

# Time to Capitalize

The ice fishing season began this year looking pretty darn good, with many smaller bodies of water having anglers walking out by Thanksgiving weekend. Unfortunately, all of this optimism was put on hold due to the record breaking high temps recorded throughout the region. There was a very limited amount of water that we could fish, with some smatterings of good reports, but it was very hard to get a good feel on the bite as there were very few out, with the vast amount of water remaining untouched and untested.

The cold snap that did finally arrive in January managed to heal up some of the open areas and solidified the marginal ice into safe ice. This allowed for expanded access and the anglers responded, but right in what is typically the toughest part of the season. Results have ranged from very good to downright disappointing-and often on the same body of water. Sporadic would be the most accurate assessment, as would be expected during the Mid Ice Period.

The positive thing is that we are just turning the corner into what I would term the Late Ice Period with typically very consistent results and the best ice fishing of the year yet to come. The lengthening days not only feel good to us on the surface, but the whole underwater world will respond in kind. Activity levels from the bottom to the top of the food chain are kicking into high gear and as humans sitting at the pinnacle of said chain...ours should too.

Meaning, we need to take a very aggressive approach to our tactics and presentations for all species. Get every single notion of the dainty finesse style of fishing firmly out of your head. There may be a time and place for this, but I can assure you, it is darn sure not now. It is time for big baits and even bolder methods. Just as well be as efficient as we can in an attempt to end the season on a very strong note. Not just in the numbers of fish we can expect to catch, but also in above average size.

Pick areas with moderately close proximity to deeper water and concentrate the majority of your efforts from the first breakline right on up into just a few feet of water right next to shore. This is a big fish affair for all species and the biggest perch, crappies, and bluegills will often be found mixed right in with the Pike, Walleye's, and Bass. They will all readily hit the larger offerings, so it can literally be a one size fits all affair.

I take my StrikeMaster to perforate all depths and walk around with a Vexilar and quickly jig each one for perhaps only a minute without signs of fish or a bite. Using a long rod such as those in HT's Sapphire Ice line will handle Perch to Pike and allow you to keep your rod tip close to the water, eliminating line bow and giving you greater control and the option for oversized jigging sweeps. Break out some noisy, high action lures; ReefRunner Cicadas, JB Lures Rattling Varmits, Salmo Zippers, and a variety of lipless rattlebaits all come to mind. Remember, we are looking to aggravate more than entice. All the while you can have strategically placed traps set up and down the structure with the largest chubs you can find hanging below tip ups; my personal favorite being the Magnetic Pop up style units.

No more excuses and no better time than right now...it is up to you to whether to capitulate or capitalize.