

OF THE OUTDOORS | GARY HOWEY

It's Hard Water Time: Ice Fishing

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

Just received an E-mail from a friend up north with a photo of several nice fish he took through the ice, made me want to get my ice fishing gear in order, because any day know, the bite is going to take off and I want to be ready.

I have my new Jiffy auger ready to go, my Otter Ice house, but I'm waiting on my new Vexilar Fish Scout Double Vision with FL20-TRI. The unit allows me to have my FL-20 locator and Fish Scout camera all in one unit, allowing my ice fishing to be more of a science and less a guessing game.

As most ice fishermen know, first ice can be some of the best hard water fishing there is as fish haven't totally went into their winter routine and they'll still be hanging around the areas they did before things started freezing up.

First ice is also some of the toughest ice to read, as all ice doesn't form at the same time, with some ice freezing more solid than ice in other areas. The moving water, snow cover as well as decaying vegetation are all things that affect the ice thickness, so anglers need to be careful on first ice.

On small bodies of water, I'm looking for changes in the bottom structure, with the edge of or open pockets in the weeds being an excellent place to start looking for fish. If these weeds are adjacent to deeper water, you're in the right spot. I'll use my locator to check out these spots before I get to excited, in order to see if there are any fish in the area.

I won't even punch a hole through the ice; I'll shoot right through it. To shoot through the ice, you're going to need a plastic bag filled with antifreeze to hold



Author and Jon Thelen, of Crystal, Minn., are pictured with some early ice walleye taken while fishing on Lake of the Woods.

PHOTO: LARRY MYHRE

your transducer. By doing this, you can place the bag and transducer right on the ice, shoot through it and see what lies below it. You'll need clear ice in order to get an accurate reading as air bubbles and milky colored ice will goof up your reading.

Since I love jigging, ice fishing is right up my alley as jigging is a big part of the deal when it comes to attracting and catching fish through the ice. It's not the same type of jigging you'd be doing on the open water as fish are cold blooded, so they slow down in cold water, almost to a point where they don't move much at all, which means, they won't need to feed as they would when water temps were warm.

Jigging in the winter is more like a twitching or wiggling of the bait, which can be accomplished by simply twitching the rod tip, just enough to make your ultra light weight bait move a bit in the water.

If you haven't set right up on top of the fish, you're going to

need to bring them in under your hole and this can be done in a couple of ways. One is to use rattling bait, something that will make a little noise to bring the fish in. Baits with sound chambers that contain BB's like the Lindy Darter will make racket, drawing attention to your baits. They're great attractors and since they're generally larger baits, they're usually those baits that take the larger more aggressive fish.

Another bait that really works well for drawing in and catching all species of fish are the rattling spoons, which come in all sizes. The Rattling Flyer Spoon comes in 1/16" to 1 1/4" as well as in a larger 3/8 ounce. The wings on this spoon cause it to spin out as it drops, this along with its rattles work very well attracting fish into your hole.

We'll fish out of two holes, if needed using our ice cabins to keep us comfortable and out of the weather. In one hole, we'll use rattling baits, jigged them

rather vigorously to draw fish in with a smaller live bait rig in the other hole. It can be a small ice jig tipped with a minnow, grub or even a piece of a minnow as many times, the rattling bait will draw the fish in and the smaller live bait rig will take the fish.

Livebait rigs such, as a hook and split shot rig tipped with a smaller minnow suspended below a micro bobber can be deadly. You'll want it so just big enough bobber or float is visible above the water. With very little bobber setting on top of the water, it takes very little effort for the fish to pull the float down. Since a float set this way has very little resistance and when a fish picks up, moving off with your bait, it's less likely to drop it.

This is where the Rod-N-Bobb's® Mr. Ice™ Bobber really come into it's own as they're a foam bobber used with a bobber stop. Since they're soft foam, they can be trimmed down to the exact size needed, so that there's

Authorities Lift Fed Protections For Gray Wolf In Parts Of Midwest

MILWAUKEE (MCT) — A resurgent population has prompted authorities to lift federal protections for the gray wolf in Wisconsin and other parts of the Upper Midwest.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said Wednesday that it was removing Endangered Species Act protections for the wolf in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and portions of adjoining states.

