: Smallmouth Bass Catch-and-Release Season

Sep 13, 2025 – Feb 28, 2026: Rabbit & Squirrel Season

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

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Forest Lake

by Dean Capra

Dean Capra is a past MidWest Outdoors TV guest and host. He is a professional bass tournament angler with multiple angler-of-the-year titles and tournament wins over the last 35 years.

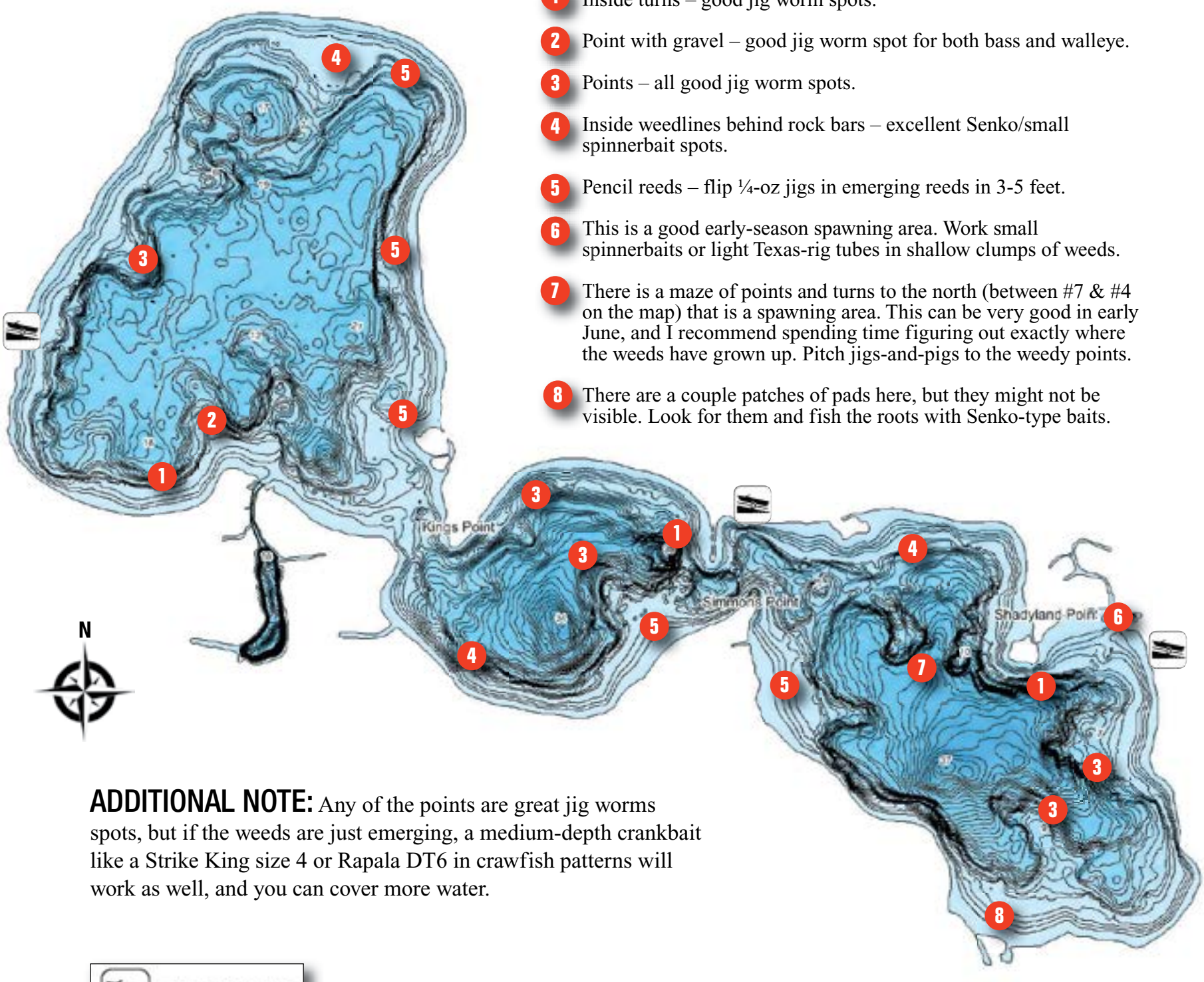


LOCATION: Washington County, Minnesota

SIZE/DEPTH: 2,251 surface acres. Maximum depth: 37 feet. By virtue of its physical makeup, anglers think of it as three separate lakes.

DOMINANT SPECIES: largemouth bass, walleyes, northern pike, muskies, bluegills, crappies

To prep you for the early portion of Minnesota bass season, Capra is focusing on late May through June on this gem of a lake just north of the Metro area. It's a good-sized lake that kicks out good-sized bass, along with bonus species like northern pike.



1. Inside turns – good jig worm spots.
2. Point with gravel – good jig worm spot for both bass and walleye.
3. Points – all good jig worm spots.
4. Inside weedlines behind rock bars – excellent Senko/small spinnerbait spots.
5. Pencil reeds – flip ¼-oz jigs in emerging reeds in 3-5 feet.
6. This is a good early-season spawning area. Work small spinnerbaits or light Texas-rig tubes in shallow clumps of weeds.
7. There is a maze of points and turns to the north (between #7 & #4 on the map) that is a spawning area. This can be very good in early June, and I recommend spending time figuring out exactly where the weeds have grown up. Pitch jigs-and-pigs to the weedy points.
8. There are a couple patches of pads here, but they might not be visible. Look for them and fish the roots with Senko-type baits.

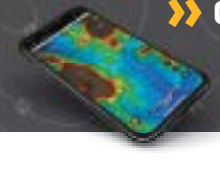
ADDITIONAL NOTE: Any of the points are great jig worms spots, but if the weeds are just emerging, a medium-depth crankbait like a Strike King size 4 or Rapala DT6 in crawfish patterns will work as well, and you can cover more water.

= Boat Launch

» GET THE MAP ON YOUR HUMMINBIRD® FISH FINDER



» GET THE MAP ON YOUR PHONE WITH A ONE-BOAT NETWORK® APP SUBSCRIPTION



MIDWEST OUTDOORS WISCONSIN

February 2026

Section Two



Avoid Bad Habits to Catch Big Trout

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Does Color Really Matter?

by Blake Tollefson

With every passing season, new rods, reels, electronics, and accessories hit the market. A quick visit to local fishing shops—large or small—can prove to be an overwhelming process for even the most experienced anglers. With so many options to choose from, how do you decide?

When it comes to tackle selection, the process can be even more onerous. The choices are essentially endless—not to mention, new options hit the market every year. Every angler has their favorite bait—you know, the one that's always tied on; the one that gives them the most confidence. For some anglers, that confidence lies in the bait's profile, and for others, it's related to the action. Color combination also gets a lot of emphasis from some anglers, while other fishermen are less concerned.

Despite what certain anglers might think, color does matter—at least a little. Not in the sense that fish won't eat something, or will eat something simply because of its color, but more in terms of how effectively the lure can be noticed in specific circumstances. Factors like water clarity, weather conditions, and time of day all impact how effective a certain color may be. Options like glow, UV, realistic, or bright and gaudy excel in some scenarios and are less effective in others. Here are some rules of thumb to help you choose the right bait for the right situation.



Non-natural colors, like Wonderbread, are more unconventional options that work well.



Natural options are perfect for emulating things that fish actually feed on.

Natural options

For as long as anglers have been fishing, they've been creating lures that closely resemble the actual things that fish are feeding on. There's no better example of this than fly fishermen. As an angling group, they spend the most time emulating the food that fish are eating.

Ice fishermen aren't all that different. Over the last decade or so, a variety of manufacturers have designed lures to imitate invertebrates, insects, and minnows that fish species target during the winter months. Such lures are often developed to mimic the size, shape, and color of said food sources.

Realistic-patterned lures are excellent choices for a number of situations, which is the main reason you hear the term "match the hatch" so frequently in fishing conversations. That being said, they often perform best in situations where fish can see what they're feeding on. For example, in clear-water environments or daytime angling. Many fish species feed based on sight, so giving them something that replicates their natural food source is a smart decision.

Non-natural options

While many non-natural colors share some similarity to natural prey (i.e. orange, chartreuse, etc.), a number of unconventional color patterns really don't look like anything. Take Wonderbread, for example. It's a staple in the ice tackle industry, but it certainly doesn't emulate anything natural. These bright, gaudy, and rather unconventional combinations may look rather ridiculous at times, but they can certainly catch their fair share of fish.

These choices are often touted for their ability to catch more fishermen than fish. There's a little bit of truth to that, but in all fairness, these options have situations in which they excel.

Non-natural options can perform well in similar instances to realistic lures; however, their abilities stand out in stained or murky





UV and glow colors perform well in specific situations, like dawn and dusk.

water scenarios really shine. Bright, unique colors add attraction and can aid in calling fish in from a distance.

Glow options

Glow-based lures have long been staples for anglers across the Ice Belt. Like the name suggests, these lures have the capability of glowing. A simple charge from a light source like a flashlight, or actual glow charger, allows them to glow for a set period of time. Depending on the lure, finish and light intensity, these lures can glow from anywhere from a few minutes to 30 minutes or more.

Technically speaking, glow lures fall into the category of non-natural lures. However, some key differences place them in a category of their own. While they often come in the same overall color schemes as other non-realistic lures, their ability to glow makes them better choices for specific situations.

Lowlight conditions like dusk, dawn, and throughout the night, are where glow options truly shine. When there's little to no light below the surface, glow-based lures contrast well against a dark backdrop—making it easy for aquatic predators to find.



Lure color matters, just as confidence matters, to an extent.

UV options

UV-based lure options are a newer addition to the ice fishing market. While they're often confused with glow lures, as the two terms are used interchangeably, they function in different ways. As mentioned above, glow lures require an external light source in order to emit light, whereas UV-based options actually reflect ultraviolet light—the key word being *ultraviolet.*

Similar to glow lures, most UV options share a similar color palette to those in the non-natural category. The differences lie in the science behind the overall finish on the lure. With the ability to reflect light, UV coatings can help lures stand out, especially in specific circumstances. Such options are hardly beneficial in situations involving adequate light (i.e, high sun) but can be a difference maker when light is less available. Take cloudy days and other lowlight conditions, for example.

A piece of advice: Rely on the correct lighting source. A number of manufacturers have developed UV flashlights and chargers which can enhance the capabilities of such lures.

Whether you believe it or not, lure color matters—at least to an extent. While a particular color likely won't lead to magical results, certain conditions and circumstances call for specific color schemes. Understanding which scenarios call for which options, coupled with some level of confidence, can lead to more promising results on the ice. ***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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Plan and Purchase for 2026



Tubes are always on-hand for smallmouths.



Spinnerbaits still catch loads of bass, especially in spring.

by Tom Luba

Since February is a shorter month, I like to let people know, "Hey, it's time to think about fishing open water again."

Your ice shack might be getting a bit claustrophobic by February. I'm not one of the legions of icemen, so by the time Cupid is testing his new compound bow with non-lethal, heart-shaped arrows, I find time to plan where I want to fish when open water reappears. And then I get what I need to be ready to roll.

In chronological order, rivers come first. They shed ice quicker than lakes, and most host walleye populations that are on the way to spawn, and hungry enough to feed, on the way upriver to dam spawning areas, as well as replenishing afterward on their way back downstream and home.

Rivers are not just spring hot spots. They can produce all year round and can save an outing, especially in summer.

For lakes, start with small, shallow waters, and leave the bigger ones for later, as they take longer to warm after ice-out. I like bass, and some less-than-100-acre spots can save your day.

I remember taking an outdoor editor on an outing in mid-May. I pre-fished a deeper lake and basically slept at the wheel instead. No fish. I needed a place for the next day, so I went to a 60-acre lake on a wing and a prayer... which was answered. We caught fish from the get-go and ended with a bunch of largemouths on tube jigs. Nothing oversized, but a few dozen willing recruits. The article he wrote for his next column was quite nice.

There are a few lakes on my list up to about 200 acres. Some of the bass in them like me. But not all the time, as I have had some tough days on them as well. Maybe it's just the fish saying, "Don't puff out your suspenders today, buddy."

Bass are catch-and-release until the first Saturday in May. I like to fish for them from April through June, then gradually switch over to larger lakes, where you can find spawning bass later and have enough water and cover to mine all depths as the season progresses. This article focuses more on spring, but the info and bait choices can be used all season.



Jigs and emerging weeds are a great combo for spring largemouths.

You can't go wrong with jigs for river walleyes. You may have to go deeper early, and in heavier current. (Summer and fall usually bring lower water levels.). So, it never hurts to have an assortment of jigs available. Round, ball head jigs from 1/8- to 1/2-ounce give you some weapons. In many cases, using just a jig and minnow works. I also like plain heads, and painted fluorescent orange or chartreuse heads, especially in off-color water. Rigging them with a plastic grub also works, especially if you want to add a little more bulk to your offering. Having some lighter- and darker-color trailers can provide the ticket. And I don't mind putting a minnow on, even if the jig is dressed. For a change-up, try a Bass Assassin 4-inch WE Turbo Shad as a swimbait.

You don't need a ton of baits for lake bass, either.

It is hard to beat a silicone-skirted bass jig and a craw-type trailer. An assortment of jig weights from 1/4- to 1/2-ounce should handle most fishing. Shallow lakes warm quicker and fish go shallow earlier. For wood laydowns and weeds I usually start with a 1/4-ounce and go from there. Berkley's MaxScent Power Chunk or Creature Hawg has been productive. Black and blue, or green pumpkin with a dash of blue, are key colors. Match the trailer colors. You can also swim jigs in and around cover.

I also like the Yamamoto Senko, for two reasons. First, they are a great throwback lure if a bass hits your jig but isn't hooked. They also are wonderful weightless baits. If the bass are not tight to cover, back off deeper, to weeds that are starting to bloom. Rig the Senko Texas-style on a 3/0 weedless round bend or wide gap hook and work it slowly though the new weeds. It will draw strikes if the fish are sitting in place, waiting to move. A lot of times, the Senko bite can be very light, so be vigilant.

Crankbaits, jerkbaits, swimbaits and spinnerbaits are also worthwhile. Shallow and deep, suspending crankbaits are good search baits along drop-offs, as are minnow-shaped jerkbaits. A shallow, square bill crankbait navigates the limbs on brush and laydowns with minimal snagging.

A spinnerbait—white is my first choice—is still a good fish catcher. Get one with twin willowleaf blades for shallow use, and a single bladed Colorado which can also call in fish via vibration. Add in a ChatterBait bladed jig, and tip it, and your spinnerbaits, with a Bass Assassin 4-inch Elite Shiner boot-tailed plastic swimbait. The kick on the boot tail intensifies the interest on these baits. I usually hit plastics with a dash of Bang Combo scent when using mobile baits.

