

OUTDOORS DIGEST

Of The Outdoors | Gary Howey

Anglers Reminded To Use Caution While Ice Fishing

PIERRE – The calendar may say we are close to winter, but mild temperatures and snow cover have made for “unwinter-like” conditions on most of South Dakota’s lakes, rivers and streams. Due to the mild beginning to the ice fishing season, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) officials are urging anglers, snowmobilers and recreationists to take extreme caution when venturing out.

“Ice conditions across the state are not very good right now,” said John Lott, GFP fisheries administrator. “Repeated freezing and thawing have made for poor ice and open areas on many of our lakes.”

The rule of thumb is that it takes at least two inches of ice to support an angler, at least six inches to support an ice shack and over a foot for a vehicle, but that applies to strong, clear ice. Many area lakes have produced “cloudy” or “dark” ice due to the warm conditions. Dark or cloudy ice is not as strong as clear ice.

If a person is going to venture out, they should also test ice conditions as they proceed. “Just because an angler sees six inches near the shore, doesn’t mean it will be six inches across the lake. Springs, current, wind or ice heaves all effect the formation of ice and can make ice very dangerous,” concluded Lott.

Anglers are reminded to drill test holes to measure the thickness of the ice they are traveling on, have flotation devices available and tell someone where they are going to be.

S.D. Snowmobile Season Officially Open

PIERRE – Snowmobile trails in South Dakota opened this week, but trail officials are still waiting to see what the storm brings.

“The Black Hills has seen minimal snowfall so far this season,” said Black Hills Trails district supervisor, Shannon Percy. “Grooming operations will be limited until we see additional accumulation.

Percy would like to remind riders that some obstacles exist throughout the 350-mile Black Hills Trails system due to the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic.

“Snowmobilers should be aware that trees, broken tree tops and dangling branches can fall at any time while riding on and off-trail,” said Percy. “Please be aware of your surroundings as trees and debris may cause obstructions.”

Eastern South Dakota saw significant accumulations in November, but most of that snow has since melted. Current projections have snow accumulations adding up in some parts of central and eastern South Dakota.

“Heaviest snow accumulation is expected Tuesday into Wednesday in western and central South Dakota,” said state snowmobile trails coordinator Ryan Raynor. “Typically we wait for 4-5 inches before grooming operations begin, and according to current projects some areas could see that and then some.

Snowmobile clubs in eastern South Dakota groom, sign and maintain over 1,200 miles of trails through a grant-in-aid agreement with the state.

Raynor and Percy would like to remind resident and non-resident snowmobilers with unlicensed sleds, they may purchase a five-day, temporary snowmobile permit online at <http://gfp.sd.gov/to-do/snowmobile/license.aspx>. The permit is \$40.

“In the past, this permit was only available at select trailside vendors,” said Raynor. “Now riders have the convenience of purchasing the permit on their personal mobile device before they hit the trails.”

Current trail conditions are available online as well as on the SDGFP Outdoors mobile app.

Trail condition updates are also posted to Twitter accounts dedicated to both the Black Hills and the East River trails (www.twitter.com/SDsnowBHills and www.twitter.com/SDsnowEast).

For more information about snowmobiling in South Dakota, visit <http://gfp.sd.gov/to-do/snowmobile/default.aspx>, or call 605-584-3896 for Black Hills trails information or 605-773-2888 for East River trails.

Moose Sighted In North Platte, Neb.

LINCOLN, Neb. – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission officials confirmed a weekend sighting of a moose within the city limits of North Platte.

The moose had been in the area for about a month before being spotted in town on Dec. 13, according to officials. Game and Parks biologists are communicating with local law enforcement about the moose’s whereabouts. If the opportunity presents itself, officials will attempt to direct the moose out of town.

Officials stress that people should not approach the moose to take pictures or attempt to feed it as they have been known to become aggressive toward people and pets.

Aggressive moose often show a variety of signs, including pinned back or flattened ears with hair raised around the neck and back. Other signs are a lowered head, stomping feet and teeth clicking or licking of its lips. In the case of a moose charging, people are encouraged to run and not stand their ground.

Hunters Advised That Telecheck Link Has Changed

LINCOLN – The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission would like to remind big game hunters that the link to the Telecheck website has changed. Telecheck may now be accessed at <http://apps.outdoornebraska.gov/BgHarvest/>.

The Nebraska Telecheck Program allows hunters to check deer or antelope by telephone or online, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All deer harvested outside the November firearm season must be checked via Telecheck, as manual check stations only are available for the November firearm season. Antelope archers, muzzleloaders and late season hunters must use Telecheck. Elk must be delivered to a check station before leaving the state and within 48 hours of kill, but no later than 1 p.m. of the day following the close of any portion of the season. To use Telecheck via phone, call 844-279-4564.

