

## Late Ice is Great Ice

I'm not talking about the quality of the ice itself but about your opportunity to enjoy some of the best fishing of the hard water season. Once the calendar rolls around to late February or early March a lot of the enthusiasm for ice fishing has waned. Just as you begin to notice less and less anglers out, all species of fish activity will be increasing proportionally.

Now is not the time to be turning all of your attention to attending sport shows and dreaming of open water. By using a little common sense in regards to ice conditions, you will have some fantastic fishing virtually all to yourself. A real bonus to this is that the weather will typically be quite mild. You will actually be much more comfortable than the guys who just can't wait and pile up below the dams this time of year.

As the days grow longer in late winter, the fish will experience a dramatic increase in their movements and are thus easier to catch. This is due to the fact that their juices begin flowing in preparation for the upcoming spawn. Feeding levels increase as Females will be finishing off their egg sacks and the Males really key up early before their role in the spawning process. As a whole, all species will be much more aggressive than in the preceding months.

Location becomes much easier to anticipate than in Mid Winter when fish are mostly basin orientated and difficult to pin down. While the majority of the fish may still be in deep water, they are more predictable in that you can expect them to be near shoreline spawning areas.

Shallow bays with quick access to relatively deep water are one of the first locations to look for. Take this type of bay and add a prominent point or bar leading directly to deeper water and your spot improves. Begin your search on the North side of the Lake due to the Sun's angle. This causes southern facing shorelines to warm the quickest in Spring. All fish are accustomed to arriving in these locales early and frequently stage just outside the first break.

Once you have your spot picked out you will want to start out working the deeper water. Particularly during the day, the bulk of the fish will be near or slightly away from the first major break. While fishing pay close attention to you Vexilar or Aqua Vu for signs of life. Once you have found some they may be a little sluggish while the sun is high but if you fine tune your presentation you should be able to get at least a few to go.

As the sun dips lower you should begin working up the first break and concentrating on shoreline related elements such as points, inside turns or cups in the break. If there are weeds or wood present they deserve a good bit of your attention. These fish will really gear up as we head into the extended Sunset period we experience with the lengthening days.

Your lure selection and presentation should focus on the aggressive side of the scale. These fish tend to be receptive and will respond well to larger rattle spoons such as JB's Varmit. The larger and heavier lures give us the added benefit of being able to get our offerings back down quickly after catching a fish and capitalize on the bite. Go to a bigger jigging motion and really pound the jig in place to get the rattles going. The flash, vibration and noise created help to draw fish in from a distance. One tip that is really helpful with Panfish is to tip with Powerbait or Gulp as it will stay on the hook while catching multiple fish, thus we spend more time catching and less time baiting.

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