These baits also work year-round. As the season progresses you might find other baits, like hollow-body frogs for slop fishing success. But these are tried-and-true.

Depending on how close you are to various waters, I'd suggest looking at 5 to 6 lakes and 2 or 3 rivers within easy driving distance. You can add or subtract for other time frames, like summer, based on your success. It won't be long now, so give it a shot.

MWO

Tom Luba is a freelance outdoor writer living in New London, Wis. He has written about open-water fishing for more than 35 years.

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Salty Lures for Freshwater Bass, Pike and Muskies

by Marc Wisniewski

Like most of us reading this publication, we love a good tackle shop. Especially a new one, or one in a new town that you have never been to before. You just gotta' stop because, surely, it will have a new lure or new color that you don't have, or something in a clearance bin that didn't sell locally, but that is a staple back home. Jackpot!

In recent years, I travel to either southwest Florida or the Florida Keys for a week every late fall. A whole new set of tackle stores! And talk about stuff that you don't see up here! This past trip, I was looking at a trolling bait with a tail that looks kinda' like a spinnerbait skirt… but this beast is 18 inches long, adorned with wild tie-dyed colors, and made from a material that would also work for truck mud flaps. The head is roughly 5 pounds, plated in chrome, and about the size of a foam coffee cup. The directions tell me that this $169.99 lure could be trolled at 25 knots on 400-pound test. Holy swordfish, Toto—we aren't in Kansas anymore.

I have no personal use for any tackle of this magnitude, but it's incredibly fascinating to look into the world of $1,200 reels the size of coffee cans, 3-, 5-, and 8-pound sinkers, and hooks that look like something that you would see on a tow truck.

I go down to Florida and cast for inshore species from bridges, piers, beaches, and passes. Predictably, there is another section of these tackle shops that have normal lures for redfish, jacks, snook, specks, snapper, mackerel, juvie tarpon, etc. The lures in this part of the tackle shop look more like what a midwestern guy is used to seeing. They are still different, but many look like things you could use to catch bass, walleyes, pike, and muskies. Oh, and they do!

In the past 20 years or so, I have found some great inshore saltwater lures that migrated up into my Wisconsin freshwater tackle boxes that you would never see in a tackle shop up here. If you don't travel to saltwater markets, you may need to order these baits online, but here are some of the gems I have found over the years.

Let's start with a relatively new company, NLBN. It stands for No Live Bait Needed, alluding that their lures look so good that you don't need live bait. Well, they are pretty close. They make a wide variety soft plastics and jigheads, but the one you will be interested in is the 3-inch paddle tail. It's a thicker, meatier body but with a fast, quick tail action. They have some very realistic colors that are great for freshwater applications. I love their matching jigheads that fit the bodies perfectly and feature beautiful paint jobs.

They have a great tail action along with a slight rock, which is deadly in a swimbait. As with all the baits I will mention in this piece, the hooks are h higquality and will land anything that you will tangle with in the Midwest. There is a color called Twisted T, and that paired with their matching 3/8-ounce head has been great for bass and pike. They also make a 5- and 8-inch if you muskie guys like the sound of them.

Jumping to one of my favorite topwater baits ever is the MirrOlure Top Dog Junior. This is one of the easiest side-to-side, walk-the-dog lures I have ever used. It casts a mile and is literally indestructible. Plus, it sits low and works side-to-side with ease. Even if you hate working spooks or other "dog" style baits, you will love this one.

You can work it with turns of the reels if you want to save your wrist. It has an internal, one-knock clacker that is loud! I originally thought "too loud," but after 15 years of catching bass and pike on it, the fish like it. They have black or bone colors that work well, but my favorite is color #808 which has a gold insert, brown back, and orange belly. There are other sizes, but the "Jr" is perfect for bass and pike.

Berkley Gulp products are staples in the Gulf or Keys for people who don't want to mess with live bait but need a little help. Down there at times, you can even dead-stick Gulp baits and fish will pick up the scent an grab them. I've fished Gulp shrimp on jigheads down there when things get tough. I've also brought half-bags back and tried them for smallmouths, and they love them. The Root Beer or New Penny colored 3-inch shrimp will trick some tough smallies up here in the Midwest.

I'm jumping back to MirrOlure for a couple more. MirrOlure/L&S Bait Company has been around forever. I'm old, and even my grandfather had L&S lures in his tackle box 60 years ago. They started in Illinois, which is why you see some old ones around the Midwest. But they soon became taples of the saltwater market, and still are. They are to saltwater world tackle shops what something like Mepps or Dardevle is up here. Their lures are bulletproof, feature high-quality hooks, and are available in what seems to be a hundred colors. Two baits I want to mention are suspending twitch baits. They are precisely balanced to dart, stop, and suspend perfectly horizontal in the water.

The first is the MirrOdine. It's a shad-shaped bait that perfectly imitates a darting, dying baitfish. It's available in several sizes, but at 2.5 inches, the #17MR is my favorite. They only go down about 2 to 3 feet (made for saltwater flats fishing) so they are perfect for working weed or hard-bottom flats or pitching at shore features in rivers. I honestly can't believe that bass enthusiasts in the South where there are shad haven't discovered this bait.

A similar but beefier bait from MirrOlure is an oldie but goodie, the legendary #52MR. It's a 1/2-ounce bait that is just under 4 inches. It has no lip to give it any action. Cast it out, let it sink a few seconds, then twitch it. It will dart, stop and then slowly sink. While sinking, it wobbles side to side. That's when bass, pike, and Lake Michigan browns can't resist it.

If anyone remembers the short life of the Storm Flutterstick Madflash sinking pencil bait, ugh, that bait was magic. I caught some of the biggest browns of my life on that bait and was devastated when they discontinued it. The 52 MR replaces that bait!

One last lure I would like to mention is the DOA Lures Cal-Shad. They come in 3 and 4 inches and are a solid-performing paddle tail that is available in many colors that you don't see offered to bass and walleye guys.

There are a few things I'd like to mention about saltwater lures in general. You may look at them and say, those hooks are too heavy; I'm changing those. Be careful, because the baits were designed to sink or suspend with the hooks that are on them. You could mess up the action. You can correct weight issues with lead golf club tape, but it's best to just use the factory hooks. Also, some of the plastics they use for things like paddle tails are a little firmer than some of the tails we are used to using. I have noticed that they don't work as well when the water gets below about 45 degrees.

One last thing about colors. A lot of the saltwater world is based around white or bright colors. That said, they always have a watermelon or root beer option which works well for our freshwater species. Also, if you see "pinfish," that's actually close to a bluegill or perch color. It's a striped baitfish—"the bluegill of saltwater."

Don't limit your freshwater arsenal to just what you see in your local Midwest tackle shop. There is another universe of lures out there in the saltwater world. If you can't hop on a flight to Tampa this winter, start doing some online shopping for at least some of the ones mentioned here. Those have proven themselves to me in both fresh- and saltwater.

MWO



Intended for the saltwater market, some great bass, pike, walleye, and muskie lures are unknown to most freshwater anglers.

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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Wednesday February 11th 6:00 PM
Todd Berg – Former LGFC Club Member and Friends of the R. D. Pike Building
Topic: Majestic Lake Trout- From the Bayfield Fish Hatchery to Geneva Lake



Former club member and Geneva fishing guide, Todd Berg is a founding member and actively involved and leads with "Friends of The R.D. Pike Building" not-for-profit organization. This organization is involved with the support of upgrading and enhancement of this historic hatchery. He will be giving a presentation on the fish, the numbers, their habits, and the history of the iconic 128-year-old building that raises them. We'll also learn about efforts to preserve and restore the facility that makes this all possible. This will be a different and incredibly fun evening blending fisheries and history! To learn more about this project go to facebook.com/61560586291844/about/?_rdr.

Our members and guests will be able to learn more about this majestic species and the opportunity to learn valuable angling advice from Todd to increase their success in catching this most exciting fish.

Wednesday March 11th 6:00 PM
Jim O'Neil – MidWest Outdoors TV & Magazine
Looking Below The Surface for Huge Bass and More

Illinois Club Meetings are on the 2nd Wednesdays, February - November

Poplar Creek Bowl Banquet Entrance
2354 W Higgins Rd
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Avoid Bad Habits to Catch Big Trout

by Len Harris

A few years ago, I had a run-in with a really large trout. It was early season, and the world was still quite brown. Trout hunters remember having run-ins with large trout and it is seared into their memories.

I, for one, don't go back the next day after I've danced with a big one and lost. Most living creatures have short-term memories, and if you go after them right away, you are lowering your odds of catching that elusive big trout. Being aggressive like that typically results in the big, hook-jawed monster moving on.

I equate trout hunting with deer hunting. You must think about what you're going to do. You just don't blindly go down the same path and expect different results. If you spooked a giant deer from your treestand and you're not sure why, a good hunter evaluates afterwards. It could have been scent control or wind. Or maybe you were fidgeting or playing with your phone when you should have been sitting silently and motionless in your treestand.

Trout do not have the same senses as whitetails, but there has to be a reason. A cause and effect. You must learn from your mistakes, or you will repeat them.

I gave that big trout two weeks before I went back after him. I was up on a higher bank and about to go into stealth mode to sneak up on the trout's lay.

The battleground from the last failure was about 60 yards away. There were no trees or brush to conceal my attempt to fool that big trout. I stepped out into the open bank, and I saw a huge swell exactly where I had lost that big trout two weeks prior. I was flabbergasted and couldn't imagine that a trout could see me from that far away.



The swell was huge. The author had walked 3/4-mile to be in this position to sneak up on a big dog. The tree leaning over the water in the distance indicates where the trout evacuated from.

I sat down on the bank and evaluated my repeat failure. How in the heck did it seem me from so far away? I had forgotten the one superpower that trout have.

They detect movement. Me stepping out into the open, even that far away, was like I was entering its backyard. I did not belong there. A figure and movement, even far away, was out of the ordinary for that trout. I was in its domain and doing something unusual.

I dug back into my lessons from my father to see if I could remember anything that might apply as to why that trout would spook from such a distance. Dad used to preach to not always approach your hole from the same direction.

There are also lots of little trout in a typical stretch, and they will see you. It will be a chain reaction, and you will indirectly spook your big trout from quite a way away. If you've located a big one, maybe you need to approach from a different direction.

Loop around the area that you were going to stroll down to where he lives. Don't be lazy; come at it from a different direction. Plan your attack like you are chasing a wily 12-point buck. Don't walk into his bedding area. If you spooked him on the way in, you need a different plan of attack.

I can remember my father crawling for 20 yards through prickly ash to get a better angle at a spooky trout. I remember one time when he spooked it with a spinner, casting upstream. The next time we returned, he crawled from quite a ways above the hole, floated a worm downstream through the hole, and bingo, he caught it.

Bad habits are hard to break. Trial-and-error is usually what works. Wearing dark clothing against light brown, dried weeds typically is a no-go. Dark clothing on snow is also a no-go. Your movement is accentuated against your background. If you spooked a big trout once from 60 yards away, a new approach is needed. ***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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Learn more at walleyesunlimitedusa.org or our Facebook page.

Illinois Meeting

Wednesday, February 25th at 6:00 PM

Chase Parsons – Next Bite TV & NWT Angler

Hot Walleye Topics for 2026



As a professional walleye tournament angler, Chase Parsons has made an impressive imprint on the fishing industry. Throughout his long career, Chase has been involved with many national television and commercial spots for several powerful fishing companies. He works extensively with sponsors in many aspects of the fishing industry, including product development and seminar/video promotions. Chase is one of the co-hosts of the popular The Next Bite TV show. He also fishes the most popular walleye tournaments, the Bass Pros Shops/Cabela's National Walleyes Tour as well as other tournaments when time allows.

He has enjoyed tremendous success since the inception of the NWT tournaments. Chase has been the champion of several individual tournaments, and he's been a season-ending championship qualifier of well over a dozen of those events.

Parsons has long-term experience with tournament fishing, his TV show, and working with his sponsors on the development and improvement of their products. This allows him to be current and in the forefront of products and techniques to catch walleyes wherever they swim. We are fortunate to have him speak at this meeting as we prepare for the 2026 walleye season and our first outing of the year.

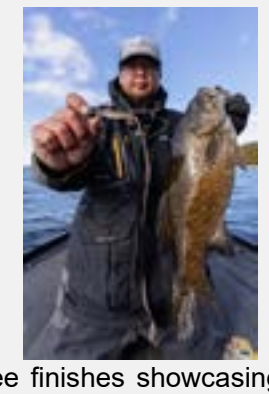
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Jan. | Mar. | (Alt Date) June 2nd | July (Alt. Location) | Sept. | Nov.
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Wisconsin Meeting

Wednesday, March 24th at 6:00 PM

TJ Andres – Tournament Bass Angler

Sturgeon Bay Spring Smallmouth



TJ Andres is deeply committed to the education and support of fellow anglers, driven by a passion to share his extensive knowledge. His sponsors in the fishing industry include Mercury Marine, Nitro Boats, St. Croix Rods and Sevin Reels, Bass Boat Technologies, D&R Sports Center Trokar, and Seaguar Fishing Line.

Andres has enjoyed success in several bass tournament series including Anglers Choice - Geneva Lake and State-Line BassCasters as well as other tours. During the Anglers Choice 2023 season, Andres secured multiple top three finishes showcasing his prowess in the competitive fishing scene. Notably, he clinched a win in both the 2022 & 2023 Lake Geneva events, and he qualified for the prestigious Anglers Choice Championship four of the last five years.

When Andres is not fishing tournaments or guiding locally, he enjoys fishing the Great Lakes. TJ will be speaking about fishing Sturgeon Bay and surrounding area for spring smallmouth. He will be offering advice on learning how to locate fish during this time of year when the wind direction can change by the day and water temps can move 10 degrees form day to day. He will focus on the tackle and techniques to catch trophy smallmouth during the early spring. Learn more about TJ at PBbomb.com or facebook.com/PaintballExplosion/.

Join us at *Illinois* meetings on the last *Wednesday* of the following months–
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One-Day, Get-Me-Home Emergency Kits

by Doug Thalacker

I was hiking less than miles from my home one spring. It was up in the 70s, so I just had on a light pair of pants and a short-sleeve shirt. I was planning to only be gone for about an hour. As usual, I became interested in this and that, and it got late. I decided to take a "shortcut" back home when I slipped down a long slope, twisting my ankle in the process. I was able to limp home, but it took longer and was more painful than necessary, and *it could have been worse.*

Most accidents happen at home. The same thing can probably be said about emergencies that occur while we are participating in outdoors activities; most accidents happen in woods and fields that are very familiar to us, usually because we all-too-often become complacent about the dangers of our familiar neck of the woods.