Late Season Can Be Great

BY GARY HOWEY

Hartington, Neb.

Late season, just before freeze up is the time you should be on the water fishing for walleyes as they have started making their way upstream in preparation of next spring’s spawn. In the Missouri River System, this migration is halted by the Missouri River dam systems.

Because the fish are stacked up below the dams, you will find them in the same general area you found them in early fall, perhaps a little deeper as they are in that transition period where they will soon be moving into their wintering areas.

Since water temperatures have dropped, so has the fish’s metabolism, so a slow presentation is what is needed to catch them. Many of the fish will have worked into the deeper water, just off the drop offs, moving very little.

The preferred bait during the late season would be jigs worked vertically, just verily raising the jig off the bottom, holding it there for a second and then following it back to the bottom. Livebait rigs such as Northland Roach rigs also produce well during cold weather and fished in the same manner as a jig.

Because water temperatures are cooling, you might have to play with the fish a bit. This is the time of the year when you want to be a line watcher. In the late season, fish are not attacking your bait and may simply pick it up and move it to the side. By watching your line where it enters the water, you can detect these subtle bites.

When fishing jigs you might want to start out by giving the fish some slack line when you feel a pickup, as they may have simply stopped the bait and not have inhaled the hook. Once you feel the weight on the end of your line, simply drop your rod back and then set the hook.

Early winter is one of those times when stinger hooks really shine, hooking those fish that are just messing with your bait. Stinger hook are a made up of either monofilament or a light leader material with a small hook. Tied to either the eye of the jig or shank of the hook and then hooked into the back of the minnow, allowing you to hook those short striking fish just biting the tail of the minnow.

If you are fishing in an area with snags, a single hook stinger is your best bet. In clean bottom areas, a stinger with a small treble hook works very well.

Whenever you are fishing a live bait rig, no matter what the season, when you feel a fish take your bait, you will want to feed the fish a little line, allowing him to ingest the bait, generally a three count is plenty, and then set the hook.

If you have tried to feed line to the fish and come up short, start setting the hook when you first detect



OUTDOORSMEN PRODUCTIONS PHOTO

Good friend, Chuck Krause of Gettysburg is an expert at catching fall walleyes. These fish were caught on jigs and released during the late fall.

ing with your bait.

the bite, you never know until you try it. Even when the water temperatures are cold and fish are at their slowest, once one fish starts paying attention to your bait it may entice other fish to bite.

Most of the fish caught this time of the year are going to be those smaller aggressive males and a few of the larger females. To assure there will be fish to catch in the future, release the females’ back, as they cannot reproduce, future generations of fish once, they are in your freezer.

Take a picture of those larger fish, release them, then say a little prayer the fish has learned its lesson and will not fall for the next boats jig. It also would not hurt to say a little prayer that the next angler who catches it will feel the same way and release it.

Late season can be some great

fishing, so when your work schedule and Mother Nature allows, hit the water as it may not be long before things really freeze up.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Nebraska, is a former tournament angler, fishing and hunting guide. He is the Producer/Host of the award winning Outdoorsmen Adventures television series, seen locally in Channels 2 and 98 at Saturday at 6:30 pm and Sunday at 7:00 am and on the MIDCO Sports Network Thursday at 5:30 pm and Sunday at 10:00 am. The show airs in nine states in the upper Midwest. He and Simon Fuller Co-Host the Outdoor Adventures radio program on Classic Hits 106.3, ESPN Sports Radio 1570 in Southeastern South Dakota, Northeast Nebraska and on KCHE 92.1 FM in Northwest Iowa. Looking for more outdoor information, check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

Dream Trip: Grizzly, Moose, Sheep In Alaska

BY SAM COOK

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Matt Yernatich had made Alaskan hunting trips before. But in September of 2009, he flew to the South Slope of Alaska’s Brooks Range for a hunt that would top all the others.

Yernatich spends most of his time preserving hunting and fishing memories for others. For the past 32 years, he has been a taxidermist and owns Artistic Anglers, a replica fish and taxidermy studio in Rice Lake.

On previous Alaskan trips, Yernatich had shot moose, caribou, a Dall sheep and a brown bear.

Now he was going back, hoping to shoot a grizzly and another moose. And if the opportunity arose, he would consider taking another Dall sheep, too.

“I was an equal-opportunity hunter,” said Yernatich, 56. “If the opportunity presented itself, I would hunt it.”

