

OF THE OUTDOORS | GARY HOWEY

Locaters Make Ice Fishing Easier

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

Ice fishing this year has been slow to start as in some places; the weather hasn't been cold enough to make ice while areas farther north have had just enough ice to allow fishermen to get out with snowmobiles or four wheelers.

A couple weeks ago, we headed up to the Webster-Waubay area to ice fish with Cory Ewing of Waubay Lakes Guide Service as he'd been doing quite well on several of the lakes and sloughs in the area.

Heading north, it was hard to believe it was December as temps were in the high 40's and 50's, not exactly what you'd call ice building or fishing weather. As we got farther north around Sioux Falls, we began to see some ice, with much of it not looking to be good ice as it was off colored.

Many of the sloughs and larger lakes we passed on the way up had some ice, but many still had open water. On those that were completely frozen, so anyone who planned to venture out onto the ice needed to do it cautiously.

We'd start out on Pickeral Lake as reports had come in of good numbers of crappies being caught on the lake. As anyone whose went after crappies under the ice can tell you, you never know where you'll find them as they're known to work up and down cruising at different



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HOWEY

depths in search of food and if you fish blind, near the bottom like many ice fishermen do, chances are you're going to catch very few fish.

This is where a good fish locator is invaluable as they allow you to know what depth the fish are located.

We've used the Vexilar locaters for years in both open and hard water conditions helping us to locate and catch fish that were cruising just a few feet below the surface on down to those holding tight to the bottom.

Fish locaters are sonar units, which shoot a signal to the bottom that bounces back to the unit's transducer. The locator then figures out the amount of time it took for the signal to return, converting it to the depth, which is then indicated on the screen.

Vexilar's three colors allow the angler to not only know the depth of the water and the fish below, it allow us to follow our bait down as well as letting us see if we have bait on the jigs, as the bait appears as a small red dot within the green signal from your jig.

As the bait descends, a green line appears on the Vexilar screen, indicating the depth of your jig or spoon, while the bottom appears as a red line. The unit allows you to see anything that comes in between surface and the bottom.

When a fish moves into the transducer cone, a slim green line will appear and as the fish nears the center of the cone, its signal will change from green to red, indicating the fish is directly below the transducer.

When the red line appears, indicating a fish, you can bring your bait up to the fish. When you hit the depth the fish is



OUTDOORSMEN PRODUCTIONS PHOTO
The Fish Scout Double vision, which includes an FL-20 flasher and an underwater camera unit, helped the author to catch some excellent fish as it gives you a whole new outlook as you can see everything that's going on under water.

at, the line on the screen will widen indicating that your bait is at the same depth as the fish.

Since inactive fish are known to lay with there belly to the bottom, on some units it's hard to tell if we're looking at just the bottom or a fish that's lying close to or tight to the bottom.

With the newer Vexilar units, you can actually divide the screen, with the right side of the screen letting you see what's happening from the surface to the bottom, while on the left hand side of the screen you'll be able to see the bottom 6 to 12 feet, giving you the ability to see those bottom hugging fish.

For those anglers that want to "see" what's below them, there's the new Vexi-

lar Fish Scout Double Vision with the FL-20 locator and underwater camera in one unit.

Equipped with a Sony underwater color/black & white camera that with enough light gives you color video or black and white when fishing at deeper depths where the light penetration is minimal.

The camera has external LED lights that turn on in darker water conditions along with sensors that let you know the depth the camera is at, water temperature as well as the direction its pointing.

On a recent trip to northeast South Dakota, we used the unit while fishing for perch and were able to watch our lures and see what was going on down there as well as what type of lure action actually enticed the fish to bite.

On one occasion we watched a northern come in and grab one of the smaller perch. It's quite a unit and can be found, along with other Vexilar products at www.vexilar.com

No matter what type of locator you're using, the key to getting the most out of the unit is to spend some time prior to heading out on the ice, so when you get there, you can quickly set up the unit and get to what's really important, "Catching Fish."