Anyone who has spent any amount of time traipsing hill and dale has probably read something about wilderness survival. Many have had training and even put together a "survival" kit—and promptly forgotten about it, leaving it in the basement. Why? Because when we think of needing a survival kit, we tend to think of vast stretches of roadless areas where the nearest care is two days away. Most of us forget that it is just as easy to break a leg 1/2-mile from home as it is 20 miles—and it is just as serious.

As a result of my less-than-happy hike, I reevaluated my "survival" needs. Since most of my activities are within easy reach of home or hospital, I don't need to "survive;" I need to get to help as quickly as possible. Now I have two get-me-home kits that can solve 90 percent of possible troubles I could get into. They are small enough that I do not debate if it is worth the hassle of carrying one with me.

The summer get-me-home kit fits in a small metal Band-Aid box, which easily fits in a shirt or pants pocket. I actually have two of these. I keep one in my truck in case I forget the other one. This kit contains:

- 6 or 7 various sized Band-Aids
- 2-3 alcohol towelettes
- 1 eye patch
- 1 blaster whistle or storm whistle—the kind without a ball that will work when wet a single-sided razor blade
- 1 small plastic garbage bag
- 4-5 kitchen matches dipped in wax some sort of fire starter such as Coghlans fuel tablets or WetFire Tinder
- 1 flexible wire saw
- 4-5 extra-strength pain relievers
- a small compass
- a signal mirror
- as much nylon string as I can stuff in the box.

The Band-Aids and towelettes are for minor injuries that won't stop you from getting home but which might become infected. The garbage bag can be used for a variety of things such as carrying water, or as a wrap for sprained or broken appendages. If you get those bright orange leaf bags that are available in fall, they also act as a good visual marker, although they will not fit in a single Band-Aid box along with everything else. Even though I usually have a knife with me, I have found that the razor blade is better for delicate operations. I use mason chalk line for the string. Most of this type you can buy has about 160-pound tensile strength, which is strong enough for any lashing or splinting you may need to do. A signal mirror only works on sunny days and in open areas, but it is good for when you get something in an eye, or a cut on the head or other hard-to-see part of your body.

My winter get-me-home kit is a little larger. In addition to the things mentioned above, it contains one to two energy bars (more if you can fit them), a pocket-sized emergency or space blanket, bouillon cubes or instant soup mix, and two or three additional plastic bags. Keeping warm is of course the most important thing in wintertime. Space blankets reflect 90 percent or more of your body heat or if used as a lean-to the heat from a fire. The plastic bags can act as extra boots, ground cloth, a water carrier, or whatever. I use a 1-quart pan and lid from an old Boy Scout cooking kit to hold everything, and I can use the pot to melt snow and make soup.

A kit, no matter how complete, is only as good as you know how to use it. Every outdoors person should take a first aid class from the Red Cross or other comparable organization. If you belong to a hunting or fishing organization, first aid training makes a good topic for a winter meeting. It's too late if you have not previously thought out what to do and practiced it in a non-emergency situation.

A kit, no matter how complete, is only as good as you know how to use it. Every outdoors person should take a first aid class from the Red Cross or other comparable organization.

No one likes to think of the bad things that can happen while out in the woods, but its better to think about them from the safety of your back porch then to suddenly be confronted with something for which you are unprepared, away from immediate help.

These kits are not intended for you to survive for weeks. Rather, they are designed to be small enough that you will not think twice about carrying them, and with the assumption that you will be found within a day.

I always leave a note of where I am and when I expect to return at camp, or with someone, and stick to that plan. Some basic skills and equipment and some forethought about possible emergencies can make your outdoor experience safer and more enjoyable. ***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.





Stocking a Tackle Box for the Beginner Bass Fisherman



by Glenn Walker

Some fishermen start off their fishing journey fishing for bass. Others started fishing for panfish when they were kids. While some may have been a walleye angler, or pursued muskies, they now want to switch over and chase largemouths and smallmouths. Whatever the scenario, properly stocking a tackle box with the right lures for new bass fishermen is important. You want to make sure that your family member or friend who is getting into the sport of bass fishing has the right lures to help them catch bass.

I have gone through and identified seven bass fishing lures that should be in a beginner bass fisherman's tackle box, as they will work across the country, on any lake or river with bass, from shore or in a boat.



A wacky-rigged Yamamoto Senko. *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

Soft plastic stickbait

Lure: *Senko (4- and 5-inch)*

Details: The soft plastic stickbait, AKA Senko, is an extremely effective piece of soft plastic to put in front of bass and just have it sit there. You can rig a Senko in several ways: Wacky, Neko, or Texas style. The last, the Texas-rig, works well when fishing around vegetation, or when you want to keep your bait from getting hung up on the cover you are fishing. The other two rigging methods, wacky or Neko, are very similar.

I rig a number 2 Lazer TroKar Pro V Finesse hook through the center of the bait. This allows the Senko to sink to the bottom, with each end of the bait pulsating ever so slightly with the twitch of your rod tip.

The difference with a Neko rig is that I'll insert a small, tungsten nail weight into one end of the bait, so this effective bait can get down to the depths where offshore bass live. These baits can be fished around any form of cover, and the slower you fish 'em, the more bites you'll get!

Jig

Lure: *Arkie Style Jig (3/8- and 1/2-ounce)*

Details: No other lure that a bass eats



A ball-headed Buckeye Lures G-Man Ballin' Out Jig.

is more versatile than a jig. Anytime of the year, on any lake or river, around any form of fish-holding cover, a rubber-skirted jig can be fished in a variety of ways to catch bass. You can flip or pitch a jig around stumps, laydowns, boat docks or around vegetation, as a jig allows you to put the bait tight to the cover where bass are positioned.

Carry an assortment of 3/8- and 1/2-ounce jigs that you can fish from shallow to deeper water. Different jig weights also allow you to show the bass a jig falling at different rates, which may be the difference in getting a bite or not. You can also cast a jig and drag it around offshore structure such as rock piles, brush piles, or offshore flats where bass are roaming.



A Tungsten ChatterBait Elite EVO with a Yamamoto Slim Zako trailer. *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

Vibrating Jig

Lure: *3/8-ounce JackHammer or Tungsten ChatterBait Elite EVO with a Yamamoto Slim Zako trailer*

Details: Since the early 2000s, the ChatterBait has become a staple for bass fisherman across the country, as it can be fished all season long. You can fish a vibrating jig in shallow water around all forms of cover, including vegetation, wood, rock and boat docks. It's action and strong vibration gets the bass's attention, and it can be brought through fish-holding cover and not instantly get hung up. The options for a soft plastic trailer are almost endless, but the important thing to remember is that you do not want action from your plastic trailer to overpower or counteract the already powerful action of the blade on a vibrating jig.



An all-around good spinnerbait choice.

Spinnerbait

Lure: 3/8-ounce Tandem Willowleaf

Details: Long ago, spinnerbaits were staple items for any bass fisherman, and they still work today! The ability to cast out and reel in a spinnerbait makes it a great choice for beginning anglers. What makes spinnerbaits so effective is the ability to alter your retrieve based on the depth of water you are fishing and the activity level of the bass.

In spring, you can very slow (called slow rolling) using a single-Colorado-blade spinnerbait that puts out a lot of vibration and get a bass' attention, even when the water is cold. When the water gets warmer and the bass feed on baitfish during summer or fall, it is more common to use a spinnerbait that has a double willowleaf blade setup, or a tandem willowleaf/Colorado blade arrangement, as these spinnerbait blade configurations emit more flash.



The deadly Heddon Super Spook for walk-the-dog retrieves.

Topwaters

Lure: *Heddon Super Spook and Rebel Pop-R*

Details: As the year progresses and water temperatures creep close to and then rise above 60 degrees, bass are actively feeding, and I'll always have a topwater rigged up and ready to go. Topwater baits work well around and adjacent to shallow water cover like emergent vegetation and laydowns, along with working the lure over offshore structure like weed lines and underwater points.

The soft, side-to-side cadence of the Spook is attractive to a bass, both when they are chasing bait and want something splashing over their heads, while also still being able to get their attention when they are not wanting to chase a fishing lure very far.

The Rebel Pop-R is a great topwater plug choice when you need to make pinpoint casts to a target. After popping the bait, let it sit motionless next to fish-holding cover.

Texas rig

Lure: Yamamoto Flappin' Hog or Big Bite Baits Craw Tube

Details: From flipping or pitching shallow-water cover, to casting and dragging a bait along an offshore weed line, a Texas-rigged soft plastic bait is versatile and effective for catching bass in and adjacent vegetation and brush.

Fishing a Texas rig allows you to slow down and catch sluggish bass and is a staple technique any time of the year. You'll want to stock a tackle box with an assortment of tungsten weights, ranging in size from 1/8- all the way up to 1 ounce, but if I had to pick a few key sizes, I would suggest 1/4-, 3/8- and 1/2-ounce. It is important to always use the smallest size possible, as this will give your soft plastic bait the most natural action in the water.

The same goes for hooks; you want an assortment of hook styles, including some



A Texas-rigged Yamamoto Baits Flappin' Hog. *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

extra-wide-gaps, traditional worm hooks, and flippin' hooks. Hook size depends on the size of the soft plastic you are using, so having 3/0, 4/0 and 5/0 hooks is important.

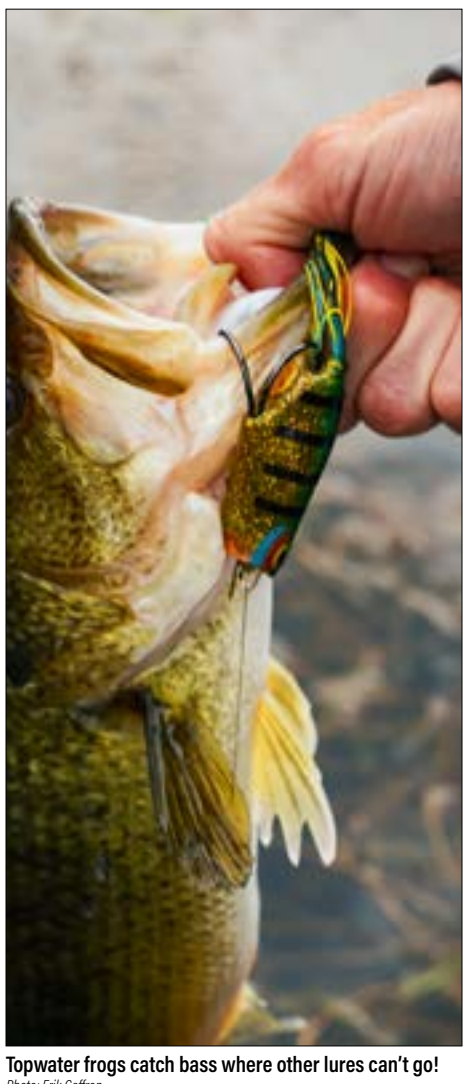
Topwater Frog

Lure: *Northland Fishing Tackle Reed-Runner Frog*

Details: Anytime there is vegetation in the water, chances are that at some point during the fishing season, it may become dense enough that you won't be able to get a fishing lure through it. This is when a topwater frog is a great lure choice as you can work the bait on the surface that now has a canopy of vegetation that the bass will hide under. Some areas that I'll use this technique are over and around lily pads or matted hydrilla, eel grass, or milfoil.

Now is a great time to look at getting someone who is interested in bass fishing there first assortment of bass fishing tackle. It will get them ready for their first fishing trip, and it will give you an excuse to look at and buy some fishing tackle. ***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.



Topwater frogs catch bass where other lures can't go! *Photo: Erik Gaffron*

Is a 16-Gauge the Ultimate Upland Gun?

by Ron Stresing

When I was growing up in the 1960s, 16-gauge shotguns were fairly common. The saying at the time was that, "The 16-gauge carried like a 20 and hit like a 12." Back then, the "big three" gun makers all marketed 16-gauge pumps. There were lots of bargain-priced, bolt-action and single-shot guns around as well. Marlin even made a 16-gauge over/under. Browning sold its famous "Sweet Sixteen" semi-auto and 16-bore BPS pump guns.

Browning and other gun makers eventually discontinued 16-gauge pumps, but in 2016, Browning revived the famous A 5 "Sweet Sixteen" and will market two versions of 16-gauge semi-autos for 2022.

By 1900 or so, the 16-gauge already had a long, storied reputation in the U.S. as a premier upland game gun. It was very popular with New England grouse and woodcock hunters, who carried Parker and other fine double barrels in that gauge. 16-bore guns were also popular in pre-WWII Europe for driven grouse, wood pigeons, and woodcock. Fine double-barrels were produced in England, Italy, Belgium, Germany and Spain. It was a favorite shotgun bore for use in German-made drillings, the three-barreled rifle/shotgun combination guns.

Remember to check the length of the chamber listed on the barrel when buying a European or classic 16-gauge double, as some older guns may have 2 1/2-inch chambers. Yes, 2 1/2-inch ammunition is still available. More about ammunition and chamber length later.

I own a collection of old and new 16-gauge shotguns, including a 1940 vintage Model 12 Winchester, post-WWII Stevens 94 single-shot with a Tennite plastic stock, several 1950s vintage bolt-actions, TriStar over/under and Viper semi-auto. The Viper semi-auto is my new favorite pheasant gun. The single-shot and bolt guns are my go-to squirrel and rabbit guns. One ounce of 6 shot moving at 1165 to 1200 fps will cleanly harvest a rabbit or squirrel with minimal meat damage. With open chokes and 7 1/2 shot, a 16-gauge makes a great grouse, woodcock, quail or dove gun. Load up with 1 1/8 ounces of 5 shot for pheasants.

So, what spelled trouble for the 16-gauge? Heavier loadings of 20-gauge ammunition and magnum-chambered, 20-gauge guns, along with steel shot laws. During the first few years of mandatory steel shot use, shotguns other than 12-gauge were allowed for use as waterfowl guns with ordinary lead rounds. Better long-range and magnum 20-gauge lead loads basically made the 16-gauge obsolete. 20-gauge shells loaded with a 1-ounce payload of lead shot were basically a 16-gauge load. Steel loads were quickly developed for the 20, and a lot of hunters simply switched from the now-illegal lead loads to compliant 20-gauge steel. Yes, they did eventually make 15/16-ounce, 16-gauge steel loads, but years later.

With 20-gauge ammunition cheaper and more popular than ever, the demand for 16-gauge guns and ammunition plummeted. Demand for the 16-gauge also fell when ammunition makers discontinued popular-priced 16-gauge game loads. Low-priced 12-gauge, 1-ounce game loads meant that you could shoot the equivalent of a 16-gauge, 1-ounce load out of a 12-gauge for almost half the cost of a box of regular-priced, 16-gauge hunting loads.