He booked the trip with Jim Kedrowski’s Alaska Hunting Expeditions, flying from Fairbanks to Coldfoot and then by Beaver to a camp on the banks of the North Fork of the Chandalar River. Yernatich had hunted with Kedrowski, originally from Minnesota, on previous trips.

The Chandalar River gathers water from four drainages and flows south into the Yukon River. The river is just south of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Each day, Yernatich, along with Kedrowski and an assistant guide, would ride horses up various drainages, climb to an overlook and use binoculars to search for game.

On an earlier trip with Kedrowski, the guide had asked Yernatich if he had ridden horses before.

“No,” Yernatich told Kedrowski, “but I’ve watched a lot of Westerns.”

Kedrowski just laughed, and Yernatich quickly grew comfortable with riding.

The Chandalar country is vast and mostly tundra with clusters of willows along creeks. Mountains rise to 4,000 feet or more. Yernatich and two other hunters in Kedrowski’s camp on this last trip of the year would see nobody else during the week, just one helicopter flying below them in the Chandalar valley.

On Yernatich’s second day in camp, the hunters spotted a grizzly, rode their horses



PHOTO COURTESY MATT YERNATICH/TNS

Matt Yernatich, left, of Duluth, Minnesota, takes time for a photo with the moose he shot in Alaska’s Brooks Range with guide Jim Kedrowski, center, and assistant guide Bret Ackerman. The moose had a 52-inch antler spread.

across the river and made a sneak toward it on foot. Yernatich shot the grizzly at 228 yards with his .30-06. The bear measured 72 inches from nose to tail, Yernatich said, probably weighing 400 to 500 pounds.

He spent the next day in camp fleshing its hide so he could do a lifesize mount of the bear. That tanned hide is still in the freezer in Duluth awaiting mounting.

“Mounting my own grizzly doesn’t pay the bills,” Yernatich said with a laugh.

Looking for a moose

Yernatich and his guides spent the next two days glassing for moose before deciding to ride five or six miles to a spike camp downriver. On the ride, they spotted the head and antlers of a moose high on a ridge. Yernatich, working downwind, made the climb on foot toward the moose, eventually getting above it on the mountain.

Finally, he saw its head. The moose was lying in the brush. When Kedrowski approached it from below, the moose stood up. Shooting freehand from less than 100 yards, Yernatich dropped the moose, which had a 52-inch antler spread.

The moose wasn’t as large as Yernatich had thought it might be when he originally saw it from below. But he

didn’t hesitate to take it when he had the opportunity.

“It doesn’t have to be a huge trophy in my eyes,” Yernatich said. “It’s about the experience and the memory.”

He and his guides loaded the meat and hide on the horses and made the trip back to camp. A shoulder mount of the moose now hangs in the Artistic Anglers taxidermy studio.

Time for a sheep

With time left in his hunt – and perfect weather – he and his guides rode a couple of hours to a spike camp on another day to go sheep

hunting. In the rugged terrain, they climbed high to look for sheep. Yernatich had done hill running at Chester Bowl, along with a lot of walking and bicycling, to prepare for the physical demands of the trip. That paid off in the mountains.

“My motto was, ‘I may not beat you to the top, but I’m gonna get to the top,’ “ he said.

He and his guides spotted several sheep high above them late one day. They decided to spend the night at the spike camp and try to find the rams in the morning.

In the morning, they hiked to the top of the mountain, where they looked into a basin

and observed the sheep walking. One of the rams was legal to shoot, having large enough horns.

Yernatich took several shots from 432 yards and a finishing shot at 50 yards. The ram had 37-inch horns and was estimated to be 9 years old, he said.

Like the grizzly hide, Yernatich’s ram hide is tanned and in safekeeping. Yernatich plans a full-body mount of the ram.

Perfect conditions

He had taken a grizzly, a moose and a Dall sheep in six and a half days of hunting. He’s the only client of Kedrowski’s to take three animals in such a short time frame.

“To do that, the weather has to be perfect,” Yernatich said. “We had no rain, and it was maybe in the 20s to low 30s at night. The stars and planets were aligned...”

While taking the animals was rewarding, Yernatich said, what made the trip so memorable was the hunting, the country, his guides and the camp camaraderie. The evening he shot the grizzly remains indelible in his memory.

“The moon was out,” he said, “and we were riding back to camp along the riverbed. It was dead quiet. You could hear the water in the river, the horses’ hooves clanking on the rocks. You could see sparks coming from the hooves. It was a full moon. It was the three of us, nobody talking. The horses knew the way. They wanted to get back to camp. You’re just riding along. And I’m thinking, ‘There’s something mystical about this. I’m a lucky guy to be able to experience it.’ “

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