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is the President of Outdoorsmen Productions, the Producer/Host of the Outdoorsmen Adventures television series and the co-host of Outdoor Adventures radio. For more information on the outdoors, check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

Briefs: Rapid City Deer Reduction Harvest Nets 200

RAPID CITY (AP) — Two-hundred deer were killed during this winter's deer reduction program in Rapid City.

Hunters hired by the city shot the deer. Carcasses are given to residents.

The city has killed deer within city limits nearly every year since 1995.

This year's hunt was smaller than in previous years, after a deer survey showed a decrease in the urban herd's population. The city had harvested 300 deer annually.

Additional Waterfowl Meeting In Lincoln On Feb. 7

LINCOLN, Neb. — The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has scheduled an additional public informational waterfowl zone meeting in Lincoln on Feb. 7.

The 7 p.m. meeting will be held in the third-floor conference room at Game and Parks headquarters, 2200 N. 33rd St.

Issues include potential changes to the state's duck zone and hunting season split configuration. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2011 changed some criteria for duck zones.

Game and Parks is considering changes to duck zones for 2012. A switch from the current three-zone format to a four-zone format is being considered. However, a change from the current 74-day season to a 39-day season is not under consideration. The four-zone format would better position duck season dates in the event a 39-day season becomes necessary in the future, according to Mark Vrtiska, Game and Parks waterfowl program manager.

Boating Has New Legal Requirement In 2012

LINCOLN, Neb. — Boaters should be aware of a new legal requirement that became effective Jan. 1, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Persons born after Dec. 31, 1985, who operate a motorboat or personal watercraft in Nebraska must have successfully completed the Nebraska boating safety course. They also must be in possession of a course certificate when operating the boat.

Boating season may be months away, but now is the time to makes plans for taking a boater safety course. A list of boating safety classes is available at OutdoorNebraska.org/boating.

Montana Considers Using Hunters To Kill Stray Bison

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Montana officials gave their initial approval Thursday to a plan that would let hunters kill bison that stray beyond designated areas north of Yellowstone National Park and from the Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Indian reservations.

The plan is to remove bison that wander outside of defined "tolerance areas" beyond the park and where wild Yellowstone bison have been slated for transfer, such as the two north-eastern Montana reservations.

The proposal by Montana's Fish, Wildlife and Parks agency comes as state officials seek to ease the stiff resistance to bison being allowed to roam in more parts of the state. FWP Director Joe Maurier said the tolerance areas recently have been enlarged by 75,000 acres into the Hebgen basin north of Yellowstone.

"We've been working hard to find more tolerance for bison in Montana," Maurier said. "Essentially what we've done is move the line, and we are trying to figure out how we manage bison past that line."

Neighboring farmers and

ranchers fear the bison will spread disease and destroy their property.

A lawsuit filed last week in state court by property rights groups and landowners aims to block the relocation of 68 Yellowstone bison to Fort Peck and Fort Belknap, which the FWP approved in December. Two other lawsuits are pending over bison in the Hebgen basin, where the animals are being allowed to wander as they seek food at lower elevations in the winter.

The commission voted 4-1 to tentatively approve the hunting measure, which now goes out for public comment before a final vote in February.

Commissioner Ron Moody, who voted against the plan, said he believes state regulators are improperly using hunters to kill wildlife that cross a containment line. At that point, an animal ceases to be game and becomes vermin, and that does not fit the concept of a fair hunt, he said.

"A moral onus falls on the people who are slaughtering bison who stray over a line. I want that moral onus to fall where it belongs and not where it shouldn't belong, which is on

this thing that we call fair-chase hunting," Moody said.

Stephany Seay, representing the advocacy group Buffalo Field Campaign, said the agency should consider the bison's wildlife status in Montana instead of proposing to kill more of the animals.

"You can't just keep killing wildlife and confining wildlife because their presence is a

minor inconvenience to a few. I think we need to learn how to coexist in a more meaningful way and a more sustainable way," she said.

Maurier said the agency is open to discussion and any ideas that people may have on managing the bison that wander beyond those designated areas.

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