



Illinois
Department of
Natural Resources
Division of Fisheries

HANDBOOK OF ICE FISHING





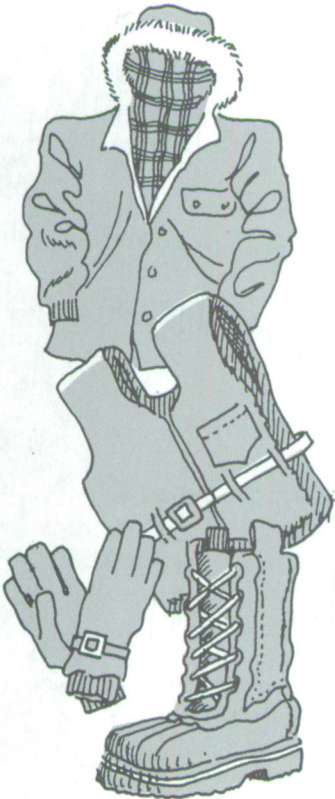
ICE FISHING

This handbook is intended to be a brief introduction to the sport of ice fishing. Although ice fishing shares some of the same characteristics with open-water fishing, ice fishing has its own unique fishing equipment and fishing technique requirements. Ice fishing is a fun way to avoid winter's "cabin-fever." It is hoped that once you have reviewed this handbook, you will give ice fishing a try.

CLOTHING

The important fact is not the amount, but rather the choice of clothing being worn. Several thin layers of loose clothing will allow you to adjust to the weather. Heavy, bulky clothing is not recommended. The following are suggestions for your comfort:

1. A parka with a hood, preferably insulated with natural or waterfowl down or artificial fiber-filled.
2. Insulated coveralls with a warm shirt and pants and thermal underwear.
3. One pair of light socks worn under one pair of medium-heavy wool socks.
4. Gloves or mittens, preferably waterproof.
5. Insulated, waterproof boots or rubber boots with felt liner.
6. Wool cap or face mask, perhaps both if weather dictates.
7. Optional items would include ice spikes for your boots (to prevent slipping); electrical battery-powered socks and hand warmer(s); and sunglasses.



EQUIPMENT

With the exception of ultra light spinning tackle, most open-water fishing equipment will not be suitable for ice fishing. Think small and light when considering tackle. Some important equipment items include:



1. Ice auger or chisel. Sharp tools are the key to keep from exhausting yourself when cutting ice holes. You can purchase either manual or power ice augers. Most have replaceable blades. Using an ice chisel to chop through the ice is much more strenuous, although it can be done, if necessary.

2. Skimmer. The skimmer (resembles a large soup ladle with holes) is needed to scoop ice slush or chips from the hole.

3. Ice rod. Ice rods range from a single, wooden rod with line winding pegs to a fiberglass or graphite rod with a micro reel. You can make your own ice rod from a discarded 18 to 24 inch long, top piece of an open water fiberglass or graphite rod. A four to six inch handle can be added by utilizing a half inch diameter doll rod. A reel or other line-holding device can be attached to the rod or handle with electrical tape. Generally, ice fishing rods are lighter, much shorter and more flexible than open-water rods. Choose lighter line test weights such as 2 and 4 pound test.

4. Tips-ups. These devices are equipped with reels and flags and are usually used for larger species of fish such as walleye or northern pike. When a tip-up's flag is released, it indicates a fish has taken the bait.

5. Terminal tackle. Terminal tackle and miscellaneous gear you should bring includes ice spoons, ice flies, small flasher blades, number 10, 12, or 14 plain hooks, slip bobbers, tiny lead head jigs, lead depth finder, pliers, hemostats or a small hook degorger,

styrofoam bucket (for bait), and a large plastic bucket (to carry tackle, rods, etc. and to deposit fish caught). An old towel or rag is handy in preventing mittens or gloves from becoming wet while removing a hooked fish.

6. Optional equipment. If you ice fish a great deal, you might consider using a sled or toboggan, and make or purchase an ice shelter along with lanterns, an electronic depth finder and safety equipment (to be discussed later).

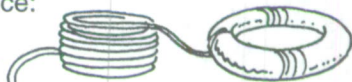
ICE SAFETY

Extreme caution should be exercised any time you venture onto the ice. Most waters have different thicknesses of ice in various locations. Weather conditions can also affect the strength of the ice. Clear-blue, lake ice is the strongest; clear-blue, river ice is less strong; and cloudy opaque ice supports the least amount of weight. Slush ice can only support one half the weight of ice that is clear-blue. New ice is generally stronger than old ice.

