

I recently had the privilege of attending the 11th Annual Mobridge Ice Fishing Tournament and associated festivities on January 13th and 14th. This is touted as the largest Ice Fishing Tournament in the world and accurately so. They filled the 450 teams allotted a berth to fish in the Tournament in a record 41 minutes this year, with teams hailing from an incredible 14 States and 1 Province. This just goes to show the immense amount of enthusiasm this little fishing community on the shores of South Dakota's Lake Oahe has generated over the past few years and deservedly so, as this is a very well run and professionally conducted event.

Even weighing in this many teams can be a logistical nightmare, but I witnessed 450 teams go through it smoothly and without any delay last year due to the experience and organizational skills of those in the community. That leads to an interesting note for this year's Tournament. Due to well beyond unseasonably warm temperatures, the ice conditions varied greatly on this large Missouri River Reservoir, prompting the organizers to err on the side of caution in the name of the safety of the contestants. What they ended up deciding to do because of the circumstances was to simply draw for the fishing related prizes that would have otherwise been awarded based on the weights of fish brought to the scales. Contestants were more than welcome to fish for their own recreation, but due to the ever present legalities and litigious nature of our society, this was deemed to be the best route as prizes awarded for weight could have been construed as an enticement to fish...with all the liability issues that would go with it.

That being said, 439 of the 450 teams still arrived in Mobridge for a "Non-Fishing"-Fishing Tournament. This is more than just a little impressive and quite notable as anyone who has been involved in organizing an event such as this would readily attest. It is pretty remarkable a feat to continually draw this kind of crowd to your town, let alone do so when faced with adverse ice conditions and the fact that the teams were not actually competing. This speaks volumes about the folks of Mobridge. Here in South Dakota we are blessed with many fine and hospitable fishing communities and Mobridge continues to rank itself among the very best.

No doubt many of the anglers came to take part in the drawings for the fishing related purse as well the vast amount product prizes-combined worth over \$170,000- that are given away due to the generosity of the many Sponsors these folks have attracted over the years. I personally work with a number of industry leaders including Vexilar and Strikemaster who have been long time backers as well as encouraging some of the companies I work with to become involved as well. These include HT Enterprises, Baserri Shotguns, J-Wheelz, Johnson's Cargo Systems, and Aluma Trailers; who are all new contributors. After this year's phenomenal turnout-despite poor conditions-I am sure the heartfelt backing from the Fishing Industry will continue to expand.

After years of hard work and diligence by the many folks involved, Mobridge has set the bar very high for true Ice Fishing Tournaments (this is not a Derby, but rather a true competitive venue) and should serve as a model for other communities who are interested in doing something similar. I must admit this will be a tough act to follow, but a worthy level in which to aspire. Events such as this are a true win-win situation for all involved. The anglers have a great format in which to compete and more importantly-have a ton of fun, the community gains good will and commerce, and the fishing industry

wins as there is not a better way to showcase the best new products on the market. In effect, we are all true and equal partners and there simply cannot be a better relationship than that. I must say that I am not the only one anxiously awaiting to see what they come up with for next year.