So, what is saving the 16-gauge.? As light and handy as most 16-gauges are, my guess is that they will always be around. Ammunition is still made in lead, steel, bismuth, etc., and imported. If you only use your 16 gauge for hunting and leave the 12- and 20-gauge guns home for clay target shooting, the ammunition cost really isn't all that bad. It still fills the niche of an ideal upland small game gun as nicely as it did over 100 years ago.



A squirrel taken with a 1950s vintage bolt action.



The author took this limit of pheasants with his 16-gauge Viper.

16-gauge ammunition—2 1/2-inch shells loaded with 1-ounce of shot, traveling about 1150 to 1165 fps—were the classic, 16-bore field loads in Europe. As 16-gauge guns became more popular here in the U.S., chambers were eventually lengthened to 2 3/4 inches. Velocity and payload of the shells were increased as well.

Game and target loads for the 16-gauge are one ounce of lead shot. I crushed sporting clays targets with 1-ounce 8 shot and harvested pigeons, doves, squirrels and rabbits with 1-ounce 6 shot. For shots at larger small game, try 1 1/8 ounces of lead shot at 1300 to 1330 fps. I've used these and harvested pheasants cleanly at 12-gauge ranges. Yes, steel, bismuth and other non-toxic and waterfowl shells are available.

Federal loads #1 buckshot for predator hunting. For deer, slug-loaded ammunition is available in both 4/5-ounce, Foster-style rifled slugs, and heavier European Brenneke slugs. I have a friend in Iowa who has harvested dozens of deer with an ancient, 16-gauge J.C. Higgins pump shotgun and Foster-style rifled slugs.



A Stevens 94 single-shot and a pair of squirrels.

Trying to find a 16-gauge gun used to require lots of looking on used gun racks and strolling around at gun shows. There are still some good, used 16-gauge finds to be had out there. Demand from the shooting public has led to some really nice, new 16-bore guns on the market! Browning occasionally sells limited runs of high-end, lightweight over/unders. TriStar and Stevens Arms import over/under shotguns from Turkey. Tristar also makes a 16-gauge semi-auto in its Viper series. As mentioned, I have a 16-gauge Viper and I love it. Baikal of Russia makes 16-bore guns, but mainly for the European market.

Personally, I would not be surprised to see a limited run of 16-gauge guns in pump-action or single-shots, either imported or made here in the USA, sometime in the future. ***MWO***

Ron Stresing has fished since age 4 and hunted since age 12, with a lifelong passion for both. He tries to convey the lessons learned over a lifetime of hunting and fishing in Wisconsin. He also writes a column on shotguns for On Wisconsin Outdoors.

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WISCONSIN Sportsman's Calendar

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.

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. **The February 11 meeting** speaker is Todd Berg – Former LGFC Club Member and Friends of the R. D. Pike Building. Topic: Majestic Lake Trout- From the Bayfield Fish Hatchery to Geneva Lake. Please check our website lakegenevafisihingclub.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 Jambo 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—Formed in 1967, we are a multi-species fishing club that fishes all over Wisconsin. The purpose of our club is to promote growth in fishing knowledge and techniques and to foster a mutual fellowship necessary for all members to become better anglers. We meet on the first Tuesday of every month from 7-9:30 p.m. and during the peak fishing season, also on the third Tuesday at the New Berlin VFW 17980 Beloit Rd., New Berlin, WI 53151. Our first Tuesday meeting features door prizes, a raffle, and a guest speaker. The cost for visitors is $5. Our meetings on the third Tuesday are less formal and feature round table discussions on the latest baits, techniques, or hot fishing spots. We hold 12-14 outings a year at some of the best fishing spots within Wisconsin. Once a year we hold a one-day OFC club tournament with the winner taking home a 50-year-old, 4ft. high trophy with their name engraved on it. In Spring, we hold a WDNR Kids Fishing Clinic, and in the summer, we put on a free OFC Picnic for all members and their families. For more membership information, please contact Rob Newman, OFC Club President at 412-996-6165, or view our Okauchee Fishing Club Facebook page or find us on the web at OFCfish.com 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 February 25 meeting** speaker is Chase Parsons of *Next Bite TV & NWT Angler*; Topic: Hot Walleye Topics for 2026. Check our website for details. For info call Bob Clark at 847-274-8247. Please check our website walleyesunlimitedusa.org for updates.

EVENTS

February 7

Muskego Lions Charities Jamboree, Raffles and Ice Fishing Derby at Danny Haskel's Pub and Grill, W171 S7260 Lannon Dr., Muskego, WI (on the east shore of Little Muskego Lake). Main Raffle drawn at 4:30 p.m.; Meat Raffles, 50/50 Raffle and Bourbon Raffles 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fishing Check-in hours: 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., catch and release on all area lakes. For info: Thomas Bykowski, muskegotom@yahoo.com.

February 7

Wanderoos Community Club Ice Fishing Contest on Lake Wapogasset, Amery, Wis., from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Prizes 1st, 2nd and 3rd place in five divisions: sunfish, crappie, northern, bass, perch/walleye. Door prizes and fun for the kids. For info: 715-338-1845.

February 7

The 52nd Annual White Lake Volunteer Fire Department Fishing Derby will be held at the heated White Lake pavilion from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Cash prizes for longest game &/or panfish caught that day in White Lake. There will be paddle wheel drawings all day long along with food and drinks. The big raffle drawing will be at 4 p.m. (need not be present to win) for the top cash prize and other prizes. For info: 715-882-2246

February 14

Gull Lake Ice Fishing Contest at Wolf Point Bar & Grill, W4186 County Road F, Springbrook, WI 54875. Hours: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come on out for a day of ice fishing on beautiful Gull Lake. Cash prizes for largest northern, largest bass, and largest pan fish. Raffle prizes, door prizes, and a Ping Pong Ball Drop for kids 12 and under. For info: 715-466-4582.

February 14

Sand Lake Pub Ice Fishing Derby from 7 a.m. - 3 p.m. Annual Ice Fishing Derby held on Big Sand Lake with awards and prizes to follow at Sand Lake Pub, 851 State Highway 17, Phelps, WI. For info: facebook.com/SandLakePub.

February 14

Jig's Up Ice Fishing Contest at The Edge Pub & Eatery on Lake Wissota, 9504 Cty Hwy S., Chippewa Falls, WI, from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. For info: 715-836-3377, travelwisconsin.com/events/ice-fishing/jigs-up-ice-fishing-contest-242021.

February 15

Richardson Sportsmen Club's annual ice fishing contest on Lake Magnor, Hwy 63, Clayton, WI, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Cash prizes for various fish species in weight and size. Door prizes and raffle tickets. Food and beverages will be sold on ice. For info: discoverpolkcountywi.com, or 715-948-2460.

February 21

Post Lake Annual Ice Fishing Jamboree at PLIA Community Center, Corner of Hwy K and Post Lake Drive, Elcho, WI, from Dawn to 5 p.m. For info: www.travelwisconsin.com/events/ice-fishing/post-lake-annual-ice-fishing-jamboree-93498, or 630-327-9148.

February 28

WinterFest Trout Derby on Big Green at Deacon Mills Park, 550 Mill Street, Green Lake, WI. Derby hours 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., additional activities Noon to 7 p.m. For info: chamber.visitgreenlake.com/events/details/winterfest-trout-derby-837884, or 920-294-3231.

SPORTS SHOWS

February 6-7

Marshfield Gun, Ammunition & Accessory Show at Marshfield Eagles Club, 1104 South Oak Avenue, Marshfield, WI 54449. Hours: Friday 12-6 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Admission: $5 good for both days. Vendor space $30 ea. For info: Gun Buyer Gun Shows, B.J. Keating, (608) 548-4867, keating84@ymail.com.

February 6-7

Siren Gun Show at Zhashagiins Event Center, 24133 WI-35, Siren, WI 54872. Hours: Friday 3 - 7 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission $6. For info: South Fork Sporting Club, (715) 327-8951, southforkclub@yahoo.com.

February 13-14

Eau Claire (South) Gun & Knife Show at Best Western Plus Conference Center, 3340 Mondovi Rd., Eau Claire, WI 54701. Hours: Friday 3 - 8 p.m., Saturday; 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission $5, children 14 and under free. For info: Bearing Arms Gun Shows, (715) 641-2439.

February 12-15

LaCrosse Sport Show, at the LaCrosse Convention Center, 300 Harborview Plaza, La Crosse, WI 54601. Show Hours: Thursday 3 – 8 p.m., Friday 10 a.m. – 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. – 8 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. For info: Shamrock Productions, shamrockprod.com, lacrossesportshow.com.

February 13-14

Narrows Valley Supply Gun, Ammunition & Accessory Show at Narrows Valley Supply, E4561 Stoney Ridge Rd., Loganville, WI 53943. Hours: Friday 12 - 6 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Admission $5. For info: Gun Buyer Gun Shows, (608) 548-4867, keating84@ymail.com.

February 13-15

Milwaukee Muskie Expo, Washington County Fair Park and Conference Center, 3000 Hwy PV, West Bend, WI 53095. Muskie Expo, Mike Veserat, (608) 220-7392, info@muskieexpo.com, muskieexpo.com.

February 13-15

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, or Ron Martin, (715) 381-7991, bobandrocco.com.

February 20-22

RV and Boat Show Main Sales Event, at the EAA Grounds, 1305 W Waukau Ave, Oshkosh, WI 54902. Show Hours: Friday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., For info: Fox Valley Outdoor Enthusiasts, LLC, rvboatmainevent.com, (920) 676-7903, info@rvboatmainevent.com.

February 27 - March 1

Bob & Rocco's 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: Bob and Rocco's Gun Shows, Bob Pucci, (608) 752-6677, ronmartinsemail@yahoo.com, or Ron Martin (715) 381-7991, bobandrocco.com.

February 27 – March 1

Wisconsin State Hunting and Fishing Expo, at the Resch Expo, 840 Armed Forces Dr, Ashwaubenon, WI 54304. Show Hours: Friday Noon – 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Saje Events, Inc, wisconsinstatehuntingexpo.com, wistatehuntingexpo@gmail.com.

February 27 – March 1

Wisconsin Fishing Expo, Alliant Energy Center, 1919 Alliant Energy Center Way, Madison, WI 53713. Show Hours: Friday 1 – 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Wisconsin Fishing Expo, Inc., ddurbin@bastdurbin.com, wifishingexpo.com.

March 6-8

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Sports Show, at the Wisconsin State Fair Park Exposition Center, 8200 W Greenfield Ave., West Allis, WI 53214. Show Hours: Friday 12 – 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For info: Outdoor Sports Group, rick@osgshows.com, osgshows.com, jssportsshow.com.

For the most up-to-date info go to:

MidWestOutdoors.com/events

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THE LAKEMASTER® DOWNLOAD HUMMINBIRD®

Lake Nebagamon

by MWO Field Staff



LOCATION: Douglas County, the farthest northwest county in Wisconsin. Lake Nebagamon is about 10 miles southwest of the town of Brule.

SIZE/DEPTH: 986 acres; maximum depth 56 feet.

SPECIES: Bluegills, crappies, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, northern pike, trout and walleyes.

The village of Lake Nebagamon is on the north side of this lake in the midst of many other fine fishing lakes in the northwest corner of the state. Cabin rentals for vacationers are available. Known especially for good-size smallmouths in open water, the lake also can produce panfish and pike along with a few walleyes for ice anglers in March.

1 The hump just out from this little point can hold bluegills, crappies and northern pike. It's a good place to set a tip-up for pike in 6 feet of water while jigging for panfish in 18-foot depths.

2 Panfish move up into the northwest corner where many spawn. Look for them suspended in 12- to 18-foot depths.

3 Another panfish and pike spot, this point can also kick out the occasional walleye.

4 The access in the town of Lake Nebagamon is near decent fishing for late-ice panfish in 12-foot depths on the large flat here. Look for green weeds shallow and if you can't find any try the 24-foot depths over the basin.

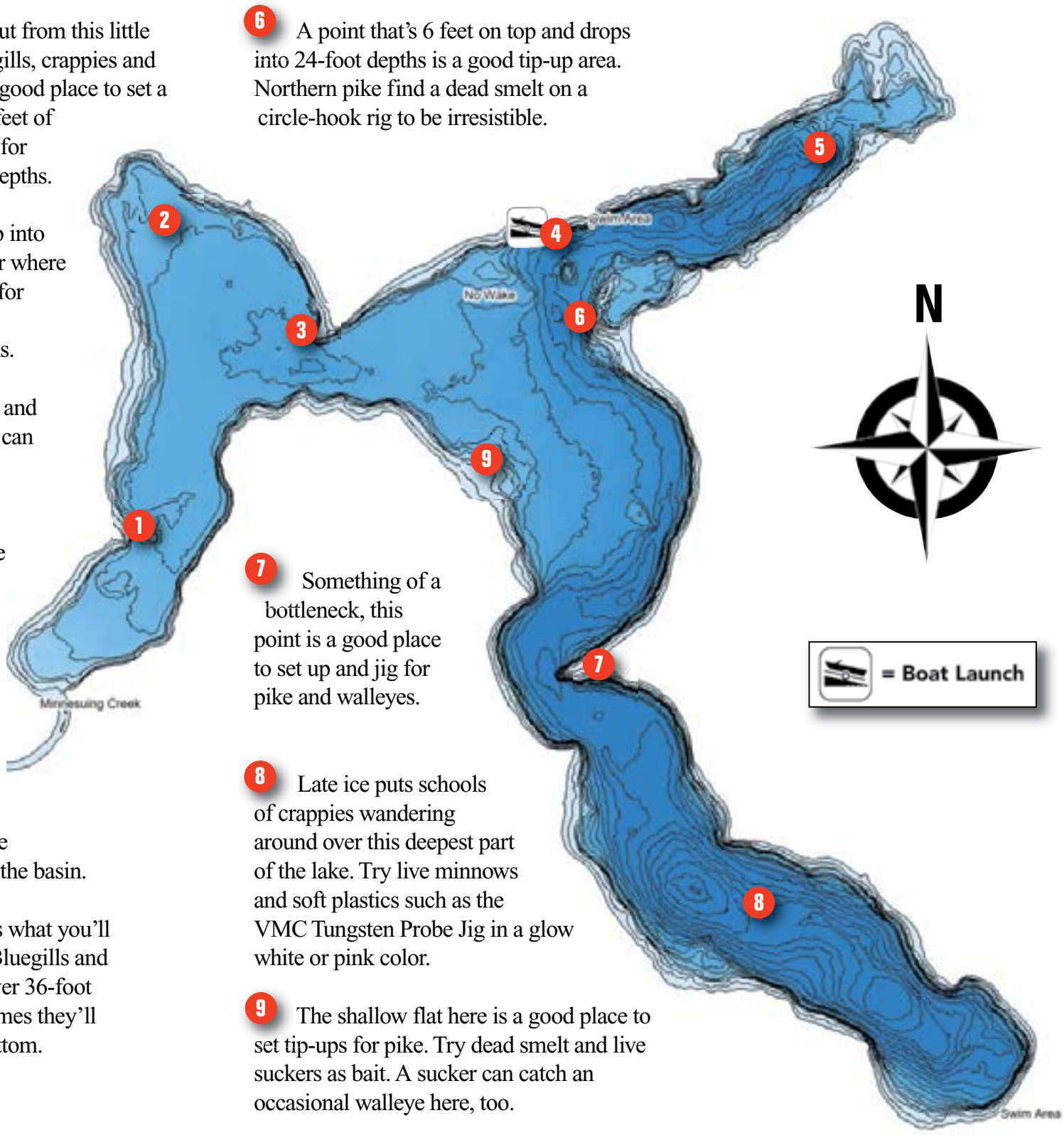
5 Basin panfish is what you'll target bassin here. Bluegills and crappies suspend over 36-foot depths here; sometimes they'll feed right on the bottom.