After the announcement, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker ordered the state Department of Natural Resources to implement a state wolf management plan, which is designed to protect animals while also being able to control a growing population.

Wolves — which can travel up to 30 miles a day — have soared to about 800 in Wisconsin. That far exceeds the state's goal of 350. There are now more than 4,000 wolves in the Midwest.

Under the state management plan, the DNR or those acting on its behalf will be able to kill problem wolves. The agency will be able to issue permits to landowners to kill wolves on their property where there are documented cases of depredation or harassment.

A Fish and Wildlife spokesman said the changes are expected to go into effect at the end of January.

The announcement appears to bring a protracted battle over the wolf's status to an end.

The Fish and Wildlife Service made several attempts in recent years to remove the wolf from its list of endangered species, but faced an array of legal challenges.

One stumbling block was resolved when the agency said it had dropped a plan to elevate a subspecies of the gray wolf to full species status.

Also, the northeastern United

States will not be a part of the delisting. There are currently few, if any, wolves in that region, and some environmentalists wanted to make sure they have a chance to return there as well.

Walker and DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp applauded the Fish and Wildlife Service's decision, as did several environmental groups, including the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"I firmly support the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to delist the wolf in the upper Great Lakes states," Walker said in a statement. "Wisconsin has exceeded its delisting goal eight times over and must have flexibility to manage wolf problems."

The Natural Resources Defense Council said that even though it had fought the removal of federal protection in the northern Rockies, it's a different story in the Midwest.

"There are a lot more wolves," the group said.

But the Center for Biological Diversity said the decision was premature, and contended that wolves remained threatened by disease and human persecution. It criticized Minnesota for using a bounty system to kill problem wolves, and said there should be less emphasis on lethal controls.

The group said it supports the government's conclusion to retain protections for wolves in the Northeast.

As its numbers soared in recent years, the wolf became a lightning rod of controversy. Motorists bought Wisconsin license plates with its iconic image, but some deer hunters blamed wolves for reducing the deer population in parts of the north. At least seven wolves are believed to have been killed during the 2011 deer hunting season.

Attacks on livestock and pets also escalated tensions. The state has paid out more than \$1 million for animal depredation by wolves between 1985 and 2010, state records show.

Despite their prevalence today, wolves were wiped off the state's landscape between 1960 and 1974. In the mid-1970s, they began to migrate from Minnesota.

The Fish and Wildlife Service said wolf populations will be monitored for at least five years, and if the numbers backslide, the agency could move to relist the species.

Also, in Wisconsin, lawmakers are expected to introduce legislation that could lead the way toward a hunting season for wolves.

Sheriff Warns Of Cracks In The Ice On Lake Of The Woods

BAUDETTE, Minn. (AP) — Ice anglers should avoid the west side of Lake of the Woods unless they're going out with a resort or an expert who knows the conditions, authorities warned Friday.

Conditions on the west side are treacherous because of cracks caused by recent warm temperatures and prevalent south winds on the popular big lake at the northernmost tip of Minnesota, the Grand Forks Herald reported (<http://bit.ly/tSS2AC>).

Lake of the Woods County Sheriff Dallas Block told the newspaper one crack was at least 100 yards wide Wednesday morning. He said it skimmed over Wednesday night and had a light covering of snow Friday morning that could give the illusion of safety.

"It's a real trap," he said. "My recommendations are that nobody goes on the west side of the lake."

The sheriff said anglers should target their efforts for now on the east side where conditions are safer, but access should be limited to light vehicles such as ATVs. No walleye is worth risking a life, he said.

"Hopefully we're not going to have anybody doing anything foolish. I've never seen these kind of

very little of the float above the water, allowing you to detect the slightest pick up.

When it comes to ice fishing, little always seems to be better. Most of the time, you'll have better luck using light line, small lures and being patient.

If patience is one of your virtues, then the run and run method will probably work best for you. Run and Gun means just that, locate the fish, fish hard until the bite dies, pack up and head across the ice looking for fish holding spots. Using your locator before you punch any holes and hoot through the ice, looking for fish holding structure and fish. Once you've located what you're looking for, punch a few holes, fish hard and when the bite dies, hit the ice again, repeating the process.

Dave Genz, a Minnesota angler all ice fishermen are familiar with as he helped develop the Run & Gun ice fishing method. He's known for his Fish Trap and the Clam Ice Fishing System and was one of the first to use and tweak portable fish finder being used on the ice.