Before going out onto the ice, walk along the shore in the area you plan to fish to check for open water areas, and areas of thin ice. Sometimes the ice will be thin near drain tiles, or in areas where a stream or ditch drains into the pond, creating current. If the ice appears safe, drill a test hole in the shallows near shore to check the thickness of the ice before walking out over deep water. At least 2 inches of ice are necessary to support one person, with at least 3 inches needed to support a group walking in single file. The ice may vary in thickness in different areas so if you are fishing early or late in the season when the ice is thin, extra caution must be used to prevent disaster.

It would be wise to have the following items in your possession and follow these general guidelines while on the ice:

1. Always travel with others when ice fishing.
2. Carry a 50-foot rope with attached throwing float.
3. Wear two spikes or screwdrivers attached to a cord and worn around your neck. Should you accidentally break through, they would provide you with a means to grip the ice and aid you in exiting the water more easily.
4. A Personal Flotation Device (PFD) not only provides flotation, but additional warmth. A PFD should be worn if you have any doubt about the thickness or strength of the ice.
5. A horn or whistle may help you attract attention should you require assistance.



Advise someone of where you are going and what time you intend on returning home.

HYPOTHERMIA

Hypothermia occurs when a person's body temperature drops below 90° Fahrenheit. It is caused by immersion in cold water or exposure to the cold air. Hypothermia affects people in many different ways. The best way to prevent hypothermia is to stay out of the water. However, if you break through the ice or see someone who has broken through the ice, you should try to get the victim out as quickly and safely as possible. Then execute the following steps:



1. Make sure the victim is able to breathe. If there is no pulse or respiration, begin CPR immediately.

2. Get the victim to shelter as quickly as possible.



3. Remove all wet clothing.

4. Wrap victim in blankets or a sleeping bag.

5. Place several sources of heat on the victim's chest, groin and neck areas.

6. Transport to a hospital as soon as possible.

7. DO NOT do any of the following:

a. Do Not give anything to drink, especially alcohol.

b. Do Not rub the victim's skin, especially with snow.

c. Do Not allow the victim to walk.



ETIQUETTE

Always clean up your area before you leave. While most anglers do not mind people around, do not crowd them, giving them breathing space.

ILLINOIS ICE FISHING REGULATIONS

A sport fishing license is required for ice fishing. The ice angler may use a maximum of three poles or tip-ups with no more than two hooks on each line. Holes cut in the ice are limited to 12-inch diameter or less. Shelter structures are limited to portable construction of metal or wood framework, covered with canvas, paper, plastic material or similar fabric. Each shelter shall have the name and address of the owner attached, and after March 1 the shelter must be removed when not in use, and not left unattended at anytime. All poles and tip-ups shall be constantly attended and kept under observation by the angler.

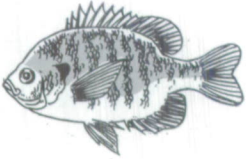

Ice fishing, while not for everyone, is a great way to catch fish and beat the winter doldrums. The fishing equipment and techniques discussed in this booklet should help get you started. For additional information, visit any of northern Illinois' frozen, inland lakes; talk to other ice fishermen or visit the local tackle shop and ask questions.

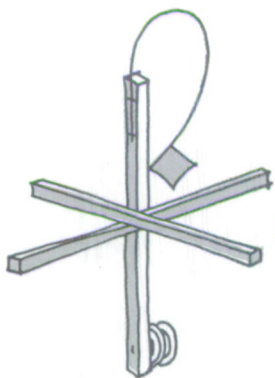
All you need is some fishing gear, some bait, a fishing license, warm clothes and a little beginner's luck.

Good luck and good ice fishing.