6 A point that's 6 feet on top and drops into 24-foot depths is a good tip-up area. Northern pike find a dead smelt on a circle-hook rig to be irresistible.

7 Something of a bottleneck, this point is a good place to set up and jig for pike and walleyes.

8 Late ice puts schools of crappies wandering around over this deepest part of the lake. Try live minnows and soft plastics such as the VMC Tungsten Probe Jig in a glow white or pink color.

9 The shallow flat here is a good place to set tip-ups for pike. Try dead smelt and live suckers as bait. A sucker can catch an occasional walleye here, too.



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The Bass Queen's Chili

It was cold; really cold. Temperatures hovered the high 20s with a strong, frigid wind blasting down the Mississippi River. Lines froze in the guides of our spinning rods, and on the way back to the landing, spray froze to the front of the boat.

Despite the temperatures and wind, we had several sauger in the livewell. The forecast for the next several days didn't look good. The weather was supposed to get worse, so this was probably the last fishing trip of the late-fall season.

We got the boat back on the trailer and noticed ice on the landing. Pulling out of the parking area of the landing, I had the heater on high in The Boat Hauler. Half an hour later, we were just beginning to thaw out.

I called The Bass Queen to tell her that we were on the way home. After questioning our sanity, sitting in a boat in such cold weather, she told me she had a pot of chili on the stove for dinner. I instantly felt myself getting warmer. On a cold day, nothing beats a bowl of chili. It is meaty and spicy and hot, both in temperature and taste. It just takes the cold away.

When I was in the Army, I commanded a basic training company, and we had a battalion sergeant major whose military specialty was a cook who had spent several years in Texas. Every quarter or so, he organized a battalion chili cookoff competition for all the non-commissioned officers of the battalion. Officers were invited as guests to sample the chilis. There was lots of beer and lots of chili. A winning combination.

The sergeant major reveled to me that real chili can only have meat, spices and tomatoes. Being a cook and living in Texas, I figured that he knew chili. Beans, rice or pasta are major taboos in chili, according to him. If he says chili can only have meat, spices and tomatoes that is good enough for me.

I did a little research on chili. There are several different stories about the origin of chili, but they all seemed to suggest that chili originated somewhere in or around Texas, sometime in the late 1700s to early 1800s. Although some beef probably made it into the chili pot then, it seemed that venison was the meat most often found in chili in those days.

The Bass Queen makes great chili, and I think my old sergeant major would be most impressed. She would never use beans or rice or pasta in her chili, either. The Bass Queen's chili makes for a fairly robust pot of chili, and if you want a smaller batch, just proportionally reduce the recipe.

She begins her chili with four pounds of ground meat. Hamburger is the traditional choice. However, The Bass Queen does not eat beef, so she substitutes ground turkey, and lately has been using ground bison. Ground venison is also a good choice and can be mixed with other ground meats.

White pepper and garlic powder.

Three onions cut into quarters. (Although my sergeant major never mentioned onions, I think he would tolerate them.)

Two 28-ounce cans of whole, peeled tomatoes.

Six tablespoons chili powder.

Four teaspoons salt.

Four teaspoons sugar.

Four tablespoons Worcestershire sauce.

One and a half packets of taco seasoning. (If you are feeling especially bold, throw in both packets of taco seasoning.)

Brown the meat and add onions, breaking up the onions while frying. Add three or four shakes of ground white pepper and garlic powder. Drain off any grease if there is any, and dump the ground meat and onions in a big pot.

Next, dump in the tomatoes. Drain the juice into the pot, and while adding the tomatoes, cut them into quarters. Add all the other ingredients.

Place the pot on the stove on low heat for at least a couple hours. The longer it cooks, the better it will be. Anytime during the cooking process, if it looks like the chili maybe a bit too thick, use six to eight ounces of Bloody Mary mix to thin it out. Bloody Mary mix is a perfect addition to chili since it is a spicy, tomato-based liquid. By the way, if you haven't already, this is a good time to mix yourself a Bloody Mary.

Chili can be served just the way it is. Many people have crackers to go with it. If you want to be fancy, add chopped onions, shredded cheddar cheese and sour cream on top of chili.

Obviously, if you follow this recipe, you will have lots of leftover chili unless you are making it for a large group. The Bass Queen packages leftover chili in plastic freezer bags and freezes it. That way, whenever it is cold out and you want a good, warmer-up dinner after sitting in a deer stand, standing on the ice, or sitting in a boat during cold weather, just pull out a bag or two of chili and heat it up. You can never go wrong with that.

Bon appétit! **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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Shallow-Water Ice Fishing

by Don Gasaway

Although northern climes offer abundant ice fishing locations on various rivers and lakes, there is something special about fishing backwater shallows and farm ponds. The main species of these waters are bluegills and yellow perch.

Finding fish through ice can be difficult, but there are ways to do it. The most obvious is to know the body of water and what depth the fish prefer. Discussions with anglers or at a local bait shop often lead to that information. It also helps to know the habits of the fish. Bluegills and yellow perch are often in the top foot or two, or the bottom foot or two, of the water columns. Usually, it is the latter.

A portable fish locator or other electronics indicate if fish are present, and at what depth. This is important, since fish tend to stay in their comfort level. Fish typically look for food at eye level or a little above, so knowing where they are will help you in placement of your lure or bait. As both species tend to school up in winter, do not just look for a fish or two. Find where there is a crowd of fish present.



Late winter is a great time to get out on small ponds with a cooler for a seat and an ice fishing rod and reel. As the water warms in the sunlight, fish become more active and the milder weather is more comfortable for fishing.
Photo: Don Gasaway

It is a good idea to drill several holes and try them all. The actual drilling process is very simple, although blades on the auger should be sharp. Evaluate the type of area and bottom structure. Water mixed with sand before it freezes, or a very shallow area where the drill may break through and hit a sand bottom, can dull blades quickly. If one hole is not producing, move to the next one. Fish move, but generally not far.

In the location is not familiar to you and you do not have electronics to aid you, try drilling multiple pilot homes. First try to locate an area with cover. An area with good routes to deep water or from it is good. During colder weather and low-light conditions, begin deeper and fish tighter to cover. With high light and warmer conditions, fish shallower and, if possible, find weeds. Drop-offs, weed beds and any other submerged structure will attract fish.

Drill a pilot hole and lower some kind of line to measure the depth. A weight placed on a fishing line works well. Once the bottom is determined, adjust the bait so that it is 4 to 12 inches off the bottom, at least to start.

Drill four holes on an angle to, or parallel to, the slope of the bottom. Each hole will have a different depth. If a certain hole starts to outproduce the others, move to that depth and drill more holes. Then each hole will probably produce about the same.

Today's angler should be mobile, and that is especially true in pond fishing. Many use snowmobiles and pull a portable fish house or shelter with a supply of tackle. You need an auger (power or manual) to drill holes. And a skimmer to clean out the shaved ice that falls into the hole. A small portable heater or lantern aids in keeping warm.

As for poles, there are numerous good, short ice fishing rigs on the market. They are usually about 2 to 2 1/2 feet in length and many have small spinning reels attached. Others will have ice fishing reels holding about 25 yards of 4- to 6-pound line. Many ice anglers use tip-ups in addition to jigging rigs. Tip-ups hold your bait or lure at a certain depth. The reel turns from the tug of a fish and releases a signal flag. When the flag flies, it is time to grasp the line with your hands and take in the fish.

Hooks are usually number 8 or 10 size for panfish. Small tear-drop jigs in a variety of colors are also good. Bait for bluegills and perch is usually grubs, wigglers, and waxworms. Small minnows hooked through the back can swim freely. A small bobber will keep the minnow or other bait at a precise depth.

Twitch the bait and then let it set motionless. The movement attracts the attention of the fish, which will strike when it is still.

Do not overdo the action. If fish are reluctant to hang on to the bait, try using a fish attractant. Attractants are at their best in cold water.

Finally, the best time to go ice fishing is anytime you can. But, when the ice thickens and the action slows during midwinter, try to key on warming trends, abrupt weather changes, and low-light periods. Night is a good time for effective ice fishing. ***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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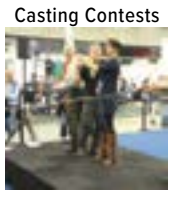
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Kimmel Stands Up for Michigan Bass Anglers

If you fish for late-spring smallmouth in the incredible fisheries of Michigan's Inland Waterway, you owe Dan Kimmel a sincere "thank you."

Kimmel is an enthusiastic bass angler who has a website design company and serves as "conservation director" for the Bass Federation of Michigan, as well as for three tournament organizations in the state. Basically, he is a watchdog for bass anglers.

Without Kimmel's low-key activism before and during the November meeting of Michigan's Natural Resources Commission, Burt and Mullet lakes, as well as the smaller lakes of Crooked and Pickerel, might have been closed to all bass fishing from May 1 until the Friday before the third Saturday in June. The closure would have included all the connecting waters, as well as Black Lake. All of these waters are part of Michigan's Inland Waterway.

The issue started at the October meeting of the Michigan Natural Resources Commission (NRC) in the Upper Peninsula, when Commissioner John Walters asked for a new regulation on Burt and Mullet banning all bass fishing from May 1 until the Friday before the third Saturday in June. The reason? Members of the Burt Lake Preservation Association told him that they weren't seeing many shallow smallmouth spawning beds, and feared that invasive round gobies were decimating the smallmouth population by devouring bass eggs when anglers caught the bass guarding the beds.

While no one doubts the little invaders from overseas do indeed eat eggs off of vacant bass beds, Kimmel knew of no evidence that gobies eating eggs affected the number of bass that grow to adult size anywhere gobies were found.

In fact, baby gobies provide food for baby bass, helping them grow bigger, faster, which gives the bass a better chance of surviving their first winter. And most bass anglers know that adult smallmouths grow big by munching the foreign forage, which have been found in Burt and Mullet since 2010.

Kimmel rallied several anglers to write emails to the commissioners and, ideally, show up at the November NRC meeting and be prepared to talk. Several did.

At the November 6 NRC meeting in Lansing, Kimmel spoke for 5 minutes, pointing out the lack of any scientific evidence that showed the gobies were hurting population levels, and the potential economic impact to the area if bass season was closed. He also pointed out that the rule would be difficult to enforce, as anglers could catch-and-release bass while claiming that they were fishing for walleyes and pike.

Also presenting was Lucas Nathan, Aquatic Species and Regulatory Affairs Unit Manager for the DNR Fisheries Division. The Fisheries Division also opposed the new rule, because there's no evidence that gobies were hurting the bass population, noting that anglers in tournaments that report catches to the DNR were seeing that the fishery was holding its own or getting better.

A representative of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs also spoke opposing the new regulation, as it had no basis in science.

In the end, Walters withdrew the proposed amendment, but Kimmel feels that this issue is not over.

"The Burt Lake Preservation Association has some money and might be looking for an organization to do its own study; this isn't going away," Kimmel said.

He noted that this closure could have set a precedent that would let lake associations trigger partial season closures all around the state. The original amendment that commissioner John Walters proposed also included Elk and Torch lakes.

The 63-year-old Kimmel has been a bass activist for around 40 years, first speaking in favor of a launch ramp at Webber Dam near Portland, Mich. He had joined a local bass club and expected to join several other club members at a community meeting hearing by the DNR about the ramp.

"Nobody else from the club showed up, and I was the only person there to speak in favor of it against like 18 lake association people who opposed it," he recalled, noting that he nervously spoke anyway.

"It was hilarious when the DNR played the recording back; I sounded like Mickey Mouse," he said. "I was shaking as I drove home, and shook for the next two days, I think.

"The DNR was surprised and pleased that I had showed up," Kimmel said. "They said that anglers rarely show up at those hearings to speak in favor of boat ramps."

I got to know Kimmel over the years at the major winter sport shows in Novi and Grand Rapids, and had the pleasure of fishing with him once last last summer on Round Lake, north of Lansing. He's a quiet guy with a quirky sense of humor. He fishes for bass a lot, and his seminars about bass fishing that he gives at shows are entertaining and informative.

His wish going forward is that more bass anglers would get involved in the politics of bass angling, keeping track of what the NRC is considering, and testifying when able so that bass angling regulation changes are based on sound science.


'Bass activist' Dan Kimmel with a 5-pound largemouth that he caught while fishing with the author last summer.

One area that he feels needs more activism is spraying public lakes for weeds. He says that it's just too easy for lake property owners to get permits for herbicide applications and that spraying often goes too far, killing weeds that make prime habitat for bass and other fish species, well away from lakefront lawns.

"I actually got sprayed once, fishing on a submerged island that had good weeds out in the middle of a small lake," he recalls. "I was trying to protect the weeds and the guy spraying didn't care."

He also noted that bass anglers, especially those in speedy boats, could do a lot to help themselves and the overall image of tournament fishing.

"For one thing, obey the speed limit; lots of bass boat guys don't realize it's 55 mph on all Michigan waters unless otherwise posted as lower," he said. "You legally can go faster if you're a mile offshore in the Great Lakes."

He also said all bass anglers are ambassadors (no pun intended) of the sport and need to avoid conflict with lake property folks.

"If you're casting under a dock and a cottage owner confronts you, just move along," he said. "You don't need to get in an argument, and YouTube has enough videos with 'angry Karens' screaming at anglers."