He very seldom sets in one spot very long as once he's taken the active fish from an area, he moves on, drilling more holes through the ice than any ice fishermen I know, allowing him to take fish when other anglers are dying because they are setting on one or two holes.

Early ice can be one of the most productive times for ice fishermen and those using rattling baits and the Run and Gun method will surely out fish anglers camping out on one area.

We at Outdoorsmen Productions LLC hope you all have a very Merry Christmas and find time in the upcoming year to get out and spend a little time in the outdoors.

Gary Howey, Hartington, NE. is the producer/host of the Outdoorsmen Adventures television series, and the co-host of the Outdoor Adventures radio program. For more information on the South Dakota and Nebraska Outdoors, check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

conditions on the lake and I've worked here 37 years," Block said. "Maybe we have, but I don't recall, and I know resorters who have been in the business for years, and this is unprecedented."

Rescuers in central Minnesota had to use hovercraft, a helicopter and boats Wednesday night to reach about 20 people stranded on Mille Lacs Lake when a sheet of ice broke loose and began drifting. That was at least the third time this winter that rescuers had to help stranded Minnesota anglers. The previous two incidents were on Upper Red Lake in northern Minnesota. No one was hurt in any of those incidents.

All SD State Parks Recognized For Customer Service

PIERRE — The South Dakota Office of Tourism recently named 62 Game, Fish and Parks Department entities as recipients of the 2011 Great Service STAR Program.

All South Dakota state parks, recreation areas, nature areas, and the state park system's main office in Pierre were honored. The program recognizes both government agencies and private businesses for providing outstanding customer service.

"This award is a tribute to the customer service that our entire Game, Fish and Parks staff provides," said Department Secretary Jeff Vonk. "State park staffers across South Dakota do an excellent job of providing quality service and educational experiences to park visitors. This outside recognition reaffirms their efforts."

To qualify for the honor, participants must complete a set of criteria for hospitality training of their employees. Those completing all steps of the program are awarded the Great Service STAR logo to use in their marketing.

The requirements include participating in hospitality training, implementing a system for visitor feedback, and recognizing outstanding employees. When those requirements are met, participants apply for the award through the South Dakota Office of Tourism.

Campsite Reservations For Custer Open Jan. 2

CUSTER STATE PARK — The New Year will find many people making plans for their 2012 camping trips in South Dakota. Beginning Monday, Jan. 2, campsite reservations may be made for the upcoming season in Custer State Park.

Campsite reservations for Custer State Park will be accepted beginning at 6 a.m. Mountain Time on Jan. 2 for all arrival dates between May 18 and Oct. 8, 2012. Those reservations can be made by calling 1-800-710-2267 between 6 a.m.-4 p.m. MT.

Beginning Jan. 2, online reservations for Custer State Park can be made 24 hours a day at www.campsd.com. Those website visitors can also view details about each site, such as pad length and amount of shade.

Telephone and online reservations for campsites at other South Dakota state parks and recreation areas can be made 90 days before arrival for the summer and fall camping seasons. Feb. 18 is the first day to make reservations for Friday, May 18, which is Open House Weekend at South Dakota state parks and recreation areas. Reservations open Feb. 25 for arrivals on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend.

The reservation center is currently accepting reservations for group campsites, lodge facilities and camping cabins for some 2012 arrivals. Group lodge facilities at Lake Thompson, Mina Lake, Oahe Downstream, and Shadehill Recreation Areas, and Palisades and Newton Hills State Parks can currently be reserved for all arrival dates in 2012.

The call center is taking group camping reservations in Custer State Park and Lewis and Clark and North Point recreation areas for the 2012 camping season. Reservations for camping cabins can be made year-round, within 90 days of arrival.

For more information on reservations, visit S.D. state parks online at www.gfp.sd.gov.

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Advance Services Ribbon Cutting

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FREE FAMILY Movie Night

Middle School Lecture Hall
Friday, Dec. 30th • 6:30-10pm

Gnomeo & Juliet
The Muppets Christmas Carol
Refreshments! Door Prizes!

FREE SWIM&GYM & Family Board Games

Summit Center
Thursday, Dec. 29th
1-4pm

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