

Anticipating Another Great Ice Season

BY DENNIS FOSTER

Firm, safe ice is finally here—and that can mean only one thing: ice fishing! Each and every foray onto hard water—in my eyes anyway—stirs up something deep in the soul akin to a religious experience. There is a direct correlation, as after all, we as mere mortals are indeed walking on water. Not God just, but God like, as we once again traverse the beautiful playing field the creator has so generously laid before us in full anticipation of what is to surely come.

Maybe a little too introspective there, but the sentiment is genuine, nonetheless. I am not alone in this passion (perhaps addiction) to the sport, as there is an ever-growing legion of those who consider ice fishing not just another outdoor endeavor, but rather *the* most important of all outdoor activities. This can be witnessed in the fact that ice fishing is the only segment of the fishing industry that is actually growing and not remaining flat or trending backwards. This is truly a benefit for the ice fishing enthusiast, as no matter what your level of interest, capitalism still works in America and the fishing industry has responded with an ever expanding array of shelters, tackle, clothing, electronics, and other goodies to meet anyone's needs and budget. Budget is one of the most attractive things in ice fishing as it is an inexpensive pastime. For a very modest investment, you can be outfitted as good as anyone out there. No sparkly \$70,000 boat needed here folks.

As our options in equipment escalate

each year, it would be in your best interest—whether novice or veteran—to check out what is new and improved. Electronics have seen the most dramatic developments and this year is no different. There are many good companies to choose from for flashers (fish locators) and underwater cameras. I am most familiar with and trust Vexilar, as they started and continue the revolution to this day. The advent of their Double Vision system (flasher and camera combined in one darn handy carrying case) is the most talked about new offering this season.

The vast array of lures and jigs continues to grow, with workable micro plastic tipping options being noteworthy. Many unique designs are now donning the shelves and perhaps the most interesting is the use of Tungsten in jigs. It is much denser (heavier) than lead, thus allowing us to get very tiny packages quickly back down to a hot panfish bite. These have been somewhat of a closely guarded secret and mostly imported from Europe, but are now widely available, as HT Enterprises has come out with their own domestic line.

Shelters have advanced from simple windbreaks to portables that are as warm and cozy as they are simple to set up. The ultimate evolution being wheeled houses that are no longer "permanent" as you can leave them hooked to your vehicle and literally drop 'em and pick 'em up in mere minutes; thus allowing the ultimate in portability *and* luxury. The models from Lodge (www.ice-shack.com) are



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them on your bait but they are not hitting it. If you are patient enough, then eventually the jig will stop spinning and make it easier for the fish to take the correct end. But sometimes one hit of the jig head and they turn around and swim away. Sometimes the others watch and then become disinterested as well.

You only have one chance to make a first impression. So if you use a small enough jig that they can inhale regardless if it is spinning or not, then you have a winner every time. Big bluegill and small bluegill alike will pound the miniature offerings.

Using size 16 offerings like the Northland Hard-Rock Mooska Jig will make you feel like an all-star angler. It is a super tiny presentation compared to what most anglers are used to, but it's big on success. Many of the world's greatest panfish anglers have secretly been using tiny jigs of this size to consistently catch fish day in, day out. If the bluegill and sunfish are biters, then give them something they can easily eat. That can also mean cutting off a portion of a wax worm

to keep the profile small.

But many of you know that cutting a wax worm or euro larvae ends up being a messy proposition and not easy to keep on the hook. This is where soft plastics can really shine. Cutting a portion of small plastic to adorn the miniature jig allows you to sweeten up the appearance. Northland Fishing tackle's new Impulse waxy will provide that profile and also give it the taste and texture that will keep them interested. It is comprised with an appetizing secret attractant, and independent lab study has proven that Impulse™ Reactionary Baits are 143% more effective than other leading brands of soft plastics.

I never feel that I am at a disadvantage when guys around me have live bait. When I am using a tiny little number with soft plastic, I can waste little time catching fish and getting my jig back in front of whoever is lingering beneath the hole.

Planning to go out soon? Get your mitts on some mini jigs, pack along the bifocals and get ready for your best day ever.

RVIA certified and offer more standard amenities than your first apartment. They even serve double duty as toy haulers and campers in warmer months.

Our first order of business is and will always be to gain access to the fish and what was once a chore is now darn fun with the latest generation of power

augers. StrikeMaster continues to the lead the way and their new Big Volt electric is just what the doctor ordered for the aforementioned hard sided shacks.

Lots of great stuff to consider, accumulate, and ultimately play with... thank God.

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