As we head toward a new season, Kimmel hopes that more bass anglers will pay attention to what's happening with the NRC, the herbicide issue, as well as launch ramp hearings. He hopes that more bass guys and gals will show up to comment whenever it's appropriate. A good place to keep track of issues that affect bass anglers is Kimmel's greatlakesbass.com website where he posts news stories.

Bass fishing in Michigan is overall pretty terrific. Guys such as Kimmel should be applauded for their time and efforts to keep it that way—and maybe even make it better.

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.

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Turkey Hunting Simplified

by Jack Payne

I borrowed a box call and was uttering sounds. I really had no clue if the noise I was making sounded like a turkey or a sick dog. Two hours into the morning hunt, I heard a gobble. Frantically, I grabbed the box call and started making noises.

A bird walked into my opening, looking at my pathetic-looking hen decoy. He gobbled, and I continued calling, and finally, the bird walked off. The next day was a near duplicate. I had planted my butt behind a few thick pines, stuck out what looked like a skinny, beat-up old hen, and started calling. And yes, a bird walked in, making loud gobbling-style noises.

This was my first season of turkey hunting. I was hunting between Ruby Creek and Baldwin. This was a very limited draw hunt in the late 1970s. After the second morning, my friend Cal and I stopped for a sandwich.

In a guy's pick-up truck was a dead turkey. I pointed out to my friend that the guy shot a hen. He started laughing and said that this was a dandy tom. I asked where the beard was, and he pointed to the chest. Crap, two days in a row, I passed up on a bird that had this thick protrusion from its chest. I thought that a tom would have a beard under the chin. My buddy roared in laughter, and I did as well.

This was the beginning of my love affair with turkey hunting. When I started turkey hunting, it was in its early stages with limited tags and even less knowledge.

When I hunt public land, I search out roosting trees, dust bowls, and feeding areas. When I hunt farms, I look for tracks, fields that hold some food, and travel routes.

On state land, I set up 50 to 75 yards from roosts. On private land, I use glassing to estimate feeding times for birds.

All of my calling is done quietly. Nothing too aggressive, unless I have a hen with a tom and I am trying to tick her off into checking out the competition. My calling will not win any competition, but to get the job done.

A box call is used when trying to reach a bird a long way out or under windy conditions. Most of my calling is done with two different slates. One is an aluminum call, and the other is a traditional slate call. Both are calls that I made. The strikers are an assortment of walnut, hickory, and Purple Heart.

I use one call with a few purrs and wait. Maybe fifteen minutes later, I will use the other call. I will also rotate which striker I use. This is my crazy calling system. I tried using a mouth-call, with disastrous results. Either I would start gagging with a fear of choking, or the sound that came out would scare any turkey within a quarter mile.

Many hunters call too often and too loudly. Pay attention to the birds. Mimic what you hear. Birds can hear you a long way out.

When I am sitting, I set out three or four decoys. When I run and gun, two decoys go with me. When I run and gun, I try to cut the distance in half. Then I will set up and call once or twice.

I use the terrain available. In hilly country, I will run the sides of the hill, maybe ten yards from the peak, but low enough to keep hidden. When ditches are available, I run in water. Knee-high boots are a must.



Tom turkey walking in.

Ditches and creek bottoms are favorites of mine. I like hunting near water, and the water lets me travel unseen.

When hunting private property, patience must be learned. At times, I see plenty of birds; on other days, zip. Thus, the problem is when hunting in corn and bean fields. Clover or grass fields are more consistent.

When I hunt private property, I set up two straw bales in a V shape. With my turkey lounge chair, the bales are just about the perfect height for a rest. I place my binoculars and calls on top of the bales. I use straw bales when archery hunting deer with equal success.

In one particular area that I hunt, the birds leave a woods, walk through a picked field and then jump a county ditch. This ditch is six feet tall. I will stand in the water where I can just barely peek over the creek bed. With this system, I can quickly move fifty or a hundred yards without being seen or heard.

I love a morning hunt. Just hearing a tom gobbling off in the distance brings excitement and hope. A silent morning might bring some doubt, but I always feel that a bird could appear at any moment.

Some hunters love the run-and-gun method. In this method, the hunter either has spotted a tom or is walking along a field or a two-track. As they walk, the hunter will call. If they hear a return gobble, they try to cut the distance. Then they will start some soft calling. Sometimes the bird will hammer back; other times, not.

If nothing happens after about 15 minutes, they will move again, hoping for a response to a more subtle call.

I like setting up where I believe the birds are roosting and where a potential feeding area might be. I hope that I'm right, but often, the birds will show up fifty or a hundred yards from where I am.

I will call very softly and infrequently. If the birds show some interest, I will sit until proven wrong. Sometimes, this might be a few hours. If the birds move in a direction that I am not set for, I will move, if possible, without being seen. The next day, I will sit closer to this new spot.

I carry three very lightweight, realistic Montana decoys that pop out into full-body shapes. Two are hens in two different poses, and the other is a Jake. I set the decoys to 15 to 20 yards on my side and maybe 10 yards out front. Once again, this is a confidence thing that works for me.

Another tip is that I scout each day. After a morning hunt, I stay in full camo—covering my hands and face—and walk out of the woods or along field edges by taking a different route than I used when entering. For evening hunts, I scout and hunt my way to the stand, always keeping at least 50 yards from any potential roosting spots.



Eric Payne with a dandy tom.

One gobble at daybreak, and that was perhaps 300 yards to the east. Three hours had passed without a sound or even the slightest hint of seeing a turkey. Finally, I heard, or believed I heard, a lone gobble maybe 500 yards to the west.

Another thirty minutes passed, and I spent the better part of it staring to the west. Finally, I spotted some movement. Slowly, I lifted my binoculars from the straw bale that I was using as a blind. It looked like two hens with a tom following another 100 yards back.

Either my decoy spread was wrong, or the lead hen showed no interest. She passed by at 80 yards. The second hen stopped and stared at my spread. The tom was hanging back another 80 yards.

I started calling as if I were the boss, and the hen started coming right into my spread. The tom had now moved within 60 yards of me. He was trying to decide which hen to follow.

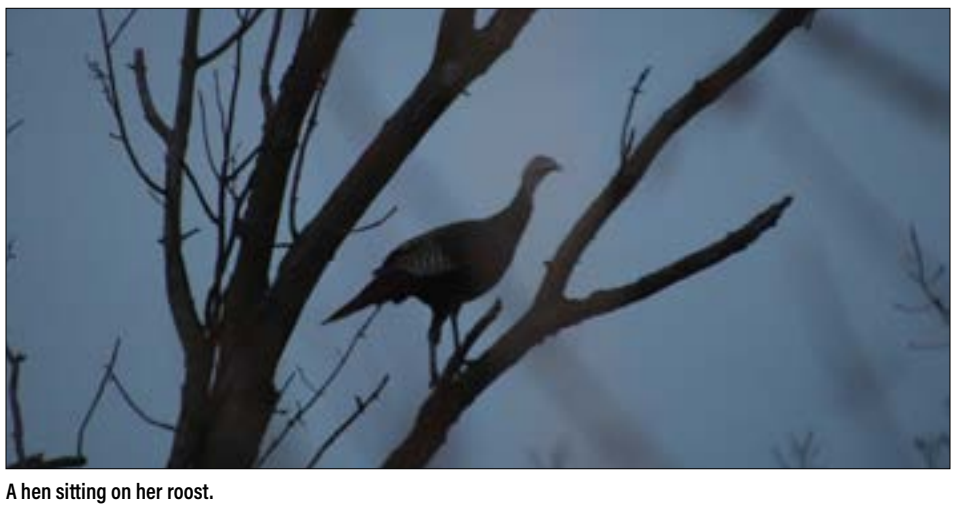
The hen walked right up and pecked at a decoy. Then she slowly started walking away. That was when I noticed that she had a six-inch-plus beard. No clean shot was offered as she walked away. The tom had maybe a 5-inch beard. I called once more, and the bearded hen turned and looked at me. Broadside, head stretched out, offering a nice 38-yard shot. Game over. The tom walked over to the dead bearded hen and then turned and went in the direction of the first hen.

I start scouting in January, scoping out the fields, walking the two tracks on the public land. Using On-X Maps, I mark each location where a turkey sign was found.

I love backtracking the turkey tracks, hoping to find their roosting locations. Yes, many times, where you find the birds in late winter is not where you will find them on opening day. It's still fun, and at least you knew that there were birds in the area.

Enjoy turkey hunting, be patient, and keep learning. ***MWO***

Jack Payne is an accomplished angler and hunter who enjoys teaching others as much as learning from others. He's a seminar speaker, outdoor photography enthusiast, hunter safety instructor and volunteer at many events for both kids and adults.



A hen sitting on her roost.

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Lessons on Electric Knife Blades

by Mike Schoonveld

I had a daunting task ahead of me. A few friends and I were headed out for a day of walleye fishing, along with even more friends on two other boats. All of us were expecting the captains/guides to put us on fish during the trip and to clean, or arrange for the fish to be cleaned, at day's end.

The first assumption was right. Limit catches were made by all, and the walleyes caught were huge by any standard. Wow, what a day!

At the end of the day, we returned to the marina and found that the fish cleaning station was closed and the guy usually at the station cleaning walleyes for a fee was nowhere to be found.

"No problem," I said. "I brought my fish cleaning tools, and there's a picnic table out back of where we are staying that we can use. Anyone else bring their fish cleaning kit?"

Nope. Once I learned that, I cut a deal with them. "I'll fillet the fish. You guys clean up the fish cleaning area, then rinse and package the fillets."

By the time I was done with my part, I was glad that I had a spare battery for my rechargeable electric knife. I was also glad that I'd switched to a "power tool" a few years ago for cleaning some of the fish I catch. I used to think electric knives were for people who didn't know how to sharpen a fillet knife. That's probably right, but experience taught me that, just as carpenters work more efficiently with power tools, for some fish-cleaning chores, a power-knife is more efficient.

I have plenty of experience—and I was getting more. I was the designated "fish butcher" the second day of the trip as well. But that taught me another life lesson a few days later.

I learned how hard on the sharpness of the serrated blades of an electric knife that filleting multiple dozens of walleyes could be. It makes sense. Fillet knives are made to cut fish meat, and if they are only cutting meat, their sharpness will last a long time. It's possible to cut through the rib bones of most fish with a regular fillet knife, but doing so quickly dulls them. Touching them up with a hone or sharpening steel after every two or three fish can keep them sharp.

That can't be done with the serrated blades on electric fillet knives. Eventually, those blades get dull.

I researched the possibility of sharpening dull, serrated blades by interviewing knife sharpening experts as well as the makers of knife sharpening tools. I learned that the steel used to make electric knife blades is extra hard and requires special tools and equipment to sharpen when they are manufactured. Resharpening to "like new" can't be done by hand using sharpening stones or files. Extra-hard steel or not, by the end of my walleye filleting sessions, the strong motor on my Rapala R12 rechargeable knife was doing more of the work than the sharp blades.

The next time I used my electric knife was closer to home, when a large lake trout was caught. The walleye-dulled blades sliced easily through the trout's skin and down to the spine, but when I rotated the knife 90 degrees to cut through the ribs, towards the tail, it wouldn't cut through the "large gauge wires" of which laker ribs are seemingly made. No way, no how!

When I remembered the workout I'd given these blades, not only on walleyes at that last outing, but other fish, on other days previously, it was easy to deduce that the blades were just plain dull.

I finished the lake trout that day by switching the 7.5-inch blade to the 6-inch blade that came with my R12 kit. This blade set is just as stout and sharp—just shorter for filleting smaller fish. Not quite the perfect tool for the job, but it worked.



Electric knives are great, but their blades don't stay sharp forever.

Later, I shopped for a replacement set of blades for my power-knife. I found that Rapala (as do most other electric knife makers) offers several other sizes and styles of blades that fit their handles, beyond the one or two that come with each knife. Most are longer or shorter, but some are thinner and/or more flexible for filleting various sizes of fish, or various species.

I ordered a couple more of the 7.5-inch blades (my favorite) and a collection of the other sizes. I want to be prepared for the next time I'm put in the role of "fish butcher" whenever that happens, or whatever kind of fish are on the chopping block. ***MWO***



Electric knife replacement blades come in various sizes and shapes.

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.

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Fishing Cold, Open Water in Winter

by Don Gasaway

The air is cold, damp with lake mist. Fishing in winter can be difficult, but worth the effort.

Col d-weather anglers may have to fish a variety of locations. Fish do not necessarily congregate in a single type of location or habitat. Fish located in a single area may or may not be of a specific species. What is usually a crappie location may prove to attract a school of bass.

Bass patterns vary in cold water. Nevertheless, the techniques are much the same, only slower. Although you can catch bass on crankbaits and spinnerbaits, it is a good idea to downsize your lures for winter fishing. You might even want to try jigging spoons or small jigs.

In cold water, fish suck bait in gently and leave only the sensation of a "tic" on the line. They are just not as aggressive as they might be when the water temperature is above 55 degrees.

Cold-weather fishing requires warm clothing, and it is a good idea to take along an extra clothing just in case yours get wet. A snowsuit, hand warmers, ski mask and rubberized gloves are a good idea. It does not hurt to have a thermos of hot coffee, hot chocolate, or soup.

It is important to use care around cold-water situations. Wet rocks or a dock can have ice on them and cause you to fall into the water or otherwise injure yourself. When launching a boat, take care that both boat trailer and tow vehicle can get back up the ramp. Ice on ramp can be a problem.

Getting back to fishing patterns, current in a body of water increases oxygen content and fish will relate to it. Generally, fish will be in the 12- to 20-foot-deep range. In larger impoundments without warm water discharges, the warmer water will be in the deeper section closest to the dam.



Cold, open water requires fishing with warm clothing, and sometimes results in bigger fish. *Photo: Don Gasaway*

The main part of a lake often provides a desirable combination of structure and current for winter fishing. Fish tend to be just out of the current near structure. Forage fish are there seeking small plankton that flow with the current. Bass hang around areas close to stumps, beneath undercuts, rocks, or just on a sharp breakline.

Runoff increases river flow and signals a feeding frenzy in predator fish. For some reason, the larger fish are the first to react. Often, you will have to fish hard, and for a long time, to get bites. However, the fish that bite will be the larger ones.

Disruptions such as sudden noises on shore or in the water make the fish shut down. Sunlight also seems to influence fishing action. The brighter the day, the closer to the bottom fish seem to be located.

Weedy areas, or those with dark bottoms, warm sooner and are likely to harbor fish. Weeds and dark, muddy bottoms absorb the heat available on a sunny day and hold it longer.

Cold-water lures fall into two categories: jigs, and deep-diving crankbaits. Rods should be very sensitive and the line very light test. The bite will be just a tic; therefore, the need for light line. One-piece rods are also more sensitive than a two-piece.

