

Pheasants or Fish?

This is a question that those of us in the Dakota's face each fall. Unfortunately, most of us choose the Pheasants to the point of complete exclusion of the fish. I'm forced to admit that I am also often guilty of this. If we can force ourselves to put down our shotguns for a day or two and risk alienating our trusty hunting dogs, the best fishing of the year often awaits us. If you're feeling guilty about leaving poor ol' Bowser at home, you can take him along too. You'll find he's just as faithful a companion in the boat as he is in the field.

The place I would recommend heading is to any one of our Glacial Lakes in Northeastern South Dakota. The scenery is great this time of year and the fishing can be even better. Don't concern yourself with trying the larger and well known lakes. Now is a good time to explore what new and often smaller waters have to offer. What you learn on these late fall outings can often lead into some of your most fantastic catches of the hard water season, just as soon as safe ice will allow. Another bonus is that you will most likely have the water to yourself. Most of the competition from Minnesota, Wisconsin, etc. will be trying their best to look like an overweight orange Poster Boy for Cabela's, while attempting to woo the local waitresses.

This is also the season for simplicity. If you've already stored the boat for winter or don't have the luxury of owning one, don't fret. You can be as or more successful from shore. Believe me, big flashy boats equipped with motors large enough to pull stumps are not necessary and do not impress the fish. Take some chubs, some shallow diving plugs and maybe a set of waders and you're all set.

The areas to look for are sand or gravel beaches that have nearby access to deeper water. If you can find this type of substrate near necked down areas or an outlet or inlet your odds are even better. Evenings or very early mornings are best. If you must pursue Pheasants, you can still get some fishing in before or after the hunt.

The techniques you will be using couldn't be easier. Throw out a chub on a slip sinker setup with around a three foot leader with a number 2 to 1/0 Gamakatsu hook depending upon chub size. If you're fishing from shore, place it in a rod holder or place on a forked stick and loosen your drag so the fish can run when it picks up the bait. A good strike indicator is a bobber hung between the eyes on your rod. Loop the line and place in one side of the bobber spring. When a fish takes your bait the bobber will drop off alerting you to the bite. Tighten your drag, take up any slack and sweep set the hook.

While you have your chub out waiting for action, you should be working the surrounding shoreline by casting plugs. You can walk the shore and fancast or you wade to get a little more coverage. If you are wading, be sure to cast in front of your intended movements and try to be as stealthy as you can. In lowlight periods these fish will be very shallow and can be spooked. All you'll need to bring is a few plugs. Large profile shallow diving models such as ReefRunner's shallow Ripsticks and similar offerings will fit the bill nicely.

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