

## Late Ice Renewal

As we begin to enter the second half of the hard-water fishing season-and in my mind at least, the better half-we've experienced both good and bad. The good part being, we had favorable ice conditions form early on this year, and as is often the case-made for some fine fishing opportunities. Pretty respectable catches were garnered in shoreline related, traditional first ice locations. The bad being, although the region started out with much promise in the form of excellent ice conditions, the opportunities to explore offshore locations, were abruptly cut short by snowfall amounts that made accessing more preferred areas, difficult at best.

That being said, angler activity was obviously greatly reduced and the subsequently limited reports were quite spotty, with few tales of a runaway bite for much of anything. Now that we have all the negative banter out of the way...there is a positive outlook to be gained from all of this. Most importantly, is that the fish have received very little-if any-pressure. They shouldn't be gun shy and will prove to be a bit more receptive to our presentations. As we begin to enter the late ice period, another silver lining to be aware of is that the recent warm weather coupled with the unseasonable rain we have experienced, has had the beneficial result of largely reducing snow pack and thus allowing us to travel more freely...and actually fish where we would like to.

When we combine the above with the fact that we are beginning to see the days growing longer, and in particular; low-light windows of enhanced fish activity as the sun rises and sets at dusk and dawn respectively. We can now reasonably expect the bite to begin to take off in earnest. From our point of view, we can also feel good in knowing that we typically experience much milder weather as we head towards spring, and the days can be downright comfortable.

Now is the time when we can confidently begin using larger presentations than during the dead of winter, and subsequently start catching more large (female) fish. Traditional flash type lures such as JB's Jig-n-Eye or Holie Angle are as effective as they were early on, only now we should contemplate beefing up the entire presentation by tipping with whole fathead minnows (maybe even two or three) instead of just the head portion.

An even more radical approach would involve the use of the smallest Smile Blade (.8inch) directly above your jigging lure. Connect the lure to a Fas Snap with a stop knot directly above-then the Smile Blade concave side pointing down and another stop knot about half an inch above. With a moderately sharp jigging stroke, this will cause the Smile Blade to spin when going up and it will flip and flutter while moving a bit horizontally on the fall. Once all the way down vertically, the jigging lure sweeps back to dead center. Definitely an unconventional approach with numerous triggering cues-but early experimentation has been very encouraging, and if you're the adventurous type...it's something to consider.

Even though conditions have not been exactly perfect to this point (in reality, how often *is* ice fishing *perfect*); if you are serious about catching fish...the past should not deter you from putting together a successful outing in the future. Every minute, hour, or day that fishing is tough-just means you're that much closer to triumphing over the slimy little beasts. As with anything worthwhile, we have to pay our dues and good things will eventually reward the persistent...it's hard to quantify-but *attitude does count in fishing*.

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