Fish lures slowly. They need to get down to or near the bottom. Crankbaits should slowly bounce along the bottom, kicking up small clouds of mud. A loose-wobbling crankbait that disturbs the silt on a branch or stump is more likely to attract attention than one that just passes quickly over it. Because baitfish are just as slow reacting as larger fish, crankbaits need to move in slow motion. The idea is to make the crankbait imitate the action of the baitfish; that is, to dart, slow down, shimmy in one spot, and then move off.

Remember that your lure is going to have to be right in front of a larger fish's nose for it to react. Long retrieves are necessary to get the crankbait down to the strike zone of a fish sitting on the bottom.

Jig fishing is easier. A 1/16- or 1/32-ounce jig fished right below the boat works well. With a fish locator, you can park the boat right on top of the fish and bounce a jig right in front of their noses. Thoroughly cover the fishing zone with the jig. The fish will not be more than a foot off the bottom. You can do well with just about any type of jig or jigging spoon if it does not weigh more than an ounce.

Fish jigs slowly and right up against any structure available.

In the case of both the jig and crankbait, pay close attention for the tic of the bite and set the hook quickly. Fish will not hold the lure for long. Any variation in the action of the line calls for a quick hookset. This is a game of total concentration.

Water clarity is an issue. With runoff, the water becomes muddy. Siltation gives visual evidence of current. Where clear water abuts muddy water, there will be a visible difference in water color. The change in water temperature there further attracts gamefish and forage.

Gamefish like to hold on the edge of the muddy water, concealed from forage fish. The silt attracts forage fish as it presents a new source of food.

Cold-weather fishing means sluggish fish that bite lightly. However, it often means big fish. Be safe, fish slowly and you too might tie into a lunker bass. ***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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Lake Michigan Corner

Mike Ratter

With the holiday season behind us, it's time to focus our thoughts on 2026 and the upcoming fishing season along the shores of Lake Michigan. The whims of Mother Nature will have a lot to say about what to expect this year.

We are now in the "winter doldrums" of fishing on the southern end of the "Big Lake." Things started like gangbusters early with boats taking limits of lake trout and brown trout trolling in Milwaukee Harbor in Wisconsin.

An early-winter arctic cold snap, however, put a quick stop to that. However, temperatures around the zero-degree mark created ice-up conditions in the harbor. A few anglers who have been venturing out from shore have been drilling holes in the ice and having some success jigging spoons like Hopkins Spoon, Acme Kastmaster, Williams Ridgeback and Mepps Syclops, but so far, it's been risky.

As quick as the arctic freeze had descended on the lake, the conditions did an abrupt change; a series of warm spells hit and everything changed. Predicting future weather on the Great Lakes is all but impossible!

I've seen past winters where pretty much the entire month of December was locked in sub-zero temperatures. Come January, the temperatures rose and didn't go below zero for the rest of the winter.

In Racine, there has been some spotty fishing for rainbows and brown trout on the Root River's lower reaches. The fish have been taking spawn sacs, skein spawn and small, Rooster Tail spinners.



The author with a limit of winter trout.

Down the lake past the Illinois state line in the North Point Winthrop Harbor area, a few lake trout been have taken by boats able to get out. But the fishing will be impossible to predict until the weather makes up its mind on what it wants to do. Anglers planning to fish out of North Point Winthrop Harbor this spring will find the fate of this popular marina in question. Operations at this popular area for Illinois Boaters and Charter Boats is presently a big question mark.

The operator has recently indicated it is ending its contract with the IDNR. This has left anglers, boaters, charter boat captains and village officials in a quandary about what the next step will be.

The IDNR's failure to issue a timely request for proposal is said to be what is being blamed for the problem. The concerned parties will have to come up with a solution pretty quick if the facility is expected to reopen in spring. More on this situation when information becomes available.

In downtown Chicago, good catches of perch are being taken at Navy Pier, including quite a few limits. Perch have been hitting waxworms and spikes on Bait Rigs Tackle Slo-Poke jigs in the 1/32- and 1/64-ounce sizes, set up with a drop sinker on the bottom. They are also hitting minnows—fatheads, rosy reds, and baby roaches—plus redworms, nightcrawler pieces and shrimp.

Some days, perch hit best on jig-and-drop method, while on other days dead sticking works best. Methods and best baits can change from day to day or even hour to hour, so it pays to have a good selection on hand.

Fishing Diversey, Montrose, Belmont and Burnham harbors can also put some limits in the cooler; the same baits that produce at Navy Pier will also take good fish here.

Fishing in the harbors, just like off Navy Pier, depends on the weather and wind conditions. A warm spell can produce smooth sailing with no ice, and you can fish any method you want. A cold snap, however, will bring in the ice off the lake if there is any out there.

If the ice is in, you will need heavy weight to bust a hole through the ice. Usually, a downrigger cannonball and a length of medium rope like nylon chalk line, commonly used on trolleys, will do the trick. You'll also need a length of pipe or conduit to keep ice away from the spot you cleared out.

In harbors, the same method will work as well if the ice is thin enough to bust through; you can fish from the dock. If not, you will need an auger to drill some holes, along with a variety of ice fishing rods. Some anglers even set out tip-ups baited with golden roaches or chubs for a chance at the ever-increasing population of northerns, and now some walleyes are starting to appear.

When perch fishing during the winter months, bring along a good-quality landing net. You might figure, "Why do I need one for perch?" Well, you don't... but you can never tell when a big brown trout, steelhead or lake trout (make sure you have your Lake Michigan trout and salmon stamp) or a whitefish, northern, walleye or burbot might decide to hit. Unless you have a landing net, you can kiss them goodbye.

The South-Side slips on the Calumet River and at 87th street are still producing big catches, but a word to the wise: Many anglers have been sorting their buckets, throwing the smaller ones on the ice or shore, and keeping the bigger ones until they reach their limit. This is illegal—and a waste of our resources. The game warden will be coming around and watching for this activity.

Littering is another problem. It's just a matter of time until the data centers move in and take over. If we want to keep these areas open for fishing, clean up your mess! Take your garbage home with you. This shouldn't be too much to ask. Don't ruin it for everyone! We've already lost too many shore fishing spots.

If you'd rather wait for spring before fishing, there are still a few sports shows left to let you get out and shake the cabin fever:

• January 29-February 1—All-Canada Show at Kane County Fairgrounds, 525 Randall Road, St. Charles, Ill.

• February 13-15—Tinley Park Fishing, Travel and Outdoors Expo at Tinley Park Convention Center, Tinley Park, Ill., tinleyfishexpo.com.

• March 1-3—Northwest Indiana Fishing and Outdoors Expo, 2450 Lincoln St, Highland, Ind., 46322, nwioutdoorexpo.com.

• March 6-8, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Sports Show, State Fair Park, West Allis, Wis.

That about does it for now. It won't be long until spring. ***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.



Well, the Weather Outside is Frightful



This nice pike was only pinned by a trailer hook being added; without it, she'd be just another painful miss.



Worthwhile lure modifications include: a larger front treble adjusted to a 'T' shape, attached with two successive split rings, instead of the original three trebles on a jerkbait; a curly grub pinned onto the hook of a weedless spoon with a piece of tubing; and a streamer instead of the original hook on a spinner.

by Joe Bednar

But your fishing tackle might be worse off! So, this winter, on a day you wanted to fish or hunt—but with 34 degrees and sideways sleet from gale force winds—consider a change in gameplan.

Spend that same amount of time tending your tackle that may have been neglected this past season. It can be a productive use of free time that pays off next year.

Much has been written about maintenance of reels, rods, line and other equipment, so this discussion will focus on what often gets less attention yet is just as important: your lure collection.

Maintenance of soft plastic types is straightforward; it's mainly replacing them as needed during the year, or at the end of the season. So instead, let's get into less-obvious care that provides lasting benefits: Care and improvements to more durable lures.

Hard body help

Hard-body baits, be they crankbaits, jerkbaits, topwaters or others, may appear to need no maintenance. But they do, especially if you use them much. Even when new, some have weak hooks—maybe split rings, too—that can be upgraded. It's a bummer, considering the high cost of lures these days. Yet it's not as depressing as a poor-quality hook bending out to lose your best smallmouth of the season, as your humble author experienced last year.

Whether it's upgrading new hooks or replacing worn-out models, there are many premium-quality replacements to choose from. Gamakatsu, Owner, VMC, Mustad and Eagle Claw all offer great hooks, though if using their more entry-level versions, a rating of at least "2X" in strength helps manage the risks of bending out too readily.

On a related note, once an even high-quality hook has been bent back after a fish or snag, it has lost significant strength, and more bending weakens it even more. Therefore, despite the hassle and expense, replacing these worn hooks is recommended—and weakened split rings, too.

Consider additional hook improvements beyond simple replacements or upgrades. Three trebles on body baits can bring hook tangles and more of a "Bird Cage" effect when harder-mouthed fish like pike strike, impeding hook ups. Three trebles can also make unhooking fish a chore, increasing the odds of you getting hooked, too.

Instead, you can remove the middle treble and use a front treble that's one size larger, or the same size in a wider-gapped and/or longer-shanked model, to help pin fish. Depending on lure size, two successive split rings can be used to provide more separation from the lure body, and more coverage if there's a concern of too much space between the front and rear treble. Or if you need to strengthen your connection, add a second, smaller or larger split ring inside or outside the existing one.

Making a "T" with the first treble on body baits can help, and not just for pike and muskies. This involves some bending, so it's only advised on strong hooks. Note that bending the gap itself is not involved, which results the weakening. Instead, it's turning two hook tines toward a "T" shape, so the tines aren't resting along the body as the lure moves forward.

Other body bait modifications consist of paint touchup or changes, epoxy coating to restore wood or foam body finishes, and possibly weighting. Fingernail polish or permanent markers work for paint touchups, and when the clear coat on wood or foam bodies gets too worn out, an epoxy like Envirotex helps. Weighting to gain a slower rise or suspending effect on floating models can be achieved with Suspend-Strips, weighted hooks, or by inserting weights on large, buoyant, wooden lures.

A helpful spoonful

Maintenance and improvements to spoons mainly centers on hooks, with much of the previous discussion on body baits being applicable, such as replacing weakened hooks, or upgrades to larger or wider-gapped models. Spoon hooks bring an added consideration, however, in that most are improved by a trailer.

Silicone strands through the hook eye are an easy upgrade to a spoon's appeal, secured with a piece of clear PVC tubing pushed past the hook eye, over the strands. Too many strands can hinder performance and bring too much lift, so about a dozen thin strands work well depending on spoon size.

Soft plastic grubs threaded onto a spoon's hook adds enticement, though the curly-tailed versions can tangle with tines a lot, at least on treble hooks. Thin, twin-tailed grubs can work better, undulating behind the spoon with fewer drawbacks.

However, with single-hook spoons, such as weedless versions (like the Johnson Silver Minnow), a curly grub helps trigger strikes. A drawback of most of these is that their design doesn't include a molded peg to help hold a trailer. A bit of super glue can help, but a piece of clear PVC tubing works better. It's not threaded on; the hook is punched through both sides of the tubing which is then pushed tight against the grub.

Consider a variety of other spoon tweaks, like paint touchups. With smooth spoons, decals can be used where there's not too much curvature. Subtle tweaks can also be helpful, such as inserting a treble into the split ring so two tines ride down toward the hump side of the spoon body for better hook-ups, or cutting off a tine with the remaining two facing upward for fewer snags.

A case can also be made for a single, wide-gapped hook working better than a treble for solid hookups. Some anglers rig a small swivel between two split rings, then the single hook, for a rotating effect to help pin fish.

Spin it to win it

Spinnerbaits and in-line spinners offer a host of maintenance and improvement considerations as well. As with other lure types, they are rarely at their best right out of the package.

Most spinnerbaits have an open eyelet—an annoyance when using snaps or leaders with snaps. A variety of hacks can close the eyelet. Perhaps the easiest involves PVC tubing. Stock a couple of different-sized versions with a small inside diameter to choose from, depending on the spinnerbait involved; suitable size pushes snugly over the eyelet.

Trailer hooks are recommended, in multiple sizes, with a 2/0 fitting most spinnerbaits well. PVC tubing is used. Punch the main hook through it above the trailer hook, not using the tubing over the eye of the trailer hook, but punching the main hook through it. You want the trailer to swing freely for better hook ups.

Soft plastic trailers enhance spinnerbaits, too, with many designs having a peg or holding contour to help secure the soft plastic. Curly grubs can tangle with the trailer hook when rigged on the main hook, so they are best rigged on the trailer hook itself. For a main hook/plastic add-on, thin, twin trailers pulsate well; jerk shad types do, too, with the added benefit of more body mass to not tear as readily where they are secured.

Consider even more spinnerbait tweaks, such as smaller blades for more depth. But we have to get to in-line spinners too, right? These are less easily tweaked depending on their design, but still offer significant adjustments.

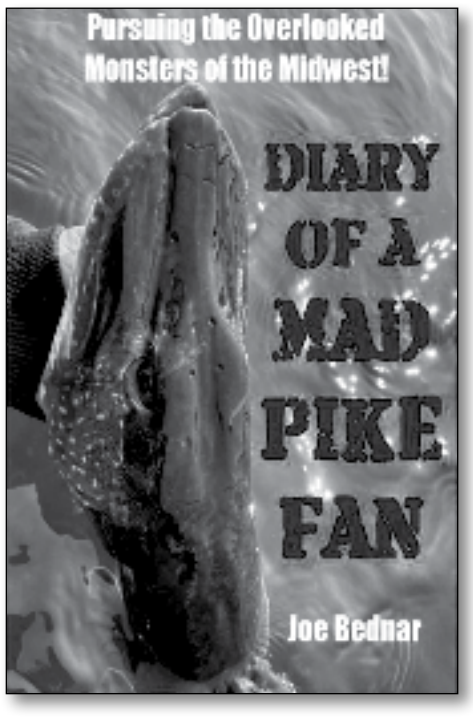
As with other lures, the first consideration is the hook, especially if attached via a split ring. An upgrade in hook quality, size and/or gap width is often worthwhile. Some great models (like Mepps) feature a dressed treble that's not attached with a split ring, requiring that it be cut off for a hook change. These can be used productively until the dressing is worn down, then cut off to employ a split ring for future hook use. Another consideration is buying undressed versions for when you cut off the treble and add a split ring to allow for larger dressed trebles, or other changes like single hooks, flies or streamers.

A couple of other In-line spinner adjustments include adding weight if there's enough space on the wire shaft, or bending the shaft past the eyelet, again if there's enough wire space, to reduce line twist. A bend of about 45 degrees is usually enough and doesn't weaken the wire if done just once.