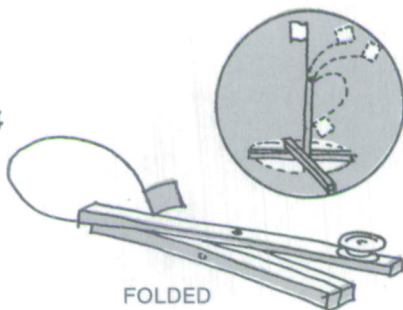
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FISH AND ICE FISHING

SPECIES	BAIT	WHERE & HOW TO FISH
<p>BLUEGILL</p> 	<p>Earthworms, meal worms, wax worms, other insect larvae.</p>	<p>Late afternoons. Fish shallow (4-6 ft.). In the coldest months fish deep (up to 20 ft.). Jig your line up, let fall. If nothing happens, drill another hole. Watch your line for the slightest movement of the line or bobber.</p>
<p>YELLOW PERCH</p> 	<p>Small minnows, insect larvae, wigglers.</p>	<p>Large perch found in deeper water. Small perch shallower. Perch travel in schools. Fish deep midday. Dropping barometric pressure, fish deep. Experiment with various depths. Jig the bait and then let drop.</p>






TIP-UP



FOLDED

FISH AND ICE FISHING (Cont.)

SPECIES	BAIT	WHERE & HOW TO FISH
<p>WHITE AND BLACK CRAPPIE</p> 	<p>Small minnows on small jigs or ice spoons</p>	<p>All day, suspended over deep water. Crappie also travel in schools. Try different depths.</p>
<p>WALLEYE</p> 	<p>Minnows</p>	<p>Lead head jigs, Swedish pimples, small spoons. Fish near the bottom. Bounce the lure 6-8 inches above the bottom. Fish often hit on the drop. Can use tip-ups.</p>
<p>NORTHERN PIKE</p> 	<p>Minnows, frozen smelt</p>	<p>Fish near weed beds. Use 10# test with wire leaders. Can be caught on tip-ups. If you have a pick up, let the pike "run" and set the hook when it moves again.</p>

LIVE BAIT

Wax Worm



Wiggler



Mousie



ARTIFICIAL BAIT

Ice Fly



Tear Drop



Flasher

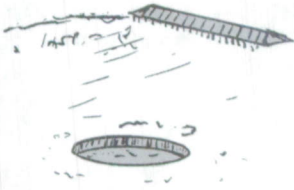


GETTING STARTED

Locating Fish

Once you have determined that the ice is safe, you must select a spot to fish. In selecting a site at an unfamiliar lake, the best bet is to move in among any group of fishermen present. They usually have found a good location, and a certain amount of friendly camaraderie is tolerated, even encouraged.

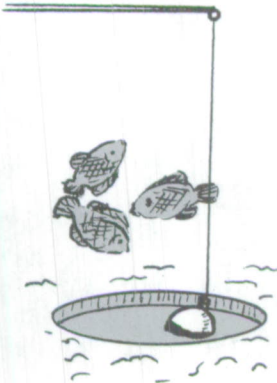
If you must select a site on your own, just remember that locating fish under ice is similar to locating fish during warmer months. Look for structure—fallen trees, piers, docks, drop offs, weed beds, brush piles, stick ups, etc. As a general rule, most fish tend to be relatively shallow early in the year and move deeper as winter progresses.



Another good tip is to try to locate the dam. If you cut your first hole about 25 feet straight out from the center of the dam, you will be over the deepest part of the lake, and you will almost always find fish. If one site proves unsuccessful, move to a new location. In this way you will remain active and warm, and you should eventually find fish!

How Deep?

After you have selected your site and have drilled a hole, you need to determine the depth of the water. Often the fish are close to the bottom, so if the water is 15 feet deep, but your bait is only down 5 feet, you will not have much luck! To determine the depth, a device called a depth finder is used. This is simply a lead weight with a clamp on the end. The depth finder is clamped to the hook being careful not to cut or abrade the line. The line is then lowered into the hole until the depth finder hits the bottom. You will be able to tell when the weight is on the bottom because the line will go slack.



You must now mark the depth in some way, either by attaching a small bobber to the line at the water level, or by setting the bobber stop (when using a slip bobber) at the water level. If you are fishing with an ultra-light spinning rod and reel, you can set your depth by noting how many turns of you reel it takes to reel the line back in. If you have an anti-reverse button on the reel, turn the anti-reverse "off" and you will be able to reel the line backwards the same number of turns to again let the line out to reach bottom.