Hopefully these lure care tips help you out this year. Why not take a break from an awful weather day and give them a try? **MWO**

Joe Bednar has had over 200 articles published on northern pike fishing and other outdoor topics. He was president of the former Pikemasters group out of Michigan, currently serves on their state committee steering fishing regulations, and was a pike columnist with former Esox Angler Magazine out of Minnesota.

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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

February 5-8

Fort Wayne Boat Show and Sale, Allen County Memorial Coliseum, 400 Parnell Ave., Fort Wayne, IN. Hours: Thursday 3 – 8 p.m., Friday 3 – 8 p.m., Saturday 11 a.m. – 8 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. For info: Fort Wayne Boat Show & Sales, info@fortwayneboatshow.com, fortwayneboatshow.com.

February 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. For info: Tipton Gun Shows LLC, Pat Comer, (317) 379-3341, comersguns@yahoo.com.

February 7-8 & 11-15

Cincy Boat Expo, at the Sharonville Convention Center, 11355 Chester Rd., Cincinnati, OH. Hours: Saturdays 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Sundays 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., Wednesday-Friday 12 – 8 p.m. For info: cincyboatexpo@gmail.com, cincyboatexpo.com

February 13-15

Tinley Park Fishing, Travel & Outdoor Expo, Tinley Park Convention Center, Tinley Park, IL. Show Hours: Friday Noon to 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. For info: tinleyfishexpo.com.

February 20-22 and 25 – March 1

Ford Indianapolis Boat, Sport & Travel Show, Indiana State Fairgrounds,1202 E. 38th St., Indianapolis, IN 46205. Show Hours: Friday, Feb. 20: 1 – 8 p.m.; Saturday, Feb. 21: 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.; Sunday, Feb. 22: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Monday & Tuesday, Feb. 23-24 – Closed; Wednesday-Thursday, Feb. 25-26: 12 – 7 p.m.; Friday, Feb. 27: 12 – 8 p.m.; Saturday, Feb. 28: 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.; Sunday, Mar. 1: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. For info: Renfro Productions & Management, Inc., renfroproductions.com, indianapolisboatsportandtravelshow.com.

February 20-22

Lake County Boat Show, Lake County Fairgrounds, 889 South Court St., Crown Point, IN 46356. Show Hours: Friday 2 – 7 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For info: Indiana Boat Shows, LLC., boatshow@boatshop.com, lakecountyboatshow.com.

February 27 – March 1

Indiana Deer, Turkey & Waterfowl Exposition, at the Indiana State Fairgrounds, 1202 E. 38th St., Indianapolis, IN 46205. Show Hours: Friday 12 – 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For info: Renfro Productions & Management, Inc., renfroproductions.com, indianadeerandturkeyexpo.com.

February 27 - March 1

Shipshewana 325 Gun, Knife & Outdoorsmen Show at Shipshewana Flea Market Grounds, Trading Place Auction Building, 345 S Van Buren St., Shipshewana, IN 46565. Hours: Friday 2 - 7 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Gun Slinger Promotions USA, 1gunshowpro@gmail.com, gunslingergunshows.com.

March 6-8

Elkhart 350 Black Friday Gun, Knife & Outdoorsmen Show at Northern Indiana Event Center, Orthwein Pavillion, 21565 Executive Pkwy., Elkhart, IN 46514. Hours: Friday;; 2 - 7 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.,. Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Gun Slinger Promotions USA, Charlotte Rodriguez, 1gunshowpro@gmail.com, gunslingergunshows.com.

March 27-29

Auburn 400 Gun, Knife & Outdoorsmen Show at The Kruse Plaza (formerly the National Military History Center), 5634 Opportunity Blvd., Auburn, IN 46706. Hours: Friday 2 - 7 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Gun Slinger Promotions USA, (260) 624-5996, 1gunshowpro@gmail.com, gunslingergunshows.com.

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Indiana News

Jack Spaulding

Safe, fishable ice

For Indiana ice fishermen and fishable ice, December and early January can be described as "ecstasy" and "agony," or here today and gone tomorrow. Safe, fishable ice has been like a yo-yo with the great fluctuations in temperatures. First, with the Arctic blast in December, there was good fishable ice across almost all of the Hoosier State. Then, record warmth rolled in to completely melt any and all ice. Diehard fishermen determined to wet a line resorted to bank or boat fishing. And, the temperature ups and downs continue.

Indiana's DNY has some sound safety tips for ice fishermen and any others enjoying the frozen water.

Every winter, thousands of Hoosiers safely enjoy fishing, skating, hiking, or just sliding around on frozen ponds and lakes. And every year, people drown after falling through ice. Don't let this happen to you or anyone around you.

Indiana Conservation Officers want to remind Hoosiers to be careful as they participate in activities such as ice fishing, ice skating, or snowmobiling. Remember to put safety first. Take caution when going on frozen lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, and retention ponds. And watch for others who may venture out on frozen waterways and find themselves in trouble.

Similar to needing to drive differently on snowy versus clear roads, safely having fun on ice may require you to adjust from what you have done in the past. The rule of thumb is to believe all ice is thin ice unless proven otherwise.

Here are a few tips to remember when considering standing on or walking on a frozen body of water:

Assume that no ice is safe ice.

Test the thickness of the ice with an ice auger. At least 4 inches is recommended for ice fishing; 5 inches is recommended for snowmobiling.

If you don't know the thickness of the ice, don't go out on it.

Wear a life jacket or flotation coat.

Carry ice picks and rope gear.

Before going on the ice, leave a note of your whereabouts with a friend or family member.

Don't test the thickness of the ice while alone.

Wearing a life jacket is especially important when on ice. If you fall through, a life jacket will keep your head above the water until help arrives.

Remember that a new coating of snow, while perhaps beautiful, can make for treacherous ice conditions. Snow can serve as insulation, causing water to freeze at a slower rate. When snow and rain freeze into ice, it is not as strong as solid, clear ice.

Another potentially dangerous situation is when you see a pet or other animal in distress on the ice. If this happens, do not go after the animal. Instead, contact local emergency response personnel, who are equipped to make a rescue.

A few more tips:

Some bodies of water may appear to be frozen solid but still have thin ice in several unexpected areas.

Avoid flowing water, such as rivers and streams, when covered by a layer of ice.

Similarly, water surrounded by sand may freeze with inconsistencies in the thickness of the ice. Underground springs, wind, waterfowl, and other animals can also keep areas of ice thin.

Enjoy the winter weather but make safety a priority.

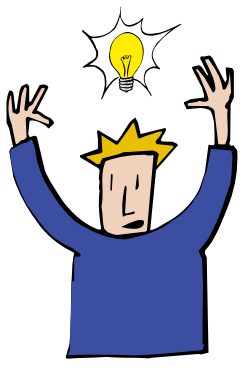
Wintertime smallmouth bass fishing

Don't let colder days fool you into hanging up your fishing rods. The winter months still offer great opportunities to catch smallmouth bass.

When the water temperatures drop, the metabolisms of smallmouth slow down, and the fish head for deeper water with slow current to spend the winter. To target them, get out on your favorite river and search for slow, deep water (somewhere in the 15-foot range). Dark-colored jigs or Texas-style worm soft baits can be used to target them. Smallmouth bass usually winter in schools, so if you find one, there's a good chance more are close by.

To find a good river for targeting

Send us your bright idea!



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Please be sure to include your name and mailing address where we can send your prize.
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smallmouth bass, check out the fisheries department online Where to Fish map.

It's always a good time to donate

Whether it's Giving Tuesday, a regular Tuesday, or any other day, Indiana's rare and endangered species benefit from donations.

The past year, generous donors to the Indiana Nongame Wildlife Fund provided critical funding for projects protecting some of our state's rarest species. Projects included rearing and releasing more than 900 state-endangered crawfish frogs, partnering with the National Parks Service to improve freshwater mussel populations, researching recently released Franklin's ground squirrels, and surveying rare bird and bat populations. The projects are a small sample of what a gift to the Nongame Wildlife Fund supports.

For every $50 donated, Indiana receives $143 for conservation thanks to federal grants. Generous donors like you make our efforts to protect Indiana's biodiversity possible. Contribute today by donating to the Indiana Nongame Wildlife Fund.

Hoosiers and forest management

A recent survey indicates that Hoosiers support a balanced approach to forest management of woodlands in Indiana—which includes managing forests to support biodiversity, environmental benefits, outdoor recreation, the production of wood products, and protection against wildfires.

This is according to a public opinion survey conducted by Purdue University's Department of Forestry and Natural Resources and D. J. Case & Associates. The survey follows a similar study conducted by the same organizations in 2009.

"Indiana's forests encompass some of our state's most cherished natural resources, which we must responsibly manage for future generations," said Governor Mike Braun. "Like many Hoosiers reflected in this survey, I support a balanced approach to forest management, and I'm pleased to see how, under my leadership, DNR and its partners are carrying out that mission so effectively. As a result, Indiana's state forests are growing healthier ecosystems and creating more opportunities for Hoosiers to get outside and explore our impressive forestland."

Eighty percent of respondents value forests for recreation, biodiversity, and environmental benefits. Most respondents also support tree harvests for forest health (87 percent), to support biodiversity (78 percent), to protect against wildfires (82 percent), or to protect against insects and disease (91 percent).

A second report compares the 2024 findings to the 2009 survey, the results of which are also posted on the website.

The comparison notes a shift from the broad ecological concerns expressed in 2009 toward specific concerns about land-use change and development. Perceptions of wildfires or unplanned fires as a threat remained stable, but concern over use of planned or prescribed fires for forest management declined significantly from 2009. Perceptions of insects, diseases, and the spread of non-native plants and animals remained largely unchanged.

"The dedicated work of DNR's knowledgeable professionals is foundational to healthy woodlands, wildlife, and outdoor recreation across both public and private land statewide," said Alan Morrison, Indiana DNR director. "This survey shows that most Hoosiers consider themselves 'nature lovers' and perceive DNR's forest management practices favorably."

The mission of the DNR Division of Forestry is to promote and practice good stewardship of natural, recreational, and cultural resources on Indiana's public and private forest lands. The stewardship produces continuing benefits, both tangible and intangible, for present and future generations.

Support Indiana DNR

Since 1982, the Indiana Nongame Wildlife Fund has supported efforts to conserve rare and endangered species, protecting our Hoosier heritage for generations to come.

In 2025, DNR and its partners worked on strategic conservation initiatives for many of Indiana's most vulnerable wildlife species. From captive rearing and releasing over 900 state-endangered crawfish frogs to partnering with the National Parks Service to promote freshwater mussel populations, our biologists' work is as diverse as the species benefited.

The projects, and many more, were made possible thanks to donations to the Indiana Nongame Wildlife Fund, a dedicated source of funding for the conservation of rare species in Indiana.

Are you ready to take the next step in supporting Indiana's rare wildlife?

Consider donating to the Indiana Nongame Wildlife Fund. Thanks to federal match funding, for every $50 donated, Indiana receives an additional $93 for rare and endangered species conservation work. Donations can be made online at: in.gov/dnr/fish-and-wildlife. ***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 jackspaulding1971@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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We know that sportsmen and women are the watchdogs of our waterways. Still, our ponds, lakes, and rivers are being littered with worn-out soft plastic lures. Commit to stopping litter – including used tackle. When a soft plastic lure is worn or damaged, dispose of it properly. Recycle it or pitch it in a trash can.

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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

January 28 – February 1

60th Detroit Camper and RV Show, at the Suburban Collection Showplace, 46100 Grand River Ave., Novi, MI 48374. Hours: Wednesday – Friday 1 – 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m to 5 p.m. For info: MARVAC, marvac.org, michiganrvandcampgrounds.org.

February 11-15

Grand Rapids Boat Show, at DeVos Place, 303 Monroe Ave. NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Show Hours: Wednesday 2 – 8 p.m., Thursday 12 – 8 p.m., Friday 12 – 9 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m to 5 p.m. For info: ShowSpan, Inc., John Loeks, (616) 447-2860, showspan.com, events@showspan.com.

February 12-15

Detroit Boat Show, at the Suburban Collection Showplace, 46100 Grand River Avenue, Novi, MI 48374. Show Hours: Thursday & Friday 2 – 9 p.m., Saturday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For info: MBIA, boatmichigan@mbia.org, mbia.org or boatmichigan.org.

February 13-14

Lapeer Gun & Knife Show at The Lapeer Center Building, 425 County Center St., Lapeer, MI 48446. Hours: Friday 3 - 6:30 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission $6, children under 14 free with paying adult. Vendor tables $35 ea. For info: PJS Promotions LLC, Pamela Smith, (989) 798-8709, mtmm1@yahoo.com.

February 14-15

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 17 and under free. Vendor tables $25 ea. For info: Huron Gun Collectors, (734) 260-3751, huronguncollectors@yahoo.com, huronguncollectorsmi.com.

February 19-22

Cottage and Lakefront Living Show – Detroit, at the Suburban Collection Showplace, 46100 Grand River Ave., Novi, MI 48347. Show Hours: Thursday 1 – 8 p.m., Friday 12 – 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m to 5 p.m. For info: Showspan Inc., showspan.com, events@showspan.com.

February 19-22

Outdoorama at the Suburban Collection Showplace, 46100 Grand River Ave., Novi, MI 48347, Show Hours: Thursday 1 – 8 p.m., Friday 12 – 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m to 5 p.m. For info: Showspan Inc., showspan.com, events@showspan.com.

February 20-22

Gaylord Boat Show, at the The Ellison Place, 150 Dale Dr, Gaylord, MI 49735. Show Hours: Friday 12 – 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m to 4 p.m. For info: Blue Water Promotions, gaylordboatshow.com, info@gaylordboatshow.com.

February 21-22

Westland Gun and Knife Show at VFW Post 3323, 1055 S. Wayne Road, Westland, MI 48186. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Admission $6. For info: Old Time Gun Show, oldtimegunshow@gmail.com.

February 28 - March 1

Macomb Gun Show at Lakeside Mall (Former Sears Garage), 14100 Lakeside Circle, Sterling Heights, MI 48313. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: Jack Jewell, (810) 858-0078, jackisjewell@gmail.com, greatlakesgunshows.com.

March 7-8

Old Time Gun Show at Knights of Columbus 48161, 202 W Front St., Monroe, MI 48239. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. For info: Jeff Walker, (313) 475-4922, oldtimegunshow@gmail.com.

March 28-29

Capital Gun Show at Lansing Center, 333 E Michigan Ave., Lansing, MI 48933. Hours: Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For info: JDR Promotions LLC, (810) 292-0001, greatlakesgunshows.com.

For the most up-to-date info go to:
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