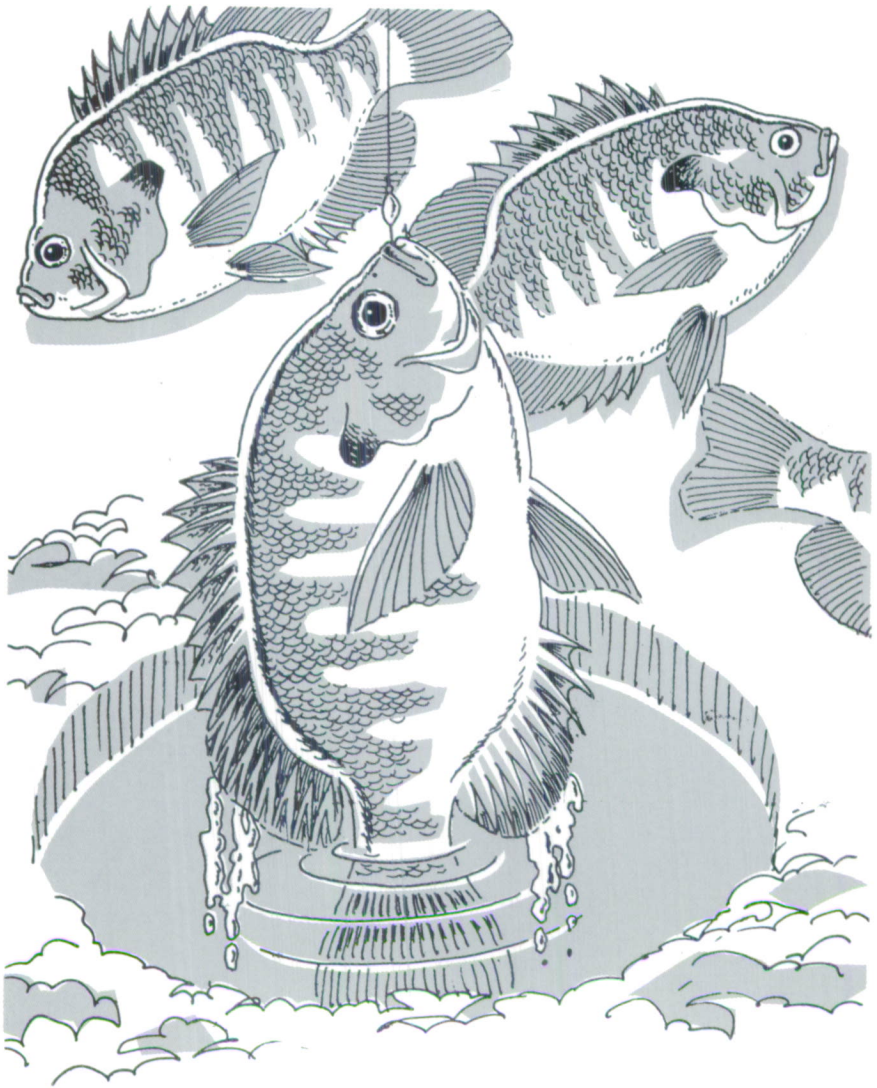
Some ice fishing rods come with a small plastic reel with a “pin” that can be removed before lowering the depth finder to the bottom. When the depth finder reaches the bottom, the pin is replaced. The line is then reeled in, and the pin acts as a “stop” to stop the line at the same depth next time you reel out.

Go Fish!

Once you have determined the depth, you can remove the depth finder from the hook, bait your hook and begin fishing. You will have the best luck if you begin fishing within 6 inches of the bottom. If you don't get a bite, move the bait up about 6 inches and try again. Continuing to move the bait up in 6 inch increments may help you locate suspended fish. “Jigging”, or moving the bait a tiny bit by repeatedly bouncing the tip of your rod up and down, will entice many sluggish fish to bite. When you get a bite lift the line firmly. Don't set the hook like you would during summer months. Don't try to jerk the fish through the hole. Use a steady retrieve and lift the fish through the hole. Be sure to note the depth at which the fish was caught. There will often be other fish in the area at the same depth!

Keep it simple. Go ice fishing with the idea of having fun and you probably will. Ice fishing is a great winter past time even when the fish aren't biting. When they are biting, you will be in for a treat!!





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Equal opportunity to participate in programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and those funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies is available to all individuals regardless of race, sex, national origin, disability, age, religion or other non-merit factors. If you believe you have been discriminated against, contact the funding source's civil rights office and/or the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, DNR, 524 S. Second, Springfield, Ill. 62701-1787; 217/785-0067; TTY 217/782-9175.

This information may be provided in an alternative format if required. Contact the DNR Clearinghouse at 217/782-7498 for assistance.